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Jews on Refugees



Jan Masaryk Was the Star Speaker

Though their tradition of solidarity in the face of danger is centuries old, the Jews of the world have never been bound closer together than they are today. This is true of America's 4,000,000 Jews no less than of the 6,000,000 Jews living in the anti-Semitic belt of Europe, and last week's news amply proved it.

In Washington, D. C., at least 1,500 delegates from 800 American communities in 44 states swarmed into the Mayflower Hotel for the annual conference of the National Council for Palestine. As one of the nation's most important and inclusive Jewish organizations, it was natural that the Council should devote its meetings exclusively to the refugee problem. As the chief organ of Zionism in America, it was equally natural that the Council should urge a Jewish homeland in Palestine as the most promising solution—a position opposed by some Jewish organizations.

Among scores of speakers, both Jews and Gentiles, hardly one failed to make these two points: (1) the Nazi proposal that non-German Jews "ransom" their brethren from the Reich by helping to sell German goods was despicable and impossible, and (2) the quickest and best way of aiding Jewish refugees was to re-open Palestine to Jewish colonization. Rabbi Abba Silver of Cleveland, chairman of the Council, scored the "ransom" plan (see page 6) as "placing a premium on brutality." His plea for a re-opened Palestine was echoed by one of the featured non-Jewish speakers, Solicitor General Robert H. Jackson, who declared that "in Palestine today there is room for more refugees than in any other country in the world."[†]

[†] Contradicting such statements, a handful of men describing themselves as "American Arabs" picketed the hotel during the conference, carrying signs reading "Arabs protest Zionist invasion of Palestine."

Star speaker of the conference was Jan Masaryk, son of the founder of Czechoslovakia who quit his post as that nation's minister to England after the Munich "peace." In an impassioned speech, he declared that he, a Christian, had decided to cast his lot with Zionism because Palestine, like his own country before Munich, was struggling to preserve democracy.

In a practical way, the meeting took two steps. The first was to petition Prime Minister Chamberlain of Great Britain to relax the ban put upon immigration into Palestine so that 100,000 German Jews could settle there this year. The second was a decision to combine with several other American Jewish organizations to raise a great sum to aid refugees.

As the Washington conference closed, an even more ambitious Zionist plan was being broached in New York City. There Robert Briscoe, only Jewish member of the Parliament of Eire, proposed that 600,000 German Jews and 400,000 from Poland, Rumania and Hungary be settled in the Holy Land in the next two years.

Striking nearer home in the mind of the average American was still another plan. A New York organization called the Public Relations Guild announced it had received an offer from a Texas realty company of 46,000 acres of land for refugees. The Guild said it needed a million acres.

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