

On 16 July 1940 Marguerite Goldschmidt-Brodsky asks the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to help Jewish refugee children from Belgium¹

Letter from M. Goldschmidt-Brodsky,² Cahors (Lot département), Terminus, to the American Jewish Distribution Committee (received on 29 July 1940), dated 16 July 1940

Dear Sirs,

In my capacity as President of the Committee for Assistance to Jewish Refugee Children in Brussels³ (section of the Refugee Committee⁴ presided over by Mr. Gottschalk) I permit myself to call your attention to the following fact: A portion of the children for whom we were responsible since December 1938, that is 92 children, who were staying in the Orphanage 'Foyers', evacuated Brussels on the 14th of May with the Belgium Director, Mr. Dewaay, his wife and two instructresses. After a frightful voyage of four days and four nights in cattle cars they all found asylum in a village in the Department of Haute Garonne, Seyre, situated about 30 kilometers from Toulouse between Nailloux and Villefranche.⁵ They found homes there under miserable living conditions but have had the opportunity of becoming assimilated with other Belgium refugees and of receiving food.

This situation has now become modified by the fact that the Belgium refugees are going to be repatriated, notwithstanding the fact that return to Belgium is neither desirable nor possible for Jewish children from Germany. Certain children among them have their families in the United States and even have authorization to go there, but it is a question of how to make this possible. On the other hand, how can we permit them to remain in France? In any case, they will not continue to be subsidized. The Director, Mr. Dewaay, still has a certain sum of money which we have received in Brussels and which will permit them to subsist for six weeks at the maximum. He himself is very much concerned about the future, and if our organizations will not come to his aid materially and morally, he will perhaps be forced to return to his own country with his family. What will become of the 92 children?

As for myself, unfortunately I cannot do more although this is a heartrending task. I have only been able to go once to see the children at Seyre and cannot return for lack of gasoline. I have referred them to the Toulouse Division of the Belgium Red Cross (rue Ambroise Paré), but in several weeks this entire organization will leave. My husband,⁶

1 JDC, AR 33/44 #450. The original document is in English. Spelling and grammar as in the original.

2 Marguerite Goldschmidt-Brodsky (1884–1973), president of the Committee for Assistance to Jewish Refugee Children (Comité d'assistance aux enfants juifs réfugiés, CAEJR); negotiated with the Swiss Red Cross for the custody of the children she escorted to the south of France to be transferred to Swiss Children's Aid (Secours suisse aux enfants) and obtained additional support for the children through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

3 The CAEJR was founded in Nov. 1938 on the initiative of Max Gottschalk, head of the Belgian Committee for Assistance to Jewish Refugees (CARJ). It organized support for Jewish children who had been able to leave Germany or Austria for Belgium without their parents.

4 The reference is to the CARJ.

5 See Doc. 152.

6 Alfred Édouard Goldschmidt (1871–1954), industrialist; treasurer of the Belgian Red Cross, 1914–1940; in summer 1940, on behalf of the Red Cross, organized the return of thousands of Belgians who had fled to France; in Oct. 1940 fled with his wife, Marguerite Goldschmidt-Brodsky, to Switzerland, where he was active in the International Red Cross.

who is Treasurer General of the Belgium Red Cross, and myself will also leave Cahors, and this is why I refer to you the work which has been set up under your auspices and is well known to Mr. Troper,⁷ to whom I would ask you to remember me.

Do not abandon these children, I implore you. I know them well. They are sweet and quite willing to adapt themselves to no matter what life. Ten to twelve larger boys from fifteen to eighteen years are eager and would be capable of agricultural work, and perhaps you can obtain for them permission to stay in France for this purpose. It is necessary for someone to take the matter in hand, and I allow myself to suggest that you send one of your delegates who could perhaps occupy himself, I hope, with two of our larger boys interned at 'St. Cyprien (pyrenees Orientales)⁸ – Kurt Moser,⁹ protégé of Mr. Heinemann, and Berthold Elkan,¹⁰ protégé of Madame Benedictus,¹¹ of Brussels (but where are their patrons?¹²).

I take advantage of this opportunity in order to indicate to you that in the same Saint-Cyprien camp there are some very distinguished personalities, such as Professor Fritz Lieben,¹³ chemist, of Vienna, Professor Fritz Feigl¹⁴ of Vienna, Rabbi Ansbacher,¹⁵ and others.

I apologize, dear sirs, for having importuned you and hope for a favorable and prompt response.¹⁶

7 Morris Carlton Troper (1892–1962), lawyer; worked as a lawyer and an auditor in New York; worked for the JDC from 1920; chairman of the JDC's European Executive Council, 1938–1942; officer in the US Army, 1942–1948.

8 St Cyprien was a camp on the Spanish border in which thousands of Belgian refugees, as well as Germans detained in Belgium, were interned in 1940. It was closed on 4 Oct. 1940, and the detainees were transferred to Gurs camp. On conditions in the camp, see Doc. 156.

9 Kurt Moser (1922–1943), farmhand; emigrated to Belgium in 1939; interned in the St Cyprien and Drancy camps from May 1940; in 1943 deported from there to Majdanek, where he was murdered.

10 Berthold Elkan (1922–1943), carpenter; emigrated to Belgium in the 1930s; interned in the St Cyprien and Drancy camps from May 1940; in 1943 deported from there to Majdanek, where he was murdered.

11 Probably Ellen Jeanne Benedictus, née Levy, wife of Maurice Benedictus.

12 In the original, the word 'protectors' is crossed out and replaced with what looks like 'patrons'.

13 Dr Fritz Lieben (1890–1966), chemist; worked at the University of Vienna, 1919–1938; emigrated to France in 1940; emigrated to the USA in May 1941; returned to Vienna in 1953.

14 Correctly: Dr Fritz Feigl (1891–1971), chemist; worked at various universities in Vienna, 1920–1938; emigrated to Switzerland in 1938, and from there to Belgium; fled via France to Portugal, and from there emigrated to Brazil in 1940.

15 Jehuda Leo, born Ansbacher (1907–1998), rabbi; trained in Germany; served as a rabbi in Brussels, 1933–1940; interned in the St Cyprien and Gurs camps, where he also served as a rabbi, 1940–1942; fled to Spain in 1942; member of the Social Council of the JDC in Madrid, 1943–1944; emigrated to Palestine in 1944; from 1957 worked as a rabbi in Tel Aviv, where he established the Ihud Shivat Zion synagogue and community.

16 No reply to this letter has been found. Thanks to the efforts of Marguerite Goldschmidt-Brodsky and her colleague Lily Felddegen, 23 of the children were able to emigrate to the US. The rest lived at Château de la Hille in the Pyrenees from 1942 and were cared for by Swiss Children's Aid. Following the gendarmerie's attempt to transfer all children over the age of fifteen to Le Vernet camp in August 1942, many of them fled across the border or went into hiding. Twelve of the children were deported, of whom just one survived.