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CONSERVATIVE RABBIS URGE INCLUSION OF LESBIANS AND GAYS IN SYNAGOGUES

By Elena Neuman

KIAMESHA LAKE, N.Y., May 16 (JTA) -- Conservative rabbis on Tuesday overwhelmingly endorsed full civil equality for lesbians and gay men, and said such Jews should be welcome in synagogues.

But in an amendment to a resolution adopted here, they also pointed out that traditional Judaism affirms and recommends a heterosexual lifestyle.

"As rabbis, we acknowledge the needs of gays and lesbian Jews to feel welcome in our respective congregations. We also want to reiterate our view that sexual preference is no basis for the denial of civil equality for any citizen," said Rabbi Mark Loeb, chairman of the resolutions committee of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Over 600 members of the Rabbinical Assembly, Conservative Judaism's 1,300-member central body of rabbis, met at the Concord Hotel this week to see old classmates, play some tennis and discuss a variety of issues facing Conservative rabbis in the 1990s.

The statement on gay and lesbian Jews was one of about 20 resolutions addressed at the gathering. It was the first time the issue was addressed by the assembly and was thought to be one of the most controversial resolutions on the floor.

Although the Reform movement has welcomed gay synagogues into its fold and broached the question of admitting openly gay men and lesbians into its seminary and rabbinical body, the Conservative movement has kept these issues decidedly in the closet.

Conservative Judaism claims to represent the largest branch of Judaism in the United States and Canada, with 1.5 million congregational members.

'Full Civil Equality' Urged

"The Reform movement is currently torn by recognition of gay and lesbian rabbis," said Rabbi Ezra Finkelstein of the Syosset Jewish Center on Long Island prior to the vote. "This resolution is the first step toward addressing the issue in the Conservative movement. I'm afraid it could become highly divisive."

Finkelstein said he was uncomfortable with the language of the resolution "welcoming" lesbian and gay Jews "as members in our synagogues."

"I don't want in any way to give legitimacy to it in the religious dimension," he said.

But Rabbi Arnold Turetsky of Temple Israel Center in White Plains, N.Y., disagreed. "It is the acting out of homosexuality that is not kosher," he said. "Impulses, instincts, proclivities and predispositions are not illegal."

While he cannot endorse homosexual relations, Turetsky says that what he doesn't see, he cannot condemn.

A number of members of Temple Israel are gay and, according to Turetsky, they are some of the most active and observant members of the congregation. "They play a vital role in my synagogue," he said.

"The problem of acceptance is more psychological and familial than religious," said Turetsky. "From the religious eye, I see no reason they should not be accepted with open arms in our shuls."

On the whole, members of the Rabbinical Assembly agreed with Turetsky, but only after a special amendment was added to the resolution to clarify that Jewish tradition "favors a heterosexual life."

The resolution supports "full civil equality for gays and lesbians in our national life" and deplores "the violence against gays and lesbians in our society."

It reiterates that homosexuals, like all Jews, "are welcome as members in our congregations" and calls upon the Conservative movement "to increase awareness, understanding and concern for our fellow Jews who are gay and lesbian."

The convention, which ends Thursday, also was debating resolutions on abortion, organ transplants and replacing mid-evening Kabbalat Shabbat services with a sunset service preceding Shabbat dinner.

ARABS DELAY VOTE ON U.N. RESOLUTION, AS U.S. SIGNALS IT WON'T SUPPORT IT

By Allison Kaplan

UNITED NATIONS, May 16 (JTA) -- The Arab nations have decided to wait until after their summit meeting in Iraq to take action on a Security Council resolution condemning Israel for settling Soviet Jews in the administered territories.

The United States, meanwhile, has reportedly signaled it will not vote in favor of even a modified version of the proposed resolution, though it may abstain, allowing the resolution to pass.

The decision to postpone action on the resolution was the result of a series of meetings held over the past several days by envoys of the Arab nations represented here.

The chairman of the Arab group told reporters the Arab envoys here would only reverse their decision and call a vote if they are directly instructed by their governments.

But the Arab ambassadors determined in a meeting late Tuesday that they should "be enlightened with whatever will emerge from the summit," Ambassador Karim al-Shakar of Bahrain said.

The Baghdad summit, which is scheduled to begin May 28, is designed to publicize Arab concern over the thousands of Soviet Jews immigrating to Israel and what their settlement means for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Arabs have been split over whether to call a vote on a draft of a Security Council resolution that strongly declares that the settlement of Jews in the administered territories and East Jerusalem is "illegal" and affirms the Palestinian refugees' right of return.

The United States has said it will veto such language and would only consider withholding its veto from a stripped-down version of the resolution that focused strictly on the settlement issue.

Sources in the Israeli Mission here and in

the American Jewish community reported that the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Thomas Pickering, informed the Arab states late Tuesday that the "limited version" of the resolution would receive a U.S. abstention, not a "yes" vote.

Role Of Jewish Groups Cited

The move occurred after members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations met Tuesday with Pickering to express concern that the United States might vote in favor of the resolution.

A delegation of American Jewish Congress leaders held a similar meeting in Washington late Monday with John Bolton, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs.

U.S. approval of any resolution linking the issue of settlements with Soviet Jewish emigration would have signaled strong displeasure with Israeli policies and drawn strong protest from the Israeli caretaker government.

Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said the U.S. decision not to support the resolution stemmed from recognition that the "true purpose of the Arab move to censure Israel in the U.N. is to halt all immigration to Israel."

A source in the Israeli Mission said that "pressure from the American Jewish community" played a major role in the U.S. decision.

U.S., FIGHTING PLO'S PLACE IN THE WHO, OPPOSES EXPANDED RED CRESCENT ROLE

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, May 16 (JTA) -- Having won the battle over Palestine Liberation Organization membership in the World Health Organization, the United States is now fighting a resolution that would give the Palestinian Red Crescent Society a primary role in administering the health needs of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Once more, the United States is threatening to withdraw its funding from the U.N. agency.

The latest controversy comes over a draft resolution introduced at the current World Health Assembly, which would give the Red Crescent such a role in the administered territories.

Israel does not permit the Red Crescent to operate in the territories, claiming it is a PLO front. The United States concurs.

A statement issued by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva expressed alarm over the "dangerous politicization" of the agency, which it says the resolution represents.

"It takes up even more of the assembly's time on a single, narrow issue, at the expense of meeting health crises everywhere in the world," the Americans said.

The resolution favoring the Red Crescent was introduced by Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Syria and Zimbabwe.

Debate on it will begin Thursday. Most European countries are expected to abstain in the eventual voting. The United States is vigorously opposed to the draft.

"The language and content of the resolution are patently political; its passage would do nothing to improve health conditions for the Arabs," the American statement said.

It described the Red Crescent Society as "an arm of the PLO which does not operate in the territories," and therefore it "makes no sense" to treat it as a health care agency there.

The United States pointed out in that connection that Israel "will only continue its cooperation with the WHO program in the occupied territories through recognized, non-governmental organizations."

U.S. influence was felt when the World Health Assembly voted shortly after its opening session May 7 to postpone indefinitely consideration of an application by the PLO for admittance to the organization as the "sovereign state of Palestine."

A resolution by the U.S. Congress mandates the withdrawal of U.S. support for WHO if the PLO is admitted. American funding accounts for more than a quarter of the agency's annual budget.

But the failure of the PLO resolution for the second consecutive year also reflected a desire by most of the 167 member nations to address urgent global health needs and not get bogged down in political controversy.

Questioned Wednesday by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a spokesman at the U.S. Mission declined to say what U.S. reaction would be if the Red Crescent resolution were adopted.

There is a strong possibility it will announce withdrawal of the \$4 million currently pledged to the WHO program in the territories.

JERUSALEM MAYOR TELLS ARCHBISHOP HE'S DEEPLY OFFENDED BY HIS COLUMN

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, May 16 (JTA) -- The mayor of Jerusalem has told Cardinal John O'Connor of New York that he is "deeply personally offended" by the "one-sidedness" of a column published by the prominent Catholic prelate last week in the newspaper Catholic New York.

O'Connor's column denounced the move of 150 Orthodox Jews into the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem as "obscene" and speculated on whether a "conspiracy" exists against Christians in Israel.

Mayor Teddy Kollek wrote a letter to O'Connor on Sunday, saying he was "upset by your column, which appeared after our meeting in New York, when I clarified not only my opinion of this stupid and reprehensible incident but also the factual situation, assuring you that it is not in any way part of an anti-Christian policy of the Israeli government."

Kollek has spoken out against the presence of the Orthodox Jews, who on April 11 moved into St. John's Hospice, a 72-room complex near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher that they had subleased.

All but 20 of the Orthodox Jews have left the complex, under the order of a court that is considering an appeal of the lease's legality from the Greek Orthodox Church, the hospice's owner.

Kollek said O'Connor is fully aware of "the Israeli government's long record of respecting the rights of the Christian community in Jerusalem," but "made no mention of it" in the column.

The archbishop's decision "to subscribe to this conspiracy syndrome," he said, will "surely not help in our efforts to reinstate the understanding and harmony" that have marked relations between Jews and Christians in Jerusalem.

He added that there is "no question that the action of the Jewish settlers was political, but I feel more and more strongly that politics is equally the motive behind a good deal of the reaction."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**SHAMIR HAS NARROW COALITION IN PLACE, BUT MAY BE STALLING FOR UNITY OPTION**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) -- Prime Minister-designate Yitzhak Shamir will present a narrow-based coalition government to the Knesset early next week, according to circles within his Likud bloc.

But other political sources believe Shamir is deliberately dragging out coalition negotiations in the hope of eventually forming a national unity government with a Labor Party headed by Yitzhak Rabin.

Although Shamir is said to already have the votes to form a Likud-led coalition with the ultra-Orthodox and right-wing parties, he is expected nevertheless to ask President Chaim Herzog on Friday for a 21-day extension of his mandate to form a government, as allowed by law.

A new Likud-Labor unity coalition would become feasible if Rabin succeeds in his drive to replace Shimon Peres as leader of the Labor Party. The former defense minister has made clear he would favor his party's entry into a unity government on more flexible terms than demanded by Peres.

A showdown over the party leadership is expected when the Labor Party Central Committee is formally presented with a study commission's report on Labor's poor showing in the 1988 Knesset elections. Leaks from the commission say the blame will be heaped on Peres and his aides, who controlled the campaign machinery.

The report was to be presented to the Central Committee on Thursday, but the panel asked Wednesday for a postponement, saying it was not ready to present its findings.

A Razor-Thin Majority

Meanwhile, Labor and Social Affairs Minister Ronni Milo, a member of the Likud negotiating team, told reporters Wednesday that he expected agreements with all the prospective coalition partners would be signed before the weekend, so that Shamir would have no trouble presenting his government to the Knesset next week.

Milo conceded that the new government would win the confidence vote by only a razor-thin, 61-vote majority of the legislative body.

But he said Likud still hoped the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party would void its agreement with Labor and join the coalition at a later stage. That would give the new government a more comfortable majority of 65 votes.

Milo spoke after a negotiating session at the Prime Minister's Office between Likud and the ultra-Orthodox Shas. He admitted there were "problems to be ironed out," but maintained they were surmountable.

Shas Knesset member Shlomo Dayan said his party wanted the chairmanship of the powerful Knesset Finance Committee.

More important, it is demanding a free vote on foreign policy issues "if the government were to deviate from its own policy platform regarding the peace process."

Shas' spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, is dovish on peace issues and uncomfortable with the proposed right-of-center government.

Yosef, Israel's former Sephardic chief rabbi, is determined to ensure a modicum of commitment from the prime minister to pursue the peace process sincerely and vigorously.

Nevertheless, Shas sources stressed there is no "ultimatum" and that their party's basic allegiance to Shamir remains firm.

Some Labor die-hards however, were keeping alive the hope that Shamir's coalition would founder on Yosef's policy stand.

Independent political observers have suggested a more complex scenario that could lead to a unity government. They stressed the rapidly escalating crisis between Rabin and Peres.

Peres Camp Playing For Time

For practical reasons, the Peres camp is playing for time. His supporters say they do not fear a fight and are prepared to accept Rabin's proposal that the issue be settled in a series of "primaries" that would allow the party's 300,000-odd rank-and-file members to decide who the leader should be.

Peres' people contend, however, that the present membership lists are inaccurate and that there must therefore be a new membership drive before the contest can take place. That would take many months, and Rabin is not prepared to wait.

Peres' supporters presumably believe his chances will improve with time.

At present, though, he is taking much of the blame for the party's failure to put together a Labor-led coalition last month. Peres was forced to relinquish his mandate on April 26.

Rabin is said to want to drive home his attack as soon as possible, to capitalize on the current widespread disaffection with the party chairman.

Observers speculate that by stalling in his coalition negotiations, Shamir is signaling the Rabin camp that if it triumphs now, the unity option can yet be revived.

A coalition negotiator for one of the small parties told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on Wednesday that at a lengthy but not especially productive session with a Likud team, headed by Shamir, the prime minister seemed "to have all the time in the world."

Said the informant, "You cannot help wondering whether he still has unity in the back of his mind."

THREE SOLDIERS KILLED IN BUS ACCIDENT, ANOTHER VICTIM IN CRASH NEAR JERUSALEM
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 16 (JTA) -- Road accidents continued to take a grisly toll of lives in Israel. There were four victims Wednesday.

Three were Israel Defense Force soldiers, who were killed early Wednesday morning when their chartered bus plunged off a culvert into a dry river bed in the Negev, south of Beersheba.

Another 56 soldiers were injured, three seriously, and the civilian bus driver was also hurt.

A fourth fatality occurred at noon Wednesday, when one man was killed and 13 people were injured in a three-way accident on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway.

Police said the smashup occurred when a minibus, a loaded truck and an Egged bus tried to pass each other at the dangerous Motza junction, where traffic signs forbid such maneuvers.

The ill-fated soldiers were traveling from military bases in the Negev to Beersheba to take the entrance examination for Officers Training School. The injured were rushed to Soroka Hospital in Beersheba.

**TEACHER BEATEN FOR DISCUSSING
DESECRATION OF JEWISH CEMETERY**

PARIS, May 16 (JTA) -- A teacher was beaten up by intruders in her home Monday, after receiving two anonymous telephone calls denouncing her for discussing the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras in her class.

Christiane Guiard, 44, who teaches history and geography to 15-year-olds in Royan, near the western coast of France, was beaten and threatened for having "introduced politics in school."

On Monday morning, two masked men broke into her apartment, badly beat her and called her a "dirty Jew" and "dirty Arab."

All of France was aroused by the brutal violation of the cemetery in Carpentras, a town of less than 30,000 in southern France.

During the night of May 10, vandals overturned 34 headstones and exhumed and mutilated the corpse of a recently buried 81-year-old man.

Prime Minister Michel Rocard announced in Parliament on Wednesday that 60 additional investigators have been assigned to the case.

The assault on the cemetery has spurred French Jews to inquire about immigration to Israel. The Jewish Agency branch here said it had received more than 2,000 inquiries in the past five days, compared to the normal 50 a week.

**WEST GERMAN EXTREME RIGHT SUFFERS
AT THE POLLS IN REGIONAL ELECTIONS**

By David Kantor

BONN, May 16 (JTA) -- West Germany's extreme right-wing political parties suffered major defeats in Sunday's elections in North Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony, West Germany's most heavily populated states, which account for about 40 percent of the national electorate.

The Republican Party, hitherto the most successful of the far-right factions, took a severe drubbing, as did the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party and various fringe groups of their ilk.

Pundits attribute the setback for the right to mounting popular concern over the unification process with East Germany, which has become the cause celebre of German rightists.

After the initial euphoria of Nov. 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall was demolished, voters began to realize that a swift unification process could bring hardship in the form of higher taxes and higher prices.

Some 19 million voters cast ballots in the two states. Parties needed 5 percent of the popular vote to be eligible for a seat in a state legislature. The Republicans scored 1.8 percent of the total vote in North Rhine-Westphalia and 1.5 percent in Lower Saxony.

Only last summer, they won just under 8 percent of the national vote for delegates to the Parliament of Europe, the legislative body of the European Community, based in Strasbourg, France.

The Munich-based party is led by former Waffen SS officer Franz Schoenhuber, who once described West Germany's small Jewish community as "the fifth occupation power," after the United States, Soviet Union, Britain and France.

The Republicans were ousted from the local parliament in the Recklinghausen district, after failing to attain the 5 percent minimum. In the last elections there, they polled 10 percent.

The National Democrats, whose membership includes many former Nazi party members, got just 0.2 percent of the vote in Sunday's elections.

**NEW ZEALAND RECEIVES EVIDENCE
WAR CRIMINALS ARE IN ITS MIDST**

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, May 16 (JTA) -- New Zealand confirmed Wednesday that it has received a list of eight Nazi war criminals who may have come to the country after World War II.

"If there are war criminals in New Zealand, there will be no hole deep enough for them to hide in," External Relations Minister Mike Moore told Parliament when the allegations were raised Tuesday.

Moore said he would be meeting with Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer to discuss the best way to deal with the problem.

The list was compiled by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center and submitted to New Zealand's ambassador to the United Nations, Dame Ann Hercus.

It includes a former police chief in Lithuania accused of killing several hundred Jews in 1941. Other suspects came from Latvia and Yugoslavia.

In Los Angeles, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center, said the center was "buoyed" hearing that New Zealand's external relations minister "announced that an official inquiry into this issue will be set up as early as next Monday."

A New Zealand magazine, *The Listener*, augmented the California center's list with claims that a Yugoslav living in New Zealand committed war crimes in Latvia and that a Latvian now living in a city on New Zealand's North Island participated in the murder of Jewish civilians.

Reports in New Zealand claim the United States has offered to help bring to trial persons who committed crimes against humanity. In any event, New Zealand has been forced to confront the war criminals issue from which it long thought it was immune.

It is premature to predict what action the government in Wellington will take, but pressure to follow Australia's example is expected to be great.

Australia is planning the trial of a 73-year-old resident of Adelaide, Ivan Polyukhovich, alleged to have murdered 24 people and to have been implicated in the murders of 850 others.

He will be the first person tried under Australia's amended war crimes legislation.

It will be one of the most expensive prosecutions in Australian history, costing the taxpayers an estimated \$6 million, it was revealed in the Australian Senate.

BEGIN IN HOSPITAL, REPORTED 'STABLE'

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) -- Former Prime Minister Menachem Begin was hospitalized Wednesday after complaining that he felt ill.

A senior physician at Sha'are Zedek Hospital said Begin's condition was "stable" and probably not related to past heart attacks he has suffered.

Begin has lived in virtual seclusion since he suddenly resigned from office in the fall of 1983.

The 77-year-old Begin was admitted to the geriatric section of the hospital, which is nearest to his Jerusalem home.

The hospital's deputy medical director, Motti Lifschitz, told reporters, "Mr. Begin felt bad this morning, and his doctors examined him and decided he should be admitted to the hospital for tests and supervision."