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Jewish immigration to Palestine (British policy), 1943.

Excerpt from letter from Turkey

dated July 25, 1943

Palestine immigration certificates were issued to children and grown-ups to accompany them. At the time they were issued, Jews were allowed to leave all Balkan countries and even Slovakia. The Turks issued transit-visas and allowed one railway-carriage to pass through Turkey every week. In this way two groups from Hungary and one from Rumania passed. But the procedure was very lengthy and complicated and it took months of intervention in London to simplify it. We saw also that immigration by rail meant the saving merely of dozens, because means of transport by land are lacking in Europe as well as in Turkey itself. When Kaplan (of the Executive of the Jewish Agency) was here we came to the conclusion that the only possibility was sea-transport. The Turks agreed to allow us to charter a boat, which would go to one of the Bulgarian ports, but they demanded that the British should officially apply to them for this. The British made their action dependent on approval of the boats. This demand naturally was fulfilled and three boats were found suitable by British experts and details were sent to London. Two months passed but no application was made by the British to the Turks. Kaplan was promised by Mr. Casey in Cairo that there would be no more delays as 'the position in the Mediterranean has become easier' and that Ankara would receive instructions to help in every way. To speed up the matter, a special official for the transport of refugees would be nominated. Meanwhile things changed. German troop movements started in the Balkans and transit through Bulgaria was cut off. Even the second group of children from Rumania who were all prepared, could not go. When Mr. Eden announced in the House of Commons that H.M.G. was prepared to render all help, ships and so forth; but the difficulty was that no Jews were allowed by the

Bulgarian authorities to leave.

Finally permission was obtained from the Bulgarian Government for 1000 Jews to leave Bulgaria during the first week of August. This permit was sent to Barlas who represents the Jewish Agency in Turkey. He addressed himself immediately with this document to the British Embassy in Ankara and requested that the British should make the necessary approach to the Turks in order that permission be granted to the Jewish Agency to charter one of the above mentioned ships. He received the answer that the Embassy would cable to London for instructions. He reminded them that Kaplan had been promised by the Embassy when he saw them during his visit to Turkey, that they would take direct action. Barlas was nevertheless told that without approval from London nothing could be done. Barlas visited Ankara a week later that the British Government were seeking to verify the permit through the Swiss Legation in Sofia. This was so in spite of the fact that a photostatic copy of the official permit had been handed to them. Barlas was also told that once the permit had been verified London would itself take care of all questions of transport by sea and land.

Meanwhile time was passing and we had at our disposal only thirty days from the time that the Bulgarian permit reached us until the approximate date fixed for departure.

It is possible that the Bulgarian Government may change its attitude and grant permission to leave for even more than the 1000 Jews specified in the permit.

This week Barlas was called to Ankara by the Embassy and we were hopeful for a positive reply from London. The only thing which they had to tell him, however, at the Embassy was to express their criticism at the fact that the

Jewish Agency had complained in London that no help had been forthcoming from the British in regard to this immigration.

Meanwhile we are approaching the beginning of August and we can only hope that intervention from without will cut through the red tape, the only result of which so far is that Jews are perishing.

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Since the above was written, Lord Cranborne, in the course of a speech on the refugee question in the House of Lords, on July 28th, stated the following:

"The difficulties involved from the points of view of travel and selection need hardly be emphasized, but they could, and I think can say they would have been overcome long ago but for the reluctance of the enemy to give any of the Jewish people concerned the necessary exit permits."

Jewish Immigration to Pol.
(Brit Policy)

Istanbul, 25th July 1943

To

Israel Mereminski, the Delegation of Labour Federation and
the Heads of the Jewish Labour Movement in the U. S. A.

Dear friends,

Since we wrote you our detailed letter, three months have passed. Our intention then was mainly to urge Chaim to use all our political possibilities in order to change the negative intentions of the English towards the immigration of children and their conveyors, which they themselves had officially announced. Although we shall inform you in this letter on immigration questions as well, our letter this time is following up a cable which ~~xxx~~ we sent you on the 14th inst. but which did not reach you. And this is how it ran:

'Re our report 30/4 besides immigration which inspite all difficulties our main endeavour and where at the moment more hopes than before also immediate help possible by transfer from terrible to comparatively easier places stop possibilities to render help much greater than at time of our communication and still growing stop jishuv remez family and kufelef trying utmost during five months but is too much to continue indefinitely stop danger makor decrease while necessities grow stop why should this effort be made only by home stop we expect your reply after consultation all ovdim friends inform also nahum - Wenia - Mendel - Zeev'

We did not find any possibility to send you a letter quickly and therefore we were forced to cable although a wire on this~~x~~ subject cannot be clear and this was apparently also the reason why the wire did not reach you. Its contents is clear. With worsening of the Jewish Position in conquered Europe at one hand and with the increase and development of the contacts and aid from here and from Geneva on the other hand, new possibilities of help and saving were developed which through all these years and even at the beginning of our work had been neglected. And conclusion: w i t h m o n e y o n e c a n s a v e l i v e s. By~~x~~ supporting those who still live and by helping people to flee from the worse traps to comparatively better places.

Not only because of geographical reasons - its nearness to Europe - it was understood in Palestine and first of all by the Labour Federation of the Jewish Agency, that they had to start this activity before they made sure of partners to help them in this difficult undertaking. During the last eight months Palestine Jewry gave 100.000 Pounds. Of this half the Labour Federation. Almost the entire sum was spent on help and saving for the different countries.

We shall not repeat today the position in the countries. We did that in our last letter. No great changes occurred since then. Only the steady trend towards the worse.

In POLAND according to the possibilities we helped with cash, with food parcels, with passports of neutral countries and by organizing the flight to neighbouring countries. Our letters of encouragement reached Warsaw before they started their opened fight. (Always there was reaction and defense in times when people were taken away and many letters and postcards from over there reached us with the words: 'haganski' and 'hagawski'). We do not know if the means which we sent from here ~~did~~ directly help the revolt because it started already in the middle of April, but from Palestine 15.000 Pounds were transferred via London to the Polish underground movement for that purpose. For everybody who sent us his photograph we

fixed the passport and this means that he will not be driven out. From those you may know which have been saved by these means, we mention Nathan Eck and the poet Izchak Katznelson and many dozens of other friends. We transferred money to our comrades in Slovakia and they succeeded to reach many of the concentration camps in ~~Slovakia~~ Poland. They send food, medicines, clothing and cash. During the last few months 400 people from Poland reached Slovakia and from there they want to Hungary. Our friends in Rumania do the same thing, and in Slovakia and in Rumania they do it while they are in personal danger. And from all sides we hear that with more means this opening could be widened and it is the only loophole which remains for Poland where even a German has very great difficulties to go.

In RUMANIA we concentrated mainly on those exiled in Transnistria. It is a pity that we cannot enclose letters from comrades in Bucarest where they write about the possibilities they have found to send cases of food and medicines to the camps in Transnistria and to those who are on the other side of the Bug-river. They manage sometimes to reach Bucarest which is a safe place. During the last weeks many people have been brought there from Bukovina. We thought it also our task to encourage ~~people~~ and to help the youth in their activities. With the help of money you could always arrange things in this country. In our days without it you cannot do a thing. Our comrades managed to obtain permission to travel by train and they visited the provinces, encouraged those who are left. We even receive letters from those who have been thrown into prison.

The chapter on SLOVAKIA you probably know. Three times expulsion of the entire community was postponed with the help of money. One through the intervention of the church. During the last weeks the Joint (through S.M. in Switzerland) contributed the substantial sum for this purpose. With the money which we transferred they keep up the Jewish Labour Camps. These camps and their productive contribution helped to avoid expulsion of the young people. They contain 4000 workers and they are also the stepping stone from Poland to Hungary. But hundreds of grown-ups and children from Slovakia itself crossed into Hungary and were saved. We encourage these 'excursions' because we think they are the most practical help.

On the position of HUNGARY we wrote you in our last letter. The central problem is how to keep the thousands of refugees who came there from Slovakia, Poland, Croatia and Prague. Amongst those thousands are hundreds of our friends, members of the party, youth movements, 'pioneer', comrades who are active in central positions in the 'pioneer' movement. But we do not make differences between members of our movement and other refugees. Help is given to every Jew because he is a Jew. Many of these refugees live in concentration camps and the help which we render makes it possible to keep them. The Jewish Community in Budapest and especially our closest friends do not sit quiet for a moment and try to rope in the rich Jews and there are still many for these activities. They succeeded to obtain big amounts but that is not sufficient. The flight into Hungary is only organized with our means and if we could dispose of larger amounts we could succeed in saving hundreds and thousands. In the provincial towns and especially in Munkacs the position is worse, but we try to use also this frontier which is closer to Poland. Our comrades in Budapest are very active in finding ways and means to render help to Poland. We are expecting a courier these days who should bring us regards and news from several places in Poland.

In PRAGUE and THERESIENSTADT the situation became more serious during the last weeks. On the 20th of May we received for the first time a detailed letter through a courier from our friends there. At that time there were 10.000 Jews left in Prague and

60.000 in Theresienstadt. Twice we transferred big amounts there. We are sending parcels of food, because this is the most important after the 'hunger-law' was proclaimed. Three weeks ago many Jews from Prague including some of our comrades were driven out and brought to upper-Silesia. But others are taking their place and the work goes on. More food-parcels, more money means a great deal to this house of prison. To save them from there seems impossible. One cannot leave this country nor can one receive permission to go to Palestine.

In SERBIA almost no Jews are left. And we have no contact with them. Two weeks ago we still were in contact with Zagreb. You probably have heard that the last Jews from there had to leave since then and only 50 are left, and we ~~try~~ help them. Part of the children could be brought into Hungary. We do not know what will happen to the rest.

In ITALY we saw as our task to encourage the 1300 refugees who are there. We send food as well as money. Lately a delegate of 'Delasem' (the organization of social help of Italian Jewry) visited Geneva and he was presented with an amount of money too. In Nonantola there are the group of children which are brought from Serbia. We send them money and clothing. The refugees are without housing and clothes. And even our small means help. At the moment we do not know how the political and military development will influence the position of these refugees. But one thing we are sure of is that it will take a long time till their situation becomes better.

About HOLLAND, FRANCE and BELGIUM. Surely you know that Jarpe is now in Geneva. He tries to find many ways and means of help, especially for children in France and Belgium. The only real help we can see today is flight to Switzerland ~~and~~ or Spain. Under great danger our friends in Holland, France, try to find the possibilities for this. There are many who continue in the heroic and daring ways which led Schuschu to his tragic end. Lately the position became worse even in the Italian part of France. We have spent substantial amounts on the flight from these countries, the money was transferred to Geneva because the work is organized by Jarperach and others, But still greater amounts are needed.

We need not write about Bulgaria and Greece. We sent this week a courier to Salonica in order to find the heads of the community. We do not know the reply he will bring us. Bulgarians up to now did not need help. But the Jews who have left Sofia and are now concentrated in the provinces are in a plight. We do not know yet how things will develop there. We ~~think~~ think that for Bulgaria, emigration is the only practical way of help. But we shall return to this.

The c o n c l u s i o n of all this you will find easily yourself. It is an offence to close the account of Jewry in conquered Europe, to look at it as a field of death only. There are Jews left, they hang between life and death. There is an organized underground movement. members of the parties, 'pioneers', youth movements who manifest their will of life, who yearn for their homeland and liberty. Their outcry reaches us only rarely. Sometimes the wireless of the Polish underground movement reports on our movement as well, sometimes, it manages to pass the German censorship, sometimes it reaches us only when those who shout are not any more amongst the living. All this is a great obligation for Palestine as the center of hope, as the heaven of safety. But also for the free countries on our brothers there, who live in freedom their everyday life and look at Europe as a lost affair. Palestine c a n n o t maintain this heavy burden on its own. WE REQUEST AND DEMAND FROM YOU TO PUT AT OUR DISPOSAL FOR THE NEXT THREE MONTHS AT LEAST THE AMOUNT PALESTINE GAVE UP TO NOW. THAT MEANS 1000.000 POUNDS. THE JEWS CANNOT WAIT UNTIL YOU OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES IN ORGANIZING A DRIVE. YOU HAVE TO BORROW THE MONEY IMMEDIATELY

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AND PUT IT TO OUR DISPOSAL. DO NOT LOSE A SINGLE DAY. IF WE COULD SEND YOU EVERY LETTER, EVERY POSTCARD WHICH IS IN OUR HANDS, YOU WOULD SEE WITH YOUR OWN EYES AND YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND THE NECESSITY TO USE ALL WAYS AND MEANS TO GET THE MONEY.

The question of transfer is not difficult. You transfer the money to Palestine, the rest is to us.

Try everything and know where the real obstacle for immigration from ad-journing countries lies.

Herewith we close our letter. We expect your action in both respects: a) means for aid and rescue - b) political activity.

Please acknowledge by cable receipt of this letter and try yourself to find possibilities to write to us quickly. Regards to all friends, to the delegates of the Labour Movement, friends of the party and of the Gewerkschaften, to everybody, everybody.

With comradely regards,

Wenia Pomeraniec

Menachem Bader

Zeev Shind

