

Ira Hirschmann Papers

Letter re Evacuation of European Jews through ^{Box 3} Turkey from J.W. Russell,
British Embassy, Washington, 4/13/44

C
O
P
Y

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
Ref. 1251/15/44

BRITISH EMBASSY
WASHINGTON 8 D. C.

April 13, 1944

My dear Mr. Pehle:

During our conversation the other day I promised to send you the substance of a telegram which we had received from the Foreign Office on the question of the evacuation of European Jews through Turkey to Palestine. I should have done this before now, but I was waiting to hear from the Foreign Office whether they had yet had any reaction from the Turkish Government. As, however, they have not yet telegraphed us about this, I am sending you now the resume (first enclosure to this letter) of the instructions sent by the Foreign Office to our Ambassador in Ankara on March 17th. You will forgive me, I am sure, if I remind you that this is very confidential material.

At the same time I thought you might be interested to see, in case you had not already had it, the text of the statement made by Mr. Eden in the House of Commons on March 30th, supporting and endorsing the President's declaration of March 24th. I am accordingly sending you a copy of that statement herewith (enclosure 2). Whilst on the subject, I thought you might also like to have for your files the text of the Interim Directive issued to the British Broadcasting Corporation on March 24th (enclosure 3).

In the course of our conversation the other day you said that you thought the British Government might improve its position on the general Palestine question if it were to issue some form of statement now to the effect that, until the end of the war in

Mr. John W. Pehle,
Director War Refugee Board,
United States Treasury,
Washington, D. C.

Europe/

DECLASSIFIED

- 2 -

Europe, any Jew who managed to escape from Hitler would be allowed at least temporary asylum in Palestine, even after the completion of the quota under the White Paper. I talked to William Bayler about this and he agreed that, so far at any rate as we can see from this end, there was a lot of force in your argument: the Ambassador also agreed, and sent a telegram to the Foreign Office expanding this theme and asking them to give it their serious consideration. I will let you know when we get their reply.

Yours sincerely,

/s/ J. W. Russell

C
O
P
Y

File
(Enclosure 1)

We have been considering again our policy in regard to the admission of Jews from occupied Europe to Palestine within limit of 75,000 laid down by the White Paper. There are still some 20,000 unfilled places out of that number. These have been hypothecated against various schemes but there is no absolute commitment in regard to them and it seems likely that very little will come of these schemes.

2. In July last His Majesty's Government decided that in future all Jews whether adults or children who succeeded in escaping to Turkey would be eligible after a preliminary security check in Turkey for onward transport to Palestine. Little has so far come of this concession for various reasons.

3. In the first place the Jewish Agency alleged that Jews still have difficulty in getting Turkish transit visas. They do not question the readiness of the Turkish Government to receive up to certain limits refugees who reached their borders, but they maintain that it is often very difficult for these refugees to get as far as the border.

4. Secondly, organized schemes in respect of which negotiations have been going on through the protecting Power have all related to children with a small percentage of accompanying adults and veteran Zionists. The agency says that these are not the categories most easily moved.

5. Thirdly they maintain that any approach to the Balkan Governments through the protecting Power, whether in respect of large parties or individuals, is bound to be brought to the notice of the German authorities who inevitably stop it.

6. The major factor is undoubtedly German opposition: we have been considering various measures to make the matter easier and now propose as follows:

(1) The Turkish Government should be told confidentially that His Majesty's Government will allow all Jewish refugees reaching Turkey to go on to Palestine. Provided that the Palestine authorities are informed concurrently of details of visas issued and arrivals in Turkey, they can watch and regulate the flow. We think therefore it might prove useful if you took as soon as possible a convenient opportunity of making oral communication to the Turkish Government in this sense. You should express the hope that this information

will/

- 2 -

will enable them to authorize their consuls in occupied countries to grant transit visas to any Jews who apply to them, thus facilitating their escape from Europe.

(2) Agency have suggested that British Passport Control Officer in Turkey should issue visas for Palestine direct on application of their representative without reference to Jerusalem or this country. The High Commissioner and we are agreeable to this course provided the Commissioner for Migration in Palestine is sent details of visas issued. I should be grateful if you would instruct the Passport Control Officer accordingly. I presume it could also be arranged for the Turkish Government to tell their Consuls in occupied countries of names of persons who would be given Palestinian visas on arrival in Turkey. This should make it easier for those persons to get Turkish transit visas. In view of suspicion referred to in paragraph 5 above, in which we believe there is some substance, we propose for the present to play down approach through the protecting Power. Agency have their own means of contact with the Jews in occupied Europe.

7. We are not optimistic that these changes will lead to any very substantial result at the moment; at the same time our hope is that they will be of some assistance. It may be that the Turks will want assurance that if there is an accumulation of refugees in Turkey, His Majesty's Government will arrange for them to be taken away by sea and that they will not become a charge on Turkish funds. If they raise these points you should say that we will certainly do our best to provide transport and that we have little doubt that arrangements could be made for Joint Distribution Committee or some other body to provide funds to maintain the refugees.

8. Please report by urgent telegram representations you make on the foregoing lines to the Turkish Government together with their reaction.

0
P
T

STATEMENT IN HOUSE OF COMMONS BY
MR. ARTHUR BURN ON MARCH 30th.

(Enclosure 2)

My Honourable friend will have taken note of the statement made on March 24th by President Roosevelt on the subject of his question, and of the fact that His Majesty's Government at once wholeheartedly associated themselves with the United States Government in this matter. Further action is now under discussion between the United States Government and His Majesty's Government, and I wish now to take this opportunity of making, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration.

Evidence continues to reach His Majesty's Government and, I understand, Allied Governments, that the Nazi policy of extermination has not been halted. The persecution of the Jews has in particular been of unexampled horror and intensity. On this His Majesty's Government in common with their Allies, now that the hour of Germany's defeat grows ever nearer and more certain, can only repeat their detestation of Germany's crimes and their determination that all those guilty of them shall be brought to justice.

But apart from direct guilt there is still indirect participation in crime. Satellite Governments who expel citizens to destinations named by Berlin must know that such actions are tantamount to assisting in inhuman persecution or slaughter. This will not be forgotten when the inevitable defeat of the Arch-enemy of Europe comes about.

Especially there are individuals and even official authorities among the Satellites who have resisted the evil German example and have shown toleration and mercy. These things are known to the Allies, and in the hope of encouraging such good deeds and increasing their number His Majesty's Government are concerned to make it clear that those who have followed the right path will also not be forgotten in the day of final reckoning.

The time of respite is short, but there is still opportunity for the merciful to multiply their acts of humanity, for the guilty to try to make amends for their deeds of shame by releasing their victims and making, so far as is possible, restitution to them. His Majesty's Government are confident that they are expressing the sentiments of all the Allied Governments in calling upon all the countries allied with or subject to Germany to join in preventing further persecution and co-operate

in protecting/

in protecting and saving the innocent. His Majesty's Government, for their part, are firmly resolved to continue, in co-operation with all Governments and private authorities concerned, to rescue and maintain so far as lies in their power all those menaced by the Nazi terror.

C
O
P
Y

(Enclosure 3)

Interim directive to B.B.C.: March 24th.

"Declaration on Refugees"

His Majesty's Government associate themselves wholeheartedly with declaration issued by President of United States, warning Germany and her satellites of consequences of further persecutions in their territories and appeal to men of good will everywhere to assist so far as they are able in protecting the victims of oppression, threatened with torture and death. His Majesty's Government are taking every opportunity of conveying to the countries and governments concerned their full agreement with the President's declaration, and their determination to cooperate in all measures consistent with efficient prosecution of the war designed to give assistance and refuge to all who can find means of escaping the Nazis and Nazi-inspired tyranny.