

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ Jewish activists turned their attention to the Senate, in the aftermath of the House of Representatives' vote on welfare reform. Many Jewish groups had actively opposed the legislation. [Page 1]

■ Jordan's King Hussein pushed for U.S. economic support for his country during meetings with President Clinton and House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Hussein arrived in Washington after receiving an award from the Simon Wiesenthal Center. He is also set to meet with Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense William Perry.

■ Syria may evict 10 groups militantly opposed to the Middle East peace process, an Israeli newspaper reported. The paper said the groups are preparing to transfer their headquarters to Cyprus. [Page 2]

■ German neo-Nazi groups moved many of their activities out of the country as a result of increased pressure from the authorities, according to the German general security service. The moves came in the wake of a major German crackdown on neo-Nazi activities. [Page 4]

■ The Jews of Belfast are optimistic about the prospect of peace in their war-torn corner of the world. But not even peace is likely to revive the tiny community. [Page 3]

■ A prominent figure of the Austrian extreme right accused of neo-Nazi activities is on trial in Vienna. A video now in police custody apparently shows the defendant calling for street fights with leftists and the police. [Page 4]

■ A dozen Italian high school students were temporarily suspended after some of them wrote anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of a Jewish classmate's home during a party. [Page 3]

■ Emilie Schindler asked Pope John Paul II to bless a hall in Jerusalem dedicated to her and her late husband, Oskar Schindler. The pope agreed in principle that he would inaugurate the site. [Page 4]

**With House welfare vote in, activists focus on the Senate**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, March 27 (JTA) — As the Senate takes center stage in the welfare reform debate, Jewish activists have intensified their efforts to restore the government's guarantee to support the poorest Americans, including immigrants.

The House of Representatives' vote last Friday to end most welfare benefits for immigrants, gut programs for poor children and turn over the responsibility for America's poor to the states came as no surprise for Jewish organizations that had vigorously lobbied against the reforms.

Nearly certain that the House would move as it did — the vote was 234 to 199 — these activists for months have been laying the groundwork for an all-out push on the other side of the Capitol building.

Now these activists have moved into high gear, in the words of some, to "right the wrongs" of the Republicans' Personal Responsibility Act, as the welfare legislation is known.

The bill is "irreconcilable with American and Jewish values," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism.

There is already talk in the Senate among key members to scrap the House bill and start from scratch. But until full-fledged hearings begin later this spring, no one knows for sure what the Senate's version of the bill will look like.

The House version of the Personal Responsibility Act ends the federal guarantee of support for the needy and declares states in command of the nation's poor.

Under the legislation, legal immigrants would be barred from access to the major cash-assistance welfare programs, including food stamps, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid. And until immigrants obtain U.S. citizenship, their sponsors' income would be counted as their own in determining eligibility for other assistance programs.

**'Budget cutting, not welfare reform'**

As expected, the House legislation would limit tens of thousands of Jewish refugees to five years of access to welfare benefits.

The overwhelming majority of Jews who come to the United States each year from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe enter the country as refugees. Thousands more come from Iran. An estimated 30,000 Jews are expected to come to the United States from the former Soviet Union this year alone. Although refugees are considered immigrants under American law, they are afforded special benefits because they are presumed to be fleeing a "well-founded fear of persecution."

Under the House legislation, which would save an estimated \$66 billion over five years, only refugees older than 75 and those who become citizens would remain eligible to collect welfare beyond five years.

Many activists here suggest that the bill is not welfare reform, but a massive budget cut to offset tax cuts.

"Let's call it what it is — budget cutting, not welfare reform," said Diana Aviv, director of the Washington office of the Council of Jewish Federations.

"If the goal is to move from dependency to durability, let's give them the tools to do so," Aviv said, arguing that cutting money for job training, transportation and child care ties the hands of welfare recipients.

Saperstein added, "Welfare reform should help move people off of government dependency. Nothing in this so-called reform has done that."

The traditionally slower paced and deliberative Senate holds the greatest hope for many in the Jewish community who will seek to reinstate legal immigrants to the welfare rolls and restore the poor's entitlement status to America's safety net.

Activists say they are optimistic that senators will more seriously consider the adverse impact of the legislation on welfare recipients.

"The Senate now has to essentially decide whether they want welfare reform or they want to cut the budget," Aviv said, pledging an all-out push to turn the tide. □

**Gore concludes Mideast visit  
pledging aid to the Palestinians***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, March 27 (JTA) — Vice President Al Gore wrapped up a tour of the Middle East last week with pledges of support for Israel and continued U.S. funding for the financially ailing Palestinian Authority.

During a visit to Israel on March 23, Gore met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to discuss the state of the stalled Israel-Palestinian negotiations.

Rabin told the vice president that implementation of the next phase of Palestinian self-rule would depend on Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat's ability to curb attacks on Israelis by Palestinian rejectionist groups opposed to the peace process.

Israel and the PLO have set July 1 as a target date for reaching agreement on holding Palestinian elections and for withdrawing Israelis troops from Arab population centers in the West Bank.

During a speech at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, where he was awarded an honorary doctorate in philosophy, Gore voiced the Clinton administration's determination to continue granting Israel \$3 billion in annual aid.

"President Clinton is committed to maintaining the present levels of military and economic assistance to Israel," Gore said.

Economic aid topped the vice president's agenda when he met the next day with Arafat in the West Bank Jericho enclave.

Gore told Arafat that the United States would live up to its commitment to provide the Palestinian Authority with \$500 million in economic aid through 1998.

**Arafat given two \$4 million grants**

He said \$150 million of that total would be distributed by September.

At a ceremony at Jericho's City Hall, Gore presented Arafat with two grants of \$4 million each.

The grants, designated to improve living conditions in the Gaza Strip, are to be used to pave roads and fix refugee camp shacks in Gaza.

Gore also announced President Clinton's decision to allow goods imported from the Palestinian autonomous zones to be imported to the United States without being subject to American tariffs.

American officials, not wanting Gore to be seen posing near a Palestinian flag, had requested that the ceremony at the Jericho City Hall be held without flags or anthems.

They also had a picture of eastern Jerusalem removed from the stage to avoid any suggestion that the United States supported the Palestinian goal of establishing that portion of the city as the capital of an eventual Palestinian state.

During a meeting with Arafat, Gore praised the PLO leader's decision to set up a special military court to try those militants who attempt to undermine the peace process.

Arafat, in turn, urged the United States to put pressure on Israel to extend Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

Arafat reportedly sought to hold the meeting in Jericho to highlight his demand for a speedy extension of Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank.

The PLO leader had originally planned to establish his headquarters in Jericho, but he chose Gaza instead when Palestinian autonomy was launched last May.

Gore was accompanied by his wife, Tipper, during his trip to the Middle East, which included stops in Egypt, Jordan and Oman. □

**Report: Syria set to evict  
10 Arab rejectionist groups***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM, March 27 (JTA) — For the first time since Israel and Syria began their peace negotiations, there were indications this week that Damascus may evict from its soil 10 groups militantly opposed to the regional peace process.

According to a report Monday in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, these groups are preparing to transfer their headquarters from Damascus to Cyprus.

Ma'ariv based its report on the assessments of American officials, who conveyed to Jerusalem their belief that the terrorist organizations are preparing for an end to Syrian sponsorship of their activities.

Among the 10 groups headquartered in Damascus are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command, led by George Habash, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, under the leadership of Nayef Hawatmeh.

The 10 Syrian-based groups have long been committed to acts of terror against Israel and Jewish targets abroad.

**Denials issued from Damascus**

But in Damascus on Monday, according to a news report, rejectionist leaders denied that there had been any pressure on them from the Syrian government to leave the country. The denials did not refer specifically to the Ma'ariv report.

Israel and Syria have long been deadlocked in the peace negotiations. Damascus has been demanding that Israel commit itself to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Israel has indicated its willingness to make a phased withdrawal, but first wants Damascus to spell out the kind of peace it envisions.

The presence in Damascus of Habash, Hawatmeh and other leading rejectionists has been a major problem for Israeli officials in their ongoing negotiations with Syria.

The Syrian side has never agreed explicitly to link the peace talks with the presence of the terror groups in Damascus.

Both sides have made it clear, however, that a peace treaty between Syria and Israel would include security questions pertaining to Lebanon, where the rejectionist groups operate with a free hand under Syria's tacit approval.

The groups are active in southern and eastern Lebanon, sometimes in concert with the Iranian-backed fundamentalist Hezbollah movement, in an effort to displace Israel from the security zone it established there in an effort to protect northern Israel.

Hezbollah officials, who believe that progress in the Israeli-Syrian talks would eventually lead to the disarming of their movement, have been the subject of previous reports that they are planning to establish a base in Cyprus.

The Israeli and Syrian ambassadors to the United States resumed their negotiations in Washington last week, the first such meeting since Assad broke off the discussions in December.

Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Muallem, also met on Sunday and Monday of this week, but no progress was reported.

The two are reported to be working closely with American mediators, led by Dennis Ross, the Clinton administration's special Middle East coordinator.

Ross is scheduled to make a round of Middle East shuttle diplomacy in April or early May. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

**Even peace won't revive Belfast's tiny Jewish world**

*By Michele Chabin*

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (JTA) — It will take more than peace to rejuvenate the tiny Jewish community of this strife-ridden republic.

It will take a miracle.

Worn down by 25 years of sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants, Northern Ireland's Jewish community is on the verge of extinction. The community here is rapidly aging, and there are few young people to ensure its continuity.

Although Jews here share their neighbors' hopes for a continuation of the five-month cease-fire agreed to by the Irish Republican Army, they have no illusions about their own community's future.

With a shrug of the shoulders and a shake of the head, they acknowledge that Jewish life here will likely cease to exist within 50 years, at the most.

And if new blood is not introduced soon, they say, the end could come much sooner.

**Younger generation has fled**

Like many of Northern Ireland's non-Jewish residents, the younger generation of Jews has fled the republic's political unrest and the high unemployment rates associated with it.

Many have been lured away by a mainland British education, causing a brain drain throughout the region.

At its heyday during the 1960s, Northern Ireland's Jewish community — based almost entirely in Belfast — had 1,600 members. Today that number has dwindled to 220.

Established in the 1850s, the community has traditionally attracted British Jews as well as those fleeing persecution in other parts of Europe.

Once a thriving center of Jewishness, with its own afternoon Hebrew school and a mikvah, or ritual bath, the community has had to sell off the building housing these facilities for financial reasons.

Although the mikvah is gone, the synagogue survives.

Modern and well-kept, the Belfast Hebrew Congregation is home to Sunday-morning Hebrew classes and a variety of activities, ranging from World Zionist Organization gatherings to bridge night.

And every so often, the small kosher kitchen caters a circumcision or a Bar Mitzvah.

Considering the size of the congregation, the turnout for Shabbat morning services is nothing short of remarkable.

On any given Shabbat, at least a fifth of the community — 40 to 50 people — come to the synagogue to pray and schmooze.

Visitors are warmly welcomed and invariably invited home for a meal.

Located in an area that was until recently considered a war zone, the synagogue has been unable to attract a permanent rabbi for quite some time.

To fill the gap, an acting rabbi is flown in from London once or twice a week.

Kosher food, on the other hand, arrives by ship. Jewish families, who once ordered their food from Dublin, now order it from Manchester, England.

And even though few community members are strictly observant, many continue to keep kosher and attend the synagogue's Orthodox services on a regular basis. Asked how their lives have changed since the cease-fire went into effect in mid-October, most Jewish residents give

a quizzical smile. "You need to understand something," says an elderly woman.

"Those who couldn't live with the violence left long ago. Those who remain feel largely unaffected."

Indeed, despite the fact that a few local Jews have been injured or worse during the 25 years of bomb blasts and shootings, no member of the community has been targeted for being Jewish, the locals say.

And despite its location in the heart of Belfast, it is believed that the synagogue has never been vandalized. As bombs maimed people around it, the synagogue remained a veritable oasis.

"In truth, I was never really affected by the troubles," says Kenneth Lewis, 80, referring to the violence between Catholics and Protestants.

"After a while, you learn to live with it. The others are so busy with themselves, they have no time for us. So the cease-fire is business as usual."

Alex Jaffe, who moved to Belfast from Manchester in 1957, concurs.

"The troubles haven't affected me very much over the years," he says. "You see, the Jewish community has been courted by both sides.

"The Catholics say, 'You're like us. You light candles.' The Protestants say, 'You're against the pope, let's join forces.' They want to know, 'Are you a Catholic Jew or a Protestant Jew?'"

"When someone asks me, 'If have you to choose between the IRA or the English, what would you do?' I say, 'I wouldn't even join the Salvation Army.'"

Jaffe stresses that "the Jewish community has been careful to remain neutral. If we keep a low profile politically, we are accepted by both sides."

But the cease-fire has had some impact on the residents of Northern Ireland, and the Jews are no exception.

If pressed, they point to fewer British troops and roadblocks, and to a greater overall sense of security.

Whether the fragile cease-fire will ultimately attract Jews back to Northern Ireland is another matter.

"If there was a sustained peace, it might bring about a change," says David Warm, chairman of the Jewish community.

"But I wouldn't bank on it." □

**Anti-Semitic graffiti results in expulsion of Rome students**

*By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME, March 27 (JTA) — A dozen students from an exclusive high school here have been accused of writing anti-Semitic graffiti at the home of a Jewish classmate.

The students from the private school were suspended for a week.

A photograph of the expulsion notice sent to the students, citing "acts of racism and vandalism," was published in the Rome daily *Il Messaggero*.

The newspaper reported that the students, all enrolled in the French language Lycee Chateaubriand, attended a party with other teen-agers at the home of a Jewish classmate.

At the party, three students and two former students destroyed a bathroom and scrawled racist slogans, including "Juden Raus," meaning "Jews Out," and "Blacks and Arabs Raus," meaning "Blacks and Arabs Out." The graffiti was on the walls of a corridor and a bedroom.

School authorities were quoted as saying that they suspended the group of 12 students "for complicity in acts of racism and vandalism" because they had known who committed the acts, but had kept silent about it. □

**Germany's neo-Nazis move their activities to foreign soil***By Gil Sedan*

BONN, March 27 (JTA) — Due to heavier pressure by the authorities, German neo-Nazi groups have moved many of their activities out of the country, according to the German general security service.

German and Austrian radicals have recently opted for countries such as Denmark and Spain as their headquarters. Although these countries condemn the activities of the German radical right, they allow the groups to operate on their soil.

These revelations come against the backdrop of two recent raids by German authorities on neo-Nazis that have been viewed as successful.

In a nationwide strike against neo-Nazis last week, police raided 80 apartments throughout the country, confiscating illegal, imported anti-Semitic material. Police also found weapons and ammunition during the sweep, officials said.

Among the illegal publications seized during the raid were those by Gary Lauck, an American neo-Nazi being held in Denmark. Danish authorities apprehended Lauck at the request of Germany, which has now asked for the extradition of the Lincoln, Neb., native.

Denmark's liberal freedom of speech laws have long frustrated Germany in its quest to silence neo-Nazis. German officials reportedly were not sure whether Copenhagen would automatically comply with the extradition request.

Lauck is suspected of smuggling banned neo-Nazi literature into Germany for more than two decades, to be copied and distributed among neo-Nazi groups.

The Midwestern suspect heads the National Socialist German Workers' Party-Foreign Organization, a name derived from the official title of Adolf Hitler's party. Lauck has said his group is heir to the Nazi party and that Hitler was "too humane."

Three days after the apartment raids, German police struck a major blow at neo-Nazi groups when 231 skinheads were apprehended while traveling to a concert in the eastern German town of Triptis.

This sting was one of the largest operations against neo-Nazis in recent years.

In all, about 450 extreme rightists arrived for the concert, which was to have taken place at a pub in town. Word of the unauthorized gathering reportedly reached the local police only hours before it was to have taken place.

The police of the state of Thuringia gathered reinforcements within hours, controlling access roads from western Germany, particularly the Munich-Berlin road. Many skinheads were seized at the station of the city of Gera.

Police confiscated knives, baseball bats, gas pistols, hit-chains and neo-Nazi propaganda from the skinheads.

Owners of the pub were reported to be surprised when informed by police that the gathering would not take place. They told police that the organizers had reserved the place to hold a birthday party. □

**Lead figure of Austrian right stands trial for neo-Nazi acts***By Richard Engel*

VIENNA, March 27 (JTA) — A prominent figure of the Austrian extreme right has been standing trial here because of alleged neo-Nazi activities.

Hans Schimanek, 31, was accused of being the provincial leader of a radical illegal neo-Nazi organization known as Vapo, the district attorney said.

The group's leader, Gottfried Kuessel, is serving an 11-year jail term.

The district attorney said the court has to fight "self-proclaimed elites, who want to replace civil peace with civil war."

A large amount of neo-Nazi material was found in Schimanek's home after a recent police search. A video that now is in police custody apparently shows the defendant calling for street fights with leftists and the police. Other films reputedly show Schimanek training 12- to 14-year-olds for various killing techniques.

A former army drill instructor, Schimanek confessed to the distribution of neo-Nazi propaganda. "We wanted to recruit young members," he has said.

But he has denied working toward an overthrow of the democracy and serving as a commanding member of Vapo, which has called itself "the most radical and militant group of the national scene," sources said.

Due to the seriousness of the charges, which date back to 1992, Schimanek faces life imprisonment. Dozens of witnesses were slated to testify at his ongoing trial.

In 1992, Schimanek was arrested but soon released — allegedly after a top judge in Vienna intervened. The judge apparently was a close friend of Schimanek's father, who is a provincial councilman in lower Austria and a member of Jorg Haider's Freedom Party. The matter is apparently under investigation.

The Freedom Party has more than nominal support from the general population, according to recent elections.

Haider has tried to keep foreigners out of Austria and has expressed support for the Third Reich's labor policies. □

**Schindler widow asks pope to inaugurate hall in Jerusalem***By Ruth Gruber*

ROME, March 27 (JTA) — Emilie Schindler has asked the pope to bless a hall in Jerusalem dedicated to her and her late husband, Oskar Schindler.

The 87-year-old Emilie Schindler met for several minutes with Pope John Paul II last week.

During World War II, the Schindlers helped save more than 1,000 Jews from the Nazis.

The pope, who has repeatedly stressed that he wants to visit Jerusalem soon, agreed in principle that he would inaugurate "The Emilie and Oskar Schindler Room," which is being built at Casa Argentina, an interdenominational organization in Jerusalem.

Pope John Paul also thanked Schindler for having helped her husband save more than 1,000 Polish Jews from the death camps. "I know what you [and your husband] did and the Polish people are grateful," the pope said.

Emilie Schindler, on a two-day visit to Rome at the start of a European tour before heading to Israel, did not say when the pope would dedicate the hall in Jerusalem.

Oskar Schindler is buried in the Catholic cemetery in Jerusalem.

Although Israel and the Vatican established diplomatic ties last year, they remain at odds over the status of Jerusalem.

Israel has declared the city as its "united and eternal" capital while the Vatican wants international guarantees protecting it as a city holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said Italian Jews extended a warm welcome to Schindler and honored the memory of her late husband. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal contributed to this report.)