



U.S. JEWISH LEADERS MOUNT INTENSIVE EFFORT TO TRY TO STEM CHANGES IN THE LAW OF RETURN

by Margie Olster

NEW YORK, July 23 (JTA) -- American Jewish leaders becoming increasingly alarmed at the prospect of the Israeli government passing legislation which would alter the definition of a Jew under the Law of Return have mounted an intensive effort to stem such changes.

A delegation of American and Canadian leaders from the top fund-raising organizations for Israel, the United Jewish Appeal and United Israel Appeal, led by Shoshana Cardin, president of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), will leave for Israel Sunday, three days in advance of a scheduled vote in the Knesset on the issue.

Cardin told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Wednesday that should the measure pass, Reform and Conservative Jews would very likely reevaluate their political, financial and psychological support for Israel. In practice, she said, this could mean less travel to Israel and less encouragement for their youth to go on programs in Israel. But Cardin stressed that "we don't want to talk about the what if, we want to avoid that." She added, "No one voice speaks for the totality."

The decision to send a delegation immediately was taken Wednesday afternoon in a closed-door session at CJF headquarters here by representatives of UJA, UIA, CJF, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the Jewish Agency and four of the largest local Jewish Federations. The move reflects the profound concern in the North American Jewish community over the "Who is a Jew?" debate within Israel.

A Political, Not A Religious Issue

Small, ultra-Orthodox parties in the Knesset have attempted for years to push through amendments to the Law of Return which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to all Jews. The small parties want the law to stipulate that a convert must go through a halachic conversion to qualify for the automatic citizenship.

Following the numerous defeats, the latest of which came when two bills failed to gain a majority vote in the Knesset on July 8, the small parties have introduced a "back door" amendment which would give the rabbinic courts the authority to determine validity of conversions. This amendment is scheduled for a vote Wednesday.

The issue has become political rather than religious, said Cardin. The smaller religious parties, threatening to pull out of their traditional alliance with the Likud and vote with Labor to dissolve the unity government, have effectively pressured Likud into supporting the proposed changes. This was reflected in the July 8th votes when Likud almost unanimously voted for the two amendments. The amendments were narrowly defeated.

Shamir had pledged to the ultra-Orthodox Shas party several months ago that Likud would "do all in its power" to pass a bill introduced by Shas to empower the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate to approve conversions.

"The number of votes for the amendment has increased over the years," Cardin told the JTA following the closed meeting. "It is possible that special pressure now is being brought to bear."

The delegation's goal, according to Cardin, is to convince both major parties to remove the "Who is a Jew?" issue from their political agendas permanently.

Passing the amendments "would delegitimize and disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Jews," Cardin said. She referred to the numbers of North American Jews affiliated with the Reform and Conservative movements who have the perception that they "do not fit in" in the Jewish state. "This could well erode support for the State of Israel -- something we cannot tolerate," she said.

The delegation leaving Sunday plans to meet with Shamir and other government figures, Cardin said. But they also want to reach the Israeli people through press conferences and meetings.

"We want to help Israelis to understand the issue. We are hoping that there is an understanding of the numbers of people involved and the potential rift," Cardin said.

Telegrams Sent To Every MK

The leaders who met Wednesday also decided to send telegrams to every member of Knesset urging them not to support the proposed changes and explaining their position. The text of the telegrams was similar to one sent earlier in the week to Shamir which warned that the changes would "irreparably damage the support of Israel and its institutions by diaspora Jews" and cause a "terrible rift" among the Jewish people. (See July 22 Bulletin.)

Representatives of the organizations supported a similar resolution at the Jewish Agency Assembly last month in Jerusalem and have communicated their displeasure with the trend on a number of other occasions.

U.S. ORTHODOX RABBINICAL GROUP OPPOSES KNESSET BILL ON CONVERSIONS

NEW YORK, July 23 (JTA) -- An organization of American Orthodox rabbis said Thursday they "categorically oppose" a Knesset bill backed by Premier Yitzhak Shamir that would give the Israeli Chief Rabbinate or Rabbinical Courts exclusive right to approve converts in Israel, even though it would exclude conversion performed by Reform and Conservative rabbis.

A statement by The Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada (Agudas Harabonim) said the proposed legislation "does not solve the problem of 'Mihu Yehudi' (Who is a Jew) and 'inherently poses a great danger because we cannot be certain of future rabbis who will constitute the Rabbinical Courts. Perhaps Conservative or Reform rabbis will be appointed by the government," the statement said.

It referred to a measure introduced in the Knesset by the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party to amend religious regulations dating from the British Mandate in Palestine. It would require that all converts to Judaism obtain the Israeli Chief

Rabbinate's endorsement in order to be fully recognized as Jews in Israel.

Despite Shamir's pledge of Likud support to Shas leader Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, the measure was defeated in the Knesset on July 8 by a vote of 60-56 with four MKs absent. Also defeated by a 62-53 margin was an amendment to the Law of Return introduced by the National Religious Party. Known as the "Who is a Jew?" amendment, it would define a Jew as a person born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism, with the words "according to halacha" (religious law) added. It would effectively invalidate conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis.

Statement By The Rabbis

The statement by the Agudas Harabonim expressed distrust of Shamir's motives and concern over inroads made by Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel.

It said: "We see the influence of Reform is growing daily in Israel and that the government has a listening ear to their opinion and their protest. In a time when many Reform temples have sprouted in Israel we are not certain that Reform and Conservative rabbis will not be recognized in the Rabbinical Court.

"We are almost certain that this resolution of Mr. Shamir is a device used to appease Rabbi Peretz whom he sorely needs in the Cabinet in his struggle for power with Shimon Peres. We are also certain that the same Reform people who did not allow the amendment of 'Givur Kahalacha'--converted according to the halacha -- to the Law of Return for so many years, will disallow Shamir's current resolution."

The statement concluded by noting that "we feel inherently the resolution as it now stands is a potential danger to the religious community and should be rescinded."

RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS HALT A DIG

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 23 (JTA) -- Religious zealots won another battle against archaeologists digging at a site the zealots claim was a Jewish burial ground. A team of about 50 American volunteers, headed by Prof. Robert Bull of Drew University in Madison, N.J. cut short their excavations near the ancient Roman town of Caesaria Wednesday when they were surrounded by three busloads of ultra-Orthodox Jews who accused them of desecrating the dead.

About 100 Israeli police were on hand to prevent a physical clash. Bull, who was reported last week ready to resign rather than give in to the zealots, abandoned the site on orders from the president of Drew University, Paul Hardin.

The university, a Methodist-affiliated institution, has been under heavy pressure from Orthodox groups in the U.S., headed by Rabbi Pinhas Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey, to halt the digging.

The project, coordinated by Drew University, employed student archaeologists from a dozen American colleges and universities who volunteered for the work. They had been excavating at the site for six weeks and were to continue for another two weeks.

The ultra-Orthodox Atra Kadisha, an organization devoted to protecting ancient Jewish graves, intervened 10 days ago and began harassing the archaeologists. They said an Orthodox boy reported to them that he had found a bone at

the site which the rabbis said they "knew" was from a Jewish body. Bull said it had been established without doubt that there were no cemeteries, Jewish or otherwise, at the site. Individual remains were found but were unearched along crucifixes and other non-Jewish ornaments and inscriptions.

Claim Site Was Not Jewish Cemetery

Israel's antiquities department, which licenses all archaeological diggings sent inspectors who concluded that the bones found were not part of a Jewish cemetery. Yehuda Neeman, the inspector for the Hadera region which includes Caesaria, said the site was a garbage dump dating back 100-150 years, on top of the Byzantine Christian area of the historic city.

But Rabbi Zeev Berlin, of Atra Kadisha, insisted that "There are dozens if not hundreds of ancient Jewish graves at the site of the excavation." An Israeli archaeologist at the site told reporters it was impossible to reason with the zealots.

He said they told him, "We know more about ancient sites than you do." When the archaeologist pointed out that some remains and artifacts found at nearby sites had been carbon-dated several thousands years back, he was told: "Don't be ridiculous. Everybody knows that God created the world only 5,747 years ago."

Dig Site To Be Shifted

Archaeologists have been working at Caesaria for 12 digging seasons spread over the past 17 years. A source from Prof. Bull's team said the diggings for the remainder of this season would be shifted to a site about 500 yards from the disputed one.

The Atra Kadisha follows archaeological digs all over the country and claims to have found Jewish graves at virtually every site. In 1981 they succeeded in suspending digging at the City of David in Jerusalem and more recently interrupted construction of a new road in Tel Aviv because they claimed it ran through an ancient cemetery.

They do not object where non-Jewish remains are found. They claim to be able to distinguish Jewish from non-Jewish remains by the way the bones are arranged.

Meanwhile, an archaeological dig aimed at uncovering an ancient Roman city in the Beisan Valley was halted Wednesday, not because of religious pressure but for shortage of funds. About 90 residents of Beth Shean employed at the dig were dismissed from their jobs.

UNIFIL SOLDIERS INTERCEPT A GROUP OF HEAVILY ARMED TERRORISTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 23 (JTA) -- Soldiers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) intercepted a group of heavily armed terrorists in south Lebanon on their way to infiltrate Israel. Their weapons were confiscated and they were released, Israel Radio reported Thursday.

According to Israel Radio, a number of the detainees were Syrians. Three terrorist squads equipped with maps and binoculars were apparently on an intelligence-gathering mission. The others carried large stocks of weapons, sabotage material and sophisticated radio and communications equipment, Israel Radio said.

The Israel Radio report said UNIFIL was trying to maintain a low profile on the operation

in order not to complicate relations with various guerrilla groups active in the south Lebanon region patrolled by the international force.

"The most UNIFIL can do is to confiscate weapons and ask the terrorists politely to leave," an observer commented. UNIFIL's mandate does not allow it to arrest terrorists passing through its zone and it can open fire only if attacked.

CHILDREN OF YORDIM OFTEN URGE THEIR FAMILIES TO RETURN TO ISRAEL

TEL AVIV, July 23 (JTA) -- The children of yordim -- Israelis who have settled permanently abroad -- are often the key to prompting their families to return to Israel, according to Absorption Ministry official Yosef Kuchik. At present there are about 40,500 children of yordim living in the U.S., 75 percent of them born there, and approximately a third live in New York City.

The figures, contained in a survey conducted for the Absorption Ministry by the Central Bureau of Statistics, were made public by Kuchik Wednesday. They are based in part on U.S. Census Bureau data.

The survey found that in 1980 there were 34,500 households in the U.S. and Canada in which at least one spouse was Israel-born. Only 15,400 of them had children under the age of 20.

Kuchik said that past experience showed that yordim return to Israel out of concern for their children's future Israeli identity and because many of the children want to come back to Israel. Kuchik heads the Ministry's efforts to encourage yordim to return.

FOCUS ON ISSUES REMEMBERING THE RIGHTEOUS CHRISTIANS By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, July 23 (JTA) -- In the early 1960's, Rabbi Harold Schulweis, then a Conservative rabbi in Oakland, Calif., came to know Herman "Fritz" Graebe, superintendent of a building in San Francisco, of meager financial means, who had once been a prestigious engineer in Germany. Graebe was assigned in August 1941 to manage a railroad engineering project for the Germans in the Ukraine. And there he witnessed the murder of nearly 1,500 Jews by Nazi extermination squads.

Graebe then engineered his greatest project: a rescue network that saved the lives of hundreds of Jewish refugees in a dozen Ukrainian cities and villages. For his rescue work, at tremendous personal risk, in which Graebe organized the Jews into work squads, Graebe became known as "The Moses of Rovno."

Graebe was the only German to volunteer to testify at the Nuremberg trials of war criminals. And for this he was hounded, his family taunted. His position taken from him, his money completely gone, Graebe came to America with his family in 1948.

Many Similar Cases

That such a man should be forgotten by those he had rescued haunted Schulweis, who began to think about starting a foundation to help Righteous Gentiles. The ailing Graebe was "just one of many that I came across," Schulweis told JTA. In 1962, Schulweis founded the Institute for Righteous Acts, whose archives were placed in the Judah Magnes Museum at Berkeley. "And not one rescuer of Jews wrote us," he said.

Schulweis said he also received reports from individuals who had visited in Canada with one of the people who hid the family of Anne Frank in Amsterdam, Viktor Kugler, who was in dire economic and health straits.

And he began to hear stories, such as the one of Mother Maria of Paris, who was sent to a concentration camp, where she gave her identification papers to a Jewish woman, who survived because of them, while Mother Maria went to the gas chamber.

Almost all the rescuers he learned about were impoverished and forgotten. Many had been turned out of their communities for helping Jews. Schulweis's thoughts were then clear: "If a Christian risked his life to save a Jew, don't I as a Jew have an obligation to help him live out his life in dignity?"

Foundation To Be Part Of ADL

Since 1981, Dr. Eva Fogelman in New York has been director of the Rescuer Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center, which was initially sponsored by the John Slawson Fund of the American Jewish Committee. For the past 10 years, Fogelman, a social psychologist and psychotherapist, has been involved with research and therapy related to the impact of the Holocaust on survivors and their children.

Fogelman, who recently received her Ph.D. as a result of this work, told JTA that "As a result of my research in this area, I have encountered many rescuers who were socially isolated because of the good deeds they had done for Jews during the Holocaust. Rescuers were attacked, some were killed after the war. We have information that rescuers were physically threatened and ostracized by their communities for being 'Jew-lovers.' And some continue to have fears until today."

And so Schulweis and Fogelman joined forces last year to bring this shame out of the closet. Together they worked on a bicoastal project, the Foundation to Sustain Righteous Christians.

It has just been announced that on September 15, the foundation will become a project of the International Center for Holocaust Studies of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. ADL's national director Abraham Foxman said that Schulweis came to him a year ago and said, "It's bigger than I am." Thereafter, plans were set in motion to make the foundation an integral part of the ADL.

Foxman told JTA, "There's a lesson, in that there is good and bad in all of us, and we must recognize both. If we are to survive as a people, it's to laud and applaud and use as examples people who did what is just and right. It's a fitting part of our institution. It's part of what we're all about."

An Important Step

Dennis Klein, director of the ADL Holocaust Center, is also enthusiastic about the transfer of the foundation to the ADL. "We're all really excited about it," he said, adding: "It supplies an understanding of that period that I don't think any program will give that much attention to, certainly not within the Jewish community. To my knowledge, there's been no full-time program addressing this issue."

The ADL has allotted close to \$100,000 for the foundation, Foxman said. The foundation will have a full-time ADL administrator, Frank Reiss. Fogelman remains the foundation's director,

Schulweis is founding and continuing chairman, and John Ruskay, who is vice chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America here, is foundation secretary.

Seeking To Befriend The Rescuers

And, said Fogelman, the foundation is seeking volunteers "who will befriend rescuers who are socially isolated, setting up speakers' bureaus, and recording the stories. We're also facilitating to help survivors write testimony to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in order to get these rescuers recorded as Righteous Among the Nations."

Schulweis, now rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, a Los Angeles suburb, has written a letter to be sent to all rabbis of all divisions of Judaism to ask them to appeal from their pulpits on Rosh Hashanah for those who were rescued by Righteous Christians to come forward with their stories, and with the current whereabouts of those who survive.

Schulweis said the foundation has already received contributions from rabbis, as well as laymen from all over the world. The concept of helping the rescuers comes from the Jewish ethic, he explained: "hakarat hatov" -- recognizing the good. This recognition of the rescuers "really provides an opportunity to relate differently to the world out there and to change an inner perception," he said.

Schulweis explained the foundation's goals as "to make a conscious, systematic effort to find out the numberless rescuers who have been accounted for. We need a (Simon) Wiesenthal and a (Beate) Klarsfeld to search out the good as we have spent our energies -- correctly -- to hunt down the evil. The evil has been well researched, but the good, tragically, have been unsung -- and that has to be acknowledged.

"In the last year, we've gotten hundreds of letters from Jewish survivors whose conscience has been pricked. The Jewish world community has not engaged in a systematic and active search for the rescuers, who clearly exist in greater numbers than we imagined."

WIESEL APPEALS TO UN LEADER TO OPEN TO THE PUBLIC UN ARCHIVES ON NAZI WAR CRIMINALS By Yitzhak Rabi

UNITED NATIONS, July 23 (JTA) -- Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel appealed to United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar Thursday to open to the public the files on Nazi war criminals at the UN war crimes archives in Manhattan.

"For the sake of memory and humanity, I appeal to the Secretary General, whom I respect very much, to open these files to the public," Wiesel, an author and Holocaust survivor, said at a press conference called by the Israel Mission to the UN.

The Israel Mission obtained 1,600 files on Nazi war criminals Thursday. It had been reported earlier that it would receive 1,500 files. Wiesel said he came to the UN to support Israel's longstanding request that the files be opened to scholars, educators, students and journalists.

"To keep them closed would mean to silence the voice of history," he said, noting that was what Hitler and other Nazi leaders wanted -- to deprive the human race of any knowledge of the atrocities and crimes they committed.

The 1,600 files were delivered to Israel's Deputy Ambassador to the UN, Yohanan Bein, who is Acting Ambassador in the absence of Binjamin Netanyahu, who is in Israel. Bein said the files would be sent to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Research Institute in Jerusalem for study. He said the Secretary General is scheduled to meet on September 22 with representatives of the 17 former member states of the now defunct UN War Crimes Commission to discuss opening the files to the public.

Bein said he believed all the countries now recognize "the necessity to grant broader access to the UN archives." So far, 14 of the 17 former War Crimes Commission members have announced they support broader access. The three countries still opposed are France, India and Czechoslovakia. Bein noted that final authority to open the files rests with the Secretary General, who will make his decision after the September meeting.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS APPEAL TO HIGH COURT AGAINST REFUSAL OF THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL TO REGISTER THEM AS JEWS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 23 (JTA) -- An Ethiopian couple appealed to the Supreme Court Thursday against the refusal by the Rabbinical Court to register them as Jews unless they undergo a special conversion process, including ritual immersion.

The couple, Dov Vera Lapeto and Eli Noga of Kiryat Arba, an Orthodox town in the West Bank, stated in their appeal that they were married in April 1986 by rabbis of the Ethiopian community, according to halacha. They have since become the parents of a daughter.

But the Interior Ministry refused to register them as Jews without the Rabbinical Court's authorization. The court will not recognize their marriage unless they undergo conversion rites.

This has been a sore point, especially since the arrival in Israel of about 10,000 Ethiopian Jews in "Operation Moses" in 1985. The Rabbinate has expressed doubts in many cases of their authenticity as Jews. The Ethiopians, fiercely devout and observant of all religious laws, consider the demand for conversion a gross insult since it is not required of Jewish immigrants from other countries.

REHABILITATION PLAN FOR MOSHAVIM By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 23 (JTA) -- The Knesset Finance Committee approved a rehabilitation plan for moshavim Thursday, ending a long dispute between Labor and Likud over measures to ease their financial difficulties.

The plan, prepared by a special subcommittee, would cancel part of the moshavim's debts to banks and the Jewish Agency. The repayment of other loans would be spread over a four-year period. They amount to 852 million shekels and would be repaid at 6.7 percent interest.

The banks and the Jewish Agency will write off the balance of the debts, amounting to 24 million Shekels. Three Likud members of the Committee, including former Finance Minister Yoram Aridor, voted against the proposal. Aridor said it would not solve the problem and the moshavim, largely Labor-affiliated, would need more assistance in the future.