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LABOR PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE VOTE PUSHES GOVERNMENT TOWARD COLLAPSE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 12 (JTA) -- A fighting speech by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and a unanimous vote at a Labor Party Central Committee session in Kfar Sava on Monday seemed to edge the national unity government closer than ever to the brink of dissolution.

The Central Committee empowered the party's leadership bureau and its Knesset faction to take the "appropriate steps" in the wake of the Inner Cabinet's failure Sunday to reply favorably to U.S. proposals on the peace process.

Labor had previously indicated that it would leave the government if the Inner Cabinet failed to take action on the peace proposals. Monday's vote authorized the party's leadership to do so, without stating it explicitly.

That is a tactical maneuver aimed at preventing Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir from firing the Labor ministers and forming an alternative government of his own.

The Central Committee vote came as Religious Affairs Minister Zevulun Hammer made a last-ditch effort to strike a compromise between Likud and Labor.

But that initiative seemed to peter out by the end of the day, when it elicited a less-than-enthusiastic reaction from the major parties. Even members of Hammer's own National Religious Party were opposed to it.

The issue that has divided Likud and Labor is Secretary of State James Baker's version of a plan to bring Israel and a Palestinian delegation to the negotiating table in Cairo, where they would discuss implementation of Shamir's proposal for elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Bitter Words Over Jerusalem

Baker, after consulting with the Egyptians and the Palestine Liberation Organization, has proposed that the Palestinian delegation include one or two former deportees and one or two residents of the West Bank who have homes or offices in East Jerusalem. This would meet Arab demands for representation of Palestinians in Jerusalem and outside of Israel.

The Likud bloc opposes the inclusion of East Jerusalem Arabs, claiming that allowing them to participate in either the Cairo talks or the subsequent elections could jeopardize the status of Israel's united capital.

Labor has been more flexible on the issue, saying the 150,000 Palestinians who live there can participate in the elections, as long as they vote outside the city. But party officials have reacted angrily to attempts by Likud politicians in recent days to portray Labor as "softer" on Jerusalem's status.

Vice Premier Shimon Peres, the Labor Party leader, told Central Committee delegates Monday evening that Likud had raised the Jerusalem issue to avoid making a tough decision on the peace process.

"Shamir tried to move toward peace, but his vehicle gave out on him," Peres said. "The Likud is a broken-down car, with its wheels falling off."

Rabin, who repeatedly has said that a unity government is the best hope for peace, launched a bitter attack of his own against Likud.

"The Likud is seeking to apply constraining clamps on us, and we will not have it," the defense minister declared to tumultuous applause.

"Their question to us" on Jerusalem "is not worthy of our reply," he said. "Who are they anyway? By what right do they presume to question us?"

Shamir Could Fire Laborites

Peres said he was "proud of the way our movement is going into the next two or three days of the most serious decision-making." He added, "All the efforts to erode and divide us have failed, and we are united and speak with one clear message."

This was an obvious reference to his earlier differences with Rabin over whether the moment was right to secede from the unity government. His implication was that now any such differences have been ironed out.

Speculation among political pundits focused Monday night on whether Shamir would exercise his right to fire all of the Labor ministers from the government immediately.

If he did so, the rump government would presumably lose the confidence votes Thursday. But in that event, ministers of the Likud, Shas and NRP would stay in power as a "transitional government," pending the formation of a new coalition or, failing that, national elections.

In order to achieve that scenario, Shamir must fire the Laborites by Tuesday morning at the latest, so that the 48-hour statutory cooling-off period is concluded before the no-confidence debate Thursday.

Political insiders say Industry and Trade Minister Moshe Nissim is pressing the premier to take this course, but that other aides warn it could enhance Labor's prospects of forming an alternative government with the religious and left-wing parties.

In Washington, the State Department urged Israel to push ahead with a vote on the Baker plan.

"We recognize that this is very, very difficult within Israel for them to reach an answer," said department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler. But she added, "The time to act is now."

"We are waiting for a vote from the Israeli government," she said. "They haven't voted yes, they haven't voted no. All that has happened is that they haven't voted."

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

RECENT U.S. STATEMENTS SUGGEST TILT AWAY FROM ISRAEL, UJA TOLD

By David Friedman and Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, March 12 (JTA) -- Recent statements by the Bush administration on Israeli settlement of the West Bank and East Jerusalem have given the impression that U.S. support for Israel is diminishing, a U.S. congressman and an Israeli diplomat charged Monday.

The statements have given other countries and groups like the Palestine Liberation Organiza-

tion the perception that "this administration is nowhere as committed to Israel as the last one," said Rep. Lawrence Smith (D-Fla.).

Oded Eran, the No. 2 official at the Israeli Embassy here, said that the U.S.-Israeli alliance has "deteriorated, from Israel's point of view."

The two and Dennis Ross, the State Department's director of policy planning, participated in a panel discussion called "The U.S. and Israel: Still an Unshakable Alliance?" at the United Jewish Appeal's seventh National Young Leadership Conference here.

Ross maintained that while allies have differences, the U.S.-Israel alliance is "unshakable" because of the two nations' shared values.

Smith and Eran said they agreed with criticism of the Bush administration voiced the night before by Tom Dine, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"Suddenly there is rejoicing at PLO headquarters in Tunis and dismay in Israel" at what is seen as a "new American tilt" away from Israel, Dine told the 2,500 delegates participating in the UJA conference.

'A Series Of Mistakes And Missteps'

"Unfortunately the administration has, in the past 10 days, made a series of mistakes and missteps that, taken together, suggest that something new and different and very unwelcome is going on," said Dine.

He criticized President Bush for raising a divisive new issue March 3 when he said at a news conference in California that the United States opposed Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem as well as the West Bank.

Before Bush, no U.S. president had raised concerns about such settlements, "certainly not publicly," Dine said.

He added that Bush received extensive briefings on East Jerusalem last week from the National Security Council, "which were presented to him in a manner highly critical of the policies of both Labor and Likud governments toward the eastern half of Israel's capital."

Eran said Labor and Likud had been very close to making a decision on a U.S. proposal for Israeli-Palestinian talks. He indicated that Bush's statement had a damaging effect on the two parties' dispute, which centered over whether Arab residents of East Jerusalem could be part of the Palestinian negotiating delegation.

He said the U.S. statement about East Jerusalem settlements combined with the administration's push for inclusion of East Jerusalem Arabs had created "a deep suspicion about Jerusalem's future."

'Sensitive Nerves' Damaged

Eran said that "sensitive nerves have been damaged" because the statements have involved two critical issues for Israel: immigration, the *raison d'être* for the Jewish state, and the status of Jerusalem, which Israel regards as its eternal capital.

"It is an insult to any Israeli to see the U.S. ambassador riding every day to Jerusalem" from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, Eran said. "Jerusalem is my capital."

Speaking at a conference luncheon Monday, Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Executives of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization, said people seem to have forgotten that Jerusalem is not now occupied territory, but was occupied territory between 1948 and 1967.

"Jerusalem has been the capital of Israel since King David," he said. "Jerusalem has been the capital of Israel, where every group is free to follow its own religion and for the first time is protected by law and will be until time immemorial."

Ross said the U.S. policy toward Jerusalem has remained unchanged since 1967. He said the city must never be divided again, but that its final status must be decided by negotiations.

He said the Bush administration's remarks that U.S. funds cannot be used to aid Soviet immigrants in the West Bank were aimed at convincing Moscow to expedite the emigration of Soviet Jews, including initiating direct flights from Moscow to Israel.

Rep. Smith said the Arab states should be told to "stop this nonsense" of opposing Jewish immigration to Israel. He said the United States should continue encouraging Soviet emigration and tell the Arabs, "We don't want to hear about it anymore."

On the peace process, Smith argued that Israel has continually moved forward, "and no one else has moved an inch."

He said the administration statements have been sending a message to the Arabs: "Don't worry about a thing. If the process stalls, we'll just beat up on Israel a little more and you don't have to do a blessed thing."

E.C. WILL NOT RESCIND SANCTIONS AGAINST ISRAEL, OFFICIAL CLAIMS

By Yossi Lempkowicz

BRUSSELS, March 12 (JTA) -- An official of the European Community has denied an Israeli newspaper report that the body will reverse itself on its decision to impose sanctions against Israel.

"As far as I know, the elements which prompted the European Community to decide several measures of displeasure against Israel have not changed, so I don't think that the E.C. position has been modified so far," an E.C. official told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The official was responding to a report published last Friday in the daily newspaper Ma'ariv, which said the E.C. had notified Israel that all E.C. sanctions against it would be rescinded before the community's foreign ministers meet in April with Israel's foreign minister.

The meeting is an annual review of the cooperation between the 12 E.C. nations and Israel, as well as developments in the Middle East.

The European Parliament, the E.C.'s legislative body, voted in January to recommend freezing scientific cooperation with Israel, because of its alleged contempt for human rights in the administered territories and for closing Palestinian universities in the West Bank.

The European Commission, the E.C.'s executive body, followed suit by postponing the signing of an agreement on energy cooperation, during a visit by Israel's Energy Minister Moshe Shahal here at the end of January.

The commission also delayed a visit to Israel by the European commissioner in charge of Mediterranean countries, Abel Matutes of Spain, and canceled scheduled talks on scientific cooperation with Israel.

According to a commission official who has participated in E.C.-Israel accords, "things have not changed substantially, so I don't think that the Europeans are going to change their mind for the moment."

POLITICS DELAY WEST GERMAN LAW TO BAR EXPORT OF LETHAL CHEMICALS

By David Kantor

BONN, March 12 (JTA) -- A proposed law that would make it more difficult for West German companies to export substances that could be used to produce poison gas is being held hostage to internal politics in the Bundestag, West Germany's parliament.

The bill, which had been scheduled to become law Jan. 1, would penalize Germans who help to supply or produce poison gas abroad. But the ruling coalition of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats has failed to put the bill to a vote.

Last week, the opposition Social Democrats introduced a bill of their own, but it was voted down by the governing majority.

Spokespersons for the Social Democrats contend that the government has been dragging its feet on the legislation, which was proposed last year following worldwide protests over assistance provided by West German firms to the Libyan factory at Rabta, some 40 miles south of Tripoli.

The Social Democrats say that prompt action to prevent the export of substances used in the production of poison gas has become urgent, in view of new information that Libya is again producing chemical weapons.

Reports last week from Washington indicate that Libya has increased production of chemical arms, with help from West German companies and other firms in Western Europe. U.S. intelligence said Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi had given the orders to do so.

West German intelligence has independently established that the Rabta factory has already produced considerable amounts of poison gas.

But West Germany is still opposed to military action to force Libya to close the factory. Instead, Bonn would favor inspection of the Rabta by United Nations observers.

Libyan Capability Questioned

Libya has repeatedly denied that it is manufacturing chemical weapons, claiming that the Rabta plant produces pharmaceuticals. Libya has said that it is prepared to participate in any international accords to prevent the proliferation of chemical warfare.

Israel is concerned that Libya could use the chemical weapons to launch a deadly attack on the Jewish state. It is said to have recently acquired the capability to conduct such a long-range strike.

But Ron Ben-Yishai, a well-informed correspondent for the Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot, wrote in an article last week that Gadhafi "lacks the capability, whether by plane or by missile, to release substantial quantities of poisonous gases in Israeli population centers."

"He can, however, supply Syria with the products of the Rabta plant, in order that it make use of them," Ben-Yishai added.

The Israeli journalist speculated that Gadhafi's real target is Chad, which drove Libyan forces out of the country in March 1987.

Gadhafi "has apparently not forgotten his stinging defeat in Chad, and is preparing to take revenge," Ben-Yishai wrote. "This is apparently the main objective of the arms plant in Rabta."

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

ISRAEL ASKS EGYPT TO EXTRADITE PRISONER WHO ESCAPED INTO SINAI

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 12 (JTA) -- Israel has asked Egyptian authorities in Sinai to extradite a Palestinian prisoner who escaped from the Ketziot detention camp in the Negev and is believed to be in Egyptian custody.

The prisoner, one of five residents of the Gaza Strip who escaped from the detention camp Saturday night, turned himself in to an international observer force at the Rafah checkpoint on the border between the Gaza Strip and Sinai.

Israel also wants Egypt to try and find two of the other fugitives, whose tracks led to Sinai. The remaining two were recaptured soon after the escape.

There was no immediate indication how the Egyptians would respond.

The army is investigating how the prisoners managed to escape. Sources say it is likely that the officer in charge of their ward will be dismissed. Initial investigation showed serious errors in the guarding of the prisoners.

The Ketziot detention camp comprises about 6,100 inmates in two sections, some 5,500 in the large section, housing intifada activists and terrorists, and a separate section of 600 more dangerous inmates, who live in tents. This is where the escape took place.

ISRAEL WON'T EXTRADITE TWO MEN WANTED IN CALIFORNIA FOR MURDER

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 12 (JTA) -- Israel will not extradite to the United States two Israelis wanted to stand trial there for the murder of a wealthy Californian couple in October 1987, the police said Sunday. But they may be put on trial in Israel.

Yair Orr, 30, and Nadav Nakan, 33, both formerly of Kibbutz Alonim southeast of Haifa, were arrested in Tel Aviv last week when the police told the Petach Tikva Magistrates Court that they were suspects in the Oct. 5, 1987 murder of Carmen and Jack Hindley.

The couple were reportedly shot to death while they slept in their Santa Barbara mansion.

Orr was ordered detained for 10 days, and Nakan for five, to enable the U.S. Justice Department to decide how to pursue the case. Israeli law forbids the extradition of anyone who was an Israeli citizen at the time he committed the crime in question.

But the police have reportedly cooperated with the FBI in an effort to find evidence against the suspects which would be admissible in court here. A trial in Israel is the only alternative open to U.S. prosecution.

Police told the court that Orr and Nakan were interrogated by the California authorities after the murder, but they were reportedly released because of an alibi provided by another Israeli, Haim Tuvya.

But Orr's wife told reporters on Saturday that Tuvya had called her husband from the United States recently, to tell him that he had changed his testimony.

The FBI is said to suspect that the Hindley murder was ordered by the couple's son-in-law, Charles Le Garo, who, together with his wife, inherited some \$6 million from her parents.

Police said that Orr was a close friend of Le Garo. The two had been business partners.

ROMANIAN LEADER ASSURES RABBI ANTI-SEMITES WILL BE PUNISHED

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, March 12 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Petre Roman of Romania has promised the country's chief rabbi, Moses Rosen, that his government will swiftly punish anyone responsible for anti-Semitic acts.

Rosen called on the prime minister, who has Jewish ancestry, to complain of recent anti-Semitic incidents and several anti-Jewish articles in the local press.

Jewish sources told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency after the March 8 meeting that the chief rabbi has confidence in the new government and is now "fully reassured" of its determination to prevent anti-Semitic incidents.

Rosen also met with Foreign Minister Sergiu Celac and the minister for religious affairs, Nicolai Stroicescu. In addition, he conferred with the U.S. ambassador to Bucharest, Allan Green.

The chief rabbi lashed out against anti-Jewish hatred in an open letter to anti-Semites published Saturday in the Romanian newspaper Adevarul, a translation of which was provided in New York by the World Jewish Congress.

"Almost half a century since the beginning of our Holocaust," the rabbi wrote, "here you are, raising your heads once more. The Nazi terminology reappears ('Heil Hitler'); the instigations against us start again."

"It is difficult, very difficult to try to dispel the lies spread against us," the rabbi wrote. "What shall we do? Cry out that we 'do not drink the blood of Christians,' that we 'do not poison the wells,' that 'the Moscow Jewish doctors did not poison the Soviet leaders?'"

"We have been here for 600 years and are not at all ashamed of our contribution to the welfare of this homeland," Rosen wrote. But he also noted that since World War II, some 400,000 Romanian Jews have immigrated to Israel and that only 20,000 Jews remain, mainly those too old to leave.

"What else do you want, Messrs. Anti-Semites? The Yids have gone to Palestine," he wrote. "You want to speed up the process, don't you? What harm does it cause you if we, the remnants of Israel, wait for our graves to be here, next to those of our parents and forefathers?"

POLLARD'S ATTORNEYS FILE MOTION TO WITHDRAW HIS PLEA OF GUILT

By Elena Neuman

NEW YORK, March 12 (JTA) -- The case of convicted American spy Jonathan Pollard took another twist Monday with the defense counsel's submission of a motion to withdraw Pollard's 1986 plea of guilt.

Pollard's attorneys have presented a motion to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, requesting that the guilty plea entered in June 1986 be set aside. They contend the U.S. government failed to live up to its responsibility under the plea bargain.

"A motion to set aside a guilty plea must be granted if the government fails to keep the promises that it made to the defendant in order to induce the plea," the summary of argument says. "In this case, the government made three promises and broke all three."

The defense alleges that the government violated its promises not to seek a life sentence,

to limit its court statements to the facts and circumstances of the offenses committed, and to inform the court of Pollard's cooperation.

Pollard's attorneys contest government accusations that he violated the plea agreement by giving two interviews to journalist Wolf Blitzer without obtaining proper permission.

They also suggest that the plea bargain itself was coerced.

Not 'An Act Of Treason'

"Treason is defined by the Constitution and in statutes," explained Hamilton Fox, the lead defense lawyer in the case. "You either have to have committed an act of war against the United States, or committed an act of aid and comfort to an enemy of the United States."

"It's clear that Jonathan Pollard did not commit an act of war. It's also clear that Israel is not an enemy of the United States. Jonathan Pollard did not commit an act of treason," he said.

"In other cases of espionage that we have seen, sentences for those involved with allies have been two or three years," Fox said. Cases of espionage for an "enemy" country are more likely to receive a life sentence, he said.

Fox admitted that while a motion to withdraw a guilty plea is a recognized procedure, courts do not readily grant them. The burden of proof rests entirely with the defendant.

Fox said the government has 11 days to respond, although he would not be surprised if it sought more time.

NEO-NAZIS FINED FOR HATE ACTS

By David Kantor

BONN, March 12 (JTA) -- A court in Hanover has fined four neo-Nazi activists 3,500 marks (about \$2,000) each for incitement to racial discrimination and for disturbances at a rally of political opponents.

The state prosecution, which pleaded for prison terms of six months, said it would study the possibility of an appeal.

Among the four activists is Willi Wegner, the vice chairman of a neo-Nazi organization known as FAP, the Freiheit Liche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Free German Workers Party).

Accompanied by several young supporters, the four caused disturbances last year at a meeting at the University of Luneburg by shouting slogans against Jews and foreigners. Several individuals were injured in subsequent fistfights.

JEWISH CEMETERY DESECRATED AGAIN

By David Kantor

BONN, March 12 (JTA) -- The Jewish cemetery of Kuterdingen-Wankheim, a town near Tübingen, West Germany, was desecrated last month for the third time in a year.

The unknown vandals daubed gravestones with slogans such as "PLO," "Israel must die" and "The wandering Jew."

Officials of this town in the southwest part of the country said that many gravestones had been overturned or otherwise damaged.

The town is offering a 1,000 mark (\$1,710) reward for information leading to the arrest of the vandals. A total of 5,000 marks (\$8,550) has already been spent on cleaning up, and much more will be needed to repair a number of gravestones, town officials said.