

**ARENS SAYS ISRAEL NO LONGER
OPPOSES GERMAN REUNIFICATION**

By David Kantor

BONN, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Israel appears to have done a sharp about-face on the question of German reunification, which it strongly opposed only a few months ago.

Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens told Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher at a meeting here Thursday that Israel is no longer negative about uniting East and West Germany, Israeli officials in Bonn said.

They said he told Genscher that Israel has confidence in the democratic institutions that have developed in the Federal Republic over the past 40 years and is encouraged by the broadening of the democratic base in East Germany.

Until fairly recently, Israeli officials were speaking out against possible reunification.

Perhaps the strongest statement was made by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir during his visit to the United States in November.

Shamir said that when the German people had been united, "the great majority" of them "decided to kill millions of Jewish people," and that if given the opportunity, it is conceivable "they will try to do it again."

Those remarks drew protests from Chancellor Helmut Kohl, which led to an angry exchange of letters with Shamir.

The Israeli prime minister wrote, among other things, "We cannot forget the images of the cheering crowds in the '30s and what they produced. We carry with us the memories of the Jews who were massacred in the Holocaust."

Arens, on an official visit to West Germany, met with Genscher for 90 minutes.

The German foreign minister is reported to have told him he opposes European Community sanctions against Israel in the areas of trade and scientific cooperation.

The sanctions were recommended on Jan. 17 by the Parliament of Europe, the E.C.'s legislative body, to protest Israel's treatment of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly the closure of Palestinian schools in there.

The sanctions were endorsed by the E.C.'s Executive Commission in Brussels last week.

According to Israeli and German officials here, Genscher said West Germany is opposed in principle to sanctions as a means to achieve political ends. He promised to raise the matter at the next meeting of the E.C. Council of Ministers.

**ATTORNEY GENERAL FINDS NO CASE
AGAINST WEIZMAN FOR PLO CONTACTS**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Attorney General Yosef Harish has found insufficient evidence to bring a case against Ezer Weizman, who was removed from the Inner Cabinet last month because of his alleged contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Harish announced his conclusion Thursday evening, after studying the results of a police investigation into the activities of Weizman, who is minister of science and development.

Weizman, a Laborite who has long advocated

negotiations with the Palestinians, including the PLO, said he is gratified by the attorney general's decision, but wants to study it in detail before commenting further.

The Likud-Labor unity coalition government was badly shaken when Shamir announced without warning at a Jan. 1 Cabinet meeting that he was firing Weizman because of his sustained contacts with the PLO.

Shamir alleged that the former air force commander and one-time defense minister briefed PLO leaders on how to respond to Israeli and American diplomatic moves.

Angry Laborites threatened to break up the government. But a compromise was quickly reached, whereby Weizman was forced to resign from the 12-member Inner Cabinet, the government's top policy-making body, while retaining the science portfolio.

Shamir made clear, however, that he hoped Weizman eventually would be forced to leave the government altogether.

He asked the police to undertake an investigation with a view toward bringing criminal charges against Weizman for violation of the Anti-Terror Law. The law forbids Israelis from having any contact with members of a terrorist organization.

Legal observers said the attorney general's finding that Weizman has no case to answer means the issue can be considered closed.

Right-wingers were enraged. Likud Knesset member Tzahi Hanegbi said he would apply to the High Court of Justice to reverse the attorney general's "strange" decision.

**NEW SYRIAN FLEXIBILITY REPORTED,
BUT TALKS WITH ISRAEL ARE DENIED**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Israel has dismissed media reports it is engaged in secret talks with Syria.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir called the reports "pure speculation, the product of a fertile imagination."

Foreign Ministry sources also said they had no knowledge of Israeli contacts with Syria, which were reported Thursday by The Independent, a British daily.

According to the paper, representatives of the two countries have so far had two rounds of talks in Austria. While the talks fell short of formal negotiations, they were conducted with the full approval of Syrian and Israeli leaders, the report said.

Meanwhile, a senior U.N. official arrived in Jerusalem from Damascus on Wednesday and reported that Syria is now "more flexible" than in the past.

The assessment was given to Foreign Ministry officials by Jean Claude Aimee, Middle East affairs assistant to U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar.

Aimee said top Syrian officials told him that Syria would not obstruct an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, though they give it little chance to succeed.

He said that President Hafez Assad of Syria still favors an international conference to settle

the Middle East conflict, but believes it should be sponsored by the United States and Soviet Union alone, instead of by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Israel opposes an international conference under any auspices.

Aimee's impressions of Syria were similar to those of other recent visitors to Damascus, including U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.).

Specter reported that Syria has moderated its views on the peace process and is now willing to reduce its stockpile of chemical weapons.

Aimee also discussed his meeting with King Hussein of Jordan, whom he described as concerned by the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in his country, but confident he can contain it.

Aimee said the Jordanian monarch is also worried by the growing emigration of Palestinians from the West Bank, which is increasing the already considerable Palestinian population in his kingdom.

ISRAEL TO GO AHEAD WITH VOA PROJECT, DESPITE RISING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Israeli leaders are determined to go ahead with construction of powerful Voice of America radio transmitters in the Arava region of the Negev, despite strong protests from environmentalists and evidence that the transmitters could pose a hazard to aircraft navigation.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Thursday assured Malcolm Forbes Jr., chairman of the U.S. Board of International Broadcasting, that despite the "problems," Israel would honor its 3-year-old agreement for construction of the station.

The transmitters still require permits from the National Planning and Building Councils.

Shamir stressed that Israel wants to strengthen its relations with the United States.

Forbes and U.S. Ambassador William Brown got similar assurances from Finance Minister Shimon Peres on Wednesday.

While some 200 environmentalists demonstrated outside the Finance Ministry in Jerusalem, Peres pledged that the government would do everything possible to speed up the start of the \$400 million project.

He told Ambassador Brown and Forbes that the "Forum of Four," the four senior Cabinet ministers, have reaffirmed the government's 1987 pledge that the project will go forward.

The four, in addition to Shamir and Peres, are Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

At a Tuesday news conference with Forbes and Brown, Communications Minister Gad Ya'acobi stressed that the transmitter complex would be an economic boon for Israel.

He claimed it would provide 550 jobs over the three-and-a-half-year start-up period, and 200 professional positions on a permanent basis.

Environmentalists, led by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, the Nature Preserves Authority and residents of the Arava region, are determined to block the project.

They say the 2,000-acre area of the station, with its nearly 900-foot high antennas -- almost as tall as the Eiffel Tower -- would ruin one of the few remaining nature preserves in the Negev, blocking scenic hiking trails and destroying the landscape.

They say the electromagnetic radiation

generated by the transmitters would endanger the health of residents of the region and disrupt the flight of migrating birds.

Could Impair Aircraft Systems

Moreover, the Israeli air force has acknowledged the radiation could affect the delicate electronic systems of advanced aircraft.

It has been learned here that high-frequency magnetic radiation from VOA broadcasting stations may have caused the recent crash of two of the West German air force's advanced Tornado jets.

The United States reportedly withheld the information from the Israeli air force, which obtained the information from other sources.

Consequently, the Israeli air force plans to move its training base and firing ranges further south, thereby extending the environmental damage.

Israeli and American environmentalists have already urged President Bush to cancel the project.

In a letter to the president on Feb. 6, they noted that apart from "serious environmental problems," the project's strategic value is "highly questionable" in view of dramatic events in Eastern Europe and the warming of relations with the Soviet Union.

The letter to Bush was signed by officials of Friends of the Earth, the Sierra Club, National Audubon Society and the American Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

They have the support of a group in Congress headed by Rep. James Scheuer (D-N.Y.). In Washington, the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on foreign operations plans to hear testimony on the environmental concerns Tuesday.

JERUSALEM ARSONIST GETS 27 YEARS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- An intifada activist from East Jerusalem was sentenced Thursday to 27 years in prison for arson.

Mahmoud Ahmed Safdi, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was convicted by the military court in Lod of setting fire to automobiles and other vehicles in the Abu Tor and French Hill neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

He also was found guilty of throwing gasoline bombs at cars.

Dozens of vehicles in East and West Jerusalem have been torched by arsonists during the past year. But that sort of intifada activity has since diminished. It is only recently that the police have been able to find the culprits.

COST OF LIVING ROSE 1.1 PERCENT By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Israel's cost-of-living index rose by 1.1 percent in January, the Central Bureau of Statistics announced Thursday.

The increase, the same as in December, was slightly higher than the original projection for January of "under 1 percent."

The average Israeli family now requires a monthly income of about \$1,500 to break even.

Economists expect the February price index to show a higher increase when it is announced on March 15. It will reflect price increases the Finance Ministry introduced.

But economists are projecting a lower annual inflation rate in 1990. They say it will be under 20 percent, compared to 21.7 percent in 1989.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWS REPORTED
IN THE UKRAINIAN CITY OF KHARKOV**

NEW YORK, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Anti-Semitic activity turned to violence last week in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov, according to Soviet press reports.

Jewish apartments were broken into, and about 20 Jews were beaten, although no deaths were reported.

The chief of Kharkov's Department of Internal Affairs was quoted Tuesday in the Moscow newspaper Trud as saying that court proceedings have begun against "several people who took part in the pogroms against Jews in the past week."

The article also reported that a "great meeting of people who support the democracy movement in Kharkov" took place on Sunday.

The mayor of Kharkov and the Department of Internal Affairs chief promised those at the meeting "that they will stop the activities of all nationalistic organizations and anti-Semitic organizations, like Pamyat, and all incidents will be investigated."

The article said that "a lot of leaflets with anti-Semitic propaganda appeared in Kharkov during the past year."

Word of the Kharkov incident reached a United Jewish Appeal delegation visiting the Soviet Union, a UJA spokesman reported from Moscow on Thursday.

The spokesman also reported that several Jews from the city of Baku, in the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, have sought refuge at Moscow's Choral Synagogue.

Jews In Tajikistan Frightened

The Jews fled the Azerbaijani capital, he said, because they fear violence directed against them as a result of ethnic tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

The UJA delegation is in Moscow on a fact-finding trip as part of the organization's preparation for Operation Exodus, the \$420 million fundraising campaign for the resettlement of Soviet Jews in Israel, which is to be launched in April.

In their meetings with Soviet Foreign Ministry officials, the UJA delegation called for Soviet leaders to speak out against anti-Semitism, in order to calm the panic in the Jewish community.

Meanwhile, the ethnic violence that rocked Tajikistan this week brought no physical harm to the Soviet Asian republic's estimated 22,000 to 25,000 Jews, according to early reports reaching the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry.

But a Jewish resident of Dushanbe, where much of the violence took place, reported by phone that the Jewish community was frightened.

The grass-roots advocacy group obtained its information from the Caucasus Network, which focuses on Jews in the Caucasus and central Asia.

The Trud article on the events in Kharkov was obtained and translated by the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry.

The committee received a skeptical reaction to the Trud article from Natasha Khassina, a former refusenik now living in Jerusalem.

"How will they be able to investigate? Who will they be able to investigate?" she asked, referring to the Kharkov's mayor's pledge to look into the anti-Semitic violence.

"We know that is a tactic that has been used for the past 75 years, and we know that no one has ever been brought to trial or sentenced for anti-Semitism," she said.

**ROMANIAN JEWS WORRY ABOUT FUTURE,
DESPITE ASSURANCES FROM GOVERNMENT**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- The Jews of Romania are seriously concerned for their future, despite assurances by officials that the new government will continue to guarantee their well-being.

The assurances were given to Sylvia Hassenfeld, president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and Michael Schneider, its executive director, who arrived here Thursday after visiting Romania and Czechoslovakia.

Romanian Jews, who had a stable if precarious existence under the late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, are fearful of the emergence of fascist elements in the turbulent atmosphere that has prevailed since the revolution two months ago, the JDC officials reported.

"Anti-Semitic slogans such as 'Jews go!' can already be seen on the walls," they said.

Hassenfeld and Schneider met with Romania's new president, Ion Iliescu, and other senior officials in Bucharest.

"Iliescu said Jews were free to emigrate, to stay or to come back, as they wish," Schneider reported.

There are at most 22,000 Jews in Romania. Before the revolution, 1,200 to 1,400 immigrated to Israel each year.

But unless the situation worsens appreciably, no mass aliyah can be expected from that country, because half the Jewish population is too old to make the move, Hassenfeld and Schneider said.

JDC Planning Seders In Moscow

They said JDC would continue to focus its program in Romania, which has an annual budget of \$4 million, on aid to the predominantly elderly Jewish population.

But JDC is also providing non-sectarian aid to the larger Romanian community. Hassenfeld and Schneider said they met with the Romanian health minister, who spoke of the many cases of AIDS discovered at local hospitals.

JDC promised the local authorities to send a shipment of syringes and disposable gloves to help control the spread of the fatal disease. Contaminated needles are suspected of spreading the virus that causes AIDS to hundreds of babies, who are routinely inoculated at birth.

The JDC officials said they found a sharply contrasting scene in Czechoslovakia, where "there is an air of euphoria following the so-called Velvet Revolution."

Because of the optimistic mood, Hassenfeld does not expect any immigration of Czechoslovak Jews to Israel.

JDC is able to engage in previously prohibited youth activities in Czechoslovakia because of the democratic reforms, the two leaders said.

The international Jewish relief and educational agency has also received the approval of Soviet authorities to open an office in Moscow and will do so when suitable space is found.

JDC is arranging to send 30 couples from Israel to the Soviet Union during Passover to run 30 communal seders all over the country. The Soviet minister of religions welcomed the project and promised to assist, the JDC leaders said.

Hassenfeld said JDC is involved in the Soviet Union, because "no matter how large aliyah will be, Soviet Jewry will continue to be the largest Jewish community in Eastern Europe."

DEMOCRATIC LEADER FINDS VISIT CONFIRMS FEELINGS ABOUT ISRAEL

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Ron Brown, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, has returned from a visit to Israel reassured about Israel's commitment to the peace process, but also convinced that the process has to be speeded up.

Television "plays a significant role in public opinion," and scenes of clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youth in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "are not helpful, as far as making friends," Brown said at a news conference last week with reporters from the Jewish media.

"The sooner that kind of situation can end, the better," he said. "I think there is a clear understanding of that within the Israeli leadership."

Brown himself saw first-hand evidence of this when a rock was thrown at his car as he was being driven through the West Bank. "You see the tension under which people live every day," he said.

This was Brown's third visit to Israel, but the first in 10 years. He was in Israel from Jan. 16 to 21 and then spent five days in Egypt. The trip was sponsored by the South Palm Beach County Jewish Federation.

The visit "really reinforced a lot of the feelings I've had about Israel for a long time," Brown said.

These included his view that the special relationship between Israel and the United States should continue and that, while the United States has influence with Israel, "we cannot deliver Israel to anybody."

Tests Shamir's Peace Commitment

Above all, the visit reinforced his concerns about Israel's security needs. He said that no one can tour Israel's borders without being "sensitized" to its security needs.

Brown said that before going to Israel he had heard rumors about the Israeli government's position on the peace process.

"I looked Prime Minister (Yitzhak) Shamir in the eye in a one-on-one meeting and asked him if he is committed to the peace process," Brown said. "He looked me back in the eye and told me he was. I take him at his word."

Brown said he also met with Vice Premier Shimon Peres and other Israelis, who gave him a wide range of opinion about the peace process.

But he said he told the Israelis, as well as the Palestinians with whom he met on the West Bank, to "get away from some of these peripheral issues and get down to real serious negotiations about matters of substance."

"My own impression is that some of the things we now hear are major stumbling blocks can be circumvented," he said.

One issue Brown believes could be solved is the role that the Palestine Liberation Organization plays in the process if a "practical, pragmatic, realistic" approach is taken.

"Almost everyone who I talked to, even those who are most vehemently opposed to direct negotiations with the PLO, acknowledged that the PLO has to be at least tacitly involved," he said. "Nobody can be at the table without PLO approval -- if not a seal of approval, at least a wink."

Brown said that in his meetings with Palestinians, "I assured them that, as a civil rights lawyer of long standing, I have concerns about

human rights, not only there but around the world. The sooner we resolve these difficult issues, the better off everyone will be."

A reporter pointed out that when Lee Atwater, chairman of the Republican National Committee, visited Israel last year, he did not meet with Palestinians or visit the West Bank.

Has Opposed Palestinian State

"I do not know how you can go to that region of the world and not meet Palestinians," Brown responded. He said the Israeli government did not object to such meetings and that he was encouraged to meet with Palestinians by leaders of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, who were in Israel at the same time.

Brown would not give his view on whether there should be a Palestinian state, saying that is up for the parties to decide. He noted that he had opposed resolutions urging a Palestinian state at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta in 1988 and at state conventions.

Brown said that he brought up the issue of Israel's relations with South Africa. He said that members of the Congressional Black Caucus, who met with Shamir when he was in Washington last year, told him that Shamir understood fully the intensity of feeling on that issue in America.

Shamir at the time promised that Israel's defense contracts with South Africa would be phased out. Brown said that he urged Shamir to announce a timetable and was told later by Peres and AIPAC officials who met with Shamir that this would be done.

Brown said the most enjoyable and encouraging part of his visit was going to absorption centers, where he saw not only Soviet immigrants, but Jews from Ethiopia and other countries. He said he had a "wonderful experience" seeing adults learn Hebrew and then visiting a classroom with two children from the Soviet Union, two from Ethiopia and one from Morocco.

Reaching Out To Jews

Brown praised the Israeli political leaders for "making their democracy work." He said they have an "incredible amount of energy and patience" in living with the unity government.

This is not something he would like to see in the United States, since it is more easy to govern when one party is in charge.

"But we Democrats know a lot about coalition politics," he added. "We are generally pretty good at it."

Brown said he has been working hard at maintaining the traditional Democratic coalition, including the support of Jews. He has been viewed with suspicion by some Jews, because he was the Rev. Jesse Jackson's campaign manager at the 1988 convention.

"Nobody has spent more time than I have reaching out to the Jewish community," Brown said, citing numerous appearances before Jewish groups. "Every opportunity I get, I am reaching out to the Jewish community, an extraordinarily important constituency to the Democratic Party."

"I, as a chairman of the Democratic Party who happens to be of African descent, have a unique and special role to play in seeing that the relationship continues," he said.

REMINDER: The JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published on Monday, Feb. 19.