

**THE WHO IS A JEW AMENDMENT  
WILL HAVE ITS PRELIMINARY READING  
IN THE KNESSET ON WEDNESDAY**  
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 14 (JTA) — The controversial Who is a Jew amendment to the Law of Return will have its preliminary reading in the Knesset this Wednesday.

The issue was forced by nine MKs of the religious bloc in parliament who requested today that the motion be placed on the agenda. Premier Shimon Peres has been seeking a postponement or a compromise of some sort but the Orthodox camp is adamant.

This apparently is because they smell victory. Political observers said today that the amendment which would invest the Orthodox rabbinate with the exclusive right, by law, to determine who is a Jew, could get through the Knesset this time, at least on its first reading.

**The Fate Of The Measure**

According to the observers the fate of the measure will depend on just how many and which MKs are in the chamber at the time of the vote. The Who is a Jew amendment was decisively defeated the last time it came before the Knesset, sponsored by the Agudat Israel party.

This time it is in the form of a private member's bill. Its most vigorous proponents are not the religious parties themselves but the Habad Hasidic movement in Israel, acting on orders from the movement's headquarters in New York.

The Orthodox politicians are well aware that the Labor-Likud unity coalition is anxious to avoid a showdown over the measure. The religious parties in the coalition have served unofficial notice that they will leave it if the amendment is defeated.

Its passage, however, could cause a serious rift with the Reform and Conservative movements which represent a majority of affiliated Jews the world over, particularly in the United States.

**Peres Cites Worrisome Problem**

Peres, addressing a luncheon of the Foreign Press Association in Tel Aviv, said the outcome would not affect his coalition Cabinet because the issue has been raised in a private member's bill and the Cabinet therefore does not face the consequences of the vote.

"The problem which really worries me is the division in Jewish life, between the diaspora and Israel, and my efforts are aimed at keeping our people together and united. Judaism was always a pluralistic concept — a nation which was able to keep together despite its different streams," Peres said.

**Urgent Warnings From U.S. Jews**

The Law of Return defines a Jew as a person born of a Jewish mother or converted. The amendment would add the words "according to halacha." In practice this would mean that conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel or abroad would be invalid and neither the converts nor their

offspring would be recognized as Jews in Israel. Peres has already received urgent warnings from Conservative and Reform leaders in the U.S. that adoption of the amendment would create a deep division among Jews and a rift between the non-Orthodox branches of Judaism and the Jewish State. (See separate story.)

**Precarious Political Situation**

Nevertheless, the political situation in Israel is precarious. Although the religious parties in the government represent only a small minority, their defection could bring down the shaky unity coalition. Labor and Likud are very much aware of this and would prefer not to alienate the Orthodox factions.

According to political observers, most Labor MKs and some Likud Liberals will vote against the amendment. But a majority of Likud especially its Herut bloc, joined by the smaller rightwing parties, are expected to support it. That could give the amendment a narrow edge.

Peres met with Orthodox MKs last night to try to postpone the vote. Rafi Edri, chairman of the Labor Party's Knesset faction proposed that a debate be held Wednesday but the actual vote be postponed for a month. Another possibility is for the Premier to ask for the right to reply to the bill and then take several weeks to prepare his reply.

But the Orthodox, led by the Habad rabbis, are already lobbying vigorously to corral doubtful votes to their side.

**U.S. RELIGIOUS, SECULAR LEADERS  
URGE ISRAELI POLITICAL LEADERS TO  
RESIST REDEFINING WHO IS A JEW**  
By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, Jan. 14 (JTA) — Representatives of 21 American Jewish religious and secular organizations today called on political leaders in Israel to resist demands by the Orthodox religious establishment for an amendment to the Law of Return to redefine Who is a Jew. (See separate story for Orthodox statement.)

In addition, the 21 Jewish leaders urged that Israel establish an international commission, composed of representatives of the major branches of Jewish religious and communal life, to meet in Israel with Orthodox spokesmen "in the hope of working out an agreement that would prevent the deep divisions in Jewish life we fear if the proposed legislation is passed."

The American Jewish leaders held a news conference today at the headquarters of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), Reform, where they issued a joint statement in response to Israeli Premier Shimon Peres' apparent willingness to seek a "compromise" with Israel's Orthodox religious parties on the volatile issue of Who is a Jew.

**'Secondary Jewish Citizenship' Rejected**

Speaking at the news conference, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC, said, "We categorically reject the notion that there is some sort of qualitative distinction between one kind of Jew and another ... We reject the notion and refuse to be reduced to a kind of secondary Jewish citizenship. We

categorically refuse to be beggars at Jerusalem's gate." Other Jewish leaders were equally adamant in their opposition to any revision in Israel's Law of Return. Gerson Cohen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), said the proposed amendment is "an attack on Torah and on the right of people to interpret the Torah."

David Gordis, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said that while the AJC is "neutral on religious matters ... we are not neutral about the right of individuals and groups throughout the world — including Israel — to make their own religious choices; and we are unalterably opposed to religious monopoly and political bigotry."

Phyllis Kaplan, a national board member of Pioneer Women/Na'amat, said her organization opposed the amendment on the basis that "Judaism is a multifaceted, religious and cultural civilization whose development continues to this date. Therefore, we support the right of all Jews to practice any form of spiritual expression whether religious or secular which transmits Jewish values."

#### Statement By The Organizations

The statement issued by the 21 organizations said, in part:

"The self-serving demand of a group of Orthodox spokesman in Israel that they be recognized as the sole interpreters of Jewish religion, and specifically that their authority to determine the legitimacy of conversions performed outside Israel be spelled out in the secular law of Israel, is morally and religiously offensive to us." The statement added:

"The proposed change in the Law of Return would do violence to the principle of Jewish unity and jeopardize the sense of solidarity that binds the Jewish people everywhere to the State of Israel."

In deciding whether a conversion performed in the Diaspora is or is not authentic, basing their opinion not on how the conversion was performed but who performed it, the Israeli rabbinate and ... the state would arrogate to themselves authority over the religious lives of Jews throughout the world."

Furthermore, the statement said the amendment could result in Israel becoming a force for "injecting divisiveness" in Jewish life, instead of acting as a force of unity. The Knesset, the statement said, "should not attempt to legislate religious homogeneity. Religious differences are to be resolved neither by majority vote nor by coalition politics. The issue of Who is a Jew must ultimately be resolved among the religious groups involved."

#### A First-Time Suggestion

The proposal for an international commission to resolve the continued dispute on the Who is a Jew amendment to the Law of Return is the first time such a suggestion has been offered, according to Schindler, who recalled that American religious and secular organizations have been forced to confront the proposed amendment some 14 times. The most recent was last August.

Besides the UAHC, the AJCommittee, the JTS and Pioneer Women/Na'amat, other signators of the joint statement were: American Jewish Congress; Americans for Progressive Israel; Association of Reform Zionists; B'nai B'rith; Central Conference of American Rabbis; Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs; Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations-Havurot.

Hebrew Union College; Labor Zionist Alliance; Marcaz; National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods; National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods; Rabbinical Assembly; United Synagogue of America; Women's League for Conservative Judaism; World Union for Progressive Judaism; and the Zionist Organization of America.

#### ORTHODOX LEADER URGES THAT PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE LAW OF RETURN BE TEMPORARILY PUT ASIDE

NEW YORK, Jan. 14 (JTA) — Harold Jacobs, president of the National Council of Young Israel, has called upon American Jewish leaders to urge Israeli officials to temporarily put aside proposed changes in the Law of Return and other issues so that government officials there can direct their full attention to the current economic crisis in Israel.

Noting that "the divisive issue of 'Who is a Jew' should not be allowed to divert attention from the desperate economic crisis which threatens the very future of the Jewish State," the Orthodox leader nonetheless said he supported "the ultimate goal of establishing halacha, traditional Jewish law, as the sole basis for determining the Jewish identity of any convert under the Law of Return."

Jacobs assailed Reform and Conservative leaders in the United States and Israel for "misleading the Jewish public over the proposed change in the Law of Return." According to Jacobs, "the proposal would only re-affirm the same standards of Jewish identity accepted by the Jewish people for over 2,000 years, and which are currently applied by the Israeli government in all Law of Return cases."

#### CABINET CONTINUES DEBATE ON UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON

By David Landau and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Jan. 14 (JTA) — The Cabinet met in extraordinary session today to continue the debate, begun yesterday, on a plan for the unilateral phased withdrawal of the Israel Defense Force from south Lebanon.

The ministers convened this afternoon and were still in session by evening. A substantial majority is expected to approve the plan which is strongly supported by Premier Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin. A hard core of Likud ministers, including Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir, the leader of Likud, are known to be opposed.

But the strongest advocate of the plan at today's session turned out to be Deputy Premier and Housing Minister David Levy, a Likud-Herut and a powerful voice in his party. His support was seen as likely to encourage several Likud waverers to join the Labor Party ministers in backing the withdrawal.

#### Two More Israeli Soldiers Killed

As the Cabinet met, Israel Radio announced that two more Israeli soldiers were killed and a number wounded in south Lebanon in separate incidents today.

The Cabinet received a detailed briefing on the withdrawal plan from Rabin and senior IDF officers at its regular weekly session yesterday, which lasted six hours. It reportedly calls for a pull-back in three stages, with pauses in between to allow the defense establishment and the government to study the situation before continuing.

The ministers are considering the unilateral option because of the apparent failure by Israel and Lebanon,

after months of negotiations, to reach a military security and withdrawal agreement. Nevertheless, the talks at Nakura are continuing, although they were skipped last week. The negotiating teams are scheduled to meet again on Thursday but the consensus in Israel is that there is little chance the impasse will be broken.

### Seeking A Compromise Formula

At today's special session, which may run well into the night, supporters and opponents of the plan appeared to be seeking a compromise formula. According to Israel Radio, the controversy surrounds specific mention of returning the IDF to positions behind the international border.

Justice Minister Moshe Nissim of Likud, who opposes the plan, was said to have proposed a resolution to approve its first phase without specifying the subsequent stages. The first stage would remove the IDF from the south Lebanese coastal town of Sidon and its environs, a hotbed of hostility toward Israel.

Levy, who has taken independent positions on Lebanon in the past, angrily spurned the notion that support for the proposed pullback implied lack of concern for the security of Israel's northern towns and settlements. "What is the alternative? How long shall we stick there (in Lebanon)? Months? Years?" Levy reportedly asked his colleagues in a forceful plea for support of the withdrawal plan.

He warned that simply redeploying the IDF along a new semi-permanent line in south Lebanon — as some ministers suggested — would endanger the army and mean more casualties at the hands of the hostile Shiite Moslem population.

### Peres Discloses Some Details

Several hours before the Cabinet met today, Peres, addressing a luncheon meeting of the Foreign Press Association in Tel Aviv, disclosed some details of the withdrawal plan. He said each phase would be short enough not to require the IDF to dig in on new lines but long enough to allow Lebanon and Syria sufficient time to make "orderly arrangements."

He stressed that the withdrawal plan would ensure security for Israel and avert a "blood bath" in south Lebanon after the IDF departs. He declined to say how long complete withdrawal would take. According to reports yesterday, the three stages would be spread over a 6-9 month period.

**NO AGREEMENT REACHED ON U.S.-USSR TALKS ON MIDEAST, ALTHOUGH U.S. WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS ISSUE WITH THE USSR**

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14 (JTA) — The United States has told the Soviet Union it would like to discuss the Middle East and other regional issues but no agreement has been made to hold such talks, the State Department said today.

Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said that Secretary of State George Shultz, in his talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in Geneva last week, "noted U.S. interest in holding" such talks but said an agreement for the talks by Mideast experts from the two countries would have to be scheduled through diplomatic channels.

But Kalb stressed that the U.S. still opposed an international conference, which would include the Palestine Liberation Organization, on the Middle East proposed by the Soviet Union because it believes

the best way to achieve peace is direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. Kalb, who accompanied Shultz in Geneva, made his debut today as the spokesman at the daily State Department briefing after years of sitting on the opposite side as an NBC and CBS television reporter.

Kalb's comments came after he was questioned about published reports that R. Mark Palmer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, went to Israel and Egypt last week to tell the two governments that the U.S. and the Soviet Union plan to hold talks on the Mideast. But Kalb said he "understood" that Palmer went to Jerusalem and Cairo to brief the two governments about the results of the Geneva talks on nuclear disarmament.

The spokesman noted that President Reagan, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly last September, "noted our interest in policy level discussions about regional problems with the Soviets. We would include the Middle East as a possible area of discussion. As the President said — the objectives of such a political dialogue are to help avoid miscalculations, reduce the potential risk of U.S.-Soviet confrontation and help the people in the areas of conflict to find peaceful solutions."

Reading from a statement on this issue, Kalb added: "We have continually urged the Soviets to take a constructive approach toward the efforts to find peaceful solutions to regional problems. In this connection, we continue to believe that such an international conference is not a productive approach in the search for peace."

"The only realistic path to peace is direct negotiations among the parties directly concerned based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, a process the U.S. has encouraged in the Camp David accords and President Reagan's September 1, 1982 initiative."

Asked what the U.S. position on the Mideast is now, Kalb replied, "The United States is ready to resume its role as co-partner in the search for peace in the Middle East whenever the parties are prepared to negotiate. We remain committed to the conditions set forth in the President's September 1, 1982 initiative and on the basis of those positions we would work with the parties to achieve a negotiated settlement."

### LATE NEWS DEVELOPMENT

#### CABINET APPROVES IDF WITHDRAWAL

JERUSALEM, Jan. 14 (JTA) — The Cabinet voted 16-6 tonight to approve a three-stage withdrawal of the Israel Defense Force from south Lebanon. The first stage, expected to take five weeks to complete, will pull the IDF out of the coastal town of Sidon and its environs.

Under the plan, the second stage will pull the IDF out of the northeast sector of south Lebanon and the final stage will bring it to the international border. No timetable was given for completion of the second and third stages. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin explained that the timing has been left flexible and would be determined following a review of the effects of the first stage.

The dissenting votes were cast by Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, leader of Likud, and five Likud colleagues — Moshe Arens, Avraham Shari, Moshe Nissim, Moshe Katzav and Haim Corfu.

## SPECIAL TO THE JTA A DIFFERENT KIND OF COMMENCEMENT By Gil Sedan

NABLUS, Jan. 14 (JTA) -- For two-and-a-half hours last Thursday, inside the unfinished parking garage at the Arab university, A-Najah, it seemed as though there was no Israeli occupation here, as if one was attending a national event in an independent Palestinian state.

Cheering Palestinians -- an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people -- attended the fourth commencement exercises at the university which has often been the scene of violent clashes between Arab students and Israeli soldiers.

They sang nationalist songs, chanted Palestinian slogans and listened to patriotic speeches, against the backdrop of a huge red-white-black Palestinian flag hanging in the rear of the garage -- an absolute no-no by the standards of the Israeli authorities. But the army kept away from the university; it did not intervene.

As a rule, political gatherings in the administered territories are forbidden. Any exception must receive prior approval from the military authorities, and this is rarely given. The commencement ceremony at A-Najah gave the Palestinian elite a golden opportunity to hold a political rally disguised as a purely academic event. Nobody who attended had any doubt that this was, indeed, a political rally.

### Distinguished Guests And Visitors

As the 481 graduating students entered the hall to the strains of the Palestinian national song, Mawtini (My Country) and raising "V" signs with their fingers, the crowd cheered with enthusiasm. Women, whose children studied at the university, yelled traditional expressions of joy.

Among the crowd were many of the national leaders, most of them deposed from their official positions -- Bassam Shaka, who was removed as Mayor of Nabulus, and Karim Khalaf, deposed Mayor of Ramallah.

Next to them sat a distinguished guest, Wat Clevarius, the American Consul General in East Jerusalem -- quite openly an expression of American interest in the quality of life of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz has often expressed interest in the development of Arab universities in the territories.

The participants did not hide the fact that they regarded A-Najah -- and seven other universities in the territories -- as symbols of national renaissance. The university's management likes to compare it with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the role it played in the early days of the Yishuv.

A-Najah National University (its official name) is the largest university in the territories. It was founded in 1918 as an educational institution. In 1941 it became a college, and in 1965 it was transformed into a teachers' training institution. Under Israeli rule, in 1977, it became a university. It grew from several hundred students at the beginning to 3,100 students now.

The driving force behind the university is Hikmat Al-Masri, a former Speaker of the Jordanian Parliament, still known for his close ties with King Hussein and with the Egyptian leadership. Al-Masri is a member of one of the most prominent -- and rich-

est -- families in the West Bank. He was greeted at the commencement ceremonies like a king. The crowd rose and applauded when he entered the hall. Al-Masri waved at them gratefully. As he stood on the podium he saluted the crowd, like a general reviewing his troops. The honor was well deserved.

It can be said that without the Al-Masri family, the university would not exist. Al-Masri -- like the late Meir Weisgal, who travelled around Jewish communities on behalf of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot -- often travels around the Arab world, raising funds for the university. He serves as the chairman of the Board of Trustees and is often involved in delicate negotiations with the student body, on the one hand, and the Israeli military authorities, on the other.

This is almost a "mission impossible." The authorities have reportedly made it clear that they will tolerate no political activities inside the universities which they regard as instruments for incitement in a delicate political situation.

### Political Activity On Campuses

Political activity on the A-Najah campus, as on most campuses in the territories, dominates the students' lives. The student body is controlled by Al Fatah supporters, with strong opposition from the Moslem Brotherhood.

Studies at the university were resumed only a month ago after a four-month ban. The sanction was imposed on the students after they held a nationalist exhibition which displayed, according to the authorities, elements of incitement. Such closure orders have become a part of the university routine.

The authorities close the university, then there is a quiet period, followed by another exhibit or a demonstration which triggers a severe reaction on the part of the military. As a rule, though, the military refrains from intervening in most indoor activities as long as it is not considered incitement.

The excessive engagement in political activities and the frequent closures of the university does not enhance the standards of the Arab universities in the territories.

### Problem Of Job Opportunities

But the major problem facing the graduates is lack of job opportunities. Of the 481 graduates this year, 354 hold degrees from the arts and economics faculties. There are three faculties for journalism in the territories, but there is hardly a need for that many journalists.

It is estimated that there is a total of some 13,000 university graduates in the territories working at jobs for which they were not trained because they could not find jobs in their professions.

Unemployment, however, is not widely felt in the territories. Those who want to work can find jobs either in Israel proper or closer to home. But the shadow of unemployment hung over the commencement ceremony at A-Najah last Thursday. It also hangs over Israeli officials in charge of the territories who know that unemployment in the territories is not only a social and economic problem, but may well have serious security implications.

A hungry, hostile population may be much more unpleasant than a population that so far has had little to complain about so far as their standard of living goes.