



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Jewish voters in New Jersey favored Democratic challenger State Sen. James McGreevey over Gov. Christine Todd Whitman by a margin of 55.7 percent to 40.2 percent, according to an exit poll commissioned by the New Jersey Jewish News.** Whitman, who was re-elected, received more than 70 percent of the Orthodox Jewish vote according to the poll, which was conducted by Zogby International.

■ **New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was elected to a second term with 72 percent of the Jewish vote.** Democratic challenger Ruth Messinger, who is Jewish, claimed 27 percent of the vote.

■ **A German court ruled that 21 Jews who worked as slave laborers at a factory near Auschwitz during World War II are not entitled to back wages from the German government.** The judge ruled that German laws prevent payment to the laborers because the government has already compensated them for their imprisonment.

■ **The U.S. House of Representatives rejected a proposal that would have given low-income students nationwide vouchers for use at private or parochial schools.** The bill, which would have allowed states to use federal money they now receive as general aid for elementary and secondary schools to fund vouchers, failed by a vote of 228-191.

■ **Senators introduced legislation that would open records held by the U.S. government on Nazi war criminals.** The Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act would require federal agencies to make public records regarding individuals alleged to have committed war crimes.

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set up a committee to decide whether to publish excerpts of classified material submitted to the commission which investigated the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.** Allegations that there was a conspiracy resurfaced this week, the second anniversary of Rabin's death, after an article appeared in a newspaper affiliated with the National Religious Party.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Germany's obsession with past cuts both ways for nation's Jews

By Lisa Hostein

BERLIN (JTA) — It seems ironic that Berlin is hosting a Jewish cultural festival that coincides with the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the 1938 pogrom that marked the beginning of the end of pre-war Jewish life in Germany.

But then again, maybe not.

As one prominent Berlin journalist says, "We didn't only lose many people during the Holocaust; we also lost an important culture."

As if atoning for the past, things Jewish — past and present — are now chic in Germany.

Jewish literary, artistic and musical events dot the cultural landscape here on a regular basis.

So the Jewish Cultural Days, slated for Nov. 10-23 and featuring klezmer bands and Jewish authors from around the world, is just the latest in what has become a national trend.

Indeed, for some of Germany's Jews, the emphasis on Jewish life — rather than Jewish death — is a welcome respite.

For in the very land where Adolf Hitler and his henchmen plotted the destruction of the Jewish people, every day, it seems, is a day of remembrance.

The signs of the nation's dark past are everywhere:

- Memorials small and large pop up across the country — from neighborhood residential streets where a synagogue once stood to a central Berlin plaza. There, a tall, stark plaque listing Europe's concentration camps stands in front of the city's most-frequented department store.

- On television and in the press, there are almost daily documentaries and reports that focus on what is referred to here as the "German past."

- The question of a national memorial to victims of the Holocaust has become a subject of prolonged, nationwide debate.

The success and attention accorded Daniel Goldhagen's book "Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust" this year is a prime example.

Indeed, the editors of the German newsweekly Der Spiegel say one of their highest-circulation issues was the one that featured an interview with the Harvard professor.

Jewish communal officials and analysts alike say they had expected the German focus on the Holocaust to end after 1995, which marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of Auschwitz.

But they were wrong, as was evidenced by the popularity of Goldhagen and his book.

Widespread need to 'fill in the history'

Explanations vary for this collective dwelling on the past — which many believe borders on obsession — but one historian describes the phenomenon this way: "The best anti-Semites of yesterday are the best philo-Semites of today."

Historian Johannes Wachten is a good example of the non-Jewish intellectual fascination with things Jewish.

The deputy director and chief curator of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, Wachten says this phenomenon can be attributed in part to a sense of guilt, a lingering question of what one's parents — and now grandparents — did or did not do during the Nazi regime.

Oliver Viest, the 25-year-old Jewish co-editor of Chuzpe, a student-run magazine in Frankfurt, agrees.

"It's not only Jews in Germany who have an identity problem; non-Jews have to deal with the German past even more."

For Wachten and others, there is also a need to "fill in the history" following a lack of education about the war years.

Indeed, education about the Holocaust has shifted dramatically from the immediate postwar years, when educators — and the nation in general — were too close to the war to critically explore Germany's evil deeds.

Today, in contrast, students study a mandated curriculum, whose

success, experts say, varies from school to school and teacher to teacher.

For the Jews here, Germany's national obsession with its Nazi past is a double-edged sword.

On one hand, it serves as a convincing argument that a Third Reich could never again rise on German soil.

Although anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism exist, especially after the unification of Germany produced a shaky economic situation, most Jews do not fear for their safety.

As Cilly Kugelman, the education director of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, put it: "I'm not saying that all 70 million Germans are not anti-Semitic, but it's the kind of anti-Semitism with which we can live very well."

At the same time, this obsession marks the Jews with a special label that many would prefer didn't exist.

"Every Jew in Germany is a symbol — a symbol of a Holocaust survivor," Kugelman says.

"I don't know when we will have a state of normalcy," says Kugelman, 50, who like many in her generation immigrated to Israel and then came back.

Indeed, the deputy editor of *Der Spiegel* confirms the view that the "public picture of Jews in Germany goes beyond the numbers."

Joachim Preuss says he was astounded when he read recently that there are only 60,000 Jews in Germany.

In fact, until the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the influx of more than 30,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union, the Jewish community was half that size.

"I didn't realize the number of Jews was so small," he says. "The Jews in my mind are an important part of the world and in my thinking."

As a result of this obsession, Jews of all ages — from community leaders to school-age youngsters — are singled out for special treatment.

Ignatz Bubis, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is often courted by the press, and when he celebrated his 70th birthday earlier this year, the party drew top government officials.

For her part, Berlin university student Sophie Mahlo, says: "I feel like just because I'm Jewish, I'm something special, like a little star."

Jews often use this special status for both personal and communal gain.

For example, Jewish immigrants, mostly from the former Soviet Union, are given rights not available to other newcomers.

Atoning for past sins

While Jewish communal officials lobbied for these special benefits — including refugee status and welfare benefits — German officials were happy to oblige, welcoming this new influx of Jews as an important step in its atonement for past sins.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl "decided to revitalize the Jewish community depleted by the Holocaust," explains Olaf Reermann, the Interior Ministry official who heads the immigration division.

The Jews also receive more public money for their synagogues and institutions than other religious communities.

But by and large, most Jews here are striving for a normal life in a country which they know harbors a history that a half-century ago crossed the divide from normal to barbarous.

It is against this backdrop that one seeks to explore Jewish life here, all the while wondering: How can there be Jewish life in a nation so steeped in Jewish death?

It is a complex question that plagues both Jews and non-Jews.

Many Jews, in fact, are sick of being asked.

"The only problem Jews have living in Germany is that they are always being asked if there's a problem," quips journalist Henryk Broder.

For the older generation, most of whom were East European survivors who arrived in the country at Displaced Persons camps, their continued presence in Germany is largely a result of inertia.

Communal leader Bubis, for instance, says he doesn't "have a reason why I'm living in Germany. But I also don't have a reason to leave Germany."

Bubis, a real-estate magnate who, over the years, contemplated living in Israel, Canada and France, represents a generation of Jews who for decades were, as they say here, "sitting on packed suitcases."

Only in recent years have they developed a comfort level, committing themselves to institutions and synagogues — apparently ready to put away the suitcases.

For their part, the younger generations are wrestling with their future more than their past.

"We are not spending time discussing whether we accept Germany as our home — that's a given," says Philipp Goldscheider, 26, another co-editor of *Chuzpe*, the student publication in Frankfurt.

Mahlo, in Berlin, agrees. "We want to work toward a new Jewish identity."

Rabbi Ernst Stein, the only spiritual leader in Berlin, has been trying to help teach Jews here about their heritage and religion.

There is a lack of knowledge, he says, adding that the need for education is particularly urgent given the large numbers of Russian Jews who could ultimately shape the community.

Stein is a German-born Jew who was a retired businessman living in New York when he visited Europe in 1969 and saw the "desolate state" of the postwar West German Jewish communities. He then went to rabbinical school in London and returned to Germany as a rabbi in the mid-1970s.

"It's an academic point" whether Jews should live in Germany, he says.

"History has spoken. There are Jewish communities in Germany and as long as they are here, they should be served." □

Russian racist leader arrested

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — There were indications this week that the Russian government intends to launch a fight against political extremism.

Human-rights watchers were hopeful after the leader of a rabidly anti-Semitic group was arrested here after he was questioned at the Justice Ministry.

Alexander Ivanov-Sukharevsky, leader of a small group known as the People's National Party of Russia, was summoned to the ministry along with several other Russian ultranationalists and political radicals.

The arrest of Ivanov-Sukharevsky, a 47-year-old former film director, came a week after Russia created a presidential commission to fight political extremism.

Created by presidential decree last month, the commission, headed by Justice Minister Sergei Stepashin, will enforce a ban on organizations that seek to overthrow the government through violence, violate Russia's territorial integrity or incite racial, ethnic or religious hatred.

In recent months, the Jewish community has repeatedly called on the authorities to take a stand against racism and anti-Semitism.

Russia's public prosecutor general, Yuri Skuratov, is expected to discuss the issue during a board meeting of the Russian Jewish Congress later this month. □

Jews still waiting for Pope to issue Holocaust document

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Vatican's latest condemnation of anti-Semitism as an offense against "God and the church itself" has been welcomed by Jewish experts.

But they say they are still waiting for a long-anticipated papal document that is expected to be a full inventory of the Roman Catholic Church's relationship to the Holocaust.

The Vatican's most recent remarks came out of a three-day, closed-door conference of 50 Catholic biblical and theological scholars.

No Jewish scholars were invited to participate.

Pope John Paul II, in his remarks at the conference, blamed centuries of anti-Jewish prejudice for "deadening" Christian resistance to the Nazi persecution of Jews, but steered clear of blaming the church itself.

The symposium in Vatican City focused on examining interpretations of the Christian Bible that the church said produced anti-Semitic tendencies.

The scholars produced "a dossier" on the subject for the benefit of the pope, according to the closing statement made public by the participants.

That work might be used as part of what Jewish observers hope will be the major statement that the Vatican promised a decade ago.

What came out of the conference is "not a breakthrough, but building blocks, and very important ones," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interfaith affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

The goal of the conference was to make positive Catholic-Jewish relations part of the church's mainstream agenda, and under this pope it has, he said.

One example, Rudin said, was the recent action taken against a well-known Polish priest, the Rev. Henryk Jankowski of Gdansk, after he said there is no room in Poland's government for a Jew.

A Polish Jew, Bronislaw Geremek, was named foreign minister to the recently elected government of Poland.

Jankowski's bishop suspended him from giving sermons for at least a year, though the priest is still permitted to celebrate mass and hear confessions.

Attempt to deal with 'anti-Judaism'

The recent conference was "a serious attempt to deal with the question of the anti-Judaism that can be produced by the use and abuse of [Christian biblical] text," said Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of interreligious affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

"The pope was very clear in that, and his statement opens the possibilities for joint work between Christians and Jews on study of the so-called first century, the relations of early Christianity and Judaism," he said.

The ADL, together with a Christian publishing house, is developing a series of 16 volumes, each examining the attitudes toward Judaism in one of the books of the Christian Bible.

Many of the passages in the Christian Bible that condemn Judaism have been long used to justify hatred of, and violence against, Jews.

Klenicki said the volumes, written by Jewish, Catholic and Protestant scholars, will be used by priests and preachers who will read passages out loud before they read the biblical text itself and, it is hoped, avoid anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic interpretations.

He anticipates that the first of the volumes will be published in about six months. □

Kristallnacht events slated as annual reminder for Germans

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The sounds of Nazis shattering glass panes, setting synagogues on fire and shouting anti-Semitic slogans still reverberate in Germany — 59 years after an unforgettable night of terror.

Hundreds of events throughout Germany, scheduled by local governments and private organizations on Nov. 9, will commemorate Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass.

On Nov. 9-10, 1938, in a well-orchestrated national action planned by Nazi propaganda chief Josef Goebbels, marauding bands of Nazis and their sympathizers destroyed synagogues and shops belonging to Jews across Germany.

Many synagogues were set afire while large crowds of onlookers watched without intervening.

Thousands of Jewish men and boys were arrested and deported to concentration camps.

Kristallnacht occurred five years after the Nazis instituted their anti-Semitic persecutions, and many Germans today regard that fateful night as marking the beginning of the Holocaust.

As a result, Kristallnacht commemorations scheduled for next week in cities throughout Germany will not only recall the horrifying events of that evening, but will also remind Germans of the consequences of anti-Semitism and racism. The commemorations will be sponsored by German officials as well as by local Jewish communities.

In Frankfurt, a ceremony is planned that includes speeches by city and state officials and by the president of the Central Council for Jews in Germany, Ignatz Bubis.

Many of the ceremonies will be held at city halls or local Jewish cemeteries and will include prayers, the laying of wreaths and the reciting of Kaddish.

Some of the events are planned by local German groups involved with Christian-Jewish relations or with the study of local Jewish history.

Students in Berlin present play

In Berlin, high school students will present a play called, "In Reality, It Was the Last Sign Before the Extermination."

In the western city of Wiesbaden, actors will partake in a performance inspired by paintings created by Jewish artists.

Many churches plan to sponsor events on that evening, including lectures, concerts and readings of works by Jewish authors. Several German television stations will also participate in the commemorations.

The public television station for the region of Hesse, Hessischer Rundfunk, will broadcast four hours of documentaries and studio discussions on the persecution and dispossession of the German Jewish community under the Nazi regime.

Nov. 9 has been a fateful day in German history.

In 1918, it was the date that the Weimar Republic, the first democratic government in German history, was established.

In 1989, it was the evening on which the Berlin Wall came down, ending the postwar division of Germany.

After German unification, there was a debate about whether to make Nov. 9 a national holiday.

Because of the somber commemoration of Kristallnacht on this date, many politicians considered it inappropriate as a national independence day.

Instead, Germans celebrate their postwar unification Oct. 3, the day East and West Germany were formally united in 1990.

Next year, a national ceremony is planned for the 60th anniversary of Kristallnacht. □

PULSE OF REFORM JEWRY

Re-evaluating a relationship at time of ongoing controversy

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

DALLAS (JTA) — Reform movement leaders are sharply challenging the Israeli government and Orthodox leaders, pledging not to be deterred in their fight for official recognition there.

Their challenges were enthusiastically received by the 4,500 members of American Judaism's largest denomination attending the biennial convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which met here Oct. 29-Nov. 2.

But what lies behind the standing ovations and ardent applause Reform Jews gave their leaders' words? How do they feel about Israel? How do they show their support?

And how, if at all, have their feelings changed in light of recent events playing out around official Israeli recognition of their movement?

The Reform convention came at a time of intense controversy surrounding religious pluralism.

Last week, leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements suspended their court actions on religious matters, and Orthodox Knesset members postponed efforts to pass legislation that would codify Orthodox control over conversions in Israel and bar non-Orthodox representatives on local religious councils.

The actions by both sides enabled a government-appointed committee headed by Israeli Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman to have three more months to work out a compromise.

"This battle energizes our people, and particularly among the committed, it demonstrates how important it is to do this work," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the UAHC, said in an interview after the convention.

"At the same time, those on the fringes are often turned off by these debates and this drumbeat of attacks on Reform," he said. "It doesn't encourage them to embrace Zionist causes."

The movement is currently finalizing its strategy on how to deal with the issue as the Ne'eman Committee continues its efforts to hammer out a compromise.

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, the Reform movement's Zionist wing, called on Reform Jews to raise \$100,000 to develop greater grass-roots support in Israel during this time.

Israel 'too important to be left to Israelis'

Rousing applause greeted Yoffie when he said in his Shabbat-morning sermon, "Israel is far too important to be left to Israelis."

Rhetorically addressing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoffie said, "You have two constituencies: one that votes, and another that needs you even if it doesn't vote" in Israel's elections.

He also asked Netanyahu to give Reform Jews permission to pray near the Western Wall and to promise protection from Orthodox Jews angered by their presence.

Efforts by men and women to pray together near the Wall last Shavuot and Tisha B'Av ended in violence.

Against this backdrop, Reform Jews who gathered here last week said their feelings toward Israel range widely. Some of those at the convention did, however, feel spurred to take action.

Ricki Olean, a member of Temple Sinai in Oakland, Calif., originally didn't want to let her daughter spend a year in Israel next year after she graduates from high school, but now she's inclined to let her go.

"I want my daughter to go as a Reform Jew," she said. "My tolerance of fundamentalist Orthodox representing my Judaism is maxed out."

The classical Zionist response to Israel has been to settle there.

But few American Jews make aliyah, and just a tiny number of these are Reform. Most are Orthodox, for whom settling in the land of Israel is a religious commitment, experts say.

Earlier this year, the Reform movement embraced the idea of aliyah and the centrality of Israel to Jewish life when its rabbinical organization adopted a pro-Zionist platform to mark 100 years of modern Zionism.

Still, over the past two decades, the denomination has created two kibbutzim and a settlement in northern Israel, along with a young synagogue movement in Israel.

There are about two dozen Reform congregations, with a large synagogue in each of the country's three major cities — Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.

More than 1,000 teen-agers go to Israel each summer with the Reform movement, through its roughly 15,000-strong youth group, Yoffie said.

A semester-long program brings 50 to 60 high-school students each year to study in Jerusalem under Reform auspices. These youths make up the majority of Reform visitors to the Jewish state.

While the number of all American Jews who visit Israel during their lifetimes is low, the percentage among Reform Jews is in the single digits, said Hirsch of ARZA.

Just 31 percent of those polled in the 1990 National Jewish Population Study who identified themselves as Jews by religion said they had visited Israel.

Brian Schuster, president of Temple B'nai Torah on Mercer Island in Seattle, was wearing a large button at the conference that said, "Israel: Don't Write Off 4 Million Jews." Hanging from it was a ribbon: "I Love Israel, That's Why I'm an ARZA Member."

Changing attachment toward Israel

Schuster, who is in his 30s and has three young children, has never been to Israel.

He said his attachment to Israel "has changed" in the wake of the controversy over religious pluralism.

If the Reform movement doesn't get the recognition he believes it deserves, then he won't be as enthusiastic about sending his children to visit, he said.

The primary vehicle for supporting Israel for most American Jews has long been political clout — and financial contributions via the Jewish federations that send a portion of their funds to Israel.

Diaspora Jewish leaders say donations to central fund-raising organizations have not increased as much as anticipated as a result of anger concerning the lack of legal Israeli recognition for the non-Orthodox movements, which represent 85 percent of affiliated American Jews.

Dr. Joe Schuster attended the biennial with his son, Brian.

"I'm very angry about the recent developments," the senior Schuster said. He warned that if the Reform movement is not recognized, he may step down as co-chair of the physician's division of Seattle's Jewish federation.

He said he may give the \$1,400 that he donated this year to the federation to Reform and other causes that advocate religious pluralism more directly.

For his part, Israel's ambassador to the United States, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, said aliyah would be a more effective path toward change.

"To effect change requires more than impassioned rhetoric and threats of financial punishment," he said. "If Israel is too important to leave to Israelis, then show it, show it!" □