

Bubis grave defaced in Israel

20 August 1999

By Regine Wosnitza

THE HEAD of Germany's Jewish community, who died suddenly last Friday, was showered with praise worldwide — but an Israeli artist shocked relatives and dignitaries at his Tel Aviv funeral by defacing the grave.

Meir Mendelson said that he had poured paint on the grave because Ignatz Bubis was a "bad person" — a characterisation in stark contrast to the tributes paid to the long-time president of the Central Council of German Jews.

Mr Bubis's body was flown to Israel for burial on Sunday — ironically, because of the German leader's fear that his grave might be desecrated by neo-Nazis in Germany, as happened to his predecessor in the council post, Heinz Galinski.

The decision of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder not to interrupt his holiday in Italy to travel to the funeral, which was attended by German President Johannes Rau and Interior Minister Otto Schily, drew criticism in the German media.

"This lack of instinct is more than just a faux pas," the daily Die Welt said.

Mr Bubis's death, from cancer, at the age of 72 in Frankfurt triggered a wave of mourning in Germany.

The daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung said: "It is not Bubis the Central Council head who has died, but a great German."

Hundreds of Germans converged to sign books of condolence at Jewish community centres.

The city of Frankfurt has announced the establishment of a "Bubis Prize for Tolerance and Understanding."

Mayor Petra Roth said that the prize would be awarded to individuals who distinguished themselves in the "liberal and unprejudiced" spirit in which Mr Bubis had lived his life.

American President Bill Clinton joined the tributes, calling Mr Bubis one of Germany's foremost champions of tolerance.

Andreas Nachama, 48, and Michel Friedman, 43, are among communal figures being discussed as possible successors to Mr Bubis.

Others believed to be in the running are Charlotte Knoblauch, 66, president of the Munich community; Paul Spiegel, 61, head of the Dusseldorf community; and Salomon Korn, 55, a Frankfurt architect.