

**MOSCOW JEWISH CENTER OPENS
AS SOVIETS SOFTEN HISTORY**

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- The opening of a Jewish cultural center in Moscow Sunday night was preceded by a flurry of statements by Soviet officials, signifying the lifting of decades-old restrictions on the expression of Jewish culture and the granting of official legitimacy to a viable Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

The center, the first in the Soviet Union since the days of Josef Stalin, was attended by delegates from around the world, including Soviet ambassadors from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, France and Australia, as well as a group of Israeli diplomats.

The Solomon Mikhoels Center, most recently a movie theater near the center of Moscow, was addressed by Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, and Nobel Peace laureate Elic Weisel.

The theater was originally the Moscow Yiddish State Theater, of which Mikhoels was director.

There was no formal greeting from the Soviet government, although a member of the Foreign Ministry's humanitarian affairs department and a member of the Cultural Ministry did attend the opening ceremonies.

Nevertheless, the last week saw again a change in how the Soviet Union is facing up to its past.

Last Thursday, two Soviet historians denounced Soviet anti-Zionist campaigning of the last twenty years, comparing it with Nazi anti-Semitism.

Sergei Rogov, who used to be a diplomat at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, and Vladimir Nosenko wrote an attack on this official anti-Semitism, saying it helped create the climate in which thousands of Jews have sought to emigrate.

In an article appearing Thursday in the newspaper Soviet Culture, Rogov and Nosenko said a leading anti-Zionist, Vladimir Begun, established the tone of government propaganda by seeking "to sow mistrust toward Soviet Jews."

Anti-Semitism Still Remains

The historians also cited a virulent anti-Semitic article that was published in December in a reactionary journal, Nash Sovremennik. In writing this, they showed that the problem of anti-Semitism remains very strong even under Mikhail Gorbachev.

In another display of the lifting of restrictions in the Soviet Union, Soviet authorities signed an unprecedented agreement this month with the New York-based Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

The arrangement will permit Soviet Jewish cultural activists for the first time to accept grants from a Jewish foundation in the West.

Four initial grants have been approved. One goes to Mikhail Gluz, artistic director of the Jewish Musical Theater of Moscow, to write an original opera based on the life of Bar Kochba, the 2nd-century Jewish hero.

In addition, grants will enable Cantor Vladimir Pliss of Moscow's Choral Synagogue to study

in Israel; Zev Kuravsky, a teacher of Judaic studies at the synagogue, to study advanced Talmud in Brooklyn; and a Moscow Jewish cultural activist to study museum curatorship at a Jewish museum in the United States.

Also last week, Moscow news broadcast that the Soviet Supreme Court had voted in 1955 to rehabilitate the reputations of the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the Soviet Union, most of whom were imprisoned and/or shot under Stalin's orders.

This was the first time the crimes committed against these Jews was publicly acknowledged by Soviet authorities.

Moscow news, monitored by the BBC, reported Jan. 26 that the Politburo heard a report from the Soviet Supreme Court, which has been examining material on the subject of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the rehabilitation of its members.

The report, which was reprinted the following day in Pravda, said, "A check carried out in 1955 established that the charges against the members of the 'Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee' were fabricated.

"The USSR Supreme Court on 22nd November 1955 examined the USSR Procurator General's conclusions on the so-called 'Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee' case and annulled the sentences against all those convicted in this case."

**DESPITE ISRAELI PLEAS, U.S. WILL
NOT BREAK OFF TALKS WITH PLO**

NEW YORK, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- The United States is not prepared to break off its dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization, despite urging by Israel to do so.

Secretary of State James Baker indicated, however, that attacks on Israeli military or civilian targets, inside or outside of Israel, would deeply trouble the Bush administration.

The State Department apparently has decided that a clash between Israeli troops and Palestinian infiltrators a week ago did not fit that category.

The Israel Embassy in Washington appealed to the United States last Monday to break off contacts established with the PLO on Dec. 15 by former Secretary of State George Shultz.

The State Department remained non-committal over whether the incident breached the agreement reached with the PLO last year.

Baker, speaking to reporters Saturday aboard his Air Force jet, was making his first public comment on the issue. He said the department was still in the process of gathering information about the episode.

"And we are not prepared to say at this time that this constitutes an action by the PLO which would cause us to break off the dialogue."

He added, "We made the point that actions such as this, directed against civilian or military targets inside or outside of Israel, was something that gave us trouble."

The Israelis claimed the PLO violated its commitment to Shultz to renounce terrorism.

They cited what they said was an attempted terrorist infiltration of Israel last weekend by members of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

ISRAELI CABINET DENIES CONTACT WITH ARAFAT
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- The Israeli Cabinet on Sunday dismissed as "propaganda" remarks attributed to Yasir Arafat that he was having "indirect contacts with Israeli government officials."

The story originated from Cairo, where the Palestine Liberation Organization chairman met Saturday with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

In an interview published in the Rome daily *Il Messaggero*, Arafat claimed the PLO had continuing secret contacts with Israeli officials.

Economics and Planning Minister Yitzhak Moda'i denied the story after Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting. "It is not true. The question was just asked in the government meeting. It was denied as propaganda which has no grounds to stand on."

Arafat said he learned the Jerusalem government was preparing a "war scenario" in southern Lebanon.

"It's true. They (the Israelis) send us many messages under the table, through our representatives in the occupied territories, through other channels in Europe and elsewhere," Arafat said, according to the Italian newspaper.

Arafat said the American special envoy, Philip Habib, served as a channel during the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982.

Arafat also claimed that according to his information, Israel is planning three types of operations against the Palestinians.

"The secret service, Mossad, has been given the order to carry out further attacks against our leadership," he said.

"They will increase the repression in the occupied territories. At the same time, they are preparing a war scenario in southern Lebanon.

"It will be for the summer, maybe late spring, but they are preparing it. Not necessarily a war, but a crisis scenario," Arafat told *Il Messaggero*.

(JTA correspondent Ruth E. Gruber in Rome contributed to this report.)

AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS WELCOME SPEECH BY QUAYLE

PALM BEACH, Fla., Feb. 12 (JTA) -- American Jewish leaders were unequivocal in their praise of Vice President Dan Quayle's speech on Friday, in which he affirmed America's lasting commitment to Israel's security and the Bush administration's deep suspicion of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Their statements, however, took no notice of his assertion, with reference to Palestinian casualties in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that Israel must be judged by higher standards than prevail in the region, and that the status quo in the territories is "clearly unacceptable."

The vice president spoke here at a meeting of the national executive committee of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Burton Levinson, the ADL's national chairman, called his speech "an early statement by the Bush administration of continuing U.S. commitment to the long-standing principles of American Middle East policy."

Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, "We welcome Vice President Quayle's

unequivocal affirmation of support for Israel. We support his statement on American policy toward the PLO."

The speech was Quayle's maiden appearance before a major Jewish group since his swearing-in on Jan. 20.

He dwelt on the most immediate aspects of the Middle East situation -- the Palestinian uprising and the U.S. dialogue with the PLO.

"Those who believe that American policy is about to undergo a basic shift merely because we have begun to talk with the PLO are completely mistaken," Quayle said.

He said there "are many reasons for looking long and hard" at PLO chief Yasir Arafat's acceptance of American conditions for initiating the dialogue, "before drawing any firm conclusions.

"We need more than press conference statements and semantics. We need to see real evidence of concrete actions by the PLO -- actions for peace and against terrorism -- before changing our fundamental attitude toward the PLO," Quayle said.

IDF MOVES TO HEAD OFF SETTLER REPRISALS
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force moved Sunday to head off vigilantism and reprisals by Jewish settlers in the West Bank, furious over the deteriorating security situation.

Maj. Gen. Amram Mitzna, commander of the central sector, held meetings for most of the day with settler representatives, who vented their anger and frustration over the IDF's failure to heed their demands for "improved security measures."

But by the end of the day, the settlers and the military agreed "the talks had been good."

In the meantime, a group of settlers, together with two Knesset supporters, Geula Cohen of Tehiya and Michael Eitan of Likud, cornered the Arab mayor of Kalkilya, Abdul Rahman Abu-Sneinch, in his office Sunday.

They demanded that he and other local Arab leaders take measures to end attacks on Jewish vehicles.

If not, they hinted, they could expect the settlers to react in their own way.

But Abu-Sneinch was the wrong party to approach. Appointed to office by the Israeli military government, he is seen by the townspeople as Israel's "puppet" and his influence with local trouble-makers is nil.

He told his visitors he could do nothing for them. The interview ended when IDF officers ordered the settlers to leave the mayor's office.

The problem of Jewish reprisals was also discussed by the Cabinet Sunday.

Minister of Labor Mordechai Gur, a Laborite, said settlers who complain against the IDF and take matters into their own hands "are weakening Israel."

Only scattered disturbances were reported in the territories Sunday. There was a clash in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip where soldiers wounded one Arab.

Two gasoline bombs were thrown at a military camp near the Neveh Ya'acov neighborhood in northern Jerusalem.

They ignited on the perimeter fence but caused no casualties or damage.

W. GERMAN COMPANY DEALING CHEMICALS ONCE SOLD POISON GAS TO AUSCHWITZ

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- A West German company which shipped potentially deadly chemicals to Libya was a major shareholder in the company that supplied poison gas to Auschwitz, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

The Wiesenthal Center made public Friday the information that the Frankfurt-based Degussa Company was a 42.5 percent owner of Degesch, a company which during World War II manufactured Zyklon B, the lethal chemical used in the gas chambers.

Degesch was an acronym for German Company for Pesticide Production. The company's manufacture of the infamous chemical is documented in historian Raoul Hilberg's "The Destruction of European Jewry."

Hilberg, contacted Sunday, was concerned but also very careful in his analysis of the German company's relationship both to chemical production and to the German firm that operated during the Nazi era.

In a telephone interview from his home in Burlington, Vt., the dean of historians of the Nazi destruction of the Jews said he "espoused the fact that knowledge must be distributed to persons who make decisions, and these people in turn have an obligation to acquaint themselves with the relevant moral implications as well as with the technical commercial facts."

Hilberg cautioned that "it's very complicated. Even in those days, you had all the same gimmicks as now, in terms of company ownership and distribution of product."

Degussa was one of three parent companies of Degesch, the other two having been I.G. Farben and Goldschmidt.

Delivered Gas To Auschwitz

Degesch, said Hilberg, marketed this gas to two companies, Heli and Testa, and Testa delivered the gas to Auschwitz.

Hilberg said that "these things are not simple. Many people can claim, 'I didn't know what this was for.'

"And it's true," he acknowledged, that "many people don't know -- because they don't inquire."

On Thursday, meanwhile, the West German consul to New York underlined the special relationship between Germany and Israel and the feelings of moral responsibility.

But Leopold von Bredow emphasized, nonetheless, the extreme difficulty in finding and prosecuting some individual or firm that broke the law and exported lethal chemicals.

Von Bredow spoke in an exclusive interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency after he had spent more than an hour with a delegation from the Zionist Organization of America, Likud-Herut Zionists of America, United Synagogue of America, Emunah Women of America, Religious Zionists of America, Americans for a Safe Israel, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and Amit Women.

"We can only enact legislation," von Bredow said. "We can never prevent that some people are going to circumvent laws. Our trouble is that certain things are not even punishable because until now we have had a very limited list of things which could not be exported."

VATICAN REPORT ON RACISM WELL RECEIVED BY JEWISH GROUPS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- The Vatican's blanket condemnation of anti-Semitism, in its document on racism issued here Friday, was well received by several Jewish organizations, though they found some flaws.

While it is probably the strongest statement of its kind yet made in the name of a pope, the document stopped well short of examining the Church's historic role in the persecution of Jews.

Furthermore, while it acknowledged that anti-Zionism "serves at times as a screen for anti-Semitism," it contains no reference to the infamous Zionism equals racism resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 10, 1975.

That omission was cited by Rabbi A. James Rudin, national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, in a statement released in New York Friday.

But he otherwise acclaimed the document as "clear and powerful."

The World Jewish Congress also welcomed the pontifical pronouncement.

Noting that the statement recognizes the Holocaust as "racial ideology in its 'most tragic form,'" the WJC prodded the Vatican to comply with the Feb. 22 deadline to relocate a Carmelite convent from the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

The document, titled "The Church and Racism -- Towards a More Fraternal Society," was ordered by Pope John Paul II and was written by the Vatican's Justice and Peace Commission.

It dealt with all forms of racism, and specifically came down hard on South Africa's apartheid and the historic racial discrimination in the United States.

But its historical overview of the development of racism failed to deal in more than cursory fashion with severe anti-Jewish measures, such as the Inquisition or confinement in ghettos imposed by churchmen.

Not A Complete History

"No attempt is made here to trace a complete history of racism, nor of the attitude of the church in this regard," a footnote at the opening of the document explained.

"This by no means implies an effort to gloss over the weaknesses and even, at times, the complicity of certain Church leaders, as well as other members of the Church in this phenomenon," it said.

The concentration on 20th-century anti-Semitism and neglect of its millennial aspects was acknowledged by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace at the Vatican, and Monsignor Jorge Mejia, at a news conference here Friday.

Etchegaray said that the document was not intended as a replacement for a long-planned document that is to specifically address the question of anti-Semitism and Catholic-Jewish relations.

"If it's a question of anti-Semitism, we hope that our colleagues in the Commission (on Religious Relations with the Jews) will take up completely the subject," Mejia said.

"Here, we thought this was enough. It's quite clear to recognize that we have not lived up to the standards always and everywhere, particularly regarding anti-Semitism," he said.

Behind The Headlines:**WALKING ON PATROL ALONG THE STREETS OF NABLUS**

By Mark Joffe

NABLUS, West Bank, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- It is cold and wet today in Nablus. The sun peeps out from time to time, but mainly the wind sends sheets of rain dancing down the streets, causing both the merchants in the marketplace and the soldiers in their tents to rub their hands quickly together.

The town casbah, where 15,000 people are packed tightly into less than one square mile of dilapidated shops and homes, is one of the centers of the intifada -- the 14-month-old Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But today, the streets are quiet. From a lookout post above the town, one sees neither tires burning nor tear gas fumes billowing. Just the eggshell-blue domes of the town's mosques and line after line of once-dry laundry getting soaked by the driving rain.

When there is an incident, it usually occurs while a group of soldiers is patrolling the cramped streets of the casbah. Typically, a group of children fling stones at the soldiers from the rooftops. In response, the soldiers point machine guns at the children, usually sending them fleeing.

But sometimes the stones are actually concrete building blocks, and sometimes the children are 20 years old or more. And sometimes they do not run away in fear. That sends the soldiers chasing after them, running from rooftop to rooftop, trying to catch up.

It is a game of cat and mouse, explains one soldier -- but not one that the Israelis enjoy. Yesterday, one of the soldiers fell 15 feet through a decrepit roof, trying to drive the rock-throwers away.

Hail Of Stones

A soldier who came under a heavy hail of stones yesterday had to be rescued with the firing of a small amount of plastic bullets. No one was hurt. It was the first time in three weeks that ammunition had been used here. There has only been one firebomb thrown here in the last month.

Today, the big incident is a suspected explosive charge that has been discovered behind a parking lot off one of the main streets here. Troops cordon off the block with jeeps as sappers move in to detonate the suspected bomb.

Merchants and wide-eyed children cluster on the sidelines, hoping to catch a glimpse of what is going on. They are held at bay by calm soldiers pointing Uzis upward.

A rustling in the bushes and the sound of a few pebbles falling inspires an order from the battalion commander. Soldiers rush toward the crowd, their guns now pointed directly at the crowd. The onlookers scurry away and order is restored.

A loud boom signals that the suspected bomb has been detonated. But it turns out not to have been an explosive after all.

All of this has occurred outside the walls of the casbah, causing a bit of excitement in an otherwise monotonous day. But inside the casbah, just a few moments later, a patrol finds eerie silence, as if some nuclear disaster has snuffed out all signs of life.

It is just past noon, and all of the shops are shuttered closed, heavy metal doors giving no clue

to what goods are sold inside. Two veiled women walk by, but otherwise not a soul is seen.

The patrol turns down a side street, and some 500 yards away, a group of young children are causing a ruckus. Soldiers run toward them, and the children disperse like pigeons in a public park.

The patrol has ended without incident. No headlines here today, just the same routine that professional soldiers have been burdened with for the last 14 months.

"It is difficult to be a soldier in the intifada," says 31-year-old Yehuda, a major whose unit is doing its first tour of reserve duty in the territories since the uprising began.

He explains that the unit was trained to be paratroopers, not policemen, and is used to fighting a hostile enemy, not bright-eyed children.

"We are human beings, and not just soldiers," he says. "We want to behave as human beings." But while "most of the population here does not want to fight against us," Yehuda and his fellow soldiers know that "some of them are against us and are threatening our lives."

It is very difficult to see kids here, with their naive eyes and their fear. It is very difficult, stresses Yehuda, who has a 5-month-old daughter inherit himself and a wife at home in Tel Aviv.

Eyal, also 31, a captain with two children at home, agrees. "The little kids are so afraid," he says. "But sometimes," he adds, "we, as fathers, have stronger feelings than the kids."

"We try as much as possible to avoid casualties," he says.

"We are not a guerrilla army," says Yehuda. "We are a moral army that has its problems, but is trying to do the best to solve its problems."

But another soldier confides, "I'm just doing my duty. And I want to get out of here as soon as possible."

TERRORIST ATTACKS TO CONTINUE, DESPITE ARAFAT'S PROCLAMATIONS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 12 (JTA) -- Military authorities believe continuing attacks on Israel can be expected from groups linked to Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, including its mainstream fighting force Al Fatah.

This is expected despite Arafat's ostensible renunciation of terrorism, according to Ha'aretz military correspondent Dan Sagir.

"The vague definitions of terrorism, guerrilla, national struggle and popular struggle (intifada) which the PLO makes provides Fatah and other organizations tied to Arafat's initiative . . . with a broad umbrella to carry out attacks against Israel," Sagir wrote.

"The timing, nature and frequency of the actions will be dictated by many factors, primarily Washington's position on the question of whether these are violations of Arafat's commitments," he said.

The United States opened a dialogue with the PLO last December and so far has rejected Israel's urging that it be abandoned.

Sagir said the Israel Defense Force has made these conclusions regarding terrorists attacks based on the organization and composition of an infiltration squad that was intercepted in the southern Lebanon security zone a week ago.

The squad was found to belong to the PLO. PLO spokesmen acknowledged this, and made clear such actions would continue, Sagir noted.