



MEETING WITH ARAFAT YIELDS 'PROGRESS' SAYS ONE OF THE AMERICAN PARTICIPANTS

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- Five American Jews met with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat Tuesday for six-and-a-half hours of "very serious talks for the purpose of trying to help the peace process," according to one of the participants.

In a telephone interview from Stockholm, Menachem Rosensaft, president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, declined to relay any details of the meeting pending a news conference to be held in Stockholm Wednesday morning.

"At this point I'm cautiously optimistic and hope by the time this meeting is over significant progress will have been made," he said.

The Swedish Foreign Ministry issued a brief statement saying the discussion was "fruitful and constructive" and that "important progress had been made."

Members of the ministry took part in the meeting, along with the five Americans, Arafat and his delegation. The meeting was held at the Riksdag, Sweden's parliament. It was facilitated by Swedish Foreign Minister Sten Andersson.

Rosensaft, who has challenged mainstream Jewish organizations before as head of both LZA and the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, left Monday night for Stockholm with four other American Jews drawn from groups supporting Israel's left.

Four Other Participants

Joining him were:

- Drora Kass, executive director of the U.S. arm of the Tel Aviv-based International Center for Peace in the Middle East. The center has long called for territorial compromise and direct talks between Israel and representatives of the Palestinian people. Abba Eban serves as its international chairman.

- Rita Hauser, attorney and American chairwoman of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East. Hauser recently wrote an op-ed piece in The New York Times urging the United States to open talks with the PLO, which are currently outlawed.

- Stanley Sheinbaum, economist and publisher of the liberal journal NPQ. Sheinbaum is prominent in the Los Angeles area, where he supports a number of liberal causes.

- Abraham Udovitch, chairman of the Near Eastern studies department at Princeton University and member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Mainstream Jewish organization were quick to condemn the meeting, which was first announced Monday afternoon. Among those issuing condemnatory statements were the American Zionist Federation, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, B'nai B'rith International, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, said the delegation "does not represent the mainstream of Jewish opinion in the United States" and the meeting "does not reflect a softening in American Jewish attitudes" toward

the PLO.

The American Zionist Federation statement, which called the Jewish participants "actors in Yasir Arafat's public relations melodrama," was signed by the organization's president, Benjamin Cohen, one of Rosensaft's predecessors as president of the Labor Zionist Alliance.

Rosensaft's participation in the meeting puts him on a collision course not only with his own organization and most mainstream Jewish organizations, but with Israel's Labor Party, with which the LZA is affiliated.

Hertzberg, Schindler Declined

Labor leader Shimon Peres came out strongly against initiatives made by the PLO at the Palestine National Council meeting last month in Algiers. The PNC declared a Palestinian state and only indirectly recognized Israel.

The Labor Party also has joined the Likud in rejecting official talks with representatives of the PLO. Israelis who have openly met with the PLO in the past have been prosecuted.

According to sources, Peres was not consulted about the Americans' meeting with Arafat.

Two prominent American Jewish leaders, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg and Rabbi Alexander Schindler, denied an Israel Radio report that they had "backed out" of the meeting. Both said they had been invited to participate, but declined. They would not say who had invited them.

Hertzberg, a professor of Judaic studies at Dartmouth College, is vice president of the World Jewish Congress. Schindler is president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

In Stockholm, the American Jewish delegation was invited Tuesday night to a banquet for Arafat and his delegation hosted by the Swedish government. Rosensaft did not attend.

Earlier, Sweden greeted Arafat with the pomp usually reserved for visiting heads of state. Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson reportedly cut short a visit to France and rushed home to meet Arafat. Sweden has warm relations with the PLO, which maintains a representative's office in Stockholm.

ISRAEL TO ATTEND GENEVA SESSION, BUT WILL BOYCOTT ARAFAT SPEECH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- Israel will attend the U.N. General Assembly's session next week in Geneva, where its annual debate on Palestine has been moved so that Yasir Arafat can be heard.

Israel's acting ambassador to the United Nations, Yohanan Bein, will address the assembly, Haaretz reported Tuesday. But when the Palestine Liberation Organization chairman delivers his speech, the Israeli delegation will walk out.

Arafat was denied an entry visa by the U.S. State Department to address the General Assembly in New York.

The debate on Palestine, to have opened there on Dec. 1, was postponed until Dec. 13. The assembly voted overwhelmingly last Friday to shift the session to Geneva, where Arafat is welcome.

There had been some doubt whether Israel and the United States, the only nations to vote against the move, would attend. The U.S. State

Department indicated last week that the American delegation would be in Geneva.

In New York, a spokeswoman for the Israeli Mission to the United Nations confirmed that Bein will attend the meeting in Geneva.

The Israeli envoy will attempt to refute a broad consensus in Europe that the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers last month took significant steps toward the recognition of Israel, acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the renunciation of terrorism.

An Israeli information team, headed by Moshe Raviv, director general of the Foreign Ministry's information bureau, will attend the Geneva session.

At the United Nations in New York, meanwhile, Bein addressed the General Assembly on Tuesday during its annual debate on "the situation in the Middle East."

The theme of his remarks was that the region's troubles do not arise from the Arab-Israeli conflict but rather from "the wars, subversions and assassinations which Middle Eastern states practice with such alacrity."

"Israel baiting," he said, "is the only instance in which they find fraternal fulfillment."

BUSH PICKS EX-AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL TO REPRESENT U.S. AT UNITED NATIONS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- Thomas Pickering, the U.S. ambassador to Israel for the last three years, was named by President-elect George Bush Tuesday as the next U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Bush also reappointed William Webster as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Unlike the practice in previous administrations, neither will be members of the Cabinet.

The 57-year-old Pickering, the country's most senior career diplomat, had recently been replaced as ambassador to Israel, where he had served since July 1985. Before Bush's announcement, he was slated to become undersecretary of state for management.

President Reagan recently named William Brown as the new U.S. ambassador to Israel. Brown formerly served as ambassador to Thailand and was once second-in-command at the embassy in Israel.

The tall, balding Pickering went to Israel after a wide-ranging career in the State Department, including four years as ambassador to Jordan.

Pickering, who is known for his outgoing and friendly manner, went to Israel as a successor to Samuel Lewis, who had served there eight years and was very popular with Israelis.

While his tenure in Israel was a time of continued growing close relations between the United States and Israel, Pickering also served during a period of major public disagreements between the two countries.

Tensions centered on the proposed international peace conference and Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising in the territories.

In New York, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations welcomed Pickering's appointment Tuesday afternoon.

It issued a statement calling Pickering "a sensitive and knowledgeable observer of the Middle East scene, with an understanding of the people of Israel."

LABOR TO RECONSIDER JOINING UNITY COALITION WITH LIKUD

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- The Labor Party's 1,300-member Central Committee will convene Thursday to decide whether Labor should join Likud in a new government.

The latest development was announced after a meeting Tuesday between Labor Party leader Shimon Peres and President Chaim Herzog.

It followed Herzog's unprecedented call Monday for a broad-based Likud-Labor coalition government. His intervention, which Herzog admitted was "unusual" for an Israeli chief of state, heartened elements in both major parties favoring such an alliance.

Housing Minister David Levy said Tuesday that the chances for a broad-based government were "improving hourly."

The president expressed his views Monday after giving Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the Likud leader, another 21 days to try to put a government together. His original 21-day mandate expired Monday.

Shamir plans to wrap up negotiations soon with the ultra-Orthodox and extreme right-wing parties. Together, they would give Likud a 65-vote majority in the 120-member Knesset.

But the prime minister is said to be open still to a broad coalition with Labor. Shamir offered terms for such a government to Labor a week ago. Labor's 120-member leadership bureau rejected his offer in a surprise move Nov. 30.

Peres and Labor's No. 2 man, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, reiterated their support of a Labor-Likud alliance at a meeting Monday night with leaders of the party's kibbutz and moshav wings.

But there are equally strong elements opposed. The party's secretary-general, Uzi Baram, vowed to continue his drive against a unity government when the Central Committee convenes on Thursday.

GREECE REFUSES TO EXTRADITE ROME SYNAGOGUE BOMBING SUSPECT

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- The Greek government is refusing to extradite a Palestinian terrorist believed responsible for the October 1982 machine gun and grenade attack on the main synagogue in Rome, which left a child dead and 35 worshippers wounded.

Justice Minister Vaso Rotis announced Monday that Osama al-Zomar, a member of the Abu Nidal terrorist group, will not be handed over to the Italian authorities for trial.

His decision flies in the face of a Greek Supreme Court ruling in October 1984, upheld in March 1985 by then Justice Minister George Mangakis, that Zomar be extradited.

Rotis' only explanation was that "he is a Palestinian fighting for his freedom."

The Greek government has gone to great lengths to avoid extraditing Zomar since he was arrested on the Greco-Turkish border in November 1982 trying to smuggle 130 pounds of explosives into Greece.

He was released from jail Tuesday, after serving 20 months of a two-year jail term for carrying an illegal weapon and planning to escape from prison, where he was serving a previous sentence.

DEMONSTRATORS TO GREET GORBACHEV WITH MIXED MESSAGE ON EMIGRATION

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- Soviet Jewry activists are planning a demonstration here Wednesday morning, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev is scheduled to address the United Nations General Assembly.

But for the first time in many years, demonstrators will seek to balance their usual angry appeals for free emigration with some message of appreciation for progress already begun under Gorbachev.

The Soviet leader arrived in New York Tuesday afternoon. He is scheduled to meet Wednesday afternoon with President Reagan and President-elect George Bush.

Gorbachev is expected to discuss human rights in his U.N. address, in light of the Dec. 10 observance of United Nations Human Rights Day.

Human rights also will be on the agenda when Gorbachev met with Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz assured representatives of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry at a meeting Wednesday in Washington. Shultz is to meet with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday.

But the message conveyed to the Soviets will undoubtedly be different than it has been in the past, because of indisputable headway made in the treatment of Soviet Jews.

In the past few months, there have been promises of renewed Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union, a lifting on the ban of Israeli radio broadcasts and the easing of the notorious "state secrets" obstacle to emigration.

Greet Gorbachev 'With Respect'

Above all, the numbers of Soviet Jews being allowed to leave reflect major improvement. 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.

In Washington, NCSJ Chairwoman Shoshana Cardin told a news conference after the meeting with Shultz that she is optimistic that promises made by the Soviets in recent months will be implemented.

Although most of the major Soviet Jewry groups welcome this progress, few have been as encouraged as Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Schneier, whose Park East Synagogue is directly opposite Gorbachev's headquarters at the Soviet Mission, said in a statement Monday that the New York Jewish community should greet the Soviet leader "with respect, in recognition of the increased opportunities for Jews in the Soviet Union to emigrate and to practice their religion and their culture at home."

Schneier returned from the Soviet Union last Friday, after talks with government officials. On the basis of those talks, he said "a new, liberalized code" affecting the practice of religion would be presented for ratification by the Supreme Soviet in April.

Abraham Bayer, director of international concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said it would be impossible to ignore the progress made recently.

"But no one should be under the impression that we're satisfied," said Bayer. "It's like a mother with four children who gets two children back. She wants all four."

JEWISH COMMUNITY WILL WORK WITH U.S. TO RESOLVE SOVIET REFUGEE PROBLEM

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- The American Jewish community will work with the State Department to ensure that all Soviet Jewish emigrants who want to enter the United States can do so, a Jewish leader said Tuesday.

"It is a problem with which we have to wrestle together," Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said after she led an NCSJ delegation in a 30-minute meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz.

The leaders also met with Richard Schifter, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

Cardin said the Jewish leaders expressed concern that some of the Soviet Jews arriving in Rome are being denied visas to the United States because of the "stricter application of the term 'refugee' " by the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Until last September, all Soviet Jews who requested permission to come to the United States were admitted as refugees. They receive U.S. financial support for traveling to the United States and for resettlement.

But since September, about 179 Jews have been denied refugee status by the INS, and another 300 are still waiting in Rome for a decision by the INS.

Cardin said the problem has arisen because the number of Jews leaving the Soviet Union is larger than the anticipated funding.

Reagan To Raise Human Rights

From January through November, 15,640 Jews have been allowed to leave the USSR. Cardin estimated the figure would reach 20,000 by the end of the year, and perhaps 30,000 in 1989.

Cardin said Shultz affirmed that "those who are refugees should be able to leave and should be able to come here." She quoted the secretary as saying that "the doors to the United States are open and will always remain open."

She said that the timetable now for long-term refuseniks seeking to leave the Soviet Union is three to six months and that the wait for those in Rome is 30 to 45 days.

But a top official of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, disputed that timetable in a telephone interview Tuesday.

Many Soviet Jews who have received exit visas are being told by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow "to come back in a year or two" before applying for a visa to the United States, said Karl Zukerman, HIAS executive vice president.

State Department spokesman Charles Redman reiterated Tuesday that Soviet Jews are not being denied entry into the United States.

He explained that the "small number of people" being denied refugee status can still enter the United States under the attorney general's "parole authority." But doing so would disqualify them from receiving federal assistance.

Zukerman said HIAS has advised Jews refused refugee status not to seek the parole authority until HIAS can appeal each case to the INS.

Zukerman said the Jewish community is mounting an effort to have the U.S. government appropriate more funds for refugees. Whether this is successful or not, "the Jewish community will have to come up with more funds, and it is prepared to do so," he stressed.

JEWES OF YUGOSLAVIA EXHIBITING INCREASED INTEREST IN JUDAISM

By Ruth E. Gruber

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- The recent upsurge of nationalism in some parts of Yugoslavia has been paralleled by a new interest in Judaism among young Yugoslav Jews.

"We now have more interest by young people for a religious life," Dr. Ivan Brandeis told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in an interview at Jewish Community Federation headquarters here.

Two young men of the community are now training to be cantors, and another went to Israel last summer to study for the rabbinate, he said.

"We hope he will return in two or three years as a rabbi," Brandeis added.

If he does, he would be obligated to serve as a rabbi in Yugoslavia for at least five years.

Brandeis said there is now a group of 15 to 20 young people who get together regularly for Bible study. "The younger generation grew up in atheistic surroundings and earlier showed no great interest. Now it starts, and we hope it develops," he said.

One sign of increased interest in Judaism was that more young people are attending Jewish functions such as the communal seder every Passover.

"There are still very few, but for us everything is relative," said Lucy Petrovic, the federation's secretary.

More than 80,000 Jews lived in Yugoslavia before World War II, and nearly 70,000 were killed during the Nazi occupation. There are about 6,000 Jews in Yugoslavia today.

The Jewish Federation lists dozens of cities, towns and villages with Jewish populations. Only nine have synagogues.

But only three cities in the country -- Belgrade, Zagreb and Subotica -- are able to muster a minyan (quorum) for services once a week. Belgrade is the capital.

There is a fairly big Jewish community in Sarajevo, Brandeis said, but Friday night services can't be held for want of a minyan.

"We have to solve the problem of Sarajevo. There is no rabbi there. One youngster is training to be a cantor, but it will be a year or more before he is ready to perform," Brandeis said.

One Full-Time Rabbi

In fact, there is only one full-time rabbi in all of Yugoslavia, Tsadik Danon. He is based in Belgrade but travels to other towns.

The Subotica community functions with a young man sufficiently knowledgeable to conduct services.

But most other towns with Jewish populations may see a rabbi only once a year, when visiting rabbis conduct services on the High Holidays.

In the Dalmatian coast resort of Dubrovnik on the Adriatic Sea, there is a "very beautiful 400-year-old synagogue, but only about 20 Jews, and only seven are men," said Brandeis.

"Sometimes, during the tourist season, we can organize services by finding tourists for the minyan. But for now, the synagogue is more a tourist attraction than a house of prayer," Brandeis said.

According to federation figures, there are more than 1,500 Jews in Belgrade and more than 1,000 each in Sarajevo and Zagreb. Jewish museums in Belgrade and Sarajevo document a rich

Jewish past in Yugoslavia.

There were many more synagogues before the war that were destroyed by the Nazis.

Some that survived now serve different functions. One elaborate synagogue is now a theater, while another houses the largest museum in Sarajevo.

Brandeis said it was a great problem to maintain the synagogues and Jewish relics. "There are over 200 Jewish cemeteries in towns where no Jews live anymore," he said.

He and others noted that there seems to be a new interest in Jewish life and culture among Yugoslav non-Jews.

Belgrade broke diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967 at the time of the Six-Day War.

Brandeis said many books on Jewish topics are published in Yugoslavia. They include an illustrated book of Old Testament stories that rely heavily on Jewish imagery.

"There is also a wide interest in Yugoslavia in mysticism and the Kabbalah," he said.

JEWISH EX-REFUGEES RETURN TO VISIT GERMAN HOMETOWNS

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 6 (JTA) -- Jews from all over the world who fled Nazi persecution in Germany a half century ago are returning for visits to their old home towns, often as guests of the local municipalities.

They come in groups, whether out of nostalgia or curiosity, and are warmly welcomed by the authorities who are ever conscious of West Germany's image.

That image was recently overshadowed by an ugly manifestation of anti-Semitism that infuriated a group of 16 Jewish guests.

The group was staying in Wesel, in northern Germany, and went to visit the neighboring town of Xanten. There they found, on the walls of the regional museum and two schools, banners with the legends, "This way to the gas chambers" and "Auschwitz was too small."

The visitors were prepared to leave Germany immediately. Mayor Heinz Trauten of Xanten and another town official, Alfred Helters, begged them to stay.

Both urged their guests not to think the graffiti reflected local feelings. But the Jews canceled a reception in Xanten and returned to Wesel.

There, Mayor Volker Haubitz offered an apology. He said the incident jeopardized what was meant to be a gesture of understanding and reconciliation.

Elsewhere, the homecomings have gone off without incident. About 570 Jewish guests from as far away as Australia, Israel and California visited Karlsruhe in October.

In November, 300 more came and were greeted by Mayor Gerhard Seiler. He said the idea was to re-establish contacts between people who may not have seen each other since they fled Germany.

The weeklong program includes sightseeing, cultural events and visits to Jewish cemeteries.

About 200 Jewish visitors attended the inauguration of the new synagogue in Darmstadt. Another 17 Jews, former citizens of Muelheim-Ruhr, spent a week there.

The town of Hamm also invited former Jewish residents after tracing them to Argentina, South Africa and other distant countries.