

**JEWS JAILED IN SYRIA LAUNCH
UNPRECEDENTED HUNGER STRIKE**

By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, June 11 (JTA) -- Two Jewish brothers in Syria, detained without charges since 1987, have begun a hunger strike to protest their sentencing to six-and-a-half years in prison.

Jewish organizations, including the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews and the Canadian Jewish Congress National Task Force on Syrian Jews, are urging Jewish communities and others to stage protests against the prison sentences and the secret trial that preceded them.

According to Amnesty International, a human rights group, the closed trial was held March 5, apparently on charges of espionage or treason. The trial reportedly began in the fall of 1990, and was adjourned several times, Amnesty reported.

According to a 1990 human rights report on Syria issued by another human rights group, Middle East Watch, Eli and Selim Swed were originally detained for violating emigration and travel restrictions.

The Sweds, who are pharmacists, were also accused of "making contact with the enemy," which means having traveled to Israel.

After their arrest in the fall of 1987, the brothers were held incommunicado for two years. Their families were allowed to visit them in the 'Adra Civil Prison near Damascus starting in October 1989, according to Amnesty International.

The estimated 4,000 Jews in Syria live under harsh conditions, with little chance of emigrating.

"No other community in Syria faces such heavy surveillance and none is made to feel so completely powerless in the face of the authorities," Middle East Watch wrote in its report.

Although the U.S. State Department last year issued a statement that the Syrian government would take a "more flexible approach" to the issue of family reunification and Syrian Jews, human rights monitors say little has changed.

The Jewish groups noted that Congress is considering legislation to bar future assistance to Syria "until such time as the Syrian government permits emigration for all its citizens."

Syria does not currently receive U.S. aid.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**ISRAEL BRACING FOR U.S. REACTION
TO SHAMIR'S LETTER OF REJECTION**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- Israeli officials are waiting in trepidation for U.S. reaction to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's rejection of President Bush's appeal for flexibility on procedural obstacles to a peace conference.

Whatever solace they might have gained from the unruffled public responses at the White House and State Department so far was disrupted by a veiled hint from Bush linking future U.S. aid for Israel to noticeable progress on the peace front.

Observers here said Israel cannot expect to emerge unscathed after Shamir rejected two proposals made by Bush and threw in a new condition of his own.

The president dropped his hint of quid pro

quo at a brief meeting at the White House late last week with a delegation of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

He seemed to indicate that he would favor making U.S. government loan guarantees to help Israel absorb new immigrants conditional on advancing the peace process.

According to some accounts of the president's remarks, he referred specifically to Jewish settlements in the administered territories.

They have become a major cause of friction between Washington and Jerusalem as the administration tries strenuously to bring Arabs to the negotiating table with Israel while the Israelis plant new houses and mobile homes for Jewish settlers almost daily at new sites in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Erosion Of Capitol Hill Support

The president's comment was especially unnerving for Israelis because of evidence on Capitol Hill that this sort of linkage could find unprecedented broad support among legislators, including many friendly to Israel.

Pro-Israel lobbyists who have been preparing a vigorous campaign on behalf of Israel's expected request for \$10 billion in absorption loan guarantees this fall could face difficult questions about Jerusalem's stand on settlements and the peace process.

The vexing settlement issue surfaced again early this week when it became clear that the United States had proposed -- and Israel had rejected -- a deal in which Israel would suspend new settlement building in return for a formal move by key Arab states to end their state of belligerency with Israel.

It is the continuing state of war, Israel claims, that is the fundamental cause of the Middle East conflict.

According to some reports, the deal proposed by Bush would have included an end to, or at least a mitigation of, the 43-year Arab trade boycott of Israel.

But the Israelis said no.

In a June 6 letter to Bush, Shamir also rejected the president's proposals on two procedural issues: U.N. involvement in the peace conference and whether the conference would adjourn or reconvene once direct talks began.

Choosing Palestinian Delegates

Bush suggested that the United Nations be allowed to send an observer to the peace conference and that it reconvene periodically for progress reports on the bilateral negotiations, with the approval of all participants.

But Shamir insisted on no U.N. role and that the conference limit itself to a ceremonial opening for bilateral talks between Israel and its various Arab adversaries and then dissolve beyond recall.

Finally, Shamir insisted on what would amount to Israeli veto power over the composition of the Palestinian negotiating team.

In Washington, State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher said pointedly Tuesday that "Palestinians must choose those who will represent them in negotiations."

Those Palestinians presumably would be part

of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. King Hussein of Jordan indicated this week his readiness to join the peace process.

Another fear haunting the Israelis is that the United States and Soviet Union might go ahead and issue joint invitations to all parties to attend a peace conference despite the absence of agreement on its form or nature.

A decision could be made when Bush meets Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev at their upcoming summit meeting, now expected to take place in late July.

The Bush administration so far has used measured words to describe the Shamir letter. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Monday that the administration does not want to characterize it as a "rejection," because "it's not entirely clear" what Israel's position is.

Israel's stance -- and that of the Bush administration -- was expected to be clarified Thursday morning during a meeting in Washington between Secretary of State James Baker and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

Observers in Israel predicted Levy would hear some harsh words from his "friend Jim," as he is fond of calling the secretary.

But a leading Jewish insider in New York doubted that the meeting would be confrontational. He predicted Baker would use Levy as a "channel" to convey to Jerusalem the U.S. frustrations over the stalled peace process.

The State Department had said early last week that Levy would be welcome to visit when he came to the United States to address the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in New York.

Bush and Baker, and their counterparts in a dozen European chanceries and foreign ministries, seem to regard the ambitious Israeli foreign minister as a promising political prospect in the long term and an important influence for moderation in the present Israeli power structure.

Possible Invitation From Egypt

But just how influential he is in Jerusalem remains to be seen. Sources close to Shamir have persisted in recent days to stress to reporters that Levy is held in low esteem by the prime minister.

It was no accident, they pointed out, that Shamir sent his letter to Bush while Levy was heading home from a visit to Paris. Shamir appeared to be flaunting the fact that Israel's foreign minister had no input in a crucial communication to Israel's most important ally.

But Levy also is being courted by Egypt. Its ambassador to Israel, Mohammed Basiouny, hinted Tuesday that Levy might be invited to Cairo to meet the new Egyptian foreign minister, Amre Moussa.

If such an invitation were issued, it would underscore the widening gap between Levy and Shamir, whom the Egyptians stolidly refuse to invite.

Basiouny went on Israel Television to assure Israelis that "personal attacks" on Shamir and other Israeli leaders in his country's press are disapproved by his government.

The envoy indicated that Cairo would soon invite a group of Likud Knesset members for an official visit. It would be a counterweight to the visit to Egypt, beginning Wednesday, by a group of dovish Knesset members from the Labor Party.

(JTA correspondent David Friedman in Washington contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

PROMINENT PALESTINIANS URGING END TO THE INTIFADA IN ITS PRESENT FORM By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- For Palestinians who marked the start of the 43rd month of the intifada this week, the burning issue was self-inflicted wounds.

The popular uprising this past year has become less a struggle against the Israeli presence than a murderous Arab civil war.

Hardly a day passes without at least one gangland-style execution of a presumed "traitor" to the Palestinian cause, so designated by the "popular committees" that control the streets.

Lately the category has been enlarged to include such "negative elements" as prostitutes and drug dealers. And many a personal score has been settled under cover of the intifada.

The situation has degenerated to the point where prominent Palestinians have issued public appeals to end the bloodbath.

On Tuesday, a group of Palestinian journalists, university professors, trade unionists and white-collar workers gathered at the Hakawati theater in East Jerusalem for one of the soul-searching sessions that have become a regular event since the Persian Gulf War.

The message that emerged would have been unheard of six months ago. It was basically a call to end the intifada, at least in its familiar form.

Dr. Yussuf Abu-Samra of Bir Zeit University suggested a fundamental change of tactics. Shops closed each afternoon to protest the Israeli administration should be reopened. Strike days should be limited to one or two a month, but schools should remain open. And children under 15 should not be involved in the struggle.

Intifada May Not Last

But the most painful issue was the destructive effect the murders are having on Palestinian society. Abu-Samra called the killers "fascists." If the intifada does not change, he warned, it will not last out its fourth year.

As television cameras from the Israeli and foreign media recorded the scene, speaker after speaker urged the Arab intelligentsia not to abandon the struggle to "the youths in the streets." Some claimed the masked youths terrorizing the population are criminal elements not interested in politics.

It was also charged that some are even provocateurs of the Israeli authorities.

There were many suggestions, including a two-month "freeze" on the activities of the violence-prone popular committees and an end to the frequent strikes and boycotts of Israeli products which hurt Palestinians more than Israelis.

No answers were given at the meeting and no new directives were issued. But the consensus was that the intifada should take a new tack, comprising less violence and more civil protest.

Also proposed were the fostering of local institutions for the benefit of the population and special efforts for the advancement of education.

Basically, the call was for a new leadership to seize the initiative from the streets. But that leadership must be able to enforce its authority. It can expect no help from the Israeli authorities whose attitude is "a plague on both your houses."

Experience has shown that in a contest between the meeting hall and the streets, it is the most brutal elements that take the upper hand.

**HIGH COURT TO CONSIDER
LOCAL HATE CRIMES STATUTE**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 11 (JTA) -- Jewish organizations find no fault with the Supreme Court's decision to consider the constitutionality of a St. Paul, Minn., "hate crimes" ordinance.

The Minnesota Supreme Court had upheld the law against a challenge by a Skinhead convicted of burning a cross on a black family's lawn.

The municipal ordinance bars the display of symbols that arouse "anger, alarm or resentment in others on the basis of race, color, creed or religion or gender."

The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith readily admit that the language of the statute is too subjective, although they argue that burning a cross on private property is inherently illegal.

ADL hopes that the high court affirms the conviction, citing its strong concern that hate crimes laws are "an important part of the arsenal in fighting bigotry and ignorance in our country," said Steven Freeman, ADL legal director.

But AJCommittee and AJCongress have not reached that judgment because they have yet to determine whether or not the court should invoke its so-called "overbreadth doctrine."

That doctrine allows a statute to be struck down if part of it is found to be overly restrictive of free speech.

AJCommittee and AJCongress are concerned that Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who strongly opposes that doctrine, could muster a majority of the court to strike it down. Such an outcome would be a "substantial loss for free speech," said Marc Stern, AJCongress' legal director.

The Supreme Court will not hear the case until the fall.

A Very Awkward Position

Stern said the Jewish community has "always had difficulty" on First Amendment free speech cases in advocating the "punishing of people who commit hate crimes."

"It puts us in a very awkward position," he said.

ADL, AJCommittee and AJCongress agree that the law is flawed, because it appears to bar speech on public property and less inciteful speech. For example, to some Jews it is anti-Semitic to advocate that Israel should become a binational state, Stern said.

The three groups have agreed on a model hate crimes law, drafted by the ADL, that imposes special penalties for acts which violate existing assault or trespass laws and are motivated by race, color, creed, religion or sexual orientation.

While the model law was drafted specifically to pass constitutional muster, actual statutes are not always so carefully drawn.

The St. Paul law, for example, imposes penalties for those who arouse "anger, alarm or resentment" in others because of racial, religious or sexual motives. That language may simply be too subjective.

"There's First Amendment protection for allowing people to make other people angry even if they do so in a fashion that we may find despicable," said Richard Foltin, director of governmental affairs at the AJCommittee.

Of the three organizations, only the ADL has decided to file a friend-of-the-court brief.

**PLO TRANSCRIPT OF SCHWARZKOPF'S
COMMENTS ON WAR EXPOSED AS HOAX**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 11 (JTA) -- Army Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf's spokesman has dismissed as a "hoax" a Palestine Liberation Organization transcript that quotes him as saying U.S. forces fought Iraq "for Israel."

The transcript, which has the four-star general making disparaging comments about Saudi Arabia's role in the war, was obtained by Hassan Abu Rahman, director of the Arab League's Palestine office here.

Rahman forwarded it to the National Association of Arab-Americans, which then provided it to the Hearst news service.

The PLO said the Schwarzkopf interview was conducted by Israeli army radio, but it denies it ever interviewed Schwarzkopf.

Army Maj. Olin Saunders, a spokesman at the U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Fla., told Hearst, "This interview did not take place. It is a hoax."

Ruth Yaron, the Israeli Embassy spokeswoman, called the transcript "a cheap and desperate ploy by unnamed adversaries who would use any measure to drive a wedge between Israel and the United States."

Referring to "anyone who would fabricate something like that and embarrass our friend (Yasir Arafat)," Rahman said that such a person "would not be in a good position."

He added that reports about the purported phony interview have been "blown out of proportion. It does not deserve all this attention."

"I believe that whether they fought for Israel or not, it is a beneficiary of this war," Rahman said. "The Israelis say so. The Americans agree that this war served the interests of Israel."

**POLICE TEST ELECTRONIC DEVICE
THAT WILL ALLOW HOUSE ARREST**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 11 (JTA) -- Israel's Police Ministry confirmed Tuesday that it is testing a device that allows prisoners to serve their time at home instead of behind bars, thereby relieving overcrowded prison conditions, reducing the damaging effects of detention and saving the state money.

The system, used successfully in parts of the United States, consists of a transmitter, attached to the prisoner's leg, that sends radio signals to a telephone recorder in the prisoner's home.

The data are transferred by telephone line to a central computer, allowing authorities to monitor the prisoner's movements.

The device would be used only for prisoners who are not considered a threat to society.

It would allow a prisoner to hold a job outside the home to support a family, as the device enables automatic transferral of data to a central computer, giving information on the prisoner's hours of activity outside the home.

Police and prison authorities who have visited the United States to see the system in use were impressed by its performance.

They said it is much cheaper than ordinary incarceration.

The tests are in the preliminary, and more will be required before a recommendation is made whether or not to adopt the system.

REFORM LOSES OUT TO CHABAD IN BATTLE FOR MOSCOW SYNAGOGUE

By Charles Hoffman

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- The head of the world movement of Reform Judaism has charged that Chabad used underhanded tactics to gain control of a disputed synagogue in Moscow.

"Chabad spread lies and acted irresponsibly throughout this entire affair," said Rabbi Richard Hirsch, executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, which is based here.

"They are trying to keep the Reform movement from being established in the Soviet Union, but they won't succeed," he said.

But in New York, a spokesman for Chabad called the Reform movement's charges "completely unfounded."

"It displays a degree of desperation on their part and reminds me of the saying, 'When your argument gets weak, yell as loud as you can,' " said Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, spokesman for the Lubavitcher Hasidic movement.

The dispute, which was resolved by the Moscow City Council on May 7 in favor of Chabad, involves the former Moscow mansion of Eliezer Poliakov.

Poliakov was a wealthy banker and railroad magnate of the pre-revolutionary era, and his home included a private synagogue. The building was seized before World War I by the czarist government when Poliakov's enterprises failed. In recent years, it was occupied by the All-Union House of Folk Arts.

Late last year, Hineni, the Reform congregation of Moscow, received permission to use the synagogue, which had been turned into a theater. Reform services on Friday nights drew crowds of several hundred people.

Orthodox leaders in Moscow, including Chabad rabbis and the leaders of the Great Synagogue, objected to this arrangement and pressured the city authorities to keep Hineni from using the building.

A Public Scandal

Reform and Orthodox leaders fought over the building for several months in numerous meetings with the Moscow authorities.

Rabbi Hirsch, who visited Moscow in April, charged that Chabad "lied to the authorities. They said we were a political and not a religious movement, and that the Poliakov synagogue had belonged to the Hasidic community."

"Chabad acted irresponsibly," he charged, "by making a public scandal over the building in front of the authorities. This makes the Jewish community look terrible."

But in New York, Krinsky of Chabad said the accusations were "very vituperative, convoluted and distorted." He said the Reform leaders should "really be a little more sophisticated and respectful in their statements."

Krinsky maintained that Poliakov and his family were "very prominent Lubavitch Hasidim who supported the work of Lubavitch in Russia" as far back as the early 1900s.

"Eliezer Poliakov gave the house to Lubavitch Hasidim to pray in before the revolution, in the early 1900s, and they used it constantly for decades," he said. "It was taken away in 1938 or '39, confiscated by the Communists, who changed it into some kind of cultural center."

"The Reform sect never had any Reform temple in Moscow before World War II," he said.

"I have no idea why it was given to Reform or taken by them in the meantime. This has nothing to do with the rightful ownership of the building."

But Hirsch said, "We have a letter from the Jewish Historical Society of Moscow attesting to the fact that the building was never a Hasidic synagogue."

The Moscow City Council resolution says that another building will be provided for the Hineni congregation. Chabad is supposed to bear the costs of renovating the Poliakov building and moving the present occupants to other quarters.

(JTA staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen in New York contributed to this report.)

POLICE HAVE THE GOODS ON SHAS KNESSET MEMBER

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- Police sources indicated Monday that they have sufficient evidence to bring criminal charges against Shas Knesset member Yair Levy.

Although there was no official announcement, the information was passed on to the media after Levy was questioned by detectives for about an hour in Jaffa on Sunday.

Levy is believed to be suspected of handling forged checks in his former capacity as director-general of El Hama'ayan, the educational and cultural institution of the Orthodox Shas party, according to sources. But there has been no police confirmation of that.

The probe of his conduct is part of a broader investigation involving top-ranking Shas officials suspected of mishandling funds. The state attorney recommended last month that charges be brought against Interior Minister Arye Deri, who is alleged to have illegally channeled government funds to favored Shas institutions.

Levy has accused Police Chief Ya'acov Ternier and his top officers of bias and of "leaking" information about the investigation to the press.

The Knesset member recently returned from the United States, where he went in March as a guest of the U.S. Information Agency. When he failed to return home after his official tour, the authorities feared he absconded to avoid questioning about his activities as a Shas official.

But Levy produced evidence that an illness forced him to extend his stay in the United States and seek medical treatment.

ITALIAN JEWISH CEMETERY VANDALIZED

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, June 11 (JTA) -- Evidence of extreme vandalism was recently discovered in an obscure Jewish cemetery in a small village in northern Italy, the Turin newspaper La Stampa reported.

According to the report, a family visiting the tiny overgrown Jewish burial ground in Moncalvo discovered two unearched coffins and the skeletal remains of the deceased, buried over 50 years ago, scattered on the ground.

Police said the crime had occurred at least two months earlier. There were no indications of anti-Semitic intent, but empty beer bottles and cigarette butts littered the enclosure.

"I personally discount anti-Semitism as the motive. Rather, I think it probably was thieves," said Piero Norzi, the cemetery caretaker, who is the only Jew in Moncalvo, a village of 3,500.