



WE SAW THEM BUILD

IWO VICE-PRESIDENT DESCRIBES HIS VISIT TO THE NEW DEMOCRACIES OF EUROPE

Interview with
RUBIN SALTZMAN



Warsaw's New Monument Commemorating Heroic 1943 Ghetto Uprising.

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"I was shocked, when I returned from my trip to Europe, at the startling contrast between the war atmosphere here and the spirit of peace and reconstruction over there," said Rubin Saltzman, Secretary of the Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order and Vice-President of the IWO, in an interview with *Fraternal Outlook*, shortly after he returned from his trip, during which he visited England, France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Poland.

Brother Saltzman had gone to Europe as the delegate of the JPFO to distribute relief and rehabilitation funds for numerous children's homes, cooperatives, and Jewish cultural institutions in Europe, and to cement friendly relations between the Jewish communities in the United States and Europe.

"In Europe," he told us, "the people are preoccupied with rebuilding their countries and overcoming the effects of the last war. In the midst of the big job of rebuilding in Europe, you tend to forget the war hysteria at home. But when I got back, I found it in full swing.

"We read much in the American press about the great wall separating Western and Eastern Europe. Actually, the people in both Western and Eastern Europe want the same things—to reconstruct their lives on a peacetime basis, and to achieve security. It is reaction which is trying to make the terrible separation. The one big difference between Western and Eastern Europe, which is obvious immediately to anyone who travels through Europe, is the greater progress in reconstruction which has been made in Eastern Europe. In the new democracies the morale is much higher, the people are happier, and there is more food available for the people. In France, for example, there is tension in the air, fear of the U. S. attempts to bring De Gaulle to power, and the feeling of war danger. In Poland and Romania, on the other hand, you never meet people talking about war and the people are confident in their own ability to build a free future, and in their governments, which represent them. The great difference is that in the new democracies the governments are doing everything in their power to unite the people, while in the countries of the West everything is being done to disrupt the unity of the people.

"In my first talk with one of the outstanding leaders of Poland, State Minister Jacob Berman, I asked him,

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among other things, about his country's attitude on the Marshall Plan.

"He said, 'Tell me, Mr. Saltzman, is it really true that in your country many people believe that we refuse help from America to build our country? Are we crazy? Are we so foolish that we don't see that machinery and other supplies from America would hasten our reconstruction?'

"Your people,' he said, 'offered us help, but only on the condition that the Polish government include those that the people of Poland hate—the opponents of land distribution and nationalization of industry. They told us that unless we yielded to their demands, they wouldn't give us help. Don't you think that our guarantee to repay all loans fully, in cash and in kind, was enough? We want to be friends with the United States. But the Polish people want to be the masters of their own country, just as the American people want to be the masters of your country, and we won't sell our country out. For our independence we are ready to sacrifice.'

"The first question I asked Vacila Luka, the Finance Minister of Romania, was: Why didn't you make use of the Marshall Plan, especially during the terrible years that you suffered as a result of the crop failure?

"He said, 'You sound naive, Mr. Saltzman. The first two years after the war were really terrible years. Millions of people might have died of hunger. Are we murderers? Would we refuse help? Your Ambassador

came and offered help to us in the terrible days and we were glad. We thought that this aid would help our country. But in the long talks we saw that you were beginning to make demands on us, demands leading to the return of the Antonescus, who ruined our country. You came to put such mortgages on us that the people of Romania would no longer control their own land.

"Our king resigned and what a hullabaloo there was in your country. You don't want a king in your own country, and yet your officials want us to have one! You, a humanitarian country, were ready to allow tens of thousands of people to die. You had to get your conditions, or you would give no aid.

"Our nearby neighbor saved our people from death by starvation: We had only to tell them of our needs, and they gave us help, without asking for conditions. Nobody died because of the help we got from the Soviet Union.'

"He went on to tell me, 'We don't want any war, our people don't want any war. We don't believe that your people want war and we don't believe your government leaders will dare to start a war. Our nation suffered and we shudder at the mere mention of the word war. Apparently those of your countrymen who can speak of a new war have not learned the horrible lessons of the last war. But I want to tell you that if the forces of reaction and war get the upper hand, our people will fight to the

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last drop of blood in defense of their country and its independence.

"All over Romania, which suffered so much, the people are building like bees, building their own future. Production exceeds pre-war years; the peasants bring not only wheat and corn to the market, but ducks and geese; while the workers make the shoes and clothes and tools that the peasants need."

Brother Saltzman told us: "I had visited Europe 22 months ago, and I was surprised to see how things had changed in less than two years. France is worse off than it was 22 months ago, but Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia are much better off and are making phenomenal headway.

"I was in Prague on the day of the people's demonstration in *Na Vaclavuku* Square. Every inch of the huge square was jammed with people, and there were even some who climbed up onto the big statue in the square. There were well over 100,000 people here. I had to laugh when I read in the European edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* that the demonstration in support of the new cabinet was a flop and that hardly anyone was there.

"I also visited the peasants' conference on the next day, which had more than 100,000 peasants, representing virtually every village in Czechoslovakia. The people's backing of the new government was obvious everywhere and it was quite clear that a conspiracy against Czechoslovakia had been stopped and defeated, and that the people were marching ahead to a higher level of life.

"After everything I saw in Europe, the lie of the war propaganda in America—which implies that there is a threat to the security of the U. S.—stands exposed as the biggest hoax of the century. If it were up to the people of Europe, and particularly the people in the new democracies that I visited, there would never be another war. There would be deep and abiding friendship with the United States."