

**ARAFAT VISIT SPURS ISRAELI OPPOSITION
AS WELL AS A WEEK OF PALESTINIAN PRIDE**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, July 5 (JTA) -- The five-day visit of Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat to the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho spurred the Israeli right-wing opposition into high gear at the same time that it stirred popular Palestinian pride.

The opposition protests culminated in a massive demonstration Saturday night that clogged the narrow central arteries of downtown Jerusalem.

Uri Schorr, who came from outside Tel Aviv to demonstrate against the Israeli government, said he hoped the protests would signal to the Rabin government that "we mean business."

"Our government is still covering up and saying (the autonomous area) is not a state and there won't be any state, like an ostrich with its head in the sand," said Schorr, who stressed he was not religious and rejected Rabin's effort to categorize the protesters as religious fanatics.

Following the demonstration, which drew tens of thousands of people, hundreds of demonstrators rampaged through eastern Jerusalem, damaging Arab property and stoning a U.S. Consulate building.

The Jewish protesters also disrupted Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting by blocking traffic, blowing whistles and banging on metal objects. Police arrested dozens of protesters.

By Tuesday morning, opponents of the peace process were out in force, blocking desert roads with their bodies and burning tires to prevent Palestinians from going to the West Bank town of Jericho to hear Arafat speak.

In preparation for Arafat's visit to Jericho on Tuesday, Israeli security forces rerouted Jericho-bound traffic to an old military road, which made the trip more than twice as long as the regular half-hour route.

Along the road there were at least five Israeli checkpoints to navigate, intended to prevent anti-Arafat Jewish settlers from getting to Jericho, soldiers said.

Meanwhile, Arafat was greeted throughout the autonomous areas by Palestinians who were both exuberant to see their leader return from exile and impatient to see concrete changes in their daily lives.

'A Historic Day For Our People'

For his part, Arafat repeatedly called for Palestinian unity and the establishment of a Palestinian state that would have Jerusalem as its capital.

In Jericho on Tuesday, a few thousand Palestinians braved heavy security to stand under a scorching sun to greet the man they call Abu Amar.

After touching down dramatically in an Egyptian helicopter, he was cheered as he had been cheered last Friday upon his arrival in Gaza with cries of, "In blood, in spirit, we will sacrifice for you and for Palestine."

"It is a historic day for our people when our president is coming back to his homeland to manage the Palestine National Authority," said Munthir Salah, president of Najah University in Nablus, one of the dignitaries who had been bused in for the speech.

"It's a first step to our state -- Palestine," Salah said.

Awni Shahrour, a dentist from Tulkarm who said he had last seen Arafat 24 years ago when Shahrour was a student in Algeria, said, "This is a historic moment to receive our president in our land which is liberated from Israeli occupation."

A Palestinian woman, 25-year-old Fatna Kassab, said, "I am very happy, but I won't be fully happy until we return to all the 1967 borders, especially Jerusalem."

Throughout Arafat's visit, the core of the Israeli opposition's protest was a makeshift, dusty, multi-colored tent encampment opposite the Prime Minister's Office, where hundreds of Jewish families from around the country have been living for weeks.

A Massive Police Presence

The right-wing activists claimed the Arafat visit marked the start of a Palestinian jihad, or holy war, for Jerusalem. They vowed that Jewish sovereignty over a united Jerusalem would never be compromised.

On Saturday evening, as Shabbat was drawing to a close, the camp was being stared down by a massive police presence fanned out across the street, in front of the government buildings.

The show of force was in apparent response to Rabin's claim last week that the protesters planned to take over the government with violence.

But the protesters denied any such intention. They said Rabin was using hot rhetoric to turn the Israeli public against them and to serve as a pretext for anticipated police brutality against them.

Rabin intensified the rhetoric Sunday when he reportedly charged the radical right wing with being in an "evil, wicked circle of partnership (with) the Hamas murderers" to undermine the peace process.

Yisrael Hanukoglu, a biochemistry professor at the Weizmann Institute, came from Rishon le-Zion to camp at the site, where he preferred to sleep in his car rather than take up residence in a tent.

Hanukoglu said that as a native of Turkey, he believes he is more sensitive than Westerners to the language and symbolism used by Arafat in the speech he gave when he arrived in Gaza City last Friday.

"In the symbolism of Islam," he said, the references to "the blood of the martyrs and the importance of Jerusalem (make) it very clear to me that what he intends to do is establish a Palestinian state that's eventually going to destroy Israel. There is just no question."

By sundown Saturday night, at the conclusion of Shabbat, the ranks of those in the tent camp swelled as tens of thousands of demonstra-

tors joined them in downtown Jerusalem to rally against the government.

"Rabin the Traitor!" "Rabin resign!" and "Death to Arafat" were the favored chants as portraits of Rabin in traditional Arab headgear were held aloft and set on fire.

There were fliers offering a \$1 million reward for the assassination of Arafat.

Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, one of the speakers at the Saturday night rally, maintained that Arafat's decision not to come to Jerusalem during this visit was immaterial.

"When Arafat came, he didn't talk of Gaza," Netanyahu told the crowd. "He spoke of Jerusalem, the Galilee and the Negev."

Not all Israelis who were out on the streets of Jerusalem Saturday night agreed with the demonstrators.

"I am against the demonstration and I am very happy Arafat came because the time has arrived for peace," said Miriam Danan, the owner of a pizzeria.

"I was born here and I know wars and I don't want my two sons to be in Gaza," she said, referring to last month's withdrawal of Israeli troops from most areas of Gaza.

Even on the question of Jerusalem, Danon had a different view. She said she doesn't want to lose the city to the Palestinians, but that its "internationalization is okay with me."

NEWS ANALYSIS:

GOVERNMENT DECLARES VISIT A SUCCESS AS ARAFAT BEGINS BUSINESS OF GOVERNING

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 5 (JTA) -- Success often comes in strange guises.

On Saturday night, a massive demonstration in Jerusalem turned ugly and violent as protesters vented their fury against the historic return of Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat to the Gaza Strip.

On Tuesday, smoke could be seen rising from roads leading to the West Bank town of Jericho when Israeli demonstrators burned tires to prevent Palestinians from arriving in Jericho to hear Arafat speak.

And for days on end, Israelis saw television images of Arafat being given a hero's welcome in the two districts that last month officially fell under Palestinian autonomy.

Despite the difficult images, by the time Arafat was preparing to leave, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his ministers were congratulating themselves -- and by implication the PLO leader himself -- on the success of Arafat's homecoming.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, who has played an important role in the peace negotiations, was the first to give a stamp of government approval to Arafat's all-important arrival speech in Gaza City's main square last Friday.

"We can live with it," Sarid pronounced.

His satisfaction apparently stemmed from the fact that Arafat had said nothing in Gaza that violated the declaration of principles signed in Washington last September or any other subsequent agreements with Israel.

Sarid's judgment was echoed by other ministers, and eventually by the prime minister himself.

As long as Arafat wasn't violating any agreements, Israeli officials saw his visit as important and tangible evidence that self-rule was beginning to take hold in Gaza and Jericho.

Their confidence was given a boost Tuesday, when after speaking in Jericho, Arafat swore in 12 members of the Palestinian governing council that will have responsibility for running day-to-day affairs in the Gaza Strip and Jericho until elections for officials are held later this year.

The sense of Arafat taking control was further reinforced by statements made by Arafat aides that his departure at midweek for a meeting in Paris with Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was only temporary and that the PLO leader would be coming back to stay.

Top aides differed on exactly when and where Arafat would return. Some said in a few days, others in a few weeks; some said he would settle in Gaza, others said he would move between Gaza and Jericho.

Defusing A Potential Explosion

Arafat's relative moderation, meanwhile, was credited with defusing a potential explosion of political and religious tension within Israeli society.

Had Arafat been less moderate in his remarks, say observers, Israeli opposition groups may have responded with a fury that could have threatened the existence of the government as well as the future of the peace process.

At Saturday night's demonstration, tens of thousands of protestors jammed downtown Jerusalem to hear leaders of the right-wing parties and of the settler movement blast Arafat as a murderer and Rabin as a traitor.

Had the PLO chief insisted on praying this week at the Al Aksa Mosque in eastern Jerusalem, there might well have been double or triple that number of demonstrators.

The Likud and its allies were clearly embarrassed by the behavior of extremists, who ended the huge Saturday night demonstration with a splurge of wanton violence against Arab property in eastern Jerusalem.

The police, too, apparently were embarrassed by the failure to prevent what many saw as a predictable turn of events.

By Sunday morning the police had gotten much tougher, and the first hints of renewed violence outside the Cabinet Office led to dozens of arrests.

"They do not represent us," Likud Whip David Mena said of the extremist demonstrators in the Knesset on Monday. "We want no part of them."

But the Likud's censures of the ultra-hardliners rang hollow in the minds of many, given the fact that a huge painted sign calling in Hebrew and English for the death of Arafat draped the balcony from which Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and the other opposition leaders had spoken during the rallies.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert also appeared to want to put some distance between himself and the rampaging demonstrators from Saturday night.

A week after announcing that he was setting up an office in Jerusalem to prevent Arafat from visiting the city, Olmert said this week that the office was closing, according to Israeli media reports.

N.Y. STATE LEGISLATURE PASSES NEW BILL TO ALLOW KIRYAS JOEL DISTRICT TO STAND

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, July 5 (JTA) -- One week after the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the Kiryas Joel Village School District created to serve disabled Chasidic children in upstate New York, the battle over that district's future has been re-engaged.

In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court on June 27 ruled the district unconstitutional, with the majority opinion saying the district, set up by the New York State Legislature in 1989, "crosses the line" of acceptable separation between church and state.

On Saturday, the state legislature responded. It passed a bill, expected to be signed by Gov. Mario Cuomo, enabling any village to form its own school district if certain conditions are met.

The bill's sponsors say the measure reflects language in Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's concurring opinion, which objected to the original Kiryas Joel district because it was created by the legislature to benefit the Chasidim directly.

A more general law would remove this aspect of entanglement, say advocates for the special district. According to a memorandum to legislative leaders and the governor written by Nathan Lewin, who represented Kiryas Joel before the Supreme Court, such a provision would pass muster with at least five of the justices. Included in this majority would be the three dissenters in last week's decision, who felt there was no entanglement in the way the legislature originally created the Kiryas Joel district.

The Supreme Court ruling in the Board of Education of Kiryas Joel vs. Grumet upheld a 1993 state appeals court decision that the legislature overstepped the constitutional boundaries of accommodation to religious establishment when it passed the 1989 law creating the special district.

The legislature had been responding to the concerns of Chasidic parents who believed they could not send their disabled children to their own religious schools because of inadequate facilities, or to public schools because of religious and cultural differences.

Bill Could Encourage 'Balkanization'

Opponents of the original bill have vowed a challenge to the new version. Louis Grumet, executive director of the New York State School Boards Association, who brought the original challenge against the school district, said the bill encourages "Balkanization" and promised to oppose it in court. And Jewish groups are again likely to join the challenge.

"We are not convinced that this will be constitutionally sound either, and we are committed to protecting the separation of church and state," said Steven Freeman, director of legal affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL "will consider involvement if litigation results," Freeman said.

The American Jewish Congress believes there will be litigation, and is planning to sign on.

"The case is going to be litigated on the ground that essentially only one school district will qualify. In reality, it's just a way of doing what has already been done," said Marc Stern, general counsel of the AJCongress.

While the children of Kiryas Joel have needs which should be met by the surrounding school district, Stern said the route chosen by the legislature represents "the worst of all possible worlds."

"You can imagine some group moving up to some village, and then setting up their own school districts to train extremists or bigots or what have you. You're inviting this sort of micro-specialization or Balkanization," he said.

"Given the strains and stresses on the public school system, with people wanting separate male and separate female districts, separate black and separate Hispanic and separate gay school districts, it is very poor public policy to rush into this," Stern said.

State Assemblyman Jules Polonetsky, a Brooklyn Democrat who was one of the bill's co-sponsors, defended the bill.

"We have done something that is good educational policy," he said. "The direct intention was to solve a problem for the children of Kiryas Joel, but hopefully we've done it in a way to be of benefit for other children in the state."

Polonetsky called the Balkanization issue "a sham. We're giving more flexibility to school districts," he said, citing other bills passed by the legislature aimed at school-based management.

Critics of the bill have called it an election-year maneuver to appeal to Chasidic voting blocs.

Going Along With The Larger Community

"It's very hard to understand why it is proceeding in this fashion, other than a desire to take advantage of the political clout of the Satmar community," said Stern, referring to the Chasidic group that requested the special school.

"You can only speculate that the politicians believe it is far easier to get an immediate reward by satisfying one element of the Jewish community. Then it is going along with the wishes of the larger, more numerous Jewish community," Stern added.

Polonetsky denounced as "offensive" charges of political motivation.

But it is clear that Cuomo, who is up for re-election this year, is facing what may be his toughest contest yet. Last year's victory in the New York City mayoral campaign by Republican Rudolph Giuliani, who was strongly supported by the Orthodox community, highlighted the community's political clout.

At the same time, the approach of the AJCongress and other mainstream Jewish organizations, which have long supported church-state separation and a strong public school system, may be losing out in an increasingly Orthodox New York Jewish electorate.

A 1991 New York Jewish Population Study found that of the 329,000 Jewish children in New York City, Long Island and Westchester between 6 and 18, those attending Jewish day schools or yeshivas outnumbered those in afternoon or Sunday school programs by 111,000 to 72,000. The remainder were receiving no Jewish education.

Whatever the politics, it remains to be seen whether Kiryas Joel will have another day in the Supreme Court.

While advocates of the new bill say it will easily prevail there, Stern predicts provisions of the state constitution will derail the new districting law at the state level.

BRITISH BLOCKADE RE-ENACTED FOR TEENS ABOARD 'EXODUS '94'

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, July 5 (JTA) -- During a three-day sea voyage from Brindisi, Italy, to Haifa, North American teen-agers learned a lesson in Zionist history they will not soon forget.

On their way to Israel to participate in a variety of summer programs, the teens traveled to Italy, where they boarded a ship bound for Haifa.

Once aboard the ship, which set sail June 30, the teens re-enacted the voyage taken by the Exodus '47 -- one of the many ships engaged in Aliyah Bet, or "illegal" immigration of Jews to pre-state Israel during the 1930s and '40s.

Organized by the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education of the World Zionist Organization as a means of bringing Diaspora youths closer to their Jewish roots, the cruise proved to be an eclectic mix of fun and education.

The adventure began during the long bus ride from Rome to the port of Brindisi, during which WZO staffers and leaders from the eight participating youth groups described the hardships faced by Holocaust survivors in the years following World War II.

As the buses approached the port, the leaders drew the shades and began role-playing:

"Soon we will attempt to board the ship. There will be many British soldiers and spies who will try to stop us from getting to Eretz Yisrael. If asked, tell them you are sailing to Colombia. Never utter the word Palestine," they said.

Forewarned, the teens were prepared when mock British soldiers suddenly appeared and began to question their presence on the dock.

Already living the fiction, the teens refused to give away the fact that they were indeed bound for Israel.

After boarding the Atalante, a circa-1950s ship that the WZO had renamed the "Exodus '94," the teens settled down into a routine that included seminars, workshops and sunbathing around the swimming pool.

Grappling With Difficult Issues

Divided into their respective youth groups -- among them Young Judea, National Federation of Temple Youth, Habonim and United Synagogue Youth -- the illegal immigration of Jews to Israel before it became a state. Habonim, National Federation of Temple Youth and Young Judea -- the teens nonetheless shared many of the same experiences.

At different times throughout the trip, each group was forced to grapple with difficult issues.

In one of the role-playing workshops, the teens had to imagine themselves as refugees living in Europe after the war.

"What would you do if you were a refugee?" asked a youth leader. "You've lost your home, your business, but France has agreed to give you citizenship. Do you stay in Europe and start again, or do you try to get past the British blockade of Palestine?"

"There's a good chance that you'll be caught and sent to an internment camp in Cyprus. What would you decide, if it were up to you?" the leader asked.

In another scenario, the teens were the leaders of Aliyah Bet. They were told, "You are

the leaders. It is you who will decide on a passenger list.

"You will be faced with difficult decisions. On the one hand, you have wealthy Jews who found refuge in Sweden before the war. On the other hand, you have sick Holocaust survivors who may not survive the six-day journey at sea. Who do you take, and who do you leave behind?"

While grappling with these dilemmas, the teens had the opportunity to meet some of the real leaders of Aliyah Bet.

Ike Arranne (Isaac Aronowicz), the captain of the actual Exodus '47, was on board to share his experiences, as were a handful of American ex-servicemen who had volunteered on Aliyah Bet ships after World War II.

Frank Lavine, who had served in the U.S. Army Air Corps before joining the Exodus '47 crew, told his mesmerized listeners that Leon Uris novel "Exodus" bore little resemblance to the real-life Exodus '47.

In addition to other discrepancies, he noted that "the refugees of the Exodus '47 weren't sent to Cyprus. They were sent back to France, and then to Germany.

'They Have Brought The Story To Life'

"The trip itself was rather uneventful until we came within 25 miles off the coast of Palestine and encountered the British blockade.

"I remember that two children were born during the voyage, and that one of the mothers died in childbirth," Lavine said.

Sherri Lewis, an 18-year-old Young Judean from Chicago, said of the lectures, "The speakers have been incredible. They have brought the story to life. While I was listening to the history, I could really imagine what happened back then."

Before the trip was over, the teens had their own opportunity to meet "the British blockade."

Within sight of the Haifa Port, a two-seater plane from the British Mandate period suddenly swooped over the ship's deck and distributed hundreds of leaflets telling the "refugees" to surrender without a fight.

A few minutes later, a dangerous-looking missile boat -- in reality, part of the Israeli navy's arsenal -- circled the ship and demanded a surrender. In response, the teens, who were now gathered on the deck, began to wave banners and chant anti-British slogans.

Though they play-acted with gusto, several of the travelers said they felt a bit silly shouting at an Israeli navy boat in the middle of Haifa Bay.

Yet, as the Haifa shoreline drew nearer, even the skeptics seemed to get into the spirit. Spontaneously, the teens joined hands and danced around the deck.

While most of the participants expressed enthusiasm about their adventure, some had reservations.

Hannah Greenstein, a member of Habonim, said, "I learned a lot, but I thought the experience would be more realistic."

Referring to the swimming pools, good food and air-conditioning on the ship, Greenstein said, "The experience would have had greater impact if the conditions had been harsher. There was too much luxury. The trip was too much fun to be realistic."