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U.S. Federations, Reform & Conservative Leaders

PANIC ON "WHO IS A JEW" BILL

U.S. Supreme Court Orders Husband To Issue A GET After 20 Years

Yehuda Shragai, of Manhattan, issued a GET to his wife at the Beth Din of the Rabbinical Council of America on Friday, November 11, 1988, after 20 years of withholding the GET in order to inflict "G-d's punishment" on her. The GET was delivered to Mrs. Shragai in the Rabbinical District Court in Jerusalem on November 17, 1988.

Mr. Shragai's decision to issue the GET occurred only after United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, on October 18, 1988, denied Mr. Shragai's application for a stay of an order for his arrest for contempt of court, based upon his failure to issue the GET after he was ordered to do so by a New York court. Mr. Shragai sought to have the stay imposed while he sought leave to appeal the order to the United

States Supreme Court.

Justice Marshall's decision left Mr. Shragai subject to immediate arrest and jailing for contempt of court until he issued the GET.

According to the attorney for Mrs. Shragai, A. David Stern, of Manhattan, the New York Supreme Court's decision which enforced an Israeli GET decree reflected the court's recognition that an order directing a GET to be given is in line with New York public policy. Mr. Stern also observed that Justice Marshall's refusal to issue a stay while Mr. Shragai pursued efforts to get the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case is a very positive sign. Mr. Stern noted that Justice Marshall is one of the Court's most civil liberties

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Leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements as well as the leaders of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) are bordering on panic as they make every effort to see that the "Who is a Jew" amendment does not even come up in the Knesset.

They have launched separate campaigns urging adherents to petition Israeli leaders not to change the legal definition of who is a Jew.

When a high-level delegation of Jewish philanthropic leaders arrived in Israel on an emergency mission this week they were carrying a powerful message from North American Jewry.

The message was that any attempt to change the Law of Return through Israel's political process could drive a deep wedge between the Jewish state and the Diaspora.

At stake is not merely the fate of a handful of non-Orthodox converts to Judaism living in Israel, but the unity of the Jewish people as a whole, according to leaders of the Council of Jewish Federations, which concluded its 57th General Assembly here Sunday morning.

The drive by Hasidic and other Orthodox parties in Israel to deny automatic citizenship to immigrants converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis preoccupied the General Assembly since its opening last Wednesday night.

Passionate discussions of the issue permeated nearly every session of the assembly, occasionally breaking out into white-hot exchanges.

But Shoshana Cardin, a past president of CJF, said anger is the wrong word to describe the depth of feeling here and in many quarters of the North American Jewish community.

Rather it is "pain and anguish that the unity of the Jewish people, Klal Yisrael, could be destroyed, could be shredded," she said. Israeli leaders must be aware of the "tremendous, tremendous trauma that will take place if we are not understood."

Delegates from the CJF, the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the United Israel Appeal in both the United States and Canada were part of that delegation.

Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher rebbe, reportedly turned down a request to meet with National UJA Chairman Morton Kornreich, citing health reasons. Kornreich is said to have declined offers to meet with top aides to the 87-year-old rebbe.

The Brooklyn-based rebbe, who is now the spiritual mentor of Israel's Agudat Yisrael party, which

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Kosher Food Violations Cited At Kosher Law Hearings

A call for increased penalties against kosher food law violators and a speedy resolution of allegations was called for by Assemblyman Howard Lasher last week as a panel on kosher food law enforcement ended their hearings. Assemblyman Lasher, who was the lead-off witness pointed out that a charge had been made against the Hebrew National Company that some meat was found soaking in hot water prior to salting. Lasher claimed that Hebrew National had challenged the Department of Agriculture's Kosher Law Enforcement charges publicly claiming an improper investigation by the Department. Lasher charged that this action by Hebrew National has led to the case not going forward to a factual hearing although considerable time had passed.

On November 17th at the World Trade Center, in the second and final day of public hearings on the New York laws protecting the kosher consumer, the hearing panel, the New York State Advisory Board on Kosher Law Enforcement heard testimony from government, organizations and individuals on the current state of those provisions. The Advisory Board, part of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, held the hearings to seek input on

possible changes. Both sessions were chaired by Gerald E. Feldhamer, the Chairman of the Advisory Board.

Serving with Mr. Feldhamer on the panel were Board members Eric Freudenstein, Rabbi Emanuel Holzer, Steven Prager, Dennis Rapps, and Rabbi Ephraim Sturm. Sitting with the panel were Deputy Commissioner Stephen Harausz, Deputy Commissioner Anthony Papa, Deputy Counsel Dennis E. Buckley, Department Chief of Kosher Law Enforcement Rabbi Schulem Rubin, Advisory Board Secretary Rabbi Philip Reiss and A. David Stern, legal consultant to the Advisory Board.

New York State Assemblyman Howard Lasher, lauded the efforts of Rabbi Rubin in protecting the rights of the kosher consumer and spoke of the insidiousness of misleading the kosher consumer into unwittingly eating non-kosher. Assemblyman Lasher, called for increasing penalties for violations of the kosher laws, regular inspections of out-of-New York State companies selling food represented as kosher in New York and the power for the Agriculture and Markets Department to close down companies that

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Kosher Food Violations Cited At Special Hearings

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commit egregious violations of the kosher laws. Assemblyman Lasher also spoke of the necessity for correcting the perception that the larger companies were able to avoid prosecution for violations.

Another witness, Jerome M. Luks, Vice President and General Counsel of National Foods Inc., the parent company of Hebrew National vigorously disputed Assemblyman Lasher and claimed that the case had not gone forward because of problems of proof and with the procedures the Department followed in connection with preparing the case and not because of any impropriety on Hebrew National's part. Mr. Luks also challenged news reports of allegations of improper kosher procedures reportedly made by a former kosher supervisor at Hebrew National's Indianapolis, Indiana plant noting that an investigation was being conducted by the Department of Agriculture and Markets into those allegations. Mr. Luks said that the claims made by the supervisor, Robert Schwartz, did not mean that the challenged practices were indeed improper. Rather, he said, Rabbi Schwartz disagreed with the halachic (Jewish religious law) rulings of the Chief Supervisor of Hebrew National, Rabbi Tibor Stern. Mr. Luks said that Rabbi Stern was a world renowned authority on Jewish law and that Hebrew National followed his views on the requirements of that law.

During questioning by Advisory Board members Mr. Luks specifically contested the significance of

Rabbi Schwartz' testimony at his unemployment insurance hearing relating to his leaving the job at Hebrew National. Rabbi Schwartz, in that testimony, which was also made a part of the record of the Kosher Law hearings, had said that meat was used in the Hebrew National Indianapolis plant which had been shipped in a box called a "combo." Rabbi Schwartz had said that the meat was compressed in the combo not permitting adequate drainage or washing according to Jewish law and which also led to the meat soaking in blood, all in violation of Jewish religious law. Rabbi Schwartz had also claimed that there was inadequate soaking and salting and evening of meat at the plant in violation of the kosher laws. Mr. Luks vehemently denied any wrongdoing saying that Hebrew National followed the requirements set by Rabbi Stern who was a superior authority to Rabbi Schwartz. Mr. Luks acknowledged that for a time Rabbi Stern did rely on Rabbi Schwartz in supervising the kashruth of the plant.

Mr. Luks acknowledged that Rabbi Schwartz' allegations had originally been credited by the unemployment insurance board which had initially granted him benefits on the ground that he could not continue to work at the Hebrew National plant because of the kosher law violations he claimed to have seen. That decision, however, was reversed on the grounds that the dispute was based on a difference of opinion with Rabbi Stern.

Mr. Luks also said that New York State law should be changed to permit the coming of kosher and non-kosher packaged food products held out for sale. Under New York law such products must be kept separately. He said that the current rules unnecessarily burden merchants and are not necessary to protect the kosher consumer against inadvertently choosing non-kosher products.

Rabbi Robert Schwartz testified that the circumstances surrounding his leaving the employ of Hebrew National were not related to disputes of Jewish religious law. Rather, he said that there were practices at the Indianapolis plant that were plainly contrary to the laws of kosher and about which there were no differences of opinion among legal decisors. He reiterated the testimony he presented to the unemployment insurance board and also added that there were substantial and key periods of time during which no supervisors were scheduled to monitor the Indianapolis plant's operations. Rabbi Schwartz also submitted for the record a number of pictures, he said were taken at the Indianapolis plant, of meat in combos and meat taken from combos, which he said showed the problems associated with the use of the combos.

Rabbi Schwartz said that his experiences pointed very clearly to the need for routine and regular inspections of plants producing food for sale in New York, regardless of whether they have kosher supervision. (To Be Continued Next Week)

Lasher Calls For Heavier Fines In Kosher Law Enforcement

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reduced to \$53,000 (approximately 10 percent of last year's penalties).

"Obviously, a need exists to change the rules and regulations where penalties are concerned," said Assemblyman Lasher. "Furthermore, current policy changes at the Department of Agriculture and Markets seem to encourage Kosher food fraud, rather than to discourage it."

Testimony was presented at the hearing stating that Hebrew National, a major kosher food producer, committed violations. More than two years ago the company was investigated by New York's Agriculture

regulation."

In addition to the need for rapid resolution of violations cases, Assemblyman Lasher also asked that information concerning such violations should quickly be made public knowledge.

"I hope to submit a bill, at this coming session, which would deal with disseminating information on violations," stated Assemblyman Lasher. "This bill would empower the Agriculture and Markets Department, after internal review of reported violations, to release this information to the public."

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Lasher Calls For Heavier Fines In Kosher Law Enforcement

Assemblyman Howard L. Lasher feels that all is not kosher in the kosher food industry according to the findings of a recent public hearing on New York State's kosher laws. Assemblyman Howard L. Lasher, known as the "Father of Kosher Food Laws," was the



Assemblyman Howard Lasher

first to testify at the second hearing conducted by the New York State Advisory Board on Kosher Law Enforcement. Mr. Lasher cited a decrease in assessed penalties levied against Kosher food law violators and an increase in the length of time used to prosecute violators.

"Violators of the Kosher law commit especially heinous crimes," said Assemblyman Lasher. "Such a violation is much more than an attempt to gain extra profit dollars, it is a desecration of the spiritual and religious beliefs of a certain segment of our population."

During the hearing it was disclosed that assessed penalties for kosher food violators have been decreasing. In 1987, 417 violation cases brought in \$500,000 in penalties to the state. In 1988, the number of cases had increased to 545 but the fines collected had been

reduced to \$53,000 (approximately 10 percent of last year's penalties).

"Obviously, a need exists to change the rules and regulations where penalties are concerned," said Assemblyman Lasher. "Furthermore, current policy changes at the Department of Agriculture and Markets seem to encourage Kosher food fraud, rather than to discourage it."

Testimony was presented at the hearing stating that Hebrew National, a major kosher food producer, committed violations. More than two years ago the company was investigated by New York's Agriculture and Markets Department for violations with no final determination made.

"This type of situation clearly points out the current problem with non-resolution of cases" said Assemblyman Lasher. "Final determination of cases must be made. It is unfair to all parties and the public when a matter is not speedily resolved."

"In the case of Hebrew National, both the company and the consumers lose, since a time period is allowed to exist in which consumers may unwittingly consume non-Kosher products," said the Assemblyman. "In addition, the company also loses since it can lose credibility and sales while waiting for a resolution of the case."

To discourage violators, the Kosher Law Enforcement department of the New York State's Agriculture and Markets Department has called for increased penalties including turning misdemeanors into felonies.

"I support such increased penalties and have consistently authored legislation requiring strict controls over the preparation of Kosher food as well as increased penalties for violators," said Assemblyman Lasher. "We need strict law and strict controls which should not be watered down either legislatively or by

regulation."

In addition to the need for rapid resolution of violations cases, Assemblyman Lasher also asked that information concerning such violations should quickly be made public knowledge.

"I hope to submit a bill, at this coming session, which would deal with disseminating information on violations," stated Assemblyman Lasher. "This bill would empower the Agriculture and Markets Department, after internal review of reported violations, to release this information to the public."

"Currently, this information cannot be released until after conviction of the violator by the State's Attorney General," said Assemblyman Lasher. "Unfortunately, this method leaves the public completely in the dark. This creates a situation, whereby, by waiting until a final determination is made the Kosher consumer unwittingly consumes non-Kosher food for a lengthy period of time."

"It is imperative that consumers who buy Kosher products receive all of the safeguards that can constitutionally be given including strong enforcement, strict penalties and speedy determination of the alleged violations," said Assemblyman Lasher.

He thanked the Advisory Board for giving their time and efforts to assist in presenting the facts to the public and for working to obtain new ideas for the improvement of the existing Kosher food laws.

In addition, Assemblyman Lasher singled out, lauded Rabbi Schulem Rubin, Director of the Division of Kosher Law Enforcement, of the Department of Agriculture and Markets for his many years of dedication to the cause of Kosher law enforcement on an impartial basis, many times under very trying circumstances.

Infant Mortality Rate Is Down

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Israel's infant mortality rate has declined over the past 10 years and continues to drop.

The improvement was registered in both the Jewish and non-Jewish populations, according to data in the new Statistical Yearbook to be published shortly.

In 1977, about 1,700 infants died before their first birthday. In 1987, the deaths were down to 1,100.

Taking into account the increased birthrate in that period, infant mortality has dropped from 18 deaths per 1,000 births to 11, a decline of about 40 percent.

In 1977, infant mortality was nearly 14 per 1,000 births in the Jewish community and 32 per thousands

Anger Over Nazi Memorabilia

By William Saphire

NEW YORK (JTA) — The case of the Nazi-fancier of "Glitter Gulch" has taken on national ramifications.

Ralph Engelstad, owner of the Imperial Palace, a 2,700-room casino hotel on the Las Vegas strip, allegedly holds parties to celebrate Hitler's birthday amid his personal collection of Nazi-era memorabilia said to be worth millions.

Hotel employees are invited or coerced to attend, it has been charged.

The University of North Dakota, in Bismarck, having learned of this, was reported last week to be pondering whether to rename the sports stadium it

Rosanne To Head Israel Bonds

NEW YORK (JTA) — Meir Rosenne, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, will head the worldwide Israel Bond Organization beginning Jan. 1, according to David Hermelin of Detroit, international chairman, and Julian Venezky of Peoria, Ill., chairman of the board of directors.

The two Israel Bond leaders said that Rosenne was recommended for the position by the Finance Ministry of Israel, and that the formal elections will take place at the next meeting of the organization's board of directors.