

Ira Hirschmann Papers Box 3  
Jack Shafer, "How We Negotiated With the  
Enemy to Save Minority Groups"

## How We Negotiated With the Enemy in Wartime to Save Minority Groups

By JACK SHAFER

The hitherto untold story of how we negotiated with the enemy to save human lives is revealed by Ira A. Hirschmann, former special State Dept. representative of the War Refugee Board, in his *Life Line To A Promised Land* which will be published Oct. 24, by the Vanguard Press.

When Hirschmann was sent to Turkey in an effort to obtain the release of the victims of fascist persecution in the Balkan countries, he carried with him orders which said: "Insofar as concern the Trading with the Enemy Act, the Treasury Dept. has vested in The Refugee Board and its representatives full authority to communicate with enemy territory in carrying out the purpose of the Order. . . ."

Armed with this power, Hirschmann got in touch with the Romanian and Bulgarian ambassadors.

"A direct approach," writes Hirschmann, "involved infinite hazards. Failure could be nothing short of catastrophe. . . . Nazi and Turkish agents were constantly on



my trail. . . . ( . . . the British Intelligence, also had a complete dossier of my movements.) A leak revealing that an American envoy . . . was negotiating directly with a Romanian minister could be exploited by our enemies with disastrous results . . ."

Hirschmann arranged the meetings through Gilbert Simond, An-

kara representative of the International Red Cross. The first talk was with Alexander Cretsianu, Romanian Ambassador to Turkey. Hirschmann's aim was to get Romania to release from the Transnistria area—known as Death Valley—between the Bug and Dniester rivers, the remnant of some 175,000 anti-fascists who had been herded in that area by the Antonescu regime.

Specifically, according to his own account, Hirschmann asked Romania to: ". . . disband the . . . camp at Transnistria at once and . . . return the remaining 48,000 refugees . . . to their homes. Release 5000 children from Romania . . . provide exit certificates . . . for these children to go . . . to . . . Palestine. . . . Arrange to have Antonescu issue, without delay, an order which will put an end to all forms of persecution . . ."

Hirschmann relates: "It was apparent that he (Cretsianu) could see a way out for his Government. And his years of professional training must have enabled him to sense an advantage for himself as well. . . . The personal appeal was the

rit in the armor of this second diplomat."

A week later, reported Hirschmann, a slightly disheveled Cretsianu met him in hurried conference to say that Antonescu had agreed to the proposals.

Simond also arranged the meeting with Bulgarian ambassador Nicolas Balabanoff, a diplomat of the old school who "seemed to be constantly on the lookout for an opening to place me on the defensive." It took two meetings to get action from Balabanoff. An important factor in negotiations with both envoys was the advance of the Red Army to the Balkans. When Hirschmann poked to the Bulgarian the second time, this advance had resulted in the replacement of the Filoff cabinet by the Bagrianoff regime which was much more amenable to Hirschmann's suggestions.

Hirschmann obtained from Balabanoff a letter saying that the "new Bulgarian government regrets exceedingly all the anti-Jewish measures taken . . . and . . . I have the impression that the Government intends to abolish the present laws

concerning the Jews. . . ."

This gave Hirschmann the idea to demand of Sofia that the entire Jewish population of about 45,000 be "saved inside Bulgaria." With this in mind, Hirschmann sent a letter to Dr. Floyd H. Black, former president of the American College at Sofia, and now president of Robert College in Istanbul, who had contacts with Bulgarians, telling him how the Bulgarian Government could win "a priceless measure of goodwill" by revoking "the scandalous anti-Jewish laws."

As Hirschmann intended, the contents of the letter reached Sofia, thanks to Dr. Black. After the Bulgarian Parliament had been called into session in September, 1944, Hirschmann got word that discussions concerning minority groups of 45,000 people was "incidental compared with the preservation of their (Bulgaria's) entire population." Hirschmann replied through Balabanoff that "the good will of the American people could be won through giving way on a small matter." Shortly after, the Bulgarian Government revoked its anti-Jewish laws.