

REMARKS BY LAURA MARGOLIS AT ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS AND DIRECTORS OF NRS, JANUARY 15, 1944:

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"Mr. Chairman and friends: Dr. Simons said to you tonight that he stood here as a composite of human beings. I too come to you tonight as a composite of 21,000 souls who today are sitting trapped in Shanghai. When I speak to you I speak with the full knowledge of what it means to be deprived of liberty and freedom. I sat behind barbed wire for seven months and although I know many of my friends do not believe it and I always have to apologize in the beginning for the fact that I look so well, let me assure you that it was not very much fun, but that part of it is over and I feel that the one thing I can do is to bring to you the message of those people still in Shanghai who were not fortunate enough to get out.

"Let me tell you very briefly something about Shanghai. You will then be able to understand what they are facing.

"Shanghai has traditionally been a city of refuge. In 1917 thousands of Russian immigrants fled to Shanghai from the revolution in Russia. A total of 50,000 settled in that city. The story of their immigration is certainly one of courage and hard work but can in no way compare to the struggle and hardship of the 21000 refugees who have come to Shanghai since 1939. In 1917 Shanghai was a booming city. There were frontiers to be developed and it was the day when the mighty white man was still master of the Orient. The era of expansion, growth and development, and the economic growth of Shanghai ended in 1937 with the Japanese incident.

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In 1939 when the refugees began coming from Europe to Shanghai that city was on the decline. American capital and business was beginning to pull out and anti-foreign feeling was growing. Shanghai was war-torn and weary. Economically it was dead. It certainly could not absorb another 20,000 souls into its economic structure, but Shanghai had always been generous. This city never had any restrictions on immigration. Anyone who landed on the shores of Shanghai was welcome and a free citizen from that time on.

"In 1939, as in 1917, it was still a city of refuge, but in every other respect it was different. It was a dying city. The Axis persecution of Jews was growing. The Italian Line had begun to operate what could almost be called a ferry service between Genoa and Shanghai. Literally thousands upon thousands of refugees arrived in one month. Two and three ships a month came in the early months of 1939.

"You must remember that Shanghai had never been the choice of the persons who came there. Shanghai, probably of all cities in the world, was the most remote from their plans, but Shanghai was one of the few ports where these poor people could go without landing money and without immigration permits and so they came. Therefore, by the end of 1941 we had now 20,000 refugees from Central Europe.

"In the meantime, Germany had moved into Poland and thousands had begun their trek across Siberia to Japan. Some were fortunate enough to get out of Japan to America, Canada, Australia, and Burma, but in October, 1941 when things began looking very tense in the Pacific, Japan brought there the remaining thousand Polish refugees from Tokyo to Shanghai.

"You must remember that Shanghai was totally unprepared to receive the invading horde. Shanghai was economically unable to absorb them and then another great problem was the large number of imminences among the refugee

population. There was never a real community to plan for them, or any plans made to receive them. A very serious situation developed. Housing, feeding, and medical care had to be provided for these people. It was provided but always with the feeling that they were there only for a temporary period. Nothing permanent was ever constructed and nothing constructive was ever planned. That is why the Joint Distribution Committee sent me to Shanghai.

"My primary reason for going to Shanghai was to see how many people of these people could be re-emigrated. Of course, we were primarily interested in seeing how many could be emigrated to America because many of them had friends and relatives here. We also wanted to look into the relief problem in an attempt to work out some constructive plan for those who could not leave.

"What did I find in Shanghai? About 12,000 of the 20,000 were living in Hongku. Hongku, you should know, had been Japanese occupied territory since 1937. Of this 12,000, 8,000 had actually been certified as in need of relief meaning that if we certified them as in need of relief they would get one meal a day from the kitchen. 2,500 of these people were living in the camps operated by the committee.

"I tell you, my friends, men, women, children, the old and the sick were all crowded together in huge dormitories. Privacy was an unknown event. There was no place to hang one's clothes, no place to put a towel. There was just a horde of human beings all put into large dormitories with double decker beds for convenience. If I hadn't seen this myself I could never have believed it. It was unbelievable that white human beings could live as these people were living. By the time I arrived, I want you to know, that many of them had already lost hope of ever gaining a good hold again.

A very small group of the group that come into Shanghai had gotten some foothold in the International Settlement and in a French concession and were comfortable, but that was definitely a minority group.

"Our plans, were, of course, as I told you, to move these people out of Shanghai. We were concentrating on the young, on children and young couples with small children, and our program of co-ordinating our work with the American Consul in Shanghai was working out very well. We were beginning to send people to America, to Australia, to Burma, and to New Zealand. The living standard of the resident group was on its way to improvement. Congestion had been partly relieved by building a new camp and our work was progressing, but then came December 8, 1941, and the famous Pearl Harbor Day. I don't want to repeat the story of what happened in Shanghai after Pearl Harbor because I think most of you have heard me tell it time and time again, but just to summarize, I want to have you know that the conditions in Shanghai were such that if it had not been for the work of the Joint Distribution Committee and the fact that the Joint Distribution Committee was able to make credit available to us whereby we could borrow money for these people, half of the population today would not be alive.

"Just to give you as an example a specific instance, I will tell you about something of the death rate and you can judge for yourself. In 1940 the death rate was 139. In 1941 it was 182, and 1942 it was 350. In 1942 the death rate had practically doubled that of the previous year. 1942 was a typhus year. We don't know the death rate for 1943, but I can guarantee you that 1944, being an alternate year of 1942, and every other year is a typhus year, will have a death rate four or five times as great as it was in 1942. I have the greatest respect for courage and the will to live which those people have shown.

"The staff that was employed by the committee was always hungry. The men and women interviewing other men and women applying for relief and trying to evaluate which one was hungrier, the worker or the client, and yet that was the kind of thing they had to do. Our staff was ragged and their shoes were torn, and they were the ones who had to distribute the little clothes we had to those who were more tattered and more torn.

"Our staff came to meet daily with notices of eviction, and yet they were the ones handling the applications for the thousands that were trying to get into our camps because they too had received evictions.

"Prior to my own internment some of the men and the people who had worked with us came to say good bye. Their words to me were very interesting. They were trying to console me because I too was going into internment. I didn't feel that I needed any consolation because I had an American passport which makes a great deal of difference. These people are stateless and helpless.

"I have jotted down some of the things they have said to me as they have come back to me. One man said, 'You are leaving us at a time when we feel much stronger. In the first year of the war it would have been impossible for us to stand it, but now the United Nations are on the march to victory.'

"Another man said, 'It can't be as long now as it already has been, and we are not afraid.'

"One woman said to me, 'We are over the worst, we feel we have the courage to hold on a little longer because we know that your people in America care.'

"There is another story I want to bring to you. About two months after Pearl Harbor a family applied for relief, a family which had never had relief before and in those days we were not making or taking new applications.

We were taking people off relief and not taking on new people, but this apparently seemed like a very, very urgent case and we certified this couple in their early 50's for relief. A few weeks later we were notified that the couple had committed suicide. Our worker rushed over. When our worker entered the room he saw several cases there which he had never seen before, and a letter on one of the cases addressed to the American Joint. I have tried to reconstruct the contents of this letter from memory.

'Dear Joint:

'We can't go on living on relief, and we can't live on what we have. You resourceful Americans can perhaps use our things and make the money go further than we can.

'We hope our little contribution will help you Americans a little. You have done so much for all of us. We pray that America will never forget those who still have the courage to live.'

"The cases were full of saleable articles.

"My friends, American money and efforts have helped and are still helping those people in Shanghai to hold on. They have the will to live. The victory of the United Nations is their salvation just as it will be the salvation of all enslaved people. Those people in Shanghai are conscious of where the salvation will come from and when the time comes I hope that we Americans shall rise to the occasion and show them that they have not lived in vain.

"Thank you."