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U.S. DENOUNCED FOR SPONSORING VISIT OF ANTI-SEMITIC RUSSIAN NATIONALISTS
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 18 (JTA) -- Soviet Jewry advocacy groups are protesting the U.S. government's sponsorship of a visit by a group of nationalist Soviet writers and editors, some of whom are openly anti-Semitic.

Martin Wenick, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, and Micah Naftalin, national director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, rejected the State Department's explanation that the eight Soviet nationalists were brought to the United States as a means of educating them about American democracy.

The State Department said Tuesday it knew that three of the eight persons on the monthlong tour, sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency, had been accused of anti-Semitism.

But department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler stressed that "bringing them here does not signal that we approve or sanction their views." She said the government invited them "to teach them how the United States works as a multiethnic society, based on individual freedom."

Wenick of the National Conference rejected this explanation. "Do we reward the Ku Klux Klan with government funds to enable them to express themselves?" he asked.

He said there are "loads of people" in the Soviet Union who do not understand Soviet society, including Russian nationals, who could have been brought on the tour.

But he said it was "outrageous that taxpayers' monies are expended" for persons engaged in disseminating anti-Semitism either personally or through journals for which they work.

"They are perfectly free to come to the United States on their own money," he added.

'Such Contemptible People'

Jess Hordes, director of the Washington office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, also expressed outrage, saying that the government could have found others with a variety of views who were not anti-Semitic.

And Sholom Comay, president of the American Jewish Committee, issued a statement saying that the U.S. government "ought not to be in the business of sponsoring even one anti-Semitic visitor to the U.S., much less providing a group with broad exposure in the country and public platforms.

Those who suggest that "exposure to American democracy could magically transform these Soviet visitors into born-again pluralists" show a "profound lack of understanding of who several of these individuals are and the views they have long represented," he added.

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) told the House of Representatives on Wednesday that after reading about the anti-Semitic writers, he canceled a meeting he had been scheduled to have with them.

He said it "boggles the mind" that the USIA would spend \$60,000 to take "such contemptible people" around the United States.

"I believe we ought to kick these so-called visitors right on the rear end, right back to Russia," he said.

Both Wenick and Naftalin also questioned the Soviet visitors' appearance here Tuesday at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. The institute is part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, which receives partial funding from the federal government.

They not only objected to their being hosted by a prestigious institution that receives government funds but to the scheduled subject, "Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in the Soviet Union."

Wenick and Naftalin pointed out that all the visitors are Russian nationalists and do not represent the cultural diversity of the Soviet Union.

The three charged with anti-Semitism are Viktor Likhonov, an author; Oleg Mikhailov, a scholar at the World Literary Institute in Moscow; and Stanislav Kunayev, chief editor of the conservative magazine Nash Sovremennik.

They were among 74 persons who signed a letter published in Literaturnaya Rossiya that accused Zionists of causing anti-Semitism in order to make it easier for Jews to immigrate to Israel or the United States.

Against Zionists, Not Jews

Ernst Safonov, editor of the publication, who is also on the tour, told The Washington Post that the letter "is not directed against the Jews," but Zionists.

Kunayev, writing in his own publication last June, called the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" not the forgery of Czarist Russia that it is, but a real document, written by "an anti-human intelligence and an almost unnatural satanic will."

Naftalin said the three anti-Semites represent a "very powerful" movement in the Soviet Union, whose leaders include the anti-Semitic writer Valentin Rasputin, appointed last month to President Mikhail Gorbachev's new presidential advisory council.

Rasputin was invited to join the U.S. tour but did not come, Naftalin said.

He said the Soviet writers are being presented to the American public "without disclosing who they really are and what they stand for."

At the Kennan Institute, for instance, they were introduced by their resumes, and there was no mention that they "represent the intellectual center of the anti-Semitic, Russian nationalist, neo-Nazi movement," Naftalin said.

He said editors and writers are also speaking in Pittsburgh, San Francisco, New York and other cities, where they may be received by audiences that will not know what they stand for.

JEWES OCCUPYING CHRISTIAN QUARTER WILL STAY, DESPITE COURT RULING
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 18 (JTA) -- Jewish settlers who stirred religious strife when they moved into a building in the Old City's Christian Quarter last week have no plans to leave, despite an eviction order issued Tuesday by Jerusalem District Court Judge Ruth Orr.

The settlers, 150 Orthodox Jews, have appealed to the High Court of Justice and hope it will decide in their favor.

But they promised Wednesday to obey the eviction order if the High Court upholds it.

However, they intend to ignore the order during hearings to establish their tenancy rights in the building, which is owned by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Police practice is to let civilian authorities implement eviction orders. According to the settlers' attorney, that means they have 21 days to comply voluntarily.

They moved into the building, known as St. John's Hospice, on April 11, during the holy days preceding Easter.

That triggered a protest demonstration by Christians and was criticized by many Israelis and Jews abroad as ill-timed and deliberately provocative.

The settlers claim they are "guests" of a Panamanian corporation they say leased the building for 10 years for \$3.5 million.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate said the lessor, Armenian businessman Mardiros Matosian, had no legal standing, as he is himself a tenant.

The settlers admit they have an agenda to expand the Jewish presence in the Old City, including a building they claim was owned by Jews who were forced to flee Arab riots in the 1930s.

But they will abide by the law if their appeal to the High Court fails.

"Under no circumstances will you see here sights of policemen dragging people out," said David Ben-Ami, one of the settlers' leaders.

"I hope there will be no eviction, but the law of the State of Israel is the law of us all, and there is no logic in us acting against ourselves," he said.

YOUNG INTIFADA ACTIVIST KILLED DURING INTENSE RIOTING IN GAZA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 18 (JTA) -- A young intifada activist from Khan Yunis, in the southern end of the Gaza Strip, was killed Wednesday as Israeli security forces battled Palestinians, in the worst rioting to sweep the Gaza Strip in recent weeks.

The violence erupted Tuesday when the Israel Defense Force lifted a blanket curfew intended to prevent disturbances.

The occasion was the second anniversary of the slaying of Abu Jihad, the Palestine Liberation Organization's then command who was gunned down at his home in Tunisia, presumably by Israeli commandos.

According to Palestinian sources, 39 Gaza Strip residents, seven of them children, were wounded by live ammunition or rubber bullets Tuesday.

The IDF could not confirm the figure because many of the wounded left the hospital after initial treatment.

Military authorities agreed, however, that there has been a serious escalation of violence in the territory in recent days.

It peaked Wednesday with the fatal wounding of Ghazi Abed Rabbo Abu-Mustapha, 20, described by authorities as one of the leaders of the intifada in the Khan Yunis refugee camp.

He was shot when IDF soldiers opened fire to disperse demonstrators in the camp and died later at a local hospital.

Abu-Mustapha had been wounded in the leg by the IDF six months earlier.

Part of the recent strife in the Gaza Strip is attributable to a sudden spurt of Jewish settle-

ment activity taken while the Likud caretaker government is in charge.

Knesset member Yossi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement has accused the settlers and their allies in the government of taking advantage of the situation.

A Rush To Set Up Settlements

Defense establishment sources confirmed they intend to speed up the process, so that settlements approved by the old government are established before a new government takes office.

Settler activists are rushing, therefore, to set up Dugit in the northern part of the Gaza Strip.

It was tentatively approved as long ago as 1982, but given the green light only since the national unity government was toppled on March 15.

Dugit, which consists for the moment only of tents, will be the 16th settlement in the Gaza Strip since it was captured from Egypt in 1967.

The first settlement, Netzer Hazani, was established in 1977. A total of 5,000 Jews now live in the territory. Nine of their settlements are involved in agriculture. The others are only bedroom communities for Jews who work in Israel.

Dugit, which is planned for a population of 250, will earn its income mainly from fishing and the provision of beach services.

PRIVATELY FINANCED FLIGHT BRINGS 190 SOVIET IMMIGRANTS TO ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 18 (JTA) -- Private donations financed a flight that landed 190 Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel on Wednesday, and hopes were expressed that it will set a trend.

Normally, the immigrants' air passage is paid for by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The new arrivals were funded by donations to the Swiss-based International Fund for Medical Education and Development, which raised \$250,000 for the purpose.

Shlomo Hillel, chairman of Keren Hayesod, described the operation as an example of the civilized world's willingness to support a humanitarian cause.

Keren Hayesod is the worldwide philanthropy which raises funds for Israel and other Jewish needs, except in the United States, where the philanthropic agency is the United Jewish Appeal.

Hillel predicted that private contributions soon would be financing more Soviet immigrant flights.

ISRAEL EXPECTING 3,000 ARGENTINE OLIM

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 18 (JTA) -- Israel expects 3,000 immigrants from Argentina this year, compared to 1,930 last year, according to Uri Gordon, head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department.

He said 820 immigrants arrived from Argentina in the first quarter of 1990 and another 300 families have registered to immigrate.

According to Gordon, the main reason for the influx of immigrants from that country is that country's painful financial crisis.

Gordon said his department has special projects designed to absorb olim from South America. About 1,000 were located last year in settlements in Galilee, he said.

COURT'S RULING IN PEYOTE CASE SEEN AS DANGEROUS TO RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 18 (JTA) -- The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to allow the prosecution of American Indians who use illegal drugs in religious rituals is "outrageous" and "troubling," the American Jewish Congress said Wednesday.

Mark Pelavin, the group's Washington representative, said the 6-3 ruling Tuesday shows a "very troubling lack of concern for minority religions."

The court said that two members of an American Indian church could not be exempted from an Oregon law that makes it a crime to possess or use peyote, even though they used it only for sacramental purposes.

AJCongress had filed a brief in support of the Indians, who had been denied unemployment benefits by Oregon after they were fired from their jobs for using peyote.

"I think the decision is a very troubling omen of how the court will treat the rights of religious minorities," Pelavin said. "It suggests that the First Amendment free-exercise clause offers no protection in cases such as this."

The Oregon Supreme Court had ruled that the First Amendment's protection of the "free exercise" of religion required that the two men be exempted from the Oregon law.

But Justice Antonin Scalia, who wrote the Supreme Court's majority decision, said such an exemption was not required by the First Amendment, although the state legislature could provide such an exemption. Federal law and laws in 23 states exempt the sacramental use of peyote from criminal penalties.

"We have never held that an individual's religious beliefs excuse him from compliance with an otherwise valid law prohibiting conduct that the state is free to regulate," Scalia said.

State Law Vs. Religious Belief

But Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who voted with the majority, nevertheless disagreed with Scalia's opinion, which she called "incompatible with our nation's fundamental commitment to individual religious liberty."

O'Connor argued in a separate opinion that "if the First Amendment is to have any vitality, it ought not to be construed to cover only the extreme and hypothetical situation in which a state directly targets a religious practice."

Dissenting from the court's majority opinion were Justices Harry Blackmun, William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall.

Pelavin said Scalia's opinion misunderstands the role of the free-exercise clause in the Constitution. "This is a case which poses a conflict between a state law and religious belief," he said.

"What's troubling is the court's suggestion that in such a conflict, the First Amendment is all but inapplicable, and the only recourse available is to the legislature."

The court's ruling in the case, Employment Division vs. Smith, was the second time in recent years that American Indians have lost a religious rights case in the Supreme Court, Pelavin said.

AJCongress also supported the Indians in Lying vs. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association. In that case, the court ruled 5-3 that the government could build a road through a part of a national forest in California held sacred by three Indian tribes.

BRITISH ARMS EXPERT DOUBTS IRAQ IS WORKING ON A 'SUPER-CANNON'

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, April 18 (JTA) -- A British arms expert has cast doubt on allegations that steel tubing seized by customs officials were intended by Iraq for a "super-cannon" that could hurl chemical or nuclear projectiles at Israel.

The giant sections of reinforced steel tubes were confiscated at Middlesbrough in northeast England before they could be loaded aboard a ship for Iraq.

The British manufacturers and Iraqi authorities insisted they were for an oil pipeline. But some experts said they were the smooth-bore barrels of a huge artillery piece.

Henry Dodds of the authoritative Jane's Defense Weekly says that although a long-range artillery project is feasible, he is not 100 percent certain that is what the steel tubes are for.

According to Dodds, their most likely use would be to place a satellite into orbit at low cost.

He said he doubted long-range artillery was intended, because a shell fired to a distance of 300 miles would have to reach very high altitudes.

Given such variables as air temperature, humidity and the Earth's rotation, it is not likely to be very accurate, Dodds explained.

U.K. MAY MOVE AGAINST ARAB BOYCOTT

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, April 18 (JTA) -- Britain may be prepared to outlaw compliance with the Arab League boycott of Israel if its European Community partners initiate such action, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd has indicated.

Hurd reminded Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a letter that "like the United States, we do not support the boycott." He added, "Should there be an E.C. initiative to legislate, then the U.K. would be ready to join."

Martin Savitt, chairman of the Anti-Boycott Coordination Committee of the British-Israel Chamber of Commerce, called Hurd's letter the "first-ever positive reaction" from the Foreign Office on the boycott issue.

2 GERMANY'S JOINTLY FIGHT EXTREMISTS

By David Kantor

WEST BERLIN, April 18 (JTA) -- East and West Germany are planning joint measures to curb the activities of right-wing extremists in both countries, even before unification takes place.

Plans for cooperation were announced here Tuesday evening, shortly before the interior ministers of the two German states were to hold their first official meeting in Bonn. They are the ministers responsible for the surveillance of extremist groups considered dangerous to the democratic system.

A number of such groups, including neo-Nazi organizations active in West Germany, recently have sprung up in East Germany.

The Republican Party, strongest of the extreme right-wing factions in the Federal Republic, planned to campaign in East Germany, but was banned from participating in the March 18 parliamentary elections.

The Republicans, led by a former Waffen SS officer, are estimated to command about 3 percent of the popular vote in West Germany.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**LABOR'S RACE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT
HINGES ONCE AGAIN ON A SINGLE RABBI**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 18 (JTA) -- While Shimon Peres struggles against a fast-approaching deadline to form a Labor-led government and Yitzhak Shamir and his Likud bloc do everything possible to prevent him, the governance of the nation may depend on the decisions of one man.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the 70-year-old the spiritual leader of the ultra-Orthodox, largely Sephardic Shas party, seems at this juncture to hold in his hands the political futures of both the prime minister-designate and the acting prime minister, as well as their respective parties.

The arithmetic is such that Shas' five Knesset votes are crucial for both sides.

Neither can attain a majority to form a government without them. And Shas, for its part, must decide either to support one of them or, by withholding support, force both into a national unity government again.

That possibility has been raised amid talk in Labor circles of replacing Peres with the party's more widely accepted No. 2 leader, former Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

In a new Labor-Likud alliance, the popular Rabin would rotate the office of prime minister with Shamir, just as Peres and Shamir did after the inconclusive 1984 elections.

But such developments are presently in the realm of conjecture.

Rabbi Yosef continues to be ardently courted by both sides. He met with Shamir on Wednesday morning and was to hold a meeting Friday with Peres and Rabin.

Yosef has undertaken to convene Shas' Council of Torah Sages well before Peres' mandate expires on April 26, in order to guide them to a choice between conflicting ideologies.

Conflicting Pressures Within Shas

The stakes are high for Shas as well. If it overplays its hand, Likud and Labor could in disgust agree to dissolve the hung Knesset and call new elections.

In that event, Shas cannot be sure of repeating its meteoric success as a brand new party in 1984, when it won four seats, or the consolidation of 1988, when it picked up two more -- one of which was lost last year when Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz defected from the party.

Therefore, as Rabbi Yosef ponders his role in deciding the nation's future, the eminent Sephardic halachic expert finds himself prey to conflicting pressures.

Strongest among them, perhaps, is the still-resounding echo of his own televised address to the nation after the Shamir government fell March 15 in a no-confidence vote.

"I must be able to stand in judgment before God for innocent blood that might be spilled," Yosef declared with passion.

He explained that for him, peace and the prevention of needless bloodshed were the overriding moral and religious considerations. He had therefore demanded from Shamir a favorable reply to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's proposals for launching an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

When Shamir refused such a commitment, Yosef instructed Shas' Knesset faction to absent itself from the confidence vote, thereby ensuring the downfall of the Likud-led government.

It was not a surprise shift by the former Sephardic chief rabbi, who is also president of the Rabbinical Court of Appeals. For years, he has written and argued that the halachic principle of "pikuach nefesh," that there is no higher moral deed than saving lives, applies to the land-for-peace equation in the Middle East.

Persuasion By Manifesto

It was to reawaken that determination in Rabbi Yosef's heart that Labor this week launched an energetic effort of persuasion.

A long list of dovish Sephardic leaders, including academics and local religious council chairmen, signed their names to manifestoes published in the press urging Yosef to "support a peace government under Shimon Peres."

Delegations of dignitaries from Israel and abroad were encouraged by Labor to call on the rabbi in his book-lined study in Jerusalem's Talbiyah section to offer the same advice.

But there are strong countervailing pressures, some generated by Likud activists, but others by the Shas rank and file, who have always seen themselves part of the "national camp" led by the Likud.

Yet Shas politicians are divided as to the strength of this grass-roots sentiment.

In particular, Yosef's high-profile visit to Cairo last year as the guest of President Hosni Mubarak is thought in some Shas quarters to have deeply impressed much of the rank and file.

But there is pressure from another quarter, which Yosef will have to overcome if he is to line up behind Peres and Labor.

Rabbi Eliezer Schach, the 92-year-old spiritual leader of the two-seat Degel HaTorah party, has taken a wholly unexpected pro-Likud stance during this coalition crisis. He instructed his party to conclude an agreement with Shamir and to have no truck with Labor.

Schach has much credibility and influence in Shas, which he actively helped found in 1984 as a first Orthodox breakaway from Agudat Yisrael.

Moreover, as the eldest sage in the "haredi" yeshiva world, his moral writ runs far beyond his own Ponevezh yeshiva and his town, Bnei Brak.

A Split With Degel?

Beneath the surface, there has been growing discomfort in Yosef's close circle at the dogmatic position taken by Schach, who, if anything, has been even more dovish than Yosef over the years on the territorial issue.

Indeed, in his own controversial speech to the Degel convention in Tel Aviv last month, Schach reiterated his consistent belief that "territory does not matter."

Nevertheless, he ruled that Labor, with its "pig-breeding, rabbit-eating kibbutzim," is inherently more anti-religious than the Likud. The implication was that his political support would go unwaveringly to Shamir.

Yosef, a few days later, made a point of noting during a talk to his followers that Shamir "eats treife food no less than anyone else."

Sensitive political observers saw that as the first sign that the alliance between these two very different rabbinical authorities -- the Lithuanian-born "gaon" (Talmudic genius) and the Sephardic "posek" (halachic authority) -- might be coming unstuck.

Peres doubtless is praying this week that it will rupture, while Shamir and the Likud are desperately trying to see that it does not.