

VOL. 68 - 73rd YEAR
FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 1990
NO. 69

REBBE'S INFLUENCE BLAMED FOR LABOR'S FAILURE TO FORM GOVERNING COALITION

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, April 12 (JTA) -- Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the 88-year-old spiritual leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, has come under fire from American Jewish organizational leaders and the Israeli press for allegedly meddling in internal Israeli politics.

But Schneerson's spokesman, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, claimed the Brooklyn-based Hasidic rebbe is "apolitical" and was not directly responsible for the refusal Wednesday of two ultra-Orthodox Knesset members to join fellow members of the Agudat Yisrael party in forming a coalition with the Labor Party.

The two defectors from Agudat Yisrael, Avraham Verdiger and Eliezer Mizrahi, effectively blocked Labor Party leader Shimon Peres from forming a government by denying him the votes he needed in order to win a parliamentary motion of confidence.

Krinsky denied reports that Schneerson had telephoned his disciples and instructed them to take such action.

"They did not speak to the rebbe," Krinsky said flatly.

Instead, Krinsky said that Verdiger had called the Lubavitch headquarters in Brooklyn, asking if the rebbe still opposed ceding territory in a peace agreement with the Arabs -- which the Labor Party strongly advocates.

Not One Inch

Schneerson's decades-long position has been that Israel should not surrender "one inch" of territory. The Lubavitcher rebbe's stance is at odds not only with the Labor Party but with some of the most revered Torah sages in Israel, who uphold the primacy of saving lives over territorial sovereignty.

But Lubavitch contends that Israel must retain the administered territories in order to save lives. Though he has never seen the Jewish state himself, Schneerson preaches that he takes this position to preserve the physical well-being of the Jews who live there.

After receiving confirmation that Schneerson's position remains the same, Verdiger and Mizrahi could "deduce that the rebbe would be opposed to a party that had on its agenda the surrender of territories," Krinsky conceded.

But he maintained that the two Knesset members chose on their own not to join with Labor.

Whether his influence was direct or indirect, Schneerson's pronouncements and their effect on Israeli politics has concerned many in Israel and the United States alike.

An angry editorial in the mass-circulation Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot stated that Israel's fate now appears to lie "in the hands of a rabbi who lives in Brooklyn, who has never set foot in Israel."

This sentiment was echoed in comments Thursday by several American Jewish leaders.

"Rabbi Schneerson, sitting in his study on (Brooklyn's) Eastern Parkway, decided that Agudat Yisrael would not participate in the proposed

government," Rabbi Alexander Schindler said in a statement.

Schindler, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said, "One is forced to ask: How can a religious leader in good conscience reject the idea of moving toward peace when the young men in his own movement are exempted from military service so they can pursue their yeshiva studies?"

Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, refused to criticize the Lubavitcher rebbe directly. But he called it "reprehensible for anyone in the Diaspora to interfere with the Israeli political system."

Message Sent To Federations

An official of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America also expressed concern.

"While we hold Rabbi Schneerson in the highest regard, we are concerned by American Jewish involvement in Israeli internal affairs," said William Rapfogel, executive director of the Orthodox Union's Institute of Public Affairs.

In Israel, one group charged the Lubavitch movement with being a "covert political movement."

Professor Hillel Shuval, chairman of Hemdat, the Coalition for Freedom of Religion in Israel, said he had "indisputable proof" that Chabad uses its organization, funds and influence to "affect the outcome of political elections in Israel and critical votes in the Knesset."

In a cable he sent to leaders of the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, the mainstream Jewish fund-raising and philanthropic agencies in the United States, Shuval urged that they withhold funds from Lubavitch.

But Frank Strauss, a CJF spokesman, said that "very few" federations give money to Lubavitch, and in those cases, only to Lubavitch houses in their individual communities.

"Certainly no money goes to Eastern Parkway," Strauss said.

(JTA correspondents David Landau and Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

RABIN BACKING PERES FOR THE MOMENT, BUT READY TO ASSUME PARTY LEADERSHIP

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 12 (JTA) -- Yitzhak Rabin, the Labor Party's second in command, pledged anew Thursday to support Prime Minister-designate Shimon Peres' continuing efforts to form a coalition government.

But the popular former defense minister primed himself to take over the party's leadership should Peres fail again.

Peres suffered a humiliating defeat in the Knesset on Wednesday, when he was deprived at the last moment of the vote he needed to win a parliamentary motion of confidence in the Labor-led coalition he had painstakingly assembled.

His 11th-hour setback came at the hands of two Agudat Yisrael Knesset members who balked at the coalition deal their ultra-Orthodox party had made with Labor a week earlier.

Both men acted in defiance of Agudah's

Council of Torah Sages, the party's supreme authority, which had given its blessings to an alliance with Labor.

One of the men, Avraham Verdiger, resigned his Knesset seat rather than cast his vote with Labor. The other, Eliezer Mizrahi, quit the party and pledged allegiance to Likud, giving it a 60-59 edge.

As a result, Peres called off the vote and petitioned President Chaim Herzog for 15 more days to pursue his coalition-making efforts. His request was granted in a move that angered Likud politicians.

Likud's leader, caretaker Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, confidently predicted Thursday that Peres would fail. If he is correct, Herzog will have little choice but to call on Likud to form a new government.

Shamir did little to discourage Likud zealots from denouncing Herzog and demanding his resignation for alleged partisan bias.

Likud Courts Agudah Members

Rabin, who rarely issues formal statements, reiterated his support for Peres apparently to scotch speculation that he was considering a bid for the Labor Party leadership now.

But he said the party might have to consider other actions at a future time "to prevent the formation of a narrow-based Likud-led government."

According to political observers, Rabin's assertion that there is a "national need" to prevent a narrow rightist regime is an indication that he is prepared to seek the Labor leadership eventually. They say he would agree to head a unity government if Peres fails, rather than allow the premiership to fall again into Shamir's hands.

Meanwhile, Agudat Yisrael, badly shaken by its role in preventing the formation of a government Wednesday, has come under scrutiny from the major political parties.

Likud is desperately trying to persuade Verdiger to withdraw his Knesset resignation and cast his lot with the Likud bloc. But the former Knesset member told reporters he was "at peace" with himself and his decision.

His replacement on the Agudah list, David Halachmi, has said he will obey the party's sages and support the deal with Labor. But that would only restore the 60-60 Knesset tie, since Peres needs all five Agudah votes to break it.

HIGH COURT ORDERS LARGE PARTIES TO DISCLOSE COALITION DEAL DETAILS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 12 (JTA) -- The High Court of Justice has acted to lift the curtain of secrecy from the political deal-making that takes place in the process of forming governing coalitions.

It issued a show-cause order Thursday instructing the major political parties to publicly disclose the details of their agreements with the smaller parties.

The order was requested by four citizen groups, which suspect the secrecy surrounding the agreements may conceal illegalities.

It was addressed specifically to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, leader of the Likud bloc, and Labor Party leader Shimon Peres.

The court also demanded disclosure from the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party and six individual Knesset members.

The individual Knesset members under court order include five who quit Likud last month to form a separate Knesset faction.

Four of them returned to the fold this week after making deals with Shamir. The fifth, Avraham Sharir, shifted to Labor after reaching an agreement with Peres.

The sixth Knesset member served with a disclosure order is Charlie Biton, who was ousted from the Communist Party Knesset faction for refusing to obey a rotation rule. He now sits as an independent member.

CHRISTIAN CLERGY JOIN PALESTINIANS IN RALLY AGAINST OLD-CITY SETTLERS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 12 (JTA) -- Interreligious strife erupted in the Old City on the eve of Easter, further aggravating tension over the settlement of Jews in East Jerusalem.

Police fired tear gas to disperse some 200 Christian clergymen, who were joined by Palestinian activists in a demonstration Thursday.

The march was to protest the occupation by 150 Jews on Wednesday of a large housing complex in the heart of the Christian Quarter known as St. John's Hospice.

It was the first time Jews have moved into the Christian Quarter of the walled city since Israel captured it from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Their new home is located near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, traditional site of Jesus' crucifixion and a major tourist attraction, particularly at Easter time.

The Jewish settlers consist of about 20 families and 60 single men, many of them students at the Ateret Cohanim and Mercaz Harav yeshivot.

A spokesman, David Ben-Ami, said they were simply restoring a Jewish presence to property that belonged to Jews forced to flee the Arab uprisings in 1929 and 1936.

The settlers claim they purchased the property, consisting of four joined buildings with 50 rooms, from the legal owners.

But the Greek Orthodox Church insists the buildings belong to the church and the sellers, Armenian brothers, were only tenants who had no right to sell.

"I feel indignation and condemnation and I denounce all these acts," the ranking Greek Orthodox clergyman, Patriarch Diodoros, told reporters.

"This is the most sacred week for Christians, and the Jews have desecrated our holy festivals," he added.

Later on Thursday, Jerusalem Police Chief Arye Bibi met with the Greek and Latin patriarchs to try to calm tempers. He said the dispute would be settled in court, not by religious rioting.

But Jewish-Christian relations have suffered. Diodoros was reported to have sustained slight injuries when he fell during the police melee. One of his aides was allegedly clubbed by police officers.

Jews claim the protest was actually led by prominent Palestinian nationalists, Faisal Hussein, Dr. Sari Nusseibeh and Sheikh Muhammad al-Jamal, deputy head of the Higher Islamic Council.

JTA will not publish the Daily News Bulletin on Tuesday, April 17, the eighth day of Passover.

EAST GERMANY'S MEA CULPA WELCOMED BY JEWISH GROUPS

NEW YORK, April 12 (JTA) -- Representatives of American and world Jewry were quick to respond Thursday to the East German parliament's unequivocal apology to the Jewish people for their suffering in the Nazi era, and its acceptance of responsibility as an heir to the Third Reich.

A statement, filled with contrition and self-reproach, was delivered at the televised inaugural session of the new Volkskammer, where Christian Democrat Lothar de Maiziere, elected just a month ago, was installed as prime minister.

"East Germany's first freely elected parliament admits joint responsibility on behalf of the people for the humiliation, expulsion and murder of Jewish women, men and children," said the statement, read by Sabine Bergmann-Pohl, speaker and acting head of state in the new regime.

"We feel sad and ashamed. We ask the Jews of the world to forgive us."

Apologies were extended as well to Israel, with whom the parliament expressed hope of soon establishing diplomatic relations.

The statement was a total rejection of the position held for 40 years by East Germany's Stalinist rulers, that the German Democratic Government bore no responsibility for Nazi atrocities because it was founded on anti-fascism.

"There's widespread recognition that this is an important historical statement turning over from the past and looking to the future," U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in Washington.

Dr. Israel Miller, president of the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, hailed East Berlin's statement.

'Providing Just Compensation'

"We are heartened by the readiness of the GDR parliament to follow its sentiments with deeds by providing just compensation for material losses," he said.

"We look forward to early negotiations by the government of the GDR with the Claims Conference as the recognized designated representative of the organized world Jewish community and with the state of Israel," Miller said.

World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman called the GDR's statement "the first step in the foundation of a new relationship between the Jewish people and the whole of the German people."

Benjamin Meed, president of the American Federation/Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, observed that "what is really important is what effect the statement will have in preventing any repetition of the Holocaust in the future."

B'nai B'rith International President Seymour Reich welcomed the statement as a "belated recognition of historical fact," and "a hopeful sign that the planned reunification of Germany will be a positive development."

In a footnote from Prague, abbots of the Roman Catholic Church issued a statement expressing regret for the church's failure to act against the Nazi genocide against the Jews during World War II.

The statement voiced remorse that church leaders did not "raise our voices" to assist the rescue of Jews, adding, "Our help to those persecuted was not helpful enough."

(JTA correspondent Josef Klansky in Prague contributed to this report.)

HUNGARIAN HEAD PLEDGES NO FUNCTION FOR ANTI-SEMITES IN HIS GOVERNMENT

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, April 12 (JTA) -- Jozsef Antall, the newly elected prime minister of Hungary, reassured leaders of Jewish groups that members of his Hungarian Democratic Forum who have made anti-Semitic statements will not have a leading role in the new government.

Antall, son of a Righteous Gentile who has been honored by Yad Vashem, sought the meeting himself during the campaign in order to assuage growing qualms over manifestations of anti-Semitism during Hungary's election campaign.

Jews in Hungary have become increasingly edgy since the appearance of anti-Semitic flyers, campaign statements and graffiti that was smeared on posters of Jewish candidates, most of whom belonged to the Alliance of Free Democrats, which lost at the polls.

Anti-Semitic flyers were sent to the offices of MIOK, the Central Board of Hungarian Jews, and to the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary.

At the Feb. 2 meeting here at the office of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Antall told six leaders of the conference and the World Jewish Congress that "there would be no repetition" of statements construed as anti-Semitic, recalled Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the conference.

"Antall sought to reassure us that those individuals who have made references of an anti-Semitic nature do not play a leading role in the party," said Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director.

Spoke Out Against Minorities

Antall referred specifically to statements made by Istvan Czurko, a fellow member of the center-right party, who spoke out in a radio broadcast against minorities.

Czurko did not say the word "Jew," although it was so construed, said Leslie Keller, a Hungarian Jewish emigre who is head of three international Jewish groups helping the Jewish community of Hungary.

"Before the elections, we hoped that the new government would be led by Mr. Antall and that he would be able to control the anti-Semitism," Keller said.

Czurko lost in his own drive to represent his district, but will nevertheless sit in Parliament because he is a leader of the Democratic Forum's party list.

Likewise, Rabbi Tomas Raj, a candidate of the Alliance of Free Democrats, was defeated but will sit in Parliament as a leader of that party.

The Alliance, which has many Jews among its leaders, was targeted during the campaign with Stars of David or swastikas on campaign posters.

The Jews as a group will also have a representative in Parliament because of a new measure allowing for representation for eight minority groups.

Conversely, Hungary's chief rabbi, Alfred Schonher, will no longer hold the seat he held for the past several years as a religious leader.

"The Jews hope that the new government will be loyal to the Jews, in the same way that the Jews are loyal to the country," Keller said.

Antall's father, who was Hungary's deputy interior minister during World War II, saved not only Hungarian Jews but Polish Jews who had fled into Hungary.

**STATE DEPARTMENT MUM ON REPORT
DIVULGING IRAQ'S BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS**

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 12 (JTA) -- The State Department expressed concern Thursday that some countries were seeking to develop biological weapons, but refused to confirm a report that Iraq was among them.

State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher said he could not comment on a report by NBC News on Wednesday night that Iraq had developed biological weapons capable of spreading death and disease to all the cities in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East.

NBC said Iraq was using Western European equipment to make weapons from anthrax, typhoid and cholera bacteria, and viruses, which could be carried by missiles.

"The United States is very concerned about the spread of this particularly horrible form of warfare in the world," Boucher said.

He said the United States believes some nations are trying to develop biological weapons capability. "We cannot identify these nations further for intelligence reasons," he said.

"But regardless of what countries are involved, we call upon all nations to comply with existing international agreements banning these weapons."

These agreements not only ban such weapons, Boucher added, "but they also ban development, production, stockpiling, possession or transfer of biological weapons. Iraq is a signatory to these agreements."

The NBC report came just as British customs officials announced that they seized what they believed to be the 130-foot barrel of a "super gun" as it was being loaded on a vessel bound for Iraq.

Ability To Fire Biological Weapons

If Iraq were to build such a gun, it would be able to fire nuclear or chemical shells at Israel and presumably also shells carrying deadly biological material.

The seized gun barrel was contained in eight crates.

Its British manufacturer, Sheffield Forge-master, insisted that it was not a gun barrel, but parts of a pipeline for an Iraqi petro-chemical project.

On March 28, British customs agents seized crates at Heathrow Airport carrying what they said were U.S.-made trigger mechanisms for nuclear weapons.

While denying Iraq was attempting to make a nuclear weapon, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein warned that half of Israel would be destroyed if Israel tries to repeat its 1981 air strike, which destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor.

He said Iraq doesn't need nuclear weapons, since it has binary chemicals, or poison gas. "I swear to God, we will let our fire eat half of Israel if it tries to wage anything against Iraq," he warned.

Meanwhile, it was reported from Mosul, Iraq, on Thursday that Hussein told a Senate delegation -- headed by Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) -- that Iraq would dismantle its weapons of mass destruction if Israel would do the same.

Boucher stressed that the United States by itself or together with other countries controls the sale or transfer to Iraq of "sensitive dual use military items."

**FRENCH RESPONSE TO HOSTAGE RELEASE
CRITICIZED AS FAWNING OVER GADHAFI**

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, April 12 (JTA) -- French President Francois Mitterrand has come under fire at home and abroad for praising the Libyan role in securing the release of three hostages held by a radical Palestinian terrorist group.

The hostages, held by Abu Nidal's notorious Fatah Revolutionary Council, were released Tuesday, ostensibly after Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi intervened on their behalf.

Coinciding with the release, Mitterrand heaped effusive praise on Gadhafi and lifted an embargo on three Libyan jets grounded in France for the past four years.

Mitterrand personally thanked Gadhafi for his help. And Foreign Minister Roland Dumas paid tribute in Parliament to the Libyan leader's "noble and humanitarian gesture."

Opposition leaders promptly condemned what many described as the French administration's humiliating fawning on Gadhafi, who in all probability, they said, originally instigated the kidnappings.

In Britain and Italy, media commentary resorted to such words as "nauseating" and "hypocrisy."

Only one of the freed hostages is a French national: Jacqueline Valente, 32. Released with her was her Belgian lover, Ferdinand Houtekins, 43, and their 2-year-old daughter, Sophie-Liberte, born during the couple's 30 months in captivity.

Valente's two older children were released to her estranged husband in 1988. Five other Belgian hostages, including Houtekins' brother, remain prisoners.

Valente's two children by her marriage to a Frenchman and the Belgian Houtekins family were hijacked at sea in November 1987.

The hostages were accused of spying for Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, though none of them is Jewish or known to have Jewish or Israeli contacts.

The latest gesture has gotten Gadhafi's jets back. The three French-built Mirage fighters flew to France for repairs in 1986 and were seized after the European Community imposed sanctions on Libya for abetting international terrorism.

**HAVEL WELCOMES ARAFAT, TO VISIT ISRAEL
IN DISPLAY OF BALANCED MIDEAST POLICY**

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, April 12 (JTA) -- Vaclav Havel, the playwright president of Czechoslovakia, has written himself an evenhanded role in the Middle East conflict.

He will arrive in Jerusalem later this month as the first Czech chief of state to visit Israel, in order to receive an honorary degree from the Hebrew University.

Meanwhile, Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat arrived here Thursday for a two-day state visit, part of Havel's Middle East balancing scenario.

Arafat arrived to a comparatively cool public reception, probably because of his cordial relationship with the discredited former Communist regime.

Arafat nevertheless congratulated representatives of the Czech and Slovak political parties on their victories over dictatorship. He stressed the need for a peaceful solution in the Middle East.