

The Damascus Affair

Compare the Damascus Affair of 1974 with the Damascus Affair of 1840. It will show you how little progress the Jews have made in much of the world.

It was on February 5, 1840, that Father Thomas of Damascus and his servant disappeared. A Jewish barber was tortured by the authorities and "confessed" that the Jewish community had planned a ritual murder. A number of Jewish leaders were arrested and tortured. Sixty children were systematically starved in order to elicit a confession from their parents. The Syrians were building up to a general massacre of the Jews.



Raab

This Damascus Affair marked the significant entry of Western Jewry into the realm of foreign affairs on behalf of world Jewry. With the help of their governments, Sir Moses Montefiore of London and Adolphe Cremieux, noted French lawyer, headed a Jewish delegation to Constantinople. Damascus was, of course, under the rule of the Ottoman Empire at the time. The Sultan ordered the arrested persons acquitted, and forbade the mistreatment of Jews or use of the ritual murder slander.

The Damascus Affair of 1974 does not have such an ending. As we know, four young Jewish women of Damascus were horribly slain as they attempted to cross the border to Lebanon. A thousand Damascus Jews broke out of the ghetto last month to demonstrate against the slaying. The bodies of two more slain Jews, young men, were delivered to the community. Syrian authorities announced that two Jews had "confessed" to participating in the murder of the four girls. Knowing the two arrested, the Jews of Damascus know this to be a fabricated story.

Today no Montefiore can go forth with the backing of his government. No Cremieux can go forth with the backing of *his* government. England and France are fallen giants, slaves to the Arab oil fields. The Jewish communities of England and France are helpless.

In fact, the Jewish community of Israel is helpless in this situation. The 2,000 or so Jews of Damascus have lived in a state of special terror since the Yom Kippur war. At best, they are regularly assaulted, arrested, restricted to the ghetto. They are forbidden to work for the government or to own shops. Their lives are being squeezed from them and they are constantly fearful of a "final solution." Another couple of thousand Jews "live" in Aleppo and El Qamishliye, under similar conditions.

Who can help them? Not England or France, as in 1840. Not Israel. Not the United Nations, today more a reflection of world anarchy than of world order. If the Syrian Jews can be helped at all, it will be by the United States. The U.S. does not have formal diplomatic relations with Syria. But it still has some leverage in the Russian-Chinese-Arab network of relationships which affect Syria. Somehow we must make the condition of Syrian Jews—as dramatized by the Damascus Affair of 1974—a *serious consideration* in the conduct of our foreign affairs with that Russian-Chinese-Arab network of relationships.

On behalf of the organized Jewish community of San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula, the JCRC has called on Secretary of State Kissinger to protest the murders, to put the liberation and emigration of the Syrian Jews on his *serious* agenda. The JCRC has pressed religious leaders and congressmen from this area to make the same plea. And the Jews of San Francisco have been asked to do the same. (It has been discovered that over 1,500 of those who receive the *Action Alert* in this area have responded by communicating with their public officials *more than once* during the recent months!)

In addition, a special group called The Committee to Save Jews in Arab Countries has been initiated by Bay Area residents of Sephardic Origin. This committee, whose operating Vice-Chairwoman is Regina Bublil at 45 Wilder St., (585-1400) is intent on keeping the community's attention on this issue. It is asking for people to join it in this effort. *On Friday, April 26, at noon, in Union Square, The Committee, with the support of the JCRC, will hold a rally on behalf of Syrian Jews. Everyone attend.*

Are we really more helpless in 1974 than we were in 1840?