

Rescue Efforts in the Iberian Peninsula

BY PEREZ LESHEM (FRITZ LICHTENSTEIN)

After reading 'A Chronicle of Rescue Efforts' by S. Adler-Rudel¹ I felt impelled to record the rescue efforts undertaken on behalf of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, with the participation of delegates of German Jewry, in Spain, Portugal, Tangier, Morocco and Algiers between 1943 and the end of World War II.

Adler-Rudel's chronicle summarizes the very beginning of those efforts in the Iberian Peninsula and mentions the tragic death of Wilfrid Israel², whose own report, in the form of his letter to the British Ambassador in Spain, cannot, for obvious reasons, do full justice to the strenuous efforts he made during his two months' stay in Portugal and Spain and to his own achievements. A moving tribute paid to him after his death by Heinz Wisla³, a young refugee who emigrated to Palestine on SS "Nyassa" in January 1944, characterizes Wilfrid's approach to rescue work and his influence on the refugees. I have tried to piece together, as in a mosaic, a picture of the 2,500 Jews, refugees from Nazism, restored to a meaningful life in Palestine or elsewhere, and to illustrate the conditions — physical and psychological, social and material — in which these refugees found themselves. This may keep alive the memory of the days of suffering, hopelessness and despair which by organized action were turned into a new beginning.

During the winter months of 1942/43 alarming information reached the Jewish Agency in London and the Halutz movements in Britain — mainly composed of young people from "Greater Germany", who had been temporarily admitted into the United Kingdom for agricultural training before the outbreak of the war — that Jews were being deported from all parts of Nazi-occupied Europe to labour camps in the East and that, in fact, these were extermination camps.

At the time, this news sounded so utterly unbelievable and was so difficult to verify from where we were in the beleaguered island of Britain, that it became clear that emissaries would have to be despatched to neutral countries in order to establish contacts, to organize relief and attempt rescue in co-operation with whatever body, voluntary organization or government agency, offered itself.

Obviously, understanding and active co-operation on the part of the British Government were indispensable, and this made the choice of possible emissaries very restricted indeed. In spring, 1943, Wilfrid Israel and S. Adler-Rudel left the

¹LBI Year Book XI (1966), pp. 213-241.

²Ibid., pp. 218-220.

³In *Wilfrid Israel, July 11th 1899 - June 1st, 1943*, Marsland Publications, London 1944, pp. 39-42. - Wisla later wrote a book on his experiences as a refugee and his emigration on the SS "Nyassa", Ben-Zwi Kalischer (Heinz Wisla), *Vom Konzentrationslager nach Palästina. Plucht durch die halbe Welt*, Edition Olympia-Martin Feuchtwanger, Tel-Aviv 1945 (Hebrew version, *Ba Derech P'Erutz Israel*, Am-oved 1945).

British Isles for the Iberian Peninsula and Sweden respectively, to gather reliable information and, if possible, to establish contacts with the Jewish underground leadership.

On 1st June, 1943, it was announced on the evening news in London that a British civil airliner on its way from Lisbon had been shot down by enemy fighters over the Bay of Biscay and was feared to be lost with its thirteen passengers and crew.⁴ Knowing that Wilfrid Israel was scheduled to return from his mission about this date, I felt that a major disaster had struck our endeavours for relief and rescue. The work he had been doing for almost two months in Portugal and Spain would have to be carried on by somebody else.

The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem had hoped to send Walter Turnowsky to succeed Wilfrid Israel. He had been Director of "Peltours" for eighteen years and was greatly experienced in organizing transportation to Palestine. However, after many weeks, all efforts with the British military authorities in Cairo to secure visa and travel facilities failed.

Four Palestinian delegates of the General Federation of Jewish Labour in Eretz Israel (Histadrut) were then in London for Hehalutz work: A. Ben-Israel, Rafi Meisels, Otto Sinek and myself. By the nature of our work and by reason of the fact that we dealt primarily with Jewish youth from "Greater Germany", brought to the United Kingdom through the efforts of Anglo-Jewry and its institutions⁵, we belonged to the group of people closely connected with the Jewish Agency (partially enumerated by Adler-Rudel)⁶, who were anxiously watching the deterioration of the Jewish situation on the Continent.

It was against this background that, towards the end of August 1943, I was asked by the Jewish Agency in London to go to the Iberian Peninsula and to try to restore the links which Wilfrid Israel had forged in Spain and Portugal, and to carry on the efforts which he had begun by selecting refugees willing to go to Palestine. We would endeavour to ensure that as many Jews as possible, living in the Nazi-occupied Western countries, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and, possibly, Italy, could reach at least transient safety in the Peninsula.

The goal was clearly defined: relief and rescue through emigration to Palestine. At that time the Government of Palestine promised to add 150 immigration certificates for Jewish refugees in Portugal and Spain to the 400 granted in 1942, about a third of which had been distributed by Wilfrid Israel. These additional certificates were to be allotted by a representative of the Jewish Agency able to explain to potential immigrants the conditions of life in Palestine. Only some of them were Zionists, the rest were scantily acquainted with the way of life and the aspirations of the *Yishuv*.⁷ Many just wanted to escape from the restricted and

⁴See Ian Colvin, *Flight 777*, Evans Brothers, London 1957, p. 200; On Wilfrid Israel see also *LBI Year Book III* (1958), H. G. Reissner, 'The Histories of "Kaufhaus N. Israel" and of Wilfrid Israel', pp. 239-256.

⁵E.g., the Agricultural Committee, Bloomsbury House, London W.C.1, under the energetic chairmanship of the late Rebecca Sieff.

⁶*Loc. cit.*, p. 214.

⁷Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.

(Recibo)
(Receipt)

C-5

Modelo n.º 75

Reg. n.º 126.321

ADMINISTRACION DES POSTES
Administração dos correios
de PORTUGAL

(A remplir par le bureau d'origine)
(A preencher pelo estafete de origem)

Envoi recommandé (Carta) Carta
Ofício registrado

Lettre
Carta
Bulle
Carta
Caja
Caja
Caja
Caja

avec valeur déclarée
com valor declarado

Mandat de poste de Carta C
Vale do correio de

Depuis Carta C bureau de poste de
Desde em estafete de

le 7/1/43 au cours de N.º 3560
em

expédié par M. Bassulius Clima
remis por

et adressé à M. Dr. Leo Baeck
a destinataria M. Leo Baeck
(destinatário)

1) Indiquer dans le paragraphe la nature de l'envoi
(lettre, journal, etc.)
Indicar no parágrafo a natureza do objeto
(carta, imprensa, etc.)

2) Donner les indications utiles
(Riscar as indicações inúteis)

RECEPTION
PAYEMENT
RECEPÇÃO

AVISO DE

LA remplir par l'expéditeur qui mentionnera ci-dessous son adresse complète)
A preencher pelo remetente que indicará abaixo a sua endereço completo

R. S. 14 B. 17

Lieu de destination en portugais
(Localidade de destino em língua portuguesa)

D. T. B. C. N.

(Rue et numéro)
(Rua e número)

(Pays de destination)
(País de destino)

Service des postes
Serviço postal

(Vergo)

C-5

Le soussigné déclare que (carte)
le mandat mentionné ci-dessus par
O abaixo assinado declara que a
objeto mencionado de fração desta forma
pelo

A ce mandat N.º 30 VII 1943
pays

de destination

Timbre du bureau destinataire
Marca do dia de estafete destinatário

Signature (s)
Assinatura

de destination
de destinatário

de l'agent de bureau destinataire
do empregado de estafete de destino

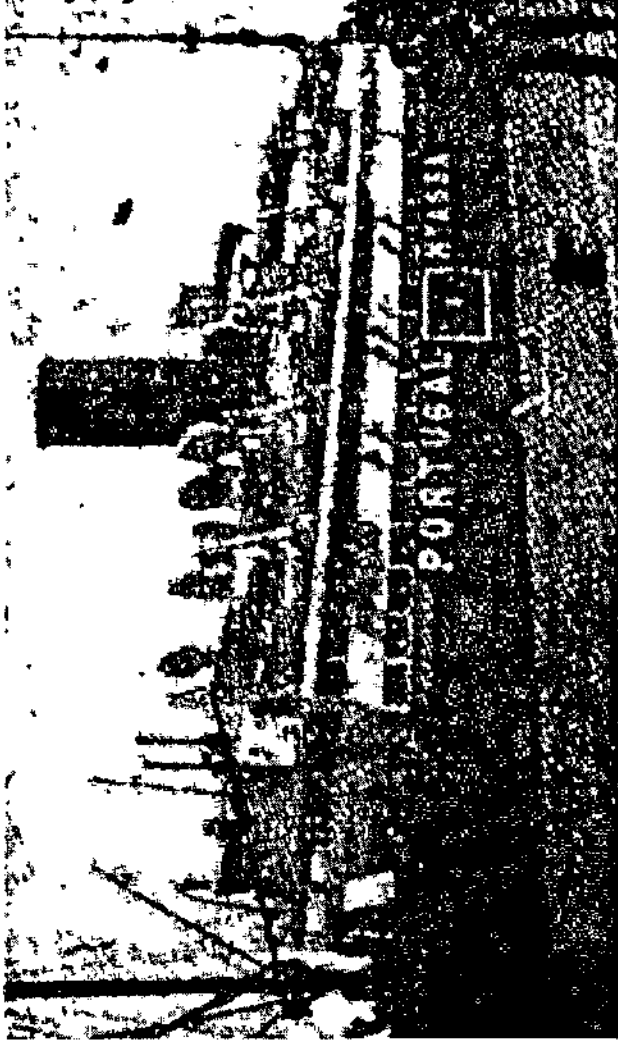
Dr. Leo Baeck

1) Cet avis doit être signé par le destinataire ou, si les règlements du pays de destination le comportent, par l'agent du bureau destinataire et renvoyé par le premier courrier directement à l'expéditeur.
Este aviso deve ser assinado pelo destinatário ou, quando os regulamentos internacionais o permitirem, pelo empregado do estafete de destino e devolvido pelo primeiro correio diretamente ao remetente.

Card of acknowledgment, signed by Leo Baeck, for a food parcel sent by Jewish aid organizations from Lisbon



Embarkation for Palestine



The SS "NYASSA"



DAVID BLICKENSTAFF



Farewell celebration at Caldas da Reinhu
Seated left, Joseph Schwartz, Director of European Joint;
right, Perez Leshem

depressing circumstances of life in war-time Spain and Portugal and were eager to grasp any opportunity offered to them. As one of them, Heinz Wisla,⁶ put it: "... most of us had not thought of going to Palestine until now, simply because there were no means of transport; we had finally reached the Atlantic Coast and were looking only for help from England or America."

The immigration certificates promised by the Mandatory Government to the Jewish Agency were limited both in time of validity and in kind. They were subdivided and sectionalized in four main categories: artisans, unskilled agricultural workers, orphans and capitalists. In addition, they were earmarked for certain age groups, for single people and for families.

My appointment and tasks were communicated by the Jewish Agency to Dr. Joseph Schwartz, the European Director of the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and to Dr. James Bernstein, his opposite number in the HIAS-ICA Emigration Association (HICEM), who would extend their co-operation and that of their co-workers at their Lisbon European Head Offices. Mr. Isaac Weissmann, who acted on behalf of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), was likewise informed.

Meanwhile, the Political Secretary of the Jewish Agency in London, Mr. Joseph Linton (later to become Israeli Minister to Australia and New Zealand and Ambassador to Tokyo and Berne), prepared the ground with the British Foreign Office, which gave its blessing and accorded the necessary facilities. Mr. Linton introduced me to the Head of the Refugee Department, Mr. Osbert Peake. Mr. Peake advised me as to my contacts with H.M. Embassies which were informed by the Foreign Office of the nature of my mission and asked to assist me when necessary.

My departure was dependent on the transport to be allocated by the British Government. My Palestinian passport was endorsed with the exit permit, valid for departure before 14th December, 1943, for one journey only, to Portugal. At the beginning of October 1943 the Portuguese Embassy in London had received instructions to grant me an entry visa. My Palestinian passport, issued in Jerusalem on 7th March, 1939, for "all countries, except Spain" had been extended by the addition of Palestine passport No. 147724, dated London, 11th October, 1939, valid, after the outbreak of war, for "British Empire, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, France, Switzerland, Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Syria." This, again, was altered on 17th September, 1943. Whilst all these countries were cancelled, Portugal, Spain and Tangier were added. The passport was stamped "Not valid for any Military Zone Overseas", but on 19th April, 1944, endorsed in Lisbon "for travelling to French Possessions in North Africa."

Imperial Airways, as it then was, warned me to be ready for departure on "twelve hours' notice". A meeting point would be assigned the night before, and nobody was to accompany me beyond it. One evening about the middle of October, I was told over the phone to get ready for departure at Imperial Airways House

⁶In *Wilfrid Israel*, p. 40.

by 6 o'clock next morning, my luggage not to exceed 20 kg. I was not to leave the flat without further notice, but to stand by for a possible alteration of the schedule. This came promptly at 2 a.m., when I was informed that my departure had been postponed and that I might expect new orders after 6 p.m. next day. In the evening I was advised of my departure next morning, but in the small hours of the night the telephone rang again. This time we were told that I could not expect to leave before the beginning of the following week. Then the familiar game started again. Several marching orders were given and countermanded, so that we got used to interrupted nights and disbelieved an evening call, advising me to be at Airways House by 6 a.m.

There, next morning, a small group of people quickly disposed of their few suitcases and were led through a side exit onto a railway platform and into a dining car train which moved off while breakfast was served and daylight dawned. In war-time Britain, station names had been removed and replaced by very small nameplates, unreadable from a moving train. We stopped seemingly nowhere for about two hours, and the passengers hardly conversed even with their table partners.

When the two-carriage train came to a halt, we were told to alight and to hand over to the guard all letters written on the journey. They were subject to censorship, since we were considered already as being outside the United Kingdom. We were at Poole station. A waiting bus took us to customs control sheds within the harbour. Some seaplanes were rocking on the choppy water. Formalities over, our group split up. Taken to a launch, we soon reached one of the seaplanes. All windows were blacked out, with notices warning against interference and threatening arrest prominently displayed. The flight captain added a verbal warning and told us where to find blankets and lunch boxes. He apologized that the crew could give us only scant information before landing at our destination.

When finally the plane took off it was forenoon; we worked out that, all going well, we might land at Lisbon late in the evening. Little by little one began to converse with one's neighbours. We sat in fauteuils, two on opposite sides of a table. My neighbour turned out to be a French-born countess, married to a Spaniard. She was on her way to Algiers, General de Gaulle's headquarters, stopping over on a mission in the Peninsula. Opposite sat the Portuguese Naval Attaché at the London Embassy going home.

After a few hours in the air we touched water and a crew member came in to tell us that we would disembark and have a cup of tea — the best thing to have in any situation — before taking off for the onward flight. When we set foot on shore, unfamiliar lettering in a strange language made us wonder where we might be. People who had flown here previously, explained that we were in Eire, at Shannon Airport. An experienced war-time traveller gave us to understand that we would sweep out over the Atlantic by night to avoid detection from the near-by French coast with its German fighter and submarine bases. When dusk fell, the captain told us that in fifteen minutes a bus would take us to a country

hotel, some twenty-five miles inland, where we would stay overnight, and the next day, at 4 p.m. it would bring us back for the take-off. The bus and we were all on time and after an hour's ride again we changed over to the launch and onto the plane, and shortly before 6 p.m. we were in the air again. To our surprise a crew member came from the cockpit informing us that the bus was standing by to take us back to the hotel because, owing to fuel leakage, we must turn back and previous arrangements held good for Thursday, our third day out of London.

Feeling by now quite at home, we spent the second spell of twenty hours. Embarkation and take-off had become routine and when we touched water on Friday, 29th October, at 2 o'clock in the morning, we knew it must be the Tajo and that we had arrived. Whereas transit passengers had hotel rooms reserved by the airline, we who were going neither to Gibraltar, Casablanca nor Algiers, had to make our own arrangements, which proved to be rather difficult. But with the help of the Air Terminal's office a double room was finally secured which I shared with the British Naval Attaché returning to his Madrid post. Later on, this companion for one night proved to be a valuable contact with the British Embassy in Madrid when I had to arrange transportation for emigrants from Spain and Tangier, with the help of the Ministry of War Transport in London.

From 1940 and until the end of the war, Lisbon was "the" door to Europe. It was a truly international city. Unlike Stockholm or Istanbul, which were also capitals of neutral countries, Lisbon offered easy lines of communication with the free Western world. Thus it had become a meeting-point of friends and foes alike. Here nationals of all the belligerent States tried to gather information, to establish contacts with Portuguese go-betweens, to keep their eyes open, their mouths shut and their ears pricked. Hotels were booked by long-term residents from all parts of the world. Relief and rescue organizations had made Lisbon their European headquarters. Consular representatives of "free" Governments, rivals of satellite Governments in occupied countries, worked, if not side by side, in proximity. To name only a few, there were de Gaulle's consular representative, M. Gorlier; the Dutch Legation with Dr. J. Luns (the present Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs) on its staff, representing a country no longer master in its own house, was tolerated by the Portuguese Authorities; the Czech Government-in-exile in London was represented by Frantisek Cejka as consul.

While Europe sank deeper and deeper into ruin, Lisbon flourished, for neutrality paid handsome dividends. Some people grew rich overnight if they were clever or ruthless enough to seize the chance in dealings of all sorts.

A long-delayed cable to London, announcing my safe arrival, was dispatched in the early morning, but it was not before 9.30 a.m. that one could contact any office, including those of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and HICEM. Eventually I met Dr. Joseph Schwartz, Director of the JDC European Office, in Rua Aurea, for an initial talk and survey of the relief work being done in the Peninsula. I was also introduced to his co-workers with whom I kept contact as

they — though changing often in the course of the following two years — were more permanently available than Dr. Schwartz to whom Lisbon served merely as a foothold and stepping-stone for his own far-flung travels.

The same afternoon I had a useful meeting with the wife of Professor F. Wohlwill, originating from Hamburg, who had been very helpful to Wilfrid Israel.⁹ She was familiar with the problem of the refugees as well as with local conditions in general, having lived in Portugal since Hitler's ascent to power. Her husband, who was Professor at Lisbon University and working as a neuropathologist, had wide connections and was greatly respected in the whole community. Through Mrs. Wohlwill's help the technical foundations of my work were quickly laid: two rooms with a Jewish family which provided me with an address, telephone and headquarters as the basis for organized work, and an excellent part-time secretary.

Next I met Dr. James Bernstein of HICEM and Professor Moise Amzalak, the head of the Jewish community, to whom I conveyed greetings from Dr. Weizmann. Professor Amzalak, a widely known economist, was Portugal's representative in his field at the League of Nations. He owned a large library comprising contemporary Hebrew books and old volumes of Judaica and religious dissertations. A friend of Salazar, he saw himself — as happens in such surroundings — above democratic community rules, a benevolent, but self-confident, and strong-willed *pater communitatis*.

I paid a visit to the Rabbi, Mendel Diesendruck, a learned man with a profound knowledge of Hebrew literature, a confirmed Zionist, with whom I soon established a lasting contact, and I also met the active members of the community. Gradually I learned about the division of the community into Portuguese and Ashkenazi groups, the former identical, on the whole, with the old resident families, the latter with the "immigrants" (who had settled in Portugal between the two World Wars). The majority of the Jews, in all about 1,600, lived in Lisbon. There was a small community in Oporto and a few families scattered in some small provincial places.

The war refugees were nearly all concentrated in two places of "assigned residence", about 350 at Caldas da Rainha, 140 km north of Lisbon, and 170 at Ericeira, 40 km from Lisbon on the Atlantic coast. Whilst the English expression "assigned residence" states a simple fact, the French term "*résidence forcée*" conveys the real significance of the position in which the refugees found themselves.

During my conversations I gained some insight into communal affairs and their bearing on relief and rescue work. Divisions within the community caused an unhealthy competition and arguments which occasionally degenerated into mutual recriminations. I always declined to be drawn into local strife. As a whole, Jewry in Portugal was in complete sympathy with the work which the Joint, HICEM, the WJC and the Jewish Agency were doing or trying to do. Understanding and moral support, however, varied according to each group's past experiences and

⁹On the Wohlwill family cf. *LBI Year Book XI* (1966), Albert Friedländer, "The Wohlwill-Moser Correspondence", pp. 261-299 and subsequent correspondence.

immediate interests. Of the total Jewish population of 1,600, less than 400 were born in Portugal, while about 650 were Ashkenazi Jews, originating mainly from Poland and partly from Germany, while the remaining approximately 550 were war refugees who had reached Portugal after 1939, largely via Spain.

Portuguese Jews had returned to Portugal from Morocco, via Gibraltar and the Portuguese Isles (Cape Verde, Azores) only a few generations before. They were all well established in commerce, industry and the professions, while still owning considerable plantations in the islands. (This small community is assimilating rapidly and dwindling through mixed marriages and emigration to the U.S. and Brazil. Their social and cultural standards are high, but their wealth is gradually passing into Gentile hands — not only their landed property, but also valuable books and collections of specific Jewish interest).

The rediscovery of the Marranos and the study of their life during almost half a millennium, culminating in the establishment of a small museum in a disused, mediaeval synagogue at Tomar, about half-way to Coimbra, is due to the devoted research of Dr. Samuel Schwarz, a Russian-born Jewish mining engineer. When he died a few years after the war, all efforts to secure, for the Hebrew University or Israel Museum in Jerusalem his priceless library, with its many illustrated Jewish books and rare translations into Portuguese, proved in vain.

While the Portuguese Jews fully subscribed to the official approach to the new arrivals, but otherwise took no notice of the refugees, the Ashkenazi Jews maintained contact with those refugees who had permission to live in Lisbon or to visit the capital. They invited them to their homes, went to see them in their places of "assigned residence" and celebrated the Jewish holidays with them.

The representative of the World Jewish Congress in the Iberian Peninsula, Mr. Isaac Weissmann, was keenly interested in the rescue side of my work, as he thought that the approach of voluntary organizations was too legalistic and that they did not push rescue efforts hard enough. With his European-Jewish background, he found it difficult to understand the attitude of the American-educated leaders of the JDC or HICEM. The antagonism between the representatives of the three big Jewish organizations complicated relief and rescue work. Though I appreciated Mr. Weissmann's feelings, I also understood the hesitations and the more formal attitude of Dr. Schwartz's European Head Office of JDC. Although his co-workers in Lisbon changed repeatedly, all of them, as far as I could judge, gave remarkable service to relief work in the Peninsula and, later, in various countries of liberated Europe and North Africa where I met some of them again.

We were, after all, in foreign countries with whose laws we had to comply. The difference between the two approaches was, perhaps, as to whether or not one believed in the possibility of making the governments of these countries understand the peculiar position of Jewry in general and of Jewish refugees in particular. This could not be achieved in a short time or without endangering the immediate rescue work.

At the HICEM Office I learned of the practical aspects of Wilfrid Israel's work. There were lists of *Aliyah* candidates, which he had compiled in Spain and Portu-

gal; people he had accepted, and others who were tentatively confirmed if and when more certificates became available. Then there were lists of applicants not yet interviewed and more who had come forward only after Wilfrid's departure. I was anxious to see them all, since by conversing with them I hoped to learn what standards had been applied.

The European Director of HICEM, Dr. James Bernstein, generously offered his office facilities. His second-in-command and the man actively concerned with matters of the Peninsula and Tangier, was M. Raphael Spanien, whom I had met in Paris some years before. He agreed that it would be most useful to go to Caldas da Rainha for a few days to meet the candidates who were eagerly looking forward to getting transport to Palestine. He offered to send with me his chief assistant who was familiar with the place and the local relief office, knew most of the active refugees and could organize my meetings and interviews, while also acting in a secretarial capacity. Whilst I preferred not to use any other organization's premises and working facilities, I accepted this offer gratefully, and we fixed the earliest convenient date for this first "field" visit.

Soon after my arrival at Lisbon I had presented myself at the British Embassy, where I was introduced to the First Secretary and to the Liaison Officer with the Portuguese Police, who dealt with visa appropriation, residence permits, extensions, etc. He was well acquainted with all branches of local government which even in matters exceeding their own competence, could get things done at central government level, if they were so inclined.

My contacts in the British Embassy, and those with representatives of Allied Powers and of Governments-in-exile were friendly throughout and in many respects of great help, whether in the case of my visa for Spain being applied for by the British Embassy, or whether enlisting their assistance in dealings with the Portuguese authorities; sometimes it was a matter of speeding up a telephone link or transmitting urgent reports to the Jewish Agency in London, or of forwarding books on Germany's warfare, such as *Blitzkrieg in Polen*, to the Wiener Library in London. I had permission from the British Authorities to purchase such books. Initially, my command of German was unsuspected in the German bookshop on Avenida de Liberdade, but later on I was apparently stamped as a British Intelligence Agent who disturbed the circles of the German Embassy in Lisbon and was to be "liquidated" by two Nazis. Their names and history and those of the German diplomat who suggested my liquidation became known to me by chance in 1966, when I served as Israel's first Consul-General in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Through contacts with the Netherlands Legation, I was able to receive first-hand reports on the situation of Jewry in Holland and on the three camps for detained Jews, Baarenfeld, Westerbork and Tyrs (which later was dissolved). I was also able to forward a report from a Jewish officer of the Foreign Service who returned from Greece and told me his observations regarding the attitude to, and the treatment of, Jews by the German Occupation Forces.

From Lisbon, food parcels could be dispatched to concentration camps in all parts of German-held Europe, and the signed or unsigned cards of acknowledgment permitted occasional conclusions as to the state of affairs there. The Joint and HICEM had long lists of German and French Jews to whom Lisbon firms were instructed to send regular food parcels. I added to these lists the names of several Palestinian civil internees at Ilag VIII Z (*Internierten-Lager VIII, Zivilisten*). A card of acknowledgment signed Leo Baeck — astonishingly not Leo Israel Baeck, as he had to be called under Nazi law — from Theresienstadt is reproduced on another page.

I served in Lisbon also as a link between the Jewish Agency offices in Switzerland and those in Jerusalem and London. Even letters between Geneva and Lisbon, in two neutral countries, were censored by German interference. Information on atrocities in concentration camps inside Germany and German-occupied territories, which became known to the Red Cross and to Jewish organizations in Switzerland, often was transmitted through Lisbon to London, Jerusalem, New York and Istanbul where contacts with the underground in Eastern Europe had been established. Thus I kept in touch with Richard Lichtheim at Geneva, with the Palestine Office there, and with Adolf Silberschein who directed the placement of intellectual refugees and relief in Switzerland in close contact with the World Jewish Congress.

When meeting the refugees in Lisbon I listened to their wishes and answered their questions to the best of my ability. I tried to make them see the realities of the war-time situation. The difficulties which awaited them were in some respects even greater in Palestine where young and healthy people were needed, used to physical labour or adaptable and willing to start a new life different from that which they had led before. They had to be told that, although the Allies would finally defeat Hitler and liberate the conquered countries, pre-war conditions could nowhere be expected to return. Life would have to be rebuilt on new foundations, economically, socially and with a different spiritual outlook.

In these interviews I had to explain the nature of my mission and its limitations, imposed by the number of certificates granted by the Mandatory Government and by the measure of co-operation provided by the British authorities and the Jewish bodies, such as JDC, HICEM and WJC. All these were anxious to do their utmost to help those who wished to go to Palestine and to rescue any Jews who could be reached, especially those who came clandestinely over the border from occupied Europe into Spain.

These lectures not only acquainted the refugees with a new outlook, they raised their morale and strengthened their determination. For them it was, of course, difficult to form a picture of the situation on the distorted information provided by Portuguese news items in a language few of them knew, which was supplied from both belligerent sides.

Somewhat similar to the cultural activities arranged in the internment camps on the Isle of Man and elsewhere in Britain during the summer months of 1940,

lectures, study circles, popular high school courses on many subjects and, particularly, Hebrew, Spanish and English classes, had been organized in the places of "assigned residence" in Portugal and Spain. The aim was twofold: therapeutical, to fight boredom, and practical, to gain or brush-up knowledge which might have a bearing on the hoped-for future. In Britain these activities were initiated and directed from within by utilizing the capabilities of the internees. They were less popular with the refugees in the Peninsula, scattered as they were over large areas and residing amongst people who led normal every-day lives. While in Britain the internees came from German-speaking countries and had a German cultural background, that of the refugees in Portugal and Spain was far more varied. Linguistic barriers and different educational standards fractionized the refugee communities. Moreover, their psychological outlook deteriorated as time dragged on with no solution in sight.

It may be understandable that in Portugal and Spain attempts to combat the lethargy of the refugees by cultural activities were short-lived despite an often enthusiastic initial beginning. The payments doled out by the organizations which supported and maintained the refugees, were strictly earmarked for given purposes and might not be spent at the recipient's will, except for a very small sum of pocket-money. Also mistakes were sometimes made by Jewish clerks and accountants which set off clashes and exacerbated frayed tempers.

Although the numerous refugees at Caldas da Rainha and the smaller group at Ericeira appreciated the material care which JDC extended to them, many were dissatisfied with the way in which this assistance was rendered. More independence, as to how the total amount at the disposal of the individual or the family could be spent, was clamoured for. It was understood that the Portuguese authorities set certain limits but many of the refugees wished to work. To be supported and guided like children caused discontent, indifference and despondency.

My appearance among the Jewish refugees revived their hopes for an early departure. They began to intensify their social and cultural activities, which now centred mainly on Palestine and Zionist topics. Hebrew courses for selected candidates were extended. There was a lack of text-books and teachers, but all available knowledge and material (prayer books, songs, etc.) was put to good use.

Most of these refugees expected an emissary of the Jewish Agency to solve all their problems; that the Jewish Homeland would restore to them the life they were used to; that everyone would get a certificate; that formalities could and would be dispensed with; that there need be no more filling in of forms, no fresh examinations; that a boat would bring them to Palestine speedily and safely. It was natural that the life that they had been forced to lead had given rise to illusions which were hard to destroy.

In autumn 1943, Canada offered to accept certain refugees, and immigration forms were distributed among married craftsmen with young children. It transpired that in interviews with immigration officers many a Jewish refugee, already listed for a Palestine certificate, changed his mind. Long discussions ensued in families,

among friends, in groups emanating from the same township or country. The JDC and HICEM morally and technically supported the Canadian bid for skilled Jewish immigrants. Though both organizations were ideologically neutral, their representatives were then more knowledgeable as far as Canada or Latin America were concerned than in respect to Palestine.

Single people and young couples, especially those who belonged to Zionist youth movements knew their goal. It also became obvious that for the duration of the war emigration possibilities existed only for Palestine. Some people resolved to stay where they were and to go to Canada when the time came. Others took the advice of relatives and friends to accept jobs offered in South American countries as Allied victories in Southern Italy seemed to herald a successful conclusion of the war. The formation of the Jewish Brigade and the wish to fight Nazism, were decisive for those young refugees who could join the forces of their countries of origin in the United Kingdom and register with their consulates for trans-shipment, while former German and Austrian nationals saw a chance for enlisting in Palestine.

At the end of 1943 Palestine seemed safe enough. The war in the Mediterranean was practically over. But doubts began to appear as to whether Palestine would in fact provide the chances longed for. Most of the families hoped to resume their former life in new surroundings. Who could say what the Palestine of the White Paper with its restrictions on settlement might hold in store? An article in *The Times* by its Special Correspondent in Jerusalem on 2nd and 4th December 1943 under the heading "The Palestine Outlook", "Future of the White Paper Policy — Limits of Immigration" and "Dangers of Violence on both sides — Policies based on mutual Fears" was heatedly discussed.

Among the refugees, all age groups were represented; most trades and commercial skills could be found. Families with children, bachelors as well as spinsters pondered their chances in various countries which might eventually be open to them. And why not even wait and return to the place from which they came? Even if things had changed there drastically and destruction been wrought by the war, something worthwhile might still exist and compensation be claimed for losses sustained.

It seemed to me that everybody who was willing and appeared able to work in Palestine was acceptable. It was imperative that the largest possible number of persons which could be covered by each certificate should utilize these precious "passports to freedom". In other words: if a family certificate could be used by parents with more children — other qualifications being more or less equal — they should have preference over a smaller family. Younger people should rank before older candidates, as their contribution to Palestine's war effort would be greater and their integration easier and more successful than that of people less adaptable. Persons with close relatives in Palestine should enjoy preference over those with no family ties.

At first, in the late summer of 1943, it had seemed that at best a few hundred

refugees in Spain and a few dozen in Portugal would utilize the certificates granted in winter 1942/43 by the Palestine Government to the Jewish Agency. But soon it became clear that, while certificates of some categories would not find applicants, of other categories there were too few. The immigration certificates authorized the British Passport Control Officers at the British Embassies in Madrid or Lisbon to issue entry visas for Palestine, but only part of these certificates were already at their disposal.

Meanwhile time passed and a vicious circle was created by the following dilemma:

- a) Should we select and process candidates without waiting for all the necessary certificates to be deposited with the British Passport Control Officers?
- b) Should we go on with the endeavours to charter a boat — anyway a well-nigh impossible undertaking — unless we could be sure of filling it with suitable immigrants duly provided with visas? How could we fix sailing dates from Lisbon and a Spanish port without being assured of the “Navy cert” or “Safe conduct” and *Freier Geleit* from the belligerents, a *conditio sine qua non* for the Government under whose flag the boat sailed as well as for any ship-owner whom we might approach? Who could — in time of war and scarcity of shipping space — tie down a neutral shipping company for an indefinite period without running up prohibitive costs?
- c) Could we, on the other hand, afford to wait until the certificates, with their limited validity, arrived and only then start processing the candidates and hunt for a boat? Would time allow us to complete these drawn-out operations and coordinate them with all the authorities concerned?

As I learned from representatives of the JDC, the Junta for Shipping — a Government-controlled syndicate — was “in principle” prepared to let the SS “Nyassa” undertake the journey which the Joint was “in principle” ready to finance. “In principle” meant that a host of conditions had to be complied with and certain prerequisites fulfilled. These were dependent on different bodies outside Portugal with which the Portuguese authorities would have to deal.

Provided, then, that a) we could utilize in time all the certificates of which only an insufficient number was actually at my disposal, the remainder being merely promised by the Palestine Administration; b) we could complete the screening and medical examinations of the candidates; c) the British Passport Control Officers could issue the visas in time; d) overland transport from Northern Spain to a port in the South, probably Cadiz, could be secured and scheduled for embarkation on a given day; and e) the total number of immigrants would fill SS “Nyassa” to capacity — then the Joint was prepared to sign a contract for the boat.

Understandably enough, the Portuguese authorities would sanction the sailing through the Mediterranean only after obtaining formal assurances from the belligerents that the boat could proceed without hindrance and danger to its destination. The “Navy cert”, the agreement allowing the boat’s journey at a given time and

along a prescribed route between agreed ports, had to be issued by the Allied Authorities, represented by the British Ministry of War Transport, and the *Freies Geleit* from the German High Command. Many conditions had to be complied with before these indispensable permits were finally granted.

Routes other than the direct sea voyage through the Mediterranean were also considered and explored by HICEM and the Joint. I was not in favour of North African overland transport in military vehicles. With elderly women and small children amongst them, I felt that the refugees were not physically able to cope with that. Furthermore, I doubted that the Allies would undertake civilian transport over vast distances of desert and among hostile populations and that they would provide food even if lorries and other facilities were put at their disposal.

Another "possibility" under consideration was the way around South Africa by a Portuguese boat to the Portuguese province of Mozambique, to Lourenço Marques and from there either by sea along the East coast of Africa via the Suez Canal to Haifa, or overland through the then British Colonies and Ethiopia.

As communications from Portugal and Spain with London or Jerusalem were hampered by scarcity of planes as well as by censorship, it was almost impossible for me to consult the Jewish Agency offices there and I had to make up my mind independently even in major matters. Though the British Foreign Office and Embassies allowed me an occasional urgent message sent by diplomatic pouch, I could not ask for such a favour too often. Besides, all communications forwarded officially through the Foreign Office, were, of course, subject to approval by the Embassy officers and to inevitable delay at the receiving end. Sometimes cables from London took up to five days, longer than those from Jerusalem, which usually reached us within 48 hours. The text of foreign language cables sent from Spain had to be given in Spanish as well and the correctness of the translation had to be certified. Even my letters from Lisbon to Madrid were often censored and delayed.

Because of all this we could not afford to adhere to ordinary business routine. The selection of candidates and their preparation for *Aliyah* could not be delayed until the certificates were safely deposited with the British Passport Control Officers nor could we wait for the agreement for the "Nyassa" to sail to be signed by JDC and the Portuguese shipping agency. We could not even wait for the conclusion of the negotiations between the Portuguese authorities and the belligerents. We just had to assume that everything would work out all right and on time and to act accordingly.

The nearer fulfilment came of the refugees' yearning to leave the "assigned residence" and to escape from what only yesterday had seemed to them an undignified life of tutelage, the more doubtful many became and the more reluctant to burn their bridges. There were enough candidates to fill the "Nyassa" to capacity with about 750 passengers, but the majority were in Spain and more scattered there than in Portugal. *Aliyah* from Spain would more deeply affect the Jews in German-occupied France, Belgium and Holland, and give a moral uplift to the Jewish factions in the underground movements, particularly in France. While there was no common frontier between Portugal and occupied Europe, the

Pyrenees did provide a slim chance of escape, in spite of the enormous physical difficulties involved. Thus the possibility of *Aliyah* from neutral Spain would encourage many Jews and particularly *halutzim* from Germany whom the war had overtaken in Holland, and who were supplied by the Dutch underground with false papers. Even so, some had been detected, arrested and never been heard of again, while to others this could happen at any moment. Yet news of a feasible *Aliyah* would set in motion a southward movement of endangered Jews. But before this final and decisive step was taken, they had to be sure that it was a practical proposition and not wishful thinking.

I decided to go to Spain before granting certificates in Caldas da Rainha and Ericeira to all applicants who came forward. I thought that about one fifth should be reserved for Portugal, where a few Jewish families, well established for many years, had also applied for *Aliyah*. Living in the smaller towns with adolescent daughters, they were apprehensive of approaching matrimonial problems in a Catholic country, and took advantage of their chance to go to Palestine on certificates of the "capitalist" category. When the British Embassy had obtained my Spanish visa and my coming had been announced to Mr. Blickenstaff by the Lisbon Joint, I took the plane to the Spanish capital on 15th December.

Madrid impressed me even more than Lisbon with its glittering lights and colourful illuminated advertisements — things one had forgotten during three-and-a-half years of black-out in London. Compared with Madrid, Lisbon seemed dull. Yet as a centre of world affairs during war-time Madrid was of lesser importance than Lisbon. Its importance for rescue work, on the other hand, outweighed that of Lisbon, because Spain had a common frontier with Nazi-occupied Europe. The country, and particularly Madrid, still showed the scars of the Civil War. The roads were in need of repair and the railways' rolling stock was depleted.

Spain was the goal of all refugees from Western Europe, French, Dutch or Belgian, as well as those numerous Germans and East-Europeans who had lived in France before 1939 or had sought safety there afterwards. The tortuous Pyrenean border not only divided two countries, but it created a kind of no-man's-land on the Continent, by isolating Nazi Europe from the Allied Countries.

In Madrid relief and rescue organizations had their offices. Quakers and Unitarians, whose mighty American parent bodies had brought relief to the victims of the Civil War, found in the refugees from Nazi persecution a new challenge. The Joint used their combined offices at Calle Eduardo Dato 20 under the direction of Mr. David Blickenstaff. The latter, a U.S. citizen, had headed the Quaker Relief group and had been *persona grata* both with the Republican Government and Franco's forces during the Civil War. He had been the only person allowed to cross the lines and had thus become thoroughly acquainted with conditions in Spain. In Madrid lived a privileged refugee group of all confessions and nationalities. They had partly financial means of their own to supplement the allocations received from the Joint. Some of these refugees had found employment in Mr. Blickenstaff's office.

Discussing the prospects for securing the SS "Nyassa", he told me what arrangements he and his office could make for the refugees to reach a suitable Spanish port of embarkation, and to care for their food and well-being whilst en route from Barcelona via Madrid to the south. He offered his office's and Dr. Block's assistance. Dr. Paul Block had been appointed by Wilfrid Israel to deal with the preparation of selected candidates and the registration and scrutinizing of new ones. He was well versed in the situation in the various places of "assigned residence" and at Miranda del Ebro camp. From time to time he was permitted to visit the places of "assigned residence" in the north. At that time, travelling in Spain was subject to special police permits for all residents. Police registration in the hotels often deprived one of one's passport for days.

Together with Dr. Block I discussed personal problems individually with about 150 people in Madrid. Compared with the mental and emotional strain of these interviews; the discussion of technical arrangements — with medical officers, the relief organizations or the Passport authorities — seemed a relaxation.

At the British Embassy I met the Naval Attaché with whom I had travelled on the plane from England, and the First Secretary, to whom I explained the subject of my mission. I informed him that additional certificates were to be communicated to the Embassy and that I would rely on the co-operation of the Passport Control Officer whom I would have to burden with a great deal of work over a comparatively brief period. He fulfilled my wish to meet the principal officers right away in order to coordinate the work which we expected. He also informed the Consul-General in Barcelona of my forthcoming visit and asked for his assistance.

The Passport Control Officer turned out to be a warm-hearted lady with deep understanding of the human aspect of the relief and rescue work. She outlined the details of the procedure as far as her office was concerned and the preparations which would facilitate and speed up her issue of the visas. Her office would do anything, she said, regardless of office hours or holidays, to get a transport ready in time, provided we submitted the travel documents and health forms as early as possible. We worked out that to utilize the full capacity of SS "Nyassa" at least one hundred more certificates would have to arrive at the Embassy three weeks prior to the sailing date at the latest.

Dr. Block shared my view that we should proceed as if all the certificates needed were actually in our hands. The candidates approved during my stay in Madrid would be processed under his supervision, additional applicants would be listed and could be selected on my return from Barcelona, where I was to go as soon as possible.

We urged the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to ensure the speedy transmission by the Mandatory Government of the promised additional certificates to the British Embassy in Madrid which acted as distribution centre and had to pass on the certificate numbers to its counterpart in Lisbon.

Processing selected candidates in places of "assigned residence" in Spain meant lots of coordination work. They lived hundreds of miles apart, in small townships or camps and could not leave without police permits. For these they had to apply

well ahead of intended journeys. Good, valid reasons for the application were required. Destination, date of departure and return were stated on these permits when granted. Police officers, local authorities and Government agents had to be convinced that the grant of such a permission was indeed warranted. The JDC office in Barcelona became in these matters a "trusted partner" of the local Spanish agencies.

Added to these cumbersome formalities was the ever-present transport problem. I realized this rather drastically when, soon after my arrival in Madrid, I had to enlist the help of the British Embassy to obtain a ticket for the night train to Barcelona. It appeared that a remunerative black market secured and disposed of all tickets for these trains which ran only every second day. It was a fourteen hours' journey.

Barcelona was the centre for rescue work and also the main base for relief in the northern provinces of Spain. The townships south of the French-Spanish border served as reception and absorption points for refugees entering Spain illegally for temporary residence. Lerida was the largest of such places of "assigned residence", which stretched from Figueras, the most easterly, via Pamplona to small villages in the neighbourhood of San Sebastian in the west. Refugees were scattered there in small numbers, often at first imprisoned, but generally soon freed and transferred to hotels and maintained by their respective consulates. For Jews deprived of their original German or Austrian citizenship and for other stateless persons the JDC shouldered financial responsibility and was accepted by the Spanish authorities in a quasi-consular capacity. By far the largest proportion of refugees who crossed the Pyrenees were Jews who fled from Southern France after it had been taken over by the German Forces in November 1942.

Whilst refugees under the protection of their consuls were also under their direction and, on the whole, left the Peninsula sooner or later to join the Allied Forces or to do work of national importance in Britain or overseas, stateless Jews were stranded, at least for the duration of the war, unless the Jewish Agency could procure certificates for their immigration into Palestine. By combining its public standing and special legal status with the material potentialities of the JDC, the Jewish Agency attained *de facto* a status similar to that of a consulate. Indeed, when I called on the British Consul-General in Lisbon, he told his senior staff jokingly that my rights and powers exceeded his own. If I accorded a certificate, and provided the security check revealed no objections, they would have to endorse a visa for Palestine without reference to London or Jerusalem, whereas he himself had to refer every visa application for Great Britain to his home authorities and to await their decision.

At Barcelona, the Joint occupied two floors of the Bristol Hotel, bustling with activity. Here new arrivals were registered; guides who had piloted a group of refugees across the border received their payment; bills were presented, refugees consoled, lectures given and all the needs, small and large, of the refugees dealt with. From here, groups in smaller provincial places, in Aragon and Navarre were

administered, and permanent contact was maintained not only with Mr. Blickenstaff's office in Madrid, but also with the Spanish local and district authorities and the police. Dr. Samuel Sequerra from Lisbon was in charge. He received his instructions from the JDC's office in Lisbon. He facilitated my work and provided me with secretarial help.

Barcelona became the main single station of my work. Not only did the largest number of refugees reside in this town, with fairly large groups living in the towns and townlets of the northern frontier provinces, but here information could be obtained and contacts established with German-occupied France. The regular *Lufthansa* planes flying the Berlin-Lisbon route touched down first in Barcelona on neutral ground.

Besides being a busy harbour which has much in common with that of Marseilles, Barcelona is an important industrial centre, very different in character from Madrid. Dozens of Jewish non-refugee families lived here. Though not allowed to observe their holy days or to form Jewish associations, they were eager to meet an emissary from Palestine. To these Jews, Sephardim of Moroccan or Greek origin, it meant a chance of contact with Jewry and Palestine and they were determined not to let it slip. Quite a few families with numerous children were included in transports during the last eighteen months of World War II.

This was an aspect in our work of which we had been unaware in London. The several hundred Jews who lived in Spain, mainly at Barcelona, were small artisans, skilled in various crafts, in their forties and with many children. Though Spanish citizens, they were deprived of organized Jewish life. After the Civil War, synagogues could not re-open. The right of assembly at public places was severely restricted. To gather ten men at a private place for prayers would have constituted a grave risk. When these Sephardic families learned of a possible sailing to Palestine, they clamoured for admission and certificates. While physically safe as Spanish citizens, they felt their Jewishness was in danger.

The inclusion of Spanish citizens in our list meant additional complications and negotiations with the Spanish authorities. Anyone, citizen or refugee in "assigned residence" alike, needed an exit permit to leave the country. While it took some time for the Spanish authorities to grant it to refugees on the strength of their Palestine entry visas, for Spanish citizens it was still more difficult to obtain, since it involved a different Government department and the local authorities too. Yet, at long last, fifty such Spanish citizens were able to leave on SS "Nyassa" from Cadiz on 24th January 1944.

In Portugal, HICEM was charged with the technicalities pertaining to emigration matters. In Spain, the American relief organizations, the Society of Friends (Quakers), the Unitarians Service Committee and smaller organizations with which a close and smooth co-operation existed in all fields of relief work had an office in Madrid in which the JDC participated. Later on it became the representative and unified office of President Roosevelt's WRB (War Refugee Board) for the Peninsula, still under the direction of Mr. David Blickenstaff.

The overall picture and situation of refugees in Spain did not differ in any essential point from that in Portugal. They were mostly accommodated in small, poorly equipped hotels. Their numbers fluctuated. In little townships a few resided, in larger provincial centres, some dozens. Many had acquired some furniture, their own bedding and books. Some tried to learn and to keep abreast of developments in their professions, and all whiled away time by reading, studying languages, playing games. Old-timers who had been living in Spain for years and recent arrivals from France, young healthy men and women, old, sick, single and married people, with or without children of widely varying ages, were pressed by fate into unified communities. Many who had relatives in Canada, U.S.A., Australia or South America, hoped to proceed there but found that, at least as long as the war lasted, no such opportunities existed.

In autumn 1943, Allied victory seemed certain, but still far off and everybody realized that even after victory admission to overseas countries would be difficult to obtain and shortage of transportation would involve further delays. Everybody felt the prevailing situation humiliating and almost unbearable. Thus many begged to be considered as candidates for Palestine who might never have had it in mind to work on the land, to speak Hebrew, to regard themselves as observing or national Jews; but who could no longer bear an idle life as refugees. During preceding years of educational work for Hehalutz, I had had experience of the fact that many "good Zionists" were not able to master the difficulties and realities of life in Palestine, whilst many a Jew who was not an organized Zionist and knew little or nothing of Zionist ideology, integrated speedily and successfully.

On the already familiar pattern, my meetings and interviews took the best part of three weeks in Barcelona, at Lerida, capital of the province of that name and at the ill-famed Miranda del Ebro Camp, where political internees and refugees were held. Here were nearly thirty candidates whom Wilfrid Israel had accepted elsewhere. Rabbi Dr. Leo Ansbacher led the Jewish refugee group and acted on behalf of the Red Cross for all. I also visited a small number of *halutzim* from Germany who had crossed into Spain only a few days before, coming from Holland and awaiting their release from badly lit and primitive prison cells.

With Jews who were citizens of an Allied country and eager to join the war effort of its forces, we also kept contact. They were as much interested to hear about the situation in Palestine as we were to learn from them of their experiences concerning the situation of the Jews and the efforts being made for their survival in the regions from which they came. Though each of these Dutch, French or Belgian arrivals knew only a little of the whole picture, from combining their stories we learned a great deal about their contacts and the routes that they had covered. This proved most valuable for becoming acquainted with some aspects of underground work and the circles directing it.

It might be added that totalitarian Spain showed more active human understanding and generosity than a liberal, well-administered country in the heart of Europe. I do not know and did not hear of a single refugee who was refused

Deutsche Botschaft
in Spanien.

Die Passagierkosten sind offenbar ebenfalls von der spanischen Seite bezahlt worden. Der Dampfer "NIASSA" fährt unter portugiesischer Flagge als Schiff einer in Lissabon ansässigen "Companhia Nacional de Navegacao". Nach den der Botschaft vorliegenden Nachrichten hat der Dampfer mit Hilfe eines portugiesischen Agenten gechartert, der hierfür Dollar 500.000.-- erhalten haben soll. Der Charakter des Schiffes als reinen Judentransporter zu lassen und die Reise bei einer Versicherungsgesellschaft decken zu lassen, hat die Companhia Nacional de Navegacao in portugiesischen Zeitungen, u. a. in "O Seculo" von 17. d. Mts., eine Anzeige aufgegeben, in der mitgeteilt wird, dass der Dampfer am 25. Januar von Portugal nach Madeira, Alexandria, Port-Said, Lourenco Marques, Corungio und Cochin laufe und noch Passagiere 1. und 2. Klasse mitnehmen könne. Tatsächlich sind aber Passagiere und dritte Personen so gut wie gar nicht verkauft worden, da beinahe alle verfügbaren Plätze durch jüdische Passagiere in Anspruch genommen waren. Als Rückfracht wird der Dampfer indische Baumwolle für Portugal laden.

Der Abtransport geht nach den der Botschaft vorliegenden Nachrichten auf einen künstlich auf der Iberischen Halbinsel getroffenen amerikanischen Juden **B a k e r v a n N** zurück, der hier als Bräutigam verschwiegener amerikanischer Hilfsorganisationen auftritt und ausserdem sich besorgt, unter den in Spanien befindlichen politischen Flüchtlingen, insbesondere den Spanjosen, eine Liste für die amerikanische Rüstungsindustrie anzufertigen. Die Gründe, die die amerikanischen Stellen vom Abtransport der geflüchteten Juden verhindert haben, sind nicht ganz klar. Da ein erheblicher Teil der Juden nur unter Anwendung wirtschaftlicher Druckmittel in die Ausreise eingewilligt hat, dürfte die Zeitung auf Initiative der Juden selbst zurückgehen. Da gleichzeitige glaubwürdige Nachrichten vorliegen, dass nach Spanien geflüchtete französische Juden, auch wenn sie in Marokko ihren Wohnort haben, ein Bireisevisum nach Exorok verweigert und ihnen nur die Möglichkeit der Ausreise nach Palästina gegeben wird, ferner offenbar geplant ist, alle nach Marokko geflüchteten Juden, die nicht in Marokko verbleiben, sondern über wirtschaftliche Mittel verfügen,

K 213143

178247

Deutsche Botschaft
in Spanien

- 2 -

Existenzmittel verfügen, ebenfalls nach Spanien
portieren, dürfte vielleicht die in diesen
Kreisen geübte Ansicht antreffen, dass
durch den Abtransport der jüdischen Elemente
dies letztere nicht der von ihnen als bewirkt
Besetzung Europas an ihren früheren Wohnorten
und dadurch antisemitische Reaktionen auszulösen
müsste, sondern dass die amerikanischen Besatzungstruppen nur Schwierigkeiten
würden.

Es erscheint durchaus verständlich, dass
solchen Behörden durch Bereitstellung von Geld
sonstiger Weise die Abreise der geflüchteten
vert haben, die abgesehen von den in Spanien
der Rasse, aber aus Gründen des Glaubens vornehmlich
tionalis die hierher geflüchteten Juden sich durch
Betrügereien und sonstige strafbare Handlungen
mehr bemerkbar gemacht und den ausländischen Behörden
manche Sorgen bereitet haben.

In Untermund geschickter Bedienung

Sechshundert



Kansler

K24314

entry at the Spanish border or sent back into enemy territory. It would exceed the scope of this report to analyse the underlying reasons.

The very fact of my presence in Barcelona and the apparent progress in evacuating several hundreds of refugees to Palestine from the Iberian Peninsula encouraged the Jewish section of the Maquis (French resistance movement) to redouble its efforts to have people guided into Spain over the snow-clad mountains and to prepare young people and children for the spring months when the crossing would be less dangerous. The possibility of swelling this clandestine trickle from German-occupied Europe into Spain into a rivulet, employing Spanish guides and developing the random contact with the Maquis into a regular mutual information service was viewed by different people in different lights. The background of the persons in question, the tasks for which their organizations worked, their relationship to other agencies, to the financial sources — all these complex realities made long-term decisions impossible and led to divergent opinions and rivalries among the Jewish organizations which — quite rightly — regarded rescue and relief as their most pressing and noble task. Though the aims were identical, the daring was not.

I met some members of the Jewish section of the Maquis who had come to Spain to advise their organization on matters affecting the reception and prospects of those who were guided into Spain for transit to Palestine. They had contacted the Joint, HICEM and the World Jewish Congress and in due course forged an important link with their Toulouse Area Command for all of us. On the eve of the SS "Nyassa's" sailing, I received information that a delegate of the Jewish section of the Maquis would soon come to Spain to discuss these matters with me. However, it was only in May 1944, after my return to the Peninsula for a longer spell of work as delegate of the Jewish Agency for Palestine in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, that I met M. Croustillon for a lengthy exchange of information.

But prior to these developments, in December 1943 and well into January 1944, preparations for the first transport went on. Negotiations to enable the SS. "Nyassa" to sail were progressing. The missing certificates had not yet reached Madrid or Lisbon, and we were extremely anxious to secure these essentials in close co-operation with the JDC and HICEM.

Whilst the short December days went by rapidly in encouraging, selecting and processing refugees at Barcelona and Lerida, the authorities in Lisbon completed the legal formalities for the sailing of SS "Nyassa" and the Joint prepared to sign the contract with the ship's agent and the "Junta". During Christmas and New Year's day postal services as well as consular and Government offices came practically to a standstill, and health examinations could not take place. Travel permits for accepted candidates in the smaller places of "assigned residence" were delayed. The potential emigrants were unable to sell their belongings or buy what they wished to take with them.

Finally, I arrived at the conclusion that a frank discussion of our problem with the British Ambassador in Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare (later Lord Templewood), might be useful and that his intervention with the Governments in London and Jerusalem might produce the long-awaited action by the Mandatory Government. I felt that Sir Samuel would be in a position to authorize the Passport Control Officer to issue the visas even without waiting for formal instructions and the knowledge of serial letters and numbers of the certificates. I felt all the more emboldened to approach the former British Foreign Secretary on humane grounds, since we knew that the Allies were anxious to relieve neutral countries of refugees and thereby encourage them to let others cross their borders. Therefore I asked the British Consul-General to request, through the Embassy, an appointment with Sir Samuel.

On 3rd January, 1944, I was informed at Barcelona of a telegram which JDC Lisbon had dispatched on 30th December to Mr. Blickenstaff, reading: "Nyassa sailing arranged for January 20th. Please make all arrangements. Advise us your progress". This was good news, but it made it even more imperative to have the certificates in hand without further delay. The news of the "Nyassa's" sailing in less than three weeks was received with great joy by all the candidates. It set others thinking whether they should not present themselves as candidates for joining the transport. The paper-work kept us working late into the nights. The British Passport Control Officers were swamped with application forms for travel papers and visas in preparation for the final granting of visas, once the certificates arrived.

The Consul-General at Barcelona depended upon his Madrid Embassy, where these matters were centralized for the whole of Spain. I decided to see the PCO in Madrid, who would have to carry an enormous burden in the very short time at our disposal. Also Dr. Block and Mr. Blickenstaff were eager to clarify the steps necessary to ensure the sailing of the boat with the greatest possible number of refugees. The Spanish authorities were required to co-operate in granting exit permits. Special trains had to be provided from Barcelona and Madrid to Cadiz, which was to be the Spanish port of embarkation. Provisions for about 570 people — amongst them children of all age groups and elderly, sick people — had to be prepared. Accommodation for such a large group at Cadiz was not only very expensive, but difficult to find. Departure from Barcelona of 420 people, who were to be joined in Madrid by the others, had to be timed for the arrival at Cadiz on 24th January, coinciding with the arrival of SS "Nyassa" from Lisbon. The agency in Spain of American Relief Organizations, with David Blickenstaff at its head, contacted the competent authorities in Madrid and, thanks to this, the over-land transport went through without a hitch.

We were lucky to enlist the goodwill of Miss M. Gillor and her co-workers at the British Passport Control Office who subsequently worked throughout the night issuing the necessary papers. Some people received theirs whilst in transit in the special train in Madrid.

An additional reason for my short visit to Madrid between January 3rd and 6th,

was to consult with Señor German Baraibar, the head of the European Department at the Spanish Foreign Office, regarding the admission of 73 Sephardic Jews, held by the Nazis at Athens and Perpignan. Several hundred Sephardic Jews, mostly from Salonika and detained in Bergen-Belsen, had been recognized by the Franco Government as Spanish citizens. On the strength of this they were to be released by the Germans and brought to Spain in the spring of 1944. The Spanish Government was helpful, knowing that the War Refugee Board could be trusted to see to it that these groups would not stay more than three months in Spain when they would be transferred to the first UNWRA camp, then under construction near Fedhala, a village in Morocco between Casablanca and Rabat. During their stay in Spain, the Joint would maintain these Jews, thus even adding dollars to the Spanish Treasury. I based my request for the Athens and Perpignan groups on this precedent.

We raised the question whether Jews who would be allotted Palestine immigration certificates, but could not join the first transport on board SS "Nyassa", might be freed from "assigned residence" and await their departure in Spain. We discussed the question of release, in particular, from the Miranda del Ebro camp, where conditions were cramped and more difficult than elsewhere. No direct answers could be expected, but in the course of the following months some facilities were granted to Miranda camp inmates.

At the British Embassy, I learnt that the Ambassador was absent from Madrid, but my request for an urgent interview would be submitted to him on his return at the end of the week. I returned to Barcelona to help in the preparations of the candidates for the "Nyassa" sailing. Some anxiety was caused by the fact that nearly half of the Barcelona area candidates were not covered by the certificates actually at our disposal.

Saturday, 8th January, the British Consul-General informed me that the Ambassador would see me at his residence on Monday, the 10th, at 5 p.m. I tried immediately to book the first Iberia¹⁰ flight to Madrid for that day, but was told, to my distress, that both planes scheduled to reach Madrid before 4 p.m. were fully booked. My explanations on the urgency of my trip produced the suggestion that I book one of the few remaining seats on the *Lufthansa* plane which, on its Berlin-Lisbon flight, lands at Barcelona and Madrid. Fully aware that with a Palestinian passport, I could not risk travelling on a German airliner, I booked a seat and immediately explained my predicament to the head of the Iberia's Barcelona office. Relying on the fact that I was a good customer, flying Iberia often on its Lisbon-Madrid-Barcelona route, I suggested that he go out with me on Monday morning to the airport and request one of his passengers to be good enough to swop tickets with me and travel half an hour later on the German plane. Finally he agreed and on Monday morning sent one of his officials with me to the airport. Luckily the plan worked: tickets were exchanged and names altered. I arrived in time at Madrid.

When I met Sir Samuel Hoare, we chatted about Palestine over a cup of tea.

¹⁰National Spanish Airline.

He had once visited the country and it so happened that he had seen the kibbutz of which I was a member. He questioned me on the collective way of life and showed his interest in a British-run country which to him seemed both romantic and strange. When I explained my plight to him, he listened attentively, made a few notes and said he would do what he could to help me. Hesitatingly I asked whether he would take it upon himself to authorize his Passport Control Officer to issue the visas in case the certificates from Jerusalem did not reach Madrid in time. His answer was that he trusted that they would arrive on time.

After more than half an hour, I left him with a feeling of relief. The preparations in Madrid for the transport were in full swing. I left next day for Lisbon and found the HICEM office there busy completing the formalities for 170 candidates from Portugal who would embark first. Early in January we cabled repeatedly to Jerusalem and London explaining time and again the difficulties arising out of the absence of certificates and our ignorance of categories and dispatch date. These cables were to convey the sense of urgency and desperation under which all of us laboured who were actively involved in this work. It was also suggested that we enlist the support of the High Commission for Refugees and of Miss Rathbone¹¹ in the negotiations with the Colonial Office. Finally a cable arrived on 12th January from the Jewish Agency Jerusalem saying that "Government cabled today Britconsul Lisbon 150 certificates without age or other restrictions also cabled Madrid ten youth certificates", and on 16th January a reassuring cable came also from the Jewish Agency London, dated 11th January. Now it was certain that on 23rd January SS "Nyassa" would sail filled to capacity. The Jewish community in Lisbon, its clubs and associations gave a farewell party for the refugees. Well-meaning speeches sped them on their way to Palestine. Lisbon's Jews never were as Zionist-inspired as in those days in January 1944. The Portuguese press announced the sailing date and hailed the coming event. Most local Jews and crowds of Gentiles gathered in the harbour to bid farewell and wish the refugees a safe landing in the Jewish Homeland. From Portugal 166 refugees sailed in SS "Nyassa". Four *halutzim* originating from Germany, who had trained in England, were given certificates in London to assist the refugees on the boat trip and, later, the Jewish Agency officials at Haifa on disembarkation.

Dr. David Schweitzer accompanied this first war-time transport on behalf of the Jewish relief organizations in U.S.A. when, on 23rd January, 1944, it sailed with 170 Jews and a hundred non-Jews, clergymen, Red Cross and relief workers for India on board. At Cadiz they were joined by six refugees from Tangier and 564 from Spain (138 from Madrid, 384 from Barcelona and 42 from Miranda camp, Uberagua, Nanclar de la Oca, Murguia and Lerida). About 40% of the passengers were Jews from "Greater Germany", many more had lived there till 1933 and had fled France and Belgium in 1940 before the invading German armies.

¹¹Eleanor Rathbone, Independent Member of Parliament for the Combined English Universities, died in 1946, known and respected for her activities for refugees and underprivileged people.

A statistical break-down shows that of the total of the 170 passengers ex Lisbon

68 were German Jews;

74 Jews originating from Poland, but residing in Germany before 1933 or in Austria before 1938.

The rest resided mostly in France till 1940.

Among the 564 passengers ex Cadiz were about

50 residents of Spain, partly originating from Greece;

151 Jews from Germany;

260 residents of Germany before 1933 mostly of Polish origin;

80 residents of France prior to 1940 but of Polish origin.

SS "Nyassa's" sailing in January 1944, almost five months before D-Day, was applauded in many quarters as a kind of break-through. The fact that refugees from Nazi oppression were evacuated from two European countries and from Tangier, where they were marooned, put heart into Jews still clandestinely living in Nazi-occupied Western Europe. All relief and rescue organizations, whose migration plans had not materialized so far, looked upon it with renewed hope. It showed the Governments of neutral countries that they need not indefinitely be saddled with the Jewish refugee problem, and this produced a more lenient attitude on the part of various district and local authorities. Officials in Government departments, Embassies and Consulates saw the human side of the event and attended to the formal work which they had to do with more than usual readiness, goodwill and understanding. A many-sided upsurge of sympathy allowed us to look forward to a continuation of this endeavour with good prospects.

My mission to the Iberian Peninsula was accomplished. While I began to prepare my report and the return journey to London I was urged by the Jewish Agency Jerusalem to continue the work in the Peninsula till the end of the war. I felt, however, that I should first report in person and in detail to the Agency and discuss the lines on which further work should proceed. Important technical matters, such as a new allocation of certificates and their categories, had to be settled. I indicated, therefore, that if desired I would return to Lisbon, but I wanted first to come to London to report and to prepare future activities.

After this had been agreed upon, it only remained for me to thank the heads of the Jewish community, the Joint, HICEM and War Refugee Board representatives, the Passport Control Officers and the diplomatic officers at the Embassies concerned for their unstinting and invaluable co-operation and having taken leave of them, I flew to the United Kingdom on 29th January, 1944. On the attitude of the various Governments I learned more during the continuation of my work between April 1944 and September 1945.

The Portuguese press reported extensively on the sailing of the boat in which the people took special pride as being of Portuguese registry, belonging to the Companhia Nacional de Navegacao with a Portuguese crew, and because it made history by crossing the Mediterranean in war-time. Other publications in Spain,

Palestine, U.S.A. and Great Britain as well as Jewish papers also carried the story. The *Manchester Guardian* on 25th January, 1944, published a short report, headlined "For Palestine at Last". The *Observer* wrote on Sunday, 23rd January, "750 Jews Sail for Palestine". Naturally, the *Zionist Review* (28th January) gave a more detailed account under the headings "The Way Home" and "God Speed the Ship": In its May 1944 issue, *Life in Palestine* devoted to the event an illustrated page entitled "On the Way to Eretz Israel — the Lesson of the 'Nyassa'". It concluded the report with the words: "Further 'Nyassas' must cross the waters now. Later it will be too late." In his report to the Annual Conference of the Zionist Federation on 31st January Dr. Weizmann singled out this action as being "on the credit side of the ledger".

After the arrival of SS "Nyassa" in Haifa port with 754 passengers, drawn from 21 nationalities and all walks of life, all the Hebrew papers reported at length and published interviews with Dr. Schweitzer and some of the newcomers. Among the British papers, the *Evening Standard* on 2nd February under the headline "Jewish Refugees reach Palestine", quoted the Master of the SS "Nyassa" as saying that the journey had been uneventful and the spirit of the passengers very high.

A German reaction is expressed in a dispatch of the German Embassy Madrid, dated 27th January, 1944, to the *Auswärtiges Amt*. It is inaccurate in almost every detail concerning persons and organizations although in Portugal and Spain these were common knowledge. The document reproduced in this essay speaks for itself.¹²

In the meantime, the Allied invasion of Hitler's "Fortress Europe" and the decisive blow in the West were expected to be imminent. In liberated France, Belgium, Holland and, eventually, occupied Germany, relief work and rescue activities needed strong and capable Jewish and Palestinian teams to attend to the pressing needs of starving, humiliated, sick and apathetic Jews of all age-groups who were known to be in concentration camps, in hiding, in monasteries or with friendly Gentile families. To add to relief and rescue, search and training centres, exchange of data, compilation of lists had to be organized and extended.

Lisbon soon became a transit station for Palestinian visitors who were either organizing these future activities or already awaiting their call to proceed in the wake of the Allied Armies to liberated areas. Meanwhile, being nearer their future assignments, they would try to gain first-hand knowledge in Lisbon of problems with which they would soon be confronted.

On Good Friday, 7th April, 1944, I returned to Lisbon to continue my work for the duration of the war. A small office of the Jewish Agency was established at Rua Castilho 30, Lisbon. Our rescue efforts were to include the — then still international — zone of Tangier as well as Morocco. At my disposal were still some immigration certificates in Madrid, unused by the "Nyassa" *Olim*, and the

¹²I obtained a photocopy of this report in September 1968 through the Embassy of the Federal German Republic in Israel. To the best of my belief it has not been published before. The document is reproduced in facsimile between pp. 248-9.

new schedule of 600 certificates granted by the Palestine Government as a result of the "Nyassa" sailing.

During my ten weeks' absence in London, some efforts undertaken in 1943 bore fruit. A few weeks before my return to the Peninsula, several hundred Sephardic Jews, mostly originating from Salonika and some from other small Greek towns, had been brought to Spain in a special train from Bergen-Belsen. As stated before, Franco's Government had been prevailed upon to recognise and claim them as Spanish citizens. They were evacuated to Fedhala in the summer, swelling the number of refugees already in Morocco. After due processing by us in September 1944, these Sephardic Jews were brought to Nuseirat in the south-west of Palestine, gradually released from the British detention camp there and largely integrated in the *Yishuv*.

Apart from this ethnically homogeneous group, there were hundreds of individual refugees from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, France and Poland waiting anxiously at Tangier for their *Aliyah* or a definite absorption elsewhere. During the years 1944/45 a hundred or so refugees had been able to join the boats then sailing from Portugal and Spain to Palestine. Now a special boat, the Liberty ship "Asquanius", was put at our disposal for Tangier people by the British Shipping Office, following our negotiations in 1944 with it and with the Colonial Secretary at Gibraltar. She sailed from there on 27th April, 1945, with 248 refugees and some local Jewish families to Haifa where they landed on the last day of the war in Europe.

During the second period of my work in the Peninsula, I intensified my contacts with representatives of the Jewish Section of the Maquis. I met M. Joseph Croustillon in Spain and, later also M. Jules Yefroikin. We discussed and devised ways and means to help Jews in France in general, and young trained workers in particular, to escape to Spain. They were to serve the *Yishuv* in Palestine, or the Allied war effort. I knew already that, as an echo to the "Nyassa" sailing, many Jews, members of Hehalutz, helped by false papers issued by underground groups in Holland and France, had succeeded in crossing the Pyrenees. Some of them had worked their way south as workers for the German "Organisation Todt", building the Atlantic Wall near Bordeaux, in order to be nearer the Spanish border. They were a motley lot, stemming from Germany, which had deprived them of their citizenship by the Nuremberg Laws, from France, Holland or stateless, originating from East-European countries, though having lived and been educated in Germany since the early twenties. I visited the newcomers along the border from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic in the places of "assigned residence" and the children, who had been brought over from Youth-Aliyah-type homes in the south of France, by paid guides.

A first group of children had been brought to Portugal by the efforts of Mr. Isaac Weissmann who cared for them near Lisbon on behalf of the World Jewish Congress. The Joint set up a Children's Home at Barcelona under the direction of Laura Margolis, who later headed the Joint work in Sweden and in France, and, as Mrs. Jarblum, is now a devoted social worker in Israel.

The continuous arrival of children and young people soon necessitated another boat. The Portuguese liner "Guiné" sailed with refugees from Lisbon on 23rd October, 1944, to Tangier, where 88 additional refugees embarked and reached Haifa safely. Most of her passengers were young members of the German Hehalutz and Youth Movements who had gone underground in Holland and France during the war. After the Allied landings on the Riviera in August 1944 a land-bridge between Switzerland and Spain was soon opened and permitted the departure of organized adult groups and of Youth Aliyah groups from Switzerland via Spain, on boats sailing from Barcelona under Charter to Haifa. These Youth Aliyah boys and girls originated from Germany and had been training in Holland and France when war broke out. They had been guided clandestinely into Switzerland for their safety and education. Their evacuation encouraged international bodies in Switzerland and the Swiss Government to admit survivors from death camps who had just been liberated in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria.

On 31st May, 1945, the Spanish liner "Plus Ultra" sailed with refugees from Lisbon, called at Barcelona for the embarkation of 155 children and 93 adults from Switzerland, was joined by more refugees in Spain, took 25 refugees at Algiers and some from Italy at Naples, and reached Haifa with almost 400 immigrants on 19th June.

When the war in Europe had ended, Relief Units and Allied help poured into the liberated areas. Concentration camps were dissolved. But repatriation or emigration were still far off. This situation imposed upon us additional tasks. We became a clearing house for lists of Jewish survivors in the camps of Germany, lists of Danish Jews and elderly German Jews deported to Theresienstadt, lists of Jewish intellectuals from Hungary in Mauthausen, lists of deportees in Vittel and other camps with thousands upon thousands of names. We were approached by Palestinian and U.S. Jews, by those in Spain and Portugal, Tangier and Morocco who sought information about their relatives and friends. We forwarded hundreds of lists to the Jewish Agency and to World Jewish Congress Offices in London and Jerusalem.

We were able to help 364 more displaced persons, as they now were, sending them on our fifth — and last — boat, the Portuguese steamer "Lima", on 27th August, 1945, from Lisbon to Haifa.

The eighteen months of intensified rescue efforts over a wider area, which followed the "Nyassa" sailing, were made possible by the success of the initial mission of October 1943 to January 1944. About two thousand people, refugees for years, displaced and homeless, could build their lives again in Palestine. Others went later from Spain and Portugal overseas, to Canada and the United States. The Jewish Agency's Immigration Department reported these activities to the 22nd Zionist Congress in Basle in December 1946 in sparse language, on less than two pages. This naturally could not encompass the human side, nor explain circumstances and background, or give an idea of the actual development of the story which I have tried to present.