

REFUGEE RANSOM CASES

10098

TREASURY DEPARTMENT

INTER OFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE May 20, 1944

TO Mr. L. Lesser, War Refugee Board  
FROM Dorothy Steinberg, Program Planning Section, WFO  
Subject: Ransom of Jewish Individuals in Hungary

You may be interested in the following information concerning the present release of Jews in Hungary on the payment of high ransom. It has been learned that the industrialist, Goldberger, who is reported to be well known internationally was recently released on a 5,000,000 pengo security (approximately \$1,000,000 at the old rate of exchange).

200969

**CONTROL COPY**

*2 Mrs. Refugee Bd.  
(Mrs. Peltz)*

Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 4, 1944.

No. 13759

Subject: Foreign Funds Control: License Application to Unblock Funds Belonging to Mrs. Friedrike Wreschner for the Benefit of Hans Kroch in Buenos Aires.

*File*

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to the Embassy's despatch No. 10785 of June 29, 1943, regarding the unblocking of currency belonging to Mrs. Friedrike Wreschner for the benefit of Hans Kroch.

At the time the Embassy forwarded the above mentioned despatch all evidence before us was favorable to the granting of the application in favor of Mr. Kroch. However, we have recently received certain information from a Jew by the name of Hans Kohnstam, of Lavalle 733, Buenos Aires, which information appears to be definitely against Hans Kroch. Since Hans Kohnstam has only recently arrived in Argentina from Europe it has been impossible to find out anything about him, and for that reason we are forwarding to the Department the information which he gave regarding Hans Kroch, in order that the Department may be advised as to these events and may take whatever action it deems advisable.

Mr. Kohnstam arrived in Argentina with his wife and children on the Spanish ship Cabo de Buena Esperanza, during the first week in July 1943. He stated that since he was a Jew the Germans would not let him leave Amsterdam unless he paid for the privilege of leaving. Some time prior to his leaving Amsterdam the Germans sent him to talk to Hans Kroch, who was still in Holland at that time, to make the necessary financial arrangements. Kroch told him that he would have to pay 100,000 Sw. fr. in order to get the necessary permit to leave Holland. It was explained that the payment would be made in Amsterdam to one Dr. Arthur Wiederkehr (a Proclaimed Listed national since December 18, 1942), a Swiss lawyer who would fly from Switzerland to Amsterdam to get the money. Wiederkehr would then arrange for a pass to be issued which would enable Kohnstam and family to travel through Holland, Belgium, France and Spain. Presumably Wiederkehr would divide the money with the Germans and with Kroch, according to Kohnstam. Kohnstam refused to pay the money and later escaped with his wife and children across the frontiers of all of the above named countries, and arrived in Buenos Aires on the above mentioned date.

Mr. Kohnstam

DECLASSIFIED  
State Dept. Letter, 1-11-72  
By R. H. Parks Date **SEP 11 1972**

000970

Mr. Kohnstam was definitely of the opinion that Kroch was working for the Germans in Holland and not for the Jews, as he knows of several cases where Kroch collected huge sums of money from Jews in Holland for permits to leave the country. He stated that Kroch was regarded by the other Jews in Amsterdam as being definitely employed by the Germans, and it was believed that he was not acting as a friend of the Jews. He also stated that Kroch never assisted any Jews that he knew of unless they paid a very dear price for such assistance. He also alleged that the Germans did not allow any Jews to leave occupied territory unless they paid for the privilege or unless they agreed to work for the Germans in America. He pointed out that Kroch and his children traveled by train from Holland through Belgium, France and Spain with the full approval of the German authorities, and he expressed himself as believing that this would have been impossible if Kroch had not been working for them and perhaps if he had not agreed to work for them in the Western Hemisphere.

We wish to point out that we have discussed various refugee ransom cases with Mr. Kroch and he frankly admits that he has assisted many Jews to leave Axis occupied territory, but he contends that this was done in an effort to assist the Jews and not to collect money either for himself or for the Germans. We pointed out in our previous despatch that Kroch and his family were imprisoned and suffered many indignities and hardships at the hands of the Germans, and his wife is supposed to have died in a concentration camp and all of Kroch's property in Germany was confiscated, but of course this information was obtained from Mr. Kroch. The Embassy is not in a position to vouch for the information given by Mr. Kohnstam, but in view of Mr. Kroch's admitted connection with many Jewish refugee cases, and in view of various censorship intercepts indicating his connection with refugee cases, we believe that, at least for the time being, the license application heretofore filed by him, as well as all future applications which he may file, should be denied, and we so recommend.

Respectfully yours,

Original and hectograph to Department  
File No. 861  
BS:mn

000971