

AMERICAN JEWS FASCINATED BUT WARY OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE PEROT

By Cynthia Mann

States News Service

WASHINGTON, June 16 (JTA) -- American Jews, who traditionally vote overwhelmingly Democratic, are nonetheless fascinated by the maverick independent candidacy of Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot.

But their fascination is coupled with a profound wariness of his proud detachment from the political establishment, his ambiguity on Israel and other policies at the core of the Jewish agenda, and an alienating personal style.

In fact, Jews are reserving judgment on Perot in far greater numbers than non-Jews. Exit polls from the June Democratic primaries in California and New Jersey, the only recent presidential surveys with a statistically significant Jewish sample, found Jewish Democrats much less willing to defect to Perot than other Democrats.

In California, 38 percent of Democrats said they would vote for Perot in November, compared to 25 percent of Jews; in New Jersey, Democrats who would vote for Perot numbered 30 percent -- much higher than the 19 percent among Jewish Democrats.

Many political analysts and Jewish leaders predict that Perot's now-soaring presidential bid will falter by October. But if the strong three-way race now in the offing does persist, they say the Jewish vote will be disproportionately important, especially in key states, such as California and New York.

Window Of Opportunity For Perot

Pundits project that in a three-way contest, more than 60 percent of the Jewish vote would be firm for the apparent Democratic nominee, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton.

President George Bush, meanwhile, is expected to suffer a sharp drop in the 30 percent of the Jewish vote he won in 1988, primarily because of his hard-line stance on loan guarantees to Israel last fall and winter.

That leaves a window of opportunity for Perot.

Already he has begun to court the organized Jewish community, through his close friend, Morton Myerson, who runs Perot's business and has recently heightened his own profile in Dallas-area Jewish causes.

"The currency of the Jewish vote is now much more significant than it was three months ago," said Abraham Foxman, executive director of the Anti-Defamation League, "and because he is an astute and organized politician, Perot is beginning to reach out."

By Myerson's account, Jewish leaders have been "more than eager" to hear him out on Perot and on Perot's stands on the issues.

But he has some doubts to assuage.

For one, Perot was a longstanding member in a Dallas country club that bars Jews and blacks, from which he only recently resigned. Further, he has come under scrutiny for his company's firing of a Jewish employee for wearing a beard as an exercise of his religious beliefs. He has not yet responded to a recent call from the Anti-Defama-

tion League to explain that action by Electronic Data Services, which was found guilty of civil rights violations by a court in 1983.

"If the Jewish community is looking at this incident for an indication of anti-Semitism," said Myerson, "I was president of the company at the time and that should answer the question. EDS always has had strong anti-discrimination policies."

The most public evidence of Perot's new outreach mission was his speech at an American Jewish Committee fund-raiser in New York last month at the invitation of event co-chair Alan Greenberg, chief executive officer of Bear Stearns and Company and a Perot enthusiast.

The speech touched a host of Jewish buttons. It offered standard fare in support of Israel: "Israel is our friend," he said, "and you stand by your friends, it's just that simple." But it offered little by way of substantive policy.

Perhaps more memorable than the speech, however, was the \$100,000 contribution he sent to the AJCommittee shortly afterward.

A Fundamentally Decent Man

Those who have made contact with Perot say that despite a few examples of apparent insensitivity to Jews, he appears to be a fundamentally fair and decent man, free of systematic anti-Semitism or bigotry.

Greenberg, who conceded he is helping the Texan in his Jewish outreach efforts, was spare in explaining his support for the independent candidate and assessing broader Jewish response.

"He's a smart guy, a good guy, without a vicious bone in his body," said Greenberg. "Jews who like smart guys, good guys, will vote for him. Those who don't, won't."

"Jews are like other Americans," he said. "There is no attachment to parties, just personalities."

A bipartisan poll of the overall American electorate released last week found Perot had the lead in a three-way race with 36 percent, followed by 32 percent for Bush and 24 percent for Clinton.

But close observers say the "outsider" appeal that has catapulted Perot to the top of presidential polls resonates far less for Jewish voters than for other white Americans, who believe Perot is an answer to their frustrations with the status quo.

Jews Unhappy With Bush

ADL's Foxman said Jews will be open to Perot because of "unhappiness with George Bush's policies in the Middle East" and because of lingering concern with past Democratic concessions to pro-Palestinian demands in party platforms.

But Foxman conceded Perot's defiant outsider status is of little appeal to Jews and even inspires fear and mistrust.

"Minorities are protected by the system against the tyranny of the majority," he said. "The system isn't perfect but it provides safeguards."

"We need to hear more meat on Israel than the fact he's met Golda Meir and liked her," said Foxman.

including former Washington Post reporter Marilyn Berger, who will advise him on the Middle East.

But reservations about Perot extend beyond foreign policy programs to his hard-line moralistic posture; he has said he would not hire homosexuals or adulterers for Cabinet positions.

"The rather rigid lines he draws on social behavior are foreign" to the vast majority of Jews, said Steve Gutow, executive director of the National Council of Jewish Democrats and a long-time Texas political activist.

Gutow believes, however, that Perot is "fundamentally not an anti-Semite and not bigoted" and that he would not foster divisiveness among different groups.

"There is an attraction among Jews to the Horatio Alger type (because) we came from the ghettos and made something," said Matthew Brooks, head of the Republican National Jewish Coalition, based in Washington.

But Brooks said Jews have to look harder at Perot's ambiguous positions on Israel and on his company practices that resulted in the firing of the Orthodox Jew for wearing a beard. The "autocratic" and "dictatorial nature of his business doesn't resonate well," said Brooks.

"Perot has been successful building a coalition by being all things to all people to date, but that can't last. The electorate is not that unsophisticated," he said.

MISSION TO ETHIOPIA URGES ISRAEL NOT TO ACCEPT FERRIS MORA AS JEWS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 16 (JTA) -- The Ferris Mora, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, appear far from their goal of coming to Israel following the return here of a government-appointed fact-finding team.

Rabbi Moshe Waldman, representing the Chief Rabbinate, and Yisrael Kimchi, of the Interior Ministry, said they visited scores of villages in their month-long visit to Ethiopia and conducted "a very thorough inquiry."

Their conclusion, they said, was that the Ferris Mora had largely converted to Christianity 100 years ago, and today lead a totally un-Jewish life.

The Ferris Mora are estimated to number at least 25,000 and perhaps even 75,000. Accurate counts are hampered by the lack of population registries in Ethiopia, as well as by the fact that much of the population in the country's Gondar province is at least partially descended from the Jewish kingdom that ruled the area centuries back.

An immediate protest to the report came Tuesday, as dozens of Ethiopian immigrants demonstrated outside the prime minister's office in Jerusalem in support of the early immigration of the Ferris Mora.

"We want our mothers," "We want our fathers," the placards read. Several of the demonstrators told reporters that their families were split by the government's policy not to facilitate the immigration of the group.

A few of them had made it to Israel despite the government's policy -- and they were now campaigning on behalf of all the rest still living in Ethiopia.

The campaign has been joined by Gush Emunim leader Hanan Porat, a Knesset member from the National Religious Party, and Yehuda Etzion, one of the leaders of the Jewish terrorist

underground that plotted attacks against Arab mayors on the West Bank and the destruction of the Dome of the Rock.

But representatives of the 55,000 Ethiopian Jews now living in Israel are divided about supporting the Ferris Mora. Some of the Ethiopian Jews angrily charge the Ferris Mora with hindering Ethiopian Jews fleeing Ethiopia in 1984.

Reporting on his mission's findings, Waldman told the Ma'ariv daily: "We have reached the definite conclusion that the people concerned are today living as Christians in every respect, and no amount of lobbying in Israel can change that fact. Certainly there is the possibility of bringing them back to Judaism. But it is not going to be easy."

That task should be undertaken in Ethiopia, the fact-finders urged, and only then should those who have been brought back to the Jewish fold be aided in making aliyah.

They recommended that the Israeli authorities begin the task with the group of some 3,000 Ferris Mora presently assembled in Addis Ababa and pressing to be taken to Israel.

The full report of the fact-finding mission has been submitted to the Cabinet Secretary and to the two chief rabbis of Israel.

The Ethiopian government "is very much against the Ferris Mora leaving," a Jewish Agency official told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

"It sees them as part and parcel of Ethiopian society. The problem of a growing proportion of Moslems in the country creates a tremendous negative position on the part of the government and Ethiopian church," said the official.

The Jewish Agency official indicated, however, that family reunification might be dealt with separately from facilitating aliyah for all of the Ferris Mora.

"We will have to find a way to solve it," he said, referring to the divided families.

"There are different ways of entry to Israel. There's the Law of Return (under which all Jews have the right to immigrate), but also there is entry for people who are non-Jews," he said.

(Staff writer Larry Yudelson in New York contributed to this report.)

SHAMIR ADMITS CONCERN OVER LOSING VOTE OF SOVIET OLIM

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 16 (JTA) -- Admitting that his Likud government is "worried" about losing their support, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir urged Soviet immigrants to "consider broader national issues" when they go to the polls June 23 and "not vote under the influence of your personal, transient problems."

In a spirited address to some 300 olim at the Diplomat Hotel, which now serves as an absorption center in Jerusalem, the prime minister said Tuesday that he knew many of the newcomers were unhappy in their present circumstances, lacking suitable jobs and adequate homes.

"I appeal to you," said Shamir, speaking first in Hebrew and then in Yiddish, "do not cast your vote under the influence of your present problems. Consider the broader national issues: peace, defense, borders, the economy."

Shamir said it was "only natural" that new immigrants were having a hard time during their first two years in the country.

"But we can't postpone the elections until you are comfortably settled," he said.

WIESENTHAL CENTER PROTESTS EXCLUDING JEW FROM ARMY AUCTION IN SAUDI ARABIA

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, June 16 (JTA) -- The Simon Wiesenthal Center is protesting the exclusion of an American Jew from a huge auction of U.S. Army surplus material, being held in Saudi Arabia.

The sale, being billed as the Operation Desert Auction, is offering massive quantities of trucks, heavy equipment, tents and scrap metals held in Saudi Arabia at the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War.

John Schwartz saw a local announcement of the auction, being held in various phases from May 18 to July 8, in the Saudi port city of Dhahran.

The announcement, which was posted at a military surplus depot near Los Angeles, included two logos, one of Marhoon Nasser Auctioneers, the other showing an American shield and eagle with the words Defense Logistics Agency. Interested parties were asked to contact the auctioneers for visa applications, listing their names, passport number, nationality and religion.

Schwartz, a longtime scrap metal and surplus dealer, as well as a Holocaust survivor and combat veteran of the Korean War, thought the opportunity was too good to pass up. He and his partner, Rita Lowy, faxed the required information, listing Schwartz' religion as Jewish.

The very next day, a fax came back from Nasser, thanking Schwartz for his interest and adding, "Since it is difficult to get the visa for a person who is Jewish (sic), we suggest you sent (sic) the particulars of someone else who is other than Jewish."

Letters Sent to U.S. And Saudi Governments

Schwartz turned, with this correspondence, to Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center, who dispatched letters of protest to U.S. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and to Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to the United States.

In the letter to Cheney, Cooper asked the Pentagon to immediately suspend participation in the auction, "which is clearly in contravention of U.S. law."

Addressing the Saudi ambassador, Cooper urged his government "to immediately revise its archaic and demeaning laws" which "in this case, actually forbid American citizen from bidding on materials produced in their own country."

No answers have been received so far.

There are a few aspects of this incident that puzzle Schwartz. First, since according to his figures, 80 to 90 percent of American scrap metal and war surplus dealers are Jewish, the Saudi and U.S. government must have known that some Jews would want to attend the auction.

Secondly, he is surprised that the Saudi auctioneer replied immediately by fax and spelled out the reason for the refusal. "He could have sent the reply by mail or pleaded some technicality until it was too late to make the auction," said Schwartz.

A final odd note was added by a June 8 dispatch from the Middle East News Network, reporting on the initial phase of the auction.

The news story noted that while more than 1,300 local and international bidders had registered, "the auction was dominated by Saudi Arabian buyers and not a single international bidder won a bid."

GORBACHEV RECEIVES PRIZES AND AWARDS, DENOUNCES ANTI-SEMITISM ON ISRAEL TRIP

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, June 16 (JTA) -- The formal atmosphere surrounding the arrival here of Mikhail Gorbachev lightened up as the week progressed and the former Soviet president learned that an Israeli potato had been named after him.

Gorbachev could not help smiling on Tuesday, the second day of his four-day visit, when the Agricultural Research Center at Beit Dagan presented the former Soviet leader with "Mikhail," a potato it recently cultivated.

Still, Gorbachev has spent most of his time here in a suit and tie, visiting dignitaries and receiving awards from the country's universities.

On Monday he accepted the prestigious \$35,000 Harvey Peace Prize from the Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa.

Gorbachev also picked up an honorary doctorate from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba Tuesday. Altogether, the honors and awards on this trip will earn him about \$55,000, about what the Israel government spends to feed and shelter eight Soviet immigrant families during their first year in the country.

In his speech at the Technion, Gorbachev spoke about anti-Semitism in the old Soviet Union where it was "officially denied in policy but encouraged in practice."

He added, "I hope you know how much leeway Jews in Russia received in order to realize their talents after the revolution. Yet in the days of Stalin, especially after World War II, anti-Semitism was introduced into domestic and foreign policy. Even after the death of Stalin, this state of affairs continued, but not in openly repressive forms."

Looking back at his own tenure as president, Gorbachev said, "Only in the days of perestroika did we finally succeed in putting an end to the signs of anti-Semitism."

Israel welcomed the former superpower leader as a hero because it was during Gorbachev's regime that Soviet Jews were finally given the right to emigrate freely.

About 350,000 of them have come to Israel to date. But Gorbachev viewed their exodus with mixed feelings. He saw it as a "loss for our land and society," he told one reporter.

JEWISH LAWYERS PUBLISH COMPENDIUM ON EUROPEAN LAWS AGAINST RACISM

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, June 16 (JTA) -- The International Association of Jewish Lawyers, meeting this week in Paris, announced the publication of a compendium of all the European legislation against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

Israeli judge Hadassah Ben-Ito, president of the association, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the new democracies of Eastern Europe repeatedly asked for documents on the ways used by Western democracies to fight discrimination.

"Such a document, comprising everything done in that field, did not exist until today. This is why we took upon ourselves to publish this compilation of all the laws passed by European countries on that issue," she said.

The announcement was made Sunday in Paris, in the presence of the highest French judiciary authorities.

**THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS:
REFORM LAW HAS NOT CHANGED VOTING,
BUT IT MAY AFFECT COALITION PROCESS**

[Part 2 of a Series]
By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Political parties seeking entry into the 13th Knesset will have a higher barrier to scale than they had for the 12th -- but not by much.

An amendment passed last year raising the election threshold from 1 to 1.5 percent of the vote cast has failed to achieve its first goal, which was to deter splinter parties with little hope of success from running in the elections.

Last year, when a list of candidates needed 1 percent of the vote -- then about 26,000 ballots -- 27 lists ran, of which 15 were elected.

This year, considering that the electorate has grown considerably, a minimum of about 44,000 votes will be required for entry into the chamber.

Undeterred, 25 would-be factions have completed the registration procedures to the satisfaction of the Central Elections Committee. They have paid their 23,000 shekel entry fee (slightly under \$10,000) and submitted their verifiable lists of at least 1,500 sponsors.

Among the aspirants are 10 parties that have never won a seat but think they can this time.

On the face of it, there has hardly been a major streamlining of Israel's notoriously fragmented political structure.

But there are those who say that in order to work in the next elections four years from now, the higher threshold must be seen to work in this one.

If, in the upcoming elections, substantially fewer than the 15 lists of 1988 get into the Knesset, that may well have a chastening effect on the political ambitions of assorted would-be national leaders when the time comes to elect the 14th Knesset.

In fact, such a reduction of the number of factions in the Knesset would be a great success in itself.

The higher threshold, moreover, renders unlikely the fairly common one-person party. In the new Knesset, the smallest delegation will probably consist of two members.

That is because the difference between the new threshold of 1.5 percent and the "votes value" of two Knesset members -- $1/60$ or 1.66 percent -- is so small.

Another new law forbids Knesset members from splitting away from their parties to become single-member factions.

But beyond such calculations, the present election campaign must be seen as the first stage of a lengthy process of constitutional reform, which began by raising the threshold and will continue with the implementation of a new law providing for the direct election of the prime minister.

That measure, enacted by the 12th Knesset, will become effective when the next Knesset is elected, by statute in 1996, if not before.

Then, and presumably in all elections to follow, voters will cast two ballots -- one for prime minister and one for the party of their choice.

Should that electoral reform enjoy success, it might catalyze efforts to introduce some form of district or constitutional element into the Israeli political process, possibly in the form of a

mixed proportional representation-constitutional system.

It is justifiably said that Israeli elections do not end on polling day but merely move from the first stage of the process of forming a new government to the second.

That is because no party in Israel has ever won an outright majority; nor is any party likely to do so as long as the present proportional system remains in force.

Governments are invariably formed in a drawn-out process of negotiations among the parties after the president has assigned one of the party leaders the task of trying to set up a government.

The president need not confer this upon the leader of the largest party. After consulting with all the factions in the new Knesset, the president selects the candidate with the best chance of forming a government, regardless of its strength at the polls.

This year's coalition-forming process will take place in the shadow of the new direct election law. The parties will negotiate in the knowledge that if they fail, or if the government they set up falls, the new law will be invoked and will be applied in early elections.

It is hard to guess in advance how this new factor will impact the political players.

Conventional wisdom is that many of the small parties that fear the new law and opposed it in the last Knesset will try to get it overturned in the new Knesset, or at least postpone its implementation.

The small parties therefore will be vitally interested in the survival of the new government and loath to cause a coalition crisis that would threaten its longevity.

This logic presumably will apply to small parties that are partners in the coalition. But it could also apply to small parties in the opposition, since they fear the effects of the new law too.

Yitzhak Rabin, the Labor Party leader, has been one of the most ardent advocates of the direct election law. He believes -- and the opinion polls bear him out -- that he would win a landslide victory in a direct, personal fight against Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir.

Rabin's strategy in the next Knesset, especially if he heads a shaky coalition, may be to bring about its early collapse so that he can run again under the new law.

OZ TO GET GERMAN WRITERS PRIZE

By David Kantor

BONN, June 16 (JTA) -- Israel's internationally famous author and peace activist Amos Oz has been named recipient of the 1992 Peace Prize awarded by the German Association of Book Distributors.

The association said last week that the prestigious award was in recognition of his literary contributions and his struggle for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The presentation of the prize, worth some \$16,000, will take place Oct. 4 at St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt, during the city's giant International Book Fair.

According to the association, Oz, a longtime member of the Peace Now movement in Israel, has been at the forefront of political efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute by creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel.