

**KNESSET BATTLE OVER PEACE PLAN
MAKE DECIDE FATE OF LABOR REGIME**

By Cynthia Mann and David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's battle to win Knesset approval of the historic accord signed in Washington with the Palestine Liberation Organization last week is being seen as a test of his government's strength and longevity.

Rabin, who has characterized the vote as an expression of confidence in his government, was expected to survive it, albeit by the most slender of majorities.

But it was less clear whether the Labor Party leader would be able to muster a Jewish majority in the vote, which was expected to be held late Wednesday or Thursday, or whether his victory would depend on Arab members of the Knesset.

The Knesset began debating the accord on Palestinian self-rule Tuesday while demonstrators against the peace agreement gathered in the rose garden opposite the Knesset and vowed they would remain there until the vote was cast.

Some 2,000 police were on hand to control the crowds.

The debate began with a lengthy and dramatic plea for support by the prime minister, who said the historic opportunity for peace must not be missed after decades of untold bloodshed and suffering.

"On the eve of Yom Kippur 5754, the government of Israel is offering the Jewish people a chance for peace, and perhaps for an end to wars, violence and terror," he said.

Rabin said the plan was a test of the PLO's intentions and would pose little danger to Israel's security.

He also emphasized that the welfare and protection of the roughly 130,000 Jewish residents in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho -- where the self-rule accord is first to go into effect -- would remain the responsibility of Israeli security forces.

Netanyahu Speech Irks Rabin

Rabin, at one point, was interrupted by a Knesset opposition member, who shouted that Israel's negotiating partners were "bloodthirsty killers."

Toward the end of his address, two right-wing youths in the visitors' gallery began shouting slogans and waving a PLO flag before they were ejected.

Likud party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, replying for the opposition, said he believes the government is pursuing peace at any price.

He said the agreement will inexorably lead to violence and the creation of a Palestinian state that will threaten Israel's security.

Netanyahu said the blueprint would result in PLO leader Yasser Arafat's entering Jerusalem and triumphantly claiming the Temple Mount as Palestinian turf.

Rabin walked out in anger during Netanyahu's speech.

The debate was billed by Knesset Speaker Shevah Weiss as one of the most important assemblies in the history of the nation. Indeed,

the warnings of apocalypse from those opposing as well as supporting the peace agreement lent credence to Weiss' claim.

On Tuesday night, a few thousand Bnei Akiva students who were holding a prayer vigil at the Western Wall marched to the Knesset to join the other demonstrators.

The purpose of the protest was "to tell this government they're going in the wrong direction," Bob Lang, one of the demonstrators, told Israel Television.

All 120 members of the Knesset were being allowed to speak before the vote.

One by one, Knesset members against the agreement said the government had no right to gamble on Israel's future with a partner that has been committed to Israel's destruction.

The PLO, they said, will be unable to control Palestinian extremists violently opposed to the accord in the short term and will not honor the territorial limits negotiated with Israel in the long term.

"We will all pay the price" for this "terrible mistake," warned Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin of Likud, whose father, the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin, orchestrated the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt.

Shas Party Holding Out

Supporters countered by saying Israel could not afford to pass up the chance to embrace a peaceful future and would not be vulnerable under the terms of the agreement.

The Jewish people are entitled not just to pain and to warfare, said Communications Minister Shulamit Aloni, leader of the dovish Meretz bloc. "We are also entitled to live," she said. The agreement is a "first step for the future of peace."

Rabin was particularly eager to win the support of the fervently Orthodox Shas party.

If the Sephardic party's six Knesset members vote to endorse the agreement, the government would have the support of a clear Jewish majority and not have to depend on the Knesset's Arab members.

Rabin was scheduled to meet Wednesday with the spiritual leader of Shas, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who met earlier in the week with Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur.

When Rabin informed the Knesset that the vote would be considered a vote of confidence in his government, he formally put Shas on notice that opposing the agreement would spell the end of the party's coalition alliance with Labor and Meretz.

Shas, for its part, has called for a referendum on the peace agreement within six months -- but only if all of the opposition parties back that call.

But the referendum idea appeared Tuesday to be a non-starter, since neither Likud nor Labor exhibited much enthusiasm for it.

While Likud and the other opposition parties were sounding the alarm against the accord, the latest polls show public support for the plan has grown to about 60 percent.

The polls indicate that the Israeli public does not believe in the vulnerability of Israel, a point emphasized by the opponents of the accord.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
RESIDENTS OF ISRAELI ARAB VILLAGE
WATCHING KNESSET DEBATE WITH PRIDE**
By Gil Sedan

KAFR KASIM, Israel, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- As the muezzin called worshippers for noon prayers, the streets of this large Arab village on the foothills of the Judean Mountains were virtually empty Tuesday.

The children were still in school, and most men were at work in nearby Jewish towns.

But small groups of unemployed men could be found at the local coffehouses, playing backgammon and watching a live television broadcast of the Knesset debate on the Palestinian self-rule agreement signed last week in Washington.

For the residents of this village, it was a moment of historic significance.

For the first time since Israel's establishment, Arab Knesset members were likely to cast the deciding votes on an issue that will determine the future of the Jewish state.

With the six Knesset members of the fervently Orthodox Shas party still undecided on whether to vote in favor of the Israeli-Palestinian accord, it appeared the government would have to rely on support from the three representatives of the Hadash Communist party and two members of the Arab Democratic Party.

Neither party is a member of the governing coalition, but both have pledged their support of the Labor government since it took power last year.

All but one member of those two parties are Israeli Arabs. In addition, two members of the Labor Party's Knesset faction are Arabs, as is one member of the Meretz bloc's delegation.

The vote was certain to be controversial, if only for the growing voices on the political right, which have questioned the legitimacy of the Arab vote in determining the fate of the Jewish state.

Some Knesset members, such as Yehoshua Matza of Likud, publicly questioned the validity of a majority reached by rallying the support of the Arab Knesset members.

But residents of this Israeli Arab village have rejected the criticism as nonsense.

"The Likud fears that it is losing the battle," said Aed al-Akili, 32. "This is why they discredit our Knesset members.

"But there is no difference between Darawshe and David Levy. They are all representatives of the people," he said, referring to the former Likud foreign minister and to Knesset member Abdel Wahab Darawshe, head of the Arab Democratic Party.

No Longer 'Just Bystanders'

Darawshe spoke out Tuesday against the right's attempt to "disseminate fear within the public."

Speaking in a radio interview, the Arab Knesset member said he was proud to support an agreement that would bring peace to the area, "so that within a year we can have 22 Arab ambassadors in Israel, and 22 Israeli ambassadors throughout the Arab world."

Darawshe's jubilant mood was also reflected in the Arab villages within Israel proper.

Here in Kafr Kasim, one could almost hear a sigh of relief competing with the sound of the muezzin. For the first time in years, local residents felt no conflict between their Israeli citizenship and their Palestinian identity.

"For years we were just bystanders," said Jihad Kassem, 48, a truck driver. "The only time we could influence Israeli politics was on Election Day.

"Now, for the first time our representatives determine the course of events, along with the others," he said.

Kafr Kasim, which lies northeast of Petach Tikvah, is one of the largest Arab villages in central Israel, with a population of nearly 12,000.

In 1956, 49 of its residents were shot to death in a tragic incident.

The villagers were shot by Israeli border policemen as they were returning from the fields, not knowing that a general curfew was in effect as a result of the Sinai Campaign, which began Oct. 29, 1956.

For years, the tragedy has cast a heavy shadow on the relations between the residents of this village, located within the borders of Israel proper, and the Jewish state.

A large monument, carrying the names of the 49 victims of the attack, welcomes visitors at the entrance to the village.

But time has healed many wounds, and in recent years the village has become a symbol of Arab-Jewish coexistence in Israel, particularly as a result of the fact that most of the village's residents earn their livelihood in nearby Jewish towns.

And never have they been prouder to be Arab Israelis than in the past two weeks.

For years, the village's mayor, Ibrahim Sarsur, has refrained from raising the Israeli national flag on top of the municipality building, concerned that it might cause negative, nationalist reactions.

Now, for the first time, he said, they can raise the flag wholeheartedly.

**PRO-ISRAEL PLO LEADER IN GAZA
GUNNED DOWN BY HARD-LINE FORCES**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- Israeli analysts fear the murder of a leading Palestine Liberation Organization official in the Gaza Strip this week may signal the start of a spate of intra-Palestinian strife, touched off by the historic Israeli-PLO accord signed in Washington last week.

Mohammed Abu Shaaban, a lawyer and local leader of Yasser Arafat's Al Fatah faction of the PLO, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen Tuesday while driving through Gaza City following a speech he made at a rally to support the accord on Palestinian self-rule.

Shaaban's family and sources within Fatah said he had been killed as a result of an internal power struggle within Fatah, and Israeli analysts offered a similar appraisal.

Shaaban, 36, had been known for years as a strong supporter of maintaining dialogue with Israel, and he recently played an important role in the negotiations that led to the historic agreement with Israel.

The accord has met with some stiff Palestinian opposition, not only from the rejectionist Hamas movement, but also from radical elements within Fatah, the largest and most moderate faction of the PLO.

Arafat had secured only a narrow majority of support from the PLO's executive committee before the agreement was signed last week in Washington.

JEW OF RUSSIA CONCERNED, CONFUSED AFTER YELTSIN DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- Russia's Jews are watching their country's latest constitutional crisis with a sense of concern.

More than anything, President Boris Yeltsin's decree Tuesday dissolving Parliament highlighted the two conflicting views of what Russia's future should be.

The future that Russian Jews prefer is that favored by Yeltsin, who envisions a rapid transition to a Western-style democracy and economy. It is in hope of such changes that rather than making aliyah, Russian Jews are staying away from Israel in droves.

But the hard-liners of the Russian Parliament envision a future that is closer to the old Soviet Union, or to a Greek Orthodox theocracy, than to Western democracy.

And Russia's Jews cannot but worry which vision will reign, when the dust settles from this week's events.

As of Tuesday night, both camps had their own competing government.

There was President Yeltsin, who signed a decree eliminating Parliament and called elections for a new legislative body in November.

And there was the Parliament, which claimed that Yeltsin forfeited his post by his decree and elected Vice President Alexander Rutskoi to serve in his stead.

The last parliamentary elections were held prior to Russian independence.

According to officials at Jewish organizations who spoke to Jews in Russia, there was less information in Moscow about the situation than in the Western media -- and consequently less concern.

Groups Banking On Yeltsin

"It's too early to assess the situation," Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said after a conversation with Michael Chlenov, co-chairman of the Vaad, Russian Jewry's umbrella body.

"He hopes today's events do not disrupt the moves toward democracy," said Levin.

Richard Wexler, chairman of the National Conference, added in a statement that his group is "closely monitoring the situation with regard to the status of the Russian Jewish community."

The statement, implicitly taking sides in the power struggle, continued, "We trust that President Yeltsin will continue to safeguard human rights as the Russian Federation moves toward new elections."

Similarly, Ambassador Milton Wolf, president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, ordered that communication be established with all of the JDC's representatives in the former Soviet Union and that the situation be monitored closely.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, warned in a statement that "any sudden shift in the government of what is now Russia has to be a concern for democracy, and for the Jewish community, especially when the sudden shift moves to the right."

If Rutskoi prevails, however, it will not necessarily be a disaster for the Jews.

Rutskoi's mother is Jewish, and he is remembered in Israel for the warm visit he paid there in the spring of 1992.

POPE'S MEETING WITH CHIEF RABBI SEEN AS A STEP TOWARD RELATIONS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- A meeting this week between Pope John Paul II and Israeli Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau is being seen as a historic and highly significant encounter that augurs well for closer relations between the Holy See and the Jewish state.

The half-hour session, which took place Tuesday at the pope's summer residence at Castelgandolfo, south of Rome, was the first ever between a pope and a chief rabbi of Israel.

The pontiff greeted Lau with the word "Shalom" and said he wants to visit Israel soon.

After the meeting, Lau and a Vatican spokesman stressed that only spiritual, rather than political, issues had been discussed. Lau invited the pope to visit Jerusalem, following up on a similar invitation that had been extended to the pontiff by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres during a visit to the Vatican nearly a year ago.

Without naming a date, the pope told Lau the moment for such a visit "is growing near."

The full-bearded, bespectacled Lau, wearing a black hat and knee-length coat, was accompanied to Castelgandolfo by his wife, Israeli Ambassador Avi Pazner and other officials. He presented the pope with a shofar.

The two religious leaders spoke to each other in English, although both were born in Poland.

Lau's visit to Italy and his meeting with the pope were arranged long before this month's breakthrough agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

But the suddenly accelerated Middle East peace process has given added significance to encounters between Israel and the Vatican.

Last Papal Visit Was In 1964

Last week, Israeli and Vatican negotiators reached an agreement that could soon lead to the establishment of full diplomatic relations.

Sources close to the talks said a special Vatican-Israeli commission that had been meeting since July 1992 agreed on a 14-point agenda for the normalization of relations.

An announcement on the establishment of full diplomatic relations is expected within weeks.

The Vatican has resisted establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel since the state was founded in 1948.

Pope Paul VI visited Jerusalem in 1964, but the Vatican's formal recognition of Israel has always been sidetracked by a number of issues, including Israeli recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people.

But that major political hurdle was apparently cleared last week with the signing of the Israeli-PLO accord.

Another issue of concern to the Vatican has been the status of Jerusalem, which the Holy See would like to see put under international jurisdiction.

Lau told reporters prior to his meeting with the pope that Israel would never give up Jerusalem or agree to its being put under international jurisdiction.

The pope has met a number of times with Jewish groups and prominent Jewish leaders.

His most significant meeting was in 1986, when he traveled to Rome's main synagogue and met with Rome Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff.

DEMJANJUK LEAVING ISRAEL FOR U.S., TO FACE PROTESTS AND LEGAL BATTLE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- After nearly eight years, the John Demjanjuk case came to an end for Israelis this week, as family members of the acquitted Nazi war criminal arrived to escort him back to the United States.

The former Cleveland autoworker, who was cleared this summer of being the brutal Treblinka gas chamber operator known as "Ivan the Terrible," was expected to board a flight out of the country shortly after midnight Tuesday, and arrive in New York by early Wednesday morning.

But as far as the U.S. government and American Jewish groups are concerned, the case is far from over.

Holocaust survivors and Jewish groups planned to launch demonstrations in New York and Cleveland the moment Demjanjuk set foot on U.S. soil.

And the U.S. Justice Department made clear it would pursue all legal efforts to have the de-naturalized Ukrainian native removed from the country permanently.

Arriving here Tuesday to whisk Demjanjuk out of Israel were his son and son-in-law. They were accompanied on their trip by U.S. Rep. James Traficant (D-Ohio), a burly former county sheriff who said he would help assure Demjanjuk's safety in the wake of threats to his life by militant Jewish groups.

His departure became possible Sunday, when Israel's Supreme Court lifted a restraining order that had barred Demjanjuk's deportation.

The Supreme Court on July 29 had overturned Demjanjuk's 1988 conviction and death sentence for war crimes committed at Treblinka. But until Sunday, it had barred him from leaving the country, while it considered appeals from Holocaust survivors and their supporters.

They argued that he should be tried for war crimes allegedly committed at other concentration camps, including the Sobibor death complex in Poland.

With Sunday's ruling, the Supreme Court upheld the recommendation of Attorney General Yosef Harish, who had argued that a new trial would not be in the interest of the state and that a conviction was uncertain.

The decision provoked anger and charges that the court had damaged Nazi-hunting efforts worldwide.

Airport Protest Planned

The way was cleared for Demjanjuk's return to the United States on Aug. 3, when the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati ordered the Justice Department to allow his return while the court reconsiders the legality of his 1986 extradition to Israel.

The Justice Department is allowing Demjanjuk into the country on a temporary basis under the attorney general's parole authority. But it has made clear that it will seek to have him deported again for lying about his wartime activities during his original attempt to enter the United States.

Demjanjuk was also expected to face an onslaught of protests from Jewish groups.

On Wednesday, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Gathering/Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors planned to demonstrate at New York's Kennedy International Airport as Demjanjuk's plane touched down.

And Rabbi Avi Weiss of New York, president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, said his group would demonstrate outside the acquitted war criminal's home in Cleveland.

Jewish groups in Cleveland are meanwhile planning a demonstration at a public square in the city next week.

The demonstration is being co-sponsored by a number of Jewish organizations in the area, including the regional Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Congress chapters, the Kol Israel survivors group and local congregations.

ADL LEADERS SEND CLINTON LETTERS ASKING TO COMMUTE POLLARD SENTENCE

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- The leaders of the Anti-Defamation League have written President Clinton, asking him to commute the sentence of Jonathan Pollard.

The letters, sent on the eve of Rosh Hashanah by ADL National Chairman Melvin Salberg and National Director Abraham Foxman, reflect the continuing acceptance of the campaign for the former U.S. Navy analyst's freedom by the mainstream of the American Jewish community.

Not until this past year did organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress adopt cautiously worded statements asking for a presidential review of Pollard's life sentence for passing secrets to Israel.

Because the Anti-Defamation League remains one of the few organizations not supporting the pro-Pollard campaign, Foxman and Salberg wrote their letters as expressions of their individual, not organizational, views.

Pollard's lawyers have filed a request for commutation with the Justice Department. Clinton recently promised to "give consideration to all the relevant facts in order to make a fair and just determination" once he receives a Justice Department recommendation on the case.

Sheldon Rudoff, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, visited Pollard on Monday and said the former analyst was encouraged by the letters of the ADL officials.

Rudoff reported that Pollard, who was recently moved from a maximum-security prison in Marion, Ill., where he was kept in solitary confinement, to a medium-security facility in Buttner, N.C., was "very positive in his attitude, showing a remarkable resilience after years of solitary."

Pollard is now sharing a dormitory room with 40 other inmates, and is working eight-hour days as a cutter in a prison factory.

"He seems a rehabilitated person," said Rudoff, whose group is organizing a nationwide petition drive on Pollard's behalf at its hundreds of Orthodox synagogues. "He does not want to be deemed a hero or be remembered for this."

Pollard was thankful for all the people who are supporting his effort to be released, and particularly "for the grass-roots support he's getting," said Rudoff, who was accompanied on his visit by Raphael Butler, national director of the Orthodox Union.

Salberg, in his letter to Clinton, reiterated that the ADL found no evidence of anti-Semitism in the sentencing of Pollard. Nonetheless, he wrote, "it is my personal view that as serious as his crime was, Jonathan Pollard has paid his debt to society."