



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 103

Wednesday, June 10, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu may back referendum

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated he might support a nationwide referendum on a pending redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank. While saying he was not fully committed to a referendum, Netanyahu told Israel Radio that "there must be broad public support" for the redeployment so that "rifts in the nation will heal."

House approves Holocaust bill

The U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation to create a presidential commission to examine Holocaust victims' assets in the United States.

The bill allows the commission to construct a list of all insurance companies that issued policies to Jews who later perished in the Holocaust. The Senate already approved the measure, and the Clinton administration supports it.

Bubis: More banks to face suits

The leader of Germany's Jewish community said he expects lawsuits stemming from Holocaust-era accounts to be filed by Holocaust survivors against British and American banks. Ignatz Bubis told a weekly German news magazine that British and American banks weren't "one iota better" than their German or Swiss counterparts. Last week, survivors filed an \$18 billion class-action lawsuit against two German banks accused of accepting and trading in looted assets during World War II.

Museum official apologizes

The incoming director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum apologized for a 10-year-old article he wrote comparing Israeli policies toward the Palestinians to the Nazi treatment of Jews. [Page 1]

More Jews to leave Ethiopia

Fighting on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border has not affected any Jews in the region, according to sources from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Sixty-three Jews are expected to leave Addis Ababa for Israel on Thursday, leaving fewer than 400 refugees in the Ethiopian capital. The rest are expected to be evacuated within a month, at which time the JDC will shut down its operations there, the source said.

Holocaust scholar apologizes; museum stands by appointment

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The incoming director of a Holocaust studies center at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has apologized for a 10-year-old article that compared Israeli policies toward the Palestinians to the Nazis' treatment of Jews.

In interviews and statements, John Roth, an internationally renowned Holocaust scholar who serves as chairman of the philosophy and religious studies department at California's Claremont McKenna College, sought to end controversy over a 1988 op-ed he wrote for The Los Angeles Times.

Stung by attacks from the Zionist Organization of America, which publicized the essay, and reacting calls for a clear retraction from the Anti-Defamation League, Roth said in a statement this week:

"If I could erase one item from my professional record, it would be the opinion piece I wrote 10 years ago for The Los Angeles Times. I apologize for and would like to retract that essay."

Museum officials are backing Roth and say that he will assume his new post as head of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies as scheduled in August.

Ruth Mandel, vice chair of the museum, said that when Roth's article was called to the attention of museum officials, "we all had concerns."

However, in the context of his 30-year career, the essay itself, she said, would not influence her decision to support him.

After Roth's comments this week, Mandel said she was "satisfied with that explanation."

Roth, who is not Jewish, wrote the opinion piece after an Israeli election campaign during which the right-wing Mokedet Party advocated the forced removal of Palestinians from the West Bank.

"Kristallnacht happened because a political state decided to be rid of people unwanted within its borders. It seems increasingly clear that Israel would prefer to rid itself of Palestinians if it could do so," Roth wrote in the Nov. 12, 1988, article.

"As much as any other people today, they are being forced into a tragic part too much like the one played by the European Jews 50 years ago."

The piece concludes: "As a Holocaust scholar, as one who has lived and taught in Israel and who loves that country deeply, during this year's remembrance of Kristallnacht, my thoughts are on the Palestinian plight at least as much as on Israeli security."

Amid increased media attention on the controversy, Roth said this week that "any such comparison" between Israel and Nazi Germany "would be historically inaccurate and morally outrageous, and furthermore, would be a repudiation of my own studies and life experiences."

Roth has written or edited more than 25 books and has served on the museum's board since 1994.

Despite the statements, ZOA President Morton Klein is not giving up.

Klein, who acknowledges that Roth has apologized and retracted the op-ed, said that he would withhold judgment on Roth's appointment because some of Roth's additional writings raise concerns about his appreciation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

However, Klein refuses to identify the other passages that he finds troublesome.

Holocaust scholars and longtime colleagues of Roth have leapt to his defense.

"This is a man who has dedicated his life to the study of the Holocaust," said

MIDEAST FOCUS

Yeshiva request approved

Israel's Housing Ministry approved a yeshiva's request to build housing in eastern Jerusalem.

A Palestinian lawmaker condemned the move, which could lead to the construction of some 58 units, as an example of Israeli "arrogance." The request by Beit Orot had been first presented in 1994. The plan must still receive permits from Jerusalem municipal officials.

No-confidence vote passes

The Israeli Knesset voted 38-10 in favor of a no-confidence measure against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Most coalition members, following the advice of the coalition chairman, boycotted the vote, which requires a 61-vote majority to pass. It was the second time in as many weeks that the premier lost a no-confidence vote that had been boycotted by members of his governing coalition.

Israel bars Marzook's wife

Israel barred the wife of a Hamas political leader from entering the Gaza Strip. Nadia Abu Marzook was planning to visit relatives in the Gaza Strip when she was turned back by Israeli border officials.

Nadia's husband, Mousa, was deported by the United States to Jordan in May 1997 in light of a later-dropped Israeli extradition request based on his alleged involvement in terrorist attacks.

Histadrut holds elections

Some 300,000 Israeli workers cast ballots for the leadership of the Histadrut trade federation, choosing for the first time between joint lists that crossed usual political divisions. Incumbent chairman Amir Peretz, who is expected to beat Maxim Levy, ran on a joint slate made up of the Labor and Likud factions, the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, the immigrant Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party and the Arab Democratic Party.



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, President

Mark J. Joffe, Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein, Editor

Kenneth Bandler, Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein, Business Manager

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

Deborah Lipstadt, a member of the museum's board and the search committee that chose Roth.

"His work is important, significant and shows sensitivity," said Lipstadt, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta who called on the public to view Roth's career as a whole and not judge it by one essay that he has apologized for.

The questions over Roth are the latest in a series of controversies involving the Holocaust museum.

Most recently, Klein was involved in protests over an invitation by the museum to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. After initially refusing to invite Arafat, the museum reversed itself, a move that led to a public feud and the eventual ouster of the museum's director, Walter Reich.

Klein's quest to convince the museum to oust Roth has fueled criticisms that the ZOA is acting out of revenge over the museum's invitation to Arafat, who never in the end visited the museum.

"If you want to disagree with the museum's inviting Arafat, do so. But do not bring down a man's reputation," said Lipstadt.

Klein strongly denied that his motivation stemmed from the Arafat invitation.

"If the Arafat issue never existed, we would have the same problem with a major figure at the museum equating Israel with Germany," he said.

For his part, Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, said he dropped his opposition to Roth after this week's statements by the scholar.

But escalating a long-running battle with Klein, Foxman said, "Mort Klein has set himself up as a thought police."

Citing Klein's opposition to Jewish groups inviting New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman as a speaker and his latest opposition to the Israeli government's sponsorship of a Central Park concert that included folk singer Pete Seeger, an outspoken critic of Israel, Foxman said, "This is hideous behavior. It smacks of McCarthyism."

Klein responded by accusing Foxman of "trying to stifle my freedom of speech."

As the head of the ADL, Klein said, "Foxman should be condemning the defamers, not those who are speaking out." □

Russian man sentenced after killing Jewish family

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Russian judge has sentenced to death a former tax inspector convicted of murdering seven people — including a Jewish family on the eve of their emigration to Israel.

An investigation ruled out anti-Semitism as a motive in the murder of the Beilin family.

According to the verdict, the murderer, Valery Kulakov, killed his former lover, Yevgenia Beilin, her mother and the young woman's 3-year-old son in a pique of jealousy. The three were stabbed to death a few hours before they planned to board a flight to Israel, where Yevgenia's husband already lives.

Also killed were two Jewish relatives of the Beilins and another couple, who apparently witnessed the October 1996 killing spree.

Beilin, who lived in Magnitogorsk, which is located in the Ural Mountains, was separated from her husband and had promised to marry Kulakov so that they could emigrate to Israel together.

Shortly before their planned departure, however, she apparently changed her mind and told Kulakov she planned to reunite with her husband.

Kulakov had an indifferent expression on his face as the judge read the verdict. His lawyer has filed an appeal.

Whether or not the appeal is successful, it is unlikely that Kulakov will be executed.

Nobody has been executed in Russia since August 1996, when the country introduced a moratorium on executions. □

JEWISH WORLD

Bank merger approved

The U.S. Federal Reserve approved a merger between Union Bank of Switzerland and Swiss Bank Corp.

The approval was considered a foregone conclusion after the New York State Banking Department recently gave its backing to the move.

The World Jewish Congress made no objection to the earlier approval, which has led observers to conclude that significant progress has been made with Swiss banks toward reaching a settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

New report expected on Swiss

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center is planning to release a report Wednesday that it says will document the "close association between senior Swiss government officials and Swiss extremists" to attempt to deny Jewish refugees entry into Switzerland during World War II.

Swiss President Flavio Cotti, who saw an advance copy of the report, flatly rejected its findings as "wrong."

Papal aide visits Iraq

An aide to Pope John Paul II is visiting Iraq to discuss the possibility of the pope's visiting that country as part of a long anticipated papal tour of Middle East states to mark the start of the new millennium.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray is spending five days in Iraq as part of a mission that also takes him to Israel and Jordan, where he will hold similar discussion about a papal tour.

Goussinsky buys stake in Ma'ariv

A Russian businessman purchased a 25 percent stake in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv for \$85 million.

Vladimir Goussinsky, a banking and media magnate who serves as president of the Russian Jewish Congress, beat out American businessman and Jewish leader Ronald Lauder in the bidding for the shares.

Arafat adviser stirs controversy

The life of the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem is in danger because he is "selling land that belongs to the Palestinians to Israelis," a former advisor to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said during a speech in Athens.

Bassam Abu Sharif said the church had sold land that it owns in Jaffa for \$22 million. Palestinian officials promptly distanced themselves from Sharif's comments, saying there was no information about a plot against the patriarch.

A spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem said the land in Jaffa was being leased to a Canadian company and has not been sold.

AOL pays a record price for Israeli software company

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The world's leading online service has turned three young Israeli software programmers and a venture capitalist into multimillionaires.

In the biggest-ever foreign acquisition of an Israeli software company, America Online announced this week that it would purchase Mirabilis, a small Israeli company that develops technology for the Internet, for \$287 million in cash. According to the deal, Mirabilis could earn another \$120 million after 2001.

Mirabilis is the manufacturer of ICQ — or "I Seek You" — which allows users to chat or exchange files with friends all over the world. The program has become immensely popular on the Internet because it instantly notifies users when a friend comes online.

Yossi Vardi, a venture capitalist and the current chairman of Mirabilis, and the three programmers — who are aged 24 to 27 — founded the company with an investment of \$3.2 million nearly two years ago. As a result of the sale, each of the four principal founders will receive approximately \$60 million of the \$287 million price.

Today, Mirabilis has 70 employees but no revenues since the program is distributed for free on the Internet. But Steve Case, AOL chairman and chief executive, said ICQ has "one of the fastest growing and most loyal communities in Cyberspace."

Indeed, Israeli technology analysts said AOL made the acquisition because it was able to "buy" millions of ICQ users, enabling AOL to use ICQ Web sites as a springboard for selling advertisements and offering new services.

According to Vardi, ICQ has been downloaded by nearly 13 million people since its launch in November 1996 — even though the company has not spent any money on advertising or public relations. Vardi said the company never tried to generate revenues, and instead focused on increasing the number of ICQ users.

He said ICQ's successful penetration of Cyberspace can be attributed to an "unconventional" distribution strategy he calls "word-of-mouse." □

Anne Frank as a martyr doesn't sit well with Jews

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Anne Frank as a martyr in the Catholic Church?

Reports that an Italian Catholic Church official wants the Vatican to recognize Anne Frank as part of an "ecumenical commemoration of new martyrs" for the year 2000 have raised Jewish concerns that the church might attempt to appropriate the Dutch Jewish girl, known for the diary she kept as she and her family hid from the Nazis, as a Catholic symbol.

The Italian media reported over the weekend that Monsignor Antonio Pace of Naples had formally submitted the request to the Vatican. But a spokesman at the Vatican's office told JTA on Monday that no such formal request had arrived. He said the Vatican's proposed new martyrs would all be Christians.

"It seems to be just a proposal floated by the priest in question as a means of widening the discussion," the Vatican official said of Pace's remarks.

The Vatican announced last month that it would honor 20th-century witnesses and martyrs in a ceremony at Rome's ancient Colosseum in May 2000.

Pope John Paul II has declared 2000 — which begins the third millennium of the Roman Catholic Church — a holy year. Pace last week urged that the list be widened to include Frank as well as Iqbal Masih, a 12-year-old Pakistani Muslim boy who was killed because of his activities protesting the exploitation of child laborers.

These moves, Pace told the news agency of the Italian Bishops Conference, would be a means of "promoting interreligious dialogue and reiterating that martyrs are an example and a patrimony for all religions."

The Vatican has received some 4,000 suggestions for the new martyrs. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Conversion crisis erupts anew
as parties return to old stances***By Avi Machlis*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly one year after a truce was called in an effort to reach a compromise in the battle over religious pluralism in Israel, all the parties appear to be back where they started.

On Tuesday, American Reform Jewish leaders, on a mission to Israel, warned the government of a severe response from U.S. Jewry if they pushed through a bill that would codify into law the Orthodox monopoly over conversions performed in Israel.

And in a meeting in New York the same day, leaders of the Conservative movement's rabbinate expressed their deep frustration to Shmuel Sisso, Israel's consul general in New York.

Orthodox parties in Israel have been pressing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to revive legislation regarding the conversion bill. The premier signaled last week that the government would indeed revive the legislation.

The move followed a decision by the Conservative movement to renew a petition in Israel's High Court of Justice aimed at winning recognition of its conversions of adopted children.

The case had been frozen for about a year, while a committee headed by Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman tried to hammer out a compromise to the conversion crisis.

The Conservative and Reform movements accepted the committee's conclusions, which called for the creation of a joint conversion institute involving the three major streams of Judaism while leaving control over the performance of the conversions under Orthodox control. But the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate never agreed to the Ne'eman Committee's proposal, which the liberal movements said forced them to return to court.

Last Friday, the Conservative and Reform movements sent a letter to Netanyahu accusing the government of presenting "a distorted picture" of the "developments that led to the government's present initiative."

The letter added that the Ne'eman recommendations carry no weight because the Chief Rabbinate never signed on to them.

It also explained that when the liberal movements froze legal proceedings, it was "explicitly clear that the courts would be asked to renew their deliberations on this matter if no agreement were reached among the parties."

During Tuesday's showdown, a delegation of 170 U.S. Reform rabbis and lay leaders faced off with Ne'eman over the conversion issue. Several leaders told Ne'eman that their communities were losing patience and predicted a backlash in support for Israel if an acceptable compromise were not reached.

The board of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, meeting in New York with Sisso, sounded a similar note. The Conservative rabbis passed a resolution protesting the Israeli government's recent actions and calling upon Netanyahu to both pull the bill out of consideration and to "cease and desist" from his government's "campaign of disinformation," which they say is an attempt to smear the Conservative movement.

Reaction among the Conservative grass roots to the renewed legislation is beginning to grow stronger, said rabbis at the meeting. "My community is hurt that Israel is rejecting them," said

Conservative Rabbi Kass Abelson, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Beth El in Minneapolis.

For his part, Ne'eman urged all sides to return to the table for dialogue. "Let us resolve and solve these issues ourselves without a solution imposed upon us by the courts, and without legislation," he told the Reform leaders in Jerusalem.

Ne'eman, who criticized leaders from all sides for using inflammatory rhetoric, also said some Reform rabbis had complicated efforts to create a dialogue with the Orthodox by agreeing to perform homosexual marriages and to define Jewishness by patrilineal descent. Reform and Conservative representatives defended their decisions to return to court and told Ne'eman and Sisso they had no choice because no progress has been made.

In New York, Sisso urged the Conservative rabbis to have patience and to appreciate the gains they had already made.

But in Jerusalem, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations and leader of the visiting delegation, told reporters after Ne'eman spoke that "we refuse to accept a situation where we withdraw from court, and yet at the same time are unable to perform conversions or have conversions recognized."

"American Jews are losing patience," he added. "They don't understand the intricacies of these compromises. What they know is that there is a profound inequality that exists here, that their rabbis are not rabbis."

Earlier, at a meeting of the Knesset's Absorption Committee on the conversion issue, Philip Meltzer, president of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, urged Israeli legislators not to "drive a wedge between the State of Israel and the 90 percent of U.S. Judaism that is Reform and Conservative," and warned that North American Jewry "will react negatively and with hostility" if a conversion bill is pushed through.

Rabbi Aryeh Gamliel, deputy minister of religious affairs and a member of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, was the only Orthodox Knesset member to attend.

Gamliel said Shas had no choice but to legislate after the court case was revived, and accused the Conservative movement of being "provocative" by returning to court "in order to destroy the status quo." The Orthodox parties, he pledged, would never be able to compromise on the conversion issue since it is an issue of halachah, or Jewish law. Gamliel also urged the liberal movements to adhere to halachah "for their own good."

He sidestepped questions by committee chairwoman Naomi Blumenthal of Likud, who asked whether he accepts the Ne'eman Committee's compromise proposals for a conversion institute. So far, it does not appear that the government will be able to muster a majority to support the conversion bill.

Meanwhile, in a shift of strategy, the government is considering pushing through legislation based on the Ne'eman Committee's recommendations instead of the conversion bill.

But the Conservative and Reform movements also object to this route, saying it would amount to legislating the Orthodox monopoly over conversions in a different guise.

In addition, they say, legislation — even of the Ne'eman recommendations — would destroy a crucial element of a compromise that was meant to forge a historic reconciliation among Judaism's major streams. □

(JTA staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen in New York contributed to this report.)