

**DINITZ STEPS DOWN FROM JEWISH AGENCY
AFTER CHARGES ARE BROUGHT AGAINST HIM**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- Closing a difficult chapter for the Jewish Agency for Israel, Simcha Dinitz has announced he will step down as chairman following a decision this week by Israel's attorney general to indict Dinitz on charges relating to his alleged misuse of Agency credit cards.

The leave of absence was in accordance to an agreement made last summer with Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the Agency's Board of Governors. That agreement had capped months of speculation about Dinitz's future at the Agency after allegations of misconduct first surfaced.

The decision to indict Dinitz on charges of aggravated fraud and abuse of public trust was announced Monday, two days before the Agency's Board of Governors was to begin a week-long meeting in which the Dinitz affair and how to handle the vacancy will doubtless top the agenda and spur heated political wrangling.

"Anything can happen," one senior Agency official quipped before the meeting.

Meanwhile, reaction from Agency officials appeared to be a mix of regret for Dinitz and relief that there was some resolution of a long ordeal.

Kaplan called the attorney general's decision "a great personal tragedy for Simcha Dinitz and his family."

Though Kaplan insists that the "cash flow has never been better," it is clear the affair has tainted the Agency's image.

The Jewish Agency, which is the primary recipient of United Jewish Appeal funds raised for Israel, is the largest single recipient of American Jewish philanthropy.

It is also the embodiment of political Zionism, the Diaspora community's link to the nation-building enterprises largely undertaken now by the Israeli government.

In Israel, the Jewish Agency is considered a quasi-governmental body. Its salaries are pegged to those of Cabinet officials, its actions are coordinated with the state and its leaders come from the ranks of the Israeli political parties in proportion to their strength in the World Zionist Congress.

Diaspora Community Has Been Frustrated

Kaplan conceded the Diaspora community has been frustrated with the slow pace of the case.

"What they'd like to see now is a definite decision as to permanent leadership in the Agency," he said. "That's what they expect from us."

The controversy surrounding what has come to be known here as the Dinitz Affair began with reports at the end of 1992 that Dinitz had misused the Jewish Agency's credit cards.

Dinitz has admitted making personal purchases on the cards and not repaying \$13,793 worth of charges until the bills were brought to his attention in December 1992.

During the summer of 1993, a police investi-

gation was launched into Dinitz's activities. The investigation ended in late August, but police officials at the time would not disclose whether they had recommended that state prosecutors press ahead with an indictment against Dinitz.

The case was subsequently turned over to the attorney general, who had the responsibility of determining whether charges should be pressed.

Kaplan has called on Agency Treasurer Hanan Ben-Yehuda to preside over meetings of the executive in the absence of the chairman, as stipulated in the agency's bylaws.

Ben-Yehuda will continue in that role at least until the Board of Governors makes a decision in the coming days on whether and how to appoint an official acting chairman.

Kaplan refused to mention any candidates, but the likeliest contenders for the temporary post are Ben-Yehuda, Yehiel Leket, head of the Youth Aliyah Department, and Shlomo Hillel, the head of Keren Hayesod.

Such a candidate must be put forward by the World Zionist Organization and may be vetoed by Diaspora fund-raisers before being elected by the board.

However, the board is not obligated to elect an acting chairman at this time, and they could keep Ben-Yehuda on as de facto acting chairman until the time comes for the election of a permanent chairman.

Leket and his part of the Labor Party camp are expected to be among those pushing for the election of an acting chairman at this week's board meeting.

Some insiders say he wants a chance to demonstrate his ability to lead the agency and thus be in a better position to run for the permanent post down the road.

Dinitz To Remain On Leave

Ben-Yehuda has virtually no chance of being a permanent chairman because he is a member of the Likud Party and the post is widely viewed as a Labor post. Indeed, there may be pressure on Kaplan from Labor not to leave Ben-Yehuda in the post even as de facto acting chairman because he is a Likudnik.

Dinitz will be on leave until the conclusion of his trial or until Dec. 31 of this year, if the case is not concluded by then. At that point he will retire, according to the agreement he reached with Kaplan last August.

If he is exonerated before then, Dinitz has said he will retire, although he reserves the right to stay on in the post. He will receive a salary during his leave of absence.

While Dinitz is on leave, said Kaplan, the position is not officially vacant, and so he cannot be permanently replaced. But should a vacancy occur, through a resignation, a conviction or the arrival of the Dec. 31 deadline, a permanent appointment may be made.

Some sources believe Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin could pressure Dinitz to resign sooner than the agreement calls for, paving the way for an election in June for a permanent chairman.

Meanwhile, "We are doing our utmost," to

cope with "a very difficult situation for the Jewish Agency," said Ben-Yehuda.

"The image of the Jewish Agency was damaged" by the "unhappy" Dinitz affair, he said, and "we have to do all we can to bring things (back) to normal."

"On a personal level, there is a lot of pathos and personal tragedy involved," said another senior agency official.

"On the other hand," he continued, "this is an institution dealing with voluntary donations and public funds and there is an overriding feeling within the whole world of fund-raising that the integrity of the donations has to be maintained and leadership has to be beyond suspicion."

"This has been hanging over us for almost two years," he added.

The Jewish Agency is "at a critical juncture," said another senior agency official. "More than anything else, we need someone here who is a leader and a decision-maker, (as well as) a team player, someone who can bring people together."

In a prepared statement after the attorney general's decision, Dinitz said that his decision to go on leave "will enable me to devote my time to prepare for the trial in order to prove my innocence, of which I am convinced beyond any doubt."

"The judicial authority is the only branch of government authorized to determine the guilt or innocence of an individual, who is considered innocent until proven guilty," he said.

TALKS RESUME IN TABA FOLLOWING SECURITY ACCORD REACHED IN CAIRO By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- With the major security issues facing them resolved last week in Cairo, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization resumed their negotiations at the Sinai border town of Taba.

On Monday, the two teams devoted much of the day to a detailed discussion of the proposed police force that the Palestinians will establish in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho once the self-rule accord signed last September in Washington is implemented.

The discussions covered the size of the police force, the types of weapons it would have and where it would be deployed.

The head of the Israeli delegation, Israel Defense Force Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Amnon Shahak, said the tone of the proceedings in Taba had been favorably affected by the agreement signed last week in Cairo by Foreign Minister Simon Peres and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

That agreement, known as the Cairo Document, focused on a host of security issues that had held up implementation of the self-rule accord.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said after the signing of the Cairo Document that he hoped negotiations on remaining issues facing the two teams could be completed within one month. But other Israeli officials have said that assessment may prove overly optimistic.

The Taba talks were also scheduled to cover administrative issues, with the parties discussing the transfer of control in Gaza and Jericho from

the Israeli military government to a Palestinian civil authority.

The talks will include Palestinian control over public works, communications and archeological sites.

Next week, Israeli and PLO negotiators will reconvene in Paris to discuss economic aspects of the evolving accord, including banking and customs issues.

A FIRST: KNESSET HOSTS PALESTINIANS TIED TO PLO By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- For the first time ever, the Knesset played host last week to Palestinians aligned with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

At the invitation of Knesset member Ran Cohen of the left-wing Meretz party, five Palestinians from Nablus attended a meeting with lawmakers from mostly left-wing parties.

The visitors called for the release of Palestinian prisoners, whom they said had no Israeli blood on their hands. They also called for the release of Israeli soldiers missing in action.

The Palestinians arrived at the Knesset with five Israelis, all of whom are part of a long-running Arab-Jewish dialogue group from the Nablus-Jerusalem area which supports the peace process.

The Palestinians asked to come as a "goodwill gesture" in anticipation of the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, he said.

The Palestinians included Sihab Shaheen, who was deported from Israel in 1968 because she was a member of the Communist Party, and Muhammad Sawalha, a professor and a former member of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks.

SIMCHA HOLZBERG IS DEAD AT 70; 'FATHER OF WOUNDED' AIDED VETERANS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- Simcha Holzberg, affectionately known as the "father of the wounded" for his decades of volunteer work with Israeli veterans and families of victims of terrorism, died Monday after suffering a heart attack.

Holzberg, who was 70, died while attending a memorial ceremony for Israelis killed in 1978 in a terrorist massacre of Israelis on the coastal road.

Holzberg, a Holocaust survivor who lost his entire family at the hands of the Nazis, devoted his life here to aiding wounded veterans and the families of terrorist victims.

Despite his ever-cheerful appearance, he was said to live with memories of the Holocaust each day of his life. He used to tell people that in place of blood kin, he had the extended family of the Israel Defense Force.

Despite failing health in recent years, Holzberg maintained his practice of visiting wounded soldiers at hospitals throughout Israel, assisted by a driver assigned to him by the IDF.

At the time of his death, a special IDF tribute was to have been held in Holzberg's honor. It was postponed because of an official mourning period for the commander of the Central Sector, Maj. Gen. Nehemia Tamari, who died with three other officers in a helicopter crash last month.

CROATIAN LEADER TUDJMAN APOLOGIZES TO JEWS FOR BOOK'S ANTI-SEMITIC PARTS

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- Croatian President Franjo Tudjman apologized this week to the Jewish community for sections of a book he wrote that are widely viewed as anti-Semitic.

In a letter to B'nai B'rith President Kent Schiner, Tudjman pledged that the English-language version of the book, soon to be distributed in the United States, will not contain the offending sections.

In his letter, Tudjman said the negative reaction from Jews around the world to his book "has affected me deeply and has caused me to re-examine my statements and to re-evaluate those parts of the book in which I cited documents and personal views of some writer or participant."

His letter was presented Monday to B'nai B'rith representative by acting Croatian Ambassador Kresimir Cosic at the Croatian Embassy.

Tudjman's book, "Wastelands of Historical Reality," was published in 1989 and consists of Tudjman's reflections on history.

In it, Tudjman made statements such as thanking God that neither he nor his wife are Jewish or Serbian.

He also alleged that the fact that 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust "is based to the greatest extent on emotionally biased testimonies as well as on one-sided and exaggerated data on postwar calculations of war crimes and on the settling of accounts with the defeated perpetrators of war crimes."

In the past he has claimed his statements or writings were mistranslated.

Sidney Clearfield, B'nai B'rith's executive vice president, who received the letter from the Croatian ambassador, said Tudjman's book is "full of" anti-Semitic statements.

'First Step Toward Mending Fences'

Clearfield said in an interview that the book takes the perspective that Jews brought the Holocaust and other persecutions on themselves.

But in a statement, Clearfield called Tudjman's letter "a first step toward mending fences."

Tudjman has long been viewed as controversial by Jews. Last year, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum came under fire from many Jewish groups for inviting Tudjman to its opening ceremonies, along with other world leaders.

A spokesperson for the museum said the point was to educate him.

In his letter to B'nai B'rith, Tudjman wrote, "It is in terms of my evolving relationship with and increased understanding of the Jewish people that I now realize the hurtfulness of certain of the portions of this book and the misunderstanding they have caused.

"For this I offer an apology, both as the president of a newly independent state which wishes to forge a firm and enduring friendship with the Jewish people, and as a human being who desires to make amends in furtherance of such a friendship," Tudjman wrote.

He added that he would "work toward an ever better understanding between the Jewish communities and the Republic of Croatia."

Croatia, once part of Yugoslavia, became

independent in 1991. During World War II, it was an active ally of Nazi Germany and was the site of a notorious death camp, Jasenovac, in which Serbs, Jews and Gypsies were slaughtered in the most bestial manners, sometimes by Croatian priests.

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum.)

HEAD OF FRENCH JEWISH COMMUNITY HIGHLY RANKED FOR EUROPARLIAMENT

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- Jean Kahn, head of the French Jewish community and president of the European Jewish Congress, expressed surprise at rumors circulated by a French Jewish weekly last week that he might be a candidate for the European Parliament, the legislative body of the European Union.

Kahn returned here last Friday from a four-day meeting in Washington of the World Jewish Congress to learn that La Tribune Juive had published a story that he is highly placed on the list of candidates for the parliament.

The article quoted sources close to Prime Minister Eduard Balladur as saying Kahn had a "good ranking," which indicates considerable assurance of being elected.

A similar article ran Monday in the French daily Le Monde, quoting Agence France Presse news agency for the information.

'All This Is Premature'

Some people who know Kahn said they thought he probably knew of his candidacy in advance and was less than surprised.

In fact, he carefully avoided denying that he would eventually be a candidate to the European Parliament.

The international body meets in Strasbourg, where Kahn is an industrialist. He has never publicly expressed affiliation with the ruling center-right parties.

As Kahn put it, it is not possible that he is on "the list" because, he said, leaders of the two political parties sharing power in France's coalition government have not yet decided if they will field one or two lists of candidates.

"All this is premature" he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

If Kahn, who is president of CRIF, the secular umbrella body of Jewish groups in France, does indeed run for the European Parliament, this would be a first for an active leader of the Jewish community.

Presidents of CRIF have always been careful to remain politically uncommitted. In doing so, they have avoided turning CRIF into a political outcast in case the government changes.

At present, the parties Rally for the Republic and Union for Democracy share power, and a minority leader, Francois Mitterrand of the Socialist Party, is president.

Some members of CRIF's governing board have apparently warned Kahn against getting involved in politics.

Kahn's second three-year term as leader of CRIF will end in 1995. He is not eligible to be re-elected to the position.

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York.)

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
EXPERTS CONTEST FARRAKHAN CLAIM
THAT JEWS PREDOMINATED IN SLAVE TRADE
By Pamela Druckerman**

NEW YORK, Feb. 14 (JTA) -- Experts on the history of slavery are strongly contesting claims by Nation of Islam leaders that Jews overwhelmingly controlled the African slave trade.

One expert called the accusations a "vicious libel" against the Jewish people. And historians have used substantial documentation to disprove the slavery charge.

The charge has gained prominence since they were contained in a widely publicized speech last November by Khalid Abdul Muhammad, a top aide to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

At a Feb. 3 news conference, Farrakhan said he supported the "truths" spoken by his aide and detailed in a 334-page document put together by his organization's Historical Research Department.

The speech and subsequent news conference infuriated Jewish leaders and the ensuing controversy has highlighted the sensitivity of the issue in black-Jewish relations.

"The reason (Nation of Islam leaders) focus on Jews and slavery," said Kenneth Stern, program specialist for the American Jewish Committee, "is that's the biggest canard they can put inside the African American experience. That's the central event in the African American experience."

Analysts say Farrakhan exploits a widespread ignorance of American history. "If people like Farrakhan get to people before the legitimate sources, then they are captive to his version of events," said Mark Caplan, a research analyst for the Anti-Defamation League.

"The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews," published in 1991, alleges that Jews were involved in the slave trade "disproportionately more than any other ethnic group in New World history."

Nothing Fundamentally Historical About It

Critics of this claim, including prominent black leaders, point out that there is nothing fundamentally "historical" about it. They say it is an attempt to distort history to suit the Nation of Islam's own political agenda.

Mainstream historians compare the thesis that Jews played a prominent role in the slave trade to Holocaust denial and say the slavery charge reflects classical anti-Semitic notions of Jewish power and control.

Yale University historian David Brion Davis, an expert in the history of slavery, says that while it is possible to cite specific examples of Jewish slave owners, Jews overall played a very minor role when compared to their Protestant and Catholic counterparts.

"A selective search for Jewish slave traders becomes inherently anti-Semitic unless one keeps in view the larger context and the very marginal place of Jews in the history of the overall system," Davis wrote in a 1992 article in a publication called Culturefront.

Rep. Major Owens (D-N.Y.) said Farrakhan is scapegoating Jews as a "shortcut to power." Owens, one of the few black politicians who have called publicly for the black community to sever ties with the Nation of Islam leader, said Farrakhan's anti-Semitic views have received wide play from sympathetic members of the black media.

And the particular charge regarding the Jewish role in the slave trade may have gained a level of legitimacy within the black community that extends beyond Farrakhan.

In a 1992 New York Times op-ed, Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. warned that among "significant sectors of the black community" the Nation of Islam book has become "a credo of a new philosophy of black affirmation."

"The new anti-Semitism," Gates wrote, "arises not in spite of the black-Jewish alliance but because of it." Gates said the most troubling aspect of the slavery claims is the notion that alleged historical deeds reflect an essential, inherited evil which is manifest in modern Jews.

Gates was directing his article in part to other black intellectuals and academics, some of whom have endorsed Farrakhan's message.

Trying To Argue Can Be Fruitless

Wellesley College Professor Anthony Martin recently came under heavy criticism for teaching "The Secret Relationship" in a history course.

In March 1992, Professor Leonard Jeffries of the City College of New York was fired from his post as head of the school's Black Studies Department because of anti-Semitic remarks -- including the slavery charge -- he made in a 1991 speech.

The AJCommittee's Stern said that Jewish officials have made the mistake of trying to argue with groups like the Nation of Islam on a point-by-point basis and are now trying to portray larger issues of historical distortion.

He said that when they do not care about factual accuracy, "you're never going to be able to keep up with what their next lie is."

Historians point out that "The Secret Relationship" takes the words of Jewish writers out of context, twisting them in order to suit the Nation of Islam's own premise.

Specific instances of Jewish slaveowners are frequently cited without noting that these were a very small percentage of slave owners as a whole.

At his recent news conference, Farrakhan charged that Jews owned 75 percent of slaves in the American South.

Davis, the Yale historian, said in an interview that the Farrakhan team was forced to use Jewish sources to buttress its claims because the Jewish role in the slave trade was too negligible to be mentioned by most non-Jewish accounts.

Even avowed anti-Semites, Davis said, did not make claims of Jewish involvement in the slave trade.

Following a series of expulsions from Western European countries, most European Jews went to Eastern Europe or the Ottoman Empire, where they were far from the booming slave industry.

"Logistically," Davis said, "it was impossible for Jews to have any kind of major role." He said that at no time was the proportion of Jews in the slave trade comparable to that of Christians.

And contrary to Farrakhan's charges that Jews owned 75 percent of all American slaves, Harold Brackman, a consultant for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said less than 1 percent of Southern slaves were owned by Jews.

It was Brackman who called the slavery charges a "vicious libel."