

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ **Jewish activists praised House Speaker Newt Gingrich for taking quick action against his appointee for the post of House historian.** Christina Jeffrey had opposed federal funding for Holocaust education because the curriculum did not include the "Nazi viewpoint." Proponents of Holocaust education said the Jeffrey debacle served to reaffirm the importance of teaching about Nazi atrocities to American students. [Page 3]

■ **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin apologized for remarks he made last week suggesting that American Jews should stop contributing to the United Jewish Appeal and other agencies connected to the government of Israel.** But he continued to urge American Jews to help strengthen projects in Judea and Samaria. [Page 2]

■ **Six armed Palestinian security agents in civilian clothes tried to force their way onto a bus carrying Jewish schoolchildren in the Gaza Strip.** Israel Radio said the men emerged from a Volvo that was blocking the road and tried to board the bus. A joint Palestinian-Israeli patrol prevented their action and enabled the bus to continue safely on its way.

■ **The resignation of Jordan's former prime minister Abdul Salam al-Majali should not affect the implementation of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan,** Majali said. Majali's main function was seen as furthering the peace process between Israel and Jordan. He resigned last week after serving as prime minister for 19 months. His resignation was widely expected. Jordanian King Hussein appointed his cousin and former army chief, Zeid Bin Shaker, 60, as the new prime minister. He is a close confidante of Hussein's and is considered popular with the Jordanian army.

■ **Iraq is reportedly continuing its efforts to open contacts with Israel,** this time using Morocco as an intermediary. Iraq said that as a longtime supporter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, it is appropriate for it to follow the PLO's lead in establishing ties with Israel, according to a report in Ha'aretz. Israel, for its part, has said it will have no official contact with Iraq until it abides by all U.N. resolutions.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****In the middle of Muslim Russia, a klezmer band warms a wintry soul**

By Lisa Glazer

KAZAN, Tatarstan, Jan. 10 (JTA) — Eight hundred miles east of Moscow, in the capital city of the republic of Tatarstan, the Volga river turns into ice, thick snow slumbers atop concrete apartment blocks and the few hardy souls out on the slippery streets are well-wrapped in woolens as the thermometer sinks to 13 degrees below zero.

Warmth, buoyancy, energy and joy are a rare treat here, but inside the sturdy old House of Actors, where steam from the doorman's tea kettle billows into the entranceway, this is exactly what the Simcha Klezmer Band provides.

Six musicians — half of them Jewish, the other half Tatar — sway, sing, tease and perform, creating a spontaneous celebration of the sweet, soulful melodies of the shtetl.

In addition to providing warmth, the music has served as a catalyst for wider Jewish involvement in this isolated community of 7,000 Jews.

How was a klezmer band created in this historically Muslim republic in the middle of the Russian Federation?

"We are musicians, artistic people, our brains are upside down, and we're not 100 percent healthy psychologically," answers Leonid Sonts, the green-eyed violist who oversees the group and serves as a one-man source of inspiration for Jewish cultural life in Kazan.

"You have to be crazy and enthusiastic to do this," he says.

And determined.

The 50-year-old Sonts was trained as a classical musician and was employed for decades as a symphony violinist.

But all his life he was entranced by stories about his grandfather, a klezmer performer.

Sonts never actually heard him play, but he did hear some Jewish wedding music as a child, and the vivacious tunes hummed through his memory for years.

When Jewish life became possible again after perestroika, the series of reforms initiated by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, Sonts was more than ready for what he describes as a "folklore expedition" into his past.

He met with senior citizens who remembered the Yiddish tunes of their youth, finagled them to sing and scratched down the notes. He borrowed dusty records and tape cassettes, and he requested Jewish songbooks from foreign visitors.

**Filling the concert halls**

Then he gathered a group of musician friends and proposed creating a concert of Jewish songs, just to see if it could work.

The event took place in May 1989, and the response was overwhelming: They attracted a concert hall full of people, many of whose eyes welled up with tears.

From this encouraging beginning, Sonts decided to develop his band and to concentrate on klezmer music.

Albert Gilfaneth, a clarinetist who is Tatar, agreed to join in, as did guitarist Oskar Korbungaleyev, drummer Edward Norulin, pianist Vladimir Shteinman and singer Edward Tumansky.

The cross-cultural mix came easily, they say, and is not new here. There is much intermarrying between Tatars and Jews, and relations between the two groups are generally congenial.

"Music is international, especially Jewish music, because Jews are all over the place," Gilfaneth says.

"There is also something Oriental in both Jewish and Tatar culture," he adds.

Besides traveling to perform in places like the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, the Jewish autonomous region of Birobidjan in eastern Siberia, and Moscow, the Simcha Klezmer Band has also become something of an institution here in Kazan, a city of one million people.

The city has been the site of two Jewish music festivals. A recent

Chanukah concert brought together 1,200 fans, who were a mixture of Russians, Tatars and Jews.

The group's open-armed reception in Kazan is no big surprise, Sonts says.

Although some anti-Semitism exists here, Sonts says, Jews have usually been well-treated by the Tatars, a Muslim people who were conquered by Ivan the Terrible in 1522 and forcefully joined to the Russian empire.

Today, Tatars comprise less than half the population of Tatarstan, but in the last few years there has been a growing interest in their language and culture, as well as in the cultures of other ethnic groups, including Jews.

As the Simcha band generated respect and goodwill, Kazan's Jewish community began to re-emerge from decades of repression under Soviet rule.

Using Jewish music as a catalyst, Sonts established the Menorah Cultural Center, which now provides a home for three musical groups, a veterans club, a women's group and a youth group.

They meet in an old synagogue in the center of the city, a building that was confiscated by the Communists and transformed into a Dom Uchitelya — a House of Learning — for all the ethnic groups of Tatarstan.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, a bus stopped outside the building and a long line of rotund, gray-haired women in babushkas filed out.

They later appeared on a first-floor stage in local costume: brightly-embroidered, cotton-candy pink dresses decorated with flowery embroidery, their foreheads ringed with necklaces of silver coins.

### **Bringing Kazan's Jews together**

Upstairs, different Jewish groups were meeting throughout the day: a singing group for children under 10, a senior citizens group, the youth group.

Nikolai Kolupayev, a 23-year-old medical student, said he first heard about the Menorah center at a Simcha band concert.

"Simcha brings together the Jews of Kazan," he says.

"You usually meet people there who don't go to clubs and aren't involved in the Jewish community. The hall is always full and the music is very special."

There is not a single functioning synagogue in Kazan, and knowledge of religious Judaism is sparse. But the band's lively, accessible music does seem to act as a positive, unifying force in a community that lacks the usual institutions and rituals of Judaism.

"We had scientific atheism hammered hard into our brains," explains Olga Apollonova, a Jewish community activist who has lived in Israel.

"Now some of the youths are curious, but many people say they've lived their whole lives without it and they don't need it now," she says.

Four months ago, two young Chabad Lubavitch rabbis arrived from Israel to try to spark renewed religious curiosity among the local community.

They began by working with Kazan's few remaining religious Jews — a small but devoted group that had been praying in the privacy of a tiny apartment.

But they soon held well-attended holiday festivals and even met with Tatarstan's independent-minded president, Mintimer Shaimiev.

But the work facing the rabbis remains enormously challenging.

It is very hard to collect people "who never knew what was a tefillin," says Rabbi Avraham Lerer, 22.

Another aspect of Judaism is being promoted by Lev and Ilanit Izakovitch, two Israeli university students who chose to work in bitter-cold Kazan instead of sun-drenched Aruba as part of a volunteer program run by

Arevim, an Israeli organization connected to the World Union of Jewish Students.

"People here haven't known that Judaism has many variations — not just Chasidism, but Conservative and Reform," says Lev Izakovitch, whose family is originally from the former Soviet Union.

"Our goal is to help make the community active, to help them ask questions about doing things for themselves, not religiously, but culturally."

To do this, he says, he needs resources, everything from Woody Allen videos to Jewish encyclopedias.

Despite these clusters of activity, the future of the Jewish community in Kazan remains elusive, as it also does in many of the more isolated parts of the Russian Federation.

The vast majority of Kazan's Jews are assimilated and uninvolved, and those that do join in religious or cultural life usually end up emigrating for Israel or America.

Sonts, for one, harbors no illusions.

"It is not my wish, but the general trend is that there will not be any more Jews here in 15 or 20 years," he says. "They are either dying or leaving."

So why devote days, nights and weekends to a doomed community?

Israel doesn't need another unemployed violinist, Sonts says, adding that his place is in Kazan.

"If I can perform," he says, "I feel that I am needed here." □

### **Efrat's chief rabbi apologizes for remarks about giving to UJA**

*By Lisa Hostein*

NEW YORK, Jan. 10 (JTA) — Rabbi Shlomo Riskin has apologized for remarks he made last week suggesting that American Jews should stop contributing to the United Jewish Appeal and other agencies connected to the government of Israel.

"I don't believe that we shouldn't give to UJA," he said in a telephone interview from the West Bank settlement of Efrat on Tuesday.

"If it came out that way, then I'm sorry," he said, referring to comments he made at a news conference in New York.

Riskin, the chief rabbi of Efrat, had flown here last week in the wake of a heated controversy over plans to expand his community.

Efrat's plans were thwarted when the Israeli government decided to halt the expansion project. The government reached its decision after Palestinians and left-wing Israelis protested the expansion and warned that it could disrupt the peace process.

The government ultimately reached a compromise with Efrat's leaders to expand on land closer to their community.

Despite the compromise reached with the government, Riskin took a hard line against the coalition led by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. He predicted an all-out war if the government continued to halt expansion of settlements.

Saying his remarks about UJA "came out wrong" at the news conference in New York, Riskin noted that his own Ohr Torah Educational Institutions in Jerusalem are helped by UJA funds.

At the same time, however, Riskin, in the phone interview, reiterated the position he articulated at the news conference that American Jews should give directly to projects in the territories.

"I am in favor of strengthening Judea and Samaria," he said. □

**Debacle over House historian reaffirms Holocaust education***By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON, Jan. 10 (JTA) — The rise and fall of the House of Representatives historian who opposed funding a Holocaust education program for not reflecting “the Nazi point of view” may well strengthen the hand of Holocaust education, advocates say.

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has garnered widespread support for his quick decision to dismiss Christina Jeffrey, who had opposed the curriculum, “Facing History and Ourselves,” while serving as an Education Department consultant in 1986.

Gingrich fired Jeffrey, his hand-picked choice for the post, on Monday, just hours after learning she had labeled the middle school and high school Holocaust curriculum biased.

“The program gives no evidence of balance or objectivity,” Jeffrey wrote at the time.

“The Nazi point of view, however unpopular, is still a point of view and is not presented, nor is that of the Ku Klux Klan,” she wrote.

In a letter to the speaker, the Anti-Defamation League was among the first of many Jewish groups to praise Gingrich for implementing his “swift and decisive action.”

Despite his praise for Gingrich, however, ADL national director Abraham Foxman sounded alarms that Jeffrey could have reached such an important position in Washington in the first place.

“That there are people who reach posts of such importance and influence underlines the need for Holocaust education,” Foxman said.

Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors, agreed.

“More and more, this signals the need for proper Holocaust education,” Meed said.

He noted that the Holocaust survivors’ group currently has 435 teachers certified in its own Holocaust education program.

Although only a handful of states currently mandate Holocaust education, students currently learn about the Holocaust to varying degrees in every state, according to Holocaust education advocates.

**‘No place for this type of view’**

Meed also praised Gingrich for taking the action of firing Jeffrey.

“We are very appreciative that the speaker acted so fast and understood that there is no place for giving ample time to the devil. And that’s what she is,” Meed said.

“This sends an important message that there’s no place for this type of view in the country,” said Meed, who is himself a Holocaust survivor.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center agreed, saying, “There’s only one place for her and that’s out of the House of Representatives.”

That Jeffrey slipped through the cracks has raised the eyebrows of many on Capitol Hill, in the White House and in the Jewish community.

“Someone did not do their homework,” said Michael Berenbaum, project director at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Gingrich met Jeffrey at Kennesaw State College in Georgia, where she was an associate professor and where she supported a controversial college course the speaker teaches.

A Gingrich spokesman said the speaker did not

know Jeffrey’s views on the Holocaust education program and fired her as soon as he found out about her offensive remarks.

Jeffrey, whose maiden name was Price, went undetected by activists who now vividly recall her critique of the “Facing History” program in 1986.

The program “may be appropriate for a limited religious audience, but not for wider distribution,” she then wrote.

Jeffrey concluded her 1986 review of the education program, saying: “It is a paradoxical and strange aspect of this program and the methods used to change the thinking of students is the same that Hitler and Goebbels used to propagandize the German people.

“This re-education method was perfected by Chairman Mao and now is being foisted on American children under the guise of understanding history,” she wrote.

At the time, Education Department officials labeled her evaluation “appalling” and Jeffrey was removed from the list of teachers called upon to evaluate teaching curricula.

**Holocaust curriculum blocked by right-wingers**

For three years in the mid-1980s, the Education Department denied funding for the Holocaust curriculum, in part because of consultants opposed to the curricula and because of right-wing groups, such as Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, which objected to the program.

However, due to persistent congressional support for the grants, the program finally broke through in 1989 and began to receive federal funds, which continue until today.

A national educational organization based in Brookline, Mass., Facing History and Ourselves, which has the same name as its program, has trained some 15,000 teachers since its inception in 1976.

Those teachers have reached 500,000 new students each year, according to Erica Stern, a staffer with the group.

Officials at Facing History and Ourselves refused to comment on the Jeffrey controversy.

According to congressional aides, a senior White House official tipped them off to Jeffrey’s questionable background.

It’s “hard to imagine how someone with these extreme views would have been considered in the first place, but the speaker quickly recognized that and made a decision that strikes us as appropriate,” White House press secretary Michael McCurry said Tuesday.

Gingrich sent Jeffrey a letter dated Monday, 9:15 p.m., in which he wrote, “I do not feel that it would be prudent nor beneficial for you or your family, nor the House of Representatives, to continue your employment at this time.”

The hand-written letter was signed “your friend Newt.”

Jeffrey was quoted by *The New York Times* on Monday, saying, “It wasn’t the kind of thing I would have said if I had known it was going to be in the *New York Times*.”

“It has never been my position that you ought to be going out and finding the KKK and bringing them into middle-school classrooms.”

She also told the *Times* that she didn’t “know anything about the Holocaust.”

After being ousted on Tuesday, Jeffrey charged in a written statement that she is the victim of “slanderous and outrageous” charges.

But advocates said that Jeffrey’s record speaks for itself. □

**CJF to re-evaluate role in Russia;  
NCSJ will be most affected by study***By Larry Yudelson*

NEW YORK, Jan. 10 (JTA) — Three years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the federation community is re-evaluating its role in the former Soviet republics.

The National Funding Councils of the Council of Jewish Federations will convene a committee next month to examine how to best aid Jews in the transformed landscape of the former Soviet Union.

The agency most likely to be affected by this study is the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, which receives more than half its \$670,000 annual budget from CJF.

Founded in 1971 as the organized Jewish community's response to grass-roots efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry, the NCSJ became the official lobby for free Jewish emigration and for maintaining the Jackson-Vanik Amendment linking Soviet-American relations to emigration rights.

But with the collapse of Communism and the emigration of more than a half-million Jews from the former Soviet Union in recent years, the continued role of the NCSJ has come under question.

"The issue is what is the best, most efficient way of structuring our whole approach to the former Soviet Union, and programs which advocate on behalf of Jews in the former Soviet Union in the future," said Robert Hyfler, director for budget and planning at the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Greater Washington.

"We have no predetermined stance, other than to say that things have obviously changed in the past [several] years, and structures need to change with changing times," said Hyfler, whose federation was one of those that proposed the study.

"Many functions of NCSJ need to continue, and maybe need to be enhanced. Maybe some of those functions could be better served under better venues," Hyfler said.

"I have no idea where the process is going to lead," he added.

The agency's budget has shrunk from \$800,000 in 1992. That year, its highly respected executive director, Martin Wenick, left the agency to join the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which helps resettle refugees in the United States.

The move was seen at the time as symbolic of the change in focus in efforts on behalf of Soviet Jews.

**Advocacy role overshadowed**

NCSJ's primary role as political advocate has been overshadowed in recent years by the massive resettlement efforts on behalf of Soviet Jews in Israel and the United States.

These efforts run in the hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Groups like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli government also spend tens of millions of dollars on educational and welfare programs in the former Soviet Union.

The other main advocacy group, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, has a budget of \$750,000. It receives no funding from the federation system.

Richard Wexler of Chicago, chairman of NCSJ, acknowledged that the pending CJF re-evaluation has created "an aura of uncertainty" concerning his agency.

That uncertainty was heightened last week, when the Washington Jewish Week, citing "knowledgeable sources," reported that NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin was being considered by the White House to fill a

possible new post as White House liaison to the Jewish community.

Levin's departure would be keenly felt in an agency with only four other full-time staff members.

Both White House and NCSJ sources denied the report.

"I know of no direct White House inquiries into Mark's availability or Mark's interest" in the post, said Wexler.

Wexler attributed the planned federation study to "an unfortunate ignorance among a small group of federation professionals of the role the NCSJ is playing."

**'We welcome the scrutiny'**

Especially in a time of increased instability in the former Soviet republics, Wexler said his organization is as vital as ever.

"The conference continues to advocate for freedom of the Jews of the former Soviet Union to leave the 15 republics in which they are located and to ensure that the gates do not close, through our contacts with the government in each of those republics," said Wexler.

"We continue to advocate for the right of those Jews who choose to remain to practice the Jewish religion freely and openly.

"And we are the organized Jewish community's instrument for advocacy with our own government — the Congress, State Department, etc. — on behalf of those communities in the former Soviet Union, for economic assistance and matters related to Jackson-Vanik," Wexler said.

"We welcome the scrutiny — especially at a time of tremendous volatility in the former Soviet Union, the reorganization of our own Congress and when we're actively involved in a myriad of activities for our constituency in the former Soviet Union as well," said Wexler.

Leaders of the funding councils say the study is not a threat to NCSJ.

"We are not discussing whether the agency should exist or not. We are not discussing funding levels. We are looking at the agency vis a vis what it does," said Barbara Rosenthal of Cleveland, chair of the funding councils.

"One of the major purposes of the founding of the funding councils was to support and be helpful of the national agency system and that continues to be our goal," said Rosenthal.

"So we really look at ourselves as partners," she said.

The scope and nature of the federation inquiry will not be determined until the end of February.

The study was proposed in November, in the closing meeting of a funding councils subcommittee during the CJF General Assembly in Denver.

"During the closing moments [of the subcommittee meeting], the question was raised of whether or not it was time for a review of the services provided to and on behalf of the Jews of the former Soviet Union," said Yisroel Cohen, director of the National Funding Councils at CJF.

"The purpose of the National Funding Councils is to — on a regular basis — review and evaluate the agencies that are part of the process, so this is not extraordinary," Cohen added.

Hyfler, of the Washington federation, added, "Clearly, events in the former Soviet Union are very ambiguous. Freedom is developing alongside greater insecurity.

"It is a very precarious situation, and there is obviously a need for American Jewish involvement in that area," he said. □

*(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this story.)*