

Z. William Birnbaum
1303 East 41st Street

Seattle, Washington
January 22, 1940

Mr. M. Bloch
15 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y.

[1/1] My Dear Friend,

[1/2] I recently got your telegram¹. Of course, it's a very irritating [1/3] situation. It's hard for me to storm off and tell the family that they should leave for [1/4] Vilnius, because I'm afraid that they will understand it as a command and [1/5] irrespective of hardships and danger they will attempt to get [1/6] through to Vilnius at all costs—in the end they might get stuck there in an unfamiliar [1/7] place, without means to maintain themselves, and a very small possibility [1/8] to get out and go further.

[1/9] Before I do anything, I beg you, please write and send me via air-mail [1/10] and special delivery, what you concretely know about the situation, [1/11] specifically, please answer the following questions:

[1/12] 1/ Where did you get the news that Loizio is going to Lwow?
[1/13] 2/ Have you had any news from your sister in Lwow?
[1/14] 3/ Do you have any bloody idea what methods one should use to get [1/15] out of Lwow to Vilnius?
[1/16] 4/ Do you suspect that it's possible to apply for an [1/17] American visa in Vilnius?
[1/18] 5/ What does it mean, that, "Romania, not possible"?² I suppose that [1/19] to Vilnius, just like to Romania, one can only get illegally, [1/20] so what's the difference?
[1/21] 6/ Do you know the odds, when one illegally gets into [1/22] one of these blessed countries like Romania or [1/23] Lithuania, of getting briskly thrown out, eventually with a return to [1/24] the Russian occupation?
[1/25] 7/ Have you had any news from Lwow besides telegrams? Today, [1/26] I got a letter from a friend in Vilnius, dated, XII.5, in [1/27] which she writes, that she's corresponding with our mutual [1/28] friends in Lwow. The letter begins with the words "Comrade Wilus", and with an [1/29] explanation that it's now the accepted form, because all the "lords were kicked out"³. [1/30] What does this mean, isn't Vilnius still Lithuanian, and Lithuania isn't [1/31] yet formally Bolshevik?

¹ The telegram is translated and can be found among the other documents related to Bloch.

² This was the content of an early cable sent to Z.W. Birnbaum by his family (father, mother, sister) from Lwow.

³ The quote might be read as meaning that the Russians exterminated the bourgeoisie.

[1/32] 8/ What news have you from Steinhaus?⁴ I have written regarding his [1/33] case, but I'm not promising myself anything, in any case, tell [1/34] me everything that you might hear about him, because I'm [1/35] in touch with a group, which is organizing, of scholars of Polish [1/36] descent, who are setting up for themselves the goal of helping scholars in Poland, so [1/37] maybe, after all, it will be possible to do something.

[1/38] 9/ Apropos Steinhaus: I get a letter from Stechter, whose full contents I'm [1/39] sending you:

[1/40] "Dear Professor Seinhaus: We are exceedingly pleased to hear that [1/41] you are well and we sincerely hope to get some word from you. Very [1/42] truly yours, G.E. Stechert, Col. Albert Daub."⁵ [1/43] I'm worried that the letter sent to Steinhaus was put into an envelope [2/1] addressed to me, while a letter written to me, which might contain some [2/2] unpleasant things, is on its way to Steinhaus. The letter was dated January 15.

[2/3] If it's possible, write back, please, immediately. I'm sure that you're [2/4] pretty irritated over there.

[2/5] While we're at it, my macher^{*}, who could put me in [2/6] touch with the local importers—to be precise, with all the importers on the [2/7] West Coast—just came back, but it makes no sense to [2/8] talk with him, until I can say what conditions you are [2/9] suggesting.⁶

[2/10] Let us have hope that this whole affair will end somehow. I send you sincere [2/11] embraces and greetings for your family.

[2/12] Yours

⁴ Steinhaus (1887-1972) was Z.W.'s former professor. He was one the most outstanding Polish mathematicians of the 20th Century; co-founded *Studia Mathematica*, and was a major contributor to the famed *Scottish Book*. He remained in Poland during and after the war.

⁵ The original is in English.

^{*} A footnote added by the author, it reads: "an influential lawyer, Democrat politician, a former president of the B'nai B'rith lodge, very active and [the last word is illegible]"

⁶ This might be a reference to a scheme, which apparently did not pan out, to form a business that would be a cover for smuggling Poles and others into the United States.