jta
DAILY NEWS BULLETIN
© Contents copyright: Republication only by previous arrangement.
PUBLISHED BY JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY · 330 SEVENTH AVENUE · NEW YORK, NY 10001-5010 · (212) 643-1890

75th ANNIVERSARY YEAR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1992 VOL. 70, NO. 22

ALIYAH FROM FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS DROPS TO LOWEST LEVEL IN TWO YEARS

By Yehonathan Tommer

JERUSALEM, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- A variety of explanations are being given for the sharp drop in aliyah from the republics that formerly constituted the Soviet Union.

Despite widespread food shortages and a civil war in Georgia, only 6,237 Jews from the former Soviet republics came to Israel in January.

That was the lowest monthly total since February 1990, when 5,746 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel, according to the Soviet Jewry Research Bureau of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Aliyah from all countries totaled 7,375 for January, a 35 percent decline from the month before, when more than 10,000 olim arrived from the former Soviet Union alone.

But even with the decrease, Jews from the former Soviet republics are still streaming into Israel at a rate of well over 1,000 per week. Last week, Israel welcomed the 400,000th Jew to arrive from the former Soviet Union since the massive exodus began in the fall of 1989.

The latest fluctuation, though, has raised questions about whether aliyah has tapered off permanently or has only slowed down temporarily. There is also speculation about whether the dip is caused by the perception of worsening conditions in Israel or expectations of a better life in the newly independent states that were until recently components of an authoritarian superpower.

One explanation was offered by the editor of the Moscow-based Jewish Herald, a bi-weekly that claims a readership of 48,000 in more than 150 cities in the former Soviet empire.

In Israel for the fourth International Conference of Jewish Media, Dr. Tankred Golenpolsky told an Israeli newspaper that Jews are not coming because they are optimistic about the future in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

They have received just about everything they had fought for in the old Soviet Union, Golenpolsky said: freedom of movement, independent Jewish schools and the right to partake in Jewish cultural activities.

Property Law May Be A Factor

But Uri Gordon, chairman of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, maintains aliyah is being deterred and deferred primarily because of Israel's worsening unemployment situation and other absorption difficulties.

Predictably, Likud Knesset member Michael Kleiner, chairman of the Immigration and Absorption Committee, rejects the theory advanced by Gordon, a Laborite, and its implied criticism of the governing party.

The Jewish Agency's deputy spokesman, Yehuda Weintraub, offered a different explanation for January's decline in aliyah.

Jews are delaying their departure because recent legislation recognizing private property throughout the commonwealth enables them to sell their apartments and take the money out of the country, he said.

Another source of delay, according to Weintraub, is the recent establishment of direct flights to Israel.

Many Jews booked on flights departing from transit cities in Eastern Europe are canceling them and rebooking seats on direct flights to Israel from one of the eight departure points in the commonwealth countries, he said.

After these initial dislocations, the aliyah flow is likely to pick up in the next few weeks.

Aliyah emissaries in the 11 commonwealth republics are already reporting a growing phenomena of youth aliyah.

Parents, caught between bureaucratic delays in the privatization law and fears of mounting local instability, are sending their teen-age children to Israel now. They plan to join them there later, after selling their properties.

There have been conflicting reports about the aliyah process itself.

According to one source, hundreds of Jews are beginning the process daily by making applications for exit visas to reunite with families in Israel. In the republic of Georgia, which is not a member of the commonwealth, 600 applications were made for exit visas in the past two weeks.

The Interior Ministry in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, has posted a government official to the local Jewish Agency office to speed up bureaucratic procedures. The Israel Consul in Moscow is sending an official to Georgia to speed up the issuance of visas.

But the Israeli Consulate in Moscow itself reported a drop in visa applications to about 150 a day, compared to more than 1,000 a day earlier in the year.

According to Gordon, the deceleration of aliyah will continue this month.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

LEVY, BACK FROM TRIUMPHS ABROAD, WARNS OF PEACE PROCESS PITFALLS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, praised at Sunday's Cabinet session for his diplomatic successes of the past two weeks, warned his colleagues of minefields on the road to peace, at least its multilateral phase.

Levy, who led the Israeli delegation at the multilateral conference on Middle East regional issues held in Moscow last week, is disturbed by the possibility that representatives of the Palestinian diaspora will be invited to join the working committees the conference has established to deal with specific regional issues.

He told his fellow ministers Sunday that the procedural issues in the peace process have to be agreed by consensus. "What we do not agree to will not come about," he declared.

The United States, which is the driving force behind the current peace process, and the Russian republic, its co-sponsor, announced in Moscow that they would support the presence of diaspora Palestinians at future sessions of the working groups on refugee resettlement, meeting in Ottawa this spring, and the economic development group, which is to meet in Brussels.

That is clearly intended to compensate the Palestinians for refusing to accredit the delega-

tion they sent to Moscow, which included members of the diaspora community as well as residents of East Jerusalem.

The ground rules laid down for the Middle East peace process that began in Madrid last Oct. 30 stipulated that Israel would not have to negotiate with Palestinians except those residing in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Israel refuses to agree to a diaspora presence, on the grounds that the Palestinians could then demand that the "right of return" to lands lost during Israel's War for Independence in 1948 be made an issue in the current talks.

Arab sources say that "right," while never forfeited, would not be exercised. Instead, compensation for lost lands and property would become a negotiable issue in the peace talks.

Levy Congratulated By Shamir

The Palestinians, who boycotted the Moscow conference when their enlarged delegation was refused seating, also reject the U.S.-Russian formula.

They insist diaspora Palestinians be included on all five working groups. The others are arms control, environmental issues and water resources.

Levy, meanwhile, was congratulated by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and other ministers for his historic trip to Beijing where, on Jan. 24, he and Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen signed a protocol establishing full diplomatic relations between their nations, on the ambassadorial level.

It was the culmination of a 40-year quest by Israel for normal diplomatic relations with the world's most populous nation.

It was promptly followed by another diplomatic coup, when Levy was notified in Moscow that India was prepared to upgrade its low-level ties with Israel to the ambassadorial level.

The "walls of our isolation" are tumbling, Shamir said, and the nation fully appreciates this. But "we aren't home and dry yet," he cautioned. He warned against slackening Israel's political efforts abroad.

U.S. RAN ISRAEL-SAUDI LIFT DURING WAR
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- The United States operated an airlift between Israel and Saudi Arabia on the eve of the start of the Persian Gulf War, it is disclosed in a new book about to be published here.

A dozen Israeli-made bridges were flown into the war theater for the U.S. Marine Corps, according to Yosef Evron, author of "Shield and Spear: The Story of Israel Military Industries."

The portable bridges provided by Israel were used by allied troops to cross canals and tank traps set by the Iraqi army.

Israel also provided the U.S. armed forces with Tomahawk cruise missile launchers, writes Evron, a spokesman for Israel Military Industries for 22 years.

The equipment was built by Israel Military Industries in Haifa.

Evron says the bridges were custom-made for the Marines. U.S. Air Force Galaxy transports flew them from Israel to Saudi Arabia between Jan. 10 and 12, 1991.

The bridges performed satisfactorily, the Marine Corps reported.

Evron wrote that the Israeli military conglomerate got the U.S. Navy contract for the missile launchers in January 1987.

VIOLENCE IN TERRITORIES DECLINES, BUT U.S. HAS HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- The level of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined sharply last year, but the U.S. State Department continues to be concerned about Israeli human rights practices in the territories.

Richard Schifter, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs, made this assessment Friday as the State Department released its "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991."

The report, which covers more than 150 countries, is required by law to be submitted to Congress each year.

The report found that the Israeli government last year began reducing some of the restrictions on Palestinians in the territories. But it also said human rights violations continue to occur.

One major concern raised in the report is Israel's practice of deporting Palestinians, which the United States considers illegal under international law.

In January 1991, Israel deported four Palestinians from the Gaza Strip who it said were leaders of Hamas, a fundamentalist Islamic group. The current dispute over Israel's plans to deport 11 Palestinians is not mentioned, since this occurred shortly after the new year began.

The report said that since the outbreak of the intifada in 1987, Palestinian violence has been met by "severe Israeli countermeasures." But the level of incidents was significantly lower in 1991.

"The number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces and intra-Palestinian violence was significantly lower than in 1990," the report said.

Specifically, 27 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in 1991 and 140 killed by other Palestinians.

More Israelis Killed Last Year

However, there was an increase in the number of Israeli soldiers and civilians killed in the territories during 1991. Twelve Israelis were killed and at least 124 injured last year. Israeli civilians killed four Palestinians in 1991.

"Sentences given to Israelis for killing Palestinians are generally much lighter than sentences handed down to Palestinians convicted of killing either Israelis or Palestinians," the report said.

The report also noted that there were fewer demolitions of Palestinian homes and sealing of houses and rooms in 1991. "According to press reports, security authorities demolished 55 houses and sealed 62 for security reasons," the report said. "Israeli authorities reported 43 demolitions and 58 sealings."

The figures for 1990 were 94 demolished and 87 sealed.

"The number of administrative detainees at the end of 1991 was less than one-third the number of administrative detainees at the end of 1990," the report said.

The report also found "credible reports of torture, abuse and mistreatment of Palestinians detained in prisons and detention centers, despite Israeli laws prohibiting torture.

"The major controversy between Israel and the United States over the territories on human rights and other issues results from their different interpretation of international law," the report said.

SURVEY FINDS RABBIS ARE AT ODDS OVER ISSUES OF PERSONAL STATUS
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- Almost one-third of Reform rabbis in the United States still oppose the patrilineal definition of Judaism, which was accepted by the movement as policy in 1983.

And nearly a fifth of Orthodox rabbis now support it, even though it runs counter to halacha, or traditional Jewish law.

Those are among the surprising findings of a recent survey of attitudes held by rabbis and rabbinical students representing the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements of Judaism.

The survey was conducted for the American Jewish Committee by Samuel Heilman, a professor of sociology at Queens College and the author of "Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodoxy," to be published shortly.

Heilman surveyed 525 rabbis and 138 rabbinical students from the four movements, querying them on a wide range of issues, including conversion and the role of halacha in modern life.

The results revealed that the movements, particularly the non-Orthodox, are far from monolithic in their positions.

They also show that Orthodox rabbinical students are consistently more conservative and particularistic than their own rabbis.

This, said Heilman, could indicate that the Orthodox rabbinate will be less pluralistic in the future than it is now, but could also merely be a reflection of the "quasi-monastic life" that some yeshiva students live.

These students' attitudes may change once they "get into the real world of being a rabbi, where they have to make compromises," he said.

Patrilineal Decision Still Controversial

The answers to questions on patrilineal descent show that it continues to be a controversial issue nearly a decade after the Reform movement decided to recognize the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers as Jewish.

The Reconstructionist movement also recognizes such children as Jewish. But the Orthodox and Conservative movements adhere to the halachic definition, that Jewish identity is passed matrilineally, or through the mother.

A majority of rabbis from all of the movements, except for the Reconstructionist, agreed that the patrilineal decision was one of the most divisive acts in contemporary Jewish life.

Even 52 percent of Reform rabbis agreed with this characterization. And when asked if they favor or oppose the patrilineal definition, 32 percent of Reform rabbis said they oppose it.

When Orthodox rabbis were asked the same question, 70 percent said they oppose the patrilineal definition. But a surprisingly large minority of 19 percent said they favor it.

The Orthodox rabbis are saying that "they understand that defining Jews by patrilineal descent may have some benefits," said Heilman.

And in the Reform movement, he said, "patrilineality isn't by any means a closed issue, and the rabbis might, at some point in the future, reassess the decision they've made."

The survey also found that rabbis and rabbinical students differ on the status of converts.

Almost all of the rabbis said they accept conversions by an Orthodox beit din, or religious court, but only one quarter of the Orthodox rabbis said they would accept halachic conversions not conducted under Orthodox supervision.

Almost none of the Orthodox and few of the Conservative rabbis would accept any kind of non-halachic conversion.

Reform Too Quick On Conversions

Almost all of the Orthodox respondents, and most of the Conservative respondents, said Reform rabbis are often too quick to perform conversions to Judaism. And one-fifth of Reform rabbis agreed with that statement.

And when it came to bringing converts into their own families, even the liberal rabbis showed a marked preference for those converted under traditional standards.

Interestingly, more Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis approve of having Orthodox converts in their own families than Orthodox rabbis do.

More than one-third of Orthodox rabbis said they would approve of their son marrying a Conservative convert, and more than one-quarter said they would approve of a Reform convert. But none of the Orthodox rabbinical students approved of having a non-Orthodox convert in the family.

When it comes to divorce, nearly all of the Orthodox rabbis said that a get is indispensable in the dissolution of a marriage. Eighty-five percent of Conservative rabbis agreed, and about an equal percentage of Reform rabbis disagreed. The Reconstructionists were split.

When it came to determining the status of children of a second marriage whose mother's first marriage was dissolved without a get, the Orthodox rabbinical students were far less flexible than their rabbis.

More than a quarter of the Orthodox rabbis said they would not consider these children mamzerim, or halachically illegitimate, but only 3 percent of their students agreed.

Conservative rabbis equivocated on the issue, though more said they would not consider those children illegitimate than would.

A majority of Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis would not consider these children mamzerim.

Students Less Flexible On Halacha

As might be expected, the movements differ on the role of halacha in modern life.

When asked if halacha must sometimes be compromised to preserve the Jewish people, just over one-third of Orthodox rabbis agreed, and 55 percent disagreed. By contrast, 70 percent of the Orthodox rabbinical students disagreed that halacha must sometimes be compromised.

A clear majority (82 percent) of Conservative rabbis agreed that halacha must sometimes be compromised, while 15 percent disagreed. Half as many Conservative students as rabbis were willing to compromise halacha.

The Conservative movement was evenly split on whether halacha must sometimes be ignored for the sake of Jewish unity. Heilman called their attitude toward halacha "one of the most ambiguous elements of their Judaism."

When asked if they agree that in Jewish observance the middle road is best, a majority of Orthodox rabbis disagreed. Fifty-six percent of Conservative rabbis agreed, and more liberal rabbis disagreed than agreed.

Significant minorities of students in each of the movements were simply not sure how moderate or flexible they should be.

REVISIONIST MEETING A FIZZLE, BUT STREET PROTESTERS SIZZLE
By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- Like many show biz extravaganzas in this town, a promised summit meeting of black and white racists and Holocaust revisionists here Saturday did not live up to its advance billing.

Only three of the promised 13 speakers and about 15 listeners showed up, who were well outnumbered by reporters and television crews ready to cover the "ecumenical hate-fest" anticipated by Anti-Defamation League officials.

Missing was the expected star of the afternoon, Professor Leonard Jeffries of the African-American studies department at the City University of New York, whose list of alleged Jewish conspiracies ranges from control of the colonial slave trade to denigration of black characters in Hollywood movies.

Also absenting himself was Willis Carto, founder of the white racist and anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby.

What the meeting inside the 400-seat hall lacked in numbers and volume was made up by 300 noisy protesters outside, with bullhorns, banners and placards.

They displayed and shouted such slogans as "No Nazis, No KKK, No Racism" and "KKK Out of L.A." One Jewish participant wore a T-shirt emblazoned with a yellow star and the words "Auschwitz, Never Again."

The protesters, mainly blacks but also some whites and Hispanics, identified with a bewildering number of organizations, reminiscent of the 1960s, including the Malcolm X Grass Roots Movement, L.A. Radical Women, International Committee Against Racism and People Against Racist Terror.

Makungu Akinyela, spokesman for the Malcolm X group, told a street corner news conference, "We have learned from history that advocacy of white privilege and Aryan supremacy will ultimately lead to the genocides of African, Latino, Indian and other non-'Aryan' people."

17 Protesters Arrested

As the protests became more intense, foot and mounted police in riot gear cordoned off the meeting hall and street approaches, and later spirited some of the speakers to safety. Seventeen protesters were arrested.

The conference was organized by the Cosmopolitan Brotherhood Association, a black nationalist and separatist group, purportedly to discuss constitutional rights of free speech and to question the uniqueness and veracity of the Holocaust.

It was left largely to two speakers to carry the conference message. Robert Brock, president of the Cosmopolitan Brotherhood, advocated reparations and self-determination for African-Americans and complained bitterly that no one paid attention to what he called the black holocaust.

"Blacks worked for 245 years and didn't get paid. You don't see that in the papers, you only read about Nazis and Jews," he said. Brock claimed that whites had spread syphilis among slaves by forcing black women to breed with dogs and that "there were 110 million slaves and the Jews brought most of them here."

Jews and liberals were also blamed by Brock for foisting racial integration on America.

Under questioning, Brock ascribed the no-show of Jeffries, as well as the absence of an unidentified Jewish participant, to the machinations of the all-powerful ADL. He also lashed out against the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The more traditional Holocaust revisionist theme was propounded by Mark Weber, publications editor of the Institute for Historical Review.

While Jews experienced great suffering and persecution under Adolf Hitler, there was no German policy to exterminate Jews, gas chambers never existed, and the figure of 6 million Jewish victims was highly exaggerated, Weber claimed.

Dee Fields, a South African-born advocate of apartheid, was also scheduled to speak, but left the hall before her turn came up, surrounded by a protective police wedge. She was accompanied by her husband, Joe Fields, a leader of the Populist Party, which has been tied to Louisiana state Rep. David Duke, a white supremacist who is now running for president.

The couple held an impromptu news conference before the meeting. Dee Fields remarked, "What I object about the Jews is that they say (about the Holocaust) 'Never Forgive, Never Forget.' I think that's a very un-Christian attitude."

Joe Fields said that although his Populist Party is fielding its own presidential candidate, he would urge his followers in Los Angeles to throw their weight behind Republican conservative candidate Pat Buchanan, because "he has a better chance of being elected."

IDF WORRIED ABOUT SUICIDES

TEL AVIV, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force is seriously concerned about the suicide rate among soldiers.

Seven have taken their lives since Jan. 1, bringing to 37 the total suicides in the armed forces during the current statistical year, which ends on March 31.

Maj. Gen. Ran Goren, head of the IDF's Manpower Branch at General Headquarters, testified on the subject before a joint Knesset committee last week. Committee Chairman Haggai Merom agreed it was cause for great concern.

Another committee member, Michael Bar-Zohar, observed that the number of suicides in the 14 to 21 age group in Israel corresponds to that in Western countries, and he doubted it could be reduced.

Goren said each case of suicide in the IDF is investigated. It turns out that most stem from family or personal problems and very few are service-related, such as an inability to adjust to army life, he said.

In fact, only two soldiers who killed themselves indicated the were abused or harassed while in military service.

FORMER JTA BUREAU CHIEF IS DEAD

JERUSALEM, Feb. 2 (JTA) -- Asher Schwartz, a leading journalist who formerly headed the Tel Aviv bureau of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, died Saturday after a long illness, at the age of 79.

Schwartz, a nationally known Israel Radio reporter, was JTA's Tel Aviv bureau chief from the 1950s until his retirement in 1970. At that time, JTA contracted with Itim, Israel's domestic news wire service, to distribute its incoming news to the Israeli press and electronic media, which had been one of Schwartz's responsibilities.

Schwartz was among the founders of the Tel Aviv Journalists Association and a familiar figure at Beit Sokolov, the journalists club in Tel Aviv.