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PUBLISHED BY JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY · 330 SEVENTH AVENUE · NEW YORK, NY 10001-5010 · (212) 643-1890

YOL. 67 - 72nd YEAR

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 1989

NO. 17

INTERIOR MINISTER WOULD DENY VISAS TO NON-ORTHODOX CONVERTS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- The Orthodox-controlled Interior Ministry is effectively denying immigrant status to Reform and Conservative converts to Judaism, though it insists it has not instituted a new policy.

The potentially explosive action came to light in a statement by Interior Minister Arye Deri of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, read to the High Court of Justice Monday. The statement was addressed to Attorney General Yosef Harish.

He said the ministry's aversion to registering non-Orthodox converts as Jews would henceforth be extended to the issuance of immigrant visas to such converts.

Some observers see that as tantamount to implementing the "Who Is a Jew?" amendment to the Law of Return, long demanded by the ultra-Orthodox, but consistently rejected by the Knesset.

But Benny Ya'ari, the Interior Ministry's deputy legal adviser, denied that Deri's statement represented a new policy.

He said it meant only that ministry officials are now referring converts to rabbinical courts as a matter of "friendly advice."

"Our officials are not knowledgeable about Jewish communities around the world, so as a matter of friendly advice we refer converts to those who know about Jewish communities around the world -- the local rabbinical courts," Ya'ari said.

He admitted it is virtually unthinkable that a rabbinical court would validate a non-Orthodox conversion certificate.

Not A New Policy

He denied that Deri started a new policy when he took office as interior minister. But when an official has doubts about a document, he can refuse to accept it, Ya'ari said.

The legal adviser pointed out that the former interior minister, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, also of the Shas party, had told the Knesset and the High Court that non-Orthodox converts were allowed to enter Israel under the Law of Return, even though he was unwilling to register them as Jews.

Ya'ari replied that "virtually all" of those converts were spouses of Jews who were automatically covered by the Law of Return.

He maintained that Shoshana Miller, an unmarried American woman converted by a Reform rabbi, was never given immigrant status and remained a temporary resident as long as she was in Israel.

The Miller case was the first in which the Interior Ministry refused to abide by a court order to register a convert as a Jew. Peretz, who was minister at the time, resigned rather than comply.

But Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center here, stated flatly that Miller "was given an Aleph/1 (immigrant) visa at the Israeli Consulate in San Francisco and given a teudat oleh" (immigrant's certificate) when she arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport.

He added that another Reform convert, Alicia Oren, was given a visa under the Law of Return by the Israeli Consulate in Argentina as the wife of a Jew.

Following a protest, however, she was given an immigrant's visa as a Jew, Regev said.

"There has never been any question in the past concerning immigrants' visas for non-Orthodox converts," Regev said.

The High Court is presently considering petitions for and against the registration of several non-Orthodox converts as Jews.

Ya'ari's explanation of Deri's remarks did not appear to comfort the editors of the Jerusalem Post. In an editorial Wednesday, they attacked the "brazenness" of the interior minister's statement.

"At one fell administrative swoop, the interior minister, true not to his duty to observe the law but to his religious convictions, has seemingly achieved what the religious parties have for years failed to secure by means of orderly legislation," the paper said.

FOUR JEWISH JOURNALISTS CONVICTED OF LINK WITH TERROR ORGANIZATION By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- Four editors of a left-wing periodical were found guilty of membership in a terrorist organization by a Jerusalem district court Wednesday.

They received relatively light sentences as a result of plea bargains, avoiding a prolonged trial that would have tested the limits of a free press in a democratic society.

The defendants edited Derekh Hanitzotz, a Hebrew publication the prosecution said was financed by the Marxist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by Nayef Hawatmeh.

The magazine was ordered shut down last April on grounds that it was "receiving funds from terror organizations."

Its editors were arrested shortly afterward.

They are Ya'acov Ben-Efrat, editor in chief, who received a two-and-a-half-year prison sent-ence and a four-year suspended sentence; editors Michal Schwartz and Assaf Adiv, who each received one and a half years in prison and three-year suspended sentences; and Ronni Ben-Efrat, former wife of Ya'acov Ben-Efrat, who got a nine-month sentence.

She will be released immediately, having already spent nine months in custody.

All four admitted to membership in the Democratic Front and providing service to "an illegal organization."

The defense and prosecution agreed to reduced sentences instead of a trial that might have lasted many months, because each side planned to call dozens of witnesses.

Defense attorney Felicia Langer said, however, she had no choice, because her clients were sitting in jail and denied bail.

In related news, the controversial issue of contacts between Israeli citizens and representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization was debated Wednesday in the Knesset.

The subject on the agenda was the recent

visit to Paris by four Knesset members to attend an international conference that the PLO also attended.

Israeli law forbids contacts with the PLO. Rabbi Yitzhak Levy, a Knesset member of the National Religious Party, accused his four colleagues of conducting their own foreign policy contrary to the law, the government's position and the will of the majority of Israelis.

But Yossi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement called the restrictive law "null and void."

Yair Tsaban of Mapam, who attended the Paris conference, said it "would never pass the test of reality." He noted that "PLO missions are regularly accepted by international forums."

Levy, however, insisted that individuals cannot decide "what is a legal law and what is an illegal law." He said that is up to the High Court of Justice.

INNER CABINET, JUSTICE MINISTRY REVIEWING USE OF PLASTIC BULLETS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- New orders giving army troops greater leeway to use plastic bullets against Palestinian rioters in the administered territories were reviewed Wednesday by the Inner Cabinet.

The legality of the new instructions was also discussed by the Justice Ministry.

But neither body reached any conclusions as Israelis expressed concern over the high Palestinian casualty rate and worried about the Jewish state's tarnished image abroad.

The Inner Cabinet was briefed by two ranking IDF officers, Gen. Amram Mitzna, commander of the central sector, which embraces the West Bank, and Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai of the southern command, which includes the Gaza Strip.

But the discussions, which began at last week's Inner Cabinet meeting, developed into a debate over whether the intifada, as the Arabs call the uprising, can be brought to an end before there is a political settlement.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin reportedly thinks so. Others differ.

Minister of Science and Development Ezer Weizman urged immediate direct talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization. But the coalition agreement signed by Likud and Labor when the current government was formed explicitly rejects such negotiations.

Ariel Sharon, the minister of industry and trade, said the government has to unite behind a single policy.

Sharon implied criticism of his Herut colleague, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, for suggesting to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee last week that Israeli policy could be more flexible.

The Inner Cabinet debate will continue next week on the subject of rubber bullets.

Ha'aretz reported Wednesday that Rabin told Knesset members that rubber bullets were replaced by plastic bullets because they could not reach the minimum range at which IDF troops are permitted to fire.

Ha'aretz also said senior military sources confirmed that local commanders have been ordered to keep shooting to the minimum because of the public outcry over casualties.

Davar said Rabin informed the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that disturbances have decreased since high schools were closed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

There were no reports of unrest Wednesday.

The Justice Ministry, meanwhile, is hearing expert opinion from the military and civilian jurists on the legality of the new shooting orders.

Attorney General Yosef Harish has asked for further clarification from the army. Harish will have to defend the military establishment before the High Court of Justice, where the Israel Human Rights League has filed an appeal against the use of plastic or rubber bullets.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

HADASSAH ANGRILY DENIES REPORT OF TURNING AWAY ARAB PATIENTS

JERUSALEM, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- Hadassah has reacted sharply to a report in the Los Angeles Times alleging that Arab patients are turned away from its hospitals in Israel.

Dr. Samuel Penchas, director general of the Hadassah Medical Organization, called the report "a seriously misleading analysis of a very complex situation."

Carmela Efros Kalmanson, national president of Hadassah, charged that the Times story by Daniel Williams, published Monday, "paints a grossly distorted picture of the health care received in Israeli institutions by Arabs from the West Bank and Gaza."

Penchas denied that Palestinians from those territories were being refused medical care because the Israeli government will no longer pay their hospital bills.

"No patient, whatever his or her ethnic origin or ability to pay, has ever been denied care at a Hadassah hospital under any circumstances," he said.

Penchas also termed false the Times' implication that a Palestinian youth was denied a bone marrow transplant at Hadassah because the government would not cover the cost of the procedure.

He said it may have been delayed "because there is a very long waiting list for bone marrow transplants" at Hadassah hospitals and other hospitals where they are performed.

According to Dr. Shimon Slavin, head of the bone marrow transplant department at the Hadassah Medical Center, one-third of its patients since its inception have been Arabs from the territories.

According to Penchas, leaders of the Palestinian uprising discourage West Bank Arabs from seeking medical care at Israeli facilities.

TABA TALKS BOG DOWN OVER AGENDA By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- The troubled Israeli-Egyptian negotiations over Taba bogged down in a dispute over the agenda Wednesday.

The nature of the dispute was not known, but by evening it had not been settled.

The talks, which came close to breaking down last Friday, were resumed Tuesday evening, after the direct intervention of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

He ordered his delegation to adhere to the original agenda and strive for a settlement acceptable by both sides.

The two teams had been expected to split into a half dozen subcommittees Wednesday, each dealing with a specific issue. But instead, the day was devoted to a renewed debate over the agenda.

WEST GERMANS PLEDGE TO END ROLE IN LIBYAN CHEMICAL ARMS PLANT By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman received assurances Wednesday from West Germany's top leaders that the government is doing its utmost to prevent further West German involvement in the Libyan manufacture of chemical weapons.

Bronfman met in Bonn for an hour each with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, according to reports from the West German capital.

He was accompanied by Israel Singer, WJC secretary-general, and Elan Steinberg, the organization's executive director.

The main issue on the table was West German involvement in building a reputed chemical weapons plant in Rabta, Libya.

Genscher said the issue "cannot simply be seen in everyday political terms, but has developed into a moral and historical problem for Germany to address," according to Steinberg, who was reached by telephone from Bonn.

The foreign minister outlined action the West German government is undertaking, independent of ongoing legal proceedings, toward restricting future German involvement in projects with Libya. The plan includes:

- * Introduction of new legislation to tighten foreign trade regulations, to prevent German companies or individuals from exporting chemicals or technology to make chemical weapons.
- * Putting West Germany's rough equivalent to the FBI in charge of the current investigation and all future investigations of individuals or companies suspected of involvement in chemical weapons production.
- * The strengthening of penal sanctions for involvement in the production of such weapons.

Steinberg reported that Kohl confirmed the entire program as Genscher outlined it to the WJC leaders.

'In Favor Of A Complete Ban'

WJC's foremost concern "was to ensure that the Libyan plant is not completed" and that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi "is not given the wherewithal to use chemical weapons," he said.

According to Steinberg, both Genscher and Kohl said they are now discussing coordinated actions with the Western allies to try to prevent any possible use of chemical weapons from the Rabta plant or by Libya in general.

He said the West Germans indicated "they are in favor of a complete ban on the manufacture of chemical weapons and on their use."

The WJC also expressed concern at reports that West Germans helped Libya acquire the ability to refuel fighter jets in midflight, which would enable the planes to strike targets in Israel.

On Wednesday, the Institute for Customs Crimes, based in Cologne, made raids on 14 firms suspected of helping build the Rabta chemical weapons plant.

A leading state-owned company, Saltzgitter Industriebau, has conceded its involvement in the affair, as has the Lahr-based Imhausen-Chemie, which has been accused of playing a leading role in coordinating the Libyan effort to produce poison gas.

(JTA correspondent David Kantor in Bonn contributed to this report.)

WEST GERMAN MINISTERS CLASH OVER SALE OF JETS TO JORDAN By David Kantor

BONN, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher clashed angrily at a Cabinet meeting Tuesday over a \$200 million West German loan to finance Jordan's purchase of eight advanced Tornado jet fighter-bombers.

Kohl desended the deal. Genscher opposes it, as does his Free Democratic Party, the junior partner in the governing coalition led by Kohl's Christian Democratic Union.

The loan was advanced by the Munich-based Bayerische Landesbank, which is owned by the federal state of Bayaria.

The Bonn government, which originally was to have underwritten the project, was forced to abandon it three months ago because of public protests.

The FDP and the opposition Social Democratic Party say the sale is a threat to Israel and violates Bonn's longstanding policy of barring arms shipments to "areas of tension."

Kohl told Genscher there is nothing "immoral" about the transaction.

The Tornado is produced jointly by West Germany, Britain and Italy. Although about 40 percent of its components are manufactured in Bavaria, it is marketed primarily by Britain.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reportedly intervened with Kohl to secure the financing.

Wolfgang Schauble, an aide to the chancellor, said Israel had been informed in advance of the deal and raised no objections.

A spokesman for the Israel Embassy here refused to comment. But Israel is keeping a low profile on this and other matters.

Observers note, for example, that unlike the United States, Israel has been restrained in its reaction to reports that West German firms have helped Libya build a chemical weapons plant.

Israel's restraint is attributed to the inroads its military industries have made recently into the West German market.

EUROPEAN MINISTERS TO CONVENE ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE STRATEGY By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias will go to Madrid Thursday to further advance the European Community's efforts to resolve the Middle East conflict.

He will be meeting with the Spanish foreign minister, Francisco Fernandez Ordonez, and Foreign Minister Roland Dumas of France.

The three foreign ministers, the so-called "troika," were asked by their E.C. partners to focus on the Middle East and hold discussions with all parties to the conflict.

They are scheduled to meet with Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat in Madrid and will visit Jordan, Egypt and Syria on Feb. 11, 12 and 13.

Ordonez, current chairman of the E.C. Council of Ministers, has already visited Israel, as has Dumas, who will succeed him as chairman on July 1.

Papoulias, immediate past chairman of the council, visited Israel in November 1986. Greece is the only E.C. country that has less than full diplomatic relations with Israel. It is considered the most pro-Arab of the 12 member states.



SYNAGOGUE VANDAL'S PLEA BARGAIN DENOUNCED AS 'SLAP ON THE WRIST' By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- Jews in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn were outraged Wednesday after a state Supreme Court judge recommended sentencing an adolescent synagogue vandal to four months of weekends in jail, five years' probation and 200 hours of community service.

Spokespersons for the community called the sentence a slap on the wrist and urged Judge Thaddeus Owens to change his mind before formal sentencing on March 1.

Lewis Franceschi, 16, pleaded guilty Wednesday in Brooklyn Supreme Court to arson, burglary and criminal mischief charges for last September's High Holiday attack on Orthodox Congregation Rabbinical Institute Sharai Torah in the Midwood section of Flatbush.

In New York state, the Supreme Court is the court of first jurisdiction, rather than appeal.

Franceschi, who was 15 at the time of the incident, and a 12-year-old accomplice were charged with setting fires throughout the synagogue and desecrating at least five of the synagogue's Torah scrolls.

The Sept. 17 attack, coming during the week between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, evoked painful memories of Kristallnacht, the night of Nazi-led anti-Semitic violence, whose 50th anniversary was marked last fall.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith has called the attack on Sharai Torah one of the most serious anti-Semitic incidents of 1988.

Franceschi faced trial as an adult. His accomplice will appear separately in family court.

Essay On Nazi Persecution

On Wednesday, defense attorney Howard Weiswasser entered guilty pleas on all counts, including three felony and two misdemeanor counts, for which Franceschi could have received 28 months to seven years in jail.

When a client pleads guilty to an entire indictment, the sentence falls to the discretion of the judge.

As part of the judge's recommendation, Franceschi will be asked to write an "extensive essay" on the plight of Jews under Nazi Germany.

If the essay does not meet with the judge's approval or if Franceschi violates any of the other provisions of the sentence, Owens could recommend a jail sentence of 16 months to four years.

Brooklyn Assistant District Attorney Paul Demartini asked that Franceschi receive a substantial jail sentence.

"We hope, nonetheless, that the threat of a jail sentence as well as the other penalties imposed will ensure that this defendant does not engage in this kind of conduct again," said Brooklyn District Attorney Elizabeth Holtzman.

New York City Councilman Noach Dear, who represents Flatbush, called the recommended sentence "not only a slap on the wrist, but a badge of honor."

"He basically gave him a can of gasoline to go ahead and do it to another synagogue," said Dear.

On Tuesday, Dear wrote Supreme Court Administrative Judge Leonard Yoswein asking that Owens be removed from the case.

Dear claimed Owens made racist and anti-

Semitic remarks during prior hearings.

Rabbi Max Schreier, president of the Rabbinical Council of America and religious leader of the Avenue N Jewish Center in Flatbush, said the recommendation was "an outrage as far as the Jewish community is concerned."

'Not Just A Wanton Attack'

"This was not just a wanton kind of attack, but very premeditated. You had to see it to believe it" he said of the damage to the synagogue, which included the charred remains of the Torahs and swastikas scrawled on the walls.

"It is obvious from what has taken place that there is something emphatically wrong with the whole penal code," said Rabbi Yechezkel Pikus, executive director of the Council of Jewish Organizations of Flatbush.

"We need additional legislation to set up a whole new system of guidelines for crimes against religious institutions."

Rabbi Hillel David, religious leader of Sharai Torah, declined to comment on the sentence.

Franceschi's lawyer denied that the sentence was a light one. "Anytime anyone goes to jail, even for two minutes, it is not pleasant," said Weiswasser.

Weiswasser, who is Jewish, said Franceschi had no known history of anti-Semitism, but was rather a "frightened and dumb 15-year-old" who was easily led by his 12-year-old acquaintance.

"I know my client is deeply regretful of what he has done," said Weiswasser.

"I don't believe a community can make an example out of a 14- or a 16-year-old. If he were older and understood more, I might very well agree."

10 APPOINTED TO HOLOCAUST COUNCIL By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Jan. 25 (JTA) -- President Reagan, in one of his last acts before leaving office, named 10 new members to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and reappointed three others, all to five-year terms.

The council, which is made up of 55 persons appointed by the president and 10 members of Congress, is the governing board for the U.S. Holocaust Museum being built near the Washington Monument.

Those reappointed to the council are Benjamin Meed, New York, a Holocaust survivor and president of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors; Dr. Hadassah Rosensaft, New York, a Holocaust survivors and lecturer and author on the Holocaust; and Edward Rosen, chairman of Raymond Rosen Co., Conshocken, Pa.

Among the new members appointed to the council are William Brock III, who was Labor Secretary in the Reagan administration and is a former Republican senator from Tennessee, and Alan Kranowitz, who was Reagan's assistant for legislative affairs.

The other new members are Marshall Ezralow, president of Marshall Ezralow & Associates, Reseda, Calif; Louis Kestenbaum, board chairman of Americorp Equities, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Aric Kopelman, president and chief operating officer of Chanel Inc., New York.

Also, Michael Moskow, vice president of Premark International, Deerfield, Ill.; and Sanford Sigoloff, chairman, president and chief executive officer of the Wickes Companies, Santa Monica, Calif.