

11/10/39

MEMORANDUM

The following account was forwarded to the Amsterdam Office of the Joint Distribution Committee from Kaunas by M. W. Beckelman on 11/10/39. Attached was a note from Mr. Beckelman stating that this was written originally in Russian by the doctor who made the trip with the group mentioned in the opening paragraph.

"NOBODY'S LAND"

On November 5th, 1939, a commission consisting of 5 men ---- representatives of the Jewish organizations Joint, Hias, Ose and the Lithuanian Red Cross ---- arrived at the Lithuanian-German frontier in order to learn the fate of the Jews of the little towns of the so-called Suwalki district, who had been expelled by the Nazi authorities.

Rayon Vyzuonos. A cold, rainy day in November. A sharp, penetrating wind is blowing. A black field, changed into marsh by the autumnal rains. Figures rise up as though out of the ground ..... Rags, cries, shouts; "Help us". Terrible faces, swollen from the wind and the cold..... Insane looks..... The cries dont cease. The commission is allowed to stay ten minutes only.

We wish to absorb the situation. Never shall we forget what we have seen there.....

31 men. Among them 12 women and 2 children. One of them has been ill for three days with a temperature 39-40. They are half-alive but there is a dead one too ----- she died in the night from the cold. A young woman of 36 years.

To see their "buildings" against the wind and the cold you would not be able to understand how they have managed to keep living; several sticks rammed in the autumnal dirt and covered with twigs ----- that is their defense against death from the cold. Thus these unfortunate people have been living for ten days and nights.

A girl of 18 relates the following; "On October 29th, at one O' clock in the afternoon, at the command of the Nazi authorities, the whole Jewish population of the little town of Vyzuonos was driven to the market square. By the same command they were forbidden to take anything with them. At the square they were given new instructions; to take off their mantles and new shoes and to hand over money and valuables. In such a state we were driven to the Lithuanian frontier. We were 281 men, women and children, old ones and sick persons. An old man of 70 and an old woman of 62 who were paralyzed had to be carried all the way. I myself had to go in stockings. After a long painful trip during which we were derided by our tormenters, we reached the Lithuanian frontier. Returning was prohibited under the threat of being shot. The Lithuanian authorities refused to let us pass into their territory.

## 2) Nobody's Land (continued)

281 men remained in the open field, in the marshy country, in the air, in "Nobody's Land", condemned to death from hunger and cold. The life of a caveman seemed ideal to them, for they did not even have caves...

During the first two days the German authorities did not allow them to build any shelter against the autumnal winds. On the third day they were allowed to use twigs to serve as a kind of roof. They did not have any food with them and no delivery of food was permitted. They surely would have perished, particularly the little children, had it not been for some help that they obtained from three poor peasants' families who lived close by.

The news about the Jews of Vyzunoc condemned to death spread all over the small frontier towns. The Jewish youth set about energetically helping, and owing solely to them and in spite of the various prohibitions from one source or another they succeeded in passing in some food and thus keeping them alive.

Some of these people, driven to despair and having nothing to lose, secretly passed during the night from "Nobody's Land" into Lithuanian territory, even at the risk of being shot down by the frontier-guards. Thus the population of "Nobody's Land" decreased as time went on. The more active ones passed over the frontier and there remained only the weakest and most helpless and unhappy people, full of fright and despair.

This was their condition when the commission found them. On returning from "Nobody's Land", the commission met a local country-woman. We asked her whether she had seen the expelled people. "Oh", said she, "yes! well, it is better now than it has been. But the first days were awful, yes, rather awful".

The same procedure was practised by the German authorities in Seiniai and other little towns close by. Since October 25th, Jews have been driven from the places where they had been living all their life long. Everywhere the same methods; robbery, taking of clothes, deprivation, marching to the Lithuanian frontier. The Lithuanian authorities refusing to permit them entrance to their territory, they had to stay in the open air, day and night. By November 2nd there were 700 men already.

The suffering and torments of the women and children cannot be described. A woman, mother of two six month twins, not being able to suffer any longer, threw her children in the field and rushed into a pond. They succeeded in saving her. The Lithuanian frontier guards had pity on them and let them pass the frontier finally.

### 3) Nobody's Land (continued)

An old man of 78 years with an amputated leg was not allowed by the Germans to take his prosthes with him and the unfortunate man had to be carried on the shoulders all the way along. After several days in the open air, he was helped to pass over the Lithuanian frontier secretly. The old man relates "You cannot imagine how they tormented us. At Seiniai they compelled us to clean closets with our very hands. In their sadism the Nazis guards compelled us to drink their urine".

Many of those who have passed into Lithuania have frostbitten arms and legs. Others have internal injuries the extent of which can only be known after thorough medical examination. At present we may only say; they are wholly destitute, hungry and naked.

Copied in Amsterdam, November 15th, 1939