

IN AN UNUSUALLY CONTENTIOUS ELECTION, FRANCE'S CHIEF RABBI EMERGES AS VICTOR
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, June 19 (JTA) -- Following a bitter campaign that pitted traditionalists against secular modernists, French Jewry this week re-elected Rabbi Joseph Sitruk to a second seven-year term as France's chief rabbi.

In voting that was open to delegates of the Consistoire Central, which oversees the religious needs of the French Jewish community, Sitruk won Sunday's election by 121-75, with two abstentions.

Sitruk, 49, was opposed by Rabbi Gilles Bernheim, 42, a chaplain serving Parisian students.

Sitruk, who was born in Tunisia, had the backing of Sephardic Jews who emigrated to France from North Africa when their countries became independent in the 1950s and 1960s. Sephardic Jews now represent the majority of France's Jewish community, which is estimated at between 600,000 and 700,000.

Bernheim, an Ashkenazic Jew from eastern France, was supported by the leadership of CRIF, the umbrella organization of French Jewish communal groups.

The campaign was marked by charges from CRIF leaders that Sitruk was increasingly leading the community in the direction of his own brand of Orthodox Jewish fundamentalism.

Observers believe his election victory may result in a widening gap between the Orthodox and secularist branches of French Jewry.

'A Painful, Difficult Day'

"This was a very painful, very difficult day," Sitruk said after his re-election. "The community is hurt, and I now see as my goal the beginning of a deeper and more fruitful dialogue."

"I now want to take this community, without dividing it, to where it needs to be taken," Sitruk added.

Challenger Bernheim said after the election that there was neither a winner nor a loser.

"The only winner is the Jewish community," he said, adding, "I wish mazel tov to Chief Rabbi Sitruk."

Sitruk had triggered several controversies during his first term in office.

During the campaign, there were charges that he had been cavalier in his handling of funds and that he had created his own financial network that bypassed the Consistoire Central's fiscal controls.

Another stir arose last month after the French weekly *Globe Hebdo* revealed that the tuition of at least seven of the chief rabbi's nine children was paid for by the Consistoire even though none of them attended schools supervised by the Consistoire Central or the mainstream French Jewish Social Fund.

Sitruk would not comment on the charges.

While Sitruk's alleged financial improprieties were kept relatively secret until recently, some of his political pronouncements have been a source of widespread controversy.

Sitruk's announcement in March that the country's Jews should not vote in this year's local elections because they were held on the first day of Passover angered many who thought he was driving a wedge between French Jewry and the government.

Likewise, his cool stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian self-rule accord, along with his criticism of any land-for-peace deals in Israel's negotiations with its Arab neighbors, angered many French Jews, including former Chief Rabbi Rene Sirat.

"One cannot at the same time salute the Oslo achievement and declare that each square inch of the Holy Land is sacred," Sirat said, referring to the series of secret meetings in the Norwegian capital that led to the signing of the self-rule accord last September.

Despite the criticisms, Sitruk is widely acknowledged as a charming and gifted speaker who has succeeded in attracting huge crowds to his public appearances.

In a recent interview with the French Jewish weekly *Actualite Juive*, Sitruk voiced some criticism of the chief rabbinate's seven-year term, saying that it should be left to his own discretion when to step down.

The suggestion was greeted less than enthusiastically by the Consistoire Central.

MOSCOW SHUL LEADER MOVING TO GERMANY
By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, June 19 (JTA) -- The chairman of Moscow's main synagogue is emigrating to Germany and will be replaced by a new president and executive director, according to the synagogue's spiritual leader, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt.

Vladimir Federovsky, the lay leader of Moscow's historic Choral Synagogue, has held that position for the past six years.

Goldschmidt said a committee of synagogue members has elected Igor Yaroslavsky to serve as executive director and Mendi Kasziner as president.

In Germany, Federovsky will join thousands of other Russian Jews who emigrated there in search of greater economic opportunities. In the last year alone, an estimated 15,000 Russian Jews emigrated to Germany.

Commenting on Federovsky's decision to move to Germany, Goldschmidt said, "In general, I'm much happier if a Jew leaves for Israel. However, I can only answer a question (about where someone should move) if I'm asked."

COMPUTER NETWORK LINKS LATVIAN JEWS TO A WIDER WORLD OF JEWISH INFORMATION
By J.A. Sisman

RIGA, Latvia, June 19 (JTA) -- When Dina Belman, a high school student at the Simon Dubnow School in Riga, was interested in finding out about the history of the Holocaust in Latvia, she turned to her computer.

Using telephone lines hooked up to the computer, she was able to connect to the Dis-

tance Learning Network, a recently created Jewish database that also provides a communications network with teachers around the world.

"Even though I am in Riga and the teachers or information are in Europe or Israel, we can still communicate," said Belman, enthusiastically pursuing her interest in Jewish issues.

Similarly, Anotoli Freedman, the principal of the Dubnow School, can now "discuss" curriculum development for his school with fellow educators throughout the world as a result of the computer linkup.

Freedman, who also heads the Association of Jewish Schools in the former Soviet Union, expressed his hope that Jewish education would improve here as a result of the network.

"We need to be able to connect to other schools in the (former Soviet Union) and the world to fully be a part of the Jewish world," he said.

"Jewish schools in the Soviet Union have many students and many teachers, but few specialists. This network will help overcome that problem," said Ellen Isler, director general of World ORT, one of the co-sponsors of the network, known officially as the Shirley and Milton Gralla Distance Learning Network.

The New York-based Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Rich Foundation in Geneva also sponsored the creation of the network.

After extensive development of the project, the Dubnow School in Riga became the first pilot school to be joined to the Distance Learning Network's regional center in Moscow -- and via Moscow to the London Center of World ORT.

Since its founding four years ago as the first Jewish day school in the Soviet Union, the Dubnow School has grown to over 500 students. The Jewish community of Riga numbers approximately 15,000.

More Pilot Programs Expected

In London, an extensive collection of software on Jewish themes written in Russian has been developed for use on the network.

Similar pilot programs are scheduled to be implemented in the near future in Minsk and Kiev, the respective capitals of Belarus and Ukraine.

Officials with the Distance Learning Network are hoping eventually to reach all Jewish schools in the former Soviet Union.

"All the Jewish schools in the (former Soviet states) face a severe shortage of materials, resources and especially a dearth of teachers. This network will provide ongoing contact with Jewish experts in Jewish education," said Jerry Hochbaum, executive vice president of the Memorial Foundation, which took part in the official unveiling of the new network last week, when its biannual meeting was held in Riga.

The Memorial Foundation is an umbrella group representing 60 Jewish organizations whose goal is to rekindle Jewish cultural and religious life around the world. The foundation was created in 1964 with a \$10 million grant from reparations funds provided by the former West German government.

The foundation has been actively assisting Jewish schools in the former Soviet Union over the past several years.

ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT, CHURCH FIGURES JOIN JEWS TO REMEMBER WWII DEPORTATIONS By Odette Caufman-Blumenfeld

IASI, Romania (JTA) -- High-level government representatives joined with members of Romania's Jewish community recently to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the deportations of the Jews from the Transylvania region during World War II.

The commemoration, which was held in Oradea, located in the Crisan-Maramures area of western Romania, on the border with Hungary, recalled the events of May 3, 1944, when Nazi-allied Hungarian authorities began rounding up the Jews of that town.

Along with members of the country's dwindling Jewish community, Romanians and Hungarians also attended the ceremonies. The three groups have lived together for centuries in the Transylvanian town.

A religious service, conducted with the ringing bells of the town's churches in the background, was led by Rabbi Ernest Neumann of the western Romanian city of Timisoara.

The ceremony was opened by Theodor Blumenfeld, the secretary-general of the Romanian Jewish Federation. In the course of his talk, Blumenfeld referred to this ceremony as the last request of longtime Romanian Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, who died May 6 at the age of 81.

In a show of solidarity with Romania's Jewish community, government and church officials spoke at the commemoration.

Among the government officials in attendance were Victor Opalski, personal representative of Romanian President Ion Iliescu, and Education Minister Liviu Maier.

Opalski, reading the president's message, referred to the 1,300 towns and villages devastated in the region and the 150,000 Jews deported from there.

"Out of the 166,601 Jews (deported) only 25,000 returned," said Opalski.

It was the first time an official Romanian speech contained figures of those killed and from how many towns.

SCHONHUBER CHARGES JEWISH WRITER WITH INCITING OTHERS TO MURDER HIM By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, June 19 (JTA) -- Franz Schonhuber, chairman of Germany's extreme right-wing Republican Party, has brought charges against a Jewish writer on allegations that the writer had issued a public call for his murder.

Schonhuber cited an article by Ralph Giordano that included the statement: "It is outrageous that nobody does Schonhuber in immediately."

A former member of the Waffen SS, Schonhuber said the comment represented nothing less than a public call to commit a crime.

The prosecuting attorney in the northern city of Kiel has opened an investigation against Giordano. But an Interior Ministry spokesman for the state of Schleswig Holstein, which has Kiel as its capital, has criticized the investigation, saying Giordano probably meant to make a political statement rather than call for the murder of Schonhuber.

AMID SIGNS OF GROWING LABOR PAINS, RABIN LASHES OUT AT HIS PARTY CRITICS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) -- Confronted by growing signs of internal distress within the Labor Party and widespread talk of its disintegration, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has lashed out at his critics within the party.

Speaking at a meeting of the party's Central Committee in Tel Aviv on Sunday, Rabin called for local party leaders on the Histadrut trade union level who had made coalition deals with the Likud opposition to be drummed out of the party.

Rabin left the hall when the foremost of these local leaders, Tel Aviv's Gershon Gelman, rose to speak and defend himself.

Speaking later to reporters, Rabin stopped short of confirming speculation that his longtime rival, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, is behind the disaffection within the party and the rebelliousness at the local level.

Rabin said that he and Peres were "collaborating closely on issues of national policy," suggesting that their collaboration was less than close on domestic and party-related matters.

Rabin faces deep dissent and even bitterness within the ranks of his party following Labor's unprecedented defeat in the May 10 Histadrut trade union elections.

Renegade Laborite Haim Ramon, the former minister of health, ran -- and won -- at the head of his own list, known as Ram.

Rabin has repeatedly accused the previous Histadrut secretary-general, Labor's Haim Haberfeld, of deliberately delaying the transfer of power to Ramon.

He has also accused Haberfeld of backing local leaders who, contrary to the party leadership's specific instructions, concluded local coalition deals with the Likud.

Rabin wanted all such deals, on the national and the local levels, to be made between Labor and Ram.

Political observers here have set this discord against a wider backdrop of profound political uncertainty in the wake of the Israel-Palestinian peace initiative and in anticipation of the upcoming elections, which are to be held no later than 1996.

Due to recent electoral reform legislation, the elections will be conducted under a new two-vote system, which for the first time will enable Israelis to vote directly for their prime ministerial candidate.

Israelis will vote separately for the Knesset list of their choice.

The growing sense of political uncertainty goes beyond the usual pundits.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal said in an Israel Television interview Sunday that he expected vast changes in "the political map" during the latter half of the 1990s.

Shahal predicted these changes would affect both Labor and Likud, creating new blocs and political alliances.

One upshot of the atmosphere of political uncertainty has been the evolution of a groundswell against the long-awaited electoral reform.

Led by Labor Party doves, prominent among them Knesset member Avraham Burg, these newly outspoken anti-reformers argue that the proposed

new system is proving dangerous even before it goes into effect.

They say the system will encourage demagogic, public-relations-oriented politics and could produce a prime minister and a Knesset engaged in a permanent deadlock.

Opponents of electoral reform also have powerful support in the Likud, where former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir is among the most consistent critics of the new legislation.

Burg said Sunday he would introduce a bill designed to postpone the electoral reforms.

In the current unpredictable climate of political opinion, it is not at all clear whether or not such a bill would pass.

BY LUCK OF THE DRAW, PORUSH LOSES KNESSET SEAT

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) -- The luck of the draw has cost longtime member Menachem Porush his Knesset seat.

Porush, 78, has sat in the Knesset for 39 years as a representative of Agudat Yisrael, which along with another fervently Orthodox party, Degel HaTorah, comprises the United Torah Judaism bloc.

A ruling last week by the Council of Torah Sages, the supreme council of UTJ, ousted Porush from the Knesset, but left the equally colorful Avraham Shapira, also a member of Agudah, still in the Knesset.

In the summer of 1992, when the current Knesset was elected and the UTJ bloc was formed, it was agreed that one of the two Agudah members would resign after sitting for two years to permit Avraham Verdiger, who remained waiting in the wings, to take his place.

But when the time came, neither Porush nor Shapira wanted to yield his seat. Last week, the rabbis who comprise the Council of Sages decreed that lots should be drawn.

Porush took the result of the draw with equanimity, saying that he had many other public duties to perform.

Commenting on his winning the draw, Shapira said: "It was apparently divine will that I should continue."

ISRAELIS WILL BE BARRED FROM JERICHO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 19 (JTA) -- Israelis will be barred from the autonomous Jericho district in the West Bank when Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat visits there, according to the Israeli commander in charge of the West Bank.

Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, who heads the Israeli army's central command, said last week that the ban will affect all Israelis, with the exception of journalists covering the event.

He said that Route 90, the north-south highway that runs from Jerusalem to Tiberias, will be closed at Jericho, and that Israelis will be asked to use a dirt road that bypasses the Jericho area.

Biran explained that the travel restriction was being imposed to prevent clashes between Arafat supporters and Israelis seeking to attack the PLO leader.

PALESTINIANS CONSIDER DEATH PENALTY FOR THOSE WHO COOPERATED WITH ISRAEL

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) -- Some Palestinians who collaborated with Israel's Shin Bet security services may be put to death, according to Freih Abu Medein, the newly named justice minister of the Palestinian governing council.

According to Medein, the death penalty may apply to those collaborators whose activities led directly or indirectly to the death of other Palestinians.

But Medein also said the Palestinian authorities may decide to pardon those who turn themselves in and pledge to abandon their work with the Shin Bet.

Last week, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Israel might hold up the release of Palestinian prisoners if the Palestinian authorities decide to prosecute individuals suspected of collaborating with Israel.

Two collaborators, meanwhile, in an address to the Knesset last week, accused the Shin Bet of failing to honor its promises of financial assistance, forcing them into extreme financial difficulties.

They said there are some 7,000 collaborators holding documentation from Israeli authorities attesting to their status.

They also complained that under the terms of the Cairo agreement for implementing Palestinian self-rule, Israel is now freeing Palestinians imprisoned for hunting down suspected collaborators.

Palestinian security officials recently announced they would not tolerate individual vendettas against suspected collaborators.

Since the Palestinian uprising began in December 1987, an estimated 800 to 1,000 Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel have been killed by fellow Palestinians.

IDF DENIES RIGHTS GROUP REPORT THAT IT TORTURES PALESTINIANS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 19 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force has denied a report by an American human rights monitoring organization claiming Israeli interrogators torture Palestinian detainees to obtain confessions of wrongdoing.

An IDF spokesman issued a statement last week stating that the use of torture or violence against detainees is forbidden under Israeli law. He added that any confession obtained by such means would be inadmissible as evidence.

The denial was issued in reply to a report published earlier in the week by the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, which charged "a systematic pattern of ill-treatment and torture" in the Israeli handling of Palestinian detainees.

In issuing the denial, the IDF spokesman stressed the safeguards already in place to prevent such mistreatment and added that the number of complaints has been minimal.

But Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, who was questioned last week about the human rights report, acknowledged that Israel had probably committed human rights violations during its 27 years of administering the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"I do not believe there is anywhere a benevolent occupier," Beilin said. "I do not believe that Israel has been a benevolent occupier."

"I am sure that during the occupation of the territories there were deeds which are regrettable, and the only way to put an end to them is to withdraw eventually from the territories as a part of the permanent solution," he said.

GOVERNMENT APPROVES SALE OF 51 PERCENT OF EL AL AIRLINES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- The government's privatization committee has approved the sale of 51 percent of El Al Airlines to the general public, paving the way for privatizing the national carrier.

The announcement followed a meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Privatization, which accepted the recommendations of Transportation Minister Yisrael Kessar and Finance Minister Avraham Shohat to privatize El Al.

The actual sale of shares was expected to take place in October, when the once-ailing airline is to be taken out of the 13-year-long receivership under which it has been operating.

A board of directors for El Al will be named once the company is out of receivership.

Kessar opposed the sale of a controlling interest to a private investor in order to protect the airline's workers, who have already expressed fears about their salaries and working conditions under new owners.

"El Al is a national carrier and its shares should not be sold to an investor who would be free to do as he pleased with the airline," said Kessar, a former head of the Histadrut trade union federation.

"In every privatization process, one must try not to harm the workers who contributed to the company's positive financial situation," he added.

El Al was put into receivership by the government 13 years ago when it suffered heavy losses in the wake of numerous strikes by one or more of the 12 local unions representing El Al workers.

At its meeting, the privatization committee discussed El Al's costs for maintaining security.

Security costs total approximately \$55 million a year, some 80 percent of which is currently paid for by the government.

Kessar and Shohat will decide during the privatization process how the security costs, which represent a heavy financial burden for the airline, will be shared by the government and El Al shareholders.

A Transport Ministry spokesman said the government's privatization committee will decide at a later date how to dispose of the remaining 49 percent stake in the airline.

The 51 percent share to be sold to the public will probably be offered first to El Al employees and then to the public in an offering on the Tel Aviv and New York stock exchanges.

El Al has yet to report its 1993 results, but a company official has said the carrier had net profits last year of approximately \$10 million on revenues of more than \$1 billion.

El Al currently operates an all-Boeing fleet of 22 jets, and recently ordered a third Boeing 747-400 jumbo jet for delivery next May.