

COURT NOMINEE'S VIEWS ON FARRAKHAN ARE UNDER SCRUTINY BY JEWISH GROUPS

NEW YORK, July 14 (JTA) -- Jewish organizational leaders are not entirely satisfied with a statement Judge Clarence Thomas issued last week distancing himself from anti-Semitic remarks made by Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan.

At least some Jewish groups are insisting that Thomas, who is President Bush's nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court, unequivocally repudiate Farrakhan, not simply the anti-Semitism he has been spouting since 1972.

Thomas issued a statement Friday saying he could not "leave standing any suggestion that I am anti-Semitic," and denied that he was.

The uncertainty arose when the Dallas Times Herald disclosed that statements in praise of Farrakhan and his self-help programs for blacks were included in two speeches prepared for delivery by Thomas in the fall of 1983, when he was chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The texts of the two speeches have Thomas describing Farrakhan as "a man I have admired for more than a decade."

Thomas, a black conservative, currently sits on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Bush selected him to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, a liberal who is the first and only black to sit on the nation's highest bench.

In his statement Friday, Thomas said, "I am, and always have been, unalterably and adamantly opposed to anti-Semitism and bigotry of any kind, including by Louis Farrakhan."

He added: "I repudiate the anti-Semitism of Louis Farrakhan or anyone else. While I support the concept of economic self-help, I have never supported or tolerated bigotry of any kind."

May Have 'Disqualified Himself'

But Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, maintained Friday that it is "not possible to separate Farrakhan's message from Farrakhan the messenger."

He expressed "hope that Judge Thomas, who has always eschewed bigotry, will publicly acknowledge the danger in attempting to distinguish elements of a bigot's program which might be considered positive from an overt message of vicious racism and anti-Semitism."

"Failure to acknowledge this only legitimizes Farrakhan's overall message of hate," he added.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, stated flatly Friday that if Judge Thomas expressed admiration for Farrakhan, "he has disqualified himself from service on the Supreme Court."

But Siegman acknowledged that at this point there is no hard evidence whether or not Thomas actually made the remarks attributed to him.

Armstrong Williams, a Washington public relations consultant who was Thomas' spokesman when he headed the EEOC, confirmed in news reports Friday that two speeches prepared for Thomas in 1983 contained a quote by Farrakhan which Thomas could identify with because it promoted black self-help.

Williams said Thomas abandoned the prepared

text in a September 1983 speech to black journalists at the Capital Press Club in Washington, but used it in a speech the following month to the Association of Black MBAs in Atlanta.

Williams pointed out that in 1983, Farrakhan had not yet made his now infamous slur on Judaism as a "dirty religion" or called Adolf Hitler a "wickedly great" man.

Needs To 'Clarify His Views'

The American Jewish Committee appeared to take that into consideration when issuing a statement of concern on the matter Sunday.

"While it is important to remember that Judge Thomas' speeches occurred before Minister Farrakhan's anti-Semitism became common knowledge in 1984, it would be appropriate for the Senate Judiciary Committee to inquire about this matter," said Alfred Moses, the agency's president, and David Harris, executive vice president.

The Senate panel is expected to hold confirmation hearings for Thomas in September.

Other Jewish leaders maintained that the Black Muslim minister's diatribes against Zionism and charges that Jews controlled the American news media had been public knowledge for more than a decade.

In Los Angeles, the Simon Wiesenthal Center released a brief statement Friday saying, "We are much concerned about a Supreme Court nominee who expresses admiration for Louis Farrakhan." It urged Thomas "to immediately clarify his views on Farrakhan in light of Farrakhan's public anti-Semitic statements made subsequent to 1983."

Later, Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Wiesenthal Center, was quoted by The New York Times as saying, "We accept Judge Thomas at his word, that he has never been anti-Semitic and repudiates Louis Farrakhan."

But Siegman of AJCongress said the remarks attributed to Thomas "warrant the closest scrutiny by both the White House and the Senate Judiciary Committee."

He urged Thomas, the White House and the Senate to "respond to these allegations, so that the nation may determine whether in fact Judge Thomas has allied himself with one of the nation's most notorious anti-Semites."

ISRAEL FOLLOWS U.S. MOVE BY LIFTING ITS SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 14 (JTA) -- Following the lead of the United States, Israel on Sunday ended four years of economic and cultural sanctions against South Africa.

The Cabinet voted unanimously at its weekly session to remove the bans imposed in March 1987 to protest the apartheid policies of the South African government.

Israel has coordinated its policy toward South Africa with the United States all along.

President Bush announced July 10 that he was lifting U.S. economic sanctions against South Africa, which Congress imposed in 1986 over Ronald Reagan's veto. Bush said the Pretoria government had complied with the five conditions set by Congress to remove the sanctions.

Israel has not, however, lifted its ban on

military trade with South Africa, also suspended in March 1987. No new contracts were entered after that date.

If military sanctions are not dropped by December, when the last of the old contracts expire, Israel will have no military ties whatsoever with South Africa.

Economists hope Israeli exports to South Africa will rise again after declining sharply in recent years.

They amounted to \$164 million in 1989, dropped to \$96 million in 1990 and were only \$18 million in the first three months of this year.

ISRAELI PEACE ACTIVIST NATHAN DETAINED UPON RETURN TO ISRAEL By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 14 (JTA) -- Peace activist Abie Nathan returned to Israel on Sunday from his latest meeting with Yasir Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and was detained as soon as he landed.

Police from the serious crimes unit took Nathan from his plane, which had just arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport from Paris. He was escorted to an unmarked car after talking with his lawyer.

Nathan had said from Paris before embarking that he expected to be arrested for his meetings with the PLO chief, which violate an Israeli law forbidding meeting with members of terrorist organizations, the PLO specifically.

It is not known if he was charged with anything. Israeli police officials had said he would be "questioned" on arrival.

A small band of his supporters demonstrated on Nathan's behalf outside the terminal, from which reporters were blocked.

Nathan faces three months of one suspended prison sentence for a 1989 meeting with Arafat and a trial in September for another meeting with the PLO leader. His latest encounter with Arafat took place in Tunis at the end of June.

He served four months of the first sentence last year. Nathan left to meet with Arafat after holding a life-endangering hunger fast to protest the Israeli law that prohibits such meetings.

Before leaving Paris, Nathan disclosed that he had applied for a visa to go to Yemen, where he intended to hold "meaningful political talks" and visit the remnants of the Jewish community there. But the visa had not been forthcoming and he apparently tired of waiting.

Nathan also applied in vain for visas to visit Jordan and Sudan.

The peace activist predicted, in a July 7 telephone interview from Paris, that he would face a "witch hunt" upon his return.

But he had said he had no regrets about attending Arafat's news conference in Tunis last month. Nathan submitted 12 questions, to which the PLO leader replied last week.

The answers were faxed to leading Israeli newspapers on stationery whose letterhead read "State of Palestine." Arab affairs experts here said there was little new in the responses.

IDF, POLICE NAB DOZENS IN NABLUS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 14 (JTA) -- Hundreds of Israel Defense Force soldiers and border police swooped down on the casbah in Nablus, the largest Arab city in the West Bank.

The surprise raids Saturday morning netted

dozens of men on the wanted list, including some suspected of murdering Arab informants. The operation was described as a major blow to the intifada.

Homes and other hideouts were searched for firearms and propaganda material.

A rifle, four homemade pistols and a homemade submachine gun were seized. But the two large arsenals found consisted of so-called cold weapons, mainly knives and axes.

SYRIANS QUELCH U.S. FILM FESTIVAL, NIXING COLUMBIA PIX FOR ISRAEL TIES By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, July 14 (JTA) -- The American Film Festival that was supposed to open June 29 in Damascus but did not is this summer's puzzler for Hollywood mystery buffs.

Intended as a token of improved relations between the United States and Syria, the film fest was abruptly called off by the Syrian authorities after weeks of organizing work by U.S. Ambassador Edward Djerejian and Najah Alator, the Syrian minister of culture.

The two officials had agreed on 25 movies to be screened, including cinema classics such as "The Wizard of Oz" and "Gone With the Wind."

There were also to be three films produced by Columbia Pictures Entertainment: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Awakenings" and "Glory."

Three days before the opening, Alator informed Djerejian that on orders from top government authorities, the three Columbia films had to be withdrawn.

The ambassador refused and the festival was canceled.

A brief news story filed by the Reuters news agency caught the attention of Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

He contacted U.S. Rep. David Dreier (R-Calif.), who got in touch with the State Department. The report came back that the three films were vetoed by the Syrians because Columbia was on the Arab League's secondary boycott list of companies trading with Israel.

That was curious, because Columbia is now owned by the Sony Corp. of Japan. Previously, the studio belonged to the Coca-Cola Company, makers of a soft drink bottled in Israel and therefore banned in most Arab countries.

Possibly the Arab League boycott office failed to update its list, Cooper speculated; or a well-publicized event 10 days before the cancellation may have aroused the Syrian leadership's ire.

On June 16, President Bush spoke at a Wiesenthal Center dinner here, honoring actor Arnold Schwarzenegger for his support of its work.

The president naturally referred favorably to Israel at a major Jewish function, and his remarks were reported by the international media.

The co-chairmen of the evening were the two top men at Columbia -- Peter Guber and Jon Peters. (Peters had resigned that position a few days before, but showed up anyway, fulfilling his previously arranged role at the dinner.)

A corporate spokesman at Columbia Pictures was asked to shed some light on the curious events. After two days of deliberations, word came down from corporate headquarters in New York that the studio chiefs "declined to comment."

PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY UNLIKELY TO FIGHT \$473 MILLION ARMS PACKAGE FOR SAUDIS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, July 14 (JTA) -- Congress is not expected to block a \$473 million contract proposed by the Bush administration last week to provide Saudi Arabia with jeeps and aircraft maintenance and training.

The proposed sale was unveiled by the administration July 11, as a \$682 million arms package for the United Arab Emirates cleared Capitol Hill. Congress has 30 days to block arms sales after formal notification from the administration.

Pro-Israel lobbyists are more concerned about expectations that sometime after Labor Day, the administration will announce a major Saudi package valued at more than \$10 billion. That package has been projected to include F-15 fighter planes, AWACS surveillance aircraft and multiple-launch rocket systems.

The package announced last week includes 2,300 Humvee jeeps, or High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles. Valued together at \$123 million, the jeeps would be sold from U.S. stocks left in Saudi Arabia after the Persian Gulf War.

The remaining \$350 million would provide training and maintenance for AWACS and aerial refueling tanker planes in the Saudi arsenal.

The Pentagon said the airplane services "will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to maintain the security of a friendly country." The prime contractor is the Boeing Co. of Seattle.

The sale of jeeps "is consistent with the stated U.S. policy" of transferring "reasonable amounts of defense articles and services," the Pentagon said. The jeeps would provide "an all-terrain mode of transportation for (Saudi) ground forces."

Saudi Arabia "has been and continues to be an important force for political stability and economic progress in the Middle East," the Pentagon said. The jeeps would be sold by LTV Corp. of South Bend, Ind.

Opposition To UAE Sale

The package for the United Arab Emirates includes 20 Apache attack helicopters and 620 Hellfire missiles.

Symbolic opposition to the sale came from 28 senators, who signed onto a resolution of disapproval sponsored by Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.). A similar resolution was introduced in the House by Reps. Dante Fascell (D-Fla.) and Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.).

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee did not take a position on the UAE package, said one pro-Israel lobbyist. When told of the proposed Saudi jeep and AWACS training package, the lobbyist issued a flat "no" to the possibility of opposition.

Meanwhile, Cranston is accusing the UAE of possibly using laundered drug money to pay for the \$682 million package.

He cited a July 10 New York Times report that the UAE president, Sheik Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahayan, is the principal shareholder of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which Cranston called "one of the world's most notorious launderers of narcotics money."

The bank collapsed July 5, when leading creditors, including Britain and other governments, seized its assets.

MITTERRAND WARNS IRAQ ON ATTEMPTS TO GET NUCLEAR ARMS OR HARM KURDS

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, July 14 (JTA) -- French President Francois Mitterrand warned Iraq on Sunday that an attempt to acquire nuclear arms or persecute the Kurds could invite another allied attack.

In his traditional Bastille Day interview, Mitterrand said renewed military action against Iraq would be justified, "in order to protect populations martyred, persecuted, massacred by Saddam Hussein's government, or should this country arm itself with nuclear weapons."

"The decision to bomb Iraqi nuclear sites would have to be taken with my consent" and "we are ready to do it, if needed," he said.

The French president seemed disappointed that the allied victory over Iraq in the Persian Gulf War failed to resolve the most urgent and longstanding conflicts in the region.

A settlement of "pending and burning issues of the Middle East -- the Israeli-Arab conflict, the situation in Lebanon, among others -- would be the logical outcome of a victory that wouldn't then have a bitter taste," he said.

In Jerusalem, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens was skeptical that Iraq would abide by the July 25 U.N. deadline to disclose its weapons of mass destruction.

But he considered it unlikely that the United States and its allies would attack Iraq as soon as the deadline expired.

He said Israel did not plan to reinstate any of the emergency measures it adopted during the Gulf war.

Foreign Minister David Levy told reporters after Sunday's Cabinet meeting that Israel has no reason to fear Iraq's weapons because it has the necessary means to counter them.

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

RABIN STILL TOP CHOICE FOR PREMIER AMONG ISRAELI VOTERS, SURVEY FINDS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 14 (JTA) -- Yitzhak Rabin is the favorite candidate for the office of prime minister in the next elections, according to a poll taken by the Hanoach and Rafi Smith Research Center during the last week of June.

The pollsters asked a representative sample of 1,100 Jewish voters, "Whom do you prefer to head the two major parties?" Under Israel's electoral system, the head of the winning party forms the new government.

Rabin, a former Labor Party prime minister who served as defense minister in the last government, was the top choice of 34 percent of the sample.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the Likud leader, received 19 percent of the mock vote, and 17 percent chose Labor Party leader Shimon Peres, Rabin's political rival.

But those who identified themselves as Labor Party voters chose Peres over Rabin.

Shamir's closest rival for Likud chairman was Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, one of Likud's younger generation of Knesset members, who also was supported by 17 percent of the respondents.

Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, probably the most controversial Likud leader, was endorsed by 11 percent of the sample.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: REFORM MOVEMENT EXPANDING PRESENCE, STEPPING UP ACTIVITIES IN SOVIET UNION

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, July 14 (JTA) -- The Reform movement is stepping up its activity and expanding its presence in the Soviet Union with the establishment of religious schools, adult education classes and new congregations.

The World Union for Progressive Judaism, the Jerusalem-based parent organization of Reform, Liberal and Progressive synagogues worldwide, will open three religious schools this fall, one in Moscow, and two in locations that have not yet been finalized, according to its executive director, Rabbi Richard Hirsch.

The schools, for children from ages 7 through 13, will be run in cooperation with the Association for Jewish Studies and Jewish Culture in the USSR, headed by Valerie Engel.

Classes of 30 students at a time -- as many as can be filled -- will meet on Sundays and run for most of the day, Hirsch said.

In Moscow, they will be held at a location that has just been rented to temporarily house Hineni, the country's first Reform congregation.

Hineni was ousted from the facility it was using, called the Poliakov synagogue, during an acrimonious and public feud with Chabad, the Brooklyn-based Lubavitch Hasidic movement. Chabad claimed it was the legitimate heir to the building under the Soviet government's plan to return Jewish-owned property confiscated under Communist rule to the Jewish community.

On May 7, Moscow's City Council decided to give the Poliakov synagogue to the Lubavitchers and to find new premises for Hineni.

In the meantime, Hineni has been conducting weekly religious services in a Moscow apartment, with 50 or 60 people crowding into a small living room to attend, Hirsch said.

He was in New York for a brief stop after a visit to the Soviet Union, where he arranged the new home for Hineni.

Cultural Center Planned

Hirsch said the World Union agreed to accept either one of two buildings he saw during his Moscow visit: a three-story building on Arbat Street or one which he prefers, a two-story structure on Amalya Bronnaya Street.

The final decision will be made by the Moscow City Council, which is supposed to have an answer by the end of July.

Both buildings have over 21,000 square feet of space and are "considerably larger than the Poliakov synagogue," Hirsch said.

Whichever one the Moscow City Council selects, the Reform movement will pay to renovate, which will require "considerable investment," Hirsch said.

Since other premises will need to be found for the Soviet government-authorized offices currently occupying both of the selected buildings, and the extensive renovations either building requires will take some time, it may be a year or more before the facilities are ready for Hineni, Hirsch said.

The facility he prefers, on Amalya Bronnaya Street, was formerly the Rosenbloom Music School, which was run by Jews, and is on a major thoroughfare. The building on Arbat Street is in an "unsavory" neighborhood, Hirsch said.

Once the new site is selected and renovated,

it will be turned into a Jewish cultural center, as well as Hineni's home.

The planned center is expected to attract thousands of Jews to a library and museum for Judaica, meeting areas for conferences and cultural events, and activities, including lectures, concerts, films and theatrical productions, in addition to religious services, Hirsch said.

It will enable "the majority of Jews (in Moscow) who still have not had contact with anything Jewish" to "come out of the woodwork" and explore their identity, he said.

Teachers Training In Israel

Circles of Progressive Jews are also being established in Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Odessa, Riga, Tallinn, and the smaller cities of Chernovtsy, Narva and Rostov, according to Hirsch.

"We have prepared a charter for these groups," he said. "We are drawing plans to create a national structure of Progressive Jewish congregations and congregations in formation."

The World Union's associate coordinator for the development of Progressive Judaism in the Soviet Union, Mark Rykel, will soon visit the active communities in the Soviet Union.

The World Union has also flown 25 Soviet Jews to Israel, where they are attending a three-week seminar at Beit Shmuel in Jerusalem, the organization's headquarters.

Participants will return to the Soviet Union to teach in the educational classes for adults and the Sunday school programs for children that have recently been launched in various Soviet cities, Hirsch said. They also will serve as community and congregational leaders.

Next month the World Union will sponsor a 10-day adult summer camp in the Soviet Union for 25 to 30 potential leaders of Progressive groups. Staffers from the World Union's headquarters will travel from Jerusalem to Moscow to teach in the camp.

Both of the programs have been partially funded by a leadership development grant from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

LACK OF JOBS BLAMED BY MINISTERS FOR KEEPING SOVIET IMMIGRANTS AWAY

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 14 (JTA) -- Concerned about a sharp drop in Soviet aliyah this month, the Israeli government appears to have finally come to grips with the fact that the biggest problem facing new immigrants is a lack of jobs.

The ministerial committee on immigrant absorption convened Sunday to discuss solutions to the employment crisis. Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz proposed that the panel devote every session for the next three months to the subject of jobs.

Peretz admitted that word of high unemployment in Israel is more to blame than new Soviet passport regulations for holding down aliyah to 5,700 so far this month.

Soviet immigration in July is not expected to exceed 8,000, compared to over 20,000 last month.

Peretz suggested that in the short run, the government provide work for olim while it presses the private sector to absorb as many workers as possible from the immigrant population.

Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, warned the committee recently that Germany and other countries are increasing incentives to attract well-educated immigrants.