

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewish groups host L.A. party

President Clinton addressed nearly 4,000 Jewish guests at a party held in Los Angeles on the eve of the Democratic Party's convention.

During his speech, Clinton quoted comedian Red Buttons that the Democrats are changing their theme song from "Happy Days Are Here Again" to "Hava Nagila."

The party at the Sony Pictures movie set was hosted by the National Jewish Democratic Council, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. [Page 1]

Shas legislator creates new furor

An Israeli Knesset member from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party is being criticized for accusing Zionists of abandoning Europe's religious Jews to perish at the hands of the Nazis.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv quoted legislator Shlomo Benizri as saying Zionists preferred to bring "another cow" for a kibbutz rather than save an observant Jew. His remarks came a week after the spiritual mentor of the Shas Party said the 6 million who died in the Holocaust were the reincarnated souls of sinners. [Page 2]

Bush adviser addresses Israelis

Texas Gov. George W. Bush will try to foster Middle East peace if he is elected president, according to his senior foreign policy adviser.

Bush would have "other areas of difference in American foreign policy" from the positions of President Clinton, "but the Middle East would not likely be one of them," Condoleezza Rice told Israel's Army Radio on Monday. "You would certainly see Gov. Bush energetically engaged in the peace process and in trying to bring the parties together."

Germans urged to fight racism

The leader of Germany's Jewish community accused German citizens and politicians of not doing enough to fight anti-Semitism, xenophobia and right-wing extremism.

"We didn't let ourselves dream that a half-century after the Holocaust it would be so difficult for the democratic German society to resist right-extremism," Paul Spiegel said. [Page 3]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

At the Democratic Convention it's suddenly cool to be a Jew

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The official agenda of the Democratic Party may be to nominate Al Gore and Joseph Lieberman, but the real business so far has been to party from morn til morn, raise zillions of dollars and tell the Jews what wonderful folks they are.

President Clinton, addressing nearly 4,000 Jews at an outdoor party on Sunday afternoon, quoted comedian Red Buttons that "in Los Angeles, the Democrats are changing their theme song from 'Happy Days Are Here Again' to 'Hava Nagila.'"

Sen. John Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) keynoted an elegant fund-raiser for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on Saturday night and wound up a somewhat disjointed speech by declaring, "I wish I were a Jew."

Between Saturday and Thursday, there are an estimated 100 convention parties a day, 80 percent by private invitation only.

Somewhere near the top in cachet and money-raising prowess was the \$100,000-a-couple brunch, to benefit the Clinton Library, at Barbra Streisand's Malibu digs Sunday morning.

Even more exclusive are the small parties thrown by billionaires David Geffen and Gary Winnick, presumably for friends of similar financial standing.

For the merely affluent, plastic surgeon Steven Teitelbaum, a new player, threw a \$1,000-a-head party for and with Hillary Rodham Clinton, to aid her Senate race in New York.

As early as Sunday evening, the pace was beginning to tell on Howard Welinsky, a tireless Democratic activist but not a man of exceptional wealth, who had received 35 party invitations, and counting.

Some parties combined conviviality with a more serious purpose, such as the one at the home of Mel Levine, a Gore foreign policy adviser, who gave his guests a chance to dialogue with Leon Fuerth, the vice president's longtime national security aide.

There were even some free parties, such as the one at the Sony Pictures movie set (formerly MGM), addressed by both Clintons.

The hosts — the National Jewish Democratic Council, AIPAC, United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles — proved that Jewish organizations can pull together and even provide soft drinks and a light buffet for the multitudes.

The NJDC took the opportunity to debut its new campaign button, with photos of the Democratic and Republican presidential contenders.

The photo of the Democrat is identified as "Gore," and the photo of a puffy-cheeked George W. Bush as "gornisht" — Yiddish for "nothing."

Democrats for Israel weighed in with buttons in which Gore's name was spelled out in Hebrew.

Most of the fund-raising, and spotlight, benefitted Bill and Hillary Clinton. But the first couple has promised to leave town after addressing the Democratic convention Monday evening, to the relief of the Gore campaign.

The platform for launching a volley of pro-Jewish encomiums has been the nomination of Lieberman as the Democratic vice presidential candidate.

Guests at the AIPAC party at the splendid Beverly Hills home of Herb and Beverly Gelfand — "I always wanted to live in a house like this," Rockefeller said — were

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister: New summit next month

Israel and the Palestinians could hold another summit sometime in September, depending on how the two sides work in the time leading up to then, Israel's acting foreign minister said Monday.

Shlomo Ben-Ami made the comment while visiting Italy, his latest stop on a tour of European nations to present the Israeli side following the collapse of the Camp David summit.

Meretz may return to coalition

The left-wing Meretz Party appeared poised to return to the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak following talks the premier held with party leader Yossi Sarid.

Sarid said Meretz would rejoin only if he is reinstated as education minister.

Barak ordered to explain firing

Israel's High Court of Justice ordered Prime Minister Ehud Barak to explain why he dismissed the director general of the Foreign Ministry, Eitan Ben-Tsur, following the resignation of David Levy as foreign minister.

The court was acting on a petition filed by the Movement for Quality Government.

The group claimed that Ben-Tsur had received a professional, not political, appointment.

Talks focus on strategic defense

U.S. and Israeli officials met in Washington last week to discuss strengthening strategic relations, the Washington Post reported.

The delegations discussed forging closer cooperation on issues such as a defense against ballistic missiles.

They also discussed programs aimed at counter-ing biological and chemical terrorism, and strengthening defensive arrangements on the Israeli-Lebanese border.

ecstatic about Gore's selection of Lieberman as a validation and empowerment of American Jewry.

Actor Richard Dreyfuss, at the Mel Levine party, praised the Lieberman candidacy as "fabulous," even agreeing with some of the senator's criticisms of Hollywood, which have raised hackles elsewhere in the entertainment industry.

Most effusive was Andrew Cuomo, U.S. secretary of Housing and Urban Development, speaking at the Sony studio rally.

"We share your joy, because if the Jews can make it, then Italian Americans can make it, Hispanic Americans can make it and African Americans can make it," Cuomo said.

Only a few pessimists ventured, off the record, to throw some cold water on the near universal enthusiasm.

They warned that a number of liberals would be turned off by Lieberman's centrist politics, that many Americans might vent a latent anti-Semitism in the polling booth and even voiced the old tribal fear that excessive Jewish visibility invites later retribution.

An unexpected presence at the weekend's festivities was the family of the late Yitzhak Rabin.

Clinton, who greatly admired him, announced that just before his plane touched down in Los Angeles, he had talked by phone to Leah Rabin, widow of the prime minister, who is in the United States for medical treatment.

Rabin's son, Yuval, popped up at the Mel Levine party.

He has been quietly approaching some well-heeled Democrats to raise funds for the Yitzhak Rabin Center for Israel Studies, to be built in the Ramat Aviv section of Tel Aviv as a kind of presidential library and educational center. □

Another comment on Holocaust, another outcry against Shas Party

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For the second time in a week, the fervently Orthodox Shas Party has sparked a public outcry over remarks about the Holocaust.

Knesset member Shlomo Benizri was quoted by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv as claiming that the Zionist movement abandoned Europe's religious Jews to perish at the hands of the Nazis.

"They preferred to bring another cow" for Kibbutz Ein Harod rather than save an observant Jew, he said.

Benizri later defended his remarks, saying they were based on research.

While he said he was not issuing a blanket accusation of the entire Zionist movement, he told Army Radio, "Don't try to whitewash history. The nation should know there were foul-ups."

Benizri also defended the party's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who came under widespread criticism in Israel and abroad after he said last week that Holocaust victims were the reincarnated souls of sinners.

Yosef was also criticized by Arab officials for referring to the Palestinians as "snakes."

Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office called Benizri's remarks "grave and unnecessary" and said they hurt the memories of those who perished in the Holocaust.

Professor Yehuda Bauer, a Holocaust researcher, said Benizri displayed ignorance about the period.

"I don't know who knows more about the Holocaust — the cow from Ein Harod or Rabbi Benizri," Bauer told Israel Radio. "This person hates Israel and the Jews."

"He is blaming the Jews for their murder, and not the Nazis. The Nazis did not differentiate between the Jews — they wanted to exterminate all of them."

Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg accused Shas officials of using the Holocaust as fodder for their political squabbles.

"Making use of the Holocaust in the context of a domestic debate between rival groups cheapens both the memory of the Holocaust and the sanctity of its victims," he said. □



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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JEWISH WORLD

Carter: Religion not an issue

Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman's Jewish background will not be an issue with voters, according to Jimmy Carter.

"His demeanor is so good, his integrity is so good," the former president said Monday on NBC's "Today" show. "The fact that he's been an independent and very accomplished senator, I think, overcomes all of the possible aversion some people might have about religion."

Buchanan tries to burnish image

The presidential candidate of one wing of the Reform Party sought a more tolerant image as part of his long-shot White House bid.

"We don't want anyone who hates anyone. We don't want any bigots. We don't want anyone who hates Jewish folks," Pat Buchanan said Sunday. Buchanan's opponents from another wing of the badly divided party said Buchanan's comments were merely cosmetic and could not hide the fact that some white supremacist groups support him.

Group blasts Putin meeting

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the editors of two anti-Semitic newspapers, according to the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

The Aug. 10 meeting was "part of a disturbing pattern," said Leonid Stonov, the group's director for international bureaus and activities. It indicates that Putin "apparently doesn't see the promotion of anti-Semitism as a litmus test for political legitimacy."

Latvia to host war crime experts

Latvia plans to host a meeting of international experts next month to discuss the cases against two men suspected of carrying out Nazi war crimes, Konrad Kalejs and Karlis Ozols. The meeting will be a follow-up to one held in February with experts from Canada, the United States, Britain, Germany, Israel and Australia.

Latvian prosecutors have been investigating the wartime activities of both suspects, who are originally from Latvia and now live in Australia.

Divers search for Jewish treasure

Divers began searching the sea off southern Greece last Friday for a sunken treasure that may be worth \$2 billion and was hoarded by a Nazi officer from Greek Jews during World War II. Nazi officer Max Merten, who died in the 1970s, planned to recover the treasure but was imprisoned upon his return to Salonika. Merten shared his secret with a Greek inmate, and the man, who remains anonymous, is funding the search.

Jewish leader says Germany could do more to fight extremism

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The leader of Germany's Jewish community is accusing German citizens and politicians of not doing enough to fight anti-Semitism, xenophobia and right-wing extremism.

"We didn't let ourselves dream that a half-century after the Holocaust it would be so difficult for the democratic German society to resist" right-wing extremism, Paul Spiegel said Sunday, commenting on the specter of mounting neo-Nazi violence.

Spiegel, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, has spoken out bluntly several times since a bomb in Dusseldorf two weeks ago injured 10 people, including six Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

His comments came during an address to 700 people in Frankfurt at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of his predecessor, Ignatz Bubis.

Spiegel called on the German government to combat hate sites on the Internet and urged German parents to speak openly to their children about the threat posed by neo-Nazism.

Failure to speak out against racist violence, he said, makes it "all too easy to look away" and only encourages extremists.

The neo-Nazi threat has become a leading topic in the German media this summer. How to confront the threat has become a high-profile problem, both for the government and for concerned citizens.

In an interview with Italy's *Corriere della Sera* newspaper Sunday, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said right-wing extremism had to be fought "with every force and every legal instrument."

In Germany, he said, "the Nazis are not in the position to seriously pose questions of power, but it is extremely disturbing that in certain zones of the country it is dangerous to have a different color skin."

Democracy, he said, "must combat neo-Nazism until it is defeated."

In recent days, police detained more than 100 skinheads and other extremists in a series of raids in various German cities.

And on Sunday, a spokesman said the government would back a ban on Germany's largest extremist group, the National Democratic Party.

Last Friday, a special parliamentary commission began debate on whether to ban the party, which is believed to have about 6,000 members nationwide.

The government also began enlisting German show business and sports celebrities, such as tennis star Boris Becker, to rally the public against neo-Nazism and extremism.

On Sunday, hundreds of Germans staged an anti-extremist protest in the eastern city of Zwickau, and its mayor said it was time to put an end to far-right intimidation.

There are estimated to be about 51,000 right-wing extremists in Germany, out of a population of 82 million.

About 9,000 of these extremists are considered violent.

Statistics show that racist violence tends to be concentrated in the former East Germany, which was reunited with the western portion of the country after the fall of the Berlin Wall a decade ago.

In Rome, meanwhile, the leader of Italy's Jews warned that it would be "dangerous" to regard the recent wave of right-wing violence as a problem that was "exclusively and specifically" German.

"This could furnish, even involuntarily, a convenient cover for such trends in other countries," Amos Luzzatto, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, wrote in an editorial in the newspaper *Il Manifesto*.

"According to this theory," he wrote, the British, the Italians and others still are congenitally too good and civil to fall sick with the racist virus.

"The fact is that Europe is going through a phase of rapid economic, social and cultural transformation," he wrote. In such conditions, there "emerge threatening tendencies for people to use violence to resolve problems that they cannot or do not want to resolve through rational means." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Prague violating human rights in cemetery dispute, group says*By Magnus Bennett*

PRAGUE (JTA) — A dispute over a Prague cemetery is a human rights issue, according to a London-based Orthodox group.

The Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe has lodged a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights concerning the construction here of an office building over what is one of Europe's oldest Jewish cemeteries.

The committee has been trying for several months to halt construction work at the site on Vladislavova Street.

According to the committee's Czech lawyer, Simona Maskova, the group filed the petition against the Czech government with the Strasbourg, France-based court on the grounds that the government had violated Jews' human rights, especially "the right to perform religious actions freely."

"The committee believes that this construction breaches Jewish law because the cemetery is holy land for Jews and they are not being allowed to perform religious actions and other rituals," Maskova said.

"The cemetery must not be disturbed in any way."

Maskova also said she applied to a Prague court for an injunction to halt construction work at the site, also on human rights grounds.

"These are preliminary proceedings with the court and it will take weeks or months for a decision to be reached," she said of the move for an injunction.

But time is working against the committee: The Czech insurance company Ceska pojistovna, which owns the site, said it will be ready to move ahead with construction as early as next month.

As part of the work, the insurance firm plans to encase the remains from the cemetery in concrete as soon as up to 160 skeletons previously removed from the site for anthropological research are returned.

The issue first hit the international stage last year, when misinformation relayed over the Internet said the burial site was Prague's famous Old Cemetery, actually located a half-mile away in the Old Jewish Quarter.

The involvement of foreign Jewish groups became particularly heated earlier this year, Czech Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon recently said, following another misinformation campaign over the Internet. This time, said Sidon, "Jews acting in their own interests" spread rumors that the Prague Jewish community owned the site and had sold it to Ceska pojistovna.

Protests by those groups have made the local community's job considerably harder, Sidon charged.

In June, Czech police fined a dozen "English-speaking" Jewish protesters for entering the construction site and refusing to leave.

The committee has consistently refused to accept a compromise worked out between the Czech government and the Prague Jewish community to allow construction work to continue around and below the section of cemetery lying underneath the construction project.

The compromise flew in the face of a rabbinical ruling by

Yisrael Meir Lau, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, that no construction should take place around the site.

The legal step marks a change in tactics by the London-based group, which has organized a series of protests at the site, as well as at Czech embassies in London and Brussels.

Rabbi Herschel Gluck, a member of the group, said at a recent news conference that the case of the cemetery was "one of the most painful issues in Jewish European history since the Second World War."

The committee's executive director, A.C. Ginsberg, said the group would continue to voice its opposition to the construction around the world.

"We cannot and will never agree with something that is against the Jewish law," he said.

"We want to make it absolutely crystal clear that any desecration of the cemetery that has been done or will be done in the future is strongly opposed by all Orthodox Jews around the world," Ginsberg added.

The Czech government is unlikely to heed the committee's last-ditch appeals.

The Czech foreign minister stated recently that the cemetery issue is an "internal matter," while Czech Culture Minister Pavel Dostal ruled out a change of heart on the agreement reached in March. □

Comments from Israeli president fan flames of secular-religious rift*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Less than two weeks on the job, Israeli President Moshe Katsav is learning how difficult it will be to keep his inaugural promise to foster unity.

Katsav drew the ire of secular-rights activists over remarks attributed to him in an interview with a fervently Orthodox newspaper.

The religiously observant Katsav, who took office two weeks ago promising to promote tolerance and national unity, was quoted as saying that "the Jewish people would not exist if not for" the observant.

"If secularism dominated in the past hundreds of years, we would have long ago disintegrated and dispersed."

He was also quoted as saying, making a reference to two legislators from secular parties, "I say to all of the Tommy Lapid and Yossi Sarids to show respect for those who keep the Torah commandments."

Knesset member Joseph Paritzky, of the secular-rights Shinui Party headed by Lapid, threatened to start impeachment proceedings unless Katsav apologized for the remarks.

If not for the secular "Zionist movement that brought the Jewish people to its homeland," said Paritzky, "Katsav would still be sitting in Iran under an Ayatollah regime."

Sarid, leader of the Meretz Party, said, "If that's unity, I wonder what incitement is."

Katsav, who as a child immigrated with his family to Israel from Iran, tried to put a quick end to the controversy, saying his remarks were taken out of context and that he did not intend to offend anyone. Officials from Meretz and Shinui accepted Katsav's apology. □