

SOVIETS REMOVE 'SECRECY' BAN ON LARGE NUMBER OF REFUSENIKS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Dec. 1 (JTA) -- Officials in Moscow have removed an important obstacle to the immigration of Soviet Jews, less than a week before Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's expected arrival Tuesday in New York.

Soviet officials this week informed a large group of long-term refuseniks, many of them well known, that their purported knowledge of "state secrets" would no longer be used as grounds for barring their emigration.

As many as 120 refuseniks may be affected by the move, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

News of the development came amid reports that Jewish emigration continued its steady rise last month. The National Conference reported Thursday that 2,334 Jews were permitted to emigrate in November, 179 of whom went to Israel.

Some 15,640 Jews have been allowed to emigrate so far this year, compared to 8,155 last year and a mere 914 the year before.

Knowledge of "state secrets" has long been used by Soviet authorities as a reason for barring the emigration of people who are presently or were previously working in jobs deemed to entail classified work. The secrecy designation is also applied to people who have served in the military forces.

Soviet government officials have frequently said they were working on resolving this hotly contested issue, in conversations with Jewish leaders and activists, interviews with Western journalists and exchanges with members of the American government.

Kosharovsky Affected

Soviet leaders have sometimes maintained that the secrecy designation can be applied no longer than 10 years after a person leaves a job so classified. The reality is that the status is often extended for far greater duration.

Lifting of the secrecy designation does not guarantee permission to emigrate, but does clear a sizable obstacle in that path.

Lynn Singer, executive director of the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry and past president of the Union of Councils, said an authority at the OVIR emigration bureau in Moscow reported that 120 refuseniks were on a list either as having their secrecy designation lifted or as being permitted to emigrate.

The OVIR authority gave the information to Esfir Orlov, wife of one person whose secrecy status was lifted, Boris Orlov.

Singer received her information by phone from refuseniks, who were notified by Soviet authorities. Reports also were received by activists in Boston and Chicago.

On top of the list of those whose secrecy was lifted are Moscow refuseniks Yuli Kosharovsky, who has been waiting 17 years to emigrate; Vladimir Kislik, 15 years; Leonid Shabashov, 14 years; Boris Strelchik, 14 years; Yuri Cherniak, 12 years; and Boris Orlov, 11 years.

The National Conference reported that Ada Grauer of Chernovtsy had her secrecy lifted. Singer said later information indicated that the entire Grauer family, including Ada's husband, Mark, had received permission to emigrate.

Shultz Welcomes Progress

The Union of Councils also reported emigration permission for four other refuseniks from Moscow: Evgeny Rubenstein, refused 10 years; Oscar Mendelev, 15 years; and Lev Gecht, a nine-year refusenik whose secrecy status was lifted in August.

Vyacheslav Royak of Bendery also reportedly received permission to emigrate. He was last refused in August.

In Leningrad, the secrecy designation was lifted for, among others: Alexander Yampolsky, waiting 15 years; Roald (Alec) Zelichonok, 10 years; and Israel Zaidas, 10 years.

Alexander Pyatetsky, a 14-year refusenik from Kiev, also reported his secrecy lifted. His wife and children have been in the United States for six months.

Shoshana Cardin, newly elected chairwoman of the National Conference, welcomed the news, but said "it appears necessary to remind General Secretary Gorbachev" of refuseniks still designated as possessing state secrets.

She mentioned Evgeny Lein of Leningrad, and Inna and Igor Ouspensky of Moscow, as well as "others who appeal in vain to the authorities."

In Washington, Secretary of State George Shultz praised the Soviet Union Wednesday for making major progress on human rights in recent years.

"The progress they have made is quite substantial," Shultz told foreign viewers on the U.S. Information Agency's "Worldnet" program.

"Still, there are political prisoners. Still, there are people being refused permission to emigrate," Shultz added.

"We think it ought to be possible for people to travel or emigrate, and travel back and forth to their country as they choose," he said.

(JTA correspondents Howard Rosenberg in Washington and Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

SOVIETS PUT END TO JAMMING OF ISRAEL RADIO BROADCASTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 1 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union has stopped jamming radio broadcasts from Israel.

Israel Radio confirmed these facts in a telephone interview Thursday morning with long-time refusenik Yuli Kosharovsky, who has been denied an exit visa since 1971 because he had knowledge of "state secrets."

Kosharovsky was asked to tune in his radio to the Israeli broadcasting band. The Jerusalem broadcast was heard loud and clear in the Soviet capital, with no interference.

The Soviets also reportedly have ceased jamming broadcasts from the United States and Western Europe. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was credited with having influenced Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, with whom she has good relations.

LIKUD, LABOR BLOCK EACH OTHER FROM FORMING NEW GOVERNMENT

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 1 (JTA) — Likud and Labor appear to have checkmated each other in a political chess game to see which party will head the next government.

Each now seems to have enough votes in the Knesset to prevent the other from forming a governing coalition.

And each is depending on the support of ultra-Orthodox parties, which have shown themselves in recent days to be notoriously fickle.

According to the latest arithmetic, Likud and its religious and right-wing partners command 60 votes in the 120-member chamber. The other 60 represent Labor and an unlikely bloc of religious and extreme left-wing parties.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the Likud leader, is trying desperately to work his way out of the stalemate. The 21-day mandate he got from President Chaim Herzog last month to form a new government expires Monday.

He can request a 21-day extension. But he seems further from accomplishing his task now than he was three weeks ago.

The political scene was thrown into turmoil when the Labor Party's leadership bureau unexpectedly rejected an offer to join Likud in a broad coalition government.

The 61-57 vote Wednesday was a slap at party leader Shimon Peres and other Labor ministers, who had been urging a renewed alliance with Likud.

Agudah Signs With Labor

A variety of new scenarios swiftly emerged. The ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party signed an agreement with Labor Thursday, whereby neither party would join a coalition without the other.

Within hours, Shamir sent Herut powerhouse Ariel Sharon to a Jerusalem hotel room to meet with Agudah leaders, in an effort to cajole or shame them out of their deal with Labor.

He reportedly taunted the bearded, black-garbed Agudah Knesset members for entering a bloc with Arab and Communist parties.

Sharon also is said to have told them, "Only we (Likud) can give you 'Who Is a Jew,' " the amendment to the Law of Return that would disqualify non-Orthodox converts from citizenship.

The measure was the religious parties' price for joining a Likud-led coalition. But the fierce opposition it aroused among Diaspora Jewry has put its adoption by the Knesset in doubt.

At least some Agudah members now feel their chances are better with Labor than with Likud.

The accord they signed with Labor promises that the party's 1,000 member Central Committee will decide within three months whether to instruct its Knesset faction to back the controversial measure.

Labor is also said to have promised Agudah two ministerial posts and chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee if it joins a Labor-led coalition.

Meanwhile, the smallest of the religious parties, Degel HaTorah, is reported to have done its second "flip-flop" this week.

It announced earlier in the week that it would not join a Likud-religious-rightist coalition because a broad-based Likud-Labor government

was better for the country.

On Thursday, it seemed to be leaning again toward Likud. Shamir, in fact, may have to depend on its two Knesset votes to prevent Labor from forming a government.

EUROPEAN ALLIES URGE U.S. TO REVERSE ARAFAT RULING

By Yossi Lempkiewicz

BRUSSELS, Dec. 1 (JTA) — The United States is under intense pressure from its Western European allies to reverse its decision barring Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasir Arafat from addressing the U.N. General Assembly.

The 12-nation European Community issued a strong statement Wednesday night, the eve of its summit meeting, that amounted almost to a reprimand of Washington for denying Arafat an entry visa.

At the same time, President Francois Mitterrand of France told a French radio interview in Paris that the American decision was "regrettable and imprudent."

The E.C. statement was issued simultaneously in Brussels, seat of the Community, and in Athens, capital of Greece, which currently chairs the E.C. Council of Ministers and will host the summit on the island of Rhodes this weekend.

The statement read: "In accordance with the Headquarters Agreement and the opinion of the Legal Committee of the United Nations, Arafat should be allowed to address the U.N. Assembly in New York."

The Headquarters Agreement, signed in 1947, defines the relationship between the United Nations in New York and the United States as host country.

The E.C. statement was paralleled by a similarly worded resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly Wednesday night.

The vote was 152-2, with only the United States and Israel opposing it. The United Kingdom abstained.

The same resolution was carried earlier by an overwhelming majority in the Assembly's Political Committee.

Asks U.S. To Reconsider

The E.C. statement called on Washington "to review the legal arguments and reconsider its decisions."

The E.C. foreign ministers are expected to hear U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz explain why Arafat was denied a visa. He will be in Brussels next week for NATO and E.C. talks.

Shultz has already stated publicly that Arafat knew of and condoned acts of terror against Americans and others, which makes him a security risk.

The E.C. foreign ministers stopped short of recognizing the independent Palestinian state proclaimed by Arafat in Algiers last month.

Meanwhile, Greece, the most pro-Arab of the E.C. states, has tried to influence its fellow members to "move further" toward the Palestinians and to initiate an international peace conference to resolve the Middle East dispute.

And Spain, which takes over the rotating chairmanship of the Council of Ministers on Jan. 1, reportedly has expressed hope that the E.C. will recognize an independent Palestinian state.

(JTA Paris bureau chief Edwin Eytan contributed to this report.)

ULTRA-ORTHODOX HARASS FEMINISTS FOR TORAH SERVICE AT THE WALL

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Dec. 1 (JTA) — About 100 Diaspora Jewish women, many of them Americans, were called "pigs" and otherwise harassed by religious extremists when they held a prayer service Wednesday at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City.

The worshippers, who were among 500 women from 25 countries attending the first International Conference on the Empowerment of Jewish Women, were the targets of insults and curses by ultra-Orthodox men and women who pray regularly at the holy site.

A Reform rabbi from Toronto, Debra Brin, conducted the service, which marked the final day of the conference.

As the feminists, many wearing skullcaps and prayer shawls, prayed and read from the Torah, black-garbed men shouted and pounded on the wooden barricades that separate male and female worshippers at the Wall.

Said one pious Jew, "The spectacle of a woman carrying the Torah is as scandalous as bringing pigs to the Kotel," as the Western Wall is known in Hebrew.

"In the name of God, I protest," shouted another. "This is a holy place for all of Israel and they are defiling it."

An elderly Orthodox woman pushed and shoved the foreign women, screaming that they were desecrating the Torah.

"Disgraceful," snorted Rabbi Yehuda Getz, the functionary in charge of the Western Wall. He was referring to the foreign women, not the behavior of his ultra-Orthodox colleagues.

He conceded to reporters that the prayer session did not itself violate halacha (religious law). But the Wall "is a holy place, not a place for demonstrations," he said.

The targets of the attack seemed to accept it with equanimity. Helene Ferris, a Reform rabbi from New York, told reporters, "We came here to pray. That's all."

But author Blu Greenberg, also of New York, said it was "unfortunate that something like this turns their world upside down. They should realize that prayer isn't only for men. It would be nice if they could accept reality," said Greenberg, who is Orthodox.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR HURLS ACID IN FACE OF DEMJANJUK ATTORNEY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 1 (JTA) — A 70-year-old Holocaust survivor hurled acid into the face of Yoram Sheftel, chief defense counsel for convicted war criminal John Demjanjuk, during the funeral Thursday for Dov Eitan, a member of the Demjanjuk defense team.

Sheftel was rushed to a hospital, where doctors treated damage to one eye. A hospital spokesman said his exact condition would not be known for several days.

A woman with him was also treated for slight injuries. Israel Radio identified her as author Edna Shabtai.

Eitan, 53, a retired Jerusalem district court judge and former military court president, committed suicide Tuesday by jumping from the 15th floor of a downtown Jerusalem office building.

According to witnesses, Sheftel's assailant

stepped from the crowd at the Sanhedria Cemetery and threw a bottle of acid at the attorney and the woman. Police immediately arrested the Holocaust survivor, Yisrael Yehekeli.

According to police spokesman Rafi Levy, he is a Jerusalem resident and survivor of the Treblinka death camp.

Yehekeli was said to be in good spirits and in no way remorseful over his act.

Demjanjuk, 68, a Ukrainian-born former American citizen, was found guilty last April 18 of crimes against humanity, crimes against a persecuted people, war crimes and crimes against the Jewish people.

He was identified by witnesses during his 15-month trial here as the Treblinka death camp guard known as "Ivan the Terrible," who operated the gas chambers where some 800,000 Jews perished.

Yehekeli reportedly was a frequent spectator at the trial.

Demjanjuk was sentenced to death a week after his conviction. The High Court of Justice was to begin hearings on his appeal next Monday.

At the request of Sheftel, the court agreed Wednesday to postpone the hearing until May 4, to give the defense time to find a replacement for Eitan.

POLICE DRAGNET CATCHES 120 ILLEGAL WORKERS IN 6 CITIES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 1 (JTA) — Police and government agents conducted a dragnet in six Israeli cities and towns Wednesday to round up foreigners working in Israel illegally.

Ten teams of five persons each, including police officers and inspectors of the Employment Service and Interior Ministry, swept through Tel Aviv, Holon, Herzliya, Yavne, Ashdod and Bat Yam.

They hit restaurants, bars, hotels, factories and other places where aliens are likely to be employed illegally.

At the end of the day, their "catch" numbered about 120.

Thursday's roundup is only the beginning, as the campaign will be extended to other localities all over the country. Foreigners working illegally will be repatriated to their respective countries.

Those rounded up so far come from the Philippines, Thailand, Portugal, Ghana and Britain.

Many were employed as kitchen workers, as housemaids or in factory jobs that Israeli workers prefer to avoid.

A SECOND GIRL FOR THE SHARANSKYS

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Dec. 1 (JTA) — Former refugee Natan Sharansky became the proud father of a baby girl Wednesday.

His wife, Avital, gave birth at Hadassah Hospital here. It was a normal delivery. The infant weighed 6 pounds, 13 ounces.

She is the Sharanskys' second child. Their first, daughter Rachel, was born two years ago, nine months after Sharansky was released from the Soviet gulag in February 1986.

Sharansky, who is attending the World Conference on Soviet Jewry at the Laromme Hotel here, told a news conference his wife and child are doing fine. He said the baby will be named at synagogue services Saturday.

U.S. ECONOMIC AID TO ISRAEL COULD BE CUT IN 1990 BUDGET

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1 (JTA) — The \$1.2 billion in economic aid Israel receives each year from the United States may be in jeopardy in the coming fiscal year, according to sources on Capitol Hill.

The \$1.8 billion in military aid Israel receives appears less vulnerable at this point. The State Department and the Pentagon have agreed to recommend that Israel receive that amount in the 1990 fiscal year, U.S. and Israeli sources said.

But Capitol Hill sources noted that both components of Israel's \$3 billion annual aid package, all of which is disbursed in the form of grants rather than loans, could be cut at any step in the annual budgeting cycle.

President Reagan is due to submit his 1990 budget to Congress on Jan. 9. George Bush may elect to submit his own budget after he is sworn in as president on Jan. 20. Congress has until Oct. 1, when the fiscal year begins, to act on the White House budget by appropriating funds.

In computing Israel's economic aid for 1990, U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead, are suggesting that Israel's savings under the December 1987 foreign debt-financing law be taken into account, sources said.

Under that law, Israel is expected to save an estimated \$2 billion over 20 years by converting high-interest government loans into lower-interest private loans. It saved about \$100 million over the past year, an Israeli source said.

Israel currently owes \$10 billion to the United States from loans received during various Arab-Israeli wars and in annual aid packages before they were converted to grants in 1984.

Most Favorable Package Ever

In recent years, Israel's annual debt payments to the United States have generally approached the level of economic aid it received from the United States.

In fiscal year 1990, however, Israel would pay less in debt obligations than it would receive in economic aid, if current assistant levels were to continue, according to a Capitol Hill source.

The \$3 billion that Israel received in fiscal years 1988 and 1989 were its most favorable packages ever, constituting close to 10 percent of Israel's national budget.

Increases are considered unattainable, since under the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction law, Congress and the executive branch must cut \$35 billion from the anticipated 1990 U.S. budget deficit of \$135 billion.

It is not clear whether President-elect Bush will submit his own budget. Like Reagan, Bush does not support tax increases, although there has been talk of "revenue enhancement" measures.

The agreement on military aid was reached in the U.S.-Israeli Joint Security Assistance Planning Group. In a concurring agreement, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed not to seek more than \$1.8 billion in military aid for 1990, sources said.

But U.S. and Israeli officials said the Reagan administration is considering a 2 percent cut in military aid for the current 1989 fiscal year, which could cost Israel \$36 million.

The money would be reappropriated to countries whose military aid was cut dramatically in recent years, including some that allow U.S.

military bases on their territory.

The administration would not need congressional approval to make such a cut.

Possible Cut For 1989

Carlucci informed Rabin in Israel last month about the possible cut. The defense minister reportedly replied that he "would not fight it."

Three of the four key members of the congressional appropriations subcommittees with jurisdiction over foreign aid reportedly are urging the administration to scrap the idea. They are Sens. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Robert Kasten (R-Wis.), and Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.).

"If it is blocked, it will be because of them," the source said. "If it goes through, it will be because Rabin gave (the administration) a green light."

Yosef Gal, the Israel Embassy spokesman, said he did not know what Rabin had told Carlucci, but added that "we believe and hope" that the 2 percent cut will not take place.

As for fiscal year 1990, Gal said he was "pretty confident" that the current level of U.S. aid will be maintained.

Morris Amitay, a pro-Israel lobbyist and former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said there is "definite cause" to be concerned that foreign aid to Israel will be reduced in the coming fiscal year.

In the most recent major foreign aid battle, for fiscal year 1988, Congress cut the administration's total foreign aid request from \$19.5 billion to \$16.2 billion, although it maintained the \$3 billion in aid to Israel.

Pro-Israel activists were happier when the budget summit of Nov. 1, 1987, restored the administration's international affairs budget to \$18.1 billion, which meant smaller cuts for other foreign aid recipients and avoided greater resentment at Israel.

That agreement established the foreign aid levels for both fiscal years 1988 and 1989, and helped Israel avoid a major budget battle this past year.

Will Baker Be As Pro-Israel?

Foreign aid is considered one of the most vulnerable of all accounts in the U.S. budget. Despite the widespread support in Congress for aid for Israel, most lawmakers would likely not face repercussions from voters for cutting foreign aid in favor of limiting cuts in health, education and welfare services.

Because Israel and Egypt together receive more than half of the \$10 billion U.S. foreign aid budget, supporters of Israel have lobbied hard to keep the administration's international affairs budget intact.

As one Capitol Hill source put it, "There is one constituency to pass foreign aid — the pro-Israel community." Without it, "you could not get a dollar for Egypt."

Egypt is to receive \$2.3 billion from the United States this fiscal year. Under the Camp David accords, Egypt must get two-thirds of the foreign aid Israel receives from the United States.

It remains to be seen if Secretary of State-designate James Baker III will be as pro-Israel as Shultz has been.

In November 1987, Baker, who was then treasury secretary, expressed concern about the Israeli debt-refinancing plan, saying it could ultimately cost the United States "tens of billions of dollars."