

"WHO IS A JEW" TALKS RESUME

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- The National Religious Party and the Aguda Israel are expected to join a Likud-led coalition even if Premier Menachem Begin declines to meet their demands for a guarantee that the controversial "Who is a Jew" amendment to the Law of Return will be adopted by the next Knesset, according to reports.

The amendment would define as a Jew any person born of a Jewish mother or converted by an Orthodox rabbi "according to halacha." The proposal has been effectively shelved during the past four years despite Begin's promise in 1977 to "do his utmost" to get the amendment through Parliament. However, Simcha Ehrlich, a leader of Likud's Liberal Party wing gave notice that he and his party were not prepared to support the proposed amendment which went against their conscience.

Israel's Ashkenazic and Sephardic Chief Rabbis, Slomo Goren and Ovadia Yosef have sent telegram to all religious members of the Knesset to withstand pressures from non-Orthodox Jewish communities and their leaders in the diaspora to kill the amendment. The Chief Rabbis noted that the non-Orthodox religious community in Israel represented "a tiny majority" of the people and its leaders "live in the diaspora because they wish to do so" but still seek the right to influence decision making in Israel. Observers here noted however that neither of them issued a halachic ruling requiring the religious parties to stay out of the government unless they were assured that the "Who is a Jew" amendment was certain to be adopted. The ruling however had been issued at the NRP's request in the 1974 Labor-led coalition of Premier Yitzhak Rabin for a time on the strength of such a ruling by Goren. This time, it has made no such requests and one NRP politician observed privately, "We've learned our lesson. We shan't ask for a halachic ruling this time."

Meanwhile, the religious parties are being urged by Orthodox leaders in the United States particularly the Aguda Is-

rael in America to press their demands for the amendment without compromise because the political climate is favorable in Israel. Leaders of Conservative and Reform Judaism in America are protesting the amendment with equal vigor.

A leading Reform figure in Israel Prof. Michael Klein, Dean of the Hebrew Union College Jerusalem branch, noted in an open letter to Begin that "over three million affiliated non-Orthodox Jews throughout the world are concerned about their legitimacy being questioned by the State of Israel." He continued, "In the post-Holocaust period of our history we cannot afford to suffer another division in the hands of a small intolerant and presumptuous group of ultra-Orthodox politicians. We respectfully but rightfully demand equal rights and religious freedom for all Jews in the State of Israel as guaranteed by the declaration of independence.

FRANCE LOOKING TO CAUSE MORE TROUBLE

PARIS (WNS) -- Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson told the Beirut daily "Al Nahar" that if Iraq makes a request of France to replace the reactor destroyed by an Israeli raid June 7, France will replace the reactor "on the terms we apply to other countries," it was reported here. Earlier, he said that France will "multiply checks and controls to ensure that civilian reactors are not used for military purposes."

BEGIN PONDER'S DEFENSE MINISTER

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- Premier Menachem Begin hinted strongly that he intends to name Ariel Sharon Defense Minister in a new Likud government despite the bitter controversy surrounding the ultra-hawkish Yom Kippur war hero.

He said in a television panel interview that he believed the appointment would not encounter the overwhelming opposition raised within the Cabinet a year ago when he favored Sharon for the defense post just vacated by Ezer Weizman.

Begin declined to say flatly that he has decided to appoint Sharon, observing that he would name his Cabinet members only after he receives a formal call from President Yitzhak Navon to form a new government.

France will sell arms to Middle East countries but not to Israel. He added that arms will not be sold to countries with totalitarian regimes or which are at war. "As far as the Middle East is concerned, only the second restriction is applicable," he said. "As a consequence (of the restriction) we shall not deliver arms to Israel." Cheysson

named Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the Persian Gulf States, Egypt and North Africa as countries to which France is prepared to sell weapons.

French officials refused to comment on Cheysson's declaration. Only State Minister for Foreign Trade, Michel Jobert, confirmed Paris' readiness to replace Iraq's reactor "on certain conditions and

if Iraq makes the demand." When asked whether the training of a nuclear generation in Baghdad might not by itself endanger ultimate peace, Jobert said, "there is no stopping progress. All over the world, an increasing number of countries and scientists are about to enter the nuclear age." Jobert did not comment on Cheysson's declaration barring Israel from the French arms market.

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