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SHAMIR RE-ELECTED TO HEAD LIKUD, BEATING LEVY AND SHARON HANDILY

By David Landau

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Yitzhak Shamir won a resounding endorsement Thursday from Likud's huge Central Committee, which selected him to head the party for another four years.

The decision means Shamir will remain prime minister if Likud wins enough seats in the June 23 Knesset elections to form a government.

The 76-year-old premier easily outdistanced his rivals. By the final count, Shamir had 46 percent of the vote in the 3,000-member committee, compared to about 31 percent for Foreign Minister David Levy and 22 percent for Housing Minister Ariel Sharon.

Both Levy, who is more dovish than Shamir on foreign policy, and Sharon, a hard-line hawk, each claimed before the Central Committee convened that they were running to win.

But political observers suggested that neither realistically believed he could unseat Shamir and that both were merely positioning themselves for a future contest for party leadership after the aging Shamir steps down.

The Likud convention followed by a day Israel's first U.S.-style primary election, conducted by the rival Labor Party.

Its leadership contest was decided by the party's 150,000 registered members, who voted Wednesday at 700 polling stations around the country.

The main battle was between Shimon Peres, the incumbent party chairman, and his longtime rival, Yitzhak Rabin. The outcome gave Rabin a 40.5 to 34.5 percent edge over Peres.

By scaling the 40 percent mark, Rabin avoided a runoff election.

Labor Now Tougher To Beat

The two veterans, each approaching 70, easily shook off challenges from a younger generation of Laborites.

Yisrael Kessar, secretary-general of Histadrut, Israel's powerful trade union federation, polled less than 20 percent of the vote. Ora Namir, one of only two women in Labor's 39-member Knesset delegation, trailed far behind with 5.5 percent.

After 3 a.m. local time, Peres phoned Rabin to concede defeat and congratulate him.

Both men spoke of their future "cooperation" to secure the party's return to power.

"That is the main thing," said Rabin.

"No doubt about it," echoed Peres.

Shamir declined to say which of the Labor contenders he considers the stronger candidate against Likud in the June 23 elections.

Most pollsters predict that Labor under Rabin will be much tougher to beat than Labor under Peres.

That, in fact, was the central plank of Rabin's platform in his primary campaign.

Peres, who has been the party leader since 1977, campaigned on the strength of his government experience, having been the last Laborite to serve as prime minister.

Rabin was forced to resign that post 1977 in a scandal over his personal finances.

ISRAELI MOP-UP IN LEBANON TURNS INTO HEAVY FIGHTING

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force mop-up operation against Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon escalated into serious fighting, involving tanks and close-quarters combat, according to reports from Lebanon and Israel.

There were diplomatic repercussions at the United Nations and an appeal by the U.S. State Department for all sides to exercise restraint.

The reports of fighting in southern Lebanon coincided with Israel's disclosure that a Katyusha rocket scored a direct hit on the Kiryat Shmona bus terminal Wednesday, damaging its roof. A dozen people were treated for shock.

On Thursday, two IDF soldiers were killed and three others wounded in the IDF's incursion into Shi'ite villages, just north of the central sector of the security zone, the IDF spokesman said in a delayed announcement Thursday night.

Sources in Lebanon reported that 25 Lebanese had been killed outside the security zone.

Radio Beirut said Israeli gunners shelled 10 Lebanese villages. Reports on Thursday evening from Lebanon said IDF forces briefly occupied Yatar village, facing the central sector of the security zone.

The report said the Israeli troops withdrew in a fierce gunbattle with guerrillas.

Yatar, and its sister village, Kafra, were targets of heavy artillery attack by the IDF and its allied South Lebanon Army. The villagers abandoned their homes Wednesday after the SLA commander, Gen. Antoine Lahad, warned they were about to be bombed.

U.S. Expresses 'Deep Concern'

Although residents of Upper Galilee had a respite Wednesday night from rocket attacks, two more Katyusha salvos hit the region Thursday. One at noon caused no casualties or damage. Another, which landed in the Galilee panhandle in the afternoon, caused minor damage, but no one was hurt.

Israeli forces were said to be employing 17 tanks and assault helicopters, in an attempt to route Hezbollah guerrillas, who have been launching rockets against Israel since Sunday.

If the reports are correct, it is the first ground action in a battle fought with rockets, artillery and air power since Israeli helicopters ambushed and killed Hezbollah leader Sheik Abbas Musawi in southern Lebanon on Sunday.

Radio Beirut reported, meanwhile, that Amal, the mainstream Shi'ite militia long at loggerheads with the Iranian-backed fundamentalist Hezbollah, announced it would join forces with its erstwhile foe in their common struggle against Israel.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler expressed "deep concern" Thursday about "escalating violence" in northern Israel and southern Lebanon.

The State Department has made "high-level demarches" to Israel, Lebanon and Syria "to urge the exercise of maximum restraint in order to bring the violence to an end," she said.

In New York, U.N. Secretary-General Boutros

Boutros-Ghali summoned Israel's U.N. ambassador, Yoram Aridor, to receive a protest.

The U.N. chief expressed "grave concern" about the violence, and, unlike the United States, appeared to lay the blame exclusively on Israel.

Skirmishes With U.N. Troops

Boutros-Ghali ordered Israel to withdraw its troops immediately from the zone in southern Lebanon patrolled by international peacekeeping forces after the IDF got into a serious confrontation with the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon.

The IDF incursion into southern Lebanon was officially described as a "cleaning-up operation" employing "limited forces."

IDF and SLA artillery pounded abandoned villages, apparently hoping the local population would hold Hezbollah responsible for the destruction of their homes.

As the IDF engaged Hezbollah holdouts, attempts by UNIFIL to intervene resulted in angry exchanges between IDF and UNIFIL commanders.

Physical clashes were reported when IDF bulldozers shoved aside UNIFIL and other vehicles and set up roadblocks.

Two Fijian soldiers of UNIFIL were wounded in cross fire between the IDF and Lebanese gunmen. A UNIFIL spokesman complained that the Israelis refused to provide a helicopter to evacuate the injured troops.

Eventually, the Italian government provided a helicopter, which took the wounded soldiers to the UNIFIL headquarters hospital at Rosh Hanikra, in Israel's north.

One of the soldiers was transferred to Rambam Hospital in Haifa for major surgery.

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

IDF OFFICERS REMOVED FROM POSTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- At least two senior Israel Defense Force officers have been removed from their posts, and court-martials may be in store for others in connection with the savage guerrilla attack last weekend on a poorly defended IDF training camp in Israel that left three sleeping recruits dead.

Military sources said Thursday that these were only the first disciplinary measures and hinted that a much broader shakeup was in the offing, affecting IDF brass and non-commissioned personnel alike.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, was reported Thursday to have received and accepted the report of Maj. Gen. Nehemia Tamari, a ranking member of General Headquarters staff, whom he assigned to investigate the disaster.

Tamari is said to have recommended court-martials for a lieutenant colonel and four junior officers and that an unspecified number of non-commissioned officers should be stripped of their rank for lapses of discipline.

The chief of staff is reported to have sent those recommendations to the military prosecutor's office, which will decide if charges should be pressed.

Meanwhile, military sources said a colonel in command of Nahal Training Base 80, to which the recruit camp was attached, has been removed, along with a lieutenant colonel.

The IDF has issued new regulations beefing up security at all military camps, especially those housing untrained recruits.

FRENCH SOCIALISTS REPUDIATE PUBLISHED ANTI-ISRAEL LETTER

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- The governing Socialist Party was swift to repudiate a hate-filled attack on Israel by a low-ranking official.

The party's executive board, meeting Wednesday, urged the quickest possible removal of Roland Gabory, a 51-year-old high-school teacher who sits as a Socialist deputy in a provincial assembly in southwestern France.

Gabory is the author of a letter denouncing Israel as "a racist, expansionist, fundamentalist, parasitic state, which has monopolized the land of Palestine in the name of 4,000-year-old ridiculous biblical twaddle."

His letter also equated Israelis with Nazis.

"The inexplicable crimes perpetrated half a century ago by those who called themselves the master race do not excuse at all the terrorism of those who still believe they are the Lord's race," he wrote.

The letter was published in Sud Ouest (Southwest), a large-circulation provincial daily, and in the Socialist weekly, Vendredi (Friday).

Vendredi has apologized for allowing the letter to appear. "We regret that such hatred has been able to slip into a publication striving to fight against racism and exclusion," it said.

But the editor of Sud Ouest told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the letter drew no reaction from its readers.

Jean Kahn, chairman of CRIF, the Representative Council of French Jewish Organizations, said he was "scandalized."

Kahn said he could not understand how such views could be expressed by an official of the Socialist Party and demanded that "sanctions" be taken against him.

The Socialist Party's executive board said it shared "the legitimate emotion and indignation triggered by the scandalous declaration of Roland Gabory, in total contradiction of the values and actions of the Socialists."

It urged the relevant party body to oust Gabory as soon as possible.

EGYPT WILL FREE JEW IT ARRESTED

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- David Ovitz, an Israeli furniture importer arrested in Egypt, will be released and sent home shortly, his family was assured Wednesday by the Israeli ambassador in Cairo, Ephraim Dubek.

The Egyptian authorities informed Israel officially of Ovitz's arrest Monday. They mentioned no charges against him.

Ovitz was questioned, however, about his connections with a family of Israeli Arabs arrested earlier in Cairo, allegedly on charges of spying. Farres Mussarti, 41, of Ramla, his 21-year-old son, Majed, and daughter Faya, 17, have been in custody for more than two weeks.

But sensational stories in the Egyptian press that Farres had confessed to spying for Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, were disavowed by the Egyptian interior minister, Abdul Halim Mussa.

It appears now that the family will face no more serious charges than using forged travel documents and overstaying their tourist visas.

Cairo investigators also seem to have accepted Ovitz's claim that his sole connection with Farres Mussarti was in the line of business.

**U.S. ACCUSES FOOTWEAR MAKER
OF COMPLYING WITH ARAB BOYCOTT**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- The U.S. Commerce Department is accusing L.A. Gear, the athletic footwear company, of violating federal laws barring acquiescence with the Arab boycott of Israel.

The purported violations are likely among the last involving Kuwait. They took place in July 1987 and January 1990, when the Los Angeles-based outfit provided names and background data on its manufacturers to an unnamed company in the emirate.

Before leveling the public accusations, the Commerce Department "entered into settlement discussions with L.A. Gear," said a Commerce Department official.

Those discussions "did not reach a successful conclusion" and prompted the government to issue a "charging letter," the official said.

In a statement released Tuesday, L.A. Gear disputed that "it has engaged in any unlawful activity" and said it "believes that it has meritorious defenses to the allegations raised."

If the administrative law judge hearing the case, Hugh Dolan, finds L.A. Gear to have violated boycott laws, it could face penalties of up to \$460,000 and be denied export privileges.

It is "highly likely" that Dolan will significantly reduce the number of penalties from 46, said Will Maslow, general counsel to the American Jewish Congress and editor of its Boycott Report newsletter.

Maslow said Dolan issued a ruling to that effect Nov. 27 in the case of Martin Brothers, an export trading company.

Dolan has lumped together simultaneous violations, such as those incurred when an Arab country, on a single sheet of paper, asks for, and receives, information on several companies.

Kuwait Not Enforcing Boycott

But in that case, which Martin Brothers is appealing, Dolan ruled that the company would lose its export privileges for at least six months.

That marked the first time a U.S. company would face a sweeping export ban for violating the U.S. anti-boycott law, enacted in the mid-1970s at the urging of Jewish groups.

The groups are lobbying members of Congress to increase from \$10,000 to \$50,000 the maximum penalties for each boycott violation, as promised to them last year by then-Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher.

Maslow said that any violations by L.A. Gear are of "no great significance" because since the Persian Gulf War, Kuwait has stopped asking companies to assure that they comply with the 41-year-old boycott of Israel.

A Commerce Department official said Kuwait "has not been enforcing their boycott. However, there have been no official statements from Kuwait abandoning the boycott."

The boycott is observed in varying degrees by the 20 members of the League of Arab States, whose Central Boycott Office in Syria developed the boycott policy.

Only one of the 20 Arab League countries, Egypt, trades directly with Israel. Of the other 19 countries, eight do business with companies that do business with Israel: Algeria, Djibouti, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia.

Eleven others bar any such business, directly

or indirectly: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The Jerusalem Post reported Tuesday that the Israeli Cabinet has decided to "make the boycott issue central to all economic and political meetings between Israeli and foreign representatives."

In addition, the Cabinet called on Israeli companies hurt by the Arab boycott to report the offending firms to the government, the Post also reported.

The Cabinet appointed a five-member committee composed of ministry directors general to coordinate the effort.

An explanatory note accompanying the announcement stated that Israel's trade with France, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, Japan and Korea has been significantly affected by the boycott.

Maslow said this marks the "first time the Israeli government has ever assumed that it would ever take an all-out position attacking the boycott."

**AUSTRALIAN LEADER ASSURES JEWS
OF OPPOSITION TO ARAB BOYCOTT**

By Jeremy Jones

CANBERRA, Australia, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans assured a delegation of Jewish leaders that he would see to it that Australia's opposition to the Arab League's boycott of Israel is clearly understood by boycott offices and the boycotting states.

Evans, a member of the national Senate, said he was "very unimpressed" by the way some government officials failed to act consistently with Australia's declared opposition to the boycott.

But he dodged a commitment to support legislation that would outlaw boycott compliance in Australia. He said in that respect that Australia would closely watch the actions of other Western nations.

Evans promised, however, that he would urge the Arab states to drop their boycott of Israel when he visits the Middle East in May. He said he would stress that it was the sort of confidence-building measure needed to facilitate the peace process there.

The foreign minister received a delegation representing the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the Zionist Federation of Australia at his office here. Their discussion centered on the boycott and the efforts by the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce this past year to highlight the adverse effects it has on Australian trade.

The Zionist Federation obtained documents under Australia's Freedom of Information Act which indicated that certain Australian diplomats and other officials were not making clear that Australia opposes the boycott and, in some cases, were actually directing Australian companies not to trade with Israel.

Evans said he would take several measures shortly to make sure that no Australian company or any foreign country got the impression that Australia gives tacit support to "this economic blackmail."

When pressed about anti-compliance legislation, the minister said the only existing legislation "with teeth" was in the United States. Australia must be realistic in estimating its relative strength in world trade, he said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: CONSERVATIVE JEWRY IS GRAPPLING WITH STATUS OF GAYS IN MOVEMENT

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- As the leadership of Conservative Jewry struggles to define the status of gays and lesbians in the movement, one thing is clear: There is no broad consensus on what that position should be.

The movement has few formal policies on homosexuality, relying heavily on the tradition of deferring to local rabbinic authority.

But Conservative rabbis have long understood that they are expected to adhere to traditional interpretations of halacha, which views homosexuality as abhorrent.

Several rabbis who have attempted to deviate from this interpretation have been deterred by strong institutional and social pressure.

In recent years, though, the movement has begun to grapple with the reality that tens of thousands of Conservative Jews are gay.

Two years ago, the movement's Rabbinical Assembly adopted a statement affirming "full civil equality" for gays and lesbians, deploring violence against them and welcoming them as members of Conservative congregations. But it also affirmed "our tradition's prescription for heterosexuality."

That stance was welcomed as a step in the right direction by gay and lesbian Jews, who had long felt the movement had turned its back on them. For years, these Jews, finding their needs unanswered by the religious establishment, had created their own synagogues and rituals.

But times have changed. Gay and lesbian Jews now want to be part of the Conservative movement without having to hide their homosexuality. They are asking for more than tolerance—they are demanding acceptance.

'The Family Is Under Attack'

And while it seems unlikely that the status quo will change dramatically in the near future, quiet support for the gay cause has been growing among Conservative rabbis and at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

At a recent meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, more than a dozen rabbis and students, gay and straight, proudly wore small Magen David pins as they listened to the panel discuss what status homosexuals should have in the movement.

One triangle of the Jewish star was pink, a gay rights symbol modeled after the badges homosexuals had to wear in the concentration camps.

Some rabbinical authorities in the Conservative movement maintain there is no way to reconcile homosexual behavior and halacha.

According to Rabbi Joel Roth, who is in three influential positions as chairman of the law committee, professor of Talmud at the seminary and incoming dean of its rabbinical school starting in July, homosexuality is immutably "toevah," or an abomination.

He advocates celibacy as the only acceptable sexual behavior for gays and lesbians who do not want to breach halacha.

Rabbi Sam Frint of Moriah Congregation in Deerfield, Ill., and a member of the law committee, says that to confer legitimacy upon homosexuality as a lifestyle co-equal to heterosexuality would be to destroy Judaism's very foundation.

"Judaism is not carried through the synagogue or rabbi or school, but through the fami-

ly," he said in an interview. "The family is under attack, and Judaism depends for its very survival on the health and vigor of the family."

Representatives of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational arm, said that most of its membership agrees with the traditional view.

According to Rabbi Jerome Epstein, United Synagogue's executive vice president and a member of the R.A. law committee, congregants "want to be very sensitive to homosexuality and not be discriminatory. On the other hand, Jewish life has certain guidelines that should be applied."

Need For 'More Listening And Learning'

Some on the 30-member law committee, which is likely to soon vote on a policy guideline, believe the movement should defer a decision until it can study the issue more thoroughly.

Rabbi Gordon Tucker, currently dean of the seminary's rabbinical school, and Elliot Dorff, provost of the movement's West Coast affiliate, the University of Judaism, say the panel should take an exhaustive look at attitudes within the movement and at current scientific theory about homosexuality before it takes action.

"We should do a lot more listening and learning. We don't have the kind of wisdom we need to chart out a definitive position for the years ahead," said Tucker.

Shana Gerber, co-founder of the Incognito Club at the seminary, a support and social activity group for gay and lesbian students, agrees that the rabbis would benefit from further study.

"They would be surprised by the results of a survey of the community that they think they know so well," she said. "And they're going to make all these decisions when they don't know who we are. Talk to us," she urged.

At least two students have left rabbinical school in the last two years over the issue of their homosexuality, she said. The pressure to conform to heterosexual norms is so great that gay and lesbian students at the seminary date members of the opposite sex so they will fit in.

'Just A Matter Of Time'

"David" spent many years as a Jewish educator and Conservative Hebrew school principal but now works in theater. He never hid his homosexuality from students or their parents and encountered "only love and respect," he said.

"David" said that leaders of Conservative Jewry are afraid of accepting openly gay people in influential positions, because they believe in "the two myths: that a gay or lesbian teacher will influence students to become gay or lesbian," and that gays molest children.

"It would be great if the Conservative movement accepted homosexuality and did a great deal to foster tolerance," he said. "Right now it fosters homophobia," or prejudice against gays and lesbians.

No matter what the outcome of the law committee's current discussion, the era has arrived when gays and lesbians will no longer be "closeted" by Conservative Judaism, says Bernard Raskas, rabbi emeritus of Temple of Aaron Congregation in St. Paul, Minn.

"There's no question that it's just a matter of time" before Conservative Jewry accepts gay and lesbian Jews fully, "because our understanding of human nature has become greater and more compassionate," he said. "In time, homosexuals will be ordained."