



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

### FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Elections to Zionist Congress hinge on success of deal-making

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — The registration forms have been printed for the U.S. election of delegates to the next Zionist Congress.

But whether they will be mailed out is anybody's guess.

Reform and Conservative Zionists believe that they have the most to gain by an election and that the fight for religious pluralism in Israel will be advanced as a result.

But whether the balloting will be held depends largely on the outcome of a series of complex political machinations — here and in Israel — that would confound most American Jews.

Further, many point to a flourishing Israel and say modern Zionism, now in its centennial year, has achieved its goal of Jewish nation-building and has little relevance.

Nevertheless, Zionist activists here say all Jews who feel a connection to Israel and to the concept of Jewish peoplehood have a stake in the congress, which they term the parliament of the Jewish people.

The congress, which selects the leadership of the World Zionist Organization and sets its policies, was the brainchild of Theodor Herzl, who convened the first one in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland.

The next one is scheduled for December in Jerusalem.

In anticipation, the Labor and Likud parties in Israel, which historically have dominated international Zionist politics, are working furiously to broker a deal for top posts in the Zionist establishment.

At the same time, the heads of these parties are trying to fashion a political plan that would satisfy the Zionist parties in the United States, particularly those of the Reform and Conservative movements.

An agreement on all these matters would obviate the need for an election in the United States.

At stake are the apportionment of delegates to the congress and the assignment of their portfolios in the WZO and other Zionist institutions.

The WZO, along with the Jewish Agency for Israel, uses funds raised by Jews around the world primarily to rescue and resettle immigrants in Israel and to promote Jewish and Zionist education internationally.

The WZO constitution says each country may decide independently whether to elect its delegate slate.

Both Labor and Likud risk an erosion of power if Zionist elections are held here.

Some say this is partly why they are trying to make a deal.

### 'Still adheres to democracy'

As it is, the United States has much Zionist clout, assigned 152 of about 525 delegates to the congress with full voting rights.

And here, more than anywhere else, the Zionist parties of the Reform and Conservative movements have grown in strength, edging out more traditional Zionist parties, including Labor and Likud affiliates.

Further fueling the tension is the raging debate over the merits of an election.

This year, it would be open for the first time to any Jewish person 18 or older.

He or she simply must subscribe to the principle of the centrality of Israel in Jewish life and pay \$2.

Officials of the American Zionist Movement, the federation of 20 Zionist parties and organizations, and other proponents say an election would provide American Jews a unique opportunity: to have a say over the allocation of communal resources and world Jewish policy at a time of widespread disaffection over a Jewish organizational world that is otherwise undemocratic.

"The congress is the parliament of the Jewish people" said Moshe Kagan, head of the election committee.

"The Zionist movement is probably the only Jewish organization of renown which still adheres to democracy."

Said Rabbi Robert Golub, the executive director of Mercaz, USA, the

■ A Detroit-area Jewish man who told investigators that he inadvertently passed classified military information to Israel over a 10-year period was placed on leave with pay and had his building and parking passes revoked. The FBI searched the home of Army engineer David Tenenbaum, who made the admission after a polygraph test. Meanwhile, the Israeli defense minister convened senior ministry officials to discuss the case.

■ The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel started its eight-day meeting in Israel. Among the main issues on the agenda are structural reforms in the organization.

■ A campaign to increase religious expression in public schools in America is sparking complaints by the author of the guidelines on which the proposed program is based. [Page 3]

■ Poland's lower house approved a bill on state relations with Jewish communities that will allow nine tiny congregations to recover some properties lost during and after the Holocaust. The bill, which still must clear the nation's Senate, will provide a legal framework for the surviving congregations to claim the property.

■ German government agencies are helping to conceal payments of disability pensions to members of Hitler's elite SS who live aboard, a German television show reported. A member of the opposition Greens Party vowed to raise the issue in Parliament next week.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conveyed condolences to China after its leader, Deng Xiaoping, died. Netanyahu met Thursday with China's vice premier, Li Lanqing, who cut short his weeklong trip to Israel because of the leader's death.

■ Israeli Ethiopian leaders asked the government to implement an AIDS awareness campaign in their community. The Israeli Ethiopian community has a relatively high incidence of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, according to Israeli officials. [Page 2]

Zionist organization for the Conservative movement: "This is a referendum on where the Jewish people are and what direction we're headed in."

Detractors, for their part, say elections are a waste of money.

And they call the democracy argument a smokescreen for plans to wage a battle over religious pluralism in Israel in the world Zionist arena, where, they say, it does not belong.

"The elections would be a referendum on religious pluralism and not on Zionism," said Evelyn Blachor, president of Amit, an Orthodox Zionist women's organization.

"The democratic process would be sadly distorted for people's use or misuse."

"Democratic, shmocratic," said Israel Friedman, executive vice president of the Religious Zionists of America.

If an agreement can be reached, he said, elections "would be a waste of Jewish money" and a "public scandal."

The Orthodox Zionists, including Amit, say they would boycott the election because of the injection of religious pluralism.

In fact, they are technically ineligible to participate because they are not members of AZM in good standing, a requirement for participation.

They suspended themselves in protest two years ago, when an AZM convention adopted a resolution supporting religious pluralism.

Karen Rubinstein, AZM executive director, estimates that the election would cost about \$700,000, at least \$400,000 of which likely would be recouped by registration fees.

Although the congress is held every four or five years, the last election for delegates was 10 years ago.

In 1992, elections were planned but time ran out due to political foot-dragging.

The congress selects the leadership of the WZO, which makes up half the governing body of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

### **Burg is against elections**

JAFI and the WZO have a joint chairman.

The current chairman, Avraham Burg, who is a prominent member of the Labor Party, has come out against elections.

The Jewish Agency is the primary recipient in Israel of funds raised by the Jewish world's mainstream fund-raising entities, including the United Jewish Appeal and federations in the United States.

The WZO has an independent budget of \$30 million, plus 50 percent control over JAFI's annual budget of more than \$400 million.

The WZO has been under fire for many years, charged with being an outmoded, overly politicized organization that is slated for radical restructuring.

But supporters of the election defend the WZO's continuing relevance.

For their part, Reform and Conservative Zionists see elections as an opportunity for their rank and file to champion religious pluralism in Israel.

"You want to send a message to the prime minister? Vote for ARZA," said Hirsch.

Further, Reform and Conservative leaders want to boost their representation to reflect the recent changes in the landscape of Israel-Diaspora relations.

"In the last 10 years, our movements have grown and become even more committed to Zionism," said Golub of Mercaz.

As it was, in the 1987 elections, ARZA and

Mercaz came in second and third with 33 delegates and 20 delegates, respectively.

Only Hadassah, the largest Zionist organization in America, won more, with 35.

But Hadassah would not be part of an election mix this time.

It has sought and won approval for a special non-political status that would give it a certain number of delegates rather than make it compete for them.

Meanwhile, negotiations continue as a deadline looms.

ARZA and Mercaz may, in the end, agree to forgo elections if they can be assured fair representation in the Zionist establishment.

If not, they plan to send out the registration forms to their constituents by the end of the month.

The deal also depends on efforts by Labor and Likud to fashion a power-sharing arrangement for the chairmanship of both JAFI-WZO and Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael.

KKL, the Israeli sister organization of the Jewish National Fund of America, functions as a division of the WZO.

In spite of all the flux, AZM and the election committee is prepared to move forward.

Indeed, Kagan is deeply committed to elections and is haunted by the 1992 scenario of running out of time. He also disdains talk of the expense.

"I say the price of democracy is much more important than the cost." □

### **Israeli Ethiopian leaders seek program to educate about AIDS**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Ethiopian leaders have asked the government to implement an AIDS awareness campaign in their community.

The community has a relatively high incidence of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, according to Israeli officials.

Funding for the program — about \$6 million is needed — has not been secured.

One year ago in Jerusalem, a violent protest of Ethiopian Jews erupted after the discovery that Israeli health officials were disposing of their blood donations for fear of HIV contamination.

A commission of inquiry was subsequently established to examine the matter.

Consensus was that health officials had bungled badly.

But there was also recognition that the Ethiopians were expressing pain and outrage over the broader insult of not yet being accepted or absorbed by mainstream Israeli society. □

### **Kach activist's sentence reduced**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Supreme Court has reduced the three-month prison sentence of a former Kach activist to three months of community service.

Baruch Marzel was convicted by the Jerusalem Magistrates Court of causing public disorder when he called Palestinian official Faisal Husseini a murderer.

After the Jerusalem District Court upheld the conviction in an appeal, Marzel obtained permission to appeal to the Supreme Court.

A three-justice panel, headed by Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, decided Monday to ease the sentence after the prosecution agreed to the motion. □

## Use of guidelines reignites debate over religion in school

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The debate over religion in the public schools is back.

In the latest development, a campaign to increase religious expression in public schools has raised the hackles of the author of the guidelines on which the proposed program is based.

Attorney Marc Stern, who authored guidelines detailing the types of religious expression legally permitted in public schools, is mounting a campaign to prevent the Center for Jewish and Christian Values — a Jewish-run organization that raises money from evangelical Christians — from using the guidelines in a way that he calls “totally unacceptable.”

Those guidelines were endorsed nearly two years ago by a wide range of groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress.

Stern is the co-director of the legal department of the AJCongress, which also signed on to the guidelines.

Several months after their initial publication in April 1995, similar guidelines were endorsed by the National PTA and by the U.S. Department of Education, which then distributed them to every school district in the country. The guidelines were authored — and issued by the administration — in an effort to avert a proposed constitutional amendment on religious equality. The administration had hoped that once Americans realized the extent of the protections under current law, politicians would abandon their efforts to amend the Constitution.

According to the guidelines, students can pray during the school day, wear religious attire, express religious beliefs in assignments, and make religious or anti-religious remarks as part of an appropriate classroom discussion. But for those intent on enhancing religion in the schools, those guidelines were not taken seriously enough.

In addition to promoting the guidelines, more must be done to get the guidelines actually implemented in public schools, said Chris Gersten, director of the politically conservative Center for Jewish and Christian Values, the Washington offshoot of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

### Teachers cite passages

To that end, his organization is launching a program that encourages teachers to use the Old Testament and the New Testament as part of their programs to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and teen-age pregnancies.

In the center's recommendations for prevention programs, it suggests that teachers cite specific biblical passages to explore the ethics of avoiding destructive behavior and that they recommend that students read the Jewish and Christian Bibles as well as William Bennett's “The Book of Virtues” and Dante's “Divine Comedy” and “The Inferno.”

The proposal also urges teachers to suggest to students that they turn to prayer to avoid self-destructive behavior. They encourage the suggestion of other techniques when tempted to engage in illicit behavior. Such techniques include counting to 10 or reflecting on the response of a moral figure of authority.

This point most irks Stern. Having teachers suggest to students that they turn to prayer or religious texts to overcome temptation “is flat out illegal,” he said, “as well as ineffective.” He said it was illegal for teachers to steer students toward a particular religious practice.

Even if the center manages to make its proposal

conform to the letter of the law, it would still be “very unwise,” Stern said. “What are you going to do when a teacher engages in religious speech? It's unpoliceable.”

This is precisely what “the far right wing of the evangelical movement wants to do,” Stern said.

The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews is run by Orthodox Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, who said he raised last year close to \$6 million from 35,000 evangelical Christians eager to show their support for the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

That is twice the amount and twice the number of contributors that the fellowship had in 1995, Eckstein said.

The program to increase the role of religion in the lives of public school students within what the programs' backers say are legal limits is initially being targeted at five places: Grand Rapids, Mich.; the Burbank-Glendale school district outside Los Angeles, Calif.; Littleton, Colo.; Knoxville, Tenn.; and Charlottesville, Va.

School board members in those cities have not yet been contacted and are unaware that they have been selected as pilot cities for the center's efforts, said Gersten, the center's director. The center hopes to recruit local community organizers to try to persuade their local school boards to actively utilize the guidelines.

The effort is being launched with a \$185,000 grant from the John Templeton Foundation, Eckstein said.

They hope to expand the program, titled “Protecting Religious Expression in Public Schools,” from five to 25 school districts in 1998, said Eckstein and Gersten.

According to its preamble, the program's goal is to counter the fact that “over the last generation, there has been an ongoing effort to remove all references to religion and to all personal expressions of religious belief from the public schools, removing any biblical basis for morality from American's educational system.”

### 'Essential for America's future'

“This lack of a sound moral foundation for our nation's children has led to a marked increase in juvenile delinquency, violent crime and teen-age pregnancy,” it says. “Bringing moral and character education back into the classroom and protecting allowable religious expression in schools is essential for America's future.”

The center is trying to get some mainstream Jewish groups, including the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Anti-Defamation League, the AJCommittee and the AJCongress, to back its effort. Stern, for his part, is trying to convince them not to.

At a meeting with Gersten last week, several Jewish officials apparently expressed concern about the prevention aspect to the program, which is the part that specifically encourages teachers to use religious materials.

While a campaign to educate people about what is legally permissible in the schools is a “good thing,” said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “I'm very skeptical about the prevention program,” which seems to “expand ways religion is used” in the schools.

Pelavin said he and other representatives agreed to Gersten's request to further consider their position on the issue. Gersten said that if the Jewish community opposes the prevention part of the program, which encourages teachers to use religious materials, then it is unlikely his group will move forward with it.

“It would just be stupid for us to mobilize part of the community, the evangelicals and Catholics, and have the Jewish community feel that what we were doing was so abhorrent that they would fight it,” said Gersten. “There's no point of splitting the unity of the Jewish and Christian community on this approach. If we can't do it, then someone other than us will have to run with it.” □

**NEWS ANALYSIS**
**Jerusalem building plan tops crises confronting Netanyahu**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a stormy welcome from his own governing coalition after returning from a successful visit to the United States.

Reporters and analysts were unanimous in sensing a new warmth in relations between Netanyahu and President Clinton during the premier's visit to Washington last week. But this warmth sent cold shivers up the spines of Netanyahu's hard-line critics who are openly suspect about the direction the Likud premier is heading in the peace process.

Both Netanyahu and Clinton revealed few details about their discussions on the next stage of Israeli-Palestinian talks and on efforts to restart Israeli-Syrian talks.

What was left untold is perhaps causing the most concern among conservative critics of Netanyahu.

Likud Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, the prime minister's most scathing political foe on the right, said Monday that his premiership had "seriously deteriorated over recent months, and most especially in the past two weeks."

Begin, who resigned his Cabinet position last month to protest the Hebron agreement, cited reports in the Israeli media that Netanyahu had decided to temporarily delay plans to build a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

Begin introduced a motion for the Knesset to discuss "the dangers of dividing Jerusalem." The wording deliberately echoed one of Netanyahu's most effective, and most controversial, election slogans last year — "Peres will divide Jerusalem."

That slogan, suggesting that former Prime Minister Shimon Peres' dovish attitude toward the Palestinians would extend to granting them future control over parts of Jerusalem, has now come full circle to haunt Netanyahu.

**Netanyahu faces right-wing opposition**

In recent days, right-wing groups have put up billboards on main highways proclaiming that "Bibi will divide Jerusalem." In fact, Begin's fellow Likud parliamentarians struggled to persuade him not to title his motion, "The prime minister has divided Jerusalem."

Netanyahu met Wednesday with Knesset members from the coalition and opposition and told them that he was committed to the Har Homa project, adding that the timing for starting construction would be decided next week, according to a statement issued by his office.

He was also said to be thinking of allocating some of the new housing to Arabs.

Anger directed at Netanyahu from his right flank also focuses on reports from Washington that Netanyahu had signaled a new willingness to compromise his stance regarding the Golan Heights.

While Netanyahu reaffirmed publicly in Washington his opposition to a complete withdrawal, he was deliberately vague on the question of accepting a territorial "compromise" over the strategic Golan.

Clinton and Netanyahu said little about the Syrian negotiating track during their joint news conference last week. But U.S. officials, during unofficial briefings for reporters, seemed more optimistic after Netanyahu's visit that a formula would be found for resuming the Israeli-Syrian talks, which were suspended last March. Indeed, American officials now expect the talks to restart within two months, according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

The right wing is also concerned about what it

views as Netanyahu's ongoing caution about Jewish building in the West Bank. For their part, settler leaders repeatedly complain that Netanyahu's promises to them have not translated into specific permits and funding for new construction projects.

Netanyahu, however, can perhaps take some small consolation from the fact that problems with his hard-line right have driven deep wedges into the official opposition.

The Labor Party was torn this week in a debate over whether to link up with the conservatives in a no-confidence motion against the premier over Har Homa.

Labor doves insisted that this would be a piece of unpardonable political opportunism, but others in Labor sounded as furious as Begin and his friends over Netanyahu's refusal to move ahead with construction projects in eastern Jerusalem.

"When it comes to Jerusalem, there is no room for shilly-shallying," said Labor Knesset member Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who recalled that the Har Homa project had first been approved when he served as housing minister under the previous Labor government.

Any consolation to be drawn from the opposition's disunity on the Har Homa project and other related issues cannot extend to the sensitive issue of non-Orthodox conversions.

Labor and its allies are backing the Conservative and Reform movements' efforts to thwart impending legislation, sponsored by the Orthodox parties and supported by the rest of the coalition. The proposed bill states that Israel would not recognize non-Orthodox conversions of Israeli citizens or residents, regardless of whether they are performed in Israel or abroad.

Under the proposed legislation, if an Israeli studies for conversion under a non-Orthodox rabbi in Israel and then flies to New York for the ceremony, the conversion would not be registered by the Ministry of Interior.

This issue featured prominently in the premier's discussions last weekend with Jewish religious leaders in New York. Netanyahu told Orthodox leaders that he remained committed to the conversion bill. In a separate meeting with non-Orthodox Jewish leaders, Netanyahu maintained that the proposed measure does not mean a change of the status quo in state-synagogue relations, because Israel has never recognized non-Orthodox conversions of Israelis when the ceremony is performed in Israel.

The non-Orthodox movements promise to hold a lively last-ditch stand in the coming weeks.

They still hope that Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, with seven Knesset seats, will support their cause — despite its commitment when joining the coalition to back its Orthodox partners on this measure.

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, headed by former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, is said to favor the proposed measure insofar as conversions performed in Israel are concerned, but is less happy with its restriction on conversions performed abroad.

Whichever way the party finally goes, Netanyahu seems assured of troubled times — both within the Knesset and among the Diaspora Jewish leadership — as this contentious issue comes to a head. □

**Shops reopen in downtown Hebron**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian storekeepers have begun to reopen shops in an Arab market in downtown Hebron for the first time in three years.

Israel's opening of the market, which is adjacent to the Avraham Avinu settler complex, honors the agreements made last month with the Palestinians.

Most of the West Bank town was transferred to Palestinian self-rule as a result of the accords. □