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ISRAELIS BY THE THOUSANDS RALLY TO PRESS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- Israelis of varying political persuasions made it clear this weekend that they are fed up with the system of proportional representation that allows small parties to wield disproportionate power in the Knesset.

Tens of thousands of members and supporters of the Labor Party and Likud, and parties to the right and left of them, demonstrated in a driving rain storm here Saturday night for swift overhaul of the political machinery.

Assembled in Malchei Yisrael Square, they urged Labor and Likud, the two largest political parties, to join forces in a temporary emergency coalition government.

It would be in office for no more than six months and its sole purpose would be to enact electoral reform. The present election system based on party lists would be replaced by direct constituency elections.

The mass rally was called by the Public Committee for a Constitution for Israel and the Committee of Concerned Citizens.

Although attendance was below the hoped for 100,000, that was attributed to the bad weather and the relatively little advance publicity given the rally.

But its size nevertheless was substantial. The banners and slogans demonstrators carried along with their umbrellas made evident the deep revulsion felt by secular Jews in Israel over the price the ultra-Orthodox parties are demanding for their participation in a new coalition government.

79-Seat Majority

The big surprise of the Nov. 1 elections was the strength shown by the religious parties. They emerged with 18 Knesset seats among them, making it virtually impossible for either Labor or Likud to establish a government without them.

There are bitter rivalries and feuds within the ultra-Orthodox bloc. But it seems united in trying to impose religious observance and customs on the non-observant population and to redefine who is a Jew by enacting legislation that could alienate much of Diaspora Jewry from Israel.

Premier Yitzhak Shamir reportedly promised the religious parties Friday that if they joined Likud in forming a government, he would obtain passage of "Who Is a Jew" legislation within three months.

The idea of electoral reform is not new in Israel. But it has been blocked until now by the many small parties. Labor and Likud, with a combined total of 79 Knesset seats, could in theory enact reforms in a temporary coalition set up for that purpose.

Speakers at the rally included such diverse public figures as peacenik Abie Nathan and reserve Gen. Rafael Eitan, leader of the far right-wing Tsomet party.

Eitan said that although a constituency election might make it harder for small factions such as Tsomet to win Knesset seats, it is essential to elect a stable government that would not need to pay "blackmail" in order to govern.

GROUPS' PLEA ON 'WHO IS A JEW' MAY BE OVERLOOKED BY SHAMIR By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- American Jewish leaders expressed disappointment but not surprise Sunday at indications that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir may ignore their plea not to use the "Who Is a Jew" controversy as a political bargaining chip.

An ad hoc coalition of 27 organizations signed onto a statement Friday that said a proposed amendment to the 40-year-old Law of Return "would inflict enormous damage, actual and symbolic, on the Jews of the Diaspora."

The law essentially defines who is considered legally a Jew in Israel and thereby entitled to automatic citizenship.

Professing their "devotion to the State and people of Israel," the groups sent a cable to Shamir, Labor Party rival Shimon Peres and President Chaim Herzog saying they "reject any offer to divide our people by legislative action of the Knesset."

The organizations also announced plans to send a representative delegation to Jerusalem later this month to discuss the issue with Israeli political leaders, including those of the Orthodox parties.

But the delegation's mission may come too late. On Friday, an aide to the Likud prime minister said Shamir had promised Israel's four Orthodox parties that he would ensure passage of the amendment by his government, in exchange for their support.

The amendment would change Israel's basic immigration law to deny automatic citizenship to those converted by Reform or Conservative rabbis. Both movements, representing approximately 90 percent of the affiliated Jews in the United States, have long argued that such a change would delegitimize them and alienate their adherents from Israel.

Shamir May Have The Votes

The Orthodox parties are able to demand the change because of their surprisingly strong showing in Israel's elections. The four parties emerged with 18 of 120 Knesset seats, enough to represent the balance of power between Shamir's Likud bloc and Peres' Labor Party.

Reports from Jerusalem on Sunday indicated that Shamir had won the backing of the Orthodox parties and now has enough votes to assemble a governing coalition.

"It's dismaying to hear that Shamir has made a deal, but I suppose that in the quest for political power anything goes," Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of Reform Judaism's Union of American Hebrew Congregations said in one of a series of telephone interviews the Jewish Telegraphic Agency conducted Sunday with Jewish leaders.

The Reform leader expressed anger at a statement by Shamir Cabinet Secretary Yossi Achimeier, who in announcing Shamir's pledge to the Orthodox parties, said American Jewish resentment to the amendment "will calm down."

"If Achimeier thinks this will 'blow over' after a month, then that is a misreading of the

American Jewish community," he said.

"Israel was created in order to be a place where every Jew can enter," said Schindler, who arrived in this country as a refugee from Hitler's Germany.

'Irrevocable Alienation'

The Reform leader warned that new limitations on the law would alienate those Jews in the Diaspora affected by intermarriage and conversion.

Ira Silverman, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, said Shamir's pledge could lead to "deep and possibly irrevocable alienation."

"It can start from anger and reduced interest in Israel because people feel disenfranchised, and lead to reduced tourism and reduced political and financial support. I'm not suggesting that as a threat, but it can lead to those unwanted results," he said.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, also said he wasn't surprised by Shamir's pledge to the Orthodox parties.

He said it was possible that Shamir or other Israeli leaders do not understand the impact of a change in the "Who Is a Jew" definition on Diaspora Jews."

Morris Abram, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said in a statement Saturday that changing the Law of Return would be "divisive" and would have "deep symbolic significance."

But the Conference of Presidents, which includes a number of Orthodox groups, is not expected to take a position on the controversy.

Orthodox Divided

Statements released this weekend show the extent of division even among Orthodox groups.

Nessim Gaon of Geneva, president of the World Sephardi Federation, said that even though Sephardic Jews "treasure our Orthodox tradition," they fear that "political decisions may be adopted accommodating a fanatic and extremist point of view for reasons of political expediency."

Gaon warned that "this will inevitably result in tragic dissension and strife within the Jewish people and the Diaspora."

But according to Rabbi Max Schreier, president of the Rabbinical Council of America, various unnamed organizations in the Jewish community have launched "an avalanche of unbelievable hatred and hysteria" against the possibility of Shamir giving into Orthodox demands.

The 27 organizations signing Friday's statement were Americans for Progressive Israel, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Association of Reform Zionists of America, B'nai B'rith, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, Hadassah, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jewish Labor Committee, Jewish Theological Seminary, Labor Zionist Alliance, Mercaz, Na'amata USA.

Also, National Council for Labor Israel, National Council of Jewish Women, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Rabbinical Assembly, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United Synagogue of America, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, Workmen's Circle, World Council of Synagogues, World Union for Progressive Judaism.

IDF SEALS OFF TERRITORIES AS PNC CONVENES IN ALGIERS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- The West Bank and Gaza Strip were completely sealed off over the weekend and placed in a tight military grip.

The Israel Defense Force deployed troops in unprecedented numbers to crush any disturbances that might erupt in the territories as a consequence of the Palestine National Council meeting that began Saturday in Algiers.

Telephone lines were cut, school buildings were occupied by soldiers. Local inhabitants were denied freedom of movement from one zone to another, and many workers heading for jobs in Israel were turned back at military checkpoints.

The PNC, the parliamentary body of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is expected to issue a political statement Tuesday that will include the proclamation of an independent Palestinian state in the territories.

Unconfirmed reports from Algiers on Sunday said the body would also endorse U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, which implicitly recognizes Israel's right to exist.

The Israeli authorities expect the declaration of statehood to trigger a massive escalation of the Palestinian uprising, now in its 12th month. They have vowed to prevent it by whatever means necessary.

General Strike In Israel

There has been unmistakable nervousness on Israel's part over the PNC's potential to unleash new violence in the territories and possibly among Israeli Arabs.

An ad hoc committee of Arab Knesset members and the mayors of Arab towns in Israel has, in fact, called a general strike for Tuesday.

They say it is to protest the demolition of 15 houses in the Israeli Arab town of Taiba a week ago. The Interior Ministry ordered the houses destroyed because they were built without licenses.

Organizers, who have urged the population to refrain from violence, insist the timing of the strike is not intended to coincide with the PNC's expected declaration of statehood.

ISRAEL TO CONSIDER DEATH PENALTY

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- A gasoline bomb attack that killed an Israeli woman and her three small children near Jericho two weeks ago may result in the death penalty being applied to terrorists.

The Cabinet set up a ministerial committee Sunday to deal with the controversial issue.

It will be headed by the defense minister and will include the foreign minister and justice minister. The Cabinet's resolution also calls for the participation of the attorney general.

The judge advocate general, the chief legal officer of the military, could, after consultation with the ministerial panel, demand the death penalty for a particularly heinous terrorist crime, with good chances that it would be applied.

Capital punishment for terrorists is allowable under Israeli law. But military prosecutors have avoided it, in part for fear of the consequences that would befall Israeli soldiers or civilians captured by terrorist organizations.

WEST GERMAN'S RESIGNATION LEAVES A TRAIL OF SORROW AND BITTERNESS

By David Kantor

BONN, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- Philip Jenninger shifted over the weekend from public remorse to a bluntly defensive stance, following his resignation Friday from the presidency of the Bundestag.

He complained bitterly in interviews published here Saturday that it was no longer possible to speak the truth. In Germany today, "you can't call things by name," he said.

He was referring to the stunning speech he delivered in the Bundestag Thursday, which many interpreted to be a justification of the Nazi regime.

His remarks were all the more shocking because of the nature of the forum. He spoke at a solemn special session of the lower house of the West German parliament commemorating the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

As disbelief at what they were hearing turned to revulsion, more than 50 deputies rose and walked out of the chamber.

They included not only the opposition Social Democrats and Greens but members of Jenninger's Christian Democratic Union and its coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party.

Jenninger, a ranking member and rising star of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's governing CDU, seemed bewildered by the furious reactions to his speech.

He resigned Friday under fire in the Federal Republic and abroad.

Jews Present In Chamber

In a statement read for him by the Bundestag's vice president, Annemarie Renger, Jenninger said he was shaken by the response and it weighed heavily on his conscience.

He claimed his speech was misunderstood and that his auditors did not grasp his intention, which was to explain why the German people so ardently embraced Hitler.

Among those in the chamber at the time were Heinz Galinski, a Holocaust survivor who is chairman of the Central Council of Jews in West Germany, and the Israeli ambassador to Bonn, Yitzhak Ben-Ari.

Also present was the president of the Federal Republic, Richard von Weizsacker, widely hailed for the heartfelt eloquence with which he has acknowledged Germany's guilt for its dark past.

Jenninger maintained in his speech that the Germans accepted Hitler because he transformed the country from a defeated nation into a feared and respected world power.

He said Germans agreed that the Jews had "risen above their station" and had to be "put in their place."

He argued that anti-Semitism was a phenomenon of long standing in Europe, hardly the invention of Germany, and that National Socialist ideas were common long before Hitler.

He also appeared to express understanding for Germans who would rather suppress memories of the Nazi past and concentrate on rebuilding their country from the ruins of war.

Observers predicted that Jenninger's speech will become a major political issue in the days and weeks ahead. Demands for his resignation became moot when he stepped down, voluntarily but obviously under intense pressure from those concerned with the government's image abroad.

As soon as he resigned, the government and

opposition parties welcomed his move. Chancellor Kohl issued a statement praising Jenninger for his achievements and insisted that he really held deep feelings of friendship and respect for the Jews.

Surprisingly, Jenninger found a defender among the members of the Central Council of Jews in West Germany. Michael Fuerst said there was no reason to demand his resignation.

According to Fuerst, the speaker had simply acknowledged that the German people followed Hitler blindly because of his initial successes.

Jewish Groups Express Regret

Chairman Galinski maintained, on the other hand, that Jenninger's resignation was the "natural consequence" of his speech.

Reactions from American Jewish organizations seemed expressions of sorrow more than anger.

In New York, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said Jenninger's remarks were "insensitive and wrong, since they were interpreted as a justification of Hitler's rise to power."

Foxman added that the speech "was all the more regrettable since Mr. Jenninger has a record of sympathy and support for the Jewish people and for Israel."

Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress, said Jenninger was "trying to explain the state of mind of many Germans during the early '30s without justifying or condoning that state of mind."

But, he added, "such understanding must be expressed in a way that does not lessen outrage and condemnation," Lifton said.

AUSTRIAN CATHOLIC LEADER SPEAKS OF CHURCH'S FAILURE TO STOP NAZIS By Reinhard Engel

VIENNA, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- A Catholic lay leader last week took his church to task for its failure to speak up, much less aid Jews, during the pogroms of the Nazi era in Catholic Austria.

Dr. Paul Schulmeister, president of Catholic Action, addressed several hundred people who packed the Jewish community center here Thursday night to observe the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

He shared the platform with Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky; Cardinal Karl Berg, chairman of the Austrian Catholic Bishops Conference; and Paul Grosz, president of the Austrian Jewish community. The meeting followed an hour of prayers at the main synagogue here.

Vranitzky, a Socialist who heads the Socialist-Conservative coalition government, stressed the need to continue to reflect on the Holocaust after the current commemorations have ended.

"We all know that democracy and human rights are endangered all the time. Fascism has many different faces and wears many different clothes. One has to remain alert."

Schulmeister stressed the guilt Catholics must bear by not having resisted the Nazis when they devastated temples and harassed and killed Jews.

"I ask myself why the Christian belief has failed. One becomes guilty not only when committing a crime, but also when letting someone else commit it by not resisting the evil."

Schulmeister added, "To remain silent is not enough for Christians today. We must remember what led to Auschwitz."

BACKLOG IN PROCESSING EMIGRANTS COULD HAVE IMPACT ON SOVIET JEWS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- The budget crunch that has caused a backlog in the processing of Soviet citizens seeking to immigrate to the United States has the potential to affect Soviet Jews, although it does not as yet, the State Department said last week.

Department spokesman Charles Redman said the problem exists at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, where the Immigration and Naturalization Service does not have enough personnel to handle the flood of applicants that have been streaming in since last summer.

Only about 5 percent of these applicants are Jews. The bulk of the applicants are Armenians, Redman said.

Most Jewish emigrants leave the Soviet Union on Israeli visas and go to Vienna. From there the majority go on to Rome, where they apply to enter the United States on refugee status.

The problem in Moscow is a result of the Reagan administration's success in pressing the Soviet Union to increase emigration, Redman said.

"We have seen during the past year a positive Soviet response to our call for increasing numbers being permitted to emigrate," he said.

"This welcome development has meant that our embassy in Moscow processed six times as many emigrants from the Soviet Union in fiscal '88 as it had the year before."

Not Yet A Problem In Rome

The State Department official explained that for the 1989 fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, the INS has been given funds for enough personnel to interview 4,000 applicants in Moscow and 12,500 in Rome.

The problem began last July 1, when the embassy in Moscow stopped issuing visas because of the budgetary constraints, stranding about 3,000 people.

Redman said that about half of these have since been granted visas through private means, and the remaining 1,500 have been processed under the 1989 budget.

This has exhausted the number that can be interviewed during the first quarter of the fiscal year. Redman said processing will resume in January for the applicants who have been streaming into the embassy at the rate of 2,000 a month since July.

He urged persons seeking visas to the United States in Moscow not to sell their homes or other possessions until they have a visa.

The problem does not exist yet in Rome, where 2,400 persons arrived from the Soviet Union in October, Redman said.

He said if this rate continues it "may result in some delays in Rome as well."

The State Department official ruled out a suggestion that any potential problem in Rome could be solved if the United States would agree to Israel's demands that Jews with Israeli visas be forced to go to Israel by way of Romania.

He reiterated that the United States supports "freedom of choice" for the emigrants.

Redman also stressed that despite the financial problems associated with processing immigrants, the United States is continuing its demand that the Soviet Union allow all those who want to emigrate to do so.

SOVIET, IN CONTROVERSIAL APPEARANCE, RENOUNCES ANTI-ZIONIST COMMITTEE

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Nov. 13 (JTA) -- A top official of a Soviet propaganda organ long critical of the Jewish emigration movement has repudiated his group's work. But a Jewish New York City councilman is nevertheless under fire for welcoming him at a reception here.

Councilman Noach Dear on Sunday strongly defended his decision to host a reception for a visiting Soviet delegation that included Samuil Zivs, co-chairman of the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public.

In past visits to the United States, Zivs has been shunned by Jewish groups because of his support of previous Kremlin policies considered to violate the rights of Soviet Jews.

The reception, which took place Saturday night at the Park Avenue Atrium in Manhattan, included a visiting Soviet delegation of five, as well as three representatives of the Soviet Mission to the United Nations and Soviet Embassy in Washington.

Zivs, who was asked to renounce the Anti-Zionist Committee, did so publicly at the reception and by telephone to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Hoenlein was asked by Soviet Jewry movement leaders to intercede in an 11th-hour endeavor either to have Zivs renounce the committee or return to the Soviet Union.

Hoenlein told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Sunday that Zivs said he would personally be the "gravedigger of the Anti-Zionist Committee."

'Said It Was A Mistake'

"He said it was mistake, that these were different times," Hoenlein said. This was repeated by a guest at the reception, who said Zivs said flatly Saturday night that creating the committee "was a mistake in the first place."

The purpose of the reception was the discussion of Jewish cemeteries in the Soviet Union. Discussion focused on free access to the cemeteries and burial sites of revered rabbis, and the erection or maintenance of nearby mikvehs to ensure halachic observance of ritual cleansing when visiting a grave.

The reception was cosponsored by Albert Reichmann, an Orthodox Jewish businessman from Toronto who owns the Atrium building.

According to sources close to Reichmann, who supports the Soviet Jewry movement, he felt very uncomfortable about Zivs' presence after Soviet Jewry activists presented Dear with an ultimatum that Zivs either renounce the Anti-Zionist Committee or return to the Soviet Union.

Activists in several area Soviet Jewry groups declined to speak about the reception, citing a desire not to show division in the Jewish community.

But on Thursday and Friday, many of these same activists objected to Zivs' inclusion in the delegation, and criticized Dear for having unilaterally chosen to host the delegation without consulting other interested parties.

Dear, however, brushed aside the criticism as part and parcel of the infighting and competitiveness that has long characterized the Soviet Jewry movement. He replied that he had indeed consulted with some Soviet Jewry leaders and said it was impossible to talk with all of them.