

President's Secretary's File
Departmental File
State: Hull, Cordell 1943
Box 74

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 29, 1945

My dear Mr. Secretary:

There has just come to my attention a BOC Airgram No. 60 of June 15, 1943, from the Combined Committee for French North and West African Civil Affairs, relative to "Property Changes under German Rule - Tunisia".

The conditions described in this airgram are additional evidences of the extremes to which the axis powers have gone to wreak their vengeance upon innocent inhabitants of occupied territories.

I should appreciate it if you would notify the representatives of the United States Government in North Africa that the conditions described in BOC Airgram 60 come within the accepted and announced policy stated by the United Nations last December not to recognize property transfers made by inhabitants of occupied territories under the aures of the axis powers.

Our representatives should also be instructed to notify the French authorities in North Africa that this Government looks with disfavor upon any attempt at foreclosure or collection of interest on mortgages incurred as a result of levies made by the Axis powers.

I should appreciate your keeping me informed of such actions as are taken by our representatives and of any changes in the situation that may occur.

Sincerely,

(Signed) FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

The Honorable

The Secretary of State

By Authority of State Dept. letter 1-12-72 and
British Govt. telegram 1-13-72
EJS Date MAR 3 1972

4. On 6 December, 1942, the Council of the Jewish Community in Tunis received an order from the German authorities to produce 2,000 workers, under an arrangement whereby food, clothing, wages etc. were to be paid for by the Jews. At the cost of an additional 1,000 laborers a 24-hour extension was obtained. On 8 December, 1942, the request not having been complied with, a reign of terror commenced, in which synagogues and schools were broken into, Jews beaten and threatened, and obliged to march long distances. At this point the Jewish Community organized itself and set up services for crafting laborers, feeding, clothing and paying them, as well as supplying them with transportation and medical aid. About 4,000 workers were disbanded, and put at work at the airport and harbor in Tunis, at Bizerte, Metour, Mafideville, and Cheylus, all points of nearly constant Allied air attacks. The Jews also had to act as policemen, to insure that the workers remained at their jobs despite heavy bombings and maltreatment.

5. The Jewish Community was obliged also to shoulder the financial burden of caring for Jewish refugees who came to Tunis from Bizerte, and similarly destroyed cities as well as those who lost their homes by other means.

6. The funds to meet the expenses referred to above including the costs of feeding and care for the labor gangs were obtained by the Jewish Community by imposing a capital levy of 10-15% upon the property of its members. Mortgages, sales, etc. were resorted to to raise these funds, which were estimated at 60,000,000 francs. At the present time, these mortgages are still outstanding, and in the hands of banks principally.

7. On 22 December 1942, the Germans imposed a levy of 30,000,000 francs on the Jewish Community to "pay" for the Anglo-American looting of non-Jewish property, for which the Jews were said to be responsible because they were friends of the Allies. The head of the Jewish Community endeavored, without success, to raise these funds at the private banks in Tunis, and was obliged to appeal to the Government for aid. The latter authorized the Caisse Fonciere, a semi-public institution, to advance these funds in the form of a loan at 5% interest, with commissions and carrying charges running it up to about 12%. The loan was secured by mortgages on Jewish estates, those in the country being insisted upon because there was less danger from looting. The Caisse Fonciere received the funds from the Bank of Algeria, Tunis Branch, and on leave been advised that payment was made in Bank of France notes. It was said that these Bank of France notes were subsequently distributed among the Arab and Italian followers of the Nazis. The former head of the Jewish Community has recently approached the Government in Tunisia with a view toward adjusting or deferring the payment of this loan which the Jews are not in a position to meet at present. The Caisse Fonciere threatened

Handwritten: *see pt letter 1-12-72 and British govt telegram 1-13-72*
By *js* Date *1943 3 1972*

At Tunis the Government has said we have received a lot of information about the German situation. The latest indications were that the French authorities had not yet reached a definite decision of the question but were thinking in terms of a moratorium.

8. On 15 February, 1943, the Germans, because many of the forced Jewish laborers were leaving the work camps, imposed a fine of 2,000,000 francs on the Community. This fine was paid without resort to the banks, by the sale of jewels, etc. belonging to individual members of the Community.

9. On the basis of present estimates, the measures taken by the Germans and Italians against the Jews in the Tunis area, from 6 November, 1942 to 3 May, 1943 cost the latter about 100,000,000 francs. No indemnification or relief measures have yet been taken by the French, and, insofar as the bulk of the problem is concerned, none appears to be contemplated.

10. From the fact that this memorandum is confined largely to the Jews, it should not be inferred that this class stood alone in regard to discrimination. The case of the Jews is probably the most glaring, because the great majority of them could not be considered enemies of the Nazis or Italians in the technical sense. Furthermore, there appears to have been more physical hardships, and the imposition of fines seems to be an additional measure of oppression. However, vehicles, houses, factories, etc. were requisitioned from the French in Tunis. Machinery was taken away, and forced labor was at least threatened, if not in fact realized. We are canvassing this side of the picture more fully at the present.

11. Likewise, a counterpart of this story which we will narrate if the matter of increments to Italians and Arabs as the result of this discrimination. Rumors as to these matters have reached us, but it is, of course, more difficult to develop this side of the problem.

12. We are also studying the question of real property transfers made during the occupations and endeavoring to obtain as much information as possible on this score.

13. We should appreciate your views on the problems. In this connection, reference might be made to the United Nations Declaration on property transfers.

ACTION: Treasury, State
DISTRIBUTION "A"

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 20, 1943

Grace -

Will you please see that
the President gets this?

Lube

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 26, 1943

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: MR. LUBIN

The attached cable from Algiers describes one of the most damnable situations I have ever heard of. It is worthy of very careful reading.

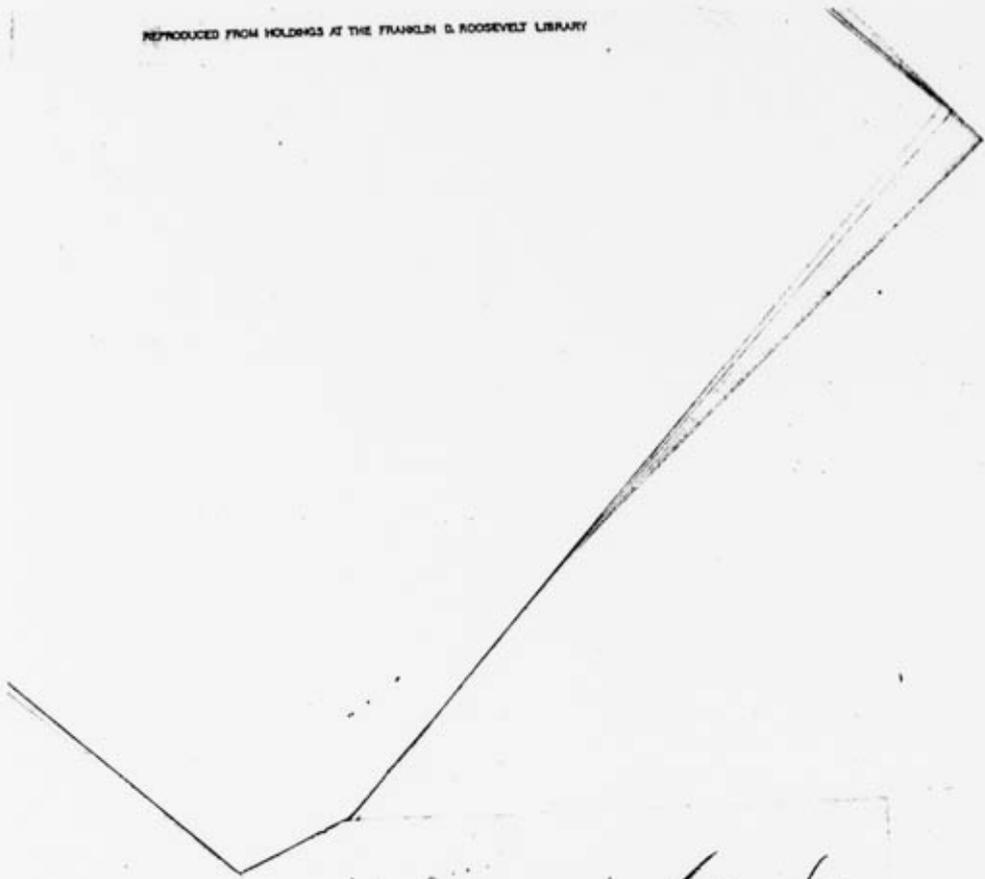
Would it be possible to have the State Department bring pressure upon the French Committee immediately in order to relieve what appears to be an unbearable situation?

The State Department might notify the French Committee that the United Nations refuse to recognize as valid any sale or mortgage incurred by the Jewish residents of North Africa to meet levies made by the Germans and Italians.

The State Department should also be asked to notify the French that we do not countenance the pressure now being exercised by the French banks upon those Jews who were forced to mortgage their properties at high interest rates in order to meet levies imposed by the Axis. It is certainly beyond reason to believe that these banks would be permitted to foreclose on loans made under the conditions described in the attached cable.

I am attaching herewith a draft of a letter that might be sent to the Secretary of State in the event that you can see your way clear to taking some action in this matter.

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Have a copy made
of this for file & then
send out — GBT

file

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

August 6. 1943

My dear Mr. President:

I appreciate the expression of approval in your letter of July 30, 1943 with reference to the cables sent by the Department to the Consulate at Algiers and by the CCNA to the NAEB, regarding steps that may be taken to relieve the hardships caused by acts of dispossession by the enemy in Tunisia.

Regarding your request for information as to what has been done under cable COB 769, I attach for your information a copy of the paraphrase of BOC 927, a cable from the Field Headquarters of the North African Economic Board, received on July 26. This is the only information thus far received, and I shall see to it that you are promptly informed of any further reports.

Faithfully yours,

Cordell Hull

Enclosure:

Paraphrase copy of
BOC 927, July 24, 1943.

The President,

The White House.

By Authority of ~~France~~

British govt. telegram 1-13-72

By J Date MAR 3 1972

COMBINED COMMITTEE FOR FRENCH NORTH AND WEST AFRICAN CIVIL AFFAIRS

The following communication was received 26 July 1963.

PARAPHRASE

REF: W-5615/3901, 26 July 1963 (Passery A-53)

From: FEABD
To: CCNA
Subject: United Nations Declaration - Property Losses in Tunisia
Ref: COB 760; State 1275

Given below is the French position on Tunisian property losses and an application of United Nations declaration.

1. We have been advised by the French authorities that the necessity for approval of United Nations declaration by the Comité Français De la Libération Nationale still exists. However, they feel it will be done rapidly.
2. Arrangements for provisional moratorium on mortgage loans to Jewish communities in Tunisia will be made by French authorities, after such approval and as first application of declaration. This will be done until a program for the disposition of these claims is worked out.
3. At present a plan for administering and financing a war damage compensation program is being studied by the French authorities. Cases arising under the United Nations declaration will be included in this. This is felt by the French to be a matter of extreme delicacy and one which must be considered carefully.
4. The significance of this program for economic warfare purposes is acknowledged by the French authorities.

ATTN: Treasury
DISSEMINATION: "A"

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS INFORMATION AFFECTING THE NATIONAL DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE ESPIONAGE LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE TRANSMISSION OF THE INFORMATION OF ITS ORIGIN TO AN UNAUTHORIZED PERSON IS PROHIBITED BY LAW.

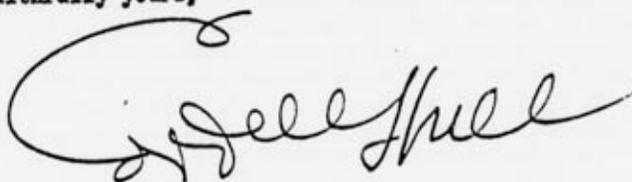
2-48
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

September 22, 1943

My dear Mr. President:

In your letter of June 29, 1943 you requested me to keep you informed of developments with respect to the fines imposed by the German occupation authorities on the Jewish Community of Tunisia. There is attached a copy of the paraphrase of telegram no. 1513 from Algiers which indicates the current proposals of the French authorities for dealing with the problem. You will observe that the proposed measures would prevent any foreclosure or collection of interest on mortgages incurred as a result of levies made by the occupying authorities, but, on the other hand, would not at this time make an unqualified indemnification for the losses incurred.

Faithfully yours,



Enclosure:

Paraphrase of telegram no. 1513
from Algiers, September 1, 1943.

The President,

The White House.

RECEIVED

FROM: AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL, Algiers
 TO: Secretary of State, Washington
 DATED: September 1, 1943
 NUMBER: 1513

DECLASSIFIED
 State Dept. letter, 1-11-72
 By J Date MAR 3 1972

[REDACTED]

Murphy and Glasser send the following for the Secretary and Morgenthau.

Reference is made herewith to the Department's telegrams nos. 1289 and 1276.

The following is the proposal made by the Commissariat of Finance for settling the problem of levies, fines, mortgages, et cetera, which the enemy imposed on Jews in Tunisia: loans will be made by the banks to organized Jewish Communities who will give formal acknowledgment of the debt and distribute funds but no property will be pledged by them. The loans are to be of indefinite maturity and the Tunisian Treasury is to guarantee them. The proposal is that the advance will last until such time as it is possible to settle the whole question of levies and fines imposed in both France and Tunisia by the enemy. All charges, including interests, will be paid by the Tunisian Treasury. These advances will be large enough to repay bank loans made previously and to reimburse fully the members of the Jewish Communities who advanced funds to meet the levies imposed by the enemy.

This proposal is to be submitted to Comite. It was stated by us that the conditions were a great improvement over suggestions made previously but we felt it was important that the obligation be assumed in the first instance by the French authorities. There are two objections to this on the part of the French. In the first place they do not wish to commit the French Treasury at this time to an unknown and possibly huge financial burden once France is free. In the second place they fear that, in view of the delicate Arab-Jewish political problem in Tunisia, direct payment of Jewish fines will lead to resentment and demands by the Arabs for financial aid. It has been requested by us that pending your reactions the matter not be referred to the Comite. It is felt by us that we still have a good possibility of achieving unqualified indemnification by the French authorities by continuing to point out advantages to Economic Warfare of our position. An urgent reply is requested.

MCBRIDE