

SECRET

Memo: JNK-5451

10 June 1946

FILE

TO: SAINT, JJE
FROM: SAINT, HBS
SUBJECT: Jewish Olandestine Emigration to Palestine
REF.: JZL-5534 - 5721.

1. Attached hereto report of investigation covering the Jewish refugee group recently stopped from sailing from the port of La Spezia. The investigation was conducted and report written by Lt. De Francesco, SIM officer attached to SOI Unit 2, Milan. (Milan JNK-1222)

2. A copy of this report was passed by Milan to Genoa and three copies were passed to Rome. We are sending one copy to Vienna. Genoa please note JNK number on your report.

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cc: Washington (1)
Vienna (1) ✓
Milan (your JNK-1222 refers
cover memo only)
Genoa (cover memo only)
File (1)

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SOURCE METHOD EXEMPTION 3B26
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DATE 2006

SECRET

JEWISH CLANDESTINE EMIGRATION TO PALESTINE

I. THE "FEDE" Shipment

A. Personalities involved

1. FELDMANN, John - leader of the "FEDE" group, age 27/30 ; 5'7" ; blue green eyes, brown curly hair; slim; well educated. Speaks many languages, German, Polish, French, English, has some knowledge of Italian. Very clever, knows how to use his strong personality. Definitely a man of action, has a very strong ascendancy over the whole group with whom his word is law. Speaks very freely of the Jewish problem but become very reticent when speaking of his own past. Very strongly anti-British. Feldmann of German/Polish extraction, escaped to PALESTINE at the beginning of the racial persecution after spending some time into an internment camp, managed to return to central Europe soon after the German collapse. Most probably an executive of the JEWISH PALESTINE COMMITTEE.
2. CANTONI, a Roman lawyer, head of the Italian Jewish Community. In charge with the negotiations with the British and Italian Governments.
3. NAHON, a wealthy Roman Jew, member of the NAHON family leaders of the Jewish community of TRIPOLI of LIBIA.
4. Signora DACCO', a blonde, good looking woman from MILANO, supposed owner of the "FEDE".
5. Fratelli MARGUCCI, shippers of the boat, with offices at SAVONA.
6. BARGIACCHI, owner of the shipyard of the same name at LA SPEZIA, arrested by the British and presently jailed at GENOA.
7. Captain FARIDONE, Ugo - skipper of the FEDE.

B. The emigrants

1. A mixed lot, numbering over 13 hundred. All young, mostly in their twenties, the majority men. They come from all parts of central Europe, the largest nucleus is formed by Poles, the rest are Germans or Austrian, with a small percentage of Rumanian, and Hungarian. The average is very poorly dressed, but they all look well fed and in very good physical conditions. A sturdy lot that can give a lot of trouble should any strong measure be taken to stop them from leaving for Palestine.

2. The ships

The "FEDE" a motor boat of about 800 tons, recently built at ONEGLIA, registered at SAVONA in the name of Mrs. DACCO'. Passengers accommodations are very poor and the ship is totally unfit to carry over 300 or 400 people at the most. The ship speed is little over six knots in favourable weather conditions. Having the Italian Authorities refused to grant shipping certificates for over six hundred and fifty passengers a new motor boat, the "FENICE" has arrived at PIRELLI PIER and will take aboard the rest.

The FENICE a sister ship of the FEDE is also registered at SAVONA and managed by the same shippers.

According to current rumours the Jewish Committee owns four more ships of the same type of the two mentioned above.

3. The ship committee

A committee, composed by FELDMANN, two doctors and the "Ingegneri", runs the life of the community which is run on military lines.

4. Organization

The organization is almost perfect. After reveille no one is allowed to remain on the ships, which are used only as sleeping quarters.

The meals are prepared and consumed on the pier. Special squads attend to the cleaning of the ships and the pier.

Washing and sanitary facilities have been installed. Medical attention is provided by two Jewish doctors. Everything and everybody looks neat and clean. Since the Italian authorities have suspended policing the pier, the Jews have their own guards at the gate and no one is allowed to enter the pier without the authorization of the committee. Regular passes are issued daily to those who want to go to LA SPEZIA. A Post-Office has been set up and a special post-mark is being used.

The meals, three a day, are good and substantial, and are prepared mostly with fresh supply bought at LA SPEZIA. The cigarettes issued are of British or French make, the latter bear the marking, in French, "for prisoner of war".

5. Transportation

The whole group arrived at LA SPEZIA on a convey composed of trucks belonging to the PALESTINE BT. At present the only mean of conveyance is a small truck provided by the British authorities.

6. Finances

Money seems plentiful, is provided by Avvocato CANTONI; the main subscriber is the JEWISH AMERICAN JOINT COMMITTEE, who has also sent on the 24 April a large supply of clothing.

7. Outside help.

UNRRA help in the form of a refugee camp and cash has been turned down and so local offers of food and clothing.

The only things accepted were two trucks load of flour, Jewish bread and wine, cognac sent from CASERTA HQ. and money - mostly american bills- and cigarettes offered by American Officers and

Journalists.

C. Reactions of the British authorities and the Italians.

1. The British, who at first showed a very stiff attitude and seemed determined to prevent the sailing of the "FEDE" at any cost, since the intervention of Mr. LASKI have taken the role of passive observers. A captain of the FSS has been left to LA SPEZIA to watch for future developments.

The Jewish committee feels sure that, should the British Government refuse to legalize the FEDE departure, no action, if any, will be taken until the ship enters the PALESTINE waters. The measures taken by the British were the following :

a. A captain of the FSS came from GENOA on or about the 5 of April, tried with the help of the Italian Police to seize all foodstuff stored on board the FEDE and have the leaders and the ship crew arrested. After hours of discussion gave up the whole scheme, but before leaving went over the BARGIACCHI shipyard confiscated about six trucks' loads of foodstuff belonging to the Jews, arrested the shipyard owner and took him to GENOA.

b. Three days later a Captain of the British Navy arrived on board the FEDE with twenty sailors, the party was armed with automatic weapons and two LMGs. They occupied the deck and the engines room, seized all charts and nautical instruments, then the officer gave orders to everybody to come on board as the FEDE was going to sail at once for CHIAVARI where a refugees camp had been set up for the emigrants.

Having met with a most determined refusal on the part of the committee and realizing that the carrying out of his plan would have caused much bloodshed, left after a few hours.

2. The Italian authorities have tried to please both parties and naturally made some blunders.

a. When the convoy was captured by the Italian Police at SARZANA and taken to PIRELLI PIER all the emigrants were locked in the pier, the whole area heavily policed and all the ship-crew put under house-arrest.

b. After the arrival of the British authorities the police acted only according their orders.

c. The Italian Navy then intervened, the Skipper FARIDONE was approached by an officer of Admiral MAUGERI's staff and asked to have the ship engines sabotaged. Having the Skipper refused, a party of officers came on board for inspection on the following day and one of them managed to steal away with a fuel pump and one injector. The damage however was readily repaired, as on the same evening a car was despatched to Genoa to buy replacements for the parts stolen. This incident caused a lot of resentment and a strong letter of protest was sent by FELDMANN to DE COURTEN. The Navy Minister answer, a long telegram expressing the Government regrets for what had occurred and their sympathy for the Jewish cause, although not yet delivered to FELDMANN, by order of Admiral MAUGERI, has been made known to the committee by an officer of the Admiralty.

d. A few days before Easter a representative of the Admiralty has again approached the FEDE Skipper with the offer of another employment for him and his crew and some kind of premium if they'll leave the ship. The offer has been turned down.

C. Relations with the local population and political parties .

1. The whole population is full of sympathy for the Jews and should anything happen it is certain that they will be given all kind of help.

2. Although all the political parties have sent words of sympathy and offers to help, the only frequent callers to the pier are representative

of the Communist Party.
On Easter Monday John FELDMANN and fifty Jews went over to LA SPEZIA as official representatives of the "FEDE" to a Communist ceremony. On their return to the ship a Communist demonstration took place on the pier, improvised by the 500 or so people who had escorted back the Jewish party, with party's flags and band. A couple of speeches were made by the Italians on the rights of the oppressed, freedom accts. , followed by a mass singing of the "red-flag. After Feldmann words of thanks and gratitude for Italian hospitality, the meeting was called of. Incidentally, the Commissario Politico of LA SPEZIA Questura, well known for his leftist leaning is one of FELDMANN good friends.

II. Captain FARIDONE, Skipper of the "FEDE" statement.

A. Personal data :

FARIDONE, Ugo ;
fu Angelo and fu Caterina COLOTTO;
born at LERICI, LA SPEZIA, 1899;
5'7"; brown hair and eyes; slim; wide scar on the left cheek;
married, two children;
address: LERICI ;
religion : catholic;
politics : well known anti-fascist, a member of the Demo-Christian Party.

B. Narrative

1. Arrival of the "FEDE" at LA SPEZIA.

The FEDE arrived at LA SPEZIA on the 24 March. According to FARIDONE , none of the crew or himself, had any knowledge of the shippers plans for the trip.

Before leaving ONEGLIA there had been rumours that the FEDE was going to be used for the repatriation of I.P.W. from North Africa, but the only instructions he had received, from the shippers before sailing was to go to LA SPEZIA and wait there for orders.

On the following day the ship was moored at the PIRELLI PIER, belonging to the Royal Navy, and workmen of the BARGIACCHI's shipyard started at once to erect sleeping berths.

Three days later a convey of British Trucks loaded with foodstuff, mostly army rations arrived at the pier; part of the load was taken on board, the rest was stored at BARGIACCHI's shipyard. The two officers, who were wearing British uniforms and the insignia of the PALESTINE BT, in charge of the convey never gave any informations and left as soon as the vehicles had been unloaded.

2. Italian Police Intervention.

On the 31 March a Captain of the FINANZA inspected the FEDE and as the Skipper could not offer any satisfactory explanation for the large amount of allied rations found and for the works that had been carried out, seized all the materiel and gave the order that no one was to leave the ship until some orders from CASERTA ALLIED HQ. had been received.

In the evening a strong police force arrived on the spot.

3. Arrival of the Convey.

On the 3. April, late in the afternoon, two allied officer, wearing the British uniform, arrived at the pier on a Jeep. Went on board the FEDE and told the Skipper to get ready to take on board about one thousand people.

To the Police Officer they told briefly that they had orders from CASERTA and all the official papers including the passengers' list was in the hands of the convey commander. The Police Officer not knowing what to do, asked the two to accompany him to LASPEZIA and make together a phone call to CASERTA Allied Hq., at first the two agreed, but as soon as the vehicle was out of the pier gates, the Italian was thrown out of the car which disappeared in the dark.

Later in the night the rumour was spread that a large convoy of Germans and members of the SAM,

heading for LA SPEZIA, had been captured by the Police near SARZANA.

Little after daybreak, about twenty trucks, escorted by jeeps and police cars, entered the pier, unloaded their passengers, well over a thousand people and left almost at once. The trucks, of British make, bore the markings of the PALESTINE BT.

The Police authorities, not knowing what to do, ordered everybody on board and reinforced the armed watch on the pier.

4. British intervention

Early afternoon a Sgt. of the FSS arrived, but did not stay long. Left with the promise that an officer would soon be dawn to straighten matters out.

A Lt. and two Sgts. , also of the FSS, were on board on the following morning, and they informed the Jewish leaders that all foodstuff was going to be confiscated . Further, transportation would be provided by the British authorities to take the emigrants to some refugee camp. After much arguing the FSS party left contenting themselves to seize all the provisions that had been stashed at the BARGIACCHI's shipyard, about six trucks loads, and arresting Mr. BARGIACCHI.

On the 6th , a party composed of two British and one American , all officers, arrived from CASERTA, but soon left without making any decisions.

The morning of the 7 , an armed party of H.M.N, composed of one officer and twenty men, all armed with automatic weapons came on the FEDE, seized all charts and nautical instruments, took possession of the deck and of the engine room, then curtly told FELDMANN to call everybody on board as the ship was going to sail for CHIAVARI, where a refugee camp had been set up.

Again FELDMANN refused to obey. For a while it looked like serious trouble could not be avoided, then the Officer somehow frightened by the very hostile attitude of the crowd, gave up and left.

5. The hunger strike

As a protest against the attitude of the British

authorities, on the same evening the whole community went on a hunger strike, strictly observed by every body, children included.

6. Arrival of Harold LASKI

On the night of the 10, Mr. LASKI, Avvocato CANTONI and Signor NAHON arrived at the pier and shortly afterwards were joined by a British Captain. After two hours conference with the boat committee, orders were issued for the strike be ceased. Laski left the same night with the promise to intervene personally with Mr. BEVIN.

First news from LASKI were received on the 19 April, when the British laborite wired that he had ample hopes to obtain from H.M. Government permission for the ship departure, at the same time he asked everybody to be patient and at least await, before making any move, until the 26 April.

The night of the 26 no communication from London had been received by the committee.

7. Italian Navy intervention

First the Admiralty informed FELDMANN that the sailing papers could not be granted to the FEDE as it was their opinion that the boat could not carry more than 650 people.

Then, Admiral MAUGERI on learning that the Jews had other ships available, had the FEDE skipper approached and asked to have some vital parts taken away from the engines. Having the Skipper refused to have anything to do with the scheme, a party of Navy Officers came on board and one of them managed to sneak away with a pump and a fuel injector.

The damage was easily repaired the next day as new parts were obtained in GENOA, but since then no Italian Navy Officer has been seen on the boat. A few days before Easter the Skipper was again approached by the Admiralty and promised another job and a reward if he would persuade his crew to abandon the FEDE. The skipper has refused the offer and states that he is ready to make the trip to Palestine with or without the British blessing.

III - John FELDMANN Statement

1. According to FELDMANN , the Jews are very disappointed by the way the Allies are handling their problem.

True, they are thankfull for the assistance they have received and are receiving by the Americans and the British but they point out that although nearly a year has passed since the collapse of Germany, the majority of the Central Europe Jewish communities are still in concentration camps, an unbearable condition ; even if to-day the Allies do their best to make them forget the years of horrors they gone through.

2. The Jews to day fear EUROPE, they are convinced that the Germans have really won their racial war. In every country that has been under German occupation, anti-Jewish feeling is running high. There have been pogroms in RUMANIA and HUNGARY, in POLAND Jews are being murdered everyday. The Russian authorities have done nothing to put a stop to it; moreover many Russian Jews fear the outbreak of racial persecutions in the Soviet territory. In the areas occupied by the British or the Americans, the local population does show a very hostile attitude against the Jews.

3. Of the 8 millions Jews living in central Europe before the outbreak of the war, only one million and half have managed to survive. Their leaders intend to transfer the whole lot in Palestine in little over a year. They feel that if left alone they can work out an agreement with the Arabs.

4. They believe that the main fear of the British is that a Jewish State of Palestine will form a spear head of the Soviets in the Middle East. FELDMANN denies any leanings on the part of the Jews for Comunist, admits that some of the Jews are strong comunist supporters, but also states that once they 'll find themselves in PALESTINE all politics will be forgotten. (!).

5. All offers for the settling of Jewish community in other parts of the British Empire or in South American countries have been turned down. Centuries of cruel persecutions have taught the Jews their lesson. They all believe that only a free PALESTINE can give them a full security for ever and they are determined to reach their goal at any cost.

6. Italy was chosen as a concentration and sailing point as the other route, the Balkan one, has proved too difficult and costly in money and lives. Many Jews are today in refugees camps located in norther Italy, Turin, Padua eccts. Moreover the Jews have found the Italians very sympathetic towards them.

IV. Comments

1. From different sources it is learnt that other ships of the FEDE type are moored in small ports of the Ligurian coast and more shipment are being organized.

2. It is almost certain that should the British succeed to seize the "FEDE", a good part of her passengers will be shifted over night to another boat, transportation seems to have been already found at LA SPEZIA.

3. The main concentration points in Northern Italy are in the province of BRESCIA and in the surroundings of PADUA, where the Jews arrive in small groups from Central Europe. Incidentally PADUA is the centre of a very prosperous Jewish community. To every traveller is issued a pass written in Hebrew, and a few addresses where they will found enough help to reach the embarkation point.

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