



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Data: Calif. Jews went for Davis

Jews backed Gov. Gray Davis in this week's California recall vote, according to exit polls.

Sixty-nine percent voted against the recall effort, while 31 percent supported it, according to data collected by the Los Angeles Times. Sixty-nine percent of Jewish voters voted for the incumbent Davis in the last scheduled California gubernatorial election in 2002.

The recall vote Tuesday passed overall in California by 55 percent to 45 percent. Thirty-one percent of Jewish voters backed Arnold Schwarzenegger, who won the race for governor, which also appeared on Tuesday's ballot.

Fifty-two percent voted for the Democratic candidate for governor, Lt. Gov. Cruz Butstamante.

West Bank bombing

A female suicide bomber wounded at least two Israeli soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint, military sources said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Thursday afternoon attack at an army liaison office outside Tulkarm.

Jewish exec. salaries listed

Executives of Jewish philanthropies and other public organizations earned between \$120,000 and \$450,000 in 2002.

The 12th annual salary survey by the Chronicle of Philanthropy, published on Oct. 2, showed that Stephen Solender, president emeritus of the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella, topping the list of Jewish professionals with an annual salary of \$450,417, not including benefits.

The highest-paid federation leader was Robert Aronson, of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, who earned \$380,940, plus benefits. Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles, earned \$449,836 plus benefits. Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, made \$357,375, plus benefits. Leaders of 235 major Jewish and non-Jewish non-profits participated in the survey.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Oct. 13.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Gibson's movie about Jesus sparks internal Jewish debate

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Movie star Mel Gibson's controversial \$25 million film about Jesus has sparked a new battle — among Jews.

For months, Gibson's "The Passion" has spurred headlines from the Los Angeles Times to The New York Times for its reportedly graphic portrayal of the last days of Jesus and its laying heavy blame for his death on the Jews.

Much of the media coverage has focused on the conflict between Gibson, who belongs to a traditionalist Catholic sect opposed to Vatican reforms in general, and some Jewish figures who warn the film will stir anti-Semitism by splicing together the most anti-Jewish portions of the New Testament gospels with extra-biblical writings of mystics who blamed all Jews for the crucifixion.

Now that debate is turning inward, as Jews point fingers at one another over the way they have dealt with Gibson and argue over just how Jews should deal with Christian portrayals of the Jesus story in popular culture.

The internal conflict over the Gibson movie, meanwhile, comes amid Jewish disagreement over the release of yet another movie about Jesus, "The Gospel of John," which some Jews are calling a more sensitive portrayal of events.

On one side are figures such as Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, and Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

They have led an unsuccessful campaign to confer with Gibson to discuss their concerns in the hope that he will tone down the film's alleged anti-Jewish theme.

"We're not into censorship, we're into sensitivity," Foxman told JTA.

On the other side stand those such as Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, president and founder of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and Michael Medved, a conservative film critic and observant Jew, who say the drive to refocus "The Passion" will misfire — and badly.

"The Jewish response so far has been extraordinarily counterproductive of Jewish interests, short-sighted, ill-considered and irresponsible," Medved said.

Christians may view the criticism by Foxman and others as "the Jews trying to stifle us from practicing our religion," Eckstein said.

The storm swirling around "The Passion" intensified when the ADL convened nine Jesus scholars, most of them Catholics, who reviewed an initial screenplay of the movie this spring. The panel declared that it was "neither a true rendition of the Gospel stories nor a historically accurate account of what could have happened in Jerusalem, on Passover," when Pilate was prefect and Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest.

Gibson's Icon Productions then charged that the historians illegally obtained a rough draft of the script, prompting the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which had reportedly lent the panel its blessings, to distance itself and officially reserve judgment pending the film's opening.

Gibson's movie company is still negotiating to find a distributor for the film, which is in Aramaic and Latin with English subtitles.

Meanwhile, Gibson has staged screenings of the movie for private groups of Christians and Jews. Some Christians have declared themselves enraptured, but Philadelphia's Ukrainian Archbishop, Stefan Soroka, is not among them.

Soroka told the Catholic News Service that the film left him "uneasy" for its

MIDEAST FOCUS

Haifa bombing toll rises to 20

A 59-year-old woman died of wounds suffered during Saturday's suicide bombing in Haifa.

The death of the woman, whose name was not released, brings the death toll in the attack at Maxim's restaurant to 20.

Bombed cafe reopens

A Jerusalem cafe rocked by a suicide bombing last month has reopened. A local resident, New Jersey-born Martin Lee, said he would pay for all customers' drinks at Cafe Hillel on Thursday night, the Jerusalem Post reported. Seven people were killed and dozens wounded in the Sept. 9 attack.

Palestinian Cabinet on hold

The Palestinian Authority Parliament delayed confirming Prime Minister Ahmed Karia's new emergency Cabinet.

The Palestinian legislative council indefinitely deferred the ratification that had been scheduled for Thursday, with several lawmakers citing a dispute over the Cabinet's powers.

Yasser Arafat swore in the emergency cabinet Tuesday in an effort to head off Israeli pressure following Saturday's suicide bombing in Haifa. Under Palestinian law, an emergency Cabinet must be ratified within a month.

Israel: Reject U.N. report

Israel wants a U.N. report on hunger in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to be withdrawn.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Yaakov Levy, says the report should be deemed "unfit for presentation" when the U.N. Human Rights Commission meets in the spring. Israeli officials say the report's author, Jean Ziegler, is biased. Ziegler has told reporters that Palestinians have been "reduced to begging" by Israeli security measures.



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depiction of an "evil" high Jewish priest Caiaphas, who according to some New Testament accounts turned Jesus over to the Roman leader Pontius Pilate upon the Jews' urging.

Such a story line will "have significant potential to incite hostility to Jews and Judaism," Soroka said.

The Second Vatican Council of 1964 reversed centuries of official church policy collectively blaming the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion in its historic document, *Nostra Aetate*.

Since then, many interfaith efforts have begun, and the current pope, John Paul II, apologized for church silence during the Holocaust and urged Catholic leaders to forge ties to Jews.

In recent weeks, two Vatican officials have praised the film, and one urged all cardinals and bishops to see it.

But Cardinal Walter Kasper, the pope's top liaison to the Jewish community, said these were "purely personal" views that did not reflect Rome's official stance.

Among those attempting to meet with Gibson is Rabbi A. James Rudin, senior interreligious affairs adviser for the American Jewish Committee and a veteran of interfaith dialogue.

Rudin, one of a handful of Jewish officials who saw the film, said the film's depiction of the events surrounding Jesus' death are historically inaccurate.

For example, he said, the film overstates the authority Caiaphas held and made the Roman leader Pontius Pilate seem like a weak Hamlet figure.

Further, the film included "toxic" images of "conniving bloodthirsty Jews who used Roman power" to carry out the crucifixion, he said.

Soroka's remarks are "very important" because he is the first Catholic religious leader "who has spoken out so clearly in pointing out some of the flaws" of the film, Rudin said.

Rudin said the movie he watched is a celluloid update of the once-notorious German passion play from the town of Oberammergau, which, starting in the 15th century, ignited crusades against Jews.

Hitler urged people to read or watch the play for its depiction "of the face of international Jewry."

But that play began in recent years to be revised after Vatican calls for Catholic-Jewish rapprochement.

Rabbi David Rosen, senior rabbi at Houston's Congregation Beth Yeshurun, the largest Conservative synagogue in the United States, said the film left him "disturbed" after a screening in Houston.

"The film is almost unwatchable in its portrayal of Roman brutality, but you are never allowed to forget that the brutality could have stopped at any point if the high priest had just said enough," Rosen said.

While it will unlikely spur new anti-Semitism, the movie "will confuse people about the role of Jews in the film and how they are portrayed in the Gospels," he said.

For his part, Foxman, who has not seen the movie, said he hoped to convince Gibson to film a spot to tack onto the end of his Jesus movie saying "Some out there believe Jews are guilty of his suffering — but don't believe that."

Others, such as Medved, contend the Jewish community should steer clear of Gibson's movie.

Were some film producers planning an adaptation of the Book of Esther — which Medved said is the case — Jews should certainly weigh in. "But it's a terrible position for us to claim how to tell Christians what to believe," he said.

Eckstein also maintains that it's not Jews but Christians whose reactions to the film remain most relevant.

"I would want to know: What do those Christians who devoted the last three decades to interfaith relations, what are their kishkes telling them, rather than Abe Foxman's view," he said, using the Yiddish word for guts.

Foxman said Eckstein has "spent a lifetime" building Christian-Jewish ties and he "has a lot at stake in the relationship."

Eckstein admits that is true: In the past year his group helped raise \$20 million from Christian groups for Israel, and more than \$100 million for Israel and Jewish causes in the last decade. □

JEWISH WORLD

Recession harms day schools

Jewish day schools are suffering because of the economic downturn in the United States, a new study found.

In a survey of 88 Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and community day schools representing one-third of all students enrolled nationally, 53 of the schools reported feeling a "considerable" economic impact from the downturn, while 31 said they are experiencing "minor" fallout. The study was conducted by the Avi Chai Foundation.

Arab-Israeli battles at Rutgers

Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian activists are slated to demonstrate this weekend at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Israel Inspires, organized by Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, were expected to rally Thursday night with an event organizers hope will draw 5,000 people, the New Jersey Jewish News reported.

At an adjacent site, New Jersey Solidarity and other pro-Palestinian groups are planning to stage a counter-demonstration. Hillel activists will gather for weekend workshops at New Brunswick's Hyatt Hotel, while New Jersey Solidarity holds a conference nearby.

Olympics boycott threatened

A Jewish group is threatening to call for a boycott of the 2004 Olympics if an art exhibition that allegedly glorifies Palestinian suicide bombings is allowed to proceed in Athens.

An embroidery montage in an exhibit called "Body Milk," scheduled to open Oct. 20, shows a pregnant woman pushing a cart down a supermarket aisle. Next to her are knitted women's vests with multiple outside pockets, similar to those worn by Palestinian suicide bombers.

Nazi-era officer to be deported

A former Nazi-era police officer in Lithuania will be deported from the United States.

The Board of Immigration Appeals affirmed an order of deportation this week against Algimantas Dailide, 82, of Gulfport, Fla., who took part in the arrest of Jews attempting to flee the Vilna Ghetto. Dailide was a member of the Lithuanian security police, or *Saugumas*, and came to the United States in 1950. His citizenship was revoked in 1997.

War criminal wants pardon

A former SS officer under house arrest in Italy for his role in a wartime massacre appealed for a pardon.

Erich Priebke, serving a life sentence for his role in the murders of 335 people, including 75 Jews, said he would like to be freed to spend time with his sick wife in Argentina.

Plan for religious reform in Israel leads to threats to quit government

By Dan Baron

TEL AVIV (JTA) — The launch of a long-awaited reform of Israel's religious institutions has rattled a government more used to weathering outside challenges such as terrorism and economic slumps.

Two ministers from the National Religious Party stormed out of an Israeli Cabinet vote on Wednesday, saying they could quit the government over a proposal to disband the Religious Affairs Ministry and transfer some powers to the Justice Ministry, which is headed by Yosef "Tommy" Lapid of the secularist Shinui Party.

With 18 of the remaining ministers approving the reform and only three opposed, the threat against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is slight. Indeed, a walkout by the hawkish NRP could free up Sharon to make future concessions in talks with the Palestinians, however unlikely that seems now.

But hints of strife in the government, especially over religious issues, are never insignificant in a Jewish state still unresolved in its identity.

Under the plan, the Religious Affairs Ministry will be dismantled by year's end and its various departments moved to other portfolios. Thus, for example, the rabbinical courts will go the Justice Ministry, pre-conversion academies to the Immigration and Absorption Ministry and local religious councils to the Interior Ministry.

The fate of the Chief Rabbinate is unclear, after Sharon ruled out its inclusion in the Prime Minister's Office. Israeli officials said the change is unlikely to affect the Orthodox control over life-cycle issues such as marriages, divorces and burials.

But one Reform Jewish leader in the United States hailed the decision as a victory for the liberal streams in Israel.

"This is a momentous turning point in the struggle to achieve the creation of a pluralistic society in Israel, based on a more sensible accommodation of issues of religion and state," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of ARZA/World Union. "It is a goal we have been working toward for two generations."

The Knesset is expected to ratify the change when it returns from its holiday recess. If so, the NRP will consider leaving the government, party leader Efraim Eitam said.

"The government made a wretched decision that disgraces the institution of the Chief Rabbinate and harms the Jewish character of the state," Eitam said.

According to sources, Sharon told the Cabinet before the vote: "I would never lend a hand to challenging the Chief Rabbinate as the highest religious authority in Israel."

It was Sharon's Likud Party that undertook to dismantle the Religious Affairs Ministry during its previous term in government, a reform long called for by governments of various political stripes. Still, many in Israel had assumed that the initiative originated elsewhere in the Cabinet — with Lapid and Shinui.

According to media reports, Shinui pressured Sharon to finally move on the reform.

"Shinui is a faction that uses force, and there is no way of reaching a dialogue for partnership with it," former NRP leader Rabbi Yitzhak Levy said.

Lapid, a Holocaust survivor, reportedly was close to tears at the Cabinet session, defending himself from charges of hounding the Orthodox.

Lapid and other Shinui Cabinet ministers had threatened to quit the government after Sharon had promised the country's two chief rabbis on Tuesday night that the rabbinical courts would remain under the auspices of the Religious Affairs Ministry for at least two more months.

However, a deal Sharon reached with Shinui does state that the Chief Rabbinate will maintain a degree of control over the rabbinical courts, to be determined by a special committee. The accord also states that authority over the Chief Rabbinate will not be transferred to Lapid's Justice Ministry, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported.

For all his conciliatory tones, however, Lapid made no apologies for supporting the reform of what he long has considered wasteful establishments.

"The secular revolution made a very important step forward, and I am very proud of that achievement," he said, "but I promise not to exploit my new authority, and to accord the rabbinical courts all the proper respect." □

Israel's U.N. ambassador warns U.S. defense of Israel may change

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — No matter what kind of anti-Israel resolutions Arab countries bring to the U.N. Security Council, the Jewish state can almost always count on the United States for support.

But that soon could change, says Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.

In a conference call Wednesday with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Ambassador Dan Gillerman said he fears the United States may seek to curry favor with the Arab world by backing future resolutions that pressure Israel — for example, demanding Israel implement the "road map" peace plan or stop building its West Bank security fence.

One resolution on the fence already is in the works. At Syria's request, the Security Council will meet Friday to discuss a Palestinian-drafted resolution calling for the elimination of Israel's security fence. It will be the first time the Security Council will be meeting to discuss the matter.

Since Security Council resolutions technically are binding, Gillerman said, a refusal by Israel to implement them would put the Jewish state in violation of the council. Such a move could have negative public-relations implications, but it would not jeopardize Israel's U.N. status or put it at risk of retaliatory measures.

But the public-relations fallout could be significant.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said that if Israel violates the Security Council, the Jewish state "becomes Iraq" — that is, Israel could be labeled, like Iraq, as a rogue nation.

Unlike Israel, Iraq's violations of Security Council resolutions resulted in sanctions because the international body dealt with Iraq under a separate U.N. legal provision.

Gillerman said a resolution mandating implementation of the road map could "change the rules of the game" by transferring leadership on the peace plan away from the U.S. to the diplomatic "Quartet" — the United Nations, United States, European Union and Russia — that devised the plan. The Quartet generally is seen as less sympathetic to Israel's concerns than the United States.

The Security Council might "take over and hijack the road map," Gillerman told Jewish leaders on the conference call, which included JTA. He said the United Nations is a biased entity that tilts wildly in favor of the Palestinians.

Palestinian officials could not be reached for comment.

But it's precisely assessments of the world body like Gillerman's that gives some Jewish leaders a different impression of the situation.

Dan Mariaschin, executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International, says the United Nations' bias on Middle East issues undercuts the credibility of its resolutions — even when they win U.S. support.

"When it comes in a U.N. context, the place where Israel is consistently battered year in and year out, then the currency is minimal because of the place where it comes from," he said.

The United States has served as a safeguard against that bias.

Last month, the United States vetoed a proposed Security Council resolution calling on Israel to desist from "removing"

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, also indicated that he will use U.S. veto power again if Syria puts forth a resolution condemning Israel's airstrike on Sunday in Syria.

After two vetoes, however, the Americans may feel like they "have to give something to the Arab side," Gillerman said. "The fence and the Quartet may be easy things to give."

An Israeli U.N. official said Gillerman's assessment is based on information from diplomatic sources, including Arabs and Europeans.

In the meantime, diplomatic sources say Syria is adjusting a resolution it proposed Sunday criticizing Israel's airstrike earlier that day on an Islamic Jihad training base near Damascus.

The Syrian resolution, deemed too one-sided by most members of the Security Council, now includes amendments by France and Spain that condemn terrorism.

Officials say the United States prefers that the United Nations steer clear of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

No resolutions "impact positively on what's going on on the ground in the region," a U.S. official told JTA.

Still, the official said, even a watered-down version of Syria's resolution on the airstrike won't pass unless it meets the "Negroponte Doctrine."

Last year, Negroponte, who currently holds the rotating Security Council presidency, said the United States would veto any resolution on the Middle East that doesn't contain a denunciation of terrorism, explicit condemnation of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Brigade, and a call to destroy terrorist groups' infrastructure.

Another U.S. official said he was not aware of any existing or pending U.N. resolutions that would press for implementation of the road map or strengthen the Quartet's diplomatic role. He refused to comment on what America's position might be if a resolution on either of those issues were to come to the fore.

As for the draft resolution on the fence, he said, "We're studying it."

As recently as last weekend, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell blasted the fence in an interview with the Washington Post. "We have made it clear that the fence . . . is a problem," he said.

"If you want to put a fence on something that is a recognized border, the 'Green Line' — the boundary that divides Israel proper from the West Bank, captured from Jordan in 1967 — "then put a fence on your property line. But the more you intrude in Palestinian areas and the more it looks like it could be contiguous intrusion around large sections of Palestinian land that would prejudice subsequent negotiations as to what a Palestinian state may look like, that's a problem."

The "Green Line," which was established as the armistice line between Israel and Jordan at the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, is not a recognized international boundary.

In any case, many Jewish observers are not as alarmist about developments at the United Nations as Israel's U.N. ambassador.

"The U.S. wants to avoid using its veto as much as it can" because it isolates both Israel and the United States, said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

However, he said, "at the end of the day, the United States will not permit Israel to stand alone in a situation" where Israel would be considered in breach of the Security Council.

"We always have to be concerned, but I'm not worried," Foxman said. □