

JOURNAL OF THE ROMANIAN JEWS



THE ANTI-SEMITIC TYRANT (Saying is one thing and doing another)

There is an old Romanian saying: "A lot of brave people show up after the war". At present, the mass media in Romania are beset by certain persons who are pretending to beat their breasts and shouting out their "merits" in the struggle against Ceaușescu.

Such methods are repugnant to my conscience.

The truth, nothing but the truth is our aim and that is the spirit in which I bear witness before God and history:

1. In the course of the 24 years of his "reign", Ceaușescu received me, perhaps, 8 or 9 times. During the past three years, or even more, I repeatedly solicited an audience, but received no answer. His anger was due to the fact that I was once more confronting him in connection with the demolition of the Bucharest Great Synagogue.

Here are the facts. He was possessed by the insane idea of pulling down a large part of our capital city and the work reached the former Bucharest Jewish district, Văcărești-Dudești. Tens of our buildings were demolished one after the other: the synagogues in Vinători Street (Aizic Ilie), Emigratului Street, Antim Street, Moșilor Street, the Matziah Iesua Synagogue, the Malbim Synagogue, the Old Age Home in Negru Vodă Street, etc. Every time, the Mayor of Bucharest promised: "This is the last demolition and the other synagogues and houses of worship will be left intact". And the promise proved to be a lie.

On seeing that the operations were coming close to the Sephardic Temple in Banu-Mărăciine Street, I wrote a statement of protest, pointing out that it was the only house of worship for our Sephardic believers, the other one having been burnt down by the fascists (the "Iron Guard") during the 1941 pogrom. As I received no answer and realized that any change concerning the construction plan was impossible, I approached the Ambassadors of the United States, Spain and Israel and, together, we established our tactics for saving at least the three remaining synagogues: the Great Synagogue, the Choral Temple and the Jewish Museum. The struggle was to be focussed on the Sephardic Temple, although it was too late, in order to save the three above-mentioned ones.

Therefore the three Governments sent notes of protest. The Jewish press throughout the world branded the demolitions. The American Senator Larry Pressler came to Bucharest, had a meeting with Ceaușescu, threatened him with reprisals (the most favoured nation status — MFN — was to be withdrawn in case the "leader" refused to comply) and exhorted from him an official statement which was a formal pledge that "the Choral Temple, the Great Synagogue and the Jewish Museum would be left untouched".

My role in these measures, pressures and attacks against Ceaușescu was quite visible. A few months later, new pressure was exerted on me, by Olteanu, the mayor of Bucharest and a member of the Political Executive Committee of the Communist Party.

In the presence of eng. Th. Blumenfeld, president of the Bucharest Jewish Community, all sorts of threats were hurled at me. I answered by means of letters in which I stated that I would step down on the very day on which they would touch the synagogue.

The U.S. Ambassador, Roger Kirk, and the Israeli Ambassador, Yosef Govrin, were in permanent contact with me all along this struggle.

I must render here the last of the multiple scenes of moral torture I was being subjected to, which was witnessed by eng. Th. Blumenfeld, president of the Bucharest Jewish Community.

It was on a Tuesday, three days before Ceaușescu's renunciation of the most favoured nation status. Nobody knew he had that in mind.

We were summoned by the mayor, Olteanu. The whole story began once more. On behalf of Ceaușescu, he asked me no longer to express any opposition, for

the Great Synagogue had to be torn down without fail.

My answer was categorical: "I am struck with consternation on seeing that the clear and public promise made by this country's President to spare our last three great houses of worship is not being kept. The power is in your hands. As for me, I am going to resign and in no case give my consent".

Olteanu's reply: "Think it over for three or four days. Then you will give your consent". I retorted that such a thing would not happen. But the mayor insisted, repeating several times — with a significant smile — this sentence which sounded not like a request, but like a certainty. Every time he reiterated the sentence, I made one and the same retort.

When standing up in order to leave and once more hearing the words "Come back next Monday and then you will consent", I said:

"You are obliging me to tell you the origin of a prayer we say on the days of the Judaic New Year, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, 'Unetane-Tokef'".

It is the story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, whom the duke one day asked to forsake his religion and be baptized. Surprised by this request, Rabbi Amnon said he had to think it over for three days.

After that interval, he did not come back to give his answer. He was summoned, but refused to go. He was brought by force. "Why did you refuse to come by my order?" the tyrant asked him.

"Please", Rabbi Amnon answered, "cut off my tongue which asked for a three days' respite for my considering if I should forsake my people or not".

"No," the duke said, "not your tongue, but your legs, which refused to carry you when I summoned you. They shall be cut off".

With his body mutilated, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried on a stretcher to the synagogue, on the day of the Jewish New Year. There, he composed the above-mentioned prayer and died while uttering its final words.

"Mr Mayor", I said, "I am not Rabbi Amnon. Don't give me a respite for thinking the matter over. I can already answer you. You will summon me in vain. I will not come. Do as you wish".

During that same week, on Friday, i.e. three days after this meeting, it was officially announced that Ceaușescu had renounced the most favoured nation status.

It was only then that I understood the meaning of the mayor's words. He was certain that, on finding myself deprived of any American "covering", on account of M.F.N. no longer existing, I would be afraid of reprisals and give in. Hence Olteanu's assurance.

But he was wrong.

Thus the Great Synagogue was saved. Ceaușescu the tyrant was forced, indeed, forced by me to keep his promise.

Whoever now comes to Bucharest and enters the Văcărești district, finds an area of many square kilometres of demolished buildings. Only the three synagogues, the last redoubts of Bucharest Judaism, stand erect.

At the risk of my life (Ceaușescu had already gone mad and his reprisals were fierce), I defied him and saved the synagogues.

That is why, during the past three years, my requests for an audience were vain. Fury and threats were pursuing me.

2) Yes, indeed. I did defy Ceaușescu during five years of horrible anti-Semitic attacks unleashed by Vadim's gang, by the group of "journalists" and "writers" at Ceaușescu's "Court". Between 1980 (September 5) and 1983, it was clear that no one but Ceaușescu was behind that savage campaign of hatred, of progrom-incitement. Who would dare write in the journal of the Bucharest organization of the Communist Party, "Săptămâna", the article "Ideals", in which the "Court poet" Vadim used a

language borrowed from Nazi literature, if he were not "covered" by Ceaușescu's "Securitate"?

I was the only man who had the courage to undertake a public action within and outside the country. I organized a protest meeting, with the participation of more than 1,000 persons.

Two days before the meeting, I was called by First Vice-Prime Minister Ion Dincă, who, in the presence of Petru Enache, Secretary of the Communist Party, and Ion Roșianu, President of the Department of Cults, asked me to cancel the meeting. This demand was being made on behalf of President Ceaușescu. I refused. In the course of two days I had to go and see Dincă four times and I was subjected to all sorts of pressures. The meeting took place and was followed two days later (April 1983) by the Assembly of all the communities in the country. A written protest was drawn up and signed by all the Community Presidents.

Its publication in our journal was prohibited. It was posted up in all the synagogues throughout the country.

I appealed to foreign countries and organizations. Greville Janner, a member of the House of Commons, handed in a note of protest to the Romanian Ambassador in London. The President of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman, sent Ceaușescu a telegram of protest. The Great Rabbi of France, René Sirat, did the same. Rabbi Arthur Schneier of New York came to Bucharest and was received by Ceaușescu for discussing this problem.

The Security then published a booklet of insults directed at me personally. I was accused of being "the disciple of Maimonides, who asked the Jews to kill the Christians and become the masters of the world", of being the disciple of Crémieux, who demanded "the domination of the world by the Jews".

I was in Israel when the booklet was distributed in Bucharest. The then Minister for Foreign Affairs and present Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Shamir asked me to postpone my return home. It was clear that my life was in danger.

I did not follow his advice. I went home and wrote two letters of protest — one to the Minister for Internal Affairs and the other to the Minister for Security. I received no answer.

I convened a meeting attended by more than 70 prominent personalities of Jewish cultural and scientific life. I presented the booklet, branding its contents.

Then "Saturnalia", a volume of "poems" by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, appeared. In one of the poems, in 14 verses, I was being insulted 15 times, I and my entire people, in the dirtiest words possible.

I went to the General Prosecutor, Popovici, in order to start legal proceedings. He laughed in my face, telling me almost explicitly that he had received the "order" not to sue him.

Then there appeared (I am just picking out at random, a few of the vile attacks staged by Ceaușescu, through his men, against us), in the daily of the communist youth, "Scinteia Tineretului", a "poem" threatening us with "being hanged once more from hooks". In 1941, during the fascist pogrom, Jews were hanged from the hooks in the Bucharest slaughter-house, with the words "kosher meat" inscribed on their bodies).

When Valter Roman, a great antifascist and a highly cultivated man, died, the following epigram signed "Sima" (the name of the head of the "Iron Guard" — the Nazi party of Romania; he was Vice Prime Minister and ordered the 1941 pogrom) was published by the same "communist" journal, "Săptămâna": "Moses Shmil is dead"

What a good idea he had!

Had his Rachel, too, kicked the bucket, All our accounts would have been settled!

I sent the epigram and a letter of protest to Ceaușescu. No answer.

Finally, a certain M. Pelin published an article in which, under the pretext

of analysing the book "Kaput" Italian writer Malaparte, he simply derided the 11,000 Jews killed in the Iasi pogrom.

In defiance of the authorities much to their surprise, I brought, in the Iasi cemetery, on the occasion of the commemoration of the several thousand Jews coming from Moldavia. The U.S. Ambassador, Kirk, and the Israeli Ambassador, Govrin, were present. I also invited authorities. In my speech, I attacked the communist journal of the above-mentioned article. I demanded that the Government take steps against the paper and M. Pelin, the author of the article.

The result: M. Pelin was awarded a scholarship in Italy, where Iosif Constantin Drăgan, an anti-Semite and a friend of Ceaușescu, published an ample literature with the poison of racial hatred.

His printing office in Lugoj published the anti-Semitic pamphlets.

I stop here. I should have written entire volumes if I wanted to denounce the savagely anti-Semitic actions of the first and foremost against me the only person who openly went against this campaign; I was with the help of the American Government, therefore I was an "agent spy", but I hope to do so in due volume of documents which will help, I am going to publish something I have stated here will be in these documents.

Do not my above assertions stating that "at the risk of my life I defied Ceaușescu numberless times".

It was only after Mr Lawrence Burger, then and now Undersecretary of State at the U.S. Department of State came to Bucharest and interviewed Stefan Andrei, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the most favoured nation status would be withdrawn. The anti-Semitic campaign was not stopped only then that I was saved death and that the savage attack ceased.

3) The most favoured nation status. Beginning with 1975, I made ceaselessly strove to obtain this status for Romania. It would provide the country with many hundreds of millions of dollars yearly, on the one hand; on the other hand, it would give Aliya, i.e. the possibility for Jews in Romania to leave for Israel, which I wished to do so.

True, Aliya had existed also in 1975. Hundreds of thousands of Jews had departed during the previous years, but with many tormenting cutbacks.

Numerous persons who applied for passport lost their jobs, but were allowed to leave. Therefore, I was taking risks when registering for the future: one might be dismissed, children might be expelled from school, and, finally, one's demand to leave might be rejected.

When MFN status was obtained, our help, all these obstacles were eliminated, since then, every Jew who to leave has received a passport, but not lost his job up to the moment of departing.

The whole activity for backing MFN was carried out with the approval of permanent contact with the Israeli Government and the great Jewish organizations in the United States: the Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, etc.

At the same time, MFN facilitated great action undertaken by the Joint Distribution Committee for assisting the old, sick, needy Jews in the country.

Tens of thousands of terrified people who had come back from the wretches, as well as parents whose children had gone to Israel leaving without any support, were saved, able to enjoy good food, clothing, medicines, money, a.s.o. and to live in dignity.

Talmud Torah, the education of our youth in a religious and national spirit, which had been so often repressed and threatened, could continue owing to the fact that we had become a factor which had to be taken into account in connection with the clause.

For the Romanian people, having to starve, hunger, cold, darkness and terrible poverty, the hundreds of millions of dollars entering the country alleviated the situation to a certain extent. What would have happened if they had not entered the country?

I have considered — and am still holding this opinion — that my efforts in obtaining the MFN status, were patriotic and that it was my duty to make them, both for my Jewish brothers and for the Romanian people.

4) To clear things up completely, I want to quote a question which a "well-meaning" journalist asked me during the years that followed our great revolution, namely:

"How do you account for the fact that, in Romania, the Jews have been treated far better than in the other communist countries? Isn't this due to the good relations you had with Ceausescu?" Even in such a dramatic situation, I must resist my sense of humour, which never leaves me.

The great Jewish humorist Shalom Aleichem tells us that a woman asked her neighbour to return the pot she had borrowed from her.

She received three answers:

a) I have given it back to you.
b) It was broken.
c) I have borrowed no pot from you. Let me now answer the journalist's question:

It is not true that Ceausescu bowed upon us all the "favours" we were enjoying.

All of them, without any exception, were obtained by struggling, despite all dangers, in Stalin's time and during the following period — long before Ceausescu's time.

Aliya — 100,000 Jews made Aliya between 1948 and 1952. After 1953, down to 1965, the year when Ceausescu assumed office, several more tens of thousands of Jews left for Israel. Ceausescu did nothing but maintain that Aliya.

Education — During the period 1948 — 1965, tens of thousands of children received a Jewish education. Ceausescu repeatedly tried to prevent that. The MFN status enabled us not to let him set down our Talmud Torah classes. Our Journal appeared as early as 1956. Our relations with the World Jewish Congress — They began in 1943.

Our work with the "Joint", for assisting the poor. After a ten years' struggle, obtained the approval in 1964. Three years of negotiations followed and the action started in 1967.

Ceausescu was already in power, but he was not yet an absolute tyrant. It was Prime Minister I. G. Maurer who gave the approval.

b) In 1965, when Ceausescu assumed office, I had already been Chief Rabbi for 17 years (I had been elected in 1948).

c) By unleashing anti-Semitism, by demolishing synagogues, by numerous hostile attitudes, he attempted to deprive us of our rights. The clause and my relentless struggle hindered him from achieving this aim.

In contrast with the story of the pot, I have also a fourth answer:

In Hitler's case, which Rabbi, which was, which great-hearted mad would not have been happy to be able to reach in and save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives and give back to our people as of thousands of Jewish children? A fifth answer:

The Ceausescu of those first years, who was the only one in the communist block to refuse, in 1967, to break off diplomatic relations with Israel, who refused, at the United Nations, to vote in favour of the resolution identifying Zionism with racism, who opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, that Ceausescu was completely different from the one of the past decade.

I am a Rabbi and not a prophet and could not — and nobody could foresee — "evolution".

A sixth answer given to the same "well-meaning" journalist, who mentioned in his story the "detail" that I had been a Member of Parliament:

In Romania, already during the period between the two World Wars, the needs of the various denominations were present in the Senate. This situation was introduced in the Grand National Assembly in 1957, before Ceausescu's time. The Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Bishop, the Hungarian Protestant Bishop, the German Protestant Bishop, the Chief Rabbi were Members of Parliament in their capacity of representatives of the respective beliefs. Ceausescu found this situation readily established and maintained it. Unlike the Patriarch and other heads

of cult, I have never made a speech in the 32 years during which I was a member of the Grand National Assembly.

My relations with Ceausescu? They can be summed up in the following account of what happened in Jerusalem and in Bucharest, on the occasion of the celebration of 40 years since I had been elected Chief Rabbi and 50 years since I had become a Rabbi.

In Jerusalem, the World Jewish Congress, the Joint, and the Diaspora House organized, at the Plaza-Sheraton Hotel, a festive dinner in my honour. The speakers were Prime Minister Y. Shamir, Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Shimon Peres, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, and Acad. Prof. Dr. N. Cajal.

Several weeks before June 19, 1968, when this festivity took place, Romania's Ambassador to Israel, Mr Bituleanu, was invited to participate in it and he gladly accepted. At his request, an invitation was also sent to the President of the Department of Cults, I. Cumpănaşu. At the last moment, Ceausescu forbade both of them to take part and he did not even allow them to send me congratulations.

Edgar Bronfman, the President of the World Jewish Congress took his personal plane to come to Bucharest in order to congratulate me.

In Bucharest, the Federation of Jewish Communities, likewise organized a festive dinner and a festive divine service at the Choral Temple. Up to the very last moment, the President of the Department of Cults, I. Cumpănaşu, was unable to confirm his participation. When he came, he made just a brief formal speech without mentioning any of my achievements.

Ronald Reagan, the President of the United States, sent me a warm telegram, congratulating me and thanking me for my "contribution to the good Romanian-American relationship".

The President of Israel, Chaim Herzog, sent me a telegram paying homage to the "mission impossible" which I had fulfilled.

Only the President of this country in which I have been the head of a cult for 40 years, in which I was a member of the Grand National Assembly, only Ceausescu did not send a single word.

I stop here. Ceausescu's actions of personal enmity towards me are not limited to those I have enumerated here.

Naturally, in order to save our communities from destruction, we could not but put into practice the old Jewish saying about "appointing a thief to be a watchman".

We were perfectly aware of all Ceausescu's machinations; however, it was to him we had to "appeal" to do justice. Only thus could our protest reach the world.

When I managed (in June 1981) to obtain from Ceausescu a few words against anti-Semitism, they were only formal and so they were when he repeated them later, but in fact he continued to encourage the propagators of racial hatred.

He often tried to annul the rights and liberties he had granted us, but was unable to do so owing to the most favoured nation status. In fact, he was an anti-Semite.

His madness had reached proportions reminding us of Nero's. He was being constantly cursed by an entire nation, upon which he had bestowed only grief and misfortune.

Alongside the Romanian people, we are doing our utmost for the country's reconstruction, for strengthening the freedom acquired by thousands and thousands of sacrifices, for preventing fascism from ever reappearing here, for establishing a real democracy, in which all citizens, irrespective of religion or nationality, should enjoy the homeland's progress and prosperity.

TELEGRAM

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH

January 18, 1990

*Dr. MOSES ROSEN
Chief Rabbi of Romania
Str. Sf. Vineri 9-11, Sector 4
Bucharest, Romania*

Dear Rabbi Rosen:

At this time of great change in Romania, with the hope that the country will become a democracy committed to democratic ideals, we offer you and the Jewish community our full support. These are trying times, moments of uncertainty, but these are also exciting times for the Jewish hope for the future. We wish you well.

*BURTON S. LEVINSON
National chairman*

*ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
National Director*

MEETING OF THE LEADING COMMITTEE OF THE F.J.C.

On January 22, 1990, in the morning, there took place the meeting of the Leading Committee of the F.J.C., chaired by His Eminence Chief Rabbi Dr. Moses Rosen.

Dealing with the first point on the agenda, the committee unanimously ratified the adhesion to the National Salvation Front expressed by His Eminence as soon as it was set up and issued its proclamation, adhesion which was also presented at our radio and TV stations.

Passing to the second point on the agenda, His Eminence made an ample exposé of the situation of our Jewish communities during the Ceausescu dictatorship and of the main changes having taken place after the December 1989 Revolution.

Numerous members of the Leading Committee spoke in connection with the exposé. They all warmly appreciated and backed, by means of rich arguments, His Eminence's tireless activity for defending the interests of the Jewish population in Romania, an activity which was, in fact, a determined struggle in spite of all possible risks, steadily animated by a lofty belief: the belief in

the justice of the cause he was defending, the belief in his sacred mission — that of ensuring a dignified life for his community. And he fulfilled it brilliantly, defying the tyrants up to the highest level.

The speakers wished His Eminence many more years of fruitful activity and asked him to continue here the sacred mission to which he had dedicated himself and whose results are unanimously appreciated both in this country and abroad, in the most varied countries and by the most important international organizations — Jewish and non-Jewish, the most recent example being, a few days ago, in Moscow, the World Forum for Global Survival. It was also said that, if our people had many such leaders, that would greatly improve the life of our whole people.

His Eminence concluded the meeting, by thanking for the appreciation, the trust and the warm words of encouragement, which a leader truly needs during such moments, and promised to continue to devote all his strength to our sacred communities and to the Jewish people.

VISIT

On Saturday, January 27, Mr. Lionel Stoleru, Minister Secretary of State at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of France, accompanied by His Excellency Mr. Jean-Marie Le Breton, the Ambassador of France to Bucharest, called on His Eminence Dr. Moses Rosen, Chief Rabbi of the Mosaic Cult in Ro-

mania.

A cordial conversation took place, in the course of which Chief Rabbi Dr. Moses Rosen made a brief presentation of the situation of the Jewish communities in Romania.

The Choral Temple was visited afterwards.

World Jewish Congress Executive Renders Homage to His Eminence

On January 18, 1990, there took place in New York a meeting of the World Jewish Congress Executive, chaired by Mr. Edgar Bronfman, the president of the W.J.C.

It was also attended by Mr. Simcha Dinitz, the president of the Jewish Agency.

President Bronfman warmly eulogized the wise leader of Romanian Judaism for almost 42 years, Chief Rabbi and President of the Federation of Jewish

Communities in Romania, Dr. Moses Rosen.

The Executive unanimously voiced a high appreciation of our Chief Rabbi's activity, expressing their gratitude for the immense work he has been and still is carrying out for his community, his homeland — Romania, and world Judaism.

They wished His Eminence a long life of blessed shepherding up to the age of 120 years.

COMMEMORATION

On Monday January 22, 1990, at the Choral Temple in Bucharest, there took place the commemoration of 49 years since the January 1941 fascist pogrom, when 120 Jews in the capital were the victims of the fascists' ferocious crimes.

His Eminence Chief Rabbi Dr. Moses Rosen evoked, in a moving sermon, the days of terror lived by the Jewish population when the fascist gangs devastated and set on fire synagogues and Jewish dwellings, forced Jews out of synagogues and houses, tortured them and dragged them into forests, where they shot them, or into slaughter-houses, where they butchered them like cattle and hanged them, with the inscription "kosher meat" placed on their bodies.

"The fascists' savagery," His Eminence said, "was the result of a long-lasting

education in the spirit of intolerance and hatred, despite the honest work of the Jews who had been living here for centuries and were continuing to make an ample contribution to the economic, scientific and cultural flourishing of this country, to the prestige of Romania throughout the world."

After the sermon, His Eminence officiated the divine service, assisted by cantors Aizic Jukovski and Willi Hamnik and accompanied by the Choral Temple choir, conducted by Isaac Ledeanu. In the framework of the religious service, His Eminence evoked the names of all the pogrom martyrs and prayed for the rest of their souls in Gan Eden.

The "Shira Vezimra" choir, conducted by Izu Gott, presented a programme of adequate songs and the actors Sedy Glück and Ioan Henter recited poetry and prose by I. L. Peretz and Lev Tolstoy.

The commemoration was attended by relatives of the martyrs and many other persons.

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On Tuesday January 25, a pilgrimage took place at the martyrs' graves, in the Soseaua Giurgiului cemetery, where are also buried the sacred Torah scrolls desecrated by the fascist hordes during the pogrom.

After the divine service officiated by His Eminence assisted by the Choral Temple cantors, there followed a procession to the kedoshims' graves. A large number of community members participated.

My God bless forever the memory of our beloved and unforgetten martyrs, who died Al Kidush Hashem!

