

Abroad

Palestine Refugees Upset Appeal of Reason

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By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

JERUSALEM, Jan. 14—Meeting a trainload of refugees arriving in Palestine from concentration camps of eastern Europe is an experience that explains why it is difficult to be objective or even rational on the subject of immigration into this contentious country. The immigration issue is tied into a Gordian knot with issues larger than itself, larger than Zionism or pan-Arabism. At the center of the knot is the question whether or not there is going to come out of this holocaust a world fit for Jews to live in, therefore fit for any human being to live in.

This question is pushed into the background here. The typical Zionist is interested in the fate of the minority of Jews who want to come here or are forced by abnormal circumstances to seek refuge here, not a bit in the effect of his nationalism on the position of the majority of people of Jewish faith who are free citizens of free countries, fighting to remain so themselves and extend freedom to others.

When the refugee train pulled in from Bucharest the other day it was easy to understand this concentration on an immediate problem, to the exclusion of far-reaching and long-term consequences. Looking into the eyes and listening to the stories of men and women just emerging from hell, involved political and economic considerations give way to elemental human feeling. Impassioned arguments as to what the homeland was intended to be and what it is, what this coveted strip of sacred and strategic earth can be and what it cannot, become irrelevant in the presence of survivors of a pogrom of continental dimensions and inconceivable cruelty. "For four years we haven't been human beings," said a 19-year-old boy who saw his father and mother killed by a Nazi firing squad and a year later escaped with two other boys from a labor camp wherein 11,000 Jews were destroyed. "We were hunted like dogs and pigs."

The latest contingent of immigrants to reach the promised land numbered 626—men, women and children. They came from Rumania, but the sad fraternity of the homeless and dispossessed included Poles, Hungarians and Germans. Those coming directly from Bucharest carried battered suitcases stuffed with odd remnants of a former existence, but the majority arrived with nothing but the ragbag clothes they stood in.

These people had lived in cellars, in foxholes, in forests, and had hidden in huts of peasants who risked their own lives to save them. They had experienced and witnessed unspeakable things. One boy watched his house burned up with everybody in it. Several beheld mass massacres. They told nightmarish stories of deportation and extermination camps without emotion or emphasis, as if horror were a commonplace of life. Or they wouldn't talk about it at all. "I cannot believe what my eyes have seen," said one of the older women. "How could you believe it?"

Into the clean bare barracks of the British reception camp ten miles south of Haifa the refugee train dumped the tragedy of eastern Europe. It lifted the curtain on a hidden stage where the Nazis did their worst. Nevertheless, it was anything but tragic. Here were people literally risen from the dead and terribly excited at finding themselves in the next world. Surprisingly, they were predominantly young. The average age of those we saw was under 30. Instead of broken wrecks, they were thin and tired but healthy and eager.

These immigrants were all the more moving because they were so obviously worth saving. Their joy in being in Palestine almost blotted out the dreadful pictures in back of their eyes. They looked, in fact, like excellent material for colonists, and this suggested questions as to how and by whom entry permits are allocated. The British have some say in the matter, but the first selection among the thousand pleading for admission is made by a representative of the Jewish Agency, in this instance evidently on the principle of fitness rather than need of rescue.

This raises an interesting point. Nobody knows the exact number of Jews left in Europe or how many who sought refuge in Palestine will elect to return when the war is over. Some observers argue against attempting to deal with the immigration problem until the terms are known. Others think the British are withholding permits until a final decision can be reached, leaving the door open meanwhile as wide as possible, on the ground that the Arabs will change their attitude when convinced there is no danger of being outnumbered. If Zionists are going in for selective immigration, it means they are conscious of restrictions beyond those of the White Paper.

One of these is the Soviet attitude toward Jews in territory annexed to Russia. New arrivals were eight weeks on the way from Bucharest, held up first by the British because the December quota was exceeded, and then for three weeks at the Bulgarian border by the Russians because some refugees were suspected of being Soviet citizens. Although a large number did come from eastern Poland, Bessarabia and Bukovina, Russia finally let them go. This is not likely to happen again, however. Moscow has since banned the departure of 1,800 orphans expected here next week. As Palestine drew largely from Jewish populations in territory now incorporated in the Soviet Union, the situation here will be affected by Soviet orders against emigration. Russia gives every indication of intention to play a part in the evolution of this part of the world, but so far has made no other sign of active interest in the Palestine problem.