

Ira Hirschmann Papers
Box 3
Memoranda of Conversations
with Sergei Mikha.lov
Feb 1944 - Oct 1944

Ankara, February 18, 1944
12125 p.m.

M. SERGUEI MIKHAILOV, First Secretary of
Russian Embassy,

and

Mr. I.A. HIRSCHMANN, Attaché, American
Embassy.

Mr. Mikhailov received me cordially and asked about my status and work. I told him that I was one of Mr. Steinhardt's Attachés doing, among other things, the job of exploring the possibility of rescuing some of the innocent victims of Fascism. I related to him our government's new especial and incisive interest in this subject. He knew about the War Refugee Board and its set-up.

He expressed sympathy with the efforts generally. I explained to him the new bottleneck situation which had developed in Bulgaria and asked if his government as a friendly ally would do us the service of securing information as to what led to the recent change in the situation in Bulgaria. I emphasized the fact that we were not requesting any action whatever relating to this situation on the part of the Russian Government but wished their help through their representatives presently dealing with the Bulgarian Government's representatives in ascertaining this information, which we wish to relay back to Washington.

He asked if I could give him some figures and facts relating to the background of the situation in a memorandum, which I said I would be glad to do, either from our Ambassador or myself, today. He stated, however, that the relationship between the Russian and Bulgarian Governments was under no circumstances cordial; in fact they were rather delicate and strained; "We do not invite them to our functions, and vice versa. All our interchanges are extremely formal. In Sofia they watch and follow all our people day and night."

I interposed that the information which we were seeking might already be exposed as a public matter and might not require any direct approach; that the Fascists and their satellites have not made a point of being bashful or timid in making public their intentions and actions against minorities; and that his Ambassador there might now have this information without the necessity of going directly to the Bulgarians on the subject. He said he would have to take up the matter with his Ambassador after receiving my letter and that they would try to ascertain the best means of securing the information, although he felt that in dealing with the Bulgarian Government in any manner it would require sanction from Moscow.

I impressed

-2-

I impressed upon him the need for immediate action; also that his government as an ally and committed to collaboration with USERRA and NERRA had already adopted and implemented their own policy of assistance in participation with the relief and rescue organizations.

I made a move to leave but he offered me a cigarette and asked if I could relate other information to him concerning Barlas and Elash and what I thought of their assertion to get the three Ambassadors, namely, English, American and Russian, to apply to the Turks for a ship to evacuate refugees from Constantza. I replied that I knew only of their approach to us on this subject and that we were taking steps with our government to investigate the possibilities of guaranteeing the replacement of the ship in the event of an accident en route which they seemed to fear. He seemed to think the latter was an excuse, stating that with Red Cross protection they had nothing to fear. I reminded him that some ships had recently gone down but he pook-pooked this. He said that the Turks were unnecessarily fearful and could easily offer a ship if they wanted to. He could see no reason for our having to offer a replacement, as he was accustomed to their niggardly and tight attitude. ✓

We left with his renewed promise to try and help in this or any similar situation relating to Nazi victims. He added lamentations regarding the dullness of life in Ankara after two and a half years a "captive."

Ira A. Hirschman

IAH MB

American Consulate General
Jerusalem, Palestine

October 6, 1944

Memorandum of Conversation with
Mr. Mikhailov, First Secretary
of the Soviet Embassy, Ankara,
October 3, 1944.

In order to pay my respects and say "au revoir" to the Russian Ambassador and his First Secretary with whom I had been conferring at the request of the War Refugee Board during my incumbency in Ankara, I visited the Soviet Embassy by appointment on Tuesday, October 3, at 11:30 a.m. The ambassador was ill at home, and I spoke for an hour informally with Mikhailov with whom I had been conferring from time to time following my conversations with the Bulgarian and Rumanian ministers and the Hungarian counsul.

The conversation covered general lines without any special disclosures except the following:

1. Mikhailov asserted that he was happy that he had advised me not to take the Bagrianov Government too seriously, that it was playing with the Nazis, and that the Soviet intention to eventually override it was implied in his previous conversations. He referred to the freedom from Soviet direction with which this new Bulgarian Government was permitted to operate, and he referred, of course, to the complete reinstatement of the Jewish citizens and all minorities which, he emphasized, was part of the Soviet policy.

Mikhailov stated that the Soviet Government had watched the work of Balabanoff with interest and sympathy and that among all officials of the former Governments who were disposed of Balabanoff was saved for future usefulness.

He referred, in the same manner, to Cretzanu, Minister to Turkey from Rumania, whose sympathies and abilities he also lauded. He stated that it was his opinion that the Board had worked wisely in taking these two ministers into our confidence, as they have demonstrated that their sympathies and actions have been consistently though carefully opposed to the Nazi superimposition in their respective countries.

He referred to the "withdrawal" of the military missions of the British and Americans from Bulgaria with the statement that "the Turks have played up this incident and made it political 'fare'; the Turks are horrible people".

Early in the conversation, Mikhailov asked whether I had any opinion on the Arab Conference, which was currently in session, with relation to Palestine. I replied that I was not familiar with the reasons for the convocation of the Conference or the complex political situation in Palestine, but that I was planning to spend three or four days in Palestine with a view to learning something more about the country, the people and its possibilities; that Palestine was the one center where it had been possible to send homeless refugees; and that it interested me as a creative force in a world in the process of war.

Mikhailov volunteered that he had spent some weeks in Palestine making a study and that he was convinced that the country could not justify its aims as an independent Jewish State; that it was economically unsound and politically unnecessary. "With the United States treating its Jewish citizens as Americans, the British treating its Jewish citizens as Britains and the Soviet treating its Jewish citizens as Russians, there is no necessity in the future for a separate Jewish State," Mikhailov stated. He asked whether I had any opinion regarding the British attitude towards the Arabs and the Jews from a political point of view. I stated that I did not; though I had read a number of conflicting articles about this. Mikhailov then adroitly indicated, by implication rather than by a categorical statement, that the British skirts might not be entirely clean where the Arab unrest was concerned.

I stated that I had read in a magazine, which my memory suggested was the "Atlantic Monthly", an article indicating that the Soviet policy regarding Palestine as an independent Jewish State had recently undergone a change in the direction of favoring such a State. Mikhailov stated that he did not know of this article or any propaganda tending to suggest this change. I then asked Mikhailov if he could tell me the official position of the Soviet Government with regard to Palestine. After some hesitation, Mikhailov stated that the Soviet official position, as he knew it, was opposed to an independent Jewish State in Palestine in view of the lack of need for such a state in the new society and political orientation that would be developed in the future.

I gathered from this statement that Mikhailov was indicating his own definite views which unquestionably must have some support in official circles; although my impression was that the subject was one which was under consideration and was probably not closed or settled in principle from the Soviet point of view.

I referred again to the creative force and contribution that was apparently being made in Palestine as a good society, but these opinions apparently fell on barren soil.

After Mikhailov paid his respects to the valor and vigor of the American Army and its successors and referred to the impending drives of the Russian Armies which, he said, would culminate on the date of celebration of November 8, at which time all Russian soil would be freed from the Nazi blight, we parted with warm and friendly salutations.

Ira A. Hirschmann
Special Attache of Embassy
of the United States of America.