

**DEBATE BETWEEN SHAMIR AND RABIN ENDS
IN DULL DRAW, AS MIGHT THE ELECTION**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 17 (JTA) -- Israel's somnolent election campaign entered the home stretch with a 28-minute televised debate Tuesday night between Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Labor Party leader Yitzhak Rabin.

While Likud and Labor both claimed victory, instant polls published in several newspapers Wednesday suggested that neither man had overwhelmed the electorate although both succeeded, more or less, in getting their views across.

The debate between the leaders of the two major parties was supposed to be the high point of an election campaign characterized so far by public apathy.

With the elections less than a week away, Likud canceled a major campaign windup rally set for Saturday night in Tel Aviv. Party officials said it was decided the money would be better spent getting the voters out to the polls Tuesday.

But newspaper reports suggested that Likud feared the embarrassment of being unable to fill Tel Aviv's vast Malchei Yisrael Square, where election rallies are held.

Such fears also apply to Labor and to the smaller parties, as well. All reported a lethargic response from the electorate as the campaign entered its final week.

Rabin, for example, drew slim crowds during a tour of Tel Aviv suburbs Tuesday. In the Jerusalem suburb of Gilo on Wednesday, his audience numbered about 40.

Public Tuning Out

All of the parties, which committed large parts of their campaign war chests to a television ad blitz, have discovered that the public was tuning them out.

The majority of viewers, confronted by election commercials, switch to other channels. Many Israeli homes are now hooked into cable television, which offers them a broad choice of foreign news, sports, films and features.

During the Tuesday night debate, anchorman Nissim Mishal, a former Israel Television reporter who now heads Israel TV's Second Channel, put questions to the two candidates which they had not seen in advance. They covered the major issues -- defense, foreign policy, economics -- and elicited no surprises from either man.

Media commentators generally felt that Shamir projected a more relaxed image, though his hands were seen to shake slightly. Rabin seemed more uptight and nervous.

But he was deft in dodging awkward questions, seemed more in control of the time at his disposal, and hammered home his points with greater eloquence.

Neither of them ruled out a Labor-Likud unity government, though Shamir said he was not keen since it had not worked well in the past, for which he blamed Labor.

Rabin said his goal is to win as many votes as possible for Labor.

Shamir was unbending on the issue of territorial concessions for peace. He declined an invitation to say he would relinquish the Gaza

Strip. Eretz Yisrael is a small land and yielding any part of it is out of the question, he said.

Commentators agreed that the Likud leader has always been straightforward and consistent on that issue whether one agrees with him or not.

Rabin's responses were ambiguous. He was loath to spell out territorial flexibility with respect to the Golan Heights. He ruled out Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders.

Nevertheless, he thought Israel should ultimately retain only Greater Jerusalem and the "confrontation lines" along the Jordan River.

Rabin thought the Palestinians have to be given a form of self-rule. He stressed that Israel's supreme national interest is to keep the 1.7 million Palestinians living in the administered territories from becoming part of the body politic of the Jewish State.

"How can you make concessions?" Shamir asked him in a final comment. "Do you support a Palestinian state in the territories?"

Even Likud strategists felt this was a mistake on Shamir's part, for it invited a firm and articulate response from Rabin explaining that he opposes and has always opposed a Palestinian state.

Political experts are wondering whether the apparent lack of interest in the campaign will translate into low voter turnout Tuesday.

Some say it could reflect a maturation of the Israeli electorate, which is able to make its political choices without benefit of campaign propaganda.

The dull campaign has had at least one positive effect. National Police Chief Ya'acov Ternor reported this week that election-related violence has been lower in this campaign than in any other.

**PLAQUES AT AUSCHWITZ TO BE REPLACED;
EFFORTS CONTINUE TO PRESERVE CAMP**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, June 17 (JTA) -- A recent decision to replace commemorative plaques at the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps highlighted ongoing efforts to preserve the camps and memorialize their victims.

After two years of debate over wording, the plaques, which previously had not made any mention of the Jewish nature of the crimes committed at the Polish death camps, are being replaced with new signs created by the International Council of the State Museum in Auschwitz.

Meanwhile, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which has been working to preserve the camps and their collections of artifacts, is seeking \$42 million from Western European governments, with half that sum requested from Germany.

The 24 members of the Auschwitz museum council, most of whom are survivors of the Holocaust, have agreed finally on the way the new plaques at the death camps will be worded.

"It took a long time to reach a decision, because everyone believed that their tragedy should be emphasized," said Kalman Sultanik, a vice chairman of the Auschwitz museum council and co-chair of the Lauder Foundation's preservation project.

The old plaques, put in place by the Com-

munist government of Poland shortly after the end of World War II, read: "This is the place of martyrdom and death of 4 million victims murdered in the Nazi genocide, 1940-45."

The estimate of 4 million people initially believed to have died at the camps has been revised by scholars of the Holocaust, who say that the number is actually about 1.5 million.

The old plaques were removed after Poland's Communist regime was voted out of power.

The new plaques will be installed in the coming weeks, in Polish, English and Hebrew at the entrances of Auschwitz and Birkenau, according to Sultanik, and read:

"In 1940 the Nazis established the Auschwitz camp which became a symbol of inhuman terror and genocide. After its enlargement, the camp consisted of three parts: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Auschwitz III-Monowitz and more than forty sub-camps.

"The first to be imprisoned and die here were Poles. In 1941, Soviet prisoners of war were placed in the camp.

"From 1942 the Nazi plan for the total annihilation of European Jewry was carried out in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

"From 1943 Gypsies were also killed here.

"Men, women, children and infants were murdered here on a mass scale."

Another plaque in Birkenau is to read; "Let this site remain for eternity as a cry of despair and a warning to humanity. About a million and a half men, women, children and infants, mainly Jews from different countries of Europe were murdered here. The world was silent. -- Auschwitz-Birkenau 1940-45."

A quote from the Book of Job will be included: "Oh earth, cover not my blood. And let my cry never cease."

Convent Moving By November

And in a related development, the building at Auschwitz which is currently occupied by Carmelite nuns will be vacated by November, when they move to their new convent a short distance away from the death camp.

The building in which they have been living will be turned over to the Auschwitz museum council, according to Sultanik.

That building will fall under the aegis of the Lauder Foundation's preservation project.

In 1989, the foundation assembled a group of conservators from top American museums and hired an architecture firm to determine what would be needed to arrest the ongoing decay of the only death camps that remain largely intact.

The others were destroyed by the Nazis as the Allies advanced at the end of World War II.

The goal of the final project is to preserve both Auschwitz and nearby Birkenau, rather than embellish them, as a memorial and vivid lesson for future generations who will not have the opportunity to know Holocaust survivors personally.

"They are the only place where the crime is visible, the only physical evidence left," said Sultanik, a survivor of three concentration camps.

The committee of conservators, led by James Frantz of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, has visited the camps several times since 1989 and recommended that "a major part" of the \$42 million budget be devoted to the installation of a climate-control system for the barracks used to exhibit the remnants of the lives of the 1.5 million Jews who perished there.

Currently in a brick building that the Nazis

used for storage, suitcases, clothing and hair are piled up behind glass.

The artifacts are rapidly deteriorating because of the "extreme variations in climate to which the collections are presently subjected," Frantz told the museum council in a presentation June 1 in Poland.

While the German government has indicated its willingness to support the preservation effort, it has not yet formally committed to provide the \$21 million, to be paid out to the Polish government over four years, that the Lauder project has recommended, Federbush said.

The Lauder foundation has been negotiating the matter with the German government for more than a year.

Ronald Lauder has proposed that a meeting with Germany's finance minister take place in the next couple of weeks, but has not yet gotten a response from Bonn.

Three other Western European governments, which Federbush declined to name, have said they will contribute to the financing of the preservation project, but only if the German government "meets its commitment," she said.

BUSH REVERSES COURSE AND WILL INCLUDE ISRAEL IN WORLDWIDE MISSILE TALKS

By Cynthia Mann
States News Service

WASHINGTON, June 17 (JTA) -- The Bush administration has reversed course and decided to include Israel in planned talks on a worldwide system of ballistic missile defense, to the relief of pro-Israel advocates.

"It is our hope and expectation that Israel will participate fully in this initiative" on "international cooperation on global defenses," wrote Secretary of State James Baker in a recent letter to Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress.

Lifton had protested the exclusion of Israel from U.S.-sponsored talks to include NATO allies, Australia, Japan and South Korea.

This week he said he was relieved by Baker's reassurances.

State Department and Pentagon representatives said they could offer no explanation for the original omission of Israel.

But other sources say it was another example of the administration's insensitivity to Israel's security needs.

It may also have been an apparent fallout over unsubstantiated allegations that Israel has shared Patriot missile technology with China.

They also said it may have been an effort on the administration's part to avoid jeopardizing the fragile Arab-Israeli peace talks.

U.S. Rep. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), a member of the Armed Services Committee, had also challenged Israel's exclusion from the talks.

In a letter to Baker, he wrote, "The direct threat to Israel from attacks by ballistic missiles is far greater than any other nation on earth.

"As the only democratic friend of the United States that has suffered unprovoked, deadly attacks from Third World ballistic missiles, it is very important that the administration include Israel" in the talks, wrote Kyl.

In his letter, Kyl noted that the original goal of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was to explore "a ballistic missile defense system for the U.S. and its allies" and Israel was never singled out in those reports as a non-ally."

OSI CHARGES PHILADELPHIA ARCHITECT KILLED LITHUANIAN JEWS DURING WAR

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, June 17 (JTA) -- The Justice Department has charged a retired Philadelphia area architect with having been a high-ranking officer who helped Nazis murder Lithuanian Jews and others during World War II, and said he lied about his past when he applied for a U.S. visa and for his American citizenship.

The Office of Special Investigations, the Justice Department's special Nazi-hunting unit, and U.S. Attorney Michael Baylson, charged in documents filed in U.S. District Court that Jonas Stelmokas, 75, "advocated, assisted, participated or acquiesced in the murder and other persecution of Jews and other unarmed civilians in Lithuania."

Stelmokas has denied the charges. He told a Philadelphia television news program that "it was all Soviet fabrication." OSI charged that Stelmokas concealed his wartime past when he applied for a visa in 1949 and misrepresented his war-years activities when he applied for citizenship in 1954 and was naturalized in 1955.

The Justice Department unit has moved to revoke Stelmokas' citizenship and, if successful, will seek his deportation.

Stelmokas, a resident of the Philadelphia suburb of Landsdowne, is a former chairman of the local chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community of the U.S.A., Inc., which he has served for some forty years.

OSI charged that Stelmokas was untruthful when he swore that the only organization to which he belonged prior to 1945 was the Lithuanian Boy Scouts.

Stelmokas Was A Platoon Commander

OSI alleges that from 1941 to 1942, Stelmokas was a platoon commander in the Third Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft (Protective Detachment) Battalion, which was responsible for mass murders of Jews and others.

The battalion forcefully confined Jews to the Kaunas (Kovno) ghetto, in which thousands of Jews died either from the extremely poor conditions or by execution.

OSI said Stelmokas made no reference to this, in his 1949 visa application, 1954 citizenship application or in a 1955 sworn statement to a naturalization examiner.

Nor did he mention that he served in the 91st Light Flak Battalion of the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, in which he was a member from 1944 to 1945, according to the OSI complaint.

OSI officials said the Lithuanian government has been making its archives available to war-crimes investigators.

The charges against Stelmokas are the second against a Philadelphia area man in two months. On April 21, the Justice Department began proceedings to revoke the citizenship of Johann Breyer, charging the 66-year-old man had been an armed guard at the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.

Justice Department officials say recent access to documents in the republics of the former Soviet Union is responsible for the opening of some cases by the OSI.

"We're filing cases at a record clip," said a Justice Department official who asked not to be identified.

The charges come, however, at a time of

controversy, as the OSI has come under investigation for its prosecution of John Demjanjuk, extradited in 1986 to Israel to stand trial as "Ivan the Terrible," a notorious death camp guard at Treblinka.

Although Demjanjuk was sentenced to death, the Israeli High Court has recently expressed doubt that it has the right man.

The Justice Department has, additionally, come under scrutiny for its handling of the case against Andrija Artukovic, who was extradited to Yugoslavia to stand trial for wartime atrocities. An OSI historian may have overlooked information pointing to conflicts in key evidence in the case. Artukovic died in prison in Zagreb, Croatia.

The OSI has vigorously defended its following of correct procedures in these cases.

SAUDI ARABIA REVERSES DECISION, WILL ALLOW JEW TO ENTER COUNTRY

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, June 17 (JTA) -- Hastily reversing an earlier decision, the Saudi Arabian government has promised to allow an American Jewish scrap metal dealer to enter the country and participate in an auction of U.S. war surplus material in the Arab kingdom.

In a phone call Tuesday, an official of the Saudi embassy in Washington notified Los Angeles businessman John Schwartz that the previous rejection of his visa application was due to a misunderstanding.

Schwartz applied for the visa on June 2, after he read an announcement inviting foreign bidders to "Operation Desert Auction" in the Saudi port city of Dhahran. Up for bids were massive quantities of trucks, heavy equipment, tents and scrap metal left in Saudi Arabia at the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War.

At the top of the announcement were two logos, one of Marhoun Nasser Auctioneers, the other showing an American shield and eagle with the words Defense Logistics Agency.

Schwartz, a Holocaust survivor and Korean War combat veteran, faxed the requested visa information to the auctioneer, and on the line for "religion," Schwartz wrote "Jewish."

The very next day, auctioneer Nasser sent a fax back to Schwartz, explaining that, "Since it is difficult to get the visa for a person who is jewish (sic), we suggest you sent (sic) the particulars of some one else who is other than jewish."

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

In the letter to Cheney, Cooper asked the Pentagon to suspend participation immediately 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 citizens from bidding on materials produced in their own country."

On June 16, Cooper received a phone call from Adel Al-Jubeir, an aide to Prince Bandar, explaining that "Mr. Nasser was misinformed on current Saudi policy" and that "it is not the policy of Saudi Arabia to discriminate on the basis of religion."

**THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS:
PARTIES OF THE LEFT WILL FOCUS
ON ASSEMBLING A 'BLOCKING BLOC'
[Part 3 of a Series]**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Victory in next week's Knesset elections will be measured not by who wins the most votes but by which party is most able to form a government.

And that will depend on the size of the respective blocs rather than of the individual parties.

The key to the results on June 23, and to the subsequent coalition negotiations, will be whether the Labor-led bloc achieves at least 60 of 120 seats in the Knesset.

Labor Party leader Yitzhak Rabin agrees that his primary goal is a "blocking bloc" -- assembling a bloc of 60 Knesset mandates, comprising Labor, Meretz and the Arab parties, that could thwart any attempt by Likud to form another rightist-religious coalition government.

The complicating factor in this electoral arithmetic is that such a bloc only provides Rabin with the power to stop Likud's Yitzhak Shamir from reconstituting his old coalition.

It does not provide Rabin with the ingredients of an alternative coalition because he is not prepared to take the Arab lists into a Labor-led government.

He sees them as legitimate allies to block Likud but would want his own government to be founded on a broader basis.

There is a big question mark over whether Rabin will achieve his "blocking bloc." If he does, however, he will hold the cards.

The religious parties and other possible "swing parties" with no ideological commitment to either of the big parties would probably gravitate to him if only because Shamir's Likud would be incapable of reconstituting its government.

Alternatively, Rabin could initiate another unity coalition with Likud, leaving most or all of the small parties out in the cold.

His hypothetical ability to form a narrow government, and Shamir's inability to do so, would serve Rabin's purposes in that scenario too, for he would likely become prime minister of the unity government.

The following are the parties on the left that Rabin needs for his "blocking bloc":

LABOR. Israel's chief opposition party is running this year under the official banner "Labor Under the Leadership of Yitzhak Rabin."

Labor's entire campaign, its platform and its political posture have been subordinated to the single goal of winning.

And the party has decided that Rabin is its biggest asset.

Rabin is confident that he can woo sufficient disaffected Likud voters to his middle-of-the-road positions to tilt the balance.

Labor's doves have faded from sight, their views on peace, the Palestinians and borders deftly soft-pedaled by the campaign spin-doctors.

For the moment, Rabin and his aides have succeeded in presenting a posture that stresses the familiar Israeli negatives: no Palestinian state, no return to the 1967 lines, no descent from the Golan Heights.

At the same time, the party has not dropped its conciliatory positions: a quick autonomy deal with the Palestinians and a long-term vision that does not see absorbing the bulk of the territories

and their populace into sovereign Israel.

Labor strategists have taken pains during the campaign to focus as much as possible on domestic issues.

Labor veterans recall ruefully that their own party's fall from power in 1977 was attributable as much to disgust at government corruption as to any ideological shift by the electorate.

MERETZ. The logic behind the decision of the three dovish Zionist parties -- Citizens Rights Movement, Mapam and Shinui -- to amalgamate in advance of the elections involved the higher threshold for entry into the Knesset -- 1.5 percent instead of just 1 percent of the votes cast.

Shinui and possibly even Mapam risked being shut out if they ran on their own.

But their decision also reflected the three parties' understanding that as a united bloc, with perhaps a dozen or more seats compared to the 10 among them in the outgoing Knesset, their influence on the shape of the next government and its policies would be greater.

Ironically, Meretz could discover it has failed in its purpose even if its existence and electoral success turns out to have given the Labor-led bloc an edge over the Likud-led forces.

That would happen if Rabin decided to go for a unity government with Likud rather than undertake the lengthy and frustrating effort to cobble together a narrow coalition that would have to compromise between the antithetical positions of Meretz and the Orthodox parties.

Meretz leaders have unequivocally committed themselves not to participate in a unity government with the Likud on any terms.

HADASH. This veteran party, formerly linked closely to the Moscow Communist establishment, is fighting to show that there is life after death.

Despite the demise of communism worldwide and the breakup of the Soviet empire, Hadash has not ditched its doctrines or denied its former affinity.

Rather, the party still presents itself as a fighting force for social equality -- especially for Israel's Arabs, who comprise more than 90 percent of its constituency.

In foreign policy terms, Hadash takes an Arab mainstream position, favoring the eventual emergence of a peaceful Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Its immediate electoral concern is to keep its primacy over the competing Arab lists--Abdel Wahab Darousha's **ARAB DEMOCRATIC PARTY** and rival Mohammed Miari's **PROGRESSIVE LIST FOR PEACE**.

Political observers here attach prime importance to the announcement last month by the leadership of the Moslem religious movement in Israel that it favors Arab participation in the elections and, by implication, support for one of the Arab lists.

The fundamentalists, with their growing strength in the Arab sector, could have undermined the ability of the two small Arab lists to cross the threshold, had they recommended to their followers to stay home on polling day.

Publicly, the three mainly Arab parties bridle at the "second-class" role assigned them by Labor: They are welcome as partners in a "blocking bloc" but not in a government.

Privately, however, the Arab political leaders recognize that this reflects political realism, at least so long as there is no substantial progress toward a diplomatic settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.