

Rabbis split on lifting bank boycott

Jerusalem Post Staff

The ultra-Orthodox boycott of Bank Leumi has been lifted, according to notices appearing in Orthodox newspapers, but at least two major rabbinical leaders have reportedly refused to endorse the call to end the boycott.

The boycott was declared following charges by the Atra Kadisha (Holy Site) group that the Ganei Hamat Hotel in Tiberias, partly owned by a Bank Leumi subsidiary, was being built on a Jewish graveyard. Last week the chief rabbinite and the bank signed an agreement intended to prevent desecration of graves during the completion of the construction, which had been temporarily halted.

A notice that the boycott had ended was published yesterday on the front page of Agudat Yisrael's *Hamodia* daily newspaper, the same place that denunciations of the bank had previously appeared. But the advertisement was signed only by "religious leaders and luminaries," with no names listed, indicating that not all ultra-Orthodox groups agree to ending the boycott.

According to this week's edition of the Orthodox weekly *Erev Shabbat*, the call to end the boycott was



Rabbi Schach

backed by the Gur Hassidic rebbe, who is chairman of Agudat Yisrael's Council of Tora Sages, and by 17 other Hassidic rabbis and yeshiva heads. *Erev Shabbat* has also published the notice.

Erev Shabbat said that Rabbi Eliezer Schach, spiritual leader of the Mitnagged (anti-Hassidic) ultra-Orthodox, had not yet issued a statement on the agreement between the rabbinite and Bank Leumi. But the weekly quoted Atra Kadisha's Rabbi David Shmidl as saying: "Rabbi Schach told us the struggle (against the bank) will go on."

Schach refused to meet former Agudat Yisrael Knesset member

Shlomo Lorincz, who intended to try to persuade the rabbi to join the call to end the boycott, it has been learned.

Disagreement over the issue has reportedly already sparked conflict between Hassidim and Mitnagdim, who have posted notices in Jerusalem streets condemning each other.

The Shas rabbinical council has also refused to rescind its call to boycott Bank Leumi, *Erev Shabbat* said. It quoted former chief rabbi and Shas rabbinical leader Ovadiah Yosef as saying: "The council supports Rabbi Schach's decision and the boycott therefore remains in effect."

Atra Kadisha yesterday distributed leaflets in the Tiberias area saying that Ganei Hamat would be a site of "licentiousness and orgies" next to the graves of rabbis, and that the group could not agree to this happening.

But construction on the almost completed hotel resumed last week, and Bank Leumi sources said that as far as they were concerned the affair was over. "The hotel is due to open within three months, God willing," the sources said.

Price freeze is a flop

By AARON SITTNER
Jerusalem Post Reporter

The price freeze - scheduled to run until September 30 - has begun to melt, retail businessmen say.

"It's a sad, bad and wretched situation," Yitzhak Gutman, secretary of the Israel Commerce Federation (Jerusalem), told *The Jerusalem Post* last week. His counterpart at the Jerusalem Merchants' Association, Avraham Birnbaum, agrees and terms the freeze "one grand flop."

Their comments came amid reports from consumer organizations that Package Deal II is on the verge of collapse as an increasing number of merchants and operators of service-type businesses skirt the regulations and set their prices as they wish.

"For many businessmen the regulations are unreasonable," Gutman said. "For example, though the price of imported beef has risen by 65 per cent since November 2, restaurants were permitted to raise their prices by only 10 per cent at the end of Price Freeze I and another 5 per cent recently."

"In addition to meat, which is the main ingredient in a restaurateur's cost sheet, he must also pay much more for cooking oil, not to speak of vegetables that are not even under price control. And what about his electricity and gas bills, which have risen by about 50 per cent since November 2?"

"So, how can such a person stay in business? He will either violate the regulations, cut the size of his portions in half, or declare bankruptcy."

Therefore, Gutman argues, restaurateurs should be exempt from price control.

Birnbaum believes that the first price freeze was successful "because we then had a relatively moderate halt in the real rise in earnings, and this in turn moderated the increase in prices."

"But today the picture is different. Importers and manufacturers are raising prices indiscriminately, and retailers have no choice but to follow suit."

According to Birnbaum, a slight change in the wording of the regulations this time has left a loophole for unjustified price increases by manufacturers.

In an interview with *The Post* last week, David Brodet, head of the government's price-freeze unit, said: "There's no denying that the current freeze is more problematical than the first one, which included a tight hold not only on prices but also on the shekel's exchange rate."

"Yet, even with all its faults, the 5 or 10 per cent monthly rise in prices is still infinitely more palatable than the 30 per cent monthly jump in the index - exactly what would happen if there were no price freeze at all."

Brodet said that more than 15,000 spot checks have been made by inspectors of the Industry and Trade Ministry, with 1,253 summonses issued.

Many of the suspected violations will be heard in court within days rather than months. This follows approval last week by the Knesset Law Committee of regulations establishing special "rapid-justice tribunals" to hear charges of price-freeze violations.

\$36,000 deal with Jordan

MERHAVIA (Itim). - Israeli irrigation experts at this kibbutz in 1975 secretly designed and sold an irrigation system to King Hussein's uncle for use in his ranch, it was disclosed last week.

Merhavia's irrigation plant, Plassim, was paid \$36,000 in the deal with Sherrif Nasser, which was revealed upon Plassim's 25th birthday. The idea originated in 1974, when the plant, in search of new markets, sent a Jericho middle man to Jordan.

Once Nasser expressed his interest and the military government was informed of the project, Plassim trained a West Bank agronomist, who was then sent to Nasser's ranch to survey its needs.

Plassim designed and made pipes for the irrigation system, but payment turned out to be a problem - Nasser would not pay before delivery, and Plassim refused to send him the pipes without a down payment. As a compromise, the two sides agreed that Plassim would be paid by a middleman after he saw the delivery trucks at one of the Jordan River bridges.

Meanwhile, Nasser explained in Jordan that he bought his pipe system from West Bank Arabs. While the trucks crossed the Jordan the IDF declared a curfew in the area so the secret would not get out.

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