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**HERZOG ASKS SHIMON PERES OF LABOR  
TO ATTEMPT TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- President Chaim Herzog assigned Labor Party leader Shimon Peres the task of forming a new government Tuesday night.

He followed the announcement of his choice with an impassioned television plea for electoral reform to change a failing political system that has "no parallel in the democratic world."

"The people are sick and tired of it," he declared.

Peres was summoned to the president's residence at 9 p.m. local time to receive an official letter of appointment.

The two men had a brief private conversation, during which Israel Television microphones picked up Herzog remarking to Peres that "it wasn't an easy matter."

He may have been referring to the choice he had to make between Peres and Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir after the Likud-Labor unity coalition government collapsed under a Knesset no-confidence vote on March 15.

It was the fifth change of government in the seven years since Herzog took the presidential oath. That is not a normal situation for any country and certainly not healthy for a country with Israel's problems, Herzog said in his television address.

Under the law, Peres has 21 days to form a governing coalition and can ask for a 21-day extension if necessary. "I hope he'll end the job before then, in the interests of the state and the nation," the president said.

By law, the president of Israel is politically neutral. The statutes require him to consult with every Knesset faction and individual members who have no party affiliation before assigning his mandate to form a government.

**Concern About Cabinet Vacancies**

In his televised statement, Herzog said, "I asked myself the central question: Who has the best chance to form a government as quickly as possible?"

"It became clear to me during the consultations that Peres has the best and most reasonable chance of winning a Knesset majority," he said.

He made clear that he considers the present situation fraught with danger, especially in view of the glaring vacancies in the caretaker Cabinet.

Ten Cabinet seats have been vacant since March 13, when Prime Minister Shamir fired Peres, prompting resignations from the other Labor ministers.

Herzog pointed out that Israel does not have a defense minister, at a time when the intifada is in its 28th month and terrorist incursions along the northern border continue.

Unemployment has become critical and there is a need for far-reaching economic decisions, Herzog said. But there has been no finance minister since Shamir fired Peres.

"Above all, hundreds of thousands of Jews are knocking at our gates -- and we are involved in internal political struggles. Woe betide us if we miss this historic opportunity," he warned.

He said the fault lay in the political system, which is "bad and diverts the attention of our leaders time and again from the main issues facing us. "This system brings us no honor and distances us from the real challenge and goals of the Jewish, Zionist state," Herzog said.

Herzog recalled that he had urged Shamir "to deal with the phenomenon once and for all" when he took office as prime minister 16 months ago. But "not only has the situation not been put right since then -- it's gotten worse," he said. "The fall of the government last week was proof of that."

He urged all parties to "rise above sectarian interests and promote change of the system as soon as possible."

**Likud And Labor Had 60 Votes Each**

Although the government was brought down last week by a 60-55 vote, Peres and Shamir had each won promises of support from 60 Knesset members when Herzog ended his consultations Tuesday.

Likud was able to argue that all 60 of its supporters were available to participate in a coalition, whereas supporters of Peres included the Communists, a non-Zionist party that would never be invited to join a government.

Labor countered that while all of its 60 backers would vote against a Shamir government, there were several factions in the Shamir camp which would not object to serving under Peres.

Explaining his decision in favor of Peres, Herzog said, "Last week, the Knesset expressed no confidence in a government which advocated a certain political approach. Simple logic dictates, therefore, that a chance be given to another political approach.

"And as is accepted practice in parliamentary democracies," he said, "the party which led the no-confidence (move) should be given the right to present to the Knesset its alternative path and try to win its confidence."

**FOUR ELECTORAL REFORM BILLS  
CLEAR FIRST HURDLE IN KNESSET**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- As Israel's political parties scrambled this week to put together a government, four electoral reform bills that could eliminate the need for coalition-building quietly passed their first hurdle in the Knesset.

Emanating from both left and right wings of the political spectrum, the bills seemed to reflect widespread disillusionment with the system of government that led to the current political crisis.

Each got by its first reading as Labor and Likud politicians vied for a presidential mandate to try to form a new coalition that would replace their ill-fated alliance, which collapsed March 15.

Labor ultimately got the mandate. But in the process, both major parties ardently courted a bloc of religious factions, which most Israelis believe wield political power far out of proportion to their electoral strength.

The reform measures call for the direct election of the prime minister. They would establish a "strong executive power," greatly reducing

the prime minister's reliance on the smaller parties to govern.

But despite an apparent eagerness to reform the system, the success of the new measures is far from assured. The Knesset's archives are, in fact, bulging with failed electoral reform bills, a testament to the power of entrenched groups with a vested interest in the status quo.

The bills that passed first reading Monday face long, arduous deliberations in the Knesset Law Committee and two more readings on the floor.

They were opposed by Justice Minister Dan Meridor, on the grounds that the government is preparing its own electoral bill, which was to be introduced jointly by the two major parties. But that prospect seems dim in the present circumstances.

Nevertheless, the sponsors of the reform measures consider the time ripe for change. They envision a prime ministerial office with powers akin to the U.S. presidency and divorced from coalition politics.

The bills were introduced by Yoash Zidon of the right-wing Tsomet party, Amnon Rubinstein of the left-of-center Shinui, Uriel Lynn of Likud and David Libai of the Labor Party.

## 2 SENATORS AND JEWISH GROUPS ASSAIL STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT ON THE PLO

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, March 20 (JTA) -- U.S. Jewish groups and two senators accused the State Department this week of bending over backward to argue that the Palestine Liberation Organization has faithfully upheld its pledge to renounce terrorism.

"The PLO has adhered to its commitment undertaken in 1988 to renounce terrorism," the department said in a report submitted to Congress on Monday.

The report is the first submitted under a law enacted last year that requires the State Department to update Congress every four months on the PLO's compliance with its December 1988 statement recognizing Israel and renouncing terrorism. It was that change of policy that led to the United States opening a diplomatic dialogue with the PLO.

The report filed Monday is critical of the PLO for various anti-Israel statements made by senior officials since December 1988. But it concludes that "PLO official statements have been generally consistent" with the 1988 commitment.

It calls the PLO a "heterogeneous organization in which constituent groups and individuals often express opinions differing from the consensus of the PLO as an organization."

The report also found that PLO factions, particularly Damascus-based PLO groups, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, were responsible for nine of 30 border or rocket attacks into Israel since December 1988.

The United States is "disappointed that the PLO has not found a more authoritative way to distance or disassociate itself" from the attacks, the report says.

But it adds, "We have no evidence that these actions were authorized by the PLO executive committee or (PLO leader Yasir) Arafat personally."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American

Jewish Organizations, said he was "disappointed" with the 33-page report, calling it "not a balanced and objective account" of PLO performance in the past year.

Hoenlein argued that the report will "erode confidence" in Israel toward building "foundations for peace."

## 'Too Kind' To Arab Nations

At a Capitol Hill news conference, two senators who sponsored the reporting requirement criticized a one-time-only section that discusses the positions of Arab nations toward peace with Israel.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) charged that the section "went out of its way to be too kind to the Arab nations."

"The reality is that only Egypt has recognized the State of Israel" and established relations with it, he said.

Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) said, "I am concerned that the peace process has become a dialogue to establish a Palestinian state as opposed to a process which will bring true peace to the Middle East."

Mack said U.S. policy has "shifted too much toward the issue of a Palestinian state" and away from gaining Arab acceptance of Israel.

The report does ask the PLO to amend its national covenant, which calls for the "elimination of Zionism in Palestine." But it points out that "at present, the PLO is willing to consider revising" it "only in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement."

The report also says that the State Department does "not believe that the PLO was responsible for starting the intifada," but rather supports its continuation "as a means of pressuring Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967."

## CARTER URGES U.S. TO CONDUCT DIRECT TALKS WITH YASIR ARAFAT

By Gil Sedan and David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- Former President Jimmy Carter urged the Bush administration Tuesday to hold direct talks with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat and other Palestinian leaders.

The PLO could play "a major constructive or destructive role" in Middle East peacemaking, Carter said at news conference winding up his three-day visit to Israel.

The United States has been maintaining a low-level dialogue with the PLO since December 1988, but has had no contact with Arafat.

Carter said he shared the Bush administration's opposition to Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as East Jerusalem. He warned that settling immigrants from the Soviet Union in those areas would arouse opposition in the United States and the Soviet Union.

Carter observed, after meeting with outgoing Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, that the peace process is now "in abeyance, pending the formation of a new government in Israel."

The former U.S. president raised hackles here by his strong criticism of the human rights situation in the administered territories. He was especially critical of administrative arrests, deploring the incarceration of thousands of Palestinians for up to a year without charge or trial.

Officials who met with Carter on Tuesday said they got the impression he was misinformed.

## 17-YEAR REFUSENIK VLADIMIR RAIZ ARRIVES IN ISRAEL ON PRIVATE JET

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 20 (JTA) -- Vladimir Raiz, who first applied to leave the Soviet Union 17 years ago, arrived here Monday afternoon.

He was brought to Israel by Canadian real estate magnate Albert Reichmann, who flew his private plane to the Soviet capital to bring Raiz home.

Raiz received a tumultuous welcome from Jewish emigres who had studied with him in the Soviet Union and who are, like Raiz, ba'alci teshuvah, or returnees to religion.

His wife, Karmela, who has been in the United States for several months on a tourist visa, arrived here Tuesday afternoon, accompanied by the couple's 12-year-old son, Moshe. Vladimir came with their 7-year-old son, Shaul. The family will live in Jerusalem.

Vladimir and Moshe were accompanied by Rabbi Ronald Greenwald of Monsey, N.Y., who had helped facilitate continued interest in the Raiz family case.

Vladimir told the crowd of singing and dancing well-wishers at the airport that he intended to go first to the Western Wall to pray and then to visit with Rabbi Eliezer Schach in Bnei Brak.

The Raizes plan to be back in the United States next week to thank people who worked on their case, including President Bush, according to the Greater New York Coalition for Soviet Jews.

They are expected to be present for the April 1 Solidarity Sunday Rally of Response on behalf of Soviet Jews, to be held in New York.

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

## CONSERVATIVE WIN IN EAST GERMANY MAY SET BACK OPENING TOWARD ISRAEL

By David Kantor

EAST BERLIN, March 20 (JTA) -- Recent efforts by the East Berlin regime to improve relations with Israel appear to have been frozen in their tracks by the sweeping conservative victory in East Germany's first democratic elections Sunday.

According to East and West German diplomats interviewed here, the conservative alliance is beholden to West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl for its 48 percent electoral share and is unlikely to displease him or his coalition partner, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

While Bonn maintains full diplomatic relations with Israel, it would view any move by East Germany in that direction as an attempt to consolidate its probably short-lived status as an independent state.

The conservative alliance is a strong advocate of swift unification of the two Germanys. It proposes that East Germany simply join the Federal Republic.

"This is certainly not the time for a government here to seek new foreign policy initiatives, let alone establish diplomatic relations promptly" with Israel, an East German diplomat said here.

"However, I believe the dialogue with Israel will continue. We do want to base our relations on a new footing," he added.

Unlike Bonn, East Germany adopted a strong anti-Israel posture more than 20 years ago and

has assisted Israel's Arab adversaries diplomatically, politically and even militarily.

It is only a few weeks since East Germany abandoned its training program for Palestinian guerrillas, which included instruction in terrorist tactics and sabotage.

Now there exists a broad consensus among East German parties that the attitude toward Israel should change.

But given the apparent imminence of unification, it is likely that before any change occurs, the East Germans will simply adopt Bonn's policy as their own.

The probable demise of East Germany as a sovereign state comes, ironically, at a time when the country has been willing for the first time ever to express its contrition for the Nazi era.

Officials from Israel and the German Democratic Republic recently held two rounds of talks in Copenhagen, discussing East Germany's readiness to pay reparations to Jewish victims of Nazism and the establishment of relations between the GDR and Israel.

## EXTREMIST REPUBLICAN PARTY RECEIVES SETBACK IN BAVARIA

By David Kantor

BONN, March 20 (JTA) -- The extreme right-wing Republican Party polled about 7 percent of the popular vote in the local elections in Bavaria on Sunday.

But its fortunes are on the wane, many political observers say, because it no longer has a monopoly on the most potent of political issues, the unification of the two Germanys.

The Munich-based Republicans, led by former Waffen SS officer Franz Schoenhuber, has been described as the most effective of the reputedly neo-Nazi parties that have cropped up in the Federal Republic over the years.

The party is losing steam, according to Finance Minister Theo Weigel, a leader of the Christian Social Union, Bavaria's equivalent of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservative Christian Democratic Union.

Weigel noted that the Republican take at the polls on Sunday stood in sharp contrast to the 14 percent it scored in Bavaria in the national elections for delegates to the Parliament of Europe last year. At that time, there was a relatively low voter turnout.

Even where the Republicans did well they suffered setbacks.

In Halfing, a small town near Rosenheim in the southeastern part of the country, near the Austrian border, the Republican candidate was elected mayor, but then promptly announced his resignation from the party.

Weigel attributed the voters' rebuff of the Republicans to the responsible campaigning by the democratic parties, especially in the East German elections, which were also held Sunday.

The Republicans were barred from the East German ballot. Although they were among the first to push for unification, they can no longer capitalize on that theme, which has the support of every major party.

The Republicans are not likely to disappear, however. Although the final tally is not yet in, they appear to have won seats in the city councils of Munich, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Augsburg, Ingolstadt and Landshut.

In Furth and Rosenheim, they drew a record 11 percent of the popular vote.

## PARLIAMENT VOTES FOR WAR CRIMES BILL, ALLOWING TRIALS OF NAZIS IN BRITAIN

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, March 20 (JTA) -- Parliament voted 273-60 Monday to enact the War Crimes Bill, which permits the prosecution of alleged Nazi war criminals in British courts.

While the 213-vote margin in favor of the measure was overwhelming, opponents argued doggedly against it.

The strongest objections came from the former Conservative prime minister, Edward Heath, who charged that the bill catered to "demands for revenge" that "appeal to the lowest instincts in people."

With passage of the measure, Britain joined two Commonwealth nations -- Canada and Australia -- where the courts may try accused war criminals for crimes committed on foreign soil.

Heath used arguments made familiar during debate in those countries. He maintained that publicity surrounding the investigations would preclude a fair trial.

"As soon as investigations start, the gutter press will run the story on their front pages," he said. He also charged the proceedings would be "show trials" and "immensely damaging to this country."

Home Secretary David Waddington interrupted to point out that alleged Nazis who moved to Britain knew they would be under British jurisdiction and that they had committed what were crimes under the laws of every civilized nation.

When Heath cried, "Even that is debatable," he drew shouts of disbelief from his colleagues in the chamber.

Earlier, the House of Commons listened in silence to Alex Carlile, a Liberal Democrat member of Parliament, who described the murder in Poland of his grandfather, two uncles, an aunt and several cousins.

"We are talking in this debate about criminal cruelty on a scale which, at the time, was unimaginable," Carlile said, adding that there are still "people in this country who cannot comprehend the scale of what occurred."

Roy Hattersley of Labor, the shadow home secretary, observed that Jews all over the world are expressing fear about renewed anti-Semitism, especially in central Europe.

"It would be disastrous if today we gave the slightest impression that we have forgotten what happened 50 years ago," he said.

## FRENCH COURT CONVICTS REVISIONIST FOR PROPAGANDA ON GAS CHAMBERS

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, March 20 (JTA) -- The Versailles Court of Appeals decided Monday that spreading leaflets claiming that "gas chambers have never existed" constitutes incitement to racial hatred.

It sentenced Alain Guionnet, 36, a self-styled revisionist historian, to one month in jail.

But the case attracted little attention and was barely mentioned in the news media.

Guionnet, who is unemployed, was arrested last year for affixing revisionist posters to cars and public buildings.

A lower court acquitted him in December 1989, on grounds that his acts did not constitute racial incitement. It explained that he never blamed the Jewish community or held Jews re-

sponsible for spreading what he called the "legend of the death camps."

The prosecution appealed, however, arguing that this type of fallacious propaganda was a symptom of rabid anti-Semitic incitement.

Guionnet will serve his time in a local jail next summer, unless the Supreme Court overrules the verdict.

## OPINION DIFFERS ON BONN'S CONTROL OF U.S.-HELD NAZI DOCUMENT CENTER

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, March 20 (JTA) -- The Bonn government is discussing with Washington the possibility of taking control over the Berlin Documents Center, the largest repository of Nazi identification cards and other documents in existence, but the move is being fought by the Justice Department and the World Jewish Congress.

At the same time, two other Jewish groups involved in the search for Nazi war criminals were more sanguine about the matter, saying complete photocopies of original documents and goodwill by any future German government could ensure the proper use of the files.

A West German delegation visited the State Department on March 1 and 2 to discuss the prospects for transferring the center, which has been under U.S. control since 1945 and is now under the jurisdiction of the State Department.

A reliable source on Capitol Hill said, however, that West Germany's campaign was really half-hearted and had been instigated by the Green Party, a left-wing environmental political group that does not represent mainstream German government thinking.

The World Jewish Congress has vowed to fight any attempt by Bonn to gain control of the center, and has begun a campaign of contacting members of Congress to try to forestall the move.

## OSI Also Reported Unhappy

A source at the Office of Special Investigations was also unhappy about the possible change of control. The OSI has used the files to prosecute Nazi war criminals living in this country.

Doug Tillett, a spokesman for the criminal division of the Justice Department, said, "We are happy with the status quo and just a little anxious" about transferring control to Germany.

But according to Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, change of control to German hands might allow Germans who want to know more about the Nazis the ability to see firsthand the documents that substantiate Nazi history.

Cooper, who called the transfer of control to Germany "inevitable," said "the environment in Germany has changed psychologically and politically, and the pressure to move forward is probably much more powerful. What hasn't changed and what we won't allow to change is the commitment" to deal honestly with the Nazi period.

He said the Wiesenthal Center would expect the West Germans "to make a commitment to maintain the integrity of the files," including full copies of all files to remain in Washington.

The process has, in fact, begun, and is expected to be completed in about 1994.

A positive approach also came from Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

"As long as the Americans keep a set, I am not so much concerned about conditions," he said.