

BLEMISH ON ANGLO-JEWRY'S LEADERSHIP

LEEDS philanthropist Leslie Silver was so angry when he heard how Anglo-Jewry's leaders thwarted the mass immigration of Jews from Nazi Germany to Northern Rhodesia that he agreed to sponsor Frank Shapiro's book Haven in Africa.

London-born Shapiro said: "Leslie said I had to get the story out. He believes in the importance of bringing this story to the public domain.

"His association with the World War Two era is very concrete: Leslie flew as a flight engineer in RAF bomber crews over Europe and Southeast Asia."

Frank made aliya in 1964 at the age of 21. To prepare himself for kibbutz life he studied agriculture on a private farm in England.

After gaining degrees in history from Ben Gurion University and the Hebrew University, he taught history at a high school for 10 years.

He has also worked as a guide and researcher of Jewish communities at the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv.

Through this, the Council for Zambian Jewry asked Shapiro to write a book about the history of the community.

"I didn't know much about the Zambian community," he said. "I interviewed more than 100 people and studied archival material.

"It was the only research ever done on Zambian Jews."

He added: "I discovered Jews played a tremendous role in the development of everything in Zambia; including a Jewish prime minister Sir Roy Welensky."

Frank's research led to the book Zion in Africa.

It was through this book that he discovered that Northern Rhodesia was legally open to Jewish immigration.

"Those few Jewish refugees lucky enough to learn of the existence of this haven were granted permission of entry without any hardship," Frank said.

"The Anglo Jewish leadership and the governments of Britain and Northern Rhodesia considered and negotiated numerous settlement plans in Northern Rhodesia for Jewish refugees escaping the Nazi hell.

"These discussions were held virtually under wraps. Was there a conspiracy of silence? Why did the Jewish leadership thwart the implementation of the schemes? The subsequent story is an irreversible blemish.

"The fact that this unique country was a haven of safety on the one hand, and could not fulfill its saving potential on the other, is the core theme of my book.

"The reaction to Haven in Africa has been mostly surprise, although many people are annoyed and saddened.

"As I researched further, things got thicker and muckier."

Frank discovered this horrifying truth in 1991 when he obtained files which had been closed under

the Official Secrets Act for 50 years.

"I wondered why they had been closed and why they were secret. I gradually saw the picture - of what Anglo-Jewry's leaders were ashamed of."

Shapiro reveals that in 1941, 5,000 non-Jewish Poles fled to Northern Rhodesia and settled there legally.

"At least 100,000 Jews could have been saved," he said. "The whole face of the Holocaust could have been changed. What would have happened? The course of history would be different. Would there be an Israel? Would there be a Palestine? Would there be two Jewish homelands?"

Shapiro's next book will be about Malcolm MacDonald, the former British Colonial Secretary who held office during the crucial years leading up to the outbreak of World War Two.

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