



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 171

Monday, September 11, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinians delay declaration

The mini-Parliament of the PLO postponed a declaration of statehood until at least Nov. 15.

The widely expected decision by the 129-member Palestinian Central Council to delay the declaration from the Sept. 13 date came after a second and final day of meetings in the Gaza Strip.

Clinton, Barak meet again

President Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met for unscheduled talks Saturday to discuss whether Israeli-Palestinian negotiations can be advanced.

The two leaders "thought it would be useful to touch base one more time before they leave New York," said P.J. Crowley, a spokesman for Clinton's National Security Council.

A day earlier, before holding a meeting at the United Nations, Clinton was overheard saying, "This Middle East thing — it's maddening."

Aryan Nations loses judgment

A \$6.3 million judgment handed down Sept. 7 against a white supremacist group was just the first step toward shutting the group down, a civil rights lawyer said.

Morris Dees, who represented a woman and her son who were attacked by Aryan Nations' guards, said he intends to turn the group's fenced property into a tolerance center.

On Saturday, Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler vowed that his group would remain in Idaho even if the group's compound is seized to pay the judgment.

"They cannot run me out of northern Idaho with my tail between my legs," Butler, 82, said from a church pulpit, while standing next to a silver bust of Hitler.

Survivors sue French railroad

A group of Holocaust survivors sued France's national railroad in a U.S. court, demanding that it pay damages for shipping some 75,000 Jews to Nazi death camps.

The lawsuit said the railroad ran its deportation trains as if they were part of its ordinary commercial business, but selected cars with no broken boards to prevent escapes.

REDEFINING THE SYNAGOGUE

Funders ruffle rabbinic feathers at synagogue renewal gathering

By Julie Wiener

CHICAGO (JTA) — The details about North America's latest Jewish mega-philanthropy unfolded a bit like a mystery drama in which the detective begins the closing scene with, "You're probably wondering why I've brought you all together here tonight."

Three weeks before Rosh Hashanah, three of American Jewry's wealthiest donors brought a handpicked group of 150 Jewish leaders to a "summit" in Chicago, put them up in a downtown hotel for a busy 26 hours and waited until the last hour to announce their plans: to invest \$18 million during the next five years to "help achieve systemic change of the synagogue."

The Synagogue Transformation and Renewal triumvirate of businessmen-turned-philanthropists — Edgar Bronfman, Charles Schusterman and Michael Steinhardt — will concentrate their funding on the following:

- Awarding \$500,000 per year in challenge grants for "innovative approaches" to synagogue issues such as membership, leadership, staffing, education and worship services;
- Creating a program to train synagogue consultants;
- Convening meetings for congregational leaders from all denominations;
- Promoting public awareness of synagogues and advocating Jewish federations and other philanthropies to increase funding for synagogues; and
- Using new technology such as videoconferencing and the Internet to offer professional development courses for rabbis.

Founded last December, STAR has held smaller regional conferences and conducted research, but its precise direction had been under wraps until the Sept. 6-7 event.

The large cash announcement and element of mystery were not the only unusual aspects of the historic gathering. It started off somewhat uncharacteristically by offering participants 10-minute back rubs and, despite its spiritual agenda, shared the hotel with a conference for the more superficially concerned Mary Kay cosmetics.

In the hours between the massages and finale, the participants — most of whom are rabbis or professionals known for their involvement in promoting synagogue change — puzzled among themselves as to just what the three funders had up their sleeves.

It was an ingathering of thinkers from rarely intersecting American Jewish worlds — and not all were the usual suspects.

While representatives of the four major streams of Judaism and a handful of federation folks were present, participants also included people used to being relegated to the fringes: gay and lesbian rabbis, Jewish Renewal leaders, proponents of Jewish meditation, people from organizations reaching out to intermarried couples and the president of an alternative seminary called the Academy for Jewish Religion.

Among the more off-beat individuals:

- Shmuley Boteach, a young Orthodox rabbi known for cavorting with celebrities and writing provocatively titled books that attempt to bring Jewish values to mainstream culture;
- Niles Goldstein, a young Reform rabbi who recently authored "God at the Edge," a book about finding spirituality while embarking on adventures like dogsledding in the Arctic Circle;

MIDEAST FOCUS

Army: Mistakes led to failed raid

Faulty judgment and operational mistakes led Israeli army snipers to kill three of their own soldiers during a botched attempt to capture a Palestinian militant, Israel's top military commander said.

A high-level military committee that investigated the raid found the Aug. 27 operation was too complicated, involved too many separate units and was badly implemented.

Sabbath proposals attacked

Some members of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's One Israel bloc believe he went too far in calling for public bus service and El Al flights on the Sabbath.

Sources in the party were quoted by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as saying the steps declared by the prime minister as part of a civil reform package contradict the Labor Party platform and a consensus within the party supporting the religious status quo.

Intel threatens to pick new site

The world's largest chipmaker warned that it may pick a new country for its planned \$3 billion microprocessor factory if Israel does not commit to paying more of the cost.

Intel executives also said the company is behind schedule with plans to build the new plant in the southern town of Kiryat Gat.

Rabin widow assails Barak

The widow of Yitzhak Rabin faulted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak for making too many concessions to the Palestinians and said Barak is not heir to the legacy of her husband.

Leah Rabin told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot that "Yitzhak is turning over in his grave" because Barak offered the Palestinians compromises on the Temple Mount and control over parts of the Old City in Jerusalem.



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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• Gary Schoenberg and Laurie Rutenberg, married rabbis from Portland, Ore., who regularly invite 40 "disconnected" Jews at a time to their home for Shabbat and holiday celebrations.

Despite the diversity, men outnumbered women by a ratio of roughly 2-1, and there were a few glaring absences: cantors and grass-roots synagogue lay leaders.

While many there were advocates for synagogue transformation efforts such as Synagogue 2000, others complained that these efforts focus too much on things like fiddling with liturgy or getting people singing rather than addressing people's Jewish knowledge or relationship to God.

Rabbi Michael Balinsky, director of professional development at the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School — a two-year program of adult Jewish learning — said the conference focused more on the "liturgical experience of the synagogue — the music, the singing" than the "transformation emerging from education or how synagogues can be transformed through the education experience."

With such a diverse crew assembled, a frequent complaint was that there was too much programming and not enough time for networking.

By the end of the first night many were angered and frustrated by the funders' blunt — and, according to some, ignorant — criticisms of synagogue life.

"This is some very well-meaning people tripping over every buzzword in the Jewish world without providing any focus or direction," said Rami Shapiro, a Miami rabbi who runs a Jewish Web site called simplyjewish.com.

Shapiro was on his way out of a session in which Steinhardt had called the Reform and Conservative movements "accidents of history," and Bronfman — after stating that "rabbis don't own synagogues" — explained that he finds it more spiritually meaningful to perform the Havdalah ceremony on Sunday nights, when he returns from his country home, than at the actual conclusion of Shabbat.

Some, like Reform Rabbi Balfour Brickner, sharply objected to the philanthropists' assessment that the liberal denominations may not last, but others predicted a power shift away from denominational loyalties and toward collaboration, both among different denominations and different types of institutions, like synagogues, federations and Jewish community centers.

At the end of the first night, many griped privately about the philanthropists — with several calling the speeches "amorphous" — but hesitated to give their names for publication for fear of jeopardizing their chances of getting funding down the road.

"Part of what we witnessed last night was the inherent danger of having funders set the agenda," said one Reform rabbi at breakfast the next day. "There was a lot of sophistication in the room but it wasn't on the stage."

Later that morning, Steinhardt was offering his version of an olive branch, saying, "I gather that last night we ruffled some feathers," and then adding, "I'm sorry we didn't have a chance to argue and share thoughts. I hope there will be such opportunities, not for the sake of argument but for heaven."

And at the summit's conclusion, Richard Joel, the president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, urged participants not to be cynical or put off by the donors' confrontational styles.

"They want to learn and often say outrageous things to engage people in conversation," he said of the donors, all of whom are Hillel supporters.

One East Coast rabbi who did not want her name used remained cynical as she left the summit.

"A lot of people feel used," she said, calling the event a "24-hour press conference" in which the leaders — all of whom were busy with the high holidays approaching — were "props."

But others were cautiously optimistic, saying they were glad to see their issues talked about and the promise of funding.

Rutenberg, of Portland, described it as "an exceptional Jewish experience," adding that "it's important to think big and have vision."

However, she warned, money isn't all that is needed.

"Money itself isn't going to bring us to the Jewish future we want," she said. "It's going to come from the best of our teachers inspiring as many people as they can, then people living Jewishly and inspiring others by sharing it in warm, joyous ways." □

JEWISH WORLD

Half back Lieberman on religion

Almost half of all Americans believe Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman is spending the right amount of time discussing religion in the campaign, according to a new poll.

Some 48 percent believe Lieberman is not talking too much about religion, 24 percent disagree and 24 percent are not sure, said the Reuters/Zogby poll of 1,001 voters.

Fifty-five percent of Jews believe the Connecticut senator is spending the right amount of time on religion, as do 52 percent of Protestants and 49 percent of Catholics.

Report: Shoah lawyer sued

A lawyer who has sought restitution on behalf of Holocaust victims in much-publicized class-action lawsuits is being accused by other clients of abandoning their cases and not returning their phone calls for years, according to The New York Times.

Edward Fagan has a misconduct complaint pending against him in New Jersey, and one client recently won a malpractice judgment against him, the newspaper said.

Moscow Jewish center delayed

A meeting during which a Russian Jewish umbrella group planned to lay the cornerstone of a new community center is being postponed until November because of a lack of funds and the inability of the group's leader to attend the meeting, according to sources.

The leader of the Russian Jewish Congress, Vladimir Goussinsky, has been living abroad since he left the country this summer after the Kremlin dropped charges of embezzlement against him.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, a rival umbrella group, is going ahead with its plans to inaugurate its Jewish community center on Sept. 18.

Judge rules against French banks

A New York judge rejected a motion by French banks to dismiss a billion-dollar case brought against them by Holocaust survivors who charge that the banks helped the Nazis steal their families' assets.

The banks criticized the judge's decision, saying the issue should not be dealt with in court.

Panel: Drop Austrian sanctions

A European Union panel recommended that sanctions against Austria be lifted.

It said the measures adopted by the other 14 member states are counterproductive — and the new Austrian government has taken actions to fight racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Polish government says disco near Auschwitz not appropriate

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — The Polish government has joined Jewish groups in criticizing the opening of a disco in a building near the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

"Places of amusement should not be situated at areas marked with the suffering of the inmates of former death and concentration camps," the government said.

In a statement issued last Friday, the government said it could not order the disco's closure because it is privately owned. But the government strongly urged its owners to move it to another place.

"The government will do all it can to see this is done under the existing legal order," the statement added. It did not say what this could involve, and a government spokesman declined to elaborate.

The disco, opened in August, is situated in the town of Oswiecim, about a mile from the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp where the Nazis killed nearly 1.5 million people, most of them Jews.

Authorities in Oswiecim consented at the time to the disco, saying the building was outside a zone where activities that could be offensive to the memory of concentration camp victims are prohibited.

But the disco is situated in a former tannery where the Nazis employed slave laborers and where luggage and clothes brought to Auschwitz by its victims were sorted.

In the years since the end of World War II, the former tannery buildings have been used as industrial plants, wholesalers and a shoe shop.

Jewish groups and others have protested the establishment of the disco, which is located next door to a German-run International Youth Meeting Center.

The center hosts young people visiting the Auschwitz camp and also hosts seminars and meetings on Holocaust-related topics.

Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a Righteous Gentile and survivor of Auschwitz who heads the International Auschwitz Council, issued a statement saying he was "astonished" that the disco was approved "without consulting historians, and against the wishes of the provincial governor."

A group that has long monitored developments at Auschwitz, the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, protested the disco during a demonstration earlier this month outside the Polish Consulate in New York.

Glenn Richter, an official with the group, said at the time, "The desecration of Jewish memory at Auschwitz is also the trampling of the memory of the many thousands of Polish citizens who died there, too. If you do not respect the martyrdom of others, you do not respect yourself."

The staff at the Youth Meeting Center also protested the disco, saying the noise disturbs the center's activities and guests. "All around the world, there is a principle of not opening discos near hospitals, churches and places like this," Meeting Center Director Leszek Szuster told the Warsaw Voice newspaper.

A spokesman for the owners said the pressure was "unjustified" and noted that the disco was located well away from the Auschwitz camp and outside the protected zone.

"Oswiecim is a place where normal people live and want to have normal lives," Zdzislaw Bieniek was quoted as saying. However, he added that the owners may eventually bow to government pressure. □

Immigration to Israel up

MOSCOW (JTA) — Immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union increased by 14 percent during the first seven months of 2000, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Some 27,371 new immigrants from the former Soviet Union arrived in Israel during that period. □

THE 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES**Sydney gives Jewish Olympians red-carpet treatment for Games***By Shira Sebban**Australian Jewish News*

SYDNEY (JTA) — A Jewish Olympics Web site. Jewish drop-in centers. A permanent memorial to the Israelis slain during the 1972 Olympics in Munich.

These are just a few of the things Sydney's Jewish community is making available for the thousands of Jewish visitors who are descending on the city for the 27th Olympic Games, which begin Friday.

Established by the Sydney Olympics Jewish Organizing Committee, the Web site can be found at www.join.org.au/sojoc.

SOJOC has also produced an introductory brochure on the Sydney Jewish community, Guide to Jewish Sydney, which will be available at hotels, travel agencies and the drop-in centers during the Games, which run through Oct. 1.

"SOJOC was founded to coordinate hospitality for Jewish visitors," SOJOC publicist Naomi Jones said. "We've had inquiries from people coming from Israel, the United States, Europe, Bolivia, Canada and Ukraine, looking for all kinds of information, in particular where to go for Rosh Hashanah."

A number of finals events, as well as the closing ceremony, will clash with Rosh Hashanah. It is still uncertain whether Israel's athletes will be permitted by their government to participate on those days. While religious services will be held in synagogues all over Sydney during the Games, Jewish athletes and others residing in the Olympic Village will have their own rabbi and chaplain, as well as a religious center.

Assisted by several leaders of the Bnei Akiva youth movement, Rabbi Mendel Kastel will conduct Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah services, and will also be on hand to offer counseling to those who missed out on a medal — or are feeling homesick.

Daily prayers and study groups will also be available. Families throughout the Sydney Jewish community have volunteered to open their homes to visitors who require Shabbat hospitality.

Two Jewish community drop-in hospitality centers are also being established to welcome overseas and interstate guests.

Assisted by volunteers, the B'nai B'rith Center and Hakoah Club — a Jewish social, cultural and sporting club located in the heart of Jewish Sydney and 200 yards from the site of the beach volleyball events — will feature information booths, free Internet access, giant television screens to watch the Olympics, expert sports commentary, Jewish sporting exhibitions and kosher food.

Designated as the official Jewish home for the Israeli Olympic team, Hakoah Club's facilities will be utilized by the Israeli athletes during the Games and will record all Israeli results.

The club will also be the venue for "Shabbat Shalom Sydney," an Olympic Shabbat dinner for young adults on Sept. 22.

The Sydney Jewish community will dedicate a permanent memorial to the 11 Israeli athletes who were murdered by extremist Palestinians at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. The ceremony, which will be attended by the entire Israeli Olympic team, will be held on Sept. 26 — the 28th anniversary of the attack on the Jewish calendar.

Sponsored by Israel's Olympic team, the Jewish National Fund and a host of Jewish communal organizations, the memorial is an eight-ton, marble-clad concrete base on which the names of the 11 athletes will be engraved.

The centrepiece of the memorial is a segment of volcanic rock brought from the Galilee in Israel, selected because of its resemblance to an extinguished Olympic torch, representing the Olympic dream which was expunged for the 11 slain athletes.

Eleven trees will be planted around the monument, and the Hakoah Club will host an official reception for the Israeli Olympic team after the dedication.

On a cultural note, a selection of the Dead Sea Scrolls will be on display at the Art Gallery of New South Wales until Oct. 15. Part of the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival, the exhibition is being held in conjunction with the Israel Antiquities Authority and features 12 fragmentary scrolls, plus related archaeological artifacts from in Israel's Judean Desert.

For those interested in local Jewish history, the Australian Jewish Historical Society will be conducting walking tours of old Jewish Sydney throughout the Olympic Games.

Collectors will be able to take home a limited-edition, silver, satin-finished medallion commemorating Australia 2000.

Individually numbered and made in Australia, the medallion will include a leaflet about the Sydney Jewish community.

Requests for the medallions can be e-mailed to medallion@join.org.au. □

Dubrovnik to host collection of valuable Sephardi Judaica*By Vlasta Kovac*

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — An invaluable collection of Judaica is expected to go on display next year in the southern city of Dubrovnik, according to the leader of the Jewish community there.

A foundation founded by Francesca von Habsburg, wife of a member of Austria's Habsburg dynasty, plans to collect the \$100,000 needed to house the exhibit in a building adjacent to Dubrovnik's historic synagogue, according to the community's president, Dr. Bruno Horovitz. The exhibit will take place by the summer of next year, he added.

The collection includes 54 pieces that Sephardi Jews brought to Dubrovnik after the Spanish Expulsion in 1492. Among the pieces are Torah scrolls dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries.

The Dubrovnik Synagogue, considered the oldest Sephardi synagogue still in use in Europe is located at No. 3 Judiska — or Jewish — Street in the narrow, stone-paved streets of Dubrovnik's former Jewish Ghetto.

It is a two-story building, just like all the other houses in the neighborhood.

Only the inscription on the door indicates that it is a house of worship, which for centuries housed the collection.

Dubrovnik's official Jewish Community numbers 46 members, some of whom can trace their lineage to the families who migrated there from Spain five centuries ago.

The synagogue's roof was hit by two shells during the civil war that ravaged the former Yugoslavia during the early 1990s. The building was renovated in 1997. □