

OPPOSITION IN THE LIKUD CAMP COULD IMPERIL COALITION PACT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- Israelis remained uncertain Tuesday what sort of government they will have, seven weeks after the Knesset elections.

The Likud Central Committee was meeting Tuesday evening to approve or reject the agreement Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir reached Monday with the Labor Party to form a broad-based, unity coalition government.

The meeting began at 6 p.m. local time, and the voting was not expected to take place before midnight.

The outcome will determine whether Shamir can present his new government to the Knesset for ratification Thursday, as he hopes.

As the crucial Central Committee meeting opened, political observers were inclined to believe Shamir would prevail. But the session was described as stormy, and Shamir apparently was booed several times.

There is fierce opposition to an alliance with Labor among Likud's die-hard ideologues, including such powerful figures as Ariel Sharon.

Shamir reportedly has said he would resign the Likud leadership if the Central Committee fails to approve the coalition agreement.

He also would have to report failure to President Chaim Herzog when his mandate to form a new government expires on Monday -- unless he is able to assemble a narrow-based coalition with the religious parties before then.

In the event that he is unable to do so, the task of forming a government would be assigned by Herzog to Peres, as leader of the second largest party in the Knesset.

Like Shamir, he would have 42 days to accomplish it.

Against Talks With PLO

The coalition agreement is not expected to face major hurdles in the Labor Party. Its Central Committee voted two weeks ago to approve in principle a coalition with Likud. It will meet again Wednesday to ratify that decision.

If there is any dispute, it will be over the allocation of Cabinet portfolios among Labor ministers in the new government and whether that should be the sole prerogative of party leader Shimon Peres.

Until a new government is in office, it is premature to say what impact it will have on the rapidly changing Middle East peace process.

Observers generally agree, however, that a coalition of ideologically opposed partners cannot produce a clear policy line, even though Likud will hold the offices of prime minister and foreign minister.

The Likud-Labor agreement was reached while Israel was still reeling from the shock of the U.S. decision to open a dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Israel Radio reported Tuesday that the policy guidelines included in the coalition agreement state that the PLO cannot be a party to any negotiations with Israel.

But there are differences. Likud is firmly

entrenched in opposition to any form of political dialogue that could lead to changes in Israel's control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A growing element in the Labor Party supports some kind of dialogue with the Palestinians. Labor's dovish members even advocate talks with PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

According to Israel Radio, Labor and Likud have agreed that Israel's desire for peace will be their guiding principle, based on the Camp David accords of 1978.

'Who Is A Jew' Issue May Be Dead

The new government also would work to improve relations with Egypt and would call on Jordan to join the peace process.

Israel Radio reported that the new government, like the outgoing Likud-Labor unity coalition, would have a 10-member Inner Cabinet consisting of five ministers from each party. It would continue to serve as the regime's top policy-making body in defense and all political matters.

The Likud-Labor agreement has brought down the wrath of the Orthodox parties on Shamir. They had been ardently courted by Likud as potential coalition partners.

They exacted promises, made in Shamir's name, of key Cabinet portfolios, legislation enforcing Sabbath observances, and generous government subsidies for their schools and other religious institutions.

Most important to them, Shamir guaranteed that the controversial amendment to the Law of Return defining "who is a Jew" would be adopted by the Knesset within weeks of the new government taking office.

But chances for that became virtually nil when Likud entered into agreement with Labor.

Although the religious parties will doubtless be invited to join a Likud-Labor coalition government, they are now vowing to go into opposition in protest.

MOVES TO REDUCE REFUGEE BACKLOG GET MIXED REVIEW FROM AGENCIES

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- Soviet Jewry and refugee resettlement agencies have given mixed reviews to the latest moves by the U.S. State and Justice departments to ease a backlog of Soviet Jewish refugee applicants in Moscow and Rome.

Among other actions described in a Dec. 15 memo, the State Department said it would "front-load" the number of Soviet refugee slots available for the entire fiscal year 1989, making all of those slots -- as many as 14,000 -- open immediately.

Each year, Congress sets a region-by-region quota on the number of immigrants to be allowed to enter the United States as refugees. Ordinarily, an entire fiscal year's quota of regional refugee admissions is distributed in quarterly installments.

The need for such extraordinary measures as front-loading stems from the influx of Soviet Jews and other minorities permitted to emigrate this year.

Since January, some 15,640 Jews have been

permitted to leave, nearly double last year's total and more than 15 times the number allowed out the year before.

The number of refugee slots allocated by Congress did not keep pace. As a result, U.S. immigration officials in Rome have denied refugee status to as many as 179 Soviet Jewish emigres since September. And hundreds more applications are pending.

Jewish organizations have called the denials a betrayal of U.S. human rights guarantees to Soviet Jews.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, or HIAS, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the Washington office of the Council of Jewish Federations all welcomed the front-loading procedure. CJF said in a statement that the move "will help relieve pressures enormously."

"Trading Off" Refugees

But Karl Zukerman, executive vice president of HIAS, was less enthusiastic about the government's statement that it would also consult with Congress about reallocating to the Soviet refugee sphere 3,000 unused slots currently reserved for Vietnamese political refugees.

The slots are open because Vietnamese officials have yet to follow through on the promised release of thousands detained in so-called "re-education camps."

"While we appreciate the increase, it is a mistake to take it from other regions," said Zukerman.

The chairman of an umbrella group of refugee agencies also objected to the reallocation process.

"It's too bad there has to be this kind of jostling from one region to another," commented Dr. Donald Larsen, executive director of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and chairman of the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs.

Micah Naftalin, national director of the Union of Councils, said that he understands the concern of HIAS and others that the Vietnamese are being "traded off" for Soviets.

"However, it is my impression that we're not trading them off, but borrowing," he said. "There is an assumption among all of us that when Congress returns in January, they'll straighten it out."

The State Department is among those counting on Congress to solve the refugee problem. The State Department memo also listed department plans to draft legislation that will establish a new category of immigrant.

Currently, those being denied refugee status may enter the country as "public interest parolees," as Attorney General Richard Thornburgh has been assuring Soviet Jewry groups.

However, parolees, unlike refugees or even regular immigrants, face major obstacles in trying to become U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens.

Jewish organizations are also hoping that Congress will resist budget pressures and heavily increase the money available for refugee programs.

The refugee problem is a "whole package," said Zukerman.

"Each of the little problems is related to the overall money problems. Once there is overall understanding of what the government is going to come up with, all of the rest (of the problems) are practicalities."

U.S. APPEALS TO HELP STOP GADHAFI'S CHEMICAL WEAPONS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- In an attempt to prevent Libya from full-scale production of chemical weapons, the United States is appealing to countries whose citizens and firms are helping Libya to make such cooperation illegal, State Department officials said this week.

Arthur Berger, spokesman for the department's Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs, said Tuesday that Libya is "on the verge of full-scale production of chemical weapons at an isolated site in the desert, some distance from any major town or city."

Israel fears that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi may deploy the weapons against Israeli targets. "You begin to wonder, 'What does Gadhafi need this for?'" Berger said. "Certainly one would think not for a pesticide plant to develop agriculture in Libya."

Berger said a welcome development is that some countries made aware of private cooperation by their citizens with Libya "have begun to crack down in a very severe way."

In some cases, the countries passed laws making such cooperation illegal, he added.

Berger said some shipments of weapons from Libya have been intercepted, but that "some have not, unfortunately." He cited weapons exports by Gadhafi to the Japanese Red Army and the Irish Republican Army, as well as general Libyan support for international terrorist attacks.

"One of the tragic lessons that we learned out of the Iran-Iraq war is that chemical weapons not only have been used, but in many cases have been used with impunity," Berger said.

At the State Department Monday, spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley said, "The U.S. believes that Libya has established a C.W. (chemical weapons) production capability and is on the verge of full-scale production of these weapons."

Oakley said such a Libyan capability "would be particularly troubling in view of public reports that Libya has used C.W. in combat and because of the Gadhafi regime's support for terrorism, and indications that Libyan-backed or supplied terrorist groups have been involved in recent terrorist attacks."

Libya's chemical weapons capability is expected to be discussed at an international conference on chemical weapons in Paris Jan. 7-11.

Participating will be signatories to the 1928 Geneva Protocol banning chemical weapons. Oakley announced Tuesday that Secretary of State George Shultz will participate in the talks.

U.S. NEGATIVE ON MORE SETTLEMENTS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- The State Department on Tuesday reiterated its longstanding position that the establishment of additional Israeli settlements in the administered territories is "not helpful" in advancing Middle East peace prospects.

Department spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley would not comment directly on a Likud-Labor compromise struck Monday to build eight new settlements in the coming year.

But she said the United States considers the building of new settlements as "not helpful in moving toward the comprehensive peace settlement that we all desire."

WEST GERMAN JEWISH COUNCIL URGES DISBANDING ORGANIZATION

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- The Central Council of Jews in West Germany, shamed by an embezzlement scandal early this year, is divided over whether to disband the community umbrella organization.

Ignaz Bubis, head of the Jewish community in Frankfurt, which is the largest in West Germany, resigned from the Central Council 10 days ago, along with eight other members.

He urged the 10 remaining members to quit as well, so that elections can be held for new leadership. But that was fiercely opposed by Heinz Galinski, the 75-year-old chairman of the Central Council.

Galinski argued that blanket resignations would end all activities on behalf of West German Jews, and that he could not take responsibility for that.

The resignations followed a meeting of the Central Council's assembly in West Berlin.

Critics said the present leadership did not deserve confidence because it had failed to detect the malfeasance of the late Werner Nachmann, who chaired the Central Council for more than 20 years until he died suddenly last January.

Nachmann, a respected businessman with political connections in Bonn, was discovered after his death to have misappropriated some \$40 million, earmarked for reparations for Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Most of the money was provided by the Bonn Finance Ministry and placed in trust with the Central Council for distribution.

It was Nachmann's successor, Galinski, who uncovered the scandal last March.

The Central Council accepted full responsibility, firing its secretary, Alexander Ginsberg, who along with Nachmann had sole access to the reparations account.

So far, however, no legal action has been taken against anyone and the stolen funds have not been found.

SYRIA URGED TO LET JEWS OUT

By Yossi Lempkowicz

BRUSSELS, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- The European Parliament in Strasbourg has intervened on behalf of six Syrian Jews who are missing or were imprisoned because they wanted to leave Syria.

A resolution urging their immediate release will be delivered to the Damascus government by the president of the parliament, the legislative body of the European Community. It will also be delivered to the 12 E.C. member states.

The resolution was introduced by two members of the Liberal group, Jean-Thomas Nordmann of France and Carles-Alfred Gasoliba Byohm of Spain, during a debate on human rights violations around the world.

It notes that there are some 5,000 Jews living in Syria today, with three Jews, Ibrahim Lahal, Victor Lahal and Selim Sued, confined to prison.

Three others, Eli Sued, Jacques Lalo and Zaki Mamroud, disappeared after their arrest. They were all accused by the authorities of trying to leave Syria.

In calling on Syria to let these Jews leave, the resolution cited the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

ISRAEL PROVIDED WEST GERMANY WITH POSSIBLE FAULTY DEFENSE SYSTEM

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- Israel was the major supplier of a sophisticated electronics defense system for a West German jet fighter plane, a Defense Ministry spokesman confirmed Tuesday, but a published report said it was never tested and is considered faulty.

The ministry spokesman, Helmut Wendt, refused to elaborate on a report in Der Spiegel Monday that the \$560 million system, known as "Zerbrus," didn't work.

It was designed for the supersonic Tornado fighter plane, which is a joint venture of West Germany, Britain and Italy.

While the Germans opted for the Israeli "Zerbrus" system, the other countries chose different devices to protect the plane from enemy detection.

Der Spiegel, a mass circulation weekly, claimed "Zerbrus" failed to live up to the expectations of air force commanders and may be abandoned.

Wendt would not confirm reports that the system was never tested. He said it passed simulation tests and functioned properly. But for financial reasons, the air force has not tested it in war games, the spokesman said.

Reports have surfaced that Britain is considering the sale of 18 Tornados to Jordan.

CAIN CLEARED OF ABEL'S MURDER

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- A jury in Venice has found Cain not guilty of first-degree murder in the death of his brother, Abel.

It deliberated for 55 minutes before reaching a verdict Sunday night that could trigger a millennium of scholarly debate.

During the 10-hour mock trial, testimony was heard from historians, academicians, rabbis, criminologists and other distinguished experts.

The defendant did not take the witness stand, having died a few thousand years ago.

The trial, held in the Council Hall of the provincial government building in Venice, was sponsored by the city government, the Venetian Bar Association and, of course, the local tourist board. It was open to the public.

Practicing attorneys participated. A presiding magistrate, Luigi Maria Todaro, played the role of president of the court.

Some might accuse the jurors of favoring the criminal over the victim. While they did not deny that Cain, a farmer, slew Abel, a shepherd, they found extenuating circumstances.

Cain acted out of understandable emotional turmoil, abetted by the fact that God preferred Abel's offering to his own, the jury decided.

JNF TO PLANT 3 MILLION TREES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- The Jewish National Fund will plant 3 million trees this year, largely to replace trees destroyed by forest fires that ravaged the countryside last summer, JNF Chairman Moshe Rivlin announced Tuesday.

Much of the destruction was caused by arson from the intifada. Rivlin said the trees will be planted at 120 sites, from the Lebanese border in the north to the Egyptian border in the south.

TIKKUN CONFEREES SEEK A VOICE TO COUNTER JEWISH MAINSTREAM

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 20 (JTA) -- When 1,500 Jewish progressives gathered here this week for a three-day conference, no votes were taken and no leaders were elected.

Nevertheless, the Tikkun conference, sponsored by the liberal, Oakland-based Jewish magazine, took on the air of a political convention.

Wild applause saluted stump speeches by such stars of the Jewish and political left as Irving Howe, Abba Eban, Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Todd Gitlin.

Back-slapping delegates boasted of party unity, while others bemoaned irreconcilable differences.

And special interest groups jostled for attention on a crowded agenda: students, feminists, animal rights activists, gays and lesbians.

Most telling of all, there was a "platform." Its first main plank was contempt for what speakers called the conservatism of the organized American Jewish community.

The second plank was a belief that Israel's administration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in the words of Tikkun editor Michael Lerner, "is irrational, destructive, immoral and must be terminated."

But this was no political convention, and participants wondered again and again if the energy of the conference could be channeled into an organization to rival establishment voices, such as those within the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Hopes For Unity On The Left

"I feel that the mainstream Jewish organizations in the United States and the main thrust of the organized Jewish community in Baton Rouge don't represent my views," said Steven Weintraub, 37, a professor of mathematics at Louisiana State University.

Weintraub's complaint was typical of that of many participants, and so was his prescription. "It's necessary to find a counterweight to the mainstream, and I have hopes of a movement," he said.

Hopes for unity on the Jewish left were discussed at a plenary session Monday. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, founding editor of Ms. magazine, quoted Eban when she said, "We need a conference of presidents of minor Jewish organizations."

She described some of the institutional initiatives that were being discussed at the conference. They included the Committee for Judaism and Social Justice, which Tikkun is promoting as an alternative voice on Jewish public policy, and J-PAC, a Jewish lobby to counter the influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Lerner spoke of organizing a national campaign for "negotiations now," to urge Israeli leaders to sit down for talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

But other speakers counseled prudence in forming a new organization.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said he shared many of the participants' criticisms of the "status quo" in Israel. But he wondered if the formation of a new organization was more than just a bid for publicity.

David Gordis, former executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said there

must be guidelines followed in criticizing Israel.

"The tone of our criticism cannot partake of Israel-bashing," he said. "We have to avoid seeming to agree with those whose objectives are to undermine Israel."

In a remark that drew hisses and boos, Gordis warned participants of being "branded as illegitimate because of the fellowship in which they find themselves."

Intellectuals Vs. Activists

Gordis was hinting at the kinds of criticism of the left, including charges of anti-Israel bias, that led many former Jewish liberals to run into the arms of neo-conservatism.

However, said Lerner, an observant Jew who wears a chest-length beard and a pie-sized yarmulke, "This is not an assemblage of self-hating Jews or people alienated from Judaism."

Basing their criticism of Israeli policy on "a profound insistence of our love for the people of Israel," he said, "many of us will no longer accept organized Jewry's criteria for how we have to talk or what tone to take. We are not the periphery."

There were other dilemmas for participants. In public sessions and private discussions, there seemed to be tension between intellectuals who preferred esoteric dissection of political philosophies and those who favored activism over abstractions.

When a group discussion on anti-Semitism became a debate on the ideas of the 19th-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill, one participant, an elementary school teacher from Olympia, Wash., cried "Whoa!"

She suggested that members of the group instead introduce themselves. Those responding included students of both Judaic and Arabic studies, one Jewish and two non-Jewish college professors, two printers, a woman rabbi, a young woman contemplating conversion to Judaism and artist Judy Chicago.

Kenneth Marvet, 25, a newly religious rabbinical student at an Orthodox yeshiva in Monsey, N.Y., had his own dilemma in attending the conference.

Reconciling Divergent Strains

"I agree with many of the policy conclusions people have come to, for reasons based on Jewish law and ethics," said Marvet. "But it is hypocritical for Tikkun to say it grounds its philosophy in Jewish ethics, while it ignores Jewish religious behavior, like prayer, kashrut, family purity."

For example, Marvet said, he "couldn't take part officially in any movement that accepts homosexuality as a valid moral choice."

Whether Tikkun can reconcile these and many other divergent strains remains to be seen. Other groups have tried, and a network already exists of a number of left-wing, mostly New York-based organizations, including Americans for Progressive Israel, American Friends of Peace Now, the New Jewish Agenda and the American Committee for International Peace in the Middle East.

Arich Lebowitz, editor of the socialist Zionist journal Israel Horizons, said Lerner and Tikkun have achieved prominence among Jewish and non-Jewish readers, and have financial backing that editors of smaller, older journals envy.

However, he said, "right now it is very much a Michael Lerner production. It is still a question of whether it can reach beyond him."