

SHAMIR FIRES LABORITE WEIZMAN, TOUCHING OFF GOVERNMENT CRISIS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Sunday fired Ezer Weizman, a Labor member of the Cabinet, for "maintaining contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization."

He stressed that was not only a violation of the law, but of standing government policy.

Shamir announced his action at the end of the weekly Cabinet meeting, creating a cloud of uncertainty over whether the Likud-Labor unity coalition government will survive.

Although the Labor ministers were locked in conference over the situation late Sunday evening, pundits were fairly sure they would not leave the government on behalf of Weizman, a political maverick and, in the eyes of many, a "has-been."

Vice Premier Shimon Peres, the Labor Party leader, told the Cabinet earlier that he does not accept Weizman's dismissal. He also accused Shamir of provoking a government crisis.

The coalition agreement stipulates that the prime minister cannot oust a Labor minister without the agreement of the vice premier.

Shamir acknowledged that but argued that the law empowering the prime minister to fire any minister took precedence over the agreement.

Informed sources said Shamir advised Peres of his intentions last Thursday and spoke about it again Sunday morning to Peres and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Labor's No. 2 man.

Weizman apparently was not informed in advance, but did not appear surprised. While he denied some of Shamir's charges, he reportedly did not dispute some of the facts the premier cited at the Cabinet meeting.

Shamir Informs The Nation

Weizman said he hoped his Labor colleagues would stand by him by leaving the government. He said he welcomed the crisis, because it would force the two major parties to confront "without hypocrisy" the core issues of the peace process.

Weizman, who held the science and development portfolio, has been the most outspoken critic of Shamir's peace initiative toward the Palestinians, which he does not consider viable.

Shamir said in a prepared statement to the country Sunday night that he made his decision with "a heavy heart," because he wants badly to preserve the unity government.

He said there was no cause for Labor to secede from the government and argued that most Laborites, in fact, dissociated themselves from Weizman's position.

He accused the minister not only of maintaining contacts with the PLO, but of "schooling them" on how to deal with Israel and the U.S. government to "undermine our peace plan."

Shamir charged that Weizman was trying to focus debate on whether or not Israel should talk to the PLO, when, in fact, the government has decided categorically that it never will.

Weizman, for his part, said Shamir was heading for a confrontation with the Bush administration over the peace initiative.

He said the United States and the Arab

world are now "united with Egypt" over the proposed Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in Cairo and rather than be pressured, Shamir fired him to shift the political focus.

Weizman added that his ouster might be a "blessing" if it caused the two major parties to "drop the cant and humbug," and deal honestly with the question of talks with the Palestinians.

He said he had always openly advocated dealing with the PLO.

JEWISH-ARAB MARCH FOR PEACE MARRED BY ARRESTS AND VIOLENCE By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- Clashes between police and peace demonstrators encircling the walls of the Old City left dozens of Israelis, Arabs, tourists and police officers hurt Saturday.

At least 26 people were arrested.

The incident seemed to cast doubt on whether it is possible for Jews and Arabs to work together for peace. More important, it raised the question of whether extremist elements on both sides will prevent such collaboration from happening in the future.

While peace demonstrations are not new in Jerusalem, Saturday's event, organized by Peace Now and its supporters, was unique. It brought together Jews, Arabs and overseas visitors, many with children.

They joined in a long human chain along the walls, singing peace songs, chanting slogans and releasing multi-colored balloons into a blue December sky, in unusually warm weather.

Peace Now had a permit for the demonstration. Police were on hand as always on these occasions, mounted on cars, jeeps and horses, guarding every potential trouble spot.

Had all gone well, the demonstration would have sent out a message of the potential for peaceful cooperation, which radical Arab nationalists clearly did not want to see.

Such a message would also not particularly please Jews of the ultra right, who were barred from staging counterdemonstrations.

The trouble was confined to a narrow strip a few hundred yards wide between Damascus Gate and Herod's Gate, along the Old City's northern wall.

Several dozen Arab extremists assembled near Damascus Gate, chanted nationalist slogans and broke into Palestinian nationalist songs. Raising their fingers in the "V for Victory" sign, they shouted, "In spirit and blood, we shall redeem our fallen."

Tear Gas And Rubber Bullets

Border police charged into the crowd to disperse it. The Palestinians responded with stones. Police fired tear gas, rubber bullets and finally water cannon, indiscriminately hitting Jews, Arabs and visitors.

The injured included an Italian tourist who lost an eye. A Jerusalem police commander suffered a broken leg.

The scene was repeated two hours later, near Herod's Gate, where another group of radicals chanted, "PLO, yes; Israel no," to the surprise and dismay of the peace demonstrators.

The police reacted accordingly.

"It was terrible," said Amnon Tsaban of Tel Aviv. "Suddenly, without any provocation, they started shooting. We were standing peacefully, not doing anything," he said.

The police said they had to use force, because demonstrators attacked them with stones and raised the outlawed Palestinian flag.

According to the police, they had advance warning that extremist Palestinian elements planned to harm the peace demonstrators, and so the authorities took every precaution to protect them.

But Knesset member Dedi Zucker of the Citizens Rights Movement charged that the police overreacted, because they "could not stand the sight of Jews and Arabs demonstrating together."

His denial that Palestinian flags were raised was corroborated by reporters and other eyewitnesses.

A Peace Now demonstration Friday, which involved 5,000 Jewish and Arab women, was also broken up by police as it neared its end.

Sixteen women were detained, including an Italian member of the European Parliament. They were released later.

WHEREABOUTS OF ISRAELI AIDE TO NORIEGA REMAIN A MYSTERY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- The whereabouts of former Mossad agent Mike Harari, purported security adviser to the deposed Panamanian dictator and reputed drug czar Manuel Noriega, remained a mystery Sunday, as well as a feast of speculation for the Israeli news media.

Many here are convinced Harari is back in Israel.

Others claim he was captured by the Americans who invaded Panama two weeks ago, but talked his way to freedom.

Still others surmise that the United States indeed has Harari, but, for reasons known only to the intelligence gurus, now pretends it does not.

Harari, by all descriptions a figure straight out of popular spy fiction, was said by a U.S. Embassy official in Panama City last Thursday to be in the custody of the U.S. military in Panama.

On Saturday however, the same official told a different tale. "They thought they had him, but on further checking either they didn't have him -- most probable -- or that he convinced them he was someone else," the official said.

Reporters staking out Harari's home in Afeka, a wealthy suburb of Tel Aviv, found the house empty and locked.

Then Harari's son drove up. He refused to talk at first, insisting his father's whereabouts were nobody's business.

But when Israel Radio broadcast later that he had no knowledge where his father was, young Harari telephoned to say he did, in fact, know, but would not tell.

Millions Made In Illicit Deals

Harari's wife failed to report Sunday to her librarian's job at Tel Aviv University.

Harari, 62, is described as an athletic-looking man who almost invariably wears pilot-style dark glasses. He is said to have known Gen. Noriega since 1973 and to have personally recruited, equipped and trained his security forces.

He had been called the most powerful man in Panama, after Noriega.

Harari is also alleged to have made millions

in illicit business ventures with the Panamanian strongman, who was once on the payroll of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Harari is said to have been involved with Noriega in using the proceeds from drug sales to provide arms for the Contras, the Nicaraguan rebels supported by the Reagan administration to overthrow the Sandinista government in Managua.

Harari is still wanted by the Norwegian government for his alleged involvement in what came to be known as the Lillehammer affair, a murder in June 1973, for which several Israelis were convicted and sent to prison.

Allegedly, they were members of a Mossad hit squad out to eliminate a prominent member of the Palestine Liberation Organization who was in Lillehammer, Norway. He was believed responsible for participating in the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich.

The Israeli agents killed the wrong person, however.

The Norwegian deputy state attorney said Norway was considering asking the Americans to extradite Harari to Oslo for trial.

But that may be moot now, since the United States denies it has Harari.

One theory among Panamanian figures is that the Israeli, a shadowy figure with extensive intelligence contacts around the world, may have been turned over by the military to U.S. intelligence for questioning.

According to that scenario, the U.S. official who first disclosed his capture unknowingly released classified information.

Other U.S. officials refuse to comment on that theory.

Harari has been described as Noriega's closest associate. His arrest by the Americans would ease somewhat their embarrassment over their failure so far to capture Noriega.

The deposed dictator has found political asylum in the Vatican Embassy in Panama.

ISRAELI PUBLIC LOAN IS SUGGESTED TO FUND ABSORPTION OF SOVIET OLIM

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- The head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department thinks the Israeli public should pay for the absorption of the quarter million Soviet Jews he estimates will come here in the next three years.

Uri Gordon is trying to convince the government and the Knesset to authorize a special loan, along the lines of the Yom Kippur War loan the government levied in 1973, which was repayable in 15 years.

Gordon told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was non-committal when he presented the idea to him last week.

Vice Premier and Finance Minister Shimon Peres has spoken out publicly against what he calls a "forced loan."

Gordon does not see it in such terms.

In a letter to Peres, which he made public last week, the Jewish Agency official stressed that according to authoritative predictions, more than 250,000 olim will arrive from the Soviet Union in the next three years.

Their absorption, he maintained, is not the specific responsibility of his department or of the government, "but of every citizen of this country."

**SUPREME COURT ALLOWS MENORAH
TO REMAIN LIT IN PITTSBURGH**
By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- A 40-foot menorah displayed on the steps of Pittsburgh's City Hall alongside a Christmas tree was able to remain standing through the eighth night of Chanukah, thanks to some last-minute assistance from the U.S. Supreme Court.

The court, voting 6-3 on Dec. 28, denied an emergency request by the city of Pittsburgh for the power to remove the menorah from government property.

The city had been denied the authority to bar the menorah by a federal district court, but that decision was reversed by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

On the eve of the first night of Chanukah, Justice William Brennan Jr. ruled that for the duration of the holiday, the menorah could stand, and last week's full Supreme Court ruling supported that decision.

Joining Brennan in denying the city's petition were Justices Byron White, Harry Blackmun, Thurgood Marshall, Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy. Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices John Paul Stevens and Antonin Scalia were in the minority.

The major players in the battle over the menorah were the Lubavitch movement Chabad, which sponsored the Pittsburgh menorah, and the city of Pittsburgh. The city was fighting for the right to control what may be displayed on its City Hall steps, which it maintained, is not a "public forum."

Siding with the city was the American Jewish Congress, which has lobbied in communities across the country against the display of menorahs on public grounds by Chabad. The congress believes such displays violate the constitutional ban on government endorsement of religion.

Continuing Court Battles

Thursday's decision was "not a good sign from our point of view, but it's not necessarily a disaster," said AJCongress attorney Marc Stern.

He said that the legal battles in the days approaching Chanukah had to do with the preliminary issue of whether the menorah could stand while the full case is being fought out in court.

The case as a whole will now be considered by the federal district court, and if the past is any indication, will most likely return to the Supreme Court through continuing appeals.

"Between now and next Chanukah, this case will be litigated regularly," Stern predicted.

Neither Stern nor Chabad spokesman Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky said he foresaw an end to the continuing court battles over the issue of menorah displays on public grounds.

Whether the court fights go on "is up to our adversaries," Krinsky said, referring to groups that have opposed the menorah displays.

"They should see by now that they are fighting a losing battle," said Krinsky. "There are more menorahs up this year than before."

But Stern said Chabad appears to be uninterested in working out a compromise on menorah displays that would satisfy the larger Jewish community. Chabad will not be satisfied until "the rest of the community surrenders," he charged.

"This is going to continue unless there is a final resolution in the courts or until someone gives up from exhaustion," Stern said.

**ROMANIAN CHIEF RABBI SAYS
HE'S NOT MAKING ALIYAH YET**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen of Romania denied Sunday that he plans to resign and immigrate to Israel now.

A report that his aliyah was imminent appeared last week in the Jewish Chronicle of London, a British Jewish weekly.

Rosen stressed in a telephone interview with Israel Radio that for now, his presence is needed in Romania, where the 30,000-member Jewish community is uncertain of the future.

The popular movement that overthrew the 24-year regime of President Nicolae Ceausescu promises democratic rule in Romania. But Jews are fearful of an upsurge of anti-Semitism if economic troubles encourage a search for scapegoats.

Replying to reports that he had been "close to Ceausescu," Rosen explained that his efforts to save Jewish lives and maintain Jewish institutions in Romania depended on his working with the ousted dictator.

He said he had been preparing eventually to go to Israel and received official permission to leave years ago.

Rosen said he has bought an apartment in Tel Aviv and holds a professorship at the religiously oriented Bar-Ilan University.

Israel Radio also interviewed Romania's new premier, Petre Roman, whose father was Jewish.

Roman denied widespread reports in Romania that Palestinians and other Arab mercenaries fought in organized units with forces loyal to Ceausescu. But he conceded that some Arab students in Romania might have joined the Securitate, his hated secret police.

Roman is not known to have taken any interest in Jewish matters.

**CHANGE OF CLIMATE IN EAST GERMANY
BRINGING NEO-NAZIS OUT IN THE OPEN**
By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- The reunification of Germany may not be an immediate prospect. But neo-Nazis on both sides of the crumbling Berlin Wall are losing no time.

The official East German news agency, ADN reported last Friday that neo-Nazi groups in East Germany have contacted their West German counterparts for mutual support and to coordinate their activities.

The news agency estimates there are as many as 1,100 neo-Nazi activists in East Germany.

But in recent weeks, many reports have surfaced of neo-Nazi incidents, and fear has been voiced that it may be out of control.

Scholars and experts on the subject are warning of an upsurge of extreme right-wing violence, ADN reported.

Last week, an East German memorial to Soviet soldiers killed in World War II was desecrated with swastikas and nationalist slogans.

The East German Jewish community newspaper Nachrichtenblatt called on the authorities to take swift action against neo-Nazis.

The old regime in East Germany officially denied anti-Semitism existed in the German Democratic Republic, which it depicted as a progressive nation of anti-fascist workers and farmers.

In October, the East German media published for the first time a report that a Jewish cemetery desecration was under police investigation.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
JEWS FIND THEMSELVES IN MIDDLE
OF ETHNIC RIVALRIES IN YUGOSLAVIA**
By Ruth E. Gruber

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- There is concern among some Yugoslav Jews that the complex ethnic and political rivalries besetting Yugoslavia may be placing its tiny Jewish community in a delicate and potentially difficult situation.

"Jews have been used as short change in internal ethnic conflicts," one Jewish source put it bluntly.

Yugoslavia is a loose federation of six republics and two provinces, mostly drawn up on ethnic lines. Recent years have seen longstanding tensions and rivalries among the republics become sharper, as local ethnic nationalism has grown more powerful.

Yugoslavia's estimated 5,000 Jews are centered mostly in the republics of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in the province of Vojvodina.

More than once, amid the complicated and emotional ethnic conflict, attitudes by one ethnic group against another have been compared to historic persecution of the Jews.

Lately, concern that Jews may be squeezed by internal tensions has been heightened by the recent formation of a Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society and overtures to Israel by Serbia.

This included a visit to Israel this past fall by Serbia's regional foreign affairs secretary, Aleksandar Prlja, despite the fact that Yugoslavia as a whole does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

Motives Behind Friendly Overtures

While on the surface, nothing could seem better than overtures of friendship to Jews and Israel, there is concern that these moves are not disinterested.

"Under today's circumstances, there are various manipulations, particularly nationalist manipulations," said Filip David, a Jewish writer in Belgrade. "A society like (the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society) can become the object of manipulations and can fit into a scenario that may be written outside it," he said.

"Why have a Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society?" asked one Belgrade Jew. "I'm as much a Serb as a Jew. Wouldn't it be better to have a Yugoslavia-Israel Friendship Society?"

Serbia is the largest of Yugoslavia's six republics, and its Communist leadership has used appeals to rampant Serbian nationalism to win unprecedented popularity, while at the same time antagonizing other republics.

Jews who are concerned about developments feel that the Serbian nationalist authorities are trying to use expressions of friendship with Jews and Israel to win support for Serbian interests in the outside world.

"It's all so transparent that you need not be a genius to see through it," said one Jewish intellectual in Belgrade.

"The final idea is to get the Jewish lobby to lobby for the Serbs," he said. "This is to go through the Jewish people here and Jews abroad in the United States to explain certain things happening here."

A senior Serbian official, who did not want to be quoted by name, virtually confirmed that the Serbians are courting Jews and Israel to gain

sympathy for their position and policy, which has come under sharp criticism in the West because of the rampant Serbian nationalism.

The Serbs want to tell Jews and Israel their side of the story, to counter the criticism, he implied.

'We Trust The Jewish People'

"Friendship with the Jews is sort of a collective national identity of Serbs," the official said. "When you feel that you are in unpleasant circumstances, you feel for your old friends."

"We trust the Jewish people as people who have always been friendly with the Serbs, as we were victims together and lived in peace alongside each other," he said.

How to react to these Serbian initiatives has caused some tensions in the Jewish community.

On the one hand, said Cadik Danon, Yugoslavia's only rabbi, "it's difficult to reject a hand extended in friendship, certainly in Serbia, where there is a tradition."

On the other hand, in addition to the uneasiness felt by some Jews in Belgrade, Jews in other republics -- particularly the active community in Croatia -- distrust the Serbian motives, as Croats generally distrust the Serbs. Croatian Jews tend to align themselves politically with Croats.

"There's the danger that Jews in Croatia may not look with favor on the situation in Serbia," said Danon.

The rabbi, in fact, drew criticism from some Jewish circles in Croatia when he was prominently quoted in the Serbian press as being supportive of overall Serbian policy.

One Jewish source who distrusts the Serbian initiatives predicted that everything could backfire onto the Jews themselves.

"Consequences of this meddling are already evident," he said. "Naturally, there are disagreements between Jews within Yugoslavia in the different regions. Ultimately, it will boomerang back."

"It will be shown that it's an illusion that local Jews can do anything (to help the Serbian cause abroad) and therefore, the Jews will be to blame for not getting the message through," he warned.

Diplomatic Ties Possible

Meanwhile, there are some indications that Yugoslavia's federal government may eventually broaden relations with Israel. Diplomatic links were cut in 1967, but since then, the two countries have maintained commercial and cultural ties, as well as cooperation in the areas of sports and tourism.

The Yugoslav news media have correspondents in Israel.

"It's either stubbornness or misjudgment on the part of the federal government not to resume diplomatic relations," said a Jewish source. "They've been heavily criticized in the Yugoslav press for this."

The calls and initiatives for closer links to Israel are coming from the republics, where the real power in Yugoslavia resides.

The recent trip to Israel by the regional foreign affairs secretary of Serbia was the most visible demonstration of this. But the call to resume diplomatic relations first came from officials in Slovenia, Yugoslavia's most prosperous republic and Serbia's chief political rival.

Slovenia's Adria Airlines was also the first to initiate direct flights between Yugoslavia and Israel.