

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: CAMPS

Extracts from a letter written by a representative of the Jewish community in Jerusalem to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem, November 1942

Catalogue ref: FO 371/36648

CENTRAL AGUDATH ISRAEL
OF ERETZ ISRAEL
JERUSALEM.

Jerusalem, 10th November, 1942.

His Excellency the High Commissioner,
Government House,
Jerusalem.

Your Excellency,

2. The reports reaching us from the vast European prison are most alarming. Even if we may discount some of them and fail to believe the absolute accuracy of reports on barbaric and wicked acts perpetrated on Jews by the Nazis or at their order (e.g. that they use Jews for experimental stations for the manufacture of gas, that they deliver their bodies for the extraction of fats and their bones for the fertilising of fields, that they carry thousands of Jews from one place to another in cattle trucks in order to reduce their number), even so, it is obvious to all civilised nations that Hitler is determined to act on his nefarious boasts which he repeated in his last speech the day before yesterday, to bring about a physical extermination of the whole of European Jewry.

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What is this source?

A Jewish leader living in Jerusalem in 1942 wrote this letter. He was writing to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem.

In 1942 the British ruled Jerusalem and most of the rest of the Middle East. They took over the running of the area at the end of the First World War in 1918. At this time there was no Jewish state of Israel. Jews and Arabs both lived under British rule.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

From 1942 so many Jews were under Nazi control that the Nazi leaders came up with plans for a 'Final Solution'. This involved building camps that were used to execute millions of Jews and other groups the Nazis regarded as inferior.

It's worth knowing that...

Many Jews tried to escape the Nazis, and many non-Jews helped them. As a result there was a constant stream of information coming back to Allied commanders and Jewish communities about what was happening in Eastern Europe.

The rest of this particular letter requested that the British government should take three actions:

- Increase supplies of food and medical aid
- Allow Jewish refugees to settle in British territories
- Set up a council to represent Jews since there was no Jewish state to represent them

How does this source help us to understand Allied policy toward the camps?

1. What does the writer mean by 'vast European prison'?
2. Do you get the impression that this source is exaggerated or unreliable in any way?



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

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3. According to this letter, what is happening in Eastern Europe to Jews?
4. If events like this took place today, how would they be reported in the media?
5. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?