



**REPORT CRITICIZING HOUSING MINISTRY
THREATENS LIKUD'S PLACE FOR ELECTION**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- A report scathingly critical of Ariel Sharon's Housing Ministry threatened this week to explode into a major scandal for Likud less than two months before the elections.

Accusations of corruption, maladministration and professional incompetence by State Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat triggered demands for Sharon to resign.

Ben-Porat, a former member of the High Court of Justice, has asked Attorney General Yosef Harish to consider criminal prosecution in three areas related to the Housing Ministry's activities.

While Sharon did not specifically deny the comptroller's report, he said he put a halt to improper practices whenever they were brought to his attention. If officials and directors of government companies are found to have been at fault, they will have to "bear their responsibility," he told reporters.

The comptroller, the state's official watchdog, traditionally exercises broad autonomy and is non-partisan.

Ben-Porat said that while the government's crash program to provide homes for immigrants was praiseworthy in principle, it spawned administrative malpractice.

She observed that the ministry's choice of contractors for some projects was suspect or made on ill-considered or arbitrary grounds.

Selections often were related to Likud political favoritism, the comptroller said.

She singled out Limor Livnat of Likud, whom she accused of using her Sharon-appointed, non-salaried position as head of the ministry's Housing Authority to curry favor with members of the party's Central Committee.

Livnat said Tuesday that she rejected the comptroller's findings and questioned her good faith.

Attempt To Delay Publication

Yediot Achronot's respected economics editor, Sever Plotzker, said the charges against Sharon's ministry were the most serious he could recall in decades of comptroller's reports. According to Plotzker, Sharon should step down.

Asked whether Sharon might have to quit, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Monday night, "I hope not."

The report is a grave embarrassment to Likud, especially in light of the governing party's efforts to delay its publication until after the June 23 elections.

Livnat and other Likud figures sought to divert media attention to another section of the comptroller's report that deals with massive waste at Agrexco, the government-owned agricultural export company which was headed by a Labor minister, Avraham Katz-Oz, in the Likud-Labor unity government two years ago.

The comptroller also criticized the Housing Ministry's handling of the immigrants' needs on a professional basis.

She found there had been no agreement

between the ministry and the Treasury on the ministry's basic budget for 1991, for which she held the Treasury, too, partly to blame. The Housing Ministry exceeded its budget by \$66 million, she wrote.

Ben-Porat was sharply critical of the way the Housing Ministry imported caravans and mobile homes in large numbers.

Many of the units were erected and left uninhabited for months; many were bought from substandard suppliers without adequate prior examination of their records.

The cost of erecting the mobile units exceeded the cost of constructing fixed buildings, the comptroller said.

Roof Over Every Immigrant's Head

As for fixed-building work, the report said much of it was substandard and had not withstood the recent winter storms. They were sited incorrectly, without proper planning and in some cases violated planning and zoning laws.

Sharon, while vowing there would be no coverage of wrongdoing, reacted impatiently to the professional criticism. He told reporters his ministry had essentially done the "almost impossible," considering that every immigrant and previously homeless Israeli now has a roof over his head.

But this success "disappointed" many people in Israel, he remarked, adding that some of the comptroller's comments were themselves "unprofessional."

While Sharon conceded that some of the contracts went to companies owned by Likud members, he said much of the work was contracted out to major building companies, such as Histadrut's Solel Boneh and Shikun Ovdim.

The Kibbutz Ha'artzi construction company also won large contracts, he said.

He insisted, however, that Likud-owned companies were rightfully entitled to their share.

NEWS ANALYSIS:

**LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY CHANGE LITTLE
IN WAY TERRITORIES ARE ADMINISTERED**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- If the Palestinians are lukewarm about Israel's plan for municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is because they believe the return of Arab mayors and town councils will change very little in the way the territories are presently administered.

Under the present setup, the territories are governed jointly by the military and the Civil Administration. In theory, the military, meaning the Israel Defense Force, is responsible for security and maintaining order, while the Civil Administration, established by the IDF in 1980, manages daily civilian affairs.

But the Civil Administration is civil in name only. It is headed by officers of the rank of brigadier general who are subordinate to the senior military commanders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, both major generals.

Cooperation between the IDF and the Civil Administration is a one-way street, since the Civil Administration cannot operate independent of military considerations. The Civil Administration

is, in fact, an extension of Israel's Defense Ministry and the IDF, a fact that the local population understands clearly.

In practice, the creation of a civilian body has changed little in the way the territories are governed. At best, the local population has benefited from improved services.

Israel's difficulties stem in great measure from the existence of two rival forces that also govern large parts of the territories, often by violence and intimidation.

One is made up of the various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The other is the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas, an organization spawned by the intifada and growing stronger day by day.

The Civil Administration provides such services as health and education and operates the bridges over the Jordan River. The army tries to control the main traffic arteries and attempts to enforce law and order in the cities and towns.

Much of the Civil Administration is staffed by Arabs. That is especially true of the school system, but other branches as well.

The Arab employees exercise little power. They depend on the Israeli authorities for their paychecks. They live in danger because the local population considers them to be collaborators.

Only last week, unidentified gunmen brutally stabbed the Arab head of health services in Jenin, an employee of the Civil Administration who was targeted as a collaborator.

More Palestinians have been assassinated by their brethren this past year than killed in clashes with the IDF.

Mayors Have Little Power

Off the main roads, in the dozens of villages tucked among the rugged hills of the West Bank, the Palestinian organizations prevail.

Their chief weapon is terror. Suspected collaborators are "excommunicated" if lucky; often they are executed.

The local terrorist groups are guided by village leaders, who may or may not obey orders issued by their respective parent organizations.

Many such orders are issued by the so-called Unified Command of the intifada. But in fact, that organization exists only on paper.

Each local group does pretty much as it pleases, and Palestinian communities are often caught in their everlasting rivalries. Day-to-day events are influenced more by local village gangs than either the PLO or the Israeli authorities.

The Israeli plan presented at the peace talks in Washington calls for electing mayors. But in practice, Arab mayors have very little power.

Their budgets are subject to approval by the Civil Administration. They cannot undertake such projects as paving new roads or laying new sewer pipes without the OK of army officers.

More ominous is their lack of power to end Hamas and pro-PLO gangs' rule of the streets.

When seven years ago the Israelis appointed Zafer al-Masri mayor of Nablus, he lasted in office exactly one month. He was assassinated entering the City Hall.

If local mayors are elected as a result of the Israeli proposal, they may enjoy greater support from within the Palestinian camp.

But they will need discretionary power and budgets to run their own affairs. Otherwise, they will become as useless as the appointed mayors, torn between the Israeli authorities and the gangs in the streets.

ARABS WHO KILLED IDF RECRUITS GET LIFE TERMS, SHOW NO REMORSE By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- Four Israeli Arabs who admitted hacking to death three soldiers in their sleep in February were sentenced to life imprisonment by the Nazareth District Court in a brief session Wednesday.

The defendants, who showed no remorse, said they were serving Islam in a holy war against the infidels. Their attorney said the sentences would not be appealed.

The confessed killers are Ibrahim Hassan Agbariya, 27; his brother, Mohammad Hassan Agbariya, 24; their cousin, Yihya Mustafa Agbariya, 24; and Mohammad Tawfik Jabarin, 40.

All were residents of Israel's Wadi Ara region.

They entered the court waving Korans and chanting "Allahu akhbar" (God is great) and readily admitted their crimes, which Judge Yehuda Abramowitz called the acts of "relentless beasts committed brutally and barbarically."

The four said their purpose was to kill "non-believers." On the night of Feb. 14, they entered a lightly guarded recruit training camp near Kibbutz Galed and murdered three soldiers who were asleep in a tent, using knives, axes and a pitchfork. Two were recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

A fourth soldier was wounded. The assailants escaped with their weapons.

District Attorney Esther Sofer, who demanded life terms, said the case was especially vile because there was no connection between the killers and their victims.

The only reason they were murdered was because they were soldiers and Jews, Sofer said.

It was disclosed, meanwhile, that the interrogation of the accused led to the arrests of 12 other Israeli Arabs on charges of arms-trading with terrorists in the administered territories.

The suspects are in custody pending legal action.

RUSSIAN VICE PRESIDENT IN ISRAEL, MARKING A LANDMARK IN DIPLOMACY By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- The official visit here of Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi this week is focused on economics and agriculture, though it is also a diplomatic landmark.

Rutskoi, the second-highest official of the largest of the Soviet successor states, is clearly interested in international investment and aid. Israel is anxious for a chance to offer its skills in agriculture, medicine and industrial technology.

Rutskoi, who is the right-hand man of President Boris Yeltsin, arrived late Tuesday and was greeted by Housing Minister Ariel Sharon at the airport.

He met privately with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Wednesday. They were joined later by the Israel-based international financier Saul Eisenberg and David Kimche, former director general of the Foreign Ministry, who has gone into international trade since ending his diplomatic career and spends considerable time in the former Soviet Union.

Shamir praised Russia for adopting a "balanced policy" toward the Middle East, thereby earning a role for itself in regional peacemaking.

LARRY SMITH'S DECISION TO RETIRE SEEN AS SETBACK FOR ISRAEL LOBBY

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 29 (JTA) -- Rep. Lawrence Smith's decision this week not to run for re-election is being seen here as a major setback for the pro-Israel community on Capitol Hill, which has long benefited from the Florida Democrat's support.

Smith announced his retirement from the House of Representatives on Tuesday, saying, "The job I love has become impossible to do.

"Washington doesn't work anymore, and the public arena is increasingly frustrating and bitter," he said in a taped statement to a Miami television station.

Pro-Israel activists were quick to voice dismay over Smith's move.

"I cannot think of words that fully express our regret and the loss we feel in Larry's decision not to run," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

He called the congressman a "stalwart friend and advocate, and an articulate spokesman."

"Larry has been synonymous with outspoken, effective leadership on virtually all issues affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship," said Tom Dine, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Smith, who is Jewish, is suffering politically for having written 161 overdrafts at the House Bank. And last week, Common Cause, the Washington-based political watchdog group, asked the House ethics committee to determine if Smith made personal use of \$10,000 from his campaign war chest.

A third reason for his retirement is that his district is being reshaped, in keeping with this decade's census, to include more Cuban-Americans and fewer Jews.

Tough On Administration Officials

The six-term lawmaker will be remembered for "his activism and his outspokenness," said Morris Amitay, treasurer of Washington PAC, a large pro-Israel political action committee.

In Smith's first five terms, he served on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and became notorious for his sharp temper. It was only in the last two years that Smith made a jump to the more crucial appropriations subcommittee, which votes on Israel's \$3 billion annual foreign aid package.

Even as a freshman lawmaker, Smith achieved a reputation for his testy exchanges with State Department officials. Even pro-Israel officials, such as former Secretary of State George Shultz, received tough treatment from the Florida congressman.

Smith's departure, and the decision of Rep. Mel Levine (D-Calif.) to run for one of California's two open Senate seats, means that pro-Israel activists will have to find new House Democrats to rally their colleagues on pro-Israel issues.

Possible candidates for that role are Reps. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) and Howard Berman (D-Calif.), said one pro-Israel lobbyist here.

Another possibility is that Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), who has been a prominent supporter of Israel but has been markedly less confrontational than Smith or Levine, could step in and become more involved in rallying colleagues, the lobbyist said.

SPECTER BEATS ANTI-ISRAEL CHALLENGER BUT COULD FACE TOUGH RACE IN THE FALL

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 29 (JTA) -- Sen. Arlen Specter has been renominated for a third term by Pennsylvania Republicans, who gave him a 2-1 margin over an opponent who challenged Specter for supporting Israel.

But in November, Specter will have to face Democrat Lynn Yeakel, a candidate virtually unknown until a month ago who won an upset victory over her party-endorsed opponent.

Yeakel, who won 76 percent of the Jewish vote, concentrated her campaign on attacking the way Specter questioned witness Anita Hill during Senate hearings to confirm the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the Pennsylvania presidential contests, both President Bush and Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton easily won their respective primaries.

Bush, with 77 percent of the vote compared to 23 percent for his Conservative challenger, Patrick Buchanan, now has 1,105 delegates, enough to assure him the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Houston this August.

Clinton, who received 56 percent of the vote, does not have the nomination sewed up yet, but is two-thirds of the way there. His chief rival, former California Gov. Jerry Brown, received 26 percent of the vote, and former Sen. Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, who is no longer in the race, won 12 percent.

Among Jewish voters, who made up 6 percent of the Democrats who went to the polls Tuesday, Clinton won 54 percent, Brown won 31 percent and Tsongas won 11 percent. There was no breakdown for Jewish Republicans, who made up only 2 percent of voters in that primary.

Stance On Jewish Issues Unknown

It was the Senate race, though, that had most of the drama.

Specter, who is Jewish, received 65 percent of the vote to 35 percent for his opponent, state Rep. Stephen Freind. During the campaign, Freind attacked the two-term senator for receiving support from pro-Israel groups and for supporting aid to Israel, including Israel's request for \$10 billion in U.S.-guaranteed loans.

While this charge did not seem to have much effect, women's issues came to the fore in the primaries and may be the dominant issue in the fall campaign.

Freind, who opposes abortion, is the sponsor of Pennsylvania's restrictive abortion law, which is now being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Yeakel, a fund-raiser for women's causes, entered the race because she said she was angered by the aggressive manner in which Specter interrogated Anita Hill, who had accused Judge Thomas of sexual harassment.

By attacking Specter and ignoring her Democratic opponents, Yeakel won 44 percent of the primary vote. Lt. Gov. Mark Singel, who had been the front-runner with the Democratic Party's endorsement, received 33 percent of the vote. Another candidate, Robert Colville, received 14 percent of the vote.

Yeakel's stance on Jewish issues is largely unknown. She has issued a policy statement expressing support for Israel, for aid to the Jewish state and for providing U.S. guarantees for the loans it has requested.

THE HOLOCAUST BECOMES PERSONAL FOR 5,000 YOUTHS VISITING POLAND

By Michele Chabia

TREBLINKA, Poland, April 28 (JTA) -- On a bus bound for Treblinka, a group of North American students listened spellbound as Rena Quint, a Polish Holocaust survivor, described her childhood during World War II.

"When I was a child, the Nazis sent my father and me to Bergen-Belsen, where he disappeared without a trace. My mother and two brothers were sent to Treblinka. I never saw them again. Visiting the camps is the closest thing to visiting the graves of my family," she said.

For the students, who were among 5,000 Jewish young people taking part in this week's "March of the Living," the horror of the Holocaust -- and the bravery of its victims -- has taken on a personal dimension: They now know someone who was there.

The biennial March of the Living program, which began with 1,200 participants in 1988, has grown into the largest single Holocaust educational tool in the world. It has also become a media event that draws world attention to the Nazi slaughter of Jews half a century ago.

The youths, who range in age from 16 to 21, arrived here earlier this week aboard nearly 150 flights from 42 countries. Fifty tons of kosher food were specially flown in from Israel, along with 1,000 Israelis and 700 foreign students studying in Israel.

In Poland, the Israeli delegation was joined by 1,800 North Americans, 450 South Africans, and others from as far away as Australia, India and Colombia. According to the organizers, the group has taken almost every good hotel room in Warsaw.

Though the culture and language differ from group to group, the itineraries are consistent. On Monday, a convoy of buses accompanied by Polish police and Israeli security guards took hundreds of students to the dilapidated Warsaw Jewish cemetery, and later to Treblinka, while another convoy visited the Majdanek death camp.

A Visit To Warsaw Cemetery

The next day, the two groups swapped schedules, while a third visited the site of the Warsaw Ghetto and the refurbished Nozyk Synagogue, where Warsaw's tiny, elderly Jewish population comes to pray.

On Thursday, the students and visiting dignitaries will walk the two-mile path from Auschwitz to Birkenau, transforming the route of death for millions of Jews into the March of the Living. The day will culminate with a service at Auschwitz commemorating the victims of the Holocaust.

Following a Shabbat spent with the Polish Jewish community, the students will fly to Israel, where they will tour the country and celebrate Israeli Independence Day on May 7.

From the beginning, the kids took a hands-on approach to their tour, with the encouragement of the program's organizers and youth leaders.

At the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, hundreds of youths armed with rolls of toilet paper and determination cleaned some of the crumbling grave-stones.

The task proved more symbolic than practical, however: Many of the stones have been damaged or destroyed. Most of the remainder are

in danger of disappearing under a thick, damp layer of decomposing leaves and moss.

Still, Dina Siegel from Teaneck, N.J., and Lisa Heinrich from Monsey, N.Y., labored to unearth a nameplate. After several minutes of scrubbing, the Hebrew letters became visible, and the name "Chanah Feingold" appeared.

"These are lost graves," said Siegel, "and they will all be lost soon if someone doesn't fix up the cemetery. Not many people come here, but that doesn't make those who are buried here any less important."

Something I Needed To Do

Just why these young people came to Poland, most at their own expense, is intensely personal. For Richard Gorelick from Potomac, Md., "it was just something I needed to do. No one in my family was killed in the Holocaust, but I still think about it all the time."

The tragedy, he said, "conjured up questions I couldn't answer. It's easy to read books and find out what happened historically, but understanding on an emotional level is more difficult. I hope to find some answers here."

For Zena Abraham, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia a year and a half ago, "the Holocaust is a universal Jewish experience. Jews from America, Morocco, France -- all feel what has happened here. I needed to see what the Holocaust was all about, with my own eyes."

Often, said Abraham Hirschzon, chairman of the march, it is the world's eyes that need opening. "Sure, the march is first and foremost an educational tool for our own kids, but it can also be a model for others. Without mass demonstrations like ours, the millions who were murdered will soon be forgotten."

At Treblinka, where only a few structures from the death camp still remain, the students turned inward, toward private thoughts and feelings. As distant thunder rumbled, some lit yahrzeit candles and said Kaddish, while others, like survivor Rena Quint, searched among hundreds of stones bearing the names of cities and towns from which Jews perished.

With the help of a young American student, Quint found the stone of her hometown, Petrikov, Poland. Clearly moved, she said, "This young man, whose family was spared the Holocaust, is now a member of my family."

During the short memorial service, the students, clad in blue-and-white jackets with a Jewish star on the back, sang Hatikvah. When Kaddish was recited, the storm moved overhead. The sky darkened, thunder growled, and large raindrops began to fall.

ANTI-SEMITIC SONG REMOVED FROM CD

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, April 29 (JTA) -- An anti-Semitic song version of "Little Red Riding Hood" has been removed from a compact disc, and the recording artist has apologized -- but not before it soared to No. 3 on the list of the top 10 hits.

The song was called "Joods Kapje" (Little Jewish Riding Hood). In it, the grandmother is filthy rich and has a very large hooked nose.

A complaint lodged by CIDI, the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel, got the song withdrawn.

According to spokesman Ronny Naftaniel, the same CD contained other anti-Semitic innuendos, but the center decided not to press the matter.