

Israelis protest for African refugees

Raymond S. Solomon

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In the Spring 2018 *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* (Issue 73) it was reported that “At least 222 planned expulsions of refugees were halted last year when [many] airline pilots refused” to fly planes with African and Middle Eastern refugees being expelled from Germany.

The same article reported that “In January, three pilots for Israel airline El Al announced that they would not operate flights that were deporting African refugees.” This is, as the saying goes, “the tip of the iceberg” of increasing opposition in Israel to governmental threats to deport African immigrants. On February 27, the Israeli newspaper *Harretz* reported that:

In an unusual show of defiance, the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency has taken a public stand against the government of Israel and its plans to deport African asylum seekers.

The Jewish Agency Board of Governors published a resolution ... at the conclusion of a three-day meeting, urging the Israeli government to grant legal status to 500 African asylum seekers who arrived in the country years ago as unaccompanied minors and were housed, fed and educated in youth villages run by the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Education.

Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery reports on his blog that many Israelis have committed to giving refuge to African immigrants facing deportation.

The issue of sanctuary for refugees facing death is a very deep one, cutting directly at the heart and soul of many people in Israel, because of the many Jews who were denied sanctuary before and during the Second World War. Anarchists Maria Louisa Berneri and her husband Vernon Richards, editor of the anarchist publication *Freedom*, wrote about this both during and after the war.

In introductory material to his late wife Berneri’s posthumous collection of some of her *Freedom* articles, *Neither East Nor West*, Richards wrote:

We know, for example, that the British government, knowing exactly what was happening in Nazi-occupied Europe, sought to close the last escape-route down the Danube. In 1943 Lord Cranbourne, the Colonial Secretary, wrote to the British ambassador in Turkey to stress that Jews in occupied Europe should not be encouraged to escape, nor should they be organized or helped.

Richards cites a BBC Channel 4 documentary, *Raoul Wallenberg: Between the Lines*, showing that “400,000 places within the [United States] quota” were not filled, leaving these people to be

murdered. Richards stressed that “The United States gave refuge to only 10 percent of the number that they were allowed by law.”

Berneri had great empathy for the Jews faced with extermination during the Nazi horrors. In “Hell Ships for Refugees,” originally published in 1942, Maria Louisa Berneri cites the Italian-language American anarchist magazine *L’Adunata* about Jewish refugees in a coffin ship going from port to port with desperate passengers who would rather kill themselves than return to Nazi Europe. They were prevented from landing at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Also, “Ramon Castillo (President of Argentina) gave the order for them to leave,” after that they were re-embarked and went to a Brazilian port where they were again rejected.

After the Second World War many Nazi war criminals found a safe haven in Argentina and Brazil. Among the Nazis who found refuge was Joseph Mengele, the Auschwitz “angel of death” who performed gross medical experiments, including how long it would take a baby to die without food or water, and helped decide who would go to labor and who to the gas chambers. He died in Brazil in 1979. Mengele was also very involved with the murder of Gypsies’ children at Theresienstadt. Eichmann was in hiding in Argentina for many years before being captured.

The above incidents and others like them may well be in the minds of the German and Israeli pilots who have refused and will continue to refuse to fly refugees out of their countries. Today there are a growing number of people determined not to let such episodes of history be repeated.

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