

Black Hebrews 'duped' Glass panel

"We aren't interested in what goes on inside the Black Hebrew community... Our job is to find a solution that will put an end to the friction which has arisen in Dimona between the Israelis and the Black Hebrews."

— Zvi Zilker, mayor of Ashdod and a member of the Glass Commission, January 1978

The Glass Commission report's failure to seriously investigate the Black Hebrews' way of life worries Americans and Israelis familiar with the cult and frightens former members.

Those who have read the 147-page study of the community, its history, its ideology and its 12-year relationship with the State of Israel are most impressed with the thorough research done by MK David Glass and his three colleagues. "In all," writes Glass in the preface to his report, "we heard opinions and evidence from 66 people, read extensive background material, research studies, surveys, letters, press clippings, and other material relevant to the subject."

Everyone compliments the committee for its comprehensive analysis of the problem and its possible solutions, as well as its absolute condemnation of the government's inept dealings with the community.

And no one understands how the team, which spent 20 months, at the taxpayer's expense, probing "all" aspects of the Black Hebrew problem — a probe that entailed a trip to the U.S. — virtually ignored charges that question the cult's values, behaviour and control systems. No one can understand how the committee reached its conclusions — settling the Black Hebrews in a village and giving them permanent residence visas — without interviewing any of the numerous defectors currently living in Israel.

"Glass correctly realized that the Black Hebrews are a cult, and therefore cannot be judged by the norms applicable to other social groups," said an American who has read the report. "And then he decided that the Black Hebrews are a healthy, happy lot and dismisses as 'apparently unfounded' charges of abuse and threats. How? By interviewing two Jews from Dimona, one Black Hebrew woman jailed for theft, and 'hundreds' of Black Hebrews — as if a group living in a community characterized by that kind of regime would be free to speak openly, or is capable of speaking openly."

"Had he bothered to travel one hour from his office, in various directions, he could have talked to former cult members. They would have given him a much different picture and information that would have made it impossible for him to reach the conclusions he did."

"By refusing to come to terms with the real nature of the cult, Glass has done Israel a great disservice," said an American involved in helping "clean up" the aftermath of Jonestown. "His recommendations are based on only some of the facts. So what seems like a 'logical, humane, Jewish' solution today may well lead to disaster in five years."

Glass's only firm supporter these days is Ben-Ami Carter, who Dimona residents claim cleverly

"snowed" the MK with his "reasonable" new stance, threats of mass suicide and stirring up anti-Israel sentiment in the American black community. Of the three American Jewish organizations which, in 1978, pressured by U.S. black leaders, urged Interior Minister Yosef Burg to immediately adopt a fair solution to the problem, only the American Jewish Congress officially endorses the Glass recommendations. The American Jewish Committee has made "no formal response" and the Anti-Defamation League is saying that "in the last analysis the Israeli government must take whatever action suits its own best interests." But spokesmen for both organizations also laud Glass for finally moving the Interior Ministry towards a solution to the more than decade-old problem.

Privately, however, some American Jewish officials in Israel are becoming concerned about Glass's recommendations, which parallel so closely those they jointly proposed in 1978 — "before we knew what we know today," said

all those people here by saying, 'If you don't stay with us, it's hello Chicago, pimps, and dope pushers,' " the former member said.

Glass's most vehement critics are the residents of Arad and Dimona, as well as those familiar with the People's Temple tragedy. They insist that Glass is wrong for letting Carter continue to blackmail Israel with his threats. They charge that the MK no more comes to grips with Israel's Black Hebrew problem than did Interior Minister Yosef Burg, who dealt with the cult for 10 years by pretending it didn't exist. They reject the committee's conclusion that it is no longer possible to deport the Black Hebrews.

"Do you want to know how to deport them?" asks Amit Karni, a member of the Arad Citizens Committee. "Read the police report that Glass quotes from. It's all outlined, along with a programme on how to combat any resulting unfavourable public opinion. Unlike Glass, the police know blackmail when they see it, and they aren't willing to submit to it."

"The settlement idea isn't practical anyway. Given the Black Hebrews' history, what makes Glass think that they are going to be happy with that settlement? What makes Glass think they aren't going to demand more and more? What makes Glass think Carter is really going to stick to his promises?" Karni asks.

A former Black Hebrew laughs at Glass' "naive" belief that, once granted legal status, the law enforcement authorities in this country will be able to keep the cult under surveillance.

"You are dealing with a mastermind and a criminal mind," said C.L. "He's been infiltrating people into the country, right past airport authorities, for 10 years. He's got the whole government kow-towing, taking him seriously. What a joke. Don't they realize he's a liar, a pimp, a con-man? The truth isn't in him. He's not fit to lead anybody. Why legitimize what he's doing?"

An American-Israeli journalist, who has done research on the Black Hebrews, was working for a San Francisco newspaper when 800 members of the People's Temple committed suicide. Amazed by the parallels he found between the two cults, the reporter wrote to Yehuda Avner, an aide to Prime Minister Begin, warning that mass murder — "That's really what it was" — could also occur in Israel.

"There were also wishy-washy liberals on my paper who didn't think it was important that one of our newsmen should accompany the late Congressman Leo Ryan (he was killed by the cult) on his fact-finding tour to Jonestown."

"What galls me is not the government, which makes mistakes about everything, or bureaucrats who waffle rather than take responsibility for a strong action. It's liberals like Glass, who make things worse with their live-and-let-live attitude. They are well-intentioned, but in the end, they do the most harm."

"The Black Hebrews have no rights here. And they have nothing to do with Israel," he continued. "The sooner they are thrown out the better. Some say that something bad is going to happen if we deport them. Well, something worse is going to happen if we don't." (Last of four articles.)

NEWSBEAT

Joan Borsten

one concerned official. As defections from the cult mount, and additional reports of unusual and extreme behaviour are recorded, sending all Black Hebrews to an isolated settlement appears less than an ideal solution.

"We would like to take a look at that secret police report which details criminals and criminal activity in the group," said one of the officials. "We have never been able to challenge the black American's picture of the cult as peace-loving, a clean-cut group of black Jews being persecuted for no reason by the racist Israelis."

Particularly unnerving to all involved with the Black Hebrews is Glass' apparent willingness to require all cult members to settle in the village.

"I grant that because of international politics and the failure of the government to deal with this problem effectively, you probably have to give Carter his settlement," said an American official. "But you should at the same time try to defuse, not strengthen, Carter's hold over the lives of 2,000 people. Why is there no provision for giving permanent residence to those who are willing to leave the cult? Or who have already left it but don't want to return to the U.S.? Faced only with the choice of going back to the ghetto, they may choose Carter."

An ex-cult member added: "Glass just played right into Carter's hands. So did the police in Ellat when they arrested all the former Black Hebrews for living there illegally. Carter and his sidekicks scare potential defectors — and there are maybe 200 who would leave right now — into staying. They tell them that they can't function outside of Dimona. They tell them: 'You'll have to roam the streets, sell your body, steal and eat junk food. But if you stay with us, nothing will happen to you. No one ever gets deported from Dimona.'"

"If the government implements the Glass Commission's recommendations, Carter can hold