

SUPPORT FOR 'WHO IS A JEW' WAVERING IN LIKUD AND NRP

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- A slight wavering was discernible in the ultra-Orthodox camp and among some of its Likud supporters Wednesday over the wisdom of pushing the fiercely controversial "Who Is a Jew" amendment to the Law of Return through the Knesset at this time.

Apparently stunned by the ferocity of protests from Diaspora Jewish leaders -- including the mainstream Orthodox rabbinical organization in the United States -- some political leaders here expressed second thoughts about the proposed amendment or, more specifically, its timing.

The change in Israel's basic immigration law would disqualify persons converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis from automatic Israeli citizenship.

Although such a change would impact relatively few immigrants directly, its symbolic denigration of all non-Orthodox trends in Judaism has infuriated Conservative and Reform Jews, who comprise the vast majority of affiliated Jews in the United States and other Diaspora countries.

But the religious die-hards here seem determined to force the amendment through the new Knesset at the earliest opportunity.

Menachem Porush, a veteran Knesset member of the Agudat Yisrael party, said he hoped to see the amendment debated on the 19th of Kislev--Nov. 28 -- which is a festival day of the Chabad Hasidic movement.

The Chabad movement, headed by Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, who lives in Brooklyn, has effectively taken control of Agudat Yisrael in Israel.

Likud Divided Over Issue

Porush spoke to a delegation of American Jewish philanthropic leaders representing the Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal, United Israel Appeal and UIA-Canada.

They came to Israel on Monday to lobby against the "Who Is a Jew" amendment. The Americans, who returned to New York Wednesday afternoon, made little headway with Premier Yitzhak Shamir. He told them Tuesday that their concerns are exaggerated.

Shamir promised the ultra-Orthodox parties swift passage of the amendment in return for their participation in a Likud-led coalition government.

But Likud is clearly divided over the issue. Likud Cabinet Minister Moshe Katsav tried to convince the Americans that the amendment would help stem the tide of assimilation through intermarriage. Katsav believes intermarriage will destroy Diaspora Jewry in a few decades.

But not all of his party colleagues take such an apocalyptic view. Sarah Doron, the only woman in Likud's 40-member Knesset faction, told the American visitors she would oppose the amendment.

Two members of Likud's Liberal wing, Yitzhak Modai and Uriel Lynn, also took a negative view of the measure.

Meir Sheetrit, a former Likud Knesset mem-

ber, now treasurer of the Jewish Agency, has been waging a campaign against the amendment. He has warned in media interviews of the grave financial and political repercussions it would inevitably have on American Jewish support of Israel.

Can Shamir Risk Defeat?

Leon (Arye) Dulzin, another former Liberal leader and a former chairman of the World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency Executive, told the Jerusalem Post in an interview published Wednesday that the amendment would gravely damage Israel's ties with the Diaspora.

The National Religious Party is also split on the issue. Both the party leader, Professor Avner Shaki, and its secretary-general, Rabbi Yitzhak Levy, have long advocated the "Who Is a Jew" amendment and their support is said to be firm.

NRP moderates, however, are urging the party to back off from its support, echoing the stance of the Religious Council of America. (See related story.)

The second thoughts among some elements of the religious bloc and the lack of solid support in Likud have prompted political observers to wonder whether Shamir can afford to take the measure to the Knesset and risk its defeat.

In that case, he could tell the religious extremists he did his best and hope they would not secede from the government he is trying to form.

ORTHODOX GROUP URGES SHAMIR TO STOP 'WHO IS A JEW' DRIVE

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- Reform, Conservative and secular opponents of the proposed "Who Is a Jew" amendment to Israel's Law of Return gained an ally this week in the Rabbinical Council of America, which represents a majority of the Orthodox congregational rabbis in the United States.

In a cable sent to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the RCA said it supports "removal of this issue from the political agenda" in order to "help preserve the unity and support of the American Jewish community with and for Israel."

Rabbi Max Schreier, president of the RCA, and Rabbi Binyamin Walfish, executive vice president, said the laws of conversion to Judaism, the central issue of the legislation, belong "in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate and not in the secular Knesset."

In bucking Israel's Orthodox religious parties, who are pushing for passage of the legislation, the RCA has diverged from two other major American Orthodox groups, the Agudat Israel of America and the Chabad Lubavitch movement.

The leader of the Brooklyn-based Chabad Hasidim, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, has been a vigorous proponent of the "Who is a Jew" legislation, which would prevent non-Orthodox converts to Judaism from being eligible for automatic Israeli citizenship.

Its passage is the price being demanded by the Orthodox parties, led by the Chabad-backed Agudat Yisrael, for their participation in the next Israeli government.

Agudath Israel in America is a separate entity from the Agudat Yisrael party in Israel.

In Israel Wednesday, moderates within the National Religious Party, closely affiliated with the RCA, drew encouragement from the RCA statement, and urged their party to back off from its total support of the proposed amendment.

But Agudat Yisrael showed no signs of bending or wavering despite the gathering storm of protest from Diaspora leaders.

Feeling 'Deep And Widespread'

Schreier of the RCA said Wednesday that he attended the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, held last week in New Orleans, and "experienced a climate which was national and deep and widespread, and not phony."

The RCA statement, he said, reflects a position first enacted by the organization in 1986.

Schreier said the position might represent a rift with Chabad and other Orthodox movements, "but it expresses a general concern" about the need to "still the spirit and preserve the structure of American Jewry."

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, spokesman for Chabad, said Tuesday that the RCA's stance "does not make any sense."

Israel's Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to Jews, "was in fact enacted by the Knesset, which is a political body. What do you mean take it out of the political arena? It's a law in the books."

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel, said in a statement this week that the non-Orthodox denominations had issued a series of "false alarms" about the impact of the proposed "Who Is a Jew" legislation.

Sherer vigorously denied that the legislation would serve to delegitimize the 90 percent of American Jews who do not identify themselves as Orthodox.

"The controversy relates solely to those of the non-Jewish faith who seek conversion to Judaism, and does not impinge in the slightest on born Jews," he said.

Chabad Under Attack

According to a report Wednesday in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, of the 400 Conservative and Reform Jews who immigrated to Israel from America last year, 22 were converts.

More than two-thirds of the 1,800 Americans who immigrated to Israel last year were Orthodox, the paper said.

Nevertheless, Reform and Conservative Jews say the issue goes beyond numbers and is instead a symbolic attack on their legitimacy.

The Orthodox also say they have come under attack over the issue. "For the last few weeks the Orthodox community has become the target of an unprecedented, vicious hate campaign," said Sherer of Agudath Israel.

Schreier of RCA said he has protested "the vicious attacks in the media both from Jewish and non-Jewish circles about the Orthodox."

According to Krinsky, Chabad came under particular attack, especially at the CJF General Assembly, where some delegates suggested individuals stop contributing to the Lubavitch if they continue to press for the amendment.

Krinsky said he was not concerned that Lubavitch would lose its backing from the non-Orthodox, which is said to be considerable.

"The Lubavitch stance is based on Jewish

law and the Shulchan Aruch," he said, referring to the code of Jewish law. "Jews were always singled out because the laws were immutable. This is not a popularity contest."

One Orthodox group in the United States managed to agree in part both with the RCA and its detractors.

The president of the Religious Zionists of America, which supports Israel's five-seat National Religious Party, said in a speech earlier this week that he had warned the NRP not to take the initiative in amending the Law of Return, "because the issue was tearing the American Jewish community apart."

But Rabbi Louis Bernstein also asserted that such reconciliatory efforts "were being vitiated by the hysterical reaction of American Jewish organizations."

(JTA correspondents David Landau in Jerusalem and Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

IMPACT OF SCOWCROFT'S SELECTION TO BE SECURITY ADVISER UNCLEAR By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- Brent Scowcroft, whom President-elect George Bush appointed Wednesday as his national security adviser, does not have an extensive public record on the Middle East.

Scowcroft, who will be returning to the position he held in the last two years of the Ford administration, is better known for his expertise on arms control and the Soviet Union.

Officials involved in pro-Israel causes say privately that while he is not anti-Israel, he might lean more toward the Arab countries. In 1981, he was one of 16 former top-ranking government officials who publicly supported the sale of AWACS surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia.

Scowcroft, who now works for Kissinger Associates, the consulting firm headed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, has been a consultant for businesses dealing with the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia.

However, as in the case of Secretary of State-designate James Baker, who also does not have a well-known record on Israel, pro-Israeli sources are crossing their fingers that Scowcroft will abide by Bush's stated intention of continuing the Reagan administration's strategic alliance with Israel.

Bush's appointment of the 63-year-old retired Air Force lieutenant general was expected and was touted even before Bush's election.

"Brent is a trusted friend and he understands the White House, he understands the military, the State Department (and enjoys) the respect of many of our nation's leaders on both sides of the aisle," Bush said before leaving for the Thanksgiving weekend. "He also has earned the respect of world leaders around the globe."

If Bush, as expected, next week names former Sen. John Tower of Texas as secretary of defense, he will have appointed two of the three members of President Reagan's special review board on the Iran/Contra affair. The other member was former Secretary of State Edward Muskie, once a Democratic senator from Maine.

The review board recommended that the national security adviser have direct access to the president without having to go through the chief of staff or anyone else, something Bush stressed Scowcroft will have.

MEETING BETWEEN JEWISH LEADERS AND SUNUNU DESCRIBED AS UPBEAT

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Nov. 23 (JTA) — A meeting held Wednesday between Jewish leaders and White House chief of staff-designate John Sununu was characterized as "very positive."

The lunch meeting was hosted by Jewish Republican leader Jacob Stein, who wanted to provide Jewish representatives and Sununu a chance to meet each other personally and discuss differences and common agendas.

About 30 heads of major Jewish organizations met for more than an hour at the Princeton Club with the retiring New Hampshire governor. President-elect George Bush's selection last week of Sununu to the chief staff post at the White House had elicited concern by Jewish groups because of his pro-Arab leanings.

His refusal two years ago to sign a petition denouncing the United Nations' 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism raised the ire of many Jewish leaders.

But on Wednesday, Sununu "stated his position that he thoroughly supports the repeal of the resolution (and) that he was a major architect who set forth clearly in the record that this position should be expunged," according to Stein.

Sununu's father's family is of Middle Eastern origin. The family came to the United States from Beirut and Jerusalem's Greek Orthodox community at the beginning of this century. His mother was born in El Salvador of Greek heritage.

Sununu's rejection of the controversial U.N. resolution was confirmed Wednesday by Julius Berman, a past chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, who was at the meeting.

Berman said Sununu "was unequivocal that he clearly takes the position now that the resolution should be revoked."

'Good-Natured About Differences'

Sununu was described as "affable and informing" by another participant, Theodore Ellenoff, American Jewish Committee president.

Ellenoff said Sununu was questioned "with a great deal of interest with regard to positions he had taken on the Middle East." He said it "became clear that he was good-natured about the differences and anxious to talk about them."

According to one participant, Sununu acknowledged that he had publicly stated that positions taken at times by the organized Jewish community are "in his opinion not helpful in the overall position advocated for Israel."

Sununu was described by one participant as interested "in continuing the talks with the people present" and "in establishing the mechanisms in which there could be broad dialogue on subjects like Israel and the Middle East."

The talks were described as "no-holds barred" and also veered at times from Israel and the Middle East to such issues as education and taxes.

Everyone interviewed said Sununu clarified that he "sees himself not as a policy-maker but as an implementer of the president's policy."

Also present at the meeting were Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; Seymour Reich, international president of B'nai B'rith; Morris Abram, outgoing chairman of the Conference of Presidents; and Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the conference.

WILLIAM BROWN NAMED U.S. AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 (JTA) — William Brown was named the U.S. ambassador to Israel by President Reagan Tuesday, and is expected to stay on during the administration of President-elect George Bush.

Brown is one of 32 appointments, including five ambassadors, made by Reagan under his powers to act during a congressional recess. Brown does not need to be confirmed until after Bush takes office Jan. 20.

Reagan had originally designated Brown in May, but his nomination, as that of other ambassadors, was held up by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The current ambassador, Thomas Pickering, has been at that post since Aug. 1, 1985, and is the senior member of the State Department's Foreign Service.

Brown, the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, was second in command at the embassy in Tel Aviv under Pickering's predecessor, Samuel Lewis.

A State Department source said Brown is expected to be sworn in the week of Nov. 28. He added that it was "his understanding" that Brown would remain ambassador after Jan. 20, even though he will formally have to submit his resignation at that time.

Morris Amitay, a pro-Israel activist on Capitol Hill, said he had "heard some pretty good things" about Brown.

ISRAEL RAIDS TARGETS IN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 23 (JTA) — Four rocket-firing Israeli air force jets leveled buildings at the Ein Hilweh refugee camp, near Sidon in southern Lebanon Tuesday.

They were followed by four helicopter gunships that strafed the coastal road southwest of Sidon.

The Israel Defense Force claimed at least three terrorists were killed and nine wounded in the dual attack, Israel's 24th air strike against targets in Lebanon this year.

Targets included bases and equipment used by Force 17, a unit of the Palestine Liberation Organization close to Yasir Arafat, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, headed by George Habash.

ISRAEL TO PLAY BALL IN MOSCOW

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 23 (JTA) — The champion Hapoel volleyball team from Kiryat Ata will be the first sports team to break the ice that has frozen Israeli-Soviet sports competition for more than 20 years, it was learned here Wednesday.

They will go to Moscow in two weeks to play the Muscovite "Dinamos" in the European Cup contest. A week after that, the Russian players will come to Israel for a return match.

The good news was a disappointment for Maccabee Tel Aviv, Israel's championship basketball team. They had expected to be the first Israelis to play in the USSR.

Reminder: JTA will not publish a Daily News Bulletin on Friday, Nov. 25.

MITTERRAND SAYS PALESTINIANS ENTITLED TO INDEPENDENT STATE

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Nov. 23 (JTA) — French President Francois Mitterrand has recognized the right of the Palestinians to an independent state.

His remarks, in an interview published Wednesday, coincided with reports that France will upgrade the Palestine Liberation Organization's mission in Paris, though not to full diplomatic status.

The leftist daily Liberation quoted Mitterrand as saying that "the Palestinian nation is emerging as such among the other nations of the world and is identified as such."

He added that "France recognizes the right of the Palestinians to live in a territory with the status of an independent state."

Until now, Mitterrand and previous French presidents have spoken only of the Palestinians' right to a homeland.

Mitterrand said the proclamation of an independent Palestinian state by PLO chief Yasir Arafat in Algiers on Nov. 15 "changed in depth" the Middle East situation.

He said legal factors prevented France from recognizing the Palestinian state. But "the way has now been mapped" to such recognition, he added without elaboration.

Mitterrand is due to meet with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow on Friday. They are expected to discuss the changes in the Middle East.

That was the subject of two days of exchanges between French and Soviet experts in Paris last week. Diplomatic sources said their respective views "are very close."

The PLO office in Paris, meanwhile, seems likely to get a substantial boost. Opened in 1975, it is now known as a "liaison and information bureau" without diplomatic status.

Diplomatic sources here said Foreign Minister Roland Dumas told a group of Arab journalists Tuesday that the mission will be upgraded, though not to an official diplomatic level.

Its new status is expected to be announced next month, after the visit here of Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department.

Kaddoumi's many previous visits here were described as private or working trips. His next one might be designated an official visit.

INNER CABINET OPTS FOR MODERATE RESPONSE TO EGYPTIAN RECOGNITION

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) — The Labor-Likud Inner Cabinet was in rare agreement Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres recommended a moderate Israeli response to Egypt's recognition of the independent Palestinian state proclaimed by Yasir Arafat in Algiers Nov. 15.

The Likud members went along without much argument, as the fireworks expected to mark the final days of the outgoing Labor-Likud unity government on this issue failed to materialize.

Peres acknowledged that Israel and Egypt maintain opposite views of the Palestine National Council meeting last week.

Cairo insists that the Palestine Liberation Organization has fulfilled the conditions for participation in the peace process, by accepting U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338

that imply recognition of Israel.

The Israelis contend it did no such thing.

Nevertheless, Peres told his fellow ministers, the Egyptians have behaved in a restrained manner in the way they explained their motives for recognizing Arafat's state, and in their efforts to avoid further deterioration of relations with Israel.

Israel, he proposed, should exercise the same kind of restraint. It should not take retaliatory measures, such as refusing to hand over the Taba area to Egypt as required by international arbitration, he said.

None of the Likud ministers objected.

Peres said Israel's main diplomatic effort now is twofold: to prevent PLO chief Arafat from appearing before the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week and to block an expected U.N. resolution giving observer status to the newly proclaimed Palestinian state.

Peres said Arafat's claim that he has obtained an American visa is false.

IDF MOUNTS MAJOR EFFORT TO BREAK ARAB UPRISING IN ITS 12TH MONTH

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) — The Israel Defense Force appears to be mounting a major effort to break the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip before its one-year anniversary on Dec. 9.

The intention apparently is to convince the Palestinians they are paying too high a price in blood, with nothing to show for it. The IDF says the strategy is working.

A 13-year-old Arab youngster, Ammar Khalail, died Wednesday of wounds sustained Saturday in a violent clash with IDF soldiers in Beita village, near Nablus.

Although an escalation of disturbances connected with Yasir Arafat's Nov. 15 proclamation of an independent Palestinian state seems increasingly unlikely, the IDF is continuing to impose selective curfews. They are aimed at "forestalling disturbances," the military says.

The IDF also has been conducting almost daily pre-emptive raids on Arab villages, such as the one on Beita. The official justification is to "deflate nationalist elements" who might feel like celebrating their "independence," even if peacefully.

Although there was a general strike in the territories again Wednesday, it was not accompanied by violence.

Security sources said the large show of force by the IDF during the first half of the month prompted the Arabs to re-evaluate the situation in view of their collective suffering.

Arab sources were said to agree. A grocer in Nablus, Ahmad Masri, was quoted as saying, "OK, so they declared a Palestinian state. How does it change our lives?"

Apparently there have been excesses by IDF troops. A paratroop company commander was sentenced to two weeks in jail after he was found responsible for reprisals Sunday night by several soldiers against Arabs in the Kalandiya refugee camp, north of Jerusalem.

The soldiers' bus was stoned by local youths as it passed the camp. The senior officer, a second lieutenant, led his men on a chase of the rock-throwers. They entered the camp and smashed the windshields of several of the residents' cars.