

SHAMIR REBUFFS DIASPORA LEADERS ON 'WHO IS A JEW' AMENDMENT

By David Landau and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- American Jewish leaders trying to remove the divisive "Who Is a Jew" issue from Israel's political agenda got a chilly rebuff Tuesday from Premier Yitzhak Shamir.

He promised, however, to set up a "consultative process on the Law of Return with the Jewish Agency, which will act on behalf of world Jewry."

The proposed amendment to the Law of Return, Israel's basic immigration law, would exclude persons converted by non-Orthodox rabbis from automatic Israeli citizenship. It was officially placed on the Knesset agenda Tuesday.

The initiative was taken by Avraham Verdiger of Agudat Yisrael, Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party, Shlomo Dayan of Shas and Michael Eitan of Likud.

Clearly it was a slap at the delegation of Diaspora leaders who came here Monday to try to avert what they see as an inevitable schism between Israel and Diaspora Jewry if the controversial amendment is adopted.

No date was set for debate because the new Knesset, sworn in only the day before, has not yet elected its presidium, whose members establish the agenda.

The draft amendment adds the words "according to halacha" (religious law) to the definition of a Jew as a person born of a Jewish mother or converted.

Although of minor importance in practical terms, the addendum is being perceived as a denigration of the vast majority of affiliated Jews in the United States and other Western countries who are not Orthodox.

Says Anxieties Are Misplaced

The religious parties, which won 18 Knesset seats among them in the Nov. 1 elections, demand swift adoption of the amendment as their price for participation in a Likud-led coalition government.

Shamir, whose lieutenants were holding parallel coalition talks with Labor, apparently is determined not to upset the religious extremists, who will most likely be his coalition partners.

The prime minister was reportedly cold and blunt to an eight-member "emergency mission" from the United States and Canada that visited him Tuesday. The delegation includes past and present leaders of the United Jewish Appeal, Council of Jewish Federations, United Israel Appeal and UIA-Canada.

Shamir tried to persuade the leaders that Diaspora Jewry's anxieties are exaggerated and misplaced, the same line taken by ultra-Orthodox leaders, some of whom have called the Diaspora response "hysterical."

Shoshana Cardin, immediate past president of the Council of Jewish Federations, who heads the American delegation, told reporters after the meeting, "Mr. Shamir has an ongoing commitment to the religious parties as he tries to form a government. He said he'll see if there is a way to remove this as a burning issue of the day."

But Shamir's spokesman, Yossi Achimeier, said the premier would stick to his promise to the religious parties. He claimed the issue is an internal Israeli matter and should not create a rift or misunderstanding in the Diaspora.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Shamir, the Diaspora leaders took pains to condemn any implied threat to cut back on support for Israel because of the dispute.

Solidarity Not In Question

"The covenant from Sinai, which is 3,000 years old, will not be altered because of any momentary crisis" between Israel and world Jewry, said Mendel Kaplan of South Africa, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency.

"The solidarity of Diaspora Jewry with Israel is not in question whatsoever," Cardin asserted.

Israel Radio reported that Shamir tried to convince the American delegation that he has "no preference" for any branch of world Judaism and that the proposed legislation does not imply the "disenfranchisement" of Jews abroad.

Shamir called the Diaspora reaction "exaggerated and emotional."

The Prime Minister's Office issued a statement later Tuesday describing Shamir's meeting with the American Jewish leaders.

The statement said Shamir "stressed that for him and for the Israeli government and people, Jewish unity is a subject of the utmost importance," that "there is no question whatsoever of disqualifying any Jew, and that any perception to the contrary is regrettable."

It said the prime minister "noted his strong determination that the process of permanent dialogue and consultation between Israel and world Jewry continue."

The statement said the Jewish Agency would represent world Jewry on this issue and that the chairman of its Board of Governors would announce the names of those participating in the process.

Before the session with Shamir, the delegation met with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, head of the Labor Party, who indicated he fully supports their position.

The leaders also met with Israel's two chief rabbis, Avraham Shapira (Ashkenazic) and Mordechai Eliahu (Sephardic), with whom they reportedly made little headway.

'Liable To Split The Jewish People'

Cardin, in the meantime, tried to explain to Israelis why the issue of amending the Law of Return is of such urgent concern to Diaspora Jews.

In a late night television interview Monday, she noted that the problem of defining "who is a Jew" is not political, but religious and spiritual, and should be resolved by the religious leadership, not politicians.

She said there is no truth to Orthodox claims that the amendment would affect only Israel and Israelis.

"The prime minister and other Israeli politicians must be made to realize that this is a very serious matter," Cardin said. "It is liable to split the Jewish people."

AMERICAN JEWS CONFRONT AIDE TO SHAMIR ON 'WHO IS A JEW'

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- A top aide to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir took the brunt of North American Jewish leadership's anger over the "Who Is a Jew" issue Tuesday during a closed-circuit television broadcast from Jerusalem.

Yossi Ben-Aharon, director general of the Prime Minister's Office, could do little to assuage the indignation of leaders who called in for the two-hour program, carried over the Council of Jewish Federations' satellite network to federations across North America.

In fact, Ben-Aharon inflamed passions with declarations that a proposed change in the definition of who is Jewish -- or, in its most narrow interpretation, who is a convert -- is not an issue of "disenfranchising anybody."

The sometimes heated exchange indicated that a distance exists between how American and Israeli Jews perceive the consequences of the "Who Is a Jew" controversy.

Despite Ben-Aharon's inflexibility, former CJF President Shoshana Cardin insisted on the broadcast that a delegation of North American Jewish leaders that arrived in Israel on Monday had "had an impact" in conveying the Diaspora's distress over the issue. The delegation, led by Cardin, met with Shamir Tuesday morning.

Cardin said Shamir would give no commitment that the issue would be excluded from his Likud party's negotiations with the religious parties on forming a new government. The four religious parties, whose participation is necessary if Shamir is to form a narrow-based coalition, have been demanding assurances of a change in the Law of Return in exchange for their support.

'Not A Question Of Delegitimizing'

The law currently grants automatic Israeli citizenship to Jewish immigrants to Israel. The religious parties want to exclude from automatic citizenship those converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis.

Reform and Conservative Jews say the move would serve to delegitimize their movements and alienate their cohorts in the United States and elsewhere.

But for Ben-Aharon, who spoke on behalf of Shamir, the "Who Is a Jew" amendment "is not a question of delegitimizing or depriving any Jew his status as a Jew."

"It is not for us to recognize or not," he explained later in the broadcast. "The question pertains to what happens in Israel and Israel alone. And today, questions of personal status -- marriages and the like -- are delivered to the rabbinical courts and them alone."

Ben-Aharon's assertions that North American Jews only perceive "Who is a Jew" as something more than an internal issue for Israelis led to a storm of protest from callers.

"Yossi, you must understand that the issue, as you articulate it, is perceived as the disenfranchisement that we are talking about," said George Caplan, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. "The issue so narrowly stated ignores the concerns of American Jews."

"I am distressed by the remarks of the director general," said Lou Weinstein, a former president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. "You said that 'rabbis are rabbis.' Well, Jews are Jews, and we're not going

to take any nonsense!"

Ben-Aharon was asked by one caller what he would tell a little girl who had been adopted and then converted by a Conservative rabbi.

Issue Of American Standards

"If she is considered Jewish by your community, then she is Jewish," said Ben-Aharon. But under the "Who Is a Jew" amendment, "if she wants to move to Israel, she will have to go through a confirmation procedure by the rabbinical court."

A question on halachic standards of conversion led Ben-Aharon into a statement that seemed to reflect Israeli dissatisfaction with the religious pluralism of American Jewish life.

In America, said Ben-Aharon, someone who is not accepted by one synagogue or community can go next door and find another.

"But we are not just another community, but a state. We have security concerns. We have to know who comes into this state.

"Theoretically, someone who wanted to exploit the Law of Return and doesn't want to become a Jew could take an easy conversion, and come in for reasons against the security of Israel," he said.

Responding directly to that statement, Annette Dobbs, president of San Francisco's Jewish federation, said, "It is unacceptable, totally unacceptable what you just said. The soul and unity of the Jewish people is at stake, and we cannot stand idly by," she added.

Morton Kornreich, national chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, closed the broadcast by thanking Ben-Aharon and by urging the North American Jewish communities to "remain calm."

U.S. DENIES REPORTS THAT ARAFAT WILL BE ALLOWED TO ENTER U.S.

By Yitzhak Rabi

UNITED NATIONS, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- The U.S. government cast doubt on reports here Tuesday that Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat had been assured of receiving a visa to enter the United States and was planning to arrive at the United Nations next week.

A State Department official in Washington said that no decision on the matter had been made, and a U.N. spokesman said the United Nations had received no official word about it from the U.S. government.

Arafat requested permission, through the United Nations, to enter the United States, in order to address the U.N. General Assembly. The world body is scheduled to open its annual debate on the Palestinian question next Tuesday, Nov. 29, the 41th anniversary of General Assembly Resolution 181, dividing Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states.

According to diplomats here, the State Department plans to announce only "in the last minutes" that Arafat received a visa to avoid lengthy debate and pressure from various groups, mostly Jewish, who strongly oppose Arafat's visit.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Charles Redman said Tuesday that "absolutely nothing has happened" regarding a decision to allow Arafat to come to the United States.

According to Redman, Arafat has not even formally applied for an entry visa. He said "any application would be given severe scrutiny."

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

'NO FURTHER BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS,' SAYS LABOR ON TALKS WITH LIKUD

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- The Labor Party leadership said Tuesday that there was "no further basis for negotiations" with Likud for the creation of a broad-based coalition government.

Likud had no comment, but some observers believe that despite the apparent finality of Labor's official statement, efforts to establish a new Labor-Likud partnership have not yet been exhausted.

They believe it hinges on Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's ongoing bargaining with the ultra-Orthodox and extreme right-wing factions.

The fierce opposition of Diaspora Jewry to the proposed "Who Is a Jew" legislation may yet be the decisive factor, observers say.

But there are strong factions within the Labor Party absolutely opposed to another alliance with Likud, even if it means being out of power.

They feel that now Labor need not make "dishonorable concessions and compromises," but can wage an honorable fight against the rightist-religious government from the opposition side of the Knesset.

Haim Bar-Lev, a Labor member of the outgoing Cabinet, said the talks are over for good, "unless Shamir decides he really wants us in."

Bar-Lev, who is police minister, and his colleague, Energy Minister Moshe Shahal, had been conducting the talks with Shamir's lieutenants, Moshe Arens and Dan Meridor.

According to reliable sources, the talks foundered on Labor's insistence on both the Treasury and the Foreign Ministry portfolios in the new Cabinet and on having parity in the Inner Cabinet, the government's top policy-making body.

The two sides reportedly had reached agreement on policy guidelines, similar to those that governed the Labor-Likud unity government formed in 1984.

DOV SHILANSKY ELECTED SPEAKER AT STORMY OPENING KNESSET SESSION

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- Dov Shilansky, a Likud hard-liner with a penchant for provocation and confrontation, was elected speaker of the 12th Knesset on Monday.

It was the opening session of the new parliament, by tradition a festive occasion.

That it turned out to be the most raucous and bitter opening session in memory seemed to some observers to be a foretaste of things to come should the next government be a narrowly based coalition of Likud with the right-wing and ultra-Orthodox parties.

Labor and its left-wing allies had hoped to postpone the vote for a week, hopeful apparently that a new government would have been installed by then.

But the acting speaker, Yair Sprinzak of the extremist Moleadet faction, ruled that the vote be held immediately.

Shilansky was an easy winner, getting the votes of Likud, the far right and the ultra-Orthodox. Laborites, centrists and left-wingers managed 55 votes for Shlomo Hillel, the Laborite who was speaker of the last Knesset.

Shilansky, a Likud veteran, headed the 11th Knesset's Interior Committee. He made a habit of

leading committee members on tours of Jewish-Arab trouble spots in Jerusalem and around the country.

But in a brief acceptance speech Monday, Shilansky promised to govern the Knesset according to the rules, not ideology.

ISRAEL AND EGYPT AGREE TO DISAGREE OVER PNC

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- Israel and Egypt have apparently agreed to avoid a crisis over Egypt's recognition of the independent Palestinian state proclaimed by Yasir Arafat in Algiers Nov. 15.

Israel's protest to Cairo was relatively mild and the Egyptian response was conciliatory.

Shimon Shamir, Israel's ambassador to Egypt, met with Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid in Cairo.

He said afterward that the Egyptian minister stressed the new situation could be used constructively to advance the peace process.

Shamir told Army Radio later that the question is not how Israel should react, but rather how to pursue the peace process in light of the new development.

His remarks reflected a consensus in the Foreign Ministry that there is no point in getting overly excited by the Egyptian move, which was not unexpected.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Monday summoned Mohammed Basiouny, the Egyptian ambassador, to convey Israel's displeasure.

Basiouny emerged from the meeting with Peres, reiterating Egypt's commitment to the peace process.

Egypt Joins In Recognition

The Israelis were nevertheless disturbed when it became clear Sunday -- after conflicting reports from Cairo -- that Egypt joined with more than 30 countries in formally recognizing an independent Palestine.

The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979 is grounded in the Camp David accords, which prescribe a five-year period of autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza Strip after which permanent status would be decided.

Those provisions have not been implemented, but recognition of the declaration by Palestine Liberation Organization chief Arafat could be interpreted as a violation of Camp David.

The Foreign Ministry evidently does not view the Egyptian move as gravely as the director general of the Prime Minister's Office, Yossi Ben-Aharon.

He said Monday that Egypt's recognition was a gross violation of the Camp David agreements.

But there seems little likelihood that the Labor-Likud caretaker government will make an issue of the dispute.

It will be replaced shortly, probably by a Likud-led coalition of extreme right-wing and religious parties.

Ideologically motivated hard-liners may well utilize Egypt's recognition of Palestine as an excuse not to return the Taba region as required by binding arbitration.

Arafat, meanwhile, has gotten a royal welcome in Cairo. He is in the midst of touring Arab countries to try to work out a common front before he addresses the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week.

JFK REMEMBERED AS PRESIDENT WHO INTERCEDED ON BEHALF OF JEWS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- In November 1961, members of the board of trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, holding their convention in Washington, presented President Kennedy with a Torah that had been brought to America by Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise, the founder of Reform Judaism.

After the presentation in the White House Rose Garden, labor leader David Dubinsky shook hands with Kennedy and said, "Mr. President, that was wonderful, you're taking this Torah scroll. But why weren't you wearing a yarmulke?" Kennedy replied, "Because I'm Reform, David."

That gem, remembered Tuesday by Gunther Lawrence, then public relations director for the UAHC, as well as Albert Vorspan, who was director of social action for the UAHC, was one of the reminiscences about Kennedy's strong connection with the Jews that was recalled in telephone interviews conducted by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Vorspan remembered that day in the Rose Garden when "Kennedy was very moved by the significance of the Torah, very emotional."

Kennedy's ebullient personality was matched by what Vorspan described as "a big and good track record on Jewish subjects."

The Torah remained in the UAHC Religious Action Center until two years ago, when it was sent to the Kennedy Archives upon their request.

Lawrence, unearthing a treasure trove of stories about the JFK-Jewish connection, wrote about them in his book, "Three Million More?"

Four Jews In Administration

He recalled Tuesday the personal involvement of four Jews who worked during the Kennedy years: Meyer Feldman, then White House counsel; Arthur Goldberg, first appointed by Kennedy as secretary of commerce, then Associate Justice of the Supreme Court; Abraham Ribicoff, Kennedy's appointment as commerce secretary; and the late Sen. Jacob Javits, a New York Republican.

Lawrence's material is largely based on a confidential memorandum known for years only to a handful of American Jewish leaders.

The memo, written by Phil Baum of the AICongress, details a meeting held by Goldberg with presidents of Jewish organizations, regarding a meeting the three Jewish members of the Kennedy White House held with Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin.

Lawrence recalled that Kennedy had paved the way for that meeting in talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.

Kennedy raised the issue of divided families with Gromyko, who could not respond publicly but said the matter would be looked into "sympathetically."

Goldberg, Ribicoff and Javits held a four-hour meeting with Dobrynin on the issue of Soviet Jewry on Oct. 29, 1963, in which Dobrynin disagreed loudly with all their charges.

Goldberg, Ribicoff and Javits had found Kennedy already completely apprised of the problem, having already discussed it with White House legal counsel Meyer Feldman, who had a personal interest in the problem.

Feldman, who was in charge of several areas including the Middle East, said Kennedy and he

"had as a goal to relieve the pressure on Soviet Jewry insofar as we could, and to provide for their emigration to Israel."

Two Meetings With Golda

He said he met with Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir on the Middle East and the issue of refugees, and that Kennedy himself met with Meir twice.

Feldman said U.S.-Israeli relations during Kennedy's tenure "was excellent."

Goldberg, in recalling his meetings on Soviet Jewry, said he also spoke to Kennedy about Catholic-Jewish matters, after Jewish leaders asked him to intercede.

Kennedy, said Goldberg, asked him to personally intervene with Pope Paul VI in an attempt to bolster the Vatican declaration on Jews and Judaism, Nostra Aetate, which declared that the Jews were not responsible for the death of Jesus.

After expressing "my opinion" to the pope, said Goldberg, the pontiff "understood that it was a concern of Kennedy and our government."

SIX JEWISH CANDIDATES WIN SEATS IN CANADA'S NEW HOUSE OF COMMONS

By Michael Solomon

OTTAWA, Nov. 22 (JTA) -- Six of the eight Jewish candidates in Canada's parliamentary elections Monday won seats in the new House of Commons.

Most of them bucked the popular tide that returned the Progressive Conservative Party of incumbent Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to office with a comfortable majority of 170 seats in the 295-member house.

Big winners in Quebec were 38-year-old David Berger and Sheila Finestone, who were re-elected after serving four-year terms in Parliament.

Both are members of John Turner's Liberal Party, which won 82 seats. Finestone defeated a Jewish Conservative candidate, Robert Presser.

In Montreal, Jewish Conservative Jerry Weiner, a member of the Mulroney Cabinet, handily won re-election. He has been minister for multiculturalism.

Two Jews who held Cabinet posts in the last Liberal government also won re-election. Robert Kaplan of Toronto, the former solicitor general, and Herb Gray of Windsor, Ontario, former minister of national revenue, retained their seats in Parliament.

In Winnipeg, Manitoba, David Orlikow, a veteran member of Ed Broadbent's New Democratic Party, was defeated. But another Jewish member of the NDP, former British Columbia Premier David Barrett, was re-elected to Parliament.

Finally, in the Outremont district of Montreal, a massive turnout of Hasidic voters secured victory for a Conservative candidate, Jean-Pierre Hogue, in what traditionally has been a Liberal stronghold. Neither Hogue nor his opponent is Jewish.

Considering that Canada has a Jewish population of about 300,000, the number of Jews running in the national elections was minuscule.

Because of the Thanksgiving Day postal holiday, there will be no Daily News Bulletin dated Friday, Nov. 25.