

*JEWISH*  
**Frontier**

MAY ■ JUNE ■ 1997

**PEACE:**

REALITY or ILLUSION?

**BIBI:**

TURMOIL IN LIKUD

**ZIONISM:**

THE CENTENNIAL  
1897 – 1997

**RUSSIA:**

IS A JEWISH FUTURE POSSIBLE?

**SPIES:**

THE NILI SAGA

**RELIGION:**

“CONVERSION” CONTROVERSY  
IN ISRAEL

## **ELECTIONS!**

How to Chose Delegates to the WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

DEADLINE — JUNE 1st • Turn to PAGE 31!

SINCE 1934 — A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL

# Help Elect America's Delegates to the 100th Anniversary World Zionist Congress

## Why Register for This Election?

1. The World Zionist Congress is the only global, democratically elected body of world Jewry. The representatives we elect to the World Zionist Congress will shape the priorities of the Jewish people, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, for years to come.

2. Traditionally, progressives have controlled the World Zionist Congress. This control is mirrored in the progressive nature of Israeli society, whose democratic institutions are outgrowths of the World Zionist Congress.

3. The World Zionist Congress elects the leadership of the World Zionist Organization. The elected leaders of the World Zionist Organization, in turn, serve on the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The Jewish Agency is the channel for the hundreds of millions of dollars we raise each year in America through the UJA for Israel and for Jewish and Zionist education worldwide.

The World Zionist Congress, then, is the only democratic forum for guiding the critical work of the Jewish Agency and the many vital organizations it funds.

## Why is it important for liberal and pro- gressive minded American Jews to register to vote?

1. The World Zionist Congress has 525 seats, distributed by country based on the size of each country's Jewish population. Of the 525 seats, Israel has 199 (38%) and the United States 162 (31%).

2. The selection of the Israeli delegates is keyed to the outcome of Israel's most recent general election. Diaspora delegations are determined by local elections in each country.

Due to the outcome of the last Israeli general election, the right wing nationalist and religious parties have greatly increased their strength in the Knesset and, therefore, their strength in Israel's delegation to the World Zionist Congress. The progressive ideological group associated with the Labor Party and Meretz, on the other hand, will have fewer members in the Israeli delegation.

3. The only way in which progressive Jews can maintain their historic control of the World Zionist Congress, is by "winning" in the Diaspora World Zionist Congress elections.

In particular, we Labor Zionists must do well in the American election in order to make up for losses in Israel. Registering large numbers of non-affiliated American Jews who will vote for the Labor/Meretz (progressive Zionist) slate is our key task at this time.

To register to vote, fill out the registration form on Page 31, enclose a \$2 check and return them to the American Elections Committee today at the Address indicated. Please do what you can to register other friends and family by copying this form before you fill it out. If you need more forms, call 212/366-1194.

Voter registration closes June 1, 1997. Registered voters will receive a World Zionist Congress mail ballot in September.

*Steve Weinberg*

**Turn To  
Page 31**

# JEWISH Frontier

SINCE 1934

A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL

*Founders*  
Hayim Greenberg  
Marie Syrkin

### *Editorial Board*

Henry Feingold, *Chairman*  
Saul B. Cohen  
Hyman Faine  
Jonathan J. Goldberg  
Emanuel S. Goldsmith  
Jerry Goodman  
Rabbi Mark W. Kiel  
Jeffrey V. Mallow  
Daniel Mann  
Mordecai Newman  
Samuel Norich  
Michael S. Perry  
Mark Raider  
Eduardo Rauch  
Chava Reich  
Mordecai Shtrigler  
Ezra Spicehandler  
Phyllis Sutker  
David Twersky

Nahum Guttman  
*Editor*

### **NOTE TO SUBSCRIBERS**

If you plan to move, please notify  
us six weeks in advance.

### **JEWISH FRONTIER**

275 Seventh Avenue  
17th Floor  
New York, NY 10001

Telephone: (212) 229-2280  
(212) 366-1194

Fax: (212) 675-7685



# CONTENTS

Vol. LXIV, No. 3 (626)  
MAY/JUNE 1997

WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS ELECTIONS	2 <i>Steve Weinberg</i>
EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES	4 <i>Susan Hattis Rolef</i>
PEACE: ZIONIST VISION OR FANTASY?	7 <i>Stanley A. Ringler</i>
LZA ON "CONVERSION" BILL	13 <i>Daniel Mann</i>
AT THE 1946 WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS	14 <i>David Breslau</i>
THE RUSSIAN ALIYAH	16 <i>Henry L. Feingold</i>
<b>Biography</b> AARON AARONSOHN	22 <i>Joseph Adler</i>
<b>Poetry</b> EARLY CALL	29 <i>Henry Glickman</i>
REGISTRATION FOR ZIONIST CONGRESS	31
<b>Contributors</b>	15

JEWISH FRONTIER (ISSN-0021-6453) is published bi-monthly by Labor Zionist Letters, Inc. Editorial and advertising offices at 275 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Circulation, Jewish Frontier, 275 Seventh Avenue, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10001.

Subscription rates for U.S. and possessions, \$15.00 per year for 6 issues, \$25.00 for two years for 12 issues. Add \$2.50 for Canada. All other countries — \$20.00 per year; All foreign subscribers — remit in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank. Back issues-payable in advance at \$5.00 each.

Editorial / article contributions should be sent to the editorial office and be accompanied by return postage. Editorial and advertising rates available on request.

All material (unless otherwise noted) © 1997 Jewish Frontier. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the official position of JEWISH FRONTIER.

JEWISH FRONTIER is available on microfilm from: University Microfilm, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Distributed by Bernhard De Boer, Inc., 113 East Centre St., Nutley, NJ 07110.

# EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

## The Netanyahu Version

By Susan Hattis Rolef

**B**inyamin Netanyahu's government has managed to scrape through once again — but only just, and the story is not yet over.

To those who do not know, or do not remember, what the recent scandal — which almost ended in an Israeli Prime Minister being indicted on criminal charges of fraud and breach of trust — concerned the announcement, back in January, that Ronnie Bar-On was to be Israel's next Attorney General, or as he is known in Hebrew "The Legal Adviser to the Government". Since the Attorney General is appointed by the government, it is not surprising that the person chosen should be someone who is in accord with the general goals of the government. On occasion he has also been a person with known political views. However, in the past the person chosen for the post has either been a judge or a person with proven academic and professional credentials.

### Israel's Attorney Generals since the establishment of the state

1948-50	Ya'acov Shimshon Shapira (later Minister of Justice)
1950-60	Haim Cohen (later Supreme Court Justice)
1960-63	Gideon Hausner (later Minister without Portfolio)
1963-68	Moshe Ben Ze'ev
1958-75	Me'ir Shamgar (later President of the Supreme Court)
1975-78	'Aharon Barak (today President of the Supreme Court)
1978-86	Yitzhak Zamir (today Supreme Court Justice)
1986-92	Yosef Harish
1992-96	Michael Ben Ya'ir
1997 (3 days)	Ronnie Bar-On
1997-	Eliakin Rubinstein (former Government Secretary, former peace negotiator with Jordan, and former District Court Judge)

Not surprisingly the choice of Ronnie Bar-On — a Jerusalem-based criminal lawyer, known as a *bon vivant* and light gambler, and an active member of the Jerusalem branch of the Likud, with whom Minister of Justice Tsahi Hanegbi had done his legal apprenticeship — raised quite a few eyebrows. Even more so did the fact that when Hanegbi presented Bar-On's candidacy to the government, he implied that the appointment had the blessing of the President of the Supreme Court, Aharon Barak, even though Barak had expressed strong reservations.

As a result of the scandal that followed, Bar-On resigned and Eliakim Rubinstein, who had previously declined being a candidate, stepped in to save the day. However, very soon the mini-scandal around the appointment turned into something much more serious. 'Ayala Hasson, a reporter of the first channel of Israel TV, announced that the background to the strange appointment had not been plain clumsiness, but extortion on the part of MK 'Arye Der'i — the political leader of Shas — who is currently standing trial on criminal charges. According to Hasson, Der'i had conditioned the voting of Shas for the Hebron Agreement with the Palestinians (signed on January 15) on Bar-On's appointment, and threatened to bring down the government if his attorney, Dan 'Avi Yitzhak, who was Netanyahu's preferred candidate, were appointed.

**P**rim Minister Netanyahu reacted to this story by stating that the whole thing was a "*kishkush*" (nonsense), but suggested that a police investigation be opened. The investigation lasted for well over two months, and was extremely tricky for several reasons. The first was that the Prime Minister had to be ques-

tioned, and was in fact questioned under warning. The second was that the witnesses were able to coordinate their positions, and thus the investigating team was unable to find answers to numerous key questions, such as who had first raised Bar-On's name as a candidate in the first place. The third was that most of the personalities who were investigated kept using the excuse "I do not remember" whenever confronted by the police investigators with evidence that seemed to contradict their basic claim to innocence. The reason for the epidemic of lapsed memories was legal. The persons in question were all advised that even if they were convinced of their innocence, it was preferable for them not to have to stand trial because the police does not have sufficient evidence, than to stand trial and possibly be found guilty of some relatively minor irregularities (which is what recently happened to several public figures on trial in other cases). In other words, the fuller the police files were of "I do not remember" answers, the less likely the decision to indict.

Fourth was the fact that the main source of the incriminating information was no other than Dan 'Avi Yitzhak. 'Avi Yitzhak had wanted the position of Attorney General and he was furious with Der'i, with whom he had fallen out long before the affair, who had played an active role in reversing his appointment. In fact, 'Avi Yitzhak's name had been removed from the list of candidates because he himself was also involved in an investigation on criminal charges. Fifth, someone within the police investigation team was leaking very tendentious information to the media, which led many government supporters and even certain persons within the Prime Minister's office to accuse the police of carrying out a political investigation.

What finally happened was that the police recommended that four persons be indicted: Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Minister of Justice Tsahi Hanegbi and the Prime Minister's Bureau Chief Avigdor Liberman, on charges of fraud and breach of trust, and MK Arye Der'i on charges of extortion. However, after careful consideration by State Attorney Edna Arbel and her team, and Attorney General Eliakim Rubinstein, it was decided that even though there was reason to believe that there was basis for the suspicions against all the parties involved, there was insufficient evi-

dence that would stand up in court in the cases of Netanyahu and Hanegbi. As to Liberman, and two other personalities — businessman and former Likud activist David Apel (who was on trial on criminal charges, but was finally found innocent) and the Chairman of the Attorneys' Association, Dror Hoter Yishai (infamous for his unbridled attacks on the Supreme Court and its President Aharon Barak) — it was decided to continue the investigation of criminal wrong-doing on their part. Only Der'i is to be indicted — after a hearing in which he will be given the opportunity to convince the State Attorney's office why he should not be put on trial.

Within minutes after the State Attorney and Attorney General completed their press conference, at which they announced their decision, Netanyahu appeared in a self-initiated, swaggering announcement to the public on the two television channels. Netanyahu admitted to certain faults in the way Bar-On had been appointed, but claimed that the investigation had proven his total innocence. He accused the media of partiality and the Opposition of trying to get rid of the democratically elected government by devious means.

**S**o what now?

First of all, it is clear that the current government isn't going to fall, and for the time being one shouldn't expect early elections. Yisrael Be'aliya and the Third Way, which had announced that they would leave the government if the findings in the investigation and the decisions of the State Attorney and Attorney General would be serious, decided that the actual outcome did not warrant their departure. Minister of Finance Dan Meridor and Minister of Communications Limor Livnat (both from Likud) who had objected to the Bar-On appointment in the first place, also decided to stay in the government.

Second, the idea of a National Unity Government is dead. All the Labor leaders have called upon Netanyahu to resign and for new elections to be held. They have all emphasized that Netanyahu went scot-free for technical, not substantive reasons. For these same leaders to now crawl into a government led by Netanyahu would be political suicide for the Labor Party.

Third, the High Court of Justice will be re-

viewing several petitions against the decision of the State Attorney and Attorney General not to adopt the police recommendations regarding the indictment of Netanyahu and Hanegbi. It is not clear what the HCJ will decide, but the general assumption is that it will not overturn this decision. *Should the HCJ fail to overturn the decision of the State Attorney and Attorney General, the demand for a National Commission of Inquiry could gain momentum.*

Fourth, Ayala Hasson, who turned into something of a hero for those wishing to see the government fall, will have to let out some hot air. Though she continues to maintain a cocky attitude, what the whole affair has demonstrated is that she is more the cat's tail than the cat's whiskers: the cat being attorney Dan Avi Yitzhak, who apparently used Hasson as a *conduit* for his designs. Hasson did some investigating on her own, but like the police was finally left with little more than Avi Yitzhak's story. A great investigating reporter she is not — just a highly ambitious (dyed) honey-blond, who dared reveal an important story, but in the final resort probably caused the Opposition serious damage through her overconfidence. Damage was also caused by veteran Channel I anchor-man Haim Yavin, due to his clear pro-Labor bias and absolute intolerance towards interviewees representing the Government's position. He has helped crystallize a strong coalition of those who feel they are the media's underdogs, who are now taking political advantage of these sentiments, to Labor's detriment.

Finally, some very serious thinking must be done by all supporters of Israel's democratic system due to the fact that a large percentage of the Israeli population, perhaps even a majority, doesn't really understand what was wrong with the way Bar-On was appointed. In other words, even if everything that Ayala Hasson had uncovered would have been proven accurate, many or most Israelis don't believe there is any reason to fall off one's chairs.

**S**o what if Der'i, who is currently standing on trial on criminal charges, threatened to retaliate if Dan Avi-Yitzhak was appointed and Ronnie Bar-On was not? So what if the Director General of the Government, Avigdor Liberman, transmitted Der'i's threats to the Prime Minister rather than send him packing?

So what if Minister of Justice Tsahi Hanegbi was not absolutely candid in the way he presented the candidacy of Bar-On to the Prime Minister and to the Government? So what if Netanyahu let himself be led, for the umpteenth time, into approving a totally inappropriate appointment? And even if Hanegbi and Netanyahu were in breach of some "nerdish" norms, why on earth should they resign? Did anyone die as a result? In addition, there are too many people around who really and truly believe that Prime Ministers (as long as they are right-wing) and Rabbis (as long as they are Orthodox), should be above the law.

Though the whole story stinks to high heaven, there is very little Labor can practically do at the moment, except to try to mobilize public opinion (no easy task, given the fact that much of the public that Labor will be trying to approach now regards the media more than ever as being biased), go on with its plans for primaries for the party leadership in the beginning of June and keep a cool head. Under the circumstances, it is not an easy task. □

## THE DETROIT LABOR ZIONIST FAMILY

LABOR ZIONIST ALLIANCE  
LABOR ZIONIST INSTITUTE  
NA'AMAT USA  
HABONIM/DROR

Sends heartfelt congratulations and best wishes on Israel's 49th Birthday



*May peace reign in Medinat Israel.*

# PEACE

## A ZIONIST VISION OR FANTASY?

By Stanley A. Ringler

Labor Zionism and Revisionism / Labor's Pragmatism / Revisionist Nationalism / Political Upheaval 1977-1992 / The London Agreement and the Intifada / The Oslo Accords

**T**he great divide between the Left and Right in Israel is not a consequence of the "peace process." It is rather the expression of the still unresolved struggle between two fundamentally different Zionist ideological camps. One is represented by Labor Zionism, the other by Revisionism. For more than 75 years each has advocated a vision of Israel which is antithetical to that of the other.

### Labor Zionism and Revisionism

The Labor Zionist tradition is rooted in the vision and values of the biblical prophets, the ideology of nineteenth century nationalism and the early twentieth century socialist movements. From the outset, the Labor tradition in its various historical manifestations sought to build and secure an exemplary Jewish national home. Early Labor Zionist thinkers such as Nahman Syrkin and Ber Borochov dreamed of a Jewish country where the defining values of national life would be social and economic justice, peace, democracy, and pluralism. These, it was believed, would be best realized in a social-democratic political framework.

The Revisionist movement emphasized the primacy of the nation and of Jewish hegemony over Eretz Israel over and above social reform. And while Revisionism advocates ethical living and social harmony, it does so within a strong context of Jewish nationalism.

Both the Labor and Revisionist movements expressed some degree of messianic sentiment in their ideological visions of the Jewish future. This was characteristic of most of Zionist thought. Zionism was after all first and foremost a redemptive movement, which, from

its beginning, projected a messianic-like vision of the Jewish future.

In its beginnings, the *religious* Zionist movement was not nearly as extremely nationalistic as it is today. Modern Orthodoxy was the natural heir of the religious vision of Jewish sovereignty. Rooted in the Bible, the concept of Zion was transmitted throughout the ages in prayer, ritual, and religious thought and culture. In fact, as a modern expression of Zionism, religious Zionist advocates took their place both separately (in Mizrahi) and within the other "secular" movements. Indeed, until the 1967 War, religious Zionism was considered to be a moderate movement which, while advocating Torah principles, was nonetheless comfortable in accommodating itself to the democratic and social principles of national life as defined by the dominant Labor establishment. It was in the post-1967 period that the euphoria of "return" to the patriarchal holy sites on the West Bank produced the Gush Emunim movement, the first extreme popular expression of religious nationalism within the religious Zionist camp.

### Labor's Pragmatism

During the pre-state period of the *Yishuv*, the Labor Zionist movement was the dominant force in building the social, economic, and political foundations of the modern Jewish state. At the time, the emphasis on labor and the values of work and collective responsibility were central principles in the struggle to transform the Jewish people both physically and morally. This was part of the revolutionary ethic of the movement in Eastern Europe and, of course, in *halutzic* Palestine.

When there was little work available, the well-being of society was often set above the profitability of a particular enterprise. Similarly, after statehood, modest, poorly planned modular apartment units were rapidly constructed in order to be able to move large numbers of new immigrants out of tents and *maabarot*. This sort of activity expressed the ideological commitments of the Labor movement. That is, in the application of principle to reality the Labor Zionist leadership was socially conscious and pragmatic. It faced reality and made accommodations in order to secure the nation's interests.

Thus, in the first decades of the state a leisurely process of planning and a concern for efficiency and profitability were not primary concerns when faced with hundreds of thousands of homeless and penniless new immigrants who needed to be housed, found work, and provided with other basic social services. One matter, however, which was not subject to compromise was the state's security apparatus. The Israel Defense Forces was built on the foundation of the pre-state Hagana, a military force intended to *defend* the interests of the Jewish people in the land, not to shape them.

Characteristically, David Ben-Gurion brought the Labor Zionist movement to accept the 1947 UN-proposed partition of Mandatory Palestine, despite the continued opposition of Yitzhak Tabenkin, the head of Ahdut Avodah, the left wing of Labor. Ben-Gurion understood that the "Partition Plan" was intended to reconcile the contradictory struggle of the Zionist and Palestinian nationalist movements. It was also understood that "partition" would finally make possible the establishment of a Jewish state.

### Revisionist Nationalism

The Revisionist movement, which after independence was transformed into the Herut Party, now the Likud, had pursued with vigor the goal of Jewish national self-determination in all of Mandatory Palestine. It was therefore bitterly disappointed by the partition decision. Menachem Begin, then leader of the Irgun, announced in a special broadcast on the Irgun radio station on the day after independence was declared by Ben-Gurion, that "the Homeland has not been liberated but mutilated . . . One phase of the battle for the restoration of the whole Land of Israel to its God-covenanted owners has ended. But only one phase . . . our

country is not yet liberated . . . Our God-given country is a unity."

The traditional anthem of the Revisionist movement, the Irgun in the pre-state period, the Herut party after 1948, and its Zionist youth movement Betar, continues to be the same. It calls with undiluted nationalist fervor for Jewish hegemony on *both* sides of the Jordan, i.e., not only on the West Bank but the East as well. The anthem has not been changed or amended, and while no longer in public use, neither has the symbol of the Revisionist movement, a map of the Greater Land of Israel with a rifle grasped by a hand, above the motto — "only this way."

Revisionist Zionism advocates a theory of nationalism in which the primacy of the nation is reflected in the assertion of power. And it is through the use of power that policies can be shaped. Thus, in the pre-state period, against the good judgment of the Labor-dominated Hagana, the Revisionist Irgun and Lehi groups used violence and terrorism against the British, believing this to be the most effective way to advance the cause of Jewish statehood. Likewise, in 1982 the Likud-led government of Menachem Begin and with Ariel Sharon as Defense Minister used the Israel *Defense* Forces in an offensive mode to invade Lebanon, in what, in Labor's eyes, was the first such use of the IDF for offensive purposes.

The Likud-led government believed that through the use of Israel's military power, it would be able to create a new political reality in Lebanon. In this way it expected that simultaneously the Palestinian's leadership and military arm would be removed from the region and thus render helpless any potential or real Palestinian resistance in the territories. To achieve this end the Likud leadership deceived the country into believing that its objectives were more modest and that the goal was solely to remove the threat posed by the presence of terrorists in southern Lebanon. In the end Israel engaged the Lebanese and Syrians all the way to Beirut and subsequently found itself trapped in Lebanon for three years at a cost of 600 Israeli soldiers killed and some 3,000 wounded.

In Labor's view, the Israeli military was, for the first time, being used to make policy, not to defend it. The army was no longer merely a defensive instrument of the state but had been used as an aggressive force, a force now per-



ceived as threatening the region's stability! Clearly, the political ideology driving this policy was radically different from that which had characterized the *weltanschauung* of the Labor movement. That it happened is due to the historical shift of power brought about by the 1977 elections. For the first time the Revisionist movement had won control of the Israeli government.

### Political Upheaval 1977-1992

The dramatic outcome of the 1977 elections was due less to ideological proclivities than to certain cultural and social factors. On the one hand, there was the shock of the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath. But most of all it was the broad popular frustration with a Labor-controlled, insulated establishment, which had long demonstrated insensitivity to the ethnic interests and cultural traditions of certain immigrant groups. The result was the creation of a new reform movement and party which captured the imagination of large numbers of voters. The Dash (reform) party won a large protest vote which, with the combined strength of Herut and the Liberal Party in the Gahal alignment, resulted in the first political defeat of the Labor movement since independence. Thus, although Labor's defeat was more a consequence of social discontent than an expression of ideological principle, the assumption of power by representatives of the Revisionist movement nonetheless resulted in a radical change in public policy.

Remaining consistent to its ideological vision, the Revisionists, joined now by the religious Zionist movement and ultra-nationalist political elements, undertook an aggressive program of land expropriation and settlement building throughout the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip.

By 1992, at a cost of billions of dollars from Israel's domestic budget, some one hundred and thirty settlements had been constructed with an estimated population of more than 100,000 people. Many settlements were located in densely populated Palestinian areas. These settlements, along with the road network accessing them, were intended to establish a permanent Israeli presence which would block Palestinian growth and control of their own lands. In political terms this policy was and is designed to prevent Palestinian control over a contiguous territorial land mass, one which

would embody the national aspirations of the Palestinians.

For the Palestinian residents in the territories, the decade between 1977 and 1987 was one of increasing frustration. While Jewish settlers in the territories lacked few of the amenities of middle class suburban life, their Palestinian Arab neighbors received limited social services since they were not Israeli citizens, and saw their requests for building and development permits consistently refused, while at the same time becoming increasingly dependent on Israel for work opportunities. For Palestinians, work in Israel then meant employment in a society where they enjoyed only some of the legal benefits enjoyed by Israelis. Those who worked in Israel illegally were unaccounted for by the law and left to the exploitative designs of their employers.

### The London Agreement and the Intifada

In the spring of 1987, during the time of the first Likud-Labor national unity government, Shimon Peres met secretly with Jordan's King Hussein in London. They made an historic agreement. It would have brought peace between Jordan and Israel on the principle of territorial compromise and the understanding that Jordan would assume responsibility for the indigenous Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But Yitzhak Shamir and his Likud partners rejected this agreement. In retrospect this was one of their most serious blunders. Only recently Benjamin Netanyahu and his advisors were still hoping that they could develop some sort of new Jordanian "option." But since the time of the London agreement's rejection, King Hussein has been very consistent about his position. Not long after Yitzhak Shamir refused to support the London agreement, King Hussein formally announced his withdrawal from responsibility *and* claim over control of the West Bank. One wonders, in retrospect, if the Likud unwillingness to seize the moment was simply the consequence of short-sightedness in vision or an act of ideological principle.

At the time, Hussein's historic announcement of his disassociation from the territories exploded like a psychological time bomb within the refugee camps and overcrowded casbahs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Added to this was the pent-up anger over twenty years of occupation under conditions of increasing

despair and hopelessness. A volcano of bitterness burst forth onto the streets. For the first time since the 1967 War, violent demonstrations gave direct voice to the universal feelings of frustration felt by the Palestinian inhabitants of the territories.

The *intifada* began as a spontaneous expression of popular protest that spread rapidly first in Gaza and then throughout the West Bank. The subsequent five-year cycle of mass rioting, arrests, shooting, and killing sapped Israel of vital resources, destroyed international sympathy and good will for the Jewish state, and compromised Israel's moral strength. All the while, social and economic conditions in the territories continued to deteriorate. During the first half of this period, until 1990, the Israeli National Unity government was led by Yitzhak Shamir of the Likud. Implementation of policy in the territories was under the jurisdiction of the Defense Ministry headed by Yitzhak Rabin.

The apparent situation of near anarchy and even fratricide in the territories during the years of the *intifada* resulted in a diminution of PLO influence and control. At the same time the local Islamic fundamentalist forces, the Hamas and Islamic Jihad, offering a more spiritually appealing message of hope and social betterment, were attracting many despairing Palestinian followers. For its part, the new Likud-led government continued to build new settlements throughout the territories.

The Israeli response to the *intifada* embarrassed Israel's friends and generated feelings of deep concern among Jews in the diaspora. In Israel a raging debate over the moral, psychological, and legal consequences of the occupation policy was joined by the followers of the Revisionists and religious right wing, on one side, and those who identified with the Labor movement and liberal center, on the other.

The Labor movement characteristically looked at the reality confronting Israel and sought to find a pragmatic path to compromise and resolution. The Revisionists, on the other hand, maintaining consistency of principle, viewed the continuing advance of Israeli settlements throughout the Greater Land of Israel as reason enough to persevere against a recalcitrant Arab insurrection.

Then as now, the Palestinian reality demanded clear vision and understanding. One aspect of this are the striking Palestinian demo-

graphic facts and conditions which one could ignore only at great risk. If allowed to grow and fester they could decidedly jeopardize Israel's international standing and seriously destabilize Israel's social and economic situation. Indeed, it is instructive to review the numbers.

In 1967, after the Six-Day War, the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip was just 390,000. Today it is approaching 1,000,000. On the West Bank the Palestinian population is today about 1.5 million. And, at current growth rates, it is projected by the World Bank that by the year 2030 the Palestinian population in these areas will more than double. There will then be approximately 5.1 million Palestinians in the territories.

Of equal consequence is the fact that a majority of the Palestinian population is today under the age of 19. Thus, even before these huge numbers of youth are ready to enter into the work force, unemployment in the territories is already considered to be the highest of almost any area in the world. In the Gaza Strip in particular, according to UN reports, for more than a decade unemployment has fluctuated between 40 and 60 percent. Even in the best of times the level of unemployment has been extraordinarily high, far worse than in most impacted African countries.

Not surprisingly, during the years of the *intifada* the popular mood changed. Israel's declining economic situation was viewed by many through the prism of wasted billions in settlement building and maintenance. There was a growing concern for security on both sides of the green line due to the widespread violence and terror killings. And the nation became acutely aware of the fact that the international community, led by the United States, had become openly critical of Israel's policy of occupation and conflict with the Palestinians.

It was, however, the historic opening represented by the Gulf War and the fall of the Soviet Union which led, willy nilly, to the Madrid Peace Conference. Ironically, it was just such a conference which Yitzhak Shamir had, but two years earlier, called "stupid" and "ridiculous" when proposed by Shimon Peres and supported by Hosni Mubarak, King Hussein, Morocco's King Hassan, as well as by the E.C. and U.S. Not surprisingly, therefore, the period between the Madrid opening and the Israeli elections in 1992 was marked by "negotiating"

meetings at which the Israeli teams, directed and, in some instances, led principally by Revisionist thinkers, did everything possible to buy time and stall while the settlement program moved forward at full steam. In fact, it was not until Yitzhak Rabin led the Labor Party to victory in 1992 that the peace process began to move forward in earnest.

### **The Oslo Accords**

The story of the Oslo negotiations and agreement is one which reflects the change in Israeli ideological orientation. It could not have happened had Revisionist irredentist policy-makers been involved. It happened because Labor Zionist thinkers and practitioners were in charge. They understood that in order to advance and secure the interests of the Jewish people and state a change in policy was necessary. A readiness to compromise was essential, even if it meant a diversion from the straight and narrow path of ideological purity. This was the sentiment which carried the day in 1947 when the Zionist movement, led by Labor, agreed to the Partition Plan. This was the same sentiment which again affirmed the principle of partition at Oslo in 1993.

In the opinion of many, the Oslo agreement was in certain ways as great an achievement as the declaration establishing the State of Israel. For until Oslo, the Palestinians were officially unwilling to accept the permanence of Jewish presence in the region — especially in a large part of Mandatory Palestine. Oslo represented a historical breakthrough in this regard. It represented the achievement of Israel's acceptance by its most uncompromising adversary. For the Palestinians, Oslo represented the achievement of international legitimacy and recognition as a nation with the right to self-determination.

The Oslo process has been complicated. The task of devising a formula for separation and mutuality after nearly 100 years of enmity, distrust, and conflict is not simple. But the reality of mutual interest and dependence cannot be gainsaid. Israel requires the Palestinian Authority's cooperation if the security situation is to be stabilized. The Palestinians require Israel's good will and assistance if their social and economic conditions are to improve and their national aspirations are to be realized.

The Oslo process has been belabored for many reasons. Periodic acts of Palestinian ter-

rorism and dissatisfaction with the preventive measures taken by the Palestinian authorities resulted in the Labor government's slowing up of the process. Nonetheless, until the summer of 1996, the Oslo process remained on track. Negotiations continued to be conducted directly between Israel and the Palestinians without the necessity of outside intervention and/or guarantees of a third party because both sides were fundamentally committed to the Oslo accords and both sides were in good faith, intent on advancing the process.

At the same time, extremists in both communities continued to seek to undermine the process. On the Jewish side, Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir were perhaps the most noteworthy. No less provocative and troublesome were the all too frequent acts of Jewish hooliganism and insult by fanatical settlers and undisciplined soldiers.

On their side, the Islamic fanatics have been lethal in their resistance efforts. Their acts of terror were decisive in giving credence to the Likud propaganda claim that the Labor government was naive and irresponsible in its effort to advance the peace process. This, in spite of the fact that most of the terrorists originated in areas controlled by the IDF and not by the Palestinian Authority.

The facts on the ground today are the same as they were yesterday. The Palestinians are committed to the Oslo process. They require its implementation no less than does Israel. Indeed their need is not only one of historical urgency but of a national emergency. For if the democratically elected Palestinian leadership council is unable to improve living conditions, provide work for the Palestinian people, give its youth (a majority of the population) hope for a better future, and bring pride to the Palestinian nation in the symbols and ceremony of state building, then all could be forfeited on the anvil of resurgent Islamic irredentism and fanaticism.

Is the vision of Israel's future to be defined by a Revisionist movement which seeks to occupy and permanently control a land in which millions of people are denied their right to self-determination and sovereignty? Are we destined to live forever by the sword in order to control the violence and rage of a huge population of frustrated and angry people? Is this the Zionist dream or nightmare?

The Rabin and Peres governments were

moving, through the Oslo process, towards a reality of population and geographical separation. With it there was an implicit, even articulated, quiet understanding that 70 percent of the settlers on some 5 to 10 percent of Palestinian territory would be incorporated under Israeli sovereignty as part of the final status agreement. In their opinion, when the border separating the two peoples would be clear, the possibility of coexistence would be enhanced because such people would be able to live in security, each freely and fully in control of its own national life. Cooperation between the two peoples would thereafter be based on mutual interest and not dictated by force.

For Labor, the projected solution is a demilitarized Palestinian area, sovereign and independent, perhaps in confederation with Jordan, next to an independent, unthreatening Israel, welcomed as a neighbor and full participant in the region's collective future. This remains the Labor Party's program. The questions each must be asked, therefore, are the following:

Will Israel's security situation be enhanced or diminished if thousands of settlers did not have to be defended in densely populated Palestinian areas?

Will Israel benefit socially and economically from a policy of Zionist irredentism and a plan to strengthen and make permanent Jewish presence throughout the territories?

Is the vision of Israel's future to be defined by its role as an occupying power, encircling tight geographical enclaves of Palestinians who supposedly will enjoy "maximum possible autonomy"?

The ideological visions of Labor Zionism and Revisionist Zionism remain in conflict. The struggle between these two camps is not yet resolved. The Revisionist camp is determined to advance its vision in spite of the Oslo accords. They believe that, in any event, the Arabs are fundamentally unwilling to accept us as permanent neighbors, and in the Arab mind the entire peace process is but a charade.

The other vision is of a future in which the Jewish state remains militarily strong but also politically realistic. This camp believes that the only way to permanently advance Israel's interests is by winning acceptance and legitimacy among our Arab neighbors by forging a constructive relationship with them, based on compromise, mutuality, and peace.

Benjamin Netanyahu considers this latter Labor Zionist view to be "entertaining." Nevertheless, he has been compelled, by force of circumstances, to commit himself to fulfilling the interim stage of the Oslo agreements. This includes the redeployment of Israeli forces, in three stages, throughout the West Bank. It is here, however, that the remaining ideological strength of the Revisionist movement will be tested. For the prime minister and his colleagues are determined to do everything possible to insure the *expanded permanent presence* of Israeli settlements throughout the territories and, in so doing, to prevent the emergence of a contiguous territorial area which could become an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

The Oslo accords do not stipulate how much territory is to be given up in each of the three successive redeployment stages. The expected minimalist approach of the Likud-led government, therefore, is bound to result in a new round of conflict and yet another test of the viability of the process. The Revisionists now intend to engage in an ultimate struggle to salvage as much of Greater Israel as possible, even, and perhaps by design, at the expense of a final peace agreement with the Palestinians. □

Planning to visit Israel during  
the Zionist Centennial?

Make Histadrut part of  
your celebration!

***Feel the history.  
See the sites.  
Meet the people.***



Contact us for details.

Call: 212-647-0300

FAX: 212-647-0308

EMAIL: [NCLI\\_Histadrut@Compuserve.com](mailto:NCLI_Histadrut@Compuserve.com)

National Committee for Labor Israel  
275 Seventh Avenue  
New York, New York 10001

# LZA COMMENDS LABOR STAND ON "CONVERSION" BILL

*In a letter addressed to Shimon Peres, chairman, and Nissim Zvili, secretary of the Israel Labor Party, Daniel Mann, president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, commended the stand taken by the ILP opposing the proposed Law of Conversion being placed before the Knesset. Text of the letter follows:*

**T**he Labor Zionist Alliance commend the Israel Labor Party faction in the Knesset under your leadership for its official stand opposing the proposed Law of Conversion, and we express our appreciation for the votes of so many leading Members of Knesset from Labor in support of this policy on the first reading of the bill on April 1.

However, we must express our dismay that a considerable number of Labor MKs absented themselves from or abstained in the vote, including candidates for party chairman and others holding high Labor positions in Israel.

The determination over a year ago by the High Court of Justice concerning non-Orthodox conversions in Israel provided a felicitous opportunity for the recognition of such conversions without political entanglement, by letting the judicial process go forward without legislative interference. Instead, key personalities in the Israel Labor Party have now aided and abetted the efforts of the right wing to return Israel to the intolerable situation that obtained in previous years.

In the Jewish state and the Jewish world alike, our movement stands for peace, progress, and pluralism. Of course our highest shared concern is peace. In that respect we have been told repeatedly that concessions to the Orthodox might be needed in the interest of peace. So we now ask: In the past ten years and more, has that strategy advanced the cause of peace or strengthened the position of the Israel Labor Party?

**I**n our view, notwithstanding the change of government last year, nothing fundamental has changed on this issue since we expressed our views to the Libai Commission at the request of our world movement in February 1996. Let me therefore restate the key points of that document with only a few adjustments to update the wording:

1. While we of course recognize that the final decision on the conversion issue will be made in and by Israel itself,

we remind you that in the 1980s the single most threatening challenge to the principles embodied in the first line of the Jerusalem Program — "the unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life" — was not Lebanon or Pollard or anything else that happened in that decade but rather the proposal to amend the Law of Return.

2. Today we are confronted as never before with the need for Jewish support of the Oslo peace process. In that connection we wish to remind our colleagues that true peace is dependent on freedom and justice everywhere, that American Jews continue to have a vital role to play in the unfolding peace process, and that — above all — Jews should have full rights to practice their Judaism in the Jewish state.
3. Accordingly, let us who live in this community state clearly and unequivocally that the vast majority of American Jews will undoubtedly acquiesce to whatever develops in the peace process with Labor backing, even on hard issues such as the Golan or Jerusalem, and will do whatever is necessary to secure concomitant support as needed on the part of the American government, with one crucial exception: If American Jews conclude that the price of the peace process is a surrender to forces within Israel opposed to religious pluralism, then and only then will Jewish public opinion here — and perhaps in Israel too — turn against even those policies endorsed by the Israel Labor Party.

We would appreciate your communicating our views to *all* the Labor Members of Knesset, and we again commend you for your principled leadership on this question. □

**The Labor Zionist Alliance, together with Jews worldwide, mourns the passing of the distinguished sixth President of Israel**

## **Chaim Herzog**

**whose exemplary life served as a model for the highest military and civilian standards of the reborn state of Israel.**

**He will remain an inspiration for many generations to come.**

# AMERICAN LABOR ZIONISTS AT THE 1946 ZIONIST CONGRESS

By David Breslau

**T**he encounter of thousands of United States and Canadian soldiers with the Holocaust and with the survivors brought many hundreds into the ranks of Habonim and Poale Zion upon their return to civilian life. This was a period of reorientation and real commitment which resulted in a large *shekel* campaign which thousands assigned to the Labor Zionist bloc.

Ben Gurion was in the United States at that time. On the eve of his departure for the Congress in Basle, he met with Saadia Gelb, Professor Alexander Pekelis, Kieve Skidell and me, to discuss the situation in the American movement and the issues which would be debated at the Congress, especially that of the *maavak* — the armed resistance against the Mandatory government.

I was elected to serve as a delegate to the Congress on the Labor Zionist ticket and was named secretary-coordinator of the American Labor Zionist delegation. As such, I was on the Steering Committee of the World Labor Zionist bloc.

On our plane were many Congress delegates. When we arrived in Basle, I was assigned a room with David Wertheim, who had been secretary-general of Poale Zion for many years. The impact of the destruction of European Jewry became stronger as Wertheim met some survivors and asked where “so and so” was and the answer inevitably was: “Died at . . . . died at . . . . died at . . . .” We were all shaken.

**T**he American delegation was wooed by the two *Mapai* (Labor Party of Eretz Israel) factions. The pro-*maavak* people and the anti-*maavak* people met with us privately and as a group. Our vote could be pivotal since we were the largest delegation after *Mapai*. At a meeting of our delegation, the overwhelming majority — Poale Zion, Habonim, Pioneer Women, the Trade Unions, the Women’s League for

Palestine and the Fraternal organizations — voted for the *maavak*, but permitted individuals to vote against the *maavak* when the issue would be discussed by the entire Labor Zionist bloc at the Congress. At that meeting, Hayim Greenberg who was the moral and spiritual leader of our movement, called the *maavak* “an oven of butter” which would mean that, when kindled, the Yishuv could melt away. This caused great consternation among the *Mapai* delegation and great pain in the American delegation. The U.S. Yiddish press carried the story and we received dozens of cables telling us that the leadership in America and the membership as a whole repudiated the Greenberg position. The overwhelming majority of our delegates voted for the *maavak*.

Although we admired Weizmann, we could not agree with his anti-*maavak* position and helped to bring about his defeat.

**T**here are two other events which may interest the *Jewish Frontier* readers. Stephen Wise asked to meet with all the young delegates. We met in the hall where the first Congress had been held in 1897. Among those I met were Louis Pincus, Moshe and Ruth Dayan, Shimon Peres, and of course, the American delegates of Junior Hadassah. At the gathering, Rabbi Wise emotionally stated that we would live to see the Jewish State but that for him it may be too late. The next year, when the U.N. Partition Plan was accepted in November 1947, I called all the American delegates from all factions and we came to the Free Synagogue service to proclaim with Stephen Wise a *shehechayanu*.

Every night, after sessions, we would go walking through the streets of Basle, sometimes with Hadassah delegates, sometimes with *Mapai* people. One night when walking with Marie Syrkin and Elyahu Epstein (Elath) I mentioned that I was dismayed by the tone of the debate at the Congress, especially the

attacks on some of our leaders. After the Holocaust, such antagonisms were certainly out of place. Someone told David Remez, who presided at many of the Congress sessions, of our conversation (Remez's son, Aharon, was a *shaliach* to Habonim in America and we were close friends). I found a note in my box asking me to meet for lunch. We met and Remez asked that I repeat the conversation. When I finished, he said: "Come to Eretz Israel. You will see that our actions are nobler than our talk."

I was elected as a deputy member of the Actions Committee, and a few months later came on my first trip to Eretz Israel. It was a time of tension, and the Actions Committee session was called off. Most of the non-Israeli delegates could not get visas to enter the country. When I saw what the Yishuv was doing I understood what Remez meant.

It might be of interest to add that among the other delegates to the Congress were Bert Goldstein, Professor Hayim Fineman, Eleanor Levinson, Mary Isaacs, Lucy Lang, Harry Greenberg, Sophie Udin and Samuel S. Leibowitz, the noted "Scottsboro case" attorney who later became a judge in Brooklyn. □

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Stanley A. Ringler* is Director of the American Desk, International Department, Israel Labor Party. He is author of more than 40 articles and essays on Zionism, Israeli politics, the Middle East. This article is reprinted, with permission, from *Jerusalem/Viewpoints* published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, headed by Daniel J. Elazar.

*Susan Hattis Rolef*, Ph.D., a political scientist, is a frequent contributor to the *Frontier*.

*Henry L. Feingold* is an authority on American Jewish history; he is on faculty of Baruch College, CUNY.

*David Breslau*, a former leader of Habonim in America, was a founder of Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel. He resides in Jerusalem.

*Joseph Adler's* most recent book is *Restoring the Jews to Their Homeland: Nineteen Centuries in the Quest for Zion* (Jason Aronson Publishers, 1997). He has a doctorate in political science and history from New York University.

*Dr. Henry Glickman* is a clinical psychologist residing in Scarsdale, NY.

Best wishes for a  
**PEACEFUL,  
UNITED ISRAEL**

Dena & Lou Keller  
Levittown, NY

May Israel's 49th Birthday  
Usher in a year of  
Unity and Peace!

LZA - GESHER BRANCH #975  
LONG ISLAND NEW YORK

Shlomoh Sachs  
Chairman

Dena Keller  
Treasurer

## HAG SAMEACH

NA'AMAT USA SALUTES ISRAEL!

We proudly support our sisters of NA'AMAT ISRAEL who provide daily social services for half the Women and Children of Israel.

AS ISRAEL ENTERS ITS 50th YEAR of independence, NA'AMAT USA is proud to have shared in the rebuilding of the Jewish Homeland through our partnership with our sisters in NA'AMAT ISRAEL.

The World movement of NA'AMAT, which includes branches in 16 countries, is the largest Jewish women's organization in the world.

SYLVIA LEWIS, President

# THE RUSSIAN ALIYAH

## Communal Rescue or Plunder?

By Henry L. Feingold

I recently spent five weeks in Moscow teaching American Jewish History. The course was part of a Jewish Studies program, called Project Judaica that is funded and administered by the Jewish Theological Seminary and YIVO at the behest of the newly established Russian State University of the Humanities. The post gave me a good opportunity to observe the current state of Russian Jewry. I returned with some doubts about the communal future of the Jews of the FSU (the fifteen successor states of the Former Soviet Union), especially as it relates to the far-flung *aliyah* and *klita* program of the Jewish Agency. Let me share them with you.

\* \* \*

Together with the Jews of what is today Poland, pre-revolutionary Russian Jewry was the richest source of energy and secular and religious ideas fueling the world Jewish enterprise. Indeed, the Zionist idea itself, particularly the concept of *halutzit*, is rooted deep in Russian history and culture. Since 1917, the year Russia left the war and had its revolution, the pace of diminution of Russian Jewish influence has quickened. In one century, barely an eye wink in history, there is little that remains of its former brilliance. A religious man — and what man is not when contemplating the mystery of Jewish survival — might well wonder what historical trespass, what great sin, could have been committed to warrant such a bloody and rapid decline.

Still, there are thousands, perhaps over a million people, in eastern Europe who continue to consider themselves Jewish. The condition varies from country to country. In Poland, the nation that continued to produce antisemitism

although it had few Jews to speak of, Jews continue to come out of the closet. In the FSU there is considerable variation in the condition of the Jews. I was cautioned not to judge the Jewish condition by the Jews of Moscow who were always more deracinated, by which is undoubtedly meant that they were more urbane and therefore less Jewish. Although the *shtetl* has virtually disappeared, there are sizable aggregations of Jews in the cities of the Ukraine and Bielorus. Still comparatively uninfluenced by modernity, the Jews of Georgia and the mountain Jews of the Caucasus, remain traditionally observant and yet in Ashkenazic terms, not Jewishly learned.

While Jewish communities have been reestablished in most of the big cities of the FSU, one has the feeling that without the support of outside agencies like the "Joint" many of these would not be able to long hold their own. At a communal celebration in Vilna, once fondly called "the Jerusalem of Litte," the *lingua franca* of the ceremony was not Yiddish but Russian. It had become the language spoken and understood by all. The carriers of Yiddish culture and language are long since dead. Many lie in unmarked graves in the killing ground of Ponary.

Seeing the utter devastation of a once splendid Jewry ought not to have come as such a shock. Russian Jewry, after all, was subject to a murderous violence before the revolution which did not change with the arrival of "socialism," as too many Jews believed it would. Reading Isaac Babel, the greatest of the Russian Jewish writers, whose poems and stories have recently been republished, one senses that Red Cossacks were as prone as



Whites to massacre Jews. To the losses suffered by Jews during the civil war should be added the impact of Communist policy of communal "decapitation" which destroyed most Jewish religious and cultural institutions and often "disappeared" the leadership as well. By the 1920s the Jews of the Ukraine were so impoverished that the "Joint," which had established schools and soup kitchens during the post-revolutionary years, earning the cudors of Herbert Hoover, joined the Soviet government in a massive project to resettle 200,000 Jews in the Crimea. Incidentally, much to the chagrin of the world Zionist movement, more Jews were resettled in the Crimea in four years than reached Palestine in the second (1904-1914) and third (1919-1923) Aliyah combined. The litany of biological and cultural disaster, could include the disproportionate number of prominent Jews who lost their lives in the purges of the thirties.

Surely that devastation partly accounts for Soviet Jewry's lack of preparedness in the face of the murderous onslaught of the *Einsatzgruppen* that followed behind the German armies after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. That carnage, added to the 200,000 Jewish combat casualties, claimed perhaps as many as 1.1 million additional Jewish lives. Nor was Soviet Jewry given respite after the defeat of the Nazis. Between the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the death of Stalin in 1953, the condition of Russian Jewry grew even more precarious. Only the timely death of Stalin prevented total destruction of Russian Jewry. And if that was not yet sufficient, since 1970, and especially in the last ten years, Russian Jewry again experienced a biological hemorrhaging caused by massive emigration of almost an additional million Jews. Is it possible to imagine that after such devastating blows to its culture and demography, that there could be a future for Russian Jewry?

It is with that question in mind that I set out to interview as many of the new Jewish communal leaders as would talk to me. I heard little to convince me that the rich Jewish life of Soviet Jewry could be restored. But I also learned that there would always remain a sizable Jewish presence in the FSU. It is that reality that concerns me most. I cannot claim that the observations I make here are "scien-

tific." In fact, I would be happy if my pessimism were proven wrong. I would be the last person to write off a Jewish community that has some hope of life.

Halachically, only half of the dozen leaders I spoke to would have passed muster as Jews. Some had learned Hebrew, only one spoke Yiddish and, except for the Habadniks, who stemmed from Brooklyn but now considered themselves permanent residents, few had ever been immersed in Jewish culture, either religious or secular. Most were intermarried. In a word, they were "Jews by choice" without quite knowing what it was they were choosing.

But why should such marginalized Jews want to assume leadership roles? Initially I thought their quest for positions was motivated by opportunism. There are all kinds of "goodies": trips abroad, jobs, status, that could accrue to this Jewish "nomenclatura" by simply becoming Jewish leaders. In eastern Europe particularly, leadership has its perks. But I soon discarded opportunism as an important reason for involvement. Many Jews, not only Jewish communal leaders, seem to live on a comparatively high material level. Whether one lives in a command or market economy, professional skills bring a greater reward and, as in America, Russian Jews possess such skills in disproportionate numbers. You don't have to be a communal leader to do well. Jewish "businessmen" probably do better. Even poor Jews may be faring better than Russians of similar station. Often they receive packages and financial help from *mishpochah* and friends who earlier resettled elsewhere. The omnipresent "Joint" even organizes "meals on wheels" for elderly dependent Jews in the larger cities where most now live. In short, rather than being a burden, as it once may have been considered, being Jewish in Russia today carries certain advantages with it.

There is another side of the coin. Being conspicuously prosperous, as some Jews have become, in a society that seems to have lost its way and has a tradition of virulent anti-semitism, can pose a danger. The names of Jewish bankers and owners of newspapers and TV networks are well known, so much so that we may soon hear a new version of an old aphorism: The Gusinskys and the Yavlinskys make their fortune and the Ginzburgs and the Cohens pay the price., In the original version

they paid the price for the Bronsteins (Trot-sky) and the Martovs. But despite such forebodings of danger that the prominence of Jews in the new order can spark, especially if the economic situation continues to deteriorate, the consensus is that, for the present at least, antisemitism is not a danger. The occasional desecration of a Jewish cemetery of the antisemitic graffiti on a communal building, even the antisemitic rantings in the two hundred small newspapers is viewed with equanimity. In the FSU, as in the USA, there is far greater danger of being loved, than being hated to death. The intermarriage rate in the FSU is higher than our 52 percent.

That things have never been better is also the belief of the dozens of Jews who love Moscow and Russia and would not live elsewhere. Some are among the over ten thousand emigres who have returned after having lived in Israel and America. What holds them to a society where daily life is a struggle and danger may loom ahead? They seem bound to Russia by the ties of friendship and family that seem to be stronger here, precisely because of the history of political repression and the daily Darwinian struggle for survival. In an old-fashioned way, the quality of life in Russia, which is judged by the quality of human relationships rather than the model of the car one drives, may be superior to anything the West can offer. I looked with envy at the strong bonds of friendship and the rich network of informal support groupings that are everywhere in Russian society.

So they continue to cast their lot with "mother" Russia, much the way German Jews continued to love their "fatherland," despite the ravings of Hitler. I suspect that American Jews, whose commitment to the land of their birth is perhaps even more intense, would understand that love of country better than Zionist aparatchiks working for the Jewish Agency which operates the most far-flung operation devoted almost exclusively to *aliyah* in the FSU. What needs to be understood by those who want to "rescue" Russian Jewry, is that Russia will never be totally "Judenrein." There will always be Jews, who for one reason or another, will remain in Russia. They cannot be written off.

It is difficult to generalize about the leaders I spoke to. Some were only leaders in name

and others would not say much to someone they didn't know. Moreover, in background, outlook and aspiration, the head of the Lubavitch operation in Moscow shares little in common with the head of the Va'ad. But if the binding question deals with their Jewishness there is a puzzle since even from a secular Jewish point of view one finds little that is recognizably Jewish in these leaders. In the Russian context they identify themselves as "ethnically" Jewish. That means they cannot be Russian or something in between, like Russian-Jewish, as it is possible to be American-Jewish. There is no hyphenation in Russia. One is either Ukrainian or Russian, not both. The ethnic identity stands by itself like our concept of nationality. But what the content of that ethnic identity is, no one can say. It does not necessarily mean speaking a special language or adherence to a certain faith, or even following of a certain way of life. It just is. So similar can these identities be in values, attitudes and even humor, that I often found it almost impossible to differentiate between secular Jewish members of the intelligentsia and non-Jewish members.

That confusing composition of group identity is compounded by the fact that such a basic practice as male circumcision remains uncommon among Russian Jewish men, even after the collapse of communism. One hears few stories of a Russian Jewish equivalent to the Marranos of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when adult men often reclaimed the visible sign of belonging to the covenant by undergoing circumcision. Of my thirty students only perhaps six were halachically Jewish, that is, they were children of Jewish mothers. But even that does not necessarily mean that these six had two Jewish parents, or were familiar with Jewish rituals and holidays gained through living in a Jewish household.

Then, aside from assuming a legal ethnic identity, what makes Russian Jews Jewish? The only answer I can think of is that they voluntarily assume that identity and put into it what they want. But what makes them want to assume a Jewish identity, despite its possible disadvantages, is more difficult to determine. I think there are three basic intertwined reasons: memory; a sense of Jewish elan; and spite. Most Jews born before the war fondly remember grandparents who spoke Yiddish,

some even recall a seder or another religious ceremony that they want to reclaim, or at least not deny. Why not? Because again and again one hears the firm conviction that life among Jews is simply more elevated. No matter how removed, the sense of Jewish élan persists. It is not confined to pride in the prominence of Jewish chess players, or the disproportionate numbers of good violinists and scientists, though none of the Jews I spoke to was unaware of it. When one hears non or half Jews say: "Jews don't drink, don't beat their wives, don't desert their families," it may not necessary be a scientifically established datum. But the Jews and near Jews, who at the slightest prodding submit such "facts," are not merely convinced of their accuracy. They seem to see it as a desirable standard of behavior that can be attained by claiming to be Jewish.

Finally, there is a category of clinging to Jewish identity that is based, for lack of a better word, on spite. It is composed of Jews who have been beaten or humiliated or more likely, denied a position or access, because of their being Jewish. If you are going to suffer for being Jewish, though you barely understand what it means, then one possible reaction is to give meaning to your life by actually claiming what is held in such contempt. It sometimes goes hand in hand with the aforementioned sense of Jewish superiority also felt by a searcher for acceptance.

None of the Russian Jewish leaders I interviewed would venture a guess about the future of the community. But there was virtual unanimous agreement that the overall destiny of Russian Jewry will be determined by what happens in the next few years. If a modicum of democracy and a related market economy is established, then the prognosis is good. But if Russia does not turn the corner, neither will its Jewry. "Wie es Kristltt zich, azoi Yidltt zich." (Sometimes translated: "When the Christian world sneezes, the Jewish world catches a cold.") Most Russian Jews, as most secular American Jews, assume that Democracy is good for the Jews. They rarely come to grips with the question of whether it is also good for their ancient faith, Judaism.

Members of Habad and other Hasidic courts, who run programs in the FSU, seem truly puzzled by the survival question. But of their own

ultimate success they express confidence. I was not able to dismiss such confidence out of hand because the commitment and skill the Habadniks bring to bear is truly impressive. Unfortunately these are not the only ingredients that determine effectiveness. Their financial investment, organizational skill and energy is counterbalanced by a sense of exclusiveness and tunnel vision that distances their operations from the cultural center of gravity of Russian Jewry. To be sure, Habad has outreach among the "non-churched" but they are not concerned about survival because they do not consider these other Jews as being Jewish at all. In a word, for them Russian Jewry has already fallen and the rebuilding must start from scratch.

That may be a realistic analysis but rebuilding Russian Jewry around a command faith with a myriad of differentiating laws dictating even mode of dress does not seem possible. For Russian Jewry the aspiration is to be modern, which for them means searching, intellectualism, a sense of autonomy and self reliance, open mindedness and democratic tolerance. It makes ultra Orthodoxy or any form of command religion anathema. Their primary goal of being cultured and urbane is not possible to attain in an authoritarian totalistic Orthodox community. Yet one can see many old dependent marginalized Jews who may come to their *shtiblach* for the bowl of soup and the little communal warmth that it gives them. There are also some young people who, as part of the general revival of religious mysticism in Russia, have for the moment attached themselves to these Hasidic courts. But there is almost unanimous agreement that the Orthodox and Hasidic paths, despite the devotedness and energy of their operatives, cannot be followed by the majority of Russian Jews, who are secular to the marrow of their bones. Like the Jews of America, Russian Jews are not a people who can be commanded to return to a faith they never knew.

It is against that background that the current activities of JAFT's far-flung program designed primarily to promote *aliyah* should be viewed. The fine line that separates the noble motivation of rescuing endangered Jews from plundering a weak but relatively secure community, by luring away its most vital human resources, is difficult to determine,

especially in contemporary Russia. There is good reason to fear for the security of Russian Jewry. If there should be a political or economic upheaval, a need to extricate Russia's remaining Jews might develop overnight. Nor can anyone gainsay Israel's continued need for *olim*, especially those stemming from European Russia. Compared to the premodern Palestinian world Israel's birthrate is modest, barely above zero population growth. The developing demographic deficit cannot long be left unaddressed without undermining the ideological basis of a Jewish state while at the same time being faced with a serious security problem. At some future juncture one could envisage a strong Palestinian minority of Israeli citizens challenging the Jewish character of Israel by use of the very democratic instruments, elections, coalition politics, which are the cherished currency of all democracies. That is the reason why so many believe that for its internal political stability and its external security, Israel must have five million Jewish inhabitants by the third decade of the 21st century. Where else might they come from but the FSU whose Jews, many Zionists have convinced themselves, are in any case fated for extinction. Every Jew brought out is a Jew saved.

But hold on. Is it Israel's dire need for aliyah or Russian Jewry's need for "rescue" that is pushing a program that cost at least \$14 million in 1996? (If one adds the programs of *Lishkat Hakesher*, a formerly secret program run directly out of the prime minister's office, it comes to much more than that.)

The confusion of the one for the other is well known in the 20th century history of the world Zionist movement. One recalls the argument over *Neshira*, the drop out phenomenon in Vienna, in the seventies when Israel insisted that emigrants leaving the Soviet Union on Israeli visas must go to Israel, though "rescue" was possible in America, just as it is in Germany today. (Incidentally Germany is the most popular choice of today's Russian Jewish emigrants.) There are other instances where the needs of a beleaguered Jewry and the Yishuv, later Israel, worked at cross purposes. We have already mentioned the Agro-Joint Crimean resettlement experiment of the twenties. We might add to that the earlier conflict with the Territorialists working in Argentina and the United States.

During the Holocaust the conflict was rooted, not in the question of the need to rescue European Jewry, but where to put them. The Zionist movement argued that Palestine was the only logical haven and the only community that wanted the Jewish refugees. A ceaseless but unavailing agitation to lift the immigration restriction created by the British White Paper was mounted. Overshadowed was the remote possibility of settling a portion of the refugees elsewhere. The story of the mass resettlement alternative remains relatively unknown. Only one of the proposed havens, Sosua in the Dominican Republic, was ever established. But hundreds of investigations were undertaken. Few suitable locations were ever found and had they been, the Jewish Agency, with its pioneering know-how and funding, would have been hard-pressed to support such projects. In 1939 it cost over £2,000 to resettle a single adult refugee. There was simply not enough capital to develop both the Yishuv and such alternate projects as British Guiana which was proposed by the British Foreign Office. Resettlement imposed on a reluctant group by another power is, in any case, a form of community dissolution rather than rescue. Nevertheless, settling some European Jewish refugees anywhere for the duration of the crisis has an allure even today. One of the unanswered "what ifs" of the Holocaust concerns the question of resettlement. What if the Zionist movement had extended its support to the endeavor?

Zionists early understood that people were the true source of power and wealth. It extended even to the damaged humanity living in the DP camps of Europe. A concerted effort was made to bring this saving remnant to Israel. But the effort was only partially successful. The British continued their immigration restriction policy and the Truman administration in 1948 finally took the lead in helping to absorb the remaining DPs. That momentarily ended the latest phase of tension between the Yishuv and the Diaspora over the disposition of the survivors, thousands of whom preferred to settle in America. The next phase would concern the disposition of the growing number of Jews able to leave the Soviet sphere.

Few will deny that JAFF's work in bringing

out a threatened Jewish population from the FSU is a glorious page in Jewish history. As late as the Brezhnev era Jewish life in the Soviet Union was under constant threat by a regime and an ideology that considered Judaism, and particularly Zionism, its enemy. That *aliyah* brought, and continues to bring, an educated and productive population to Israel. But the magnificent idealistic refuseniks and teachers who taught themselves Hebrew, recognizable types to those familiar with the first, second and third *Aliyot*, might, under different circumstances, also have served as the leaders of a vibrant new Russian Jewish life. The "refuseniks" could not have been compelled to stay when all their dreams, like Sharansky's in the Gulag, were about living in a Jewish state. But they were dreams when Jewish life in the Soviet Union was becoming a nightmare. It seemed then that a fruitful Jewish life would never be available in Russia.

But today the situation has changed. There are few Sharanskys left in the FSU. The government threat has dissipated. The much feared KGB runs an elaborate public relations campaign, including a museum of heroes some of whom were Jewish, to establish a new benevolent image and perhaps to pay the rent for Lubyanka.

Most who wanted to leave have done so. We now can see the underside of that successful *aliyah*. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, from a world Jewish rather than merely an Israeli perspective, such an *aliyah* is a zero sum game. In some sense what has been Israel's gain has been Russian Jewry's loss. "If there had been no emigration," Eric Rubin, the Jewish first secretary at the American embassy in Kiev observes, "there would have been a booming Jewish community here." That may be going too far since the right to resettle in Israel is basic and no one could have compelled their remaining in the Soviet Union. But that the emigration weakened the possibility of recreating a viable Jewish life in Russia seems undeniable. The barely Jewish leadership strata that ministers to the needs of the community today is formed out of the shards of a nearly vanished Russian Jewry. It does not require much to push it over the edge.

In June the Jewish Agency assembly is scheduled to convene in Moscow and tour the

major centers of Jewish life in the FSU. I suspect there will be much self congratulation which is deserved. The broad subject of the discussions will be "Rescue and Renewal." It should allow the Assembly members to ponder what really is at stake in the FSU. There is only one policy that seems sustainable. They must at once assure that the doors of Israel remain open so that those who may need to seek haven can find one in an instant. That is what Zion is for. But at the same time they must seek to define the thin line, which, when crossed, can make *aliyah* a source of disintegration rather than renewal. That means that they must think in a world Jewish context which requires that they distinguish between emigration organized to rescue those Jews who need to be rescued and emigration used to serve Israel's demographic and security needs. The former is crucial, the latter can sometimes be damaging.

Whether by dint of age, or love of the country of one's birth or even alienation from Judaism, there will always be a considerable number of Jews in the FSU. There needs to be a Zionism universal enough to view them as part of *k'lal yisrael* and to work to restore their confidence and a sense of what they might yet become. There is in the writings of Achad Ha'Am a guide to find the line between communal rescue and plunder. It needs to be recalled. □

Greetings to I S R A E L

on its 49<sup>th</sup> Birthday



*Raisle Goldstein*  
Forest Hills, NY

*Daniel & Elaine Mann*  
Bethesda, MD

*Labor Zionist Alliance of Philadelphia*  
Shirley Katz, Treasurer

*Chaikey & Daniel Greenberg*  
Chicago, IL

# AARON AARONSOHN

## and the Nili Spy Network

*By Joseph Adler*

**T**ruth it is often said is stranger than fiction. No work of fiction is more abundant in suspenseful detail, or baffling plot twists, frustrations, and unexpected mishaps as the adventures of the Palestinian Jewish spy ring that operated in the Holy Land during World War I. The heroes and heroines of the clandestine operation known by the acronym Nili (from the biblical phrase in I Samuel 15:29, "*Netzach Yisrael Lo Y'shaker*" — The Glory of Israel Will Not Lie), however, in many ways resembled fictional characters. They were romantic and idealistic, touchingly human beings, and vulnerable to fear, despair, as well as hope and exultation.

The acknowledged leader and driving force behind the Nili operation was Aaron Aaronsohn (1876–1919), an individual of unusual versatility — a botanist, agronomist, geologist, and geographer. Born in Bacau, Rumania, Aaron at age six was brought to Palestine by his parents who formed part of the pioneer group that founded the agricultural colony Zikhron Ya'akov (1882). Early in his childhood, Aaron exhibited a love of nature. He learned to recognize every flower, every stone, and every blade of grass in his vicinity.

The agricultural school near Jaffa proved too rudimentary for Aaron who by the age of sixteen was already remarkably self-taught. After several years of working with the agricultural experts sent to Zikhron Ya'akov by the colony's benefactor, Baron Edmund de Rothschild, he received from the latter a scholarship to study in France. He attended the Institute of Montpellier, and the agricultural college at Grignon. Returning to Palestine in 1896 with a degree in agronomy, Aaronsohn

became an instructor at the newly founded colony of Metullah in the northernmost region of the Galilee. His refusal to accept the rule of the colony's administrators eventually led to his dismissal. Undaunted by the experience, he found work as manager of a large farm in Anatolia, Turkey. Two years later, Aaronsohn returned to Palestine. In 1901, Aaron together with some friends founded a bureau which specialized in making agricultural and technical surveys for potential Jewish settlements.

**I**n 1904, Aaronsohn participated in a geological expedition led by the German professor Max Blanchenhorn which explored the Dead Sea region. The following year he helped survey and map an area along some of the route later followed by the Hejaz railroad. Aaronsohn also took part along with Professor Otto Warburg of Berlin in a botanical exploration of Palestine. He was soon acknowledged by his peers as an expert on Palestine's flora and geological structure. It was said of him that he could read fossils as a pious Jew reads the scriptural portions of the week.

While trekking about the Upper Galilee in 1906, Aaronsohn discovered wild wheat ("*tritium dicoccoides*"), the earliest known prototype of bread-producing grain, a finding of some consequence not only for agronomists, but for the historians of civilization. The finding of this primitive ancestor of common wheat, together with his articles in various professional journals earned for the young scientist an international reputation. He was invited to come to the United States by Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson. Aaronsohn accepted the offer (1901). In America he lec-

tured, met with fellow agriculturists, and wrote articles for the Department of Agriculture. He also became the darling of the American Jewish establishment, numbering among his acquaintances such notables as Judge Julian Mack, Professor Cyrus Adler, Henrietta Szold, Judah L. Magnes, Louis Marshall, Paul Warburg, Samuel L. Fels, and Julius Rosenwald. A fund was created by some of Aaronsohn's admirers (spearheaded by the philanthropist Rosenwald) to finance an agricultural experimental station in Palestine under the agronomist's direction.

Aaronsohn chose for the station's location a site at Atlit on the coastal plain of Palestine, slightly north of Zikhron Ya'acov, and facing a rocky spur of the Carmel range on which rested the ruins of an old Crusader castle. Before returning to Palestine to build the experimental station Aaron persuaded his younger brother Alexander (1888–1948) to carry on his work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

At Atlit, Aaronsohn collected a large technical library, kept collections of geological and botanical specimens, and tested a variety of crops. He also explored various means of reviving Palestine's soil, and carried out extensive research on dry-farming techniques. His work became legendary, even among the younger generation of labor and socialist-oriented settlers who resented the agronomist's employment at Atlit of Arab laborers. For these Jewish newcomers, Aaronsohn and his family represented the aristocracy of the earlier generation of pioneers whose bourgeois life-style they detested.

**I**n 1913, Aaron rejoined his brother Alexander in the United States for another extended lecture tour designed to raise money for the Atlit experimental station. Breaking off the tour to obtain more material from Palestine, the two brothers were in the Holy Land when World War I erupted. Alexander was conscripted into the Turkish army. Aaron, as a consequence of his connections with American governmental circles, and his reputation as a prominent scientist suddenly found himself in a position of considerable importance to the Yishuv (Jewish community of Palestine). He was appointed to a three man committee responsible for allotting financial aid to Palestine from the United States. Although frequently at odds with the Zionist Organiza-

tion's leadership, Aaronsohn worked closely with their representative in Palestine, Arthur Ruppin, to alleviate the suffering of the Jewish community. Despite the danger to himself the outspoken agronomist did not hesitate to protest to Djemal Pasha, commander of the Turkish forces in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, when the latter began a systematic harassment and persecutions of the Jews. Amazingly, Aaronsohn's protestations did not seem to affect his status or the high esteem he enjoyed in Ottoman circles.

The spring of 1915 brought on an invasion of locusts which threatened the region's crops, and the entire population was called upon to fight the grasshoppers. Djemal Pasha, fearing that the inevitable famine which would follow the infestation would affect his army, called upon Aaronsohn to apply his scientific skills in combating the scourge in Palestine and Syria. The agronomist accepted the challenge and concentrated his efforts, with some success, in destroying the eggs of the locusts. However, nothing seemed to stop the winged horde from wreaking havoc throughout the region. By fall the swarms were gone, only to be immediately followed by a typhoid epidemic.

The corruption that Aaronsohn encountered among Turkish officials during his campaign against the locusts; and the Ottoman regime's persecution of the Jews and their institutions contributed to a growing awareness on his part that neither the Land of Israel nor the Jewish settlements had a future under the brutish Turkish administration. He had the presentment that a page in Jewish history was about to turn, and that the best hope for the Yishuv's survival lay in casting its lot with the Allied Powers. This assessment ran contrary to the majority of the Palestinian Jewish community, the Zionist Organization, and many of Aaronsohn's American friends — all of whom feared that a position in favor of the Allies would endanger the Yishuv and deliver it up defenseless to the Turkish authorities. The Jews would thus risk undergoing the fate of the recently massacred Armenians.

**A**aronsohn was strongly influenced in his pro-Ally stand by the passions of some of the people closest to him. His brother Alexander despised the Turks. He had managed to bribe his way out of the Turkish army and viewed his military experience to have been

nothing short of a nightmare. Prior to the war he had founded a semi-clandestine self-defense unit of Jewish farmers (the Gideonites) which sought to protect the settlements against Turkish depredations. Alexander's American sojourn had also reinforced his ideas on democracy and Jewish nationalism — concepts incompatible to the Turkish regime ruling Palestine.

Similar beliefs and feelings were held by Avshalom Feinberg (1889–1917) a close friend of the Aaronsohn family. Born in Hedera, one of the Rothschild supported colonies, Avshalom was descended from a family that formed part of the "Mayflower" generation. His maternal grandfather had been the principal founder of the "Bilu" (a group of young Russian-Jewish idealists who in 1882 took the initiative in establishing a foothold in Palestine). His paternal uncle had played a key role in the founding of the agricultural settlement Rishon le-Zion.

In 1904, Avshalom, with a scholarship bequeathed to him by Baron Rothschild, went to Paris to complete his studies. Upon his return to Palestine five years later, he became acquainted with the Aaronsohn family, and captivated the two daughters of the household, Sarah and Rebecca. Although attracted to both women, Avshalom became Rebecca's fiancé. Broken-hearted, Sarah in a pique married a crude Bulgarian Jew who took her to Constantinople where they settled.

Avshalom Feinberg was even more convinced than the Aaronsohn brothers that the future of Palestinian Jewry hinged on an Allied victory. His enthusiasm was shared by Aaron who made him his assistant at the Atlit station. Together the two friends organized a small group of followers, consisting mainly of members of their families and comrades (the backbone of the Nili espionage ring). Almost casually they began collecting strategic information on the Turco-German army in Palestine. Aaron Aaronsohn in his position as scientific advisor to the Turkish commander on the locust problem was able to move about freely throughout Palestine and Syria, and in the process gathered information which he believed was invaluable to the Allies when and if they decided to invade the Holy Land. He was thus bitterly disappointed when the British chose to make landings at Gallipoli (Turkey) where they suffered a stinging defeat in the battle for the conquest of the Dardanelles. A

British force which advanced from the Persian Gulf towards Baghdad (1915) was likewise defeated. To offset these reverses on the western and Turkish fronts, the Allies had the meager satisfaction of repelling several assaults which the Turks directed against the Suez Canal.

Meanwhile, the Nili network, having gathered a considerable amount of hard and exact intelligence, searched for ways to transmit this information to the British military in Egypt. Aaronsohn firmly believed that the latter would be persuaded by the Nili material of their error in not invading Palestine. After much thought, Alexander Aaronsohn was chosen to attempt to contact the British. On July 7, 1915, provided with false papers, he boarded an American ship in Haifa bound for New York. He was accompanied by his sister Rebecca whom Aaron had decided, as a safety measure, to send to the United States. When the vessel made a stopover in Egypt, Alexander tried without success to establish a liaison with the British military headquarters in Cairo. The latter regarded all Palestinian Jews as pro-German and did not choose to trust Alexander, or his message. Alexander made several more attempts to convince the British officials of the importance of establishing communications with the Nili. When at last he realized that the British refused to take him seriously, Alexander and his sister resumed their voyage to America.

Not hearing from Alexander, Avshalom Feinberg volunteered to go to Egypt. On September 6, 1915 he took advantage of the last American ship to land in Haifa to stow away. Avshalom jumped ship at Alexandria and made his way to Port Said the headquarters of the British Intelligence Bureau. Here he met and impressed Leonard Wooley, an archaeologist occupying an important post in the Intelligence Service. Wooley quickly realized the value of having a spy network behind the enemy lines, and together with Avshalom worked out a communication code and a point of contact for the use of the Nili operatives. Some weeks later a British frigate cruising at night off the promontory at Atlit brought back Avshalom who was dropped off by a launch. It was agreed that the vessel would return at regular intervals to pick up information packets prepared by the Nili network.



In December of 1915 the Nili band was augmented by the return to Zikhron Ya'acov of Sarah Aaronsohn. She had left her boorish husband and unhappy home in Constantinople, only to fall in love once again with the handsome and dashing Avshalom. At about this same time the Nili espionage operation which had begun so nonchalantly, took on a new intensity when Aaron Aaronsohn received ominous news that the Turks were concentrating large numbers of troops for another offensive against the Suez Canal.

Eager to alert the British to the new danger, the Nili were confronted with an unexpected setback. The frigate designated to pick up information from the Allied station made an unscheduled appearance (March 13, 1916) and when the sailor went ashore found no one there, he left a message that the vessel would return. It never did. Unknown to Aaron and his associates, a ship carrying Leonard Wooley, the British officer in charge of the liaison with Nili, had been torpedoed and he was taken prisoner by the Turks. Wooley's detention had resulted in the complete breakdown of communications between Atlit and Port Said.

Aaron Aaronsohn was greatly troubled by the rupture, and further alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Yishuv. The war had cut off funds regularly sent to the pious by their European communities. Turkish officials pursuing a policy of thorough Ottomanization had increased their harassment of the Jews and their institutions. The Anglo-Palestine Bank had been closed, and the American Relief Committee providing vital help to thousands of destitute persons dissolved. Disease and starvation threatened the very existence of the Jewish community.

Aaronsohn now strongly felt that the rescue of Palestinian Jewry had become a matter of top priority, and that it was vital for the British to understand that unless the Holy Land was liberated the Jews and the country's other inhabitants would not survive. Considering the gravity of the situation, Aaronsohn decided to personally inform the British what was transpiring in Palestine. Since he was so well known to the Ottoman authorities he ruled out the direct route to Egypt chosen by Alexander and Avshalom. Instead he decided to go indirectly through Europe to the heart of the British Empire, London and in his own identity.

In a meeting with Djemal Pasha he persuaded the Turkish commander that his scientific work required that he go to Berlin to do research. He arrived in Berlin on August 21, 1916. Here he met two American Zionists (Alexander Dushkin and Judah Magnes) and without revealing his plan convinced them that he wanted to return to the United States with them. The two Zionists agreed to help him get the desired passage when they got to Copenhagen, Denmark. Aaronsohn then used the influence of his scientific colleagues in Berlin to get permission to visit a seed breeding center in Stockholm, Sweden — apparently as a cover for a stop-over in Copenhagen. After arriving in the Danish capital, Aaronsohn contacted the British Embassy and made arrangements for the last phase of his plan, namely to reach England without appearing to have defected. His Zionist friends booked passage for him on the *Oskar II* bound for the United States. When the vessel arrived off the Scottish coast at Kirkwall in the Orkneys it was intercepted and boarded by the crew of a British patrol who as pre-arranged made a big show of arresting Aaronsohn as an Ottoman citizen. He was taken to London where he was subjected to a series of interrogations by Scotland Yard and by military intelligence at the War Office. He provided the British officials with information on conditions in Palestine, and with compelling evidence of Turkish intentions in the Middle East, including a Turco-German plan to capture Basra, and a troop build-up for a direct assault against Egypt. Since the beginning of the Nili network, Aaronsohn had kept a secret diary of his personal observations as he traveled about Palestine and Syria. It contained details about Turkish troop movements, location of arms depots, gun emplacements, fortifications, coastal vessels, transport, and even the names and profile sketches of a large number of Turkish army officers. This information, Aaronsohn passed on to the astounded British authorities. Throughout his conversations with the British, he emphasized Turkish vulnerability through an invasion of Palestine.

Aaron's information and knowledge of the Middle East clearly pointed to his being sent to Cairo to work closely with military intelligence there, and to re-establish contacts with the Nili organization in Palestine. En route to Egypt he learned of the auspicious nomination

of Lloyd George to head the British government (the new Prime Minister would eventually give the order for the preparation of a new offensive in the Sinai).

Meanwhile back in Atlit, Avshalom champed at the bit. After six months without hearing from Aaronsohn he decided to cross the Sinai to Egypt and re-establish the connection with British Intelligence. He paid no attention to Sarah's entreaties not to go, but asked another of the network's members, Joseph Lichansky to accompany him on the dangerous journey. Lichansky was a former member of the Ha-Shomer (association of Jewish watchmen of Palestine founded by the settlers for self-defense against Arab marauders), but was not highly thought of by the guardian elite. He had a reputation as a dandy and womanizer. On January 13, 1917 the two men set out by camel, disguised as Bedouins, and made their way to Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip without arousing suspicion. From this point on what occurred is somewhat shrouded in mystery. Lichansky arrived alone at the approaches to El Arish where he was picked up by an Australian patrol. He was seriously wounded with three bullets in his back. Taken to the Port Said hospital, he related that a brawl had broken out between their Arab guide and Bedouins of another tribe. In the exchange of gunfire that ensued, Avshalom was mortally wounded, and thrown from his mount. Lichansky, although also shot had managed to stay in the saddle and escaped. There were no witnesses to the incident, and later attempts to find traces of Avshalom proved futile. There were also ugly rumors in some quarters of the Yishuv that Lichansky had taken advantage of the incident to rid himself of a rival for the affections of Sarah. Avshalom's fate laid buried in the sands until 1967, after the Six Day War when his remains were found and positively identified. A palm tree had sprouted from a pit of the dried dates that Avshalom had taken along with him, its roots entwined around his bones.

With Aaron in Egypt, and Avshalom missing, the leadership at the Atlit station was assumed by Sarah Aaronsohn. On February 19, 1917 the British frigate *Managem* arrived off the promontory (Aaron had succeeded in restoring the clandestine sea shuttle between Atlit and Port Said), and dropped off Lichan-

sky who had fully recovered from his wounds. For the next eight months, under the very noses of the Turks, Sarah, Lichansky and their associates continued to collect and transmit to Aaron and British Intelligence in Egypt information on Turco-German troop movements and equipment.

In March of 1917, the British began an offensive against the Turco-German lines in the Sinai. After some initial successes the attack broke down before Gaza. Aaron Aaronsohn was miffed as he had long insisted, based on Nili reports, that the enemy's weakest point was Beersheba, in the center of the Negev, and not the Gaza coastline which was heavily defended. His advice had been continuously ignored by the British military. However, the situation changed dramatically after General Allenby assumed command of the British Expeditionary Force in Egypt. Made aware of Aaronsohn's intelligence reports, Allenby decided to consider the Beersheba alternative. He asked the Nili network to provide him data on the Turkish defenses around Beersheba. Sarah immediately directed her operatives to set about obtaining the desired information, while Aaron busied himself with preparing a manual (*Palestine Handbook*) for the use of officers in charge of military operations.

The Nili reports were soon forthcoming and included data on the weather, the location of water resources, the precise condition of every known route to Beersheba from the Negev desert, fortifications in the area, and disposition of Turkish troops. The information provided by the Nili network would prove invaluable to the success of General Allenby's campaign.

During the Passover holiday of 1917, Djemal Pasha ordered the expulsion of the Jewish population from Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Protests by Yishuv leaders fell upon deaf ears. Aaron Aaronsohn tried desperately to arouse world opinion to intervene, and through the Nili network sent large sums of money to help the Jewish community. The Yishuv leaders (notably the Mayor of Tel Aviv, Meir Dizengoff) welcomed the financial aid which reached them from the United States through the Nili, but continued to dissociate themselves from the activities of the spy ring. Most of the Jewish settlers took an ambiguous, even hostile attitude toward the Nili organization and its leader, Aaron Aaronsohn. The Socialist Zion-

ists, in particular, disliked the agronomist for his known antipathy to their ideology.

Many of the Palestinian Jews too, had gone to great lengths to affirm their loyalty to the Ottoman regime. Thus, until the very end of its existence the Nili did not enjoy wide support, and was on occasions persecuted by elements of the organized majority of the Yishuv. Fear of Turkish reprisals hung like a sword above the head of the Jewish community throughout the years of the war. Indeed, but for the intrusion of the German government through its representatives in the Turkish capital and the local commander General Kress von Kressenstein the fate of Palestinian Jewry might have resembled that of the Armenians.

On April 15, 1917 Sarah and Lichansky made their way to Cairo to consult with Aaron about the rapidly deteriorating situation in Palestine. They left the Atlit station in the hands of Na'aman Belkind, a cousin of Avshalom. Despite pleas from Aaron for Sarah to remain in Cairo she returned with Lichansky to Atlit aboard the British vessel *Managem*. They brought with them several carrier pigeons. On July 15, 1917, Sarah released the pigeons with coded information banded to their legs for the first time: only one of the birds arrived at their intended destination. On August 30, 1917 Sarah sent a message by carrier pigeon requesting that the *Managem* be sent to pick up a deserter whom she had been hiding at the Atlit station. When the vessel finally arrived three weeks later it took aboard the deserter and an urgent message from Sarah addressed to her brother. The communication informed Aaron that the British must reach Atlit by September 27th as the Jewish community was causing trouble. There was danger, Sarah noted, that some elements in the Yishuv were considering betraying the Nili to the Ottoman authorities. Indeed, the Ha-Shomer's central committee had met secretly and decided to put an end to the Nili spy ring.

In addition to the threat of betrayal, Sarah also learned that one of her birds had landed in the courtyard of Caesarea's Turkish "mudir" (governor), Ahmed Bek. The latter official had captured the pigeon and found the coded message. Unable to decipher it he forwarded it to the prefect of Haifa who in turn passed it on to the German intelligence experts who worked under General Kress von Kressenstein, Dje-

mal Pasha's chief of staff. Sarah was also aware that Na'aman Belkind had been caught with documents compromising the Nili network. Belkind had attempted to make his way across the Sinai to apprise Aaron Aaronsohn of the latest developments. He had been accompanied by a Bedouin guide who had rallied to Lawrence of Arabia's call to revolt against the Turks. The Bedouin betrayed him to the Turks and he was arrested and taken to Damascus. Since Belkind belonged to a family from Zikhron Ya'acov the Turkish investigations quickly centered on the colony. A Turkish detachment of police and troops were dispatched to the settlement, but a number of the young men of Zikhron Ya'acov warned in advance of their approach hid in the nearby orange groves. Lichansky was among those who managed to slip by the Turkish cordon.

Sarah who had chosen not to flee was questioned as to Lichansky's whereabouts, but insisted she knew nothing. Enraged at finding no evidence of espionage in the Aaronsohn house, the Turks seized Sarah's sixty-eight year old father and began to beat him on the soles of his feet with a club. Sarah tried to intercede and was in turn subjected to a series of brutal tortures (whipped, her fingernails crushed, and red hot bricks applied to the soles of her feet and breasts). This pattern of torture continued for several days. During the course of her ordeal, Sarah learned that the Turkish prefect had ordered that she was to be taken to Nazareth for further interrogation. When the time approached for the transfer, Sarah begged her captors to be allowed to go to the washroom of her home to cleanse the blood from her body. Granted permission she took the opportunity to recover a revolver which she had previously hidden there and shot herself (October 5, 1917). Paralyzed she lingered on for four more days before dying on the last day of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot — Simhat Torah, the day of rejoicing in the Law.

While Sarah lay dying the Ha-Shomer who were determined to put an end to the Nili operation commissioned one of its members to liquidate Lichansky and deliver his body to the Ottoman authorities. The designated assassin, Shabtai Ehrlich together with an accomplice, located Lichansky and offered to help him get safely to Metulla, his native village in the Upper Galilee. En route they shot the fugitive in

the back, but although badly wounded Lichansky managed to escape his would-be killers. However, no one would agree to give him shelter. The Ha-Shomer, furious over his escape, offered a reward for his capture. The fleeing spy hid for a time in an orange grove belonging to a woman farmer who sympathized with the Nili goals, but Lichansky, wounded and tired, was at the end of his rope. Near exhaustion he surrendered to a Turkish unit retreating before the British advance (Allenby's troops had finally broken through the Turco-German lines on the Beersheba front, and made their way to Rishon-le-Zion, south of Tel Aviv; Gaza would fall on November 7, 1917, and Jerusalem on December 9, 1917). Taken to Damascus, Lichansky was confined in the same jail as Na'aman Belkind and the latter's younger brother. Not long afterwards, Lichansky and Belkind were hanged in one of Damascus' public squares.

A month prior to Sarah's demise, Aaron had an interview with Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner for Egypt. Wingate informed Aaronsohn of his government's decision to support the national aspirations of the Jewish people. Upon receiving this news Aaronsohn decided to leave for London to discuss the matter with Chaim Weizmann and other Zionist officials. He was also anxious to obtain from Weizmann a message of support for the Nili network which was in trouble with the residents of the Yishuv. Before embarking for London, Aaron left the responsibility of his post in Cairo to his younger brother Alexander. The latter had recently returned from the United States, after a two year propaganda campaign, and had accepted a commission with British Intelligence.

Chaim Weizmann, after listening to Aaronsohn's appeal to help the Nili, eventually forwarded a message of support to Alexander in Cairo who in turn relayed it to Zikhron Ya'acov. However, the message arrived too late as Sarah was already dead and the Nili network broken. In the interim, on the recommendation of Weizmann, Aaron Aaronsohn was sent to the United States on a political propaganda campaign to incite the Americans to intensify their war efforts. While in America, Aaron learned of the tragic death of his sister. He remained in the United States until the end of hostilities in November, 1918.

Aaronsohn returned to Palestine as a member of the nine-man Zionist Commission appointed by the British War Cabinet. Headed by Weizmann, the commission's function was to coordinate Jewish affairs in Palestine, and to act as a liaison with the military government, and to try to establish links between the Jewish and Arab communities. In spite of Weizmann's backing, Aaronsohn was forced to fight for his status in the Yishuv and in the Zionist movement. His relations with the Zionist leadership had never been cordial, and he remained unpopular in the Yishuv where memories of the danger his Nili organization had placed the Jewish community was still fresh in mind.

Weizmann, however, unlike most of his compatriots recognized the agronomist's great talents and successfully fought to include Aaronsohn in the Zionist delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Although he was not of a conciliatory disposition, and was accustomed to speak his mind with more vigor than tact, Aaronsohn with his usual energy made friends with all members of the delegation, and with important members of the British government. Together with T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) Aaron organized the second meeting of Chaim Weizmann with Feisal, the son of Hussein of Mecca from which emerged an agreement of mutual recognition of Arab and Jewish aspirations (January 3, 1918). Aaronsohn also participated in the debates of the Zionist delegation and argued strongly for a Judeo-Arab arrangement that would have undoubtedly changed the face of Palestine. He also compiled an incisive memorandum on the frontiers of the territory to be placed under a British mandate for a Jewish National Home.

Aaron's activities also embraced other delegations participating in the Paris Peace Conference. Thus, he agreed to serve as an intermediary for the Italians, and transmitted a secret document on the question of Trieste to the American delegation. In addition, Aaronsohn through the mediation of his friend Louis Strauss, (secretary to Herbert Hoover upon whom American assistance to Europe depended) pressure was applied on the Poles to put an end to the pogroms sweeping their country.

As the peace talks dragged on, Aaronsohn shuttled frequently between London and

Paris. On May 15, 1919 he boarded a mail airplane bound for the French capital. Several minutes into the flight the aircraft plunged into the English Channel. There were no survivors. A French fisherman who recovered the plane's mailbag reported hearing an explosion just prior to the crash leading some individuals to speculate that the aircraft might have been deliberately sabotaged.

Aaron Aaronsohn's death was certainly not without consequences. He was one of the few Jewish notables participating in the Peace Conference to enjoy good relations with the Arabs whose language he spoke. His proposals for an entente between the two nationalisms symbolized by the Feisal-Weizmann Agreement were more realistic than those of his opponents in the Yishuv — the revolutionary Jewish settlers who had come from Russia and Poland, and whose customs and ideologies shocked their Arab neighbors.

Aaronsohn also represented a threat to British imperial interests which risked being deprived of its role as arbiter between the Arab and Jewish communities. The agronomist's death halted the process of settlement he favored which would have rendered the British role in Palestine unnecessary. It also facilitated Winston Churchill's decision to artificially sever Trans-Jordan from the mandated territory in order to appease Emir Abdullah, thus inaugurating a policy of alternately and proportionally playing up to both the Arabs and Jews of Palestine. This divisiveness was designed to maintain the role of the mandatory power at the gates of the Orient.

Although Aaron Aaronsohn's influence on the course of events that led to the ouster of the Turks from the Holy Land, and the establishment of the British Mandate for Palestine was considerable, he has not received the credit he deserves for his services to Zionism and the Jewish people. □

## POETRY

### EARLY CALL

A cardinal calls early through my  
bedroom window.  
I know he can't mean me.  
Not that we haven't met.  
I've watched him and his mate  
Circle round the feeder on my deck,  
She a bolder or a hungrier guest than he,  
And bob in for a hurried meal  
Amid the clamor of competitors,  
And when I move an inch too close  
They take my measure and retire.

But something else makes him familiar.  
He starts with two long rising notes,  
Then follows with a multiple, staccato trill:  
Almost a shofar melody,  
Almost Shevarim, Teruah.  
It isn't every cardinal's call;  
It's his own variation,  
Though I know it isn't personal.  
And if any bird were Jewish  
It wouldn't be a cardinal,  
And as for Rosh Hashanah,  
It's still two months away.  
But every morning his peculiar cry  
Finds me waiting in my bed.,  
I'm sure I recognize this local cardinal  
Almost as well as does his tufted bride.

Like her, I know that it's a call,  
And not a sing.  
He keeps repeating it, as if expecting  
a response,  
Insistently, as if there isn't time.  
I've never heard her answer him,  
But I suppose she carries out  
The duties of a female cardinal,  
And doesn't let the season pass her by.  
By now the nagging gets to me as well.  
Is there something I should say or do  
Besides lie here and listen to a lovely cardinal,  
Who'll soon be gone?

*Henry Glickman*

**Have an urgent document or package to/from ISRAEL?**  
Send it with us for guaranteed delivery within 36 hours.

**shigur/cosell**  
COURIERS INC.

147-40 184th Street, Jamaica, NY 11413  
Call 718-244-7356 or 800-695-1213  
Fax 718-244-7870

In Israel call Avi at 03-512-6649

**The fastest courier service for all your shipments to/from Israel**

## WE SALUTE

*The Democratic State of*

## ISRAEL

on its 49th  
anniversary



*The work  
your  
organization  
does is  
inspiring and  
greatly  
commendable.*



Please accept  
the UFT's  
best wishes  
on this and  
all your future  
endeavors!



Sandra Feldman  
President

Harriet Merchant  
Treasurer

The Members of the  
LABOUR ZIONIST ALLIANCE OF  
CANADA

send greetings to the  
State of Israel  
on its 49th Anniversary.  
May Peace become a  
reality in the  
coming year!



**JOSEPH KRystal**  
*National Chairman*

**HARRY FROIMOVITCH**  
**LOUIS KIRSHENBAUM**  
*Vice Chairmen*

Our Wish for Israel — PEACE!



Our Thanks to the Editor  
NAHUM GUTTMAN  
for so many devoted years to  
JEWISH FRONTIER!



Dena & Irving Greenberg  
Southfield, Michigan

LABOR ZIONIST ALLIANCE  
of CHICAGO

Extends heartfelt greetings  
to our Chaverim in Israel  
on this glorious 49th!

*Marilyn Golden, President*

# Help Make Zionist History!

Register Now to Vote in the World Zionist Congress Elections

August 29, 1997 marks the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress. Convened in Basel in 1897 by Theodor Herzl, the Congress ushered in a new era in Jewish life. For the first time, an assembly of Jewish representatives from a multitude of countries and of every political persuasion gathered to discuss and debate the major issues confronting the Jewish people. Since that first historic session, the Zionist Congress has emerged as the world parliament of the Jewish people, charting the course of modern Zionism for the past 100 years.

The World Zionist Organization's Centennial Congress will meet in Jerusalem in December 1997. Its deliberations and decisions will be of crucial importance to every person concerned with the welfare of Israel and the Jewish people everywhere. As an American Jew, you will have the opportunity to participate in the 33rd Congress by helping to elect delegates who reflect your views on world Jewish problems. And most important: You can help secure the largest Labor Zionist delegation possible.

*So please register now!* Participate in this democratic process. Fill out the registration form below (you may photocopy it for friends and family) and enclose your \$2.00 registration fee to cover expenses. Mail before June 1, 1997. A ballot with a full description of the slates will be sent to you at the end of the summer.

Send to: The American Elections Committee to the 33rd World Zionist Congress, P.O. Box 1250, Westwood, N.J. 07675-1250.

## HOW TO REGISTER

1. Please read, fill out the form below and sign your name on the bottom. Every item must be completed in full and legibly printed.
2. Enclose a \$2.00 personal check payable to American Zionist Elections (no cash) or a valid voucher to register as a voting member in the American Zionist Elections. No ballot will be sent if you fail to enclose your registration fee or voucher. Should the elections be deferred or cancelled, refunds cannot be made.
3. Each individual registrant must fill out his/her own form. You may photocopy this form, but you can register only once. Duplicate registration will be treated as fraud. Registrations must be postmarked no later than June 1, 1997.
4. My signature on the registration form confirms all four of the following statements:
  1. I am Jewish.
  2. I was born on or before June 30, 1979.
  3. I am a citizen or permanent resident of the U.S.
  4. I accept the Jerusalem Program.

## JERUSALEM PROGRAM

### THE AIMS OF ZIONISM ARE:

The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life;

The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel, through aliya from all countries;

The strengthening of the State of Israel which is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace;  
The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish, Hebrew, and Zionist education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values;

The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

## VOTER REGISTRATION FORM AMERICAN ELECTIONS TO THE 33RD WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

Every item must be completed in full and legibly printed.

Last six digits of your social security number: **X X X** - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address (No business addresses) \_\_\_\_\_

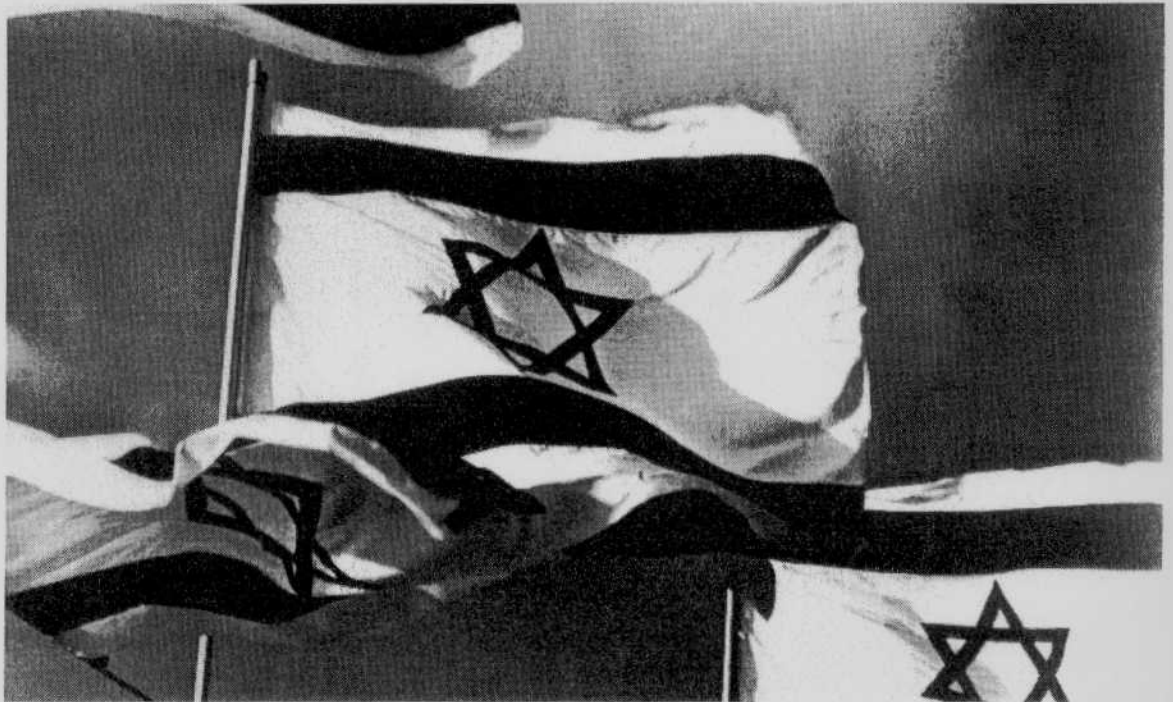
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

(Your signature affirms that all information on both parts of this form is accurate and true.)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

# "THE STATE OF ISRAEL HAS ARISEN..."

*David Ben-Gurion · May 14, 1948*



Israel Bonds celebrates Yom Ha'atzmaut and looks forward to a bright future of continued economic achievement.

*This is not an offering, which can be made only by prospectus from:*  
Development Corporation for Israel/State of Israel Bonds  
575 Lexington Avenue · Suite 600 · New York, NY 10022-6195  
**Sara Chaitin, LZA Division: 212-644-2663 x388**

