

VOL. 67 - 72nd YEAR

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1989

NO. 237

**AUSTRIA LEGISLATION ALLOWS
COMPENSATION FOR NAZI VICTIMS**

By Elena Neuman

NEW YORK, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- After decades of intractability on the question of compensation to victims of Nazi crimes, the Austrian Parliament passed legislation Wednesday that will enable Jews forced to flee Austria to receive social security benefits.

The 48th Amendment to the Austrian Social Insurance Law will make it possible for Holocaust survivors who were born in Austria before 1930 -- eight years prior to the Anschluss -- to claim social security benefits.

Whereas previous legislation had set the cutoff date at 1924, the new amendment will allow thousands of former Austrian citizens to receive an ongoing monthly payment of approximately \$400.

The Austrian government estimates that this provision will cost it between 2 billion and 8 billion Austrian schillings, or approximately \$165 million to \$665 million.

"This is a tremendous breakthrough," said Israel Miller, president of the Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria. "For years, the Austrians have claimed that they were not part of the Nazi empire, that they were a victim country" and therefore were not responsible for compensation payments.

Failure To Compensate Survivors

But according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, such legislative actions hardly fulfill Austria's obligations to its former citizens.

"This is a positive step, but it doesn't address the central issue of Austria's refusal to face up to its role regarding Nazi war crimes, and its failure to adequately compensate survivors of those crimes," he said.

There were approximately 181,000 Jews in Austria prior to the Nazi Holocaust. Between 60,000 and 80,000 are estimated to have perished.

Although compensation plans were initiated in the mid-1950s, the one-time award of a few thousand dollars was considered inadequate by world Jewish organizations.

"The legislation," said Steinberg, "simply does not meet the repeated four-decade-old demand of the Jewish world that Austria recognize its responsibility as West Germany has, and as East Germany in principle has said it would."

The Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria agrees that the Austrian legislation is not comparable to West German reparation payments to Nazi victims, but nevertheless feels that a great step forward has been taken.

"What has emerged out of this effort is that Austrian victims of Nazi persecution will receive acceptable benefits," said Saul Kagan, executive director of the committee.

"This is an additional measure to provide a degree of compensation to groups of former Austrian Jews who were heretofore not eligible to receive pensions under the Austrian social insurance system as victims of Nazi persecution," he said.

The WJC has taken various steps in the past

to pressure Austria to recognize its responsibility and compensatory obligations. Most recently, it has been the leading force of a movement in Europe to ban Austria from the European Community.

**REMOTE-CONTROL BOMB EXPLODES
IN ISRAEL, PROMPTING CONCERN**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- Security sources are concerned over an incident Wednesday night whereby for the first time, a remote-controlled explosive, a device favored by terror groups in southern Lebanon, was used inside Israel.

The remote-control roadside bomb damaged a car but did not hurt its driver, 27-year-old Nava Gotchalk, who is seven months pregnant.

Nearly a pound of explosives was detonated from a distance of several yards.

The incident occurred just outside Gotchalk's village, Katzir, near the Wadi Ara road, which crosses the Carmel range from Hadera to Afula.

The police found tracks leading from the scene of the bombing to an Arab village in the Samaria district of the West Bank, just across the "green line" from Israel proper.

Wadi Ara was the scene of the first intifada-related attack inside Israel proper, which occurred about a year ago. It caused alarm at the time that the violence of the Palestinian uprising was spreading to Israel.

LEVINGER ACQUITTED OF ASSAULT

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- A Jerusalem magistrate acquitted Rabbi Moshe Levinger of assault charges Wednesday, after discounting the testimony of an Arab family.

Judge Joel Tzur also found the militant Gush Emonim leader from Hebron not guilty of insulting an Israel Defense Force soldier who intervened.

According to the charges, Levinger entered the home of an Arab family near the old Hadasah building in Hebron in January 1988, and physically threatened a 7-year-old girl and beat up her mother and brother.

The charge sheet said Levinger acted after his daughter complained that the Arab children had taunted her.

The judge said he ruled out the testimony of the Arab parents because he did not believe that Levinger, an Orthodox Jew, would hurt a child.

Tzur also said there was a conflict between the testimony of the 17-year-old Arab youth who said Levinger beat him and the soldier who witnessed the encounter.

He gave Levinger the benefit of the doubt.

The soldier, who was on guard duty nearby, heard the commotion and ordered Levinger to leave the Arabs' house.

Levinger refused and called the soldier a "PLO agent."

The magistrate said he believed Levinger made the remark but found him not guilty because the soldier, having left his post, was not insulted "while on duty."

Levinger thanked the court. But his legal problems are not over. The right-wing rabbi faces

three other trials, one of them for manslaughter in the shooting death of an Arab shopkeeper in Hebron two years ago.

SEARCH OF GRAVE SITES YIELDS NO TRACES OF MISSING CHILDREN By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- A largely forgotten and little-known tragic story from Israel's early years of statehood became the focus of attention this week, when hundreds of Yemenite Jews who immigrated in the early 1950s descended on Kfar Yona cemetery near Netanya.

They were searching for the unmarked graves of their children, many of them infants who died during their first harsh winter in the ma'abarot -- the tent cities and tin hut hovels where tens of thousands of immigrants were temporarily housed at the time.

Hundreds of thousands of Yemenites were flown from Aden between 1950 and 1952, in what was dubbed "Operation Magic Carpet."

More than 600 of their children fell ill and were taken to regular or makeshift hospitals where their parents, unfamiliar with Western ways, lost track of them.

Rumors surfaced at various times that Yemenite babies were "kidnapped" and put up for adoption by childless German immigrant couples and concentration camp survivors.

Reports surfaced recently that missing Yemenite children of that era were buried at Kfar Yona. Their parents, elderly now and distraught, hoped to find their graves. But they were disappointed.

Netanya police reported Wednesday that the graves of 120 children were found at the cemetery.

Time and weather eroded the markers, but forensic tests established that the remains were those of children from Libya and other North African countries brought to Israel at the same time as the Yemenites.

Nissim Atai, a 75-year-old Netanya stonemason and volunteer gravedigger, recalls that he buried 120 North African infants and young children who died in epidemics of diphtheria and typhoid that swept the immigrant encampments some 40 years ago.

"There may have been one or two Yemenite children among them, but certainly no more," he said.

He added, "There was no mass grave. Each child was buried in his own grave."

The discovery is expected to revive a long-standing Yemenite demand for a state inquiry into the disappearance of their children.

FINANCE MINISTRY TO CUT BUDGET, BUT FROM WHERE WILL IT COME? By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- The Treasury is locked in fierce battle with the Defense and Education ministries over the national budget for fiscal 1990.

But economic analysts are yawning -- they have seen it all before.

The sense of déjà vu stems from the fact that defense and education are always the prime targets when the Finance Ministry wants to slash spending.

This time, the Treasury wants to do away with a special \$150 million allocation to fight the

intifada.

The Defense Ministry is resisting. But while the two wrangled, the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee decided jointly with the Finance Committee to add \$75 million to the intifada fight next year.

The Treasury, meanwhile, raised the hackles of the Education Ministry and the Teachers Union by proposing that free education be abolished.

The idea is to have parents pay for educating their children on a sliding scale based on family income and the number of children in school.

While the budget battle goes on, Finance Minister Shimon Peres is negotiating with Histadrut, the trades union federation, over a possible wage-price freeze and a frozen rate of exchange for the shekel.

A similar package was successful in checking inflation in 1985.

But economists say the proposed new budget is more inflationary than the current one, which is based on a \$1.5 billion deficit and an annual inflation rate of 18 percent.

DAY OF ACCIDENTS KILLS FIVE By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- Five people were killed and at least 41 injured in a rash of road accidents that occurred here Thursday.

Four of the fatalities were young women, who died when their Peugeot van collided with a bus in Jerusalem in the morning. All were from Jebel Mukaber village near East Talpiot, a Jerusalem suburb, and were being driven to school.

Seven other girls in the Peugeot van were injured, three of them seriously. They were taken to Mokassed Hospital in East Jerusalem.

The fifth death was a man killed instantly when he was run over by a bus near Ashkelon in southern Israel.

A three vehicle pile-up on the Nazareth-Afula road injured 34 people, three of them badly enough to require hospitalization. Israel is believed to have the highest rate of highway fatalities per capita in the world. But thousands of hours of safety messages on state radio and television have failed to alter the driving habits of Israelis.

IT'S EASIER TO CRITICIZE IN ISRAEL By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- A 12-member delegation of black American officials has discovered what many other U.S. visitors have learned before them: It is easier to criticize Israel's policies in Israel than in America.

The group, on a 10-day Israel tour sponsored by the Foreign Ministry and the American Jewish Committee, consists of congressional aides, city council members and municipal judges from Atlanta and Philadelphia.

"You can't say anything in the United States critical of Israel without offending American Jewish sensibilities," Thomas Dortch, state executive assistant to Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), said at a news conference in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

"But here there's been a real give-and-take with the people with whom we met, and we have taken the authorities to task whenever we found their version of events did not coincide with reality."

DEFENSE LAWYER IN FINTA NAZI TRIAL CHALLENGES EXISTENCE OF GAS CHAMBERS

By Susan Birnbaum

TORONTO, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- The attorney defending Imre Finta, on trial here for Nazi crimes, challenged in court Wednesday the existence of gas chambers.

Douglas Christie questioned an expert witness from the City University of New York on whether the extermination chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau did, in fact, exist.

He used a controversial book written by a Jewish historian to substantiate what he called documented evidence that facts about the gas chambers had been grossly exaggerated.

Cross-examining Professor Randolph Braham while brandishing the book "Why Did the Skies Not Darken?" by Professor Arno Mayer of Princeton University, Christie said that Braham must "recognize that historians now hold there is little evidence for the gas chambers."

Mayer's book questions the numbers of Jews who died during the Holocaust and the manner in which they died.

In the courtroom, Christie's contention drew snickers from about five non-Jewish Hungarians who have been regularly attending the trial and who have previously locked horns with the Jewish Holocaust survivors in attendance. The groups sit on opposite sides of the courtroom.

Wednesday's attack on Braham's testimony was in line with Christie's attempt last week to discredit the testimony of two Hungarian Holocaust survivors from Israel.

Christie said Wednesday that based on Braham's one visit to Auschwitz, Braham "didn't know what a gas chamber is."

At this, there was some laughter from the jury, which often appears mesmerized by Christie.

'A Deal To Save Their Lives'

Braham refuted Christie's charge, saying he based his information on survivors' accounts. Christie contended that "there were no written orders for the gas chambers."

Braham, who responded quietly and somewhat haltingly to Christie's brash assertions, testified that "many Hungarian Jews ended up in the gas chamber at Auschwitz-Birkenau," including "many of those found unsuitable for labor."

Wednesday was Braham's third day of testimony at the trial of Finta, who was a captain in the Nazi-controlled Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie during World War II.

Finta, 77, a retired Ontario restaurateur, has pleaded not guilty in Ontario Supreme Court to charged counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including manslaughter, forcible confinement and robbery. He is charged with the forcible confinement of 8,617 Jews in the ghetto of Szeged, Hungary, in June 1944.

During the cross-examination, Christie also elicited an acknowledgment from Braham that Jewish leaders in Szeged, as members of the Jewish Council, compiled lists of Jews to be deported. Those Jews who cooperated with the Nazis were permitted to go to Switzerland and were not charged after the war, Christie stated.

Braham, saying he was "morally torn here," admitted it had, unfortunately happened, but that they had "entered into a deal to save their lives."

Christie replied, "So Hungarians entered into a deal with the Germans to save their lives."

Christie tried to draw an analogy to the American and Canadian internment of Japanese-origin citizens of the two countries.

Braham replied that given the disparate conditions, Jews "would have loved to be in the shoes" of the Japanese.

JEWS IN LATIN AMERICA WILL THRIVE ONLY IN DEMOCRACY, BBI LEADER SAYS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- The Jews in Latin America cannot afford to be neutral in the struggle to preserve democracy in that region, a Latin American Jewish leader warned last week.

There is a future for Jews in Latin America only if they maintain "a very strong commitment to strengthen democracy, to help it flourish, to take care of social problems, to help those who suffer," said Alfredo Neuburger, B'nai B'rith International's assistant executive vice president for Latin America.

Neuburger, who lives in Buenos Aires, spoke at a day-long symposium on "What Economic Measures Will Advance Democracy in Latin America?" sponsored by the International Council of B'nai B'rith.

The last decade has brought a rapid growth in democratic governments to a majority of Latin American countries, and as a result, the region's population now has great expectations, he said.

But, he cautioned, "this massive return to democracy came at the same time as the worst economic crisis that Latin America has endured in this century."

The deteriorating economic situation throughout much of Latin America has affected Jews no differently than others, he said. Most Latin American Jews are middle class. But in Argentina, for example, the middle class has been "pushed down" by the economy and there are now many Jews in poverty along with other Argentinians, Neuburger explained.

Call For A 'Strong Hand'

Since the democratic governments of Latin America have been unable to solve their social and economic problems, some people, Jews among them, are calling for "a strong hand," he warned.

He underlined that Jews, just like many other Latin Americans, have no experience with democracy. Where there is no tradition of pluralism or dissent, democracy "is not part and parcel of everybody's life."

He added that he is "disturbed" by Jewish self-centered concerns. "I have heard those who have said there are some dictatorships that are not so bad because they don't affect the Jewish community," he said.

Neuburger stressed that Jews become second-class citizens in dictatorships, just like everyone else.

Now, as economic turbulence grows alongside democracy, anti-Semitic forces have begun to appear.

Neuburger said this is now happening in Argentina, a country with an anti-Semitic legacy, and in Brazil, where neo-Nazi groups have begun to raise their heads publicly.

Despite these dangers, Neuburger predicted that there will be no mass emigration of the some 500,000 to 600,000 Jews in Latin America. He said the various Jewish communities of the region are integrated into their individual countries and are committed to the destinies of these lands.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
HOW INTERFAITH COUPLES FACE
THE DECEMBER HOLIDAY DILEMMA**
By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Dec. 14 (JTA) -- The Christmas holidays, which symbolize warmth and togetherness for Christians, are often a source of stress and discomfort for Jews.

But for the ever-growing number of households with intermarried partners, and even for those in which one partner has converted to Judaism, the holidays can be no less than a time of crisis.

Popularly known as the "December dilemma," the problem of dealing with the celebration of Christmas and Chanukah often marks a turning point in such couples' overall approach to religion, both for themselves and for their children.

While intermarriage is considered a deeply disturbing trend for most in the Jewish community, it is an undeniable reality.

According to research by sociologist Egon Mayer, about 35 to 40 out of 100 Jewish marriages now include a non-Jewish partner. Approximately 25 percent to 30 percent of intermarriages involve conversion to Judaism, with an estimated 5 percent converting to Christianity.

For intermarried couples, the holidays are "the annual test of how they handle their differences the rest of the year," Mayer said.

"It brings to a head differences that are there all year 'round but cannot be avoided during this time of year because of the high awareness that Christmas and Chanukah arouse."

Those involved agree. "The December dilemma intensifies and highlights what happens during the rest of the year," Roberta, a non-Jewish woman with a Jewish husband, said at a workshop on the issue at Manhattan's 92nd Street Y.

'Fellow Berkeley Radicals'

Wed during the 1960s when they were self-described "fellow Berkeley radicals," Roberta and her husband did not find the issue of religion troubling during the first 11 years of their marriage.

She said she had always assumed their home would be a potpourri of religious and cultural traditions. She had happily participated in Passover seders and assumed that her husband would accept her traditions just as tolerantly.

After their first child was born, she said she hoped that their family traditions might now include a Christmas tree.

She was utterly unprepared for her husband's reaction. He said the tree would not only disturb him but deeply threaten him.

"It's like having the boot of the oppressor in my own home," he told her.

The Christmas tree debate led Roberta to rethink the role religion should play in her home and resulted in a growing involvement in Judaism for the entire family.

They joined a progressive synagogue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which attracts many intermarried couples. Their two daughters have attended religious school and the eldest is now preparing for a Bat Mitzvah. The daughters converted to Judaism, though Roberta has not.

Despite the family's growing Jewishness, Roberta's reluctance to surrender her cultural heritage is symbolized in the small Christmas tree that still stands in her home.

Roberta's case is typical in that it is usually

the Jewish partner who feels most threatened by celebration of Christmas.

With the weight of American society's stress on the Christmas holiday, Jews fear that if they allow signs of Christmas inside the home, their Jewishness will be eroded.

"Jewishness has been such a threatened identity for so long," said Rabbi Rachel Cowan, who directs interfaith programs for the 92nd Street Y. "The paradox for them being involved with someone non-Jewish is that their Jewish identity is threatened in an intimate way."

Non-Jews do not feel an equal threat, Cowan said, and are usually much more open to Jewish symbols and traditions. Therefore, it is usually the non-Jewish partner who feels the family should celebrate both religions, and the Jewish partner who resists it.

Worst Time Of Year

Neil Jacobs, another workshop participant, said that "Christmas was unquestionably the worst time of year" when he was growing up. As a young boy attending yeshiva in an Italian neighborhood, he did not directly experience anti-Semitism, but said he "felt more vulnerable" in addition to feeling left out and alienated.

He is adamant in wanting his home with his wife of five months free of Christmas symbols, and has gone as far as to oppose having a poinsettia plant in his home during the holidays.

He has, however, agreed to celebrate Christmas with his new wife's parents at her childhood home in Vermont, and will learn, he said, to "force the words 'Merry Christmas' through my teeth."

"Joan is my wife," Jacobs said, "and these are her parents. To cut them off and not show respect for their traditions is not correct."

Lina Romanoff, who heads the Philadelphia-based Jewish Converts Network, said that even in homes where a partner has chosen Judaism as his or her religion, it is often difficult for the person to give up treasured childhood symbols of family holidays.

One convert Romanoff counseled was active in Jewish life, but had such an emotional attachment to the symbol of the Christmas tree, that she actually kept a fully decorated tree hidden inside a closet during the holiday season.

"Every year, she would sit in a closet with a Christmas tree and cry," Romanoff said. "She called herself a Christmas tree junkie. On the outside, she was a model Jew, but she had a deep, dark secret."

Patience Advised

In cases where the non-Jewish or converted partner feels it is impossible to give up a Christmas symbol, Romanoff advises patience. She points to the example of another convert she counseled who felt she could not give up a Christmas tree.

Romanoff told the woman's Jewish husband to be patient and advised her to go ahead and put up the tree.

"A year later, the tree was smaller," Romanoff said. "As time went on, it got smaller and smaller. Eventually, she said she didn't have to have it anymore. As her comfort level with Judaism increased, she didn't need it."

When it comes to children, Romanoff takes a harder line. Couples "should agree to raise the child in one faith," she said. "When they are raised with both religions or nothing, they are confused, angry and resentful later in life."