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My mission in England, 1942.

WPLS
MY MISSION IN ENGLAND

Rabbi Silver will continue to recount his experiences
on his recent visit to Great Britain

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 12, 1942

My dear Friends:

There were several reasons behind my visit to England. In the first place there was a need felt for establishing greater and closer contact between the two remaining important Jewish communities in the world, the two communities outside of Palestine of importance -- Great Britain and the United States. War had more and more isolated them and many peacetime channels of communication had been disrupted. Full and free exchange of ideas on vital issues, on Jewish matters had become increasingly more difficult. Yet so much was happening in the world affecting Jewish life and the future of the Jewish people that an exchange of ideas between the representatives of these two great historical Jewish communities, the exploring of each others minds and the pooling of each others thinking was regarded as important.

Not only were the problems which called for arming considered, but there were these large-range, long range problems of reconstruction which followed the war which required consultation on the part of representatives of these two communities. In both countries the respective governments were giving considerable thought to the subject of post-war reconstruction, and in both countries, too, responsible Jewish parties were giving considerable thought and attention to these problems. It was felt that personal contact from time to time during the war on the part of men in both countries who were familiar with the problem and in close touch with the entire Jewish field would be extremely helpful.

It was also felt that a personal message to British Jewry at this time now that America entered the war -- a personal message from a spokesman of American Jewry to British Jewry would be welcome. In very truth it was very welcome. I did not realize how welcome until I got to England. This was not a tribute to me. The same tribute would have been forthcoming to anyone coming from America at this time. I was looked on as a sort of American Ambassador. Some graciously spoke of me as a big brother representative from America. They thanked me for coming

at the psychological moment, for having uplifted the spirit of the Jewish communities.

I found British Jewry somewhat depressed as I found British people generally. Two and a half years of war, bitter war, hard war, desperate war and costly war had taken its toll on their resilience, optimism. More recently the military disasters in the Far East were bearing down heavily on the English people and ^{on} the Jews of England.

The Jews of England have their especial problem which did not contribute to the uplifting of their spirit in an hour of great trial. There was developing as in this country an anti-Semitism which had not taken on any serious proportions but which was emanating from pro-Nazi circles and who seized every opportunity openly and covertly to snipe at the Jews of England - just as they are doing in this country. When I was there the black market, which had developed as result of the rationing of all things, brought on the exploitation of the Jews by the anti-Semites. The incident of the Struma, the negative attitude of their own government to the Jews in Palestine also tended to depress the spirit of British Jewry. So that my coming at this particular moment and my message particularly -- that was looked upon as a sort of link with them who felt themselves somewhat isolated from the great Jewish community of America, as all Englishmen look with hope and confidence to America. My coming tended to lift up the spirit a bit, as it were, to strengthen it. There were large numbers of people who flocked to these meetings, plenty of them, in spite of the blackouts, not so much as a tribute to me but as an ambassador from America which could strengthen them and give them hope. That spirit reflected itself in the Anglo-Jewish press. So that, if I did not do anything, I felt amply rewarded in bringing this word of strengthening and uplifting at the psychological moment.

I spent considerable time in England with the Jewish Board of Deputies and its officers. That is an officially organized body of British Jewry. We exchanged ideas. They permitted me to look into their post-war reconstruction plan. I shared with them what we were doing in the field of relief and defense, in planning for after the war. Through the offices of Dr. Brodetsky I was arranged an interview with Sir William Jarvitt, a very wise and intelligent person. We discussed the status of European Jewry after the war. We discussed the restoration of rights after the war. We discussed problems of liberation in Jewish communities in Europe. We found him very understanding and sympathetic. We discussed with him the inevitability of large scale emigration from Eastern and Central Europe after the war and the availability and non-availability for such mass emigration. But of course in that connection we spoke of the key position, the primary role which Palestine must occupy in any large-scale emigration after the war. It was the first time the representatives of the British Jews sat down with Sir William Jowitt and discussed these problems and it was the first time he had the time to discuss it with a representative Jews of of the American Government. Channels of communication opened up between British Ministry, representatives of British Jewry and representatives of organized American Jewry.

Another interesting, and I believe, helpful visit was one which I made to the Russian Ambassador, Ivan Maisky in the company of Dr. Chaim Weizmann. There are three million Jews in the Soviet Union. Many hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews fled into the Soviet Union since the recent occupation of Poland. Russian Jews were fighting gallantly in the Soviet armies and the Soviet armies were beating the daylights out of the Nazi supermen. England and America were acclaiming their courage and prowess and we wanted the Soviet Ambassador to know how heartily we shared in that acclaim, how the Jews felt about it. - Next passover -- the Jews would say Le Shana Habah Timoshenko. Maisky was interested in the attitude of the American people towards

the Soviet Union. I explained to him what was taking place, the great sympathy and admiration which was aroused for the Soviet Union. I explained what was being done by non-Jews and by Jews in war relief. He was interested in what progress was being made for a total war effort. We spoke of the shipments of American war supplies which had landed and of our hope to increase more and more such supplies. We spoke to Ambassador Maisky of the plight of the Jews in Nazi-occupied lands. He had reason to observe their brutalities in Russian cities which they had invaded. We spoke of Jewish Palestine and the role which Jewish Palestine can play in this war in offering a Jewish army. We spoke to him of the cooperative settlements which we had established there which embody the social vision which must appeal to all men interested in a new social order. And we suggested to Ivan Maisky that his country, the one country in the whole world which has outlawed Anti-Semitism, which has made Anti-Semitism which has swept like a plague over the world counter-revolutionary and punishable by severest penalty throughout the Soviet Union, would wish to ~~play~~ have a voice in the reconstruction of the world. This country would wish to interest itself in and heap the Jewish people in the grave tasks with which it is confronted.

I went to England for yet another purpose -- to launch their campaign for the Palestine Foundation Fund. I went there on the invitation of the Jewish Agency of ~~London~~ London. They had heard of me as head of the United Palestine Appeal and as co-chairman of the United Jewish Appeal and that I had some kind of reputation as a successful schnorrer. Heretofore it was England who sent English representatives to the United States to help us launch our campaigns. Now they were asking American Jews to send their spokesman to help them. I was the first to be summoned and I was delighted with the results.

In spite of the absorption of English Jewry in war there they are

doing a magnificent job as British subjects sending money and sons to war - many sons have already received signal distinction for bravery on land, sea and in the air -- not only are they fulfilling all their obligations as civilians in war-time but they are not unmindful of their obligations as loyal members of the Household of Israel. We found a generous response from these British Jews. It is a small community, less ^{Jews} in the whole of England than in the City of Chicago. And yet this community gave to the Palestine Fund, the Keren Hayesod this year over a half million dollars, to the Jewish National Fund more than a half million dollars -- and that to Palestine alone. If you add to that what they gave to other relief purposes for refugees one must stop and pay tribute to them. Last year, I was told, the day after London was subjected to a most terrific barrage -- the day after that barrage, the leaders of the Jewish community sent a telegram to London: "We are now ready to proceed with our Palestine Fund. Please send us a speaker." I hope people in America will bear this in mind -- the Jews of Cleveland during the coming Welfare Fund Drive -- the courage, valor and generosity of the Jews of England after two and a half years of war.

There was a third reason which I went to England. That was to convey to the British Government the sentiments of a large number of American Jews to the Struma tragedy, and the Jewish Army -- upon the restrictions still being imposed upon the Government in Palestine. I had a long interview with Lord Cranborne a very cordial one, a very frank one. Quite at the outset, after we exchanged some irrelevant banter I said to him that I appreciated something he had said the day before in the House of Lords in speaking about the Struma.. I told him of the sense of outrage and indignation which was shared by Jews and non-Jews at the sheer inhumanity in not allowing 800 men and women and children not to land in Palestine and subsequently to drown. Lord Cranborne expressed deep sorrow of the incident. I suggested to him that the Struma

incident was only one of a series of similar incidents and all were the result of blind folly represented in the White Paper. He said he did not favor the White Paper. He said that he knew that Prime Minister Churchill denounced it in '39....

Rabbi Silver - Within the framework of the White Paper you still have some twenty-five to forty thousand certificates to issue to Jewish settlers. Surely it wouldn't disturb the equilibrium of the Near East if this year a few thousand more are allowed to enter than next year and thus save men, women and children from death. I said, the Struma people are dead. There is nothing that can be done about them. But there are ⁱⁿ Palestine, I reminded him, ^a a concentration camp, some eight hundred Jews who had been languishing in that camp for over a year. Also survivors of the Ship Salvador were also being kept in an internment camp in Palestine. I said to him, what earthly good can the government derive in keeping them interned. Among them are skilled workmen, men who would be glad to join up in the forces of the English Army. Why keep them in internment. Let these people go. Rabbi Silver, he said, I can make no promises, but I promise that I will give this the most earnest and immediate consideration. When I arrived here I learned that the children of these 800, the boys and girls were set free. They were turned over to the Jewish Agency Youth Department. I am hoping that their parents, men and women who are still in the camp will soon be released.

I spoke to Lord Cranborne about the Jewish Army in Palestine. There seems to be terrific confusion among the Jews of America about the Jewish Army. It is not intended to train a Jewish Army in America Palestine and to segregate the Jewish boys in a Jewish Legion. This is a Jewish army of Palestinian Jews to fight in Palestine. Later on it was hoped that the Jews from other parts of the world who are not permitted to join in their respective countries might

wish to join up. Why do we insist on a Jewish Army in Palestine? Why should the Free French or the Free Dutch wish to have an army of their own? Why should not the free Jews of Palestine wish to fight on their own? People forget that the Jews of Palestine have a status which is legally and internationally recognized which differs from that of any other country in any part of the world. The Mandate under which Great Britain rules Palestine, governs Palestine recognizes the Jews as the people and Palestine as their national homeland. And as a people in its national homeland it has the same right to defend that homeland under its own name its own flag as has any other people defending its national homeland.

The reason the British Government opposed the formation of an independent Jewish army in Palestine because of their tragic Arab appeasement policy -- not wanting to do anything to intimidate the Arabs in that part of the world. Secondly they don't want the Jews to be sufficiently strong in a military sense after the war because they may then claim to be politically independent. I spoke to Lord Cranborne about the Jewish Army. I told him what he undoubtedly knew -- what a critical spot Palestine occupied that at any moment the whole war might converge at that point. I reminded him of an editorial in the London Times in which it was stated that one of the reasons the British had failed in Burma, failed in Malay was that the native populations in those countries did not look upon the war as their own. They were not personally involved in this war. It was a war of the British Empire against some other empire which didn't concern them. I said the Jews of the Near East look upon this war as a personal war as their own life and death struggle. Why do you sacrifice actual friends to appease potential foes? -- Arabs hoping for a Nazi victory. The only people who would fight to the last drop of blood are the Jews. Why don't you give them weapons, give them ammunition and allow them to fight as Jews? Why do over 15,000 Jews already in the forces have to fight anonymously and die anonymously?

He had very little to say in answer to my statement on the Jewish Army. He listened. I got the definite impression that the subject was not at all closed. Very grave consideration was still being given to the subject in the Foreign Office. Incidentally the principle of the Jewish Army had been accepted by the British Government more than a year ago. Preparations were being made. Something happened, wire pulling in and another direction and the matter was shelved.

Lord Cranborne thanked me for my frankness and fairness. He realized that I spoke as a friend of Great Britain. He knew what I and the Jews in America had done, about the role of America in the war - sending of maximum aid to Great Britain, etc.

I had a similar conference with Mr. Richard Law, under-secretary in the Foreign Office. I also discussed these matters with Mr. Bitler of the Foreign Office, members of the American Embassy, members of the Press and with the Palestine Parliamentary Committee. I was welcomed in the House of Lords at which time I had an opportunity to tell the story of the Struma to the members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. What the outcome will be, I do not know.

This is clear in my mind. The whole colonial policy of Great Britain needs a drastic revision. It is shocking to realize what happened to them not merely in a military sense in the Far East. It is a fact that natives of Malay, Burma not only refused to fight alongside Great Britain but joined up with the enemy. England was shocked because in India the people refused to accept what they considered most generous proposals even in spite of threatened Japanese invasion. They don't trust the Colonial Office because it has not lived up to its promises in the past. The colonial policy of the British failed in the Far East just as it failed in Ireland some years ago, just as it failed in Palestine, pitting one people against the other. That kind of

policy is bankrupt and revision is indicated and the wisest minds of England are seriously considering the whole subject of British Imperial policy.

But I felt while I was in England and I feel today, that regardless of what criticism may be justifiably launched against the British policy, particularly with reference to the Jews of Palestine, one fact we must not permit ourselves to get out of focus -- England is our Ally in a war against Hitler and without England this war can not be won. England is fighting the same foe that America is fighting. England has made tremendous sacrifices already to win this war. England is prepared to make many many more sacrifices. We are just at the beginning of our sacrificial hour. In a Nazi dominated world there will be no chance for Jewish Palestine, no chance for free people....England respected the rights of the individual. The Natives in any of her territories are protected by law. England may not have done a good job in sweetening up the attitude of her possessions toward her, but they never committed the indecencies, brutalities which the Nazis have done to the lands which they conquered.

If the world is to be saved from that organized brutalities, of which we Jews were the first victims, we must keep all criticism of our Allies in a proper perspective. We must criticize as friends, helpfully, constructively. I am persuaded that after the war and after an allied victory, there will be a great opportunity for all people in the world to achieve their legitimate places in the world. And I am persuaded that the Jewish people as a result of an allied victory after the war will be able to achieve for itself with the aid of Great Britain with the aid of the Soviet Union, certainly with the aid of this great country the elementary rights and their national rights as a people in their national homeland in Palestine.

He thanked me for my frankness and fairness.
So did Mr. Richard Law - Under-Secy in Foreign Office
with whom I discussed these 2 matters again the next
day. My moderate sympathies attracted - I spoke as a
friend of G.B. - the ally, my own country - our common
interests looked -

I also discussed these matters with Sir Nevill Butler
of the Foreign Office ^{Am. Embassy in London} with representatives of the secular
press - and to members of Parliament ^{the regular} ^{Parliamentary} ^{Commons}
Mr. Lums who introduced me to at a Tea in the
House of Lords, presided over by Lord Wedgwood

6/ G.B.'s attitude towards P. in last 20 yrs - neither just nor wise.
Her colonial policy generally has plainly revealed its shocking
weaknesses in recent months. In Malay - Burma
natives turned against her - joined enemy - Killed Britishers
India - ~~she~~ faced with grave threat of invasion would
not accept Cripps' proposals - most generous - Fundamental
they don't trust C.O. office - Not lived up to promises.
Played one group ag. another - Ireland - India - Poland
+ in all places - disastrous results - Irish - Pol. leaders
India - unlike Am's attitude towards Philippines -
not permit them to be independent - C.O. policy may cost G.B. her Empire -
Perhaps not yet too late - Revision - Poland too -
Other voices - Poland etc Jews

7/ Contradiction - not obscure fact - E. is fighting Nazis - For all
personal liberty - progress - culture - science - ally - after the war

1) Several -

Need for establishing closer contact - 2 remaining
War had isolated - many peace-time channels
Full and free exchange - had become difficult
And yet so much was happening - called for exchange - exploring
Not only problems - calling for immediate - long range
In both countries respective govt's - study group
Personal contact bet. men - intimately acquainted - from
time to time - extremely helpful.

(B) It was also felt - a personal message to Mr. Jewry
now that Am. had entered the war - welcome
Ambassador - Big thanks - thanked - psych. moment
uplifted their spirits -

I found Mr. Jewry some-what depressed - War - defeat
Anti semites - Black Market - "Stunner" - "Army"
Beating down their words -

My coming - message - link - look up to - tended
large attendances - Black-out - Press -

(C) Spent considerable time Board of Refurb's - offices
Permitted - Sir William Jowett - states (Econ. Rehab)
well-informed - continued contact - Implications of mass
emigration - Pat - Availability - Pat - 1st time - helpful -

2/ another interesting and I believe helpful visit, was the one which I
paid the Soviet Ambassador - Ivan Maisky - accompanied by
his Chaim Weizmann. There are 3 M. Jews in the Soviet Union.
many ~~more~~ Polish Jews have since the Nazi invasion of Poland
fled to Russia. Russian Jews were fighting gallantly in
the Soviet armies - and the Soviet armies were beating
hell out the Nazi Supermen. England and America were
acclaiming their courage & prowess. - We wanted the Soviet
Ambassador to know how heartily we shared in this acclaim.
(Timoshenko. died 3/1/47) He was interested in the attitude of the
people towards the Soviet ~~Union~~ ^{changed attitude - Russian Relief - Jews} ~~in the USSR~~ ^{the USSR} - Our shipments had
slowed down for a time - in Feb. had increased. (1942) We
spoke of the plight of Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe - He had
reason to observe their brutality in Russian cities which
they had invaded. ~~He~~ We spoke of Palestine - of our cooper-
ative settlements & colonies, which we established there, which
embodied the social vision which of some of which must
appeal to all men ^{interested in} ~~who are thinking of a new social order.~~
~~the one country~~ ^{the one country} on the world which does not tol-
erate the Nazis which has swept like a plague over the
whole earth - will work to keep the J. people in the
game stakes which it is confronted. - Russia's voice

3 I went to E. - also - to launch K.H. - at the invitation of J. Agency
of London & Jerusalem -
~~They knew of me as Head~~ U.P.A. - U.S.A. - and as an
expert speaker -
Hence the leaders from Eng - a Pal. would come to U.S.
Times have changed. Am. J. community has matured.
It can now send leaders to Eng. & Pal. I was the
first to be summoned.

Delighted with results — In spite of their absorption in has — Tex ⁽⁴⁾
500,000 — Chicago — Liverpool —
Interest in P. widespread — Bequith
American Jewry should take note! How old world Jewry
uses to the challenge, the hour.

4). Convey to Br. govt sentiments of Am. Jews ^{on} ~~roads~~ "Struma"
and "J. Army".

Had long interviews with Lord Cranborne — Colonial Minister.

Very cordial and very frank. — "Beating around the bush"

"Struma" — series of outrageous vindictiveness — at the sheer inhumanity

769 on 50 foot vessel — no certificates — fleeing from Bessarabia
Deduced from next schedule of certificated entries — as placed
Spies ^(1500th) — internment camps — united character fully established
Turkish govt. insisted that ship withdraw — Blew up Feb
24 — Patria — 1940 — 200 dead

"Can not undermine the existing policy with reference to
illegal immigrants in the view of the wider issues involved"

— Antagonize Arabs — Change in White Paper —

— Cranborne: pledged to White Paper — Churchill — But was

— Public — Enforced — External Validity
We regard it illegal & immoral — But no

Refudiation — within frame-work — 30,000 Mar. '41
← Antagonize best friends in America — Protest Matur's

— Struma — victims are dead — But at all times — Parity

— Let them go — Situation called for — Workers - Soldiers survived Salvador
— World if it cannot Released Sea March Nov. 40

11-16 — into custody of Youth Dept. of J. Agency

5). J. Army — Reasons — a "people" — "Homeland" — More Jews & Free France
Jews are only friends — "Times" — Fight anonymously
— Peace Conference

Why do you sacrifice actual friends to appease potential
foes? Arabs — W. of the war — Shout them! — Pro-Nazi

Ali Maher Pasha — former Prime Minister of Egypt — now's relating to safety of
State — March '38