

Golda in Cyprus 1947

(Golda Meir, "My Life". Publ. by Ma'ariv, 1975. P' 149)

I went to Cyprus to see what could be done – if anything could be done – re the hundreds of children who were being held there. At that time there were 40,000 Jews incarcerated in the Cyprus camps and each month the British, with their punctuality and exactness, allowed 1,500 Jews to enter the Land of Israel: 750 came from the camps in Europe and 750 from Cyprus. In Cyprus the certificates were granted on a "first in, first out" basis and as a result many small children had to remain in the camps, where the living conditions were quite harsh for a long time. One day a committee of doctors appeared in my office in Jerusalem.

"We cannot accept responsibility for the health of the babies if they remain another winter in the camps", they said. That was why I started to negotiate with the mandatory government. We suggested some sort of framework in which families of survivors who had a child who was less than a year old would be allowed to leave for Palestine earlier than the regular queue. The amount of certificates would be adjusted retroactively. In order to do so we had to convince the mandatory government to act with some flexibility and logic, although at the time this government was neither. The survivors also had to be convinced that children should be given priority.

It took some time before I arrived at some sort of an arrangement with the government but I did succeed. There was also a special consignment of certificates for orphans. The next step was to go to Cyprus and talk to the survivors themselves. I was told by my friends that I would never convince them to give up their turn. Getting to Palestine was so important for them that they would not want to give up their turn for any reason. I could not accept that verdict without trying, so I left for Cyprus.

When I arrived I appeared before the British Camp Commander, who was tall, slim and elderly and a veteran of long service in India. One may say that this was a courtesy call. I told him who I was and what my purpose was and asked if I may tour the camps the following day. He listened to what I had to say with a cold and unfriendly demeanor and when I had done, he said: "I am informed of the families with babies but I have received no instructions regarding orphans." When I informed him that that had been a part of the agreement he said that he would have to clarify that. We continued our conversation when all of a sudden he agreed to add the orphans to the list. I could not figure out what made him change his mind so suddenly but the next morning I heard that he had received a report from the Chief-Secretary in Jerusalem in which he was told to "Beware of Mrs. Meirson, she is a tough one". I guess that that is what made him change his mind so suddenly.

Translated by Arieh Malkin

"The 2,000 Babies immigration"

Parts from Uri Farvari's letter 25/6/2009 to Y. Ben-Tzur

"My parents came onboard the (illegal ship) La'Negev (9 Feb' 1947)...I was born on the end of August...in the British Military Hospital, Nikosia".

"My parents came with me to Eretz-Israel (Palestine) on 28 Nov' 1947 when the Brits allowed immigration (to E-I) of 2,000 babies with their parents".