

75th ANNIVERSARY YEAR

TUESDAY, MAY 26, 1992

VOL. 70, NO. 100

R.A. VOTES TO ALLOW RABBIS TO SERVE AT GAY SYNAGOGUES

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

KIAMESHA LAKE, N.Y. (JTA) -- The rabbis of the Conservative movement have voted to allow their colleagues to work at gay and lesbian congregations, effectively reversing Rabbinical Assembly policy.

They also have decided to create a commission that will study human sexuality over the next two years and develop a Conservative perspective on the issue, which will be presented to the rabbinic body and the movement's Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards.

The rabbis' decision on serving gay synagogues is binding only because the law committee has not ruled on the issue, according to Rabbi Gerald Zelizer, the R.A.'s new president.

The policy will be revoked if the law committee decides that it abrogates halacha, or Jewish law, he said.

The incoming chairman of the law committee, Rabbi Kassel Abelson of Congregation Beth El in Minneapolis, expects that the panel's 30 rabbis will take up the issue shortly.

Furthermore, any gay and lesbian synagogue that asks the Conservative movement for help finding a rabbi will be required to abide by law committee guidelines, which prohibit ceremonies of commitment between same-gender couples, said Zelizer.

Though the new policy may be short-lived and may not, in fact, lead to any gay congregations hiring a Conservative rabbi, it sends an important message, say its supporters.

"We're telling the community of gay Jews that there are many rabbis in the R.A. inclined to serve them as fellow Jews," said Rabbi Mark Loeb, senior rabbi at Beth El Congregation in Baltimore.

"There are so many things that people do in their lives that are imperfect that it makes little sense to harp upon one aspect of non-compliance with the covenant, rather than look toward the fundamental commitment they have to being Jewish," he said.

Too Late To Help New York Shul

The new policy, adopted by a vote of 64-50 at the R.A.'s annual convention here last week, calls on the R.A. to accept applications for rabbinic placement from any congregation "without consideration of the sexual orientation of its members" and to afford R.A. members "the opportunity to apply for such positions."

The policy comes too late to help the gay synagogue that sparked the debate two years ago with its request for help in finding a rabbi.

New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah was first told that the Conservative movement's placement service would help find it a rabbi, as the movement does for other, non-affiliated congregations that abide by Conservative standards. But the congregation was later informed that it would not be helped.

The synagogue, meanwhile, which has 1,100 members, has hired a Reconstructionist rabbi, who will be installed this fall.

The R.A. policy change also will not help

gay and lesbian Conservative rabbis, who must remain celibate or in the closet if they want to work in the movement.

The commission to study human sexuality will present its recommendations to the R.A. at its 1994 convention and to the law committee, as well.

The rabbis' vote on the commission, after impassioned debate, was unanimous, and will implement the recommendation to establish such a panel that was made in March by an evenly divided law committee.

The author of the paper suggesting the study, Rabbi Elliot Dorff, provost of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, wanted it to be movement-wide, involving the movement's congregational arm, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which serves as the movement's unofficial headquarters.

How Much Individual Choice?

But key leaders of those bodies said they would not participate in such a commission. They included the seminary's chancellor, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch; the president of United Synagogue, Alan Tichnor; and its executive vice president, Rabbi Jerome Epstein.

"We have nothing against further study," said Tichnor. "But it should be under the auspices of the law committee. If anything is set up around them, it would be undermining their purposes."

The two bodies' refusal to participate is not likely to hinder the commission's formation, however. Zelizer said he would "move with dispatch to implement the will of the R.A."

Close beneath the surface of debate over the role of lesbians and gay men in Conservative Jewish life is disagreement among the rabbis over the source of ultimate authority.

It is proving a difficult task for Conservative Judaism, which has always married tradition with modernity in its interpretation of Jewish law, to balance the authority of the law committee and the principle of "moreh d'atra."

"Moreh d'atra" refers to the right of individual rabbis to interpret Jewish law according to the needs of their local communities and their responsibility not to impose decisions that their communities cannot live by.

"The movements to our left often stress individual choice to such an extent that they can resolve this. Sometimes they have a little bit easier time," said Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, director of public affairs for the New Israel Fund. "We're doing a juggling act."

Weintraub is one of the initiators of a newly organized group of rabbis who support an interpretation of Jewish law that would allow gay and lesbian Jews to be "sincerely welcomed and fully included" in Conservative life.

The group is calling itself B'Tsalmenu, which means "in our image," after a phrase in Genesis that reads: "And God said, 'Let us make Adam in our image...'"

Eighty-three of the R.A.'s 1,400 rabbis have signed onto the nascent group's statement of purpose, which so far has been circulated quietly and only by word of mouth.

ARAB WHO KILLED 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL CAPTURED JUST AS MOBS CONVERGE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 25 (JTA) -- A Gaza Strip Arab who stabbed 15-year-old Helena Rapp to death at a school-bus stop in Bat Yam on Sunday morning was captured shortly after the assault and taken into custody before mobs of enraged Jews could harm him.

The attack followed the non-fatal stabbing of a yeshiva student in Jerusalem last Friday and was the third knife attack by Arabs on Jews in Israel this month.

The latest victim was buried at the Holon cemetery Monday.

Anti-Arab riots broke out in Bat Yam, a seaside town south of Tel Aviv, immediately after the murder and spread to Rishon le-Zion and other areas. At least seven Arab laborers were attacked and injured, two of them by stabbing.

Rioters followed the lead of members of the anti-Arab Kach movement in the attacks. The black-on-yellow fist that is the emblem of the movement created by the late Rabbi Meir Kahane was seen raised above the marauding crowds.

Rocks were hurled at Arab cars, and some were overturned. A police officer suffered a serious head injury when struck by an iron bar thrown by a rioter.

At least 30 Jews were arrested, 12 in Rishon le-Zion and 18 in Bat Yam. One rioter being held was an off-duty border policeman.

The Gaza Strip was ordered sealed off for three days to prevent residents from entering Israel until tempers cool.

Helena Rapp's attacker was identified as Fuad Abdul Atti Amran, 19, an unemployed construction worker from the Nuscirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

He carried an official magnetized identification card issued by the security authorities which permit Gaza Arabs to enter Israel to seek work as day laborers. Ostensibly, the holders have been checked for security and criminal records.

'Should Have Been Shot'

Amran reportedly confessed to the killing. He told police he was disgruntled after failing to find work with Jewish building contractors and bought a knife to kill Jews.

According to police, Rapp and a friend were waiting for a bus to school outside her home on Rehov Ben-Gurion, Bat Yam's main street, at about 7:30 a.m. Sunday.

A car identified by its blue license plates as being from the administered territories drew up and the assailant, holding a knife, jumped out and lunged at Rapp's companion. She dodged and the man turned on Rapp, stabbing her deeply several times in the left arm pit.

She was pronounced dead by a Magen David Adom paramedic a half hour later.

An Israeli air force major passing by saw the attack and fired his pistol at Amran. Another Israel Defense Force officer fired from a passing bus. Both missed.

But a taxi chasing the fleeing man cut him off, and the driver pinned him down with the knife now pointing at the killer's throat.

Eyewitnesses to the killing said they saw a second Arab with a knife at the scene who slipped away. Police said the mob violence that followed the killing hampered their search.

Angry crowds, exhorted to revenge by

members of the Kach movement, stampeded through the town waving large Israeli flags and shouting "Death to the Arabs." Passersby they thought looked like Arabs were accosted.

Amran, however, was handed over to police unharmed.

News of the tragedy reached Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir at a meeting with leaders of the National Religious Party late Sunday afternoon. He told them the assailant "should have been shot."

The victim of the Jerusalem stabbing Friday was reported recovering from moderate chest wounds at Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Ein Kerem. He was identified as Yosef Grumann, 15, a student at the Toldot Aharon yeshiva in the Mea Shearim neighborhood.

He was returning from prayers at the Western Wall at about noon when he was knifed from behind in his left shoulder as he passed an Arab bakery. The attacker fled and has not been apprehended.

Grumann extracted the knife from his back and searched for help. A passerby took him to the hospital.

Earlier this month, two Jewish youths were attacked in downtown Jerusalem by an Arab resident of the Dehaishe refugee camp. One of them was slightly injured. Their assailant was captured on the spot.

ISRAEL, SLA POUND HEZBOLLAH AS SOUTH LEBANON TAKES LICKING

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 25 (JTA) -- The Israeli air force continued to pound Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon over the weekend.

Jet fighter-bombers and helicopter gunships attacked Monday for the fifth time in a week. Artillery of the Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army continued their intermittent bombardment of targets occupied by the pro-Iranian Islamic fundamentalist militia.

The air and artillery assaults pinpointed Hezbollah command posts and training camps, many located in the Bekaa Valley of eastern Lebanon, which is under de facto Syrian control.

Israeli leaders have warned Syria and Lebanon that the attacks will continue if Hezbollah and other hostile groups in southern Lebanon continue to attack IDF and SLA targets.

U.S. Secretary of State James Baker said he was trying to persuade Lebanon and Syria to impose constraints on Hezbollah and disarm it, as they have other Shi'ite militias in southern Lebanon. He reportedly informed Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy of his efforts when they met in Lisbon on Sunday.

Israel began its latest round of attacks after a well-executed Hezbollah ground attack on an SLA base in the southern Lebanon security zone last Tuesday. One SLA soldier was killed and four were captured.

It was the first time in more than two years that Hezbollah dared to mount a ground attack on the Israeli-equipped and trained SLA. Until then, Hezbollah resorted to ambushes, land mines and Katyusha rocket or mortar attacks.

Israel responded with heavy aerial and artillery bombardments, which have continued all week. Reports from the region said that at least 20,000 villagers have fled to the relative safety of Tyre and other towns on the Lebanese coast.

They were prompted to flee by Syrian radio broadcasts which predicted more Israeli attacks.

PLO SUPPORTERS WIN CONTROL OF NABLUS BUSINESS COUNCIL

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- Supporters of the Palestine Liberation Organization won control of the Nablus Chamber of Commerce in a vote over the weekend widely seen as a prelude to the election of autonomous Palestinian institutions in the administered territories.

The national list, dominated by Yasir Arafat's Al Fatah wing of the PLO, won 48.5 percent of the vote in the West Bank's largest city. The fundamentalist Islamic bloc got 45 percent.

But the regional election system allotted the PLO backers nine of the 12 seats on the chamber's Executive and three to the fundamentalists.

The victory was important for the PLO nationalists, who lost elections to the chambers of commerce in Hebron and Ramallah.

The chambers are the only institutions Palestinians in the territories are permitted to elect at the present time. While their official function is to promote local business and investment, they serve as the framework of future political bodies.

In addition to Fatah, the winning list included the rejectionist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Arab Communist Party.

The victors celebrated by driving around town honking horns and waving Palestinian flags.

Considering that Nablus, with a population of over 100,000, has been a hotbed of intifada activity, Israeli troops were out in force to guard against disturbances. But the elections were conducted without incident.

PLO supporters claimed during the campaign that the outcome would determine the status of the PLO among the Palestinian people. The next round of elections will be held in East Jerusalem and Hebron.

A mass rally was held Saturday in Gaza, at which Palestinians urged an end to the growing violence within their community. The number of Palestinians murdered by fellow Arabs, ostensibly for collaborating with the authorities, exceeds the number killed in clashes with Israeli forces.

SENIOR CANADIAN OFFICIAL DISMAYED BY ISRAEL'S NO-SHOW AT PEACE TALKS

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, May 25 (JTA) -- Canada's foreign minister told Jewish leaders here last week that she regretted the fact that Israel, Syria and Lebanon had boycotted multilateral talks on the Palestinian refugee problem, held May 13-15 in Ottawa.

Speaking May 21 at the 23rd plenary assembly of the Canadian Jewish Congress, External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall said she had been given a personal assurance on Israel's attendance by her counterpart in the Jewish state, Foreign Minister David Levy.

"I accepted this role for Canada because I believe that we can legitimately contribute to the peace process, based on our reputation as an honest broker, especially in the Middle East and especially on refugee issues," she said, adding that further talks lie ahead.

Paraphrasing Pirkei Avot (the Ethics of the Fathers), she asked, "If Canada does not respond to a call for peace, who will?"

McDougall cited Canada's role in encouraging countries such as Nigeria, India, Vietnam, Benin and the Maldives to establish diplomatic ties with Israel.

She also mentioned the trilateral agreement signed in October 1989 in which Canada defrays half the cost of training participants from the Third World who come to Israel to study agriculture and rural development.

"All of these actions build legitimacy -- and they build confidence," she said.

McDougall also recalled the triumphs in the human rights campaigns to free the Jews of the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Syria since she addressed the previous triennial CJC meeting in 1989, when she was minister of employment and immigration.

She singled out for praise Judy Feld Carr of Toronto for her work on behalf of Syrian Jewry. "It just shows what one individual and the 24-hour fax machine can accomplish.

"I am sure that I would not be alone in this room if I were to admit that the events which have taken place in these areas in such a short period of time are almost beyond belief," McDougall said. She added: "Of course, the Jewish people are no strangers to miracles."

Alluding to the plummeting popularity of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's government, she quipped, "This is something we Progressive Conservatives understand. Indeed, relying on miracles is part of our election campaign strategy."

ETHIOPIANS CELEBRATE ANNIVERSARY OF 1991 OPERATION SOLOMON AIRLIFT

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- Ethiopians from all over Israel converged on Jerusalem on Monday to celebrate the first anniversary of Operation Solomon, the airlift which brought 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel overnight.

Sponsored by the Jewish Agency, the event was more a reunion than an anniversary party. While many onlookers enjoyed the dance and vocal performances onstage at Sacher Park, the real action was in the audience.

Despite the crush of people -- most of whom were bused in by the agency -- the immigrants seemed to have no trouble finding family and friends.

In traditional Ethiopian fashion, the olim kissed loved ones on the cheek seven times, then sat on the grass and caught up on family news.

The day proved to be a respite from the difficulties immigrants face during their first year in Israel. For one day, at least, there were no ulpan classes, no bureaucracy to contend with.

Muchit Baruch, who arrived in Israel a year ago, lives in an absorption center in Beersheba. Dressed in a white gown with colorful embroidered edges, she said through an interpreter that she was happy to be with her family.

"I am having trouble learning Hebrew, and it is hard to raise a family on the small allowance we receive each month," she said.

The mother of five children, two of whom immigrated several years ago and are now soldiers, she added, "Now that we are all together, everything else will be all right."

Also in good spirits were Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Labor Party leader Yitzhak Rabin, both contending for votes in the June 23 elections, who good-naturedly shook hands at the event.

THE NEW AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT VOWS TO TAKE COUNTRY OUT OF ISOLATION

By Marta Halpert

VIENNA, May 25 (JTA) -- Austria's president-elect, Thomas Klestil, said his first order of business after he is sworn in on July 8 will be to end the diplomatic isolation brought on his country when it elected Kurt Waldheim president in 1986 despite disclosure of his Nazi past.

Klestil, a 59-year-old career diplomat and former ambassador to the United States who was the candidate of the conservative Austrian People's Party, won a resounding victory in Sunday's runoff election against the Social Democratic candidate, Transport Minister Rudolph Streicher.

Klestil said his immediate plans call for visiting the European Community countries and Austria's close neighbors -- something Waldheim was unable to do in his official capacity because of the stigma attached to his wartime activities.

Another of Klestil's early duties after moving into Hofburg Castle, the presidential mansion, will be to accredit a new Israeli ambassador.

Israel downgraded its diplomatic relations with Austria after Waldheim was elected. It is expected to restore them to the ambassadorial level as soon as he leaves office.

Runoff elections had to be held because the April 26 elections failed to give a clear mandate to any of the four candidates running. They eliminated Heide Schmidt of the right-wing Freedom Party, with about 16 percent of the vote, and Robert Jungke, a Jewish scientist who ran for the Green Alternative Party and got 5.7 percent.

Although Streicher had been favored to win in the runoffs, Klestil managed to pick up both the right-wing and the Green vote and beat him by a 57-43 percent landslide.

The race was devoid of the anti-Semitism that insinuated itself into Waldheim's campaign six years ago after his role in a German army unit linked to atrocities was exposed by Jewish groups.

JAPAN READY FOR MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN AIDING MIDEAST, WJC LEADER SAYS

TOKYO, May 25 (JTA) -- Japan is now taking a much more active, evenhanded approach to the Middle East, according to World Jewish Congress Co-chairman Isi Leibler, who met here Friday with Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe.

Among other things, Japan intends to play a role in Middle East reconstruction as part of the peace process, Watanabe told his visitor.

Watanabe, who also holds the rank of deputy prime minister, welcomed the "great developments" in the Middle East peace talks and said that if they proceed smoothly, Japan "intends to provide its assistance in the fields of reconstruction and environment," Leibler reported.

"This was extremely encouraging, and it reinforces the impression I received on my last visit to Tokyo six months ago that Japan is now taking a much more active and evenhanded approach to the Middle East," said Leibler.

He said Watanabe's reference to the possibility of a Japanese role in reconstruction "points to an extremely important area where Japan can take the lead" in bringing stability to a chronically unstable area of the world.

"I can imagine some kind of Japanese 'Marshall Plan' which, if properly coordinated with all the governments in the region, could bring very great benefits to everyone," Leibler said.

SCHOLARS EXAMINE ANTI-SEMITISM AT UNPRECEDENTED PRAGUE SEMINAR

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, May 25 (JTA) -- A host of scholars, gathered here for the first international seminar on anti-Semitism in post-totalitarian Europe, were unable to agree on what has kept hatred of Jews alive for 2,000 years.

But they all acknowledged that anti-Semitism did not die with the defeat of the Nazis and haunts the continent once again.

As Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel put it, in an eloquent address to the seminar, "Anti-Semitism has re-emerged with a stubbornness, stupidity and aggressiveness all its own."

The seminar, held in Prague from Friday through Sunday under Havel's auspices, was organized by the Franz Kafka Society of Prague and co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the British Embassy and the Prague Jewish community.

Participants included Elyakim Rubinstein, head of the Israeli delegation to the current bilateral peace talks; Karel Schwarzenberg, chancellor of the presidential office of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic; Martin Butora, counselor to Havel on human rights issues; and David Singer, AJCommittee's director of research.

Papers were delivered by Hebrew University Professors Yehuda Bauer and Shlomo Avineri and Professor Bedrich Loewenstein of the Berlin Free University.

Also participating were representatives from the countries of the former Soviet bloc, who spoke of their own experiences.

"To find rational explanation for the irrational" was one of the seminar's main goals.

120 Anti-Semitic Groups

Some lecturers sought the roots of anti-Semitism in ancient times, pointing to the schism between Judaism and Christianity some 2,000 years ago; the subsequent competition between Jewish and Christian messianism; and current attempts by anti-Semites to prove there is a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

Others maintained that anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance are byproducts of the disintegration of empires.

Those who did so drew a parallel between the fall of the Roman Empire and the ensuing instability in Europe, and the disintegration of the Soviet empire and subsequent escalating ethnic rivalries.

Scholars pointed out that conspiracy theories and denial of the Holocaust appear mainly in societies with crises of conscience and feelings of shame for the deeds of the previous generations, in such places as Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Howard Spier of the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London said that there are 120 anti-Semitic organizations in Russia, the Pamyat group being only the tip of the iceberg.

Shimon Samuels, director of the Paris office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, observed that there are nearly 400 Jewish organizations in Russia today. He claimed that only about 5 percent of Russian Jews, and no more than 12 percent of all Jews in the former Soviet Union, see aliyah as a solution to their personal problems.

Replying to an observation that some Jews seem to react in a paranoid manner to anti-Semitic remarks, Bauer said they have good reason to be paranoid.