

MITTERRAND TO MEET WITH ARAFAT AFTER SHAMIR VISITS WASHINGTON

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, March 28 (JTA) -- President Francois Mitterrand has decided to meet in France with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat, according to an official announcement made Tuesday by the Elysee Palace.

Palace chief spokesman Hubert Vedrine said the president has not yet fixed a date, but that the meeting "will take place in France" and not in Tunisia or Egypt, as previously reported.

Diplomatic sources said the meeting will "most probably" take place in Paris or its immediate vicinity a few days after Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's April 6 meeting with President Bush in Washington.

The sources said that before meeting with Arafat, Mitterrand will want to hear from Bush on whether Shamir has made new suggestions to break the stalemate in the Middle East peace process.

The French Embassy in Washington reportedly has been instructed to report all available details of any Shamir peace plan at the earliest possible date.

The announcement comes as a blow to Israeli diplomacy following recent trips to France by Shamir and Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens. Both Shamir and Arens pleaded against a meeting with Arafat, saying this would be counterproductive to the peace process.

Attempt To Influence U.S.

Mitterrand reportedly decided to make his decision known before Shamir's visit to America, in order to clearly indicate that, in his eyes, Arafat and the PLO are the most suitable negotiators in any peace process.

That appears to be the growing sentiment in the 12-nation European Community, which Mitterrand will preside over, beginning July 1.

But Jewish organizations in France plan to stage demonstrations against Arafat's visit and to lobby the government up until the last minute to cancel the meeting.

Arafat already has visited most West European capitals, but both Mitterrand and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher have so far refused to receive the PLO leader or even meet with him abroad.

Arafat visited France last September, when he addressed Socialist delegates to the European Parliament in Strasbourg and met there with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas. This meeting, which took place inside the European Parliament building, was considered by the French government as extraterritorial.

Arafat's forthcoming meeting with Mitterrand in France is therefore seen as a major breakthrough by the Palestinians. They hope it will further improve their relations with the European Community and influence America's own attitude on the eve of Bush's meetings with Shamir.

Both Spain and Italy welcomed Mitterrand's decision, according to their national radios. Greece, also a European Community member, has been openly lobbying for a meeting between Arafat and the 12 European heads of state.

PALESTINIAN LEADERS DENY THEY HAVE MET WITH SHAMIR

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 28 (JTA) -- Several major Palestinian leaders in the administered territories have denied reports that they had met recently with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the daily newspaper Ha'aretz disclosed Tuesday.

Aides to the Likud leader have reported that Shamir has been meeting recently with several prominent Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But almost all of the Palestinians mentioned in those reports have denied that any meetings took place.

Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij said Monday that he had last met with Shamir in December 1986. Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, a philosopher who lives in East Jerusalem, also vehemently denied reports that he had participated in such meetings.

Nusseibeh said he had spoken by phone with Faisal al-Husseini, who said that neither he nor colleague Hanna Siniora had met with Shamir. Husseini heads the Arab Studies Institute in East Jerusalem, and Siniora is editor of the East Jerusalem Arabic newspaper Al-Fajr. Both are abroad at present.

Gaza lawyer Fayez Abu Rahme, who is also out of the country, phoned Jerusalem and denied the reports, as well.

Ha'aretz notes that a leaflet issued last weekend by the leadership of the Palestinian uprising in the territories calls for residents not to meet with Israeli leaders, especially prior to Shamir's departure for Washington.

The purpose of such a boycott is to refute the claims of Israeli leaders that they will be able to find partners for political negotiations among residents of the territories.

But a prisoner recently released from the Ketziot detention camp in the Negev told the left-wing newspaper Al Hamishmar that Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been meeting on a regular, monthly basis with members of the "popular committees" incarcerated there.

Rabin's purpose, the ex-prisoner said, is to persuade them to form an alternative leadership to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

ISRAEL WANTS TO DIRECT AID ONLY TO SOVIET JEWS INTENT ON ALIYAH

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 28 (JTA) -- Israel has tightened the criteria it uses in disbursing financial assistance to Jews wishing to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

That was confirmed this week by Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency Executive. He said the move was part of an ongoing "effort to battle against neshira," and not a revolutionary change in policy.

Neshira is the Hebrew word for "dropout." It refers to the increasing number of Soviet Jews emigrating on Israeli visas who decide to settle in countries other than Israel.

The neshira rate hovered around 90 percent last year, becoming a source of embarrassment and frustration for Israeli officials, who have

traditionally viewed the Soviet Jewry movement as a Zionist cause.

Dinitz's disclosure, unusual because the aid program has always been clandestine, came as Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir voiced a prediction Tuesday that Israel is on the threshold of a large wave of aliyah (immigration) from Eastern Europe.

The premier, touring settlements in the Jerusalem area, spoke of many thousands of well-educated and highly qualified persons likely to arrive here in the future "for objective reasons."

He did not specify the countries concerned, though he appeared to be speaking mainly about the Soviet Union itself. He said the Israeli economy must brace itself to meet this challenge.

Shamir said that a new wave from the East might well generate more aliyah from Western countries, too.

Bucharest-Bound Jews Only?

Dinitz and other officials indicated that Israel has long sought to direct Israeli financial assistance to persons intending to end their journey in Israel, and not in other countries. The latest tightening of criteria is a further step in this direction, they said.

Their confirmation of media reports on this matter represents the first time that officials have referred publicly to the aid, which is disbursed prior to emigrants' departure from the Soviet Union.

The aid, in the order of 700 to 800 rubles per emigrant, has been paid since the early 1970s to help the emigrants meet the bureaucratic costs of processing their departure.

In the past, applicants filled out forms at the Dutch Consulate in Moscow, which handled Israeli interests in the absence of any formal Israeli consular presence in the Soviet Union.

Now this function has been transferred to the Israeli consular mission in the Soviet capital, enabling Israeli officials to tighten eligibility criteria so that they conform more closely to the end-destination of the recipients.

According to a report in the daily newspaper Ma'ariv, the aid will be granted only to Jewish emigrants booking flights to Bucharest, Romania, virtually all of whom proceed directly to Israel. This, however, has not been officially confirmed.

REVIVING JEWISH LIFE IN USSR IS TOP PRIORITY, SAYS BRONFMAN

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 28 (JTA) -- The challenge facing the Soviet Jewry movement now is no longer emigration, but rather to help revive Jewish cultural and religious life in the Soviet Union, the president of the World Jewish Congress said here Monday night.

Speaking at the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservative rabbis, Edgar Bronfman rejected the argument that all Jews must be rescued from the Soviet Union to prevent assimilation.

"So they come to New York and they are not going to disappear as Jews?" he asked. "It's nonsense."

His views appeared to differ slightly with those of Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. Addressing the assembly Sunday night, she said Soviet Jews should be given "the freedom of choice" to settle where they like. However, she added, "we should stress the benefits of settling in Israel."

Bronfman said that many in the Soviet Jewry movement now share his view, because the rate of Soviet Jews who do not go to Israel has reached 90 percent.

"Of course we want them to go to Israel," said Bronfman. But he suggested that the reason most decide not to do so is because they lack Jewishness.

'Building A D.P. Camp In Rome'

"The reason that most of them want to leave is not for religious purposes, it is to be non-Jewish, not to be Jewish," Bronfman said. In addition, because the Soviet Union has painted a distorted picture of Israel since 1967, most Soviet Jews do not realize that Israel has a Western-style economy, he said.

The WJC leader also said he would like an end of the problem of Jewish refugees in Rome waiting to enter the United States.

He said he would like to see Jews who want to go to Israel get visas directly from an Israeli Consulate in Moscow and those who want to go to the United States or other countries get their visas from those nations' embassies in Moscow.

He suggested that many of those who have to wait for long periods to gain admission to the United States will decide instead to go to Israel.

"We don't want them to go to Rome," Bronfman said. "Do you realize that we are building a D.P. camp in Rome in the year 1989?"

He said that as a result of the U.S. decision to be more selective about granting refugee status to Soviet Jews, some 7,000 Jewish emigrants are currently waiting in Rome, and there may be as many as 25,000 by the end of the year.

"Shame on us, shame on them," he said. "It is not dignified any longer for a Jew to be a refugee. It is not tenable anymore for people to say they are afraid of life and limb in the Soviet Union, because it is not really true."

A Need For Teachers

Bronfman said that if Jewish life becomes more viable in the Soviet Union, many Jews will want to remain there.

But since age-old anti-Semitism will likely continue to exist in the Soviet Union, many others will want to leave. They will be more likely to do so if they have had the Jewish education denied Soviet Jews for the last 70 years, he said.

Bronfman said that the cultural centers that the Soviet Union has agreed to open, through negotiations with the WJC, can be the vehicle "to teach people the pride, the tradition of our people."

One center has recently opened in Moscow, and others are scheduled to open in Leningrad, Kiev, Lvov and Vilnius. "Our challenge is to make those cultural centers vibrant," Bronfman said.

He said they will need rabbis, teachers and lecturers from the West and Israel to teach Hebrew and Jewish tradition. Money is needed for teaching equipment and libraries to attract Jews to the center.

Bronfman urged the some 600 rabbis and others attending the convention and others to join the effort.

"Take this opportunity seriously, because if not, in 10 years we'll kick ourselves," he said. He praised Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev for opening a window to allow Jewish cultural life. But he added, "I don't know how long this window will be open."

CONSERVATIVE RABBIS TO DEVELOP SEPARATE SERVICES FROM ORTHODOX

WASHINGTON, March 28 (JTA) -- Conservative rabbis have announced they will build their own mikvahs, encourage more of their colleagues to specialize in Jewish divorce law and train more physicians to qualify as "mohelim" to fill needs that are overwhelmingly being served by Orthodox rabbis and institutions.

The Conservative movement also announced establishment of its own Beth Din to rule on divorce matters.

The Rabbinical Assembly, the umbrella body of Conservative rabbis, announced the moves Monday at its 89th convention, which is being held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel here. The assembly represents 1,300 Conservative rabbis internationally, serving 2 million congregational members.

The moves are intended to counter what the rabbis charge is an unwillingness on the part of certain "aggressive and militant separatist" Orthodox rabbis to share religious facilities and services with their Conservative counterparts.

The problem started about 10 years ago in such communities as Los Angeles and Detroit, and it has grown ever since, according to Rabbi Albert Lewis of Cherry Hill, N.J., who is president of the assembly.

"I'm not happy over the fact that we can't have the kind of working relationship that we once had," said Lewis.

He added, however, that there are "still many communities where Modern Orthodox spiritual leaders offer their full cooperation for these life-cycle religious functions."

Restrictions For Non-Orthodox

Lewis said that mikvahs (ritual baths) built by communities to serve all streams of Judaism have gradually become appropriated by Orthodox groups that resist allowing the non-Orthodox to use them.

This has occurred, said Lewis, despite the fact that both Orthodox and Conservative Judaism strictly require ritual immersion for both men and women undergoing conversion to Judaism.

"The dissension has arisen, not because of what we do, but because it's ipso facto not good if it's done by a Conservative," he complained.

Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive vice president of the assembly, said that "what makes this condition deplorable is that Conservative Judaism has always strictly followed the halacha -- Jewish law -- when it comes to dealing with life-cycle rituals."

Lewis said mikvahs would be built by local synagogues, the assembly and the United Synagogue of America, the Conservative movement's congregational body.

The need for specialists in gitten, or divorce, has increased as age has begun to deplete the number of Conservative rabbis who know the minutiae of divorce law, Lewis said.

He also pointed to the growing number of divorces and the spread of the Jewish population beyond areas where such specialists work.

The Rabbinical Assembly has just graduated seven new gitten specialists to prepare religious divorces, a program initiated two years ago by the assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the movement's institution of higher learning and rabbinical ordination.

There are now about 15 Conservative gitten specialists.

The Beth Din, or religious court, being established by the movement to rule on matters of divorce law will include nine members: three each from the Rabbinical Assembly, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the United Synagogue of America.

The problem of aging authorities and shifting Jewish populations also has produced a new demand for Conservative mohelim (ritual circumcisors).

The need, in part, stems from the refusal by some Orthodox mohelim to perform a brit milah on the son of someone not converted to Judaism by an Orthodox rabbi.

So, beginning in October, the seminary will start training a class of physicians in ritual circumcision, in order to qualify them as mohelim.

As of now, the mohelim are all men.

Kelman attempted to play down the separatist aspect of the Conservative moves, saying that they reflect "a growing assertiveness" on the part of the Conservative movement.

There is still "close Jewish religious co-operation" with the Orthodox on such issues as Soviet Jewry, human rights and Israel, he said.

POLICE CHIEF DEFENDS PRACTICE OF AGENTS POSING AS JOURNALISTS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 28 (JTA) -- Police Inspector-General David Kraus on Tuesday defended police officers who camouflage themselves as members of the press, but said the practice would henceforth be used in the administered territories with discretion.

Kraus said there was nothing illegal about police officers who patrol troubled areas in cars marked with signs reading "press." But he said that from now on, the practice would only be undertaken with his personal permission after police proved it was essential.

The police chief met Tuesday with representatives of the news media, following complaints by a foreign television camera crew that it had filmed plainclothes police officers in East Jerusalem last week laying an ambush to catch stone-throwers by putting a sign on their car that bore the English word "press."

The undercover officers were later ordered by their superiors to remove the sign. But they substituted the "press" sign with one reading "TV."

Both the Jerusalem Journalists Association and the Foreign Press Association protested the use of press identification, which they said endangered journalists working in dangerous areas.

Kraus told a television interviewer Monday that the police were not "impersonating journalists, as they had not presented themselves as such to anybody."

"They merely camouflaged their vehicle. And there is nothing illegal in that," he said. "Police will continue to use that cover in their peace-keeping duties," he stressed.

The journalists association immediately announced it would distribute to its members English signs reading "police on duty," which they would display on their cars.

Adopting a more conciliatory tone Tuesday, Kraus told the representatives of the news media that he recognizes the importance of a working press in a free democracy, in which journalists should be allowed to carry out their essential duties without hindrance.

CJF LEADER AVOIDS 'WHO IS A JEW' IN TALK WITH LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, March 28 (JTA) -- A leader in the fight to remove Israel's proposed "Who Is a Jew" amendment from the Israeli political agenda had a rare audience Monday with one of the bill's leading North American proponents, the Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson.

But in the few minutes allotted for remarks with the Hasidic leader, Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the Council of Jewish Federations' "Who Is a Jew" committee, avoided the controversial topic.

Instead, Cardin and the rebbe focused on her other responsibilities as chairwoman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Schneerson urged Cardin to continue to work toward alleviating problems created by the mass emigration of Soviet Jews, and to reassess the National Conference's traditional support of U.S. trade restrictions toward the Soviet Union.

American Jewish groups are said to be close to supporting a waiver of the most punitive of those restrictions, the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which links most-favored-nation trade benefits with the Soviets' performance on emigration.

Cardin said that prior to her meeting with the rebbe, she discussed the "Who Is a Jew" issue with Lubavitch representatives in New York and Baltimore, where she resides.

"I asked my shaliach (emissary) if that would be an appropriate topic to discuss with the rebbe, but he said it was not the time to discuss it," Cardin said in a telephone interview.

'Toning Down' Advocacy

"At any rate, our preliminary discussion centered on the fact that the rebbe and the movement cannot move away from their positions."

She was told, however, that the Lubavitch movement is "toning down" its advocacy of the amendment to the Law of Return. If passed, the amendment would deny automatic Israeli citizenship to those converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis. Non-Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora vehemently oppose its passage.

Cardin's audience with Schneerson came during a public meeting between the rebbe and some 160 of his followers at Lubavitch world headquarters in Brooklyn.

Schneerson no longer holds private meetings with petitioners. Meetings with the rebbe are conducted with the reverence reserved for royalty.

Most of the other participants at the meeting, some from as far away as Australia, have contributed a minimum of \$100,000 to the rebbe's Machne Israel Development Fund. The fund maintains Lubavitch activities in the world's remote Jewish communities.

Cardin was invited to the audience along with a delegation of leaders of the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

The fund-raisers were invited to the gathering "to strengthen their relationship with us," said Rabbi Shmuel Butman, an aide to Schneerson and director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

The 87-year-old rebbe addressed the group, in Yiddish, for 30 minutes on the subject of Jewish unity, and then invited those gathered to come forward and speak with him individually.

Cardin said the rebbe opened their discussion by acknowledging a letter Cardin wrote to him at the height of the "Who Is a Jew" controversy last fall. "I think I owe you a letter," she quoted him as saying.

Cardin said she hoped Schneerson's mention of her letter means he will address the Jewish community's concerns over "Who Is a Jew."

But according to Butman, "the rebbe asked a while ago that we should remove that from the agenda. The rebbe even stressed that if someone approaches you with the issue, to tell him that you and he have an agenda given you by God, which is to bring unity among Jews."

ISRAELI AND RUSSIAN THEATERS TO EXCHANGE STAGES NEXT YEAR

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 28 (JTA) -- Israel's national Habimah Theater and Moscow's famous Taganka Theater are to exchange stages at the end of this year, under an artistic agreement signed in Israel earlier this month.

Habimah will perform three Hebrew-language plays on the Taganka Theater stage next January. Two weeks later, the Taganka troupe will stage three Russian-language plays in the Habimah Theater in Tel Aviv.

It will be the first time Habimah has performed in Moscow since it left the Soviet Union 58 years ago and came to Palestine.

The agreement was signed in Tel Aviv by Taganka director Nicolai Dupak and his Habimah counterpart, Shmuel Omer.

The venture was initiated by Yuri Lyubimov, who served as Taganka's artistic director in Moscow until he immigrated to Israel in 1983. He now directs plays for Habimah.

Lyubimov was invited back to Moscow some months ago to re-stage a production of Pushkin's "Boris Godunov," which he had originally directed for Taganka.

The Hebrew and Russian plays to be presented have yet to be determined by the two theater companies.

The Habimah Hebrew Theater was established in Moscow after the Russian Revolution, with the active assistance of Constantin Stanislavsky, the famed director of the Moscow Arts Theater.

Habimah played there for some years until the company moved to Palestine in 1931, after critically acclaimed performances in Europe.

ISRAELI JUSTICES SEE JESUS FILM

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, March 28 (JTA) -- Five judges on Israel's High Court of Justice attended a private screening of Martin Scorsese's controversial film "The Last Temptation Of Christ" on Tuesday, as they began hearing an appeal against the banning of the movie in Israel.

Golan-Globus film distributors, who want to show the film in Israel, are appealing last October's decision by the Film and Theater Censorship Board to prohibit screenings in Israel.

The censorship board's decision said the movie was offensive to Christians and could harm Israel's relations with the Christian world. The board cited a law that forbids practices that may offend the beliefs of any religious group.

The 27-member board reviews all movies and plays shown in Israel. Interior Minister Arye Deri recently announced that he plans to abolish it.