

SOVIET JEWS MAY NO LONGER BE ABLE TO 'DROP OUT' TO U.S. ONCE IN ROME

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- Jews who emigrate from the Soviet Union on Israeli visas may no longer be allowed to come to the United States as refugees, according to a plan reportedly being hammered out by the Bush administration.

Instead, they would have to apply for U.S. refugee status before they leave the Soviet Union. They would then emigrate with U.S. rather than Israeli visas. All those emigrating on Israeli visas would have to go directly to Israel.

That would be a major change in the way Soviet Jews have been emigrating since the mid-1970s.

Currently, the vast majority of Jews who leave the Soviet Union on Israeli visas later "drop out" in Vienna to immigrate elsewhere, mainly the United States. From Vienna, they travel to Rome, where Jewish groups assist them in applying for U.S. refugee status.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that a Bush administration plan to deal with the huge influx of Soviet refugees includes a proposal to close the U.S. refugee processing center in Rome and require those applying for refugee status to do so while still in Moscow.

Administration officials could not immediately confirm the Times report Tuesday. State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler would only say that "a number of options for procedural changes are being considered to improve our ability to cope adequately with the recent surge in Soviet immigrants seeking admission to the U.S."

If the administration goes ahead with the plan, Soviet Jews would be put in a quandary.

Few Emigrate On U.S. Visas

Until recently, the Soviet Union only allowed Jews to emigrate on Israeli visas, on the grounds of returning to their homeland or joining families in Israel. In recent years, most have used the Israeli visas as a means of getting to the United States, because there was no other viable alternative.

The Soviet Union has said in recent months that it is now prepared to allow Jews and others to emigrate on American visas. During the first seven months of this year, 265 Soviet Jews were allowed to do so, including 55 in July.

But those numbers are still small, compared to the numbers of Soviet Jews allowed to emigrate on Israeli visas. A total of 1,431 Soviet Jews arrived in Vienna on Israeli visas during the first week of September alone.

If the Bush administration proposal goes into effect, Soviet Jews who want to immigrate to the United States would have to choose either to take their chances on getting an American visa or to abandon their plans and settle in Israel.

Israel is expected to welcome the plan, since it believes its visas should not be used by persons not intending to go to Israel, including Jews and thousands of Evangelical Christians in the past year.

The new plan could go into effect as early as Oct. 1, when the 1990 fiscal year begins. But

those Soviets who had received permission to leave on Israeli visas before Oct. 1 could still apply for refugee status, the Times quoted administration officials as saying.

Currently, thousands of Soviet Jews are waiting in transit centers outside Rome for permission to enter the United States as refugees.

Meeting With U.S. Officials Set

Representatives of Jewish groups are expected to discuss the new U.S. plan Wednesday with officials of the National Security Council, State Department and Justice Department.

The U.S. officials will meet in New York with members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and with members of the so-called Monitoring and Accountability Committee, representing Jewish community federations and Jewish agencies dealing with transmigration and resettlement of refugees.

One of the key concerns of the groups will be the continuing denial of refugee status to some Soviet Jews in Rome and Moscow, according to Mark Talisman, the CJF's Washington representative.

He said the Jewish groups will ask the administration to abandon the contention that some Jews do not face "a well-founded fear of persecution" in the Soviet Union, which is a condition for receiving refugee status.

The reported procedural change in handling refugees comes at a time when the Bush administration is conferring with Congress about its proposed refugee admissions for the 1990 fiscal year. The administration sent its formal request to Congress this week, which, under the Refugee Act of 1980, must win informal approval of key members of Congress.

The request proposes that the United States admit 50,000 refugees from the Soviet Union in 1990, compared to 43,500 this fiscal year.

But whereas all of the Soviet refugees admitted this year will receive U.S. government funds for transportation, processing and initial resettlement, 10,000 of the 50,000 refugees admitted in the coming year would not qualify for such funding. It would have to be picked up by private groups.

HIAS Won't Seek Bigger Numbers

Members of Congress, such as Rep. Bruce Morrison (D-Conn.), chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on immigration, refugees and international law, are scoffing at the administration plan and will likely seek to increase the refugee budget, as they have this fiscal year.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society told Morrison's subcommittee Tuesday that based on current Soviet exit rates, 72,000 Jews will seek to come to the United States in 1990 as refugees.

Karl Zukerman, HIAS executive vice president, urged the United States to admit 40,000 Soviet Jews in 1990, while saying he was doing so "with full knowledge that 40,000 will admit only some of the likely applicants for U.S. admission."

"For us, it is a painful recognition that competing global refugee needs and limits on our national capacities require this modest request," he said. "As American Jews, we are mindful of both our civic and our Jewish duties."

EGYPTIAN IDEAS ON PEACE PLAN PUT LIKUD AND LABOR AT ODDS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- A confrontation between Labor and Likud seems to be brewing over the 10-point paper offered by Egypt to advance the Israeli peace initiative.

Shimon Peres, who is Labor Party leader and vice premier, sees merit in the Egyptian proposals. He said Sunday that they were close to Israel's ideas.

But Likud leaders, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, depict the Egyptian paper as being in conflict with the Israeli plan for Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The elections are intended to choose Palestinian representatives from the territories with whom Israel would negotiate on Palestinian self-rule and eventually the territories' future status.

Peres said Tuesday that if the Palestinians accept the principle of elections, there is no reason not to begin talks with them immediately.

He said he was not suggesting talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization but with local leaders, who could "consult with whomever they wish."

Shamir initially presented the peace initiative in broad terms, insisting that its details were for the negotiators to work out.

The Egyptian ideas, which seem to have sparked interest in Washington, are specific.

Basically, Cairo says, the elections must be part of an ongoing process that eventually will encompass the principle of "land for peace," a concept at odds with Likud party dogma.

PLO Aide Ready To Visit Israel

On the tactical level, the Egyptians propose that Arab residents of East Jerusalem be allowed to participate in the elections, one reason being that many senior Palestinian activists live there.

Laborites are amenable to the idea, provided that the voting takes place outside the Jerusalem municipal boundaries.

Likud is opposed, because it feels it would imply that Jerusalem is disputed and negotiable territory.

Shamir has signaled that he is prepared to be flexible on the participation of East Jerusalem residents, if President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt acquiesces to his longstanding demand for a summit meeting between them.

The United States reportedly has been trying to persuade the moderate Arab states and the PLO to support the Egyptian proposals.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Tuesday that the United States continues to "encourage all parties to find ways to launch an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. To the extent that the 10 points can be helpful in that regard, we welcome Egypt's effort."

The Egyptian ideas presumably were high on the agenda of talks Mubarak held in Cairo this week with PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

The semi-official Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram reported Tuesday that Arafat had agreed to accept the Egyptian points "in principle."

Arafat's key aide, Bassam Abu Sharif, said in a French radio interview Monday that he was prepared to go to Israel immediately to negotiate them with Labor Party leaders, an offer Shamir's aides reportedly described Tuesday as "cold-blooded chutzpah."

ISRAELI CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP SEEKS INVESTIGATION OVER USE OF TEAR GAS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- The Civil Rights Association has asked the Israel Defense Force to investigate the alleged unauthorized use of tear gas by soldiers against students at a girls' high school in the West Bank town of Halhoul on Sept. 5.

About 250 girls became ill from gas inhalation, the association stated in a letter to Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, commander of the central sector, which includes the West Bank.

Several dozen of the students were seriously affected, the letter said, and many more were thrown into panic by rumors that the gas would make them infertile.

The letter also charged that the soldiers used obscene language.

An IDF spokesman said the soldiers fired tear gas only after the girls rioted and threw stones into the main road of the town.

The spokesman said no more than 20 of the students suffered from gas inhalation.

Those that did inhale the gas were treated at a local hospital and sent home.

The spokesman also denied that the gas could affect fertility, saying it was approved by the army's chief medical officer.

Nevertheless, IDF Chief of Staff Gen. Dan Shomron took the unusual step this week of reminding his troops to exercise restraint in the use of force.

A memorandum distributed to soldiers serving in the West Bank and Gaza Strip stressed that force may be used only when necessary to accomplish a certain mission and never as a punitive measure.

Shomron outlawed specifically torture, humiliation or deliberate damage to property.

His circular was initiated by the legal establishment following a trial at which soldiers were convicted of manslaughter at the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza.

Railroad Fireman Injured

In other developments Tuesday, a young Arab sustained a serious head wound when security forces broke up disturbances in the West Bank village of Sebastia.

An Israeli railroad fireman was slightly injured when his Jerusalem-Tel Aviv train was stoned near Batir, south of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Jerusalem District Court imposed a 10-year prison sentence on a teen-age Arab girl for manslaughter in the slaying of yeshiva student Eliezer Schlesinger in a Jerusalem park in the summer of 1988.

Two of the three presiding judges ruled that the girl, who was 17 at the time and described as a prostitute, did not have the capacity for premeditated murder.

A court psychiatrist put her mental age at 10.

The prosecution, which intends to appeal the sentence, contends that Schlesinger and a friend were studying late at night in Jerusalem's Sacker Park when they were abruptly solicited by the defendant.

When Schlesinger declined, she pulled out a gun and shot him once.

The, as he lay on the ground, she shot the Yeshiva student four more times, the prosecution said.

NEWS REPORTS TO THE CONTRARY, EJC CALLS FOR CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- The European Jewish Congress has endorsed a strengthening of dialogue between Catholics and Jews, particularly at local levels, to resolve the issue of the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz, despite erroneous news reports Monday that said the EJC had called for 'suspension of formal contacts between Jewish groups and the Catholic Church.

At its annual meeting here Sunday and Monday, the EJC also expressed its full support for the International Jewish Committee on Inter-religious Consultations, which has been rocked within the past week by the creation of a break-away Jewish body that seeks to hold independent talks with the Vatican.

The EJC called for IJCIC to be enlarged to include a representative group of European and Latin American Jewish communities.

The European Jewish body, which represents 17 countries, issued a resolution expressing the hope that Catholic-Jewish ties not be damaged by the convent turmoil.

The EJC declared itself "conscious of the necessity of organized relations between the Jewish community and the central organs of the Christian churches, particularly at a time of difficulties and tension."

The resolution says the European Jewish communities "deplore the failure to comply within the specified time" the Geneva accord, and states the "hope that the hitherto fruitful Jewish-Catholic dialogue, strongly affected by the situation resulting from the non-relocation of the Carmelite convent, will not suffer lasting damage."

There was brief discord Tuesday over inaccurate news reports that the EJC had called for a cessation of ties with the Vatican until the convent issue was settled.

Denies News Reports

French Jewish leader Theo Klein denied reports that he called for suspension of talks with the Vatican, saying he was referring to a decision taken in February to place on hold a Vatican-Jewish conference on the Shoah until the convent issue is resolved, according to members of IJCIC.

Klein, a former president of the EJC, and Italian Jewish leader Tullia Zevi did call on Pope John Paul II to end his silence on the convent and call for its removal.

Some leaders of American Jewish groups were rankled by the original news reports. At B'nai B'rith International in Washington, President Seymour Reich said he was "deeply disturbed at reported suggestions that the Jewish community cut off relations with the Vatican." He emphasized "good will and a bit of patience" to resolve the issue.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella body of Reform congregations in America, said the controversy over the convent should not be allowed to disrupt ongoing programs of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. He, too, called on the pope to end his "silence."

The British Council of Christians and Jews, in a statement Tuesday, said its executive committee had postponed a visit to Rome. It had intended to seek an audience with the pope.

However, the body's joint honorary treasurer, Sir Sigmund Sternberg, is expected to go to

Rome in a private capacity and have an audience with the pope.

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York contributed to this report.)

JEWISH GROUPS WON'T OPPOSE CHOICE OF NIXON AIDE FOR WHITE HOUSE POST

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- The same Jewish groups who urged last year that Frederick Malek resign as deputy director of the Republican National Committee are not opposing President Bush's intention of naming him to a White House post.

Last summer, several Jewish groups urged Malek's resignation, following revelations that he obeyed President Nixon's 1971 order to compile data on the number of Jews in the upper echelons of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Nixon reportedly ordered Malek to do so out of concern that he was being hurt politically by a "Jewish cabal" that was exaggerating the country's economic woes.

The New York Times reported Sunday that Malek's new job will be to plan the 1990 economic summit of Western nations.

Most Jewish groups, with the exception of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, urged Malek's resignation last year.

Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director, described Malek at the time as "a man with no record of bigotry." Pointing out that Malek refused Nixon's order three times before finally obeying it, he said that Malek should not be ousted simply because a "stronger man" would have totally refused to heed the request.

But others, such as Stephen Silbiger, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress, said at the time that the contention that Malek was just following orders "is not an acceptable excuse in the Jewish community."

After Malek's resignation, Jewish groups continued to be concerned about the former Nixon aide's ongoing ties with Bush. But Malek has since met with several Jewish groups and "atoned" for his action, said Ira Silverman, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee.

Malek, in fact, served as co-chairman of a Jewish National Fund dinner in Washington on May 16.

VANDALS DEFACE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

By David Kantor

BONN, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- Vandals placed a pig's head on a West Berlin Holocaust memorial, the second desecration of the memorial this year.

Police believe a neo-Nazi group was responsible, but they have no clues and no arrests have been made.

The same memorial, located on a bridge in the Tiergarten quarter, and a larger one to Holocaust victims in Ploetzensee, were defaced early in January.

A group calling itself "Movement April 20" -- Hitler's birthday -- claimed credit for the January vandalism. No one has taken responsibility for the latest act.

Meanwhile, vandals defaced a memorial plaque to Rosa Luxembourg on the shores of the Landwehrkanal in Luxembourg. Luxembourg, of Jewish origin, was a leader of the German Communist Party after World War I.

THREE MOVEMENTS OF JUDAISM WORKING TO REACH SOLUTION TO CONVERT PROBLEM

By J.J. Goldberg
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- Negotiations among representatives of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism reportedly are close to developing a joint formula for dealing with converts that could begin to resolve the "Who Is a Jew" controversy.

The talks have been going on for the last six months, outside the glare of publicity, under the auspices of the Israeli government. They are apparently still touch-and-go and could fall apart without an accord being reached.

The discussions were initiated last winter by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to develop a mechanism for dealing with converts to Judaism who seek to settle in Israel.

The problem stems from demands by the Orthodox to amend the Law of Return in a way that would require converts to be converted "according to halacha," or traditional rabbinic law.

In effect, the change would recognize only conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis as valid, thereby delegitimizing Conservative, and Reform Judaism in Israel.

Persistent attempts by the Orthodox bloc in Israel to push the amendment through the Knesset have failed, due in large measure to bitter protests from American Jewry.

Israel, anxious to end the conflict with a crucial segment of the Diaspora, hopes the dispute can be resolved by coming up with an arrangement satisfactory to all streams of Judaism.

So far "various proposals exist, but no final agreement has been reached," according to Rabbi Walter Jacobs of Pittsburgh, vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, who is negotiating on behalf of the Reform movement.

"Negotiations are going on," he said.

'Sincere Commitment' By All Sides

But according to reports from Jerusalem, the talks may be doomed by fierce opposition from Orthodox circles in Israel and their adherents in the United States.

Negotiators said they decided to keep the talks secret after an earlier round of talks was leaked to the press last fall and quickly collapsed in disarray.

All requests for details of the plan under consideration were turned down. But reports from Israel said that plan calls for the creation of an Orthodox-Conservative-Reform panel that would screen those who are contemplating converting to Judaism and settling in Israel.

"I can only tell you that we're working on it, that we've met in Jerusalem and in the United States, and that there's a sincere commitment to resolve the problem by all sides," said Rabbi Louis Bernstein of Queens, a professor at Yeshiva University who represents mainstream U.S. Orthodoxy in the talks.

Negotiators include one representative from each of the principal branches of U.S. Jewry and two ranking Israeli government officials.

Rabbi Shamma Friedman of Jerusalem represents the Conservative movement, and Zev Rosenberg, assistant director of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs, acts as liaison to the Chief Rabbinate.

Cabinet Secretary Elyakim Rubinstein, repre-

sending Shamir, has chaired the talks. Rubinstein himself is Orthodox.

Bernstein emphasized that the proposals under consideration deal only with the narrow issue of potential converts who intend to settle in Israel and do not touch on broader relations between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Judaism.

But a rumor that they did, spread by the New York-based Yiddish weekly *Algemeiner Journal*, threatened to derail the talks.

Opposition Among Orthodox

The newspaper, considered close to the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement, reproduced what it claimed was a memorandum of agreement signed by the negotiators.

It reported they agreed to establish a "joint Beth Din," or rabbinic court, of all three movements to oversee the conversions of potential immigrants to Israel. That would amount to an extraordinary concession by the Orthodox rabbinate.

Negotiators insist there has been no such agreement and are calling the *Algemeiner Journal* report "fraudulent."

But the paper's report has already prompted Orthodox rabbis in Israel and the United States to condemn the negotiations.

Among them is Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik of Chicago, dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University in New York.

Soloveitchik was quoted as saying he would oppose not only a joint Beth Din, but any "joint commission" to interview applicants for conversion.

Sources said the agreement still requires substantial refinement and has yet to be ratified by the negotiators' parent movements.

The public explosion on the Orthodox side could prompt moderate Orthodox forces to unite behind their negotiators' position, according to Bernstein.

The Conservative movement also is said to be relatively united behind the tentative agreement. But that is not the case with the Reform movement.

Several Reform leaders questioned on the matter insisted they would not accept any system that required their converts to be "reconverted" by an Orthodox Beth Din.

Nonetheless, Reform leaders agreed they would have to compromise to reach an agreement.

ISRAELIS ARRESTED FOR FORGING VISAS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 12 (JTA) -- Fifteen Israelis were arrested Monday on suspicion of selling forged U.S. entry visas.

According to the police, four of the detainees were employees of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. The rest were go-betweens.

An embassy spokesman said visa procedures were changed immediately. There is no evidence that American employees were involved.

The ring was patronized by some visa applicants who had been turned down in the past.

The intermediaries who acted as liaisons between the visa buyers and the embassy workers allegedly received hundreds of thousands of dollars for their services.

Police said thousands of dollars were found in the suspects' homes, as well as documents and passports stamped with forged entry visas.