

Summer Welles Papers  
Box 165 Folder 4  
Europe Files  
Italy, 1937-1940

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*

DATE:

June 15, 1938

SUBJECT: STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

PARTICIPANTS: The Italian Ambassador, Signor Fulvio de Suvich;  
the Under Secretary

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu

By VS NARA. Date 11/7/95

\*\*\* 1-1400

The Italian Ambassador called to see me this morning. The Ambassador commenced his conversation by saying that he had not come to see me for any specific reason, but that he wanted to talk in a general way with me since he hadn't seen me for some time and more particularly because of his concern at his realization that relations between the United States and Italy were steadily getting less friendly. He said that his primary object in accepting the mission to the United States had been to do everything within his power to try and improve relations between the two countries and that it was very distressing for him to have to admit that during the two years he had been here relations appeared to have progressively deteriorated.

I told the Ambassador that I was very glad that he had mentioned this since it seemed to me myself that the traditionally particularly friendly relations between our two countries were in fact far from what they should be and that I was increasingly concerned by learning of the publication in the press of both countries of increasingly acrimonious, controversial and disagreeable reflections on the part of the Italian press against the United States and on the part of the American press against Italy.

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The Ambassador then referred to a conversation he had had with the Secretary of State a few days ago in which he had explained how the press of Pennsylvania had completely, and he thought deliberately, misquoted the Ambassador in the speech which he had made at Pittsburgh by taking a sentence out of its context and inserting it in another portion of his speech, thus changing completely the Ambassador's intentions. The Ambassador also referred to an occasion which had taken place recently in New Orleans when, at a public gathering to which he had been invited by the Governor of Louisiana, the Italian Government and the chiefs of the Italian state had been insulted in a speech made in the presence of the Ambassador by one of the other guests at the occasion. The Ambassador said he deeply appreciated the great courtesy of the Governor of Louisiana and of the audience present in the attitude they had taken upon this occasion. I expressed my own individual regret that the Ambassador of a friendly country should have been shown such grave discourtesy by an American citizen at a public function.

The Ambassador said he mentioned these two incidents merely as indications of the situation which was causing him such increasing concern and he said the time had surely come to see what constructive steps could be taken to improve matters instead of permitting them to continue to get worse. I told the Ambassador that as he knew it was the policy of this Administration and particularly of this Department to improve our relations with other countries and especially with traditional friends like Italy and that he might be sure he would find nothing but a friendly spirit of cooperation on the part of the officials of the Department of State.

The Ambassador then went on to say he had feared very much when Germany recently refused to participate in the New York World's Fair in 1939 that his Government would find it desirable to adopt a similar attitude. To his great relief, however, he had found that his Government was, on the contrary, determined to do everything within its power to make its exhibition at the New York World's Fair the best which it could possibly make and he believed that move in itself might accomplish a useful purpose. He said he also was considering, when he returned to Italy on a vacation next month, suggesting to his Government that during the time of the World's Fair ~~and~~ the Prince and Princess of Piedmont might make a visit to the United States and he asked me what I thought about this suggestion. I

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said that as I was sure the Ambassador would understand, the Federal Government had had to make it clear to the Fair authorities that it would not extend official invitations to the heads of other states nor to other foreign personages to visit the United States at that time because of the fact that if invitations were extended to one country, they would naturally have to be extended to all and it would be utterly impossible for the President in the very busy and occupied life which he leads to have to receive and entertain appropriately the official representatives of fifty or sixty other countries. The Ambassador said he understood this fully. I said that apart from that aspect, however, knowing what particularly charming and attractive individuals the Prince and Princess of Piedmont were, I was sure that if they desired to visit the United States, they could not help but create the friendly and favorable popular impression which they had created in so many other countries which they had visited.

The Ambassador then went into quite a long analysis of Italo-American relations and referred to the large number of Italians who had come to the United States, who had worked hard and who had become and whose children had become good American citizens. He said he never failed in his addresses to Italo-American organizations to emphasize the belief of his own Government that while it trusted that because of their origin they would always have a friendly feeling for Italy, nevertheless now that they were American citizens their sole loyalty and their sole allegiance must, of course, be to this country. He said that because of the number of Italians in the United States and the fact that there had never been any serious disagreement between Italy and this country and no historical memories of hostility in the past, it was hard for him to understand why so large a proportion of the press in the United States and so large a section of American public opinion was so bitterly hostile to the Italian Government. He said he could fully understand the reasons for the hostility to Germany because of their persecution of the Jews, of the members of other religious faiths and the minorities in general, but he explained that the situation in Italy was quite different. He said no step had ever been taken in Italy against the Jews because the Jewish problem in Italy did not exist. He said there were not more than forty thousand Jews in Italy at the outside and of this number many of them today were prominent citizens, highly regarded and occupying important positions under the

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state. He said before he himself entered public life he had been closely associated in Trieste with prominent Jews and that he had never seen any prejudice of any kind on the part of the Italians against the Jews as such. He said he could not, therefore, comprehend, in view of the attitude taken by the Italian Government toward the Catholic Church and towards the Jews in Italy why there should be an attempt on the part of so great a proportion of the press here to make out that the Italian Government was persecuting religious or racial minorities in that country. I said to the Ambassador that, of course, I was fully aware of the truth of what he said, but that it seemed to me that perhaps he missed, in his attempt to estimate the situation, two rather important points. In the first place, I remarked, the very close relationship which existed between Italy and Germany and the fact that governmental systems not unlike in structure, however, unlike they might be in methods or in details, existed in the two countries, created very naturally the popular impression that the domestic policies pursued in Germany with regard to racial minorities were favorably regarded or supported by the Italian Government and by Italian public opinion. It seemed to me, I said, that so long as this close identification in international policy between Germany and Italy persisted, it would be very difficult to persuade the American people as individuals that the domestic policies pursued by Germany were not sympathetically regarded in Italy. The second point, I said, which I thought the Ambassador had disregarded was the fact that American public opinion had been very profoundly and blastingly shocked by the conquest of Ethiopia and by the undertaking in that case on the part of Italy of policies of aggression which were counter to the formal pledges given by Italy when she had signed numerous international agreements, including the Kellogg-Briand Pact. There was also, I said, the traditional and well-recognized sympathy on the part of the average American citizen with the underdog and when they saw a great modern power like Italy violating its sacred obligation and undertaking the conquest of a free but weak country like Abyssinia, that fact could not but create a very hostile sentiment in the United States on the part of a great majority of the people. I went on to say that there was another aspect to this subject, since the Ambassador and I were talking very frankly, which I thought I should not overlook. I said there was hardly a day now when an American citizen picking up his newspaper did not read of the bombardment in Spain of civilian populations and of the resultant deaths of countless civilians, particularly women and children, and that it was perfectly well known that

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many of the planes and many of the aviators were Italian and that they were in Spain with the full knowledge and consent of the Italian Government. So long as this sort of thing went on, I said, it seemed to me quite impossible to hope for a more friendly attitude on the part of public opinion in this country.

The Ambassador received what I said in an entirely friendly and objective spirit and merely remarked, with regard to the latter part of my statement, that he was afraid there was nothing that could be done in any event until after the Spanish war had been concluded and that he hoped, for the sake of Europe as well as for the sake of world peace in general, that it would be concluded soon. His only remark with regard to my reference to the Abyssinian conquest was that Italy had only become a united people with a national sense within the past few years and that during the decades at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century when the other European powers were obtaining their colonies in Africa, Italy had not been in a position to obtain control of such resources. If she had not taken action now, he said, she would never have been able to enjoy the advantages which Great Britain, France, Germany and even Belgium and Portugal had been able to obtain and that it was a question of fact, however much public opinion in this country might deplore the way in which it was accomplished.

In view of a conversation which I had had with the Ambassador some months before at which time he had told me that in his judgment the maintenance of the independence of Austria must always be a cardinal principle in Italian foreign policy, I asked the Ambassador how he thought his Government and Italian public opinion had viewed the anschluss now that weeks had passed and they had had an opportunity to consider the matter and all its implications. The Ambassador hesitated a few minutes and then said: I am going to speak to you not as an Ambassador, but as an individual and very confidentially. From all the information I have it is my considered judgment that ninety percent of Italian public opinion, and the Government unanimously, desired that the independence of Austria be maintained intact and viewed with increasing apprehension the entrance of Germany into Austria and the presence of Germany only sixty kilometers from Trieste. Perhaps, he said, if Germany would be contented with the annexation of Austria - and there is a certain amount of logic in the uniting of two peoples of the same race, origin and language - and with a reasonable settlement of the Sudeten

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was imperative that these negotiations be successfully concluded in the immediate future, that he knew Bonnet intimately and that he knew Daladier fairly well and he was sure the present French Government would feel the way he himself did, namely, the sooner an agreement was reached and the present clouds of controversy between the two governments were removed, the greater the advantage would be to the two countries. With regard to this latter negotiation, he said he had word that prospects were more favorable and that he hoped for some more definite word soon.

*Handwritten notes and scribbles in the top right corner, including the number '171' and various illegible markings.*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DATE: October 31, 1938.

SUBJECT: Appointment of successor to Signor Fulvio de Suvich.

PARTICIPANTS: Signor Fulvio de Suvich, Italian Ambassador; the Under Secretary.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu

Declassified  
E.O. 12958-2  
State Department

By 171 NARA, Date 11/9/95

The Italian Ambassador called to see me this morning. I told the Ambassador that I was particularly sorry to learn of his decision to retire from the Embassy here and to leave Washington, where he and Madame Suvich had made many warm friends.

The Ambassador said that when he returned to Italy upon his recent vacation he found that the anti-Jewish campaign had already reached formidable proportions. While he was in his own home, Trieste, he had been informed that the Jewish heads of the two largest insurance companies of Italy were withdrawing by Government order and that Count Volpi had been requested to take

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the place of one of them. The Ambassador himself was informed by telegram that it was desired that he take the other position and that they would like to have his reply within twenty-four hours. The Ambassador told me that he of course was not a career diplomat, but that he had hoped to remain one more year in Washington. He told me quite frankly that he had not wished to remain longer than that because, he said, significantly, "it is not healthy for us under present conditions to stay too long away from headquarters". He said that in view of the position in which he had been placed and by reason of the fact that he had been a director of this company for some years and had always intended eventually to take over the management of it, he had accepted.

The Ambassador spoke for some time about some of the difficulties he had encountered in this country with regard to the press. He said, however, that no one could have received greater courtesy or greater hospitality from officials and private citizens as well than had he and his wife; that I could be sure no one would work more zealously than he when he was back in Italy as a private citizen for the clearing away of misunderstandings between our two countries and for the promotion of better relations.

The Ambassador said that he had been given the opportunity by Count Ciano and by Mussolini of suggesting

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his successor, and that he had done so from the list of those available for appointment to the Washington Embassy. He said that there were three outstanding candidates - the present Italian Ambassador to Spain; Signor Bastianini, the Under Secretary of Foreign Relations; and Prince Ascanio Colonna, who had been appointed Ambassador in 1936 and who was now attached to the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The Ambassador said that he had selected Prince Colonna and handed me in writing the following biography of the Prince:

"Don Ascanio dei Principi Colonna, born at Naples, August 8, 1883. Graduated in Social Sciences in 1906; entered the diplomatic service in 1906; attaché at Constantinople, 1908; transferred to London, 1910; Secretary of Legation, 1910; served at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In 1917 Secretary of the Italian Legation to the Peace Conference and of the Italian Legation to the Conference of Ambassadors at Paris, 1919 - April 1921. Counselor of Legation, 1924. Appointed Minister Plenipotentiary in 1926; served at Budapest, in 1932. Appointed Ambassador in 1936. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1936; on special assignment as Italian Delegate at the 'Commission pour la dette publique égyptienne'."

The Ambassador added that Prince Colonna spoke English very well and that his wife was a native of his own city, Trieste, but was of Greek origin. He emphasized the fact that the brother of Prince Colonna, Prince Marcantonio Colonna, was the chief civilian official at the Holy See, and that consequently the entire family enjoyed the most intimate relations with the Vatican.

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The question of the credentials which a new Italian Ambassador would present was not raised by the Ambassador, nor referred to by myself. I stated that the question of the agrément would be submitted, in accordance with our practice, to the President for his personal consideration.

I arranged to see the Ambassador once more on Saturday of this week, saying that I knew that both he and I were pressed for time since the hour of one o'clock had been passed, but that I wanted to have the opportunity of talking with him again at greater length in order to obtain from him his impressions during his recent visit to Rome.

*Final form*

DRAFT V - REVISED BY SW, December 4, 1938

(TO BE SIGNED BY THE PRESIDENT)

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Signor Mussolini:

The decisive action which you took, last September, and which was so powerful a factor in assuring the avoidance of hostilities, is recognized everywhere as an historic service to the cause of world peace. The results of your efforts have provided a practical demonstration that even grave international crises can be solved by negotiation without resort to armed force.

It is with this recollection in mind that I write to you today.

The problem of finding new homes for the masses of individuals of many faiths who are no longer permitted to reside freely in their native lands, and who are *obliged through force of circumstances* forced to find refuge abroad, is one of immediate urgency.

Both for those governments which desire to bring about the emigration of such individuals as well as for those governments whose peoples feel it their duty and their desire to help so far as they may be able in the task of

-2-

Resettlement, the problem presented is one of grave complexity. Unless there is effective international collaboration, the prospect of a successful solution is not hopeful. And unless a solution based on justice and humanity can be found, and found promptly, I fear that international relations will be further embittered, and the cause of peace still further prejudiced. I have, of course, given earnest thought to this matter and certain projects have occurred to me in which the United States could well collaborate. I am requesting Ambassador Phillips to ask an audience of you as soon as may be convenient to you after his return to Rome, and to submit these thoughts to your consideration, and to discuss them with you.

It would give me genuine pleasure to feel that you and I were working together along constructive lines toward a solution of this problem, and that thereby we might be contributing toward a happier and a more peaceful world.

I take this occasion to convey to you my best wishes

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and the assurances of my highest regard.

Very sincerely yours,

His Excellency

Benito Mussolini,

Chief of the Government.

PA/D JCD  
EU;PM  
U:SW:IJ

*Lindholm*

DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL

IV

MEMORANDUM ELABORATING THE POINTS REFERRED  
TO IN THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO THE CHIEF  
OF GOVERNMENT OF DECEMBER     , 1938.

*the*

While the Intergovernmental Committee at London has achieved some measure of success in planning, in a practical way, for the resettlement of refugees, adequate results have not as yet been produced. The President of the United States believes that only by virtue of international collaboration involving coordinated policies, based on justice and humanity, on the part both of countries of emigration and countries of reception can the problem be settled in a manner which will not tend to engender further international bitterness and ill-will.

The President is ready to assume a generous share in this collaboration on behalf of the refugees. If a *general* plan can be found sufficiently ample in scope, and practical in character, which in his judgment holds out assurance that the problem which has arisen will be solved in consonance with justice and humanity, he stands ready to request of the Congress of the United States that it agree to appropriate over a period of three years,

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\$33,333,333 annually, contingent upon the provision of equivalent amounts annually over the same period by both private subscription and by the other governments of the world conjointly, the total amount to be contributed annually for each of these three years, thus amounting to \$100,000,000.

In searching the areas which would appear to lend themselves to resettlement, President Roosevelt has been particularly struck with the appropriateness of the Plateau, a portion of which lies in the southwestern section of Ethiopia, and a portion in areas lying to the south of Ethiopia. It has occurred to him that the Chief of the Italian Government may believe that adequately financed colonization of refugee families in this area would be in accord with plans which the Italian Government may have formulated for the development and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia.

If the Chief of <sup>the</sup> Government saw merit in this plan, and was ready to make announcement to that effect and urge other states holding sections of this Plateau to do

-3-

likewise, the President of the United States would be prepared to give the proposal his <sup>as a part of a general plan</sup> enthusiastic public support.

Of great importance is the German attitude on this question. Mr. Rublee, the Director of the <sup>Inter</sup> governmental Committee <sup>in London,</sup> has made as yet unsuccessful efforts to discuss these matters with authorized representatives of the German Government. If any coordinated plans are to be carried out, the German Government will necessarily have to furnish full information as to probable emigration, and furthermore, some method must be agreed upon through which emigrants will not be forced to leave Germany as paupers. In this connection, it is understood in the United States that the main obstacle from the German point of view to the elaboration of such a plan lies in the difficulty of procuring foreign exchange in sufficient quantities to allow the emigrants to have cash in hand. The President has suggested that this difficulty might be met at least in part by permitting refugee emigrants to spend their German marks within Germany to a sufficient extent to provide themselves

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with supplies indispensable for their resettlement, as for instance, farm implements, clothing, etc. If the German Government would permit emigrants from Germany to export from that country these articles for their use, up to a sufficient per capita value, the exchange difficulty would, of course, be greatly lessened.

It is the earnest hope of the President of the United States that the Chief of the Italian Government will favor this suggestion, and, in such event, will further it in such manner as he may deem appropriate.

PA/D JCD  
EU:PM  
U:SW:IJ

DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL

III

MEMORANDUM ELABORATING THE POINTS REFERRED TO IN THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT OF DECEMBER \_\_\_\_\_, 1938.

While the Inter-Governmental Committee at London has <sup>achieved</sup> ~~met~~ with some measure of success in ~~the~~ resettlement of refugees, adequate results have not as yet been produced. ~~the determination of practical aspects of~~ <sup>planning, in a practical way, for the</sup>

The President of the United States <sup>believes</sup> ~~is convinced~~ that only by virtue of international collaboration involving <sup>coordinated policies</sup> ~~efforts~~ <sup>based on justice and humanity,</sup> on the part both of countries of emigration and countries

of reception can the problem be settled in a ~~constructive~~ manner <sup>which will not tend to engender further international bitterness and ill-will,</sup>

The President is ready to assume a generous share in

this collaboration on behalf of the refugees. If a plan can be found sufficiently ample in scope, which holds out assurance <sup>and practical in character,</sup> in his judgment

<sup>that the problem which has arisen will be solved in consonance with justice & humanity,</sup> ~~of effectively solving the problem,~~ he stands ready, ~~in the~~

<sup>to request of</sup> ~~name of the United States Government, to ask~~ the Congress <sup>of the U.S.</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>agree,</sup> ~~that it~~ appropriate over a period of three years, ~~\$30,000,000,~~ <sup>\$30,000,000,</sup> annually, ~~provide one-third of the cost thereof, the other two-thirds~~ contingent upon the provision of equivalent amounts annually ~~to be provided as follows: one-third from the other Govern-~~ <sup>the same period by both private subscription and by the other</sup> ~~ments of the world together and one-third from private sub-~~ <sup>scriptions.</sup> ~~scriptions.~~ <sup>each of these</sup> ~~the total amount to be~~ <sup>thus</sup> ~~contributed annually for~~ three years <sup>amounting to</sup> \$100,000,000.

In searching the areas which would appear to lend them-

selves

selves to resettlement, President Roosevelt has been particularly struck with the appropriateness of the Plateau, a

portion of which lies in the Southwestern section of Ethiopia, and a portion in ~~colonies (and mandated areas)~~ <sup>areas lying to the south of Ethiopia,</sup> to the South.

~~It has occurred to him that~~ <sup>It has occurred to him that</sup>  
~~He has wondered whether the Chief of the Italian Government~~ <sup>may believe</sup>  
~~would not feel that adequately financed colonization of~~ <sup>would not feel that adequately financed colonization of</sup> ~~refugee~~  
~~families in this area would be in line with the plans~~ <sup>families in this area would be in line with the plans</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>accord which the Italian Government may have formulated</sup>  
the development and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia.

If the Chief of Government saw merit in this plan, and was ready to make announcement to that effect and urge other states holding sections of this Plateau to do likewise, the President of the United States would be prepared to give the proposal his enthusiastic public support.

Of great importance is the German attitude on this question. Mr. Rublee, the Director of the Governmental Committee, <sup>as yet</sup> has made unsuccessful efforts to discuss these matters with <sup>authorized</sup> ~~German~~ <sup>representatives of the German Government.</sup> ~~representatives. An indispensable necessity for orderly~~  
~~procedure is that the German Government furnish full information~~ <sup>If any coordinated plans are to be carried out,</sup> ~~as to probable emigration, and the devising of some plan by~~ <sup>which emigrants will necessarily have to</sup>  
~~which emigrants do not leave Germany as paupers. In this~~ <sup>will not be forced to leave</sup>  
connection,

-3-

connection, it is <sup>understood</sup> ~~felt~~ in the United States that the main obstacle from the German point of view to the elaboration of such a plan <sup>lies</sup> ~~lies~~ in the difficulty of procuring foreign exchange in sufficient quantities to allow the emigrants to have cash in hand. The President has suggested that this difficulty might be met at least in part by permitting ~~the~~ <sup>refugee</sup> emigrants to spend their German marks within Germany to a sufficient extent to provide themselves with <sup>supplies</sup> ~~things~~ indispensable for their resettlement, <sup>as</sup> for instance, ~~supplies~~, farm implements, clothing, etc. If the German Government would permit emigrants from Germany to export <sup>from that countries</sup> ~~with them~~ these articles <sup>for their use,</sup> up to a sufficient per capita value, the exchange difficulty <sup>would of course be greatly lessened,</sup> ~~might be lessened.~~

It is the earnest hope of the President of the United States that the Chief of the <sup>Italian</sup> Government will ~~interest himself~~ <sup>favor this suggestion, and, in such event, will further</sup> ~~in this phase of the matter as well.~~ <sup>it in such manner as he may deem appropriate</sup>

DRAFT

IV.

(TO BE SIGNED BY THE PRESIDENT)

December 2, 1938.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Signor Mussolini:

The decisive action which you took last September, and which ~~The role you played during the troubled days of~~ was so powerful a factor in assuring the avoidance of hostilities, ~~September last in the preservation of peace is universally~~ is recognized everywhere as an historic service to the cause of world peace, ~~recognized and lauded. It was a role which demonstrated~~ ~~to the world your desire to leave no effort untried to~~ your efforts have provided a practical demonstration that ~~maintain peace as well as your belief that ways of reason~~ even grave international crises can be solved by negotiation ~~can be more effectively employed than ways of force,~~ ~~without resort to armed force.~~

It is with this recollection in mind that I write to you today, concerning a matter of high importance to the cause of peace, which, unless it is speedily solved, threatens increasingly to envenom international relations.

The problem of finding new homes for the masses of individuals of many faiths who <sup>are</sup> no longer <sup>permitted</sup> ~~to~~ reside freely in their native lands, and who are ~~selves free in their own lands, lead their own lives,~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~forced to find refuge abroad,~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~think their own thoughts,~~ is one of immediate urgency. It is an extremely complex problem, both for those <sup>Governments</sup> ~~nations~~ which desire to <sup>bring about</sup> ~~encourage~~ the emigration

gration

as well as <sup>governments whose</sup> people feel it their duty and their desire to help so far as they <sup>desire to help in their acceptance and settlement.</sup> may be able in the task of resettlement, the problem presented is one of <sup>grave complexity.</sup> Unless there is effective international collaboration,

the prospect of a successful solution is not hopeful. <sup>And unless a solution based on justice and humanity can be found, and I have been giving much thought to this matter and certain possibilities have occurred to me in which the United States could well collaborate. I am requesting <sup>to ask an audience of</sup> Ambassador, ~~Mr.~~ Phillips, <sup>perhaps</sup> to see you as soon as <sup>may be</sup> convenient</sup>

to you after his return to Rome, and to submit these thoughts to your consideration, and <sup>to discuss</sup> ~~perhaps discuss~~ them with you.

It would give me genuine pleasure to feel that you and I were working together along constructive lines toward a solution of this problem, and that we might thereby be contributing toward <sup>a happier and a more peaceful</sup> ~~better feeling throughout~~ the world.

I take this occasion to convey to you my best wishes <sup>and the assurances of my highest regard.</sup> ~~for your good health and prosperity.~~

Very sincerely yours,

His Excellency  
Benito Mussolini,  
Chief of the Government.

PA/D JOD:AMW  
Eu:PM:CMS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*

DATE:  
July 26, 1938.

SUBJECT: Jewish problem in Italy.

PARTICIPANTS: The Italian Ambassador, Signor Fulvio de Suvich;  
the Under Secretary.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu

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\*\*\* 1-1403

The Italian Ambassador called to see me this morning in order to tell me that he was sailing this week for Italy to return to Washington on September 24. The Ambassador said that as the weeks went by he felt more and more that it was imperative for him to return to his own country to get a first-hand impression of Italian policy and of internal conditions in Italy. Since his Government was not keeping him informed, it was very difficult for him to gain any accurate understanding of the line that his Government was following. I told him that I was particularly anxious to know whether his Government had confirmed to him the reports recently published in the press here indicating that the Italian

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Government was pursuing a policy of discrimination against the Jews in Italy and was commencing a course which might result in a definitely anti-Semitic policy on the part of Italy.

The Ambassador said that this was exactly one of the things regarding which he had no full information. He said that some days ago the papers had reported that the Italian Government had instructed Italian booksellers not to display books by Jewish authors. He had immediately cabled to his Government and had received a reply to the effect that one or two individual booksellers had done this of their own volition but that the Italian authorities had never laid down any such regulation nor had they even considered such a matter. Some days later, the Ambassador said, the newspapers reported that the correspondent in Rome of the Jewish News Agency, Mr. Kleinlerer, had been ordered expelled from Italy on the ground that he was a Jew. Again the Ambassador had telegraphed and had received a reply stating that Mr. Kleinlerer's race had nothing whatever to do with the expulsion which had been ordered on the ground that he had published anti-Fascist articles which were untrue and malicious. I told the Ambassador that I was gratified to have this information but asked him if it did not appear to him

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that the recent statements issued by Achille Starace had not apparently made it very clear that the Italian Government, on the ground of race purity, was commencing a policy of Jewish persecution.

The Ambassador said that so far as race purity was concerned he himself had a measure of responsibility but that it never, so far as he was concerned, had involved any question relating to the Jews. He said that at the time of the Ethiopian conquest he had persuaded Mussolini to insist upon race purity propaganda among the troops that were being sent to Ethiopia in order to avoid Italy's being confronted in the future with a half-caste race in Ethiopia which in the Ambassador's judgment would have raised very serious difficulties dangerous to the future of the Italian nation. He said that so far as he himself was concerned many of his closest friends in Trieste were Jews; that in the war of 1915 he himself was a volunteer and fought at the side of Italian Jews who had given their lives for Italy and he felt that some of the finest and most useful citizens that Italy possessed were Jews. I remarked that at the present time when the whole world was suffering from the effects of an inhumane policy of persecution against the Jews on the part of certain other countries, it was very natural that in such countries as the United States where we regarded a great majority of American Jews as among our finest and most patriotic citizens that an indication on the part of Italy that

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she was going to adopt a similar policy of persecution naturally profoundly shocked American public opinion. I reminded the Ambassador of the conversation I had had with him some weeks ago in which he had said that the Jewish question would never be a problem in Italy inasmuch as the Italian Jews didn't number more than forty to fifty thousand in the entire country and that he could not conceive of any possible advantage that Italy would gain in aligning herself with the nations that were undertaking this inhuman policy of persecution and discrimination. I said that on the contrary it would seem to me that by some official statement on the part of the Italian Government that it intended in no way to undertake such a policy of persecution, Italy would derive immediate benefits and a far more favorable and friendly attitude on the part of public opinion not only in the United States, but in most of the other countries of the world as well. The Ambassador said he thought this was absolutely correct and that he personally would try to do what he could to get his Government to follow such a course. He said he would see Mussolini immediately upon his arrival in Italy and that he hoped he would find that Mussolini had no intention of going so far as recent newspaper articles would seem to indicate.

Personal and Confidential

December 7, 1938.

My dear Signor Mussolini:

The decisive action which you took, last September, which was so powerful a factor in assuring the avoidance of hostilities, is recognized everywhere as an historic service to the cause of world peace. The results of your efforts have provided a practical demonstration that even grave international crises can be resolved by negotiation without resort to armed force.

It is with this recollection in mind that I write to you today.

The problem of finding new homes for the masses of individuals of many faiths who are no longer permitted to reside freely in their native lands, and are obliged through force of circumstances to find refuge abroad, is one of immediate urgency. Both for those governments which desire to bring about the emigration of such individuals, as well as for those governments whose peoples feel it their duty and their desire to help so far as they may be able in the task of resettlement, the problem presented

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presented is one of grave complexity. Unless there is effective international collaboration, the prospect of a successful solution is not hopeful. And unless a solution based on justice and humanity can be found, and found promptly, I fear that international relations will be further embittered, and the cause of peace still further prejudiced.

I have, of course, given earnest thought to this matter and certain projects have occurred to me in which the United States could well collaborate. I am requesting Ambassador Phillips to ask an audience of you as soon as may be convenient to you after his return to Rome, and to submit these thoughts to your consideration, and to discuss them with you.

It would give me genuine pleasure to feel that you and I were working together along constructive lines toward a solution of this problem, and that thereby we might be contributing toward a happier and a more peaceful world.

I take this occasion to convey to you my best wishes and the assurances of my highest regard.

Very sincerely yours,

His Excellency

Benito Mussolini,

Chief of the Government.

U.S. to Take	
(Germany & Austria)	20,000
(Other Europe)	10,000
Brit. Empire	20,000
St. America	10,000

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60,000

Palestine	15,000
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75,000

Brit East Africa	
Uganda, Kenya	
Rhodesia - Abyssinia	20,000

Megala etc	5,000 up
(Portugal, France & Belgium)	

Per year 100,000

= \$100,000,000

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Income at cost ~~for~~ ~~the~~  
~~\$~~ 70,000 a year (including  
but this year) <sup>margin</sup> \$ 70,000, 000  
has bankable  
Share 20,000, 000

---

50,000, 000  
Free value of  
public treatment 10,000, 000  
~~\$~~ ~~40,000, 000~~  
Private gifts 20,000, 000  
~~\$~~ ~~20,000, 000~~  
Judgments: 20,000, 000

## NOTES FOR CONVERSATION

It could be explained that the public feeling in America against Germany is largely the result of the methods employed by the German Government in dealing with masses of people of different faiths and races, - methods which have deeply shocked American public opinion. It is unfortunate, but nevertheless true, that the tie-up between the Italian and German Governments has given the impression, however mistaken, to the American public that the Italian and German Governments are in complete accord in dealing with this problem in their respective territories. The result has been that far too much of this anti-German sentiment is being directed in part against Italy with unhappy consequences in the relationship of the American and Italian peoples.

If the Duce could make some gesture to indicate his interest and desire to help solve the general problem of refugees, there is no doubt but that the sentiment in the United States would improve towards the Duce himself and towards Italy. This change of attitude would simplify the relations of our two Governments. By sponsoring this international humanitarian endeavor, Mussolini would be enlisting his powerful influence in helping to solve a problem which is causing confusion and alarm throughout the world.

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History would not fail to recognize his efforts and the American people would be the first to express their appreciation and gratitude.

In this way could the relations of our two countries be restored and maintained in a spirit of confidence and cooperation.

As the President sees the problem, there are roughly speaking 500,000 refugees to be taken care of in annual installments of 100,000. The United States is able to take from Germany and Austria some 20,000, and from other parts of Europe, 10,000, making thus an annual contribution of 30,000. He understands that the British Empire will probably take 20,000, South America, 10,000, Palestine 15,000. If to these contributions there could be settled each year in British East Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Rhodesia, and Ethiopia a total of some 20,000, and in Angola and in French and Belgian Colonial territory an additional 5,000, 100,000 refugees per year could be established in new homes.

The President estimates that in order to care for 100,000 refugees a year, it will be necessary to find \$100,000,000 a year. He guesses at the cost somewhat as follows:

Since the United States agrees to take some 30,000 immigrants a year, there are left 70,000 to care for,

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requiring \$70,000,000. Of this \$70,000,000 he believes that \$20,000,000 would be bankable, which leaves us with \$50,000,000 to be found. From this amount he subtracts \$10,000,000, as the value of goods which the German Government might permit refugees to purchase within Germany from their own resources and to take with them when they leave the country, and which would comprise agricultural implements, household goods and other necessities of life which the emigrants would have to take with them to their new homes. Of the \$40,000,000 remaining, the President believes that \$20,000,000 can be found from private gifts and that another \$20,000,000 can be furnished by the Governments.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM ELABORATING THE POINTS REFERRED TO IN THE  
PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO THE CHIEF OF THE GOVERNMENT  
OF DECEMBER 7, 1938

While the Intergovernmental Committee at London has achieved some measure of success in planning, in a practical way, for the resettlement of refugees, adequate results have not as yet been produced. The President of the United States believes that only by virtue of international collaboration involving coordinated policies, based on justice and humanity, on the part both of countries of emigration and countries of reception can the problem be settled in a manner which will not tend to engender further international bitterness and ill-will.

If a general plan can be found sufficiently ample in scope, and practical in character, which in his judgment holds out assurance that the problem which has arisen will be solved in consonance with justice and humanity, the President stands ready to request of the Congress of the United States that it agree to assume an appropriate share of the cost.

In searching the areas which would appear to lend themselves to resettlement, President Roosevelt has been particularly struck with the appropriateness of the Plateau,

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Plateau, a small portion of which lies in the southwestern section of Ethiopia, and the greater portion in areas lying to the south of Ethiopia. It has occurred to him that the Chief of the Italian Government may believe that adequately financed colonization of refugee families in this area would be in accord with plans which the Italian Government may have formulated for the development and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia.

If the Chief of the Government should see merit in this plan, and should care to make it his own and urge other states holding sections of this Plateau to do likewise, the President of the United States would be prepared to give the proposal as a part of a general plan his public support.

Of great importance is the German attitude on this question. Mr. Rublee, the Director of the Intergovernmental Committee in London, has made as yet unsuccessful efforts to discuss these matters with authorized representatives of the German Government. If any coordinated plans are to be carried out, the German Government will necessarily have to furnish full information as to probable emigration, and furthermore, some method must be agreed upon through which emigrants will not be forced to leave Germany as paupers. In this connection, it is understood in the United States that the main obstacle from the German

point

point of view to the elaboration of such a plan lies in the difficulty of procuring foreign exchange in sufficient quantities to allow the emigrants to have cash in hand. The President has suggested that this difficulty might be met at least in part by permitting refugee emigrants to spend their German marks within Germany to a sufficient extent to provide themselves with supplies indispensable for their resettlement, as for instance, farm implements, clothing, and other requisites. If the German Government would permit emigrants from Germany to take from that country such articles for their use, up to a sufficient per capita value, the exchange difficulty would, of course, be greatly lessened.

It is the earnest hope of the President of the United States that the Chief of the Italian Government will favor this suggestion, and, in such event, will further it in such manner as he may deem appropriate.