

IN REPLY REFER TO

FILE NO.

1004



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL

Vienna, June 8, 1938.

Dear Messersmith:

I have just received your letter of May 17, 1938, and I am most obliged for the background you so kindly gave me on Mr. Myron Taylor's Committee. I enclose herewith as of possible interest to you a report drawn up under date of April 28, 1938, by General Sir Wyndham Deedes for the British Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The General made only a brief visit here, but he made his report in concise and accurate form.

We have had a number of American visitors in Vienna, including Landesco, Rosen, Schweitzer of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and Bernstein of Hicem. They, too, have doubtless collected much information.

I, of course, have realized from the beginning that there would or could be no change in our immigration laws and that naturally the American Government would not contribute funds for the alleviation of the Jews in Europe. There will, however, be substantial sums available from private sources. Landesco told me that his organization was prepared to throw in a million dollars and that undoubtedly more would be forthcoming. Indeed, it looks to me as though this situation before it ends would take on the proportion of some of the post-war relief work. Should this be the case, it would be important not to have Jewish activities in Austria centered in wrong or impractical hands, which I fear may possibly be the case. I gave the Department some background on Messrs. Gildemeester and Kuffler in my despatch No. 231 of May 12, 1938, which has perhaps come to your attention.

The Honorable
George S. Messersmith,
Assistant Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.

In addition to the almost insoluble problem of finding corners of the earth where the Nuremberg victims can find refuge, there are many technical questions which directly or indirectly may fall within the province of any intelligently directed international action. To cite a few: vocational training for the young, transit visas, the financing of transportation, soup kitchens for the destitute, care of the sick, and perhaps the necessity of arranging for temporary sojourns enroute. This would apply particularly to emigrants to America.

The dimensions of this catastrophe are increasing constantly. The policy of the authorities towards the Jew seems to be utterly lunatic. I believe, however, that there is an underlying and successful policy, namely, completely to shatter Jewish morale and thoroughly to undermine the Jewish capacity for passive resistance. The combined activities of the S.S., S.A., the Gestapo and the tax authorities have, I think, been entirely successful in convincing the great majority of the Jews of the futility of opposition. Most of them are signing away their worldly possessions and subscribing to "voluntary" agreements to leave the country within a definite fixed period. We have many cases where a visa applicant will receive a visa within, say, four to six months. The applicant is ready and willing to meet all official requirements, including the spoliation of his possessions. This, however, is not enough for the new régime. The would-be emigrant is obliged to leave weeks before the visa can be issued to him. Some of these people have been able to arrange for a temporary sojourn in France or Switzerland. Others, though, have had to go to prison. The impatience of the Bürckel régime to get rid of the Jewish element is ominous. One can only perhaps imagine that it is inspired by the possibility of war and the desire to eliminate a hostile element in the population. If there is war, Heaven alone knows what will happen to these unhappy and wretched people. If there is no war, the situation of those Jews who remain in Austria will by autumn become desperate.

I feel very strongly that the State Department will be obliged to stand aloof. There will probably be no effective or proper way in which it could be of direct help. However, in order to be able to stand

1004

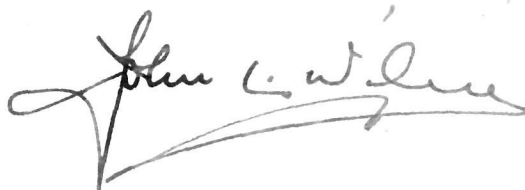
- 3 -

comfortably aloof it would be most helpful for the problem to receive intelligent and coordinated attention on the part of responsible private organizations. Personally, I still believe that an American version of Sir Wyndham Deedes should come quietly and unobtrusively to Vienna. The International or other committees dealing with the situation here could learn through him what is feasible and what is not feasible. Otherwise, valuable efforts may be misdirected, and it would be a pity if time is wasted through mistaken endeavors. Also a private person with tact and energy might be able to alleviate matters with the Austrian authorities. Naturally, I cannot rush in too directly in matters which do not in some way involve American interests.

It is probable that as conditions here seep into the consciousness of the outside world, public interest will greatly increase; also pressure on the Department.

You will appreciate, of course, that our situation here is difficult. We work in circumstances of heart-rending misery. The instinct to do something for everybody is overwhelming. Our possibilities of real assistance are terribly limited.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John C. W. Deedes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.