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*Michael R. Marrus (Ed.)*

# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

PART 8: BYSTANDERS TO THE HOLOCAUST,  
VOLUME 2

# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews

Edited by Michael R. Marrus

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# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews

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## 8. Bystanders to the Holocaust

Volume 2

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Edited with an Introduction by

Michael R. Marrus

University of Toronto

Meckler

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# Series Preface

The Holocaust, the murder of close to six million Jews by the Nazis during the Second World War, stands as a dreadful monument to mankind's inhumanity to man. As such, it will continue to be pondered for as long as people care about the past and seek to use it as a guide to the present. In the last two decades, historical investigation of this massacre has been unusually productive, both in the sense of extending our understanding of what happened and in integrating the Holocaust into the general stream of historical consciousness. This series, a collection of English-language historical articles on the Holocaust reproduced in facsimile form, is intended to sample the rich variety of this literature, with particular emphasis on the most recent currents of historical scholarship.

However assessed, historians acknowledge a special aura about the Nazis' massacre of European Jewry, that has generally come to be recognized as one of the watershed events of recorded history. What was singular about this catastrophe was not only the gigantic scale of the killing, but also the systematic, machine-like effort to murder an *entire* people — including every available Jew — simply for the crime of being Jewish. In theory, no one was to escape — neither the old, nor the infirm, nor even tiny infants. Nothing quite like this had happened before, at least in modern times. By any standard, therefore, the Holocaust stands out.

While Jews had known periodic violence in their past, it seems in retrospect that the rise of radical anti-Jewish ideology, centered on race, set the stage for eventual mass murder. As well, Europeans became inured to death on a mass scale during the colossal bloodletting of the First World War. That conflict provided cover for the slaughter of many hundreds of thousands of Armenians in Turkey, a massacre that Hitler himself seems to have thought a precursor of what he would do in the conquest of the German *Lebensraum*, or living space, in conquered Europe. Still, the extermination of every living person on the basis of who they *were*, was something new. For both perpetrators and victims, therefore, decisions taken for what the Nazis called the "Final Solution" began a voyage into the unknown. As the Israeli historian Jacob Katz puts it: "This was an absolute *novum*, unassimilable in any vocabulary at the disposal of the generation that experienced it."

For more than a decade after the war, writing on the Holocaust may be seen in general as part of the process of mourning for the victims — dominated by the urge to bear witness to what had occurred, to commemorate those who had been murdered, and to convey a warning to those who had escaped. Given the horror and the unprecedented character of these events, it is not surprising that it has taken writers some time to present a coherent, balanced assessment.

The early 1960s were a turning point. The appearance of Raul Hilberg's monumental work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 stimulated debate and investigation. From Israel, the important periodical published by the Yad Vashem Institute [Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority], *Yad Vashem Studies*, made serious research

available to scholars in English. German and American scholars set to work. Numerous academic conferences and publications in the following decade, sometimes utilizing evidence from trials of war criminals then underway, extended knowledge considerably.

As a result, we now have an immense volume of historical writing, a significant sample of which is presented in this series. A glance at the topics covered underscores the vast scale of this history. Investigators have traced the Nazi persecution of the Jews before the implementation of the "Final Solution," showing links both to Nazi ideology and antisemitic tradition. They have indicated how the Germans coordinated their anti-Jewish activities on a European-wide scale in the wake of their territorial conquests, drawing upon their own bureaucracy and those of their allies, enlisting collaborators and various helpers in defeated countries. They have also devoted attention to the victims — whether in East European ghettos or forests, in Central or Western Europe, or in the various concentration and death camps run by the SS. Finally, they have also written extensively on the bystanders — the countries arrayed against the Hitlerian Reich, neutrals, various Christian denominations, and the Jews outside Nazi-dominated Europe.

The volumes in this series permit the reader to sample the rich array of scholarship on the history of the Holocaust, and to assess some of the conflicting interpretations. They also testify to a deeper, more sophisticated, and more balanced appreciation than was possible in the immediate wake of these horrifying events. The literature offered here can be studied as historiography — scholars addressing problems of historical interpretation — or, on the deepest level, as a grappling with the most familiar but intractable of questions: How was such a thing possible?

\* \* \*

I want to express my warm appreciation to all those who helped me in the preparation of these volumes. My principal debt, of course, is to the scholars whose work is represented in these pages. To them, and to the publications in which their essays first appeared, I am grateful not only for permission to reproduce their articles but also for their forbearance in dealing with a necessarily remote editor. I appreciate as well the assistance of the following, who commented on lists of articles that I assembled, helping to make this project an educational experience not only for my readers but also for myself: Yehuda Bauer, Rudolph Binion, Christopher Browning, Saul Friedländer, Henry Friedlander, Raul Hilberg, Jacques Kornberg, Walter Laqueur, Franklin Littell, Hubert Locke, Zeev Mankowitz, Sybil Milton, George Mosse, and David Wyman. To be sure, I have sometimes been an obstreperous student, and I have not always accepted the advice that has been kindly proffered. I am alone responsible for the choices here, and for the lacunae that undoubtedly exist. Special thanks go to Ralph Carlson, who persuaded me to undertake this project and who took charge of many technical aspects of it. Thanks also to Anthony Abbott of Meckler Corporation who saw the work through to completion. Finally, as so often in the past, I record my lasting debt to my wife, Carol Randi Marrus, without whom I would have been engulfed by this and other projects.

Toronto, July 1989

Michael R. Marrus

# Introduction

Any discussion of the reactions of those outside Nazi Europe to the persecution and murder of European Jewry must begin with the question of “Who knew what, when, and how?” As will be seen, there is no simple answer that can be given to this question. Circumstances varied in Europe and North America, of course. Some channels of information were better than others. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, information about the fate of European Jews flowed steadily to the West, dispatched from many sources, notably the Polish Home Army. Such news attained a considerable degree of volume and accuracy in the second half of 1942. But there were wide variations in how this information was received. One historian wisely distinguished between “information” and “knowledge” — emphasizing that people did not always absorb the news they received from Nazi occupied Europe and indeed that they frequently tended to suppress such information, being either incapable or unwilling to accept the facts that were presented to them.

This section goes on to portray a wide variety of responses — or non-responses — to the Jews’ plight. For the period before the outbreak of war in 1939 the issue of Jewish refugees is obviously a central concern, and various essays outline and explain the restrictionist policies of Western countries and, to a much lesser degree, the Soviet Union. These articles set restrictionism in both national and international contexts, examining the basic circumstances that help condition subsequent responses, after the outbreak of fighting in 1939. Wartime attitudes and policies are also examined, notably those of the American and British governments. Other bystanders are also discussed, including Jewish communities in the West, the Jews of Palestine, and Christian churches.



*ii Palestinian Jewry*





## The Reactions of the Zionist Movement and the Yishuv to the Nazis' Rise to Power

Yoav Gelber

THE NAZIS' RISE TO POWER, alongside the first signs of implementation of their anti-Semitic ideology, provoked a wave of reactions among world Jewry in general and within the Zionist movement and the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine) in particular. This awakening was accompanied by a debate within the Jewish public and among important organizations and leading figures. The controversy revolved around two central questions: (1) what was the most effective way to bring pressure to bear on the German authorities — the quiet approach verging on the traditional politics of Jewish lobbying (*shtadlanut*), aimed at persuading the Western governments to intervene via diplomatic channels, or overt and ostensible pressure, aimed at mobilizing the support of general public opinion? (2) to what extent should one take into account the situation in Germany and the views of German Jews when planning a public campaign on their behalf? Another consideration was of concern especially to the Zionist movement and the Yishuv: to what extent may one jeopardize Zionist activity in Germany itself, immigration and the transfer of financial assets from that country to Palestine, by engaging in ostentatious actions which could upset the German authorities and provoke them into taking countermeasures against the German Zionists? The debate on those questions accompanied Jewish reaction to the Nazis' ascent and the persecution of German Jewry almost from its inception.

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On February 22, 1933 the Joint Committee for the Coordination of Action was established by the three major Jewish organizations in the U.S.A. Less than three weeks later, however, the ways of those organizations parted. The American Jewish Congress (AJC) adopted a stormy and demonstrative line of action in the form of large meetings, mass assemblies and petitions. The first and the largest of these rallies was scheduled for March 27 in Madison Square Garden, New York City. The AJC leadership, with Stephen Wise at their head, rejected pleas to either cancel or postpone the meeting. Such appeals had been issued by organizations like the *Zentralverein* (Central Association) and by the delegation of German Jews which, as a result of pressure exerted by the local authorities, had left Germany for London in late March "to give lie to the horror stories" about the persecution of Jews in Germany, which had been reported in the Western press in March. The leaders of the other two organizations — B'nai Brith and the American Jewish Committee — took a different view of appeals coming from German Jews. For them this was sufficient reason to avoid taking ostentatious and annoying steps which could worsen the situation of German Jewry instead of improving it. These organizations rejected outright any idea of an anti-German trade boycott, whereas the AJC treated this issue pragmatically, i.e. they were of the view that the question of whether the boycott should be declared, and if so at what time, should be considered on its merits and not rejected outright.<sup>1</sup>

Differences of opinion between the major Jewish organizations in the U.S.A. precluded joint action even in matters where consensus did exist, e.g., the need to pressure the Administration to initiate diplomatic intervention on behalf of German Jewry. Both the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and the American attaché in Berlin, George Gordon, were of the opinion that the success of a direct American protest to the German Foreign Ministry would be doubtful, and therefore they tried to allay the fears of Jewish

<sup>1</sup> On the reaction of the Jewish organizations in the U.S.A., see M. Gottlieb, "The First of April Boycott and the Reaction of the American Jewish Community," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 67 (June 1968), pp. 517-533.

## ZIONIST REACTIONS TO THE NAZIS' RISE TO POWER

leaders.<sup>2</sup> A similar response was given by the British Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to the entreaty of Chaim Weizmann in early March 1933.<sup>3</sup> Other Zionist leaders also tried to lobby Western diplomats to prevail on their governments to intervene on behalf of German Jews or to help them through the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup>

Diplomatic action or the public reaction of the Yishuv did not, of course, count for much. Notwithstanding the small size of the Yishuv, its leaders and the Jewish Agency Executive were preoccupied with the same problems which troubled the Jewish leadership in the West. First and foremost, they needed to obtain reliable first-hand information about current developments in Germany. Reports in the press were thought to be exaggerated, while letters from representatives of the Zionist Organization in Germany were considered to be subject to censorship and, consequently, written under duress. This communication barrier was overcome when Zionist activists in towns of neighboring countries close to the German border crossed into Germany, met with local liaison persons, returned home and submitted their findings. In this way the first detailed report was obtained; it was sent by Franz Kahn, one of the leading figures of Czech Zionism, in early March 1933.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of this report, a suggestion came from the Yishuv that the Zionist Executive in London should also try to obtain details about ongoing developments in Germany via Holland or through the British Ambassador in Berlin. There was widespread concern in the Yishuv about the fate of the *Ostjuden* who were not German citizens.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1933*, vol. 2, Washington, 1949, pp. 330-334.

<sup>3</sup> Weizmann's minutes of his talks with Sir John Simon, March 1, 1933, in Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (henceforth CZA), S25/9703.

<sup>4</sup> Sokolow's report at the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, April 5, 1933, CZA, Z4/302/21/3.

<sup>5</sup> Kahn's report on the situation in Germany, March 5, 1933, CZA, S25/9703, and Senator to Kahn, March 19, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

<sup>6</sup> Senator to Locker, March 19, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

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### Awakening of the Anti-German Trade Boycott Movement

The question of declaring a Jewish boycott of German goods and services and its expansion into a general ban on trade with Germany by mobilizing the support of non-Jewish public opinion, soon became the focus of all deliberations concerning the reaction to the persecution of Jews in Germany. The beginning of the boycott movement can be traced to a spontaneous arousal to action of small groups in the U.S.A. Their first attempts at organization, inspired by the Revisionists and Po'alei Zion, took place in late January and early February 1933. At this stage most of the major Jewish organizations rejected the boycott, but the movement continued to spread, having received the endorsement of Jewish war veterans' organizations. The Nazi declaration of a boycott against German Jews, scheduled to begin on April 1, 1933, gave further impetus to the movement. The number of spontaneous initiatives increased and spread to other countries. An organization as important as the AJC considered the possibility of declaring a boycott, but other bodies and public figures demanded moderation out of concern for a possible deterioration of the situation and fear that the spontaneous reactions were getting out of hand and might lead to grave consequences for German Jewry. Acting under pressure from the delegation from Germany, which was in London at the time, the Zionist Executive decided to take a stance against the boycott. The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem was informed that "the Zionist Organization in Germany requests that steps be taken against anti-German boycott. In our view, declaration of trade boycott by Jewish organizations is not useful and [even] dangerous."<sup>7</sup>

In Palestine, as in many other places all over the world, a spontaneous movement, calling for the boycotting of German merchandise, the burning of German flags and other anti-German demonstrations, came into being, mainly on the initiative of the

<sup>7</sup> The Zionist Executive in London to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, March 29, 1933, *ibid.* On the delegation of German Jews in London, see M. Rosenblüth, *Go Forth and Serve*, New York, 1961, pp. 250-255.

## ZIONIST REACTIONS TO THE NAZIS' RISE TO POWER

Revisionists. Toward the end of March a link was established between this movement and the organizers of the anti-German activity in the U.S.A. and in other countries. Against the background of these developments and the threat of a Nazi boycott against German Jews, the National Council (Va'ad Leumi) of the Yishuv convened on March 30 to discuss the proper reaction. In terms of numbers the Yishuv was rather insignificant in comparison with the large Jewish communities in Europe and the U.S.A.; nevertheless, the members of the National Council felt that their views might be of particular importance in view of Palestine's symbolic role in the Jewish world. This feeling found expression in the speech of Izhak Ben-Zvi:

There has been no declaration of a boycott by a responsible institution, but for all practical purposes a spontaneous movement has already begun. In Eretz-Israel many merchants have stopped their transactions with Germany, acting on their own instincts. This is also true of many [Jewish] merchants in Egypt. Such a mood exists and there are individual actions ... our position will have its impact not only here, but also in other countries. We may do well to consider whether to advocate or oppose the boycott....

German Zionist leaders, who had immigrated to Palestine in previous years and were now active behind the scenes, advised the national bodies of the Yishuv to show moderation in their discussion of ways of response. According to Ben-Zvi:

We had a session with the representatives of German Zionists, and we heard their views. They think that if we abstain from taking such action, it is possible that this will influence others [in the world] to do the same. They held the view that we must not declare a trade boycott against Germany at this moment ... since the situation in Germany is very difficult anyway and German Jewry is kept hostage by the Germans....

In contrast to general public opinion which favored the boycott, the participants in the discussion were inclined to reject it, mainly because they did not regard it as a practical or useful measure. The debate ended inconclusively, except for a decision to appoint a

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commission that would issue an announcement on behalf of the National Council.<sup>8</sup>

Actual developments, however, unfolded much faster than the activity of the National Council. Pressed by the threat of an anti-Jewish boycott in Germany, the delegation of German Jews in London, acting on its own initiative, addressed the national bodies of the Yishuv and requested them to declare their opposition to the anti-German boycott. The leadership of the Yishuv could not afford to ignore this appeal; it felt responsible for the fate of German Zionism and knew that the Zionist Executive supported this position. Under pressure of time, and without further consultations with London, a telegram was sent from Jerusalem to the Kanzler's Bureau, offering assurances that no authorized body in Palestine had declared or intended to declare a trade boycott of Germany.<sup>9</sup> The Executive of the Jewish Agency, which convened on the morrow of the April 1 boycott in order to consider its reaction to the situation in Germany, reached an interim decision favoring continuation of public protest and diplomatic action against German policy, but opposing the declaration of a boycott so as to prevent further actions against German Jews. It was also decided that public bodies would abstain from steps that might endanger the German Zionist movement and that no action would be taken without the prior consent of those who might be harmed by it, i.e., the German Jews.<sup>10</sup> A few days later the Zionist Executive in London also resolved to encourage Zionist Federations in various countries to organize protest demonstrations against Germany, but to refrain from a trade boycott.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these resolutions, the efforts of the delegation of German

<sup>8</sup> Protocol of the Assembly of the National Council, March 30, 1933, CZA, J1/7235.

<sup>9</sup> On the chain of events in London relating to the visit of the delegation of German Jews and the talks it held there, including contacts with the U.S.A. and Palestine, see Locker's letter to the Jewish Agency Executive, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/9757, and M. Rosenblüth's letter to F. Kahn, April 5, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

<sup>10</sup> Telegram from the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to the Zionist Office in London, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, April 5, 1933, CZA, ZA/302/21.

## ZIONIST REACTIONS TO THE NAZIS' RISE TO POWER

Jews in London and the objections voiced by several Jewish organizations and leading figures in the U.S.A., Britain and other countries, the boycott movement continued to gain strength.<sup>12</sup> Even in Palestine the hesitant opposition of the Yishuv leadership did not curtail the growing tendency to boycott German products, which was fueled by the organized activities of Betar, including demonstrations, the distribution of leaflets, and pressure tactics against merchants and trade companies. These activities were encouraged by press editorials, much to the distress of the German Consul and German businessmen stationed in Palestine.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the spread of the spontaneous movement and public pressure to issue a formal boycott announcement, the national institutions were reluctant to provide guidelines to the public regarding the treatment of German goods. The Jewish Agency refused to take an official position and favored the arbitration of the National Council in this matter.<sup>14</sup> The latter body, which at first objected to the boycott, decided in May 1933 to change its attitude and to support such actions in Palestine without making a formal announcement.<sup>15</sup> The leadership was influenced not only by public pressure stemming from the emotional response to the persecution of German Jewry, but also took into account additional, rational considerations. The veteran German settlers, some of whom occupied key positions in the Zionist institutions in Palestine, pointed out the political danger associated with joining the boycott movement and its implications with regard to the situation of the Zionist movement in Germany in particular and that of German Jewry in general. Leading businessmen adduced serious economic considerations: the boycott, should it succeed, would indeed harm the German economy, but also, indirectly, the world economy; it surely would add to the economic difficulties of German Jews and

<sup>12</sup> See M. Gottlieb, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States: An Ideological and Sociological Appreciation," *Jewish Social Studies*, no. 2 (1973), pp. 198-227.

<sup>13</sup> See W.E. Braatz, "German Commercial Interests in Palestine: Zionism and the Boycott of German Goods 1933-1934," *European Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, (1979), pp. 481-513.

<sup>14</sup> Moshe Shertok to Izhak Ben-Zvi, June 6, 1933, CZA, S25/9757.

<sup>15</sup> Protocol of the Assembly of the National Council, May 10, 1933, CZA, J1/7235.



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disrupt their emigration, thus missing its objective. Furthermore, while in other countries the Germans might hardly respond with comprehensive countermeasures, there was nothing to prevent them from inflicting serious damage on the economy of Palestine. Thus, for example, they could halt imports from Palestine (which were marginal in terms of Germany's total imports but constituted a significant portion of Palestine's exports) or stop the transfer of contributions to the Zionist funds.<sup>16</sup>

Within a few months, however, despite these objections, the anti-German boycott became the dominant form of a worldwide Jewish protest against the persecution of German Jewry. It was an emotional and spontaneous reaction which in a very short time assumed the dimensions of an organized movement aspiring to manifest the strength of the Jewish people in the struggle for their rights. This activity was directed mainly against Germany, which had been dispossessing the Jews of their rights and their status as citizens, but also against other European countries like Poland and Rumania, in order to deter them from following the German example by adopting Nazi policies toward their Jewish citizens.

### Discussions in the Yishuv about Preparations for Absorption of German Immigrants

From the outset the Zionist movement in general, and the Yishuv in particular, did not join the mainstream of Jewish reaction to the Nazis' anti-Jewish measures. Protest and boycott were intended to uphold the rights and status of Jews in Germany, thus reflecting the struggle for emancipation wherever Jews resided. For the Zionist movement the struggle for emancipation was secondary to the realization of Zionist goals and the upbuilding of Eretz-Israel. The Yishuv viewed this struggle as being of even more minor importance. It regarded the crisis of German Jewry as a lever for the promotion of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. In their emotional

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum of Z. Hoofien in which he explains his opposition to the very concept of a boycott and not only to its official proclamation, June 1, 1933, CZA, L51/402.

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and spontaneous response, ordinary people and, occasionally, the press did not differ from Diaspora Jewry, but inside the meeting rooms of the political and economic bodies which discussed the situation more rational counsel prevailed. In addition to holding talks about the need to accommodate the public uproar in the country and to express solidarity with world Jewry, the national bodies focused on pragmatic considerations aimed at making the best of the crisis: how to transfer Jews and Jewish capital from Germany to Palestine; how to prepare the Yishuv for their absorption; and how to secure for Palestine a share in the financial, political and propaganda efforts undertaken by world Jewry.

For the first time in their history the Yishuv and the Zionist movement were faced with the task of a large-scale absorption of "welfare immigration." The prospective immigrants were mainly middle- and upper-middle-class individuals, owners of property, with professional or university education, accustomed to a much higher standard of living than that prevailing in the Yishuv. Clearly, their needs and habits called for special absorption measures. This was also the first time that the Zionist movement was called upon to provide an answer to the plight of an entire Jewish community which was in the process of losing the foundations — legal, political, economic and social — of its existence; indeed, its situation corroborated the fundamental Zionist thesis regarding the hopelessness of Jewish existence in the Diaspora.

Gradually the full scope of the problem and its uniqueness dawned on the Zionist movement. At first, conclusions were narrow in scope and related to several aspects of immigration and economic relations. A Palestinian businessman, who had sojourned in Germany during the Nazis' rise to power, wrote to Chaim Arlosoroff, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, about the economic prospects opened up by the new situation, in view of the economic decline of the German Jews vis-à-vis the anticipated upsurge in the German economy<sup>17</sup> With the commencement of anti-Jewish terror in the beginning of March 1933, the first applications from German Jews for immigration certificates to Palestine were

<sup>17</sup> Letter (signature illegible) to Arlosoroff, February 2, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

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received. Special consideration was requested for older people in the distribution of such permits.<sup>18</sup> The German Zionist Federation mentioned difficulties in obtaining certificates for would-be immigrants who were not considered pioneers, and whose assets were insufficient to qualify them for capitalists' certificates. Such persons formed an important immigration potential in Germany. The German Zionists demanded appropriate arrangements for the absorption of these people and the introduction of changes in the system of distribution of certificates to make their inclusion possible. In their letters, they also pointed out the problems faced by owners of capital seeking to emigrate, who were asked to supply the British Consuls with proof that the capital they would be allowed to take out would indeed provide them with means of support in Palestine.<sup>19</sup> In a letter sent from Paris to Arlosoroff, Leo Motzkin, President of the Zionist Actions Committee, warned about difficulties awaiting another type of immigrant: "It should be taken into account that very soon tens of thousands of Jews will be forced to leave Germany." This process was assuming the dimensions of a disaster, Motzkin went on to say. He particularly emphasized the grave situation of stateless Jews who had nowhere to go except to Palestine; their ability to struggle for their existence in Germany was extremely limited.<sup>20</sup> Jewish organizations which took care of refugees who had fled from Germany to the neighboring countries also asked the Jewish Agency to help them by allocating special certificates for those who did not fit into any of the ordinary immigrant categories. Otherwise they would become a burden on the Jewish communities in those countries, thus diminishing prospects for the absorption of additional refugees.<sup>21</sup>

On March 17, 1933, before these cries of alarm reached Palestine, some of the leading figures from among the German veteran immigrants convened in Jerusalem to discuss means of action in

<sup>18</sup> Landauer to Senator, March 8 and 24, 1933, CZA, S49/381.

<sup>19</sup> Zionist Federation in Germany to the Association of German Immigrants, March 22, 1933, CZA, S25/9713.

<sup>20</sup> Motzkin to Arlosoroff, March 17, 1933, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Telegram from the HICEM office in Paris to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, March 29, 1933, CZA, S49/381.

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view of the situation in their native country. This meeting was attended, among others, by Arthur Hantke, Arthur Landsberg and Felix Rosenblüth (Pinchas Rosen). They were acquainted with the report of Franz Kahn, greatly concerned about the news emanating from Germany, and even more worried about the lack of detailed information about the situation there. Rosenblüth proposed that negotiations should be started with the German Government, aimed at the reduction or lifting of restrictions on the transfer of capital out of the country, in order to make possible the immigration of several thousand Jews to Palestine. At this stage, his colleagues were skeptical. On the one hand, they doubted whether they could offer an incentive to the Germans which would induce them to enter into such negotiations, and on the other hand, they feared negative reactions on the part of the German Jews themselves, which could undermine the position of the Zionist Federation in Germany.<sup>22</sup> Despite all these misgivings, the idea struck roots. In the assembly of the National Council which convened two weeks later, on March 30, the majority of the participants demanded that the question of immigration, as opposed to that of the boycott, be the focus of the debate and be considered the main issue of Jewish response to the Nazi policies. At this stage the Revisionists also shared this view, and Waschitz maintained that "we must endeavor to obtain a large number of certificates for German Jews." He also asked: "Why are we talking about a boycott... why don't we get down to business, why aren't we discussing the issue of 25,000 certificates with the Mandatory authorities?" David Remez sought to underscore the importance of practical action, contrasting it with declarations and grandiose political demands. He called upon the German immigrants in Palestine to become the spark which would ignite a broad popular movement:

...The certificates are for Jews without money. As for the Jews with independent means, the question is: What will they do in the country? What is needed is public capital, a program for absorption

<sup>22</sup> Senator to Locker, March 19, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

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and accommodation, for organizing the prospective immigrants. It is necessary to enter into political negotiations with Germany and England.... German Jews in Eretz-Israel must initiate the action, must create the first financial instruments for such action... also as an expression of solidarity.... If this particular community would take these steps, I am sure that first the Yishuv and then the whole nation would follow suit.... Had the German Jews been the first to raise the banner, they could have brought about a great awakening....

The need to take an immediate position with regard to the trade boycott cast its shadow over the debate in the National Council. No resolutions of practical importance were adopted.<sup>23</sup> On the following day the Jewish Agency demanded from the Mandatory authorities that top priority be given to requests for immigration certificates coming from Germany and to applications for naturalization from veteran German immigrants so that they could bring over their relatives within a short time. In view of the worsening situation in Germany, the Agency also requested that certificates be issued in advance of the next quota.<sup>24</sup> Responding favorably to this appeal, the High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Wauchope, announced that one thousand certificates would be issued for the halutzim from Germany in advance of the quota. He also proclaimed the easing of certain immigration procedures: the British Consul in Berlin was granted freedom of action in issuing certificates to immigrants of independent means; immigration requests submitted by free professionals of moderate means and by Palestinian residents of German origin seeking to bring over their relatives would receive sympathetic treatment.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from dealing with urgent bureaucratic problems, the Jewish Agency Executive began to discuss the question of preparations in order to cope with the crisis. At that time Weizmann arrived in the country and initiated a series of consultations

<sup>23</sup> Protocol of the Assembly of the National Council, March 30, 1933, CZA, J1/7235, pp. 1-5.

<sup>24</sup> Senator to Haymson (director of the Palestine Government Department of Immigration), March 31, 1933, CZA, S25/2419.

<sup>25</sup> Letters of Wauchope to Arlosoroff, April 4 and 6, 1933, CZA, S25/9713.

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regarding the reaction to the crisis. The Jewish Agency Executive was briefed on those consultations by Arlosoroff. In its first session devoted to the situation in Germany, held on April 2, 1933, Rosenblüth's proposal regarding entry into negotiations with the German Government in order to explore the possibilities of immigration from that country was discussed. It was also agreed that fund-raising should be commenced forthwith, to provide means for "constructive assistance" in the absorption of German immigrants in Palestine (in contradiction to "philanthropic aid" aimed at offering aid in Germany and in other countries of emigration). It was also resolved to dispatch a member of the Executive for this purpose to Berlin and to London.<sup>26</sup> The eyes of all, with the exception of the actual leaders of the Zionist movement, were now turned to Weizmann. Various individuals asked him to lead the campaign for assistance and rehabilitation: "Only in this way shall we succeed in attracting world Jewry in addition to the activists of each separate organization, and at the same time ensure that the aid to Jews in Germany will not harm and jeopardize the upbuilding of Eretz-Israel."<sup>27</sup> Berl Locker wrote to Weizmann from London:

...They expect us to act. If it turns out that it is possible to settle Eretz-Israel even with a few thousand German Jews, the call for financial aid for this enterprise will meet with a favorable response from Jews all over the world. Concentration of political and economic aid is also urgently needed, particularly in order to help the refugees whose number has probably reached thousands. We are also in urgent need of a well-thought-out program for political assistance to the vast majority of the Jewish population who will remain in Germany....<sup>28</sup>

Locker also intimated to Weizmann that he had better return to London to be present at the center of developments in those critical moments, together with the delegation of Jews from Germany and

<sup>26</sup> The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to the Zionist Office in London, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>27</sup> Oscar Cohen to Weizmann, April 1, 1933, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Locker to Weizmann, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

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the notables of British Jewry. Weizmann, however, preferred to stay in Palestine in order to continue consultations with Arlosoroff and Werner. Senator aimed at drafting the guidelines for the Zionist reaction to the situation in Germany. The three agreed that the veteran German immigrants in Palestine should play a key role in making arrangements for the absorption of the immigration from Germany and its transformation into an impetus for the upbuilding of the country. They were, however, also greatly concerned about the prospects of absorption. Therefore they took pains to emphasize the need to make appropriate preparations and to coordinate the activities of various organizations involved in this matter.<sup>29</sup> Reports from Germany reinforced the feeling that the restrictive decrees against the Jews would intensify emigration from that country and, by the same token, immigration to Palestine. In a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive with a group of activists from among the veteran German immigrants, Ludwig Pinner warned:

...Soon hundreds of refugees from Germany will arrive with not a penny in their pockets. Hundreds of people will come without means of support. Many, with a university education and similar qualifications, will not be suited for the kind of work available here. Necessary arrangements should be made, such as camps, training, accommodations in *Moshavot* [Jewish rural, but not cooperative, settlements]. We must deal with the problem of expanding the economic capacity of absorption, since in the near future we'll also be faced with the problem of Austria[n Jews]....

He also demanded on behalf of his colleagues

...the mobilization of the existing readiness to help in this disaster. It is necessary to draw up a manifesto (to be drafted by Bialik) addressed to the Yishuv and to world Jewry.... This campaign should transcend political boundaries and embrace all political parties on behalf of this aid fund. This time Eretz-Israel should be the first.... We believe that Weizmann should head this campaign....

However, Weizmann's name aroused the opposition of two

<sup>29</sup> Senator to Bernard Kahn, April 6, 1933, CZA, S49/381.

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members of the Executive, Joshua Heschel Farbstein and Emanuel Neumann. Furthermore, there was a debate about the proportion of the Zionist funds in the proposed fund-raising campaign. The opinion of the veteran German immigrants was expressed by Arlosoroff, who presented to the participants his main viewpoints:

The German crisis constitutes a crucial test for Zionism, and its results will have important consequences for the future of our movement.... Since the inception of the Zionist movement this is the first time that a portion of Jewry considered to be emancipated has been placed in this position, and Eretz-Israel, too, for the first time has found itself in a special situation.... We are faced with a number of tasks: 1) political action; 2) developing a real plan for Eretz-Israel; 3) procuring the means; 4) taking care of the refugees and extending assistance in Germany itself.... As for Dr. Weizmann — we have nobody else like him to undertake such action.... As for offering aid — a great deal of help will be needed to achieve adaptation to the conditions in the country; physicians and lawyers cannot be absorbed here. There are also questions of investments, the question of arrangements here — we must know what we shall advise the youth about their training; there is the question of bans on transferring money, or goods in lieu of money, out of Germany.... Personal contact is needed with the German Zionists. There are matters which cannot be postponed...such as, for instance, steps to be taken in Eretz-Israel.

Residents of German origin in Palestine demanded that Arlosoroff and Senator be urgently dispatched to Berlin and London in order to discuss preparations for the absorption of German immigrants with the leaders of the German Zionist movement and with the Zionist Executive in London. However, the members of the Executive were hard pressed to reach any agreement among themselves. Opinions differed on most issues on the agenda and above all on the question of procuring the means for the absorption enterprise. Neumann took exception to the decision to grant special status to the Association of German Immigrants in the proposed venture, but the main friction was over the status of Weizmann. At this stage, Arlosoroff's plan to travel to Germany in order to acquaint himself first hand with the situation and to discuss it with leaders of the Zionist Federation there, met with reservations and



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the debate ended inconclusively.<sup>30</sup> The following summary was sent to the Zionist Executive in London:

In view of the private negotiations taking place here between Pinchas Rutenberg, Weizmann and members of Mapai, he [Neumann] refuses to continue his participation in the discussions on this subject in the Executive.... Besides, he has quit the sub-committee [established by the Executive to draw up plans for immediate steps to be taken to absorb German immigrants in Palestine].<sup>31</sup>

Before the worldwide fund-raising campaign on behalf of German Jews got under way, this sub-committee, which, following Neumann's resignation, had only one member from the Executive, Senator, had engaged in planning local fund-raising in cooperation with the National Council, the Association of German Immigrants and the Jewish National Fund. This campaign was aimed at procuring funds needed to deal with urgent problems which had already surfaced after the arrival of the first immigrants, and at preparing an infrastructure for the absorption of those who would follow them. But even the establishment of this small-scale project, likely to operate until the organization of a worldwide fund-raising campaign on behalf of the German Jews, caused a lot of arguments and tension. Nevertheless, under the pressures of the German immigrants,<sup>32</sup> the sub-committee decided to start the local campaign, and the former undertook most of the practical work connected with it.<sup>33</sup> The National Council convened a week later and also endorsed the fund-raising effort. The Revisionists opposed it, complaining about the approach of the veteran German settlers to the problem and describing it as "a palliative which does not provide a Zionist solution to the question of German Jewry." In contrast to their stand in the previous assembly, they voiced their

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 9, 1933, CZA.

<sup>31</sup> The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to the Zionist Office in London, April 9, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the session of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 16, 1933, CZA.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Subcommittee for Preparation of Assistance to German Jews, April 20, 1933, CZA, S7/7.

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support of boycott actions and demanded "proposals making possible a mass aliyah of German Jews to Eretz-Israel."<sup>34</sup>

The Zionist press began to prepare the public for the anticipated wave of immigration from Germany:

...German Jewry thus joins a great number of Jewish communities for whom emigration constitutes the fundamental problem of their existence. At this time...we are asking for easier terms of entry into Eretz-Israel for them. Naturally, in the course of time this request will no longer be necessary, but we should be ready for the growing aliyah from Germany, which is a result of distress and emergency. Soon in Germany the certificate will mean what it means in Poland and other Diaspora communities...<sup>35</sup>

Activists among the veteran German immigrants estimated that some fifty thousand Jews would leave Germany by the end of 1934; this figure proved to be correct. Hantke wrote to Martin Rosenblüth that out of those fifty thousand "*Für Palästina sind 90% wie mir scheint, unbrauchbar. Mit einer solchen Auswanderung braucht eine Hilfsaktion kaum zu rechnen.*" In other words, only 20,000 could be absorbed in Palestine. They would include 800 families, i.e., 3,000 people, of means. Palestine would also be able to take in a small number of university graduates, as well as skilled and unskilled workers, adolescents who underwent occupational retraining, artisans and small entrepreneurs who would bring their own capital. Many would fit into those categories and thus Palestine would become the largest absorption center for the German emigrants. At the same time Hantke noted that in addition to the willingness displayed by the Yishuv to help the German immigrants, one could detect other, more reserved attitudes which blamed the German Jews for coming to the country as a result of Nazi persecutions and not because of Zionist considerations.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Protocols of the Assembly of the National Council, April 2 and 7, 1933, CZA, J1/7235, pp. 3-8.

<sup>35</sup> Editorial by M. Kleimann in *Haolam* (in Hebrew), April 20, 1933.

<sup>36</sup> Hantke to M. Rosenblüth, April 24, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

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### The Jewish Agency Plan for Immigration of German Jews and Their Absorption

In the heat of the debates which took place in the Jewish Agency Executive, the National Council and the Zionist Executive in London, revolving around the position of Weizmann in the campaign for German Jewry and the issue of mobilizing financial support and the supervision of expenditures for this enterprise, the operational planning of the absorption of the immigrants in Palestine was pushed aside. It was taken up by the heads of the Association of German Immigrants working together with Arlosoroff, Senator and Weizmann behind the scenes. The success of such a plan depended on accurate information about the situation in Germany, on the wishes of German Jewry, and on the cooperation of its leadership. The plan pinned great hopes on the capital that German immigrants were expected to bring with them, and thus it aimed at reaching an arrangement with the German Government to make possible an orderly transfer of assets. For this reason it was imperative at that early stage of preparations to commence talks with the Jewish leadership, or at least with the Zionist leadership, in Germany. This was the reason why Arlosoroff wanted to go to Berlin. He presented four objectives of his trip at the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on April 9, 1933:

- 1) to discuss the whole situation thoroughly and exhaustively with leaders of the German Zionist movement;
- 2) to discuss with them constructive plans for the rehabilitation of German Jews in Palestine;
- 3) to examine issues relating to immigration;
- 4) to examine properly the political situation in Germany and to become acquainted with the views of various local personalities.

Arlosoroff's proposed trip to Germany met with initial opposition; Senator was the only one to support it, whereas others maintained that the current situation demanded that fund-raisers like Neumann and Morris Hexter should go instead of the director of the Jewish Agency's Political Department (Arlosoroff) or the director of its Immigration Department (Senator). The discussion

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ended with the endorsement of Arlosoroff's proposal which was also backed by Hexter who explained that the trip as such was important even though no political contacts would be established, if only for the encouragement it would give to the German Jews.<sup>37</sup> Later, the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem informed the Zionist Executive in London about the planned trip.<sup>38</sup>

Heinrich Wolf, the German Consul in Palestine, furnished Arlosoroff with a referral to the Palestinian desk in the German Foreign Ministry. This indicates that Arlosoroff indeed intended to hold talks with the authorities during his visit, in contrast to the impression he tried to give during the discussion in the Jewish Agency Executive, where he said that, for the time being, negotiations with the German Government were ruled out and that he himself wouldn't start them.<sup>39</sup> His trip was delayed due to an internal dispute in the Jewish Agency Executive and the Zionist Executive in London concerning the Zionist Organization's participation in the general Jewish reaction to German anti-Jewish measures, the position of Weizmann, and the ways of raising money to assist German Jews and facilitate their absorption in Palestine. In late April Arlosoroff redefined the purposes of his trip, which differed somewhat from those he had presented earlier the same month:

- 1) to explore the possibility of liquidating Jewish assets in Germany and transferring them out of the country;
- 2) to estimate the number of would-be immigrants in various categories;
- 3) to review the principles guiding the distribution of certificates;
- 4) to investigate the possibilities for Zionist activities in Germany under the new conditions;
- 5) to inquire into the prospects for negotiations with the German Government (without entering into such negotiations);
- 6) to report his impressions to London;

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 9, 1933, CZA.

<sup>38</sup> The Jewish Agency Executive to Brodetsky, April 11, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>39</sup> See Arlosoroff to Wolf, April 23, 1933, *ibid.*; Wolf to Priffer (Foreign Ministry in Berlin), April 24, 1933, CZA, A44/16, and minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 25, 1933, CZA.

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7) to give the German Zionists the feeling that they were not isolated and cut off.<sup>40</sup>

After a compromise on other controversial issues had been reached, the Jewish Agency Executive endorsed Arlosoroff's mission. He left Palestine on April 26 and went to London. Following consultations with the heads of the Zionist Executive and the representatives of the German Zionists, he continued to Berlin. There he conferred with leaders of the German Zionist Federation and presented to them his ideas on the following issues:

- 1) immigration of children and youth, who would come in advance of their parents and would be brought up in youth-villages, kibbutzim and educational institutions in the country;
- 2) occupational training for young people, aged 17 to 22, who for one year would be trained for manual labor;
- 3) agricultural settlement of immigrants of independent means, the majority of whom had families;
- 4) industrial development. Here Arlosoroff was not pressed to speak in terms of specific plans since they depended on private entrepreneurs. At the same time he suggested the creation of a single authority — to avoid overlapping — which would establish contact between various investors in order to facilitate pooling their resources, and to endeavor to find investors for the completion of programs with insufficient capital;
- 5) reaching an agreement with the German Government, which would enable the immigrants to bring their capital to Palestine. The German treasury would be compensated by means of the export of German goods. In his opinion this agreement should be connected with the establishment of a trusteeship responsible for the liquidation of Jewish assets in Germany, and a fund providing loans to entrepreneurs until completion of the transfer of their capital.<sup>41</sup>

During his visit to Germany, Arlosoroff learned of the plans developed by the Central Committee for Aid (Zentral Ausschuss für Aufbau und Hilfe) established by the major organizations of

<sup>40</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> An interview with Arlosoroff, May 23, 1933, in *Jüdische Rundschau*, and Arlosoroff's memorandum (written probably during his visit to Germany) "Some Theses on the Liquidation Bank," May 1933, CZA, S25/9706.

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German Jewry. Those proposals were similar to his own thoughts on the subject and to the ideas formulated by veteran German immigrants in Palestine. Therefore he suggested that Senator should work for a few months in the Central Committee, study its plans and take care of coordinating them with those being worked out in Palestine. Arlosoroff's impression was that the younger generation of German Jews, in contrast to the community's leadership, understood the situation and realized that Jews had no future in Germany. The main institutions of German Jewry were still under the sway of old schools of thought favoring the struggle for the continuation of Jewish life in that country. In his opinion the German Zionists had failed to gain the leadership of Jewry there because they feared condemnation of their position by other Jewish institutions. In this way a united front of German Jews was created, at least in outer appearances, but at the price of concessions from the Zionists. In this united front, Arlosoroff said, one must be very cautious about using expressions like "emigration" or "liquidation of property." He was particularly concerned about the image of the Zionist leadership in the future, in view of the plans of George Landauer, Kurt Blumenfeld and several directors of branches in provincial towns to leave Germany. The Zionist Executive in London, which convened to hear the reports by Arlosoroff and Senator upon their return from Germany, approved their proposals. It resolved to establish an authority affiliated with the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem, which was to be responsible for the preparation of "constructive plans" for the absorption of German Jews. Arlosoroff was charged with processing various proposals in coordination with other departments of the Jewish Agency and was to submit them to the Executive for its approval.<sup>42</sup>

During Arlosoroff's trip to Germany and Britain, the discussions between the various organizations in the Yishuv concerning the establishment of a "United Council for Settling German Jews in Eretz-Israel" were completed. This Council was to organize an all-Yishuv fund-raising campaign on behalf of the German immigrants

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, June 1, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

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who had already reached Palestine and those expected to arrive, and to supervise the expenditure of the collected funds. Among its members were representatives of the national bodies of the Yishuv, municipalities, large organizations and the Association of German Immigrants. Its work was divided between four sub-committees: for urban settlement, for rural settlement, for education, and for immigration.<sup>43</sup> The results of this campaign were modest (about 20,000 Palestinian pounds), but its importance lay not so much in the amount collected, as in its being a forerunner of more generally organized preparations for the absorption of German immigrants under the direction of the Jewish Agency.

This program of organization, in which Arlosoroff played a leading role, was seriously disrupted by his assassination on June 16, 1933. After a halt of activity for several weeks, work was resumed. At its center now stood Arthur Ruppin in Palestine and Senator in Germany, working in coordination with the Jewish leadership in that country and backed by leaders of the German immigrants in Palestine and the Zionist Federation in Germany. Their schedule was affected considerably by the decision to hold the 18th Zionist Congress in Prague in the second half of August 1933.

The entire Zionist movement in general and the Yishuv in particular looked forward to the Congress, hoping that it would extricate the movement from the internal crisis besetting it ever since the resignation of Weizmann from the presidency and the backing out of Jabotinsky. There was a great deal of tension between the various factions in the movement: in some great centers of Zionism like Poland and Palestine, this tension erupted in violence. Apart from the hopes that the Congress would make progress toward solving the internal problems of the movement, there also emerged the expectation that it would guide the Zionist response to the crisis in Germany and thus pose a new challenge to the movement. This was accompanied by serious apprehensions, since side by side with the natural desire to issue a strong condemnation of German anti-Jewish measures from the tribune of the Congress, there was fear that such a protest would produce a

<sup>43</sup> Protocol of the Assembly of the National Council, June 7, 1933, CZA, J1/7235.

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counteraction on the part of the Nazi authorities against the Jews, and particularly against the Zionist movement, in Germany. Such steps might include the termination of all Zionist activities in Germany at a time when, according to reports from that country, they were showing an upsurge. Blumenfeld gave expression to those concerns in a letter he wrote to Weizmann just before the opening of the Zionist Congress: "We, the German Jews and especially the German Zionists, are held hostage by the National-Socialist Government."<sup>44</sup>

Since April 1933 the German Zionists had been bringing pressure to bear on the Zionist Executive to postpone the Congress in order to avoid the dilemma. In early May, just when Arlosoroff arrived in London prior to his departure for Germany, the Executive deliberated this question. During the discussion various suggestions were offered for the convening of an alternative forum, either Zionist or all-Jewish, in a special conference, thus making possible the postponement of the Congress. Arlosoroff was against the delay, maintaining that the internal problems of the movement made it imperative to convene the Congress on schedule; it should not be linked with the holding of another conference. The latter should be organized independently, he maintained, since he viewed it as a way for the Zionist movement to gain the leading position in the campaign of Jewish reaction to the German crisis and to shape it for the benefit of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine.<sup>45</sup> Upon his return from Germany Arlosoroff reported to the Zionist Executive: the Zionist leadership in Germany, with the exception of Richard Lichtheim, was opposed to convening the Congress and asked the Executive to take an appropriate decision. The latter body decided that the Congress was to take place as scheduled. However, at the same time it charged the Zionist Actions Committee with preparing the way for putting the question of German Jewry on the agenda in accordance with Arlosoroff's guidelines, so that damage to the

<sup>44</sup> Blumenfeld to Weizmann, August 14, 1933, Weizmann Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, May 8, 1933, (afternoon session), CZA, Z4/302/21.



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German Zionist movement would be minimized.<sup>46</sup> This decision did not allay the fears of the German Zionists, who continued to exert pressure and even secured the cooperation of the emissaries from Palestine, acting on behalf of the Palestine Office and the Hechalutz movement, and, of course, their own liaison men like Martin Rosenblüth, who at that time worked outside Germany.<sup>47</sup>

Despite all these pressures the Executive remained firm in its resolve to convene the Congress. The Zionist Actions Committee met in Prague on August 17 to discuss the proper way of raising the question of the German Jews. The participants were divided as to whether the discussion should be held behind closed doors, the issue should be placed on the agenda of the plenary session, or a special public and solemn session should be devoted to it, in which the Congress and Jewry as a whole would voice their protest against the persecutions. Another debate focused on the attitude of the Zionist Organization to the boycott movement. Some members supported the boycott, but others feared that a declaration approving it would have a negative impact on the position and the prospects of German Zionism. To avoid coping with this dilemma Nahum Goldmann suggested that discussion of this issue should be dropped, explaining that it concerned the whole of Jewry and not only the Zionist Congress. In his view it was preferable that this matter be dealt with in the framework of a World Jewish Conference — one of a series of conventions which preceded the establishment of the World Jewish Congress — to be held in Geneva after the Zionist Congress in Prague. In contrast to those favoring emphasis on the boycott question in the debate on German Jewry, Arthur Ruppin suggested that the Congress should focus on a constructive plan which would outline all the Yishuv's possible contributions toward solving the crisis. He maintained that such a congress could not restrict itself solely to condemnation of the German Government. The third argument revolved around the question of who would

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, June 1, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, M. Rosenblüth to Landauer, July 16, 1933, and the letter of Sereni, Landauer, Shkolnik (Eshkol) and Liebenstein (Livne) to the Zionist Executive in London, August 4, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

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deliver the opening address in the debate on German Jewry; the two chief contenders were Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow.<sup>48</sup> In view of these differences of opinion, it was decided to continue the discussion in the framework of a smaller committee which became known as the Committee for the Question of German Jews when the Congress convened.<sup>49</sup>

This committee, too, ended its discussions without succeeding in drafting a resolution, acceptable to all its members, to be submitted to the Congress plenum. The majority of the committee members were in favor of withdrawing this issue from the plenary agenda, whereas the Revisionist minority demanded that a debate be held. Thus the Congress had no choice but to vote on the proposals. The majority's proposal made no mention of the boycott question; it expressed a strong protest against the Nazi policy toward the Jews and gave emphasis to Palestine as a haven for the persecuted German Jews and to the need to support Zionism and the upbuilding of Palestine in order to consolidate further the potential which the latter offered for solving the problem. The minority's proposal, on the other hand, stressed the duty of world Jewry to react to the persecutions in Germany, and called for the Congress' approval of the boycott movement and for expansion of the Zionist movement.<sup>50</sup>

The debate on these proposals was held on August 24, 1933. On the same day Ruppin gave a lecture on the settlement of German Jews in Palestine before the Congress plenum. For all practical purposes this address amounted to a platform spelling out the principles of Zionist policy on the question of German Jewry for the next two years. Ruppin spoke of emigration as the only solution to the problem, the crux of which, he maintained, lay in the fact that the Jews were being deprived of the economic foundations of their existence in that country. He pointed to Palestine as the main country able to take in the emigrants, and reviewed the possibilities

<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee, August 17, 1933, CZA, Z4/287/1.

<sup>49</sup> Protocol of the 18th Zionist Congress in Prague, 1933 (in German), p. 169.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 199-201, 532-533 (the majority proposal drawn up by Goldmann).

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of absorption there. At the same time he noted that Palestine was also obliged to absorb Jews from other countries and could not solve the problem of all German Jews:

We must be aware that Eretz-Israel does not exist solely for German Jews, and its gates should stay open also to Jews from other countries. It is difficult to allocate to German Jewry a proportion of total immigration to Eretz-Israel without harming the interests of Jews from other countries seeking to immigrate.... Finally, there is the question of the capacity for absorption of German immigrants by means of resources they would bring along with them and those which world Jewry would mobilize for that purpose. It appears that Eretz-Israel would be able to absorb a significant portion — one-fourth, one-third, maybe even half — of the two hundred thousand German Jewish emigrants over a period of five, eight, or ten years.<sup>51</sup>

The 18th Zionist Congress endorsed the postulates spelled out by Ruppin in his lecture as the principles of Zionist policy on the question of German Jewry, and invited Weizmann to lead the aid venture. Transformation of the decisions adopted by the Congress into a practical plan of action commenced some two weeks after its conclusion. At his holiday residence in Merano on the Swiss-Italian border, Weizmann conferred with Ruppin and Senator (acting on behalf of the Jewish Agency Executive), Berl Locker (on behalf of the Zionist Executive), and Siegfried Moses and Martin Rosenblüth (on behalf of the German Zionist Federation). At that meeting Ruppin further developed his plan. Its organizational framework was to be based on three coordinated offices — in Berlin, London and Jerusalem. The German Zionist Federation was to fulfill this function in Berlin in cooperation with a liaison man from Jerusalem (Landauer and Senator acting in this capacity intermittently). The “Central Office for the Settlement of German Jews in Eretz-Israel” was to be established in London, with Weizmann as its director and Martin Rosenblüth working in close cooperation with him. A parallel body, the “German Department” of the Jewish Agency, would be set up in Jerusalem, with Ruppin as its director assisted by

<sup>51</sup> A. Ruppin, “Die Ansiedlung von Juden aus Deutschland in Palästina,” in *Dreissig Jahre Aufbau*, Berlin, 1937, pp. 331-340.

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Senator and Landauer. This framework was to supervise the aid venture in all its aspects and in all locations: in the country of origin (Germany), the absorbing country (Palestine) and in countries where money was to be raised to finance the operation. Finances for the programs implemented by these bodies would come from various funds on behalf of German Jews which had been established spontaneously and locally in various countries, including Palestine. Additional contributions would be forthcoming from the Rescue Fund, the founding of which was announced by the Zionist Executive in London in late April 1933, and from special fund-raising campaigns to be conducted in Jewish communities throughout the world. Part of the money (one-third to one-half) would be used to extend assistance to Jews in Germany itself, but most of it was intended for "constructive purposes" in order to help the German Jews to settle in Palestine.

Ruppin outlined a series of tasks to be accomplished in various countries. The most urgent of these were the registration and classification of the prospective immigrants, informing industrial investors from Germany about the possibilities of investment in Palestine, intensification of the activities of the Hechalutz movement, and negotiations with the German authorities about the organization of emigration. In Ruppin's view, top priority in Palestine should be given to the preparation of the Yishuv for the reception of the German immigrants with their special characteristics. Another main objective was to encourage the immigration of youth from Germany. Constructive absorption of the German immigrants called for extensive purchases of land for settlement purposes. At that time areas in the Beth-Shean valley were under consideration, and attempts were being made to buy land near the Syrian border with Palestine, e.g., in the valley of Bteicha, and in the valley of the Hulah. Plans for land purchases entailed discussions with the governments of Britain and France, where fund-raising campaigns were also scheduled to take place. The main objective in the United States, apart from raising money, was the procurement of immigration permits for fifty to sixty thousand German Jews. It was also deemed necessary to try to prevail on the member countries of the British Commonwealth to

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agree to absorb a certain number of refugees from Germany.<sup>52</sup>

Particularly sensitive was the question of the linkage between the Zionist Organization and the organizational machinery set up to assist the German Jews, in view of Weizmann's status and the troubled relations between him and the majority of the members of the Zionist Executive. Ruppin insisted that Weizmann alone should head the entire venture and not the Executive indirectly. As a result, the Agency's German Department in Jerusalem and the Main Office in London were granted autonomous status. The Office in London was almost completely independent of the Executive, whereas in Palestine there were both personal (Ruppin served simultaneously as chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and as director of the German Department) and organizational (Agency officials staffed the German Department) ties. This form of organization and the composition of the German Department in Palestine were acceptable to the Jewish Agency Executive and approved by it in its first meeting after the Congress in October 1933.<sup>53</sup> Although the translation of the principle into political and organizational terms continued for a longer time, the main idea was kept intact. The top officials of the Department — Ruppin, Senator and Landauer — were keen to preserve its special, independent status. Within a few months they succeeded in concentrating all authority relating to the question of German Jews in the hands of the German Department; hitherto, as a result of the delays preceding the Congress, those powers were spread among the Jewish Agency Executive and its Political Department on the one hand, and various organizations in the Yishuv, such as the National Council, the Association of German Immigrants and the United Council for Aid to German Jews, on the other. From the end of 1933 onward the German Department directed and coordinated the activities of all these bodies.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the meeting in Merano on September 19, 1933 (written by Rosenblüth on October 1, 1933), CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive, October 4 and 6, 1933, CZA.

<sup>54</sup> Senator to Weizmann, October 4, 1933, and to Leo Baeck, October 9, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

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Weizmann was in charge of activities in London and, due to the weakness of the Zionist Executive there, his work proceeded smoothly. One of the principles guiding his policy was to avoid conspicuous actions and to focus instead on quiet, practical steps in the sphere of emigration, especially to Palestine. In addition, the London Office handled assistance within Germany and engaged in diplomatic activity, particularly in the League of Nations, relating to the appointment of a Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>55</sup> From the outset, Weizmann saw Palestine as the fulcrum of the solution of German Jewry's problems, not on account of entrenchment in the Zionist position (characteristic of members of the Zionist Executive led by Sokolow), but precisely because he adopted a comprehensive view of the situation. In a letter to Sir Osmond D'Avigdor-Goldsmith, one of the leaders of British Jewry, prior to the Congress in Prague, he spelled out his main viewpoints.

...The whole situation demands in my opinion an effort on a different scale and an approach from a different angle. I need hardly tell you...that I am looking at it all not from a Zionist point of view, but as a Jew who feels deeply that his own position and the position of his fellow Jews in the world has been deeply affected by the happenings in Germany and who feels that the reply which we are giving — charity, philanthropy — is unworthy and ineffective!... This particular project [the acquisition of territory in Transjordan, Syria, etc.] is not fully thought out, but it bears in it a germ of a solution which is statesmanlike and not merely palliative and makeshift! We must all start moving on some such lines quickly before we are overtaken by a greater disaster, and the kernel of the solution lies in my opinion in utilizing as rapidly as possible the favourable situation (both political and economic!) in Palestine to strengthen the Yishuv there at all costs: 400,000 Jews established and absorbed in P[alestine] are not only a force by themselves but are — and here is the crux — the Archimedes point on which you can apply a lever to lift the weight of the problem which is likely to crush us all!<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Weizmann to Felix Warburg, October 19, 1933, in G. Sheffer (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Series A — Letters (henceforth: *Weizmann Letters*), vol. 16, June 1933-August 1935, Jerusalem, 1978, pp. 80-81, and his letter to Ruppin, November 21, 1933, CZA, S7/4.

<sup>56</sup> Weizmann to D'Avigdor-Goldsmith, August 14, 1933, *Weizmann Letters*, vol. 16, pp. 25-28.

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### Negotiations about the Transfer Agreement

In his programmatic speech at the Zionist Congress in Prague, Ruppin emphasized that implementation of the Zionist program for the absorption of Jews from Germany and other countries in Palestine and transforming the disaster inflicted upon German Jewry into an impetus for furthering the Zionist enterprise, was contingent upon a large-scale concentration of financial resources. Some of the needed capital would be brought by the immigrants from Germany, and the remainder would be procured by means of a large fund-raising campaign among world Jewry. At the time Ruppin was delivering his speech, important steps had already been taken to secure that part which depended on the resources brought by the immigrants themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Before the Nazis' rise to power, leaders of the Zionist Federation in Germany and of the Association of German Immigrants in Palestine had sought ways of circumventing the restrictions on the transfer of hard currency out of Germany. Those attempts were part of the effort to strengthen ties between German Jews and the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, to attract German Jewish capital investments to Palestine, and to increase the export of the Yishuv's citrus fruit to Germany.<sup>58</sup> For this purpose they engaged the services of a businessman named Sam Cohen, who had good connections with the Ministries of Economics and Foreign Affairs in Berlin and was also an active Zionist and a delegate to Zionist Congresses. Cohen had also established ties with various institutions in Palestine on account of his involvement in land purchases and contributions to various organizations and enterprises.<sup>59</sup> He helped them to exploit loopholes in German

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed analysis of Zionist policies and the Transfer Agreement, see Y. Gelber, "The Zionist Policy and the Transfer Agreement 1933-1935" (in Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet*, vol. 17 (1974), pp. 97-152, and vol. 18 (November 1974), pp. 23-100.

<sup>58</sup> Blumenfeld to Pinner, November 30, 1932, CZA, K11/303.

<sup>59</sup> The relevant letters and permits are in CZA, K11/180/1. Cohen himself said in a press interview conducted in the midst of the public uproar following the publication of the Transfer Agreement that he had begun to work on those

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legislation, thus facilitating emigration from Germany during the economic crisis. Such loopholes had attracted the attention of German Zionists both in Germany and in Palestine even prior to the Nazis' advent to power, and they sought ways of widening them further. After 1933 they assumed even greater importance.

From the outset the question of the transfer of capital appeared to be the key point in dealing with the crisis of German Jewry in its entirety. As aforementioned, Felix Rosenblüth, in the first consultation with leaders of the Association of German Immigrants on March 17, proposed negotiations with the German Government concerning the arrangements for emigration and the concomitant question of the transfer of capital.<sup>60</sup> Ruppin also stressed the importance of these matters.<sup>61</sup> The general uncertainty regarding the situation in Germany made the legal aspects of emigration and money transfer even less clear; it was not known whether the new government had changed the law. The Zionist Office in London asked the Colonial Office to clarify this issue via the British Embassy in Berlin. They were informed that the standard restrictions on the transfer of foreign currency still applied, but that Jews wishing to emigrate to Palestine were allowed to take with them up to 1,000 pounds in hard currency, this being the amount required by the Mandate Government for issuing an A-1 immigration certificate (to those qualifying as capitalists).<sup>62</sup>

This arrangement, however, was insufficient from the viewpoint of the German-Jewish would-be immigrants. It totally disregarded

matters already back in 1932 (*Ha'aretz*, October 6, 1933). In *Yalkut Moreshet* (vol. 17, p. 146) I wrote that this statement cannot be corroborated by other sources. In the meantime, however, a document has come into my hands (Landauer to Sam Cohen, March 31, 1932, CZA, K11/180/1) which confirms that already in the beginning of 1932, Cohen did, in fact, operate in Germany with the knowledge and encouragement of heads of that country's Zionist Federation, Landauer and Blumenfeld, as well as with the knowledge of head of the Association of German Immigrants (Felix Rosenblüth).

<sup>60</sup> Senator to Locker, March 19, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

<sup>61</sup> Ruppin's diary, March 20, and April 9, 1933.

<sup>62</sup> Parkinson to Brodetsky, April 8, 1933, and Brodetsky to Arlosoroff, April 13, 1933, CZA, S25/9706. Correspondence on this matter between the Foreign Office in London and the Embassy in Berlin is to be found in the Public Record Office, F.O.371/16721, C-1556.



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those whose property was worth less than 1,000 pounds, and did not solve the problems of those whose assets exceeded that sum. Landauer wrote to Zelig Brodetsky: "...It is by no means our only purpose to provide 1,000 pounds per capita, but [also] to procure an official authorization for the transfer of capital in an amount allowing an honorable livelihood in Eretz-Israel, at least 1,000 pounds."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, ideas were formulated in various quarters regarding possible ways of prevailing upon the German Government to change its currency regulations in order to enable Jews to leave with their assets. Another proposal was put forward by Jacob Robinson; he suggested that pressure should be brought to bear on Germany via the League of Nations, demanding the lifting of restrictions on persons wishing to emigrate to Palestine.<sup>64</sup> In Berlin, Landauer suggested a plan to the German Government to bring large amounts of foreign currency into Germany in order to create a basis for negotiations on easing the emigration of Jews from that country.<sup>65</sup> A third line of thought, advocated mainly by Arlosoroff, favored compensating the German Government for the loss of hard currency resulting from the transfer of the emigrants' capital; this was to take the form of offering greater opportunities for German exports. Implementation of each one of those ideas was contingent upon direct contacts with the German Government. On the other hand, bringing foreign currency into Germany or stepping up its exports was expected to arouse the opposition of the British, of local industry in Palestine and, particularly, of the anti-German boycott movement.<sup>66</sup> Sigmund Hoofien, director of the Anglo-Palestine Corporation Bank, and a declared opponent of the boycott, nevertheless thought that his bank could arrange a deal with the Germans making possible the transfer of Jewish property from

<sup>63</sup> Landauer to Brodetsky, undated, CZA, S25/9706.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson to Motzkin, April 15, 1933, CZA, L9/440.

<sup>65</sup> "...Der deutschen Regierung das Anerbieten zu machen, grosse Devisenbestände nach Deutschland fließen zu lassen und hierdurch eine Grundlage zu Verhandlungen...zu schaffen" (memorandum by Landauer, May 12, 1933, CZA, S25/9707).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the letters of Fleiss to Weizmann and Arlosoroff, June 6, 1933, and Hecker to the Jewish Agency Executive, same date, CZA, S25/9706.

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Germany by means of the export of commodities. In his view, if such a deal could be secured, the boycott should be called off.<sup>67</sup>

German products were, in fact, entering Palestine, since the immigrants brought some of their property with them. Thus, the boycott movement clashed with immigration, and important economic bodies (the Histadrut, the Association of Industrialists, the Farmers' Union and the Chamber of Commerce) were troubled by this phenomenon. At the beginning of July they resolved "to announce publicly the need to enable the German immigrants to settle in the country and to facilitate the transfer of their assets by purchasing the commodities brought by them."<sup>68</sup>

As the Zionist leadership in Palestine and in London was troubled by the question of the proper way to deal with the German crisis and immersed in internal disputes, the leaders of German Zionism, with the help of Sam Cohen, renewed their attempts to start negotiations with the German authorities in the hope of easing restrictions on the transfer of assets. Furnished with the recommendation of the German Consul in Jerusalem, and backed by the lawyer Siegfried Moses (one of the top figures in the Zionist Federation in Germany), Cohen, acting on behalf of the Hanoteah Company (one of the biggest privately owned companies in Palestine), began talks with two German officials: Schmidt-Rilke of the Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, and Hartenstein of the Foreign Currency Department in the Ministry of Economics. As a result of these negotiations, Hanoteah was authorized to use money, deposited in its name in blocked Reichsmark accounts, to pay for the German commodities it would be allowed to export. The license was limited to commodities for use by Hanoteah only, i.e., not for marketing and distribution, and these were listed specifically: building materials, pipes and agricultural machinery.<sup>69</sup> The agreement was limited to one million Reichsmarks, and from

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum by Hoofien on the trade boycott, June 1, 1933, CZA, L51/402.

<sup>68</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of Representatives of National Bodies in Connection with Discussion of the Question of Trade Relations with Germany" (in Hebrew), July 8, 1933, CZA, L51/933.

<sup>69</sup> Reichardt (German Foreign Ministry) to Hanoteah via Moses, May 19, 1933, CZA, L51/506.

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the beginning of July 1933 the German authorities began to refer Jews, wishing to emigrate to Palestine, to Moses, who represented Hanoteah in Germany.<sup>70</sup> Thus, Hanoteah was granted a monopoly on the export of German products to Palestine in exchange for blocked Reichsmarks.

In this affair Cohen was motivated primarily by business considerations, but he was not blind to the political implications of the agreement. He understood both the advantages that it offered him and the restrictions that it imposed. It was clear to him that he could not conduct business operations on a wide scale in Palestine without the support of the Yishuv's national bodies, especially in view of the spreading boycott movement. At the same time he conjectured that the Zionist Executive might be interested in his ventures which could serve its purposes since its own ability to establish contacts with the Germans was seriously curtailed, as it was accountable to the public which in general tended to favor the boycott and certainly objected to any direct ties with the Germans.

The relations between Cohen and the leaders of the Zionist Federation in Germany are of special interest in this context. The latter approved of his contacts with the German authorities and availed themselves of his services, but later the relations, especially with Landauer, cooled, reaching the point of a total rift. Cohen needed their backing so that he could appear before the local authorities as more than an ordinary businessman and in order to obtain the support of the Zionist Executive and the national bodies of the Yishuv for his plans. The German Zionist Federation had need of him when it seemed that it would face difficulties in starting negotiations with the authorities, but, on the other hand, it did not intend to leave the arrangements for property transfer solely in the hands of Hanoteah.<sup>71</sup> It should also be recalled that the latter company was backed by the circles of "Hayamin Haezrahi" (the bourgeois right wing) in the Yishuv, and the monopoly granted to it aroused the opposition of various economic affiliates of the

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, the letters of the Landesfinanzamt in Berlin addressed to Jews seeking to emigrate to Palestine, June 2, 7 and 11, 1933, referring them to Moses in line with the recently signed agreement, CZA, S7/92.

<sup>71</sup> Landauer to Pinner, July 3, 1933, CZA, S7/92.

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Histadrut, like the Yachin Company, as well as of competing bodies in the private sector.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Landauer's efforts in the following months to eliminate Cohen from contacts with the departments of the German Government become intelligible.

Upon procuring the license from the German authorities, Cohen went to London and explained to the Zionist Executive that he was ready to submit his deal to "national scrutiny" and to include in it other economic bodies. He met with Arlosoroff and reached an agreement with him on the relevant issues.<sup>73</sup> He was furnished with a letter by a member of the Executive, Berl Locker, who noted his satisfaction at Cohen's willingness to allow the Yishuv's leadership to examine the agreement in its entirety. Cohen was requested to leave promptly for Palestine in order to speed up the deliberations on joint action with additional economic bodies, and Locker promised to involve the Jewish Agency in these discussions.<sup>74</sup>

After the murder of Arlosoroff on June 16, 1933, Cohen was free to pursue his contacts with the German authorities. In fact, his activities could not be subjected to scrutiny in Palestine since during the short time that had elapsed since the return of Arlosoroff and his murder, he was not able to acquaint the major bodies in the Yishuv with the situation in Germany and London. For all practical purposes the Executive of the Jewish Agency was paralyzed at that time, and most of its members were abroad. Senator, the only person who could evaluate Cohen's activities, was in Germany. Apparently, this was the reason why Cohen preferred to proceed with his negotiations with the Germans (the purpose this time being to extend the agreement beyond the one million marks agreed upon in May) in Palestine and not in Berlin, where Landauer and his associates from the Zionist Federation in Germany (hereafter: ZVFD) could be expected to hamper his efforts. On the basis of Locker's referral and his talks with Arlosoroff in London, Cohen

<sup>72</sup> See the memorandum of the Palestine Trust Company on "The Export and Transfer of Assets of Jewish Immigrants from Germany to Palestine," undated (probably June 1933), CZA, L51/508.

<sup>73</sup> Cohen's notes on his efforts to achieve the Transfer Agreement, October 9, 1933, CZA, ZA/3434.

<sup>74</sup> Locker to Cohen, May 30, 1933, *ibid*.

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could present himself in Palestine as enjoying the backing of the Zionist Executive, whereas in Germany Landauer and Senator could contradict him and undermine his position in the eyes of the authorities.

Thus the next stage in the negotiations between Cohen and the German Ministry of Economics was conducted via Consul Wolf and the German Foreign Office. In the correspondence between the Consul and his superiors in Berlin, Wolf put forth as the main argument in favor of the deal proposed by Cohen, the chance of disrupting the organization of the anti-German boycott not only in Palestine, the importance of which he tried to inflate, but also in neighboring countries like Egypt and Cyprus. Cohen apparently encouraged Wolf to resort to this argument.<sup>75</sup> Feeling that sufficient progress had been made by means of correspondence, Cohen left again for Berlin in order to complete the negotiations there. This time he also planned to handle the transfer of Zionist funds in Germany, having been so empowered by the central bureau of the Jewish National Fund. Equipped with this letter, it was easier for him to present himself in Berlin as acting on behalf of the national bodies of the Yishuv.<sup>76</sup>

Prior to Cohen's departure an attempt was made to coordinate the positions of the major economic bodies in Palestine concerning negotiations with the Germans, after it became apparent that Hanoteah faced competition both in regard to deals with the Germans and in the distribution of German products in the country.<sup>77</sup> On the initiative of the Association of German Immigrants, representatives of those bodies met, with Ruppin acting as chairman, and listened to Cohen's report on his negotiations. Ruppin took upon himself the task of finalizing an agreement between Hanoteah, Yachin, and Dr. Wilhelm Brin. Felix

<sup>75</sup> Gelber, *Yalkut Moreshet*, vol. 18, pp. 64-67.

<sup>76</sup> Ussishkin to the Jewish National Fund in Berlin, June 25, 1933, CZA, K11/180/1.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, A. Shenkar (president of the Federation of Industrialists) to the Palestine Trust Company, July 11, 1933, CZA, L57/71 (most probably, this was a reply to the memorandum mentioned in note 72 above), and Pinner to Landauer, July 22, 1933, CZA, S7/26.

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Rosenblüth drew up a draft of an understanding in which the two companies declared their intention to reach an agreement and charged their representatives in Germany, Levi Shkolnik (Eshkol) on behalf of Yachin and Moshe Machnes on behalf of Hanoteah, with working out the details.<sup>78</sup> In the meantime, Landauer in Germany, being concerned about the local Zionist Federation's lack of involvement in the agreement, tried to arrange that both the Ministry of Economics and Machnes would repeal the monopoly granted to Hanoteah in the May agreement. He also sought to ensure the participation of the Zionist Organization in the deal.<sup>79</sup> Landauer asked Machnes to inform the Ministry that Hanoteah would not seek a monopoly and that the money obtained by the export of German products would be kept for the free use of the immigrants.<sup>80</sup> Machnes consented, but it appears that he did not submit his request to the Ministry prior to Cohen's return to Berlin in the beginning of July 1933.

Following Cohen's arrival a meeting was held in the Ministry of Economics on July 13. The German side was represented by officials of economic ministries, the Foreign Office and the Reichsbank, and the Jewish side by Cohen, Landauer and Senator.<sup>81</sup> A second agreement was reached, which, like the previous one, became known as the "Sam Cohen agreement."<sup>82</sup>

Apart from the fact that the German letter of authorization was sent to Cohen, the second agreement met most of the demands presented by the German Zionist Federation in the July 13 meeting, including recognition of the Anglo-Palestine Corporation (APC) Bank as the trustee representing the interests of immigrants wishing to transfer their property. Apparently, the German officials

<sup>78</sup> The aforementioned notes by Cohen (see note 73 above). They are further corroborated by the report submitted by Moshe Beilinson upon his return from Germany, minutes of the meeting of the Histadrut Actions Committee, July 14, 1933, p. 2, Histadrut Archives (hereafter — HiA).

<sup>79</sup> Landauer to M. Yakobsohn, June 9, 1933, CZA, S7/92.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the conversation between Landauer, Dr. E. Krammer, Machnes and Julius Berger (enclosed with Landauer's letter to Pinner, July 3, 1933), *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Landauer to Hoofien, July 19, 1933, CZA, S25/9706.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from the German Ministry of Economics to Sam Cohen, July 18, 1933, CZA, ZA/3434.

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who took part in the negotiations were not aware of the internal competition and political problems besetting the Jewish side. They certainly were hard pressed to recognize differences between Cohen and Landauer while the former was represented in Germany by Siegfried Moses, Landauer's colleague in the German Zionist leadership; according to the reports of the German Consul in Jerusalem, Cohen enjoyed the trust and the backing of leaders of the Yishuv. Landauer, nevertheless, was determined to end Cohen's involvement in this issue. He reported to Zigmund Hoofien, Director General of the APC, about the developments in Berlin and asked him to speed up the establishment of the trust company in Palestine which would be presented to the Germans as the practical alternative to Hanoteah.<sup>83</sup> In Germany he rallied the support of Jewish businessmen like the banker Herman Elern.<sup>84</sup> Hoofien lent his assistance in gaining the backing of the most influential figure among German Jewry, Max Warburg, who agreed to incorporate his bank into the trust company to be established in Germany, provided Hanoteah and other mediators would be excluded from it.<sup>85</sup> The readiness of Warburg's bank to join the trust company was of great significance, both in terms of lending the latter a solid image in the eyes of its prospective clientele and in terms of the impact on the German authorities.

On July 26 Hoofien left for Köln to meet with Landauer. The latter informed him of the ploys devised by Cohen to present himself as a person authorized to conduct negotiations on behalf of the national bodies of the Yishuv. Landauer demanded that Cohen be excluded completely from all future negotiations. Hoofien, who understood the complexity and the sensitivity of the whole affair, was more cautious. On the one hand, he ordered the bank in Palestine to bring pressure to bear on the German Consul to stop giving his total and exclusive support to Cohen and simultaneously to expedite the creation of the trust company. On the other hand, he refused to attenuate his relations with Cohen out of concern that

<sup>83</sup> Letters from Landauer to Hoofien, July 19 and 21, 1933, CZA, S25/9706.

<sup>84</sup> Letters from Elern to Schmidt-Rilke, July 21, and 27, 1933, CZA, L57/71.

<sup>85</sup> Max Warburg to Hoofien, July 27, 1933, CZA, L51/2178.

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this would harm the prospects of negotiations in Germany, and he was ready to include Hanoteah in the final agreement.<sup>86</sup>

Hoofien's next task was to persuade Hanoteah to give up the monopoly it had obtained from the Germans. Cohen and Machnes came under heavy pressure and finally yielded. In view of opposition in Palestine to the monopoly granted by the Germans and the negative attitude of APC toward them, they concluded that the prospects for the implementation of the July 18 agreement were slim. Therefore they preferred a partnership in an assured business venture. Hoofien promised Cohen a percentage of the business, i.e., a guaranteed quota to Hanoteah, but insisted on keeping this commitment secret.<sup>87</sup> It appears that Machnes called the shots in the decision taken by Hanoteah, since Cohen's conduct in the following months indicates that he refused to accept his exclusion from the venture and from time to time engaged in new initiatives in his contacts with the German authorities.<sup>88</sup>

Following the Hanoteah concession, Hoofien informed the German Ministry of Economics via Landauer that the APC Bank was not prepared to accept the trusteeship without being consulted in the process of negotiations with Hanoteah. His arguments were based on the inability and unsuitability of that company to fulfill its part in the agreement. He also noted that its representatives had called on him and announced their willingness to comply with his demands.<sup>89</sup> As a result of this communication, Landauer was summoned to an additional meeting in the Ministry of Economics on August 4, at which he and Ruppin were informed that the Germans were prepared either to introduce changes in the agreement with Hanoteah or to reach a new accord with whomever would be appointed for this purpose by the authorized Jewish bodies. At the same time they made it clear that they were not

<sup>86</sup> Hoofien to Margulies, July 31, 1933, CZA, L51/508.

<sup>87</sup> Hoofien (from Prague) to Margulies, August 19, 1933, CZA, L57/107.

<sup>88</sup> See notes by Hoofien on the course of negotiations, CZA, A95/19. On Cohen's activities in Germany after the signing of the Transfer Agreement, see the correspondence between Marcus and M. Rosenblüth, CZA, L13/132, and letters from Landauer to Moses, November 10, 1933, CZA, ZA/17057, and to Locker, December 24, 1933, CZA, S7/84.

<sup>89</sup> Hoofien to Landauer, July 28, 1933, CZA, L57/71.



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prepared to be informed about the position of the Jewish bodies by a third party, and demanded the personal participation of Hoofien in the negotiations.<sup>90</sup> Hoofien, who in the meantime had reached an agreement with Warburg regarding the establishment of the aforementioned trust company in Germany, was still concerned about Cohen's established connections with the German officials and was not yet sure of success. In his view, in order to ensure a successful outcome, a united front against Hanoteah was needed in Palestine, which would try to prevail on Wolf and explain to him that the agreement could be implemented only through the APC Bank.<sup>91</sup>

In fact, such a front had already been established in Palestine with the assistance of Hoofien's aide, Heinrich Margulies. Wolf yielded to the pressures which were brought to bear on him in Palestine, and informed the German Foreign Ministry that because of the opposition to the agreement with Cohen, a commission for the arrangement of trade relations with Germany had been set up in Palestine. This commission, which was headed by the APC Bank and included both national and important economic bodies of the Yishuv, took upon itself the handling of the transfer plans. A delegation appointed by it paid a visit to the German Consul and informed him that Hoofien had been granted unlimited authorization to conduct negotiations and that the participation of Hanoteah would be welcomed. Wolf explained that in view of the developments there was a chance to reach an agreement only on this broad basis; he intended that Cohen would be advised to join it.<sup>92</sup> The Germans issued invitations to another meeting which took place on August 7. During these talks, Hartenstein conferred with a Jewish delegation which included Landauer and Moses representing the ZVFD, Cohen and Machnes on behalf of Hanoteah, Hoofien and Ruppin; the latter, although not then a member of the Zionist Executive, nevertheless commanded a special position and authority within the Zionist movement. The

<sup>90</sup> Landauer to Hoofien, August 4, 1933, CZA, L51/508.

<sup>91</sup> Hoofien to Margulies, August 5, 1933, *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Wolf to the German Foreign Ministry, August 6, 1933, copy in CZA, L51/508, and Margulies to Hoofien, August 7, 1933, CZA, L57/71.

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representatives of Hanoteah informed the participants about their decision to withdraw from the July 18 agreement, and all the assembled agreed that the APC Bank would take over the role of the company in the agreement.<sup>93</sup> Hoofien announced that the APC Bank was undertaking the establishment of a trust company which would carry out the transfer of capital agreed upon. In the wake of this meeting, Hoofien and Hartenstein drafted a letter to be sent from the Ministry of Economics to the manager of the APC Bank, in which the new agreement was adapted to the change issuing from the entry of the Bank into the picture. In the meantime, Hoofien concluded his negotiations with the big Jewish banks in Germany — Warburg and Wassermann — and on August 17 signed an agreement with them concerning the setting up of a trust company in Germany.<sup>94</sup> He asked the Germans to introduce a number of changes and amendments in the technical details of the new agreement. The amendments were accepted and incorporated in an internal circular of the Ministry of Economics, which was distributed to the offices dealing with the Jewish public. The letters exchanged between Hoofien and the Ministry in August constitute the agreement known as the “Transfer Agreement”; they served as the basis for all discussions between the two parties in the following years and for all the activities conducted as part of the Transfer until 1939.<sup>95</sup>

The Zionist Executive played only a passive role in the negotiations which led to this agreement. After the murder of Arlosoroff, Senator became the central figure in the Executive in all activities relating to German Jews. In the summer of 1933 he stayed in Berlin as part of his involvement in the Central Council for Aid

<sup>93</sup> Notes by Hoofien, CZA, A95/19.

<sup>94</sup> Copy of the contract in CZA, L51/2171. See also Landauer to the Association of German Immigrants, August 22, 1933, and Hoofien to Margulies, August 23, 1933, CZA, L57/107.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Economics to Hoofien, August 10, 1933, CZA, S25/9706; Hoofien to the Ministry of Economics, August 22, 1933, and the reply of August 25, 1933 as well as the Ministry's circular dated August 28, 1933 (all these documents are in CZA, S7/84). On the August 7 meeting and the talks with Warburg and Wassermann, see also Hoofien to Warburg, August 8, 1933, CZA, L57/71, and Landauer to the Association of German Immigrants, August 8, 1933, CZA, L57/107.

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and Construction and also took part in the dealings between ZVFD and the local authorities, including those which concerned the Transfer Agreement. Consequently, he was aware of the various proposals put forward at those meetings. However, like Arlosoroff, he took a much wider view of the whole issue and was not concerned only with the three million Reichsmarks of the Transfer Agreement. While Cohen and Landauer were discussing a limited agreement, Senator tried to rally support for a comprehensive plan for the liquidation of Jewish assets in Germany, based on the scheme outlined by Arlosoroff during his visit in May 1933. He hoped that it would be possible to enter into negotiations with the German authorities about its implementation.<sup>96</sup> In contrast to Senator, Hoofien was doubtful, even pessimistic, about the prospects of carrying out a comprehensive liquidation plan. Following his visit to Germany in late June 1933, he wrote a gloomy report about the situation there, which focused on the issue of the transfer of Jewish assets. In his view, this was the main question troubling the German Jews, and he analyzed it as part of the discussion of the overall economic situation in Germany. He examined all the ideas which had been hitherto advanced to solve it and dismissed each one of them either on the grounds of their impracticability from the standpoint of the German authorities, or because of the impossibility of their implementation due to the world economic situation and the spread of the anti-German boycott movement. His only consolation was that things were taking their natural course, and although there was no chance of putting into effect a comprehensive and organized plan, individuals were finding their own ways, legal and illegal, to transfer their assets.<sup>97</sup>

Despite its limited role in the achievement of the Transfer Agreement, the Zionist leadership became the target of criticism after it was published. "This whole business of a goods agreement," reported Eliezer Kaplan upon his return to Palestine from the Prague Congress, "became a political issue...and if one is to believe

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum by Senator on the transfer of Jewish assets from Germany, July 24, 1933, CZA, A173/33.

<sup>97</sup> The report by Hoofien on his visit to Berlin on June 20-24, dated July 3, 1933, CZA, L51/520.

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press reports, there is a public uproar over it. We are being accused of wrecking the boycott....” Landauer apologized: “We did not imagine that it would arouse opposition ... we did not commit ourselves to the import of German products to Eretz-Israel; we merely sought a way to pay for the merchandise with the money of the immigrants....”<sup>98</sup> The Histadrut endorsed the agreement and criticized the Zionist Executive for its decision to withdraw from it. However, in view of the angry reaction to the news about the Transfer Agreement at the 18th Zionist Congress, at the second World Jewish Conference and in the Jewish public in general, the Zionist leadership was apparently unable to conduct negotiations on a more comprehensive agreement with the Germans.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, the Zionist leadership denied its responsibility for the agreement and presented it as the initiative of the Zionist Federation in Germany, with the Zionist bank joining in to provide technical services only. During the following two years the Transfer Agreement was something of a stepchild in the Zionist movement, and only at the next Zionist Congress in Lucerne in the summer of 1935 was it officially adopted by the Executive and placed openly under its control.

### The Yishuv's Role in the Arrangements for Assistance to the German Jews

The hopes entertained by Arlosoroff, Senator, Ruppin and others that the absorption of German Jews in Palestine could be financed mainly by German-Jewish capital that would be brought into the country by immigrants of independent means were not realized. The Transfer Agreement was very limited in scope and a far cry from the plans for the complete liquidation of Jewish assets in Germany. Its great significance lay in the stimulus it provided to the immigration of “capitalists,” and the impetus it gave to the economic

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Histadrut Actions Committee, September 15, 1933, pp. 1-8, HiA.

<sup>99</sup> On the reactions to the agreement, see Gelber, “Zionist Policy and the Transfer Agreement,” in: *Yalkut Moreshet*, vol. 17, pp. 125-137.

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development of the Yishuv. The funds which thus became available were, however, insufficient to finance the transport, absorption and settlement of a large number of immigrants. The tragic situation of the German Jews and the Zionist solution to it in the form of large-scale immigration to and absorption in Palestine demanded large-scale fund-raising throughout the Jewish world. The worldwide economic crisis did not make the conduct of such campaigns any easier. Most of the Jewish millionaires who were willing to help the German Jews in their plight were not Zionists, and it was not at all certain that Palestine would be awarded a significant portion of the funds raised in Western countries. On the contrary, from the outset the Zionist leaders feared that a favorable response to the predicament of German Jewry would be at the expense of contribution to the Zionist enterprise, if linkage with Palestine was not ensured in advance.

The leadership was faced with several options, one of which was the launching of an independent Zionist fund-raising campaign to finance the absorption of German immigrants in Palestine. At this point the following question arose: should it be a special campaign in connection with the unique situation which had emerged in early 1933, or a venture based on the already existing enterprises — the Jewish Foundation Fund (Keren Hayesod) and the Jewish National Fund? The second option was to join a general Jewish fund-raising drive, provided there would be a prior agreement among the partners regarding Palestine's share of the capital raised. In both cases the official anti-Weizmann Zionist leadership was faced with the decision to include Weizmann in the venture. The Zionist movement had no other fund-raiser of Weizmann's caliber for an independent campaign, and there was no substitute for him as far as negotiations with the Jewish millionaires from Britain and the U.S. were concerned, especially since those figures wielded the principal influence in the all-Jewish financial venture.

Those questions had been on the agenda ever since the first discussions held in London with the delegation of German Jewry which had arrived there in late March 1933. Already at that time finances had to be found to assist the refugees flooding the countries bordering Germany, and it was felt necessary to assure that the

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money would not be spent only on providing immediate relief, but that a portion would be allocated for their long-term and “constructive” absorption in Palestine according to the Zionist conception. One week after his arrival in London, Martin Rosenblüth wrote to Franz Kahn that “the important question which has arisen lately and which will become even more important in the future is that of financial assistance.” He had in mind aid to refugees stranded in ports, help in obtaining work permits and extensions of stay, and direct material assistance to refugees without property and professions. There was a need to establish connections with aid committees set up spontaneously in various places, to concentrate their efforts and to assist them financially. It was also necessary to link all those undertakings with the large aid enterprise in Palestine, which sought to help not only the refugees who came in the initial immigration wave in early 1933, but also the thousands expected to arrive in the future. Bernard Kahn, representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (A.J.D.C) in Europe, arrived in London to examine these issues and take part in discussions.<sup>100</sup> Following the first conversations with him, Martin Rosenblüth wrote to Arlosoroff: “People here believe that the slogan ‘German Jews to Palestine’ can be very appealing also from the financial viewpoint.” Kahn held the view that a mixed fund should be established for immediate assistance to refugees in their present places of residence and their long-term absorption in Palestine. The German Zionists then in London supported this approach, arguing that a Zionist fund-raising campaign on behalf of Palestine would meet with poorer response. At this stage, however, members of the Zionist Executive in London — Sokolow, Brodetsky and Locker — favored a separate Zionist venture.<sup>101</sup> There was concern that the local aid committees would go ahead with their planned general fund-raising campaign which would ignore the special role of Palestine. Thus a need emerged either for speedy preparation of a separate fund-raising drive by the Zionist

<sup>100</sup> M. Rosenblüth to F. Kahn, April 5, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive, April 6, 1933, CZA, Z4/302/21, and Locker to Arlosoroff, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

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movement, or for a quick understanding with non-Zionist Jewish organizations regarding a joint venture.<sup>102</sup>

At about the same time an alternative proposal was advanced for the way to raise funds for the absorption of German Jews in Palestine. In contrast to the approach focusing on fund-raising and the transfer of the money to the national bodies of the Yishuv, Pinchas Rutenberg put forward a plan providing for the establishment of a stock company for the settlement of German Jews in Palestine, which would operate on an economic basis and bring in profits. The capital fund, amounting to some ten million pounds, would be raised by a group of Jewish millionaires in the U.S. and Britain. Rutenberg drew the attention of Lord Reading and the English Rothschilds to the plan, and Lord Nathan was charged with working out the details. In order to placate the Jewish Agency and ensure its cooperation, Rutenberg suggested to Sokolow that it would be "associated," as he put it, with the stock company to be created, but for the time being it would refrain from raising funds on its own.<sup>103</sup> Rutenberg's proposal did not arouse great enthusiasm in the Zionist Executive, and it was agreed that the Zionist drive should not be postponed until its details were worked out and a clearer picture was obtained. English Zionists, like Israel Zieff and Harry Sacher, rejected Rutenberg's plan outright and demanded the launching of a separate Zionist campaign without waiting for possible partners.<sup>104</sup> In fact, this was a case of the resurfacing of an old internal Zionist debate, like that between Weizmann and Lewis Brandeis in the early 1920s concerning the right way of building up the Jewish National Home: whether it should be conducted by means of national capital controlled, directed and supervised by the (political) bodies of the Zionist movement, or by private capital directed by economic forces and considerations. Sokolow and his colleagues in the Executive were not willing to be contented with a specious association with the stock company proposed by Rutenberg, and demanded that the Jewish Agency exercise control

<sup>102</sup> "Brother of Felix" (M. Rosenblüth) to Arlosoroff, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

<sup>103</sup> Locker to Arlosoroff, April 8, 1933, *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Locker's notes on his talks with Zieff and Sacher, April 10, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

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over it.<sup>105</sup> In the meantime they continued their preparations for the publication of a manifesto to the Jewish people signalling the opening of the separate Zionist fund-raising drive, and they asked their colleagues in the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to endorse this project.<sup>106</sup>

In Jerusalem, where preparatory plans to cope with the German crisis were being worked out in consultation with veteran immigrants from Germany and with Weizmann, the mood was different. With the exception of his rivals in the Agency Executive, everyone agreed that Weizmann should lead the fund-raising venture. Senator wrote to Kahn that such an enterprise with Weizmann at its head could raise millions, since American and British Jews of German origin were affluent enough to contribute such sums on behalf of their brethren even in times of economic distress. He maintained that such a campaign should embrace the whole of world Jewry: the American and British Jews would concentrate on assisting their coreligionists in Germany itself and the refugees in the neighboring countries, whereas the Zionists would focus on the problems relating to immigration to Palestine.<sup>107</sup> Pinner, speaking on behalf of the Association of German Immigrants, suggested that the Agency Executive should first launch a fund-raising drive in Palestine and then join the worldwide venture.<sup>108</sup>

His proposal led to a bitter debate among members of the Executive, which brought to light the tangle of difficulties surrounding the relations between the Zionist Organization and other Jewish bodies, the position of Weizmann in the Zionist movement, the impact of the mobilization of funds on behalf of the German Jews on Zionist funds, and relations between the Diaspora and Palestine in the context of assistance activities and the funds to be allocated for them. Arlosoroff and Senator advocated active Zionist participation in the worldwide aid venture. They even

<sup>105</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive, April 8, 1933, CZA, Z4/302/21.

<sup>106</sup> The Zionist Office in London to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, April 7, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>107</sup> Senator to Kahn, April 4, 1933, CZA, S49/381.

<sup>108</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 9, 1933, p.5, CZA.



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demanded that initiative be taken by announcing such a venture and placing Weizmann at its head. In their view there was no need to be concerned about the fate of the funds or the possibility that the main aid effort would not be directed to Palestine. Heschel Farbstein, on the other hand, was against the Agency taking part in the global campaign and Weizmann leading it. Emmanuel Neumann favored the participation of the Agency, but opposed the role of Weizmann, whereas Hexter doubted the wisdom of proposing Palestine as the solution to the problem of German Jewry, since:

...The question of Germany cannot be solved in Palestine. Even with ten million at our disposal we won't solve it. It should be solved in Germany itself, in the neighboring countries, perhaps, to a small extent by opening [the gates to immigration] of Canada and the U.S. The Agency and the Zionist Organization cannot act in those directions. I do not, therefore, believe that this venture will succeed with the help of the Zionist Executive and the Agency. Money will not be awarded to the Agency and similar institutions, but to important underwriters who will not necessarily seek a solution in Palestine.

In Hexter's opinion, "we should seek a place in the general venture. This means that the Agency, by means of a special fund, would handle the work in Palestine and in the neighboring countries."<sup>109</sup> The discussion was concluded by a resolution to support the launching of an all-Jewish fund-raising campaign to provide aid to German Jews. The Agency, along with other Jewish organizations, would take part, provided a prior agreement would be reached ensuring that a suitable proportion of the funds raised in this way would be earmarked for the rehabilitation of German immigrants in Palestine; this drive would be conducted under the Agency's supervision. It was also decided that Weizmann should be asked to take steps toward convening an international Jewish conference in London in early May 1933 in order to discuss the political and financial questions connected with the situation of German Jewry.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10, and the telegram from The Jewish Agency to Brodetsky in London, April 11, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

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The discussion continued during the next meeting of the Agency on April 19. Neumann and Farbstein suggested the separation of political action on behalf of German Jews, which would be headed by Weizmann, from the fund-raising campaign, which would be conducted by the Zionist Executive without Weizmann's participation. Their proposal was rejected by a majority vote. An alternative proposal, to ask Weizmann officially to lead the fund-raising campaign, was accepted.<sup>111</sup>

The opposition to Weizmann came mainly from the Zionist Executive in London, and heavy pressure was brought to bear on Sokolow and his colleagues to change their position. In addition to Arlosoroff and Senator, leaders of the German-Jewish community in Palestine — Arthur Hantke, Felix Rosenblüth and Arthur Landsberg — and also the National Council sent telegrams to London demanding that Sokolow and his colleagues withdraw their objection to Weizmann's candidacy and find a way to include Rutenberg.<sup>112</sup>

On April 23 Rutenberg took part in the Agency Executive session and submitted his plan for a settlement company. He made a brief report on his contacts in London with Lionel Rothschild, Herbert Samuel, Otto Schiff and others, on discussions with Weizmann ("There is no specific agreement with him. There is goodwill on both sides to work jointly.") and on a conversation on this subject with the British Colonial Secretary. On their part, the members of the Executive were mainly interested to learn how the Agency could be guaranteed control over the stock company and to what extent the latter would engage in commercially unprofitable ventures, like financing health and education services for the immigrants. Rutenberg replied as follows:

...If I wanted a commercial company, there was no need for me to come here. The enterprise has both moral and material aspects. Lionel Rothschild wouldn't have become involved in a venture of

<sup>111</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 19, 1933, CZA, and the telegram from the Agency to the Zionist Office in London, April 20, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>112</sup> Telegrams from the National Council and the Association of German Immigrants to the Zionist Executive in London, April 19 and 20, 1933, *ibid.*

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this kind were it not for the special situation.... I am and was aware that there are expenditures for education, immigration, etc., and the Agency cannot provide for all this. Why should you oppose Lionel Rothschild's contribution of money for this purpose also?... Here it turns out that you all unanimously oppose me: I am the representative of the capital and you are the public opinion. My assumption is that the Agency will not be able to raise sufficient funds. What I am saying is this: this instrument of the poorer segment of the Jewish people can be of use if it works jointly with the instrument of the wealthy. Rothschild the secretary will raise more money than Senator the secretary....

In the end Arlosoroff's proposal gained approval. "The Executive accepts in principle Mr. Rutenberg's proposal on the condition that the national bodies will control half of the board and 50% of the proposed company and that the worldwide fund-raising campaign will not suffer delay."<sup>113</sup> There was a great deal of confusion in the Zionist Executive in London, which grew even worse due to the difficulties besetting telegraphic communications with Jerusalem. On the one hand, they sought to expedite the campaign and asked Jerusalem to dispatch urgently a representative of the Jewish National Fund to organize it. Simultaneously, they gave their consent to the holding of the general Jewish conference and asked Jerusalem to prepare detailed plans for the absorption of the immigrants, which were to be submitted to that conference. At the same time news reached London that Stephen Wise intended to convene in London a conference of Jewish organizations which, in addition to his organization — the AJC — would include the American Jewish Committee, B'nai Brith, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the British Board of Deputies, and the World Zionist Organization.<sup>114</sup>

In London the impression was gained that the Zionist Organization was falling behind those other Jewish organizations in providing assistance to German Jews; the latter had already taken various steps aimed at aiding the refugees and raising funds for that

<sup>113</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Agency Executive in London, April 23, 1933, CZA.

<sup>114</sup> The Zionist Office in London to the Agency in Jerusalem, April 15, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

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purpose. Leo Motzkin, who had arrived in London from Paris, reported about their activities. He demanded that Zionist fund-raising activities on behalf of German Jews be speeded up, and maintained that the drafting of a manifesto was less important than its publication.<sup>115</sup> However, the Palestinian demand to place Weizmann at the head of the campaign created a new dilemma in London. Sokolow maintained that it was disrespectful to him, and only under the pressure of telegrams from Palestine did he agree to a compromise solution: there would be two commissions handling the situation in Germany: the political commission headed by himself and the worldwide fund-raising commission directed by Weizmann. His colleagues in the Executive, Brodetsky and Locker, also gave their consent, and Sokolow immediately asked Weizmann to head the fund-raising venture.<sup>116</sup> Locker explained to Arlosoroff that this compromise was the most that could be achieved and asked him to prevail on Weizmann to accept it.<sup>117</sup> Now the heat was on Weizmann. He had left Palestine before receiving Sokolow's invitation and, on April 27, without waiting for his answer, the Zionist Executive published its manifesto "To Jews throughout the Diaspora," which constituted its first public reaction to the situation in Germany. The manifesto did not call for a special fund-raising campaign on behalf of German Jewry but intimated that the Agency did, in fact, plan to commence it.<sup>118</sup>

The expectations relating to the convening of a general conference of Jewish organizations in the beginning of May for the purpose of organizing and coordinating a joint response to the German crisis proved to be premature. Fundamental differences of opinion regarding the ways of response, the stance to be taken toward the boycott, the desired solutions and the division of efforts

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the Zionist Executive in London, April 16, 1933, CZA, Z4/302/21. On his return from Germany to London, Martin Rosenblüth made a stopover in Paris and attended talks held by Kahn with representatives of Jewish organizations, like the HICEM (Rosenblüth to Senator, April 21, 1933, CZA, S49/377).

<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the Zionist Executive in London, April 19-22, 1933, CZA, Z4/302/21; Sokolow to Weizmann, April 21, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>117</sup> Locker to Arlosoroff, April 4, 1933, CZA, S25/794.

<sup>118</sup> Pamphlet in *Haolam*, April 27, 1933.

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between offering assistance in Germany itself, emigration in general and to Palestine in particular, remained and were even intensified. As long as those issues were not settled, there was no point in holding such a conference which would only reveal the internal dissension in the Jewish public and its powerlessness. In the meantime separate, countrywide, and local organizational initiatives were springing up. In late April 1933 Jewish notables in Britain set up a commission presided over by Lionel Rothschild, which took upon itself fund-raising activities among their British compatriots on behalf of the German Jews. A few weeks later this commission became "The Central British Fund on Behalf of German Jews" and it was joined by Zionist leaders — Weizmann and Sokolow — and by Chief Rabbi Hertz.<sup>119</sup> It thus became necessary for the Zionist leadership to take stand with regard to such initiatives. Weizmann and Simon Marx were invited to join the presidency of the Central Fund, while the Zionist Executive took the initial steps toward starting its own special fund-raising drive. The Executive of the expanded Agency was still divided on this question and as a result the decision was delayed time and again. Hexter and Kahn were totally opposed to the idea of a separate fund-raising drive, whereas Marx and Leonard Stein rejected even the manifesto published by the Zionist Executive, maintaining it could diminish Weizmann's prospects of leading the all-Jewish venture. They held that the efforts should be focused on securing Palestine's portion in such a general fund, which would be larger than the sum that the Zionist movement could raise on its own.<sup>120</sup>

The Zionist Federation of Britain decided to join in the fund-raising drive which was about to be announced by the Central British Fund, and to take steps to assure that fifty percent of the money raised would be earmarked for the absorption of German Jews in Palestine. A protracted debate ensued in the Zionist Executive on the question of joining this initiative. There was a feeling that the Zionist leadership had missed the deadline to issue its own separate call to the Jewish people and thus to keep ahead of

<sup>119</sup> Pamphlet of the Central British Fund, *Haolam*, April 25, 1933.

<sup>120</sup> M. Rosenblüth to Landauer, April 26, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

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other initiatives. Arlosoroff, who arrived in London on his way to Germany, participated in the debate; he maintained that the Zionist leadership should not become involved in the Jewish British venture since its job was to address the world on behalf of the Palestinian cause.<sup>121</sup> During his sojourn in Germany, however, the British Zionists gained the upper hand in the Executive in London. The Executive joined the proclamation of the Central British Fund and, at the same time, issued a separate call to "Jews everywhere in the world" to set up a rescue fund for the settlement of German Jews in Palestine. Several friends of the Zionist movement — Lord Cecil, Herbert Samuel and Jan Smuts — endorsed this latter proclamation.<sup>122</sup> This was an encouraging precedent for the possibility of cooperation between Zionists and non-Zionists in rallying to the aid of German Jews.<sup>123</sup>

Arlosoroff returned from Germany convinced of the urgent need for an all-Jewish conference. He urged the Executive to take steps toward the convening of such a conference in late June and to invite all the Jewish organizations interested in the linkage between the question of German Jewry and Palestine. His colleagues in the Executive were more skeptical and reached the conclusion that it would be impractical to hold such a conference. The only Zionist figure whose prestige could ensure a favorable response to the invitation was Weizmann who, at this stage, however, preferred to leave for the U.S. to start fund-raising there.<sup>124</sup>

In the meantime the Agency hastened to draw up plans for the absorption and settlement of immigrants from Germany, so that they could be presented to the Central British Fund in order to secure a portion of its money for Palestine and for Zionist activity in Germany itself. Martin Rosenblüth, who was in charge of the operations in London, urged his colleagues in Berlin and Jerusalem to hurry, since no other body had submitted an operational

<sup>121</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive, May 5, 1933 (morning session), CZA, Z4/302/21.

<sup>122</sup> Pamphlet in *Haolam*, April 27, 1933.

<sup>123</sup> Warburg to Marx, June 2, 1933, CZA, L51/520.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London, June 1, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

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blueprint for action to the Executive of the Central Fund. Consequently, if the Agency's plans were to be submitted soon, they could be guaranteed the major portion of funds mobilized in Britain.<sup>125</sup>

On June 12 a tentative proposal was sent from Jerusalem to London, which focused on occupational training, agricultural settlement, assistance to industrial undertakings, and aid to scientists and intellectuals who would immigrate to Palestine. The total budget was 300,000 pounds.<sup>126</sup> Meanwhile the Central Commission for Assistance and Rehabilitation of German Jews submitted its own plan to the Central Fund; Senator played a major role in its preparation. Although Palestine figured prominently in this plan, its importance was secondary to the scope of intended activities in Germany itself, which included material assistance, providing professional training and the encouragement of emigration.<sup>127</sup> The Agency's plan was delayed in London because of the need to work out various details and to examine the political and economic assumptions underlying it.<sup>128</sup> The Agency's representatives in London still hesitated to submit long-term plans, the finances for which were to come from future money-raising drives. Hoofien, who arrived in London to participate in internal discussions and negotiations with economic bodies, urged his colleagues to overcome their misgivings and to submit such plans.<sup>129</sup> The Central Fund received not only comprehensive plans but also many requests from private bodies in Palestine for support of specific ventures which could help in the absorption of immigrants from Germany.<sup>130</sup> In the Executive of the Central Fund and its

<sup>125</sup> M. Rosenblüth to Landauer, June 7, 1933, CZA, L13/138.

<sup>126</sup> A. Hantke to the Jewish Agency in London, June 12, 1933, CZA, S7/3. According to a comment by Hantke in the margin of the copy he sent to Arlosoroff (CZA, S25/9809), the letter was sent, after all, to Leo Hermann and not to the Agency.

<sup>127</sup> The Central Committee Program, July 21, 1933, CZA, S7/24.

<sup>128</sup> Brodetsky to Leo Hermann, June 26, 1933, CZA, S25/9705.

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum by Hoofien on plans to settle German Jews in Palestine, undated, CZA, L51/402.

<sup>130</sup> The referrals by WIZO, the Ben-Shemen youth village, Children's Village near Afula and others in the months May-July, 1933, are to be found in CZA, L51/520.

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Allocations Commission, those requests became entangled in internal disputes between Zionists and non-Zionists. Upon his return from the U.S. Weizmann resigned in protest against the position adopted by the Commission.<sup>131</sup> His step bore fruit and in early August the Central Fund, which had already raised substantial sums of money, began to provide funds to the Agency for financing occupational and agricultural training programs, housing and absorption. The first allocation totaled 25,000 pounds, and the Agency was requested to monitor the expenditures and to report on them back to the Fund.<sup>132</sup>

With the help of the initial allocations it was possible to go ahead with several absorption and building undertakings initiated in Palestine. In the meantime the organizational work within the Zionist movement in preparation for the absorption of the anticipated immigration from Germany proceeded apace following the presentation and endorsement of Ruppin's absorption plan at the 18th Congress in Prague, and the establishment of the German Department of the Jewish Agency and the Central Office for Settlement of German Jews in London. On the other hand, no progress was made during this period in creating a framework and devising a plan for cooperation with other Jewish organizations, and in the coordination of the fund-raising undertakings which had come into existence in various countries.

Since Weizmann's position as director of the venture on behalf of German Jewry had been secured at the Congress, he plunged vigorously into the organizational work. After the basic guidelines had been agreed upon in talks held at his vacation residence in Merano after the Congress, Weizmann began to concentrate the resources which had accumulated in his London office.<sup>133</sup> At this

<sup>131</sup> His letter to Rutenberg, in *Weizmann Letters* (August 3, 1933,) vol. XVI, p. 15, and his letter to D'Avigdor-Goldsmith, August 14, 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 25-28.

<sup>132</sup> M. Stephany (The Central British Fund) to the Jewish Agency, August 4, 1933, CZA, S7/18. One month later the Fund allocated an additional 30,000 pounds mainly for the housing of immigrants from Germany (correspondence on this matter in CZA, S7/20).

<sup>133</sup> See, for example, his letter to U. Nahon, October 4, 1933, *Weizmann Letters*, vol. XVI, pp. 61-62.



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stage he refused to come forward with a comprehensive plan of action despite pressures to do so. He argued that the program had to be operational prior to its publication, and there was still a long way to go from the resolutions adopted at the Congress to activity in the field.<sup>134</sup> Behind the scenes Weizmann was busily engaged in convening the conference of Jewish organizations; the idea of such a conference had come up already in April 1933 and its implementation had been delayed repeatedly. Now the conference was scheduled to take place in London at the end of October 1933.<sup>135</sup> In Weizmann's view this was too early a date and he feared that his plans would not be ready in time and that it would not be possible to rally behind them all the participants.<sup>136</sup> He failed in his efforts to postpone the conference and decided to accomplish all he could under the circumstances.<sup>137</sup>

He was not able to achieve much, however. The conference, which lasted four days (from October 29 to November 1), was attended by 80 representatives of major Jewish organizations and communities from all over the world, with the representatives of British Jewry playing a prominent part. Weizmann failed to attain his objectives — coordination of the separate actions of various Jewish organizations, and consensus regarding the special place of Palestine in the solution of the problems of German Jewry. No common denominator was found among the various organizations and communities which would make possible the establishment of a transorganizational framework, and the attempt to concentrate all the fund-raising activities in one central campaign on behalf of German Jews, with half of its funds to be allocated for their absorption in Palestine, also proved unsuccessful.<sup>138</sup>

The sense of emergency underlying Jewish response in the spring of 1933 was in the meantime greatly weakened, making it possible

<sup>134</sup> His letters to Morris Rutenberg, Louis Lipsky and Felix Warburg, October 19, 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 76-81, and to Joseph Rofeisen, October 20, 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>135</sup> The Zionist Executive in London to the Agency Executive in Jerusalem, October 4, 1933, CZA, S25/9809.

<sup>136</sup> Weizmann to Kahn, October 22, 1933, CZA, ZA/17007.

<sup>137</sup> Weizmann to Neville Lasky, October 24, 1933, *Weizmann Letters*, vol. XVI, p. 99.

<sup>138</sup> M. Rosenblüth to Ruppin, October 31, 1933, L13/148.

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for the conference to adopt a number of general, cautious and long-term resolutions on the setting up of permanent committees to deal with matters like the organization of emigration and aid inside Germany. These committees were empowered to act in an advisory capacity only and thus their decisions were not binding on the organizations active in the field. As expected, the conference also passed a resolution on cooperation between the Jewish organizations and the Commissioner for Refugees appointed by the League of Nations through the lobbying and efforts of those organizations. The resolution on the question of Palestine expressed compromise between Zionists and non-Zionists: it stressed the special position of Palestine as country of immigration in the solution of the question of German Jewry, but it refrained from mentioning the concept of a "National Home" or including any other phraseology expressing the Zionist outlook. The conference's subcommittee for Palestine affairs asserted in its report:

It is impossible to think about a solution to the question of the German Jews in Palestine only by means of steps directed at their problem. Although there is room for such steps, the opportunities for absorption of German Jews in Palestine are contingent upon the absorption capabilities of the country with regard to Jews in general.... Palestine cannot be treated as the monopoly of German Jews. Jews from all over the world have equal rights to it, and only the emergency situation gives priority to the immigrants from Germany.<sup>139</sup>

The restraint of the London conference put the lid on comprehensive programs like Rutenberg's blueprint for a settlement company. Its practical results were negligible and it left in its wake a mood of depression, disappointment and the feeling that a historical opportunity had been missed. Rutenberg wrote:

...It is too late; the immigration of relatively large numbers of German Jews to Palestine is now impossible ... haggling with the Government can result in our obtaining another thousand certificates, but not in large-scale immigration. I warned you many

<sup>139</sup> Protocols of the London conference, October 29-November 1, 1933, and also correspondence on the conference in CZA, L13/148 and L13/154.

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months ago. We have lost time and with it our great opportunity. Now Weizmann, Marx and Sacher, Zieff and Schiff and all the others are content. After all, the dignity of the Jewish people is now "in their hands." But no serious action can be undertaken and won't be for a long time to come.<sup>140</sup>

Weizmann's associates were also pessimistic regarding the prospects of a successful joint Jewish action. And in fact, when attempts were made to implement the resolutions adopted at the London conference, such as the establishment of joint committees for immigration affairs or for cooperation with the Commissioner of the League of Nations, the various organizations failed to arrive at a common understanding and position. Following the second conference in London six months later in May 1934, Martin Rosenblüth wrote:

All the sessions which have taken place from Sunday till Friday were marked by 1) total boredom, 2) efforts to evade the real problems and 3) lack of any outcome of the whole business.<sup>141</sup>

Against the background of difficulties besetting the all-Jewish organizational preparations for extending aid to the German Jews, the Zionist movement went ahead with its own independent work. During the third quarter of 1933 various bodies were established in line with the resolutions of the Prague Congress. In Jerusalem the German Department was set up; it was headed by Ruppin who was assisted by Senator, and Landauer served as its director. The Department had to find its place among the various committees and organizations recently set up in order to assist German immigrants, and to secure its position among other departments of the Agency and vis-à-vis its Executive.<sup>142</sup> Ruppin's election as chairman of the Agency's Executive helped to bolster the Department's autonomous status in all the matters connected with handling the immigrants from Germany and their absorption, and in the

<sup>140</sup> P. Rutenberg to Robert de Rothschild, November 13, 1933, Weizmann Archives.

<sup>141</sup> M. Rosenblüth to the Central Committee for Aid and Construction, May 7, 1934, CZA, S7/5.

<sup>142</sup> Senator to Weizmann, October 4, 1933, CZA, S49/419.

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preparation of long-term settlement plans with more far-reaching implications. In London Weizmann was assisted by Martin Rosenblüth, Stein and Sacher in constituting the small apparatus of the Central Office for the Settlement of German Jews, whose task was to coordinate related fund-raising and diplomatic activities. The third extension was supposed to be set up in Berlin. Weizmann wanted Landauer and Senator to work in Berlin intermittently; he assumed that a Palestinian resident would experience less difficulties than a German citizen in holding talks with the local authorities. The two men did, indeed, stay in Germany for extended periods in 1934 and 1935, but they did not establish an extension of the German Department in Berlin, which was represented there by the Palestine Office and the Zionist Federation in Germany. The autonomy gained by this establishment and the fact that it was financed independently from the budget of the Zionist movement, greatly contributed to its efficacy and the considerable upswing in the undertakings of absorption, youth immigration and settlement in 1930s.

Gradually there developed an internal division of labor between the Central Office in London and the German Department in Jerusalem: the planning of the absorption of German Jews in Palestine and the implementation of various settlement projects were conducted in Jerusalem. In London the political aspects of the project were handled, as well as the raising of funds necessary for the budget of absorption and settlement, maintaining connections with aid committees in various countries, and representing the Agency before the League of Nations' Commissioner for Refugees. The German Zionists were represented in the London Office by Martin Rosenblüth and in Jerusalem by the Association of German Immigrants. By the end of 1933 the Central Office had raised 121,000 pounds. Some 40 percent of this sum, i.e. 50,000 pounds, were contributed by the Central British Fund; 23,000 pounds were donated by Egyptian Jews; nearly 15,000 pounds were raised in the U.S. and smaller amounts were collected in other countries.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Report of the Central Office for Settlement of German Jews in Palestine, J.T.A. Bulletin, February 1, 1934.

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Jewish reaction to the emergency in Germany resulting from the Nazis' rise to power gradually subsided. The anti-German trade boycott remained the principal overt manifestation of the Jewish response. Although it did give vent to public feelings, it did not provide a solution to the problem itself. German Jews continued to be troubled by the approach to be taken to the question of their existence: whether to fight for its continuation in Germany by adapting themselves to the new conditions, trying to find a *modus vivendi* with the authorities and hoping for a change for the better in the future, or give up and emigrate. The fear of the collapse of the economic foundations of Jewish life in Germany proved to be premature, and after the first wave of emigration (from March to September 1933) the pace slowed down and some emigrants even returned. Consequently, most of the Jewish organizations in the West preferred to focus their efforts on assisting the refugees stranded without accommodation in the countries bordering on Germany and helping Jewish institutions in Germany itself. The basic assumption shared by almost all those organizations was that the Jewish response should focus on the preservation of a Jewish presence in Germany; differences of opinion among them related to the ways of achieving this objective and not to the objective itself. Conservative and elitist organizations favored quiet action aimed at strengthening German Jewry in its daily struggle, whereas militant organizations like the AJC maintained that the boycott movement should be strengthened and expanded in order to deter the Nazi authorities from taking steps against the Jews; in any event the position of Jews in Germany would be strengthened as a result. Furthermore, such a demonstration of strength would have its impact not only on Germany itself, but also on other countries pursuing anti-Semitic policies, like Poland and Rumania.

The anti-German trade boycott was the main expression of the struggle against the erosion and abolition of Jewish emancipation in Germany and possibly also in other countries. The Zionist movement, on the other hand, was less concerned with this aspect of the debacle of German Jewry — even though it did not ignore it completely — and more with the prospects which unfolded before the Zionist enterprise in Palestine as a result of this development.

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For the first time it seemed that Palestine could offer a solution, even if an incomplete one, to an entire embattled Jewish community. On the other hand, this community, the overwhelming majority of whom had until then been apathetic to Zionism, could provide an enormous impetus to the construction of the National Home provided it would accept it as a practical solution to its problems.

Thus, the Zionist response was directed at the strengthening of Zionism among the German Jews and at portraying Palestine as the principal constructive solution to their problems. If this effort was to be successful, the Zionist movement had to demonstrate that the arrivals from Germany were indeed being absorbed successfully in Palestine, even though this necessitated occupational retraining either before or after their immigration. In order to facilitate their absorption and encourage their emigration from Germany, and — no less important — to take advantage of the situation in order to bring capital into Palestine, the Zionist leadership strove to settle the question of transferring the immigrants' assets from Germany. For this purpose it was obliged to enter negotiations with the German authorities and to pursue policies fundamentally at variance with the line of action pursued by the Jewish public in the Diaspora. The boycott symbolized the reaction of the Jewish Diaspora to the Nazis' rise to power and their persecution of Jews, as a struggle for the preservation of emancipation. The Transfer Agreement and youth immigration became symbols of the response of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv, which was directed at building up the country and investment in the future. German Zionists — both in Germany and in Palestine — took the initiative in shaping the Zionist response; before the patterns of this response were established in the movement and the Yishuv, and before the apparatus for fund raising and for absorption planning had been set up, several thousand Jews from Germany, veteran Zionists and new adherents, showed the way from Germany to Palestine in 1933.

*Zionist Policy and the Fate  
of European Jewry*  
(1939 – 1942)

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THE POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS gained by the Zionist Movement were to a great extent due to the circumstances surrounding World War I and the subsequent peace treaties. The set-backs at the end of the 1930's, on the other hand, which resulted in the White Paper of May 1939, were generally considered an outcome of the British policy of appeasement. The outbreak of World War II thus fostered expectations for change in Zionist political position and relations with Britain, and fired the hope that an appropriate atmosphere would be created for new political achievements. Concurrently, gloomy memories of World War I were reawakened, and there were fears that the *Yishuv* would once again be weakened and impoverished, and the future of the entire Zionist enterprise endangered.

The war broke out at a time when the Zionist Movement and the *Yishuv* in Palestine had been, as of the 1937 Partition Plan, in the throes of an internal conflict concerning Zionist aims in the face of the increasing distress of the Jews in Europe, the struggle for the future of the *Yishuv*, and Britain's renunciation of her obligations towards Zionism. Rather than overriding the existing conflicts, the war brought a new dimension to this internal dispute: the question of the war's significance for the *Yishuv*, its influence upon Zionist aims and struggles, and the

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extent to which participation in the war was in itself a Zionist goal. In addition to the political orientation, and the means of combatting the White Paper, it became now a central theme in the dispute, dividing the various components of the Zionist Movement.

The significance of Jewish participation in the war was seen as a symbol of the general Jewish struggle against the Nazis. However, differences in opinion as to its ramifications vis-à-vis the Zionist Movement in the Diaspora were evident. The controversy focused mainly on the Movement's interest in creating separate Jewish units within the Allied armies (similar to the Czechs, Poles, etc.) and the participation in the war of a Jewish "legion" from outside Palestine, without, however, specifying any particular theatre of war. The problem ceased to be relevant when the war spread to the Middle East and after Soviet Russia and the United States joined the Allies. The conflict mainly concerned the war's relevance to the *Yishuv* in Palestine.

There were some who contended that:

Certainly the *Yishuv* cannot regard concern for its existence as an aim in itself . . . but it is very doubtful whether we shall pave the way for the redemption of our brothers-in-exile by proclaiming, as comrade Ben Gurion has done, that "Judah shall be among the helpers" in a struggle between mighty world powers . . . it would be politically unwise to attempt to revive an updated version of Jewish "missions" in the world at large and to make sacrifices for their sake. The mission of Jewry and Zionism at this time is not the establishment of a foreign legion but stubborn resistance and careful watchfulness over all of our economic and political positions in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Others, on the other hand, claimed that:

This war is a sacred war in which we, as a Jewish nation, are obliged to take an active part . . . even if for no more political compensation than the collective and general reward for the achievement of the goals of the war. This fight is particularly

<sup>1</sup> R(ichard) W(eintraub), "Sikum ha-Giyus," *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir*, September 28, 1939.



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sacred for us, since there are grounds for supposing that not only the fate of the Nazi regime will be sealed in this war, but also the political future of our country and, at the same time, our own future in it . . . The border of Jewish Palestine is now the Rhine . . . this murderous conflict is too blatant for us not to perceive that on every front and in every battle . . . our life and honour oblige us to assist as far as our forces permit. Our participation cannot be of much significance in this mighty engagement; its value will be mainly moral and symbolic . . . the participation of the Czech and Polish battalions in the last World War was no more than that.<sup>2</sup>

The Zionist Movement, the *Yishuv*, and *Mapai* as the main political party in particular, sought a stance midway between these two conflicting viewpoints. An internal party discussion in the first month of the war revealed that the majority of the leaders tended to view Palestine and its problems as the touchstone of their attitude towards the war. They were inclined to leave front-line fighting as such, if unconnected with Palestine, to the Jews in the Diaspora, and relied heavily on the awakening of the Jews in the United States.

Even when Ben Gurion first pronounced his well-known formula on this subject during the same discussion,<sup>3</sup> he was referring to Palestine (and from the context he was clearly referring to assisting the British Army in Palestine and not, as may be inferred from the perhaps intentionally distorted citation in *Ba-Ma'arahah*: "to help Britain in its war"). Ben Gurion's reasons for concentrating his attention on Palestine did not stem from indifference to the war, but from the fact that he foresaw an additional struggle for the *Yishuv* in its wake:

<sup>2</sup> Y. Lufban, "Le-Me'ora'ot ha-Yamim," *Ha-poel ha-Tza'ir*, September 27, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> "I would describe my view of how we should act in these words: we should assist the army as though there were no White Paper, and we should fight against the White Paper as though there were no war." Minutes of a meeting of the *Mapai* centre, September 12, 1939, Labour Party Archives (hereafter — LPA), p. 3.

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It is true that the fate of the world is being decided on the French front; it is true that Hitler's victory is likely to determine our fate; his defeat, however, will not determine our destiny. Poland's fate will be sealed by France's victory, but our destiny will be decided here in Palestine... in the midst of this great war, upon whose outcome the fate of the world depends, we are fighting a small war which to us is everything.<sup>4</sup>

While in Palestine emphasis was placed on the *Yishuv's* "small" war, the activity of Weizmann and his colleagues in London centered around the mobilizing of Jews outside Palestine. The war was more perceptible in Britain than in Palestine, even during the period of the "phoney war," and the feeling that it was necessary to break the ice in the relations with the British Government was stronger. Weizmann's inclination to refrain from pressing the British on the question of recruitment in Palestine, or from requesting that Jewish volunteers from abroad be sent there, gave rise to misgivings on the part of Berl Katznelson. Katznelson himself visited Britain after the Zionist Congress in Geneva, and sharply criticised the Zionist line in London upon his return to Palestine.<sup>5</sup> It was therefore decided to send Shertok to Britain to "supervise" Weizmann's activities and to protect the *Yishuv's* interests in the military negotiations which were underway there.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently it was resolved to send Eliyahu Golomb to the United States in order to establish a voluntary movement there, and ensure its Zionist character even before the conclusion of the negotiations in London. In the meantime Italy abstained from joining the war, and it seemed that it would be some time before the fighting spread to the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Survey by B. Katznelson at a meeting of the *Mapai* Centre, September 21, 1939, LPA, pp. 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; minutes of a meeting between members of the *Mapai* secretariat and *Mapai* members of the Jewish Agency Executive, September 27, 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 6-9.

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Middle East. The question of Jewish volunteers outside Palestine therefore gained in importance, all the more so as the Revisionists had already taken certain initiatives in Europe, Britain and the United States.<sup>7</sup>

It rapidly evolved that the optimism regarding the prospects and potential dimensions of volunteering outside Palestine was ill-founded. The Jewish public as a whole felt that Palestine, which was remote from the scene of war, did not merit a volunteer movement. In the apologetic atmosphere which prevailed among Western Jewry at the end of the 1930's, the idea of Jewish volunteering gave rise to fears and reservations, particularly in the United States. Upon his first visit to the United States during the war, in the fall of 1940, Ben Gurion found that the idea was unenthusiastically received,<sup>8</sup> and upon his second visit, in the winter of 1941-42, he discovered that it met with clear-cut opposition on the part of non-Zionists and even Zionists.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Zionist youth movements and *He-Halutz* groups in the Diaspora were fanatically Palestine-oriented, even more so than their sister-movements in Palestine:

The members of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* oppose any form of volunteering which involves serving outside Palestine; neither are all the members of *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad* content that the framework be enlarged. If the volunteering was at least connected with

<sup>7</sup> On the Revisionist activity in London, see J. Shekhtman, *Fighter and Prophet*, New York, 1961, pp. 370-374; on their activities in Europe and the United States, see F.O. 371/23250, E-6342; E-6346; E-6680-1; F.O. 371/24567, E-2277; and E-2394. On the competition between them and the Zionists in the United States, see letters of M. Newman, a member of the union of World War I veterans, who was sent to the U.S.A. to work for the establishment of a volunteer movement there, to M. Smilansky and his colleagues in the Union, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter — CZA), S-25/6082.

<sup>8</sup> Diary of Ben Gurion, October 3-6, 1940, Ben Gurion Archives (hereafter — BGA), Israel Army Archives (hereafter — IAA) 3269.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, December 9-18, 1941, BGA, IAA, 1356.

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*Palestine*, as was the wish of Berl Katznelson in the discussions with Namier, it would be easier to overcome the opposition.<sup>10</sup>

The most extreme refutation of the war's relevance to Palestine came from the Warsaw Ghetto, at the very moment when the *Yishuv* was closest to active involvement in the war and on the eve of the invasion of the USSR. In June 1941, after a meeting of the council of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* in the ghetto, its underground newspaper proclaimed:

Here we must state our firm resolution not to make *Eretz Yisrael* a battle-field for a war which is not our own. Enough Jewish blood has been shed on battle-fields throughout the world and in the armies of all the nations. We shall not sacrifice the blood of the best of our people for the sake of the accursed British Empire which is not, and has never been our ally. Not one Jewish soldier shall join the Brigade! This war is not our war. It is being fought not for the freedom of nations, but to gain riches from the treasuries of despoiled colonies. We shall never, for any reason, join in such a war. In the struggle between two imperialist powers, England and Germany, *Eretz Yisrael* should maintain total neutrality. For *Eretz Yisrael* can and must throw in its lot with socialism alone, and at this moment, in the first place with the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> M. Shertok, *Political Diary*, Vol. IV, Tel-Aviv, 1974, p. 484 (London, November 12, 1939); Y. Yizraeli, *Bi-Shlihut Bithonit*, Tel-Aviv, 1972, pp. 32-35.

<sup>11</sup> From *El Al*, the organ of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* in the Warsaw ghetto, pamphlet no. 2 (published following a meeting of the graduates council which took place on May 31-June 8, 1941). In Palestine, too, Nathan Friedel (Peled), recruitment co-ordinator of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir*, complained about the "copying of definitions and slogans employed by the revolutionary movement during the previous war, at the beginning of the present war; disregard of Fascism as a factor which lends this war a particular character, and denial of the belief that military defeat of Fascism is a precondition of the advancement of the revolutionary movement (with the political conclusions which stem from this supposition); weakening of the realization that the principle of defending the *Yishuv* and the Zionist Movement under all circumstances is an essential part of the programme and orienta-

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While the “phoney war” dragged on, and Italy remained neutral, it became apparent that a Palestine-oriented approach to the war, at a time when Palestine was so far removed from the battlefields, would not advance the Zionist Movement politically, and might even prove detrimental to the efforts to obstruct the enforcement of the White Paper.

The decisive changes in the progress of the war in June 1940—France’s surrender, Italy’s entry into the war, and Britain’s isolation—necessitated a revised appraisal of the situation. The war was now approaching Palestine: the country’s northern border ceased to be secure and friendly; Italian bombers began to appear in the skies above Haifa and Tel Aviv, and the Italian army crossed the Egyptian border; isolated Britain was fighting for her life and preparing for an invasion by the Germans. Fears increased that under the circumstances, the defense of the Middle East would have only second priority. On the other hand, however, the progress of the war, as well as the personal changes in the British Government, aroused hopes for improvement in the *Yishuv*’s position vis-à-vis the British.

The changes on the front in the summer of 1940 affected the two major Zionist leaders in different ways. While Weizmann perceived the political opportunities, Ben Gurion feared increasingly for the fate of the *Yishuv*. It was precisely at this crucial stage that their ways began to part, and their personal relationship was shaken. It was no longer possible to persuade them to cooperate sincerely in leading the movement, despite manifold attempts to do so both during and after the war.<sup>12</sup>

The scene of the war was now no longer in remote France, but on the Egyptian-Libyan border, and its existence could no longer be ignored. Its proximity to the country did not

tion of the movement; “Diary of the Secretariat of the *Kibbutz ha-Artzi*, 7/40, September 11, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, diary of Ben Gurion, September 11, 1940, and September 18, 1940, BGA, IAA, 2074.

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make it easier to determine how it should be faced; on the contrary, against the background of Britain's weakness in the Middle East and the continued enforcement of the White Paper, there were elements in the *Yishuv* that feared betrayal by the British in an attempt to gain the support of the Arabs in Palestine. This danger seemed to them to be more immediate than a war which was being fought beyond the borders. Such circles—and particularly *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* and the Tabenkin Group in *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad* and *Mapai*—continued to regard the possibility of a repetition of the riots of 1936–39 as the principal threat facing the *Yishuv*.<sup>13</sup>

The real test of the *Yishuv's* attitude to the war began in the spring of 1941 and continued for some eighteen months. Twice during that period, Eretz Yisrael was faced with a threat of invasion, and the *Yishuv's* constant and chief concern was the war. The question of participating in the war outside Palestine was superseded by the dispute regarding recruitment, behind which lurked, *inter alia*, differing views on the relevance of the World War for the *Yishuv*, as well as the best manner for effecting a build-up of the military force for the “state on the way.”<sup>14</sup>

From 1942 onwards, the supporters of the “independent force”

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the words of Y. Tabenkin at the fifteenth *Mapai* council, June 14–16, 1940, LPA, 22/15, pp. 111–114.

<sup>14</sup> For this discussion, see, for example, minutes of a meeting of leading members of the party, March 26, 1942, LPA 24/42; minutes of the meeting of the Security Committee of the *Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad*, April 9, 1942, *ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad* Archives, section 2, 1/8; minutes of the *Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad* Congress in Givat Brenner, April 15, 1942, *ibid.*, 3/22; lecture by Y. Galili to the “Young Turks” group, May 17, 1942, Haganah Archives, (hereafter — HA) Y. Galili files, no. 8; discussions of the fifth *Histadrut* Congress (April 19–23, 1942); discussion at the *Mapai* congress (April 17, 1942), and discussions at the meeting of the Inner Zionist Council, April 28, 1942, CZA, S-25/1842.

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claimed priority for the *Palmah* and the Jewish Settlements Police (J.S.P.), which they regarded as potential instruments in the *Yishuv's* future struggle: bodies which would not be subordinate to the British, and would not be called up to join the war effort later, after the struggle for *Eretz Yisrael* had ended.

The argument was obscured by pathetic talk about a fraternity of "uniformed" and "non-uniformed" fighters, until the Germans were halted at El-Alamein. When the direct danger to Palestine and the area as a whole had receded, the dispute sharpened as the volunteers, both in and in many cases out of uniform, demanded to leave for the front, despite the fact that the latter was becoming increasingly distant. This demand derived from a perception of the war as touching upon the *Yishuv*—all the more so from Zionist and Jewish vantage points—although *Eretz Yisrael* was now safe from its dangers.

The pressure to leave for the front increased in the wake of reports reaching Palestine at the end of 1942 concerning the nature and extent of the Holocaust in Europe. These reports brought about a change in the perception of the war from the Jewish view-point. Hitherto, the Jewish aspect of the war had been regarded as subsidiary to the universal struggle against Hitler, and thus likely to be resolved with the general victory. Reports which had occasionally reached the *Yishuv* of what appeared to be pogroms and murders in certain cities and small towns in Eastern Europe were regarded as by-products of the war. Only at the end of 1942 was it understood that this was an independent phenomenon.

A small minority recognized the significance of the Jewish aspect of the war even before the full extent of the Holocaust was realized, but the Holocaust became a criterion for the attitude of the *Yishuv* as a whole towards the war only as of the end of 1942. Those who favoured Palestine's isolation continued to maintain this position even in the face of the Holocaust. Tabenkin proclaimed: "Our duty is here, and not in Radom . . . in the midst of the revolution and the war, our concern is our

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own war and our own survival.”<sup>15</sup> The leaders of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* expressed themselves similarly.<sup>16</sup> Ben Gurion, too, continued to hold the view that though the “Jewish” war necessitated the participation of a Jewish army, the latter should be raised outside Palestine.<sup>17</sup>

The Zionist struggle for the future of Palestine was a major factor in creating the complex attitude towards the war. This struggle entered a critical phase before the outbreak of the war, and comprised a number of “fronts”: first of all, a struggle against Arab bandits and terror; secondly, immigration and settlement, which were regarded as factors in the confrontation with the “White Paper Government” but were, in fact, part of the political campaign for the country’s future. A third “front,” apparent at the time to isolated individuals only, was to become a major element in the fight for the country’s destiny—the military encounter with the neighbouring Arab countries.<sup>18</sup>

On the eve of the war, the *Yishuv* and the Zionist Movement anticipated a change in British policy which would obviate the need for political confrontation, and would help in the case of a military conflict with the Arabs in Palestine, or even serve in preventing such. In this expectation, Weizmann urged Chamberlain to set aside the differences of opinion between Britain and the Zionists,<sup>19</sup> and Jabotinsky suggested to MacDonald that he call a halt in implementing the White Paper policy and turn a blind eye to illegal immigration, as Britain’s war

<sup>15</sup> Y. Tabenkin at the forty-eighth *Histadrut* Council, December 3, 1942 (also in *Tzror Mihtavim*, no. 120, December 18, 1942). See also M. Tabenkin, “Le-Noḥaḥ ha-Sho’ah,” *Tzror Mihtavim*, no. 134, March 30, 1943.

<sup>16</sup> A Praiy, “Yamim Kodrim,” *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir*, December 9, 1942.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, November 29, 1942. Minute by Y. Galili, November 30, 1942, HA, *ibid.*, no. 4.

<sup>18</sup> E. Galili to S. Meirov, June 14, 1938, CZA, S-25/957.

<sup>19</sup> Weizmann to Chamberlain, August 29, 1939, CZA, S-25/5093.



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interests necessitated the strengthening of the *Yishuv*.<sup>20</sup> Ben Gurion was doubtful, and stated that “in the best case, a moratorium has been declared on the White Paper, but it has not been abolished.”<sup>21</sup> It soon emerged that there was no question even of postponement, and that the conflict was doomed to continue concurrent with, and parallel to the war. The Land Laws, which were promulgated at the end of February 1940, dashed hopes that the war would lead to a change in the “White Paper Government”’s position with regard to Palestine. Hopes were once again revived when the government in London was replaced,<sup>22</sup> only to be extinguished by a long process of sobering events, from the arms incident in May–June 1940, to the “Struma” disaster at the beginning of 1942. At the end of 1942, with the change in the military situation in the area, Ben Gurion’s return to Palestine, and the adoption of the Biltmore Plan, the question of the fight for the future of the country surfaced once again and became the dominant issue in Zionist policy.

In the eyes of the vast majority of the Zionists and the *Yishuv*, it appeared at the outbreak of the war that there was no possible diverging from the traditional Zionist political dependence on Great Britain. Neither the ‘Jewish orientation’ of *Siyah Bet* (of *Mapai*), nor attempts by *Ihud* and others to conduct a dialogue with the Arabs, nor Ussishkin’s anachronistic leanings towards Turkey, nor the orientation of *Po’alei Zion* (Left) and *Ha-shomer ha-Tza’ir* towards the “forces of tomorrow” (U.S.S.R.) provided a real alternative to a Zionist political effort to persuade Britain to change her pre-war policy. “What is termed

<sup>20</sup> Record of a meeting between MacDonald and Jabotinsky, September 6, 1939, F.O. 371/23242, E-7729.

<sup>21</sup> Protocol of a meeting of the *Mapai* centre, September 12, 1939, LPA, 23/39, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Memoranda of Ben Gurion, *He’arot le-Matzav ha-Noḥaḥi*, May 14, 1940, and *Tosefet le-He’arot*, May 17, 1940, CZA, Z-4/14632; reviews by Shertok at meetings of the *Mapai* political committee, May 14, 1940 and November 21, 1940, LPA, 25/40.

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'British orientation' has been thrust upon us by history," Ben Gurion declared at the outbreak of the war.<sup>23</sup> In his view, this was the direction which Zionist policy was obliged to take, despite the White Paper, and while combatting it. In this issue he concurred with Weizmann, but they differed regarding the actual policy which the approach involved, and the formulation of its aims.

Ben Gurion had a clear and declared alternative—to be applied first within the Zionist movement and later outside it—to the White Paper policy: the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. At the beginning of the war, he had declared the effort to accomplish this aim to be the focal point of Zionist policy,<sup>24</sup> and he continued to abide by this view during the entire period. He anticipated that the objective would only be achieved after the war, and regarded the consolidation of his party and the moulding of the *Yishuv* and the Zionist Movement as the principal tasks to be undertaken during the war. Outside Palestine, he advocated winning Jewish and non-Jewish public opinion in the Anglo-Saxon countries to active support of the Zionists and to exerting pressure on the British and United States Governments to refrain from making any commitments to the Arabs both during and after the war.<sup>25</sup>

Ben Gurion was prepared to be flexible with respect to the implications of this definition of the Zionist aim and the term

<sup>23</sup> Protocol of a meeting of the *Mapai* centre, September 12, 1939, LPA, 23/39, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> "We are at the beginning of the war... if the war continues for long we shall feel its impact in *Eretz Yisrael* too and we shall face difficult and complicated situations; we need a political compass to direct our path in this dark confusion. In my opinion, this political compass corresponds to striving for the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael*," *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3; Ben Gurion at meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive, February 16, 1941, and May 28, 1941, and at a meeting of the Inner Zionist Council, February 24, 1941, CZA, S-25/1838. Ben Gurion's notes, *Kavim le-Medinyut Zionit*, March 9, 1941, CZA, S-25/1494,

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“Jewish State.” This flexibility was apparent as concerning the formal status of the Jewish State (including its relations with an Arab federation after its establishment); its borders (despite his insistence that the Jews should not initiate or propose partition, he was prepared, for lack of any other alternative, to come to terms with it); the status of the Arabs in the state; and arrangements for the transitory period between one government and another. At the same time, Ben Gurion uncompromisingly insisted upon the definition of the objectives which in his estimation were mandatory to the welfare of the Zionist cause—immigration, settlement and development of the country; these could not, in his opinion, be pursued under a non-Zionist government.

In the course of his visits to London in the summers of 1940 and 1941, Ben Gurion became convinced that in the absence of outside pressure to balance Arab appeals, Britain could not reach a solution to the Palestine question which would be acceptable to the *Yishuv*. The United States was, in his opinion, the only source for this pressure. Even before the United States’ entry into the war, he wrote:

There is not a shadow of doubt which attitude will influence the British Government: the American attitude or that of the Egyptian King or the Iraqi Prime Minister. American support for a Jewish State in *Eretz Yisrael* is therefore the key to our success.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to the clear alternative presented by Ben Gurion, Weizmann continued to hesitate in a search for a solution to the Palestine problem which would be both practicable and acceptable to the British, while not openly declaring the aims

and *Outlines of Zionist Policy*, October 15, 1941, CZA, Z-4/14632, p 19f. Ben Gurion at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, October 4, 1942, and a meeting of the Inner Zionist Council, October 15, 1942, CZA, S-25/293.

<sup>26</sup> *Outlines of Zionist Policy*, October 15, 1941, CZA, Z-4/4632, pp. 27–28.

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which Zionist policy was actually pursuing. He sought, in fact, to renew the British-Zionist alliance, as he had known it at the end of World War I, and which had been regarded as the pinnacle of his life-work. He believed that World War II had created an appropriate background for a renewal of the alliance, and that his personal status in British Government circles would pave the way for its realization. The continued enforcement of the White Paper policy in Palestine, and particularly the measures against illegal immigration; the postponement of the plan to establish a Jewish Division, and the subsequent evasion of this issue, revealed as inappropriate Weizmann's policy towards the British Government, and led him as well to focus his efforts on the United States.<sup>27</sup>

Until its entry into the war in December 1941, the United States was one of Weizmann's trump-cards in his dialogue with the British ministers. On occasions he attempted to convince them of his ability to influence the American Government and public, by means of the Jewish community, to be less isolationist. Churchill and Halifax were impressed by his claims, and this impression played a considerable part in the Cabinet's decision of October 1940 concerning the establishment of the Jewish Division.<sup>28</sup> Weizmann's actual influence over the United States Government and public opinion was much less than he claimed when he confronted the British. American Jews—with the exception of a militant Zionist minority led by Stephen Wise—hesitated to pursue an active, interventionist attitude, as British ministers and officials in London and Washington pointed out more than once, and as Weizmann himself was prepared to admit

<sup>27</sup> Weizmann enumerated the disappointments he had suffered from the British since the eve of the war in a letter to Sinclair of October 23, 1941, CZA, Z-4/15278.

<sup>28</sup> Halifax to Churchill, August 28, 1940, E-2387; F.O. 371/24567, and Churchill's minute at the margins of this letter, W.O. 32/9502; see also Eden to Churchill, September 3, 1940, *ibid.*

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to his closest colleagues.<sup>29</sup> After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Weizmann's American trump-card lost much of its worth. His visit to the United States in April 1942 was not for the purpose of enlisting America's support for isolated Britain; he sought rather backing for a Zionist solution of the Jewish question and the problem of Palestine—without, however, clearly defining the nature of the solution.

The hazy formulation which had been agreed upon at the Biltmore Conference was regarded by the majority of the Zionist Movement as a political programme. It was interpreted differently, however, by Ben Gurion—who claimed that it meant a Jewish State—and by Weizmann, who stated that it afforded him flexibility and room to manoeuvre in his contacts with the State Department (which began systematically at the end of 1942 and continued through 1943) and with the British representatives in the United States.

Until the summer of 1942, the question of the establishment of a Jewish fighting force was a crucial issue for both Ben Gurion and Weizmann. From the Zionist point of view, the renewed British-Zionist alliance, for which Weizmann was striving, would depend primarily on a military force composed of Jews from Palestine and elsewhere, who would volunteer to aid Britain in her war against Germany. Obviously, the relative contribution of such a force to the war effort would be extremely modest, but Weizmann considered that it would have great symbolic value and become a focal point for identification by Jews all over the world, particularly in the United States, with Britain. Jewish support would take the form of propaganda, fund-raising, and economic aid, and the enlistment of Jewish scientists and technologists to aid the war effort. From the Zionist point of view, such a military force was necessary—even if it would not serve in Palestine—to emphasize by its very existence the contrast between the attitude of the Arabs and that of the Jews towards

<sup>29</sup> Ben Gurion's diary, London, November 14, 1939, CZA, S-25/179/30.

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the plight of Britain—a contrast that world public opinion and the British Government would not be able to ignore when the time came for a final settlement of the Palestine question.

The emphasis on the symbolic value of a Jewish fighting force aroused criticism and opposition on the part of the British, who claimed that Weizmann's only objective was to gain for the Jews a place among the belligerents at the post-war peace conference. Weizmann was also attacked by advocates of the Jewish military force in Palestine, such as Berl Katznelson, who reported on his meetings in London at the beginning of the war as follows:

In our [!] London, they apparently suppose that we shall win the war as a result of meetings and talks, or through the merit of Jewish units on the fronts, wherever they may be—even on guard-duty in Singapore... How will the battalions be set up? Our London regards the matter as very simple: we shall negotiate with the British Government and receive its permission to set up units—and we shall set them up. Naturally, in order that the British Government give us permission... we must make matters as easy as possible. How shall we do that? By not mentioning Zionism or *Eretz Yisrael* either directly or indirectly; by explaining that it would be better if Jewish refugees from various countries not mingle with armies from Poland, Britain, Czechoslovakia, etc., and that Jewish units possess a number of technical advantages...<sup>30</sup>

Only very late in the war, and as a result of the reports on the Holocaust, did the *Yishuv* in Palestine grasp the symbolic importance of participation by a Jewish force in the World War. Even so, there were many who opposed placing a matter of merely symbolic importance so high on the list of the *Yishuv*'s priorities.

As long as Weizmann still entertained hopes that his proposal of aid would be accepted by the British, he adhered to it

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the *Mapai* centre, September 21, 1939, pp. 2-3.

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tenaciously. The abandonment of the plan for a Jewish Division in October 1941 marked the failure of his efforts not only in the military sphere, but in his entire conception of a renewed alliance between Britain and Zionism. He consequently concentrated his political activities during the following two years in the United States.

Ben Gurion regarded the establishment of a Jewish army in Palestine during the war as an essential prerequisite for the establishment of a Jewish State after it. Although his speeches during that period do not contain explicit references to his concept that the state would be created through an armed struggle, this viewpoint can be clearly inferred from his words. He did not at this stage hint who would be the adversary in the armed struggle which would lead to the establishment of a Jewish State: the Arabs in Palestine; the British; or the neighbouring Arab countries. After the failure of Weizmann's plan for a Jewish fighting force, he stated:

At present, Zionism has two aims: a) a Jewish army; b) a Jewish State. Although, from the historical viewpoint, a Jewish State is far more important than a Jewish army, it would be a grave mistake were we to concentrate now solely on preparations for a Jewish State and abandon the only matter of significance at this moment, which, as far as we can see, is the chief, if not the only means by which to achieve our aim after the war, i.e., the recognition of the Jewish people as a military ally.<sup>31</sup>

Weizmann and Ben Gurion were aware of the causes underlying British opposition to the Zionists' military demands and proposals, but their approaches to overcome these differed radically. Weizmann attempted to act with flexibility in the hope of circumventing points about which the British were sensitive, while Ben Gurion favoured frontal attack on those very points.

The tension which characterized British policy in Palestine during the Mandate—its posture determined by the peculiar

<sup>31</sup> *Outlines of Zionist Policy, CZA, Z-4/14632, p. 1.*

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circumstances prevailing in Palestine (taking into account the Jewish factor, both local and global), or by regional Middle Eastern considerations—persisted throughout the war. The same considerations which had led to the consolidation of the White Paper policy at the beginning of 1939 brought Chamberlain's government to pursue it after the outbreak of war. The change in government in Britain had less effect than the Zionist leaders had expected. With the exception of the Prime Minister and the Colonial Minister, all those who had shaped British policy in the area before the war—whether in London, Palestine, or the capitals of Arab countries—retained their posts. One of the two new personalities, Lloyd, was known to be a pro-Arab. Churchill did succeed, almost single-handedly, in thwarting the desire of his colleagues to continue the consolidation of the White Paper policy (in particular the "Constitutional Clause") but his success was limited to prevention of further deterioration in the Zionist position. Against general opposition in the cabinet and by the people "on the scene," and in the face of the limitations of a "national emergency government," he was unable to go as far as he would have liked and replace the White Paper policy by a different political line in Palestine, nor to alter accomplished facts with respect to that policy, particularly as regarded immigration matters.

For a short while, in the summer of 1940, it seemed—in the face of Britain's isolation and the threat of invasion—that the importance of the Middle Eastern policy had diminished. It was at that point that the government agreed, chiefly in view of the estimated effect of such a step in the United States, to accept Weizmann's military proposal. When the immediate danger of invasion had passed, American support was assured, and the focal-point of British warfare shifted to the Middle East, regional considerations soon became paramount again. Only at the end of 1942, when the danger to Britain's position in the Middle East had receded and America's role in the war became



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increasingly prominent and seemed likely to be decisive in the formation of a post-war settlement, was it possible to review British policy in Palestine. This re-evaluation was undertaken in London in 1943 and 1944, but went almost unnoticed in Palestine. In contrast to the pre-war situation, when the *Yishuv* anticipated a British settlement without offering a Zionist alternative, the British realized after publication of the Biltmore Program that they were faced by an alternative Zionist solution. The immediate aim of the military and civil authorities in Palestine and Cairo from the end of 1942 onwards was to ensure the possibility of effecting a British solution to the Palestine question, whatever the policy formulated in London might be. The practical consequence of this policy was a methodical attempt to stamp out any activity or preparations within the *Yishuv* against the time when the country's fate would be decided and a Jewish state conceivably established.

During the war period the Zionist leaders tended to differentiate between British politicians in London and their representatives and colleagues in the Middle East, particularly, in Palestine. However, it is clear from the British documents that the principles and application of the Palestine policy were then acceptable to all—except Churchill—and insofar as there were superficial differences, these concerned practical points and not principles.<sup>32</sup>

The assumption of the Zionist leaders that the attitude of the military in London and Cairo would differ from that of the politicians who had formulated the White Paper policy, and would be based on practical considerations, independent of

<sup>32</sup> It was MacMichael himself who was doubtful whether the British would act wisely if they changed the government organisation in Palestine during the war (MacMichael to Lloyd, August 24, 1940, and November 12, 1940, W.O. 193/68) and opposed the restriction of Jewish recruitment to a parity with that of the Arabs (MacMichael to Lloyd, July 28, 1940, and August 1, 1940, C.O. 323/1801 1137/15A).

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the calculations of the Arabists in the Foreign and Colonial Offices, proved to be illusory. This belief was the source of the pre-war expectations for a possible change in the relations between the *Yishuv* and the British Government prior to the publication of the White Paper.<sup>33</sup> The Zionist leadership hoped that the British High Command would appreciate the military importance of the Jewish contingent in Palestine and its value for the war effort, and would thus intervene on its behalf on the political level.<sup>34</sup>

The attitude of the British generals in the Middle East and in the War Office in London was different from what was expected. The generals were, in fact, the principal and most virulent opponents of Zionist military plans in Palestine or elsewhere, even at the stage when the Jewish Brigade Group was created.<sup>35</sup> Although their arguments were often political, or based on fear of the far-reaching consequences of the establishment of a Jewish force,<sup>36</sup> the generals' influence on Britain's attitude was profound in view of the military objections which they raised. They belittled the military value of Jewish volunteers, and stressed the additional military burden upon Britain in the Middle East were the Zionist proposals to be accepted.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Diary of Dov Hos, May 7, 1939, CZA, S-25.977 (an extract from his diary which was sent from London in a letter to A. Kaplan of May 19, 1939); diary of Shertok, *ibid.*, p. 315 (June 14, 1939) and p. 327 (July 18, 1939).

<sup>34</sup> B. Katznelson to S. Meirov and E. Golomb, September 28, 1939, HA, Golomb files, 116/41; B. Katznelson to D. Hacoheh, October 1, 1938, LPA, Section 6, (B. Katznelson Legacy) 4/1; B. Katznelson to S. Meirov, October 18, 1938, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For example, General Wavell to General Pownall, September 3, 1939, W.O. 201/2118.

<sup>36</sup> For example, General Haining to the Colonial Office, August 24, 1940, W.O. 32/9502.

<sup>37</sup> For example, General Pownall to the Secretary of State for War, Margesson, September 17, 1941, *ibid.*; and subsequently Margesson to Moyne, September 2, 1941, *ibid.*, and Moyne's memorandum to the Cabinet, September 30, 1941, Cabinet Papers, W.P. (6) (41) 105.

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The Zionist demand for the creation of a Jewish fighting force was presented to the British before the war. The British regarded it as part of the Zionist endeavour to prevent a shift of policy in the Arab's favour. As the military was one of the main advocates of such a change, envisaging a state of war, they consequently rejected the proposal outright. The outbreak of the war was the occasion for renewed demands on the part of the Zionists, but the British opined—with some justification—that this was an attempt by the Zionists to exploit the war in order to further their aims in Palestine by forming a military force, which would however be of no use in the war effort. Furthermore they viewed it as an attempt to modify a British policy which had been formulated according to military needs. Wavell pointed this out from Cairo and warned against the Zionist "trick,"<sup>38</sup> and similar opinions were voiced in the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London.<sup>39</sup>

Both the Zionist plan—as expressed in the Biltmore Program—and the British apprehension on that score were founded on the assumption that a solution would have to be found at the end of the war for millions of European Jews, for it seemed likely that of the foundations of their existence, which had been undermined even before the war, and during its early years—the years of uprooting, deportations, and ghettos—nothing remained. Only at the end of 1942 was this proven unfounded.

Reports of the situation of European Jewry under Nazi rule and in Germany's satellite states (Roumania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, etc.) reached the West in various ways—through accounts of refugees, private letters sent to neutral countries and press-reports—and were frequently published. From the beginning of 1942 onwards, reports on the extermination of Jews in various places in the Soviet Union and other countries were

<sup>38</sup> Wavell to Lord Gort, August 24, 1939, W.O. 201/2119.

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum by Bagallay and notes by Cadogan, Butler, and Halifax, September 7-8, 1939, F.O. 371/23239. E-6384.

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published with increasing frequency. At first, these reports came from Soviet sources and therefore were rejected as 'Bolshevik propaganda'; later they also emanated from several other sources.<sup>40</sup> In June 1942, the Polish Government-in-exile in London published a "Black Paper" on the Nazi occupation of Poland, which described *inter alia* the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Eastern Galicia in the summer of 1941, and exterminations carried out in gas-vans in Western Poland at the beginning of 1942. According to this report, which was printed in the British press on June 27, and in the Palestine newspapers the following day, 700,000 Jews had already been murdered in Poland alone.<sup>41</sup> News of the extermination of Jews and deportations to the "East" became more widespread in the summer of that year. In addition to press publications, the Jewish Agency received information from its own representatives in neutral countries about the conditions in the Nazi-occupied countries. Lichtheim in Geneva, and Barlas in Constantinople, sent regular, detailed reports on the situation of the Jews.<sup>42</sup>

As long as Palestine faced external threats, these reports were given only cursory attention by the public and the leaders. Characteristic of this lack of interest was the reaction in Jerusalem to a report of August 15, 1942, which a German source in Switzerland had transmitted to Lichtheim. This was the first account revealing the scope of the Nazi extermination programme and its methods, and proved that there was a connection between what had until then been regarded as "pogroms," and scattered de-

<sup>40</sup> Y. Gelber, "Ha-Itonut ha-Ivrit be-Eretz Yisrael al Hashmadat Yehudei Europa, 1941-1942," *Dapim le-Heker ha-Sho'ah ve-ha-Mered*, new series, Vol. 1, Tel-Aviv, 1969, pp. 30-34.

<sup>41</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, June 26, 1942; *Ha'aretz* and *Davar*, June 28, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence with Lichtheim in CZA, L-22/3 and L-22/10. The letters of Barlas are scattered in various files in the political department section (S-25) and in files in the immigration department (S-6).

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portations in various places in Europe. This report showed that the latter actually were elements in a comprehensive programme for the liquidation of European Jewry as a whole. Lichtheim attached the original report to a letter which he sent to Jerusalem on August 30:

I enclose a report based on information received from a man (non-Jew) who comes from Poland and is considered reliable. The report is so terrible that I had my own doubts whether to send it to you or not. Since certain facts mentioned in the report have been confirmed by other sources as well (for example, the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto during the past few weeks) I decided to send it. I actually believe the information to be correct, and in keeping with Hitler's declarations that at the end of the war, no Jews will remain in Europe.<sup>43</sup>

The reply from Jerusalem stated:

As regards your letter . . . Frankly I am not inclined to accept everything in it literally . . . Just as one has to learn by experience to accept incredible tales as undisputable facts, so one has to learn by experience to distinguish between reality—however harsh it may be—and imagination which has become distorted by justifiable fear.<sup>44</sup>

Thus far, the Zionist leadership had not been very concerned with regard to the situation of the Jews in Nazi-occupied countries, and the Jewish Agency Executive had only devoted a few isolated meetings to the subject since the outbreak of war. One of these took place after the arrival of two Zionist communal workers from occupied Warsaw at the beginning of 1940,<sup>45</sup> and another at the end of 1941. The general feeling was that

<sup>43</sup> Lichtheim to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, London, and New York, August 30, 1942, CZA, L-22/3. See also Lichtheim to A. Luriah, September 15, 1942, CZA, Z-5/354, and Gelber, *ibid.*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>44</sup> Lauterbach to Lichtheim, September 28, 1942; and see also Y. Grünbaum to Lichtheim, October 6, 1942, CZA, L-22/3.

<sup>45</sup> Report by A. Hartglas and A. Kerner at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, February 11, 1940.

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the sufferings of the Jews in Europe was one of the side-effects of the war, only to be resolved when the war ended, and therefore nothing could be done to alleviate their plight. "None of us knows what to do in order to help these Jews," said Kaplan in the discussion at the end of 1941. Grünbaum stated that "our concern is not only for the Jews in the German-occupied territories, but also for the Jewish refugees from Poland who are at present in Russia." This provoked the initiator of the discussion. Schmorak, to retort that "he had referred to the Jews living under the yoke of the Nazis." Rabbi Fishman asserted that "an uproar and hubbub are more likely to harm than to help. Even a declaration by Churchill to the effect that revenge would be taken for the maltreatment of the Jews would only lead to a greater slaughter. There is no one who can influence the Nazis, and the Pope himself cannot help." At the conclusion of the discussion, it was decided to establish a committee that would discuss the possibility of rendering aid and "to send two hundred pounds to help the *Halutzim* (pioneers) in Tashkent."<sup>46</sup>

In the wake of Lichtheim's reports, which were also sent to the United States, Wise and Goldmann approached the British Ambassador, but still this was only the third item on the agenda at their meeting—coming after the problem of the future of the Jewish battalions in Palestine and the difficulties of transferring refugee children from Teheran to Palestine.<sup>47</sup> In Palestine, too, where the subject was discussed a second time at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in the light of the reports

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, December 14, 1941, pp. 2–5.

<sup>47</sup> Wise to Halifax, September 24, 1942, CZA, Z-5/354, and minutes of a meeting of the emergency council on the same day, *ibid.* In the United States, the Jewish leaders learned of the Holocaust through the World Jewish Congress in Geneva as early as July 1942, but they refrained from publicizing the reports in accordance with a request from the State Department. See N. Goldmann to A. Kaplan, January 11, 1943, CZA, S-25/1504.

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from Switzerland, it was still placed among a long list of other subjects.<sup>48</sup> Grünbaum opened the meeting, in Ben Gurion's absence, with an announcement that: "All kinds of rumours have reached us of the murder of Jews by the Nazis. He [Grünbaum] telegraphed to a number of places and the answers are all the same: that Jews are being sent away for forced labour and disappear . . . the telegrams cost us a great deal of money and he suggests setting aside one hundred pounds for telegram expenses." His suggestion was to telegraph to Jewish organisations the world over to alert them and rouse public opinion. Kaplan, the treasurer, stated that fifty pounds would suffice for sending telegrams. Other members were doubtful as to the efficacy of action by the Jewish organisations, and claimed that only a proclamation on the part of the Allied governments would be of any value. Shertok pointed out that Jerusalem was not a source of information. These—and perhaps further reports—were reaching London and the United States. "It is also strange to suggest to the governments that they turn against the Nazis. These governments are actually in a state of war with the Germans."<sup>49</sup>

A few weeks later, Palestine itself did become a source of information concerning events in Europe. In the third week of November 1942, seventy-eight elderly people, women and children, citizens of Palestine who had been arrested by the Germans in Poland at the beginning of the war, reached Palestine from Europe. After lengthy negotiations conducted through the Red Cross, they were exchanged for German citizens who had been interned in Palestine at the outbreak of hostilities. The group

<sup>48</sup> "On the agenda: 1. The situation of the Jews in occupied Europe. 2. Cost-of-living increment for the Jewish Agency employees. 3. A government committee on wages. 4. A new constitution for labour bureaux. 5. War profiteering. 6. Transport problems. 7. The Surplus Produce Law." (Order of the day of the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive of October 25, 1942.)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

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left Poland at the end of October 1942, and its members reported on what they had themselves seen or heard from eyewitnesses.<sup>50</sup> Their accounts were not new, and the greater part of them had already been published in the press in previous months; however, encounters with people who had come from “there” broke down the defense mechanisms which had hitherto rejected the reports which had reached Palestine from Europe. The *Yishuv* and its leadership were now faced with the planning and methods of the extermination process, with no possibility of ignoring them, and sought appropriate ways to react.

A week of mourning was declared in the *Yishuv* as a token of solidarity with the Jews in occupied Europe. A stream of telegrams was sent to organisations and various public personalities, urging them to protest against the extermination and to request the Allied governments to warn the Germans and Nazi satellite states. Until then it had been usual to consider the actions against the Jews in terms of local pogroms, which took place on the initiative of petty officials, by-products of the military occupation. Now the principal shock derived from the realization that the extermination was methodical and planned. “. . . not the scale of the murder and slaughter alone, but chiefly its methodical nature is what is so shocking . . . The massacres are carried out not in fierce anger, or violent rage, but cold-bloodedly, after deliberation and discussion.”<sup>51</sup>

As long as the mass murders had been viewed as local pogroms, there had been a tendency to disregard them, due to a feeling of impotence and the desire to consider them merely as a transitory phenomenon which would disappear when the final victory came. At the end of 1942, however, it became quite clear that these were

<sup>50</sup> Shertok to Linton, November 20, 1942, CZA, S-25/5183, review by E. Dobkin at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive of November 22, 1942, pp. 19–21.

<sup>51</sup> Y. Grünbaum, “Va’adot ha-Hashmadah,” *Ha’olam*, November 26, 1942; and see also A. Reis in *Davar*, November 27, 1942.



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not a local or transitory trend, but part of a wide-scale systematic plan, which would result in the extinction of Jewish life in occupied Europe. After the first spontaneous reaction of weeping and wailing, the Zionist leadership had second thoughts about the reaction demanded on their part and its political implications. Apprehensions were voiced on:

publishing data exaggerating the number of Jewish victims, for if we announce that millions of Jews have been slaughtered by the Nazis, we will justifiably be asked where the millions of Jews are, for whom we claim that we shall need to provide a home in Eretz Israel after the war ends.<sup>52</sup>

Vociferous protests were therefore toned down, and instead, ways of responding more “constructively” were sought. Ben Gurion summed these up in a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive as follows:

We must limit ourselves to focusing on a few main issues which can be adapted to demands for the Jewish people as a whole, and to gaining for them the support of the enlightened world. They are: a. cessation of the slaughter and rescue of the Jews; b. enabling the Jewish people to fight as Jews against Hitler. It is also our duty to request that the Allies threaten the Nazis with individual and collective retribution for massacres of Jews. We must try to increase the scope of exchanges. Dr. Ruppin has already mentioned the many Germans scattered all over the world, and his suggestion is sensible. We must particularly stress the rescue of children, but we ought not to be satisfied with children alone: every Jew who can possibly be rescued must be saved.

Ben Gurion suggested concentrating on a demand for the establishment of a Jewish army, but one which would not weaken the Jewish force in Palestine:

<sup>52</sup> When a journalist told Bernard Joseph, the director of the Jewish Agency political department, that the Journalists' Union had requested its colleagues abroad to give widespread prominence to the reports from Europe, Joseph cautioned him in these words (diary of Dov Joseph, November 26, 1942, CZA, S-25/1510).

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There are hosts of stateless Jews, and there are also Jews in neutral countries. We must ask permission for them to fight as a Jewish army against Hitler, in addition to the Jewish army in *Eretz Yisrael*, whose task is mainly to defend the country.<sup>53</sup>

A week later the Jewish Agency Executive summed up the main reactions to the reports of the Holocaust in Europe and resolved to create a Rescue Committee, to publish “an illustrated book on the horrors perpetrated against Polish Jewry,” and to endeavour to send emissaries to Poland and neutral countries in order to make contact with the Jews in Poland. Even now, the perception of the Holocaust did not relate to the whole of Europe, focusing mainly on Poland. In accordance with Ben Gurion’s request, it was also decided to “demand the creation of a Jewish army to fight in Europe. This army will be comprised of Jews who are not citizens of the United States, Britain, Russia or Palestine.”<sup>54</sup>

In keeping with the Jewish Agency’s conclusions, Ben Gurion wrote to Felix Frankfurter requesting him: a. to influence President Roosevelt to warn, if not Hitler, then at least the commanders of the German army, that they would be held personally responsible for the horrors; b. to campaign for the exchange of Jews for German citizens in Allied hands; c. to warn the satellite governments; d. to put pressure on the British Government to permit the immigration to Palestine of all Jews who could be saved; e. to establish a Jewish army abroad.<sup>55</sup>

At the end of the 1930’s, an ever-growing schism was created between the Zionist Movement and the *Yishuv*—deeply involved in a struggle for the future of Palestine—and the Jewish public in the Diaspora, who was concentrating its efforts on grappling

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, November 29, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, December 6, 1942, pp. 7–8.

<sup>55</sup> Ben Gurion to A. Luria for F. Frankfurter, December 8, 1942, BGA, IAA, 93.

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with the increasing hardships of the Jews in Europe and the refugee problem. The inability of Palestine to contribute adequately to the solution of the problem created by the undermining of the basis of existence of millions of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, made untenable its position vis-à-vis the Jewish organisations in the West. The latter regarded Hitler as a more concrete adversary than the Mufti—certainly more than Macdonald—and to concentrate on a struggle against the British seemed inconceivable at a time when Britain was almost the only country which had the means (and was also willing) to make some contribution towards the solution of the refugee problem.<sup>56</sup>

Zionist policy was thus faced with two problems in the Jewish sphere of activity outside Palestine. Its aim was to convince the Jewish community in the West, and particularly its wealthy and influential “notables,” that the Zionist solution was the only practicable (or at least the principal) solution to the plight of the Jews in Europe, and to win their political and financial support. The efforts of Ben Gurion and Weizmann in this direction met with difficulties in Britain,<sup>57</sup> but in the course of the war, they enjoyed greater success in the United States.

The Zionist leaders had to convince the Diaspora Jews that Palestine was economically capable of absorbing millions of Jews after the war, and that such a possibility was within the sphere of real politics. Before the war, Western Jews had had serious doubts concerning the Zionist project as a solution to the Jewish problem in Europe. The British encouraged several

<sup>56</sup> For example, the words of Rabbi A. H. Silver at discussions of the twenty-first Zionist congress in Geneva, CZA, S-5/1716.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Weizmann, Ben Gurion and the non-Zionists in New Court, September 9, 1941, F.O. 371/27129; E-8556; a memorandum prepared by the Zionists following the meeting, September 25, 1941, Weizmann Archives. Memorandum of Anthony de Rothschild to the British Foreign Office, October 29, 1941, *ibid.*, E-7072.

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territorial alternatives to Palestine. At the beginning of the war, they still continued to toy with the idea of a Jewish settlement in British Guyana, and even contemplated establishing a sovereign Jewish state there. In the course of the war, they raised similar suggestions: in 1941, Moyne mentioned the possibility of post-war establishment of a Jewish State in Eastern Prussia;<sup>58</sup> at the end of 1942, the British Foreign Office replaced Eastern Prussia with Slovakia,<sup>59</sup> and even Churchill reflected on the idea of Jewish "colonies" which would somehow be linked with the national home in Palestine, but would be set up in the occupied Italian colonies in Africa.<sup>60</sup> The actual and potential influence of such ideas in the Jewish world compelled the Zionist Movement to fight for a Zionist solution in the midst of the war, not only on the political front against Britain, but also on the Jewish front against what was called "the delusions of impotent and deceptive territorialism."<sup>61</sup>

It was more difficult for the Zionists to confront the non-Zionist Jews, who claimed that Jewish efforts during the war should be directed to the restoration of Jewish emancipation and assuring its place in the new democratic world, and that the solution to the Jewish question would thus inevitably follow. This thinking implied a line of demarcation between the World War and the question of Palestine, and a repudiation of the attempt to reach a Zionist solution by exploiting the war. If the Zionist Movement rejected this approach, prospects for achieving cooperation with the non-Zionists would be non-existent. Weizmann and Ben Gurion therefore preferred to yield in this matter. They agreed that the question of equal rights

<sup>58</sup> Ben Gurion at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, October 4, 1942, pp. 3-4; see also G. Cohen, *Winston Churchill u-She'elat Eretz Yisrael, 1939-1942*, Jerusalem, 1976, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Various minutes of November 28, 1942, F.O. 371/31380; E-6946.

<sup>60</sup> Churchill to Cranborne and Stanley, April 18, 1943, PREM 4/52/3.

<sup>61</sup> Ben Gurion at a meeting of the Inner Zionist Council, June 17, 1941, CZA, S-25/1839.

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should be given priority (in the Biltmore Program) while the question of Palestine should take second place, if they could only persuade non-Zionists to support them and thus divert them from territorialist notions.

The fight on the Jewish front for the Zionist solution removed the Zionists and the *Yishuv*, even before the war, from rescue attempts and strategies not connected to *Eretz Yisrael*. This is shown by Weizmann's refusal to attend the Evian Conference of 1938. The efforts of the Jewish organisations in the West and the diplomacy of the Great Powers seemed concerned with partial and temporary solutions that were thus untenable. Ben Gurion expressed this most bluntly in the course of a discussion of the proper attitude towards the plan to bring over thousands of the Jewish children from Germany to Britain after the *Kristallnacht*; this plan was suggested by the British in an attempt to neutralize a demand that they permit mass immigration of children to Palestine. Ben Gurion stated:

If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England, and only half of them by transporting them to *Eretz Yisrael*, then I would opt for the second alternative. For we must weigh not only the life of these children, but also the history of the People of Israel.<sup>62</sup>

The question of immigration became the focal-point of Zionist policy at the end of the 1930's, mainly due to the realization that it was essential to strengthen the *Yishuv* in its struggle, and only secondarily, and later, because it was conceived as a means of saving Jews from Europe. The conflict inherent in Zionism between *Zukunft-Arbeit* and *Gegenwart-Arbeit* once again surged to the fore.

The contrast between the needs of the *Yishuv* in the face of the restrictions on immigration, its daily difficulties during the Arab riots, and its growing need for young, skilled

<sup>62</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the *Mapai* centre, December 7, 1938, LPA, 23/38, p. 41.

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manpower and the needs of the Diaspora caused by the hardships in Europe and flight of refugees, was raised once again. The interests of the *Yishuv* necessitated selection of the greatest possible number of immigrants capable of augmenting its strength and the minimum number of unsuitable immigrants—elderly, ill, etc.—who were likely to become a burden. On the other hand, preference given to the plight of European Jews implied an indiscriminate immigration policy, in the first place of those in the greatest distress.

The declared desire of the *Yishuv's* leadership and the Zionist Movement at that point was clearly to give priority to Palestine's requirements. This attitude can partly be explained by the particularist sentiments and *avant-garde* self-image of the *Yishuv*, which had grown during the years of the Arab riots, persisted after the outbreak of the war, and were fostered to an even greater extent during the period when the war was being fought in the Middle East. The Diaspora was regarded as a back up of the Jewish people's front in Palestine, the crucial and focal point in the struggle for Jewish survival; even the calamity of the major part of European Jewry falling under the Nazi yoke was viewed primarily as a disaster for Palestine and not the Diaspora.

The primary, and perhaps decisive tragic contradiction resided in the conflict between the Jewish people's extreme need at this moment to fortify itself to its maximum potential in Palestine, and the declining capability in this time of war, of the Jewish people to contribute to the effort.<sup>63</sup>

The question of European Jewry during the first years of the Holocaust was viewed by the *Yishuv* in terms of discriminatory legislation, eviction, deportations and local pogroms, while the *Yishuv* imagined itself to be in a far greater danger of physical extermination by the local Arabs in Palestine. The term "Ho-

<sup>63</sup> Shertok at the fifteenth *Mapai* council, June 14–16, 1940, LPA, 22/15, pp. 6–7.

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locust" was generally used in 1941–1942 to designate the fate of the *Yishuv* in the event of an invasion of the country by Axis forces,<sup>64</sup> and it was only at the end of 1942 that it began to be used in connection with events in Europe.<sup>65</sup> The view that "the play of forces involves not only the question of Zionism but that of physical destruction"<sup>66</sup> was exceptional during the first years of the war, and only held by isolated individuals. The reports of the destruction of European Jewry, which began to reach Palestine at the end of 1941 and proliferated during 1942, were refuted by a series of psychological defense mechanisms—primarily the cultivation of the consciousness of the danger which threatened the *Yishuv* itself, its uniqueness in comparison to the Diaspora Jewry, and the *Yishuv's* duty to forestall the danger and confront it in a different, and more honourable fashion. The cultivation of these ideas continued even after the course of the war in the Middle East had turned and the full significance of the Holocaust in Europe had become apparent. It created the impression of having withstood a test, which was actually unfounded.<sup>67</sup>

Even before the extent of the Holocaust in Europe had become known, the Jews in Palestine began to consider the need to find a substitute for the European Diaspora to "feed" the *Yishuv* with pioneering manpower. In 1941–42, the Zionist Movement

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 27, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Shertok at the meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Gurion to Altmann, July 15, 1940, Jabotinsky Institute, files of the new Zionist Organisation, Palestine Office.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, protocols of the discussion in the Histadrut AC, April 29, 1941; minutes of the seventeenth *Mapai* council, April 27–28, 1941, LPA, 22/17; diary of Ben Gurion, May 5, 1941, BGA, IAA, 1357; Shertok to Locker, May 3, 1941, CZA, S-25/1555; suggestion for meeting the Nazi invader in Palestine, May 23, 1941, CZA, S-25/4752; minutes of meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive of June 28, 1942, June 30, 1942 and July 5, 1942.

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“discovered” the Jewish communities in the Middle East. Until then contacts with the Jews in Arab countries had been limited and irregular, and there was no infrastructure of a Zionist organisation, nor any regular Zionist activity. Now, as a result of the Arab-Jewish tension in Palestine and increasing intervention by the Arab states, the situation of the Jews in these countries underwent a change. The pogrom in Baghdad in June 1941 boded ill and turned the *Yishuv's* attention eastwards.

The break with the Zionist hinterland in Europe; the need to maintain a certain degree of immigration at a time when the Mediterranean was almost completely blocked; deterioration in the situation of the Jews in Iraq; fears of a similar deterioration in Syria, Persia, Egypt and Lebanon; and the need to find new human potential to enlarge and strengthen the *Yishuv*—all of these factors compounded by the feasibility of working in the nearby countries, led the *Yishuv* leadership to recognize the importance of seeking an approach to Middle Eastern Jewry. During the war, and in its wake, foundations were laid which led, after a few years, to the mass immigration of these Jews.<sup>68</sup>

During the last months of 1942, crucial changes came about in the political arena. It seemed at that moment as though nothing could prevent the imposition of a new British settlement in the Middle East, since Britain was free from the direct and indirect pressures which the military threat to her position in the area had created before the war and during its early years. The White Paper policy had been to a great extent the result of these pressures, and the British Government, although headed by one of the fiercest opponents of this policy, could see no way of changing it or deviating from it as long as Britain's position

<sup>68</sup> The subject was first raised as an issue of cardinal importance in the discussion of the *Mapai* centre of July 9, 1941 (LPA, 23/41). It frequently re-emerged later on and occupied the attention of the party, the *Histadrut* and the Jewish Agency Executive. *Ha-Mosad le-Aliyah* was mainly concerned during the war years with the Middle Eastern countries: Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.



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in the area was still precarious.<sup>69</sup> When the significance of Arab pressures and threats diminished, it seemed as though Britain could begin to examine alternatives to the White Paper policy—either a federation or the partition of the country into Jewish and Arab states. Indeed, in the years 1943 and 1944, a Cabinet Committee actually discussed future British policy in Palestine and alternatives to the White Paper.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, while during the war the British regarded Palestine mainly as one factor of the Middle Eastern complex, the particular considerations relating to Palestine itself and its Jewish hinterland were now given more attention following increasing United States intervention in the war and its expected influence on the post-war settlement. It was now necessary for Britain to take into account the influence of American Jewry on public opinion and the United States Government. A second factor necessitating a review of British policy stemmed from the crucial change in the position of European Jewry in 1941–1942, and the effect on public opinion when reports of the extermination began to filter through to the Free World.

As stated above, the Zionist leadership, including both Weizmann and Ben Gurion, expected an increase in the importance of the American factor and its influence on British policy, and in 1942, the Zionists' main political and propaganda efforts were focused on the United States. The results were summarised in the Biltmore Program and attempts to gain the support of non-Zionist organisations in America for the plan. Increasing Zionist propaganda in the United States influenced the British decision to create the Jewish battalions in the summer of 1942, and was a factor of constantly increasing importance in British

<sup>69</sup> For Churchill's attitude towards the policy in Palestine and his arguments upon the subject with ministers and generals, see Cohen, *Churchill u-She'elat Eretz Yisrael*, p. 52f.

<sup>70</sup> See G. Cohen, "Churchill u-Va'adat ha-Kabinet le-She'elat Eretz Yisrael," *Ha-Zionut, Me'assef le-Toldot ha-Tenu'ah ha-Zionit ve-ha-Yishuv ha-Yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael*, Vol. IV, Tel Aviv, 1976.

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policy in the Middle East. From the crisis period of June–August 1942 onwards, the links between the Zionist leadership in the United States and government circles in Washington strengthened. At the end of that year, Weizmann commenced a series of systematic discussions with representatives of the State Department on possible post-war solutions to the Palestine question.

At the beginning of October 1942, Ben Gurion, who disagreed with Weizmann's policy in the United States, returned to Palestine after an absence of fifteen months. The centre of internal Zionist activity relocated to Palestine, where Ben Gurion introduced the Biltmore Program (according to his own interpretation), to the Jewish Agency Executive and the Inner Zionist Council and demanded their approval.<sup>71</sup> When the Biltmore Program had been approved, the dispute in the *Yishuv* concerning its future political line flared up once again in all its original fury, after a temporary abatement during the period of external threat to the country in 1941–1942.

The question of the establishment of a Jewish army (as one of the Allied armies or within the framework of the British army) and *Yishuv* enlistment to defend Palestine were now ousted from the central, and indeed pre-eminent position which they had occupied in Zionist policy since the outbreak of the war, and even more so when the latter spread to the Middle East. The Biltmore Program did indeed contain a clause which demanded the establishment of a Jewish fighting force and the recognition of the rights of the Jews to participate fully in the war effort and to defend Palestine. During the crisis of the summer of 1942, Zionist political and propagandist activity was concentrated mainly on this clause; however, after the changes on the fighting fronts, this claim lost much of its importance for

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive on October 4–6, 1942; minutes of the meetings of the Inner Zionist Council of October 15, 1942 (CZA, S-25/293) and November 10, 1942 (CZA, S-25/294).

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Weizmann and his American colleagues, and they turned their attention to the post-war settlement.<sup>72</sup>

The British, particularly those in the Middle East, were alarmed by the Inner Zionist Council's approval of the Biltmore Program in Jerusalem and interpreted it in their own fashion. They associated it with the disappearance of an external threat, and anticipated a renewal of the internal strife. A report of the C.I.D. on a meeting of the leaders of *Mapai* in Shertok's house on November 12 reported Ben Gurion as saying:

British policy towards both Jews and Arabs during the past three years has been largely one of appeasement, due to military considerations. Now that events in North Africa have taken a favourable turn, and the tide of war has receded from this part of the world, there is no longer any need to appease the Arabs . . . The adoption of the Biltmore Program as our new policy has demonstrated to the Allies exactly what we expect, and we must do everything within our power to force Britain into a declaration of her intentions.<sup>73</sup>

The authorities were thus aware not only of the public Zionist proclamations in the United States and Palestine, and Ben Gurion and Shertok's statements at their meetings with them,<sup>74</sup> but also of what seemed in their eyes to be the actual mood in the *Yishuv* as it emerged during internal discussions in closed quarters. As a result, MacMichael hastened to warn his superiors in London and Cairo:

I feel that I should not await the next monthly telegram to report recent developments in Jewish politics. It has been stated in the

<sup>72</sup> Weizmann's memorandum to the State Department, February 1, 1943, CZA, S-25/7570; report by Y. Berlin on his meeting with Weizmann, after which he met with S. Welles, January 26, 1943, F.O. 921/58.

<sup>73</sup> Copy of a C.I.D. report in F.O. 921/7; I did not find a record of the meeting from the Jewish side.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, reports of the Chief Secretary of his meeting with Ben Gurion (November 3, 1942, F.O. 921/6) and with Shertok (November 19, 1942, F.O. 921/7).

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press and elsewhere that the Inner Zionist Council has accepted as the Zionist programme the 'Biltmore resolutions'... These developments mean that official Zionist policy has been shown publicly to be maximalist... The situation is in my view potentially dangerous. I have long felt that the critical period in Jewish politics would come when it was evident that we are winning the war but still have our hands full. It is now apparent that the nationalist political bosses have read into successes in Africa a sign that the end of the war is drawing near and that they should hurry ahead with the construction and consolidation of their maximalist platform to be in time for the Peace Conference. Nor are indications wanting that at this juncture the Zionist extremists would not be averse to some manifestation of Arab resentment that would have good publicity value abroad.<sup>75</sup>

MacMichael was aware of the opposition of *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir*, *Ihud* and other factions in the Yishuv to the Biltmore Program,<sup>76</sup> but he estimated their importance to be minimal and judged that the vast majority of the Zionist Movement and the *Yishuv* supported the plan. He therefore called for an early check to the deterioration in the situation:

If we are not very careful, His Majesty's Government will be faced with the dilemma of either having to give way to the exaggerated demands of the Jews and so provoke rebellion in the Middle East (with repercussions in India), or of having to suppress the Jews *vi et armis* (which I do not see them doing). It will be difficult enough, in any case, to avoid bloodshed here at the end of the war and the best way of minimizing the risk is to put the brake on the Jews betimes.<sup>77</sup>

One must consider the deterioration in the relations between the *Yishuv* and the British Government, which characterized the following years against the background of the apprehension

<sup>75</sup> MacMichael to Stanley and Casey, November 21, 1942, F.O. *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> MacMichael to Stanley, December 11, 1942, *ibid.* (On M. Bentov's meeting with Scott, when Bentov raised *Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir*'s objection to the Biltmore Program and requested the government to support the plan for a bi-national state before it was too late).

<sup>77</sup> MacMichael to Hopkinson, November 23, 1942, F.O. 921/9.

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which plagued the British authorities in Palestine. The military and civil authorities began to fear increasingly the prospect of a Jewish attempt to seize power in the country by force, or provocation which would lead to the renewal of the Arab rebellion. This fear was at the root of their attempts to restrain the growth of the *Yishuv's* military power—edicts against the Jewish Agency's conscription policy in January 1943, the closing of the recruiting bureaus in April, removal of Palestinian units from the country and the increase in arms searches in the summer of 1943. Hints of these fears were already visible earlier on, and at the beginning of October 1942 Ben Gurion wrote in his diary:

Talk with E - - - u [apparently Eliyahu Golomb]. The British army here regards every Jewish soldier as a potential rebel. We have hardly any friends. They think that they could not prevail because a) they won't have a large army after the war (and bombers?); b) for political reasons they would not be able to quell a Jewish rebellion.<sup>78</sup>

The commander of the army in Palestine, General McConnell, who commanded 120,000 administrative and service personnel and only two infantry battalions (apart from the Palestine regiment)—one Indian and the other Yugoslav—was indeed pre-occupied. At the end of 1942, he prepared a review concerning "internal security in Palestine" and pointed out that he was writing with a background of more than four years of service in Palestine (McConnell had been at this time operations officer in Jerusalem under the command of Barker, Giffard, Nim and Wilson). His experience in the country led him to conclude that the unrest in the *Yishuv* in the summer and autumn of 1942, although in part a sincere reaction to the danger which threatened the country and to the Holocaust in Europe, was intended, in the final analysis, to conceal Jewish preparations to take over control of Palestine and to set up a Jewish State.

<sup>78</sup> Diary of Ben Gurion, October 8, 1942, BGA, IAA, 2076.

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He estimated that such an attempt could perhaps be expected even before the end of the war, when the front would recede from the Middle East and military requirements in Europe would cause the area to be left without adequate British forces. His estimate of the *Yishuv's* military strength was most exaggerated (127,000 trained men with arms against 66,000 Arabs), and he terminated his memorandum as follows:

As the War recedes from Palestine, politics come to the fore and the danger of disturbance amounting possibly to Civil War increases. Any trouble in Palestine has world-wide repercussions. If trouble comes, it will be due to Zionist aspirations. It may be initiated either directly by the Jews or as a result of Jewish provocation by the Arabs. Neighbouring Arab countries may be more likely than they have been in the past to take a hand preventing Zionist aims from succeeding. The Jews may well take advantage of the absence of British fighting troops from Palestine to try and enforce their claims.<sup>79</sup>

At the end of 1942, these fears were still disguised and repressed, but from 1943 onwards, they constituted the guideline for the military and civil authorities' policy both in Palestine and in Cairo.

The reaction in London to the approval of the Biltmore Program in Jerusalem was less apprehensive and stressed the potential dangers of Zionist political activity in the United States rather than the fear of a rebellion in Palestine.<sup>80</sup> Concurrently, the ideas which Lord Moyne had discussed with Ben Gurion in the summer of 1941 on the question of the establishment of a Jewish state in Europe were raised once again.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum on "Internal Security in Palestine," General McConnell to General Headquarters in Cairo, the Commanding Officer of the 9th army, and to the Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government, December 18, 1942, W.O. 169/4333.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of Foreign Office officials, November 27, 1942, F.O. 371/31380, E-6946.

<sup>81</sup> Report by Ben Gurion at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, October 4, 1942, pp. 3-4. See also G. Cohen, *ibid.*, p. 43.

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Then Moyne had mentioned East Prussia, whereas now the British Foreign Office considered establishing a Jewish state in Slovakia. The originator of the idea enumerated a long list of advantages which made the country an ideal location for a Jewish state, but Eden dampened his enthusiasm with the words: "What will the Slovaks say to all this . . ." <sup>82</sup>

When the realization of the Holocaust's significance began to penetrate the *Yishuv*, the traditional view of mutual relations in the Jewish world underwent a gradual change. It was increasingly claimed that the *Yishuv* must now support the Diaspora; "immigration" became "rescue," and the selection principle began to change accordingly; material help began to flow from Palestine to the Diaspora; the slogan "enlist to defend the country" was replaced by a demand to go out to the front, behind which lay the hope of reaching the remnant which would survive; and the realization grew that the Jewish front in the war was not in Palestine, but in Europe.

It is extremely debatable whether the *Yishuv* mobilized its forces to their full potential during World War II. Apart from the military, political, ideological and psychological dilemma in which it found itself, how far was the *Yishuv* actually capable of action? Without examining this point, it would be difficult to evaluate the actions and omissions of the period. Even before the war, Ben Gurion regarded the *Yishuv* as the principal and perhaps sole mainstay left to Zionist policy in the light of the termination of the partnership with Britain, the beginning of the destruction of the Jewish communities in Europe, and doubts of firm support for the Zionist solution by American Jewry.<sup>83</sup> It seems that Ben Gurion's expectations were greater than the *Yishuv* could live up to, particularly after the outbreak of the war.

The possibilities for voluntary activity in the *Yishuv* (without

<sup>82</sup> F.O. *ibid.*, minutes of November 28, 1942.

<sup>83</sup> Diary of Ben Gurion, London, January 31, 1939, CZA, S-25/179.

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government authorization and in the absence of an ideological-political consensus in its active and organised sector) were necessarily limited. It was thus impossible to exploit the sporadic enthusiasm, such as the call for volunteers in 1939, and again in 1942. An additional factor was the social and economic situation of the *Yishuv*: a considerable section of the population had not yet been acclimatized. The latter, together with veteran members of the *Yishuv*, bore the brunt of the economic crisis that befell the country after the outbreak of the war.

Under these conditions, the *Yishuv* was indeed the only support—albeit a very frail one—for Zionist policy during the early war years. This policy was dictated during that period, primarily by fears over the fate of the Zionist project in Palestine. It led different circles within the *Yishuv* to varying, and sometimes conflicting, conclusions, regarding its course of action in the face of the dangers threatening it. Only when developments in the war had decisively removed the dangers to Palestine was it possible for the *Yishuv* to turn its attention to events outside the Middle East. Only then did it become clear, that while the Jewish vanguard had been immersed in home affairs, it had lost contact with the Diaspora hinterland and had accordingly failed to understand the tragedy which had overtaken European Jewry.



**SOME ASPECTS OF THE *YISHUV* LEADERSHIP'S ACTIVITIES  
DURING THE HOLOCAUST**

*Bela Vago*

Talking about such a delicate, and also unrewarding topic—the attitude and the activity of the Jewish community of Palestine (*Yishuv*) during the Holocaust—one cannot refrain from seeking certain methodological schemes in order to facilitate the researcher's task.

This paper centers around a few basic questions. Among them: who were the leaders, who knew what, when, and how in the Yishuv leadership about reality in Europe; how did they react; what was the scale of priorities of their interests and activities; how were their intentions translated into deeds; what were the objective possibilities of lending a helping hand and of rescuing; and to what extent did the leaders succeed in exploiting the objective favorable factors; how effective were their actions?

At the top of the scene were the leaders of the Jewish Agency, of the *Vaad ha'Leumi* (the National Council), of the Zionist Organization, of the *Histadrut* (Trade Union) and of the *Mapai* (Labor) party; in fact there was an overlapping of positions and of the leading roles in all these forums, so that the number of the top leaders can be reduced to six or seven persons. However, the leadership, in its broader sense, included some fifteen persons—most of them, albeit not all of the prominent ones—belonging to the *Mapai* wing of the Zionist labor movement.

To the inner circle belonged David Ben Gurion, Chaim Weizmann (although he spent most of the war years outside Palestine), Moshe Shertok

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The Yishuv leaders are identified in this paper by their hebraised names rather than by their former names (thus for example Sharet, Meir instead of Shertok and Meyerson).

I am indebted to three of my graduate students (Mrs. Neima Barzel, Mr. Arie Kohavi and Mr. Arie Steinberg) who helped me in collecting the source material for this paper.

(Sharet), Berl Katznelson, and also Yosef Sprintsak, Eliezer Kaplan, Yitzhak Grünbaum, and a few other personalities. It should be made clear that neither Weizmann, nor Grünbaum belonged to the *Mapai-Histadrut* group. The leaders of all other political shades, including those of the Revisionists, the *Agudath Israel*, and the left-socialists, appeared at best on the periphery of the leadership, lacking a real leading role in the Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency, and other important forums.

This paper will emphasize the attitude of the members of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency, since this body saw itself not only as the leading committee of the *Yishuv*, and acted as a kind of government, but also of the Jewish people as a whole.

It should also be kept in mind that there were different phases in the wartime activity of the leadership (following the military and political changes on the map), and that there were marked differences of view even inside the small group of leading personalities. Therefore, besides the attitude or policy of the leadership as a whole regarding the Holocaust, this paper will also follow the personal views, attitudes, and policy of the individual leaders.

Although the schematic division of a leadership's record into positive and negative parts is certainly simplistic, an attempt will be made to draw up a short survey of the credit and debit sides of the balance sheet of the leadership's reaction to the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

Since the most important decisions regarding the *Yishuv's* reaction to the Holocaust were taken at different forums of the Jewish Agency, the *Histadrut*, and the *Mapai*, the archives of these organizations serve as the primary source material for this research.

After the Anschluss the leaders of the *Yishuv* became more and more involved in elaborating relief and rescue plans—almost always in the framework of *Aliya* (Immigration) projects. A telling example of these endeavors was the grandiose plan to extricate and to ship to Palestine some 10,000 children from Germany and Austria (the drawing up of the plan coincided with the time of the *Kristallnacht*).<sup>1</sup> Important meetings and conferences took place between the Zionist leaders and the British authorities, the former putting pressure on the British government for a positive change in its rigid immigration policy, emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of their demands.<sup>2</sup> The publication of the White Book on May 17, 1939 gave rise to an uproar among the leaders and the whole *Yishuv*, not in the least because of the alarming news from Europe which heralded an unprecedented upsurge of a new type of anti-Jewish persecution.

Most of the Zionist leaders, among them the top figures in *Eretz Israel* (Palestine), had no illusions as to the gravity of the Nazi onslaught in Europe

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(mainly in Central and Eastern Europe). In April 1938 Weizmann was aware of the fact that "all or most (of the German and Austrian Jews) are thrown into concentration camps, committing suicide, and those who still hold out are subjected to humiliation and torture." It was probably for the first time that a Jewish leader had envisaged the apocalypse of "six million Jews being threatened with extinction."<sup>3</sup> "Part of us will be destroyed—wrote Weizmann with a mixture of pessimism and a peculiar nationalist confidence—and on their bones New Judea may arise! It is all terrible, but it is so."<sup>4</sup>

At about the same time Ben Gurion warned his friends in the *Mapai* leadership that European Jewry was facing a new type of anti-Semitism and persecution, carried out by a totalitarian regime using every modern means for a systematic extermination of the Jewish people.<sup>5</sup>

However, from the critical prewar period (after the Anschluss and before the outbreak of World War II) and later on during the first years of the war a contradiction characterized the awareness (or the apparent awareness) of the impending tragedy, and the facts, the practical reaction of the leaders.

The first important landmark on the international scene where the plight of European Jewry was the only issue, and the first international gathering where the *Yishuv* leadership could have affirmed itself as one of the factors in the relief and rescue activities, was the Evian Conference of July 1938. Although the Jewish Agency was not invited as an interested party, its representatives—in fact the delegates of the *Yishuv*—could participate as observers, and they could have used this rostrum for focusing interest on the necessity of an organized mass exodus meant to preclude a stalemate which physically endangered hundreds of thousands of Jews in Germany and Austria, and in other Central and East European countries. Weizmann and all the other top leaders refused to participate as junior partners, or as mere observers; moreover, they had no confidence in the outcome of the Conference from a Zionist point of view, namely the fostering of the immigration to *Eretz Israel*. Only A. Ruppin, Dov Hos, and Golda Meir participated under the flag of the *Histadrut*—Ruppin reporting mainly about the absorption abilities of Palestine. (Golda Meir later deplored her passivity at the Conference.)<sup>6</sup>

The policy of the *Yishuv* leaders during the Evian Conference regarding the Jewish emigration from the Nazi area was determined by an *Eretz Israel*-centered view, which could be formulated in these terms: If the Conference were to lead to a mass emigration to places other than Palestine, the Zionist leaders were not particularly interested in its work. It was a few months later that, after *Kristallnacht*, Ben Gurion could voice his often quoted words: If he knew that all Jewish children could be saved from Germany by being

transferred to England, whereas only half of them could be saved if transferred to *Eretz Israel*, he would choose the second alternative, since the problem, in his opinion, was not only one concerning the children, but a historical issue of the Jewish people.<sup>7</sup> Ben Gurion implied that this dilemma involved the consideration of a national interest, superior to the task of organizing the children's emigration.

During the years of the aggravating ordeal of the Jews in Germany and in former Austria, and after Munich also in "independent" Slovakia and in the Czech Protectorate, and in the period of worsening conditions in Romania and Poland, the *Yishuv's* own problems and interests overshadowed in *Eretz Israel* the task of help and rescue; all that happened in Europe was subordinated to the internal necessities and concerns of the *Yishuv*. The principle of *Eretz Israel* as the only place where Jews should find their new home—not merely temporary shelter—and therefore the duty to dedicate every human and material resource to building up the Jewish Homeland, prevailed over other alternative solutions, like financial and material help, diplomatic interventions, and emigration to countries other than Palestine. Moreover, the principle of selective *Aliya* was preferred to the possibility of absorbing every endangered Jew willing to emigrate to Palestine, irrespective of his political views and his usefulness for the *Yishuv*. (In reality a distinction was made between Zionist and non-Zionist elements, between "useful" and "burdensome" immigrants; however, this distinction became devoid of practical consequences partly because of the British immigration policy, but mainly because of the local practice in Europe in the distribution of immigration certificates.)

In the late 1930s the Zionist leadership, and mainly the *Yishuv* leaders, were entangled in a vicious circle and a contradiction which was bound to become insoluble: on the one hand the pretension to represent the whole Jewish people (in reality the Zionist leaders had in mind only European Jewry), and the awareness of the unprecedented danger, coupled with the logical conclusion to help the endangered Jews, and on the other hand the fervent commitment to serve the *Yishuv*, to fight for its progress and to lay down the foundations of the Jewish state. Since obviously the two tasks were seen as a much too heavy burden, the choice of priorities favored the *Yishuv* at the expense of the help and rescue activities on behalf of the Jews in Germany and in other Nazi dominated countries.

In the pessimistic atmosphere of the last two prewar years some of the leading personalities in *Eretz Israel* and on the world Zionist scene voiced strong criticism at the passivity and lack of ability of the *Yishuv* leadership. Zalman Shazar, Rabbi Fischmann and Yosef Sprintzak were among those

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leading figures who criticized the indifference, or lack of initiative and concrete steps on behalf of the German and Austrian Jews.<sup>8</sup> The opinion of a small minority (including Moshe Schapira, one of the senior officials of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency, and of Senator David Werner, the non-Zionist member of the Jewish Agency Executive) that the main task was to help and to extricate the Jews from Austria and also from other countries in the danger area, regardless of the destination of their emigration, was dismissed by the overwhelming majority, including the dominant figures of the leadership.<sup>9</sup> It was Sprintzak who put the finger on the crux of the attitude toward the fate of the Jews in Germany and Austria on the eve of World War II: The concentration of too much interest and energy on the *Yishuv's* own affairs, while neglecting the Jews who were threatened by a major catastrophe in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the leaders were concerned lest considerable amounts of money should be spent on financing emigration to countries other than Palestine; besides, quite a few, including Grünbaum, expressed their anxiety about the difficulties in the *Yishuv's* labor market: they forecast unemployment in case of mass immigration in a short span of time. When discussing the financial aid to the refugees and to those who still languished in the Nazi dominated territories, the *Yishuv* leaders often objected to the channelling of large amounts (actually mainly from Western sources) to the refugees and to Central and Eastern Europe, arguing that the money was badly needed for the *Yishuv*; they had little doubt that the money sent to territories under Nazi control was as good as lost, while money spent for the resettlement of the refugees elsewhere than Palestine was detrimental to the Zionist cause.<sup>11</sup> Most of the leaders agreed that, whereas the help lent to the German and Austrian Jews was an unquestioned Zionist duty, attention and effort should not be diverted from the central task—the creation of a National Home, which ultimately was to be the only solution of the Jewish question in Europe.

Although some of the *Yishuv* leaders here and there mentioned the word “annihilation” in connection with the bleak future of European Jewry, in 1938–1939 they could not have been fully conscious of the impending Holocaust, and they continued to devote the debates of the leading *Yishuv* forums to problems which dwarfed in comparison with the relief and rescue tasks.

The task of paving the way for the Jewish state understandably prevailed over all other objectives in the political thinking and practice of Ben Gurion and his top associates; the fostering of the *Aliya* and the opposing of alternative emigration targets was a corollary of this guiding principle. The economic difficulties of the *Yishuv*, unemployment included, and above all

the increasing Arab terror, diverted much energy, attention, and time from the fate of European Jewry. While everything that happened in the Nazi sphere of influence concerning the Jews was of great interest and concern to the *Yishuv* leadership, the help and rescue operations were not at the top of the leadership's agenda. The centrality of the *Yishuv's* security problems and the incessant efforts to build up the nucleus of the future state were legitimate preferences in the daily activity of the *Yishuv* leaders; however, some trivial problems, like internal political frictions, the internal struggle in the *Mapai*,<sup>12</sup> personal rivalries, petty, peripheral preoccupations also figured high on the leadership's list of priorities, at the expense of the relief and rescue efforts.

The attitude and the priorities of the *Yishuv* leadership did not change radically after the German attack on Poland; however, the outbreak of war brought a reassessment of their policy toward Great Britain, as they became more ready to join the Allied war efforts against Nazi Germany.

The first alarming news about the setting up of ghettos and concentration camps, about the humiliation, degradation, and spoliation of the Jews in the German occupied part of Poland, and later about the first mass executions, did not arouse the appropriate reaction among the Jewish populations in Palestine, or in the Hebrew press—and not even among the Jewish leaders.

As early as the end of 1940 Berl Katznelson was aware of the fateful impact of the Nazi persecution upon the future of the Jewish people. He was sure that after the war “everything would be different than it had been,”<sup>13</sup> and that every Zionist decision of what should be done had to be anchored in the reality of the destruction of European Jewry.<sup>14</sup> But we have to surmise that voices like his were rather the exception than the rule in the ranks of the leadership.

The problems generated by the growing emigration pressure on the one hand from Germany, Central, and Eastern Europe, and on the other hand by the hostile British immigration policy led to a specific offshoot of the *Yishuv's* rescue activities. A handful of *Yishuv* activists, most of them kibbutz members, set up in 1937 the nucleus of the *Mossad le Aliya Bet* (Center for Illegal Immigration) established as such in 1938 by the *Hagana*, as the main instrument to promote illegal immigration. Few of the top leaders, perhaps only Katznelson and Eliahu Golomb, gave their blessing to the initiative in its incipient phase. Later all the leaders praised the activity of the *Mossad*, which rescued the lives of thousands of Jews just before and throughout the war years. However, the *Mossad* was the result of a grass-roots initiative, and the credit for the implementation and even for the financing of its activity during its first years should be accorded to the small group of barely known,

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devoted, and courageous activists, rather than to the *Yishuv* leadership.<sup>15</sup> The Revisionists also initiated fruitful rescue operations in Europe, independently from the *Yishuv* leadership.

Information in Palestine about the fate of Polish Jewry, and later about the catastrophe that befell the Jews in other Nazi-occupied territories, was rather scarce. The *Yishuv* press was not well-informed,<sup>16</sup> and not particularly alarmed. This was also true of the *Davar* (Word), which was edited by Katznelson, albeit in name only. The meetings and the debates of the central forums in *Eretz Israel* after September 1939 and during 1940 did not reflect anxious concern about what was going on in Europe, surprisingly enough, not even after the German attack on the Soviet Union. The opening of a new front against millions of Jews failed to lead to dramatic reactions among the *Yishuv* leaders. Their interest remained focused on the *Yishuv's* own specific problems: The setting up of Jewish armed units in the framework of the British Army, the strengthening of the local semi-legal armed forces, and the facing of the real danger threatening from the advancing Axis troops in North Africa.

As the war escalated during 1940 and more information reached the Jewish organizations in *Eretz Israel* and in the West, the *Yishuv* and its representatives abroad stepped up their activities for promoting *Aliya*. Even before the German attack on the Soviet Union, the alerted leaders took the initiative for the extrication of a maximum number of Jews from the critical areas. One example, out of many, was the positive reaction to the anti-Jewish pogroms in Romania during the Legionary (Iron Guard) rebellion against General Ion Antonescu in January 1941.<sup>17</sup>

On February 7, 1941, Weizmann, representing the Jewish Agency, demanded from Churchill the immediate granting of a substantial number of additional immigration certificates for the Romanian Jews.<sup>18</sup> As before, all, or at least most, of these interventions were limited to one form of rescue action only: the fostering of legal and illegal immigration. This policy would continue until the end of 1942.

The imperative of the *Yishuv* to rescue European Jews appeared time and again—but inconsistently—in the debates of the leading forums in *Eretz Israel*. Elyahu Dobkin reassured his audience in October 1941 that the *Yishuv* would not forsake the Diaspora, but—significantly—he made a point of making his determination dependent on the existence of a strong Halutz-movement in the plagued areas.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, in the very same days Eliezer Kaplan raised his voice against diverting the *Yishuv's* financial resources to other purposes than those directly connected with the military efforts against Germany;<sup>20</sup> yet one month later he appealed to his audience to try to alleviate

the sufferings of Romanian Jewry.<sup>21</sup> Barely a few days had passed, and the same Kaplan sounded more cautious, warning his associates in the Jewish Agency Executive against taking upon themselves too great a burden by encouraging mass-Aliya from Romania, lest the *Yishuv's* economy should be affected, and lest the immigration of thousands monthly should cause more damage than benefit.<sup>22</sup> At about the same time Grünbaum, who often stood out as an advocate of extremist *Eretz Israel*-centered attitudes, even though he had not started his activity in the country until 1933, sounded as a defeatist and a demoralized leader: he had no plans or advice, and believed that as long as Hitler was in power there could not be even the slightest chances of improving the conditions of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied countries.<sup>23</sup>

Unchecked and summary information about the mass executions in Eastern Europe reached the *Yishuv* leadership in the summer of 1942. (Most reliable were the reports sent from the Geneva representatives of the *Yishuv*.) The Executive of the Zionist Organization in Jerusalem and other leading forums soul-searchingly pondered the trustworthiness of the sad news. The leaders were “not inclined to accept all the statements [about the extermination] at their face value,” and “had great doubts as to the accuracy of all the facts reported.”<sup>24</sup> But in August and September 1942 they had already been informed about “gruesome details” and were inclined to draw the correct conclusions.<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of October 1942—before the first eyewitnesses had arrived in Palestine—Grünbaum and other leading personalities received confirmation from Richard Lichtheim, the Jewish Agency representative in Geneva, that “the deliberate destruction of the Jewish communities in Poland [was] not only contemplated but already [was] on its way”; further, the *Yishuv* leaders were informed about Jewish interventions in England, in the United States, and in the Vatican “to try to save at least the Jewish communities in the semi-independent states” (i.e., Romania, Hungary, Italy, and Bulgaria), and about actions taken on behalf of Slovak Jewry. Lichtheim concluded in an apologetic tone, that it was his “painful duty” to tell what he knew. “The tragedy is too great for words.”<sup>26</sup>

After the arrival of the first group of Palestine citizens from Nazi Europe—they had been exchanged for Germans on November 26, 1942—Sharet cabled to London the news about the “progressive annihilation” of the Jews in Central Europe, the “mass slaughter” in Warsaw, “fearful tortures” in Treblinka and elsewhere, and—a piece of information passed to the West for the first time by a *Yishuv* leader—about “harrowing details . . . of people thrown into flames [in a specially constructed *crematorium* [or] locked up [in] *poison gas chambers*” (italics added).<sup>27</sup>



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This time Sharet asked J. Linton, one of the World Jewish Congress leaders in London, "to make utmost efforts [to] ensure widest publication in authoritative press. Emphasize these [are] no atrocity tales but accounts [of] eyewitnesses who were fully cross examined."<sup>28</sup> (Eliyahu Dobkin was slapped in the face by one of the women eyewitnesses because he was skeptical and doubted the veracity of her account.)<sup>29</sup>

Weizmann, residing in London and often visiting the United States, was up to date with the information which had reached not only several Jewish organizations, operating in the West (first of all the World Jewish Congress), but some of the governments in exile as well. Through him, too, the *Yishuv* leadership was kept up-to-date, or got confirmation of some news which had not reached Palestine through the West (e.g., via Istanbul.) We can conclude that in the summer and autumn of 1942 the *Yishuv* leadership had a more or less accurate picture about reality in Nazi-occupied Europe, while in November of the same year it was in possession of first-hand information about the process of extermination, including news about the crematoria and the use of gas.

In February 1943 Weizmann wrote to Lord Halifax that "The news which *continues* to reach us of the *annihilation* of European Jewry remains horribly beyond description"<sup>30</sup> (italics added). On February 16 Weizmann got the news about the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and foresaw the elimination of the ghettos in Eastern Europe. He noted: "It is lamentably clear that Hitler is seeking even in the moment of the downfall and perhaps because of it, to exterminate the Jews of Europe." He was soliciting England's help, this time in rescuing 70,000 Romanian Jews deported to Transnistria, who allegedly were to be allowed by the Romanian government to leave the country.<sup>31</sup>

The *Yishuv* leaders were pressuring the British government during 1943 for more visas, for interceding in Ankara on behalf of the refugees who were likely to leave the Nazi occupied territories in transit through Turkey, and they initiated some steps which could free tens of thousands of Jews from Romania, Bulgaria, and other parts of southeastern Europe.<sup>32</sup> However, these interventions were limited almost without exception to plans for extricating Jews from the Nazi grip and shipping them to Palestine. While these efforts were reasonable, feasible, and motivated by the Zionist fervor of the *Yishuv* leaders, other rescue possibilities were overlooked, or misjudged; thus, for example, plans to enable tens of thousands to flee to Western neutral countries were not considered. The infusion of material help, and enlisting—by bribes—the cooperation of the local Fascist authorities (for example in Slovakia) would have been more realistic than the much more complicated and uncertain *Aliya* plans. Without the intention of diminishing the impor-

tance of the rescue efforts by the *Yishuv* leaders at that time, a survey of the problems which preoccupied the leadership in 1943 could raise the question whether it was not only cognizant of the facts—they often mentioned the term of “annihilation”—but was also fully aware of the real priorities, or if it was able to distinguish between the main task it had to fulfill and the secondary, local assignments and concerns.

At about the time when the first groups of eyewitnesses reached Palestine, Slovakia became an invaluable source of information about the major tragedy that was starting to take its course in Poland. The Bratislava Jewish leadership obtained accurate first-hand information about the fate of Polish Jewry and those deported to the East.<sup>33</sup> From Bratislava information reached Jewish Agency and *Histadrut* officials based in Switzerland, who kept the *Yishuv* leadership informed about events in Poland and Slovakia, and pressured the leaders for prompt material and political help. Although some money reached Slovakia, and even Poland, via Bratislava (mainly from Western sources) the amounts were insufficient. Lichtheim could complain in the second half of 1942 that even his advice that the *Yishuv* leadership (and first of all the Jewish Agency Executive) should mobilize the Western mass media for the denunciation of the persecution in Slovakia, Croatia, and Romania, and of course, of the crimes committed on Polish territory, was not heeded. It should be made clear that by the time the *Yishuv* leadership was being bombarded by warnings and demands from Geneva, the imminent danger which threatened the *Yishuv* had been lifted by the positive change in the military situation in the Middle East and Africa (e.g., El Alamein, the Allied invasion of French North Africa), but a radical change in the *Yishuv* leadership's attitude was still not detectable. Presumably after the shock-treatment of the report by the first group of eyewitnesses in mid-November 1942, at long last, in mid-December 1942, a rescue committee was set up in *Eretz Israel*, which was renamed and reorganized on a broader political basis in January 1943, and which took a third and final shape in October 1943, when the Unified Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency was created.<sup>34</sup> The Committee worked out plans for rescue operations and for the raising of the necessary financial means. But again, this time too, two different views clashed, although not overtly, on the surface; one trend favored the raising of funds and the mobilization of the *Yishuv* primarily for the creation of a material and military infrastructure in *Eretz Israel*, joining the Allies' military efforts and thus helping the remnants of European Jewry, and also preparing the *Yishuv* for the postwar era; others saw in the rescue activity, in its literal sense, the first and foremost duty of the *Yishuv*. As a matter of fact, the rescue committees, in their different organizational forms, lacked

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autonomy and executive power, and the various rescue operations during 1943 and 1944 were subordinated to the specific interests of the *Yishuv*, as seen and interpreted by Ben Gurion, Sharet, and Weizmann; therefore their activity should not be overestimated.

As in the case of the *Mossad*, during 1942 and 1943 a new and very efficient rescue organization emerged without the direct involvement of the inner circle of the leadership. In Istanbul a group of Jewish Agency delegates and representatives of several political parties and kibbutz movements from the *Yishuv* succeeded in creating a kind of rescue center, or representative body dedicated to the help and rescue efforts.<sup>35</sup> Geneva remained an important liaison center between the *Yishuv* and the free world on one side, and the Jews in the Nazi-occupied territories on the other; but while the *Yishuv* representatives in Switzerland acted on their own, without constituting a bureau, or a unified delegation, a unified and representative delegation came into being in Istanbul, where, besides the Jewish Agency, the *Histadrut* and the *Mapai*, other political forces, including the General Zionists, the Agudath Israel, and the Revisionists, were also instrumental in coordinating the common rescue efforts.<sup>36</sup> The Istanbul delegation established contacts with Budapest, Bratislava, and other capitals of the Axis satellites, and even with some camps in Poland via Hungary and Slovakia. The delegation gathered valuable information, forwarded it to *Eretz Israel*, sent practical, operational instructions to the Jews under Nazi yoke, and succeeded in injecting great amounts of money for help and rescue operations in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and, indirectly, even in Poland. The first dispatch of money from Istanbul reached Budapest in December 1942. This important activity did not involve the *Yishuv* leadership directly; irrespective of the question if such an involvement would have been vital, the fact stands that the first short visit to Istanbul by a *Yishuv* leader, Eliezer Kaplan, occurred as late as in March 1943, and it was not until April 1943 that, at last, the patterns of fundraising for the Istanbul-based rescue operations crystallized in *Eretz Israel*. Significantly, the problem which preoccupied Kaplan in Istanbul in the first place was the promotion of the *Aliya*, rather than the transfer of money for rescue *per se*.<sup>37</sup>

The Central Rescue Committee ("The Committee on Behalf of the Jews in Occupied Europe") conceded in March 1943 that it "had not done enough."<sup>38</sup> When concrete actions were suggested, however—for example by Yosef Klarman, the Revisionist member of the Committee, who proposed to organize a protest mass-demonstration in Jerusalem<sup>39</sup>—or when Michael Landau, a former member of the Romanian parliament, requested that the Committee should join the Ottawa Conference alongside the delegations of

all the “enslaved peoples,”<sup>40</sup> the proposals were rejected by the majority. No operational, practical steps were taken. The ineffectiveness of the Committee should be deplored, the more so as, for example, the abovementioned meeting also had on its agenda the feasible plan of the shipping of thousands of children from Romania and Bulgaria. Even in this latter objective, which fitted in with the general rescue policy of the Jewish Agency Executive and other leading *Yishuv* forums, nothing tangible was achieved by the Committee during 1943, and not even in 1944, when the chances of emigration from Romania and Bulgaria looked more favorable.

Characteristic of the narrow and *Eretz Israel*-centered conception of the rescue efforts is a confidential paper presented in April or May 1943 by A. Hartglass, a member of the Central Rescue Committee. Hartglass, working closely with Grünbaum, stipulated that his memorandum should be kept secret, even before the non-Zionist members of the Committee.<sup>41</sup> While his analysis and conclusions should not be considered as necessarily expressing the Jewish Agency’s or even Grünbaum’s views, neither should they be discarded as the extremist theses of a lonely minor figure in the ranks of those active in the rescue efforts; on the contrary, the reasoning, if not the wording, of his conclusions reflected the views of most of the top leaders.

Hartglass advocated the attainment of three practical goals, important from a Zionist viewpoint: (a) to let the world know that only *Eretz Israel* was willing to accept the rescued Jews; (b) to emphasize that it was the Zionists who had initiated the rescue operations; and (c) to convince the survivors, even before the end of the war, that the rescue operations were carried out by the Zionist movements and by the *Yishuv*, and that consequently the way of the survivors should lead to *Eretz Israel*.<sup>42</sup>

Hartglass defended the idea of a rigorous selection in the Zionist rescue work, his guiding principle being the saving of Zionists. Since there were no chances for rescuing and extricating Jewish *masses* from Europe, he advised, all that could be hoped for—through material help and emigration—was the rescue of a few thousand, or at best of some tens of thousands. He therefore advocated that only children (“the best prospective material for the *Yishuv*”), and members of the Zionist youth movements, as well as some adult Zionist activists, should be helped and rescued by the *Yishuv*.<sup>43</sup> He concluded that his advice was a harsh one, but the lessons of the past e.g., the *Yishuv*’s “bitter” experience with the immigrants from Germany, as well as the burning interests of the *Yishuv* and its limited potential for help and rescue operations dictated this solution. Since there were no means even for the rescue of all the “best” one must desist from rescuing the “damaging” elements. The gist of Hartglass’ views, having in mind the postwar era in

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Palestine was: (a) if possible, to avoid the organized immigration through rescue operations, of non-Zionists; and (b) to extend substantial help to the rescued Zionist "olim" (immigrants) for their rapid integration in the country's economic life.

While this last conclusion could be taken for granted, Hartglass' cold pragmatism versus humanitarian considerations, at a time when the *Yishuv* leadership regarded itself as the representative of European Jewry, could only have caused bitter resentment among the Jewish masses, had his suggestions been made public during the war.<sup>44</sup>

The *Yishuv* representatives in Istanbul were dissatisfied with the top leaders' involvement in the rescue activity in general, and in the Istanbul center's work in particular. Bitter recriminations were made by some of the Istanbul delegates who deplored the absence of top leaders in this vital center for connections with the Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. (Sharet, the second to arrive in Istanbul, after Kaplan, decided to get acquainted with the delegates' work only in the summer of 1943.) The Istanbul delegates claimed that not enough money was put at their disposal, and that the *Yishuv* leadership did not assess its duties in accordance with the dramatic developments and the urgency of the task.

In a letter addressed in August 1943 to the Jewish Agency, to the Rescue Committee, and to the Executive Committee of the *Histadrut*, three delegates (Venia Pomerantz, Menachem Bader, and Zeev Shind) regretted that they had failed to convince the leaders to increase the financial resources for the rescue operations; they warned that the tragedy of European Jewry had not yet reached its peak, and implored the leaders to "leave for a moment" their routine work and "help to rescue before the curtain drops (and covers) everything."<sup>45</sup>

At about the same time, Ben Gurion's presence started being felt more on the rescue scene. From the summer of 1941 and until October 1942 Ben Gurion had spent his time in the United States. No evidence can be found about his possible concern for the fate of European Jews during this period. After his return to *Eretz Israel*, the otherwise very active Ben Gurion seldom participated in the discussions about the help and rescue activities. In the wake of the uproar caused by the first eyewitness reports about the exterminations, the Jewish Agency Executive put on its agenda, for the first time, at its meeting of November 1942, the tragedy of European Jewry in the debate on "political problems." This was the occasion when Ben Gurion took the floor and demanded that interest should be concentrated around two issues: to put an end to the extermination, and to enable the Jewish people to fight against Hitler.<sup>46</sup> These proposals were not too helpful—although the

importance of Jewish (*Yishuv*) participation in the anti-Nazi war should not be minimized; warnings, appeals, and demands by Ben Gurion throughout 1943 constantly expressed two essential ideas: (a) the annihilation of European Jewry, which constituted a real danger for the future of Zionism, and (b) the role of the *Yishuv*—its rescue and absorption potential.<sup>47</sup>

An important speech was delivered by Ben Gurion on August 24, 1943, at a meeting of the *Mapai* leadership. Responding to the criticism voiced by the Istanbul delegates (he referred to Venia Pomerantz), he agreed with the necessity and urgency of doing more in the field of help and rescue, but opposed the idea of using the funds of the *Keren Kayemet* (Jewish National Fund) or *Keren Hayessod* (Jewish Investment Fund) for purposes other than their original goals; in a veiled form he even objected to the use of the Jewish Agency's funds for purposes other than the necessities of the *Yishuv* ("The Jewish Agency is an all-Israel organization for the building of *Eretz Israel*"), and hinted that the Joint, the American relief organization, and the World Jewish Congress and similar relief organizations should take over the responsibility for helping and rescuing. Replying to a proposal regarding the necessity of rescue efforts in southeastern Europe, Ben Gurion asked rhetorically: "It is true that sometimes it is more important to rescue a child from Zagreb [than to act for the *Yishuv*], but here are two different things, and whom will it serve to mix them up. . . . why confuse [different] notions?"<sup>48</sup> At the same meeting Sharet also took the floor, and—in spite of the deep impressions that his recent visit in Istanbul had made upon him—he devoted much attention to the problem of the survivors from the viewpoint of the Zionist enterprise: would there be enough survivors who could materialize the Zionist goals?<sup>49</sup> A few days earlier, in a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive he had analyzed the tragedy of European Jewry from the same angle, namely, that the political future of *Eretz Israel* depended to a great extent on the number and strength of the survivors.<sup>50</sup>

It should be emphasized that reflections and analyses like the above were usually complemented by critical remarks—though not by top leaders—about the lack of concrete acts of the *Yishuv* leadership. Meir Ya'ari, the *Mapam* (Left Labor Party) leader, deplored the inability of the *Yishuv* to raise more money for help and rescue purposes,<sup>51</sup> and David Remez, then Secretary of the *Histadrut*, voicing the same complaint as Ya'ari, suggested that a special "Minister" in the Jewish Agency Executive should be entrusted with the rescue work, and that he should be engaged "day and night only in this activity."<sup>52</sup> Suggestions about how to organize and centralize the rescue work and how to raise more money were not followed by operative resolutions, and in spite of the intense correspondence between Jerusalem

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(and Tel Aviv) and the Western world, and numerous interventions at the highest governmental and political level in England and in the United States, no new patterns of the rescue activity were initiated during 1943.

On September 1, 1943, on the fourth anniversary of the German attack against Poland, the inner circle of the Zionist leadership, mainly members of the Zionist Executive Committee, held a meeting in Jerusalem. The Chairman of the meeting, Sprintzak, declared the occasion "the day of Polish Jewry"; he surveyed the plight of the largest Jewish community in Europe, and also expressed the leadership's solidarity with the Polish people. However, the interest of the confidential meeting was focused on Sharet's report about his visit in Istanbul and about his political talks in Cairo concerning the future of Palestine.

Sharet reminded his audience that the main aim of his trip to Istanbul was the promotion of the rescue operations through *Aliyah* from the Balkan countries. He informed his associates that he was ready to discuss with them only the problem of immigration from the Balkans, including the transportation and other technical aspects of the *Aliya*, but—in his opinion—the meeting was not supposed to deal with the otherwise "very important and serious problem of the help activity" on behalf of the European Jews. Sharet's priority to deal only with the task of immigration to *Eretz Israel*, postponing the very important, and perhaps more realistic, relief work to a later date, was in contradiction with his praise for the *help-activity* of the *Yishuv* delegates in Istanbul. While criticizing the loose contacts between the *Yishuv* and some Western help and rescue centers, including those in Geneva, he commended the Istanbul group for having established a window enabling the *Yishuv* to have an insight into Nazi-occupied Europe, and for having created important channels operating in both directions for the benefit of the endangered survivors. Sharet described the means by which material help was instrumental in maintaining some labor camps—for example in Slovakia—which turned out to serve as an alternative for deportation to the death camps in Poland, a respite for at least a period of time.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, his analysis was not devoid of illusions—characteristic of many *Yishuv* leaders during the whole war period. For example, he was convinced that some of the Nazi forced labor camps had been transformed by the Zionist youths into *Halutz*-training camps, and that the concentration of Jewish masses provided the Zionists with the opportunity to organize educational and mutual relief activity.<sup>54</sup> As most of his fellow-leaders, Sharet saw in some of these alleged phenomena, which had little to do with reality, a positive aspect of the tragedy, adroitly exploited by the Zionists, with far-reaching practical consequences for the future Jewish Homeland.

Sharet demanded an increase in the financial help sent to Europe via Istanbul, and indeed the only practical outcome of his visit in Turkey (and also of the abovementioned marathon meeting in Jerusalem, with the active participation of many top leaders) was the significant increase of the amounts which reached Istanbul during the last months of 1943 and in the first half of 1944. (The money sent to Istanbul was not raised exclusively in *Eretz Israel*, as Sharet intimated in this report and in his later reports.) The meeting, which apparently was intended to be centered on the fate of European Jewry (around Sharet's report), was dedicated mostly to other problems. The central issue analyzed by Sharet was the complex picture of his negotiations with the British over the *Yishuv's* envisaged military participation in the war. Precisely because Sharet saw the *Yishuv* leadership as "the government-in-exile of European Jews,"<sup>55</sup> he demanded that the *Yishuv* participate in the anti-Nazi war, thus contributing to the war efforts and taking revenge for what the Jews were being subjected to in the Nazi occupied territories.

One can not question the importance of the setting up of Jewish fighting units and of all the other political and military problems which preoccupied Sharet and his associates in 1943. But one cannot overlook the salient disproportion, measurable by pages in the stenogram of his report (and of other leaders' speeches), between on the one hand the account of his Istanbul experience and his conclusions concerning the fate of European Jewry, and on the other hand his absorption in some problems related to the *Yishuv* leadership's negotiations with the British authorities. This lack of proportion between the interest devoted to the catastrophe of European Jewry and to the *Yishuv's* security and its political and economic problems was not in the least remedied during 1944, despite the ample flow of more accurate information about the dimensions of the Holocaust and especially about Auschwitz.

At about the same time as three or four leading *Yishuv* figures were visiting Istanbul and becoming more acquainted with the developments in Nazi Europe, yet another offshoot of the *Yishuv's* rescue efforts came to the forefront. Propelled into the limelight only after the war, and mainly after the creation of Israel, volunteer paratroopers, most of them from kibbutzim, arrived in the Mediterranean area and in southeastern Europe. It was a heroic enterprise, involving some outstanding young people, trained secretly by the *Haganah*, and later enrolled in the intelligence branches of the British army. The operation, viewed from the *Yishuv's* angle and from that of the volunteers themselves, was destined to add new dimensions to the rescue activity and to the Jewish resistance. However, the practical results of these missions, though not the moral ones, were not really significant.



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Evidence about the aims that the *Yishuv* leaders had in mind when they initiated, or consented to, this facet of the Jewish participation is scarce. However, it is certain that the leaders did not work out a unified plan, based on a general consensus.

In a recorded testimony Joel Palgi, one of the volunteer parachutists, hinted at a lack of clear vision on the part of the *Yishuv* leaders of the general aims of the help and rescue operations, and of organizing resistance.<sup>56</sup> Yona Rosen, another paratrooper, confirmed this testimony.<sup>57</sup> However, years after the recording of his testimony, in his book published in 1977, Palgi quoted various personalities bearing out the fact that the *Yishuv* leaders were divided among themselves as to the scope of the operation. He summed up their views, obviously only partly voiced in his presence, as follows: Elyahu Golomb saw the main target of the paratroopers in “teaching the Jews to fight”; Ben Gurion wanted the Jews to know that “*Eretz Israel* was their land and their stronghold”; while Katznelson urged the volunteers to save Jews, arguing that if there were no survivors in Europe there would be no *Eretz Israel* and no Zionist undertaking.<sup>58</sup> Chaim Mermesh, another paratrooper, recapitulates the order of the day they heard from their leaders: to act on your own judgment and to the best of your ability.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, in Kibbutz Hazorea, where the *Haganah* instructed the future paratroopers, they were told by Ben Gurion—as Hermesh recalls—to prepare the Jews in Europe for the hour of liberation. After the war, they would have to help from the outside to open the gates of *Eretz Israel*.<sup>60</sup> Ben Gurion envisaged a stormy mass immigration into Palestine from liberated Europe; the mobilization of the Jews for the mass-*Aliya* was the chief aim of the paratroopers. His words and attitudes were characteristic of the main objective that most of the *Yishuv* leaders had in mind when British Intelligence raised the possibility of sending young Jews of east-central European origin into the occupied territories. Hermesh, and presumably most of his fellow paratroopers, assumed that as soon as they reached Yugoslav territory under Tito’s control, and from there the countries of their destination, their task would be the organizing of the local Jewish youth for armed resistance, and also the evacuation of the older people and of children, possibly to Italy.<sup>61</sup>

These unrealistic plans were partially based on inaccurate information, e.g., the rumor that about 5,000 Jews had managed to flee from the Kolozsvár (Cluj) ghetto in late spring 1944. The differing views of the *Yishuv* leaders regarding the assignment of the paratroopers, and the image the volunteers created about conditions in the Nazi-occupied territories, attest to a distorted picture that both the leaders and the paratroopers had about reality in the area. The conditions of the Jews, the mood of the local population, the grip

of the military authorities, and other aspects of the unfavorable circumstances were misjudged, and erroneously assessed. Insofar as the emphasis was put on the organizing of armed resistance by the young emissaries, and not on the help and rescue efforts, some of the mentors of the operation, among them Ben Gurion, were out of touch with reality. The few paratroopers who actually reached some of the countries in the area and managed to survive—among them Joel Palgi—had to admit that the pretentious ambition, like armed resistance and escape of *masses* of older people and children to the liberated territories, was unrealistic. The only feasible task of the paratroopers turned out to be to join the local activists, mainly the young underground fighters, and try to help and rescue, guided by the local leaders.<sup>62</sup> At the same time they must have been aware of their very limited resources to contribute, beyond the boost in morale emanating from the very fact of their presence, to the rescue operations initiated and conducted by the local activists.

By the end of 1943 and during 1944, mainly after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, a lot of energy from the *Yishuv* went into various actions on behalf of the Balkan and east-central European Jews. The tragedy of Hungarian Jewry shocked the *Yishuv* precisely because it struck at a late phase of the war, when the chances of its survival looked real, and also because of the unprecedented rapidity of its partial liquidation.<sup>63</sup> Efforts were made to increase the number of certificates—not without success.<sup>64</sup> Ben Gurion was briefed more often than before about the rescue operations, and Sharet and Weizmann stepped up their interventions in London, indirectly in Tito's headquarters, and elsewhere in the Allied circles.<sup>65</sup> However, in spite of the intensified *Yishuv* activities, many critical voices were raised against the leadership's performance, even in the midst of the leading circles.

David Remez, the *Histadrut* secretary, confessed that "there is a painful issue, and I presume that all of us are constantly living with the feeling that a great mistake has been made, and is still being made [namely], that we have not put unlimited amounts of money at the disposal of the rescue operations. . . . If the *Yishuv* had raised a loan for ten million Palestine pounds," argued Remez "the *Yishuv* and the Jewish people could have been sure that no opportunity was missed by the leadership to rescue Jewish lives. That has not been done."<sup>66</sup>

Various immigrant organizations, and first of all the one representing the immigrants from Romania, were critical and impatient because of what they considered a lack of awareness and the wrong choice of priorities by the *Yishuv* leadership.<sup>67</sup> The answers were usually apologetic and based on the unquestioned priority of *Eretz Israel* in determining their tasks.

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The Joel Brand mission brought an explosive element into this controversy, the more so as the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry had a peculiar Zionist facet. Since the approximately 800,000-strong Hungarian Jewry (including the "racial Jews"—Christians considered as Jews by the Nuremberg-type laws) which had survived until April-May 1944 was counted upon as the last great European reservoir of the future Jewish state, the impending catastrophe shook the optimism and the faith of many personalities in *Eretz Israel*. And then, when it became clear that the Brand mission had failed, bitter recriminations were voiced by Brand himself and by quite a number of Zionists in Hungary, that Sharet, Weizmann, and other leaders were not up to the mark. While Brand's accusations were much exaggerated,<sup>68</sup> Sharet's and the other leaders' explanations were not entirely convincing on this issue,<sup>69</sup> which arouses passions until this very day.

In June–July 1944, Weizmann, Sharet, and Golda Meir were active in urging the Allies to bomb Auschwitz and the railway lines leading to the extermination camps. However, bitter recriminations persisted even in the ranks of the leading personalities.

As one of the then young *Mapai* leaders, Eliezer Livne, recalls, doubts tormented him, and probably many others in the leadership, about whether their preoccupations were the appropriate ones, and if besides the *Yishuv's* political and military buildup, other concerns, like party squabbles, various cultural enterprises, and similar routine activities were indeed the order of the day at a time when the great reservoir of the future state was perishing in Europe.<sup>70</sup>

Berl Katznelson suffered perhaps more than others, torn by the dilemma of priorities, and by his and his associates' inadequate activity. He was among the few who warned against nurturing illusions, and as early as April 1942 took upon himself the ungratifying Cassandra-role of prophesying that the Nazi solution of the Jewish problem was the graveyard.<sup>71</sup> The eminent theoretician of the Labor Movement was short of conceding that the Zionist movement had failed inasmuch as the *Yishuv* faced the prospect of vegetating without its natural *Hinterland*, and he asserted unequivocally that the *Yishuv* was not trying to achieve the maximum attainable. However, even Katznelson did not initiate any practical measures, did little beyond speeches in rather narrow circles, and was deeply committed to a cultural enterprise he initiated in the very critical years of 1943–44.<sup>72</sup> In his case at least, the failure to convert the awareness into actions could be explained by his being outside the inner circle of the executives, and also by his frail health.

### Summary and Conclusions

Time and again the question is asked: What could have been more adequate, more efficient, and more vital than the help actually extended?

Let us quote again Eliezer Livne, a close friend of Katznelson, although he did not belong to the top leaders. After being informed about the August 1944 deportation and extermination of the Jews of Lodz, his former hometown, Livne desperately and soul-searchingly exclaimed:

There was not one Jewish radio station in our country, or in Europe (already liberated in its greater part), operated by the Hagana, the Etzel, or the Lechi, which could have informed the Jews [of Lodz] what they should expect [the deportation to Auschwitz]. No emissary was sent by the [Jewish] underground or by the Army units of Eretz Israel—although heroism and self-sacrifices were not lacking to warn them. . . . No Hebrew pilot was available out of thousands of our brethren who fought in the Allied air forces who we could entrust with the illegal mission of disseminating warning leaflets.<sup>73</sup>

If one refrains from “writing history backwards,” and desists from solutions which seem feasible today, but were beyond reach during the Holocaust, the answer to the “what could have been” should, for practical purposes, be limited to two spheres: the financial aid, and the influencing of the Allies and of public opinion in the free world.

The *Yishuv* and its leaders managed to transfer substantial funds to several Nazi-occupied countries, which served to buy Jewish lives, to relieve hunger and distress, and to enable thousands to leave the Nazi-controlled territories. Obviously, as borne out by the dramatic appeals of the local leaders, for example in Slovakia, and confirmed by the *Yishuv's* emissaries, including those in Istanbul, more money could have been of much more help. And the raising of more money was indeed within reach. In point of fact much more money was raised in *Eretz Israel* than the amounts sent to Europe, but it was used for local purposes. The priority in the allocation of the financial resources was one of the weakest points of the *Yishuv* leaders.

The *Yishuv* leaders were not particularly effective in mobilizing American Jewry, nor is there much evidence of their having stimulated Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in the free world for large-scale help and rescue attempts. The leaders had ample opportunities for taking the floor in the allied countries and in other countries of the free world, except in the Soviet Union they also had easy access to the mass media. But evidence is scarce about their awareness of taking full advantage of these possibilities. Yet, such

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pressures could indeed have been successful, as evidenced for example, by Admiral Miklo's Horthy's shift of attitude in Hungary in July–October, 1944.

A comparison between the deeds of the *Yishuv* leaders and those of the Jewish communities elsewhere in the free world is not unfavorable to the former, and anyhow, the *Yishuv* leaders were committed to fight for two historical tasks—the survival and the strengthening of the *Yishuv*, and the struggle for European Jewry—a dispersion of energy and resources which did not weigh down the shoulders of the Jewish leaders elsewhere. Undoubtedly the *Yishuv* leadership was motivated by a profound sense of solidarity and responsibility, which induced it to undertake efficient and sometimes even vital help and rescue actions—despite the *Yishuv's* limited human and material resources and the specific conditions imposed by the war and by the British domination.

Nevertheless, understanding and explaining cannot change the fact that the *Yishuv* leadership was rather late in grasping the dimensions and the significance of the Holocaust; it was immersed in its own problems at the expense of the attention that the fate of European Jews should have commanded. Its participation in the help and rescue activities was below its capacities and competence, and it failed to fully exploit the given circumstances.

Notes for this article appear in the Appendix, beginning on page 1483.

## PALESTINIAN JEWRY AND THE JEWISH AGENCY: PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE HOLOCAUST

DINA PORAT

***H**istorical research on the behavior of the free world in the face of the Holocaust has dealt quite extensively with the relationship between humane activity and political realism, often pointing to the preeminence of the latter. Similar conclusions have been reached in the case of certain Jewish organizations in the thirties and forties.*

*The Palestine situation posed a particular dilemma: How did the Zionist leaders of varying viewpoints incorporate the yishuv's deep personal solidarity with the Jews of Europe into their political designs vis-à-vis the British? D. Porat raises this issue and elucidates the leadership's concern to avoid confrontation with the Mandatory Power.*

**T**he Jewish community in Palestine received information about the situation of the Jews in Nazi-occupied territories from the beginning of the second World War. But it was only in the autumn of 1942 that the significance of this information became clear — planned mass extermination. The Jewish Agency Executive, the leading political framework of the Palestinian Jewish community (the *yishuv*) convened on November 22, 1942, with David Ben-Gurion at its head, to evaluate the situation and examine possibilities for action.

One of the subjects raised at that meeting was how to give public expression to the deep shock of the *yishuv*. Moshe Shapira, the executive member on behalf of Mizrahi (religious party), proposed a day of mourning with fasting and prayer in the synagogues, accompanied by a general strike and organized public meetings “like that held in connection with the White Paper.” This spontaneous proposal combined a traditional religious response, to which no one took exception, with actions that had political implications and to which most of the members present objected. Eliahu Dobkin (Labor Party), Isaac Gruenbaum (General Zionist

Party), Dr. Werner D. Senator (non-Zionists), and especially Eliezer Kaplan and Dr. Bernard Joseph (both Labor Party) argued that such a strike would hurt the war effort against Germany. Joseph even proposed that, instead of striking, the usual work-day should be lengthened by two hours in order to further the war effort. The opponents of Shapira's proposal carried the day, and the Executive decided that Joseph and the "Committee of Four" — Shapira, Gruenbaum, Dobkin, and Dr. Emil Schmorak, who since 1939 had been charged with providing help to the Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland — should seek more appropriate ways of expressing public grief.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, Shapira's proposal for a reply like that expressed in connection with the White Paper provoked the greatest opposition, for the stormy demonstrations against Britain's closing the doors of immigration had signaled both the deterioration of relations between the *yishuv* and the British, and the acrimonious controversy between activists and moderates within the *yishuv*. Thus the proposal of a general strike again raised a key political question and confronted the Jewish Agency Executive with the necessity to give practical expression to the slogan Ben-Gurion had coined at the start of the war: "We must aid the army as if there were no White Paper and fight the White Paper as if there were no war."<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish Agency had to decide how to express forcefully the horror of the *yishuv* at the news of the Holocaust and, in light of the news, to pressure the British to permit Jewish immigration into Palestine and to concentrate effort and resources upon the rescue of European Jewry — all without impairing the British war effort. Conversely, it had to determine how to continue its support of the British without neglecting the urgent need to rescue European Jewry.

It must be remembered that the Agency session was held less than one month after the turning point in the British war effort at el Alamein. During the months when there had been the real danger of a German conquest of Egypt and Palestine, there was a rapprochement between the British and the local Jewish community, expressed in recruitment policies and military cooperation. Now the fear arose (which later proved justified) that Britain's military success would change its attitude to the *yishuv*. The Jewish Agency Executive had to consider whether this was the right moment to permit relations with the British to deteriorate.<sup>3</sup>

These questions were not discussed in depth. This was the first meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive entirely devoted to a discussion of the plight of European Jewry and the members had not yet asked themselves whether and how their position had changed vis-à-vis the Mandatory Government and the White Paper. Therefore, they maintained the stance they had taken since the outbreak of the war, and the outstanding moderates in the Executive opted against demonstrations or any other forceful response which might cause friction between the *yishuv* and the British.

### The Three Days of Mourning

The Committee of Four, with the addition of Joseph, had to operate in conjunction with the General Council of the Jewish community in Palestine (*Va'ad Le'umi*) headed by Izhak Ben-Zvi. The General Council was responsible for internal affairs of the *yishuv*, including national conferences and statements on its behalf. In a joint meeting it turned out that most of the members of the Executive of the General Council, especially Yosef Sprinzak, one of the most outspoken moderates, supported the decision of the Agency Executive not to strike or demonstrate. A resolution was passed calling for a "day of assembly" on which the Elected Assembly would convene. During the afternoon, economic sectors nonessential to the war effort would strike and the municipalities would hold public meetings. The subject was again referred to a joint committee of the Executives of the Jewish Agency and the General Council to further define the content of the "day of assembly", so that the organized response would encompass the entire Jewish community.<sup>4</sup>

On November 23, 1942, the newspapers carried the Agency Executive announcement of the systematic extermination of European Jewry, and a few days later the Executive of the General Council, with the consent of the Jewish Agency Executive, resolved to proclaim three days, November 30 to December 2, 1942, as days of "alarm, protest, and a call to action."<sup>5</sup> What brought about the extension of public expression to a three-day period? The answer is to be found in the press, which vividly revealed the indignation and rage among Palestinian

Day of mourning for Jewish victims of the Nazis; a prayer service on the Mt. of Olives





Jewry upon reading the Agency Executive's announcement which turned doubts, rumors and bits of information into a clear and frightful reality.

These feelings were understandable, for most of the *yishuv* consisted of persons who had left Europe a few years before the war, and feared for the safety of the families, friends, and communities they had left behind. The press was full of letters and articles demanding that every effort be made to stop the murder immediately and avenge these war crimes. "*Al domi!* The *yishuv* must not remain silent!" "Every hand in Israel will avenge!" "Protest! Rescue! Revenge!" These slogans, which appeared in banner headlines in the press almost daily in late November and early December 1942, were evidence of the agitation that gripped the *yishuv*.<sup>6</sup> The national institutions could not ignore these reactions and thus decided to broaden the scope of the response.

On the first day of national mourning, a special session of the Elected Assembly was convened. Members of the Jewish Agency Executive, the chief rabbis, representatives of the settlements and municipalities, and members of the consular corps were present. After a number of speeches and the prayer "*El Malei Raḥamim*," a petition in the name of the entire *yishuv* was read out calling upon the Allies and world Jewry to rescue and avenge the victims of the Nazis. The session concluded with the vow not to remain silent nor to permit the world to remain silent. The following day public meetings sponsored by the municipalities were held throughout Palestine. The third day was one of fasting and prayer, with transportation stopped and strikes called from noon to midnight in sectors nonessential to the war effort. Needless to say, all festivities and various forms of entertainment were cancelled.<sup>7</sup>

A study of the events of those three days shows that the joint committee of the Jewish Agency and the General Council did not permit the agitation within the *yishuv* to turn into protest demonstrations against the British, who showed no intention of repealing their ban on Jewish immigration despite the news of the Holocaust. On the contrary, the Agency and the General Council directed the *yishuv* to find more moderate forms of expression. While the Jewish national institutions broadened the scope of the response, they did not deviate from their political principles.

The three days of mourning were a special event in the history of the *yishuv*. They were a spontaneous demonstration of unity, with every faction and party participating. "The large square near HaBima [the main theatre in Tel Aviv] and the side streets around it were filled with crowds . . . silent and overwhelmed with emotion . . . sorrow deeply etched on every face . . . and out of the silence rose the vow of the *yishuv*."<sup>8</sup> Grief and anxiety over the survival of the Jewish people united the *yishuv*. The Agency's announcement of the extermination of European Jewry and the three days of mourning mark the dividing line in the *yishuv*'s consciousness between the first three years of the war, when it did not grasp the implications of what was happening in Europe, and the following three years.

## Attempts to Coordinate World Jewish Reaction

“What happened here a week ago was something tremendous,” Ben-Gurion said, summarizing the days of mourning, and proposing that this kind of action be continued.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, this was the question facing the Jewish Agency Executive: how to achieve more tangible rescue results than the *yishuv*'s expression of unity and its emotional response – though this in itself was an achievement in a community composed of so many factions and parties. Two main spheres of action were indicated: a) setting up a rescue fund; b) coordination of expressions of grief with Jewry throughout the free world, especially England and the United States, in order to influence non-Jews in the democratic nations where public opinion and pressure carried some weight. Through demonstrations, conferences, and a sympathetic press it might be possible to exert pressure on various governments to aid rescue efforts, and open Palestine to Jewish refugees.<sup>10</sup>

Since communications in wartime did not enable full coordination with these Jewish communities, the Jewish Agency Executive proposed to send a delegation from the *yishuv* to the United States and, if possible, to England and South Africa as well. Armed with appropriate materials, the delegation would call press conferences, be received by public figures and ministers, and work with the help of local Jewish communities. Ben-Gurion opposed the idea because he thought that a broad delegation of Jews from the free world should come to a Zionist Conference in Palestine that would deal with the danger to European Jewry and, as a consequence, with the Zionist enterprise as well. Despite Ben-Gurion's opposition, a joint committee of the Jewish Agency Executive and the General Council was appointed to determine the composition of the delegation that would leave for abroad. At the same time, it was agreed that subsequently they would also consider how to implement Ben-Gurion's proposal.<sup>11</sup>

The committee could not reach a decision because of the disputes which arose. The Labor Party Central Committee and the Histadrut suggested that Berl Katzenelson or Golda Myerson, “one of our own”, be included in the delegation. Mizrahi members wanted to send Rabbi Meir Berlin. The General Council was concerned that despatching envoys without prior coordination with members of the Zionist Organization of America “would result in insult and failure,”<sup>12</sup> as this act would likely be interpreted as an imposition of the will of the Zionist leadership in Palestine upon its American colleagues. The Executive of the General Council and the Committee of Four feared that a united delegation in the name of the *yishuv* was an impossible dream, and they reached the very conclusion of the Jewish Agency Executive, namely, to despatch Gruenbaum alone.<sup>13</sup> The proposal for a united delegation was dropped as a result of the various factions' inability to reach an agreement. Now every party or organization could send its own representative abroad, independent of the Jewish Agency Executive. Meanwhile, time was passing and no one left Palestine on behalf of the national institutions – not even Gruenbaum. As Moshe Shertok

admitted in May 1943, for months the idea remained “just a proposal of the Executive.”<sup>14</sup>

A parallel process was in operation in the United States. An American delegation which was supposed to come to Palestine at the request of the Jewish Agency Executive, never left because of endless arguments over its composition.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the *yishuv* continued to organize its public response alone, but with a sharper sense of isolation from the rest of the Jewish people. They felt as if they bore the entire burden of response. Ben-Gurion expressed this feeling: “We are in a terrible state because of the lack of communication . . . among members of the [General Zionist] Executive scattered all over the world.”<sup>16</sup>

### The Month of Mourning

Meanwhile the news of the extermination of European Jewry had also roused public opinion in Washington and London. Jewish public figures and institutions, Christian religious leaders, and humanitarian and professional organizations pressured the British and American governments to take a stand and embark upon rescue operations. On December 17, 1942, Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Minister, read a statement in Parliament on behalf of the eleven Allied governments and the French National Committee. He reported that the attention of the Allies had been directed to the news that the German regime intended to exterminate the Jewish people, and that the Allied governments denounced this barbaric policy and promised to take active measures to punish the criminals. The Members of Parliament stood at attention for a moment of silence to demonstrate their sympathy. The same day, the statement was published in the newspapers and read on all the radio stations of the Allied Powers.<sup>17</sup>

Eden’s statement was received in Palestine as an indication of the success of mourning. A joint statement published by the Jewish Agency Executive and the General Council expressed a feeling shared by many: “The cry of the *yishuv* during the three days of mourning breached the wall of silence around this terrible massacre . . . and the leaders of mankind in the free world have been aroused.”<sup>18</sup> At the same time, it did not escape the national institutions’ attention that this sympathetic statement made no mention of rescuing the Jews or of opening Palestine to Jewish immigration, and they did not fail to express their bitterness at this fact in their joint statement.<sup>19</sup>

Together with Eden’s statement, information arrived that Himmler had ordered the extermination by January 1, 1943 of the survivors of Polish Jewry who were concentrated in 53 ghettos and of the Jews remaining in the Reich (Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia).<sup>20</sup> It was obvious that not only was time short but that, in fact, it had already run out, for only a few days remained until that date. Rage again welled up in the *yishuv*, and the same day on which the Allies’ statement was received, the General Council proclaimed thirty days of mourning – from December 18, 1942 to January 16, 1943. The members of the national

institutions assumed that the three days of mourning had helped bring about the statement of the Allies. (In fact, the main factors behind that statement were the pressure of organized Jewry in Britain, the Polish government-in-exile, and local public opinion.) They therefore hoped that the month of mourning would move the Allies at least to declare their willingness to extend tangible aid to the survivors. Thus, the *yishuv* would serve as an example to the Jewry of the free world.

"The whole way of life of the *yishuv* must be an expression of mourning, rage, and demands upon ourselves and others to rescue whatever can be rescued," stated the General Council's declaration of the month of mourning. The *yishuv* was required to restrict its festivities, the press and teachers were requested to give prominent treatment to the subject, and special prayers were recited in the synagogues.<sup>21</sup>

In Britain, the Allies' statement aroused a wave of harsh public criticism of the government for confining itself to a mere expression of sympathy instead of adopting active measures. The editors of the most influential newspapers, prominent religious leaders, heads of trade unions, and Members of Parliament wrote articles, made speeches, and submitted questions to Parliament.<sup>22</sup> Foreign Minister Anthony Eden declared the government's intention to do everything in its power, but "tremendous difficulties" stood in the way. Nonetheless, under pressure of public opinion, the British government would consider several practical proposals.<sup>23</sup>

Gruenbaum proposed that the Jewish Agency Executive publish a reply to Eden's statements and declare the readiness of the *yishuv* and the Jewish people to absorb into Palestine all the Jews who would hopefully be rescued. This would solve one of the major difficulties, namely, finding a haven for the refugees and the means to support them. Ben-Gurion, Joseph, and Dobkin objected to this proposal on the grounds that the Allies' statement was significant enough and that yet another statement would only diminish the effect of the first. Statements were only idle talk. Moreover, the Zionist Executive in London had already published a demand for concrete rescue work and had expressed the wish that the government let "half a million Jews in Palestine do their duty and fulfill their mission" with regard to their brothers. The Jewish Agency Executive decided that it would be sufficient to issue another statement in the name of the General Council, and this was done.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible that the Agency Executive lost a valuable opportunity to exert pressure on the British government precisely at the moment when that government had taken a defensive, apologetic stance under the fire of a unified public opinion regarding its failures. Perhaps a more forceful response on the part of the *yishuv*, such as a mass demonstration or general strike, might have seemed justified to British public opinion and the Mandatory government might not have been able to clash with the *yishuv* at that moment. It would be hasty, however, to state categorically that the British government would have felt constrained by the

combined pressure at home and in Palestine to make significant concessions regarding rescue actions and Jewish immigration into Palestine. This key question will be dealt with again, later on.

### The Internal Debate about the Nature of the Mourning

The emphatically religious character of the three days and the month of mourning led to controversies within the *yishuv*. In leftist circles, distaste was expressed for the despised "Diaspora" custom of fasting and lamentations, and parading through the streets with the chief rabbis, bearing scrolls of the Law, leading the community. This custom, they felt, was not befitting the renewed life of the people in its own land. Fasting, they claimed, was in fact "an expression of weakness . . . a very nice messianic affair," but nothing more.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, some secular Jews felt that it was precisely traditional religious custom which united all parts of the people; in time of trouble, the differences between the Jews in Palestine and in the Diaspora, and between religious and secular Jews within the *yishuv*, should not be emphasized.<sup>26</sup> This view was expressed by Isaac Tabenkin and Berl Katzenelson, the two prominent ideological leaders of the Labor Party. Tabenkin saw genuine grief in the weeping of Jews, religious as well as secular, and their tears, he felt, were in no way inferior to other forms of response. Berl fasted because he felt that in this way he was expressing his participation in the plight of the Jews, a tragedy that was above all party disputes and questions regarding a way-of-life; he was deeply grieved that not all the youth in Palestine completely shared this feeling.<sup>27</sup>

Ben-Gurion, however, feared that organized mourning was merely an easy, uncommitted outlet for sadness and bitterness, and might be a substitute for a sober view of the situation. He felt that the days of mourning lacked "a sufficiently Zionist character," that is, not enough emphasis on Erez-Israel as the center of the people and of action.<sup>28</sup> The minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive meetings contain no explicit resolution, but it seems that at that stage, namely the first months of 1943, the Executive decided to entrust the religious expression of grief to the Chief Rabbinate and the General Council, and to search for more efficient and influential rescue activities.

During the month of mourning, the feeling grew within the public and the national institutions that this was a decree that had been imposed upon them and that the public could not endure. Those who made their living in the entertainment industry complained that their livelihood was being jeopardized and that some means should be found to ensure that the burden of public response would weigh equally on all sectors of the economy. It must be remembered that during the months following the German retreat from North Africa, thousands of soldiers from the Allied armies passed through Palestine, all of them starved for entertainment and diversion. The General Council Executive decided to permit the performance of plays and screening of films, but prohibited dancing and

orchestras “which are in marked contrast to the mood of the *yishuv*.” This very general definition made it possible to evade the prohibition.<sup>29</sup>

There were some, however, who supported the idea of mourning and tried to pressure the institutions to proclaim a continuing collective expression of mourning even after the month had elapsed. Among the most prominent of these was *Al Domi* (do not be silent), a group of intellectuals who attempted to rouse the *yishuv* and its institutions to view the rescue of European Jewry as the supreme task of the hour.<sup>30</sup> Others, however, thought that the month of mourning was artificial, a form of lip service expressed in public weeping and hysteria that was difficult to continue, and that the *yishuv* must express its strength in the face of the calamity. Someone coined the slogan “Not *al domi* (do not be silent), but *al dema* (do not cry).”<sup>31</sup>

Berl Katzenelson, who was an adherent of the other ideas of *Al Domi*, opposed the idea of a “regime of mourning” and was not “willing to demand that sadness be written on every face or that they give up things which make them happy.” It had to be a spontaneous expression, not imposed and organized.<sup>32</sup> Ben-Zvi was of an even more extreme opinion, and consistently stated that he did not see the good of a public response. Gruenbaum did not want to bring daily life in the *yishuv* to a standstill because, in his view, it represented the only ray of hope in that terrible period. Gruenbaum’s statements drew withering criticism, for being chairman of the Rescue Committee (an enlargement of the Committee of Four), and expressing himself generally in a provocative manner, he had been the target of bitterness and frustration over the Holocaust and rescue work.<sup>33</sup>

## The End of the Month of Mourning and its Political Aftermath

The month of mourning apparently failed. Despite the efforts of the General Council, there were only “negligible signs of mourning.” Public feeling had cooled and the *yishuv* had quickly gone back to its “merrymaking”. Even private individuals complained that daily life had returned to normal, and condemned this. Yet it was probably difficult to continue to make ritual gestures that would never influence any government to change its policy or save European Jewry. Nor did the scepticism of the chairman of the General Council Executive (Ben-Zvi), and the chairman of the Rescue Committee (Gruenbaum), contribute to the success of the month of mourning.<sup>34</sup>

As the month drew to a close, the question arose as to which public occasion should mark its conclusion. In the Rescue Committee and the General Council, the well-worn ideas were again raised: a special session of the Elected Assembly, a fast, a strike, etc.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, however, representatives of the opposition parties, the Revisionists and Agudat Yisrael, had joined the Rescue Committee and rejected these earlier actions out of hand. They felt that concrete actions, not just statements, should be demanded of the Allies, by combining a forceful, even dramatic, response on the part of the *yishuv* together with a similar one by British

and American Jewry, and by reinforcing the pressure of British and American public opinion on His Majesty's Government. The Aguda and Revisionist representatives on the Rescue Committee, headed by Yosef Klarman, repeatedly proposed mass rallies, a strike even of work essential to the British Army, a journey by every man, woman, and child in the *yishuv* to Jerusalem to sit in front of Government House and the High Commissioner's office until their demands were met.<sup>36</sup>

In the Executive Committee of the Histadrut (the General Labor Unions organization), Hillel Frumkin and Aharon Ziesling demanded "a public expression which would attract the Diaspora to join it." They felt that the Jewish community in Palestine wished to continue to express its demands for rescue, but in a more forceful way than the month of mourning. "We differ from America in several respects, especially when it comes to demonstrations," said David Remez, chairman of the Histadrut Executive Committee, in reference to the fact that American Jews had several times postponed a mass rally which was to have been held in New York.<sup>37</sup> The Histadrut Executive tried to win support for their proposal in various bodies. Avraham Haft, the Histadrut representative on the Rescue Committee, favored the general strike demanded by the Revisionists and proposed, in the name of the Histadrut, that if not the entire population, at least 500 representatives from all parts of the country travel to Jerusalem and fast for three days in front of the High Commissioner's residence.<sup>38</sup>

In response to Joseph and Senator who from time to time reiterated their proposal to work overtime in order to emphasize that the rescue of the Jews would be accomplished only with the victory of the Allies, Remez proposed, in the name of the Histadrut, that the workers should work additional hours during the days following the strike.<sup>39</sup> Haft also tried to convince the Labor Party to support the Histadrut's initiative but his complaints that the Jewish Agency Executive had no interest in the subject and that the General Council's proposal of two minutes of daily silence was a mockery, did not even evoke discussion, much less a resolution.

In a joint meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive and the representatives of the Histadrut, Remez demanded that the Agency issue "another political alarm." The Agency's reply was that it could not work under pressure from Agudat Yisrael and the Revisionists, but only in keeping with its own views.<sup>40</sup> Some members of the General Council Executive, too, were not satisfied with the action taken thus far. One of these was Shlomo-Zalman Shragai, who was also a member of *AI Domi* and who had resigned from the Rescue Committee in protest over the Jewish Agency's unwillingness to organize an appropriate public response.<sup>41</sup>

It seems that the tragic events in Europe made possible a rare combination of forces, as representatives of the Histadrut, the Revisionists, and Agudat Yisrael all supported the same ideas in opposition to the national institutions, because of their desire to put teeth into the *yishuv's* response. Nonetheless, they were unable to outweigh the views of the Jewish Agency Executive and the majority of the

General Council Executive who repeatedly rejected proposals that ran counter to the accepted political line. They mustered the official arguments: the Rescue Committee could not accept a resolution before the proposal had been submitted for discussion by the various bodies represented thereon; it was impossible to appoint a committee because important members were absent. There were also more substantive, though ironic, arguments: the fast proposed by the Histadrut, that bastion of secular Socialist Zionism, was too redolent of the spirit of the Exile.<sup>42</sup>

But the main arguments, of course, were political. First was the fear that mass demonstrations would provoke clashes with Arabs in the cities with mixed populations, especially Jerusalem. Pro-Nazi sentiments had increased in the Arab world, particularly in 1941–1942 when the British had been in grave trouble on the various fronts. The Jewish Agency Executive, which was responsible for the security of the *yishuv*, did not want to give the Arab population a pretext to renew the disturbances of 1936–1939.

The second political argument was that mass demonstrations and strikes affecting the war industry would cause an open rift with the British at precisely the time when, some two months after the start of the German retreat in the Western desert, weapons searches, arrests, and British harassment of the recruiting offices had begun. The British no longer needed Palestine Jewry's military strength. Rather, they feared its increase. The *yishuv*'s resentment against these British measures grew and the Jewish Agency Executive feared that a harsh public reply to the British policy regarding Jewish immigration and rescue work would ignite a conflagration whose flames the Revisionists would fan. Such a situation would give the Mandatory government the pretext for harshly oppressing the *yishuv*, and the outcome might cause severe damage to Zionist achievements and political aspirations. For all these reasons, the Jewish Agency Executive felt that it was its duty "to beware of harmful activities" and to weigh carefully "the extent of the responsibility" that it was assuming by engaging in overly-rigorous activities.<sup>43</sup>

The Revisionists wanted to force the Jewish Agency Executive to reconsider its policy on this matter of principle, and their representatives on the Rescue Committee proposed that the subject of public response be decided by the Executive of the General Zionist Council, the supreme authority of the Zionist Organization. At that time the Revisionists were not members of the Zionist Organization and thus could not air their demands in the Council Executive,<sup>44</sup> but apparently they made this proposal anticipating that public opinion during the debates would demand forceful action.

The following meeting of the Zionist Council Executive (January 18, 1943) was the first since the start of the war that discussed the news from Europe; among the issues raised in disorder and an atmosphere of pain was the question of the *yishuv*'s reply to the events in Europe. Those who related to this issue spoke in general terms, insisting on a great outcry in order to shake up the Jews and the free world, without taking into account the possible consequences. Gruenbaum



claimed that the proponents of loud public expressions were deluded if they thought that either the Allies or the Germans would be impressed by the cries and protests of the *yishuv*.

As the Revisionists had expected, the debaters expressed their feeling that the public was pressuring them: "Jews are crying out . . . they are besieging this very building and demanding action" and "now people are saying, at last, even in the Zionist Council Executive they're talking about the Diaspora . . . some say that our institutions aren't doing anything, while in the meantime the Revisionist circles and Agudat Yisrael try to exploit the situation." Despite these unequivocal statements, not one of the discussants made any practical proposals nor was any resolution on the issue passed during this meeting.<sup>45</sup> Hence the Jewish Agency Executive's policy remained in effect and the month of mourning came to an end without being marked by any public event.

### Public Reaction during February and March 1943

During January and February 1943 it became increasingly clear that the deportations from various countries to the extermination camps in Eastern Europe were continuing rapidly and systematically. In Palestine there was a growing sense of depression, for in the meantime the *yishuv's* rescue attempts had come to naught and the Allies had done nothing beyond issuing their statement at the end of December. On February 22, 1943, a session of the Elected Assembly was convened "to demonstrate solidarity with the victims whose numbers mount daily, and to express disappointment before the whole world over the inactivity of the democratic states." Statements on behalf of the Chief Rabbinate and Agudat Yisrael were issued; Ben-Gurion and Gruenbaum made speeches; during the conference there was a two-hour curfew, and that night all forms of amusement and entertainment were cancelled. During the curfew there was a general strike, even by workers in the army camps. The statement which the Elected Assembly published reflected the *yishuv's* feelings of despair and impotence in the face of the so-called enlightened world's indifference to the plight of the Jewish people. The only threat they could utter against the Allies was that "Jewish blood spilled in vain will give you no peace."<sup>46</sup>

The agenda of the Elected Assembly was similar to those of previous meetings which had marked the beginning of the three days of mourning and the month of mourning, but here despair and weariness were more clearly felt. The session lasted only two hours, but even then — as the members of the General Council Executive complained — it was necessary to mediate among at least nine different bodies. When Ben-Gurion spoke, Gruenbaum demanded equal time, and if the Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi addressed the delegates, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi must do likewise; if there was a statement on behalf of Agudat Yisrael, the Revisionists felt slighted; then the women demanded representation, and so it went, endlessly.<sup>47</sup> This weariness was felt to an even greater degree in the next session of the Elected

Assembly, which convened on March 24, 1943. The session was devoted to defense mobilization and financial affairs; only at the opening was the plight of European Jewry discussed. Gruenbaum analyzed the news which had been received by the Rescue Committee and the session issued a proclamation, even more desperate than the first, against the indifference of the Allies.<sup>48</sup>

During the four months that had elapsed since the Jewish Agency's statement regarding the annihilation of European Jewry, four public events had been organized in Palestine in response to the news of the Holocaust — all with much the same format. The public and the national institutions had the feeling that a fixed form of response had developed and become routine, and that repetition had detracted from its effectiveness. "The same curfew, the same fasting," more speeches by the Chief Rabbis, the same old statements. "We're tired of conferences, and have said everything that could be said. Meetings — they are all a farce." The members of the institutions which debated the form of the *yishuv's* response had already adopted their positions, so that even in those discussions there was nothing new.<sup>49</sup> It almost seemed as if the public response of the *yishuv* had become an issue which was slowly being forgotten, until two events reawakened the debate: the Bermuda Conference and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, both of which occurred on April 19, 1943.

### The Shaping of Agency Executive Policy

Debate over organization of a public event to be held on the eve of the Bermuda Conference (an Anglo-American conference on refugees) began in early March. Once again, Yosef Klarman and Avraham Haft, speaking at the Rescue Committee meeting, proposed a mass demonstration in Jerusalem. This time, Agudat Yisrael, HaShomer HaZair, and the Left Poalei Zion supported the idea, stating unequivocally that they could not accept the Jewish Agency's contention that any mass political activity might endanger the *yishuv*. On the contrary, Ya'acov Zerubavel, leader of Poalei Zion, wanted "any friction between the government and the Jewish population resulting from a demonstration against the tragedy in the Diaspora" to be made public abroad. The representatives of the immigrant organizations in the Immigrants Council which had been set up alongside the Rescue Committee demanded a mass assembly, at least in Tel Aviv if not in Jerusalem; and at a meeting of the representatives of the settlements and municipalities, there was unanimous support of the mass assembly. "If something is not planned that will involve many people, there will be demonstrations," Ben-Zvi warned the General Council Executive, referring to spontaneous expressions beyond the control of the national institutions.<sup>50</sup>

Gruenbaum and Shapira tried to communicate to their colleagues on the Jewish Agency Executive their sense that the pressures within the Rescue Committee and the population at large for forceful public action were growing as the Bermuda



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Conference approached: "In various quarters people are demanding . . . a new reply: a general strike, a demonstration of tens of thousands in Jerusalem . . . until now we have rejected these demands, but it seems . . . that it is becoming ever more difficult to go on rejecting them, especially since the English, despite the terrible catastrophe, had not eased the restrictive immigration laws one whit." He reminded his listeners that there were complaints that the Jewish Agency Executive was not doing anything to shake up the public in the free world; that terrible news continued to arrive from Europe, and that Bermuda might be the last chance to rescue European Jewry. Therefore, one of the members of the Jewish Agency Executive should be in the United States in order to rouse public opinion during the Conference. Another of his arguments was that the Jewish Agency Executive had thus far rejected every proposal made by the Rescue Committee; the time had come to reconsider them.<sup>51</sup>

Some Labor Party members expressed their opposition to the Jewish Agency's position in writing and in person, within the Labor Party, in the Zionist Council Executive, and in the Histadrut Executive: "Our leaders are making a serious mistake in taking a stand against a popular movement which they consider unnecessary."<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, the same members of the Labor Party feared demonstrations as much as did the Agency Executive, and sought a more moderate response.

The Jewish Agency Executive rejected all these pressures and arguments. Demonstrations, they felt, were as ineffective as more moderate actions; they could not exert pressure on the British and the Americans in Bermuda. All they could do was provide some sense of relief to the *yishuv*, while they cause problems and even hurt it. The members also objected to Moshe Shertok, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, staying in the United States until the opening of the Bermuda Conference. The Agency Executive was willing to approve another conference of the *yishuv* to be organized by the General Council, and a petition in the name of the *yishuv* to be sent to Bermuda, but no more.<sup>53</sup>

It may be that because the Jewish Agency Executive was preoccupied with practical matters it paid no attention to the divergence between its own views and public sentiment for a response to the Allies' indifference to the fate of the Jewish people. Even if the Agency's arguments were logical and compelling in view of the political situation, the Jewish community in Palestine did not wish to hear them; and it was difficult for people to understand why the Jewish Agency Executive restrained their desire to protest. Because of the dimensions of the carnage, the magnitude of the disaster, and family and Zionist movement ties between the Jews in Palestine and the Jews in Europe, it was inevitable that the reaction of the *yishuv* to the Holocaust would be first and foremost an emotional one: "Our Zionism is an outcry; We can not remain silent; Jewish history will never forgive us; our brother's blood cries out to us." Bitter experience had shown that there was nothing to be gained from any of the various forms of response, ". . . but it is simply not in accordance with human respect for the living and the dead that tens of thousands of Jews were cut down like grass, with no outcry, no echo worthy of the name." These utterances and others like them were repeated many times.<sup>54</sup>

Apparently, as long as there was still some hope, however faint, that the response of the *yishuv* would affect Allied policy, the Jewish Agency Executive was willing to join in organizing days of mourning and public gatherings. However, when this hope proved false, the Executive came to the conclusion that there was no point in continuing to deal with the subject. Its decision not to have Moshe Shertok remain in the United States for the Bermuda Conference is evidence that, even before it began, the Executive thought that the conference would be of no real value, and that the *yishuv's* response would not change the outcome or Allied policy.

Such a response merely had a domestic value, helping to unify the *yishuv* and salve its conscience, but it was of no use in rescuing the victims of Nazism, and its organization could thus be entrusted to the General Council Executive. There would thus be a division of labor: the General Council would deal with the religious expressions of mourning such as had already been organized, and with the *yishuv's* response in general — public meetings, petitions, statements in the Elected Assembly, etc., while the Jewish Agency Executive would deal with practical and political problems of rescue.

The General Council hoped that this division would extend its influence upon

the *yishuv*, especially since it had an advantage over the Rescue Committee whose proposals to make the *yishuv*'s response more severe had been rejected by the Jewish Agency Executive. In the words of the members of the General Council Executive, the Elected Assembly had become "the only institution which informs the world," an institution whose purpose is to give the *yishuv* no rest; "and this is an inner psychological necessity."<sup>55</sup>

The Executive of the General Council thus began its preparations for another *yishuv*-wide assembly on the eve of the Bermuda Conference, as had been decided by the Jewish Agency Executive. But the members of the Histadrut Executive Committee, especially David Remez and Golda Myerson, had not yet given up. To the General Council they recommended an activity which would be different from the *yishuv* gatherings and mass demonstrations that had already become abhorrent to them, namely, to get the entire *yishuv* to sign a petition which the Elected Assembly would publish. It would be a mass project that would be carried out in the streets with the participation of the leaders and prominent public figures of the *yishuv*. For two days the institutions would cease all activities and devote themselves to this campaign which would achieve several ends. The petition would encompass the entire *yishuv* and imbue it with a sense of involvement, instead of the prevailing depression. The public would see that its leaders sensed their pain; "Our children and young people will remember that there were two days during which their parents showed a different spirit," said Remez. Golda Myerson hoped that it would also be possible to carry out such a campaign in the United States, England, and South Africa, among Jews and non-Jews, and that the expression of the opinion of two to three million persons would exert real pressure.<sup>56</sup>

Most of the members of the Jewish Agency Executive and some of the General Council Executive were against the signature campaign (the "petition" as they called it), arguing that it was nothing but a vain hope and a waste of time and energy. Ben-Zvi correctly doubted that it would be possible to agree on a text that everyone would sign and that it would be possible to carry out such a complicated project. Only after pressure on the part of David Remez, and extensive discussions, was it decided to appoint a sub-committee to consider the possibility of implementing the suggestion.<sup>57</sup>

### The Bermuda Conference and its Aftermath

Meanwhile, the Bermuda Conference had begun on April 19, 1943, without being marked by any public event in Palestine. The protocols of the conference were not published, but it was known that every proposal submitted by the Jewish Agency Executive and the Rescue Committee had been rejected. The conference was described abroad as a maneuver to pacify the criticism of public opinion in the free world. The Elected Assembly was convened on May 3, 1943 to express the *yishuv*'s profound disappointment at the outcome of the conference which many had considered the last chance to rescue European Jewry, and to issue another

call "to everyone who has a human conscience, not to preclude the possible rescue of the few survivors because of political considerations."<sup>58</sup> It was obvious that this call was no more than the despairing rhetorical gesture of an isolated group. But "what can we expect of the Gentiles," asked Golda Myerson, "when the Jewish *yishuv* itself did not raise a cry to the very heavens?"<sup>59</sup>

At the meeting of the Zionist Council Executive held two weeks later, bitterness was expressed that no fitting public response had been organized in Palestine either before or after the Bermuda Conference. Explicit accusations were hurled against the Jewish Agency Executive for rejecting practically every proposal for fear of the consequences and lack of faith in the power of the *yishuv* to carry out any project, and for not having permitted a public response, as in the case of the *Patria*, for example. The Agency Executive was accused of not having considered public sentiment and not realizing the value of a public response for reinforcing sympathetic public opinion which had once more been aroused after the paltry results of the Bermuda Conference were made known in England and the United States. Gruenbaum, Shertok, and Sprinzak tried to calm the atmosphere, to minimize the value of any response on the *yishuv*'s part, and to postpone voting on a resolution.<sup>60</sup>

The next day, May 19, the British government, under pressure from its critics, scheduled a debate in Parliament on the results of the Bermuda Conference and the government's policy on the refugees.<sup>61</sup> Most of the Zionist Council Executive wanted the *yishuv*'s criticism and disappointment to be expressed alongside that of public opinion in the West. A resolution was accepted in principle on "the need for a mass public response to the lack of rescue efforts," especially if the debate in Parliament should prove fruitless.<sup>62</sup> This was the resolution which the Revisionists had sought four months earlier — a resolution formulated by the Executive of the supreme Zionist institution as a result of a strong public reaction against the policy of the Jewish Agency Executive and the General Council — but it came too late. The debate in Parliament produced no results, nor did the Jewish Agency Executive change its policy against public demonstrations. On the contrary, by mid-1943 it had additional arguments in its favor.

In early 1943, many in Palestine thought that public response by the *yishuv* would serve as an example and a motivating force for comparable action on the part of Jews in the United States and England.<sup>63</sup> However, after the Bermuda Conference, the Jews of Palestine concluded that in New York, London, and other centers of Jewish population the shock had worn off and life had returned to normal, to the usual internal dissension and dissipation of energies. The *yishuv* felt itself more isolated, even from the Jewish people in the free world.<sup>64</sup> Most of the members of the Jewish Agency Executive felt that no action taken by the *yishuv* had impelled Jewry to do anything up to then, nor would it do so after Bermuda, for the Jewish communities in the Diaspora lived under different conditions and their own internal problems determined their response to the Holocaust: their fear of growing anti-Semitism, of losing positions achieved with tremendous effort,

their relationship with the government, and problems within the communities. Therefore, one should not be provoked by those who insist that the *yishuv*'s actions are important and can influence Jews and non-Jews; the time had come to face the fact that any strike or demonstration in Palestine received no more than two or three lines of coverage in foreign newspapers.<sup>65</sup>

Following the Bermuda Conference, the activities of the Irgun *Zevai Leumi* delegation in the United States were intensified. At the beginning of 1943, this delegation had set up an "Emergency Committee for the Rescue of European Jewry" headed by Hillel Kook (also known as Peter Bergson). The committee attempted to attract the attention of the American public by employing professional publicity methods such as taking full-page advertisements in the leading newspapers, organizing mass rallies, and staging a pageant in the large metropolitan centers, that was seen by Eleanor Roosevelt, U.S. Senators, and leading public figures who supported the committee. The Jewish establishment, the Zionists in particular, considered this activity irresponsible and dissipating of energies, and they categorically opposed it. At the same time, the Jewish leadership realized that the Revisionists were exploiting the vacuum created in the wake of their own lack of effective response to a public yearning for action.<sup>66</sup> The Jewish Agency Executive did not want a similar, and to their mind, undesirable, state of affairs to prevail in Palestine as well, namely, a situation in which a vociferous minority would raise basic questions in opposition to the official leadership. Ben-Gurion condemned the "gang . . . of lawless Irgun *Zevai Leumi* members who desecrate the name of the Jewish people among the Gentiles" for the sake of publicity.<sup>67</sup>

One must note that at this point the argument between Revisionists and the Zionist Executive, both in the United States and in Palestine, no longer concerned the specific question of a forceful response to the Allies' failings. That issue had become part of their acrimonious quarrel over the methods and style of Zionism in general. The Labor movement wanted to follow Weizmann's famous slogan, "One more goat, one more acre" or in this instance, "One more immigration permit, one more refugee" — silent, hard work which might bring solid results, as it did in the past, rather than what they considered high-flown rhetoric, grandiose declarations, and solemn ceremonies which they felt bore no resemblance to concrete action.

### Reaction to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

On Passover eve, April 19, 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising began and the whole Jewish world was stirred with profound pride as well as grief. The uprising may have been a factor in the change in the *yishuv*'s attitude to the position of the Jews in the Diaspora, and led to the growing feeling of solidarity with them. The public again pressured its representatives to let it express its desire to make sacrifices and to help. On May 6, the Histadrut held a special conference at which

it declared seven days of fundraising "to encourage the ghetto defenders." At the Zionist Council Executive a proposal was made to organize community-wide fundraising. The representatives of the settlements, the cities, and the Executive Committee of the Histadrut met with the General Council Executive; as a result of their pressure it was decided to hold, if not a demonstration, at least a strike which would include the workers in the defense industry and the army camps, mass meetings, and the signing of a petition by the entire *yishuv* as had been proposed before the Bermuda Conference. The strike would be called "Warsaw Day" and would be unique, different from its predecessors, for "there has never been a day like Warsaw Day." The Agency Executive, as before, objected to the signing of a petition but was forced to relent since it had put the General Council in charge of this matter, and was obligated to abide by its decisions.<sup>68</sup>

The general strike and the petition were supposed to reflect the united stand of the *yishuv*, but Agudat Yisrael and the Revisionists did not agree to them because no one had consulted their representatives on the Rescue Committee, and because a strike and petition were, in their view, an inadequate response to so momentous an event as the Warsaw uprising. These two parties announced that they would not support the action of the National Council, nor would they participate in the petition which the public would be exhorted to sign, although they would not obstruct these activities.<sup>69</sup>

The public in Palestine paid no heed to the disputes between the parties, and the signing of the petition was a success. On June 15, 1943, over 250,000 adults and some 60,000 children from every settlement signed "the petition of the *yishuv*" which demanded that the Allies immediately undertake rescue and aid operations for European Jewry. A delegation on behalf of the General Council delivered the text of the petition and the signatures, along with a memorandum detailing recommended rescue measures, to the British High Commissioner and to all the consuls and representatives of the Allies and the neutral states in Palestine and in London. However, the question remained, would this enterprise have any effect upon the rescue measures? "What can I, you, and His Majesty's Government do? After all, everything depends upon Germany," Harold MacMichael told Ben-Zvi, in an attempt to defend his government.<sup>70</sup>

## Last Debates

In the latter half of 1943, relations deteriorated between the *yishuv* and the Mandatory government, and also between the organized *yishuv* and the Revisionists. It was clear that any demonstration might turn violent, as a protest not only against the British failure to carry out rescue operations, but also against the British prosecution of Jews caught with weapons, and against the weapons searches, closure of the recruiting offices, and the refusal to establish the Jewish Brigade. The Agency Executive feared that "the provocative elements," "the lawbreakers among us" (that is to say, the Revisionists), might gain the support of



the masses where bitterness against the British was increasing; then the Jewish Agency Executive would lose control of the situation and the public. The key members of the Labor Party who sat in the Jewish Agency Executive and the General Council, were determined not to let things develop that far. The Revisionists' insistence on a violent response – in December 1943, Dr. Aryeh Altmann, the leader of the Revisionists in Palestine proposed a demonstration that would be intentionally violent – was seen not only as a sincere and pained outcry against the tragedy of the Jewish people, but also as a political tactic: “The Revisionists are trying to make political hay out of the Jewish calamity, and it is our duty to warn these people not to play with Jewish lives. Of course, we must do everything we can, but we must not be led on by empty shouting,” warned Kaplan.<sup>71</sup>

Gruenbaum cautioned the Zionist Council Executive against the delusion inherent in the Revisionists' proposals for, in his opinion, all the Jewish blood that had been shed in Europe had not moved the Allies to action and rescue. Shertok noted that the British had suffered many casualties and wounded of their own, and queried whether the death of a handful of people in clashes with the Mandatory police in Palestine, if such should occur, would trouble them.<sup>72</sup> Dr. Altmann's proposal also stirred up debate in the homes of the Chief Rabbis, Rabbi Yiṣḥak Isaac HaLevi Herzog and Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai Uziel, between members of *Al Domi*, several members of Agudat Yisrael, and “some of our comrades,” as Gruenbaum later reported to the Jewish Agency Executive – all of whom had endorsed Altmann's proposal but strongly opposed deliberately provoked clashes with the British – and between Martin Buber and Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, who categorically rejected the proposal.<sup>73</sup> Apparently, then, at the close of 1943, the subject continued to stir up some portions of the public.

But this was practically the last debate on the subject; from the beginning of 1944, there was a change in the position of the supporters of a forceful response on the part of the *yishuv*, except for the Revisionists. A move towards the position of the Jewish Agency Executive was apparent, particularly among the members of the Histadrut's Executive Committee. First of all, it was becoming obvious that the Allies had no intention of sacrificing, in Gruenbaum's words, “even the tiniest fraction of their own interests” in order to save Jews.<sup>74</sup> Second, in the liberated countries there were possibilities to aid the survivors; and the satellite states of Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary were beginning to detach themselves from their alliance with Germany. These countries had a population of over one million Jews whose lives could be saved as a result. Therefore concern over the tragedy of European Jewry on the part of sympathetic non-Jewish circles had waned, and more people in the Western world thought that an Allied victory would bring about Jewish deliverance. No one heeded the *yishuv*'s protests that when victory came there would be no one left to save.

The *yishuv*'s envoys in Istanbul and Geneva who administered the practical work of rescuing Jews, had insisted from the very beginning that publicity and

public statements would only hurt their endeavors. From mid-1943, they became even more insistent on this point, for they felt that there was now a possibility of carrying on direct negotiations with the satellite states and any publicity would bring the matter to the Germans' attention, thereby causing irreparable damage.<sup>75</sup>

For these reasons, the argument ceased within the Jewish Agency Executive and other *yishuv* institutions over the need for a public response. The public gatherings that were held in 1944 were devoted mainly to raising rescue funds. Then the German invasion of Hungary in March 1944 raised the subject all over again. At a meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, held a month after the invasion, at the height of the preparations for deporting Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, members demanded that the General Council immediately declare a "Hungarian Jewry Day" to warn the world, which already knew very well the results of such preparations. Otherwise the *yishuv* would have to declare another day of mourning after the Jews' annihilation. However, these members doubted whether there would be any practical results from a day of this kind. A month later, at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, Gruenbaum made a similar proposal; Ben-Gurion's reply was that the matter "is not the domain of the Jewish Agency Executive, but of the *yishuv*" (meaning the General Council).<sup>76</sup>

Shortly thereafter, this discussion became pointless. In a period of a few weeks, beginning in mid-May, 430,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. The *yishuv* stood by powerless, stunned by the deportation, the efficiency of the death

Jerusalem, V-E Day (May 9, 1945); demonstration urging immediate Jewish immigration to Palestine



machine, and the vast number of victims. On June 5, 1944, a day of strikes, fasting, and public meetings, "a day of outcry for the rescue of the few remaining survivors," was proclaimed. A stern warning was issued to the governments of Rumania and Hungary, where there still were Jews, that the day of judgment was approaching, and the demand was made that the Allies enable rescue and immigration.<sup>77</sup>

Early in December 1944, the Elected Assembly called upon the Allies to save the few survivors, and upon the undergrounds, the churches, and the welfare organizations to aid in returning the Jewish children who were in hiding with Christians. In the second week of March 1945, as the war drew to a close and the full extent of the Holocaust became known, a week of mourning was proclaimed in Palestine, followed by a fast day and a curfew, and another demand was made to save the few survivors.<sup>78</sup>

This sequence of events and its analysis raises a number of questions that require an answer.

First, there is the question of the lack of cooperation between the *yishuv* and the Jewish communities in the free world, who failed to join in a common effort to rouse Western public opinion through unconventional means. It would seem that the answer lies beyond the technical difficulties of communication during time of war. The small *yishuv* — 450,000 people, mostly young newcomers to Palestine — was viewed by the Jewish communities abroad as an experiment whose value and future existence still remained to be proved. It did not possess the power to focus and activate the potential of the entire Jewish world — especially when most of this world was not Zionist, and was suspicious of the Zionist movement. The *yishuv*, and the Jewish Agency Executive, were not the leaders of the Jewish world that they wished to be.

The second question concerns the basic disbelief of the Jewish Agency Executive that the *yishuv* would be able to rouse Western public opinion to pressure the governments of the free world to engage in concrete rescue operations. In retrospect one must admit that this disbelief was an accurate expression of bitter Jewish realism. The extermination and suffering of millions of Jews did not move the British or American governments to act beyond verbal declarations; public opinion in the West was more concerned about its own casualties, especially in Britain. When public opinion did speak out for rescue operations, the voices were mainly those of religious circles, women's charitable organizations, intellectuals, and opposition political parties. But these circles did not possess real power, and the Western governments silenced their accusations and demands by making promises they never intended to keep.

The third question is whether the Jewish Agency Executive was correct in regarding mass rallies and anti-British demonstrations as potentially dangerous to the *yishuv*. The answer must be in the positive. The *yishuv* and its main military force, the Haganah, were still in an embryonic stage of development, and the British government which resented their growth could easily have suppressed

them. The Jewish Agency Executive keenly felt its responsibility for the existence and development of the *yishuv*, and its potential ability to serve as a shelter for the survivors of the war. The Revisionists and Agudat Yisrael, who were in opposition to the national institutions, did not bear such responsibility; neither did the intellectuals such as the supporters of *Al-Domi*, nor the Labor Party members on the General Council Executive, nor the Histadrut. None of these represented the *yishuv* in matters of policy and security, and none of them was in direct contact with the British government. The control the Agency Executive exerted over the Jewish community in Palestine undoubtedly protected it from severe repercussions.

The gap that existed between the Executive members, particularly Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Kaplan, and public opinion in the *yishuv* was a manifestation of a difference between a leadership assuming strategic responsibility for the welfare of the community at large, and the impelling emotional needs of the public.

Translated by Carol Kutscher.

#### Abbreviations used in footnotes

- CF—Committee of Four
- CZA—Central Zionist Archives
- EA—Elected Assembly (*Asefat HaNivharim*)
- GCE—General Council Executive (*Va'ad Leumi Executive*)
- HA—Histadrut Archive
- HEC—Histadrut Executive Committee
- HES—Histadrut Executive Secretariat
- JAE—Jewish Agency Executive
- LPA—Labor Party Archive
- LPC—Labor Party Center
- LPS—Labor Party Secretariat
- RC—Rescue Committee
- TUA—Teachers' Union Archive
- ZCE—Zionist Council Executive (*HaVa'ad HaPo'el HaZioni Executive*)

- 1 Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive (hereafter referred to as JAE), Nov. 22, 1942; Ben-Gurion was absent from the meeting. For the views of Dobkin and Gruenbaum, see also the meeting of the General Council Executive (hereafter, GCE), Nov. 23, 1942, J1/7255, and the meeting of the Committee of Four (hereafter, CF), Nov. 23, 1942, S26/1237, all in the Central Zionist Archives (hereafter, CZA).
- 2 Ben-Gurion's comments at the Labor Party Center (LPC), Sept. 12, 1939, 23/29 in the Labor Party Archive (hereafter, LPA); these appeared in Hebrew, with slight changes, as "We must help the English in their war . . .", *BaMa'arakha* 3 (Tel Aviv, 1950):18.
- 3 On relations with the British during the summer of 1942, see Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance — A History of Jewish Palestine, 1939–1945* (Philadelphia, 1970), ch. 5; Christopher Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel* (London, 1965), pp. 275–278.
- 4 GCE, Nov. 23, 1942, CZA J1/7255; CF, Nov. 23, 1942, CZA S26/1237.

- 5 GCE, Nov. 27, 1942, CZA J1/7255. For the text of the announcement see *Sefer HaTe'udot ... 1918-1948*, ed. M. Atiash (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 332.
- 6 *Davar*, for example, published a news item (Nov. 24, 1942) about soldiers who came to the recruiting offices to demand the formation of "companies of ghetto destroyers" to be dispatched immediately to Europe; see also letters from two Palestinian soldiers in the Royal Engineer Corps to the GCE Nov. 30, 1942, in which they demanded the "strengthening of Jewish force" so that it could share in "the destruction of the ghettos and the rescue of the handful of survivors," CZA S44/471.
- 7 This was the eleventh session of the Third Elected Assembly (hereafter, EA). The principal speakers were Henrietta Szold and David Ben-Gurion. The resolutions of the GCE do not specify that there was no intention to call a general strike, as is evident in the demand made by Yosef Klarman, Revisionist representative on the Rescue Committee (RC) that *all* sectors be affected in the next strike. See the meeting of the RC, Jan. 15, 1943, CZA S26/1239.
- 8 M. Bar-Yehzekel, *BaMa'agal HaSatum* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1973), p. 49; E. Reiss, "Aid and Rescue Operations" (Hebrew), *Dapim LeHeker HaShoa VebaMered* 2 (1952), p. 24, and similar descriptions in the press of that week. Many vividly remember the three days of mourning, but have no recollection of other similar events.
- 9 From his remarks at a conference of Labor Party activists in Tel Aviv, Dec. 8, 1942, LPA Box 3/6; see also meeting of JAE, Dec. 6, 1942, CZA.
- 10 Meetings of the JAE, Nov. 22, 1942 and Dec. 6, 1942, CZA; Rabbi Y.L. Fishman and Moshe Shapira proposed a day of mourning in England and the United States; see also GCE, Jan. 11 and 17, 1943, CZA J1/7255.
- 11 JAE, Dec. 6, 1942, CZA. *Davar*, Dec. 14, 1942, published Joseph's statement to representatives of the press: "We want a delegation of Jews from America to come to Palestine because it is important for them to become familiar with what is happening here at first hand."
- 12 LPC, Nov. 30, 1942, LPA 4a/3; GCE, Dec. 14, 1942, CZA J1/7255; remarks by Ben-Gurion and Kaplan, JAE, Jan. 4, 1943, CZA.
- 13 CF, Dec. 10, 1942, CZA S26/1237. According to the GCE minutes, Dec. 14, 1942, CZA J1/7255. This resolution was not passed wholeheartedly because Gruenbaum was not considered to be representative of the entire *yishuv*.
- 14 The proposal was again raised at a meeting of the Labor Party Secretariat (LPS), Feb. 10, 1943, LPA 4/4a; at the JAE, April 22, 1943, CZA J1/7255; and at a meeting of the Zionist Council Executive (ZCE), May 18, 1943, CZA S25/297. Several months before, on Jan. 1, 1943, Rabbi Meir Berlin had gone to the United States on behalf of Mizrahi. Before his departure he met with several members of the Jewish Agency Executive and representatives of Polish Jewry, and was armed with relevant material. In the United States he worked with Leib Yaffe, one of the Keren HaYesod administrators, in an effort to rouse American Jewry to save the Jews of Europe. He returned to Palestine at the beginning of 1944 and reported on his trip to the JAE, Jan. 17, 1944, CZA J1/7256.
- 15 JAE, Jan. 4, 1943, CZA; on the inability to form a delegation, see Dr. Nahum Goldmann's letter to Kaplan, Jan. 11, 1943, CZA S25/1504.
- 16 JAE, Jan. 4, 1943 and Feb. 28, 1943, CZA.
- 17 Details on public pressure in Britain and the Allies' statement appeared in the daily press in Palestine, for example, *Davar*, Dec. 5-9, 1942; also see B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (London, 1979), pp. 170-175.
- 18 Ben-Gurion at JAE, Dec. 20, 1942; Dobkin at ZCE, Jan. 18, 1943, S25/29; Klarman at RC, Jan. 31, 1943, S26/1239; Remez at GCE, Feb. 15, 1943, J1/7255 (all CZA).
- 19 For the text of the announcement, see *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 334-335.
- 20 *Davar*, Nov. 22, 1942, printed Himmler's announcement that not one Jew would be left in Germany, and on Dec. 12, 1942, reported Himmler's statement that by the end of 1942 the extermination of half of all Polish Jews must be completed. It was obvious that the discrepancies between the reports were the result of the difficulties of getting reliable information and did not detract from the seriousness of the situation. The reference is to Himmler's order of July 19, 1942 to complete "the total purging" (*totale Bereinigung*) of Jews from the *General-Gouvernement* by Dec. 31, 1942. For the text of this order, see *Documents on the Holocaust*, eds. Y. Arad, I. Guttmann, and A. Margalot (Jerusalem, 1981), Doc. 115.

- 21 *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), p. 335; CF, Dec. 10, 1942, CZA S26/1237; press of Dec. 17–18, 1942.
- 22 The press in Palestine reported on this at length from mid-December 1942 to February 1943; a banner headline in *Davar*, Dec. 19, 1942: "British Public Opinion Demands Immediate Action to Save Jews"; *HaZofe*, Jan. 5, 1943 cited the lead article in the *Manchester Guardian* supporting concrete action; see also Wasserstein (above, n. 17), pp. 173–178. Many thought that public opinion in Britain was more aware than American public opinion of the plight of European Jewry; Gruenbaum at RC, Mar. 14, 1943, CZA S26/1237; Shertok at ZCE, May 18, 1943, CZA S25/297. This was also H. Feingold's conclusion, *The Politics of Rescue; the Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust* (New Jersey, 1970), p. 177.
- 23 See the daily press in Palestine, e.g. *Davar*, Dec. 19, 1942; for more on Eden's remarks see Wasserstein (above, n. 17), pp. 172–178. Lord Selbourne, Secretary for Economic Warfare, Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary, and Lord Cranborne, Colonial Secretary, were forced to reply to frequent questions regarding the Government's intention to undertake concrete action: *Davar*, Dec. 10, 13, 17, 1942.
- 24 JAE, Dec. 20, 1942, CZA; for the text of the GC's declaration, see *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 335–336; for the announcement of the Zionist Executive in London, see *ibid.*, p. 335 and the daily Palestine press of Dec. 19, 1942.
- 25 Ya'acov Zerubabel, at ZCE, May 18, 1943, CZA S25/297; Eliezer Pirei, *HaShomer HaZair*, Dec. 9, 1942; the quotation is from Sprinzak's remarks at the GCE, Feb. 15, 1943, CZA J1/7255; see also A. Katzenelson at GCE.
- 26 *HaPo'el HaZair*, Dec. 10, 1942; *HaAreẓ* editorial, June 5, 1944; *BaMa'agal HaSatum* (above, n. 8), p. 49, etc.
- 27 Y. Tabenkin's remarks at the Kibbutz HaMe'uḥad council, Ramat HaKovesh, Jan. 2, 1943, appeared in *Zeror Mikhtavim* 131 (Jan. 22, 1943); Berl Katzenelson, *Writings* 12 (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1950), p. 222, includes remarks made at a Mapai young leadership seminar, June 6, 1944. Regarding his feelings on the matter, see Anita Shapira, *Berl* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1980), pp. 668–671.
- 28 JAE, Dec. 6, 1942, CZA. For an analysis of the negative effect of the formal, organized mourning on the capacity for action during the period of the Holocaust, see Fischel Schneersohn, *The Historical Psychology of Holocaust and Rebirth* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1968). These articles were published in the daily press, principally *Davar* and *HaZofe* during 1943–1945, and Schneersohn routinely sent copies of them to Ben-Gurion. See Ben-Gurion's letter to him dated Oct. 28, 1943, *Al Domi* folders in the Teachers' Union Archive, Tel Aviv (hereafter, TUA). Interestingly enough, despite the fact that they agreed in theory that the days of mourning had a negative effect, they arrived at opposite practical conclusions; Ben-Gurion opposing organized mourning, Schneersohn favoring it.
- 29 GCE, Dec. 14, 1942, CZA J1/7255; *Davar*, Dec. 16, 1942; RC, Jan. 31, 1943, CZA S26/1239: "They attacked us for prejudicing their livelihood." At the GCE, July 12, 1943, it was resolved that before each day of mourning the movie theater owners should be consulted, CZA J1/7256.
- 30 On this group, see Dina Porat, "Al Domi, Intellectuals in Palestine in the face of the Holocaust, 1943–1945" (Hebrew), *Zionut* 8 (1983):245–275. It included the author Rabbi Binyamin; professors Fischel Schneersohn, Martin Buber, Ben-Zion Dinur, and Yosef Klausner; Yizḥak Yaziv of *Davar*, and others. The idea of a regime of mourning won adherents primarily among writers and intellectuals; see Yehuda Kaufman, *Moznaim* 18 (1944):341; Chaim Greenberg, *Davar*, July 30, 1943; S.H. Bergman's letter dated April 7, 1943 to *Al Domi*, TUA.
- 31 "Al Dema," *HaAreẓ*, Jan. 8, 1943, in the "Against the Current" column and in recurring letters to the editor until the end of January.
- 32 B. Katzenelson, *Writings* (above, n. 27), p. 217.
- 33 Ben-Zvi expressed his objections and doubts about a public response at nearly every meeting of the GCE, RC, and JAE, and on other occasions, yet he was never criticized, whereas Gruenbaum's statement at the ZCE, May 18, 1943, created a stir, CZA S26/297; for example, A. Haft at the LPC, Feb. 10, 1943, LPA 3/4a; Yaziv in *BaMa'agal HaSatum* (above, n. 8), p. 93.
- 34 Ben-Zvi and Elmaleh's remarks at GCE, Jan. 17 and 31, 1943, J1/7255. At the ZCE, Jan. 18,

- 1943, S25/295, Dobkin voiced his doubts as to the possibility of perpetuating such an activity; his words were omitted from the text of his speech when it was published in a leaflet of the Jewish Agency's Office of Information on Jan. 21, 1943, S26/1240; A. Katzenelson said, "The people want active, not passive demonstrations," GCE, Feb. 15, 1943, J1/7255 (all CZA). See also letters of Ben-Zvi and S.Z. Shragai to the *Al Domi* group dated April 28, 1943 in the *Al Domi* folders, TUA: "We tried but did not succeed." The press also reflected this. The original plan was that each Thursday of the month of mourning would be a day of fasting, prayer, study, etc., but this was carried out only once. The press of June 13, 1943 carried a request by the GCE (apparently on the basis of prior experience) that the public demonstrate rather than use the day to tour the country. See also *BaMa'agal HaSatum* (above, n. 8), pp. 88–106, and Ben-Zion Dinur, "Remember" (Hebrew), *Devarim 'al HaShoa VeLekaha* (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 14–34.
- 35 Meetings of GCE, Jan. 11, 1943, J1/7255; RC, Jan. 10, 1943, S26/1237, and Jan. 15, 1943, S26/1239 (all CZA).
- 36 Meetings of RC, Jan. 15, 1943, S26/1239; Jan. 28, 1943, S26/1237; Jan. 31, 1943, S26/1239; Feb. 7, 1943, S26/1239; Feb. 22, 1943, S26/1237; March 4, 1943, S26/1237 (all CZA).
- 37 See meetings of the Histadrut Executive Committee (HEC), Jan. 27–28, 1943, vol. 67m, Histadrut Archive (hereafter, HA); see also Gruenbaum's statements, RC, Jan. 15, 1943, S26/1239, expressing amazement at the delays in organizing the rally in New York, and Dr. Goldmann's letter of explanation to Gruenbaum dated April 5, 1943, S26/1234, (both CZA).
- 38 RC, Jan. 15, 1943, S26/1239; and GCE, Feb. 15, 1943, J1/7255 (both CZA).
- 39 GCE, Feb. 17, 1943, *ibid.*
- 40 LPC, Feb. 10, 1943, LPA 4a/3; JAE, Feb. 14, 1943, CZA.
- 41 S.Z. Shragai, in a conversation with the author, Feb. 6, 1981, Jerusalem. He was replaced on the Rescue Committee by Binyamin Mintz of Agudat Yisrael. Shragai also resigned from the joint subcommittee of the Jewish Agency Executive and the General Council Executive which had been appointed to organize the *yishuv's* response. He felt that the public meetings and days of mourning were organized without complete faith in their effectiveness.
- 42 At a meeting of the GCE, Feb. 15, 1943, opinions were expressed against the fast, CZA J1/7255.
- 43 Ben-Zvi spoke about fear of the Arabs at the RC, Jan. 31, 1943, S26/1239, and at the GCE, June 1, 1943, J1/7256. The quotations are from Dr. Werner Senator, JAE, April 4, 1943, and from Gruenbaum, RC, Jan. 31, 1943, S26/1239. See also E. Reis, RC, March 8, 1943, S26/1237, and discussion, GCE, June 1, 1943, J1/7256 (all CZA).
- 44 The proposal was made by Klarman, RC, Jan. 15, 1943, CZA S26/1239.
- 45 ZCE, Jan. 18, 1943, where Y. Hazan, E. Reiss, and D. Zukhovizki (Zakay) demanded "a great outcry," CZA S25/295. The quotations are from remarks by Y. Sprinżak and Dr. Rufeisen at that meeting. For remarks by Ben-Zvi regarding public pressure, and his warning that if the institutions did not coordinate the activity the communities would act on their own, see GCE, Dec. 14, 1942, CZA J1/7255.
- 46 For a summary of the news items see Gruenbaum's speech, EA, Feb. 22, 1943; the press of that date, and S26/1240. On the declaration of the Elected Assembly, see *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 339–340 (this was the twelfth session of the Third Elected Assembly); a discussion prior to the Assembly, at the GCE meeting Feb. 17, 1943, J1/7255, and after it, at the RC meeting, Feb. 22, 1943, S26/1237 (all CZA).
- 47 Statements by S.Z. Shragai and Sprinżak, GCE, Feb. 17, 1943, CZA J1/7255.
- 48 *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 341–342. This was the thirteenth session of the Third Elected Assembly.
- 49 Gruenbaum, JAE, April 4, 1943; Rabbi I.M. Levin, RC, April 16, 1943, S26/1237; M. Kolodny (Kol) and Y. Zerubavel, ZCE, May 18, 1943, S25/297; the quotation is from statements by Moshe Erem, GCE, June 1, 1943, J1/7256 (all CZA). In Feingold's opinion, a "pattern for a regular protest ritual" developed in the United States as well, *The Politics of Rescue* (above, n. 22), p. 175.
- 50 Klarman and Haft's proposal, RC, March 8, 1943, S26/1237, and March 23, 1943, S26/1239 (both CZA); Po'alei Zion: Y. Lev, "The Yishuv Leadership and the Rescue of the Jews of Europe" (Hebrew), *Kol HaPo'el* (March 1943), given first as a lecture at the Central

- Committee, Feb. 27, 1943, LPA 407/IV/278. For statements by Y. Zerubavel and M. Erem, see minutes of the Histadrut Executive Committee, March 31–April 1/2, 1943, HA vol. 67/m. For the demand of the representatives of Polish immigrants at the Rescue Committee, March 8, 1943, CZA S26/1237, see remarks by Dr. Menaḥem Landau; Y. Ben-Zvi's remarks, GCE, April 27, 1943, CZA, J1/7256.
- 51 JAE, April 4 and 11, 1943, CZA.
- 52 Reiss, ZCE, Jan. 18, 1943, S25/295, and May 18, 1943, S25/297 (both CZA); Hillel Frumkin, LPC, Feb. 10, 1943, LPA 3/4a, quoted from Leib Yaffe's letter to Dr. Goldmann, dated July 22, 1943; Leib Yaffe, *Writings, Letters and Diaries* (Hebrew), ed. B. Yaffe (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 205; see also HEC, Mar. 31–April 1/2, 1943, HA 67m.
- 53 JAE, April 4 and 11, 1943, CZA.
- 54 The quotations, in order of appearance, are: David Zuhovizki (later Zakay), ZCE, Jan. 18, 1943, CZA; Yaffe (above, n. 52), p. 201, from his letter to Dr. Stephen Wise dated June 2, 1943; letter sent to Gruenbaum and also published in the daily press on Dec. 6, 1944 by Schneersohn, Yaziv, and Rabbi Binyamin in protest against Shertok having opened the session of the Elected Assembly the preceding day with the announcement of the death marches of the Jews of Budapest, and immediately thereafter turning, with his colleagues, to a discussion of current *yishuv* concerns.
- 55 Sprinzak and A. Katzenelson, GCE, April 5 and 27, 1943, CZA J1/7256.
- 56 GCE, April 12, 15 and 27, 1943, J1/7256, CZA; HEC, March 31–April 1/2, 1943, 67m, and Histadrut Executive Secretariat (hereafter, HES), April 4, 1943, 14/43 (both HA).
- 57 JAE, April 11, 1943, and GCE, April 12, 1943, CZA J1/7256; D. Remez, S.Z. Shragai, and M. Ichilov were appointed members of the subcommittee. They had also volunteered to organize the event itself. See also HES, April 13, 1943, HA.
- 58 *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), p. 342.
- 59 See her remarks HES, April 29, 1943, HA.
- 60 ZCE, May 18, 1943, CZA S25/297. The critics were Y. Zerubavel, E. Reiss, M. Kolodny (Kol), and P. Rosenblüth (Rozen); the debate was carried over to the GCE meetings on May 31, June 1 and 3, 1943, CZA J1/7256. Sprinzak, A. Katzenelson, A. Elmaleh, and Y. Ben-Zvi opposed demonstrations because of their fear of the Arabs and the Revisionists, whereas Rabbi M. Ostrovsky, Y. Suprasky, and Z. Shazar demanded action and criticized the Political Department of the Jewish Agency for its fears. Their criticisms were directed largely at Joseph's stand against demonstrations and strikes.
- 61 Wasserstein (above, n. 17), pp. 204–205.
- 62 ZCE, May 18, 1943, CZA S25/297.
- 63 Yaffe (above, n. 52), pp. 199, 201, 202: "The Jews of Palestine are making a tremendous fuss . . . it was two Jews from Palestine who, with their outcries and protests, helped bring about the passing of the resolution on the mass demonstration." This is a reference to Rabbi Meir Berlin and to Yaffe himself who attempted to shake up the Jews of the United States, and to the mass demonstration held on March 2, 1943 in Madison Square Garden. See also GCE, Jan. 11 and 17, 1943, J1/7255; Klarman, RC, Jan. 31, 1943, S26/1239; *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 334, 340; E. Reiss, ZCE, May 18, 1943, S25/297; Shapira, JAE, April 4, 1943; Dr. Goldmann's letter to Gruenbaum dated April 5, 1943, S26/1234 (all CZA).
- 64 See discussions, JAE, Feb. 14 and 28, 1943, CZA; LPC, Feb. 10, 1943, LPA 3/4a; and Chaim Greenberg's famous article in *Davar*, July 30, 1943, "Bankrupt!".
- 65 Gruenbaum, RC, Mar. 23, 1943, S26/1239; Ben-Gurion, JAE, April 4, 1943; Shertok, ZCE, May 18, 1943, S25/297 (all CZA).
- 66 See Yonatan Kaplan, "Rescue Action by the Irgun Zevai Leumi Delegation in the United States during the Holocaust Period" (Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet* 30 (Nov. 1981):115–138, and 31 (April 1982):75–96; see also Yaffe (above, n. 52), p. 205; Rabbi Binyamin's articles in *Be'ayot* (April 1944) and in *BaMishor* (Feb. 10, 1944). Rabbi Binyamin called the "Emergency Committee for the Rescue of the Jews of Europe" formed in the United States "a sort of *Al Domi* group in Erez Israel."
- 67 JAE, June 4, 1944, CZA.
- 68 On the Histadrut conference of May 5–7, 1943, see HA, 68/m, and *Davar*, May 7, 1943; also Y. Zerubavel, ZCE, May 18, 1943, CZA S26/297. Opposition to the signing of the petition was



- voiced at the JAE, June 6, 1943. Kaplan and Gruenbaum insisted that the resolutions of the GCE were binding.
- 69 RC, June 11, 1943, S26/1239, and GCE, June 21, 1943, J1/7256 (both CZA). See the debate on the authority of the General Council as against that of the Rescue Committee, and the attempts to pacify the representatives of Agudat Yisrael and the Revisionists with the contention that the oversight had been a mere "formal error." Gruenbaum formulated another public announcement which was submitted for the approval of the Jewish Agency Executive. The announcement stressed that "... the leaders of the self-defense and heroism in Warsaw and other Polish cities came from the Zionist movements," June 14, 1943, CZA S26/1240. This announcement was apparently not approved for publication, since it does not appear in *Sefer HaTe'udot* or in the press.
- 70 The petition which the public signed was formulated by the Histadrut Subcommittee on the Strike and the Petition, headed by Z. Shazar, and composed of M. Erem, M. Ya'ari, G. Myerson and A. Ziesling; the petition was then approved by Gruenbaum and Joseph. See meeting of HES, June 6, 1943, HA; for the text of the petition see *Sefer HaTe'udot*, pp. 343-344, and press of June 14, 1943; on the GCE delegation to the High Commissioner, see GCE, June 21, 28, and July 2, 1943, CZA J1/7256. Agudat Yisrael representatives agreed to join the delegation. A letter addressed by Ben-Zvi to Jews in occupied Europe and sent by courier stressed that the *yishuv's* petition was an expression of its tremendous anxiety over their plight and of its solidarity with them; *Sefer HaTe'udot*, pp. 347-348.
- 71 GCE, May 31, June 1 and 3, 1943, J1/7256; Kaplan's remarks were made at JAE, Dec. 20, 1943 (both CZA).
- 72 Gruenbaum, ZCE, Jan 3, 1944, S25/118; Shertok, ZCE, May 18, 1943, S25/297 (both CZA).
- 73 On the meeting and the debate at the home of Chief Rabbi Herzog, Dec. 16, 1943, see Idov Cohen's letter to Dobkin dated that same day, S25/1235; also, that day's meeting of RC, S26/1237, and JAE, Dec. 19 and 20, 1943 (all CZA).
- 74 See press reports of the discussions in the Elected Assembly, Jan. 12, 1944.
- 75 See Dobkin's remarks on the evaluation of the envoys, JAE, Dec. 20, 1943; ZCE, Jan 3, 1944, CZA S25/118.
- 76 See remarks by M. Neustadt and J. Aharonovitz, HES, April 25, 1944, HA; JAE, May 21, 1944, CZA.
- 77 *Sefer HaTe'udot* (above, n. 5), pp. 355-356, and the daily press.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 366, and the press of December 1944 and March 1945.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE JEWISH AGENCY  
DELEGATION IN ISTANBUL IN 1943

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DURING THE Second World War, individual representatives, and subsequently a delegation, represented the Palestinian Jewish community (the *Yishuv*) in Istanbul, which was one of the focal points of international communications during this period. From this city, they attempted to establish a route for immigration to Eretz Israel (*aliyah*) and to initiate relief and rescue activities for the Jews in occupied Europe.

In late 1942, the representatives of the *Yishuv* in Istanbul established an organizational framework entitled the "Eretz Israel Delegation in Istanbul," which operated as the representative of the Jerusalem Rescue Committee (*Vaad ha-Hatzala*) established by the Jewish Agency. The Turkish regime did not officially authorize the activities of the delegation, and it therefore operated illegally.

The only representative of the delegation who was recognized by the Turks was Chaim Barlas. He represented the Jewish Agency and headed its delegation in Istanbul. The rest of the members of the delegation posed as individuals on various assignments, while they secretly did the work of the Rescue Committee. Needless to say, this fact hindered the operations of the members of the delegation and often placed them in difficult situations.

The activities of the delegation should be examined as an attempt to carry out relief and rescue operations despite the difficulties inherent in working in Istanbul, and despite the policies adopted by the Allies regarding such matters.

Historians researching the rescue attempts undertaken during the Holocaust, as well as the methods used during this period to effect rescue, will find the activities of the Istanbul delegation of special interest, since all the various factors which made rescue activities so problematic existed in that city. The most important of these were:

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- 1) the attitudes of neutral states, such as Turkey, toward the rescue of Jews;
- 2) the changing attitudes of the Balkan States to the "anti-Jewish policy" of the Reich;
- 3) the desire of certain German groups, such as the Army and the S.S., to find alibis during the final stages of the war;
- 4) the attitudes of the Allies vis-à-vis rescue activities, in view of the claims that they were waging a "Jewish war;"
- 5) British policy regarding the future of Palestine.

The "Istanbul Story" also gives us an insight into the attitudes of the Jews — both in Palestine and the rest of the Free World — regarding the complex problems of relief and rescue. Those who study the activities of the Istanbul delegation gain insight into the plight of the Jews in occupied Europe. In addition, we learn of the attitude of the *Yishuv* and the Zionist movement toward what was happening to the Jewish communities in Nazi territory and the future of the Jewish people. Istanbul served as the *Yishuv's* right arm in its efforts to rescue Jews from occupied Europe.

The activities of the *Yishuv* representatives and the attempts to provide relief and rescue via Istanbul may be divided into three main periods:

- 1) September 1939 until late 1941;
- 2) the end of 1941 through 1942;
- 3) 1943 and 1944.

This division coincides with the different forms of the activities in Istanbul and is also closely linked to the process whereby the awareness of the Holocaust — its essence and scope — penetrated the consciousness of the Jews in Palestine and throughout the world. During the initial period, the war only slightly influenced the activities in Istanbul. At that time, representatives of the institutions of the Jewish Agency and the Aliyah Department (Palestine Office) were stationed in Istanbul, as were emissaries dealing with illegal immigration (*Aliyah Bet*). Immigration to Eretz Israel via Istanbul continued; the war, on the one hand, served as an impetus for increased illegal immigration, but on the other hand, it hindered practical activities to organize *aliyah*.

The second period — from the end of 1941 through 1942 — is the most passive as far as rescue activities are concerned. Illegal immi-

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gration to Eretz Israel was almost totally halted as a result of the "Struma" disaster. There still was no real perception of the nature of the events in Nazi-occupied Europe, and hence there were no attempts to reorganize. Efforts were made to initiate legal immigration to Eretz Israel, especially from the Balkan States (which was difficult, since the Jews of those countries had officially been classified as citizens of "enemy countries"). They attempted to obtain special permits from the British for the immigration of children from enemy territory and to induce the Turkish Government to issue more transit visas. These activities required a concerted effort due to the indifference or hostility of the bureaucracy.

Toward the end of 1942 and in the beginning of 1943 — the third period, according to our chronological division — there were significant changes in the composition and structure of the delegation, its scope, and activities. During this period, the leaders of the *Yishuv* began to realize the implications of the events in occupied Europe and they established the *Vaad ha-Hatzala* in Jerusalem. The Istanbul delegation became a branch of this committee, and its assignment was to discover new ways of making contact with the Diaspora lands in which relief and rescue activities could be implemented via Turkey.

During the two years in which the delegation operated in Istanbul, various attempts were made to establish contact with Jewish communities in Europe, to send them funds, and to help smuggle refugees from Poland to Slovakia and from there to Hungary, Rumania, and Palestine. In 1944, the delegation even arranged the departure of several shiploads of immigrants to Eretz Israel.

If we judge the activities of the delegation on the basis of the number of people it saved, the figures are indeed small, even in comparison with other rescue centers.<sup>1</sup> The activities of the delegation, however, must be examined in light of the circumstances and unique factors mentioned at the beginning of this article, rather than solely according to the number of people rescued.

I will concentrate on a number of issues related to rescue operations via Istanbul, which I consider essential in describing the me-

<sup>1</sup> According to the most optimistic of the reliable estimates, 10,000 people were rescued via Istanbul. There are those who claim that 20,000 were rescued, but this is undoubtedly an exaggeration.

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thods used by the delegation. The subjects, which are all from the third period (1943-1944), are as follows:

1. How was contact established with the Jewish communities in the Diaspora? What use was made of information obtained from these sources?
2. the development of the concept of "rescue" among members of the delegation and its effect on their work and their links with Eretz Israel;
3. an attempt to evaluate the means at the disposal of the delegation in order to evaluate the scope of their operations.

The following individuals were active in Istanbul during that period:

1. Chaim Barlas — head of the *Vaad ha-Hatzala* delegation. Barlas had been in Istanbul from the summer of 1940 as the director of the Aliyah Department. He knew the local Jewish leaders, representatives of the foreign governments, and various officials of the Turkish Government. He worked to obtain Turkish transit visas, which were the basis of the rescue operations in Istanbul, and he deserves credit for one of the large-scale rescue operations carried out by the Istanbul delegation — the rescue of 2,000 refugees from Vilna during the years 1940-1941.<sup>2</sup>
2. A. Lader — the personal representative of Yitzhak Gruenbaum in the delegation;
3. Venya Pomerantz — arrived in Istanbul in December 1942 as the emissary of the *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad* and served as its representative on the delegation;
4. Menahem Bader — joined the delegation in January 1943 as the representative of *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Artzi*;
5. Ze'ev Schind — replaced Zvi Yehieli in February 1943 as the representative of the *Mossad le-Aliyah Bet*;
6. Teddy Kollek — sent to Istanbul in March 1943 to serve as the representative of the Political Committee of the Jewish Agency and to be in charge of initiating and implementing special programs for cooperation with the British;

<sup>2</sup> See the article by Chaim Barlas "Miv'tza Aliyat Lita," *Dappim le-Cheker ha-Shoa ve-ha-Mered*, Second Series, Volume 1, *Beit Lohamei ha-Gettaot*, 1969, pp. 246-255.

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7. David Zimend — arrived in April 1943, was the representative of the General Zionists;
8. Joseph Klarman — arrived in August 1943, was the representative of the Revisionists;
9. Yaakov Griffel — represented *Agudat Yisrael* in the delegation, arrived in the spring of 1943;
10. Akiva Levinski — the representative of Youth Aliyah, arrived in the spring of 1943.

The delegation organized subcommittees the most important of which were the:

- 1) Aid Committee;
- 2) Aliyah Committee;
- 3) Liaison Committee;
- 4) Treasury.

The abovementioned members of the delegation served as chairmen of the various subcommittees.

The delegation itself was composed of all the emissaries. This large group was divided into two smaller subgroups, which worked together and fully cooperated with one another. One group consisted of the workers of the *Mossad le-Aliyah Bet*, which was expanded in the course of 1943 (with the arrival of Moshe Agami and Ehud Avriel who replaced Teddy Kollek), while the other group was made up of the representatives of the *Histadrut*, and included Bader, Pomerantz, and Schind. These two groups formed the nucleus of the delegation and their members held the key posts. The newcomers, therefore, obviously felt that it was difficult to penetrate the already existent inner circle, and they complained quite a bit about the fact that the leftist Zionists controlled the delegation.

Chaim Barlas occupied a position above these subgroups, and as head of the delegation was the only person who dealt with all the "outside contacts" — the official representatives of Turkey, Great Britain, the United States, Russia, the Red Cross, etc. The other members of the delegation subsequently complained about this situation.

Contacts between representatives of the Istanbul delegation (Barlas, Yehieli, and others) and the Jewish communities in the Balkan States were initiated even before the delegation was officially established. Once the delegation was organized, its members sought to inform the

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Diaspora communities of this step, as well as to supply them with information about the delegation's special character, structure, and the means at its disposal.

Venya Pomerantz's first letter to Hungary, which was sent via courier,<sup>3</sup> described the shock of the *Yishuv* when they learned about the plight of European Jewry, the outcry which was raised and the subsequent establishment of the Rescue Committee, as well as the functions of the Istanbul delegation. Letters of this type were naturally also sent to the Jewish communities in the Balkans. The delegation used every available means of dispatching letters, information, and funds to the Jewish communities in the Balkans and Slovakia, and from there to Poland. (On a few occasions, direct contacts were established with the occupied areas of Poland and Russia). Conventional but less effective channels were the mail and telephone. The most dangerous means of communication, but the one which offered the greatest chances of success, was the contacts established by emissaries, members of the diplomatic corps, and their clerks and couriers, who also served in most cases as double agents.<sup>4</sup>

The contacts established by the delegation had two purposes — to obtain information on the events in Nazi-occupied territory and to transmit information and financial assistance. The news which reached Istanbul from occupied Europe was relayed to responsible bodies in Eretz Israel, as well as to Jews and non-Jews throughout the Free World. This information was utilized in various ways. For example, it influenced the planning of the delegation's activities and the manner in which its relief operations were carried out. Thus, information was obtained concerning the political situation, the plight of the Jews in various countries, the number of refugees, and other seemingly insignificant facts which were actually of great importance for the work of the delegation, such as train schedules, information on border patrols, names of policemen who could be bribed, etc.

The information which was received was also used to try and influence the Allies to undertake rescue activities. In negotiations with

<sup>3</sup> Moreshet (the Anielewicz Museum in Memory of the Commander of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Givat Haviva) Archives, D 1.1664/68.

<sup>4</sup> The most famous was Bandi Grosz, who accompanied Joel Brand on his "trucks for blood" mission.

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the Allies, the members of the delegation used the information they obtained to strengthen their case. The actual high-level negotiations, however, were conducted by the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and other Jewish organizations in the Free World. Thus, the efforts of the delegation were not necessarily directed toward combating the political policy adopted by the Allies, but rather toward obtaining certain concessions from them which would facilitate relief and rescue operations, such as simplification of the procedures for obtaining entry visas to Eretz Israel, expedition of the procedure for the confirmation of the lists of those eligible for transit and entry visas to Eretz Israel, and the easing of regulations governing the transfer of foreign currency to Turkey and even to enemy territory. Each such concession would increase the chances of helping additional groups of people, expanding the sphere of activities, and attempting new methods.

The delegation assumed that the information they transmitted would be used to arouse public opinion regarding the rescue of the Jews, whether through the press or through direct talks with parliamentarians and statesmen. At the same time, great care had to be taken in publicizing the information, and especially in publicizing the names of those with whom the delegation was in contact, lest it cost the delegation's informants their lives.

The delegation considered the collection of reliable information on the persecution and annihilation of the Jews in occupied Europe its right as well as its obligation. They considered themselves situated before the gates of Hell, and they made sure to transmit the news and the shocking stories to Eretz Israel, in accordance with the explicit demands of the Jews in occupied territory with whom the delegation was in contact. The Jews in occupied Europe feared that they would disappear from the face of the earth, taking with them the story of the suffering, struggle, and death of the Jewish communities. In numerous letters received in Istanbul, this fear was expressed and the demand was repeated: "Tell our story! Let the Jews and the entire world know what is happening to us! It must be recorded in the pages of history!" The members of the delegation also considered the transmission of the information a means of intensifying the awareness of the plight of European Jewry in Eretz Israel and a means of enlisting the manpower and funds needed to carry out rescue operations.



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The information received from Europe was also used in another way — it was sent to other communities in occupied territory. The delegation attempted to learn what might occur in one country from the events which had already taken place elsewhere. An outstanding example of this was the attempt to learn about the negotiations regarding the fate of Greek Jewry which the Jews of Slovakia had conducted with Wisliceny in the summer of 1942.<sup>5</sup> There were also attempts to arouse an increased awareness of what was liable to occur in a certain community, on the basis of past experience elsewhere. A very good example is the letters sent to Hungary during the period when the fear of a Nazi takeover of that country increased—from the end of 1943 until the German occupation in March 1944. The leaders of the Rescue Committee in Hungary were instructed not to cooperate with the Germans — even in a passive manner — by carrying out activities which were “preparation for destruction,” such as a census, concentration, yellow star, etc.<sup>6</sup> The delegation attempted to prepare one country for increased rescue activities when the danger increased in another. Thus, for example, the letters sent to Hungary described the causes for the deportations and the liquidation of the work camps in Slovakia, and included explicit instructions on what course of action to follow.<sup>7</sup> Directives were also sent to Rumania just prior to, and after, the conquest of Hungary by the Germans. It appears, therefore, that attempts were made to use the information obtained from occupied Europe, which was sent to occupied territory via Istanbul, in order to arouse an awareness of the danger, as well as to be used as a tool for applying as much pressure as possible on the authorities of the satellite countries, to focus the attention of the Jewish community on the events occurring in neighbouring countries, etc.

According to the members of the delegation, one of the conditions necessary to carry out rescue work was the creation of a situation in which the lack of opportunities for legal operations would not hinder the implementation of the activities planned by the delegation. The

<sup>5</sup> Venya [Pomerantz] to Eretz Israel, March 16, 1943, Moreshet Archives, D 1. 771.

<sup>6</sup> Menachem Bader to Zvi, Yaakov, Hansi, and all members of his movement, September 25, and October 23, 1943, Moreshet Archives, D. 1.735.

<sup>7</sup> Bader to Zvi, Yoshko, and all the members, October 23, 1943, Moreshet Archives, 1.735 — H.

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story of the *Diaspora Capta* and the hope of saving the remnants should have been factors in arousing and motivating the responsible agencies to intensify the activities needed to deal with the extraordinary situations and create the tools suited to the conditions. At a certain point, however, the members of the delegation begin to feel as if the information they were transmitting had the opposite effect. Today, it is a well-known fact among Holocaust researchers that the Jews in Eretz Israel, as well as those throughout the rest of the Free World, fully realized what was going on in Europe at a fairly late date. When the dimensions of the disaster became known, the knowledge was accompanied by a terrible and paralyzing helplessness and impotence. All was lost, there was no one left to save — there were no Jews! Many believed that the chances of rescue depended solely on winning the war. To a certain extent, this feeling was justified, even though it was liable to impede the practical activities which later led to the rescue of several small groups. The number of those saved was indeed miniscule in relation to the total destruction wrought during the years 1943-1944.

The Istanbul delegation was formed to assist those who had managed to survive until 1943, as well as those communities which had still not yet been affected by the "Final Solution." In order to implement these activities, it was necessary to enlist the maximum means, as well as a readiness to take risks — all of which did not fit in with a feeling of helplessness and impotence. If people feared that the funds sent to the Diaspora would be of no avail, if they assumed that the money would eventually fall into the hands of the Germans and thereby aid the enemy, the willingness to allocate funds for rescue operations naturally diminished.

This was apparently the source of the conflict between the members of the delegation, and those in Eretz Israel who had sent them to Istanbul. The differences in opinion and approach stemmed from changes in the thinking of both sides regarding the concept of "rescue". While those in Eretz Israel were mainly concerned with the overall picture of the Holocaust, the war, and Zionist policy, those in Istanbul emphasized one aspect of the situation — the plight of the persecuted, hungry people who were crying out for help, who had been waiting for aid for four years or more, and who had still not received any assistance. The end of the war would, obviously, end the destruc-

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tion, but the question was what to do until then? What about those refugees who succeeded in escaping, the remnants who were still alive even after the large-scale waves of destruction, those communities which the Germans had still not reached?

It was difficult for the members of the delegation to operate on the basis of cold, calculated decisions when rescue was involved. They refused to accept arguments based on efficiency, advisability, lack of means, and other such considerations. They believed that attempts must first and foremost be made to relieve and rescue Jews even if the chances of success were minimal. More than anyone else, they were aware of the nature of the difficulties and the obstacles which impeded relief and rescue operations — those which stemmed from the policy of the British or the Turks or from the policies adopted vis-à-vis the Jews in the countries in which the Jews were living. The members of the delegation were well acquainted with the difficulties resulting from the channels used to provide assistance and the type of couriers employed, many of whom were thieves and robbers and, in some cases, German agents.<sup>8</sup> Yet was it permissible to be deterred and refrain from doing even the little bit which could be accomplished under the existing conditions?

I believe that at this point the manner in which “rescue” was viewed by the members of the delegation becomes quite clear. Rescue meant reinforcing the strength and status of the Jews, even if only for several hours, days, or weeks. Rescue did not only mean removing Jews from areas of destruction or from places in which they were in danger of deportation, but also to extend material aid to those who were being persecuted. There is no difference between relief and rescue. Every operation designed to provide relief must be carried out with the same urgency. Every means of reaching Jews, of letting them know that someone is thinking about them, is worried about them, wants to help, and is anxious about their fate, is important and justifies the investment of a great deal of means and effort. Who is qualified to determine what helps people survive under the conditions which existed during the Holocaust? All those who live in freedom, even those who were as close as possible to “hell” and maintained daily contact with the doomed Jews cannot fully compre-

<sup>8</sup> See the testimony of Venya Pomerantz, Archives of the Hagana, Tel Aviv.

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hend the situation and feelings of the Jews who lived in the countries directly affected by the Holocaust. Most of the members of the delegation suffered from persistent feelings of discomfort and guilt, which stemmed from the gap between the lives they led and the living conditions of the Jews in occupied Europe.

The practical implication of the approach adopted by the members of the delegation was that they attempted to take advantage of every opportunity available in order to help Jews obtain more clothing, forged documents, and an additional slice of bread. The labor camps in Slovakia, which in fact served as a place of refuge for the Jewish inmates, had to be supported and maintained, and groups of refugees in the underground, also had to be helped. If the delegation's plans would ever be realized and *aliyah* would become possible, this of course, would represent the crowning achievement of their efforts.<sup>9</sup>

In summation, it should be emphasized that the members of the delegation regarded themselves as the true representatives of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Their geographical proximity to the Diaspora, as well as the nature of their activities, allowed them to see things as they really were and they had no illusions about the situation. The members of the delegation believed that the *Yishuv* and its leadership did not fully comprehend the gravity of the situation. The reason for this was not rooted in principles, but according to their opinion stemmed, from the fact that the leaders were so far removed from the actual relief and rescue activities. The delegation requested, therefore, that the heads of the Zionist movement and the *Histadrut* come to Istanbul and remain there for a period of time, during which they too would become "infected" with a belief in the strength of deeds and the possibilities which still existed. Indeed, Sharett, Kaplan, Dr. Shmorak, and Rabbi Herzog came to Istanbul for various periods and Shaul Avigur also spent a lengthy period in that Turkish city in 1944. Similarly, the delegation decided to send one of its members to Palestine once every several months on a propaganda and fundraising mission, and as early as March 1943, Menahem Bader set out on such an assignment. In this

<sup>9</sup> Venya [Pomerantz], Menahem [Bader], and Zvi to the Executive Committee of the *Histadrut*, July 30, 1943, Archives of the Hagana, 14/60B.

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manner, the delegation sought to forge direct contact with the *Yishuv* both to make them aware of the magnitude of the tragedy and to banish the sense of desperation and helplessness.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, the changes which took place in the thinking of the members of the delegation should be noted, namely the weakening of particularistic political loyalties and the emphasis on an united approach. I specifically used the term “weakening” because party loyalties and the concern for the interests of specific political movements did not disappear. We must remember that the members of the delegation were sent to Istanbul to represent various political movements and organizations. Their first contacts abroad were with individuals from their own parties and they always displayed a high degree of loyalty and especially warm sentiments for members of their movements. In the course of their work, however, the particularism of the members of the delegation paled in comparison to their desire to attempt to solve the problems confronting European Jewry, which became their primary goal. An outstanding example of this phenomenon can be seen in *Hashomer Hatzair*, a group whose members were known for their extremely strong party loyalty.

Menahem Bader, the representative of *Hashomer Hatzair* and one of its most outstanding veteran members, became involved in a serious argument with members of his movement in Hungary, because the latter refused to join the general Rescue Committee on the grounds that it was against party interests. (The members of *Hashomer Hatzair* had a special agreement with Moshe Krausz, the Mizrachi representative, who headed the Palestine Office in Budapest.)<sup>11</sup>

There were other indications of the weakening of party loyalties. Thus, for example, the letters sent to the Diaspora always contained information on events in Eretz Israel — economic developments, the strengthening of the Jewish community, British policy, etc. There was

<sup>10</sup> Today, we are able to state that their position was correct. The reports written by Kaplan, Eliyahu Eilat, and Moshe Sharett after their sojourn in Istanbul reveal the importance of direct contact with the delegation’s activities. This is also proven by the fact that following these visits increased funds were allocated to the delegation. The abovementioned reports may be found in the Archives of the Hagana, 53/23.

<sup>11</sup> See for example an entire series of Bader’s letters to Hungary, Moreshet Archives, D 1.735.

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virtually no mention of the disputes between the various movements within the *Yishuv*. The Jews of the Diaspora, however, specifically requested information on this topic. They inquired about ideological controversies and expected answers on these questions.

It is not easy to assess the work of the delegation. The contacts the delegation maintained with Jews in Europe undoubtedly boosted the morale of those fortunate enough to benefit from them. It was not only material assistance which was important. Emotional support was by no means any less important, a fact attested to by many letters.<sup>12</sup> The simple fact that the voice of the *Yishuv* was once again heard in the Diaspora, after a gap of four years, was of tremendous significance for the Jews in occupied Europe. The Jews wanted their story publicized, so that they would not disappear without leaving a trace. This was what they wanted to transmit to the world, and in a sense, the delegation served as a means of expression for these Jews.

One of the ways of assessing the extent of the material assistance provided by the delegation is to examine its budget. The term "budget" is liable to be somewhat misleading since we cannot discuss the means at the disposal of the delegation in terms of an organized, planned budget. Their budget was flexible and was the product of the circumstances. It expanded and contracted under different conditions. Fundraising campaigns were often held the night prior to the dispatch of a courier. The delegation was involved in relief and *aliyah* operations which were generally connected with organizational work done in the Jewish communities themselves, or in other concentrations of Jews, such as the work camps in Slovakia, and the refugee camps in Hungary. The activities included the provision of funds for obtaining forged documents, the dispatch of relief parcels to Slovakian Jews deported to Lublin, and through the International Red Cross to the Jews in Transnistria, etc. In other words, these were concrete projects which were generally initiated by the local Jewish community. Eventually large-scale programs were suggested, such as the ransom of the Jews in Transnistria, the "Europa Plan," the famous "blood

<sup>12</sup> In his letter of February 22, 1943 to Eretz Israel, Bader quotes a paragraph of a letter from members of the movement in Rumania. Moreshet Archives D 1.1711. See also the letter of September 5, 1943, Yad Vashem Archives M-2/360, and a letter signed R.B., July 12, 1943, Archives of the Hagana, GNF/2.

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for trucks” deals. These programs required large sums of money, which the delegation did not possess. In order to raise these funds, the delegation appealed to the Jewish Agency in Palestine and requested special allocations.

The delegation received funds from the following sources:

- 1) the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency via the “Mobilization and Rescue Appeal” of the *Yishuv*;
- 2) the General Federation of Labor in Eretz Israel (*Histadrut*);
- 3) the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC);
- 4) movements and political parties in Eretz Israel, who sent funds on behalf of their members in the Diaspora;
- 5) other Jewish funds — the South African, Egyptian, and Australian Jewish communities.

Menahem Bader, the treasurer of the delegation, claims that the delegation transmitted £1,500,000 to the Diaspora.<sup>13</sup> He estimated that two-thirds of the sum was provided by various sources in the *Yishuv*, while the rest was donated by the JDC. This sum appears to be quite high when compared with estimates available from other sources. According to the report of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency, the overall budget of the Committee was 1,756,734 Palestinian pounds.<sup>14</sup> It is hard to believe that the Istanbul delegation received one million Palestinian pounds (or even 750,000 pounds). In March 1944,<sup>15</sup> the delegation reported that it had spent 330,000 pounds for rescue until that time. It appears that the sums allotted for legal and illegal immigration (obtaining ships, bribing port officials, etc. all of which required large sums) were not included.

According to the terms of the agreement the delegation made with the JDC in August 1943, the latter agreed to finance the immigration to Eretz Israel of indigent Jews, and the *aliyah* of 1,000 persons from Bulgaria, as well as to allocate approximately \$30,000 per month for a fundraising campaign among Jewish communities. (The Jewish Agency promised that after the war it would return the equivalent in

<sup>13</sup> *Pe'ulot Hatzala be-Kushta 1940-1945* (Discussions at Beit Lohamei ha-Gettaot) Jerusalem, 5729 (1969), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Doch Vaad ha-Hatzala la-Kongress ha-Zioni ha-Kaf-Gimmel*, Jerusalem, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Sharett, March 10, 1944, Moreshet Archives, D 1.745.

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dollars of the sums raised in these appeals. In this manner funds were raised in Turkey, Hungary, and the Balkan States.)

In view of the above, even if we estimate the budget at only slightly less than the amount mentioned by Bader, it appears that during the course of its activities the delegation spent more than one million pounds sterling. These are not extraordinary sums in relation to the missions which were carried out, and it is important to emphasize that the members of the delegation believed that the amounts of money at their disposal were much less than what they required to fulfill their tasks. The lack of funds was stressed both in letters and in the memoirs of the people involved. There are stories of opportunities which were missed because of the lack of funds, as well as tales of Barlas having to run from one local Jewish leader to another in order to raise funds, a tactic which was not always successful.

If we compare the amount of money spent to the sum of one dollar per person per day, mentioned by Gisi Fleischmann in her request for assistance for the labor camps in Slovakia, we see that the actual sums required were much greater. These sums, however, must undoubtedly be compared with the relief budgets of other organizations.

I would like to conclude by posing several questions which the Israeli researcher must ask himself when dealing with this difficult subject. The underlying question, which is problematic for all research on rescue attempts during the Holocaust, is whether it was indeed possible to carry out large-scale rescue operations under the conditions which existed in Europe and the Free World during the Second World War? We in Israel are bothered by an additional question: What was the role played by the *Yishuv* in rescue operations? Was the Jewish Agency, in its capacity as the representative of the Jewish community in Eretz Israel, really in a position of greater responsibility than the members of other Jewish communities and organizations, such as the World Jewish Congress, the JDC, etc.?

I believe that only when we find an answer to this question will we be able to continue to assess the rescue activities of the *Yishuv* within the framework of the questions which members of that generation and our own often ponder. Did the people in Eretz Israel really understand that the very existence of the Diaspora and, in this context, the future of Zionism and Eretz Israel were being put to the test?



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The Jewish community in Eretz Israel displayed great resourcefulness and perseverance in all matters related to its struggle for existence in this country. Was the question of rescue brought to the forefront of the *Yishuv's* concerns? Were the *Yishuv's* particular characteristics — its initiative, daring and unconventional approach to problems — applied to rescue operations? I believe that it is still too early to answer these poignant questions. They are partially illuminated by the story of the Istanbul delegation. Without, however, completing the picture, by examining the activities of other centers, such as Switzerland and Jerusalem, we will not be able to provide a complete answer to these questions.

## D E B A T E

SHMUEL KRAKOWSKI

I would like to add a few remarks to the interesting lectures by Dr. Kermish and Mr. Gutman. The first remark concerns "Żegota," the Council for Aid to Jews. Polish historians frequently stress the fact that their country was the only one in which this type of inter-party organization was established. In other words, a committee to aid Jews was founded under the auspices of the National Representative of the Polish Government-in-Exile (*Delegatura*) which supposedly was supported by a large segment of the population. If this were true, however, why did this organization carry out so few activities and why was the scope of its operations out of all proportion to the possibilities afforded the parties represented in the *Delegatura*, in general, and in "Żegota," in particular? Why did "Żegota" receive such small allocations in comparison to the sums made available to the Polish underground? We may also ask why, despite all this, did its activities to aid Jews yield such meager results?

It seems to me that the answers to these questions lie in the composition of the *Delegatura*. One must bear in mind that most of the parties represented on the *Delegatura* were hostile toward the Jews, and unequivocally anti-Semitic.

Even during the war, the majority of these parties adopted the position that the mass or total emigration of the Jews from Poland was the solution to the Jewish problem. This position was not altered even in 1943-1944, when hardly any Jews remained in Poland. Groups represented in the *Delegatura* were also responsible for the extermination of Jews hiding in forests and villages. These murders were organized with the consent and knowledge of the leaders of the various factions. According to a decree issued in September 1943, all thieves were to be killed. While this decree did not specifically order the murder of Jews, it is absolutely clear that it was directed against Jews. It was, in effect, a declaration that no laws existed as far as Jewish blood was concerned. Moreover, in December 1942, the N.S.Z. ordered the persecution and extermination of the Jews in the forests, and as is well known, at least part of the members of the N.S.Z. later joined the *Armia Krajowa*, the military branch of the *Delegatura*.

In my opinion, one must not forget that there were "Righteous Gentiles" among the active members of "Żegota," and we, as Jews, and even as ordinary human beings, owe them a great deal. Nevertheless, under the circumstances which existed at that time in the Polish underground, those elements which supported anti-Semitic propaganda and even participated in the murder of Jews, sometimes extended

limited aid and helped rescue Jews. How can this contradiction be explained? The various parties manifested a certain degree of sensitivity to world public opinion. It is a fact that a considerable number—if not a majority—of the leaders of the Polish underground and the members of the Polish Government-in-Exile viewed the existence and limited activities of “Żegota” as a positive political factor, which was therefore important for them. The activities of “Żegota” were a convenient front for their real policy toward the Jews, who were being exterminated throughout the country.

I would like to add a final comment. Mr. Yisrael Gutman mentioned the second most important element in the Polish resistance, the underground connected with the Polish Labor Party, i.e. the Communists. No one can blame them for not doing enough in 1942, since at that time they were not in a position to do anything significant. These two groups — the underground of the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Communist underground—clashed on every issue. They engaged in a very cruel struggle for power in Poland, which was about to be liberated from the yoke of the Nazis. Yet, I believe that during the last phase of this struggle, both groups adopted a similar policy vis-à-vis the Jews. This may be seen in the minimal aid they extended to Jews, which was out of all proportion to the needs and possibilities which existed at that time. I stressed that in 1942 the Communists were fairly weak, but in the summer of 1944 they were a decisive factor in Poland and were, in effect, the government in the liberated areas. Even if the regime established by the underground was not officially called a government, for all practical purposes it was a government. Despite the fact that there were still possibilities for rescue at that time, they did not make any efforts or launch any large-scale initiatives to save Jews.

#### ABRAHAM (ADOLF) BERMAN

As Secretary-General of the underground Council for Aid to Jews (“Żegota”) and as a member of the Presidium of the underground Jewish National Committee, together with my friend and comrade Yitzhak Zuckerman, and the late Daniel Guzik, the director of the JDC, I must assume that my friend Dr. Kermish presented an accurate and generally objective picture of the important, beneficent, and ramified activities of the Council for Aid to Jews. I am sorry that the lecture by my friend Yisrael Gutman was not objective and did not present an accurate picture of the Polish underground, and the attitude of a significant part of that underground to the Jewish tragedy, and the issue of extending aid to Jews. I am not, of course, referring to the fascist underground. I am referring to the democratic underground, which was made up of Catholics, right-wing and left-wing socialists, and Communists. Needless to say, I absolutely take exception to all

the exaggerations, and the fantastic concoctions of various authors, among them those of my friend Bartoszewski, to the effect that the entire Polish people, millions of Poles or the majority of the Polish people, helped the Jews. This assertion is not correct. By the same token, however, we must not, due to political considerations, disregard the fact that thousands of Catholics, socialists, Communists, Democrats, and Syndicalists, among them very simple people as well as Polish intellectuals, professors, and students extended aid and helped us. We, the remnants of the Jewish underground, are alive today thanks to them. I therefore take exception to the tone used by my friend Mr. Gutman, as well as to the generalizations he and Mr. Krakowski made. The reality was incomparably more complex and tragic, and I obviously cannot make all the numerous comments I would have liked to make about the two lectures.

I will confine myself to one issue — the number of Jews in Warsaw and its environs who were helped by Poles from the categories I previously mentioned, not by the Polish reactionaries. “Żegota,” whose secretary I was, extended aid to more than 4,000 Jews. Moreover it aided Jews not only in Warsaw. It is a well-known fact, and Dr. Kermish mentioned it in his lecture, that “Żegota” had branches in Cracow and Lwow, and had a special representative for Lublic and Zamość. Dr. Kermish, however, should have taken into account that the Jewish National Committee extended aid to 6,000 Jews. Who provided this help? We had more than one hundred cells involved in the relief and rescue of Jews, the majority of which were made up of Poles. Moreover, these cells did not operate in the framework of “Żegota,” but rather via the Jewish National Committee. The third factor was the Bund, which helped approximately 2,000 Jews. Once again, the active workers were members of the Bund and Poles affiliated with the Jewish National Committee, first and foremost, Polish socialists. In addition, Dr. Kermish did not mention the fact that besides “Żegota” and the Poles affiliated with the Jewish National Committee and the Bund, the members of the Polish Communist Party (P.P.R.) also helped the Jews. As Director of the Department for Jewish Affairs in the underground leftist Polish parliament — the National Federal Council (K.R.N.), I know for a fact that hundreds of Jews, not only in Warsaw, but throughout Poland, were aided by the Communists. If we add up all these figures, it is not a matter of 4,000 Jews, but of at least 20,000 Jews. I therefore believe that it is improper that in Yad Vashem, which is supposed to be a scientific institute, this help should be disregarded for political reasons. We must consider how matters were there and keep in mind that only in Poland was the situation such that all those who helped Jews thereby endangered their lives.

## BELA VAGO

My first question is directed to Mr. Gutman. Although it is not common custom to praise lecturers, I must state that I agree with his opinion regarding the Polish Government in London. Nonetheless, I would like to ask a question about the *Armia Krajowa* (A.K.) Despite what was said, it is a known fact that the A.K. transmitted a large amount of important material — intelligence information as well as other types of news — to the West. I would like to ask whether there was local initiative and, in this case, a genuine desire to help, or whether this was merely the response of the intelligence mechanism, which automatically relayed all available information to the recipients who used the material and made the decisions. There is a third possibility, that perhaps the government-in-exile in London sent instructions to the *Armia Krajowa* to check the Jewish problem and send them the relevant material.

My second question is directed to Dr. Livia Rothkirchen. I am very aware of the emphasis you placed on the fact that Rabbi Weissmandel was the originator of the proposal [to bomb Auschwitz — Ed.]. I would like to ask Dr. Rothkirchen whether she is of the opinion or has proof to the effect that it was Rabbi Weissmandel's letter which motivated the Jewish organizations to present their proposal. Second, does the fact that they responded to Weizmann's appeal, whereas they did not answer Rabbi Weissmandel's entreaties, stem from the fact that the latter was considered a "non-entity," an unknown? They did not even know whom he was and did not consider themselves obliged to answer, whereas when Weizmann appeared they had no way out and had to respond.

## MR. BEIT-ZVI

My question is directed to Dr. Kermish. Although we must refrain from passing judgement, I must note that I was very impressed by the facts he presented, particularly following the corroborative testimony of Dr. Berman. It seems to me that they represent a turnabout or a breakthrough in the concept of Israel and the nations. My question is why was this revealed only now, after so many years have elapsed?

My second question is addressed to Mr. Yisrael Gutman, who spoke about the Polish Government and mentioned Dr. Schwarzbart. The latter complained that the Poles had fooled him. There was another Jew, by the name of Zygielbojm, in the Polish National Council. In August 1942, Zygielbojm publicized a detailed description of the camps and everything that had occurred.

## MIRIAM PELEG

I feel I have a moral obligation to briefly deal with the work of the "Zegota" group in Cracow, of which I was a member. I recently was informed of the demise of Wladyslaw Wicik, who was the secretary

of the committee. I would like to tell Mr. Krakowski that under no circumstances do I agree with his assertion that the work of "Żegota" was carried out in order to camouflage other activities. I make this statement as someone who was in contact with these people. As for Dr. Kermish's claim that the Poles boast about the "Żegota" group I can categorically state that the announcement of Wladyslaw Wicik's death, which included a detailed list of his activities in various fields, did not mention a single word about the fact that he was the secretary of "Żegota" in Cracow during the war. Despite the fact that the Cracow branch was financially dependent on Warsaw, they carried out many activities on their own initiative. After the Polish revolt, the group of Jewish underground activists in Warsaw was helped with documents and money which were sent from Cracow.

#### MEIR DWORZECKI

I would like to ask two questions and make one comment. Perhaps the lecturers would be so kind as to explain the meaning of the word "Żegota." The second question is directed to Dr. Rothkirchen who stated that the "Working Group" in Slovakia was unique because it was an underground group which operated within the framework of the *Judenrat*, as a sort of anti-*Judenrat*. This matter requires further analysis and clarification. I believe that in the French U.G.I.F. there was also a part which did the opposite of what that body was ordered to do. In Vilna, for example, Glazman was the Deputy Chief of Police, and yet he was simultaneously one of the leaders of the underground, i.e. he did the opposite of what he was ordered to do. I will cite another example. Dr. Alter Dworzecki, who was head of the *Judenrat* in Zhetl organized a group of partisans, left the *Judenrat*, and went to the forests. In other words, he also supposedly acted against himself. He was supposed to carry out the Germans' orders and did the opposite.

I would also like to make a comment about the issue of Polish-Jewish relations, which was raised here. I believe these relations must be examined not only in Warsaw and the General Government, but in all the areas which were part of Poland prior to September 1939, including Vilna, Grodno, and Bialystok. As far as Vilna is concerned, the situation in this respect was very different than the one described by Dr. Berman of Warsaw. I cannot forget the degrading screams of the Poles when they led us through the streets of Vilna.

#### LENI YAHIL

The lecturers and even some of the participants in the debate dealt with the policy of the Polish Government in London, but the matter is still unclear. From the few documents which I read in the Public Record Office in London and after I heard the lectures here, I be-

lieve that the subject requires basic research. There are several questions which we must answer: What was the general background of the relations between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the British Government? What was the attitude of the Polish Government to the Jews and did it undergo any changes? As far as the attitude of the British Government is concerned — there is no doubt that the British received direct reports from the Polish ghettos. In addition, they undoubtedly obtained information from their own sources, and it is important to understand how they decided what to publicize. There is no doubt, however, that as far as the British are concerned, the publicizing of the reports on the extermination and the reliability of the information on the events were dependent on the official announcements of the Polish Government. As soon as the Polish Government confirmed the reports and officially announced that the events had indeed occurred, the news was immediately transmitted over all the communications media in London and from London was relayed further. This entire network must be thoroughly researched.

JOSEPH LITVAK

Although I am certain that Yisrael Gutman does not need me to defend him, I would like to support the thesis he presented, and to corroborate the statements made by Krakowski and, to a certain extent, to reinforce them.

Someone asked on what basis Mr. Gutman asserted that the Polish Government spoke with two voices, that it had serious reservations vis-à-vis the rescue of Jews by Poles, and that the rescue activities it undertook stemmed to a large extent from Poland's international position — since she was a member of the anti-Nazi coalition she needed an alibi for her inactivity — and the view of the Poles that public opinion, and the influence of the Jews upon public opinion, were very important. Poland sought to appear as the protector of the Jews in the eyes of these elements and it seems to me that this policy also had an influence on the activities of "Żegota."

One must, however, distinguish between the various groups. It is obvious that there were "Righteous Among the Nations" in Poland. Although the number of such persons was proportionally less than in other countries, there nonetheless were people who risked their lives and it is our obligation to emphasize and note this phenomenon. It is also obvious that "Righteous Gentiles" operated in the framework of "Żegota" and that they carried out the dangerous work due to deep humanitarian motivations.

If, however, the Polish Government in London extended its aegis to "Żegota" and financed its activities, and representatives of the Polish Government were members of this committee, it did so mainly to cover up for its inactivity and its real intentions vis-à-vis the Jews.

What is the basis for these statements? I do not have the material in my possession, but I know of a letter sent by Yitzhak Gruenbaum — a fairly reliable witness — to Schwartzbart in November or December of 1942, which is found in the archives of Dr. Schwartzbart's office, now at Yad Vashem. In the letter, Gruenbaum writes to Schwartzbart that he is very bitter about the fact that so few Jews were evacuated from Russia with the help of the Polish Government and that the Polish Government did not do anything to save the Jews in Poland. He also hints that one of the key figures in the government-in-exile (referred to in the letter as S.) met during his visit to the United States with Arab representatives and told them that the reduction of the number of Jews in Poland is a positive process, which spares the Poles problems. Of course it is impossible to know for sure whom the person is and if Gruenbaum's accusation is levelled at Sikorski. The latter indeed visited the United States at that time — the latter half of 1942 — and stayed there three weeks. It is unlikely that Gruenbaum would write to Schwartzbart and ask him to publicize the fact that the matter was known in Eretz Israel, unless the statement was made by an important Polish personage. It is possible that the S. mentioned in the letter is Professor Stroński, who had formerly served as Minister of Information, and also visited the United States at that time. Stroński, however, had previously been a member of the Endek party and I do not think that Gruenbaum would have seized upon such a statement if it had been made by Stroński. There is no guarantee, however, that the person can be identified, the only thing certain is that it was a leading Polish personage.

Gruenbaum also reported on his meetings with the Polish minister Stanisław Kot, during the latter's stay in Eretz Israel. In his talks with Kot, Gruenbaum asked why the Poles had not extended aid to the Jews when the Germans set out to destroy the Jews. Gruenbaum notes in his report that he did not receive any answers to his questions, and Kot ignored the demands he presented to him regarding the future. Moreover, in the course of his discussions with Gruenbaum, Kot hinted that if the Jews did not stop portraying the Poles as anti-Semites, the latter who had information on the activities of the Jewish Police in the ghettos, would respond by publicizing information on the behavior of the Jews.

#### CHAIM PAZNER

I agree with the opinion expressed by one of the participants in this debate that the various problems concerning the way in which the Polish Government-in-Exile reacted to the reports on the systematic annihilation of Polish Jewry, such as the report of the Bund which arrived in May 1942, must be thoroughly researched. Several things, however, are clear about this subject, only three of which I will men-



tion. On June 6, 1942, the Polish Government-in-Exile held a meeting regarding the reports on the murder of the Jews and decided to transmit a message to the Allies on this subject. On June 9, the Polish Prime Minister declared in a B.B.C. broadcast that Polish Jewry was in danger of extermination. On June 10, upon the initiative of its two Jewish members, Y. Schwartzbart and S. Zygielbojm, the Polish National Council issued an appeal on this subject to all the parliaments of the Free World.

The steps taken by the Polish Government-in-Exile in London and the Polish National Council are, as noted above, well-known. They also undertook similar activities during the initial half of July 1942, and these activities can undoubtedly be considered manifestations of understanding and desire to help. On the other hand, the fact cannot be ignored that the abovementioned actions consisted only of public declarations and formal appeals to Allied governments and the like.

It is true that in June 1942, merely publicizing the reports on the systematic extermination of Polish Jewry on British radio, and bringing the details to the attention of the Allied governments by means of special appeals, was very important. Nonetheless it is obvious that there is a significant difference between these steps and extending practical aid, and at this point we must ask the crucial question — besides the announcements over B.B.C., other public declarations and the appeals to the Allied governments, did the Polish Government-in-Exile and its various representatives and institutions undertake any concrete activities to extend any aid whatsoever to their Jewish citizens, who — as the Polish authorities knew quite well — were being subjected to a process of total extermination? This question, as I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, must be thoroughly researched.

In her lecture on the Eretz Israel representation in Istanbul, Dalia Ofer used the term “delegation” in referring to the groups of people who operated there on behalf of the *Vaad ha-Hatzala* (Rescue Committee) established by the Jewish Agency. In reality, the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem did not establish delegations abroad. In some countries, the *Vaad ha-Hatzala* used the public figures and officials of the local Jewish institutions as well as individual emissaries sent for specific periods of time. It established a representation in Istanbul, while Geneva was considered a secondary center for the relief activities and rescue attempts undertaken on behalf of the committee in Jerusalem. The Palestine Office in Geneva played a significant role in these attempts and activities. Unfortunately, the lecturer did not refer to the large amount of material available on this office. It should be noted that the majority of the activities undertaken in Istanbul and Geneva were interconnected, although both offices also initiated their own relief and rescue projects. Perhaps it is worthwhile to mention one additional fact. During the course of the Holocaust,

there were frequent instances in which the contact between the representation in Istanbul and the Jewish institutions in occupied Europe was cut off for a prolonged period of time, while the contacts between the latter and Geneva was maintained and vice versa. It is obvious therefore that on various topics, the material in the archives of the Geneva and Istanbul offices is complementary. In any event, it seems to me that one cannot cover the activities in Istanbul without referring also to what was done in Geneva. I will confine myself to this brief general comment.

RACHEL AUERBACH

Those who were not there do not understand that reality. On the background of that reality, there were Poles who endangered their lives. I have already heard the opinion expressed that the entire Polish people was made up of murderers, among whom were several good people, the "Righteous Among the Nations." As far as the extreme anti-Semites were concerned, the Jews were a demonic people, but here and there a good Jew existed. I believe that in passing historical judgement, one cannot judge people by their motives. One must also consider the reality in which things were done. The number of Jews saved was mentioned; there were also instances in which Poles were executed by the underground for handing over Jews. I know of an incident which is not recorded in any book. Upon the orders of a colonel of the *Armia Krajowa*, four people were executed. I was surprised that Sikorski's name was not mentioned and that the government-in-exile was referred to as if it were a homogeneous group. There were differences of opinion among its members as well. We know of hundreds of thousands of Jews who came back from Russia, and we cannot be certain that they would have ever succeeded in returning if not for the struggle waged by Sikorski so that Jews would also be released from the camps and be allowed to enlist in the Polish Army in the Soviet Union.

YISRAEL GUTMAN (reply)

First of all, I would like to respond to the comments made by Dr. Adolf Berman. Dear Dr. Berman, I must state that I was disappointed by the style and wording of your remarks, which are not appropriate for the debate being conducted. I am certainly not the one whose writing or lectures are influenced by current political interests, and I believe it best if you would not level such accusations. In general, the words of wise man are best heard in a relaxed atmosphere.

As far as the assertion you made — and that is the main thing — I believe that it is best if those who played a key role during that period — and I am aware of and admire Dr. Berman's activities during those days — would speak about their own activities and the matters they know about, and not attempt to make generalizations

on the basis of their own personal experience. I believe that those who attempt to speak about this period and about the entire Polish people on the basis of the rescue of thousands are seriously distorting the picture. Of course we must not forget that there was rescue on a significant scale in Poland, and that there were "Righteous Among the Nations" who risked their lives to engage in rescue work. For this reason the lecture by Dr. Kermish was included in the conference. I spoke about the attitude of the Poles to the news of the extermination and the manner in which the reports were publicized in the course of the large-scale deportations from Warsaw in the summer of 1942. Dr. Berman did not mention one word about the specific episode I dealt with or about the documents which I cited.

I would like to make one comment regarding rescue. One merely has to peruse the "memorial books" [published to commemorate the Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust—Ed.] to find hundreds and perhaps thousands of cases which seemingly contradict each other. One individual relates how Poles endangered their lives to save him and the same person tells of cases in which Poles murdered and handed over Jews. A Jewish historian, whom I respect very much, once told me "You must remember that those who were saved are the ones who talk and relate the stories, while those who were murdered or turned over to the Germans cannot speak." This morning Mr. Arad told of Jewish partisans and Jews in hiding in the forests who were murdered by units of the *Armia Krajowa*. Dr. Berman certainly knows that several fighters who survived the Warsaw Ghetto revolt were among those murdered. Thus the picture is very complex.

As far as the subject I dealt with is concerned, Schwarzbart received information from the Polish Government-in-Exile in London. I do not know via which channels he received the information, with the exception of meetings with individuals who came from Poland. The question is how and when they gave him the information. The lack of clarity and the delays in transmitting the information to Schwarzbart are indicative of the intentions of the Poles. Zygielbojm occasionally received information from his Polish socialist friends, but essentially there was no difference, although it is very difficult to examine the matter thoroughly, because while we possess the archives of Dr. Schwarzbart's office, we have not seen the documents in Zygielbojm's archives.

How do we know that the Poles acted hypocritically? On several occasions, when Schwarzbart applied pressure on the members of the Polish Government-in-Exile and demanded that they take action immediately on a certain matter, they replied that they had to take the responses from Poland into account and that there had been protests in Poland because the government was defending the Jews and deal-

ing with Jewish matters. On the one hand, the government was under pressure from those elements which demanded that they denounce anti-Semitism and work to save Jews, and on the other hand, there were those within the government who continued the tradition of the *Endecja*. Moreover, there were echoes from Poland to the effect that the Poles would not reconcile themselves to the return of Jewish property and economic positions and that if an attempt would be made to return the Jews to their positions it might very well lead to a rebellion by the Poles. The Polish Government was forced to face contradictory demands and it occasionally avoided taking a clear-cut stand. The manner in which the information which was received from Warsaw in the summer of 1942 was handled, was typical of that evasive, delaying approach and is, of course, illuminating regarding the attitude of the Poles to the Jews.

The question is whether all the various aspects of the attitude of the Polish Government to the Jews can be thus summarized. Dr. Yahil remarked that the subject required additional research and I agree with her statement. The various aspects of the attitude of the Polish Government-in-Exile to Jewish affairs must be thoroughly and systematically examined.

As for Professor Vago's query, it is true that the *Armia Krajowa* collected detailed information on matters concerning the Jews. An individual was appointed whose job was to collect such information. The underground institutions, the Government Delegation — the representatives of the government in Poland — and the *Armia Krajowa* transmitted detailed accounts on the situation in Poland. These reports, which covered a specific time period, usually included a section on the situation of the Jews. This information was generally accurate and the reports confirm what Professor Vago said in his lecture yesterday. It is obvious that they attempted to keep their government informed and sought to supply them with a complete picture of the events. What was done with the information, how it was publicized, and what was publicized is another question.

I assume that there is a reason for the fact that the news of the murder of 700,000 Jews was announced by the Polish Government as early as June 1942, whereas the news on the destruction of the Jews of Warsaw was delayed for several months. I believe that the Poles publicized the statistics on the eastern regions, i.e. the area which was under Soviet rule during the years 1939-1941, because the population of that area was mixed and Polish influence was not predominant. On the other hand, when the city which had been the Polish capital, a city in which the main centers of the Polish underground were located was involved, publicizing the news would have obligated the Poles to actively respond — something they were not ready to do. They therefore kept silent for a long time and refrained from expressly calling upon the Poles to actively engage in rescue operations.

## JOSEPH KERMISH (reply)

Due to the lateness of the hour, I will answer the questions I was asked very briefly. First of all, the question was raised why we are discussing "Żegota" at such a late date. There were two journals which appeared in Warsaw, one in Yiddish and one in Polish, one of which is still published to this day [the journal of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw — Ed.], and the information was published years ago. Moreover, it should be noted that the book by Bartoszewski and Lewin, two English editions of which have already appeared, has a lengthy chapter on "Żegota." It is true, however, that not much has been written on the subject in Hebrew.

Another question dealt with the fate of the Jewish children in monasteries. We know of the work of the Catholic authoress Zofia Kossak-Szczucka who even after she returned from Auschwitz continued to extend aid to Jews and was especially active in the efforts to rescue children. Some of those active in this work hoped to convert the children to Christianity, and Dr. Berman wrote about this phenomenon. On the other hand, we know that immediately after the end of the war, a Jewish institution called *Koordynacja* was established, which did a great deal to obtain the release of all the children who were in monasteries.

As for the question why so little mention was made of the activities of the Council for Aid to Jews in Lwow or Cracow, the answer is simple — the lack of time. The diverse aspects of the work of "Żegota" and its various branches deserve a major monograph. We have the material, but in this limited framework one cannot encompass the entire subject. I will try and expand the lecture prior to its publication.

As for the meaning of the name "Żegota," Tadeusz Rek, a member of the organization wrote that one of the Poles who participated in the meetings of the Provisional Committee for Aid to Jews was named Żegota. It is likely that this is the origin of the name. It is also likely that the Council was named "Żegota" because the word is similar to the word for Jews in Polish — *Zydzi*.

## LIVIA ROTHKIRCHEN (reply)

First of all, I will respond to the question by Professor Vago. I mentioned and emphasized that the proposal to bomb Auschwitz was formulated by Rabbi Weissmandel and originated in Bratislava. I obtained the pertinent documents from the Schwalb archives. Rabbi Weissmandel's letter was sent from Bratislava together with the famous report on Auschwitz in the usual way, via diplomatic channels in Bratislava, and it reached the Istanbul branch of the *Vaad ha-Hatzala* (Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency). A copy of the report was also sent by Moshe Krausz from Hungary to the Geneva branch of

the Jewish Agency and was transmitted by the Czechoslovak Embassy in Geneva to the War Refugee Board in Washington. In the correspondence of the War Refugee Board, Jaromír Kopecký, the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Geneva, is mentioned as the person who relayed the proposal. In addition, I assume that a copy of Weissmandel's well-known letter, which I published in my book *The Destruction of Slovak Jewry*, is found in the Weizmann Archives. Weizmann presented the proposal to the leaders of the Allies. I would like to emphasize that Rabbi Weissmandel requested that his name not be mentioned, thus I consider it an honor, as well as a moral obligation, to note that he was the originator of the proposal.

Dr. Dworzecki proposed checking whether there was an underground group which operated within the framework of the U.G.I.F. To the best of my knowledge, U.G.I.F. did not have a "Europa Plan" to save the remnants of European Jewry, and it did not conduct negotiations with Germans as did the "Working Group." We are dealing with an exceptional case in which the leaders of a small Jewish community take upon themselves a crucial task — to bring about a basic change in the policy of the "Final Solution." I emphasized that the Jewish leaders in Slovakia operated under specific conditions and enjoyed certain advantages. I do not believe that the *Judenräte* in Poland or in Lithuania had such opportunities.

The question was also asked whether the members of the "Working Group" received the recognition due them while they were still alive. Of course not. Jewish historiography, however, did appreciate their activity and praise for their deeds already appears in the books by Reitlinger and Poliakov. I would also like to note that it is to our credit that we at Yad Vashem published the letters and treated the activities of the "Working Group" with the proper respect. Moreover, our interpretation was accepted elsewhere and has appeared in the general literature related to this subject.

DALIA OFER (reply)

I do not have much to add to what has already been said. I agree with the opinion expressed here that additional comprehensive research is required and I emphasized this point in my lecture. Istanbul was undoubtedly connected with other centers and the activities undertaken were carried out over a period of time, partially by the individuals in Turkey and partially by others elsewhere. As far as my use of the term "delegation" rather than "center" — I accept the correction. I used it more as a technical term than as a specific historical term.

## Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust of European Jewry 1939–1945: A Stereotype Reexamined\*

Tuvia Frieling

The main question I wish to address in this paper concerns the role of David Ben-Gurion and his perceptions, policies and actions in the rescue efforts undertaken by the Yishuv on behalf of European Jews during World War II. This issue merits special attention in view of the importance of the efforts undertaken by the Yishuv at that time, and the fact that the details of these activities have gradually begun to emerge. Furthermore, according to one argument, despite his central position in the Yishuv, Ben-Gurion failed to take part in the rescue activities; it is maintained that he viewed them as clashing with the achievement of the objectives of the Zionist movement which was beset with other formidable difficulties. This argument entails serious moral, educational, institutional, national and personal implications which bear upon the present reality in Israel, and its detailed discussion is thus imperative.

- \* This paper is based on the lecture delivered at Yad Vashem on May 27, 1985 at the ceremony awarding scholarships on behalf of Yad Vashem and the scholarship funds under its auspices. The discussion draws on my Ph.D. dissertation which is now being completed at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, under the supervision of Prof. Yehuda Bauer.

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In order to elucidate the components of this part-thesis, part-belief concerning Ben-Gurion's attitude to the Holocaust and the question of his participation or lack thereof in the rescue activities, it is first necessary to outline the stages of its emergence.

The negative assessment of Ben-Gurion's role in the rescue activities can be said to stem from two main sources. The first comprises statements given during the period under consideration and afterward by figures from the Yishuv, including the leadership, who were active at that time. The second source consists of a number of scholarly studies touching upon the period under consideration.

To quote a few examples of the first approach: Many years after the Holocaust, Anshel Reiss, a Mapai member, said that Ben-Gurion "did not evince much understanding of these matters [i.e. rescue activities]" since "he didn't believe in them, or else was busy with the affairs of Eretz-Israel."<sup>1</sup>

In the discussion on the rescue issues held by the Mapai Secretariat on February 10, 1943, Abraham Haft said, *inter alia*:

...I am not as much concerned about the attitude of the Jewish Agency in this matter as about the attitude of our comrades in the Agency. My concern is that Mr. Ben-Gurion does not devote maximum attention to this issue. This is true not only of Ben-Gurion, but of London and America as well. This is my feeling. Conventional reason and rationality simply cannot absorb the dimensions of the great catastrophe and stand in stark contradiction to it.<sup>2</sup>

When the discussion focused on the question of raising money for the rescue activities, Golda Myerson (Meir) remarked:

There are one hundred Jews in the country who can be gathered together and told quietly: each one of you is now going to contribute ... one thousand Palestinian pounds ... and I have no doubts

<sup>1</sup> Ben-Gurion Research Center and Archives (henceforth: Ben Gurion Archives), Oral Documentation Section, interview with Anshel Reiss; interviewers: Igal Dunitz, Eli Shaltiel, cassette 147, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Mapai Secretariat, February 10, 1943, Haft, Labor Party Archives, Beit Berl (henceforth: LPA).



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whatsoever that this can be achieved. The question is, who is going to call upon these Jews; if Ben-Gurion, Kaplan and two or three other Jews could have done it, the job would have been much easier...<sup>3</sup>

Meir Yaari, in his article entitled "Facing the Disaster," published in the weekly organ *Hashomer Hatzair* on January 6, 1943, criticized the handling of information about the extermination of European Jewry which had begun reaching the Jewish Agency Executive prior to the official announcement in November 1942. He also reprimanded Yitzhak Gruenbaum and other members of the Agency Executive for their treatment of this matter. Yaari commented, *inter alia*:

"...And meanwhile Ben-Gurion has been staying in Washington dealing with the question of a Jewish army and the "Biltmore Program." You keep wondering and asking yourself: What has happened to the Zionist movement? Have we lost our sense of proportion and direction?"<sup>4</sup>

Aharon Zisling, Heshel Frumkin and Beba Idelsohn also voiced criticism of the leadership, which naturally focused on the key figure.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of the Brand affair, even Gruenbaum described Ben-Gurion as "a man who refuses to listen even to what people say, his thoughts protected by impenetrable armor."<sup>6</sup>

Several scholars also contributed to the emergence of this view of Ben-Gurion, either by referring explicitly to the subject or by

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Golda Myerson.

<sup>4</sup> See Sh. Beit-Zvi, *Post-Uganda Zionism in the Holocaust Crisis* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1977, p. 139. Sh. Beit-Zvi comments: "This article was republished in the collection of Meir Yaari's writings entitled *The Long Way* [in Hebrew], 1947, and also in the first volume of *The Hashomer Hatzair Book* [in Hebrew], 1956. In both those publications this passage was omitted." See also Yaari's critical remarks delivered at the Secretariat of the Histadrut Executive on February 11, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Zisling, Secretariat of the Histadrut Executive, February 2, 1943, Labor Archives, Lavon Center. Frumkin, *ibid.*, session of the Executive, May 26, 1943, vol. 68, "mem"; Beba Idelsohn, *ibid.*, November 18, 1943.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive (henceforth: JAE), July 23, 1943, Central Zionist Archives (henceforth: CZA). Gruenbaum conceded he had said this for "tactical" reasons so as to force Ben-Gurion to listen to him, and he moderated his tone when speaking on the subject later during the session.

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expressing puzzlement over it. Certain recently published studies do not address this issue at all, whereas others discuss Ben-Gurion's activities not in their own right, but as part of the actions undertaken by various bodies in the Yishuv. On the whole, their conclusions were reached by way of generalization, by lumping together the "leadership" as a collectivity and Ben-Gurion, without scrutinizing the perceptions and the motives of the man himself.

The most recent biography of Ben-Gurion, which covers also the period of World War II, was published in the U.S. in 1983. Its author, Dan Kurzman,<sup>7</sup> devotes a chapter to Ben-Gurion during the period under consideration. In this chapter, based mainly on prevailing views and other studies, Kurzman writes that from August 1942 onward information about the events in Europe began reaching the Yishuv. Most of the Yishuv leadership either did not know or did not want to know about the disaster in Europe. In August that year, after his return from the United States, Ben-Gurion devoted but a few of his addresses to the rumors making the rounds in the Yishuv. He preferred instead to focus his efforts on seeking the support of the main public bodies of the Yishuv for the Biltmore plan.

The author goes on to say that there is no evidence of any kind of Ben-Gurion's attempt to reveal to his people the dimensions of the ongoing catastrophe, neither at that time, nor after the war. When he appealed to the conscience of the free world and proposed undertaking rescue activities in countries other than Palestine, his words carried an undertone of a somewhat "un-Zionist" attitude; nonetheless, he always linked the disaster with the need to establish a Jewish army and a Jewish State. Kurzman asserts that Ben-Gurion, despite his curiosity, his investigative bent and his thoroughness, did not bother with checking the facts connected with the Holocaust; he failed to focus on the attempts to prevent the disaster and did not place himself at the head of the "crusade" which would prevail on the Pope to use his power and influence, or force the Allies to bomb the extermination camps and the access roads. Nor did he spur American Jewry to pressure their government, or try to set up a special think tank to tackle the

<sup>7</sup> Dan Kurzman, *Ben-Gurion — Prophet of Fire*, New York, 1983, pp. 227-257.

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question of rescue activities. In the affair of Joel Brand he concurred with the British and opposed bombing the death camps. In this view, Ben-Gurion's policy on the questions of the Holocaust and rescue efforts lacked his customary determination and practicality. Consequently, owing to his failure to halt the progress of the Holocaust or to reduce its scope, he should be judged on the same terms as the Pope or the free world. Ben-Gurion, as Kurzman maintains, despite having failed to find time and energy to deal with the issues of assistance and rescue, nonetheless brought his full powers into play in regard to the "surviving remnant," i.e. the potential immigrants.

Robert St. John, another biographer of Ben-Gurion,<sup>8</sup> does not deal with this subject at all. Instead, he contents himself with outlining the essentials of Ben-Gurion's reaction to the Holocaust in a few sentences in which he describes the unsympathetic stance taken by the free world and the effort to secure the consent of the superpowers to set up the Jewish Brigade.

In the chapters describing Ben-Gurion's activities during World War II, Michael Bar-Zohar<sup>9</sup> deals with the following issues: Ben-Gurion and the "Biltmore Program," the confrontation with Chaim Weizmann, the crisis of Mapai and the secession of the B faction, the death of Berl Katznelson, Ben-Gurion's family crisis, and, finally, the establishment of the Jewish Brigade, the activities of the I.Z.L. and Lehi, and the "season" affair. Bar-Zohar dwells extensively on Ben-Gurion's activities in Paris soon after the end of the war in late 1945 and early 1946, as well as on his visits to the DP camps in October 1945 and January 1946. In contrast, he touches neither on the issue of Yishuv and the Holocaust nor on the question of Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust. This omission creates a void which anyone can fill as he wishes.

According to Avraham Avi-Hai,<sup>10</sup> Ben-Gurion attached supreme importance to immigration to Eretz-Israel and spoke of the establishment of the Jewish state as the ultimate objective also

<sup>8</sup> Robert St. John, *David Ben-Gurion, Unusual Biography*, Jerusalem, 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> A. Avi-Hai, *Ben-Gurion — State-Builder*, Jerusalem, 1974, pp. 33, 34, 127, 202-211, 246-248.

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during World War II. Avi-Hai does not consider the possibility that Ben-Gurion's leadership was formed also thanks to his involvement in issues connected with the Holocaust such as assistance and rescue. In his view, Ben-Gurion's views on security and his attitude toward reparations from Germany and the Eichmann affair are indicative — even if only partially — of his attitude toward the Holocaust; consequently, the issues themselves need not be studied.

Another scholar, Hava Vegman Eshkoli,<sup>11</sup> summed up Ben-Gurion's views thus: "...The speedy realization of Zionist goals is the only answer to the Holocaust. Mass immigration to the independent Jewish homeland in Eretz-Israel — this was Ben-Gurion's answer to the tragedy of European Jewry." Ben-Gurion shared the political assumption that:

If the world war will not be taken advantage of in terms of furthering the political prospects of Zionism in Eretz-Israel, rescuing Jewish people wouldn't make sense, as there will be no place to absorb them after the war. The Jewish Agency was guided by this consideration when it continued its "partnership" with Britain, despite that country's overt and covert efforts to obstruct the rescue of European Jews....

One need not go far to detect a note of disapproval in this sympathetic account.

Sh. Beit-Zvi<sup>12</sup> maintains that Ben-Gurion, like most leaders of the Zionist movement during the period under consideration, endorsed the approach which "adhered steadfastly to the principle of placing Zionism above all other considerations." According to him, Ben-Gurion did not know much about the Holocaust and was less well informed on this subject than were others. He neither wanted to know nor did he evince interest in such "details." With the exception of the speech delivered by Ben-Gurion before the Assembly of Elected Representatives (*Assefat Hanivharim*) in November 1942, which dealt expressly with the Holocaust, Sh. Beit-

<sup>11</sup> Hava Vegman Eshkoli, "Attitude of the Jewish Leadership Toward Rescue of European Jewry" (in Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet*, 24, October 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Sh. Beit-Zvi, *op. cit.*, pp. 104, 119, 133, 143.

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Zvi failed to discover even one public appearance by Ben-Gurion in which he addressed himself to the extermination of Jews as an issue in its own right. He alleges that Ben-Gurion did mention the Holocaust on a number of occasions but then only to voice his fears that the total extermination of Jews would harm the Zionist venture, or contented himself with expressing the hope that the surviving remnant of the great massacre would contribute toward the realization of Zionist aims. Moreover, Ben-Gurion abstained from taking part in the main debates on the Holocaust. He regarded it as "...the tragedy of millions" which "is also the redeeming force of millions; the mission of Zionism ... is to cast this great Jewish disaster into the mighty forms of redemption." This is all he has to say on the subject and here, too, the note of disapproval can be detected.

Thus, it appears that this image, or the stereotype of "estrangement," "ignorance," "unwillingness to know" which Ben-Gurion allegedly displayed toward the issues related to the Holocaust, assistance and rescue, was formed not only with the help of scholars, but also by Ben-Gurion's contemporaries, including his fellow party members and individuals active in rescue ventures. This fact invests the entire controversy with even more drama.

These appraisals raise the question of what was Ben-Gurion's position on the issues related to rendering aid to European Jews during World War II. Did he regard assistance and rescue undertakings as clashing with the chief objectives of the Yishuv, namely, the struggle for the establishment of a Jewish army and of the state? Did he take any part in those ventures, and if so, what was their priority for Ben-Gurion in his capacity as chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive? These questions should be examined in the context of the times and contemporary events, particularly because of the complexity of the period in question and the fast pace of the developments. Such a study must also be based on the assumption that the stereotypical assessment of Ben-Gurion's attitude to these matters stems largely from the erroneous practice of inferring his positions and involvement in rescue undertakings

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during the Holocaust from his actions and statements before and after the Holocaust.

Since each question is to be examined against the background of the times, I propose to deal separately with the three following main periods:

- 1) From the outbreak of the war until the beginning of the implementation of the "Final Solution," in mid-1941.
- 2) From mid-1941 until the end of November 1942, at which time the fact of extermination was officially proclaimed in the Yishuv.
- 3) From the end of November 1942 until the surrender of Germany in May 1945.

The third period can be further broken down into two phases: a) until the Bermuda Conference in April 1943, or, rather the time when its failure to produce practical results became public knowledge — Ben-Gurion proclaimed it a "sign of fiasco"<sup>13</sup>; b) from the Bermuda Conference onward until Joel Brand's mission reached a dead end in summer 1944.

It should be borne in mind that the views adopted by Ben-Gurion and his involvement in rescue activities during the third period should not be inferred from the statements he made in the first two; the historical background was then completely different. As already mentioned, each statement or act should be studied in its historical context.

Taking into consideration the periodical division delineated above, the examination of the stereotypical view of Ben-Gurion's attitudes raises several questions:

- 1) What did Ben-Gurion know about the Holocaust in each of its stages? Was he aware from the outset of the challenge posed by the Nazi regime to the existence of the Jewish people? When did he realize, if at all, that it amounted to a time of trial, unprecedented in its gravity? How did he receive the first news of the mass murder of Jews, which began reaching the Yishuv in early 1942? And, after the fact of the mass murders had become known, did he grasp the full import of this information, or at least its gravity, so that it could lay

<sup>13</sup> Ben-Gurion's address to the Convention of Industrialists and Businessmen, September 23, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Minutes of Meetings.

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foundations for a new perception which, in turn, could spur him to action?

2) What was Ben-Gurion's attitude to the initial reactions of the Yishuv in the form of organized activity in Eretz-Israel? Did he play any part in shaping their initial manifestations such as demonstrations, strikes and petitions?

3) What was his role in setting up the "Rescue Committee," in shaping its image and defining its powers? Did he maintain any relations with it, and, if so, what was their nature? In particular, what were his relations with Yitzhak Gruenbaum who headed this committee?

In addition to these questions, two other issues related to the rescue and assistance activities must be examined. The first concerns the "great rescue": what was Ben-Gurion's attitude to and his role in the ransom schemes such as the Transnistria plan, the Slovakia affair and, later, the larger scheme termed the "Europe Plan," which were discussed and examined by the Yishuv leadership? Another ransom proposal which deserves special consideration in this context was that concerning the rescue of Hungarian Jewry, i.e. the Joel Brand affair, known as "goods for blood." Also meriting examination is the attempt to provide 29,000 immigration certificates for children; this plan gained the approval of those associated with it and aroused greater hopes than any other scheme developed at the time. It, too, ended in failure.<sup>14</sup>

The second issue concerns Ben-Gurion's attitude to and involvement in the parachute drop plan. This plan proposed dropping 32 parachutists, all Jewish volunteers from Palestine, behind enemy lines, but the British approval for it came too late — in spring 1944 — and it was too restrictive. In connection with this issue, we would do well to scrutinize Ben-Gurion's views on the question of bombing the extermination camps and the access roads as a reprisal for the extermination of Jews and a pressure tactic for halting it.

<sup>14</sup> On the plan of 29,000 certificates see Tuvia Frieling, "Ben-Gurion's Position on the Rescue-of-Children Affair, November 1942–May 1945" (in Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet*, 41, June 1986.

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It is also important to examine Ben-Gurion's role in the plans relating to the "small rescue." The Yishuv leadership, having assessed the conditions in the Nazi-occupied areas, came to the conclusion that in view of the difficulties encountered by the large-scale rescue ventures, the chances of their realization were very slender. The plans in question called for exchanging Jews in the occupied countries of Europe for German nationals living in areas under the rule of the Allies, or for German POWs; smuggling Jews across borders; sending food parcels, medicines, clothing, money and forged documents. All this required the mobilization and allocation of resources. The question arises: Did Ben-Gurion become involved in these ventures?

A number of factors contributed to the emergence of the stereotypical view of Ben-Gurion during the Holocaust: the extent of his involvement in the efforts to induce the countries of the free world to act on behalf of Jews in the areas occupied by Germany and to spur the Jewish communities in these countries to pressure their governments to do something in this sphere;<sup>15</sup> harnessing the Jewish Agency's offices in Istanbul and Geneva to assistance and rescue efforts; and work among the survivors.

Careful study of all these questions should yield a more complete and complex picture of Ben-Gurion's role and involvement in the efforts undertaken by the Yishuv to come to the aid of European Jews. By the same token it will enable us to reassess the stereotypical view of his attitudes and actions in the period under consideration. Among other things, this stereotype attributes to Ben-Gurion the view that Eretz-Israel, or rather the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, was defined as the main objective of the Zionist movement, even at the expense of rescuing the Holocaust victims. To put it bluntly, according to this view Ben-Gurion regarded the "question of Eretz-Israel" as taking precedence over the "question of European Jewry." Thus formulated, it implies a most grave charge against Ben-Gurion during the period under consideration. This is an additional reason, if not the most important one, for undertaking a reexamination of the

<sup>15</sup> On the contacts with Jews of South Africa and their government, see *ibid.*



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aforementioned stereotypical assessment of his attitudes and actions.

It should be recalled in this context that during that period Ben-Gurion achieved and consolidated his position as the most powerful figure in the Zionist movement, even though more than once he found himself isolated both in the Jewish Agency and within his own party, i.e. Mapai. Any attempt at elucidating the issues raised above must also draw on the many-faceted figure of Ben-Gurion: the man himself, the leader, his way of thinking, work habits and the language he used.

Once the fact of the extermination of Jews in Europe was made public in the Yishuv, Ben-Gurion made his views clear by stressing the need for the Yishuv to give top priority to the question of rescue. His involvement in and efforts to promote and implement the plan to save Jewish children in the Balkans (the plan of 29,000) were particularly notable. The plan was not implemented due to a number of difficulties unconnected with the Yishuv, but stemming from the British position on this issue. Ben-Gurion's statements and actions in connection with the rescue activities could hardly be more evident. Thus, in a speech delivered before the Assembly of Elected Representatives on November 30, 1942, he called upon leaders of the countries fighting Hitler to do everything possible to save the Jews from slaughter:

The elected representatives of the Jewish people in its homeland have assembled here to call on you, leaders of the nations fighting against Hitler, the Prime Minister of Britain, and the President of the United States, to use all your might to try to stem the tide... We know that you cannot accomplish the impossible, but there are German nationals living in the United States, in Britain, in Russia and in other countries — proclaim your demand to exchange them for the Jews of Poland, Lithuania and other countries over which the Nazis have erected their scaffold! Let as many Jews as possible flee the Nazi hell and don't close the door in their faces!<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ben-Gurion's speech at the emergency session of the Assembly of Elected Representatives, November 30, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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Ben-Gurion went on to demand the removal of the Jews, above all the children, to any place possible, so that their lives could be saved. He emphasized that the "exchange" was practical and could be carried out. The Yishuv, he proclaimed, was willing to receive and absorb all Jews unable to find refuge in the "free world," as long as they were able to flee the vale of slaughter.

Ben-Gurion did not content himself with declarations. He sent letters to the emissaries of the Jewish Agency Executive in Britain and the United States, calling on them to launch rescue activities; he even provided them with guidelines for action. Thus, for example, in his letter to Nahum Goldmann, he underscored the importance of rescue in general and that of children in particular:

...In view of the great tragedy and the gravity of the situation we must not content ourselves with general declarations, even though their importance should not be underestimated. It is incumbent on us to focus our efforts on ... speedy removal of the Jews, and, in particular, of women and children, from the enemy countries.

His letter to Felix Frankfurter, one of the leaders of American Jewry, a Supreme Court judge and adviser to President Roosevelt, was sent through Arthur Lurie and signed "Avi Amos"; in it he described at length the dangers facing European Jews and surveyed some of the rescue options. Because of the importance of this letter, I quote it almost in full:

To Arthur. Tell Miriam [Cohen-Taub, Ben-Gurion's secretary during his visit to the U.S. in the early forties] to send the following letter to F.F. [Felix Frankfurter] on behalf of Avi Amos:

"Hitler's decision to exterminate all the Jews in Poland probably constitutes the first step toward the extermination of Jews in all occupied countries. Residents of this country who came here through exchange [the words "through exchange" were erased and replaced by "a week ago" in Ben-Gurion's handwriting] confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt that unbelievable atrocities had been committed against women and children; confirmation was also supplied by Polish Deputy Prime Minister Kot, now staying in Jerusalem, who had received information from the Polish government emissaries in Poland [the last part of this sentence, beginning with the words "who had received," was crossed out by Ben-

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Gurion]. It is doubtful whether Hitler can be influenced in some way, though it seems that the army does not take part in the slaughter which is carried out by the Gestapo and the special storm troops of the Nazi party. It is possible that a stern warning issued by the President to the heads of the German army, holding them personally responsible in the future for atrocities committed, will have its effect. There exists, perhaps, a possibility of saving children and perhaps even women by exchanging them for children and women of German nationality residing in the Allied countries. The Yishuv is prepared to adopt 50,000 children and more if possible [Ben-Gurion crossed out the word "possible" and wrote "needed" instead], and we are already working out all the necessary arrangements.

...Special steps must be taken to save Jewries of the Balkan countries, Hungary and Western Europe which are either not ruled directly by the Nazis or not subjected to the same ferocity as in Eastern Europe. [An] American warning to the governments of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria might [could] have an effect, even though they are allied with Hitler. At least women and children can certainly be rescued from those countries and the British government must be pressured into letting into the country [Palestine] all the children who can be rescued from these countries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ben-Gurion to Nahum Goldmann, and Ben-Gurion to Arthur Lurie to be forwarded to Felix Frankfurter, December 8, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence. In the third letter he wrote that day and addressed to Berl Locker in London, Ben-Gurion made similar comments with a shift of emphasis: "...We regard the permit to bring 4,000 children only as a beginning, but it definitely is not enough." See also Dobkin's address before the Mapai Secretariat on November 24, 1942: "...These demands which we sent on behalf of the Executive were bolstered by individual appeals addressed to certain figures. Ben-Gurion sent a cable to several people with whom he maintains contacts, Frankfurter among them, and a wire will be sent to Herbert Lehman who heads the venture for assisting the population in the occupied countries..." LPA, Mapai Secretariat, Dobkin, November 24, 1942. As far as the exchange is concerned, it should be noted that Ben-Gurion's appeal to intensify these efforts did not lead to significant results, again, for reasons unrelated to the Yishuv. It should be borne in mind that in this matter, too, the Yishuv's position was anomalous. As a rule, exchanges are negotiated between two countries at war whose citizens were trapped in the enemy's territory on the outbreak of hostilities. In this case, the Yishuv demanded an exchange even though it was not the government of a sovereign country and the Jews it sought to exchange were not its citizens. Moreover, the British raised obstacles, arguing that the Nazis could infiltrate their agents into the ranks of those covered by the exchange. Criticism of this discouraging attitude of the British can be found in the speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the House of

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The exchange plan, the need to urge the American President to warn commanders of the German army against taking part in the atrocities, contacts with the Polish government-in-exile, the understanding that Hitler's extermination plan encompassed all European Jews, and the need to do everything possible to rescue the Jews of the satellite countries where Nazi rule was still indirect — all these do not exhaust the entire range of issues raised by Ben-Gurion in his letter. He went on to say:

Yesterday we received a confidential communication, which for the time being should not be made public, from the government, allowing us to bring 4,000 children accompanied by 500 women from Bulgaria to Eretz-Israel. This constitutes a small proportion of the children who can be rescued and absorbed in this country. The efforts to rescue everyone possible from the Nazi slaughter notwithstanding, we feel that the democratic world will be guilty of unpardonable injustice against the Jewish people writhing in its blood, if, even at this time, they do not let us, the Jews, fight as Jews against our terrible enemy....

Ben-Gurion concluded his letter with a call: "...and on behalf of all the Jews of Eretz-Israel I urge you to do everything you can to save the lives of our people and its honor." It should be recalled that this letter was sent to a man who at that time was regarded as influential in the Roosevelt government. In addition to the proposals of rescue actions included therein, we should not underestimate the value of those "deletions" which appear in the original version. They exemplify and underscore the importance of the "confidentiality" or secrecy in which these matters should be discussed. It is quite possible that the need for clandestinity was among the factors contributing to the feeling — prevalent also among persons close to those matters — that nothing was being

Lords on March 3, 1943: "...The fear that those people might be dangerous is so unfounded that we can ignore it..." (in: M. Praeger, *The Destruction of Jews in Europe* [in Hebrew], Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1948, p. 316). Speaking at the session of the Inner Actions Committee on January 18, 1943, Dobkin said: "...We have been involved in a bitter dispute with the authorities for two years now, over the ban on entry of Jews fleeing the enemy to Eretz-Israel. The authorities claim that the ban has been imposed for reasons of military security and in order to avoid disruptions of the war effort...."

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done, or, at least, not enough. The emphasis on secrecy forms a recurrent theme during this period.

Ben-Gurion also dealt with this issue in the forum of his party. Thus, at a meeting of Mapai delegates he reiterated the willingness of the British government to allot 29,000 certificates remaining from the 1939 quota for children to be removed from Europe. In the first stage, he explained, 4,000 to 5,000 children would be rescued. He emphasized that the allotted permits were not enough and that "this is only a paltry beginning — this is not the answer.... I do not belittle those 4,000, I am only saying that this is a small beginning."<sup>18</sup> In the same meeting Ben-Gurion also raised the issue of the countries of destination for the rescued. He stressed that the neutral countries could not and did not want to absorb the survivors even for a short period of time. He argued at length that even Switzerland could not come up with a solution — a prediction borne out by future developments.<sup>19</sup>

On December 13, 1942, acting on the assumption that the plan of the 29,000 was plausible, the Jewish Agency Executive appointed a committee of five members to oversee it. Ben-Gurion, who was one of the members, again underlined the importance of rescuing the children and asked the Immigration Department "to spare no effort and start acting immediately to bring children from any place whence they can be rescued." At the same time, he stated that the Jewish Agency Executive would accept responsibility for supporting the 4,000 children from Bulgaria due to arrive on the

<sup>18</sup> Ben-Gurion at the convention of party representatives, December 8, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches. In the opening remarks Ben-Gurion complained about Dobkin's disclosure of classified materials to those present. This "leak" embarrassed Ben-Gurion, as on the same day he had ordered the representatives of the Jewish Agency Executive in London and America not to reveal in the meantime the news about the British government's approval of the permit quota for the Balkans. This episode also has bearing on the question of "knowledge," publicity, classification and filing of information, overt vs. covert action, etc.

<sup>19</sup> On the position of Switzerland, see also Y. Bauer, *The Holocaust — Historical Aspects* (in Hebrew), Tel-Aviv, 1982, pp. 112-114; Meir Dworzecki, "The International Red Cross and Its Policy vis-à-vis the Jews in the Ghettos and Concentration Camps in Nazi-Occupied Europe," in: I. Gutman, ed., *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 81-82.

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basis of “permits that the government is ready to place at our disposal.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, as these few examples indicate, Ben-Gurion was involved in and had knowledge of the issues surveyed above soon after the extermination of European Jews was made public in the Yishuv.

Appeals for assistance were addressed to Ben-Gurion already in those early stages of rescue undertakings. An example of one such appeal which reached him immediately after the publication of the horrendous news is provided by a letter sent to him “by special delivery.” Its author wrote as follows:

I have no choice but to address you again, honorable sir, on my own behalf and on behalf of my friends, whose wives and children have been left behind in Poland. I strongly urge you to help us to save their families, as long as rescue options are still open. I note with regret that my problem has been neglected in the last few years. Our entreaties to rescue women and children were met with lack of response on the part of both the government immigration department and the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency....

The author of this letter went on to say that now he regretted not having approached Ben-Gurion earlier, as his visit to Ben-Gurion two years before on the same matter had produced some results. He expressed his hope that Ben-Gurion would take immediate steps to rescue the families of his friends from death.<sup>21</sup>

Individuals seeking to embark on rescue missions on behalf of their movements also turned to Ben-Gurion as the man regarded as possibly capable of cutting through the bureaucratic red tape. Thus, for example, Menachem Bader of Hashomer Hatzair met Ben-Gurion on December 21, 1942 and asked him to remove obstacles preventing Bader from embarking on a mission to Istanbul. Ben-Gurion described this meeting in his diary:

...Bader came to see me. He wants to go Turkey. He had worked in Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia until the invasion of these

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of sessions of the Jewish Agency Executive, December 13, 1942, CZA.

<sup>21</sup> A. Klarman, Union of the General Zionists, to Ben-Gurion, December 4, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence.

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countries. He has connections with Englishmen, Turks and others both in Turkey and in Yugoslavia. He thinks they can rescue Jews. A few weeks ago Gruenbaum ordered Eisenberg to obtain a travel permit for him, but the permit has been delayed even though the secretariat has responded favorably. He requested me to intervene. I asked him: in view of the fact that the Executive is to dispatch people, will he accept instructions from it? He said he would gladly exchange the mandate given to him by Hashomer Hatzair for that of the Executive.<sup>22</sup>

Two days after this meeting Bader came to the conclusion that it had failed to produce the results he had hoped for, and he appealed to Ben-Gurion once again.<sup>23</sup> He wrote that four months had elapsed since his first meeting with Gruenbaum, and he spelled out the objective of his journey "to the border of the Exile." He mentioned that "at that time the Jewish Agency already had in its possession the sorrowful and gloomy letters sent by Lichtenbaum describing the events taking place in the Diaspora, as well as the news of his desperate cry to London, saying, why don't they believe him." Having described the difficulties he had faced, he added that his aim was the rescue of children, which was also the official purpose of his journey. The letter turned out to be unnecessary, since in the meantime the obstacles were removed, as Bader himself subsequently acknowledged.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the question of who smoothed the way and made Bader's journey possible, two aspects of this episode merit closer scrutiny, as they do not fit the stereotypical view of Ben-Gurion as delineated above: 1) Since appeals of this sort were addressed to Ben-Gurion, we must conclude that he was both aware of and tactically involved in the rescue activities; 2) Appeals of this kind, concerning rescue efforts, came to Ben-Gurion from the whole political spectrum — from Bader, a member of Hashomer Hatzair, and from the religious and secular right in the Yishuv.

<sup>22</sup> Ben-Gurion's diary, entry for December 21, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Menachem Bader to Ben-Gurion, December 23, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence.

<sup>24</sup> M. Bader, *Cheerless Missions* (in Hebrew), Merhavia, 1954, p. 43. According to him, Ben-Gurion reprimanded the secretary of the Political Department for improper conduct in this matter.

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In addition to newly advanced proposals, the plan involving the 29,000 certificates was also considered in early 1943. At the "Yishuv Convention" held on January 17, 1943, Ben-Gurion emphasized the tremendous importance of bringing the first 5,000 children, who were to be followed by the remaining 24,000 whom the British permitted to enter Palestine.

Needless to say, finding refuge for the children could not solve the problem of millions of imperiled Jews — "Before we speak of the millions, let us first bring the 5,000..."<sup>25</sup> said Ben-Gurion at the same convention. He also stated:

... Tonight I wish to speak about three things: the war against our mortal enemy, the argument we have with our allies, and our internal dispute. This is the first time that our mortal enemies are also enemies of others. But, although we do have fellow sufferers, we are isolated and the enemy singles us out. Our allies discriminate against us also ... the enemy keeps wiping us out in the war. His aim is not to enslave us, but to exterminate us. This singling out demands a special reaction from us. We must not content ourselves with waging war; we are entrusted with the mission of rescue as the war goes on....<sup>26</sup>

Ben-Gurion also spoke in the same spirit in the session of the Mapai Executive (February 24, 1943), following the long (extending over 17 pages), detailed and accurate report of emissary Zvi Yehieli describing the extermination of Jews in Europe and discussing a whole range of problems associated with various possible rescue undertakings. Ben-Gurion was the first speaker after Yehieli. Like the latter, he dwelt extensively on various aspects of rescue activities and the numerous related difficulties. His opening remarks were about the implementation of conclusions and decisions taken ten or fourteen days earlier by the executive bodies of Mapai and the Jewish Agency Executive. On this occasion he referred to the special meeting attended by Mapai officials in charge of immigration, members of the Secretariat of the Histadrut Executive and members of the Agricultural Center. At this

<sup>25</sup> "The Yishuv Convention," *Davar*, January, 17, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Articles.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



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meeting he had taken up the questions of rendering assistance to Jews in the countries occupied by the Nazis and of immigration from those countries. Ben-Gurion spoke about the Jewish Agency offices in Geneva and Istanbul, and about the importance of their connections with almost every Nazi-occupied country with the exception of Poland “by means of letters coming through the regular mail service and letters sent by special delivery....” He also described the prospects of the “small rescue”:

There are places stricken by hunger, but help is needed also in more vital matters. There are places where help is possible, but for this money is needed, money has to be paid for this. There are countries in which Gentiles are willing to help and there are places where without money it cannot be done. It is possible to transfer [Jews] from a more dangerous country to a less dangerous one, even though the numbers involved are small .... To put it simply, officials must be bribed to prevent massacres, slaughters and deportations.<sup>27</sup>

Here, too, Ben-Gurion laid emphasis on the need for secrecy on this important issue, both within the country and abroad. He revealed the contents of the reports written by rescue activists and issued a stern warning to those present in the hall “regardless of whether they maintain connections with the journalistic profession or not” not to leak anything concerning the proceedings outside. Publicity, he said, imperiled the rescue activities and negligence in this regard was liable to cause unnecessary damage to other vital interests of the Yishuv, as well as the projects, funds and money-raising drives related to them.

In his speech Ben-Gurion also dwelt on the time which was running out and the urgency to do something “because no one knows how much time we’ve got left to render assistance and for how long people will need help....”<sup>28</sup> He also said that from then on the Yishuv was duty-bound to live “with the feeling, knowledge and readiness that we, this handful, constitute the avant-garde of the Jewish people, a numerically small avant-garde of half a million

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of sessions of the Mapai Executive, February 24, 1943, Yehieli and Ben-Gurion, LPA.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

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people....” The most crucial implication of this commandment was assuming the responsibility “for the blood that will be spilled, for the humiliations that are still to come.”<sup>29</sup>

That same month Ben-Gurion responded to further pleas for help and suggestions for possible rescue undertakings from individuals in the Yishuv. In his replies he also addressed himself explicitly and in detail to the issues connected with rescue. Here I would like to quote two of them:

I have received your letter and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for having appealed to me and for what you wrote. There is no need to apologize — this is your right and your duty. Who doesn't have relatives and friends in the Nazi hell? The heart of which Jew is not touched by this? For the most part, your suggestions are right and good and the Zionist Executive is already studying them. People have already been dispatched to the neutral countries and on our part we try to send emissaries to the ghetto itself. I welcome your having come forward and I shall pass on your proposals to the people in charge of those matters. They will contact you.<sup>30</sup>

In this reply we have a hint of the parachute drop plan and other schemes to send emissaries from Eretz-Israel to the occupied areas; at that time it could not be surmised that most of them could not be put into effect.

Here is Ben-Gurion's response to another appeal:

I have received a copy of your letter concerning the question of food for the Jews in Nazi [-occupied] Europe. My reply was delayed because I wanted to clarify a number of points. Although I am not yet able to reach a final conclusion, I am nonetheless much better informed now about the tremendous difficulties raised by the proposal; in all likelihood it will be impossible to overcome them. The example of Greece does not prove anything, because that country is not self-sufficient in food and must import it. Famine in Greece was caused by the blockade imposed by the Allies. This should not be compared with the situation in other countries, particularly Poland, where food is plenteous. There the Germans

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Ben-Gurion to watchman A. Yerushalmi, January 18, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence. The watchman's letter has been lost.

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starve both the Jews and the Poles, and it is doubtful whether the Allied powers will allow the bringing in of food which directly or indirectly will improve the food supply of Hitler's armies. At any rate, at this time the Allied powers have a negative view of this plan.<sup>31</sup>

It is self-evident how much this reply diverges from the stereotypical description of Ben-Gurion as "not knowing," "not wanting to know," "not interested," etc.

Characteristic of Ben-Gurion's dealing with rescue was also the way he combined the appeals directed at audiences abroad with those aimed at the local scene. Thus, for example, at the 13th session of the Assembly of Elected Representatives held on March 24, 1943, he recalled the two previous sessions devoted to sounding the Yishuv's alarm and arousing its concern in connection with the massacre of European Jewry. On this occasion he also emphasized the need "to speak to ourselves this time." Recently, he said, three calamities had been visited on the Jewish people: the White Paper, the war, and the massacre — each more oppressive than its predecessor. There was a danger that one trouble would take the Yishuv's mind off another. He argued that in the face of the present danger, as in the case of the previous ones, one must sound the alarm to the world; nonetheless, the Yishuv and the Jewish people must not forget that they could rely only on themselves. One must not despair of the conscience of humanity, but this conscience will be awakened only if "we help ourselves."<sup>32</sup>

He also presented this principle to the pioneer youth. In the addresses delivered before the executive of the new immigrants' camps on April 2 and 3, 1943, Ben-Gurion stressed rescue as a national priority:

I have one question which takes precedence over all others: How to rescue the remnant of Israel from slaughter. And I think every Jewish youth must face this burning question. This is the mission for

<sup>31</sup> Ben-Gurion to Dr. Leo Kolinski, January 25, 1943, Ben Gurion Archives, Correspondence. Kolinski's letter containing his appeal to Ben-Gurion has been lost.

<sup>32</sup> Ben-Gurion at the 13th session of the Assembly of Elected Representatives, March 24, 1943, afternoon session, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches.

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the youth as a whole. This burning question must not be laid aside. We shall undertake this effort, we shall do everything we can, so that we won't have to carry the mark of disgrace for having sat idly while this blood was flowing. There is no greater mission; I despise any Jewish socialist who has something more important to do .... All the youth, the entire Yishuv must be mobilized for this purpose. Even this could prove insufficient .... Empty is the life of the youth who ignore this question. What's all its work for, if not for this? Is there a way to mobilize all [the] youth and [the] Yishuv to make the maximum effort? This is the principal question I am asking you.<sup>33</sup>

The recognition of the importance of rescue and its definition as the principal issue in Ben-Gurion's views are evident also from the fierce debate which broke out in the Yishuv concerning the "children of Teheran" even prior to the release of news about the extermination in Europe in November 1942. Ben-Gurion dealt with this affair mainly in his capacity as a mediator between the opposing camps, as one who endeavored to iron out differences and find a solution acceptable to all parties involved. In retrospect, his activity in this sphere amounted to laying the foundations of the structure which later assumed the shape of the *status quo* in relations between religion and state. Ben-Gurion sought to secure the consent of all parties — the right and left, the religious and the secular camps — in order to gain time and to avoid at any cost another rift which would make the closing of ranks even more difficult. Although the confines of this paper do not permit a discussion of this affair, I would like to quote Ben-Gurion's remarks in his conversation with the two chief rabbis, Izaak Halevy Herzog and Ben-Zion Meir Hay Uziel:

...Perhaps sometime in the future we will have arguments, when the danger of slaughter will not hang over the heads of the Jewish people, when the people of Israel will no longer be in danger of being robbed of their land. When the people of Israel shall dwell securely in their land, then, perhaps, they will quarrel among themselves. But now the foremost task is to save the people of Israel because without Jews Judaism cannot survive. For me this is the paramount issue. In

<sup>33</sup> Ben-Gurion at the secretariat of Immigrant Camps in Beth-Hashita, April 2-3, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches.

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my view, the peril facing the people of Israel takes precedence over everything else. If the whole Jewish people were religious, as Rabbi Herzog wants them to be, I would have given everything to save them....<sup>34</sup>

Ben-Gurion spoke in the same spirit with representatives of the opposite pole of the Yishuv's political spectrum, e.g., the delegates of the Agricultural Center.<sup>35</sup> He recorded these conversations in his diary, and they were also set down in stenograms during his meetings with representatives of various camps. His views on the question of rescue and its place on the agenda of the Yishuv as reflected in these documents, stand in stark contrast to the argument according to which Ben-Gurion held rescue and Zionism to be mutually exclusive.

Another opponent of Ben-Gurion's who appealed to him was Rabbi Benjamin (penname of Yehoshua Radler-Feldman), one of the founders of the "Al-Domi" (Against Silence) group. In a letter to Ben-Gurion requesting a meeting, he wrote: "...Our mutual acquaintances ... keep asking me: Why don't you tell Ben-Gurion about those things? He is the only one capable of putting them into effect, provided he agrees with them." Later, he added, in a tone implying secrecy: "There is another matter for us to discuss briefly and it doesn't concern the Jewish Agency...." This appeal was followed by a series of contacts between the two men on the question of financing rescue ventures.<sup>36</sup>

In September 1943 Ben-Gurion attended a special conference of wealthy industrialists and merchants with a view to persuading

<sup>34</sup> Meeting between Ben-Gurion, Gruenbaum and Kaplan, and Chief Rabbis Herzog and Uziel, Jerusalem, June 24, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Minutes of Meetings.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting between Ben-Gurion and representatives of the Agricultural Center, July 13, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Minutes of Meetings.

<sup>36</sup> Rabbi Benjamin to Ben-Gurion, April 8, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence. With Ben-Gurion's encouragement Rabbi Benjamin turned to Novomeyski, then director of the Dead Sea Works, asking him and other industrialists and businessmen to support a fund-raising drive to finance rescue activities. He was turned down. D. Porat, *An Entangled Leadership* (in Hebrew), Tel-Aviv, 1986, p. 157, discussion on the issue of allocation of money for rescue in 1944.

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them to make a special donation to finance rescue activities. The conference was held as part of "The Month of Communion with the Diaspora" and it lasted from September 25, 1943 until the night following Yom Kippur on October 10, 1943. Ben-Gurion delivered one of his most important speeches which reflected not only his involvement in fund-raising, but also his familiarity with the whole range of issues connected with rescue, including the "small" as well as the "great" rescue projects. Following a report on the current political situation, which contained an assessment of the first signs of "rethinking" on the part of the British, possibly heralding a turning point, Ben-Gurion warned against "unfounded optimism"; after all, he noted, the struggle and the war were not yet over:

There is still a fearful might at Hitler's disposal ... and there is no doubt that much blood is yet to be spilled in the air, on the land and at sea before this might is vanquished. We, sons of the people who were the first and the most tragic victims of Hitler, must not succumb to a feeling that the danger is over....

He went on to say that the continuing advances of the Allied powers in Europe, which kept pushing Hitler's armies back, further endangered the surviving remnant, as no one knew what the Nazis would do in the course of their retreat. They had hapless victims under their control on whom "they will be able to vent all their wrath and hatred — the Jews. We are not omnipotent, but if there is one thing which depends on us, it is stalling."<sup>37</sup>

Ben-Gurion added,

I have no words, I shall not speak about the disaster, I think that the language in which one could articulate this tragedy has not yet been created, but I don't even have words to underscore the tragic if not fatal significance of one single factor whose name is time. Under conditions such as these, if in some way we succeed in putting off the catastrophe for even one or two days, it is possible that this would mean the difference between life and death for thousands, or even scores of thousands.

<sup>37</sup> "Convention of Industrialists and Businessmen for Fund-Raising, Mobilization and Rescue," Jerusalem, September 23, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Minutes of Meetings.

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Ben-Gurion returned to the factor of time later in his speech:

Listen to the comrades who recently have been closer than you to the site of the Holocaust, have them acquaint you with the details. I only want to tell you that if in some town or region, we manage by various means, means which are useless without money, to postpone an edict against property or some other edict, this could mean a hair's breadth difference between life and death....

Things could happen all of a sudden, he said, and the disaster accompanying an invasion or retreat might also come like a bolt from the blue. Consequently, "those standing on guard will be able to take advantage of an opportunity. To the extent we'll be able to stand on guard, or rather, to the extent we'll be allowed to stand on guard, and succeed in causing some delay, this could mean rescue."<sup>38</sup>

Ben-Gurion further elaborated on the time factor:

The lives of Jews standing on the scaffold, the sword poised over their necks, can possibly be saved by staying the execution for a week or a month.... This means one thing: we must do whatever is humanly possible, whatever a human being of flesh and blood is capable of doing, in order to render material assistance to those on the forefront of rescue, in order to save those who can still be saved, to delay the disaster to the extent it can be delayed. We must do it now, to the best of our will and ability. Because the task is of such utmost importance, I am afraid I can't say we will do the maximum; as human beings we can't do the maximum, but we will do something.

Ben-Gurion called upon his wealthy audience, on their colleagues and friends throughout the country, to make an extra effort by which they "will give a sign to the entire Yishuv and the communities abroad to help more, to do more than they have until now, for the danger is great...."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Ben-Gurion was referring to the impressions brought by Kaplan and Shertok from their visit to Istanbul, as well as to the reports of the officials of the Jewish Agency office there. He also alluded to the situation in Slovakia as it was perceived then. The question of what brought about the discontinuation of transports should be discussed separately.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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Dr. Emil Schmorak also delivered a speech at the conference. He defined clearly the purpose of the meeting and called upon the participants to increase tenfold their original pledges.<sup>40</sup> He went on to describe the situation and the needs, and enumerated the possible means of assistance such as escape routes, food, clothing, and bribes; he also gave estimates of the amounts of money needed for each. Chief Rabbi Herzog, another speaker at the conference, reminded his audience of the binding dictum: "He who saves one soul of Israel, it is as if he saved the whole world."<sup>41</sup> The resulting contributions amounted to a total of 30,000 Palestinian pounds. Ben-Gurion praised this achievement:

It seems that this gathering did not disgrace the Yishuv. I hope that every one of us will do all he can to bring the spirit which has pervaded this conference to fruition, so that we will yet meet with our redeemed brethren in the Hebrew Eretz-Israel.<sup>42</sup>

The meeting between Ben-Gurion and the delegation of the Committee for the Rescue of Bulgarian Jews, which took place the same month, provides yet another example of his efforts on behalf of and involvement in rescue activities. Members of this delegation presented him with two problems:

- 1) Out of 160,000 Palestinian pounds which, according to them, were earmarked for the rescue of European Jews, only 200 pounds were sent to Bulgarian Jews, despite the great privation suffered by them.
- 2) If the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry was to be effective, it was necessary for a Bulgarian Jew to be present in Istanbul. Their committee, composed of members of several political parties, had reached an agreement on the candidate for this post.

Their predicament was so grave, they informed him, that they seriously considered a sit-down strike in the offices of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary: "I told them that had I believed that a sit-down strike in the offices of the Jewish

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Dr. Schmorak.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Chief Rabbi Herzog.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Ben-Gurion.



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Agency could save the Jews of Bulgaria, I would have proposed it myself, but they are mistaken in believing that this will pressure us more than the danger facing Bulgarian Jewry in Bulgaria.” Ben-Gurion expressed his regret that the sense of anxiety was not universally shared and told them about the efforts being undertaken at that time to remove one thousand Jews from Bulgaria (as part of the plan of the 29,000 certificates and parallel with it), and about the difficulties encountered in the course of these efforts. As for their specific request for money and the appointment of an emissary in Istanbul, Ben-Gurion was wary of making promises which later he would not be able to keep. He said that he would ask the Rescue Committee to give them all possible financial aid; he also promised to find out whether it would be possible to post a Bulgarian Jew in Istanbul to oversee rescue activities in Bulgaria.<sup>43</sup>

Ben-Gurion also placed rescue as the main topic on the agenda in 1944. Here is what he said in the Mapai Council in January 1944:

From time to time the emissaries who are engaged in the sacred work of rescue and assistance to the Diaspora send us reports from the threshold of Nazi Europe about the atrocities and also about possibilities of rescue. It is our duty to keep the anxiety and nightmare constantly alive in our hearts. We must constantly keep before our eyes the image of the Nazi axe dripping with blood which is hanging over the heads of millions of Jews, children and the elderly, women and men, and as long as the nightmare of the murder of half of our people keeps haunting us, neither we here nor the Jews in America and England will rest, so that the outcry will not subside, the conscience will be kept awake, the trumpet-call will not fall silent and the rescue efforts will not slacken.

I do not intend to review all the recent developments. I am only going to address myself to the tasks with which the movement has been charged in the areas of Zionist activity, the Histadrut and the party. But there is one issue which cannot be disregarded: one thing happened this year which we cannot afford to ignore even for one day. History did not treat the Jewish people kindly even when they dwelled in their own country, but never was it so cruel to us as it has been this year.... The executioner's sword still threatens Jewish

<sup>43</sup> Ben-Gurion's diary, Jerusalem, entry for September 14, 1943, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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communities in all European countries occupied by the Nazis.... The fact that the end of the war is looming near does not, in itself, diminish the threat of perdition. The death-throes of Hitler are no less dangerous.... The superpowers do not seem to be visibly moved by the sight of our blood. But for us, to become dependent on the indifference of others would amount to a mortal sin. The danger is not only that the mighty of this world, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, ignore the murder of our people. The danger is that fatigue will overcome us, our feelings will become dull, we will get used to the Holocaust and resign ourselves to it, using the excuse of hopelessness.<sup>44</sup>

Speaking at the convention of Hakibbutz Hameuchad which also took place in early 1944, Ben-Gurion again stressed the paramount importance of rescue:

...The rescue issue stands before us in all its urgency. It is the right thing for us to do, to commune from time to time with those who were transported in the death wagons and died with the *Hatikva* on their lips.... I believe that by saying rescue we are not expressing an empty phrase, just as I believe that by uttering the word brotherhood we mean it. And I don't think that there is among us a truth more profound than the will to rescue, and not only among the workers of Eretz-Israel, the Jews of Eretz-Israel and Zionists.<sup>45</sup>

The Yishuv, Ben-Gurion went on to say, was playing a central role in finding a solution and it was charged with great historical, moral and practical responsibility. The dead could not be brought back to life, but life had not been totally extinguished in the country and the Diaspora:

And to some extent we are responsible for life. So that the fate of the murdered millions will not befall us.... Many of us, those over 30, or 25, 26, must ask ourselves whether we do not share some responsibility, I mean not for the six million ... but for scores of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of the slaughtered. Perhaps, had we exerted ourselves even more, they would have been

<sup>44</sup> The Mapai Council, January 15, 1944, LPA.

<sup>45</sup> Ben-Gurion's speech before the congress of Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 15th session, January 19, 1944, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches.

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here with us. And I don't know who among us can say to himself with a clear conscience that none of the responsibility is his.<sup>46</sup>

Ben-Gurion's involvement in rescue was no less pronounced in smaller, less open and public forums. Thus, for example, in March 1944 he met with a delegation of Hungarian Jews in Palestine. Its members submitted to him various proposals for rescue which they regarded as practicable, including the allocation of the greatest possible number of immigration certificates to Hungarian Jews "because no one knows how long this interim period is going to last..." action through diplomatic channels to secure the support of the superpowers, utilizing the territorial proximity of Tito, and an appeal to the Pope in view of the religious devotion of the Hungarians. The delegation also argued that such an appeal could have tangible consequences, as the Hungarian clergy were very active in politics. They also suggested supplying Hungarian Jews with Turkish transit visas and with money, as well as spurring into action Hungarian-speaking Jews in America and England. Ben-Gurion accepted some of their demands:

I told them that there are four things to be done: a) [to obtain] as many certificates as possible...; b) financial assistance — the conditions in Hungary are a bit better [this assessment was accurate at that time], because not the whole nation is poisoned and at times some things can be accomplished through money; c) utilization of all possible channels of influence, even though the Nazis don't lend their ears to the Pope anymore, but individuals can still be influenced in this way. If they wish to establish contacts with Hungarians in Britain and America, they would do well to use the services of Stephen Wise in America as well as our offices in London; d) local self-defense — from here it is difficult to say what needs to be done, but should even the slightest opportunity arise, we shall do something in this context.<sup>47</sup>

This appeal by the delegation of Hungarian Jews on behalf of their Kindred in Hungary did not change the course of

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Ben-Gurion's diary, entry for March 23, 1944, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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developments in that country, and despite the fact that it was made at the right time, it is doubtful whether it could have produced any practical results. This in itself, however, does not detract from Ben-Gurion's interest in the conditions prevailing in Hungary and his involvement in the attempts to change the course of events there, just as the failure of Joel Brand's mission does not invalidate the way Ben-Gurion handled that affair.

Several similar meetings took place afterwards, but for reasons of space, I shall present only one of them. This particular example touches upon an extremely controversial and stereotype-laden subject: the position of the Yishuv leadership and Ben-Gurion's stance in the Joel Brand affair. The affair itself produced a host of diverse interpretations; some maintained that the leadership did not treat Brand's mission with all due seriousness, whereas others argued that the Yishuv leadership accepted the arguments put forth by the British, or if it did not accept them, then it hushed up the whole affair, hoping for political benefits after the war.

This is not the place to review all aspects of this affair, not even Ben-Gurion's involvement in the attempts to bolster Brand's mission or, at least, to gain time. Here I would like to quote his statement bearing on this issue which he made when he met with a delegation of the Sephardic community. The delegation complained to Ben-Gurion about Gruenbaum who had insulted the Sephardic Chief Rabbi when the latter came to see him to discuss the rescue of Greek Jewry. Responding to the complaint, Ben-Gurion said:

...And the henchman did not make distinctions between the Jews of Warsaw and the Jews of Salonika. This whole thing is not over yet, as death keeps staring us in the face. We are still dealing with this, this is the main thing we are dealing with. Mr. Shertok flew to London especially for this purpose and [Eliezer] Kaplan left for Istanbul also to attend to it. We are currently engaged in negotiations with foreign governments, we are even negotiating with Satan himself....<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Reception of delegation of the Sephardic community by Ben-Gurion, diary, minutes of meetings, July 6, 1944, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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In his meeting with the High Commissioner on the subject of Joel Brand's mission, Ben-Gurion made statements complementing his remarks to the Sephardic delegation.

From Ben-Gurion's involvement in Joel Brand's mission I now turn to his journey to Bulgaria at the end of 1944. He had also intended to travel to Rumania but did not succeed in obtaining a visa. It was a very intensive and very moving visit; in its course Ben-Gurion gave expression to his deep emotions at what he had seen and the welcome given to him during his first encounter with the "surviving remnant." Despite the fact that the trip to Bulgaria is well documented,<sup>49</sup> it has barely been studied, even though it constitutes a link in the chain of Ben-Gurion's activities in the area of assistance and rescue.

There are many accounts and examples of Ben-Gurion's involvement in rescue, but those presented above are enough to refute the arguments about his alleged "estrangement," "ignorance deriving from his unwillingness to know," and other such labels describing his attitude to the Holocaust and rescue efforts. Furthermore, these examples raise another question, namely that of the intricate relations between Zionism and rescue. After all, these two do not necessarily contradict each other: rescue as a humane act and duty, on the one hand, and the pioneer spirit and Zionism, on the other hand, are quite possibly but two different facets of the same vision. It seems that the key word here, and with regard to Ben-Gurion as well, is "or"; not "either Zionism or rescue" but "Zionism *and* rescue," because there is no Zionism without rescue. This view of the relationship between Zionism and rescue reflects more accurately Ben-Gurion's attitude to the rescue of European Jews during the Holocaust.

In this paper I have endeavored to demonstrate that Ben-Gurion had a clear conception of rescue and assistance both as matters of principle and as technical issues. In order to present a relatively

<sup>49</sup> For example Ben-Gurion's diary, entries for late November-early December 1944, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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lucid and complete picture of his knowledge of and involvement in this sphere, I have quoted in chronological order the statements he made on various occasions over the period beginning with the publication of information on the extermination and ending with the last stage of the war. Lack of space prevented a fuller presentation of the context of those statements. For the same reason I could only touch upon the actions implied by those statements and their significance. It is only appropriate to sum up the discussion in the same minor key, and to try to offer an explanation for the stereotypical view of Ben-Gurion in its many aspects as outlined above.

One explanation is that this stereotype dovetails with the prevalent view presenting Ben-Gurion as the upholder of the principle of “negation of the Diaspora” which aimed, even prior to the Holocaust, at the establishment of the Jewish state. According to this principle, negation of the Diaspora and its abandonment are practically synonymous. It is more difficult to explain how one can negate the Diaspora and, at the same time, believe that it is imperative to do everything possible on behalf of the Jews who chose it as a way of life, not to mention those who, having decided to leave the exile, were prevented from doing so. Thus, it would appear that the Yishuv was to blame for the fact that most of the rescue plans came to grief, since it did not make any rescue efforts. The more extreme version of this argument holds that the Yishuv and its leadership, including Ben-Gurion, refrained from giving support to any venture not related directly to Eretz-Israel and the aims of the Zionist movement.

The second possible explanation rests on the disappointing outcomes of rescue undertakings. Although the saying “He who saves one human life, it is as if he saved the whole world” is known to all of us, it was nevertheless difficult to understand and accept the failure. The number of Jews saved through rescue actions, including children whose rescue required tremendous efforts,<sup>50</sup> does not bear

<sup>50</sup> For the estimates of the number of the children who were rescued and brought into the country, see Ben-Gurion's diary, entry for March 7, 1945, Ben-Gurion Archives.

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any comparison with the colossal number of Holocaust victims. Blaming Ben-Gurion provided a ready-made explanation for this terrible disproportion.

The third line of reasoning draws on the image of Ben-Gurion as a strong, pragmatic and business-like leader, capable of taking difficult decisions often fraught with grave consequences. This would account for his allegedly having decided to refrain from rescue undertakings whose chances of success were very slender from the outset.

Another possible reason for the emergence of the stereotypical view of Ben-Gurion can be attributed to methodological sins of both omission and failure to discuss the context of statements and actions, as well as indiscriminatory mixing together of different spheres, issues and periods. Thus, Ben-Gurion's statements and actions both before and after the Holocaust were uncritically accepted as indicative of his views and activities during the Holocaust. This anachronistic approach gave rise to an erroneous interpretation of his attitudes and behavior during this fateful period.

Thus, it appears that there were several factors contributing to the emergence of the stereotype: 1) the ideological factor, i.e. "negation of the Diaspora," as providing justification for non-involvement and posing the action-inhibiting contradiction between Zionism and rescue; 2) the factual considerations, namely, the inability of the numerically small Yishuv to support at the same time two enormous undertakings, each of which exceeded its capabilities. This would explain the need to exercise the terrible choice; 3) other factors — "the uncompromising leader" capable of taking difficult decisions at critical times, the aforementioned numerical disproportion for which one is hard pressed to find a rational explanation, and, finally, the anachronistic practices which make the task of providing needed explanations so much easier.

The view which furnished the breeding ground for this and other stereotypical notions relating to the Holocaust holds sway not only over minds inclined to discover conspiracy and wrongdoing everywhere. It dominates the world view of many others, including the generation which came of age after the Holocaust. To

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understand it, one must grasp the predicament which was, and still is, the legacy of all of us after the Holocaust. Any attempt at a comprehensive account of this predicament must perforce be an interdisciplinary undertaking.



## Al-domi: Palestinian Intellectuals and the Holocaust, 1943–1945

Dina Porat

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

Rescue those who are being taken away to death;  
Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,'  
Does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,  
And will he not requite man according to his work?

Proverbs 24:10–12

At the end of 1942, a small group of Palestinian intellectuals joined together with the express purpose of rousing the Yishuv and the free world to action in order to combat the danger of the imminent destruction of European Jewry. They appealed to the leadership of the Yishuv to give chief priority to rescue work. They called themselves *Al-domi*—do not keep silent.<sup>1</sup>

Few people remember *Al-domi* today. Almost all of its members have died and there is no comprehensive review or summary of its activities. However, available archival material, especially the correspondence files of the members themselves, illuminate the organization and activities of the group.<sup>2</sup> These sources cast light on the many related issues they discussed, such as the efficacy of individual or intellectual protest within a highly organized political community; the significance of Nazism and the Holocaust; and the prospects for mankind and the Jewish people following the Holocaust.

\* This article is dedicated to the Regev family in Nahalal, Israel. It is based on a seminar paper submitted to Professor Uriel Tal in December 1979.

1 From Psalms 83:1. "O God, do not keep silent, do not hold thy peace or be still." The above verse from Proverbs was their motto.

2 I am grateful to Mrs. Zvia Balshan and to her mother, the late Mrs. Hassia Dvorjetzki, who worked in the Aviezer Yellin Archive of Hebrew and Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora of the Teachers' Association in Tel Aviv, for access to the files. The *Al-domi* files are in the above-cited archive and are not numbered.

*The Establishment, Composition, and Aims of Al-domi*

Toward the end of 1942 the Jews of Palestine began to understand that a planned annihilation of European Jewry was systematically being carried out. Their previous skepticism or downright disbelief gave way to a need to respond in one way or another.

On December 17, 1942, at a meeting of intellectuals and public figures in Jerusalem, the writer, Rabbi Benjamin, proposed the formation of "an Al-domi Committee" to assure that "no Jew in Palestine will be able to pursue life as before."<sup>3</sup> The first action of the Committee was the publication of an open letter in the press on December 30:

*To Everyone!*

The Al-domi Group in Jerusalem hereby announces that it has begun to operate in various directions. Despite all our misgivings and doubts, if there is one chance in a thousand or even one chance in ten thousand of saving those being sent to their deaths, we must not spare any effort in the attempt.

Jews of every class, wherever you are! Organize immediately! We must not lose a minute in circumspect delays!

We are prepared to send representatives and information whenever and wherever requested.

R. B., on behalf of the Al-domi Group in Jerusalem

The founding meeting was attended by Shmuel-Yosef Agnon, Professor Yosef Klausner, Professor Shmuel Hugo Bergman, and others. The next meeting was larger, as it was also attended by (*inter alia*) the Chief Rabbi, Yitzhak Halevi Herzog; the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Daniel Auster; Professor Martin Buber; Dr. Judah Leib Magnes, President of the Hebrew University; David Shimonovitz (Shimoni), secretary of the Hebrew Writers' Association; Dr. Yosef Kruk, a left-wing journalist; and Henrietta Szold, head of the Youth Aliya movement. An executive committee was elected consisting of Rabbi Benjamin, Professor Klausner, and Professor Fischel Schneersohn.<sup>4</sup> They resolved that Al-domi would be "a committee to move the world to action in face of the destruction of European Jewry."

3 *Hatzofeh*, December 18, 1942. Rabbi Benjamin is the pen name of Yehoshua Radler-Feldman (1880–1957), a writer and journalist.

4 Professor Fischel Schneersohn (1885–1957), psychologist and writer, was a seventh-generation member of the Schneersohn family from Lyady and a cousin of the Lubavitcher Rabbi, Menachem Schneersohn.

In the course of time, the executive committee included others, among them Yitzhak Yatziv and Dr. Herzl Landa. They worked together with Dr. Menachem Landau, Zvi Scarlet (Shani), Shlomo Zalman Shragai, Yitzhak Molcho, Professor Martin Buber, and Professor Benzion Dinur.<sup>5</sup> There were others who joined in activities or discussions from time to time, in Tel Aviv or in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Altogether, Al-domi consisted of twenty to thirty people, of whom Professor Schneersohn and Rabbi Benjamin were apparently the most active. Organizational expenses were covered by membership dues and occasional contributions.<sup>7</sup>

The ideological and political inclinations of the members were diverse, though the number of people from Brit Shalom and the Ihud movement—Rabbi Benjamin, Buber, Bergman, Magnes, and Henrietta Szold—was notable. Shragai, Schneersohn, and Landa were members of Mizrahi; Yatziv and Dinur came from Mapai; Yosef Kruk came from Poalei-Zion; Menachem Landau and Yosef Klausner were from the General Zionists (Klausner later veered toward the views of the Revisionists and, like Landa, vigorously opposed the views of Brit Shalom). Others were apolitical.

A considerable number were associated with the Hebrew University, although the most active were those from the Writers' and the Journalists' Associations. In short, there was no single political or professional framework with which the members of Al-domi could be identified.

5 Dr. Herzl Landa (1897–1967), historian, philosopher, scion of Rabbi Yehezkel Landa of Prague, the author of *Hanoda be-Yehuda*. Yitzhak Yatziv (1889–1947), teacher, writer, and one of the editors of *Kontres*, *Davar*, and *Davar le-Yeladim*, who, like Rabbi Benjamin, came to Palestine during the Second Aliya. Dr. Menachem Landau (1900–1959), historian, had been a member of the League of Nations Refugee Committee during the 1930s, and was a member of the Council for Assistance to the Diaspora at the end of the 1940s. Zvi Scarlet (Shani) was the group's treasurer and effectively its secretary. Today he works for Magen David Adom. Shlomo Zalman Shragai was then a member of the Executive of the Va'ad Leumi (National Council) and the Zionist Executive, a member of the editorial board of *Hatzofeh*, and head of the Va'ad Leumi's Press Department. Yitzhak Molcho (1894–1974), a well-known public figure in Jerusalem in the 1920s, was associated with the Ihud movement and active in the cause of saving the Jews of Rhodes.

6 For example, Israeli author Professor Dov Sadan attests to the fact that he was influenced by Al-domi and considered himself its "agent" (letter to the author, Passover 1979). Participants in other meetings included Yitzhak Lamdan, Y.M. Neuman, Benzion Katz, Avraham Sharon, Avigdor Hameiri, and Benzion Yisraeli—all writers, poets, and known figures. See Yehezkel Y.M. Bar, *In the Closed Circle* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1973, p. 93.

7 According to Shragai, Berl Katznelson and Rabbi Meir Berlin donated substantial sums, but he does not remember how much, when, and whether this was a personal donation or a contribution from Mapai and Mizrahi (in a conversation with the author, September 25, 1978).

Perhaps Buber's definition of Al-domi was most precise: "Intellectuals ... concerned with rescuing [Jews]."<sup>8</sup>

Their motivation for joining Al-domi was evidently shock over reports of the Holocaust and a need to respond. Although many were skeptical about the value of individual action outside the framework of the Yishuv's public institutions, most of them maintained that the role of the intellectual was "a watchman for the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 3:17), cautioning the public in times of danger, guiding and criticizing the political leadership. Al-domi's initial call implied that the group was open to all Jews and based only on the need to respond actively to the Holocaust. And indeed those who subsequently joined Al-domi gave unstintingly of their time and effort. They were in the throes of a "spasm of hurried activity,"<sup>9</sup> dogged by the feeling that human lives were at stake and that failure to act would be viewed as a crime by future generations. Each sought his own channels of expression.<sup>10</sup>

Premonitions of impending disaster had disturbed most of the group even before 1942. After *Kristallnacht*, at the end of November 1938, Schneersohn, Buber, Bergman, Rabbi Benjamin, and other intellectuals had established a short-lived society called "Between Israel and the Nations," which appealed to intellectuals in the free world, warning them of the danger posed to the entire world by the Nazi persecution of the Jews.<sup>11</sup> They had lectured, written articles and even books on the subject during the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>12</sup> Many other Jews were similarly perturbed, though no one foresaw the Holocaust as it actually unfolded.

Al-domi's objective was not to compete with the institutions of the organized Yishuv but rather to impress upon the leadership and the public at large the need to enter into intensive rescue operations. It wanted to reinforce "a positive climate for rescue" that would remain constant and prevent the Yishuv, world Jewry, and intellectuals in the free world from sinking into despair and a sense of powerlessness. "The idea of Al-domi, like its name, calls for a constant, collective expression of alarm in various

8 *Be'ayot*, April 1944, p. 23.

9 Dov Sadan, *My Seniors and Acquaintances* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1972, p. 165.

10 "Not a single day must pass without an article"—note from Rabbi Benjamin to David Zakai, then secretary of the Journalists' Association, Yatziv's file, 104 IV/11, Labor Archive (hereafter Yatziv's file).

11 Other members of "Between Israel and the Nations" were: Shaul Tchernichovsky, Eliezer Steinman, Rabbi Assaf, and Drs. Kaufman, Glickson, Mossinsohn, Grunman, Feinberg, and Levin (File 30-A, Yellin Archive).

12 Rabbi Benjamin, *Davar*, October 27, 1941, February 9, 1943; *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944; *Hame'orer*, third issue. Schneersohn at the International Congress on Demography, Paris, 1937. Klausner in *Autobiography* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1950, p. 324. Dinur, *Moznayim*, 15, p. 252, etc.

forms: outcry, mourning, protest, appeals, propaganda, penetrating the very heart of the tragedy, an incessant search, and attempts at rescue, of any kind, without respite."<sup>13</sup>

### *Al-domi's Proposals and Activities*

Al-domi was not a crystallized group that operated in an organized manner or at set times. It was rather a small spontaneous protest movement. It appears that Professor Schneersohn and Rabbi Benjamin sometimes published material on Al-domi's behalf without even conferring with the others—prompted, as they were, by a burning sense of urgency.<sup>14</sup> We should also note that not all of Al-domi's proposals and ideas were exclusive to that movement; some had been propounded independently by others in the Yishuv.

Al-domi's activities can be divided into three periods: (1) January 1943–April 1943, i.e., from its establishment up to the Bermuda Conference and the Warsaw ghetto uprising; (2) May 1943–December 1943, an interim period; and (3) 1944, during which attempts were made to save the Jews of Hungary and the Balkans. Rabbi Benjamin called its activities “a tragedy in three acts.”<sup>15</sup>

#### *January–April 1943*

On December 17, 1942, the national institutions of the Yishuv declared a period of thirty days of mourning for the destruction of European Jewry.<sup>16</sup> The members of Al-domi called upon the Yishuv not to rest content with that symbolic gesture but to declare a “regimen of mourning,” abstaining from any form of entertainment and relating daily, in a variety of ways, to what was happening in Europe. They believed that conduct of this kind would influence world Jewry and the rest of the free world. In the course of the month, it seemed to the members of Al-domi that the public's

13 Schneersohn to Buber, March 24, 1943, July 11, 1944, Buber Archive, National Library, File 8/699.

14 In 1943 Schneersohn decided to devote most of his time to Al-domi and to abstain from any form of amusement as a way of identifying with the suffering of European Jewry (conversation with his widow, Dr. Hannah Schneersohn, in March 1978). Rabbi Benjamin on himself, *Davar*, February 9, 1943: “For months now he has avoided every other subject. Day and night he hears the cries of sisters and brothers extending their hands and begging to be saved.”

15 *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944; *Be'ayot*, June 1944.

16 That same day a declaration was published by the Allies. It described the systematic destruction of European Jewry and warned the criminals that they would be punished. This was the first time during the war that the Allies spoke explicitly of the annihilation of Jews.

interest was flagging, so they appealed to the national institutions to declare a full day of mourning, attended by a nationwide demonstration. Members of Al-domi went *en masse* to the Chief Rabbinate and the Tel Aviv municipality to seek support. They also appealed to the Writers' Association and the Hebrew University to convene their own memorial assemblies.<sup>17</sup> And indeed, on February 22, 1943, the Asefat Hanivharim—the Elected Assembly—declared a two-hour general strike and curfew, evidently in response to this and similar public pressure.

It did not take long for Al-domi to realize that there was little sympathy for the idea of sustained restraint, so it proposed instead one day of mourning a week for a year, on which memorial services would be held in public places and educational institutions. There was widespread objection to this proposal on the grounds that it indicated public hysteria. And some punster even went so far as to respond to "al-domi" with "al-dema"—"stop crying." Even members of the national institutions believed that as the month of mourning had been a failure, there was no point in organizing additional events of that kind. Still, there were those who did support Al-domi, writing to them and to the editorial pages of the newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

The general opposition to public mourning angered the members of Al-domi, who continued to advance reasons for it, repeating them often during their two years of activity: public protest would attest to the sustained identification with the tragedy; it would disturb the conscience of the Allies and the rest of the world; it would counter the sense of helplessness that the Nazis had succeeded in spreading through the free world; and it might even deter the Nazis, serving as a reminder of the punishment that awaited them. Moreover, it would create a link between the scattered parts of the Jewish people. Silence in such a situation was unnatural and debilitating for all.<sup>19</sup>

17 The Al-domi delegation, January 8 and 25, 1943. The Chief Rabbinate was prepared to support other demands by Al-domi, January 18, 1943, February 4, 1943. An appeal to the Writers' Association, March 21, 1943, and to the Hebrew University, February 16 and 24, 1943.

18 Schneersohn, on March 7, 1943, in draft proposals and on April 8, 1943, to Yitzhak Gruenbaum, chairman of the Jewish Agency's United Rescue Committee (U.R.C.), Al-domi files. (See below on U.R.C.) The opponents of mourning: *Ha'aretz*, January 8, 1943, the "Against the Stream" column and letters to the editor till the end of January; Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, chairman of the Va'ad Leumi Executive, to Schneersohn, April 28, 1943. Supporters: Eliyahu Dobkin, one of the heads of the Jewish Agency's Aliya Department, April 16, 1943; Professor Bergman, April 7, 1943; Chaim Greenberg, *Davar*, July 30, 1943; Dr. Yehudah Kaufman, *Moznayim*, 18, pp. 340–341; Asher Barash, and others.

19 Klausner, *Hatzofeh*, December 18, 1942; Rabbi Benjamin, *Bamishor*, May 25, 1944; Dinur, *Our Fate and Our War in These Times* (Hebrew), Mapai Publishers, March 1943 [reprinted in

Another of Al-domi's suggestions was the establishment of an institute for propaganda to counter the effects of Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda. It would employ multilingual Palestinian sociologists, psychologists and writers on a full-time basis. It would address itself to intellectuals in the free world, urging them to exercise pressure on politicians and public opinion. They would point up the moral decline overtaking mankind as a result of the Holocaust and try to convince the peoples under Nazi rule that the annihilation of the Jews was just the first step in a plan to oppress all the peoples of Europe. It would prove to them that aiding the Jews was essentially in their own interest. The institute would also operate on the domestic front by organizing lectures to familiarize the public at large with the history and culture of the Jewish community in Europe, thus impressing them with the magnitude of the tragedy. It would use all the media to keep the public informed and aware of what was happening in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The institute for propaganda was conceived of as a short-term operation, and in the beginning of 1943 Al-domi proposed the establishment of a permanent institution similar to what subsequently became Yad Vashem. It would systematically collect and analyze material about Nazism and the Holocaust; it would classify the material according to countries and communities, and publish the results of its research. Later, Al-domi also demanded the appropriate punishment for war criminals, and a campaign against manifestations of anti-Semitism in countries where it was likely to rear its head. It hoped to establish ties with intellectuals in other countries and muster the finest talents that Palestine had to offer. Until an institute of this kind could be created, Al-domi tried to initiate the work single-handedly on a modest scale.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of January 1943, Al-domi issued a call to establish a central institution "that would deal exclusively with urgent rescue activities." At the same time (December 1942–January 1943), negotiations were already under way between the Jewish Agency Executive and the

his book *Remember: Writings on the Holocaust and Its Lessons* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1958, p. 43]; Schneersohn, "To the Philosophers of Silence and Despair in Our Day" (Hebrew), *Hatzofeh*, February 11, 1944; "On Silence and on Paralysis in the War for Rescue" (Hebrew), *Davar*, November 8, 1943; to Ben-Zvi, May 13, 1943, Al-domi files; and others.

20 Al-domi to the Municipality of Tel Aviv, the Va'ad Leumi, the Jewish Agency Executive, and the chairman of the U.R.C. (Al-domi files); in speeches at conferences, and in the daily press.

21 Al-domi files; Al-domi collected press cuttings, articles and testimonies, and published a series of pamphlets on subjects related to the Holocaust under the name Al-domi Library. It also participated in a similar venture by the U.R.C. entitled "From the Holocaust: Testimony on the Suffering of the Jews under the Nazi Regime." The pamphlets and articles were sent to a few dozen people and institutions in Palestine and abroad.

Va'ad Leumi—the National Council—on the one hand, and officials of Agudat Israel and the Revisionist New Zionist Organization (N.Z.O.), on the other, and in mid-January the United Rescue Committee (U.R.C.), representing all sectors of the Yishuv, was created. Yitzhak Gruenbaum was appointed chairman of an executive board of twelve, while a larger council, representing the political parties, immigrant associations, and economic organizations, was also formed. The U.R.C.'s mandate was to centralize all the aid and assistance activities that the Yishuv would extend to European Jewry.

Although at first glance Al-domi's demand seems redundant, in fact, it was not. All members of the U.R.C. held public office and would not be in any position to devote themselves exclusively to rescue work. Al-domi's proposed rescue institution was envisaged as being engaged solely in rescue work. In order to forestall public rancor, it proposed that such an exclusively oriented body be subordinated to the U.R.C. and not independent of it. However, after a number of meetings and an exchange of correspondence with the Jewish Agency Executive and the Va'ad Leumi, it became indisputably clear to Al-domi that their suggestion had been rejected, together with their proposal that the Jewish Agency Executive choose two of its members to devote all their time and energy solely to the matter of rescue.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time Al-domi continued with its propaganda efforts: joining in a demand to drop leaflets over Germany, threatening the German people with retribution and encouraging resistance to the Nazi regime, doing the same over Poland asking for the aid of the Polish population and informing the Jews in the ghettos that the Yishuv was behind them. Al-domi published newspaper articles and pamphlets and distributed them in Palestine and abroad. It tried to organize a national convention of intellectuals on the theme "Within the Holocaust" but failed, despite extensive preparatory work, though more modest meetings and symposia did take place.<sup>23</sup>

22 Correspondence with Gruenbaum and the response of the Va'ad Leumi Executive, January 25, 1943, April 8 and 28, 1943, Al-domi files. Three secretaries worked full time for the executive board of the U.R.C., but Al-domi demanded that a few members of the Jewish Agency Executive likewise devote themselves to rescue work.

23 Appeals: to the Rabbinate, January 6, 1943; to writers, January 25, 1943, February 1, 1943; to the Hebrew University, February 24, 1943, Al-domi files. Appeals for broadcasts: Rabbi Benjamin, *Davar*, January 19, 1943, January 30, 1943, February 19, 1943; *Hatzofeh*, February 10, 1943. Attacks on him for supposedly defending the German people: *Hatzofeh*, January 25, 1943; *Hamashkif*, January 31, 1943, etc.



*May–December 1943*

After Al-domi's initial proposals were refused, a period of relative lull set in and Al-domi concentrated chiefly on trying to create a propaganda institute. Its repeated approaches to the Jewish Agency and the Va'ad Leumi, on this matter, as well as attempts to mobilize support through personal contacts, proved to be ineffectual. A number of compromise proposals were raised by the U.R.C. in order to mollify Al-domi, but they were not accepted.<sup>24</sup>

Toward the end of 1943, the testimony of an escapee from Treblinka was published for the first time in the newspapers in Palestine, including a detailed description of the extermination process in the camps. The members of Al-domi sensed that the death camps and their names would become the symbol and embodiment of the Holocaust, and they suggested that the Treblinka testimony be the focus of a campaign calling for immediate action. They also sought a worldwide response to the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto—the largest and most renowned of the ghettos in Eastern Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Despite their relentless activity, it was obvious that the U.R.C. and the Va'ad Leumi were not interested in their proposals. They appealed to members of Agudat Israel and the Histadrut (the General Federation of Jewish Labor in Palestine), who had begun acting for the rescue of European Jewry at least half a year before the national institutions, to serve as channels to these institutions. Yet despite agreement in principle, no concerted action ever emerged from these contacts.<sup>26</sup>

Al-domi's inability to obtain cooperation from the organized Yishuv in the implementation of its ideas continued and even intensified during the period in which Hungarian Jewry was annihilated.

*1944*

At the close of 1943 Dr. Aryeh Altman, one of the Revisionist leaders in Palestine, returned from a visit to Istanbul. In a conversation with Rabbi Benjamin (the gist of which was conveyed to Al-domi), he described the inclination of the Axis satellites—Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary—to

24 Correspondence with the Standing Committee of the Asefat Hanivharim; with the Va'ad Leumi; with the U.R.C., in Al-domi files, Yatziv file, and the U.R.C. files in the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter C.Z.A.).

25 Schneersohn, Yatziv, and Landau to Gruenbaum, the members of the U.R.C., the Journalists' Association, November 18, 1943. And Schneersohn to Ben-Zvi, May 13, 1943, Al-domi files.

26 As early as mid-1942, a few members of Agudat Israel suggested establishing a countrywide united front for rescue, and the party's official organ, *Haderech*, gave prominent coverage to reports from Europe. The Histadrut sent a representative to Istanbul as early as spring 1942, and formed a rescue committee on his return, in mid-1942.

undertake negotiations with the Allies as a result of Nazi military setbacks. It was precisely in these countries, geographically close to neutral Turkey, that large concentrations of Jews remained. Were Hitler to take over the satellites in response to their growing alienation, the remaining Jewish communities would be destroyed. It was imperative therefore to exert vigorous political pressure on the Allies and to include the issue of saving Jews in their negotiations with the satellites. To achieve that end, it was incumbent upon the Yishuv to establish a high-level political mission in Turkey—a center for military and political intelligence—where all the combatant countries and the satellites maintained personnel.<sup>27</sup>

Altman's assessment was hardly novel, nevertheless it roused Al-domi to intensive action prior to each of the sessions of the Asefat Hanivharim in January, June, September, and December 1944. A number of meetings between Al-domi members and "rescue workers"—as Rabbi Benjamin dubbed those people who worked outside the framework of the national institutions—were held in the homes of the Chief Rabbis. Sharp criticism was directed at the Jewish Agency's U.R.C. and the work carried out by the Yishuv's representatives in Istanbul. The participants chose a committee made up of Altman, Buber, Bergman, Rabbi Benjamin, and Molcho to take up Dr. Altman's proposal with representatives of the U.R.C. But the latter opposed the plan on the grounds that the Yishuv's representatives—already doing important and dedicated work in Istanbul—sufficed, and it would be more valuable to send people directly to London and Washington to negotiate on rescue issues. The Al-domi committee also held talks with a number of public figures, including Rabbi Herzog and Dr. Mordechai Eliash, both of whom expressed their willingness to go to Turkey. Al-domi also helped organize a convention of rabbis and delegates from the immigrant organizations to apply pressure on the Asefat Hanivharim (scheduled to meet on January 12, 1944). They wanted the deliberations devoted first and foremost to the issue of rescue.<sup>28</sup>

27 In 1937 Vladimir Jabotinsky appointed Dr. Aryeh Altman head of the Hatzohar movement in Palestine. From 1940 onward Altman headed the N.Z.O. office in Jerusalem. He was also a member of the Va'ad Leumi Executive. During the war years he traveled to Cairo and Istanbul several times to investigate the possibility of political action to save European Jewry. There were ten emissaries from the Yishuv in Istanbul in 1943, but Altman was talking about well-known leaders coming to Istanbul to conduct political negotiations.

28 A detailed report of the meeting at which the committee was elected: *Be'ayot*, April 1944, and a detailed letter to Eliahu Dobkin, December 16, 1943, C.Z.A., S26/1235. Meeting of the committee's members with the executive board of the U.C.R., December 16, 1943, C.Z.A., S26/1241. Dr. Eliash was the general secretary of Zionist Commission in the 1920s, and afterward the Va'ad Leumi's legal adviser; Rabbi Herzog had already made a number of "rescue journeys" during the war, to London, Istanbul and Cairo, to influence statesmen and religious leaders to lend their assistance. Reasons for the opposition to Altman:

On the morning of January 12, the daily press published a list of proposals submitted by Rabbi Benjamin and summing up Al-domi's demands that the Asefat Hanivharim declare "a rescue regimen," an organized and efficient mobilization of all the human and material forces in the Yishuv to that end.

But despite Al-domi's efforts, the Asefat Hanivharim session proved disappointing. Rabbi Benjamin called it "our Bermuda"—a term that became his slogan until the end of the war. The Mapai delegates, exhausted from their own convention, which had gone on for five days and was devoted to the Biltmore Program and internal party problems, hardly contributed to the meetings. The session went on for one day only, and most of it was devoted to problems pertaining to enlistment in the British army; not a single discussion was scheduled on the subject of rescue. Nevertheless, Gruenbaum was urged to take the floor, and spoke briefly about opportunities for rescue operations that had recently opened up, and about the considerable amount of money that was required but not available. Neither Gruenbaum's statement nor the proposals published by Rabbi Benjamin seemed to evoke serious attention.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of its disappointment, Al-domi continued its activities and was even somewhat encouraged during the coming months. First, it emerged that the U.R.C. had received more money than had been reported by Gruenbaum.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, the United States Government established a War Refugee Board (W.R.B.) and dispatched its envoy, Ira Hirschmann, to begin work in Turkey. It was hoped that the W.R.B. would furnish the rescue effort with the political momentum and resources that the Yishuv

Gruenbaum, *Hazeman*, June 12, 1944. Al-domi tried to enlist the support of David Remez, Golda Meyerson, and Yosef Sprinzak, all Histadrut leaders, for Altman's proposal; it is not clear to what degree it succeeded. Yatziv file, undated.

- 29 A description of the session, *Be'ayot*, April 1944. Gruenbaum reported that the Recruitment and Rescue Fund channeled 80 percent of the money it collected toward the expenses of recruiting for the British army and 20 percent to rescue needs, according to an agreement signed between the U.R.C. and the Recruitment Executive Board in April 1943. (The Recruitment Fund was established in June 1942, when Rommel's troops were advancing in North Africa.) Gruenbaum resigned as head of the U.R.C. on January 17, 1944, in protest to the attitude toward him personally and the committee in general, and especially the way in which the funds were distributed. He rescinded his resignation after many appeals to do so.
- 30 Money for the rescue effort was also collected outside the framework of the fund: from individuals and companies; through special campaigns such as the donation of a day's wages "to encourage the defenders of the ghettos," organized by the Histadrut in May 1943; and the "Diaspora Month," held in September of that year; from the Jewish communities of the free world; and afterward from the Joint Distribution Committee. See the files of the U.R.C., C.Z.A., S26/1084, 1089, 1140, 1240, 1266, 1238A, and the files of Gruenbaum's office, C.Z.A., S46.

lacked.<sup>31</sup> Thirdly, in the wake of public pressure on the national institutions, including that of Al-domi, Rabbi Herzog and Dr. Eliash were sent to Turkey. Shortly thereafter, in March 1944, after the British authorities announced that every refugee who reached Turkey would be granted a permit to immigrate to Palestine, the Turks agreed to increase the number of *laissez-passer* issued to refugees.<sup>32</sup>

In 1944, Al-domi itself came under attack. *Hamashkif*, the Revisionist paper, denounced the various “faint-hearted and narrow-minded Rabbi Benjamins” making nebulous demands about collecting money for rescue purposes. The paper branded these demands as obsequious and delusive: the only way to save Jews was to activate the Jewish masses in an overt war for their political rights. *Hamashkif* also accused the Jewish Agency, Mapai, and Gruenbaum of abandoning European Jewry to its fate.

In response, Rabbi Benjamin reiterated Al-domi’s proposals—of which raising funds was merely one—and shot back that the concept of a “war for one’s rights” was also quite vague. If it was supposed to mean bloody clashes with the British, then it would harm the rescue effort more than help it. Raising large sums of money to provide for the care of the refugees would place moral pressure on the British and the Americans. Moreover, Rabbi Benjamin noted that Dr. Altman, himself a Revisionist, had risen above party rivalries and was working for the rescue effort together with men whose views differed from his. Nor did he believe that an open war against the British was the only means of achieving the rescue of European Jews.<sup>33</sup>

31 Rabbi Benjamin believed that the Revisionists in the United States, who established the “Israel Front” for rescue work, were the first to act constructively, and to a certain degree their activities influenced the establishment of the W.R.B. (*Be’ayot*, April 1944, p. 20). He called the Israel Front “a kind of Al-domi in America” (*Bamishor*, February 10, 1944).

32 In his book *Rescue during the Holocaust* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 105, and in a conversation with the author on March 19, 1978, Chaim Barlas credited Herzog’s and Eliash’s trip to Turkey to Al-domi. So did Rabbi Benjamin, *Bamishor*, February 19, 1944; *Moznayim*, 18, p. 338; and S.Z. Shragai in a conversation with the author on September 25, 1978. They are right: see Shertok’s letter to Barlas, January 25, 1944, C.Z.A., S6/4587. Turkey had officially announced the granting of open passage to refugees as far back as February 1941, but in fact it only granted a few *laissez-passer* for a week’s time and delayed and impeded the refugees’ entry as much as possible — with the encouragement of the British Embassy. The question is whether it was Herzog’s visit in February that speeded up the British announcement on the approaching of the end of the White Paper, at the end of March 1944. Al-domi believed this.

33 *Hamashkif*, March 20, 1944. Rabbi Benjamin’s reply, *Be’ayot*, June 1944, pp. 104–116; *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944, pp. 2–6. The debate began after Rabbi Benjamin, with Ben-Gurion’s encouragement, appealed to businessmen in an open letter asking them to support the collection of money for rescue operations (*Davar*, January 27, 1944, March 2, 1944; *Hamashkif*, March 13 and 20, 1944). In a conversation with the author on July 16, 1980, Dr.

On March 19 the Nazis occupied Hungary, and all debate appeared petty and irrelevant. Eichmann and his men arrived along with the Wehrmacht, and in the third week of May transports of 10,000–12,000 Jews per day were dispatched to Auschwitz, where new crematoria had been put into operation. By July 7 some 470,000 Hungarian Jews had already been deported. And this was happening toward the end of the war, when the whole world already understood the meaning of the deportations. Moreover, this development had been foreseen at least half a year earlier. The Yishuv was in a state of shock, helpless in face of the deportations, horrified at the efficiency with which the murders were being carried out and at the sheer number of victims. Distraught with anguish, Al-domi made harshly worded accusations in its public outbursts that something might have been done to avoid the slaughter had only the Yishuv been prepared with an efficient organization backed by ample funds and headed by the best leadership the country could offer.

Word of the deportations reached Palestine a few days after they began, prompting the Jewish Agency Executive to meet in emergency session. That same day, May 25, 1944, in the course of the meeting, Rabbi Benjamin suggested that Moshe Shertok (Sharett) implore the Allies to bomb the railroad tracks leading from Hungary to Poland.<sup>34</sup>

On June 5 the Yishuv held a “Day of Appeal for the Rescue of the Remnant.” It included a fast, prayers, and memorial meetings throughout the Yishuv. A special assembly was held in the Jewish Agency building for all representatives of the Yishuv, and called upon the Allies to initiate rescue actions while it was still possible to do so, and upon the Yishuv to devote itself to a supreme fund-raising effort. The meeting warned the governments of the satellite countries that they, too, would be held responsible for the mass murder of the Jews. After the declarations were read aloud, Rabbi Benjamin—in an emotional outburst that interrupted the speech of the chairman, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi—demanded that a political

Altman confirmed Rabbi Benjamin’s statement: before leaving for Cairo in 1944 for talks with the British and to raise money from the local Jewish community, he asked the I.Z.L. (Irgun Tzevai Leumi—National Military Organization) to postpone its actions until his return.

34 Handwritten note to Shertok, May 25, 1944, C.Z.A., S26/1251. Dr. Aryeh Morgenstern believes that the signature, R.B., may also be that of Benyamin Mintz, the representative of Agudat Israel on the U.R.C., and that the author of the note had previously consulted with Dov Hos [“The United Rescue Committee and Its Activities” (Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet*, 13 (June 1971), n. 175]. But R.B. is the signature of Rabbi Benjamin, and the handwriting is his. Since Dov Hos was killed in 1940, the reference must be to David Remez. Evidently Rabbi Benjamin was the first in Palestine to propose the idea of bombing; Rabbi Weissmandel of Bratislava proposed it on May 16, 1944 [Livia Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of the Jews of Slovakia* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1961, pp. 237–238].

delegation including Magnes and Rabbi Herzog be sent to Istanbul. His move caused a public uproar that lasted at least until the end of June.<sup>35</sup> Magnes did get to Istanbul and his mission, which ended in July 1944, proved a success. Once again Al-domi had some small satisfaction, and demanded that he be posted to Istanbul permanently.<sup>36</sup>

In the meanwhile, Professor Schneersohn proposed that the writers elect a Committee of Response to maintain constant contact with the U.R.C.; and that a delegation of writers be sent to England and the United States to organize a propaganda effort commensurate with the magnitude of the tragedy.<sup>37</sup> In June and the beginning of July, when the transports from Hungary were at their height, Schneersohn initiated a telegram campaign through the Writers' Association (funded and supported by the U.R.C.). Cables were sent to the Soviet Writers' Association in Moscow, the Jewish anti-Fascist Committee in Kuibyshev, P.E.N. in England and the United States, members of Parliament and Congress, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Prime Minister Churchill, and all leading newspapers.<sup>38</sup>

On July 9 the Hungarian regent, Miklos Horthy—influenced no doubt by the warnings of such figures as the Pope, the King of Sweden, and President Roosevelt, as well as the International Red Cross—called a halt

35 Attacks on Rabbi Benjamin in *Ha'aretz*, June 6, 22 and 29, 1944. And on June 27—a letter defending him: "A man is not blamed for his sorrow. If we all did things that are not done in normal times, like a mother when her son is being slaughtered, perhaps the world would have been shocked."

36 At a meeting of the U.R.C.'s executive board, July 14, 1944, Magnes expressed great admiration for the rescue work being done in Istanbul while commenting critically on the organizational side of the work, which he tried to reframe (C.Z.A., S26/1238). It is likely that Magnes's trip helped to increase the Joint's contribution to funding the rescue operations [*The Book of the Recruitment and Rescue Fund* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1950, pp. 104–105].

37 Rabbi Benjamin supported Schneersohn's demand and in the midst of a literary discussion scolded the writers for holding it while thousands were being killed every day. Evidently their resolution was not passed. Schneersohn's statement was published in a pamphlet in the Al-domi Library series under the title "The Cry of Millions about the Slaughter of Millions."

38 See the telegrams of July 5, 1944, C.Z.A., S26/1232: "Heartbroken over the slaughter of Hungarian Jewry. Raise your voice to rouse statesmen in your countries and the conscience of the world. Lend your voices and your pens. Try to persuade your governments to bomb all access to the death camps in Poland." Cables were also sent to Ernest Hemingway, Pearl Buck, Ogden Nash, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, Anthony Babel, Joseph Cronin, Upton Sinclair, Victor Gollancz, Harold Laski, Eleanor Rathbone, and others. Answers were received from only a few. George Bernard Shaw replied: "I can do nothing to help Hungarian Jewry. Do you suppose that I am the Emperor of Europe? Of course my sympathies are with the Jews, but the connection of my name with their cause would create as much hostile prejudice as friendly support" (cable dated September 30, 1944, Al-domi files).

to the transports from Hungary. Schneersohn regarded this as a vindication of Al-domi's claim that intellectuals can have an effect on events, and he stepped up his telegram campaign to forestall a renewal of transports. In September, when reports reached Palestine that Hungarian Jews were being mobilized for forced labor under horrendous conditions, Al-domi sent an urgent letter to the Asefat Hanivharim, demanding action. Al-domi also queried the U.R.C. about what was being done in light of the disconcerting news.<sup>39</sup>

Following the session of the Asefat Hanivharim on December 4, Gruenbaum received a letter of protest signed by Schneersohn, Yatziv, and Rabbi Benjamin, later published in the press as an open letter, entitled "What Happened?". They claimed that at the beginning of the session, Moshe Shertok conveyed startling new information about the Jews of Budapest to the effect that tens of thousands had just been deported, tens of thousands had died, and nothing could be done to save them. And then, without further ado, he switched to matters concerning the Yishuv. The letter ended with words that reflected the essence of Al-domi's outlook: bitter experience had shown them the

... helplessness and the dubious benefit of various "responses" .... Yet without disputing the point, they considered it inconsonant with human dignity, with respect for the living and the dead, that hundreds of thousands of Jews should be cut down without an outcry, without an explicit response worthy of itself.<sup>40</sup>

### *Al-domi's Criticism of the Yishuv*

From the end of 1942 until the Bermuda Conference (held on April 19–27, 1943), the Yishuv harbored the hope that the Allies would come to the aid of European Jewry. But the Conference's fruitless results proved otherwise. The members of Al-domi felt that the Yishuv, despite its pain over the Holocaust, had lost all hope of saving Jews and had turned back to its own affairs. The issue was discussed at a stormy meeting of Al-domi after a letter had reached the country from Tossia Altman, a member of the Hashomer Hatzair Central Committee in Warsaw, accusing the Yishuv

39 Renewal of the cables in September, Al-domi files. When replies came from the P.E.N. in England, Eleanor Rathbone (an M.P. who was also active on the National Committee of Rescue from the Nazi Terror), and from others to the effect that they were doing all they could, Schneersohn sent a report on his cable campaign to Ben-Gurion and to Gruenbaum.

40 Open letter to Gruenbaum, December 6, 1944.

of ignoring what was going on in Europe.<sup>41</sup> They concluded that the root of the problem lay in a lack of identification between the Jews in Palestine and the Jews in the Diaspora. "The very essence of our enterprise is open to doubt, despite our striving for a renaissance," was the way Buber put it. Dinur placed the blame on a policy that focused on building the country, and measuring everything by a local-national rather than an all-Jewish standard. Schneersohn contended that the mind was incapable of comprehending a tragedy of such proportions taking place so far away. Thus despite its pain and sincere desire to act, the Yishuv was paralyzed by shock, and many still harbored the illusion that the information coming from Europe was not really accurate or reliable.<sup>42</sup>

Al-domi voiced two charges against the Yishuv: first, that the Holocaust had not affected the country's way of life in any way; that between memorial assemblies and declarations, life continued as usual.<sup>43</sup> Even reports from Europe and the testimony of refugees became routine. The students in Jerusalem held a Purim party in 1943. The Kibbutz Hameuchad convened thousands of youngsters at a choral festival in Ein Harod, and the Kibbutz Artzi resumed its annual folk-dance festival at Dalya. Zionist education had "imbued the country's youth with too much arrogance toward other Jews and too little a sense of mission and responsibility toward them," argued Dinur.<sup>44</sup>

Their second charge was that there was a glaring lack of proportion between the tranquil life of the Yishuv and the planning and effort that the Nazis had invested in the extermination of the Jews. This imbalance extended to the Yishuv's war effort compared to that of other peoples

41 "Why, you have wiped us out of your memories ... Don't ask how we are." Full text of the letter in *Letters from the Ghettoes* (Hebrew), collected by Bracha Habas, Tel Aviv, 1943, pp. 41-42. [Reprinted in *Sefer Hashomer Hatzair*, Part I, Merhavia, 1956, p. 523.] Yitzhak Lamdan read out a response to T. Altman, in which he expressed a profound sense of shame.

42 Description of the meeting: Bar, *Closed Circle*, pp. 88-107. Apparently it was held during the latter half of 1943.

43 The national institutions declared a month of mourning on December 17, 1942; on February 22, 1943 they declared a strike and curfew; on June 15 they declared a one-day strike and a petition was sent to the Allies; on September 15, 1943 they declared a "Month of Identification" with European Jewry; on June 5, 1944 they declared a "Day of Outcry," a fast, and one-day strike, to save the remnant of European Jewry.

44 The routine: after broadcasting a selection entitled "And Every Jew Will Be Killed by a Shot," the announcer on Radio Jerusalem continued: "And now we will hear some light music. Shalom to you all" [entry from Yatziv's diary, December 27, 1942, from *Between Eye and Soul* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1953]. On the youth: Rabbi Benjamin, in "The Throes of Response" (Hebrew), *Moznayim*, 15, p. 393; and *Be'ayot*, June 1944, p. 111: "I saw a country without shame." Dinur, *Our Fate and Our War*, p. 60.



who had mobilized themselves for the fight against the Nazis.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it was precisely during this time of war and genocide that symptoms of moral decline were emerging in the Yishuv: apartments were rented to refugees at exorbitant prices; little aid was extended to refugees in Europe and in the Soviet Union; the rich evaded contributions; there was a significant spread of speculation and war profiteering.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that the Yishuv had failed to organize an appropriate rescue program had implications for the entire Zionist venture. Zionism viewed itself as the vanguard preparing a haven for the rescue of the Jewish people. But precisely when the people cried out to be saved, when millions were being lost, the Yishuv was steeped in political and party quarrels over how to prepare that refuge and what its image should be. It was again Dinur who observed:

Try juxtaposing the dates of reports about the destruction of thousands of Jewish communities ... with reports on the splits and disagreements within the parties and factions, and you will appreciate the full horror that these facts imply for our future .... We forget that future generations will closely examine everything we did during these times... and I very much fear that the judgment of the generation closest to us, the judgment of our children, will be very harsh.<sup>47</sup>

Al-domi's grievances against the Yishuv's leadership were even more explicit. The intellectual leadership was insensitive to and unaware of what was going on. Journalists did not give suitable prominence to reports about the Holocaust or attempt to rouse public opinion.<sup>48</sup> The status of writers had declined, and they were no longer capable of influencing and

45 Rabbi Benjamin, *Bamishor*, January 13, 1944, January 27, 1944, April 6, 1944, June 29, 1944; Bar, *Closed Circle*, pp. 90, 103. Letters from Schneersohn, Yatziv, and Landau to the Va'ad Leumi, January 25, 1943, and to the Writers' Committee, March 31, 1943, Al-domi files.

46 Rabbi Benjamin, *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944, July 15, 1944: "Piggish rich men who harden their hearts to the Holocaust of their people." Benzion Katz in Bar, *Closed Circle*, p. 100; Buber, *Moznayim*, 14, p. 380.

47 Dov Sadan, *Controversy and Equivalent to Controversy* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1972, pp. 32–33, 38; Dinur in Bar, *Closed Circle*, p. 96; Avigdor Hameiri, *ibid.*, p. 102; Rabbi Benjamin, *Be'ayot*, January–February 1945; *Bamishor*, May 25, 1944, quoted in Dinur, *Our Fate and Our War*, p. 63.

48 Yatziv's diary, *Between Eye and Soul*, pp. 167, 201; *Bamishor*, May 25, 1944. At a convention of journalists held at Kibbutz Ma'aleh Hahamisha on September 3, 1945, David Zakai, secretary of the Journalists' Association, took himself to task (*Moznayim*, 21, p. 73, etc.). In a protest against the journalists and their editors, Dov Sadan volunteered to serve as a night editor for *Davar* for half a year in order to give prominence to the reports on the Holocaust. He was supported by the editor, Berl Katznelson (Sadan's letter to the author, March 15, 1978).

leading people as Ahad Ha'am, Yosef Haim Brenner, and A.D. Gordon had done during the early period of Zionism. Writers abjured their obligation to subject Palestinian society to criticism, by refusing to respond to what was happening and helping to create an atmosphere appropriate to the tragedy.<sup>49</sup>

Rabbi Benjamin bitterly argued that nowhere in the Yishuv—the Histadrut, the Va'ad Leumi, the Jewish Agency, the university, among the newspaper editors, etc.—was there a single person of stature prepared to put aside his other affairs and deal solely with the rescue effort. Rescue, it seemed, was marginal to their other involvements: to Chaim Weizmann's laboratory, to David Ben-Gurion's forging of the political future, to Berl Katznelson's Am Oved publishing house. Rabbi Benjamin appealed to Weizmann, whom he respected and admired greatly, to devote at least one full month of his time to trying to save the remnant of Israel and Jewish honor.<sup>50</sup>

Al-domi did not make such stringent demands on Ben-Gurion. But they did call upon him to keep abreast of events in Europe and prevail upon others to act. Ben-Gurion regularly received Al-domi's publications and occasionally reacted sympathetically. On the eve of the Bermuda Conference, Rabbi Benjamin had a long talk with him about the issues at hand and Ben-Gurion promised his support, morally and financially. He proposed that Rabbi Benjamin go to the United States to further rescue efforts. Rabbi Benjamin always defended Ben-Gurion against charges that he was ignoring the Holocaust, though he continued to reprimand him sharply and tried to goad him into action.<sup>51</sup>

Of all the Yishuv's leaders, it was Berl Katznelson who proved to be Al-domi's greatest disappointment. He supported the founding of the group, and aided it financially and in the press; the leading publishing house, Am Oved, of which he was editor-in-chief, published a series of books entitled "At the Stake" on what was happening in Europe; and he was always raising the subject of rescue, perhaps even more than others. He appeared to be the person best suited to head a major rescue venture, as, among other things, he did not hold any crucial public office during the war years. Nevertheless, Berl was unresponsive to Al-domi's pleas. After Berl's death Rabbi Benjamin wrote a "j'accuse":

49 See *Moznayim*, 13, 14 and 18. A debate broke out among the writers over whether it was possible to react to events by writing a serious literary work while they were still going on.

50 *Be'ayot*, January–February 1945, p. 92.

51 Defense of Ben-Gurion: Rabbi Benjamin to Ben-Gurion, April 8, 1943, the Ben-Gurion Institute. Yatziv to Sadan, beginning of 1943, Sadan's file, 4/1072, Manuscript Department of the National and University Library. Rabbi Benjamin, *Be'ayot*, June 1944, p. 114, against

... You should have been in the lead ... but you weren't there on the day of evil and destruction ... You disappointed [us], just like the others ... You were busy publishing books during the days of the terrible Holocaust, and, as a result, Am Oved cost us tens of thousands of lives.

This grave accusation naturally roused indignant responses.<sup>52</sup>

Other charges were directed at the political leadership as a whole—for not activating the Yishuv to the maximum; for conditioning the public to wait for initiatives from above; for their alienation from the intelligentsia, rejecting both its criticism and its contribution; for their inability to overcome party differences and close ranks behind a united, organized, and effective rescue enterprise.

Ah, how good it would have been if Hitler, Goebbels, and Goring had dragged their feet in the murder campaign like our leaders ... who have procrastinated, delayed, and moved agonizingly slowly, like lofty creatures who have all the time in the world.<sup>53</sup>

### *The Dispute between Al-domi and Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Chairman of the U.R.C.*

As noted above, two parallel bodies were established at the end of 1942: Al-domi and the U.R.C. Some of the members of the U.R.C., and particularly its chairman, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, were offended by the very formation of Al-domi. Even before the U.R.C. began its work, there were people who doubted its efficacy. And when Al-domi started operating, its penetrating criticism reflected, as well, the views of other people in the Yishuv and added to the U.R.C.'s difficulties. Gruenbaum apparently feared the dissipation of the rescue effort if a small number of organizations came into being, each acting on its own. The relations between the two bodies were, therefore, tense from the outset.

the attack of *Hamashkif*, March 20, 1944. The meeting with Ben-Gurion: *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944; Ben-Gurion to Schneersohn, October 28, 1943, Al-domi files; C.Z.A., S44/471.

52 Rabbi Benjamin, *Be'ayot*, October 1945, pp. 70–71. Replies: Akiva Ernst Simon in the same issue of *Be'ayot*. Chaim Greenberg in *Davar*, May 3, 1946. Both responded that Berl Katznelson was right in refusing to be a member of Al-domi because, with all due respect to the group, it was not very effective. I believe that their replies misconstrued Al-domi's purpose in appealing to Katznelson and misunderstood its mode of operating.

53 Rabbi Benjamin, *Bamishor*, June 29, 1944. Schneersohn to Shertok, January 2, 1944: "Is it really so, that I and those like me are good only for amusement?" Al-domi files.

Al-domi monitored the activities of the U.R.C. through U.R.C. members themselves, such as Shlomo Zalman Shragai, himself an Al-domi activist in Jerusalem. In March 1943 the Association of Immigrants from Central Europe chose Dr. Menachem Landau, one of Al-domi's founders, as its representative to the plenum of the U.R.C. He made his own minutes of their meetings available to Al-domi. Yehoshua Soparsky, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Levin, Benyamin Mintz, and Eliyahu Dobkin, all members of the U.R.C. Executive, agreed in general with Al-domi's outlook, represented its ideas at U.R.C. meetings, and tried to mediate between Al-domi and Gruenbaum.<sup>54</sup>

On the basis of their information, the members of Al-domi concluded that the U.R.C. was a worthless institution. The plenum was, in their view, too large a body, it met too rarely and spent too much time on emotional diatribes. The Executive lacked the authority to take real action because it was dependent upon the decisions of the Jewish Agency Executive and Political Department for policy, and on the Agency's Treasury and Recruitment and Rescue Fund for money. Moreover, they were divided, as Rabbi Benjamin put it, between those dedicated to the cause of rescue and others who were "napping." The members of Al-domi described the attitude prevailing in the Jewish Agency offices as "formal and cold," a "philosophy of despair," stupidity, apathy, irresponsibility, and the like.<sup>55</sup>

Only Gruenbaum, as a member of the Jewish Agency Executive, had any real power to act, but, Al-domi argued, much as he was talented and pained by the issue, it was out of the question that a man burdened by so many other duties could efficiently head the U.R.C. While they conceded that he displayed certain traits needed for the role—such as goodwill, a rare capacity for work, and a sharp mind—they charged that his excessive self-confidence and dogmatism obviated cooperation with colleagues and critics. Indeed, his statements more than once roused a public uproar.<sup>56</sup>

54 A few weeks after the establishment of the U.R.C., Shragai resigned from it in protest over what he deemed to be a tendency to avoid raising an outcry over the Holocaust in Europe. Mrs. Miriam Landau (Dolan) provided the author with a file containing material related to Dr. Menachem Landau's membership in the U.R.C. and in Al-domi. Yehushua Soparski was a member of the Va'ad Leumi Executive, and for a number of years led the General Zionists B. Rabbi Benjamin intimated from time to time (e.g., *Bamishor*, February 10, 1944) that Al-domi had its own sources of information. At the same time it is clear that many things were kept from it.

55 *Be'ayot*, April 1944, p. 20, September 1944, p. 196; *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944; Yatziv's diary, July 2, 1942, March 15, 1943; Rabbi Benjamin to Ben-Gurion, April 8, 1943, the Ben-Gurion Institute.

56 *Ha'arets*, January 25, 1944; *Bamishor*, January 15, 1944; *Be'ayot*, April 1944, pp. 16–17, etc.

Gruenbaum and Al-domi had a number of heated arguments over theoretical subjects as well, such as the background to the Holocaust and the resistance of the Jews in Europe. At one meeting of writers, Dinur expressed the opinion that the Holocaust was a unique phenomenon not only in its geographical scope and magnitude but by virtue of the fact that the annihilation of an entire people was one of the pillars of another nation's official ideological program. He viewed this program of genocide as the climax of an age-old process and predicted that the murderers and their passive accomplices would subsequently seek ways to justify themselves.

Gruenbaum in turn quoted a German-Polish rationalization to the effect that Jewish craftsmen and tradesmen had supplanted the influence of the German burghers over the Slavic nations during the Middle Ages, and now the Germans, aided by the Slavs, were intent upon uprooting their historical adversaries. Another of his explanations was that the *Judenrate* were suspected of collaborating with the Germans, as the result of which the Polish underground, *inter alia*, refrained from extending them aid. Because the Jews, as a people, were not fighting alongside the combatant nations, the Nazis did not consider them human beings, and they had become fair game. The Jews began to defend themselves too late, Gruenbaum argued, after "the Jews of Poland and those who were deported there had lost their humanity." Their passivity was not only a source of burning shame but a pretext for further attacks by the Nazis.<sup>57</sup>

Al-domi regarded these views as an expression of Gruenbaum's inability to appreciate the depth and gravity of the events in Europe, a mere summary judgment. "Our brothers and sisters fell in battle, a worldwide battle, even if they did not fight with weapons. Their very existence was a monumental and stubborn war against the beast of prey," was how Buber put it.<sup>58</sup> The members of Al-domi believed that there was an irrational, apocalyptic element in the Nazis' attack against Judaism, and that an entire world of values was pitted against its diametrical opposite—two

Rabbi Benjamin, "On Yitzhak Gruenbaum's book, *During the Days of Destruction and Holocaust*" (Hebrew), *Davar*, September 20, 1946. Gruenbaum's book is an almost complete collection of his speeches and articles during the Holocaust. He was then a member of the Zionist Executive and on the Jewish Agency Executive, headed the Labor Department and the Organization Department of the Jewish Agency, headed Mossad Bialik, and was a member of a number of standing and ad hoc committees throughout the war, such as the Committee for Veteran Zionists and the Budgetary Council of the Zionist Executive. His radical secularism also provoked an uproar on more than one occasion.

57 Gruenbaum and Dinur, *Moznayim*, 16, pp. 250 ff. Also Gruenbaum, "Indeed We Are Open Prey in Europe" (Hebrew), *Moznayim*, 16, pp. 258 ff. This article does not appear in the collection *During the Days of Destruction and Holocaust*.

58 Dinur, *Our Fate and Our War*, p. 15.

ways of being that could not possibly coexist. Herein lies one of the roots of the debate that continues to this day—and will undoubtedly go on in the future—over the resistance of European Jewry. Gruenbaum expressed a positivist-materialistic outlook that measured success or failure in empirical terms, while Al-domi expounded a moral approach that viewed the struggle itself as its own reward. Part of the Yishuv later accused European Jewry of going like sheep to the slaughter, whereas Al-domi understood the helplessness and isolation of a people denounced by their enemies as evil incarnate.

The disparity between these views was especially pronounced when it came to relations between rescue efforts and the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. Dinur epitomized Al-domi's approach in the debate: "We must devote ourselves to rescue with all our might ... It is our obligation to save the House of Israel." Gruenbaum believed that the Yishuv had another, prior obligation: the upbuilding of Palestine—and it was the Jewish Agency that was responsible to the Diaspora for the fulfillment of that pledge. The struggle for the redemption of the land did not stem directly from the Holocaust and did not necessarily turn upon any benefits accruing to the Diaspora. If one had to decide between the two, Zionism came first: "the life of the Yishuv, its needs and concerns, come before the Holocaust that has overtaken the Diaspora in Europe."<sup>59</sup> Al-domi placed rescue at the top of its agenda, and considered free immigration to Palestine as only one of many means of rescue.

This clash of principles led to other disagreements: Rabbi Benjamin tried to persuade Gruenbaum that the development of the country should be halted and all the capital of the Jewish National Fund, the Keren Hayesod, and the Fund for Recruitment and Rescue should be channeled to rescue work. "No, and again I say no," was Gruenbaum's reply. "We must resist the pressure that is trying to push the Zionist endeavor into the background."<sup>60</sup> Another debate centered on the question of publishing the whole truth about the dimensions of the Holocaust, as Al-domi demanded. The Jewish Agency, and Gruenbaum in particular, had been accused of perpetrating a "coverup" because they had received reliable information about what was going on in Europe as far back as August 1942 and kept it from the public for a few months. Gruenbaum defended himself by claiming that the Yishuv was well aware of at least a part of the picture from the press, but it was difficult to believe the reports, espe-

59 Dinur, *Moznayim*, 16, pp. 254–255. Gruenbaum, *ibid.*, pp. 262–263; "On the Holocaust and the Response" (Hebrew), *Moznayim*, 15, p. 255; speech before the Zionist Executive, January 18, 1943.

60 A speech before the Zionist Executive on January 18, 1943; *Davar*, January 13, 1944.

cially since the German advance in North Africa at that time placed the Yishuv in jeopardy and distracted its attention.<sup>61</sup>

Gruenbaum was against public mourning, arguing that dampening the good spirits of the Yishuv would not be helpful to the Jews of Europe. This approach was sharply attacked by Al-domi and its supporters as an expression of insensitivity toward the tragedy in the Diaspora.<sup>62</sup> Gruenbaum vigorously rejected any suggestion of reorganizing the U.R.C., or that its members needed to be more informed about what was going on, or that they required greater freedom of action. He did not even respond to Al-domi's demand that he resign from his other posts. As to the suggestion that new members be appointed to the U.R.C. who would devote their time exclusively to rescue activities, he replied that they would go mad from a lack of opportunity to act. He expressed certainty that all that could be done was being done; if something was not being done, it was simply unfeasible. Al-domi found this difficult to believe.<sup>63</sup>

From the beginning of 1944, a certain softening in Gruenbaum's position could be discerned. He already argued that the struggle over the Jews' right to free immigration was precisely the struggle to save the remnant of European Jewry, and whoever distinguished between the two merely proved that he did not understand the needs of the hour. He was also ready to earmark Zionist funds, and devote more time and energy to rescue activities.<sup>64</sup> As far as Al-domi was concerned, however, these changes came too late to justify Gruenbaum's continued chairmanship of the U.R.C.

Gruenbaum, for his part, was deeply offended by Al-domi's criticism. He believed that the charges against him stemmed from an unrealistic view of the Yishuv's situation: it was a weak community of limited resources, dependent on the British and the other Allies, beset by difficulties caused by the war, isolation, and a hostile world. He argued that "the masters of reproof," as he called Al-domi and its supporters, along with his other critics, were convinced that if the leadership of the Yishuv wanted to, it could overcome all obstacles. They did not understand that no amount of explanation could persuade persons or governments that

61 Gruenbaum, *Days of Destruction*, pp. 62–64. Buber believed that the people should have been informed of the reports and be made aware of the concern (*Be'ayot*, April 1944).

62 Gruenbaum, "Sorrow and Compassion and Helpless Anger" (Hebrew), *Ha'olam*, December 4, 1941; "On the Accusations and the Shoutings" (Hebrew), *Hazeman*, December 13, 1944, and elsewhere. Al-domi: Bar, *Closed Circle*, p. 93 and elsewhere.

63 Minutes of March 23, 1943 and April 8, 1943, in Landau's file (see note 54); Rabbi Benjamin, *Davar*, September 20, 1946.

64 Gruenbaum, "Indeed We Have Sinned and Betrayed" (Hebrew), *Hazeman*, April 21, 1944. And his letter to Sir Simon Marks, June 1944, C.Z.A., S26/1089.

had no real interest in helping. They did not appreciate the cost—in manpower and money—that even the most meager of rescue efforts involved.<sup>65</sup>

To a certain degree, Gruenbaum's criticism was justified. Occasionally Al-domi's members were too acrimonious, as when they accused the Yishuv's leadership of being able to prevent the destruction of European Jewry in some part and failing to do so—e.g., "Am Oved cost us tens of thousands of lives." Their statements implied that the Yishuv and its leadership were *the* decisive force in conducting the work of rescue, ignoring the goodwill of the Allies, the White Paper policy, and war conditions. The Al-domi people seem to have been so caught up in their anger over Gruenbaum's provocative statements that they never bothered to check whether, indeed, he invested more in the rescue effort than he admitted or was apparent. Barring an examination of this kind, it is difficult to understand how Gruenbaum, an outstanding leader of Polish Jewry, could pronounce such a stinging judgment on European Jewry and fail to regard rescue as a pressing and primary issue; or why, indeed, he continued to head the U.R.C.—a position that earned him only reproach and disappointment. Perhaps he served as the target of the Yishuv's anger over its own inability to save the Jews of Europe.

Yet in replying to the attacks, Gruenbaum missed the main point of Al-domi's demands, namely, that everything had to be tried, even the most farfetched and unimaginable schemes for rescue, without stint, without delay, and without calculating the actual prospects of success. First of all, such an approach might reveal unexpected means of rescue. Secondly, while the Yishuv would never know how many people it could have saved by expending its maximum energies—perhaps only a few thousand more—this and future generations would know that it had tried everything, and had stood up honorably to the test of the Holocaust, as Jews, as Zionists, as human beings.

### *Al-domi's Contribution*

Anyone who reads the Al-domi documents cannot help but feel a sense of respect for its members. Most of them were not young; some were not in good health. They had no financial or organizational support of any kind.

65 Gruenbaum's reply in three articles, "Indeed We Have Sinned and Betrayed" (Hebrew), *Hazeman*, April 21, 1944; "Our Bermuda" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, June 12, 1944; "On the Accusations and the Shouting" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, December 13, 1944.



Nevertheless, they doggedly reiterated their views, admonishing, writing, pleading, mobilizing all their strength without any party or personal considerations. They were a handful of intellectuals with disparate views and different temperaments, who joined together out of mutual respect and a desire to achieve a common goal. The question remains: what was their contribution as a group and to what degree did they succeed in fulfilling the mission they took upon themselves? In approaching this question we must, of course, distinguish between the way they were regarded in their own time and our opinion about them today, a generation after the Holocaust.

During its two years of activity, Al-domi was the object of biting criticism. It is not difficult to view this group as a collection of indignant, self-righteous and tiresome intellectuals, exhorting others to action. Their strong language alienated the public at large, giving rise to the feeling that these men believed that they alone had a monopoly on sorrow and pain. Moreover, their florid Hebrew styles and complex histori-philosophical analyses worked against them, making their ideas obtuse. It is quite possible that when Gruenbaum, the secular rationalist, received a letter regarding rescue work couched in Bible quotes and Aramaic proverbs, he was overwhelmed by a desire to toss it into the wastepaper basket. While members of Al-domi were aware of the criticism voiced against them, they felt only bitterness toward the U.R.C. for repeatedly ignoring them, for failing to answer their letters, for failing to turn up for meetings, for failing to provide promised financial support, and for the personal attacks against them that appeared in the press. In their own eyes they were voices crying in the wilderness.

Nonetheless, we believe that Al-domi exaggerated its own sense of isolation. There were people in the Yishuv who admired their work, and who went to the trouble of expressing this approval in public. Nor were they ignored by the Yishuv's leadership. In the Histadrut, Al-domi received a sympathetic hearing from David Remez, Golda Meyerson (Meir), Zalman Shazar, Yosef Sprinzak, and Berl Katznelson. Even Shertok, Ben-Gurion, and Gruenbaum, while disagreeing with them, never disparaged them, and often lent their support to various of Al-domi's undertakings.

The bleak picture that Al-domi drew of the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust seems likewise exaggerated. By the time the group had coalesced, others had already written and spoken about the Holocaust with no less concern and pain; the settlements and individual families had taken in refugees with open arms, contributed unsparingly to the rescue funds, and sent packages to Europe. In fact, the special rescue funds were quite successful and were instrumental in bolstering contributions to the

Recruitment Fund when its income began to fall off. The "Winter Clothing Campaign" for refugees who reached Palestine or were still in various countries in Europe was another successful venture. And there were many in the Yishuv no less driven by the Holocaust who volunteered to take part in various activities and submitted proposals to the U.R.C. and Jewish Agency Executive. Finally, we must not forget those who enlisted in the British army and the Jewish Brigade in order to fight the Nazis; the parachutists who operated behind enemy lines; the emissaries working in Istanbul, Geneva, and elsewhere; those who organized illegal immigration and the flight of refugees from Europe (*Bricha*). Al-domi overlooked these manifestations of involvement—i.e., the response of people *as individuals*—nor could they (or anyone else) possibly measure the depth of shock and grief in the life of individual people.

Without disparaging these people in any way, Al-domi's criticism *was* pertinent to the community as a whole. The Yishuv did not change its way of life because of the Holocaust. It did not stop investing its best energies in internal affairs and party problems; no call was heard to bring other efforts to a temporary halt in order to devote the better part of its strength and resources to the rescue effort. On the contrary, 1943 and 1944 were years of prosperity in industry and in the building and settlement of Palestine. Furthermore, no rescue institution capable of effective action was organized. These statements should be considered separately from the question of realistic rescue possibilities, and are in no way a criticism of the many in the Yishuv who volunteered for rescue operations in Palestine and abroad.

Al-domi was also correct in its assessment of the Yishuv's leadership. It understood that the Zionist vision was an all-consuming one for Ben-Gurion, and that it was pointless to attack him on those grounds. But it did attack Weizmann and Katznelson for not devoting all their energies to public life during the war years even though they enjoyed great prestige and moral influence. Katznelson was Ben-Gurion's only close and admired friend, and if anyone could have influenced him it was Berl. Today it is difficult to understand why neither Weizmann nor Katznelson regarded the rescue effort as the chief challenge to a Jewish leader, for their deep feelings for the sufferings of their people are beyond doubt. This question, like that of Gruenbaum's attitude toward the Holocaust, remains to be elucidated.<sup>66</sup>

66 In her book *Berl* (Tel Aviv, 1980), Anita Shapira speculated why Katznelson was not active in the rescue effort, despite his deep pain over what was happening. She maintained that his age, illness, and sense of alienation from his party do not suffice as an explanation, and the question remains open.

Al-domi avoided being dragged into party politics, because of its belief that the subject of rescue should be above political differences, as it was within Al-domi itself. Al-domi constituted an interesting political phenomenon in that members of Brit Shalom and Agudat Israel met in the homes of the Chief Rabbis with the leader of the Revisionists and with members of Ahdut Ha'avoda and Poalei-Zion, and together tried to influence the actions of the national institutions. Because their aim was to close ranks, Al-domi avoided discussing any questions that provoked controversy among the public at large, e.g., did the leadership suppress reports about the Holocaust? Was the Holocaust exploited to advance the cause of the state-in-the-making? How far was it possible to exert pressure on the British to aid in the rescue venture? Yet avoiding the questions that divided the parties in the Yishuv detracted from the value of the debate that Al-domi itself roused and made it seem diffuse.

The very attention paid to Al-domi—positive or negative—brought the group a modest degree of success by placing the topic of rescue in the headlines. Yet Al-domi failed to have its proposals accepted and acted upon, and it may have been precisely because they were serious and to the point that they were difficult to accept and implement. Al-domi called for a change of the way of life of the Yishuv and its scale of priorities: instead of the building of the Yishuv as the pet project of the Diaspora, the rescue of the Diaspora was to become the all-consuming objective of the Yishuv. On the other hand, it failed to appreciate how deeply the political leadership was perturbed by the question of whether a change in its order of priorities would not place all the Yishuv's achievements in jeopardy; whether shifting the main effort to saving the Jews of Europe would not deplete the meager resources at the disposal of the Yishuv, deprive it of the young men needed for its defense, and lead to an overt clash with the British before the Yishuv was ready for it. While Al-domi believed that there was no point or substance to any Zionist political achievement as long as the plight of the Jewish people was regarded as marginal, it was unwilling to take two major considerations into account: the fear of jeopardizing the Yishuv's achievements, and the relatively small prospects of an independent rescue operation. This was what led Gruenbaum to accuse it of a lack of political realism.

In retrospect, Al-domi's chief contribution was its unique attempt to comprehend the Holocaust and its historical, social, and moral implications while it was still taking place. The intellectual stature of its members and their individual fields of competence are what accorded to their discussions their unusual depth and scope.<sup>67</sup>

67 Two of the discussions received a more extensive description than the rest. See in Dinur, *Our Fate and Our War*, pp. 14–34, five “outlooks on the disaster to the Jewish people”: that

The problems that the members of Al-domi addressed in their discussions are still crucial: the role of the intellectual in modern society; the efficacy of propaganda and of personal initiative; genocide as a recurrent phenomenon in the twentieth century (without detracting from the uniqueness of the Holocaust);<sup>68</sup> the ability to build a comprehensive picture out of events as they occur and are reported; the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust as a phenomenon and the need to explore and explain it at every possible opportunity (the idea of Yad Vashem); the Holocaust as an expression of a universal crisis of values—the struggle between the image of man as the bearer of moral values and the Nazis' attempts to eradicate this image; Zionism as the solution to anti-Semitism and the Diaspora (despite the sobering recognition that anti-Semitism is a manifestation of the fears and problems of those infected by it and will therefore continue to exist); the radical swings in the national mood between pride in the country's achievements and hope for its future, and division and despair; Jewish resistance during the Holocaust as an expression of the power inherent in Judaism; and, finally, the question of the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust and rescue—a more important issue in the long run and in my opinion than the question of the realistic chances of saving Jews.

Al-domi raised questions that derived from a comprehensive and penetrating perspective on the period. It appealed to the Yishuv, and to the world at large, not to stand by passively, not to engage in pragmatic calculations, but to devote all its energies to saving the Jewish people—a call that may not have been graced by political realism but was imbued with authentic emotion and love.

of the philosopher (Buber), the hassid (Schneersohn), the historian (Dinur), the writer-journalist (Yatziv), and the soldier and farmer (Benzion Yisraeli from Kinneret). See also Bar, *Closed Circle*, pp. 88–107. Participating in this discussion, in addition to the members of Al-domi, were Yitzhak Lamdan, Avigdor Hameiri, Benzion Katz, and Avraham Sharon (Shvadron).

68 Professor Schneersohn devoted many articles to an analysis and description of genocide in the twentieth century. They are collected in his book *Historical Psychology of Destruction and Renewal* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1965.



*iii American Jewry*



## THE AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERSHIP AND THE HOLOCAUST

*David S. Wyman*

### Hopes for Rescue

The best hope for rescuing European Jews during World War II lay in a strong and concerted effort to convince the United States government to undertake a comprehensive rescue program. For American Jews, the obvious approaches were two: contacts by Jewish leaders with high government officials; and a national campaign to publicize the mass killings, with a view to building public pressure for rescue and directing it toward the Roosevelt Administration and Congress. American Jewish leaders, once aware of the Nazi extermination plan, moved in both those directions. But lack of united action severely diminished their impact. Furthermore, the Zionist organizations, the most politically effective of the American Jewish groups, continued throughout the crisis to place first priority on their long-term goal of achieving a Jewish state in Palestine.

During the Holocaust, and since, the American Jewish leadership of that era has been faulted for failing to do what it could and should have done for rescue. Criticism has also been leveled because of the disunity and fighting that racked organized American Jewry and hobbled the rescue efforts that were made.<sup>1</sup> One of the sharpest rebukes is Hayim Greenberg's bleak and

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I want to acknowledge the friendship, help, and encouragement given over several years time by two of my former students, Aaron Berman and Eliyho Matzozky. They have generously shared with me documentary findings of vital importance to this study. And each has contributed hours of discussion of the issues involved.

For a list of abbreviations, please see the last page of this chapter.



scathing article entitled “Bankrupt,” which appeared—in Yiddish—in the midst of the crisis—in February 1943. Greenberg, a leading Labor Zionist, charged that “American Jewry has not done—and has made no effort to do—its elementary duty toward the millions of Jews who are captive and doomed to die in Europe!” He was especially dismayed that “the chief organizations of American Jewry . . . could not in this dire hour, unequalled even in Jewish history, unite for the purpose of seeking ways to forestall the misfortune or at least to reduce its scope; to save those who *perhaps* can still be saved.” What, he asked, “has such rescue work to do with political differences?” Actually, as Greenberg conceded in his article, a start had been made, during the last weeks of 1942, toward action, even united action. But it had died out by January 1943.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after Greenberg published his indictment—and possibly partly in response to it—united Jewish action for rescue was rekindled and started to gather momentum. This tardy but promising development was short-lived, however. The Bermuda Conference of late April 1943 mortally wounded it, and the American Jewish Conference, held four months later, extinguished it.

### **Reactions to Revelations About the Holocaust**

Starting in late June 1942 reports of massive killings of Jews reached the British and American news media from authoritative underground sources in Axis Europe. These accounts spoke of 700,000 Jews murdered in Poland alone, and over a million annihilated altogether.<sup>3</sup> The news was relegated to the inner pages of the regular American newspapers, but it dominated the Jewish press and set off calls for immediate steps to urge the Allied governments to act to stem the murder.<sup>4</sup>

In response, the four major defense committees, the American Jewish Congress, the B’nai B’rith, the Jewish Labor Committee, and the American Jewish Committee, joined to sponsor a protest demonstration. On July 21, 1942, 20,000 people crowded Madison Square Garden, while thousands more stood outside, to hear speeches by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and several other prominent Jews and non-Jews. Messages to the meeting from President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill promised retribution for these Nazi crimes at a future day of reckoning. The mass meeting adopted a declaration urging the United Nations to issue a clear warning of punishment to the perpetrators. But neither the speakers nor the declaration called for actual rescue measures.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of the Madison Square Garden observance, similar mass meetings took place in numerous cities across the United States.<sup>6</sup>

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At that time, with the war running heavily against the Allies, and the American Jewish leadership numbed and shocked by the revelations from Europe, practical suggestions for rescue had not yet emerged. It would be several months before specific proposals would be worked out and pressed on the American government.<sup>7</sup>

During that summer and fall additional accounts of Nazi mass murder of Jews reached the United States. Most of them were made public, but received little attention in the news media.<sup>8</sup> The most significant report, however, was kept secret until late November. That was the information relayed in August by Gerhart M. Riegner, secretary of the World Jewish Congress office in Geneva. Riegner's message stated that a reliable source with connections high in the German government reported that a plan was under consideration in Hitler's headquarters to deport all Jews under German control to the East (presumably to Poland) and to exterminate them there. This news made clear the real meaning of the earlier reports of mass slaughter. It also explained the large-scale deportations of Jews, in progress since mid-July, from France and Holland to "an unknown destination" in the East. A policy of genocide was underway.<sup>9</sup>

At Riegner's request the American and British diplomatic missions in Switzerland forwarded the report to their governments, on about August 10. Riegner had also asked that his message be passed on to two leaders of the World Jewish Congress, Rabbi Wise in New York and Samuel Sydney Silverman in London. The British Foreign Office hesitated for a week, then delivered Riegner's dispatch to Silverman. But the State Department deemed the information "fantastic" and decided not to send it to Wise. Near the end of August the message reached Wise anyway—from Silverman, whose telegram to the American Jewish leader somehow was cleared through both the War and State Departments. Shortly afterward, Wise forwarded Riegner's dispatch to Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles, probably on September 3, asked Wise not to make the information public until the State Department had time to confirm it. Wise agreed.<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of these developments, further terrible news reached New York. On September 3, Jacob Rosenheim, president of the Agudath Israel World Organization, received a telegram from his group's representative in Switzerland, Isaac Sternbuch:

According to numerous authentic informations from Poland German authorities have recently evacuated Warsaw ghetto and bestially murdered about one hundred thousand Jews. These mass murders are continuing. . . . Similar fate is awaiting the Jews deported to Poland from other occupied territories. . . . Do whatever you can to cause an American reaction to halt these persecutions.

Rosenheim immediately sent copies of Sternbuch's telegram to both President Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt. Neither responded. He also notified Rabbi Wise. Soon afterward, Wise, Rosenheim, and other Jewish leaders met, discussed the two reports, and then asked Welles to check into what had happened at Warsaw. Welles ordered an investigation.<sup>11</sup>

Restrained from releasing the news of extermination to the press, Wise did what he could during September and October to find some way to assist the European Jews. He conferred with Welles several times. He tried in vain to reach President Roosevelt, both through Welles and through Felix Frankfurter, the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. The Rabbi carried the horrifying reports to the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. He asked Myron C. Taylor, Roosevelt's personal representative to the Vatican, to appeal to the Pope to intervene. He also saw Vice President Henry Wallace, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Everyone he approached was sympathetic. No one did anything, except Welles, who promised to seek further information through State Department channels, and Ickes, who tried unsuccessfully to convince Roosevelt to open the Virgin Islands as a temporary haven for 2,000 Jews.<sup>12</sup>

The State Department's lackadaisical inquiry into the authenticity of the Riegner and Sternbuch reports stretched out for nearly three months. Finally, late in November—15 weeks after Riegner's report reached Washington—sufficient additional information had come in to convince Welles. On November 24 he called Wise to Washington, handed him several documents, and said, "I regret to tell you, Dr. Wise, that these confirm and justify your deepest fears." Welles then suggested that Wise release the information.<sup>13</sup>

Almost immediately Wise called a press conference. He told reporters that sources authenticated by the State Department revealed that the Germans had already massacred 2 million Jews. And they were transporting others to Poland from all over the continent to be killed in a campaign aimed at wiping out all the Jews in Nazi Europe. The next day, November 25, Wise met in New York with other Jewish leaders, then held a second press conference where he spoke as representative for several leading American Jewish organizations. He announced that the Jewish groups were convinced, on the basis of State Department documentation, that Hitler had ordered the annihilation of all Jews in German-controlled territory. The purpose in publicizing the information, he stated, was "to win the support of a Christian world so that its leaders may intervene and protest the horrible treatment of Jews in Hitler Europe."<sup>14</sup>

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Just as Wise was revealing the annihilation plan to the world, additional crucial evidence of the Nazi genocide was appearing in Jerusalem and London. On November 23 the Jewish press in Palestine published black-bordered reports of systematic extermination recently brought from Poland. In London, on November 24, the Polish Government-in-Exile informed the press that Nazi SS Chief Heinrich Himmler had ordered half of Poland's 3 million Jews killed by the end of 1942 as the first step in their complete destruction.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, after November 24, 1942, it was evident to anyone in the democratic world who cared to know that a hideous and unprecedented extermination program against the Jews was in progress. It should be noted, however, that although the American press published this news, it regularly placed it in its inner pages.<sup>16</sup>

From events traced so far, two observations may be permitted. First, the American Jewish leadership was not inactive in the face of the horrifying information that it received between late June and November 1942. It was, however, held back by the restriction placed on releasing key information. It was also hindered by the difficulty in devising concrete steps that might mitigate the catastrophe.

The second observation concerns Rabbi Wise's acquiescence in Sumner Welles's request that he not release the extermination information until the State Department had checked it. Wise has been criticized on the ground that his silence cost three ir retrievable months desperately needed to build pressure on Washington.<sup>17</sup> True, time was already short in September 1942 and the Roosevelt Administration needed strong prodding before it would act. But two points warrant consideration.

For one thing, Wise had no viable choice in the matter. The State Department was responsible for refugee and rescue affairs. Had Wise contravened Welles's request, he would have alienated the department of government whose cooperation was essential in trying to help the European Jews. Secondly, if Wise is to be criticized in this instance, numerous others should be also. The British section of the World Jewish Congress, for instance, had the Riegner report, as well as the British Foreign Office's permission to publicize it. In addition, Wise conveyed the information to several people, including other Jewish leaders, and the members of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, as well as Felix Frankfurter, Myron C. Taylor, Dean Acheson, Henry Wallace, and Harold Ickes. Any of more than twenty prominent Americans could have called a press conference and broken the news.

### **The Jewish Leaders and the Holocaust: 1942–43**

Three months went by from the time the Roosevelt Administration learned of the plan to exterminate the European Jews until that news was made generally available in November 1942. Fourteen *additional* months of mass murder were to pass before the American government, in January 1944, would initiate a program of rescue with the formation of the War Refugee Board. What was the role of the American Jewish leadership in the long struggle to convince the Roosevelt Administration to act? The first several months (from late November 1942 into May 1943) saw hopeful steps toward unity, as the main Jewish leadership took sporadic but important joint action. During this time the Zionists were in the forefront of the campaign. These were the months, in fact, when Zionist responsiveness to the rescue issue reached its peak.

Once freed to release the authenticated news of extermination, Jewish leaders were anxious to spread the information as effectively as they could. They sought to build the public support that would be necessary to move the American and other Allied governments to rescue efforts.<sup>18</sup>

The group that first charted a course of joint action was a temporary and rather loose council of representatives of the major American Jewish organizations. Essentially it was the continuation of a committee of Jewish leaders that had formed around Stephen Wise and Jacob Rosenheim in early September and had met sporadically thereafter to discuss information coming from Europe as well as possible ways to respond to it. It was this group, generally referred to as the "temporary committee," that Wise called together on November 25, the day after his meeting with Welles, to decide on an initial plan of action.<sup>19</sup>

Seven organizations were represented on the temporary committee. Three were pro-Zionist and were led by committed Zionists; they were the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, and the Synagogue Council of America. Three were non-Zionist or even anti-Zionist: the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, and Agudath Israel of America. The other, B'nai B'rith, aimed for neutrality, but its membership was trending toward Zionism and its leadership was pro-Zionist. The temporary committee was a volatile combination; normally relationships among its member groups were characterized by disputes and even sharp conflict. Yet it did achieve a fair amount of cooperation.<sup>20</sup>

At its meeting on November 25, the temporary committee agreed on several actions. Press conferences and other direct efforts to get prominent news coverage for the newly confirmed facts of genocide met with very

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limited success.<sup>21</sup> But two other projects were more effective, a Day of Mourning and Prayer, held on December 2, and a conference with President Roosevelt on December 8.

The Day of Mourning and Prayer was observed in 29 foreign lands and throughout the United States. In New York, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia summoned the city to prayer. Several radio stations were silent for two minutes. Over half a million union laborers halted production for ten minutes. (Lest Jews be blamed for slowing the war effort, the time was made up the next day.) At noon a one-hour radio program was broadcast. And special services were held at five o'clock in synagogues throughout the city.<sup>22</sup>

In many other American cities, the Day of Mourning was marked by religious services and local radio programs. Late in the afternoon, NBC broadcast a special quarter-hour memorial service across the nation.<sup>23</sup>

A week later, President Roosevelt met for half an hour with five delegates of the temporary committee: Rabbi Wise, representing the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, Henry Monsky of B'nai B'rith, Rabbi Israel Rosenberg of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, Maurice Wertheim from the American Jewish Committee, and Adolph Held, for the Jewish Labor Committee. Wise, a longtime supporter of Roosevelt, read aloud a two-page letter from the Jewish leaders stressing that "unless action is taken immediately, the Jews of Hitler Europe are doomed." But the only action proposed in the letter was a request that the President "warn the Nazis that they will be held to strict accountability for their crimes" and an appeal for formation of a commission to gather evidence of Nazi atrocities. Wise also handed Roosevelt a twenty-page condensation of the extermination evidence and appealed to him to do everything in his power to bring the news to the world's attention and to stop the mass murder.<sup>24</sup>

The President readily agreed to issue the war crimes warning. He then turned to the group and asked for other recommendations. They had little to add. Held suggested an attempt to get neutral countries to intercede with Germany in behalf of the Jews. The others expressed a few ideas, but these were not recorded. This part of the conversation lasted only one or two minutes. As the delegation left, Roosevelt asked them to prepare the war crimes statement, using as a guide his message to the July 1942 mass meeting in Madison Square Garden. After clearing their version with the President's secretary, the Jewish leaders released it to the press, along with their letter to Roosevelt and the twenty-page summary of the extermination data. Shortly after the White House visit, Wise dissolved the temporary committee, stating that it had completed the tasks it had set for itself.<sup>25</sup>

News reports about the Day of Mourning and the conference with the President focused some public attention on the disastrous situation of the European Jews. And soon after, on December 17, a major burst of publicity about the mass murders accompanied a far more forceful war crimes declaration issued in London by eleven Allied governments, including the United States, Britain, and Russia. (British Jewish leaders played a key role in obtaining the December 17 declaration. American Jews were not involved in that project.)<sup>26</sup> But American Jewish organizations realized that much more public knowledge and sympathy would have to be generated before the American government would commit itself to rescue action.<sup>27</sup>

During December 1942 the American organization most active in trying to build public concern for the European Jews was the Zionist-oriented American Jewish Congress, aided by its affiliate, the World Jewish Congress. The two congresses contributed the bulk of the work that went into the projects of the temporary committee. Directly after the conference with the President, the American Jewish Congress set up a special "planning committee" of its own which soon mapped out an ambitious campaign to arouse public opinion.<sup>28</sup>

The new approach envisioned marches of hundreds of thousands of Jews through the streets of New York and other large cities. Jewish children were to leave their schools to join the processions. Appeals were to go out to Americans of Polish, Czech, Yugoslav, and other national backgrounds to join the processions or hold parallel demonstrations. During the day of the processions, all Jewish stores were to be closed, and a work stoppage was to be arranged through the cooperation of the AFL and the CIO. On the same day, large newspaper advertisements with black borders were to detail the extermination. Radio commentators were to be urged to speak about the massacres. And, as an offshoot of the processions, Jewish mass delegations were to go to Washington to appeal to Congress.<sup>29</sup>

Another project looked toward appeals to the Christian churches to hold Days of Mourning and to explain the facts of the extermination at church services. Additional plans called for enlisting the support of newspaper editors, radio broadcasters, educators' and women's organizations, liberal groups, congressmen, and other political leaders.<sup>30</sup>

The results were microscopic. Christian churches sponsored two or three radio broadcasts, the *Nation* and *New Republic* magazines printed some material, and fifty leading Americans of German descent issued a Christmas Declaration denouncing Hitler's "cold-blooded extermination of the Jews of Europe."<sup>31</sup>

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Most of the projects simply evaporated by early 1943. Why? For one thing, cooperation from non-Jews was meager. In addition, some "planning committee" members had reservations about marches and other mass-action projects, fearing they "might make the wrong kind of impression on the non-Jewish community." Probably most important, the American Jewish Congress was trying to do too many things with too few capable people and with resources that were too limited. The planning committee did not work steadily at its task and its leadership was heavily occupied with numerous other matters. Rescue had not taken on an unquenchable urgency.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout December, while trying to publicize the mass murder and arouse the concern of their fellow citizens, American Jews were also searching for practical rescue proposals. One frequent suggestion called for providing havens of refuge for Jews who might succeed in getting out of Nazi territory. England, the United States, and the other Allies should be asked to open their doors. The British should be requested to remove restrictions on refugee immigration to Palestine. The United Nations should encourage neutrals such as Turkey, Switzerland, and Sweden to accept Jewish refugees by agreeing to share the maintenance costs and to move them elsewhere after the war. Food and medical supplies should be sent, under proper safeguards against confiscation, to starving Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe.<sup>33</sup>

In the last weeks of 1942, then, attempts were made to publicize the extermination news, and specific rescue proposals began to appear. American Jewry had at least made a start. But during January and much of February, Jewish organizations were relatively quiescent; the extermination issue received limited public attention. (It was during this interval that Hayim Greenberg voiced his protest against American Jewish passivity.) Two developments in mid-February, however, sparked a quick resurgence of activity.

One was another telegram from Riegner, written this time in collaboration with Richard Lichtheim of the Jewish Agency. It disclosed that the slaughter had intensified. Six thousand Jews were being killed *per day* at a single location in Poland. Vienna had been nearly emptied of Jews and more deportations were going forward from Berlin and Prague. The condition of Jews in Romania was desperate. Of 130,000 Romanian Jews deported to the Transnistria region in 1941, 60,000 were dead. The other 70,000 were destitute, sleeping in unheated rooms, prey to diseases, and dying of starvation. The shocked leadership of the American Jewish Congress released the information to the press on February 14.<sup>34</sup>

The previous day, by coincidence, the *New York Times* reported from London that the Romanian government had offered to remove 70,000 Jews



from Transnistria and release them to the Allies. In return, Romania asked to be paid transportation and related expenses of 20,000 *lei* (about \$140) per refugee. It was not the offer itself, or the failure of the American and British governments to pursue it, that stirred up the American Jewish leadership. What did was a striking three-quarter-page advertisement that the Committee for a Jewish Army placed in the *New York Times* on February 16.<sup>35</sup>

The Committee for a Jewish Army was one of a half-dozen organizations set up in the United States in the 1940s by a small group of Palestinian Jews who were intent on forwarding the cause of a Jewish state in Palestine. Led by Peter Bergson, these young men were followers of Vladimir Jabotinsky and secretly members of the Palestine underground army, the *Irgun*. The Committee for a Jewish Army worked for the establishment of an independent army of Palestinian Jews and stateless Jewish refugees to fight Hitler alongside the other Allied forces.<sup>36</sup>

Soon after hearing the news of systematic extermination, the Bergson group began to shift its first priority to rescue. As early as December 5, 1942, in an eye-catching newspaper advertisement written by the popular author Pierre van Paassen, the Committee for a Jewish Army recommended formation of a special United States government agency with responsibility for saving European Jews. By February the committee had decided to launch an intensive publicity drive centered on its demand for the establishment of a rescue agency.<sup>37</sup>

The opening gun in this campaign was the army committee's large advertisement reacting to the Romanian government's offer. It appeared in the February 16 *New York Times* under the startling headlines:

FOR SALE to Humanity      70,000 Jews  
Guaranteed Human Beings at \$50 a piece.

(Fifty dollars was the committee's estimate of the value of the 20,000 *lei* price set by the Romanians.) The advertisement, written by Hollywood dramatist Ben Hecht, solicited \$50 contributions to help finance the Committee for a Jewish Army's drive to publicize the European Jewish situation and build pressure for government action.<sup>38</sup>

Immediately the established American Jewish organizations and the Jewish press sent up a barrage of protest. They angrily charged the army committee with deliberately and deceptively implying that each \$50 contribution would save a Romanian Jew. Undaunted, the committee not only ran a large follow-up advertisement a few days later, but proceeded to reprint Hecht's advertisement in several major newspapers across the nation.<sup>39</sup>

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Even before the February denunciations, much of the American Jewish leadership had decried the Committee for a Jewish Army, accusing it of recklessness and sensationalism, as well as gross effrontery in presuming to speak for an American Jewish constituency. Fear now arose that the Bergsonites would move into the vacuum and seize the leadership of the flagging effort for rescue. The lethargy of the previous several weeks rapidly dissolved. Apprised of the army committee's plan to hold a demonstration at Madison Square Garden on March 9, Wise and the American Jewish Congress quickly decided to schedule a March 1 mass meeting at the same location.<sup>40</sup>

The demonstration set off another wave of publicity and activity on the rescue question; 20,000 people jammed Madison Square Garden while 10,000 others stood outside in the winter cold and listened to the speeches through amplifiers. AFL president William Green and several other non-Jewish political, religious, and labor leaders addressed the meeting, as did Stephen Wise and world famous scientist and Zionist spokesman Chaim Weizmann.<sup>41</sup>

Indicative of the progress made since the December conference with Roosevelt was a comprehensive list of specific rescue proposals approved by the mass meeting and forwarded to the President. The 11-point program (in greatly condensed form) called for:

—Approaches to Germany and the satellite governments to allow the Jews to emigrate;

—Swift establishment of havens of refuge by Allied and neutral nations, including acceptance of refugees into the United States, Britain, Latin America, and Palestine;

—Transfer, by the United Nations, of Jewish refugees out of the neutral countries bordering Nazi territory, and encouragement of those countries to allow additional refugees in;

—Organization by the UN, through neutral agencies such as the International Red Cross, of a system for feeding Jews remaining in Axis territory;

—Assumption by the UN of financial responsibility for the overall program; and

—The formation of a UN agency to carry out the program.<sup>42</sup>

The mass meeting and favorable press reaction to it generated enough pressure to force a response of sorts from the Roosevelt Administration. Two days after the demonstration, the State Department released previously secret information indicating that the United States and Britain were planning a diplomatic conference to deal with the refugee problem. The mass meeting's success also hastened steps already underway to revive the temporary

committee of top Jewish leaders that had disbanded after the December visit to the White House. This group began to meet again early in March and soon formally organized itself as the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs. (The World Jewish Congress had dropped out; but newly added were the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, a political action agency representing several Zionist organizations, and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, a close associate of Agudath Israel. This brought the number of organizations on the committee to eight.) The Committee for a Jewish Army asked to be included, but was rejected.<sup>43</sup>

The Joint Emergency Committee immediately commenced efforts to influence the upcoming British-American refugee conference, set for the third week of April at Bermuda. One early step was to stimulate mass meetings throughout the United States to publicize the Holocaust and to mobilize popular opinion behind the rescue proposals adopted at the March 1 demonstration in New York. During the spring of 1943, 40 such rallies were held in 20 states, sponsored by local Jewish community organizations with help from the Joint Emergency Committee and local branches of its eight constituent bodies. The Synagogue Council of America cooperated by proclaiming a six-week period of mourning and prayer for the European Jews. And convocations of rabbis met in several parts of the nation and sent resolutions to Roosevelt and Churchill urging them to rescue those who could still be saved.<sup>44</sup>

An interesting aspect of the Joint Emergency Committee's campaign to spark the mass meetings was the full collaboration of the American Jewish Committee. Through the years the American Jewish Committee had almost never encouraged mass demonstrations. It wished to keep Jewish issues out of public attention, while quietly working to protect Jewish rights through negotiations with high government officials and other powerful persons. The president of the American Jewish Committee, Judge Joseph Proskauer, had opposed holding the Madison Square Garden meeting. But the dignified manner in which the demonstration was handled convinced him and his administrative committee that similar demonstrations could help influence American opinion "in a decent and decorous way."<sup>45</sup>

A second objective of the Joint Emergency Committee was to induce the United States Congress to go on record in support of rescue action. Despite a quiet but vigorous effort in that direction, the result was nearly useless. In March both houses unanimously approved a resolution concerning Nazi atrocities, but it mentioned the Jews only in passing. It was simply another general condemnation of German war crimes, another call for eventual punishment of those responsible.<sup>46</sup>

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Even more discouraging was a meeting that Wise and Proskauer managed to obtain in late March with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, who was then visiting Washington. By that time the Joint Emergency Committee had decided to place its highest priority on just two of the rescue proposals. One called for approaches to Germany and its satellites through neutral channels to obtain release of the Jews. The other asked for organization of a program to feed Nazi victims unable to get out of occupied Europe. If the United States and Britain would agree to these steps, the committee believed, the other proposals could be acted on in a less urgent manner by the intergovernmental rescue agency which, it was hoped, would emerge from the forthcoming Bermuda Conference.<sup>47</sup>

Eden threw cold water on the whole idea, and, in doing so foreshadowed the outcome of the Bermuda Conference. Opening the discussion, Proskauer stressed the request for a declaration calling on Germany to permit Jews to leave occupied Europe. Eden rejected that proposal outright, declaring it "fantastically impossible." The second point, sending food to European Jews, appeared to make no impression on the British leader. To a suggestion that Britain help in removing Jews then in peril in Bulgaria, Eden replied icily that "Turkey does not want any more of your people." Eden would not offer any hope of action, asserting that he could make no decisions without consulting his government.<sup>48</sup>

Eden's response dealt a crushing blow to the American Jewish leadership, as reflected in this description of the reaction of the Joint Emergency Committee when Wise and Proskauer reported back to it:

Over the entire meeting hung the pall of Mr. Eden's attitude toward helping to save the Jews in occupied Europe. Without expressing it, the people at the meeting felt that there was little use in continuing to agitate for a demand [for action] on the part of the United Nations by the Jews of America.<sup>49</sup>

Based on the encounter with Eden and similar attitudes prevalent in the State Department, members of the Joint Emergency Committee were reasonably convinced that neither the State Department nor the British would seek to map out a real rescue program at Bermuda. If anything significant were to occur at the conference, it would have to come at the insistence of President Roosevelt. Accordingly, Wise telegraphed the White House asking that a few Joint Emergency Committee members be granted the opportunity to talk with the President regarding the fate of millions of European Jews. Although the committee expected to have no trouble seeing Roosevelt, Wise's request got nowhere. The White House simply relayed it to Secretary of State Hull who wrote Wise that such a meeting could not be arranged.<sup>50</sup>

The seven Jewish members of the House of Representatives, led by Emanuel Celler, did succeed in talking with Roosevelt on April 1. But the Jewish congressmen did not press the Joint Emergency Committee's rescue proposals on the President. Celler did, however, ask whether a small delegation of the committee's leaders might be heard at Bermuda. Roosevelt rejected the idea.<sup>51</sup>

Unable to reach the President and excluded from presenting its case at Bermuda, the Joint Emergency Committee decided on a last-ditch attempt to convince the State Department to recommend its rescue proposals to the conference. In a message to Welles, the committee submitted its program (modeled on the Madison Square Garden proposals), along with an appendix of specific suggestions for implementing the plans. The accompanying letter formally requested that a small group from the Joint Emergency Committee be invited to Bermuda to explain the proposals. The message closed with an appeal to Welles, asking him to do all he personally could to influence the conference to urge a meaningful rescue program on the two governments.<sup>52</sup>

When, on the eve of the conference, the Joint Emergency Committee had not received a response, the group met again. Angered at their inability to make effective contact with government policymakers, these leaders of American Jewry briefly considered militant action. But they settled for a press conference intended to expose the State Department's rebuff. It had negligible impact.<sup>53</sup>

Welles never replied to the Joint Emergency Committee's appeal. The only answer came several days later, after the conference had started, from Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long. Long wrote that he had forwarded the committee's material to the American delegation.<sup>54</sup>

The Bermuda Conference was, in fact, no more than a pretense. It was a diplomatic hoax intended to defuse the pressures for rescue that had built up in England and the United States. It accomplished nothing toward rescue, except to recommend a feeble plan for aiding some 2,000 refugees who had reached Spain.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the secrecy that veiled most of the conference's deliberations, enough news slipped out to make clear what had occurred. This information devastated even the small hopes that American Jews had dared hold for the conference. A deep despondency blanketed many segments of American Jewry. As for the Joint Emergency Committee, demoralization set in. It never recovered from the Bermuda Conference's demonstration of the indifference of the two great democracies.<sup>56</sup>

Despite efforts to revive it by Jacob Pat of the Jewish Labor Committee, the Joint Emergency Committee met only three times, and accomplished nothing, during the five months following the Bermuda Conference. The

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American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, Agudath Israel, and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis wanted to keep the committee alive; but in the fall of 1943 the Zionist members, led by Wise, succeeded in voting it out of existence. The united front on rescue was finished.<sup>57</sup>

### The Position of the Zionists

The Zionist leadership had been in the forefront of the pre-Bermuda attempts to publicize the mass killings and to stir the government into action. Yet during those months, the Zionist movement had continued to devote its main energies to the cause of a Jewish state in Palestine. The American Zionists' overall strategy, initiated many months before the news of extermination became known, aimed at building maximum support in the United States—as rapidly as possible—for a postwar Jewish state in Palestine. The haste arose from the Zionists' perception that the best chance for decades to come to win the Jewish state would arise right after the war. The fluidity in international affairs that would emerge at the end of the war would very likely open the status of Palestine for reconsideration. The Zionist movement had to be ready to wield all the influence it could when the postwar diplomatic settlements were made.<sup>58</sup>

The first essential step toward maximizing American Zionist influence was to reach a consensus among the numerous Zionist factions. This was achieved at the Biltmore Conference in New York in May 1942. There a common policy was adopted that called for the end of the British White Paper (which limited Jewish immigration into Palestine) and the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth. (Advocacy of a Jewish commonwealth constituted a fundamental shift. The previous position had accepted indefinite postponement of the statehood goal while concentrating on building up the Jewish community in Palestine.)<sup>59</sup>

Zionism at that time was still a minority movement among American Jews. Thus, immediately after Biltmore, plans went forward for the second step in the overall strategy: lining up American Jewry as a whole behind the Zionist program. The technique chosen was to call all the American Jewish organizations to a conference where they would work out a program for dealing with the postwar problems of world Jewry. American Jews would then be able to present a united front at the peace negotiations. Because the non-Zionist organizations most likely would not respond to a Zionist initiative for such a conference, prominent Zionist leaders, including Chaim Weizmann and Stephen Wise, convinced Henry Monsky, the president of

B'nai B'rith, to issue the invitations. Monsky was popular and respected among American Jews generally and B'nai B'rith was considered neutral on the question of political Zionism. So Monsky's chances of convening the conference were very good. And his personal pro-Zionist views could only help at the conference.<sup>60</sup>

It might be noted that the small meeting at which Monsky agreed to act as convener took place during the first burst of activity following release of the extermination news. It was held December 2, 1942, the Day of Mourning and Prayer. Against that background, an outside observer might have expected the conference under consideration to have dealt first of all with rescue. It did not. When the call for the conference went out, two items were on the agenda: the status and rights of Jews in the postwar world, and the rights of the Jewish people with respect to Palestine.<sup>61</sup>

Through the late spring and summer of 1943, the attention of thousands of American Jews and much of the Jewish press turned to the election of delegates and the other preparations for the convocation, now named the American Jewish Conference. During this time the rescue issue was eclipsed, partly by this rechanneling of Jewish interest and partly because these were the very weeks of despair following the disillusionment of Bermuda. An article in June in a Zionist periodical reflected the shift: "The world at large replies to our protests and prayers and dramatizations only with resolutions and expressions of sympathy—never with deeds." "What can the Jew do now?" asked the writer. He supplied the answer himself: Jews must unite at the American Jewish Conference and demand Jewish postwar rights, especially in Palestine.<sup>62</sup>

Indications are very strong that disillusionment with Bermuda permanently altered the priorities of that part of the Zionist leadership which had previously pressed hard for a government rescue program. Before Bermuda, important Zionists, including Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann, had concentrated on two main lines of action: the political Zionist track (which led to the Biltmore Program and on to development of the American Jewish Conference), and the campaign to convince the American government to undertake rescue action. After Bermuda, some effort for rescue continued, but much the greater share of Zionist energies and capabilities went into the American Jewish Conference and the drive which followed to build United States government support for a postwar Jewish state in Palestine.

The American Jewish Conference consisted of 500 delegates. Of the 500 slots, 125 were allotted to the 65 national Jewish organizations who finally participated. The other 375 delegates were chosen by a complex indirect

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system of local elections which aimed at providing a broadly representative, democratic character to the conference. If any doubt existed that the conference was essentially an effort to prove American Jewish support for the Biltmore Program, it was soon dispelled by the all-out election drive mounted by the several Zionist organizations. Most of them agreed on joint slates of delegates for whom Zionists voted in blocs, thus defeating candidates with less thoroughly organized support. Zionist campaign rhetoric called for election of the maximum number of Zionist candidates, because the significant action at the conference would occur on the Palestine statehood issue and it was essential to show that American Jews were united in supporting that goal.<sup>63</sup>

The Zionists were enormously successful in the elections; an estimated 80 percent of all the delegates were considered "avowed Zionists," and few of the others were outright opponents of Zionism. No one seriously maintained that this outcome proved 80 percent of American Jews supported a full Zionist program. It did seem to show, though, that a majority of America's Jews were by then pro-Zionist, and an even more solid majority of those involved in Jewish organizational life backed the Zionist position.<sup>64</sup>

Some complaints were raised about the representativeness of the elections. But more important dissension arose over the allotment of the 125 delegate slots which went to the various organizations. Both Agudath Israel of America and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis withdrew from the conference before it convened, declaring that they had been granted unfairly small numbers of delegates.<sup>65</sup>

Another factor in the disenchantment of these two ultra-Orthodox, non-Zionist organizations was the continuing failure of the American Jewish Conference's organizing committee to place rescue on the agenda. As far back as January, Agudath Israel had unsuccessfully urged concentration on rescue as well as postwar issues. Only in late July (a month before the conference met), and then only after persistent hammering by the Jewish Labor Committee, was rescue added to the agenda. Even so, the conference's executive committee turned down a Jewish Labor Committee appeal to make the extermination of the European Jews the central issue of the conference, and to prepare an urgent call to the Allied governments for rescue action.<sup>66</sup>

The American Jewish Conference met in New York from August 29 through September 2, 1943. The Palestine issue dominated the proceedings. Convinced of the importance of winning united support for the positions adopted by the conference, Wise, Nahum Goldmann, and a few other leading Zionists planned to press a moderate resolution on Palestine. They recognized



that all groups, including the influential American Jewish Committee, could agree on a demand to abolish the White Paper and open Palestine to unlimited Jewish immigration. Though committed to the full Biltmore Platform, these leaders felt that the controversial Jewish commonwealth idea could wait for a later reconvening of the conference.<sup>67</sup>

The moderate plan was swept aside, however, on the evening of August 30 by a stirring pro-statehood address made by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, at that time probably the most militant of the front echelon of American Zionist leaders. Silver's speech set off a flood of emotion in the audience and galvanized the delegates into fervent support of the full Biltmore position. Two nights later, with only four negative votes and 19 abstentions, the conference adopted an uncompromising resolution calling for a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, an immediate end to the White Paper, and unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine.<sup>68</sup>

The other two issues on the agenda, the rights of Jews in the postwar world and the problem of rescue, were anticlimactic. The delegates showed limited interest in them and passed resolutions of little significance. Before it dispersed, the assembly established an Interim Committee of 55 people elected to carry out the resolutions and attend to other necessary business.<sup>69</sup>

The Zionists had triumphed. A representative assembly that included nearly all segments of American Jewry had overwhelmingly ratified the Biltmore Platform. But the victory came at a price. It led to the disbandment of the Joint Emergency Committee. In many local Jewish communities it reignited old Zionist vs. non-Zionist animosities. It ended all possibility of collaboration with the non-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox groups. And it cut off or weakened the support of other important elements of American Jewry. Not two months after the New York meetings, the American Jewish Committee withdrew from the conference, declaring that it could not support the demand for a Jewish commonwealth. This loss was critical; the American Jewish Committee was too significant a force on the American Jewish scene for the conference to be effective without it. (The American Jewish Committee lacked the broad-based organizational structure needed for most types of political action. But it did have access to high levels in the government and it could raise considerable funds. It applied these strengths to the effort for rescue, but only to a limited extent.)<sup>70</sup> B'nai B'rith and four other organizations supported the conference only partially, holding back on endorsement of the Palestine resolution. And the anti-Zionist Jewish Labor Committee gave only limited cooperation before quitting the conference altogether in December 1944.<sup>71</sup>

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Common ground for united activity did exist across the full spectrum of American Jewry. All Jewish groups agreed during World War II on the need for rescue and the need to abolish the White Paper. But unity was impossible when the question of a Jewish state entered the picture. And after the American Jewish Conference, the Zionist leadership insisted that the statehood issue was inseparable from both the White Paper issue and the rescue problem itself. Thus the disagreement over political Zionism stood squarely in the way of any united Jewish rescue effort.<sup>72</sup>

The conference's Interim Committee did not meet until six weeks after the delegates went home, thus losing the interest and momentum built at the New York sessions. When it did convene, in mid-October 1943, it elected as co-chairmen Stephen Wise, Henry Monsky, and Israel Goldstein. It also put the conference on a semi-permanent basis by establishing commissions on postwar Jewish rights, rescue, and Palestine.<sup>73</sup>

In the ensuing months, the Commission on Post-War Reconstruction did little more than issue a few statements concerning restoration of Jewish rights in Europe and a proposed international bill of rights. The activities of the Commission on Rescue were essentially only a relabeling of the limited steps taken by the already existing American Jewish Congress—World Jewish Congress partnership in the area of rescue. About all the Rescue Commission could point to in its year and a half of existence before the war in Europe ended were two mass meetings in New York City. The Commission on Palestine functioned as no more than a rubber stamp for the American Zionist Emergency Council, the political action arm of the leading Zionist organizations.<sup>74</sup>

For the most part, then, the American Jewish Conference served as a means for the American Zionist movement to affix the prestigious label of an apparently broadly representative, democratic Jewish organization onto the activities of already established Zionist committees. As such, the conference could hardly develop as a viable organization. In fact, by mid-1944 its ineffectiveness was obvious and criticism of its virtual inaction reverberated through the Jewish press and at Jewish meetings. The conference's second year was even worse, filled with internal rivalries and conflicts. Weak and ineffectual, the American Jewish Conference limped along until it expired at the end of 1948.<sup>75</sup>

What was the balance sheet on the American Jewish Conference? The main Zionist objective for the conference was achieved. The overwhelming vote on the Palestine resolution offered convincing evidence that the Zionist position had majority support in American Jewry. After August 1943 Zionist leaders could credibly maintain in their publicity and in their governmental

contacts that their program represented the broad cross section of American Jewish opinion.<sup>76</sup>

On the debit side, Zionist insistence on committing the conference to a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, a *postwar* objective, ended the chance for united Jewish action on the immediate issue of rescue, and on the related issue of the White Paper. On those issues consensus existed and Jewish unity was within reach. The American Jewish Conference could have been the instrument of that unity, but by its adoption of the full Zionist program it lost that opportunity.

As for the American Zionist movement, the victory at the American Jewish Conference completed its drive to commit American Jewry to the Biltmore Program. The next objective was to win the backing of the American people and their government. Starting in September 1943, American Zionists poured large amounts of energy into this struggle, and continued to do so throughout the rest of the war and on until the Jewish state was won. Pivotal to this effort was an immensely effective public relations and political action campaign carried out by the American Zionist Emergency Council, which had been revitalized and placed under the dynamic leadership of Abba Hillel Silver at the time the American Jewish Conference met.<sup>77</sup>

An unavoidable conclusion is that during the Holocaust the leadership of American Zionism concentrated its major force on the drive for a future Jewish state in Palestine. It consigned rescue to a distinctly secondary position, especially after the Bermuda Conference of April 1943. Why would Jewish leaders, deeply distressed over the agony of their people in Europe, have permitted *any* issue to take precedence over immediate rescue? No definite answers are possible. But available evidence suggests an explanation.

The Zionist leadership concluded that little hope for rescue existed. Hitler had a stranglehold on the European Jews and the Allied powers showed themselves unwilling even to attempt rescue. A Zionist editorial in September 1943, a survey of the then-closing Jewish year of 5703, mirrored the widespread despair:

It was during the first few months of that year that the pitiless, horrifying word "extermination" became a commonplace in our vocabulary. . . . It was in that year, too, that all our cries and pleas for life-saving action were shattered against walls of indifference until we began to stifle in the black realization that we are helpless. It was the year of our endless, bottomless helplessness.

Thirty-five years later, in entirely separate interviews, two leaders of the Jewish statehood drive of the 1940s each emphasized the same factor, the feeling of helplessness, the belief that little or nothing could be done.<sup>78</sup>

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Although some signs of despair appeared before April 1943, it was the Bermuda Conference that destroyed hope. The brief Jewish effort for government rescue action had failed to break through Washington's "walls of indifference." During that same spring of 1943, however, prospects for the basic Zionist program were rising as the American Jewish Conference movement began to gather momentum. Furthermore, it was essential to press ahead with the statehood campaign because, for a limited time in the war's aftermath, conditions might open for the emergence of the Jewish state. The drive for the state had to be expedited, lest crucial postwar diplomatic decisions take place before Zionist influence could be fully applied.<sup>79</sup>

As limited as Zionist resources were, it seemed reasonable to concentrate them on the possible, rather than to devote them to what appeared to be a nearly hopeless cause. One week after Bermuda, Nahum Goldmann stressed the point at a meeting of the Zionist leadership. Too little manpower was available, he said, both to continue the mass meetings for rescue and to launch a major campaign for the Zionist program. Bermuda convinced him that the emphasis should be on Zionist goals.<sup>80</sup>

Reinforcing the Zionist's choice was their view of Jewish history over the centuries of the Diaspora. Abba Hillel Silver expressed that view in classic fashion in his famous speech to the American Jewish Conference. The chain of disasters that constituted the history of the Dispersion, Silver reminded his listeners, extended far beyond Hitler and the present mass slaughter. It encompassed two thousand years of world hatred and murder of Jews. No end to "this persistent emergency in Jewish life" would come, Silver warned, until Jewish homelessness ceased. And that would occur only with the creation of a Jewish state. The state was the instrument that would at last put a stop to the ceaseless tragedies that dominated Jewish history.<sup>81</sup>

The Zionist leadership, limited in the resources it commanded, faced two momentous obligations. For the immediate need, rescue, the prospects for achievement appeared bleak. For the postwar objective, the Jewish state, the time to press forward seemed at hand and the goal looked attainable. The Zionists made their choice. Events would show, however, that they had misread the signs concerning rescue. Substantially more was possible than they had recognized.

### **The Bergson Group**

Although several American Jewish organizations continued to work for rescue throughout the war, after Bermuda only the Bergson group pushed

ahead with a major and concerted campaign for government action. The Committee for a Jewish Army had opened that campaign in February 1943, centering it on the demand for establishment of a rescue agency. On the night of March 9, a week after the American Jewish Congress held its New York mass meeting, the army committee presented Ben Hecht's intensely moving drama *We Will Never Die*, a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. The crowd at Madison Square Garden was so huge that an unscheduled repeat performance was given late that night. No formal addresses were made, but the pageant's final passages dealt pointedly with the inertia and silence of the non-Jewish world.<sup>82</sup>

Press and newsreel coverage in New York and across the nation was extensive. With hopes of awakening America to the European Jewish tragedy, the Committee for a Jewish Army made plans to present *We Will Never Die* in dozens of cities across the country. The pageant was actually staged in five other cities, sparking a new round of publicity each time. But after that no other performances took place. The animosity that most of the established Jewish leadership had for the army committee and the Bergson group prevented cooperation with the project. And the American Jewish Congress and some of its allies obstructed the Bergsonites' efforts to finance further performances.<sup>83</sup>

In response to the Bermuda Conference, the attitude of the Bergson group was less one of despair than of anger and determination. Five days after the conference adjourned, the Committee for a Jewish Army published a scathing three-quarter-page advertisement in the *New York Times* labeling the whole proceeding a "cruel mockery." Brushing off a counterattack on the United States Senate floor by Scott Lucas of Illinois, who had been a delegate at Bermuda, the army committee announced its own plans to hold a conference. The new meeting aimed to do what the Bermuda Conference should have done, bring experts together to seek realistic ways to save European Jews.<sup>84</sup>

In July, in New York City, the Bergsonites sponsored the five-day Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe. Despite obstruction from several quarters of organized American Jewry, the Committee for a Jewish Army succeeded in assembling an impressive group of participants. Meeting in panels dealing with such topics as transportation, diplomatic negotiations, military affairs, and the role of the church, important specialists hammered out practical rescue projects. Large evening sessions open to the public featured prominent speakers such as Fiorello LaGuardia, Dean Alfange of the American Labor Party, and (by radio) Herbert Hoover. Mention of only a few of the others who were associated with the Emergency

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Conference indicates the wide variety of people who sought to do something about the Holocaust: Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, Senators Guy Gillette, Edwin Johnson, Elbert Thomas, and William Langer, labor leaders William Green and Philip Murray, and journalists William Randolph Hearst and William Allen White.<sup>85</sup>

The Emergency Conference agreed on a comprehensive set of rescue recommendations, with the strongest emphasis on a proposal for a United States government agency charged specifically with rescuing Jews. It also called for a publicity campaign to make the American people fully aware of the extermination issue. Finally, in order to activate its recommendations, the conference transformed itself into a new organization, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. The driving force in the new committee was the Bergson group.<sup>86</sup>

The Emergency Committee immediately began lobbying the Roosevelt Administration in support of its rescue plans, but achieved almost nothing there. It was unable to arrange an interview with the President. Bergson did see Eleanor Roosevelt, from whom he received a very small amount of cooperation. Approaches to the State Department were not productive. Emergency Committee contacts with Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. brought out his deep concern about the mass killings. But Morgenthau was not then willing to spearhead a drive from within the Administration to push Roosevelt to act.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, during August and September, the Emergency Committee fired off another round of dramatic newspaper advertisements publicizing the Holocaust and urging formation of a rescue agency. Then in early October it initiated a nationwide petition drive and organized a pilgrimage to the nation's capital by 400 Orthodox rabbis. The rabbis, conspicuous with their beards and long black coats, arrived in Washington three days before Yom Kippur. They marched from Union Station to the Capitol, where they were met on the Capitol steps by Vice President Wallace and a score of congressmen. The rabbis presented a petition urging creation of a rescue agency and calling on the neutral countries, the United Nations, and Palestine to open their gates to the Jews. In mid-afternoon, after offering prayers at the Lincoln Memorial, the rabbis walked to the White House, where five of their number delivered another copy of the petition to a presidential secretary.<sup>88</sup>

The Emergency Committee had tried for weeks to arrange for the President to receive the rabbis' petition personally, but the appeals were repeatedly turned down. On the day of the pilgrimage, the White House informed the press that the President could not see the rabbis "because of

the pressure of other business." In reality, Roosevelt had a very light schedule that afternoon. By the time the rabbis arrived he had managed to slip away to Bolling Field to observe the incorporation of a 40-man Yugoslav combat unit into the United States Army Air Force.<sup>89</sup>

The rabbis' pilgrimage received no support whatever from the established Jewish organizations, except the Union of Orthodox Rabbis and the Union of Grand Rabbis. Nor did it generate the amount of publicity that its sponsors had hoped for. But on another front, the halls of Congress, the Emergency Committee's efforts at last began to take hold. Ever since the Emergency Conference, the Bergsonites had been pressing the need for a rescue agency on members of Congress. By November they had organized some powerful backing, especially in the Senate. On November 9, the Emergency Committee made its move. Introduced in the Upper House by Guy Gillette and eleven other senators, and in the House of Representatives by Will Rogers Jr. and Joseph Baldwin, were identical resolutions urging the President to create "a commission of diplomatic, economic, and military experts" to initiate immediate action to save the remaining Jews of Europe.<sup>90</sup>

The Rescue Resolution encountered little difficulty in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which approved it unanimously. But hearings in the House Foreign Affairs Committee turned up strong opposition from the State Department and from the chairman of the House committee, Congressman Sol Bloom of New York. Bloom, who had been a delegate to the Bermuda Conference, had not forgiven the Bergson group for its advertisement the previous May castigating the conference as a "cruel mockery." Furthermore, he consistently strove to ingratiate himself with the State Department.<sup>91</sup>

None of the established Jewish organizations supported the Rescue Resolution, except for the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. And Zionist leaders, working through the American Jewish Conference, threw roadblocks in its path. Senator Gillette, a dedicated friend of Zionism, spearheaded the drive for the resolution in the Senate. Afterward, describing the behind-the-scenes obstruction by Zionist leaders, Gillette stated: "These people used every effort, every means at their disposal, to block the resolution."<sup>92</sup>

In public, the Zionist leaders were more circumspect. Stephen Wise, testifying for the American Jewish Conference at the House hearings on the resolution, did not recommend its defeat. But he declared it was "inadequate" because it did not spell out a concrete program of action. Most important, said Wise, it failed to call for immediately opening Palestine to Jewish refugees. Four weeks later, in a stinging press release attacking the Bergson group, the American Jewish Conference disparaged the Rescue Resolution, though it stopped short of outright opposition to it.<sup>93</sup>

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The resolution had caught the Zionist leaders in a dilemma. They did not dare oppose openly and directly a step for rescue of Jews. But they found it impossible to assist, or even to refrain from interfering with, the project of a group they saw as virtually an enemy. They recognized that success for the resolution would bring prestige, additional public support, and more strength to the Bergsonite faction.<sup>94</sup>

The Zionists' bitter opposition to the Bergsonites arose basically from their fear that the Bergson group might build an effective rival Zionist movement. The Zionists were apprehensive not so much that such a movement could supplant theirs, but that it would draw away badly needed funds and members and disrupt their progress toward realization of the Jewish state.<sup>95</sup>

As 1944 opened, pressures were mounting on the White House. The Senate was poised to act on the Rescue Resolution; almost certainly the vote would be overwhelmingly favorable. And Sol Bloom, in the words of one close observer of the situation, was having "to do everything he can possibly do" to keep his committee from sending the resolution to the House floor. Henry Morgenthau called it "a boiling pot" which was about to pop.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, in an independent sequence of events stretching over the second half of 1943, the Treasury Department had clashed with the State Department on the rescue issue. The Treasury had to struggle for five months to obtain State Department approval for a license to send rescue and relief funds to the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland. In the process Treasury officials discovered that the State Department had consistently stalled and obstructed the rescue possibilities that had come to its attention.<sup>97</sup>

Convinced that the rescue issue had to be removed from the State Department, Treasury staff members (mostly non-Jews) persuaded Morgenthau to take their findings to the President and press him to establish a government rescue agency. Morgenthau did so on January 16, 1944. Roosevelt, fully aware of the growing pressures in Congress, realized that he could no longer sidestep the rescue issue. Morgenthau's disclosures concerning the State Department furnished the necessary last push. On January 22, two days before the Rescue Resolution was to go before the Senate, Roosevelt issued an executive order creating the War Refugee Board.<sup>98</sup>

Two convergent forces were responsible for the emergence of the War Refugee Board, the Treasury Department's pressure on Roosevelt and the long campaign for a rescue agency waged by the Emergency Committee and, earlier, the Committee for a Jewish Army. Spokesmen for the American Jewish Conference publicly denied that the Rescue Resolution had any connection with the President's action. But experienced Washington lobbyists, journalists, and political leaders reported otherwise. Moreover, records



now available show that Morgenthau and his staff, the people who were closest to the whole situation, had no doubt whatever that it was the Rescue Resolution that made it possible to force the President to act. Not to be overlooked, however, is the fact that several groups, mostly Jewish, contributed vitally over the months by publicizing the Holocaust and helping to create a limited but essential amount of public concern and political support for rescue action.<sup>99</sup>

The War Refugee Board turned out to be a collaborative effort between the Treasury Department and Jewish organizations in the United States and overseas. It did an important job, helping to save between 100,000 and 200,000 Jewish lives. But it was too little, and far too late. Strong and persistent pressure after the War Refugee Board was formed would have been necessary to have forced the Roosevelt Administration to give the board the support it needed for a maximum rescue effort. That kind of pressure did not materialize, either from the Bergsonites, or the regular Zionists, or others. And rescue never became more than a very low priority in the Roosevelt government.<sup>100</sup>

The Bergsonite Emergency Committee kept on pushing for rescue, but its activities decreased during 1944 and 1945. On the Zionist side, the World Jewish Congress continued to prod the government, but only on a minor scale. The *Va'ad ha'Hatzala*, the Orthodox rescue committee, expanded its exertions, but it was a very limited operation. A unified and dynamic American Jewish drive for rescue was critically needed after the War Refugee Board emerged, as it had been before. But in 1944 and 1945 unified Jewish action was farther away than ever. And little dynamism seemed to be left in the scattered factions that were still fighting for a full-fledged United States commitment to rescue.<sup>101</sup>

#### ABBREVIATIONS

AECZA = American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs

AJC = American Jewish Committee

AJ Conference = American Jewish Conference

AJHS = American Jewish Historical Society

AJYB = *American Jewish Year Book*

AZEC = American Zionist Emergency Council

CJR = *Contemporary Jewish Record*

CW = *Congress Weekly*

ECSJPE = Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe

FRUS = *Foreign Relations of the United States* (diplomatic papers series)

JDC = American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

JEC = Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs

MD = Morgenthau Diaries. (Citations thus: Book/page.)

NP = *New Palestine*

NYT = *New York Times*

PSC = Palestine Statehood Committee

SD = State Department

WJC = World Jewish Congress

WRB = War Refugee Board

## NOTES

1. E.g., Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), pp. 165-66, 168; Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "Ben Hecht's 'Perfidy,'" *Commentary* (Mar. 1962) 33(3):264; Joseph Tenenbaum, "The Contribution of American Jewry Towards Rescue in the Hitler Period," *Yad Vashem Bulletin* (Apr. 1957) 7(4):4; Nahum Goldmann, "Jewish Heroism in Siege," *In The Dispersion*, Winter 1963/64, p. 6; *JTA News Bulletin*, Nov. 30, 1944, p. 3; Alexander Donat, "Armageddon," *Disent*, (Spring 1963) 10(2):122.
2. Greenberg's article appeared in *Yiddisher Kemfer*, Feb. 12, 1943. It was reprinted in English in *Midstream* (Mar. 1964) 10(1):5-10. Quotations are from pp. 5 and 6.
3. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, ed., *A Holocaust Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1976), pp. 291, 316-18; Yehuda Bauer, "When Did They Know?" *Midstream* (Apr. 1968) 14(4):54-55, 57-58; NYT, June 27, 1942, p. 5, June 30, 1942, p. 7; *Boston Globe*, June 26, 1942, p. 12.
4. Re regular newspapers: NYT and *Boston Globe*, as cited in note 3; and, e.g., *Seattle Times*, June 26, 1942, p. 30; NYT, June 27, 1942, p. 5, July 2, 1942, p. 6; *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1942, p. 6; *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1942, p. 3; *Kansas City Star*, June 29, 1942, p. 8. Re Jewish press: e.g., AJC, "Review of the Yiddish Press" (mimeo.), Week ending July 8, 1942, p. 1, Week ending July 16, 1942, p. 1; CW, (June 26, 1942) 9(24):3, (July 10, 1942) 9(25):3.
5. CW, (July 10, 1942) 9(25):3, (Aug. 14, 1942) 9(26):1, 2, 4; NYT, July 22, 1942, pp. 1, 4; *Opinion*, (Aug. 1942) 12(10):4.
6. *CJR*, (Oct. 1942) 5(5):520; CW (Aug. 14, 1942) 9(26):15; *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 19, 1942, 2: 8; AJYB (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), 45: 192.
7. For instance, *Jewish Frontier*, as late as November 1942 (p. 3), called on the Allied governments "to do whatever may be done to stop the mass murder."
8. E.g., *The Ghetto Speaks*, No. 2, Aug. 5, 1942; *Jewish Frontier*, (Sept. 1942) 9(9):28-29, (Nov. 1942) 9(10): (entire issue); Segal to Hull, Sept. 23, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2240; *JTA News Bulletin*, Oct. 6, 1942, 4; NYT, Nov. 25, 1942, 10; CW (Dec. 4, 1942) 9(37):5-7, 9-13.
9. Elting, Memorandum, and enclosed draft telegram, Aug. 8, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2234; *Washington Post*, Aug. 30, 1942, p. 12.
10. Elting, Memorandum, Aug. 8, 1942, Elting to Secy of State, Aug. 10, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2234; Harrison to Secy of State, Aug. 11, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2233; John P. Fox, "The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy in 1942," *English Historical Review*, (Jan. 1977) 92(362):91-93; Easterman to Taylor, Oct. 7, 1942, SD file 740.00116 EW 1939/634; memo by P. O. C. [?], Aug. 13, 1942, Culbertson to Wise, Aug. 13, 1942, Hull to Bern, Aug. 17, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2233; Durbrow, Memorandum, Aug. 13, 1942, SD file 862.4016/2233; Stephen S. Wise, *Challenging Years* (New York: Putnam, 1949), p. 275; Silverman to Wise, Aug. 28, 1942, SD file 740.00116 EW 1939/553; Isaac Lewin, "Telegrams from Hell," *Polityka*, Aug. 9, 1975; Wise to Welles, Sept. 2, 1942, SD file 840.48 Refugees/3080; Carl Hermann Voss, ed., *Stephen S. Wise: Servant of the People* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1970), p. 251. The State Department received the Riegner message on Aug. 11; the British Foreign Office on Aug. 10.
11. Rosenheim to FDR, Sept. 3, 1942, SD file 740.00116 EW 1939/570; Isaac Lewin, "Attempts at Rescuing European Jews with the Help of Polish Diplomatic Missions during World War II," *Polish Review*, (1977) 22(4):5-6; Secy to McDonald to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sept. 4, 1942, James G. McDonald papers, file P43; Lewin, *Polityka*, Aug. 9, 1975; Voss, *Wise: Servant*, p. 249.
12. Voss, *Wise: Servant*, pp. 249-51; Wise to Welles, Sept. 2, 1942, Atherton to Welles, Sept. 3, 1942, SD file 840.48 Refugees/3080; Lewin, *Polish Review*, (1977) 22(4):6; Lewin, *Polityka*, Aug. 9, 1975; MD 68811/223Q; Harold Ickes Diary, 7053-54.
13. Hull to Bern, Sept. 23, 1942, Harrison to Secy of State, Sept. 26 and Nov. 23, 1942, SD files 740.00116 EW 1939/597A, 599, 653; FRUS (1942) 3: 775-76; MD 68811/223Q; Squire to Secy of State, Sept. 28, 1942, with enclosures, and Oct. 29, 1942, SD files 862.4016/2242, 10-2942; NYT, Nov. 25, 1942, p. 10; Wise, *Challenging Years*, pp. 275-76; Gotschalk to Waldman, Nov. 27, 1942, AJC papers, General Record, Germany Nazism 42-43.
14. NYT, Nov. 25, 1942, p. 10, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 16; *NY Herald Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1942, p. 1; *Washington Post*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 19B.
15. NYT, Nov. 24, 1942, p. 10, Nov. 25, 1942, p. 10.
16. E.g., NYT, Nov. 24, p. 10, Nov. 25, p. 10, Nov. 26, p. 16; *Washington Post*, Nov. 25, p. 6, Nov. 26, p. 19B; *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 25, p. 4, Nov. 26, p. 4; *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 25, p. 20. (All in 1942.)
17. Elie Wiesel, "Telling the Tale," *Dimensions in American Judaism*, (Spring 1968) 2(3):11.
18. *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 4.
19. Gotschalk to Waldman, Nov. 27, 1942, AJC papers, General Record, Germany Nazism 42-43; NYT, Nov. 24, 1942, p. 10, Nov. 25, 1942, p. 10, Nov. 26,

# Stephen Wise and the Holocaust

HENRY L. FEINGOLD

**T**he role played by Stephen Wise is at the very heart of the bitter controversy concerning American Jewry during the Holocaust. It is natural that it should be so. Beginning in 1900, when he took a pulpit in Portland, Oregon, he consistently involved himself deeply in the political world of American Jewry and the American political process. Wise's role as a leader of American Jewry was unique: he was more than any other leader a Jewish witness to power, not a witness who incidentally and remotely happened to be Jewish. There is therefore no way to condemn American Jewry during those years without indicting Stephen Wise. That indictment has been drawn up and its existence places a heavy burden on Melvin Urofsky, the author of the recently published biography of Wise, *A Voice That Spoke for Justice*.\*

Those who place American Jewish leadership on trial will not find the requisite failings, corruption, venality, or even ineffectiveness in the pages of this book. Wise is generally acknowledged to have been the most engaged, the most energetic, and in many ways the most satisfying of the Jewish leaders in the 20th century. He emerges from this book as an enterprising "change

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\* *A Voice That Spoke For Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982 439 pp.

agent," confident in his sense of what the proper direction for American Jewry should be and decades ahead of his time in some of the policies he initiated.

We recall how he courageously rejected the "unfree" but highly desirable pulpit of Temple Emanu-El in New York and single-handedly established the Free Synagogue. Wise went on to build a network of organizations which was in reality an alternative to the elaborate organizational structure built by the German Jewish stewards. He was a major builder of American Zionism, which was unpopular in 1910 but would ultimately become the biding consensus of American Jewry during the Holocaust and remains so today. He was the first American Jewish leader to fathom the danger of the Nazi threat to the Jewish enterprise. He attempted unsuccessfully to make contingency plans with other heads of Jewish organizations before Hitler came to power. Faced with the reality of Jewish powerlessness and vulnerability to Nazi depredations, he supported the idea of a boycott of German goods in the hope that economic pressure would wring better treatment from Berlin. The American Jewish Congress, which he reestablished in 1921, was the first Jewish organization to use the technique of the massive protest rally to mobilize public opinion. Once back in Roosevelt's good graces he was tireless in alerting him to the developing anti-Jewish pogrom and its spin-off refugee problem. More than one European Jew, prominent and non-prominent, owes his life to Wise's personal intercession and generosity. This list, which hardly exhausts Wise's activities, leaves us puzzled. How is it that precisely this apparently sterling and Jewishly committed leader has become the subject of such calumny?

**A** search for an answer must take into account the built-in propensity for failure in the Holocaust situation, a burden borne by all Jewish leaders during the period. Adding to that is the problematic role of leader of an ethnic sub-group in America. The inherent propensity for failure given the murderous intent of a nation-state, the most powerful entity in contemporary

society, requires no elaboration. The difficult role ethnic leaders face in defining their position is far less clear. We need to know how the leadership of an ethnic sub-group is determined and how it transmits its demands to secular power holders. How are these demands made compatible with the national agenda and with those of other sub-groups? There are several specializations in the discipline of sociology which deal with these problems but not even they have been able to unravel the complexities of Jewish group behavior where every known rule is flouted.

Wise, for example, was obsessed with the idea of establishing democratic procedures for the determination of programs and leaders in the community. Twice his American Jewish Congress treated the nation to the spectacle of massive community-wide elections in which hundreds of thousands voted. But it did not take Wise long to discover that those who paid the piper called the tune. He could rail against the wealthy "uptown" stewards but he understood that the chronic financial straits of his Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) and American Jewish Congress could hardly be alleviated without their contributions. He watched his mentor Louis Brandeis turn to monied Jews for succor and later saw Weizmann do the same thing through an enlarged Jewish Agency.

In pluralistic America, moreover, the matter of leadership was complicated by the ability of secular power-holders to choose their conduits to sub-cultures. Prominent Jews, like Sidney Hillman, Sam Rosenman, Felix Frankfurter, and Benjamin Cohen, made their reputations, not in the Jewish community, but in the various elites of law, labor, banking, and academia. Only Wise was a professional Jew and nothing else. Objectively, if one could have chosen an agent from within the community to represent the Jewish interest a Reform rabbi who advocated Zionism and was sympathetic to first and second generation East European Jewish immigrants and was moreover a superb orator and political activist, in short a man like Wise, would have fit the bill. But it was not logic which determined who would speak to power but politics as practiced by Roosevelt. He often chose to bypass Wise; despite the title, Wise was never

the "Pope" Roosevelt sometimes wished the Jews had. Roosevelt kept his Jews uncertain of their role, juggling them as he did his administrators. But in the case of the Jews it was not only a matter of the President's administrative style. The absence of an agent who acted exclusively for the Jewish community, especially one like Wise, precluded the need to confront Jewish demands directly. Instead Wise was one of many Jews with access to the Oval Office. Sometimes Morgenthau was reluctantly pressed into service as White House Jew. Sometimes it was Frankfurter. Paradoxically, rarely did a member of the "Jew Deal" want to be cast in such a role. Wise, on the other hand, would have cherished it.

Actually Wise came late to the Roosevelt administration and had greater difficulty than "insiders" in gaining access to the Oval Office. It is, however, difficult to determine whether keeping him at a distance involved a specific strategy. The rabbi had shown evidence of being ideologically "hot" to the point of being impolitic. He refused to "go along" with Tammany's Jimmy Walker and with some of Roosevelt's political judicial appointments. The Tammany machine was a mainstay of Democrat dominance in New York State, hence Wise's opposition dissipated the political capital he had accumulated by his strong support of the Cox-Roosevelt ticket in the campaign of 1920. Louis Howe, the kingmaker behind Roosevelt, was keeper of the gate; Wise could not establish formal relations with Roosevelt until he passed away. Frankfurter and Brandeis arranged the contact in January, 1936. Wise's crusading zeal made him anathema to the State Department, which received his outspoken demands and accusations either from the press or through a direct relay, Eleanor, the President's wife. Ironically, those demands for action and intercession seem insufficient today, but no Jew near the administration pressed for them more strenuously than Wise. The members of the "Jew Deal" were, unless asked, silent on what was happening in the death-camps of Europe.

For these reasons there may have been a reluctance to transact business with Wise. Of course Roosevelt, especially after the election of 1936, was not compelled to transact any Jewish business. The Jewish vote was very "safe" even while the enthusiasm of other hyphenates

had begun to wane during the "second New Deal." In fact looking through the Wise papers one is impressed at the frequency with which his staff solicited the White House for some statement of confirmation which could be used in a local organizational election. It may well be that more than Roosevelt requiring the support of Jewish leaders, they required his support in order to assume positions of leadership in the Jewish community.

**I**n the unlikely case that Roosevelt had been more receptive to Jewish pressure for rescue and Wise had had better access to him, would the fate of European Jewry have been altered? Probably not very substantially. Until the final months of the war Berlin was all but immune to humanitarian pressure. Thereafter, she was willing to enter into an unacceptable barter of Jewish lives for military equipment and money. The greatest opportunity to save lives existed during the refugee crisis. There is good reason to believe that the failure to find havens for the Jewish refugees helped trigger the final solution, a policy of total liquidation. A fair estimate today would conclude that between 1938 and 1941 it was virtually impossible to change the restrictive immigration laws by political means. But administration directives to show "special concern" for Jewish visa applicants and the abrogation of the Hoover directive, which almost halted immigration entirely, were taken at the behest of Jewish leaders who requested such steps. Wise apparently participated in such special requests, but generally he seems to have experienced some personal difficulty in dealing with power and the powerful.

Urofsky is straightforward in dealing with questions that have been raised concerning Wise's public and private life. He concludes that Wise did not betray the victims but was rather bound by Jewish powerlessness. Contrary to the persistent rumors regarding plagiarism, he finds that Wise wrote his own doctoral dissertation and did not really short-circuit the rabbinic training process. He finds no evidence to substantiate a pattern of marital infidelity. But while such suspicions hardly matter in themselves their persistence may hint

at a far more complex personality than the somewhat sentimentalized portrait we have here. The question of how Wise confronted power is particularly troublesome. A close reading of Urofsky's biography and Wise's autobiography *Challenging Years* (1949), on which Urofsky too heavily leans, shows a Wise who has an abiding need to follow a righteous leader. There is a sycophantic quality in his relationship to his two "chiefs," Brandeis and Wilson, and his one "boss," Roosevelt. Reading his many notes to Roosevelt and others about Roosevelt it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, like so many others, Wise was totally ensnared by Roosevelt's aura and charm. By 1942, there was little left of his earlier skepticism about the President.

Principles mattered to Wise but he could abandon them with unseemly haste. There was a predictability to the positions he took on immigration, rights of labor, women's rights, Sacco and Vanzetti, and peace. But when principle was confronted with the spell of influential men, it sometimes lost out. In 1917, his strong pacifist position caved in to Wilson's call to "make the world safe for democracy." He later regretted his support of the war, and Wise's admiration for his friend John Haynes Holmes, who adhered to his pacifism even when it was unpopular, reached new heights. Of course, Holmes did not face Wise's temptation as a Zionist; the war finally might make feasible a Jewish national homeland. In the 1930s, Wise again joined his now radicalized son in pacifism. But again the advent of Hitler forced him to abandon it.

**T**here was complexity in other areas of his public life as well. In the early decades of the century it required some courage to be a Reform rabbi and at the same time a staunch Zionist. There were other "uptowners" who followed this path but Wise might have gone further had he been less outspoken. Yet one can sometimes wonder about the stentorian notes he struck in support of this cause or that. In retrospect his fight for a "free pulpit" may seem to some to be strangely contrived in a man looking for a crusade. Jacob Schiff, a power at Temple Emanu-El, had informed him privately that he



would in effect have a free pulpit and it was not really necessary to force Louis Marshall's hand. Wise opted for the fray. There are some who saw in the establishment of the Free Synagogue not so much a lonely act of courage but an act of personal aggrandizement. "The way to start a free synagogue," observed one cynical opponent of Wise, "is to cultivate a voice, place a pitcher of ice water on a stand, and marry an heiress." It was a little unfair but not altogether untrue. Independent wealth does make the path requiring courage and bravery easier to negotiate.

There are those who insisted that Wise's institution building proclivities were all monuments to a colossal egomania. These organizations and institutions inevitably duplicated existing institutions and made Jewish organizational life even more chaotic. Of course to see the young Wise as a cause of disunity is rather simplistic. The Jewish Institute of Religion and the American and World Jewish Congress were reflections of a preexisting disunity rather than harbingers of a new one. How one judges Wise here depends on one's vantage, "uptown" or "downtown."

But weaknesses of character and spirit there were and they seem to have surfaced during the years of the Holocaust when age was creeping up on Wise. Despite his robust appearance Wise's health was often poor. During the Oregon period he suffered the first of several breakdowns which had all the earmarks of nervous exhaustion. He drove himself mercilessly, speaking out on all major issues either in the celebrated weekly orations at Carnegie Hall or writing them in the *Opinion*, a journal of Jewish thought founded by his son. By all accounts he was a magnificent speaker in great demand all over the country. By 1940, when Wise was 66 years old, some who knew him well could see that the years of bitter political strife had taken their toll. He was after all an active participant in a political arena known for its roughness — Zionist politics. Like Weizmann he had learned to accommodate, to find his peace within the system, to conserve his energy and not to tilt at windmills. He became an "insider" utterly loyal to the systems leaders. He saw no one on the horizon who could serve the Jewish interest better. The Wise of the

forties was not the Wise of the twenties. There seems to have been a critical loss of nerve not so much with reference to rescue (here Wise comes off much better than other leaders with better access to Roosevelt) but in terms of the Zionist movement. Wise could not fully understand its radicalization in the face of the unprecedented tragedy experienced by world Jewry. Abba Hillel Silver, also a superb orator, was able to fill the vacuum Wise had left to his Right. He eventually replaced Wise as Chairman of the United Palestine Appeal (UPA), a fundraising agency which would become crucial. Yet Silver's voice, so eloquent in the cause of Zionism, was rarely heard on the question of rescue of those in the camps. And of course it was not heard by Roosevelt at all.

**U**rofsky maintains, probably correctly, that in the long run the things that Wise is held accountable for today, his failure to support a Jewish army, his insistence that the Riegner cable be confirmed by the State Department, and his general loyalty to the Roosevelt administration, made little difference. The failure to bring the Roosevelt administration to a more active rescue policy occurred not because Wise failed to take the suggestions of the Bergson group seriously or because he was indifferent to the fate of the Jews. It failed because American Jewry simply did not possess the political leverage to alter wartime priorities. American Jewry did not even come close to having the necessary power.

It was perhaps that realization and the perception that the world was actually indifferent to what was happening which accounts for Wise's usual buoyancy giving way to despair. His liberal humanistic worldview was based on the assumption that there existed a civilizing spirit in the world which could be mobilized when vulnerable minorities like the Jews were threatened. The New Deal probably served as supporting evidence of such an assumption for him. But by 1943, it was apparent that such a spirit did not play a part in the world, least of all in the Oval Office. His entire life strategy and work were placed in doubt by the crisis. If Wise had been less an activist and more contemplative some

clever analyst would conclude that the rabbi was undergoing an existential crisis. But Wise was never one to sit still long enough to permit himself the luxury of such a crisis. We must conclude that he was simply in despair at what the world was allowing to happen to his people. That is what his letters say. They tell us that he did care, that he knew what the Holocaust meant. He was distraught. Those who see him as callously indifferent simply have not taken the measure of the man.

He did make concessions when he realized that the key to maximizing Jewish power was unity. In the Zionist movement he tried to heal the split between the Brandeis and Weizmann factions. Despite his distrust of Weizmann he engineered a rapprochement with Lipsky, one of his lieutenants in America. During his 1940 visit Weizmann was presented with an honorary degree from the JIR. But no sooner had these old rifts been bridged when a chasm opened up with the Revisionists on the Right. In March, 1940, at a mass rally in Manhattan Center, Vladimir Jabotinsky again made known his strategy which called for the organization of a Jewish army. Thereafter, the cry for such an army was heralded by the Bergson group. Wise felt that the call for a Jewish army was particularly inappropriate for American Jewry but also sensed that the mainline Zionists had missed the boat in not requesting at least some symbolic Jewish military formations. When Rommel threatened the Yishuv in 1941 and 1942, Wise urged the Roosevelt administration to consider the necessity of arming and training Palestinian Jewry. He would have held out an olive branch even to the rambunctious Bergson group if only they would agree to work within the system. But that was precisely what they could not do since they were convinced that it was the system that did not respond adequately to the crisis. Similarly, a strong-willed Rabbi Silver, a supporter of Taft, would not accept the notion that the only path to salvation was with the Roosevelt administration. Organizations not in the Zionist orbit were reluctant to surrender their integrity for a unity they had never

known and were uncertain could be achieved. The crisis actually sundered the delicate strands binding the Jewish community. There was no one on the scene who could have bridged the gulf which included on the one side a radicalized Zionist movement and on the other the Council for American Jewry, which Lessing Rosenwald helped establish in 1943.

**T**he reality was that there existed no cohesive Jewish community in the thirties and forties. The lethal quality of Jewish politics was but a reflection of that. Ultimately it claimed even an old warrior like Wise. Wise was never innocent of generating strife. In the twenties and thirties, he was righteous in his insistence on the preeminence of the Zionist position, particularly of his cohort in it. We have seen that his penchant for establishing new organizations may have been directly related to his inability to dominate the old. Wise energized himself by collecting causes. He loved to be in the center of the battle and, incidentally, the headlines. He loved political theater. His masterful voice, his ability to turn a neat prophetic aphorism, conscious of his leonine head, made him a star. But in the wings were great new orators like Silver and the Bergson group who mustered great histrionic skills and would go to greater lengths to capture the headlines. Most important, political theater as practiced by Wise had become arcane. The President addressed audiences numbering in the millions over the air. The epic quality of the war itself made the specific plight of the Jews, in whose service Wise placed his magnificent oratory, seem insignificant. "The truth is," he once observed about the inability to break through to the American public, "in the midst of war, it is very difficult to make anyone see that we [Jews] are most particularly hurt. These wounds are deeper and sorer than any other wounds inflicted." It was not only Wise's dilemma but that of all rescue advocates.

Wise was intensely active in both the secular and Jewish political world. Merely to describe all his activities in

both realms makes for a very long book. In one sense *A Voice That Speaks For Justice* simply does not speak long enough to explain both worlds sufficiently. But sometimes a sense that what we are reading is only the surface stems from Urofsky's refusal to make choices. One wants him to abandon his characteristically smooth narrative style and the sequential handling of life episodes to chisel the abundant information he has available so that the real character of Stephen Wise emerges. A man is more than the sum total of his experiences. As it stands one is hard pressed to discover whether Urofsky has bitten off more than he can chew or he has not chewed sufficiently what he has bitten off. There is an unresolved element in the portrait of Wise he has drawn. The discerning reader will recognize some errors of fact and emphasis and also huge chunks of Urofsky's prior works on American Zionism and Brandeis.

**W**ho is the Stephen Wise who stood astride all major Jewish developments in the first half of 20th-century America? Urofsky's Wise emerges as a flawed but essentially human and competent leader. No Jewish leader in the 20th century can claim to be more deeply rooted and committed to the survival of Jewry. It is important to understand that because it makes the criticism leveled against him all the more puzzling. If this leader earns such opprobrium then how will the other less connected leaders, Proskauer, Monsky, Brandeis, Silver, Mack, Blaustein, Adler, Waldman, Warburg, Baerwald, and dozens of others fare? Those who have a need to play prosecutor before the bar of history, and such a penchant is surely in the air, can find them all guilty. But that arouses a suspicion that our judges are using a standard more suitable for angels than for men. When we note that they did not do enough, that they were not imaginative enough, that they indulged in petty quarrels while their world was burning, we are really describing Jewish life as it is lived in the Diaspora. It is as true of American Jewry today as it was then, except that the present crisis of Jewish survival is more subtle and not one involving bloody murder.

Perhaps after we are done drawing up the indictment but before the predictable flagellation we can develop a realization that the millions of Jewish victims and their leaders lived powerless in a world which had murder in its heart. For Wise that was a truth often too difficult to bear. How odd that those who today find him wanting are motivated by the same despair. ■

## **“Courage First and Intelligence Second”: The American Jewish Secular Elite, Roosevelt and the Failure to Rescue**

Henry L. Feingold

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Excerpt from phone conversation between Samuel Rosenman, Roosevelt's speechwriter and advisor, and Henry Morgenthau Jr., the Secretary of the Treasury. Morgenthau is inviting Rosenman to a meeting on January 15, the day before he plans to deliver a report entitled “A Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews,” to Roosevelt:

**Morgenthau Jr:** Well, look, if the only thing you are worrying about is publicity. I can guarantee you there will be no publicity.

**Rosenman:** All right. Well then certainly it doesn't make much difference who is there. If it is – if there were to be publicity, I think the choice of the three people is terrible. (i.e. Rosenman, Morgenthau and Ben Cohen, three Jews.)

**Morgenthau Jr:** Don't worry about the publicity. What I want is intelligence and courage – courage first and intelligence second.

**Rosenman:** All right. I can't get there at 9:30 because I am over in the bedroom, (FDR's) but I will come over as soon as I leave the bedroom.\*

The precariousness of the Jewish position in the world has lent a special urgency to the American Jewish political agenda. Its leaders customarily assume an advocacy role before the American seat of power. During the Roosevelt era, how effective it was in playing that role became literally a matter of life and death for millions of European Jews. In recent years a bitter debate has taken shape on the question of whether American Jewry did enough, whether it used the power available to it effectively. A reasoned resolution of that debate depends on making an accurate and fair judgment on the extent and nature of the power Jews exercised. That is no easy task. In American society determining the flow of power, who exercises it in relation to what interest, is problematic because power both public and private, is diffused and concealed. Sometimes its play in human affairs is altogether denied. Conventional wisdom has it that there was a considerable enhancement of Jewish power during the New Deal. Yet its business, made more urgent than ever before by the developments in Germany, did not go particularly

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\* January 13, 1944, 11:35 AM, H. Morgenthau Jr. Diaries, Book 693. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

well. Its power could not match the responsibility kinship assigned to it. It failed to project coherent demands on power holders. It discovered that it was not a community bound by a common interest but rather a subgroup composed of numerous contending factions. Yet it assigned to itself a task which it did not possess the power to accomplish and a humanitarian mission to the Roosevelt administration seemingly more fitting for a government of saints. That unwillingness to deal with politics and power as it is but only as it thinks it should be, is characteristic of American Jewish political culture. It complicated the situation at the time and is behind the current indictment. How did a fragmented disunited sub-culture, unaccustomed to even thinking of itself as a coherent political entity, assume such an awesome responsibility? How did it use its supposedly enhanced power? What conduits to the Oval Office were available to its leaders? How attuned was the occupant of that office to understand the special need for action? These questions serve as the focus of this essay.

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American Jewish political culture, the assumptions, style and habits it brought into the political arena, had a great affinity with the New Deal, especially the aspect of the welfare state.<sup>1</sup> But at the same time its heavy ideological freight made it ill-suited for the practice of practical politics. It never managed to deliver to Roosevelt a simple direct request, by one recognizable constituency, willing to reinforce its bargain through a "normal" political transaction. Roosevelt heard instead, when he bothered to listen, a cacophony of sound from a sub-group whose interior political life was so raucous as to be uncivil.

Yet despite deep internal dissension, Jews probably projected influence slightly above that of a minority constituting only 3.6% of the population.<sup>2</sup> It came reluctantly to the political arena and often found itself unwelcome, but once there it displayed an intense activism coupled with a high voting volume and formidable mastery of issues and a willingness to make its passionately held opinions known.<sup>3</sup> The activist period begins in earnest during the third

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1 Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The Political Behavior of American Jews* (Glencoe: 1965), pp. 99-107, 177-187.

2 That percentage (3.69) is taken from the government census of religious bodies conducted during the year 1936-37. It counted 4,641,000 Jews concentrated in the larger cities of the Eastern seaboard. See H.S. Linfield, "Jewish Communities in the United States," in the *American Jewish Yearbook*, Vol. 42 (1940), 216, 220.

3 For Jewish political activism see Alfred O. Hero Jr., *American Religious Groups*



period of American Jewish history which was dominated by the values and style of the immigrants from Eastern Europe.

After World War I the Jewish vote, whose existence was denied by "uptown" stewards, had twice veered off to third parties. It favored Debs with 24% of its vote in 1920 and Robert La Follette with 17% in 1924.<sup>4</sup> Its maverick character was reinforced by a strange non-parochial ethnicity. The Jewish vote did not seem to cohere ethnically. Rather than a candidate of flesh and blood, and incidental rewards, Jewish voters supported a "constellation of values."<sup>5</sup> When those values were joined with the feeling of kinship, as they were in the case of anti-Jewish depredations in Russia and Rumania, then the galvanization of Jewish energies and resources became an important factor in the local political arena. The Jewish political club did belatedly make its debut in the twenties but again ideology was important as ethnic loyalty. Nevertheless the advent of a second and third generation of American born Jews, descendants from Eastern European immigrants during the twenties and thirties, marks the historical juncture when American Jewry was fully prepared to practice grass roots American politics, albeit of their own distinctive variety.

They switched to the Democratic column where they remain to this day its most loyal ethnic constituency. Al Smith's "Brown Derby" campaign drew their enthusiastic support. Probably the preference for Smith was based more on the belief that the presidency ought to be accessible to all groups regardless of religious affiliation than it was to the fact that Belle Moskowitz and Joseph Proskauer as well as Judge Samuel Rosenman, all well known among Jewish voters, were prominent in the Smith entourage. It was that newly developed preference for the Democratic party on the national level which was transferred to Franklin Roosevelt in 1932.<sup>6</sup> It was, however, not a totally new relationship. In the "solemn referendum" election (1920) they had preferred him as Vice President, not only because the concept of a League of Nations was

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*View Foreign Policy: Trends in Rank and File Opinion 1937-1969* (Durham: 1973), pp. 21, 39; see also Stephen Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics* (Garden City: 1974); Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite*, (Boston: 1968), pp. 319-320.

4 Fuchs, *Political Behavior*, Ch. X; Albert J. Menendez, *Religion at the Polls* (Philadelphia: 1977), pp. 24-35, 115, 221-3 (tables 16-19).

5 Deborah D. Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: 1981), pp. 210-211. Raymond E. Wolfinger, "The Development and Persistence of Ethnic Voting," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 59 (December, 1965), 896-897.

6 Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York: 1956), pp. 36-37; Fuchs, *Political Behavior*, p. 66.

close to the heart of the Jewish voter but also the fact that Warren Harding had opposed the appointment of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. In the New York State gubernatorial election of 1928 Roosevelt received the first evidence of the peculiar attraction he had for the Jewish voter. They voted for him in greater numbers than they did for his Republican Jewish opponent, Albert Ottinger, who paradoxically was compelled to spend much energy in defending himself against the charge that he was a "bad" Jew. By 1930 the switch to the Democratic party was complete. Six of the eight Jews elected to Congress were Democrats, a complete reversal of the election of 1920 when ten out of the eleven Jews elected to Congress were Republican.<sup>7</sup>

The most prominent characteristic of the American Jewish political persona is its concern for the welfare of Jewish communities abroad, which can be traced back to Colonial times. Its tilt outward, as if to hear the cry of its brethren, precedes the establishment of the Zionist consensus in the late 1930's. Since the Damascus Blood Libel (1840) they had been requesting statements of intercession from the federal government. These had been routinely formulated when anti-Jewish depredations occurred in the Swiss Cantons, in Rumania and in Russia. Extraordinary incidents such as the Dreyfus Affair, (1894) in France and the Kishinev pogrom (1903) in Russia triggered strident demands for action from the Jewish masses in America.<sup>8</sup> It was discovered that they could be assuaged by philo-Semitic diplomatic despatches which were publicized in Jewish population centers. Yet the effect such diplomatic gestures had in ameliorating the conditions of Jews abroad, especially if they were communities within nations that were immune to moral suasion, was not significant. There developed well before the Roosevelt era a kind of ritual which saw Jewish leaders requesting a supporting gesture which was granted by the administration in power because it entailed no political price while it earned political

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7 James M. Burns, *Roosevelt, The Lion and the Fox* (New York: 1956), p. 104; Mark R. Levy and Michael S. Kramer, *The Ethnic Factor: How American Minorities Decide Elections* (New York: 1973), p. 103. The eleventh was a Socialist.

8 Cyrus Adler and Aaron Margalith, *With Firmness in the Right, American Diplomatic Action Affecting Jews, 1840-1945* (New York: 1977); Egal Feldman, *The Dreyfus Affair and the American Conscience, 1845-1906* (Detroit: 1981); Naomi Cohen, *Not Free To Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: 1972); Louis L. Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lawrence: 1964); Henry L. Feingold, "American Power and Jewish Interest in Foreign Affairs," in *A Midrash on American Jewish History*, (Albany: 1982); Gary D. Best, *American Jewish Leaders and the Jewish Problem in Eastern Europe, 1890-1914* (New York: 1982). Best generally overestimates the role of Jewish powerholders.

points. In developing a "politics of gestures," Franklin Roosevelt was adhering to a well established precedent.<sup>9</sup> It was the nature of the crisis faced by Jewry during World War II which makes gestures such as the calling of the refugee conference at Evian and the conference in inaccessible Bermuda seem cruelly inappropriate.

The concern for the security and welfare of Jewish communities abroad is part of a constellation of interests which gave Jews a special concern for foreign relations. In the 1930's that interest was reflected in a consistently interventionist posture which distinguished it from other hyphenate groups. It was undoubtedly more true of the Jewish rank and file than its opinion leader intellectuals, many of whom had their confidence in the system shaken to the core by the Depression and were inclined to pacifism in the international arena. Generally, however, they were earlier than other groups to perceive Hitler as a dire threat to world peace. Jews opposed the Ludlow Amendment and the Neutrality Laws, they favored aiding the Spanish loyalists, they considered the appeasement at Munich a grave miscalculation, they favored the Destroyer-Bases deal (September, 1940) with London, they favored the concept of Lend Lease (February, 1941) and convoying the leased war equipment.<sup>10</sup> The strong interventionist posture was undoubtedly related to the special ordeal experienced by German Jewry but it transcended it as well. It was strongly linked to a preexisting penchant for universalist and humanitarian doctrines which abhorred tyrannies such as the kind developed in Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

Yet it is easy to make too much of the defining interventionist stance of American Jewry. Everyone of the issues of the "great debate" drew a sizable Jewish minority which favored the isolationist position.<sup>12</sup> In 1937, a slim majority of Jews actually opposed the

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9 The phrase is used first in the author's *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New York: 1980), Ch. 2; Similarly Senator Tydings of Maryland introduced on January 8, 1934, a resolution calling for the Senate and the President to express "surprise and pain" at German treatment of Jews and to restore their civil rights. See *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2d session, LXVIII, Part I, p. 176. The State Department opposed the resolution and it was never reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. For a full examination of executive manipulation of private pressure groups see Robert C. Hildebrand, *Power and People, Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921* (Chapel Hill: 1981).

10 Hero, *American Religious Groups*, see polls of American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO), pp. 26, 145-146, 279-284. They were, however, clearly the strongest constituency to favor welfare state measures, pp. 144, 466.

11 Fuchs, *Political Behavior*, pp. 171-177.

12 Hero, *American Religious Groups*, pp. 279-284. The majority which favored the Loyalists was a narrow one. After the fall of France in June 1940, 32% of the

admission of refugees.<sup>13</sup> It is in fact difficult to draw a clear cut conclusion from the available poll data of the thirties because of the small size of the Jewish sample and because repeatedly the Jewish position on any issue is attained by the thinnest of margins.<sup>14</sup> Jewish interventionism, such as it was, may have been far more a passion among Jewish spokesmen than a reality among the Jewish rank and file. Then, as today, it was possible, in the absence of hierarchy in the Jewish community, for self-appointed spokesmen to preempt the Jewish voice.

If Jews were distinguishable in the urban ethnic coalition of which they had become part, it was for their unerring support of the welfare state concept. It bore some remote resemblance to their social democratic proclivities. Some of its programs in social security, cheap housing, rights of organized labor were previewed by the Jewish labor movement. The American Labor Party, founded and funded by David Dubinsky of the ILGWU, viewed itself as "the permanent New Deal party of our country."<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, while Jews were loyal to Roosevelt because of his domestic program, it would be in the area of foreign policy where they most required some evidence of concern. The conspicuous absence of evidence of concern did not seriously interrupt the developing Jewish "love affair" with Roosevelt. He had received approximately 80% of the Jewish vote when he ran for governor in 1928. It rose to 83% in the presidential election of 1932. After 1936, when the ardor of the hyphenate vote began to wane, Jewish support reached new plateaus.<sup>16</sup> At least one explanation for such loyalty is that at the outset Jews shared with other Americans a preoccupation with the domestic crisis which they only reluctantly abandoned for the menacing events in Europe and the Far East. Another is that before 1939 American Jewry in fact "grossly underestimated" the length to which anti-Semitism would be carried by the Nazis.<sup>17</sup> They were

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Jews questioned felt it was more important to stay out of the war than to help Britain. (AIPO, September 30, 1940, p. 283). After the initial defeat of the Soviet army 46% of Jews questioned disapproved convoying ships to Britain (AIPO, September 9, 1940, p. 284).

13 See David Brody, "American Jewry, the Refugees and Immigration Restriction, 1932-1942," *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society (PAJHS)*, Vol. XLV (June, 1956), 219-247.

14 Hero, *American Religious Groups*, pp. 26, 279-284.

15 Moore, *At Home*, p. 23.

16 Menendez, *Religion*, p. 215; Werner Cohn, "The Politics of American Jews," in Marshall Sklare ed., *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (New York: 1958); Lawrence Fuchs, "American Jews and the Presidential Vote," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 49 (1955), 385-401; Burns, *Lion and Fox*, p. 104.

17 Hero, *American Religious Groups*, p. 202.

faced with their own credibility problem after 1939 as well. It proved difficult to fathom the difference between "normal" anti-Semitism and the murderous biological anti-Semitism behind the "final solution." Roosevelt was fully informed during the election of 1940, of the increased solidity of Jewish support and was grateful for it.<sup>18</sup> But from a political point of view that loyalty, the certain knowledge that the Jewish vote was his, diminished the leverage of Jewish leaders who could not threaten removal of the Jewish vote. He did not have to transact business with the Jews. The Jewish "love affair" with Roosevelt was from the outset fated to be unrequited. But we shall learn presently that all who unstintingly loved Roosevelt, suffered a similar fate.

Yet the thought that there was something special in the American Jewish relationship to Roosevelt, which ironically fed both the anti-Semitic and the Jewish imagination, had some basis in fact. For Roosevelt, Jewish loyalty may have been heartening but it also entailed liabilities since Jews were not winning medals for popularity during the thirties while at the same time Nazi machinations created a need to take measures requiring tampering with the sacrosanct immigration laws during the Depression. Yet if Roosevelt would usually not assume the political risk involved, Washington did become a welcome place for the formally educated generation of Jews which made their debut in the twenties. The "Jew Deal" label which haunted the Roosevelt administration was based partly on the appearance of these Jews in the upper echelons of the federal civil service where they combined with elite groups of Jews who emerged at the top of other power centers, the law, the university, organized labor, journalism, politics, and also found their way to the capitol. For some it might have seemed as if Jews were inundating the Roosevelt administration. Adlai Stevenson, then a young lawyer in Washington and one day destined to be idealized by Jewish voters in a manner reminiscent of Roosevelt, vented his resentment: "There is a little feeling that the Jews are getting too prominent and many of them are autocratic," he informed a friend.<sup>19</sup>

Of these bridging elites the law was in fact the most conspicuous. Frozen out of prestigious law firms to which merit as reflected in class rank entitled them, Jewish lawyers found employment in the

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18 Burns, *Lion and Fox*, pp. 453-455.

19 Quoted in Jerold S. Auerbach, *Unequal Justice, Lawyers and Social Change in Modern America* (New York: 1976), p. 188. Under Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, for example, only 8 of the 207 federal judges appointed were Jewish. The figure rose considerably under Roosevelt and even more under Truman but Catholics, not Jews, received the lion's share of federal judicial appointments. See Lubell, *Future*, pp. 83-84.

new regulatory agencies. From these citadels they were often called upon to do battle with their counterparts in the prestigious law firms of the private sector who found their religious and class qualifications more suitable. By the Spring of 1936, much to the chagrin of Felix Frankfurter, the eight Jewish editors of the Harvard Law Review could not find positions in private law firms. The New Deal thus became an arena for a silent struggle between outsiders and insiders which contributed fuel to the burning resentment of the Roosevelt haters.<sup>20</sup>

A second link to the Roosevelt administration was anchored in the community of scientists and technocrats whose ranks had been penetrated by Jews in the twenties and then supplemented in the thirties by refugee scientists many of whom were Jewish.<sup>21</sup> Within American Jewry evidence that the prestige of scientists had begun to overshadow that of orator-rabbis was manifest in the enthusiastic reception given to Chaim Weizmann and Albert Einstein during their whirlwind tour in April, 1921. For the Jewish community the refugee scientists, armed with a first-hand knowledge of the dangers of National Socialism, were able to serve as a balance against the powerful influence of the peace movement among Jewish intellectuals. For the Roosevelt administration their power stemmed from their expertise especially in theoretical physics which would soon become a cardinal factor in American security. Their role in the Manhattan project was acknowledged in the Smyth report in 1946.<sup>22</sup>

Social work which had become a favorite profession chosen by committed young Jews and upper class Protestants alike formed yet another link to the Administration. They possessed access to the

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20 Michael F. Parrish, *Felix Frankfurter and his Time: The Reform Years* (New York: 1982), p. 229 ("the New Deal was a 'lawyers deal'"); Auerbach, *Unequal Justice*, pp. 159, 184-189; "From Rags to Riches: The Legal Profession, Social Mobility and the American Jewish Experience," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXVI (December, 1976), 249-284. See also John W. Johnson, *American Legal Culture, 1908-1940* (Westport: 1981), pp. xi, 185 for the triumph of the socially conscious Brandeis style brief; also Peter H. Irons, *New Deal Lawyers* (Princeton: 1982).

21 Daniel J. Kevles, *The Physicists: The History of A Scientific Community in Modern America* (New York: 1979), pp. 212-221, 278-279, 288; Donald Fleming and Bernard Baylin, eds., *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960* (Cambridge: 1968); Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration From Europe 1930-1941* (Chicago: 1968); Stephen Duggan and Betty Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning, The Story of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars* (New York: 1948); Abraham Flexner, *I Remember* (New York: 1940).

22 Henry DeWolf Smyth, *Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes* (Princeton: 1964).

Oval Office through fellow professionals like Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Hopkins and Frances Perkins and formed in effect a group with administrative skills with a direct link to the Jewish "masses and classes."<sup>23</sup> Similarly the self-conscious, largely Jewish, New York intellectual community was a Jewish power source, not because they pressed for Jewish causes. They were in fact mostly unable to recognize a Jewish interest apart from that of humanity at large. But they did have power as opinion leaders and those opinions were resonated first through the Jewish community which, we have noted, took ideas very seriously. The ideational support of the New Deal, the explanation of the Welfare State and finding a rationale for Roosevelt's often inconsistent countercyclical measures, emanated in some measure from the New York intellectual community.<sup>24</sup>

Yet despite the presence of Jewish lawyers in government and the influence of Jewish opinion leaders, it is difficult to find evidence of actual enhancement of Jewish power. The Jews who made their way to Washington or other power centers usually had little relationship to the Jewish enterprise. Their success was a tribute to private drive and talent. They did not view themselves as advocates of specifically Jewish causes and many undoubtedly would have been embarrassed to do so. Moreover the influence of these "bridging elites," such as it was, was projected outside the political process to which Roosevelt was attuned.

The appearance of a special consonance between American Jewry and Roosevelt may stem from the fact that Jews strongly favored what the Roosevelt administration wanted for "relief, recovery and reform." Undoubtedly many believed automatically that the reverse was true as well, that the Administration supported special Jewish

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23 Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work As A Career* (New York: 1969); Jacob Fisher, *The Response of Social Work to the Depression* (Boston: 1980).

24 They are best described in Irving Howe's *Decline of the New* (New York: 1970); also *World of Our Fathers* (New York: 1976), pp. 598-603; Lewis S. Feuer, "The Stages in the Social History of Jewish Professors in American Colleges and Universities," in *American Jewish History*, LXXI (June, 1982); Seymour M. Lipset and Everett C. Ladd, Jr., "Jewish Academics in the United States: Their Achievement, Culture and Politics," *AJYB* (1971); Seymour M. Lipset and Richard B. Dobson, "The Intellectual As Critic and Rebel With Special Reference to the United States and the Soviet Union," in *Daedalus*, Vol. 101 (Summer, 1972), 137-198; Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot: Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education* (New York: 1974); Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968); Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Imagination of Disaster: The Response of American Jewish Intellectuals to Totalitarianism," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. XLII, (Winter, 1980), 1-20.

needs. But in the case of the admission of Jewish refugees such support was not forthcoming. Roosevelt refused to publicly endorse the Wagner-Rogers bill which would have admitted 20,000 refugee children in 1939 and 1940, outside the quota system. Public opinion polls showed that 61% of Americans were opposed to such an exemption.<sup>25</sup> Administration support entailed a political price Roosevelt was unwilling to pay. He would tolerate his wife favoring the measure but the only administration person who spoke in favor at the congressional hearings was Katherine Lenroot, chief of the Labor Department's Children's Bureau. The bill was amended to death in committee.<sup>26</sup> The incident is important because it was one of the few examples we possess which shows concretely what Roosevelt actually was willing to do for refugees. It also serves as a paradigm of the role of Jewish leadership and organizations. They were divided, uncertain and fearful of domestic anti-Semitism. The brunt of support for the measure was born by non-Jewish agencies.<sup>27</sup> The elaborate apparatus created by Louis Howe which monitored and sometimes deeply intruded into the politics of the ethnic constituencies were designed to garner votes, not to allay suffering.

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Priding himself on the number of advisors of his faith near the seat of power, the average Jewish voter knew little of the complexities of ethnic politics. He assumed automatically that such a presence meant an enhancement of Jewish influence. He was unaware that the price of such political attainment was often surrender of ethnic and religious identity. That trade-off was marked in all the Jews in Roosevelt's entourage. Judge Samuel Rosenman, a politically astute legal expert with a talent for the spoken word, whom Roosevelt picked up from Al Smith's circle, viewed his Jewishness primarily in denominational terms. Like many such Jews he associated himself with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) where he sometimes played a leading role.<sup>28</sup> His interest in fighting anti-

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25 Charles H. Stember and others, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: 1966), p. 149.

26 *Congressional Record*, 76th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 85, pp. 1457-1458, 2338-2341; David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (Amherst: 1968), pp. 78, 96-97, 244; Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 149-153.

27 With the exception of two major components of the Jewish Labor Committee, the ILGWU and the ACWA, Jewish agencies preferred to let sectarian agencies take the lead. See *New York Times*, November 10, 1939, p. 9; the rank and file donated a day's pay to the refugee cause and the bill itself was endorsed by the Executive Council of the AF of L and the CIO, *New York Times*, February 9, 1939, p. 5.

28 Samuel Rosenman, *Working With Roosevelt* (New York: 1952); Samuel B.



Semitism led him to arrange for a special chair in human relations to be endowed at Newark University. The occupant would monitor anti-immigration sentiment in textbooks and keep a watchful eye on German exchange students and professors.<sup>29</sup> His view, like those of the leaders of the American Jewish Committee, was that long range changes in consciousness through education offered the best strategy for the Jewish community. But in the short-range crisis, the admission of refugees, the furnishing of resettlement havens elsewhere, and virtually every other rescue measure advocated by Jewish leaders was opposed by Rosenman. By his own account he never broached Roosevelt directly on any matters pertaining to Judaism or the Jewish situation and observed that the President himself evinced little interest in Jewish matters.<sup>30</sup>

Most resembling Rosenman in background and career was Joseph Proskauer who became head of the American Jewish Committee in 1943 and thereby a leader of the Jewish community, if not a prominent Jew near Roosevelt. Like Rosenman he began his political career as a supporter of Al Smith but could not manage the transition to Roosevelt. Born in Mobile in 1877, Proskauer bore his religion as a "persistent torment." His biography speaks of a profound sense of alienation he experienced as a youth in the almost total Christian environment of Mobile.<sup>31</sup> Smith appointed him to the New York State Supreme Court and he retained his political loyalty to his mentor, sharing fully his estrangement from the Roosevelt administration. So pronounced did that animus become that Proskauer was one of the rare prominent Jews to join the Liberty League. Undoubtedly he would have become Solicitor General had Smith become president; as it was he became President of the AJC

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Hand, *Counsel and Advise: A Political Biography of Samuel I. Rosenman* (New York: 1981); See also oral history interviews, Wiener Library, American Jewish Committee.

29 Cohen, *Not Free*, p. 198.

30 Although Rosenman eventually contributed to the establishment of the War Refugee Board he continued to be reluctant to broach the refugee and rescue issue to Roosevelt directly. See Transcription of telephone conversation, Morgenthau and Rosenman, January 13, 1944, 11:35 AM, Morgenthau Diaries, Book 693, Hyde Park, New York; "The Refugee Run Around," *Colliers*, November 1, 1947, p. 65; See also FDRL/PPF 4, Rosenman memorandum to FDR, December 5, 1938 on his pessimism regarding mass resettlement of Jews in Latin America and elsewhere; FDRL/OF 318, Rosenman to Myron Taylor, November 23, 1938 on his opposition to the relaxation of the quota system. See also Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 102-103.

31 Joseph Proskauer, *A Segment Of My Time* (New York: 1950), pp. 12-13; Louis M. Hacker and Mark D. Hirsch, *Joseph M. Proskauer: His Life and Time* (Mobile: 1978).

in 1943. A key Jewish leader thus never had access to the Oval Office and confined his government contacts to the State Department which was sensed by Jews at large, and within the government, to be anti-Semitic. But Proskauer, who insisted that he was more American than Jewish and who required the approval of non-Jews found suitable the role of mediator between the Department and the organized Jewish community. His assumption of a leading post in the Jewish community seems in retrospect to be a strange misalliance of a man and the times. Proskauer had early involved himself in Jewish philanthropy and social work among the Jewish immigrant poor but there was little early evidence that a leadership position in the Jewish community would interest him. He occupied seats on various local Jewish agency directorships but his was to be a public career. He was a member of the remnant of "uptown" Jews who continued to be associated with the AJC. He was staunchly anti-Zionist, when that had become the binding consensus of American Jewry, and anti-New Deal when most Jews were passionate advocates of the welfare state concept. Even had access to the Oval Office been available to him it is likely that Proskauer would have advocated policies totally out of touch with the deepest concerns of the committed Jewish community. For him activist rabbis such as Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver, who were far closer to the heart of American Jewry, seemed inappropriate.<sup>32</sup> He worried about the international Zionist conspiracy and the question of dual loyalty when Louis Brandeis had solved these vexing problems for most Jews in the 1920's. His inability to see beyond his own affluence and social position made the world of the descendants of the Eastern European immigrants, despite his early work in settlement houses, *terra incognita* for him. He never really fully fathomed the Jewish plight during the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup> Had he done so he might have thought much more about leading the AJC out of the American Jewish Conference in October, 1943. There was, of course, ample cause for doing so and some will maintain that the organizational integrity of the agency demanded it. But that step, perhaps more than most others, forever foiled the possibility of a unified coherent community emerging during the crisis.

In his mind-fix and background, Proskauer resembled much more those Jews who earned a place near Roosevelt for renown earned in the law, the university, the labor movement, journalism, finance or business. Felix Frankfurter, who made his debut in

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32 Jerold S. Auerbach, "Joseph M. Proskauer: American Court Jew," in *American Jewish History* Vol. LXIX (September, 1979), 103-114, 115.

33 *Ibid.*

Washington in 1906 and whose reputation was made as a professor of law at Harvard University was among the most prominent of these power-holders. On the surface his early recruitment into the American Zionist movement by Louis Brandeis, his mentor, gave him some credentials as a committed Jew. At the Versailles negotiations he played a crucial role in moving the Zionist program forward.<sup>34</sup> Yet so bifurcated was his life that Zionism, for most Jews the most contemporary expression of Jewish identity, did not interfere with enthusiastic assimilationism. Zionism he observed helped him get "a fresh psychological relationship to other Jews and Gentiles."<sup>35</sup> Yet it was never more than a part-time interest. His main energies and talents were freely and enthusiastically expended in matching talent, especially talent in the law, with those who held power. In the Roosevelt administration it would become a crucially important area of politics.

But to serve as an agent for the Jews to Roosevelt, or Roosevelt's Jew, was too confining a role, especially for someone who felt himself more than merely ethnic. He was more circumspect than Brandeis in using his influence for purely Jewish causes. It might be that philosophically his conservative notion of the limits of government interest caused him to reject the idea that the Roosevelt administration should preoccupy itself with a Jewish community in Germany whose members were not American citizens and not its legal responsibility. Withal, had rescue advocates succeeded in mobilizing Frankfurter's energy and influence in the rescue cause, more might have been achieved. As in the case of the appointment of Brandeis to the Supreme court in 1916, what was celebrated as a great Jewish victory in fact deprived Jews of a potential influence wielder since, even more than Brandeis, Frankfurter felt that maintaining a direct link to the Jewish community would be impolitic. He probably recalled that the maintenance of an even behind-the-scenes leadership by Brandeis of the Zionist movement led to bitter charges of impropriety by Judah Magnes and the *New York Times*. It literally drove Brandeis out of direct Jewish political activity.<sup>36</sup> Predictably no

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34 Michael E. Parrish, *Felix Frankfurter and his Times, The Reform Years* (New York: 1982), pp. 129-149; Bruce A. Murphy, *The Brandeis Frankfurter Connection, The Secret Political Activities of the Two Supreme Court Justices* (New York: 1982); H.N. Hirsch, *The Enigma of Felix Frankfurter* (New York: 1981); Joseph P. Lash ed., *From The Diaries of Felix Frankfurter* (New York: 1975); Harlan B. Phillips ed., *Felix Frankfurter Reminiscences* (New York: 1960).

35 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, p. 132.

36 J.L. Magnes to Brandeis, July 25, 1916 in Arthur A. Goren, ed., *Dissenter in Zion, From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes* (Cambridge: 1982), pp. 22, 154-155, document #24; see also Yonatan Shapiro, *Leadership of the American Zion-*

such apprehensions are in evidence when it came to playing his non-ethnic role in relation to the President. After his appointment he continued to offer advice, solicited and unsolicited, to help with speech writing and to point out the fine points of the law.<sup>37</sup>

For Frankfurter it must have been something of an irony that his far-flung influence made him a target for anti-Semitic barbs. Its persistence during the Roosevelt era may have been caused by the mystery regarding the source of his influence since he did not, until his appointment to the Court, have an official position. William Randolph Hearst called him "the Iago of the Administration" and Hugh Johnson's image of a behind-the-scenes operator with octopus like tentacles was uncomfortably close to a classic anti-Semitic portrait dating back to the Populists.<sup>38</sup> Similarly *Fortune Magazine* singled him out as "the most influential single individual in the United States." He was likened to Rasputin. Calvert Magruder detected "oriental guile" while Raymond Moley saw a "Patriarchal sorcerer."<sup>39</sup>

For all the suggestions of anti-Semitism, Frankfurter's influence did not stem from Jewish sources. Arthur Hayes Sulzberger, in fact, opposed his appointment to the court, fearing it would stimulate anti-Semitism. It came from an entirely new source. Frankfurter, who had an unerring instinct for recognizing talent, became its merchandizer and broker. Legal skills, power to communicate, knowledge of the intricacy of government administration had become crucial in the management of the public business. Frankfurter, using the bright young men of the Harvard Law School, became an enabler through this access to a rare pool of high talent. Over a period of years he built up a network of bright young lawyers, Frankfurter's "happy hot dogs," in many of the agencies of the administration. It further enhanced his influence, which was in fact considerable, simply by virtue of the number of people he knew in high places. Two of his "hot dogs," Tom Corcoran and Ben Cohen, became influential power wielders in their own right. In the Spring of 1935 both had become permanent features in the White House.

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*ist Organization, 1887-1930* (Urbana: 1971), pp. 94-96; Parrish, *Frankfurter*, pp. 131-132, 242. In 1938 Hugh Johnson again brought up the impropriety charge against Brandeis. Frankfurter insisted upon and received a written apology. Max Freedman, ed., *Roosevelt and Frankfurter: Their Correspondence, 1928-1945* (Boston: 1967), p. 482.

37 Rosenman, *Roosevelt*, p. 173

38 Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 310.

39 Quoted in Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 303; Parrish, *Frankfurter*, pp. 220-221. See Lash, *Diaries of Frankfurter*, p. 64 for Sulzberger's opposition to court appointment.

To the team of Frankfurter, Cohen and Corcoran is attributed the legislative mechanics of the Social Security Act of 1935, the Public Utility Holding Company Act and several revenue measures. Frankfurter was not only strategically placed to bring such talent and skills to the Roosevelt administration; he was himself such a talent, one with sufficient insight to perceive how important it had become.

One of the Harvard boys of high-station whom Frankfurter had known since 1914 was Franklin Roosevelt. Always on the lookout for "comers," Frankfurter befriended the tall young Assistant Secretary of the Navy, who carried the famous Roosevelt name when both served in the Wilson administration. The strands were picked up again after Roosevelt's impressive victory in the 1928 gubernatorial race in New York State. That renewal of a mere acquaintanceship became the basis of one of those leader-advisor relationships which dot the pages of American history.<sup>40</sup> For Roosevelt it meant contact with one of the keenest, most engaged minds in the America of the thirties and for Frankfurter it filled some special need to be near power.

Yet Frankfurter's was never an exclusive access to the President. His influence was at times hotly contended by the Columbia University based "brain trust."<sup>41</sup> They distrusted him for personal reasons, because he represented Harvard University and, in the case of his former student Adolph Berle Jr., Frankfurter was convinced, for the fact that he was Jewish.<sup>42</sup> Frankfurter did join talent and brains to power but that was hardly a Jewish enterprise. The few Jews for whom he attained positions were good lawyers who happened to be Jewish. Moreover, as his fallout with Corcoran indicates, Frankfurter could not hope to enlist his network of "hot dogs" in all causes of his choosing, much less Jewish ones. What he did do was to serve as a conduit to bring newly found talent to power holders.

From the Jewish vantage Frankfurter's influence and access to the Oval Office made little difference. Even when it involved personal matters, Frankfurter rarely used that influence to further a Jewish interest. When he received news that his aged uncle, who

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40 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, p. 20. The comparison made is with Roger Taney and Andrew Jackson, Will Herndon and Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House. The difference is that Frankfurter never had, nor was given by Roosevelt, that sense of exclusivity and mutual trust.

41 Raymond Moley, *After Seven Years* (New York: 1939); Parrish, *Frankfurter*, pp. 204-205, 218; on the workings of the "brain trust" see Eliot A. Rosen, *Hoover, Roosevelt and the Brain Trust* (New York: 1977).

42 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, p. 206; James E. Sargent, *Roosevelt and The Hundred Days: Struggle For the Early New Deal*, (New York: 1980).

held a high position with the national library in Vienna, had been incarcerated, Frankfurter turned, not to Roosevelt, but to Lady Astor for help.<sup>43</sup> The Zionist cause was of course a special interest but even here Frankfurter spoke to the President in very general terms. He rarely accompanied Zionist delegations to the Oval Office even while he may have laid the groundwork for the visit. That occurred in June, 1942 when he forwarded a memorandum from David Ben Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency, to the President with a cover letter which characterized Ben Gurion as a person "in whom Isaiah (Brandeis) had the greatest confidence."<sup>44</sup> Yet the note which acknowledged the "smallness" of the Palestine problem and spoke of its symbolic importance, was self-effacing.<sup>45</sup> The request was denied by a busy and somewhat exasperated Roosevelt. Later Frankfurter was informed by Roosevelt of the growing opposition to Zionism in the State Department and the military, and Frankfurter meekly requested permission to pass this news on to Ben Gurion and Weizmann. Roosevelt wanted to freeze the Palestine question until after the war.<sup>46</sup> "He also asked me to tell you," states the prefacing note from Grace Tully, "that quite frankly in the present situation in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Arabia he feels that the less said by everybody of all creeds, the better."<sup>47</sup> On matters of Jewish concern Frankfurter learned, it was better to tread softly and approach the President indirectly. As early as October, 1933 his memorandum, describing the deterioration of conditions in Germany, which proposed that Roosevelt broadcast directly to the German people, observed that "the significance of Hitlerism far transcends ferocious anti-Semitism and fanatical racism."<sup>48</sup> The flow of letters designed to keep Roosevelt apprised of the deterioration of civility mentioned the depredations against the Jews within the general context of the Nazi threat. He forwarded a list prepared for the American Jewish Committee which carefully catalogued precedents for American diplomatic intercession in relation to anti-Semitism.<sup>49</sup> In turn the White House staff passed on to him such

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43 Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, pp. 474-475. A didactic response, detached and civil, was written to Lady Nancy Lady Astor who accused Jews of controlling American advertising. (Frankfurter to Astor, June 2, 1938.)

44 Frankfurter to Roosevelt, June 6, 1942 in Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, pp. 451, 611.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 661.

47 Tully to Frankfurter, July 17, 1942, Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, 667.

48 Frankfurter to Roosevelt, October 17, 1933, Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 164.

49 Max J. Kohler, *The United States and German-Jewish Persecution: Precedents*

random information on anti-Semitic activity in America as came to the Oval Office. Sometimes the exchange assumed a lighter tone. When Frankfurter informed Roosevelt that a refugee who had found a haven in Palestine had named his child Franklin Delano, the President requested that it be put in writing since it was "the greatest compliment I ever got."<sup>50</sup> It was the sort of light banter which the President preferred.

His approach to power was less confrontational than that of his mentor, Brandeis, who supported Frankfurter's enterprise with a monthly subsidy because he understood that his disciple's far flung contacts yielded a greater influence in party politics.<sup>51</sup> Moreover Frankfurter had a zest for public life which the almost reclusive Brandeis did not share. It was Frankfurter who linked Brandeis to Roosevelt in 1928 forming a relationship which lasted until the Justice's death. Frankfurter revered Brandeis as a "moral preceptor" but insisted to Raymond Moley that he was not the voice of Brandeis in politics. It was the Justice's austere morality he admired.<sup>52</sup> The difference in approach surfaced during the ill-starred court-packing scheme. To Roosevelt's chagrin, Brandeis made his opposition public while the more politic Frankfurter kept his position private.<sup>53</sup> His very connectedness made a clear-cut stand impossible. Tom Corcoran was one of the conceivers of the court-packing scheme and later was involved in a tampering designed to bring Frankfurter to the Court by encouraging the retirement of "Isaiah." While the bond between Brandeis and Frankfurter was originally forged by a common concern for Zionism during the Roosevelt era

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for *Popular and Government Action* and *The Jews in Nazi Germany: The Factual Record of Their Persecution by the National Socialists*, both reports prepared for the American Jewish Committee. See Frankfurter cable to Roosevelt, February 20, 1934 regarding Nazi depredations in Austria. Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 194.

50 Roosevelt to Frankfurter, October 31, 1942, Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 678.

51 Between 1916 and 1938 Brandeis gave Frankfurter circa \$50,000 to cover incidental expenses. Murphy, *Brandeis-Frankfurter*; Parrish, *Frankfurter*, p. 6, 224, 248. On the differences in economic approach to the New Deal see Nelson L. Dawson, *Louis D. Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter and the New Deal* (Hamden: 1980).

52 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, 210; Paul A. Freund, "Justice Brandeis: A Law Clerk's Remembrance," in *American Jewish History* Vol. LXVIII (September 1978), 7-17; Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, 25, 39, 222, Frankfurter to Roosevelt, November 21, 1928, Roosevelt to Frankfurter, June 11, 1934. It was Frankfurter who was instrumental in bringing Roosevelt and Brandeis together in 1928 and convincing Roosevelt that "old Isaiah" was a "great soul."

53 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, pp. 267-274.

their transactions were overwhelmingly concerned with legislation and policies pertaining to American society and government. There was very little of specific Jewish concern in it.

The notion of a coherent Jewish interest in the minds of those Jews close to Roosevelt, the kind of Jewish conspiracy so central to the anti-Semitic imagination, is belied by Frankfurter's troubled relation to another Jew close to Roosevelt, Henry Morgenthau Jr. There was a mutual feeling of antipathy between the two men. Frankfurter was sensitive to the fact that in terms of class, a certain mercantile patricianism and even neighborhood proximity, Morgenthau was naturally preferable to Roosevelt. The President had known Morgenthau's father who carried out certain delicate diplomatic missions for Wilson. In fact Frankfurter never forgot the desperate mission he and Chaim Weizmann undertook in 1917 to dissuade the fame-seeking Morgenthau Sr., from trying to detach Turkey from the Central Powers so that a separate peace with the Allies could be achieved.<sup>54</sup> For the Zionists the possible success of such a mission would have spelled disaster since the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a promise embodied in the Balfour Declaration, required the demise of the "sick man of Europe."

Perhaps Frankfurter was transferring to the son an animus first directed at the father. But beneath it all it was this sense that Morgenthau's position was unearned by merit which most nettled. He felt that the Secretary of the Treasury was a "stupid bootlick" who was ashamed of his Jewishness and who above all did not want to be associated with "liberal" Jews.<sup>55</sup> He was unimpressed with the caliber of assistants Morgenthau surrounded himself after ousting Dean Acheson and Tom Corcoran, two of the Harvard men he had placed in the Treasury. He was also well aware that Morgenthau had pushed for the appointment of James Landis for the vacant seat left by Cardozo's death. Above all Frankfurter could not forgive Morgenthau's apparently easy glide to high position through an inside connection.<sup>56</sup> That same snobbishness limited Frankfurter's usefulness to the Jewish community. Stephen Wise was occasionally able to use Frankfurter to gain access to Roosevelt but Jews of lesser stature were unceremoniously dismissed. Frankfurter preferred "elevated messengers." Except for Morris Cohen, who was his roommate at Harvard, he retained few contacts with other

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54 Phillips, *Frankfurter Reminiscences*, pp. 145ff.

55 Parrish, *Frankfurter*, pp. 142, 224, 248.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 142. Of Morgenthau Sr., Frankfurter observed, "take base metal, stamp on it the seal of government, call it an ambassador and you can never drive it out of circulation."



talented sons of Central and East European immigrants whose background and culture he once shared, but now preferred to forget.<sup>57</sup> In that too he differed sharply from Brandeis who devoted much energy to familiarize himself with a religious culture he regretfully never knew.

As with other Jews near Roosevelt, the heart of the dilemma concerning Frankfurter pertains to his Jewishness. Was there a possibility of fully enlisting Frankfurter and other Jews in high position in the urgent rescue work required to save European Jewry? Could they recognize and support a purely Jewish cause? Frankfurter never denied the fact of his Jewishness but despite an affiliation with Zionism his link to Judaism had over the years become tenuous.<sup>58</sup> He was far more interested in the legislative program of the New Deal than he was in the refugee problem and the rising tide of anti-Semitism.

The months before the appointment to the Court brought the problem of his Jewishness to the fore. If Frankfurter was disappointed when Roosevelt informed him privately that he could not appoint another Jew to the Court, he did not openly show it. But to Roosevelt's chagrin, Frankfurter's supposed indifference was belied by the fact that he did not signal his supporters, especially Corcoran, to stop their relentless pressure in favor of his appointment.<sup>59</sup> For Frankfurter the denial of a long sought after seat on the Supreme Court was especially painful not only because it flew in the face of merit he possessed and service he had given to the nation, but it was a rejection based on a Jewishness with which he was not connected and which had not shaped his professional life. He never associated himself as directly with the Zionist movement as Brandeis and his link to it apparently did not help alert him to the special dangers National Socialism posed for the Jews as it did Stephen Wise.<sup>60</sup> He did not see the danger only in terms of the Jews

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57 *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 242. The plight of Jewish refugee children in France and the Low Countries which was the background of the Wagner-Rogers bill apparently did not greatly move the Frankfurters. They did adopt two British children in 1940 who found refuge from the blitz in America.

59 James Farley, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York: 1948), pp. 161-162; Parrish, *Frankfurter*, p. 275.

60 Brandeis did directly intrude himself on the refugee crisis and the Zionist issue in a meeting with Hull. (See Freund, *Brandeis*, pp. 16-17). But there was in most members of the Brandeis group a curiously thin, almost part-time quality to their new found Jewishness and their investment in Zionist activities. See Ben Halpern, "The Americanization of Zionism," in *American Jewish History* Vol. LXIX (September, 1979), 32-33. See also Thomas Karfunkel and Thomas W.

and by the time he was made fully aware of Hitler's genocidal intent he found it difficult to give the "Jewish question" the kind of central focus it was receiving in Berlin. That may explain the strange response made to a courier from the Polish underground who, as a firsthand witness, was able to explain to Frankfurter the actual implementation of the "final solution" in the most gruesome detail. He told Jan Karski, the courier, that he didn't believe what he was being told. What he undoubtedly meant was that he could not conceive that an actual mass murder operation had been implemented by the Reich.<sup>61</sup>

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Involved in the intricacies of monetary policy, Henry Morgenthau Jr.'s relation to the early stages of the anti-Jewish depredations in Germany was remote. He rejected a White House invitation to head the quasi-official President's Advisory Commission on Political Refugees (PACPR). Not until the final months of 1943, when he became aware of the State Department's concerted effort to block the entrance of refugees and to suppress news of the actual implementation of the "final solution," did Morgenthau fully involve himself. Yet after the "scramble and bits and pieces" of news had become an agonized picture of wholesale slaughter planned at the highest level, Morgenthau's path of action was radically different from Frankfurter's.<sup>62</sup> One could read much of his subsequent political career, including the conception of his "plan" for the treatment of postwar Germany, as a response to that news.

As Dutchess County neighbors the Morgenthau family was enlisted in Roosevelt's revived political career in the mid-twenties. Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with the father and son can be traced back to her settlement house days. The Morgenthaus actively supported the Henry Street settlement house. Roosevelt undoubtedly knew of Morgenthau Sr.'s activities as Assistant Secretary of the Navy but it was with the son that a close relationship was knitted. Ultimately he became, according to Eleanor, "Franklin's conscience."<sup>63</sup> But that concerned general political matters, not the Jews.

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Ryley, *The Jewish Seat, Anti Semitism and the Appointment of Jews to the Supreme Court* (Hicksville: 1978), pp. 87-97.

61 Jan Karski, "Reaction of Frankfurter, Wise and Goldmann to First Reports of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Belzen Death Camp," in "The Impact of the Holocaust on Judaism in America" (colloquium, American University, Washington, D.C. March 23, 1980), p. 34 (Unpublished.).

62 John M. Blum, *Roosevelt and Morgenthau: A Revision and Condensation of From the Morgenthau Diaries* (Boston: 1970), p. 520.

63 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

In relation to Roosevelt, Morgenthau became a kind of admiring younger member of a social set. "They often differed and were annoyed with each other and probably said things neither of them meant on occasion," relates Eleanor Roosevelt, "but there was an underlying deep devotion and trust which never really wavered."<sup>64</sup> Roosevelt was aware of Morgenthau's unflinching loyalty as he was of his migraine headaches. He was grateful that Morgenthau was "not a rival or a sycophant or a scold."<sup>65</sup> Yet Morgenthau learned that he could expect to have little of his devotion reciprocated. His earnestness and a certain lack of mental agility, which Roosevelt possessed in good measure, made Morgenthau a natural foil for the President's penchant for good natured bullying and merciless teasing. That peculiar relationship sometimes brought Morgenthau's latent insecurities regarding his qualifications for high office to the surface. There were others like Frankfurter to remind him of his unearned place. It was probably his dislike and fear of Frankfurter's influence which led to the dismissal of Acheson and Corcoran.<sup>66</sup>

Morgenthau's Jewishness held true to the "uptown" pattern noted in Rosenman and Proskauer. It was viewed primarily in denominational terms, had a philanthropic component and typically an implacable hostility to political Zionism. Roosevelt understood the tensions concerning Zionism within the Jewish community. He thought it hilarious when an anti-Semitic journal reported that Morgenthau had accepted the title "Leader in Zion." He took time out to inform Frankfurter that he and Eleanor "are telegraphing him. . . that we will not receive him unless he arrives with a long black beard. Incidentally also, he will be disowned by his old man."<sup>67</sup> It was Roosevelt's way of showing how much he knew of the inner workings of Jewish politics. But "Leader in Zion" had somehow gotten confused in his mind with Zionism or perhaps "Elders of Zion."

Roosevelt understood that the Morgenthaus were not sympathetic to Zionism and since the Secretary was also aware that the possibility of lifting the immigration barriers faced by the refugees was slim, the idea of resettlement elsewhere had a natural attraction. Jewish pioneering of a new nation in an unsettled part of the world, the way the Puritans had done in New England and the

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64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

67 Roosevelt to Frankfurter, October 31, 1942, Freedman, *Frankfurter/Roosevelt Correspondence*, p. 678.

Mormons in Utah, required no commitment from the Administration, circumvented the sticky Palestine problem and yet allowed Roosevelt to maintain a principled position.<sup>68</sup> Morgenthau introduced Isaiah Bowman, the nation's best known geographer and the President of Johns Hopkins, to the President. Although Bowman could muster little confidence in pioneering resettlement in the twentieth century, the administration nevertheless enlisted his aid together with several other resettlement experts.<sup>69</sup> The President was particularly drawn to large scale ventures which by capturing the imagination of the world might also attract financing especially from the many wealthy Jews he knew of.<sup>70</sup> That was probably what was behind his request to Morgenthau to bring him a list of the thousand richest Jews in America. He would tell each how much he should contribute. Morgenthau brought Roosevelt down to earth by reminding him that "before you talk about money you have to have a plan."<sup>71</sup> Yet such visions of wealthy Jews waiting in the wings to invest their fortunes in the resettlement of their fellow Jews were after all not so far removed from those projected by Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* in the twenties or for that matter from those images then popular in Germany.

Sometimes Morgenthau was the visionary and Roosevelt the practical man. When as substitute for free immigration to Palestine, the British government offered British Guiana for resettlement of refugees, Morgenthau welcomed the offer. It would be acceptable as partial payment of the outstanding British debt and thereby contribute to the solution of the vexing debt-reparations dispute which complicated international monetary relations since the Treaty of Versailles. It would also help by contributing to a solution of the chaotic refugee problem caused by Berlin's extrusion policy. Roosevelt reminded his Secretary that it "would take Jews five to fifty years to overcome the fever."<sup>72</sup>

It is difficult to see how from such indifferent beginnings Morgenthau would develop the interest and courage to take political risks in the cause of rescue. The change was apparent in Morgenthau's response to an offer by Rumania to release 70,000 Jews if outsiders would cover the expenses of moving them. Morgenthau granted a license for transferring \$170,000 to the Joint Distribution

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68 Henry L. Feingold, "Roosevelt and the Resettlement Question," in *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: 1977), pp. 123-181.

69 See Isaiah Bowman, *Limits of Land Settlement: A Report on Present-Day Possibilities* (New York: 1937); Blum, *Morgenthau*, p. 519.

70 Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 91, 113-117.

71 Blum, *Morgenthau*, p. 519.

72 *Ibid.*

Committee and overcame the foot dragging of the State Department and the opposition of the British Foreign Office.<sup>73</sup> Soon thereafter he granted a license for \$25,000 for the support of Jewish children in the Italian occupied part of France. By the end of 1943 he had become fully involved in the rescue cause. When he received the now famous "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government In The Murder of the Jews," he was ready to act. After deleting some details and changing the title to the less dramatic "A Personal Report To The President," he delivered it personally to Roosevelt on January 16, 1944. The report led directly to the establishment of the War Refugee Board (WRB), the apogee of the American effort to rescue European Jewry.<sup>74</sup> Yet even here no mention of the word Jew could be made. The term "political refugee" found in all American reports dealing with Jews was preferred by the President.

In some measure it was the rarely discussed Jewish question which triggered Morgenthau's split with the State Department and eventually with the Truman administration. It played a role in the secretary's conception of a "hard" policy for the treatment of post-war Germany. Morgenthau preferred to believe that it was his overriding concern for a peaceful world order which motivated the Morgenthau plan for the "pastoralization" of Germany. He did not think peace was possible as long as Germany was able to dominate Europe and he recalled the strutting of German officers in Turkey during World War I when his father was Ambassador to Turkey.<sup>75</sup> He found the very idea of anti-Semitism incredible. He was nonplussed when Father Coughlin called silver a Gentile metal and condemned him for upholding the gold standard.<sup>76</sup>

But once aware of the unfairness and murderous intent of anti-Semitism, Morgenthau was more outspoken in using his position to fight openly against it. While Frankfurter patiently and almost apologetically explained to Lady Astor why her latest canard concerning Jewish control of the press was inaccurate, Morgenthau confronted Breckinridge Long, an Assistant Secretary of State whose anti-Semitism had become well-known, directly. He explained why he opposed the Department's energetic policy of keeping Jewish refugees from landing on American shores. The United

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73 *Ibid.*, pp. 522-524; Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 182-183, 239-240; Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Detroit: 1981), pp. 346-347. The offer was not authentic.

74 Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 239-244.

75 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: 1948), Vol. II, p. 471.

76 *New York Times*, April 9, 1934, 7. See also Blum, *Morgenthau*, p. 92.

States had served as a refuge “starting with Plymouth,” he explained to Long, “and as Secretary of the Treasury of 135 million people I am carrying this out as Secretary of the Treasury, not as a Jew.”<sup>77</sup> It was a forthright position marred only by the fact that the Secretary seemed uninformed that the notion of America acting as a haven for those in need had been largely undone by the restrictionist immigration laws of the twenties to which the Administration was compelled to adhere.

As the news of the extent of the Nazi depredations began to filter out of occupied Europe, Morgenthau’s anti-Nazi animus became more substantial. In May, 1945, after Germany had surrendered, he confided to Georges Bidault, the French Foreign Minister, that the contemplated War Crimes Commission would take too long to do justice and that Justice Jackson, the American representative for the trial of major Nazi war criminals, was too legalistic. Meanwhile the SS and the Gestapo would go underground. “My motives,” he explained, “are not revenge but one hundred years of peace in Europe.”<sup>78</sup>

He had published a ringing defense for his “hard” policy for Germany but already there were policy makers in Washington and London who were convinced that the locus of the post-war problem would not be Berlin but Moscow.<sup>79</sup> A “pastoralized” Germany could not serve as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, now conceived to be expansionist. Why was the Secretary of the Treasury intruding into the realm of foreign policy and was he not more interested in revenge than the national interest. Morgenthau seemed to confirm these fears by his emotional response when asked about the fate of millions of German workers in the Ruhr should his plan be implemented:

Just strip it. I don’t care what happens to the population . . . I would take every mine, every mill and factory and wreck it . . . steel, coal, everything. Just close it down . . . I am for destroying it first and we will worry about the population second. . . . But certainly if the area (the Ruhr) is stripped of its machinery, the mines flooded, dynamited - wrecked - it would make them impotent to wage future wars. . . . I am not going to budge an inch. . . .sure it’s a terrific problem. Let the Germans solve it. Why the hell should I worry about what happens to their people? . . . . It seems a terrific task, it seems inhuman, it seems cruel. We didn’t ask for this war, we didn’t put millions through gas chambers, we didn’t do any of these things. They have asked for it.”<sup>80</sup>

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77 Blum, *Morgenthau*, p. 529.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 639.

79 *Germany Is Our Problem* (New York: 1945).

80 Blum, *Morgenthau*, pp. 582-583.

Clearly the Holocaust had a profound impact on the Secretary. He felt that some type of response was required. It also suggests that one key to a stronger response within the Roosevelt administration was the activation of those power holders of Jewish background who like Morgenthau had found a place in Roosevelt's official family. The response of men like Frankfurter, Rosenman, Cohen and others indicates that it was by no means an easy task. But the activation of Morgenthau suggests that it was not an impossible one.

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Stephen Wise who bears much of the calumny heaped on American Jewry for its ostensible failure to act energetically during the crisis was a Jewish leader rather than a prominent government official who incidentally, and usually remotely, happened to be Jewish.<sup>81</sup> He seemed ideally suited to play such a role because he sat astride the vague consensus of American Jewry during the New Deal period. He was a Reform rabbi who nevertheless had broad support among the descendants of the Eastern Jewish immigrants.<sup>82</sup> He was a founder of the American Zionist movement which by 1938 was clearly becoming the binding ideology of American Jewry. He was a leader of the reconstituted American Jewish Congress which began by advocating democracy in Jewish life. In 1934 he helped found the World Jewish Congress, a Zionist oriented umbrella organization whose goal was to bring some coherence on the Jewish presence in the international arena. Since 1900, when he assumed his first pulpit in Portland, he had played a dual role by involving himself in secular as well as Jewish politics. He was one in a series of rabbis who gained sufficient stature to act as Jewish representative to the Gentile world. The key to that role may have been his remarkable ability as an orator. Before the days of radio, when an enthusiasm for scriptures prevailed, the turning of a neat biblical aphorism and a keen sense of political theater was sufficient to earn renown. By the time Roosevelt gained the presidency no Jewish leader was better located at the juncture where

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81 It is pronounced in Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven For The Oppressed, United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945* (Detroit: 1973); and Yitshaq Ben Ami, *Years of Wrath, Days of Glory, Memoirs From the Irgun* (New York: 1982).

82 The best sources for details of Wise's public life are in his autobiography *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: 1949); Melvin I. Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke For Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany: 1982); Carl Hermann Voss, *Rabbi and Minister, The Friendship of Stephen S. Wise and John Haynes Holmes* (Cleveland: 1964).

Jewish and national politics intersected. Yet Jewish politics in the thirties was not sufficiently coherent to permit one spokesman to power. Stephen Wise, who might have become such a spokesman, never became "the Pope of the Jews" Roosevelt sometimes might have desired the Jews to have.<sup>83</sup>

In the critical years between 1933 and 1936 Wise had no access to Roosevelt. These were the crucial years of the refugee phase when a more generous policy on their admission might have deferred temporarily or permanently the decision for a solution through mass murder.<sup>84</sup> Wise's outspoken liberalism was not easily harnessed to practical politics. Much of the political capital he had earned by supporting the Cox-Roosevelt ticket in the election of 1920 was dissipated by his later outspoken opposition to Jimmy Walker's corrupt administration in New York City. He had supported Al Smith's gubernatorial campaign in 1918 and again in 1926 and after the lost Presidential campaign of 1928, he lingered on in the Smith camp. In 1929 he supported Norman Thomas, the Socialist candidate, against Jimmy Walker for the New York City mayoralty. His daughter Justine joined him in denouncing the corruption and criminal ties of the Walker administration. For Roosevelt who required Tammany support, it was all very embarrassing. The Governor's hand would not be forced until the Seabury investigation in 1931 which led to Walker's resignation. In the meantime Wise was given an hour lecture on practical politics by Roosevelt. It confirmed Wise's impression that Roosevelt was superficial and untrustworthy.<sup>85</sup> He became unwelcome in the Roosevelt camp and remained so until the death of Louis Howe. Only in 1936 did Frankfurter succeed in paving his way back into Roosevelt's good graces.<sup>86</sup> Encumbered by a heavy ideological cargo, Wise was far slower than Frankfurter in gauging the political wind. He was late in sensing that Roosevelt was being groomed for the presidency.

Yet once he realized what was afoot Wise made a complete about-face, one of several in his public life. Barely five years later he became completely entranced by Roosevelt for whom he campaigned in 1936. The four years it took to get into striking position may have taught Wise a lesson about the Jewish relation to power.

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83 Selig Adler, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and Zionism — The Wartime Record," *Judaism*, XXI, (Summer 1972), 265-276.

84 That has been suggested by several researchers including Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz, Nazi Policy Toward German Jews, 1933-1939* (Urbana: 1970) pp. 2, 169-213, 255-262.

85 Urofsky, *Wise*, pp. 240, 247.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 256.



The President did not have to address the Jewish community through him. He could do so through anyone he chose. Later he would learn that, given the overwhelming enthusiasm for Roosevelt among Jewish voters, the President did not have to transact business with Jews at all. Roosevelt could keep Jewish loyalty through small gestures. Wise himself was especially pleased when Roosevelt employed a phrase in his second inaugural, "Nor will the American democracy ever hold any faithful and law abiding group within its borders to be superfluous."<sup>87</sup>

Within his heavy reformist rhetoric Wise was not totally devoid of political acumen. He had after all built a career in the rough and tumble world of American Jewish politics. Yet there was little in his prior experience to teach him how to transmit the urgent Jewish need for succor to the Oval Office. He was more perceptive and far ahead of other Jewish leaders in recognizing the threat posed by Hitler. He had spoken out against the threat in the twenties and shortly before Hitler came to power he had called for a meeting with the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith to plan a course of action should the National Socialists come to power. But it proved nigh impossible to transmit his sense of urgency to other Jewish leaders.<sup>88</sup>

Hitler's actual coming to power in January 1933 galvanized him into action. His American Jewish Congress helped organize a boycott against German goods. By 1934 it had become an international movement.<sup>89</sup> "A handful of us," he told an audience, "who have not wholly lost faith in the triumph of decency in the world have felt it our duty to unite in a boycott against Nazi goods and services, a boycott being a moral revolt against wrong, making use of economic instruments."<sup>90</sup> It was typical Wise rhetoric, highly charged with moral mission. But even at this early stage his oratory proved insufficient to unite the community behind such an effort. Even members of his own Congress were reluctant to use the boycott and the American Jewish Committee was convinced that it furnished grist for anti-Semitism and a pretext for retaliation against Jewish businesses in Germany as well as America. Wise's speaking out, his refusal to be what he called a "sh. . .sh Jew" earned him no plaudits from the leaders of the "uptown" remnant

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 263, 264. See also Cohen, *Not Free*, p. 159.

<sup>89</sup> Moshe Gottlieb, "In the Shadow of War: The American Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in 1939-1941," in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXII (December, 1972), 146-161.

<sup>90</sup> Wise, *As I See It*, p. 101.

which had remained in the Jewish fold. It was the first evidence that the so-called Jewish community would not be able to act communally in the face of the crisis. Jews showed more disapproval of his activist tactics at times than the State Department.<sup>91</sup> In April 1933 an old friend dismayed Wise by writing: "Dr. Wise will kill the Jews of Germany."<sup>92</sup> He was anathema not only in Nazi Germany where Goebbels wrote disparagingly of him in his diary and similarly to Breckinridge Long, who frantically opposed his every move, but to many of his fellow Jewish leaders who similarly found him too radical and outspoken.<sup>93</sup> It is that fact which makes the emerging indictment of him for not having done enough so bitterly ironic.

Wise was no newcomer to the strife which characterized American Jewish political life. He may even have contributed his fair share to it. He had built alternate Jewish organizations which some felt were monuments to his own ego and created disunity. He had been deeply involved in the strife within the American Zionist movement. He was 66 years old in 1940 and had had several nervous breakdowns, probably caused in part by an inability to rein in his many activities. In the thirties he had taken on even more responsibilities. His minute books, written in a bold hand with green ink, show day after day crowded with speaking and appointments in his two separate worlds. He was probably tired, yet he clung stubbornly to every position and fought attempts to relieve him of leadership responsibility.<sup>94</sup>

The Wise who faced the crisis in 1940 had spread his waning energies rather thinly and tried to give leadership to a deeply divided community while his access to Roosevelt was intermittent and rarely exclusive. He faced challenges from the Right. Both Rabbi Silver and Peter Bergson sensed that Wise had become so tuned in to the Administration that he was reflecting its low priority to the refugee-rescue cause. In 1934 Wise had complained of that low priority but not the headiness of the atmosphere in Washington, the excitement of watching the New Deal at work and the imminence of war seemed to place the special danger faced by Jews

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91 Joint Statement by the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith, April, 1933 in *American Jewish Committee, 27th Annual Report*, p. 42.

92 Wise to Rabbi Rosenau, April 10, 19, 1933, Carl H. Voss, "Let Stephen Wise Speak For Himself," in *Dimensions in American Judaism*, "Vol. III (Fall, 1968), 37.

93 Fred L. Israel, ed., *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long* (Lincoln: 1966), September 4, 1941 (pp. 216-217), April 17, 1943 (p. 332).

94 See Doreen Bierbrier, "The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group," in *AJHQ*, Vol. LX (September, 1970), 84-85.

in a larger perspective. The entire world seemed intent on plunging over an abyss. Not only the Jews were in danger. He experienced difficulty to speak exclusively of the plight faced by European Jewry in the face of such a dire emergency. Thus when Roosevelt and George Messersmith, an Assistant Secretary of State, impressed on him the need to tone down the fiery rhetoric emanating from the election to the World Jewish Congress, he complied. To be sure he did not check every move with the State Department, as did Morris Waldman and Joseph Proskauer. But almost imperceptibly he caught Washington's priority on the Jewish question and in face of the larger crisis of the war withheld pushing his own with vigor. "I find a good part of my work," he explained to Frankfurter, "to explain to my fellow Jews why our government cannot do all the things asked or expected of it."<sup>95</sup> He had become an insider aware of the limitations of Jewish power and influence.

His life-long penchant for universalism tended to conceal even from his own consciousness the special crucible of the Jews during the first years of the crisis. "The greatest crime against the Jewish victims of Hitler," he stated in 1940, "would be to treat the crimes against the Jews differently from the treatment of crimes against French, Czechs, or Poles or Greeks."<sup>96</sup> Even while aware of the anti-Jewish depredations there is no clue in his thinking that the fate the National Socialist regime had planned for the Jews would in fact be qualitatively different than for any other people under its heel. There would be no historical precedent for this kind of mass murder. By 1942 when news of the final solution was confirmed he had to change his mental set and face the difficult task of convincing Roosevelt, now himself involved as a leader in a war for survival whose outcome was by no means certain.

Full details of the fate of European Jewry was contained in the Riegner cable. It confirmed Wise's worst fears but he understood that the mood of the country and within the Administration would dismiss the incredible story as atrocity mongering. World War I had witnessed a similar cadaver story which told of the German army processing dead corpses taken from the battlefield for soap and fertilizer. Moreover, revisionist historians had drawn a picture of a gullible American public opinion manipulated into entering World War I by skillfull British atrocity mongering.<sup>97</sup> Wise gave

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<sup>95</sup> Voss, *Rabbi*, p. 39; Friedman, *No Haven*, p. 145.

<sup>96</sup> Wise, *As I See It*, pp. 123-124

<sup>97</sup> Shimon Rubinstein, "Did The Germans Set Up Corpse Utilization Establishments During World War I?" (Jerusalem: 1977); Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret, Suppression of the Truth About Hitler's Final Solution*, (Boston: 1980),

the cable to Sumner Welles for confirmation. There could be no fear of suppression of the story since a duplicate cable had been received by the agent of the World Jewish Congress in London. The three-month delay in confirmation has been one of the sources of the calumny heaped on Wise's leadership during the crisis but the circumstances of how the news was received make his course of action seem reasonable in retrospect. More difficult to understand is Wise's despair at his inability to change the course of the Administration's action which was based on the notion that the safest way to save the Jews was to win the war as quickly as possible. He knew that the Jews of Europe would be in ashes at that point. "The truth is," he observed about his inability to break through to Roosevelt, "in the midst of war, it is very difficult to make anyone see that we (Jews) are most particularly hurt. These wounds are deeper and sorer than any other wounds inflicted."<sup>98</sup> Wise who had spoken about the need for struggle for his entire adult life somehow was overwhelmed by the news. It was a human reaction for even from a contemporary vantage the gulf between available Jewish power and what had to be done was awesome. In 1943 Wise lived with the knowledge that Hitler would be allowed to destroy the Jews and nothing would be done.

It made him despair but it did not radicalize him as it did Rabbi Silver who almost single-handedly pushed through the Biltmore Program in May, 1942. For Wise there was no place else to go but to continue to support Roosevelt. His position was in some way similar to that of Weizmann in relation to Britain. He distrusted Weizmann but by 1940 he saw the necessity of making peace with him and his faction in the Zionist movement. But no sooner had Weizmann been granted an honorary degree from Wise's Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) when the much desired united front came apart. The plea made by Zev Jabotinsky for a Jewish army at Manhattan Center in 1940 could not be implemented in America but what of a Jewish contingent? Wise felt that the mainline Zionists had allowed the Revisionists to steal their thunder. He was in 1940 willing to follow a more conciliatory policy if the Bergson group would agree to adhere to the line laid down by the mainline organizations. But that was precisely what they felt they could not do. The bitter acrimony between the two groups which broke out in the press could not be resolved.<sup>99</sup> By 1943 the hope that there

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pp. 8-9; H.L. Peterson, *Propaganda For War, The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman: 1939).

<sup>98</sup> Urofsky, *Wise*, p. 327.

<sup>99</sup> Feingold, *Politics*, pp. 237-239; Aaron Berman, "American Zionism and the

could be Jewish unity had vanished. The American Jewish Committee left the American Jewish Conference. Lessing Rosenwald established the American Council for Judaism and on the other extreme the Biltmore Resolution, demanding a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, had been passed. The gaps dividing American Jewry were too wide for one man to bridge.

The huge rallies at Madison Square Garden which gave Wise a platform to deliver the most stirring speeches of his life were really examples of the political theatrics Wise was drawn to. They gave more the illusion of unity than the reality. The rhetoric was stirring but the method had grown arcane. To stir the public one had to speak to millions, as Roosevelt did in his "fireside chats." Wise spoke only to thousands of concerned Jews who needed no reminder of what had to be done.<sup>100</sup>

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The model here drawn indicates that the most effective representation of the Jewish interest depended ultimately on the activation of those nominal Jews who made up part of Roosevelt's entourage. That is what happened when Morgenthau was finally activated in the cause of rescue. But that neat model omits the enigmatic figure of Franklin Roosevelt who is at the very heart of the problem. Ultimately Jewish rescue advocates had to involve the highest political office in the nation for an enlistment of the full energies and resources of the government. The President had to understand the meaning of the liquidation of European Jewry not in terms of the Jewish interest, but the American. Only an understanding of rescue which went beyond sympathy for Jews to link it to the national interest would have given the potential proddings of men like Frankfurter and Morgenthau some chance for success. We have seen that Roosevelt did well by his Jewish constituency but that benevolence fell short of extending help to the Jews of Europe who were not legally the responsibility of the United States. The answer that is gradually emerging regarding Roosevelt and the Jews is that neither by the natural constraints of the office of President which he could not overcome, nor the critical nature of his time in history marked first by depression and then war, nor by emotional disposi-

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Rescue of European Jewry: An Ideological Perspective," in *American Jewish History* Vol. LXX (March, 1981), 310-330; Monty N. Penkower, "In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys," in *American Jewish History*, Vol. LXX (March, 1981), 281-309.

100 Henry L. Feingold, "Stephen Wise and the Holocaust," in *Midstream* (January, 1983), 45-48. A similar analysis is also given by Louis Lipsky, *Memoirs In Profile* (Philadelphia: 1975), pp. 192-200.

tion was he capable of fully fathoming the meaning of the death camps and implementing a rescue policy.

Contemporary portraits describe Roosevelt as buoyant, a patrician type, exuding self-confidence.<sup>101</sup> It may not be a wholly accurate picture. He was not, much to his regret, Eleanor informs us, very popular at Reverend Peabody's Groton or at Harvard.<sup>102</sup> His mother seems to have been omnipresent especially after the death of his father. He was considered a bright, but never a first-rate student. He was a startlingly handsome, somewhat overprotected, almost effete young man. The family was not poor but hardly comparable to the "new" wealth of the Rockefellers or even the Seligmans. Yet somehow the inner confidence sometimes associated with a regulated and secure life, relatively free of adversity, transmitted itself not only to millions of radio listeners but many of those who knew him personally. If Roosevelt was occasionally depressed, especially after his illness, he did not show it. He preferred to generate a spirit of "boisterous good humor."<sup>103</sup> For rescue advocates it may have been that cheeriness that made it seem inappropriate to bring up the question of the camps. There were those who detected behind the gayety and good cheer a steadfast, if conventional, religious faith which sustained him during his crucible. He served as a trustee of St. James Church in Hyde Park throughout his adult life. The youthful superficiality which some have noted as late as his appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was ostensibly dissipated by the attack of polio in August, 1921. The illness and handicap supposedly added a new dimension to the future president's character, greater depth and compassion and contact with a strata of the population, the handicapped, which he would not ordinarily have had.<sup>104</sup> Yet the deepening of character was not observed by Alice Roosevelt Longworth who dismissed the notion as an "absurd idea." "He was what he always would be!," Longworth observed, "He took polio in his stride."<sup>105</sup>

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101 For recent examples see James A. Farley, "F.D.R. the Man," in David E. Kejr-ig, ed., *F.D.R.'s America* (St. Charles: 1976), p. 23; Joseph Alsop, "Roosevelt Remembered," in *The Smithsonian* (January, 1982), 39-48.

102 Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin* (New York: 1973), pp. 150-157; Burns, *Lion and Fox*, pp. 10-11.

103 Farley, *FDR the Man*, p. 23.

104 That is the view recently propounded by a rehabilitation psychologist, Richard T. Goldberg, *The Making of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Triumph Over Disability* (Cambridge: 1982).

105 Goldberg, *Roosevelt*, pp. 1, 36. Goldberg also presents some evidence of a well developed sense of entitlement which prevented Roosevelt, during the rehabilitation process, from accepting the full reality of his illness and his subsequent handicap.

If anyone was "deepened" by the illness, it was Eleanor, who returned to a marriage which had all but failed and patiently nursed her husband, keeping from him the pessimistic prognosis that he would never really walk again without some outside aid.<sup>106</sup> The other was Louis Howe, his long time political manager, who throughout the worst stages of the illness maintained a skillful selected correspondence to generate the image that Roosevelt remained a viable potential political leader.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed Roosevelt maintained that confidence, a seeming personal "freedom from fear," throughout his adult life. "The same self-assurance," one historian observes, "insulated Roosevelt from intimate involvement with people. . . . He loved the adoration and attention of people, even when elementary privacy was violated. With consummate art, he played for his audience and won their plaudits. Some grew to love him and projected onto him their hopes and joys and deepest longings. They invested so much in the relationship, he invested so little and invested so broadly."<sup>108</sup> It was an observation meant to apply to his personal relationships but in a peculiar way it holds even more true for the relationship with American Jewry which by 1936 had all the earmarks of unrequited love.

Roosevelt never really distinguished between what was happening in the death camps, about which he was fully informed, and the dozens of other problems of the war which pressed in on him. The "final solution" became a not too important atrocity problem of the war. "Insulated from fear, Roosevelt was also free of doubt," observes Conkin. "It gave his mind and spirit the cast of broadness but never depth. There was little capacity for sustained thought, no ability to make careful distinctions, or to perceive crucial issues."<sup>109</sup> Often pictured as a bright, quick study, Roosevelt was almost totally unencumbered and unenriched by conceptual thought. The larger meaning of Auschwitz thus totally eluded him. He was attuned to people rather than ideas, to the operational rather than the ideological, to the concrete rather than the abstract and to the political rather than the personal. He felt certain of his ability to achieve his ends by a certain mode of behavior, by charm and manipulation. Perhaps that posture had been developed at Harvard where he felt a desperate need to be popular especially after invitations to the

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106 Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, pp. 359-373; Goldberg, *Roosevelt*, p. 39.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

108. Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal* (New York: 1967), p. 5.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 11.

clubs of his choice eluded him.<sup>110</sup> He tended to mute or join otherwise obfuscate issues which did not directly enhance his popularity or were simply distasteful or entailed a price.<sup>111</sup>

How that manipulation worked in practice is illustrated by the experience of a Jewish delegation which visited him on December 8, 1942, after the news of the systematic mass murder of the Jews had been confirmed by the Administration. The delegation wanted not only some form of intercession, a warning to Berlin regarding the atrocities, but reassurance of concern. But little occurred at the meeting; Roosevelt overwhelmed them with his banter. According to the diary of one of the participants "the entire conversation lasted only a minute or two. As a matter of fact of the twenty nine minutes spent with the President, he addressed the delegation for twenty three minutes." No one dared interrupt the President to get to the business at hand. There was barely sufficient time to present their plan of action. At the final moment they were given authority to quote from the administration's earlier statement on war crimes.<sup>112</sup> Roosevelt could not be put on the spot with a direct demand. He skillfully used his office and high position to shield himself from such unpleasant confrontations.

There is a sense of a historical disjuncture, for what may today be developing into a major issue was, during the Roosevelt era, a minor one. The refugee crisis of the thirties became eventually a minor aspect of the "great debate" between isolationists and interventionists. Its disposition was partly decided on the basis of national security. The notion that Berlin was using the refugee stream to filter spies into the country had become a veritable security psychosis. On the level of administering the immigration law it became increasingly difficult to gain access to the American haven. The later rescue issue was similarly subsumed beneath the larger issue of winning the war quickly. To say that rescue had a low priority is to misstate the case. It had no independent priority at all.<sup>113</sup> Until 1944 it was simply not considered. The creation of the War Refugee Board in January, 1944 is remarkable because it gave the notion of rescue an independent priority and an independent agen-

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110 Alsop, *Roosevelt*, pp. 39-48. See also interview with Thomas Beale, a classmate at Harvard. Quoted by Goldberg, *Roosevelt*, p. 12.

111 Conkin, *New Deal*, pp. 10-11, 14-15.

112 Eliyho Matzozky, "An Episode: Roosevelt and the Mass Killing," in *Midstream*, (August-September, 1980), 17-19.

113 Henry L. Feingold, "The Importance of Wartime Priorities in the Failure to Rescue Jews," in Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds., *Critical Issues of the Holocaust*, (Los Angeles: 1983), pp. 300-307.



cy to administer it. But one should note that the turn-about in policy which the establishment of the WRB signified occurred only when it was fairly certain that the major priority, winning the war, was on its way to being achieved. Three months later it also became possible to conceive of a plan to circumvent the immigration law by offering a handful of refugees a temporary haven at Ft. Ontario in Oswego, New York.<sup>114</sup> Two years before the immigration laws were still considered immutable.

The idea that Jews could be kept in line and politically loyal by gestures should not only be attributable to Roosevelt's talents as a manipulator. Such statements of concern had been used to placate Jewish leaders since the Damascus Blood libel in 1840.<sup>115</sup> On the Administration's part the motivation in making them was expressed by Pierepont Moffat, as Assistant Secretary of State, who was concerned with how the Administration should react after the unexpected mounting outcry triggered by the "night of the broken glass," November 9, and 10, 1938: "The difficulty was to find ways and means of making a gesture that would not either inherently hurt us or provoke counter retaliation that would hurt us."<sup>116</sup> The gesture settled upon was to bring Ambassador Hugh Wilson home "for consultation."

Any assessment of Roosevelt's relationship to American Jewry should note that we are dealing with a seventeen year period of continuous evolvment in Roosevelt and American Jewry. The Roosevelt of the "Hundred Days" was in terms of political power and aura different from the Roosevelt of the second New Deal, with its renewed Depression and politically disastrous scheme to "pack" the Court. The Roosevelt of the war years, preoccupied and in failing health, departed considerably from both. The Jewish need became urgent at the least opportune moment to press a special case. The renewed Depression in 1937, during which unemployment again reached eleven million, profits fell by 82% and industrial production declined to the 1929 level, was a vote of "no confidence" on the countercyclical measures the New Deal had implemented to fight the Depression.<sup>117</sup> It was at this juncture that Roosevelt seems to have lost his political touch and ventured into the ill-starred court-packing scheme. That debacle placed a new stress on the poli-

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114 Sharon Lowenstein, "A New Deal For Refugees: The Promise and Reality of Oswego," in *American Jewish History*, Vol. LXXI (March, 1982), 325-341.

115 See footnote #8.

116 Journal entry, November 14, 1938, Nancy H. Hooker, ed., *The Moffat Papers, 1919-1943*, (Cambridge: 1956), pp. 221-222.

117 Conkin, *New Deal*, p. 96.

tical coalition which buttressed his administration. It demonstrated Roosevelt's fallibility. Meanwhile events in Europe and the Far East suggested that the time for domestic reform would soon draw to a close.

American Jewry turned to Roosevelt for succor when his aura as a leader and his personal power base had been somewhat diminished and when the priorities created by the war in Europe left little space for the special needs of the Jews. Moreover it was a request for action which entailed considerable political risks requested by an unpopular minority, one whose support was in any case assured.<sup>118</sup> The notion that more might have been achieved had Jewish leaders had better access to the Oval Office and had a concerned public outcry developed, both unlikely to happen, is based on an oversimplified model of how the agendas of minorities are translated into public policy.<sup>119</sup> We have noted here that even the extra advantage of a conduit to Roosevelt furnished by prominent Jews in his entourage was uncertain and ultimately inadequate for the task at hand. There was the fact that by emotional disposition Roosevelt's currency was people and politics, not pain.

Given these conditions and the nature of the times and one circumstance barely touched upon, the virulent anti-Semitism of the thirties, the notion that Roosevelt could muster a sustained interest in an unpleasant and remote problem for which he was not responsible, the rescue of the Jews, is a highly dubious one. He was unwilling and probably incapable of engineering the necessary rearrangement of wartime priorities required to rescue European Jewry. For rescue advocates the bitterest pill may not even have been Roosevelt's inurement but the realization that the contenders for his high office, Wendell Wilkie in 1940 and Thomas Dewey in 1944, held out even less hope for action.

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In one sense the developing indictment of American Jewry's posture during the Holocaust is a manifestation of a habit deeply embedded in Jewish political culture. Traditionally history combined with a strong sense of kinship assigned an awesome responsibility to American Jewry. It was compelled to request things from the political process that virtually preordained failure. That process, designed originally to govern as minimally as possible, resisted the

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118 Stember, *Mind of America*, pp. 88-135.

119 The contention that greater public pressure would have gotten the Roosevelt administration to act earlier and "far more decisively" is made by Professor David Wyman, "American Jews and the Holocaust," *New York Times Magazine*, May 8, 1982, 94.

mission Jews would assign it. American Jewish leaders were hard pressed to wring any action from an administration preoccupied first with the Depression and then with the war. They never possessed sufficient political power to adequately discharge the responsibility American Jewry assumed as a matter of course since the Colonial period, the support of their brethren abroad. In retrospect most of the painful "might have beens," if American Jewry had been more unified, if they could have gotten the story believed and mobilized public opinion, if they could have raised their own army, if the camps could have been bombed, vanish back into the unreality from which they came. Often they are merely forms of self-flagellation by a people that is torn by its heavy losses. But a nagging doubt remains about one such possibility, mobilizing the new Jewish secular elite, whose leaders had found position in Roosevelt's entourage, for rescue. This paper probes that possibility and discovers that it was a real one. That is the meaning of the activation of Henry Morgenthau Jr., in 1943.<sup>120</sup> Yet for the most part the members of the new elite gained personal power and influence which they did not use for the enhancement of Jewish corporate power. The very process of secularization which triggered their rise, prevented them from recognizing and acting upon a matter of specific Jewish interest. Something had changed since men like Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall were the intermediaries between Jewry and power holders. By the Roosevelt period a group leadership function formally exercised by a single cohort had become bifurcated. It now required that leaders like Rabbi Stephen Wise, whose influence stemmed directly from his position in the Jewish community, act through men like Frankfurter, Rosenman, Morgenthau and others, who were powerholders who only incidentally happened to be Jewish. It was the failure to mobilize this new group that may in retrospect mark the most conspicuous failure of American Jewry during the Holocaust.<sup>121</sup>

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120 How far Morgenthau had developed in contrast to Rosenman is illustrated by Rosenman's resistance to being involved before Morgenthau delivered the "Acquiescence" report to the President. Rosenman demurred first on the ground of timing, then on the fear that three prominent Jews were involved (Morgenthau, Ben Cohen and himself), and finally that leaks would cause unwelcome publicity. "Don't worry about the publicity," replied Morgenthau, "What I want is intelligence and courage — courage first, intelligence second." Transcription of telephone conversation, Morgenthau and Rosenman, January 13, 1944, 11:35 AM, Morgenthau Diaries, Book 693, 205-210, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park.

121 For a probing of this dilemma see Peter Lowenberg, "Walter Rathenau and Henry Kissinger: The Jew As a Modern Statesman in Two Political Cultures," *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture Nr. 24*, (New York: 1980).

Activism versus Moderation:  
The Conflict between Abba Hillel Silver  
and Stephen Wise during the 1940s

Zvi Ganin

HITLER'S RISE TO power and the outbreak of World War II marked the end of an era during which European Jewry had stood at the forefront of the Zionist movement. Henceforth Zionist leaders in Palestine turned increasingly to the American Jewish community for the political, economic and organizational support they required. However, neither the Jews of the United States nor the American Zionist movement were prepared, either mentally or organizationally, to take the place of European Jewry. Moreover, American Jewry itself had been deeply affected by the worldwide financial crisis, by the rise of the Nazis, and by the increase in American anti-Semitism. The process of transforming the American Jewish community into a pro-Zionist political force was therefore slow, complicated, painful, and rife with internecine struggles and failures.

The danger that threatened the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine), its fear of being cut off from the Zionist centers (as had happened during World War I), and the desire to concentrate political activities in the United States combined to bring about the establishment, on September 19, 1939, of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. At its head were members of the Zionist Organization of America (Z.O.A.): Solomon Goldman (Z.O.A. President), Louis Lipsky, representatives of the other Zionist organizations (Poalei-Zion, Hadassah, and the Mizrahi) and—as the dominant figure in its leadership—the veteran Zionist leader Rabbi Stephen Wise.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Emergency Committee never managed to become an effective instrument of Zionist political activity. Its failure was double: a failure in leadership on the part of its chairman, Wise, who did not obtain

\* I wish to thank Professors Ben Halpern and Arieh Gartner for their useful comments.

<sup>1</sup> Report on the activities of the Zionist Emergency Council, 1940–1946, Zionist Archive, New York (henceforth Z.A.-N.Y.).

a sufficient budget or establish an apparatus worthy of the name; and a failure of the four Zionist parties, and particularly of the Z.O.A. whose leaders were deeply engaged in personal disputes.

The state of the Emergency Committee, wrote David Ben-Gurion in February 1942, could not be worse. The personal relations among the leadership were poor, and the lack of a strong chairman hamstrung the Committee, preventing the development of effective political activity. Wise was the best liked leader, but he was too busy to concentrate on political affairs. Ben-Gurion, who unsuccessfully tried to create a new leadership, was impressed by Reform Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver:<sup>2</sup> "... he is firm in his opinions, proud to be a Jew, he knows Hebrew, he is well acquainted with Palestine (better than other leaders), and he is not afraid of dual loyalty." However, Ben-Gurion added, "he is not well liked by the Zionist public, and is not well versed in Zionist diplomacy."<sup>3</sup>

Chaim Weizmann, also in the United States during 1942, was well aware of the grave state of the Emergency Committee. He too came to the conclusion that an heir must be found for Wise, and turned to Silver. Silver and Weizmann came to know each other better when Silver travelled to England in 1942 to lecture in behalf of the Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund). Silver's oratorical powers and his resolute Jewish and Zionist stand impressed Weizmann. In April 1942 at a meeting of the Emergency Committee, Weizmann described Silver's visit to England as "a signal success."<sup>4</sup> Wise also knew of the leadership qualities with which Silver was endowed, and at that time considered him as his possible heir.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1942 Weizmann contacted Silver (with Wise's agreement and through the intervention of Meyer Weisgal), with the aim of getting Silver to agree to head the Emergency Committee,<sup>6</sup> although the first public expression of Weizmann's intentions came only seven months later. It took a further eight months of pressure on Silver before he agreed to take on this post.

2 Silver was an interesting phenomenon, an enthusiastic Zionist leader in a large Reform community which was indifferent to Zionism. He had demonstrated his superior organizational abilities as head of the United Jewish Appeal and as President of the Palestine Appeal since 1938. Silver had been a member of the Executive of the Emergency Committee since its inception and was younger than Wise by about twenty years.

3 Ben-Gurion to Moshe Shertok, Washington, February 8, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives.

4 Protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Committee, April 17, 1942, p.1, Z.A.-N.Y.

5 Wise to Bakstansky, September 29, 1942, Stephen Wise Archive, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass. (henceforth Wise Archive).

6 Weizmann to Wise, June 20, 1942, Weizmann Archive (henceforth W.A.).

Silver made his acceptance conditional on the full centralization of authority in his hands, and on appropriate financing, which was to be guaranteed by the heads of the Jewish National Fund and the Keren Hayesod.<sup>7</sup> His demand that he exercise control over Zionist political activities in the United States encountered opposition among the other leaders and became a source of contention between him and the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, which at that time (May 1943) had decided to open an office for political activity in Washington, headed by Dr. Nahum Goldmann.<sup>8</sup>

Other obstacles also stood in Silver's way to the leadership of the Emergency Committee. Personal relations between him and some of his colleagues in the Executive of the Z.O.A. were poor. Silver, who had an authoritarian personality, was known as a difficult and sharp-tongued person who had made many enemies in the course of his work as rabbi in Cleveland and as a Zionist leader. He was also exceptional in the Zionist leadership in that he was known as a Republican (although he had voted for Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936) having close ties with Senator Robert Taft, one of the leaders of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. The opposition to Silver amongst prominent American Zionists had frustrated Weizmann's year-long efforts to place him in a leadership position.

The barriers to Silver's election as head of the Emergency Committee were finally overcome in July 1943 when Emanuel Neumann, his close friend and confidant, with the help of Meyer Weisgal and other supporters of Silver, formed a movement to "draft" Silver as candidate for the presidency of the Z.O.A. In fact Weisgal's true aim was more devious. In return for Silver's agreement to withdraw his candidacy, Weisgal hoped that Silver's opponents would agree to support his appointment as chairman of the Emergency Committee and its Executive.

The scheme worked well at first. Silver's candidacy for the presidency received broad support and demonstrated his great popularity among the members of the Z.O.A. But in accordance with Weisgal's ploy, Silver did not run for the elections. Dr. Israel Goldstein remained the only candidate for the presidency, with the guaranteed support of Silver's people, and in return the backing of the Z.O.A. was assured for Silver's nomination to the Executive of the Emergency Committee. Both Poalei-Zion and the Mizrahi supported Silver's nomination, and only Hadassah remained

7 Silver to Weisgal, March 28, 1943, Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (henceforth C.Z.A.), Z5/653.

8 Silver to Weisgal, May 13, 1943, C.Z.A., Z5/653.

ambivalent.<sup>9</sup> However, at the end of July a new obstacle arose when Wise, the veteran head of the Emergency Committee in its old form, reversed his original decision to resign from its leadership and make way for Silver. In the end Wise responded to the pressures of the Z.O.A. and the crisis ended in a compromise (August 1943), the results of which, as we shall see, were to be disastrous. Both Wise and Silver were appointed as cochairmen to the Emergency Committee, and Silver's special status was given organizational expression as chairman of its Executive Committee.<sup>10</sup>

Weizmann sent a warm telegram of congratulations to Silver, in which he emphasized that Silver's appointment constituted "an event fraught with significance for our cause at this critical moment when the Zionist world looks to America and American Zionism for political support."<sup>11</sup> In his telegraphed reply Silver promised Weizmann the support of the American Zionists in carrying out the Biltmore Program, and he declared his own loyalty and that of his colleagues to Weizmann's leadership.<sup>12</sup>

The first clash between Silver and Wise took place a few days after the final agreement between them had been reached, at the initial meeting of the American Jewish Conference (August 29–September 2, 1943). At that meeting, which was intended to create a united Jewish front against the White Paper of 1939, Silver and Neumann thwarted the secret agreement that had been arrived at previously between Wise, Nahum Goldmann, and the leadership of the American Jewish Committee (the most important non-Zionist organization), according to which the Biltmore Program would not be included in the Conference's resolutions. In a short but moving speech, Silver, who was the chairman of the Committee on Palestine of the Conference, attacked both Zionists and non-Zionists who, for the sake of Jewish unity, had shown themselves willing to abandon the issue of the establishment of a Jewish state. Silver's speech, which was delivered on September 1, 1943, electrified the delegates at the Conference, who rose to their feet at its conclusion, cheered, and sang "Hatikva." In response to Silver's demand, the Conference resolved, by a large majority, to adopt the Biltmore Program, with only the four representatives of the American Jewish Committee opposing.<sup>13</sup>

9 For a detailed description of that maneuver see Weisgal to Weizmann, August 11, 1943, W.A. See also Emanuel Neumann, *In the Arena*, New York, 1976, pp. 186–189; and Silver's unpublished autobiography, Silver Archive, Cleveland.

10 See Doreen Bierbrier, "The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, vol. LX (September 1970), p. 85.

11 Weizmann's telegram to Silver, undated (August 1943?), C.Z.A., Z5/727.

12 Silver's telegram to Weizmann, undated (August 1943?), W.A.; and see Silver's warm telegram to Weizmann, September 1, 1943, after the vote of the American Jewish Conference for the Biltmore Program, *ibid.*

13 Isaac Neustadt-Noy, "The Unending Task: Efforts to Unite American Jewry from the

Silver's fiery speech and his uncompromising attitude with regard to the Biltmore Program are important landmarks in his career. Together they established him as the outstanding leader of American Jewry, giving authentic expression to their anger and frustration at the Holocaust and Jewish impotence. He became the foremost American Zionist activist who was not willing to compromise his fundamental political position even to achieve a united Jewish front.

Silver's leadership was quickly felt in the organizational sphere as well. He first obtained what was then a large sum (about half a million dollars) to finance the expanded activities of the Emergency Committee, which had been reorganized in the summer of 1943 and renamed the the American Zionist Emergency Council. These funds permitted him to hire a professional staff of public relations men, propagandists, and organizers, headed by Henry Montor of the United Palestine Appeal. Silver also drafted Rabbi Leon Feuer, his former assistant at the Cleveland Temple, to set up the Washington office of the Emergency Council and head it. Feuer, in turn, hired a retired Jewish journalist, Leo Sack, as a lobbyist in Congress.<sup>14</sup>

Silver and Neumann had ambitious aims. They wished to obtain support for the Biltmore Program in the Christian community and in the two Houses of Congress. When that was accomplished the support of most American Jews would be guaranteed. Furthermore, favorable public opinion and support in Congress were means of exerting pressure on the Roosevelt administration, which was indifferent and sometimes even hostile to Zionist aspirations.

While the Emergency Council became more active and more effective, as Weizmann and Ben-Gurion had hoped it would, relations between Wise and Silver deteriorated rapidly.<sup>15</sup> It was clear to all that a complete breakdown of the relations between the two leaders would not be long in coming. Their differences of opinion were not based merely on their personal rivalry. It soon became apparent that their conflict centered on questions of principle regarding Zionist tactics in the United States, the urgency of which was increased by the proximity of the 1944 presidential and congressional elections.

American Jewish Congress to the American Jewish Conference," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, 1976, pp. 314-321. Neumann, *In the Arena*, pp. 189-192.

14 Sack was an interesting figure: a Jew born in Mississippi, with very little Jewish background but many contacts in Congress and the administration. Cf. Leon I. Feuer, "The Birth of a Jewish Lobby—A Reminiscence," *American Jewish Archives*, vol. XXVIII, November 1976, pp. 107-118.

15 Weisgal to Weizmann, November 9, 1943, W.A.



During the election year Silver and Neumann decided to implement their new political tactics, based on ending the traditional Jewish identification with the Democratic Party and striving to obtain support from both of the big parties; and at the same time mobilizing congressional support for revoking the White Paper in favor of the Biltmore Program. The intention was to create a new political situation in which the two parties would compete for the Jewish vote, which would allow the Jews to seek support for the Zionist cause in return. The effectiveness of these tactics depended, of course, on the willingness of Jewish voters to vote as a bloc according to the stand of the Democratic and Republican Parties vis-à-vis the Biltmore Program.

The first step toward obtaining congressional support was taken in January 1944 when identical resolutions were introduced in both Houses of Congress. They opened by recalling the support of the Sixty-seventh Congress in 1922 for the Balfour Declaration. The operative clause of the resolutions argued that the "ruthless persecution of the Jewish people in Europe has clearly demonstrated the need for a Jewish homeland" for Jewish refugees. The United States should take "appropriate measures" to open the gates of Palestine and promote settlement activities, "so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth."<sup>16</sup> However, two months later, the Zionist effort was defeated by the intervention of the President, the State Department, and the War Department, requesting that discussion of the resolution be suspended under the pretext that it might be detrimental to the war effort.<sup>17</sup>

Silver was not disheartened by this first serious setback. On March 14, 1944, he even succeeded in having a resolution passed by the members of the Zionist Greater Actions Committee resident in New York, confirming their support for the activist approach in the areas of propaganda and the congressional resolution.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Nahum Goldmann opposed Silver's tactics. "It was not wise," he claimed, "to use high pressure methods continuously." It would be advisable to go over to more effective measures of quiet persuasion. Silver rejected Goldmann's proposal, claiming that Roosevelt's declaration that "the American Government has never given its approval to the White Paper of 1939" had been obtained as a result of the powerful pressure of public opinion, and that

16 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 11, January 31, 1944, pp. 1-2, Z.A.-N.Y.; the original formulation of the resolution H. RES 418, the 78th Congress, Second Session, was published on January 27, 1944, Elihu D. Stone papers, Brookline, Mass.

17 Elihu D. Stone, "The Zionist Outlook in Washington," *The New Palestine*, March 17, 1944, pp. 305-306.

18 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 18, March 20, 1944, p. 5, Z.A.-N.Y.

they had to persist in the effort in order to influence the President to take practical measures and "give evidence of his good will."<sup>19</sup>

Along with his efforts in the Congress, Silver worked for the inclusion of pro-Zionist clauses in the Democratic and Republican platforms, whose conventions had met in Chicago in the summer of 1944. Wise, a veteran supporter of the Democratic Party, opposed the inclusion of a Palestine clause in the party platforms because of his basic objection to Silver's tactics. But Silver forced him to cooperate. As Wise himself explained: "Since Silver insisted [on the inclusion of a Palestine clause in] the Republican plank, with its terrible insult to Roosevelt [which that entailed], I had to have a similar plank [in the Democratic platform]."<sup>20</sup> Thus while Silver and his supporters were persuading the Republican platform committee meeting in Chicago to include a pro-Zionist clause, Wise, Goldstein, and their friends among the Democrats worked successfully for the adoption of a similar clause by the Democratic platform committee.

The clause in the Republican platform was distinguished from its Democratic rival not only by its length but also in several important substantive respects. The Republicans deleted the key word "Jewish" from the formula of the Biltmore Program, "a Jewish commonwealth." They also added a passage containing a sharp attack against President Roosevelt, who was described as two-faced and hypocritical. The Democratic clause, in contrast, was taken almost word for word from the resolution proposed in Congress in January 1944, which explicitly called for a Jewish commonwealth. In the view of many Zionist leaders the passage attacking President Roosevelt in the Republican platform was virtually sacrilege. Wise spoke out against it publically, and in a private letter to his friend in the White House, the presidential assistant David K. Niles, he expressed his outrage against Silver for his "contemptible" act, together with an assurance that Silver's Zionist friends would not lend their hand to it.<sup>21</sup>

However, Silver was not satisfied with the simple adoption of the Palestine clause in the Republican platform. He worked for the publication of declarations of support for the position of the Emergency Council by Zionist bodies and Jewish newspapers.

<sup>19</sup> Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 19, meeting of the night of March 20, 1944, p. 2, Z.A.-N.Y.; telegram from Nahum Goldmann to Wise, March 11, 1944, Wise Archive. In the telegram Goldmann expressed his fears of Silver's "hasty decisions." Wise and Silver succeeded in obtaining the President's statement at a meeting on March 9, 1944. For the text of FDR's statement, cf. Reuben Fink, *America and Palestine*, New York, 1944, p.103.

<sup>20</sup> Wise to Solomon Goldman, July 31, 1944, Wise Archive.

<sup>21</sup> Wise to Niles, June 28, 1944, Wise Archive.

The conflict over tactics was not restricted to Wise and Silver. An Emergency Council debate on July 10, 1944 on the question of the Republican platform revealed differences of opinion between the activists and the moderates. The women of Hadassah and some of the members of the Z.O.A. were not prepared to publish a declaration of support because of the condemnation of Roosevelt, while the representatives of Poalei-Zion, Mizrahi and other members of the Z.O.A. supported Silver's position and the compromise formula he proposed. It stated that the Emergency Council "hailed with satisfaction *the section* [emphasis in the original] in the plank on Palestine which was included in the Republican Party platform ...."<sup>22</sup>

Silver had won by a small majority (six to four) in his first confrontation at the Emergency Council; however, many members of the Zionist leadership found it very difficult to accept the new tactics. The two goals of Silver's approach (detaching American Jewry from the Democratic Party; and forging an ethnic Jewish voting bloc) were innovative and unconventional. They also flew in the face of the Jewish political tradition which had taken shape during the early 1930s, with Roosevelt's election. It was inevitable that Silver's tactics would cause dissension and even crisis within the Emergency Council.

The inclusion of the pro-Zionist clause in the Democratic and Republican platforms encouraged the Emergency Council, in September 1944, to renew its activities in the matter of the congressional resolution which had been stifled in March. Once again its leaders began to establish quiet contacts with senior officials in the State Department and the War Department in the hope of gaining their approval for proposing the resolution in Congress. But, to the surprise of the Emergency Council, a competing resolution was proposed at the same time to the Foreign Relations Committees of the two Houses of Congress by the "Hebrew Committee of National Liberation," the organization of Peter Bergson [alias of Hillel Kook, the head of the *Ha-Irgun Ha-Tzevai Ha-Leumi* ("The National Military Organization") delegation to the United States]. The Bergson resolution called for the immediate establishment of "mass emergency rescue shelters" for "Hebrews" able to reach Palestine, and it even called upon President Roosevelt and his administration to influence the British Government to permit free immigration of "Hebrews" from Hungary to Palestine. Some of the strongest supporters of Zionism in Congress backed the resolution, including the House Majority Leader

<sup>22</sup> Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 26, July 10, 1944, p. 4., Z.A.-N.Y. Cf. also the protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 12, July 24, 1944, p. 2, *ibid.*

John W. McCormack, and Senator Robert Taft from Ohio, a friend of Silver's.<sup>23</sup>

Silver, Wise, and their colleagues in the Emergency Council took a grave view of Bergson's resolution and worked vigorously to convince both its congressional supporters and the Jewish community that it could not produce concrete results. Moreover, they strongly criticized the artificial distinction between "Hebrews" and "Jews," and the representation of Palestine only as a place of refuge, thus weakening, in their opinion, the fundamental Zionist position, which saw Palestine as the national home of the Jewish people. In the end, as a result of Zionist intervention, Bergson's resolution was stillborn. However, his initiative once again illustrated the challenge presented to the Emergency Council by the constant competition of the Bergson organization.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of October 1944 Silver expressed moderate optimism about the fate of the pro-Zionist resolution in Congress. The local Emergency Councils were working for the support of Congressmen in their states, who responded positively. Sol Bloom, the Jewish chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, declared his intention of reconvening his committee immediately, although the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Tom Connally, had not yet announced the convening of his committee. Silver's optimism derived from three factors: (1) the withdrawal of the War Department's opposition; (2) the adoption of the pro-Zionist clauses in the platforms of the two large parties; (3) the pro-Zionist statements that had been made during the course of the presidential election campaign both by President Roosevelt and Governor Thomas Dewey. Nevertheless, Silver warned against excessive optimism as the State Department had not yet declared its position, and some opposition was expected from several members of the House Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>25</sup>

In the Emergency Council as well there were those who doubted both the usefulness of presenting the resolution and the tactics which were meant to bring about its acceptance by Congress. Some thought that in the light of the pro-Zionist clauses in the two party platforms and the declaration by President Roosevelt, little good would come of the initiative in Congress. On the other hand, the debate in Congress might be

23 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 30, August 31, 1944, pp. 2-4, Z.A.-N.Y.

24 On the preventive action taken by the Emergency Council to thwart the resolution proposed by Bergson, see the joint letter of Silver and Wise to Senator Elbert D. Thomas, September 8, 1944, Files of the Emergency Council, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 13, September 14, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

25 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 14, October 30, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.

detrimental because those hostile to Zionism would be given a new opportunity to express their opposition. Neumann responded by arguing that the Emergency Council had to consider the psychological and political ramifications should it retreat from the resolution. Wise claimed that only after the meeting which he and Silver were to hold on November 9 with the Secretary of State would it be possible to come to a final conclusion. Nevertheless, Silver strongly advocated presenting the resolution. Nearly a year had passed since the presentation of the first resolution, and extensive propaganda efforts had been invested in gaining the necessary public support. If the initiative was not taken at this time, when all the signs were positive, it would be impossible to do so in 1945. Despite Roosevelt's and Dewey's pro-Zionist statements, Silver argued, the congressional resolution was highly significant.<sup>26</sup>

On November 9 Silver, Wise, and Nahum Goldmann met with Edward Stettinius, the acting Secretary of State. Stettinius declined to endorse the resolution until he had consulted with President Roosevelt, and the Emergency Council was once again forced to wait. Subsequently, Roosevelt informed the State Department that he did not favor the resolution, and his position soon became known.<sup>27</sup>

At the meeting of the Emergency Council on November 21, 1944, Wise told his colleagues that the President had "urged that nothing be done about the Bill at this time, and that the matter be left in his hands for a little while longer."<sup>28</sup> The Council therefore decided to make another attempt, through Senator Robert Wagner of New York, to gain the President's approval. Wagner did call up Secretary of State Stettinius and asked him to clarify the position of the State Department. Stettinius explained to the Senator that "in view of the recent murder of Lord Moyne in Cairo and the generally delicate situation in the Middle East, it would be unwise to bring out the resolution at this time." Moreover, Roosevelt was about to meet with "high representatives of other governments" (at Yalta), where, the President hoped, it would be possible to find "a suitable solution." Wagner expressed agreement with the President's position.<sup>29</sup>

By now the two chairmen of the Emergency Council, Wise and Silver, were no longer working in tandem. Wise had full confidence in President

26 Ibid, p. 7.

27 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, Washington, 1965, vol. V, n. 55, p. 637 (henceforth *F.R.U.S.*); plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 15, November 9, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

28 Plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 16, 1944, November 21, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

29 *F.R.U.S.*, p. 640.

Roosevelt's support of the Zionist cause and on December 3, 1944 he telegraphed Stettinius that while he hoped the President and the Secretary of State would support the presentation of the resolution, he agreed in advance to accept any decision they might make. He also asked Stettinius not to reveal the President's position to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Why was Wise so concerned lest the President's position be revealed? From his meetings and contacts with Roosevelt and the White House (especially through Niles), he knew of Roosevelt's doubts about the Zionist cause in view of Arab opposition and given the paucity of Palestine's resources. In early March 1944, in a meeting with Wise and Silver, Roosevelt expressed his fears that the Zionist enterprise was liable to end in mass killing. "To think of it," warned Roosevelt, "two men, two holy men, coming here to ask *me* to let millions of people be killed in a jihad" [emphasis in original].<sup>30</sup> The President expressed that view in greater detail in a letter to Senator Wagner dated December 3, 1944, where he explains his opposition to presenting the resolution in Congress:

There are about a half million Jews there [in Palestine] .... Perhaps another million want to go .... On the other side of the picture there are approximately seventy million Mohammedans who want to cut their throats the day they land. The one thing I want to avoid is a massacre or a situation which cannot be resolved by talking things over. Anything said or done over here just now would add fuel to the flames and I hope that at this juncture no branch of the Government will act. Everybody knows what American hopes are. If we talk about them too much we will hurt fulfillment.<sup>31</sup>

Wise, in relating to Roosevelt's position, obviously tended to be more impressed by the end of the President's statement ("American hopes") than by its pessimistic beginning. He was afraid that the revelation of Roosevelt's true opinion would deny the Zionist movement the benefit it derived from the widely held belief that within the administration the President was the only ally of Zionism. Furthermore, the truth would also severely damage his position of leadership, which was partially based on his close relationship with Roosevelt and the White House. Therefore he also preferred to accede to the President's request to put off the presentation of the resolution.

30 Report of the meeting between Roosevelt and Wise and Silver, March 9, 1944, p. 1, Wise Archive, and see the protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 17, March 13, 1944, pp. 1-2, Z.A.-N.Y.

31 Richard P. Stevens, *American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1942-1947*, New York, 1962, 1970, p. 85.

For his part, Silver continued to pressure Senator Wagner to work for congressional approval of the resolution without delay. Wagner finally yielded and the two of them visited the Secretary of State on December 5, 1944, arguing that "no damage would be done by its passage now and that it does nothing more than endorse the statement" the President had made on October 15 to Senator Wagner, supporting in fact the Biltmore Program.<sup>32</sup> For the time being then the President and the Secretary of State had failed in their effort to wean Wagner away from Silver's activist position. In contrast, Senator Tom Connally supported the position of Roosevelt and his administration. Silver, who was not daunted by the opposition of the President and the State Department, continued to work indefatigably and on his own in both Houses of Congress. On November 30, 1944, the House Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of a proposal to pass the resolution on to the House Rules Committee, where it failed as a result of the opposition of the State Department.<sup>33</sup> But the main struggle took place in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where Silver led the campaign by maintaining close contacts with Senators Taft, Wagner, and Vandenberg. However, Silver's willingness to soften the phrasing of the draft resolution was not sufficient to overcome the pitfall implicit in the wording of the Biltmore proposal ("Jewish commonwealth") or the opposition of the State Department. On December 11, 1944 the Senate Committee decided, by a majority of ten to eight, to "kill" the resolution.

During the last days before the final decision of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Emergency Council in New York was involved in a series of feverish consultations. At the meetings of the Council Wise served as chairman, while Silver was absent in Washington lobbying Senators. The deliberations of the Emergency Council followed Wise's moderate line in favor of deferring the presentation of the resolution. When Silver was subsequently consulted he refused to agree, but the plenum of the Council, at its meeting on Saturday night, December 9, reaffirmed its original decision of October 30, that "... we do not proceed with the Resolution without the green light from the President."<sup>34</sup> In fact the decision of December 9 prepared the way for the inevitable confrontation between the moderates and the activists. Silver's active pressure for the resolution was now contrary to the policy of the body of which he was cochairman.

32 *F.R.U.S.*, pp. 641-642.

33 Memorandum from Harry L. Shapiro, Executive Director of Emergency Council, December 12, 1944, Manson File, Silver Archive.

34 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 17, December 9, 1944, p. 2, Z.A.-N.Y.

The crisis in the Emergency Council broke out the day after the failure in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On December 12, 1944, Wise announced his resignation from the post of chairman of the Council. "I cannot remain Chairman of a body," he declared, "one of the leading officers of which has, in a matter of supreme importance, deliberately and persistently contravened the decisions of the Plenary Council, with the resultant hurt which has thereby been inflicted upon our sacred cause."<sup>35</sup> Wise's letter of resignation provoked a series of discussions in the Zionist organizations. The main confrontations took place on December 19 at a meeting of the Executive of the Z.O.A., and the next day, at a plenary session of the Emergency Council. At those meetings Silver stood accused in the dock. His many enemies, both personal and ideological, exploited the failure of his initiative to settle accounts with him.

The meeting of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A. was particularly dramatic, both because of Silver's refusal—despite repeated requests—to report on the sequence of events that brought about the failure of the resolution in Congress (he claimed that he was going to submit a full report to the Emergency Council the following day), and because of the harshness of the attacks against him. He was rebuked both because he had been willing to modify the wording of the resolution and also because he had violated discipline, had acted independently, had been unwilling to cooperate, and had spread false optimism. Several speakers demanded Silver's dismissal, but in the course of the discussion more moderate voices were heard, calling for a considered approach and for the preservation of unity within the Zionist camp. It was certainly difficult for a proud, energetic, and autocratic leader like Silver to have to listen to the violent criticism from his colleagues within the movement. It is not surprising that after a while he left the meeting.<sup>36</sup>

The comments of three of the participants are worthy of special attention: Rabbi William Greenfeld, A. K. Epstein (a close associate of Weizmann's), and Nahum Goldmann. Those three attempted, each in his own way, to discuss the problem of Silver not on the organizational-legalistic level—lack of cooperation and violation of Zionist discipline—but on the level of personal political leadership. In the opinion of Greenfeld, Silver was a failure in every one of those respects: "The Zionist movement in general needs people who can get along with other people, who are capable of getting along with the President of the United States, people who can abide by the discipline of the Zionist Organization or of the Zionist Emergency Council."<sup>37</sup> Epstein argued that, "it is Palestine

<sup>35</sup> Wise to the Emergency Council, December 12, 1944, Wise Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., December 19, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



we are interested in primarily ... not a question of the prestige of individuals or an organization involved."<sup>38</sup> Goldmann, the protégé and ally of Wise, offered the most profound criticism. He analyzed Silver's activist tactics, the application of massive and vociferous pressure on President Roosevelt and his administration. Those tactics, Goldmann warned, were liable to bring about "complete political disaster." Historically, he argued, Silver actually had adopted the traditional Revisionist tactics of applying pressure through public opinion—which ultimately led to a dead end:

What we are doing here is what Revisionists have done for twenty years. It is exactly Revisionist tactics. Revisionists are very good Zionists. There has never lived in the world a better Zionist than Vladimir Jabotinsky, the incarnation of passion and devotion to Zionism, but if we would have adopted his tactics we never would have had six hundred thousand Jews in Palestine; we would have remained with resolutions, protests, and emotional outbursts of the so-called Jewish masses and would never have achieved the little or the much that we have achieved in Palestine.<sup>39</sup>

For years and years, Goldmann continued, those two schools had struggled over the correct way of accomplishing the aims of Zionism. On the one hand, there were the proponents of practical politics, who sought to achieve realistic goals in Palestine—and that was the path which Zionism had taken for twenty years; and, on the other hand, there was the school that emphasized success in winning public opinion, but its actual achievements in Palestine were worthless. Finally, he discussed the problem of Silver in the light of the central role ordained for the United States in determining the future of Palestine, and he claimed that the American Zionists could not permit themselves to have a leader who was in conflict with the architects of policy in the White House and the administration in Washington.

Silver had few defenders. At the head of those who supported him was, of course, Neumann. There is no doubt that Neumann and the rest of Silver's followers (Elihu D. Stone, the veteran Zionist leader from Boston, the journalist Jacob Fishman, and Rabbi Irving Miller) found themselves in a difficult position. It was clear that Silver had not cooperated with the Executive of the Emergency Council and had gone against an explicit decision. The goal of Neumann and his friends was thus to prevent Silver's dismissal at the meeting planned for the next day. They

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

suggested deferring the decision in the hope that tempers would cool, but were unsuccessful.

In summing up the discussion, Dr. Israel Goldstein rejected Neumann's proposal, arguing that deferral would permit Silver's supporters to conduct a public campaign, by approaching the press, with the inevitable result that the name of the Zionist movement would be discredited.<sup>40</sup> Goldstein's last words graphically illustrate the anger and resentment aroused by Silver, both because of his insensitivity to the opinions of his colleagues in the Executive and because of his activist tactics. Goldstein claimed that Silver had concealed vital facts from his colleagues on the Emergency Council and, moreover, was not welcome at the White House—to which the Zionists turn for assistance. True, if the Republican Governor Thomas Dewey were sitting in the White House, there would be a good reason for retaining Silver as a leader, but in the existing conditions, Goldstein argued, Silver must resign.<sup>41</sup>

After Goldstein's summary, an amended resolution was put up for a vote. It found Wise's protest resignation justified as a response to Silver's acts, and requested that Wise continue in office. Seventeen people voted for the resolution, and only four of Silver's supporters opposed it. That overwhelming majority demonstrated the control of Wise and the moderates over the Z.O.A. Executive. The fate of Silver's short and stormy period of leadership was decided; the majority clearly wished to dismiss him.<sup>42</sup>

The climax took place on the following day, December 20, 1944, when the Emergency Council met from eight in the evening until three the following morning.<sup>43</sup> The heads of all the Zionist parties were present. On one side stood the accuser, the elderly Wise, a veteran of fifty years of Zionist activity in the community, a brilliant speaker, the most prominent American Jewish leader of his generation, beloved and accepted by all his colleagues and known to be close to President Roosevelt. Opposed to him was a younger leader, also a Reform rabbi and a brilliant orator—but from distant Cleveland, Ohio—with Republican political leanings, who had dared to strike at what was most dear—the friendship and support of President Roosevelt. From the start it was clear that there would be a large majority in favor of dismissing Silver, for most of the members of the Z.O.A., Hadassah, and the other parties were against him.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Summary of the protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 18, December 20, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.

After speeches by Silver and Wise, which were heard in absolute silence, a motion was put forward stating that Dr. Silver had "acted in contravention of the decision of the Emergency Council in pressing the resolutions in Congress."<sup>44</sup> An amendment was proposed to that motion, suggesting that any decision regarding Wise's resignation should be delayed, that all officeholders on the Emergency Council resign, and that within a week a special meeting would be convened to discuss the reorganization of the Council and the holding of new elections. While the discussion of the motion and the various amendments was under way, Silver stood up. He did not wait for his formal dismissal but announced his resignation and left the meeting room. The struggle had ended with the victory of Wise and the moderates.

Wise's victory wrought great changes in the Emergency Council. He was chosen as the single chairman, and Silver's followers in the administrative staff resigned and were replaced by Wise supporters. The reorganization was achieved quickly,<sup>45</sup> although the controversy continued in the Jewish and Zionist press for some months afterwards.<sup>46</sup>

Silver's support came from two small Zionist parties, Poalei-Zion and the Mizrahi, and, to an extent which was not yet clear, from the Jewish press and the Jewish public. His central problem was therefore to consolidate his centers of power outside of the Z.O.A. and transform them into a means for taking over that organization. That was of course a long-range task, which was beyond the reach of an individual leader. Moreover, Silver attempted to shift the focus of his controversy with Wise and the moderates from the legalistic and formal issue of his violation of discipline, where he was at a disadvantage, to the questions of principle—populist activism versus personal intercession ("shtadlanut") with the authorities; and the relations of the Zionist leadership with the Roosevelt administration.

After Silver's resignation from the leadership of the Emergency Council he had, Neumann explained to him, two options open: admit defeat and leave the arena (perhaps forever), or fight back and transfer the struggle to the Zionist community throughout the United States. Silver opted for the latter, and gave his blessing to the formation of a new power base in the guise of an organization that would compete with the Emer-

44 Ibid. See the description in Neumann, *In the Arena*, pp. 202 ff.

45 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 19, December 28, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 37, January 2, 1945, *ibid.*

46 Cf. articles in Independence Jewish Press Service, December 26, 1944, Wise Archive; and *The Day*, December 31, 1944. See also Silver's press release, December 28, 1944, Manson File, Silver Archive.

gency Council. On February 13, 1945 the American Zionist Policy Committee was established, ostensibly within the framework of the Z.O.A. It received considerable financial backing from Silver's supporters, thus enabling it to undertake extensive propaganda activities parallel to those of the Emergency Council. Obviously, its activities provoked the immediate angry reaction of the leadership of the Z.O.A. and the Emergency Council.

In the meanwhile the Yalta Conference (February 7–12, 1945) had ended. The Zionists had hoped that it would come to a pro-Zionist decision with regard to Palestine.<sup>47</sup> That hope proved unfounded, however, and on February 27, 1945 Winston Churchill announced in Parliament that the question of Palestine would be decided only at the end of the war. President Roosevelt astonished the Jewish community with his short announcement to Congress on March 1: "I learned more about the whole problem of Arabia—the Moslems—the Jewish problem—by talking to Ibn Saud for five minutes [on February 14] than I could have learned in the exchange of two or three dozen letters."<sup>48</sup>

This was a harsh blow to the hopes of Zionists, especially to the expectations of Wise and the moderates, who were dependent upon the two leaders of the English-speaking world. However, it offered a golden opportunity for Silver and his activist supporters to prove that their basic position had been correct, and that they had been right to warn against attributing exaggerated importance to relations with heads of state. Now Silver could defend his exercise of political pressure through public opinion. The method of the "diplomats," Silver claimed, was bankrupt. What was left to be done?

Are we to be doomed again to subsist on pledges while fulfillment is repeatedly deferred? ... it is now almost six years since the White Paper was issued, and almost five years since Mr. Churchill took office. During these years Jewish blood has flowed in torrents, but the Palestine issue still remains where Chamberlain left it.

<sup>47</sup> On the great hopes pinned by the Zionists upon the results of the Conference of the three Great Powers at Yalta, see the protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., January 6, 1945, p. 3, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 20, January 25, 1945, p. 5, *ibid.* On the Palestine question at the Yalta Conference, see Joseph Heller, "Roosevelt, Stalin and the Palestine Problem at Yalta," *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, N.S., vol. 30 (1977), pp. 25–35; Amitzur Ilan, "The Conference of Yalta and the Palestine Problem," *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1977), pp. 28–52.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry and Israel*, New York 1979, pp. 16–17.

In the light of Zionist disappointment with the Yalta Conference, Silver declared that the only path that could be taken was to shake free of illusions:

This is no time for weakness and cautious "moderation." The moment calls for great courage and a return to a vigorous, militant policy.<sup>49</sup>

Wise was bitterly disappointed with Roosevelt's comments on his meeting with Ibn Saud, and he quickly requested a meeting with the President. He was well aware that his victory over Silver would be questioned—for it was largely based on his ties with the President. Wise met with Roosevelt on March 16, 1945. The details of that meeting, in which Herman Schulmann also took part, are scant, but the two Zionist leaders left encouraged because Roosevelt agreed to sign a short draft declaration in which he reaffirmed his pro-Zionist declaration of October 1944.<sup>50</sup>

However, Wise's success in no way weakened the counterattack by Silver and his supporters. Silver's statements and speeches were masterpieces of brevity, clarity, and acuity. Their central motifs were anchored in the horrors of the Holocaust, in the abandonment of the Jews and, especially, in the messianic vision of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. These themes, aided by Silver's impressive and tempestuous oratorical powers, touched the deepest strains of the Jewish soul and aroused enthusiastic reactions among the Jewish masses. Thus, for example, on April 29, 1945, at a huge Zionist rally held in Lewisohn Stadium in New York, in which thousands of Jews took part, Silver received long and enthusiastic applause.<sup>51</sup> His group rapidly became a Zionist force which Wise and the moderates could not ignore.

At the same time Wise was subject to direct appeals to settle his differences with Silver. Weizmann telegraphed both Wise and Silver from Palestine,<sup>52</sup> begging them to end the controversy within the Emergency Council. Wise, who suspected that Weisgal had instigated the dispatch of the telegram he received, concealed its existence from his

49 Silver's press release about his new organization, the American Zionist Policy Committee, March 4, 1945, Silver Archive; on the confusion and frustration among the leaders of the Z.O.A. after Roosevelt's announcement, see the protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., March 6, 1945, pp. 8–9, Z.A.-N.Y.

50 For photostat of Roosevelt's signature on the draft resolution, see Zvi Ganin, "The Diplomacy of the Weak: American Zionist Leadership during the Truman Era, 1945–1948," Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, 1974, p. 40.

51 Protocol of the Hadassah Executive, May 2, 1945, Hadassah Archives, New York.

52 Weizmann's telegram to Wise, February 22, 1945, Wise Archive.

colleagues in the Emergency Council. But pressure for a reconciliation continued to mount. Wise received letters from all over the United States asking him to heal the rift, and, in addition, 146 Zionists sent a telegram to the Executive of the Z.O.A. and the Emergency Council calling for a closing of the ranks and requesting Silver's return to active leadership of the Emergency Council.<sup>53</sup> Weizmann too was not inactive. He telegraphed Louis Lipsky, the veteran Zionist leader, and asked him to mediate between the two camps.<sup>54</sup>

In response to these pressures the Executive of the Z.O.A. convened a "Peace Committee" on April 1, 1945 to examine the possibilities for ending the controversy—although it had decided to reject categorically any proposal that could be interpreted as lack of confidence in Wise's leadership. A former President of the Z.O.A., Judge Louis E. Levinthal, of Philadelphia, was chosen to chair the committee, and its members included Daniel Frisch of Indianapolis, Louis Lipsky of New York, Ezra Shapiro of Cleveland, and Dewey D. Stone of Brockton, Mass.<sup>55</sup> The Peace Committee acted very slowly because its formation and meetings took place at a time when Zionist activities were concentrated on the San Francisco Conference (April 25–June 26, 1945).

Nevertheless, the internal Zionist pressure on Wise and his leadership did not cease. In early June the President of the American Mizrahi, Leon Gellman, sent an ultimatum to Wise, announcing that the great interest aroused by the San Francisco Conference could not conceal the grave political situation of the movement. Gellman's letter constituted a sharp indictment of Wise and his leadership, detailing his failures: the congressional resolution had not been submitted anew; anti-Zionist tendencies within the State Department had not been condemned; no attempt had been made to confront the administration via public opinion; and Wise had depended too much upon private and public promises of individual statesmen.

On June 15, 1945, a few days after the dispatch of the Mizrahi letter, a harsh blow was dealt the moderate camp when Hayim Greenberg, the respected ideologue of Labor Zionism in America and the chairman of the Emergency Council's Executive Committee, announced his immediate resignation because "the sharp cleavage in our ranks and the manner in which it manifests itself publicly is bound to undermine whatever remains

53 Protocol of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., April 1, 1945, p. 6, Z.A.-N.Y.

54 Ibid.

55 Summary of the discussion of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., April 1, 1945, Z.A.-N.Y.

of the prestige or reputation of our leadership."<sup>56</sup> Whatever motivated Greenberg's resignation (which was unanimously rejected by the Emergency Council), it made the leadership of the Z.O.A. and the Peace Committee realize that the position of the moderates had worsened, and that the Committee must finish its work quickly.

At the end of June 1945 the Peace Committee finally presented its recommendations to the heads of the Z.O.A.; it accepted Silver's basic demands for reorganization of the Emergency Council, the practical significance of which was his return to an unchallenged position of leadership. However, Silver and Wise were once again designated as joint chairmen, although Silver was made chairman of the Executive Committee, the decisive operative body. Moreover it was decided that Neumann and Lipsky would be included in that committee.<sup>57</sup> In mid-June Wise had written in a personal letter that he would not endorse an agreement proposed by Silver if the latter insisted that authority be concentrated in his hands,<sup>58</sup> but in the end he had to give in. To appease him three vice-chairmen were nominated, representatives of Poalei-Zion (Hayim Greenberg), Mizrahi (Leon Gellman), and the Z.O.A. (Herman Schulman—one of Wise's most ardent supporters).

Finally on July 16, 1945 the Emergency Council published a press release about its reorganization, announcing that Silver had been called upon to return to the chairmanship.<sup>59</sup> His chief assistants also returned to their former posts. The next day the American Zionist Policy Committee circulated a memorandum among its members expressing great satisfaction:

We have achieved one of our major objectives. Dr. Abba Hillel Silver has been recalled to leadership and the American Zionist Emergency Council has been reorganized in a manner that will insure the carrying forward of a militant Zionist program without obstruction.<sup>60</sup>

The memorandum also lauded Neumann, this praise being fitting, as Silver's return was largely the result of his labors. A brilliant political

56 Hayim Greenberg to Wise, June 15, 1945, appendix to the protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 53, June 19, 1945, Z.A.-N.Y. Cf. also the protocol of the Political Committee of the Mapai Central Committee, July 13, 1945, pp. 17-18, file 26/45, Beit Berl, Archive of the Labor Party.

57 Protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., June 24, 1945, pp. 2-6, Z.A.-N.Y.

58 Wise to Solomon Goldman, June 14, 1945, Wise Archive.

59 Press release of the Emergency Council on its reorganization, July 16, 1945, papers of Robert Szold, Z.A.-N.Y.

60 Memorandum of the American Zionist Policy Committee to the members of the its national council, July 17, 1945, Manson File, Silver Archive.

tactician, Neumann successfully piloted Silver and the activist camp to a central leadership position in the political struggle of American Zionism for the establishment of the Jewish state.

Zionist leaders in the United States generally came from the ranks of the Z.O.A., the main Zionist organization, whose President was changed every two years. But in addition to those presidents (whose personal and political weight varied), four key figures with great influence and authority were also active: the native leaders, Justice Louis Brandeis and Rabbi Wise; and the foreign leaders, Chaim Weizmann, the President of the World Zionist Organization, who spent a considerable part of the war in the United States, and David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, who was also in the United States for prolonged visits. After Brandeis's death in 1941 the key figures were Wise, who held several titles and positions, the ageing Weizmann, with his enormous prestige and authority, and the tough and zealous Ben-Gurion, who never made a place for himself in the American arena and failed in his attempt to have Weizmann removed from office. That chaotic leadership situation lasted for four years (from the summer of 1939 to that of 1943), four terrible years, in which Rostow's axiom was demonstrated: "The need for leadership ... is proportional to the distress of the followers."<sup>61</sup>

The distress of American Jewry and Zionism, which found expression in Wise's failure to revive the Emergency Council, brought about Weizmann's appointment of Silver. That appointment underscored the inability of American Zionism (and above all, the Z.O.A.) to cope with the ineffectuality of Wise's leadership and to produce new leaders on its own. Moreover, Wise's decision to remain in office as joint chairman of the Emergency Council at the time of Silver's appointment in the summer of 1943, had far-reaching negative effects upon the Zionist political effort and proved the unwillingness of the veteran moderate leadership to give up its influence and position.

The dire straits of the Jewish people and of Zionism during World War II also led to unceasing discussion of the strategy and tactics to be adopted by American Zionism. Among the Zionist leaders in the United States there was basic agreement that the central goal of the political struggle should be the deferral or cancellation of the ordinances of the White Paper, and that the strategy to be adopted should concentrate on bringing President Roosevelt to exert maximum pressure upon Whitehall with the aim of making the British Government change its policies in Palestine.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Dunkwart A. Rustow (ed.), *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, New York, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> Protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 20, April 3, 1944, p. 3, Z.A.-N.Y.



After the adoption of the Biltmore Program in May 1942, and especially after its ratification by the American Jewish Conference in the summer of 1943, an additional question arose: should the Zionist movement combine the struggle against the White Paper with the claim for a Jewish commonwealth and thus run the risk of division within the ranks of American Jewry, in that the American Jewish Committee was strongly opposed to the idea of a Jewish state?<sup>63</sup> Silver's attitude, even at the beginning of his leadership, toward the claim for a Jewish state was not coincidental. It clearly indicated his maximalist conception, which will be discussed below. However, in the moderate camp there were not many who shared that conception, and the prominent leaders such as Wise and Nahum Goldmann were actually sharply opposed to it.

In the extensive polemical literature that was published at the time of the confrontation between Silver and Wise, Silver's followers described the struggle as one between activism and *shtadlanut*, or a confrontation between "Aggressive Zionism" and "the Politics of the Green Light [from the White House]." One wonders whether that popular definition might not be too simplistic. For what is *shtadlanut*? As it is widely used the term is pejorative, the "opposite of a policy worthy of the name," as a mode of action taken by the representatives of a weak people "who stand at the gates of ministers and patrons, begging and interceding to obtain comfort and salvation by asking for mercy."<sup>64</sup>

We must therefore assess whether Wise's *modus operandi* can be classified as *shtadlanut*, for it is well known that he was a proud Jew and experienced in bitter public struggles within the American Jewish community and in using the masses to achieve Jewish and Zionist goals. In the early 1930s he was not deterred from a sharp public confrontation with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then Governor of New York. Generally, Wise was not known to be one who begged favors (although in his relations with President Roosevelt during the 1940s there are certain conspicuous exceptions to this generalization).

Thus Wise was not a *shtadlan* in the common sense of the term. His methods during the period under discussion (like those of Weizmann) were those of personal diplomacy, which did not underrate public opinion, but which attempted to cope with a difficult basic dilemma: how to

63 See Silver's remarks, protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 6, November 29, 1943, p. 4, Z.A.-N.Y.

64 Eliezer Steinman, "Eight Chapters in Policy" (Hebrew), in: *Ahdut Ha'avoda, Articles Collected by Mapai in Memory of Chaim Arlosoroff*, Tel Aviv, 1943, p. 91; for a harshly critical article against Silver and his presentation of the controversy as one between the activists and the *shtadlanim*, see Shlomo Grodzenski, "Dr. Silver and His Militantism" (Yiddish), *Yiddisher Kemsfer*, April 6, 1945, pp. 4-7.

obtain President Roosevelt's support and sustain it even though the Zionists held no bargaining chips and despite the animosity of the State Department and the Defense Establishment. Wise (and Weizmann) understood very well that, given the structure of the U.S. Government, only the President and the White House could neutralize that animosity.

Wise believed that continued personal contact with the President and granting him unconditional and unlimited political support for his reelection, in addition to the demand that justice be done to the Jewish people following the Holocaust, and placing trust in Roosevelt's basic integrity, would create a personal and political obligation which would be translated into pro-Zionist measures on the part of the White House. That method of action was based primarily on the carrot rather than the stick. It emphasized the obtaining of privileged access to the President,<sup>65</sup> and was accomplished by holding as many meetings as possible between Wise and the President and his Jewish associates in the White House and in Washington.

Silver and Neumann gradually developed a different approach. They began to view Zionist political activity as normal political activity by an American pressure group, which could use both the carrot and the stick with politicians. As opposed to Wise and the moderates, Silver and Neumann refused to act within the traditional framework of personal diplomacy. They gradually started to develop new rules of play and a new *modus operandi*, based on forging political power and wielding it. That system can truly be called activist and aggressive.

The activist tactics of Silver and Neumann had seven basic elements:

1. a basic belief in the importance of mobilizing the masses (in protest meetings, demonstrations, and processions);
2. emphasis on gaining public opinion and the Congress as central allies;
3. by means of the latter—exertion of constant pressure upon the President and the administration, being willing to appear to be a nuisance which, though unpleasant, demands consideration;
4. abandonment of the traditional bond with the Democratic Party and the creation of freedom of maneuver between the two major parties for the purpose of increasing Zionist bargaining power;
5. willingness to voice public criticism of the President, emphasizing the principle “put not your trust in princes ...”;

<sup>65</sup> David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 2nd ed., New York, 1971, p. 399. The *modus operandi* of attempting to convince Roosevelt's Jewish associates is well illustrated by the detailed report of Dov Yosef to the Executive of the Jewish Agency on his trip to the United States, protocol of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, no. 28, February 4, 1945, vol. 40/2, C.Z.A.

6. encouragement of Jewish bloc voting to be used as a stick to goad the White House, the criterion for the Jewish vote being the relation of the White House and the administration to Zionist demands;
7. on the level of the American Jewish community: unwillingness to compromise with non-Zionists (especially the American Jewish Committee), and in lieu of that—making a concerted effort to weaken their influence in the American Jewish community.

We have seen that Silver's path to activist leadership as head of the Emergency Council was not an easy one. His willingness to confront the State Department and the White House directly was novel, daring, and too fraught with danger for a generation of leaders who were not used to Jewish-Zionist ethnic politics. When did it become clear to the American Zionist movement that Silver actually did possess the key to real achievements? The upheaval took place in the half year between December 1944 and the summer of 1945, when Wise returned to leadership of the Emergency Council. The deep disappointment with the Yalta Conference, the bad impression made by Roosevelt's speech after his meeting with Ibn Saud, the increasing revelations about the death camps, and, in addition, the constant propaganda of the competing organization established by Neumann, and, gravest of all from Wise's point of view, President Roosevelt's sudden death, which abruptly deprived him of one of the foundation stones of his position—all of these hastened the collapse of the moderate leadership. In the summer of 1945 it seemed as if the moderate line had proven itself bankrupt.

In the controversy between the activists and the moderates, Silver and his faction won partially because of the unbroken series of failures on the part of the moderates, but principally because there was full accord between the personality of the leader and the psychological needs of American Zionists during the Holocaust. Silver created the foundation upon which Zionist power politics were built in the United States. The results of that policy were garnered by the Zionist movement during the presidency of Harry S. Truman, who called for the immigration of a hundred thousand refugees to Palestine, in the thwarting of the Morrison-Grady plan of the summer of 1946, and in other important initiatives.

Moreover, Silver liberated Zionist political activity in the United States from the guardianship both of the World Zionist Organization (Weizmann) and of the Yishuv (Ben-Gurion). In so doing he transformed American Zionism into an autonomous body, closely tied to Palestine but with its own strategy and tactics.

Nevertheless, Silver did not demonstrate sufficient understanding and sensitivity, during the Roosevelt period or under Truman, of the great

importance of personal diplomacy—and even of traditional *shtadlanut*—in the relations of the Zionist movement with the White House. For in the equation of forces which were vying with each other for the support of the President, the Zionist cause was in a weaker position than that of its powerful opponents both within the administration and outside it.

It remains true, as we have stated, that Silver created the basic currency of bargaining, but his aggressive, activist tactics toward the White House angered President Truman so much that from the summer of 1946 onwards he viewed Silver as a personal enemy and refused to receive him. The anger of the President and the White House might have had dire consequences at decisive points in the political struggle, if not for the assistance of David Niles (the presidential assistant), Eddy Jacobson (Truman's personal friend), and Weizmann (the former President of the World Zionist Organisation). The traditional approach of the *shtadlan* used by Jacobson, and Weizmann's personal diplomacy and charm, supported by Silver's power politics, created in dialectical fashion a delicate balance in the relations between the Zionist movement and the White House, which, on November 29, 1947 and May 14, 1948, brought Truman to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

## In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys

Monty Noam Penkower

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Unbelievable!, Hillel Kook thought, his eyes riveted on a headline in the *Washington Post* for November 25, 1942: "2 Million Jews Slain, Rabbi Wise Reports." The Associated Press dispatch went on to explain that Stephen Wise, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, had just received State Department confirmation that half of the estimated four million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been murdered in an "extermination campaign." Wise's own sources disclosed that the German *Führer* had ordered an end to the remainder by New Year's Day 1943, and that half of Warsaw's Jewish population of 800,000 had already died.<sup>1</sup>

If the shocking facts were true, reasoned Kook, why confine them to two brief paragraphs on page six? Surely the report merited the front page alongside the *Post's* two-column account of a suicide. Yet major New York newspapers, while including Wise's assertion that Hitler "is even exhuming the dead for the value of the corpses," which were to be "processed into such war-vital commodities as soap, fats and fertilizer," also relegated the AP item to secondary status that morning. Grabbing a telephone, the individual then in charge of an effort to raise a Jewish Army against the Third Reich called Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle for an immediate appointment.<sup>2</sup>

Within an hour the 32-year-old Palestinian had his worst fears corroborated. Apologizing for his urgent tone, Kook asked his regular contact at State for details. "Yes," admitted Berle, "we've already discussed the matter with Rabbi Wise." "What are you going to do about it?" pressed his visitor. "What can we do?" the Assistant Secretary candidly replied. The two spoke for a few minutes more, and Kook took his leave.<sup>3</sup>

Without the "faintest idea" of what to do, but knowing that he would do something, Kook contacted Samuel Merlin, his chief lieutenant, and summoned the Committee for a Jewish Army's executive board. All agreed that the imperative of rescue should now assume first priority. A program for immediate action was drafted: President Franklin D. Roosevelt should clearly announce the coun-

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1 Hillel Kook talk at the Hebrew University (notes in author's possession), June 1, 1972; *Washington Post*, Nov. 25, 1942.

2 Kook talk, June 1, 1972; *New York Herald Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1942; *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1942.

3 Kook talk, June 1, 1972.

try's determination to find ways and means of stopping the mass slaughter, and appoint a full-time committee of military and political figures for the task. In addition, those "disinherited and stateless" Jews free of Hitler's clutches should be granted the right to form a Jewish Army in league with the Allied forces.<sup>4</sup>

It would be a formidable task to shake the "helpless passivity" of Americans in the face of history's most monstrous crime. The highest United States government circles maintained a conspiracy of silence, and the rest of the country followed their example. A divided Jewish leadership also failed to grasp or convey the significance of the disaster facing their people across the Atlantic. But at this late hour, as Kook pointed out to news broadcaster Raymond Swing, "no Four Freedoms or Atlantic Charter or Democracy for the Common Man should be preached" before a democracy's collective conscience regarding Hitler's first victims was touched to the quick. Only thus could the murder of a people be shifted from the press's back pages and be interrupted by rescue action.<sup>5</sup>

The story of these Palestinian visitors to the United States had begun early in 1939, when a small delegation of the Irgun Tsvai Leumi arrived in New York. With letters of introduction from Revisionist New Zionist Organization (NZO) president Vladimir Jabotinsky, their ideological mentor, and others, Robert Brisco, Chaim Lubinski, and Col. John Patterson first sought financial support for the organization's transfer of thousands of "illegal" Jewish immigrants from Europe to the Promised Land. They immediately found a receptive audience in William Ziff, author of the anti-British *The Rape of Palestine*, and Rabbi Louis Newman of New York's Reform Congregation Rodeph Sholom. Mrs. John Gunther and Wall Street banker Harvey Schwamm opened up various doors, aided by the nephew of Lincoln's Secretary of War and some lay leaders in the Orthodox Young Israel organization. Publication of Britain's May White Paper in turn spurred the creation a month later of The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, which began publicly to champion unauthorized immigration and a Jewish military force against the Mandatory power.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Kook interview with the author, June 22, 1972; Ben Ami interview with the author, March 28, 1972.

5 Merlin interview with the author, March 27, 1972; Bergson to Swing, Nov. 29, 1942, Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe Mss., Box 66-89, Metsudat Ze'ev, Tel-Aviv.

6 David Niv, *Ma'arkhot Ha-Irgun Ha-Tsva'i Ha-Leumi*, vol. II (Tel-Aviv: 1963), p. 196; Lubinski to Ziff, May 20, 1939, and June 30, 1939, Box 1/1, Palestine Statehood Committee Papers (hereafter PSC), Sterling Library, Yale University.

Yitzchak Ben Ami, sent by the Irgun's commander-in-chief to take charge of activities when the first three emissaries left the United States on the eve of World War II, expanded the new, non-sectarian organization to embrace Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago. When the United Jewish Appeal refused to finance the NZO's shipment to Palestine of 2,000 Central European refugees, stranded in small barges on the frozen Danube, the American Friends obtained the necessary funds in January, 1940 by releasing the facts to the press. On February 13, the *Sakariya* landed its cargo of 2,175 escapees from Hitler in Haifa, the British retaliating with the arrest of Eri Jabotinsky, its organizer and the son of the NZO president. With that voyage, the Revisionist-Irgun program of unauthorized immigration came to an end.<sup>7</sup>

Vladimir Jabotinsky's arrival in the United States the following month signaled an upsurge of activity. Jabotinsky's first appearance at New York's Manhattan Center drew an impressive crowd and coverage in the metropolitan newspapers. The subsequent fall of France to the *Wehrmacht* lent extra force to his public call on June 19 for a Jewish Army of 100,000, including American volunteers, following the example of World War I's Jewish Legion. Last efforts to secure unity with the World Zionist Organization having failed, the ten-member NZO delegation headed by Jabotinsky looked forward to expanding the Jewish Army campaign that fall. The unexpected death of the Revisionists' president in August threw the NZO into turmoil, however, and the movement floundered for a year while seeking its bearings.<sup>8</sup>

Some in the Irgun had already taken issue with Jabotinsky and his tactics. Hillel Kook, while working in Europe under Abraham Stern during 1938-1939 on arms purchases and illegal immigration to Palestine, accepted his commander's judgment that the Irgun existed as a combined military-political entity free of Revisionist Party control. The NZO chief executive's faith in diplomatic negotiation and international conscience he found naïve; so did Samuel Merlin, secretary general of the NZO World Executive, after Shlomo Ben Yosef went to the Palestine gallows a martyr in the

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7 Ben Ami interview with author, March 28, 1972; Schwamm *et al.* memo, Jan 27, 1940, Box 4/2, PSC; William Perl, *The Four-Front War: From the Holocaust to the Promised Land* (New York: 1979), Ch. 6.

8 Joseph B. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet; The Last Years* (New York: 1961), Ch. 20; Jabotinsky to Lothian, June 21, 1940, and FO to Lothian, June 14, 1940, Foreign Office files (hereafter FO) 371/24566, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Kew, England; Benjamin Akzin interview with the author, Aug. 19, 1976.

Irgun's armed campaign against Arab terror. Alexander Rafaeli (alias Hadani), active on the continent in public relations and finance for the underground organization, took a similar position.<sup>9</sup>

Only an independent political arm, the Irgun leadership decided, could arouse the world's conscience to the justice of their military struggle. Creation of the American Friends and a public manifesto from headquarters in Jerusalem against the White Paper represented first steps in this direction. Kook, Lubinski, and Rafaeli traveled to Geneva in August, 1939 to brief delegates and foreign journalists at the World Zionist Congress about the Irgun's fight against the British. Jabotinsky, apprised by the trio of their task just prior to the Congress, had no choice but to accept the *fait accompli*. He did not forgive the separatists, and shortly before his death warned Rafaeli against continuing American Friends' activity in Chicago and points West.<sup>10</sup>

With Jabotinsky's passing, the Irgunists' break with the NZO in America became inevitable, and they went their own way. Not long after reaching New York in July, 1940, Kook, the Irgun's supreme commander-in-exile, attracted Ben Ami, Merlin, Rafaeli, Jeremiah Halperin, and Aryeh Ben Eliezer to his standard. Using the alias Peter H. Bergson, chosen previously so as not to embarrass his uncle, the late Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Kook turned his charm and English accent on New York's literati over cocktails with the dramatic vision of a large Jewish Army as most effectively identifying the Jewish tragedy and Jewish rights. His interest in a high pressure campaign also interested Eri Jabotinsky (released by the British after his father's death) and Ben Zion Netanyahu, the one member of the NZO delegation from Palestine who resigned in protest against his older colleagues' orthodox methods and wrote in *Bitzaron* of the Jews' need to "fight for their right to fight." Undaunted by attacks from America's established Zionist bodies, the small band of emissaries led a frugal existence, lunch often being a nickel bag of peanuts and dinner the welcome largesse of parlor gatherings.<sup>11</sup>

The breakthrough Kook and company so desperately needed came in the person of Ben Hecht. Intrigued by that author's biting attack in an April *PM* column against influential Jews who hid

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9 Niv, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 139, 164, 192; Kook oral history interview, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University; Rafaeli interview with the author, Aug. 15, 1976.

10 Schechtman, *op. cit.*, pp. 481-482; Rafaeli interview, Aug. 15, 1976.

11 Kook interview, June 22, 1972; Netanyahu interview with the author, June 2, 1974.



behind their pride in being neutral Americans rather than speak out against Hitler, Kook invited Hecht to lead their cause. The highly paid Hollywood script writer of such films as *Wuthering Heights* and *Scarface*, and author of the popular play *The Front Page* (with Charles MacArthur) and the self-flagellating *A Jew in Love*, Hecht had been far removed from ethnic roots and from all contact with Palestine. But the Nazi purge of his people and the silence of the democracies regarding that persecution brought his Jewishness to the surface. The author's *A Book of Miracles*, appearing on the eve of World War II, had prophesied a "great International Pogrom" against the Jews, whom he lovingly portrayed as the Lord's "little candle" in a world of cruelty and darkness. He subsequently wrote propaganda speeches and pageants for Herbert Agar's Fight for Freedom group, which sought to bring the United States into that global conflict. Kook's appeal therefore struck a warm chord. Hecht agreed to join the campaign to mobilize the press and Congress for a separate army which could, as he later reminisced, "bring respect back to the name Jew."<sup>12</sup>

After months of planning, the Irgun emissaries launched the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews on December 4, 1941. Beneath the grouped flags of all the Allied nations, the conference of more than 150 representatives from across the land called for a force of 200,000 to be based in Palestine to "combat the Satanic zeal" of Hitler and to fight under the British in the "evangelic hills of Galilee." Foreign correspondent and author Pierre Van Paassen, as national chairman, stressed the army's invaluable strategic importance to the free world. Samuel Harden Church, president of Carnegie Institute and honorary chairman of the new committee, went further in calling for an end to the White Paper and in forecasting the army's return to Jerusalem, where a Jewish government should be re-established in Palestine with freedom for all peoples. Senators Claude Pepper and Styles Bridges sent greetings, and, in a real coup, Secretary of War Henry Stimson called in his best wishes for the committee's future.<sup>13</sup>

America's entry into the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor three days later appeared providential for the committee's success, and Kook exploited the sudden turn of events with a master stroke. A while earlier, he had Hecht solicit prominent citizens (drawn from *Who's Who in America*) to join the future

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12 Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York: 1954), p. 536; Ben Hecht, *A Book of Miracles*, (New York: 1939), pp. 23-53, 112-201.

13 *Washington Times Herald*, Dec. 5, 1941; Pierre Van Paassen, "World Destiny Pivots on Palestine," *New Palestine*, Dec. 12, 1941.

committee, with supporters in turn recommending others. On January 5, 1942, Kook placed the names of some of these politicians, professors, and authors in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*. "JEWS FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO FIGHT" ran the headline on page thirteen, which went on to demand that the Jewish people take its rightful place in "the ranks of the free peoples of the earth" by joining the Allied cause in a 200,000 strong army.<sup>14</sup>

The \$2,000 publicity gamble shattered the prevailing American consensus regarding Jewish affairs. The Committee's forthright demand for a Jewish Army carried tremendous emotional power, appealing to non-Jews as well as to many Jews who had heretofore not identified with Zionist concerns. The very means of communication, bringing the message via newspaper and radio to the nation's breakfast tables, in turn generated further coverage. As Kook had estimated, the public found the substantial scheme, dramatically portrayed in non-partisan terms, more attractive than the Jewish Agency's limited request that HMG create a Jewish force of some 30,000 in Palestine.<sup>15</sup>

The American Zionist organizations proved unable to counter this broad appeal. Upstaged by the young Palestinian mavericks, the umbrella-type Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (ECZA) sought to co-opt the committee's leadership. The attempt failed, while Jewish Agency executive chairman David Ben-Gurion ordered an end to all negotiations with the dissidents. With the aid of advertising tycoon Alfred Strelsin and Maryland rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz, Kook invaded the nation's capital and proceeded to breach the barriers of officialdom. Congressman Andrew Somers, a fighting Irishman from Brooklyn with no love for the British, introduced a resolution in the House on behalf of the committee. Senators Edwin Johnson and Elbert Thomas spoke out forcefully in its favor, while many others joined as members; Adlai Stevenson helped obtain the public support of his superior, Navy Secretary Frank Knox. A committee delegation almost reached London to lay its case before the Foreign Office, but Whitehall, fearing that even a private reception would increase the committee's prestige, turned the scheme down. (The Committee's propaganda in London, directed by Jeremiah Halperin and Lord Strabolgi, had also been winning public acclaim.) Ultimately, HMG fell back on its an-

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14 Kook interview, June 22, 1972; *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1942.

15 "I Bring a Sword," Jan. 1947 report, Box 6, Eri Jabotinsky Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev.

nounced position that Jews could most effectively contribute against the Axis by serving in the armed forces of the countries to which they owed allegiance, and "stateless" Jews could volunteer for service. By the end of 1942, the committee's objective was still far from being reached.<sup>16</sup>

Such was the record of Kook and his comrades when the State Department first confirmed the dimensions of the Holocaust. The group's campaign for a Jewish Army had been far bolder in conception and implementation than that of the country's Zionist organizations, who had no active Palestinian emissaries in their councils, and had alerted Americans to a most worthy cause. Had such a force been created, Kook reasoned, the Nazis would have considerably reduced the scale of their annihilation of the Jews out of fear of the army's retaliation against German prisoners of war.<sup>17</sup> Events across the Atlantic had overtaken even the energetic committee leadership, however. The voices of the doomed Jews of Europe called for the opening of a new front – a campaign against massacre. The hour was very late, Kook understood, and from a determined enemy the vanquished Jews could expect no quarter.

The Irgun delegation's war for the rescue of European Jewry began with a demand for action, not pity. Across a full-page in the *New York Times* on December 7, 1942, Van Paassen's "Proclamation on the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews" called on America, "the moral and military arsenal of World Democracy," to support the Jewish Army. Only with this military force, as suggested by Arthur Szyk's accompanying portrait of a Jewish soldier eager to revenge his martyred family, could the Jewish survivors, "caught between the blows of Hitler's hammer and the anvil of our own passive sympathy," return to their rightful place among the free peoples of the earth. An end could then be put to "the scandal of history, of a great and ancient people compelled to haunt the corridors of Time as ghosts and beggars and waifs of every storm that rages."<sup>18</sup>

But something with greater impact than a ringing proclamation in a newspaper was necessary to blast the spiritual lethargy of the world toward the Holocaust. Hecht's shrill full-page advertisement

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16 Ben-Gurion to Locker, Jan. 4 and 26, 1942, S 25/41, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA); Kook interview, June 22, 1972; Rabinowitz to Merlin, June 1, 1942, Box 54-59, Committee for a Jewish Army Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. IV, pp. 544-547; FO to Halifax, Oct. 21, 1942, FO 371/31379, PRO.

17 Bergson to Swing, Nov. 29, 1941, Box 66-89, Emergency Committee Mss.

18 *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1942.

on February 16, 1943, announcing a Rumanian offer of 70,000 Jews in Transnistria's concentration camps "AT \$50 A PIECE GUARANTEED HUMAN BEINGS" immediately drew fire from Wise and respectable Jewish organizations as unjustified in the absence of official confirmation. That same month, Hecht conveyed the faint cry of Europe's Jews, based on underground reports received from Hayim Greenberg of the *Jewish Frontier*, in the *American Mercury* and (abridged) in the *Readers' Digest*. An American audience of millions now confronted the dire truth that only this people, "reduced from a minority to a phantom," would not be represented in the judgment hall when peace dawned. Yet the country's leading writers of Jewish origin, whom Hecht convened in the expectation of receiving help in dramatizing the nightmare to the United States and the world, refused to contribute their talents to the committee's crusade.<sup>19</sup>

One February afternoon Hecht came up with an idea. He quickly interested three Jewish friends in "a memorial dedicated to the 2 million Jewish dead of Europe." His script would have an original Kurt Weill score, with Moss Hart directing and Billy Rose producing the pageant in Madison Square Garden. When a meeting in his Algonquin suite of all New York's Jewish organizations failed to produce a united front, as Kook and Merlin had predicted, Hecht agreed to have the Committee for a Jewish Army coordinate the spectacle.<sup>20</sup>

"We Will Never Die" dramatically indicted the American nation on March 9, 1943, for its silence, and therefore its collaboration, in Hitler's massacre of the Jews. Coming a week after the New York arena had witnessed a massive rally led by Stephen Wise to rescue Jewry without delay, the Garden now had to open its doors twice in one evening for the overflow crowds. With the Ten Commandments on two 40-foot tablets under a Star of David dominating the stage, the haunting call of a Shofar summoning Jews to prayer ushered in the production. For two hours, as in a vast synagogue for an extraordinary Day of Atonement, those present looked into the grave of Jewry and discovered that people's singular contributions to civilization. The pageant, the city's papers agreed the next morning, had most effectively reminded the free world that the

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19 Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New York: 1961), pp. 191-192; Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: 1970), pp. 175-182; Ben Hecht, "Remember Us!", *Readers' Digest*, Feb., 1943, 107-110; Hecht, *A Child*, pp. 551-553.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 553 ff.

four million Jews still alive in Europe were “helplessly waiting for death or deliverance.”<sup>21</sup>

The success of the unique processional strengthened the “Bergson boys,” as Kook’s group began to be called, to increased activity. Americans flocked to see the memorial in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. Coverage of the event prompted the first daily press reports of Jewry’s desperate plight. On April 12, Mrs. Roosevelt headed as distinguished a gathering as ever attended an unofficial function in the nation’s capital, with seven Supreme Court justices, two cabinet members, thirty-eight Senators and hundreds of Congressmen, and the representatives of forty nations present at the bier of the massacred. When Van Paassen resigned as chairman of the Committee due to ill-health and writing commitments, Edwin Johnson assumed his position. This influential member of the Senate Military Affairs Committee announced a three-fold program of rescue: the immediate appointment of an intergovernmental commission of military experts to determine a “realistic and stern” policy to stop the wholesale slaughter; a Jewish Army, complete with commando teams and Eagle Squadrons, for retaliatory bombing of Germany; and the initiation of possible transfers of Jews from *Festung Europa* into Palestine and elsewhere. In April, the magazine *The Answer* appeared, expressing its faith that the people of America and Great Britain (including the Jewish masses), once aroused, would demand action to stop Hitler.<sup>22</sup>

When the closed Anglo-American Bermuda Conference on Refugees adjourned at the end of April without indicating its willingness to adopt an effective rescue program, the committee leadership openly broke with the State Department. Entreaties from B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Committee not to publish Hecht’s “Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe” had already proven fruitless. That advertisement carried the refrain that the Christian world (including the U.S. Department of State) “is busy with other news” than the killing of Jews, and concluded that by Christmas all Christians would enjoy their “peace on earth” without the Jews (who would be killed by then). The committee also instigated the sending of thousands of letters and cables against the White Paper to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during his White

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21 Ben Hecht, “We Will Never Die,” Box 23-25, Emergency Committee Mss.; *New York Post*, *New York Times*, and *New York Journal American*, all March 10, 1943.

22 *The Answer*, April and May, 1943.

House visit. Not surprisingly, the militant group now disregarded the Jewish Joint Emergency Council's advice, and inserted another full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on May 4 attacking the Bermuda proceedings as a "cruel mockery" of 5 million Jews caught in the "Nazi death trap." Senator Harry S. Truman resigned from the committee because of this, but Senators Langer and Murray reaffirmed their support of its objectives, and Johnson stayed on as national chairman.<sup>23</sup> The committee's propaganda war continued to win converts everywhere.

The real danger that with the advance of the Allied armies the Nazis would speed up their annihilation of the Jews, as Goebbels currently threatened, did not permit those in Kook's entourage to rest on their laurels. Convinced that governments would act only when public opinion compelled action, the sponsors of Van Paassen's Proclamation, in cooperation with the Committee for a Jewish Army, decided to call an "Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe." Meeting between July 20-25, 1943 at New York's Hotel Commodore, outstanding experts, after examining questions of international relations, military affairs, transportation and relief, placed the tragedy in its proper place as a specific Allied problem capable of solution. The conferees urged the United States government to create an official agency charged with rescuing this one people marked for death, the other "United Nations" free to participate if they so wished. The International Red Cross, neutral governments, and the Vatican, for their part, should oversee better treatment of Jews in the satellite governments, and press for their emigration from Axis-held territory. Ample food and shipping was available for limited feeding of the persecuted. In four months, 600,000 Jews from the satellite nations could be evacuated to Palestine, with an additional 150,000 brought to other temporary locations in neutral countries. Punitive raids and the threat of postwar reprisals would follow if Germany's satellites refused to let the Jews leave.<sup>24</sup>

The conference elicited wide coverage, and pressured the nation's foremost political leaders to take a stand. Responding to a telegram from Max Lerner, chief political writer for *PM* and chairman of the Emergency Conference's resolutions committee, President Roosevelt seconded Secretary of State Cordell Hull's assurance that the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and

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23 Feingold, *op. cit.*, Ch. 7; Hecht, *A Child*, pp 564-565.

24 "Memorandum on the Findings of the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe, July 20th to 25th," copy in Box 66-89, Emergency Committee Mss.

other Anglo-American efforts represented this government's "repeated endeavors" to rescue European Jewry. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Mrs. Roosevelt sent more personal messages of concern, as did Wendell Willkie, Herbert Hoover, and the chief rabbis of Palestine and England.<sup>25</sup>

Accompanied by American Labor Party leader Dean Alfange and the sculptor Jo Davidson, Kook met with Secretary Hull and Under Secretary Breckenridge Long on August 12. The delegation suggested sending three three-man teams to investigate rescue possibilities, including temporary rescue havens, in Spain and Turkey, and to ask the Palestine High Commissioner about temporary visas and the possibility of releasing the last 29,000 certificates under the White Paper. Similar camps at Jewish expense, they added, could be set up in Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, and Morocco. The Secretary replied at the time that he viewed favorably the dispatch of such delegations, and would take their suggestion for camps into consideration.<sup>26</sup>

Still, finely expressed intentions did not result in concrete action. At the end of August, the State Department announced the formation of a special United States Commission to save European art, but the new Emergency Committee's request for a specific agency to rescue Jews went unheeded. The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and the Bermuda Conference championed by Roosevelt and Hull, by ignoring the unique Jewish tragedy, had proven inadequate to meet the crisis. The Dept. of State and Downing Street, as Lerner tellingly put it in a column addressed to the President, continued to "insist on giving the Jews in their death the civil national status that Hitler denies them in life." In September Van Paassen submitted a full-page "open letter" to Roosevelt and Churchill, appealing for the immediate establishment of a joint rescue agency so that humanity could say, in the language of the Bible, "our hands have not shed this blood." He received no reply. The mission of Representative Will Rogers, Jr., sent by the Emergency Committee to London, also failed to achieve positive results.<sup>27</sup>

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25 New York City newspapers for July 20-25, 1943; Lerner to Roosevelt, July 14, 1943, OF-76C, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter FDRL); *The Answer*, August, 1943; and Sept. 7, 1943.

26 *The Answer*, Nov. 1, 1943, p. 5, and Sept. 7, 1943, p. 21; Bergson statement, Nov. 19, 1943, *Hearings, House Resolutions 350 and 352, 78th Congress, 1st Session* (hereafter *Rescue Hearings*), reprinted in *Problems of World War II and its Aftermath*, vol. II (Wash., D.C.: 1976), pp. 60-61.

27 *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, p. 5; *Rescue Hearings*, p. 61; Hull to Lerner, Sept. 1, 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4435, State Department records, RG 59, National Ar-

Confronted by bureaucratic shuffle and silence, the Bergson boys increased the public pressure on Washington. To coincide with the ten Days of Penance preceding Yom Kippur, 400 Orthodox rabbis marched on the Capitol on October 6. After presenting a petition to Vice President Wallace on the steps of the Senate which called for rescue without further delay, the bearded, black-coated assembly heard one of their number chant Hebrew prayers at the Lincoln Memorial for Hitler's victims and (to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner) for the United States government. From there the patriarchal-looking group silently proceeded to the White House for an expected interview with Roosevelt, only to be told that the President was away on "other business."<sup>28</sup>

The foremost leaders of 6,000 churches in America followed by proclaiming October 10 a Day of Intercession, requesting their followers to pray for "your Jewish brethren" in Europe and to aid the Emergency Committee. As "the last-ditch stand to prevent inaction from countenancing the slaughter of European Jewry," the committee then initiated a drive for ten million signatures to the President and Congress favoring the establishment of a separate intergovernmental rescue agency. It also staged the first rally honoring Sweden's heroic action to save Danish Jewry, at which 6,000 heard Office of Price Administration director Leon Henderson castigate the Allies' "moral cowardice" and challenge Roosevelt and Churchill to right their countries' dismal rescue record. When the Moscow Conference's Declaration on Atrocities still pointedly excluded the Nazis' prime target, Hecht penned an advertisement entitled "My Uncle Abraham Reports," an elegy which concluded bitterly with small hope of hearing anything worthwhile about Jews from Roosevelt.<sup>29</sup>

The tragedy of Jewry abroad and the success of the Emergency Committee's enlightenment campaign inspired the Bergsonites to try their last card - resolutions in both the House and Senate to move the Administration. Representatives Rogers of California and Baldwin of New York and Senator Guy Gillette of Iowa introduced identical resolutions on November 9, 1943, urging Roosevelt

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chives (hereafter SD); *PM*, July 22, 1943; *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, pp. 5, 23, and Oct. 15, 1943, pp. 5-6. Concurrently, Van Paassen's *The Forgotten Ally* (New York: 1943) broke the British censorship about the *Yishuv's* substantial efforts on behalf of the Allied military cause.

28 Merlin interview with the author, Jan. 18, 1978; Washington, D.C., newspapers for Oct. 7, 1943.

29 *The Answer*, Oct. 15, 1943 and Dec. 5, 1943, pp. 20-21; Hecht, *A Child*, pp. 579-580.



to create a rescue commission "designed to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany." For Breckenridge Long, State's chief officer on refugee matters, the demand appeared "an unwarranted duplication of effort" of the Intergovernmental Committee revived during the Bermuda Conference. Only after protracted delays and Treasury Department intervention had he recently agreed to Kook's request that Ira Hirschmann, Vice President of Bloomingdale's, be sent as the Emergency Committee's representative to Turkey on rescue matters. Seeking to blunt the attack on State's handling of the Jewish refugee question, Long released the Bermuda final report the following day. Its lack of substance, however, merely strengthened the resolve of his opposition.<sup>30</sup>

While the Senate Foreign Relations Committee took the resolution under its wing, Sol Bloom, chairman of its House counterpart, decided to hold hearings on the matter. The elderly Jewish Congressman from New York, having been pilloried by the Bergson boys for serving at the Bermuda fiasco as a stalking horse for State's position, now saw the chance to rehabilitate his image. Witnesses Dean Alfange, Representative Baldwin, William Ziff, Kook, Frances Gunther and New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, however, unsparingly accused the American government and the Allies of sabotaging all effective rescue of European Jewry, and thereby encouraging the Nazis to continue their annihilation campaign with unremitting fury.<sup>31</sup>

The mounting pressure of cables demanding action, speared by the Emergency Committee's advertisement "HOW WELL ARE YOU SLEEPING?," convinced Bloom to have Long himself testify in State's defense. For four hours in executive session on November 26, the star witness described the Department's rescue steps and dwelt on his reviving the Intergovernmental Committee at Bermuda. His confidential assertions that the Allied body had the authority to negotiate with the Axis through neutral governments and that 580,000 refugees had been admitted since 1933 to these shores contributed to a very favorable reception; even Rogers, co-sponsor of the rescue commission proposal, hailed his "fine and brilliant exposition."<sup>32</sup>

The appearance of Rabbi Wise before Bloom's committee six

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30 Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 223; Bergson-Hirschmann-Long talk, Sept. 1, 1943, Box 202, Breckenridge Long Mss., Library of Congress.

31 *Rescue Hearings*, pp. 15-160.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 161-210.

days later further weakened the resolution's chances of success. The American Zionist spokesman, keen opponent of Jabotinsky in the past, had opposed the Irgun group's independent methods from the start as unrepresentative of the American Jewish community at large. A few months earlier Wise had persuaded the United States delegate to the Intergovernmental Committee not to attend the Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe. He had also rejected a suggestion from Samuel Rosenman, Roosevelt's chief speech writer and advisor, that Kook be invited with the most prestigious Jewish organization leadership to a conference for unity; he and Rosenman (both Reform) had advised Roosevelt in October not to receive the Orthodox rabbis. The executive of the established ECZA worried about Rosenman's periodic warnings that the tactics of the Bergson clique alienated the "sympathetic" President, and no Jewish leader venerated the occupant of the White House more than Stephen Wise.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking as a co-chairman of the recently established American Jewish Conference, Wise lost no time in throwing a damper on the resolution. He first smeared those "rashly written and rashly published advertisements" (of Kook's group) which always asked for help and funds not accounted for, and casually dismissed the Emergency Committee as representing "no one but a handful, a very small number of Jews and a number of Christians." The Zionist official then deemed the resolution at hand "inadequate" for its lack of a specific program, especially for not mentioning open entry into Palestine, the Jewish National Home promised in Britain's Balfour Declaration. In their own counsels, Kook, Merlin, and the others entertained no doubt that the governmental commission they championed would quickly realize that country's central value. But in assigning rescue first priority, the Irgunists and their Congressional supporters had purposely avoided this knotty political issue out of fear that it might jeopardize the resolution. For Wise and other leading Zionists, however, rescue and Palestine were inseparable in the redemption of their beleaguered people.

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33 Monty N. Penkower, "The 1943 Joint Anglo-American Statement on Palestine," *Herzl Yearbook*, VIII (1978), 229 and n. 37; Goldmann-Rosenman talk, Nov. 3, 1943, Z5/358, CZA; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978. According to a report which Rosenman passed on to the established Zionists, Roosevelt had been "much displeased" at the rabbis' march instigated by Kook, wondering at breakfast that morning: "can nothing be done to liquidate [sic!] Bergson? He was, after all, a British Palestinian subject." Goldmann reported Rosenman's words to the British Embassy. Hayter minute, Nov. 11, 1943, FO371/35041, PRO.

Having carried the banner of a Jewish state in Palestine for many lonely years, and having now captured most of the country's major Jewish organizations for that cause at the American Jewish Conference, they were not prepared to tolerate any compromise on principle.<sup>34</sup>

The Zionist establishment's sincere but myopic perspective soon brought its antagonism towards the Bergson boys into the public eye. Rumors regarding fiscal irregularities were now heard and the American Jewish Conference released a memorandum charging that the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe was one of many "fronts" designed to undermine the recognized national Jewish agencies. Branding the committee an "irresponsible" group which "had not done a thing which may result in the saving of a single Jew," Wise even asked Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes (in an undated letter) to withdraw as honorary chairman of the committee's Washington division. He refused. With the Bergson boys having resolved early not to expose these Jewish rifts during the Holocaust, it was left to the committee's Christian co-chairmen to reply that no "property rights" existed in an issue of moral concern to all decent human beings.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the mounting pressure initiated by the Emergency Committee exposed State's position. Convinced that Long's "extensive report" obviated the need for a separate rescue commission running counter to the policy fixed at Bermuda, Bloom asked for and received Long's approval to make the Assistant Secretary's testimony public. The vacuity of the Bermuda Conference now became common knowledge, especially after the Jewish Telegraphic Agency printed a statement it had obtained from the director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees that that much lauded body had no authority whatsoever to negotiate with the Axis. State's duplicity also appeared blatant when Jewish organizations calculated the numbers of all refugees actually admitted to the United States at no more than a third of Long's figure, the Assistant Secretary having erroneously given the number of visas issued. Just before the Christmas recess, the House Foreign Relations Committee shelved the resolution, as Long had wished, but Gillette and the Senate Committee stood firm.

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34 *Rescue Hearings*, pp. 217-243; Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

35 American Jewish Conference statement, Dec. 29, 1943, MRD-1, 7/1, United Jewish Appeal Mss., New York; Wise to Ickes, n.d., in Harold Ickes Diary, Jan. 1, 1944, Library of Congress; Merlin interview, March 27, 1972; *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944, p. 24.

Gillette's resolution, which drew the unprecedented co-sponsorship of twelve colleagues from both parties, was adopted unanimously on December 20, 1943.<sup>36</sup> What would Congress do, observers asked, when it reconvened in three weeks?

The breakthrough occurred on January 16, 1944, when Secretary Morgenthau presented a report on State's record of sabotage to the President. Six months earlier, the Emergency Committee had evoked the Jewish Secretary's first public statement on the Final Solution, and his diary on Jewish refugees began with numerous clippings about the conference. Kook's appeal impressed people like Josiah DuBois, Jr. and John Pehle of Morgenthau's staff, who had exposed State's opposition to rescuing Europe's Jews and then convinced their superior that only Roosevelt could right the sorry situation. Long's published testimony and the fate of the rescue resolutions corroborated Treasury's views. Although Morgenthau wished the argument settled on its merits, he realized that his "strongest out" in pressing Roosevelt lay in the imminence of Congressional action. The President could be told, the Secretary remarked to his subordinates just before the appointment, "This is a boiling pot on the Hill. You can't hold it; it is going to pop, and you have either got to move very fast, or the Congress of the United States will do it for you."<sup>37</sup>

Morgenthau's intervention and the public pressure built up by the Emergency Committee forced Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board (WRB) on January 22 by Executive Order. Some time later, the Secretary informed Pehle, the new board's director, that the President had intervened because of Congressional pressure: "I had something to do with it, but the tide was running with me." The President could not escape responsibility any longer for the government's inaction, particularly in an election year. The Emergency Committee had been very effective. Roosevelt's abrupt step, which took rescue out of State's hands, drew 850,000 letters of support to the White House. Gillette removed his resolution from the Senate floor, noting that the President's action "attained the goal we were seeking." Unaware of the Secretary's personal involvement, newspapers like the *Washington Post*, the *Christian*

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36 *The Answer*, Jan., 1944; Bloom-Goldmann-Shulman talk, Dec. 8, 1943, Z5/665, CZA; Feingold, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-236.

37 Monty N. Penkower, "Jewish Organizations and the Creation of the U.S. War Refugee Board," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, July, 1980, 129-132; vol. 688-1 and January 15, 1944, vol. 694, Morgenthau Diaries, (hereafter MD), FDRL.

*Science Monitor*, and the *New York Post* credited the Emergency Committee's "industrious spadework" with the outcome.<sup>38</sup>

American apathy had at last been replaced with a first step to action. The Bergson boys had contributed greatly to a moral victory. Yet an additional two million had perished at the hands of the Nazis since Kook first read of the slaughter of two million Jews. The "battle against massacre" just begun would need far more than a will to rescue if the War Refugee Board were to check the German zeal to complete its mission.<sup>39</sup>

The Emergency Committee immediately moved to aid the WRB. On January 25, Kook emphasized to Pehle during a private talk the need for official measures to have the "Jewish problem" recognized abroad. Short-wave broadcasts and air drops of leaflets could begin to impress the enemy with the United States government's interest in rescuing European Jewry. If several hundred thousand Jews were also saved, he added, Germany's satellites would fall into line. A memorandum from the committee several days later specifically explained that reception centers should be set up in Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden, who would announce that every Jew reaching their borders would be admitted without difficulty. The Board, while covering expenses, would give temporary passports and assurances to satisfy the reluctant neutrals that these refugees would move on after the war.<sup>40</sup>

Palestine, the Emergency Committee maintained, should command particular attention. Because of its geographical proximity to the satellites, its internationally mandated status, and its center of 600,000 Jews eager to help their kin, the country could offer immediate haven to large numbers of refugees. The discriminatory laws of the 1939 White Paper, remnant of "Munich and appeasement politics," should be abrogated in the face of Jewry's catastrophe. At the same time, Kook cabled Aryeh Ben Eliezer, sent by the Bergson boys in September, 1943 to Palestine to reorganize the splintered Irgun high command, to undertake a bold rescue plan immediately: evacuate 500 Bulgarian Jews overland to

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38 Penkower, "Jewish Organizations," 132-134; March 8, 1944, vol. 707, Morgenthau Diaries, FDRL; Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 238; *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944.

39 *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944, p. 9. Kook had also played an important role in interesting the new Under Secretary of State in the plan. For his memorandum on the subject, see Bergson to Stettinius, Nov. 17, 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4383, SD.

40 Jan. 25, 1944 meeting, Box 6, War Refugee Board files (hereafter WRB), FDRL; memo to Pehle, Feb. 7, 1944, *ibid.*

a camp in Turkey financed by the Emergency Committee (and thence to Palestine) and charter a ship for Rumania, preferably to bring Jews from concentration camps in Transnistria either to Turkey or direct to Palestine. "One quick successful operation," Kook concluded, would prove the possibility of rescue and set the pattern for further efforts on a large scale.<sup>41</sup>

These ideas found a sympathetic audience at WRB headquarters. At Rogers' request, Pehle cleared the way for Eri Jabotinsky to proceed to Turkey as the committee's delegate, Kook hoping that his colleague's past experience in unsanctioned immigration to Palestine would prove helpful even now. As for temporary havens, Pehle and his staff agreed with the Emergency Committee that such refugee centers seemed "indispensable" to the success of any effort to stop the mass murder of Jews. In the director's view, the American government should set the first example, and thus avoid a charge of hypocrisy. The country had, after all, a legal precedent in its housing of thousands of German prisoners of war during the present hostilities. And while the WRB decided not to take a position regarding a Jewish state in Palestine, it hoped that the British would announce a willingness to admit unlimited numbers of refugees to Palestine on a temporary basis and so contribute materially to the rescue effort.<sup>42</sup>

The Emergency Committee helped Pehle muster public support for this idea, again to the consternation of the American Zionist organizations. While Morgenthau intervened with Roosevelt to back at least one haven in the United States, DuBois asked a private gathering of the Washington Emergency Committee in mid-April to campaign for the larger scheme. The committee placed full-page advertisements headlined "25 SQUARE MILES OR 2 MILLION LIVES, WHICH SHALL IT BE?," asserting that use of this "political penicillin" in Palestine, Turkey, North Africa, some abandoned United States military training camps, and in British territories could accomplish the desired miracle. On behalf of the committee, Senator Gillette introduced a resolution calling for "reception centers" in this country to receive "Jews and other special victims of Nazi hatred" until the war's end. After Roosevelt

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41 *New York Post*, Feb. 10, 1944; *The Answer*, March 10, 1944, p. 4; Bergson to Klarman (for Ben Eliezer), Feb. 11, 1944, Box 6, WRB, FDRL. Ben Eliezer proved instrumental in bringing order to the divided Irgun forces and in having Menachem Begin chosen as their military commander. Begin interview with the author, Nov. 29, 1976.

42 Pehle to Stettinius, April 1, 1944, vol. 720, MD, FDRL.; March 8, 1944 meeting, vol. 707, MD; Pehle draft, vol. 716, pp. 171-74, MD, FDRL.

set up one camp for 918 Jews and 64 other refugees at Ft. Oswego by Executive Order, the Emergency Committee followed up with resolutions from Representative Somers and Senator Thomas for a temporary center in Palestine. Again the Zionists were opposed, insisting that no refuge in the Jewish National Home should be other than permanent.<sup>43</sup>

At that juncture, the Irgun delegation took its boldest step to secure the deliverance of their people – the creation of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. On May 18, 1944, the foreign visitors cast off their anonymity and publicly declared themselves “the servants and spokesmen for the Hebrew Nation, until such time as our nation shall be free to elect its own spokesmen and representatives in democratic form.” The group went on to proclaim “that the dry and tormented bones of the Jews in European lands have now been united; that the blood of our three million dead has done more than fertilize the earth of the people who have murdered them. It has molded the survivors into a single living entity. It has brought forth a renascent Hebrew Nation. The Jews who live today in the hell of Europe together with the Jews of Palestine constitute the Hebrew Nation.” For the first time since Roman legions crushed Bar Kochba’s struggle for independence in the year 135, a unified band of Palestinians had launched, in exile, a revolt for self-determination and sovereignty.<sup>44</sup>

The ideological underpinnings of this radical move had their genesis not in Palestine, but in the group’s perception of the unique American condition. Before the Irgunists had landed in the United States, they had accepted Vladimir Jabotinsky’s dual emphasis on Palestine as a Jewish state and on European Jewry, retaining an independent national-ethnic identity, being granted minority rights. Once in America, however, the Bergsonites came to realize that many of the country’s five million Jews had become fully integrated into the United States as citizens. Accepting the American separation of state and religion, most American Jews maintained in varying degrees their religious heritage but were completely indifferent to their former national origins. Prominent Jews especially would do nothing which might raise the charge of dual loyalty. The failure of the Zionist efforts to win over the Jewish community

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43 Pehle memo, June 1, 1944, vol. 738, MD; meetings of the Washington (D.C.) Emergency Committee division, April 13 and May 1, 1944, Box 34-48, Emergency Committee Mss; Pehle report, May 16, 1944, vol. 732, MD.

44 Aaron Berman, “The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the Rescue of the European Jews,” April, 1975, Hampshire College honors paper, pp. 51-52; Kook interview, June 22, 1972; *The Answer*, June 15, 1944.

over the years were the best proof of this historical development. American statesmen themselves asked Kook and Merlin how they could interfere on behalf of “enemy nationals.”<sup>45</sup>

The Palestinian emissaries arrived at a solution to this dilemma during the latter half of 1943. Merlin, influenced by the thought of Adolf Gurevitch, presented his colleagues with a tentative draft in April outlining the distinction between “Hebrews” – the *Yishuv* and Europe’s stateless Jews – and Americans of Jewish descent. Four months later, Ben Ami suggested the formation of a Free Palestine League, whose major objective was the creation of a “Hebrew Republic” in Palestine. Merlin first articulated the new philosophy in *The Answer*. The Free Palestine Committee, officially organized at the end of November, kept out of public view until Kook addressed the Emergency Committee’s “Show of Shows” in Madison Square Garden on March 18, 1944, to celebrate the WRB’s creation. At an executive meeting of the Free Palestine Committee in early April, he recommended that its name be changed to the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. The group purchased the former Iranian embassy at 2315 Massachusetts Ave., hoisted outside the blue and white banner of Zion, and took up residence on “Hebrew soil.”<sup>46</sup>

As might be expected, the Zionist organizations reacted strongly. Officials in America and Palestine charged that the new Hebrew Committee sought to splinter the American Jewish community and to overthrow the legitimate Va’ad Leumi and especially the Jewish Agency, the only internationally recognized body representing the Jewish people in all matters affecting Palestine. Ben Zion Netanyahu, who had returned to the NZO in August, 1941 as editor of *Zionews* after Kook decided to eschew a political attack on HMG regarding Palestine, joined in the cry. The World Jewish Congress’s Nahum Goldmann contacted various ambassadors and warned Secretary Morgenthau that the Hebrew Committee’s intention to float a ten-year million dollar bond issue was a “swindle” for which it should be prosecuted. Goldmann also supported inquiries by the Department of Justice into the group’s status as a foreign agent and the Selective Service’s check into Kook’s draft status.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 55ff; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978; Kook interview, June 22, 1972.

46 Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 38; *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, pp. 12-15; and Aug. 29, 1944, pp. 23, 32.

47 Feuer statement, May 18, 1944, Emergency Committee file, ZA; *Zionews*, July, 1944, 12-16; memo of May 19, 1944, 867N.01/2347, SD; May 20, 1944 talk, vol. 734, MD; talk of May 24, 1944, vol. 735, MD; Parker-Wilson talk, May 20, 1944, 867N.01/6-2344, SD.



Despite Kook's estimate that this violent attack helped publicize the new Hebrew Committee, the opposition's united front hurt the cause. A number of American labor leaders, upon receiving a Histadrut cable condemning the committee, left the American League's ranks. Some in the Emergency Committee's executive board departed as well. Fearing that the new organization would undermine the Anglo-Committee for a Jewish Army, and not having been consulted in advance, Jeremiah Halperin resigned membership in the Hebrew Committee. The WRB, impressed that the American Jewish organizations had united on this issue, decided to maintain a neutral position on the matter. The State Department refused to recognize the committee's claims, much to the delight of anxious officials in Whitehall.<sup>48</sup>

Undeterred, Kook refused to capitulate in a Town Hall address on July 19 to commemorate the "Birth of a Nation Rally." The self-styled "nuisance diplomat" demanded recognition of the so-called Hebrew Nation as vital for rescue if Europe's surviving Jews were not to lose their identity by being classed either as nationals of a particular government or as "stateless refugees." Only those who swore allegiance to the new nation, Kook argued, could request representation in United Nations councils, a Hebrew Army, gas warfare in retaliation against Germany's use of poison gas on the co-belligerent Hebrew people, and a free Palestine with the Arabs as equal partners in a non-theocratic democracy.<sup>49</sup>

The catastrophe facing Hungarian Jewry provided the Bergson boys with their major test as the alleged spokesmen for the "Hebrews" of Europe. Immediately after the Nazis occupied Hungary at the end of March, the Emergency Committee had held a large-scale conference of Hungarian Jewish leaders at New York's Hotel Astor; placed large advertisements for immediate rescue, particularly urging the opening of Palestine's doors to Jews; sent a delegation of Hungarian Jews to confer with Congressmen and the WRB; and cabled Josef Stalin to exchange 50,000 Jewish refugees from the Western Ukraine for Soviet-held Hungarian prisoners of war. Emergency Committee representatives met with the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, who transmitted to the Vatican American Jewry's prayer that Pope Pius XII intervene for Europe's last substantial Jewish community, and requested the International Red Cross to protest to the Hungarian government over the murder of

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48 Bergson to Halperin, May 20, 1944, Colonial Office papers 733/461/75872/14A/II, PRO; talk of May 24, 1944, vol. 735, MD; Hull memo, May 29, 1944, 867N.01/2366, SD; Halifax to FO, May 26, 1944, FO 371/38544, PRO.

49 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-44. See also *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944.

Jewish Allied nationals. Following past practice, at a conference on June 17 the committee rallied the support of Christian Hungarian-Americans, whose messages against the atrocities were beamed to Europe by the Office of War Information and the BBC. The Office of War Information also broadcast a Service of Intercession, sponsored by the Emergency Committee, at the First Magyar Reformed Church of New York on July 9, during which worshippers donned the yellow armband Jews had to wear in union with "those who scream to us from the windows of rumbling death-trains."<sup>50</sup>

Through contacts with the International Red Cross, the Bergsonites learned in mid-July of Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy's offer to release thousands of Jewish children and even adults, and they acted in decisive fashion. Hoping that wide-spread publicity would force the British and American governments to respond favorably, they released the news to the press. The Emergency Committee also cabled various governments requesting the issuance of Nansen-type passports to Jews in Hungary; the creation of temporary emergency shelters capable of admitting some 100,000 refugees; and representation to Great Britain to issue Palestinian certificates immediately for those Hungarian Jews in need. Kook cabled Churchill with a plea for Palestine refugee shelters, noting that the Hebrew Committee would postpone political controversies over Palestine until the end of hostilities. The Hearst chain and the *New York Post*, particularly, supported the Palestine "free ports" scheme. Resolutions to this effect were introduced in both houses of Congress a month later, supported by a mammoth petition and the backing of House Majority Leader John McCormack. The British, who stalled concerning Horthy's readiness to send Jews to Palestine, did not budge.<sup>51</sup>

HMG's intransigence against opening the most obvious haven, even to the remnants of European Jewry, brought a final change in tactics. The Irgunists' past appeal to Great Britain on humanitarian, rather than political, grounds had proven a failure. HMG's unwillingness to create an agency parallel to the WRB; Ben Eliezer's detention by the Palestine Administration in April as he was about to depart for rescue work in Turkey; the lack of official response from London to their different appeals; and Britain's

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50 *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944, 20-22, and July 15, 1944, 17-18, 27.

51 Smertenko to Roosevelt, July 24, 1944, and Aug. 4, 1944, Box 1/12, PSC Mss.; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 86; Bergson to Halifax, June 15, 1944, Box 1/11, PSC Mss.; Isaac Zaar, *Rescue and Liberation, America's Part in the Birth of Israel* (New York: 1954), p. 97.

refusal to rescind the White Paper or even accede to temporary havens on Palestinian soil – all intensified anti-British sentiment in the ranks of the Hebrew Committee. Always acting independently of the Irgun command in Palestine and publicly deploring terrorism, the group had helped obtain the reprieve of a Stern member from the gallows. But this victory in July was the sole British concession to public pressure. Even HMG's creation of a Jewish Brigade that September rankled. While the Anglo-American Committee for a Jewish Army had generated much needed support for a Jewish fighting force, the British confined the small unit's enlistment to Jews in the United Kingdom, Palestine, and Mauritius.<sup>52</sup>

The response of the Hebrew Committee and the American League for a Free Palestine to Churchill's comment on the assassination of Lord Moyne by two Sternists in November reflected this more militant shift. Churchill's reaction in Commons that the "shameful crime" of Moyne's murder "has shocked the world," and that he and others would have to reconsider their pro-Zionist position if that movement were to end producing "a new set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany," appeared callous and hypocritical. Why, the chairman of the Hebrew Committee wrote the Prime Minister, had Germany's use of poison gas, death factories, and the extermination camps of Treblinka and Majdanek never moved Churchill to tell the House of Commons that these crimes have "shocked the world"? The two Sternists, like other revolutionaries in the British Empire, acted independently, yet the entire *Yishuv*, in "the most tragic hour of our history," had been held culpable. If anything, Britain's "cold-blooded refusal" to let the Hebrews flee death by proceeding to the home promised them in the Balfour Declaration and the Bible bore "much more similarity to the systematic extermination of one people by the Nazis" than the act of Moyne's killers.<sup>53</sup>

Difficulties in the United States compounded the Irgunists' sense of frustration. In October, the *Washington Post* carried a series of articles critical of Kook and the group's financial transactions. Although the influential newspaper printed a rejoinder by Merlin and retreated somewhat in an editorial, it refused to publish an extensive rebuttal by Kook or to take steps against the American Zionist Emergency Council's reprints of the newspaper's first articles. The Hebrew Committee distributed a lengthy booklet to

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52 *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944, pp. 4, 26; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Bergson to Strabolgi, Sept. 21, 1944, FO 371/40132, PRO.

53 *The Answer*, Nov., 1944, pp. 16–17.

state its case fully, but damage had been done. An Internal Revenue Service investigation, which in time found no irregularities, further drained the Hebrew Committee's strength. The non-Zionist American Jewish Committee and the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, the Hebrew Committee's most likely allies in terms of its Hebrew-Jew distinction, maintained a safe distance. American Jewish organizations at the second UNRRA conference also made certain to discredit the committee and its wish that separate Allied rehabilitation be granted the Hebrew Nation.<sup>54</sup>

With the first publication of the near complete annihilation of European Jewry, the Hebrew Committee's bitterness mounted. The War Refugee Board's release on November 26 of eye-witness reports about the ghastly truth of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the subsequent failure of the UN War Crimes Commission to consider any crimes committed against the "stateless" and against persons of Axis nationality, shocked the group and strengthened its demand for representation on that body. The forced resignation from the international commission of its two major British and American delegates for pressing to bring to trial and punish all Axis war criminals, including those guilty of atrocities against Jews, further convinced the committee of the correctness of its position. The group, in addition, began to insist that the entire German population be indicted morally and politically "for the holocaustal sufferings of men in our generation." *The Answer* particularly heralded *A Guide for the Bedevilled*, Ben Hecht's mordant counterattack against anti-Semitism and his depiction of the Germans as a sub-human "race of killers" damned forever.<sup>55</sup>

The Bergson boys increasingly levelled their fire on HMG. Kook's public request of Roosevelt at the end of November to mediate a conference between the British, the Hebrew Committee, and those Palestinians in the Jewish Agency meant little, for Roosevelt had already indicated an unwillingness to challenge his ally's Palestine policy. Full-page advertisements followed, sharply criticizing Britain's "ruthless occupation" of martial law against Jews and seconding the late Lord Wedgwood's exhortation that America assume the Mandate, mirrored the Hebrew Committee's

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54 Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Harper to Meyer, Oct. 6, 1944, Box 1/12, PSC Mss.; Campbell to FO, Aug. 1, 1944, FO 371/40144, PRO; Zaar, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-28, 112; *The Answer*, Nov., 1944, pp. 20, 22. As a mark of solidarity with the Allied cause, Rafaeli and Ben Ami left the Hebrew Committee to serve in the American armed forces.

55 *The Answer*, Jan., 1945 and Nov., 1944; Ben Hecht, *A Guide for the Bedevilled* (New York: 1945).

true convictions. At the end of January, 1945, it called on the peoples and governments of the United Nations to help bring the "500,000 Hebrews clamoring for an opportunity to go to Palestine immediately" to their destination, the White Paper notwithstanding. The British responded by having Eri Jabotinsky deported from Turkey to Palestine and then arrested as a suspect in Moyne's assassination. The Hebrew Committee's representative had actually been engaged in hiring a boat to carry 2,500 "illegals" per week on a Constanza-Haifa route; the British foiled the plan, and only pressure from the committee obtained his release. Yet Kook remained pessimistic as long as the Mandatory authorities could detain Ben Eliezer and 278 other Irgunists and Sternists in a camp in Eritrea and then the Sudan.<sup>56</sup>

The Hebrew Committee's plans could not be realized without clearing the opposition of Jewish organizations, and so Kook made his last effort with a lengthy letter to Chaim Weizmann on April 2, 1945. The decimation of European Jewry and the presence of still-rampant anti-Semitism in the world required a new political program if the Jewish people were to recuperate from their severe wounds. Repatriation of one-and-a-half million to Palestine in the next eighteen months could stem this national disaster. The major world leaders had not responded to that catastrophe during the war "primarily because of the confusion and the ambiguity of our present existence in the world." A free Palestine state, "the national territory of the Hebrew nation," including the Arabs already there, would allow those of Jewish descent everywhere (particularly in the United States) to exist as purely religious communities. Weizmann, as the Jewish Agency's president, should initiate the reconstitution of his organization into a Hebrew Agency (composed of Hebrew nationals), which would endeavor to secure official or de facto representation in the United Nations and various international bodies. Continuation of the status quo would be "disastrous" for Hebrews and "most harmful and potentially explosive for Jews everywhere."<sup>57</sup>

Kook's blueprint for Hebrew freedom never received an acknowledgment, let alone a response, from the recognized leader of world Zionism. Representatives Somers and Bennett of New

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56 *The Answer*, Feb., 1945, p. 17, and Jan., 1945, p. 23; Bergson to Roosevelt, Nov. 29, 1944, Box 1/15, PSC Mss; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Yaakov Meridor, *Arukah Ha-Derekh Le'Heirut* (Tel Aviv: 1975).

57 Bergson to Weizmann, April 2, 1945, Weizmann Archives, Rehovot, Israel. Meyer Weisgal, Weizmann's closest associate, published a reply in a letter to the *New York Times*, May 12, 1945.

York jointly introduced a House resolution a month later, initiated by the Bergsonites, demanding recognition of the Hebrew nation and an intergovernmental agency to repatriate the surviving "Hebrews" of Europe to Palestine. At the last minute, however, Senator Murray decided against being a co-sponsor with Senator Ferguson, stating that he had just heard that a number of Jewish organizations were not united on the proposal.<sup>58</sup> Little had changed since Stephen Wise had intervened in November, 1943 against the Emergency Committee's resolution on rescue. World War II ended, as it had begun, with this internecine conflict still raging.

The Bergson boys came to America, unheralded, to awaken its citizens to the Jewish tragedy. Without friends, supporters, or money, they gradually succeeded in piercing the silence surrounding the Holocaust. The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, never exceeding more than 2,000 active workers though it had several times that many contributors, publicized the Irgun's illegal immigration program against the British. With the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, which numbered almost 50,000 individual contributors and several active chapters of hundreds of members in the most major cities, the delegation's cause took on the proportions of a mass movement. The over-125,000 supporters and active members of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the first broadly based organization calling for rescue action, influenced in some measure the establishment of the War Refugee Board. The American League for a Free Palestine, with a membership of over 40,000, supported the ideology of the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation and its revolutionary proclamation of a separate government-in-exile. These various organizations, each created for a definite but distinct purpose, collectively dramatized to such a degree the unique plight of European Jewry that people across the nation joined to demand action, not pity, as a response to Germany's most monstrous crime.<sup>59</sup>

The fundamental creed which underlay the Irgunists' methods possessed considerable force. Believing that public opinion ruled in a democracy, they developed new mass media techniques which consciously evoked the country's noblest liberal and religious traditions. When challenged, particularly by recognized Jewish organizations, for having no authorization to speak in the name of

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58 *The Answer*, July, 1945, pp. 9, 17; Smertenko to Bridges, May 15, 1945, Hebrew Committee for National Liberation Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev.

59 Smertenko to Sulzberger, May 29, 1945, *ibid.*; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978.

an established constituency, the Bergson boys relied on what Samuel Merlin termed "the mandate of conscience."<sup>60</sup> Americans responded to their non-sectarian, non-partisan approach, much like that of the Committee to Help the Allies and the Fight for Freedom Committee, or the individual armies and governments-in-exile set up by different national liberation movements in the course of the war. Many came to understand that the Jewish disaster in Europe was also their own problem and especially a Christian responsibility. Once Hungarian Jewry vanished in the crematoria of Auschwitz, the group's increasingly militant attack on HMG's maintenance of the White Paper carried additional immediacy for a nation born of revolution against England.

The separatists wrought their greatest transformation on the American Jewish community. Until their arrival, the outbreak of World War II checked the protest movements in which Jews had been engaged during the 1930's, such as the anti-Nazi boycott or demonstrations against Britain's Palestine policy. Assimilated Jews feared taking any steps which might raise the question of dual loyalty and strengthen anti-Semitism. The Jewish establishment, relying on the good will of Roosevelt and Churchill, was also restrained and the Zionist leadership in particular did what it could to check the Bergsonites' growth. But American Jewry at large could not but be aroused by the independent, aggressive effort of the young Palestinians. Their guiding principle of directly attacking the criminal, rather than defending the victim, attracted estranged souls like Ben Hecht or non-aligned intellectuals such as Max Lerner, who insisted that Jews should "no longer be the anvil of history but its hammer." Their unwavering focus on rescue after November, 1942 also found support amongst the leaders of Orthodox Jewry, who heretofore had eschewed confrontation politics and alliances with other Jewish groups. The Irgunists' response also prodded organized Jews to adopt increasingly outspoken positions on a Jewish fighting force, immediate rescue, and the destiny of Palestine. Thus the delegates demanded that the American Jewish Conference create a committee on rescue although the agenda had initially focused on post-war Jewish rights, Palestine, and unity in American Jewry's ranks.<sup>61</sup>

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60. *The Answer*, July 12, 1944, p. 20.

61 Max Lerner interview with the author, May 7, 1979; Ben Halpern, *Midstream*, 12 (May, 1966), 76; Chaim Greenberg, "Bankrupt," *Yiddische Kempfer*, Feb. 12, 1943; *American Jewish Conference, Organization and Proceedings, First Session, 1943* (New York: 1944), pp. 333, 77-85, 115-130. Judd Teller's brief recollections are perceptive, as is Feingold's analysis, but Melvin Urofsky's link-

But the Bergson boys' attempt to remove the "biggest obstacle" impeding rescue in Europe and restoration in Palestine failed.<sup>62</sup> Their distinction between Hebrew and Jew, which was meant to free American Jewry particularly from charges of double loyalty and to promote large-scale United Nations rescue for a separate ethnic co-belligerent, created more confusion. Even non- and anti-Zionists refused to accept the novel hypothesis, and many erstwhile supporters dropped away.

When Merlin, hoping to win additional rescue support, had first advanced the Hebrew vs. Jew concept in April, 1943, Aryeh Ben Eliezer had wisely cautioned that it would only bewilder the public. Most American Jews (and certainly their Gentile neighbors) lacked a firm enough grounding in Zionist ideology and Jewish philosophy to grasp the notion behind the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation. The Irgunists wished to solve the longstanding "Jewish problem" along the lines of the American separation of church and state, and to concentrate on the "human boundaries," rather than the mere physical borders, of a future state in the Holy Land. The majority in America and Palestine, however, continued to view Jews and their history as *sui generis*, sharing both religious and nationalist identities.<sup>63</sup>

The Bergson boys' meager success in the face of the Holocaust reflected the limits of their power. They spoke for masses of Jews, summoned forth the most generous impulses of the Gentile majority, and even forced Roosevelt to leave Washington for the dedication of some Liberator bombers for the Free Yugoslav forces, rather than face the call to conscience of a few Orthodox rabbis seeking immediate rescue. Once, however, the Irgun mission's imaginative enlightenment campaign succeeded in dramatizing ideas and in winning over a compassionate public, implementation had

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ing the group with the divisive American Council for Judaism overlooks the Palestinian's positive influence. Samuel Halperin avoids the Bergson "boys" entirely. Judd Teller, *Strangers and Natives: The Evolution of the American Jew From 1921 to the Present* (New York: 1968), pp. 202-207; Feingold, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8; Melvin I. Urofsky, *We Are One!, American Jewry and Israel* (New York: 1978), pp. 75-81; Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit: 1961).

62 Bergson to Weizmann, April 2, 1945, Weizmann Archives.

63 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 109; London *Jewish Chronicle*, April 27, 1945; Kook interview, June 22, 1972. Kook's continuing adherence to the Hebrew Committee's original *raison d'être* can be found in an interview, *Ha-Aretz*, Nov. 26, 1977. For a somewhat related group, the Canaanites, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5, col. 101-102.



to be left to other hands. Action lay beyond the Bergsonites' capabilities.

Fundamental decisions still rested with Washington and London, and the two Western powers at the Bermuda Conference opposed the creation of a Jewish Army and major rescue. The British authorities stymied the Bergson boys' two representatives abroad, Aryeh Ben Eliezer and Eri Jabotinsky and kept Palestine firmly closed, even refusing to establish temporary "free ports." The Anglo-American governments would not retaliate in kind against Germany for her slaughter of the Jews, and the Allied War Crimes Commission failed to consider the specific murder of a people. In such circumstances, it is doubtful that Jewish unity would have significantly altered the outcome of the Holocaust.

In the end, the Bergson boys placed too much hope in the democracies. Public opinion, no matter how effectively summoned, does not ultimately decide. Will Rogers, Jr. emphasized at the Emergency Conference of July, 1943 that the problem had to be "taken out of the dossiers of the diplomats and placed in the hearts of humanity," but officialdom had no intention of relinquishing control over major policy. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill took up Hitler's challenge and made the rescue of Jewry one of their war aims. Even the Irgun never took Roosevelt to task - Kook even listing him in April, 1945 among "our staunchest friends" - and expected until mid-1944 that the British government would respond to its non-political appeal.<sup>64</sup> Propaganda and dissent proved to be limited in their ultimate effect. During Jewry's most anguished years, the leaders of the free world who could have translated that humanitarian call into action had other priorities. Accordingly, in one of history's most bitter ironies, the Jews of Europe who fervently dreamed the dream of Zion did not live to see its realization.<sup>65</sup> The Allies denied the existence of such a community, on whose behalf Kook and his associates had undertaken their mission. Adolf Hitler did not, and the community with its dreams went up in ashes.

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64 *The Answer*, Oct. 15, 1943, pp. 5-6, and April 1945. Ben Hecht realized earlier than most the limitations of Roosevelt's sympathies toward the plight of Jewry during World War II. *A Child*, p. 581. (The reference is to Walter Kirschner, a personal friend of the Roosevelt family. Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978.)

65 Merlin remarks, Dec. 5, 1974, at The Holocaust Seminar, Touro College, New York (notes taken by the author, in his possession).

## **American Jewish Unity During The Holocaust – The Joint Emergency Committee, 1943**

**Edward Pinsky**

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One of the lamentable facts of the American Jewish reaction to the Holocaust was the elusiveness of unity and coherence in face of that terrible crisis. While one will never know for certain to what degree American Jewish disunity made a difference in the tragic fate of European Jewry, one might still ask whether a unified Jewish voice would have been more successful in pressuring the United States Government to act if the Jews had spent less energy and resources in internecine conflict. While much has been written about the discord among American Jewry during those terrible years, little has been related about the story behind the several organizational attempts to bring at least a modicum of unity to the rescue effort. The Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs, active between March and November 1943, was the major attempt made by the Jewish organizations of the United States to coordinate their activities in a joint rescue effort. The history of this forlorn attempt at cooperative activity reveals why American Jewish unity remained such an elusive goal throughout the Holocaust years, while at the same time giving us new insights into how American Jewish organizations operated in the political sphere.

The need for cooperation among American Jewish defense organizations was evident to organizational leaders from the very beginning of the Nazi regime's war against Jewry. In June 1933, soon after Hitler's rise to power, representatives of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJ Congress) and B'nai B'rith created the Joint Consultative Council (JCC) to coordinate their defense activities in the face of the Nazi threat.<sup>1</sup>

This first attempt at unified action broke down very quickly. As one observer of the collapse of this first joint effort noted, the American Jewish organizations agreed to the objectives of unified activity, but "differed almost hopelessly as to method and procedure."<sup>2</sup>

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1 For a more complete history of the Joint Consultative Council and subsequent joint efforts, see Morris Waldman, "History of efforts to effect cooperation among constituent organizations of General Jewish Council", unpublished MS, December 4, 1940, American Jewish Committee Records Center, (hereinafter referred to as R.C.), General Jewish Council file.

2 Joseph Hyman, "Coordination of Jewish Efforts Overseas", in *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1 (September 1937), 25.

The AJ Congress favored mass demonstrations, public protest meetings and rallies, and the boycott of German-made products. The more conservative, non-Zionist AJC and B'nai B'rith opposed public demonstrations as being both counter-productive and undignified, and criticized the boycott as immoral and dangerous to the position of German Jews. The Committee favored its own policy of "backstairs diplomacy," private discussions between high government officials and influential members of the Committee. The AJC also insisted that the crisis in Europe was a matter of human rights, and therefore believed that the problem should be attacked by a broad non-partisan liberal front of Christians and Jews. The Zionist AJ Congress saw the events in Germany as a war against the Jewish people and believed that it was primarily the right and responsibility of the Jewish "nation" to unite and defend itself against Nazism. The Congress looked upon the conservative methods of the AJC as cowardly and overly cautious.<sup>3</sup>

There was a far more fundamental reason for the discord between the Jewish organizations. The AJC and the other organizations feared the all-inclusive nature of the AJ Congress. The AJ Congress did not consider itself an organization "in the ordinary sense of the word." To paraphrase a 1942 AJ Congress statement, the "fundamental principle" of the AJ Congress was that it was established to represent all of American Jewry and "every individual Jew, by virtue of his being a Jew, was in fact a member of the Congress, entitled to all rights, privileges and obligations."<sup>4</sup>

Although never officially dissolved, the Joint Consultative Council came to an end in 1936 when the AJ Congress insisted that a petition to the League of Nations be sent under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress (WJ Congress), an affiliate of the AJ Congress. The AJC refused to cooperate with this organization. Such cooperation was considered to be an anathema because the Committee saw the WJ Congress as another attempt by Stephen Wise and his Jewish nationalist movement to dominate American Jewry.

In June, 1938, irked by an AJ Congress proposal to call a nation-wide election of delegates to a "Jewish Conference" which they saw as another take-over attempt by the AJ Congress, the AJC, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of the B'nai B'rith and

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3 Alex Grobman, "An Analysis of American Jewry's Response to the Holocaust from 1939 to 1942 as Reflected in the American and Jewish Press," unpublished ms, n.d., p. 16.

4 "Call For Union in Jewish Defense," in *Congress Weekly*, vol. 9, no. 14 (April 10, 1942), 4.

the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) agreed to coordinate defense activities with the AJ Congress in a new joint venture. This new cooperative effort, called the "General Jewish Council," was established with the understanding that the autonomy of the four defense organizations would in no way be affected.

Rendered powerless by the "acute group interests" of the individual organizations, as one contemporary observer noted,<sup>5</sup> the Council busied itself with discussions of the rising popularity of Father Coughlin, various street incidents with anti-Semitic overtones, and similar issues. The Council's Public Relations Committee issued a number of "valuable reports" on various legislative proposals and bills affecting Jewish life in America, but the Council would rarely even consider dealing with the looming crisis in Europe.

By the middle of 1942, with an increasing number of reports about the large-scale massacres of East European Jews reaching America, the Jewish organizations responded in a characteristic way; each one intensified its own activities with little concern about what the others were doing. The JLC began to circulate a mass petition of protest addressed to President Roosevelt and the AJ Congress called for another mass rally at Madison Square Garden to protest Nazi atrocities. Also, characteristically, the AJC remained aloof from these activities, "angered that the JLC had not cleared its petition" through the all-but-defunct General Jewish Council.<sup>6</sup>

Even though their first instinct was to act independently of each other, particularly shocking incidents sometimes temporarily united the organizations for joint cooperative action. For example, in March 1942, shocked by the tragic sinking of the S.S. *Struma*,<sup>7</sup> the leaders of several Jewish organizations were able to get together long enough to file a joint protest against Great Britain's restrictive

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5 Bernard Zuckerman, "The General Jewish Council," in *Jewish Frontier*, vol. 7, no. 2 (February, 1940), 23.

6 Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: 1972), 240. Also see, AJC, "Report On Overseas Activities of the AJC," unpublished MS, Records Center, Foreign Affairs 1942-44 Overseas Activities file.

7 The S.S. *Struma* was a small Rumanian ship packed with 769 desperate Jewish refugees, none of whom possessed valid British permits to emigrate to Palestine. Critically over-loaded and unseaworthy, the *Struma* was unable to reach Palestine. She put into Istanbul but the passengers were not allowed to disembark unless they obtained British certificates for Palestine. After the British refused, the old ship was towed out to sea where it promptly sank, taking with her to the bottom 767 of the 769 refugees aboard.

immigration policy in Palestine. Later, in the summer of 1942, the AJC, AJ Congress, B'nai B'rith, and JLC were able to cooperate informally once again, this time drafting a joint statement to the State Department protesting the arrest of Jews in unoccupied Vichy, France and asking that the United States Government "take appropriate measures to secure the suspension of these arrests."<sup>8</sup>

After the Nazi extermination plan was verified by the State Department in November, 1942, the Jewish organizations were jarred into attempting another joint effort. Stephen Wise invited representatives from several Jewish defense organizations to a conference to consider what action could be taken. A series of conferences were held intermittently from November, 1942 until March, 1943. These meetings were originally supposed to be "purely temporary" attempts at coordinating rescue activities.<sup>9</sup>

According to the minutes of the first meeting of the "Sub-Committee of Special Conference on European Affairs," held at AJ Congress headquarters on November 30, 1942, Stephen Wise informed the delegates that President Roosevelt had agreed to receive a small delegation of Jewish leaders to discuss the atrocities in Europe. Most of the meeting was spent discussing which organizations would be included in the delegation and which would not. It was decided that the Presidents of each of the four defense groups - the AJC, the AJ Congress, the B'nai B'rith, and the JLC - would be included, as well as the President of the Synagogue Council of America and the chairman of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada. The latter two were added to give the representation more balance so that the delegation represented secular as well as religious elements in the American Jewish community.<sup>10</sup>

It was decided that a committee of delegates would compose a two hundred word statement aimed at getting the President to issue a statement of condemnation similar to the one he made after the Nazi massacre at Lidice. They would also draw up a second, more detailed report, summarizing the various documents and reports of atrocities received by the Jewish organizations up to that time. This report, giving a detailed account about the murder of two million

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8 AJC, "Overseas Activities of the AJC - Addendum to Memorandum Prepared in 1943," unpublished MS, R.C., AJC Foreign Affairs - 1944 and prior file.

9 "Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs," unpublished report to the AJC, September 28, 1943, 1, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

10 "Meeting of Sub Committee of Special Conference on European Affairs," unpublished minutes, November 30, 1942, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

Jews, was eventually handed to President Roosevelt by the six Jewish leaders on December 8, 1942.<sup>11</sup>

On March 4, 1943, a meeting of one sub-committee was called to prepare a memorandum on rescue to be submitted to Myron Taylor, Commissioner of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees. By this time, many of the organizational representatives realized that their occasional meetings were not a very satisfactory way to coordinate joint efforts. In an intra-organizational memorandum from Morris Waldman to Judge Proskauer of the AJC, Waldman complained about the great difficulty he had in getting together with all of the representatives of the other organizations for the relatively simple task of writing up the rescue memorandum for Myron Taylor. After spending days rounding up the delegates, the sub-committee, lacking any formal structure or authority, spent five hours trying unsuccessfully to compose the memo. The Committee ultimately appointed another committee, a "drafting committee," to finish a task that could have been completed with ease long before. As the AJC's Morris Waldman noted, "this kind of delay and procrastination is characteristic of all our efforts in past years in our collaborative efforts."<sup>12</sup>

The need for a new "collaborative" body was further heightened by the news that American Jewish organizations were receiving from their sources in Europe. On March 11, 1943 an urgent telegram arrived from Szmul Zygelbojm, the Jewish representative of the Polish National Council in London. Zygelbojm, passing on a desperate plea for help from the doomed Jews of Warsaw sent to him by the Jewish underground, told of the final liquidation of the Polish Jews and implored him to "alarm the world." The Polish Jews begged the Jews outside of Europe to get the Allies to take "extraordinary steps" to rescue them. The cable ended with a haunting warning: "Only you can rescue us. Responsibility towards history thrown upon you."<sup>13</sup>

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11 *Ibid.*; For a detailed account of the much publicized visit to the White House by the Jewish organization leaders, see the American Jewish Congress' 6-page press release, dated December 8, 1942, found at Records Center, American Jewish Congress file.

12 Morris Waldman to Judge Proskauer, unpublished AJC memorandum, March 11, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file. Also see "Meeting of the Emergency Committee (Sub-Committee)," Unpublished minutes, March 4, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

13 Szmul Zygelbojm to AJC, telegram, March 11, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file. Two months later, on May 11, 1943, Mr. Zygelbojm committed suicide at the age of 48. Increasingly despondent over his failure to arouse an indifferent world to the fate of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, and worried

Immediately after receiving this telegram, Jacob Pat of the JLC phoned Morris Waldman, informing him that there would be an emergency meeting of all the Jewish organizations involved in rescue on the night of March 15, 1943, four days later.<sup>14</sup> At that meeting it was decided that a new organization would be created to coordinate all rescue activities. By then it must have been readily apparent to all that a new collaborative effort was sorely needed. There was no opposition whatsoever to the formal organization of the "Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs," the third such joint effort established since the advent of Hitler in 1933.

This newest cooperative venture encompassed more Jewish organizations than any of the previous attempts. The Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs was made up of three representatives each from the "big four" Jewish defense organizations; but also included delegates from religious organizations - the Synagogue Council of America, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, and an Orthodox anti-Zionist group, the American Branch of Agudath Israel; and the Zionist umbrella organization - the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. At the first meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee, it was further decided to extend membership to the Joint Distribution Committee and to the United Palestine Appeal.<sup>15</sup>

Political tensions among Jewish organizations rose to the surface during discussions over the admittance of Hadassah, a women's Zionist organization. Mr. Schulman of the AJ Congress reported that Mrs. David de Sola Pool, President of Hadassah, wanted her organization included in the Joint Emergency Committee because it dealt with the removal of European Jewish children to Palestine. The non-Zionists objected and it was decided that Hadassah be given one of the three delegates allotted to the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. Although not specifically mentioned in the minutes, those opposed to Hadassah's membership realized that the inclusion of that organization would have given Dr. Wise nine delegate votes, putting him in position to control this new joint committee. Dr. Wise was already the President of the AJ Congress and a leader of the Emergency Committee for

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about the fate of his own family left behind in the ghetto, Zygelbojm decided he could not live while his people were perishing. Before he died, he wrote a poignant suicide note indicting the Allied nations for their indifference, but at the same time hoping that his death would somehow move the apathetic to action.

14 Waldman to Proskauer memorandum March 11, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

15 "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee on European Affairs," unpublished minutes, March 15, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

Zionist Affairs. Hadassah was a women's auxiliary of the Zionist Organization of America, another organization associated with Dr. Wise.

To maintain organizational parity, the Joint Emergency Committee elected no fewer than five co-chairmen so that almost all the organizations in the Committee would have equal authority at the executive level.<sup>16</sup> They also decided to maintain a full time secretariat to handle organizational business between formal meetings of the Committee, but there is no indication that a full-time staff was ever hired.

Since cooperating with Stephen Wise was never an easy task for the AJC, the decision to attempt another joint effort soon after the collapse of the General Jewish Council was most likely motivated by the alarming news which was emanating from occupied Europe at that time. But even after the news of the mass murders had become public knowledge, Judge Proskauer was still severely criticized by many fellow members of the AJC and he had to justify his decision to cooperate with Wise's Zionist organization to many of the AJC's supporters. In a letter to a Rabbi Gerstenfeld on March 25, 1943, Proskauer stated that the AJC would continue to stand on its own "plank where a matter of principle is involved" but would have to cooperate with other Jewish organizations "on matters of communal interest." Proskauer claimed that he was now willing to overlook certain ideological differences:

There is a very terrible crisis . . . and . . . I have no right to sit in an ivory tower and refuse to collaborate with other organizations addressing themselves to the solution of this problem merely because we differ with them on other ideologies.<sup>17</sup>

Proskauer was even willing to reserve the AJC's longstanding opposition to mass meetings as long as these rallies were "decently conducted," addressed by "prominent speakers," and not "flamboyant or vulgar."

In another letter, also mailed on March 25, 1943, to another AJC member who had questioned Proskauer's decision about cooperating in mass meetings, the Judge once again defended his action on that subject.

I know of no principle against mass meetings as such. It all depends on

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16 The five organization Presidents elected as co-chairmen were Stephen Wise of the AJ Congress, Judge Proskauer of the AJC, Adolph Held of the Jewish Labor Committee, Henry Monsky of B'nai B'rith, and Israel Goldstein of the Synagogue Council of America.

17 Proskauer to Gerstenfeld, unpublished letter, March 25, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.



how they are conducted and why they are conducted . . . I know when to fight . . . and when not to fight.<sup>18</sup>

Proskauer also pointed out, quite correctly, that it was actually the AJ Congress, not the AJC, which was going to change its tactics most drastically. He noted that he was able to convince Stephen Wise to agree to the policy of handling rescue activities through the good offices of Myron Taylor and other government officials, "over the opposition of fellows like Lipsky and Nahum Goldmann." It was better to cooperate with Wise and his group rather than having them on the outside attacking Taylor and the State Department with the AJC forced to defend them. Wise had agreed to follow the policy of cooperating with government officials and he never went back on his word. The AJC and the AJ Congress followed this strategy unwaveringly throughout the Holocaust period, a point of paramount importance to the future course of the Jewish rescue movement.

The Joint Emergency Committee accepted the basic premise of the American Jewish Committee that the best way to accomplish its task was by practicing the ancient Jewish art of *shtadlanut*, the persuasion of Government officials by influential Jews. The AJC had always believed that just about any problem concerning Jewish rights could be solved by having the proper Jewish spokesmen inform the proper Government officials of the proper facts. Now, for the first time, it had convinced the AJ Congress and other more outspoken organizations that this was the best method.

Many of the Joint Emergency Committee meetings were spent drawing up rescue proposals to be submitted to various high officials. Once it was assumed that it could persuade friendly men in government to intervene on behalf of European Jews, all activities of the Joint Emergency Committee were geared to this task. Since the policy was based upon the good will and cooperation of government officials, nothing could be done that would embarrass the Roosevelt Administration in any way. The Joint Emergency Committee coordinated mass public protest meetings and various pageants and ceremonies of mourning all over the United States, but these rallies were always "tastefully done," i.e., there was rarely any criticism of U.S. government policy at these public meetings, even in the most veiled terms. Throughout its existence the Joint Emergency Committee remained silent about the role of the United States Government as a "passive bystander" to genocide during the Holocaust.

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18 Proskauer to Morris Lazon, unpublished letter, March 25, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

In March, 1943, the Joint Emergency Committee formulated its first rescue program based upon the eleven proposals introduced by the AJ Congress at its "Stop Hitler Now" mass demonstration held at Madison Square Garden.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout early 1943, the Joint Emergency Committee continued to follow its policy of appealing to government officials for aid. On March 4, 1943, a sub-committee formulated a "demand" that a special Nansen-type passport be given to stateless people who were without protection of any government.<sup>20</sup> It also discussed means of sending packages to Jews in occupied Europe; negotiating with the British Government to accept several thousand refugees into Jamaica; and negotiating with the Allies to set up temporary refugee camps in North Africa. On March 22, 1943, it talked about plans to send a representative to meet with Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles about broadcasting appeals to Germany to release Jews "with the understanding" that the United Nations would take care of them once they were released.<sup>21</sup>

On April 2, plans were made for a "National Day of Compassion" to be held in May to be coordinated with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ of America. The delegates were to contact mayors, governors, local community leaders, and the press. At this same meeting, the Joint Emergency Committee also began to formulate its strategy for the upcoming Bermuda Conference on Refugees, convened by the governments of the United States and Great Britain and scheduled to begin on April 19. The first topic of discussion was the composition and goals of a special delegation it hoped President Roosevelt would agree to see before the Bermuda Conference. It was hoped that this delegation would convince the President to support the rescue program which the Jewish organizations intended to submit to the Conference.<sup>22</sup> As it turned

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19 For a detailed account of the Proceedings of this rally see "The 'Stop Hitler Now' Demonstration," *American Hebrew*, March 12, 1943, 6, 10. For the list of rescue proposals, see Joint Emergency Committee, "Proposals With Respect to Saving the Jews of Europe From Extermination," unpublished MS, March 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

20 In 1922, Norwegian explorer and statesman Fridjof Nansen, working under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Nations, introduced an internationally valid identification card or "Nansen passport" for displaced and stateless persons.

21 "Meeting of the Emergency Committee (Sub-Committee)," unpublished minutes, March 4, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file; "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs," unpublished minutes, March 22, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

22 "Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Joint Emergency Committee . . .," unpublished minutes, April 2, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

out, permission for this planned visit to the President before the Bermuda Conference was not granted.<sup>23</sup>

From the minutes of the April 10 meeting, held nine days before the convening of the Bermuda Conference, it is evident that many Jewish leaders began to have doubts about the upcoming conference. There were disagreements about the limited scope of the conference as articulated in the statements of Cordell Hull and Anthony Eden and whether experts be sent to testify at Bermuda. Nahum Goldmann of the WJ Congress was convinced that the presence of Jewish "experts" would only be used by the American and British governments as proof that they were considering what the Jews had to say; Jewish experts would be used as "an alibi" no different than the designation of the Jewish Congressman Sol Bloom to the American delegation to Bermuda. Louis Lipsky of the AJ Congress noted regretfully that the mood of the joint organization had changed. While at first it had reluctantly agreed to go along with the Bermuda Conference, the Committee had soon accepted the idea that it could do no more for the Jews of Europe than what could be obtained at Bermuda. He warned that they must try to change that situation. Mr. Sherman of the AJ Congress agreed with Lipsky; once "we acquiesced to the wishes" of Welles or Roosevelt, then the Jewish organizations were bound to their policies, and "our meetings are useless."<sup>24</sup>

On April 18, one day before the convening of the conference, some Jewish leaders still had doubts about the strategy that they were pursuing. Nahum Goldmann expressed the view that the time had come to change their policy; that the Joint Emergency Committee had to actively "oppose the American and British Governments' attitude and act accordingly" in its mass meetings. After Goldmann spoke, a series of proposals were introduced to effect this change. Montor of the UPA suggested that Jews throughout the nation should go to Washington on a certain date to call on their Congressmen and that a press conference be held in Washington where the five co-chairman of the Joint Emergency Committee would inform the public about their displeasure with American policy toward the rescue of European Jewry. Mr. Minkoff of the General Jewish Council suggested that they should set up radio programs with prominent non-Jews taking the same position.

After extensive discussion, it was decided that Goldmann's pro-

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23 According to the minutes of the April 18, 1943 meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee, the planned visit to the President was postponed indefinitely.

24 "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee . . .," unpublished minutes, April 10, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

posal would take place "if and when the five co-chairmen should so decide." They never did "so decide"; Montor's and Minkoff's suggestions were referred to a "Working Committee" and were never brought up again.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, the Jewish groups stuck to their original decision and cooperated with the Roosevelt Administration at the Bermuda Conference. They adopted several motions stating that the scope of the Conference was too limited, but that they would participate in whatever capacity the government decided. It was also resolved to ask the State Department for permission to send a Jewish delegate to Bermuda to present its program in person.

Once deciding, however reluctantly, that Bermuda was the best hope for helping the Jews of Europe, the Committee devoted most of its time and energy to developing its own rescue plan to be presented at the conference. By April 8, 1943 a final draft copy of a twelve point program of rescue was completed, and formally submitted to the Bermuda Conference on April 14, 1943.<sup>26</sup> The three-page document began with a summary of the "systematic mass extermination of Jews," at that time estimated at over two million killed.

In its introduction, the JEC tactfully criticized the Allied rescue effort:

The threat of retribution after the war . . . has not served to turn the Nazi leaders from their determined policy of mass murder. The condemnation of the civilized world has not arrested the mounting tragedy. It is submitted, therefore, that the United Nations cannot afford to close their eyes to this appalling situation.

So far as is known, the United Nations have as yet taken no decisive action to rescue as many of the victims marked for death as could be saved. Public opinion is far ahead of Government decision. . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Stating that the convening of the Bermuda Conference was a "measure prompted" by the public clamor of the democratic world for immediate action, the Joint Emergency Committee informed the conference that it was its duty to "turn to a planned program of determined action." The Jewish organizations then submitted

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25 "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee . . .," unpublished minutes, April 18, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

26 For the complete text of this rescue program see "Program Of Action For Rescue Of Jews In Nazi Occupied Territories Proposed By the Joint Emergency Committee On European Jewish Affairs," unpublished MS, April 8, 1943, R.C., Refugees, rescue of, 1943-47 file.

27 Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs, "Program for the Rescue of Jews from Occupied Europe," unpublished MS, April 14, 1943, 1, YIVO.

their list of proposals "in the belief that it may contribute to such a program."

The memorandum was sent off with a letter to each delegate of the Bermuda Conference and to Sumner Welles of the State Department on April 15, 1943. Included with the rescue program memorandum was a second document entitled "Appendix to the Program For the Rescue of Jews From Nazi Occupied Europe." This appendix went into more specific detail about the feasibility of the various rescue proposals. There is no evidence, however, that the Jewish memorandums were even read at Bermuda, much less seriously considered.

The American delegates to Bermuda were instructed by the State Department not to restrict the discussions to Jewish refugees alone, nor were they allowed to make any commitments regarding ship space for refugees, admittance of refugees beyond normal quotas, or changing the "extremely liberal" immigration laws already extant. The delegates were further warned that they must always bear in mind that the needs of the American war effort and civilian population for food and money came first.<sup>28</sup>

Shackled by these instructions, the American delegates went to Bermuda to discuss the refugee problem with their counterparts from Great Britain. From the evidence available in the War Refugee Board section of the FDR Library, it is evident that the delegates followed their instructions very carefully. All of the recommendations made by the Joint Emergency Committee and other Jewish organizations were quickly dismissed. The British delegations refused to consider appeals to the Nazi Government, any kind of exchange of prisoners for refugees, or the lifting of the blockade of Nazi-occupied Europe. In fact, the goals of the Jewish groups and those of the Bermuda delegates could not have been more divergent. While the Jewish proposals called for the removal of the largest possible number of refugees from Axis territory, the British delegation talked about the "danger" of having large numbers of refugees "dumped upon the Allies." The chief British delegate, Richard Law, spoke of his fear that many of these refugees were "Axis sympathizers." The only matters that were decided upon at Bermuda were that about 20,000 refugees already safe in Spain and Portugal would be removed to camps in North Africa, and that the already existing but moribund International Committee on Refugees would be enlarged and given a new mandate.

Although many voices within the American Jewish community

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28 U.S. Department of State, Memorandum on the Bermuda Conference, unpublished MS, n.d., memorandum, FDR/WRB, General Correspondence File.

decried the "mockery" of Bermuda,<sup>29</sup> the Joint Emergency Committee remained reluctant to do battle with the Roosevelt Administration. The JEC continued to pursue the same policy it had formulated from the very beginning of its existence.

At its May 24, 1943 meeting, Judge Proskauer mentioned a letter he and Wise had sent to Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles requesting him to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a war crimes commission to collect facts on crimes committed against civilians for possible indictments after the war. At the same time they were preparing a second letter to Welles in which they intended to complain about the results at Bermuda.

A long argument ensued after the reading of a draft copy of that letter. Some expressed disapproval of the "whole tone of the letter," objecting to the criticism of the State Department at the very same time that they were asking for favors from it. Others objected to the statement made concerning the role of Palestine. Still another delegate insisted that the letter should be drafted "with the impression it would make on non-Jews in mind." Mr. Perlstein specifically objected to the statement in the draft letter which said nothing had been done to rescue Jews. He believed that this should be omitted "in view of the fact that American soldiers were giving their lives." Apparently he accepted the government's principal argument about rescue, that the only way to save the Jews of Europe was by speedily winning the war. Eventually the letter was revised by a special committee composed of four co-chairmen of the Joint Emergency Committee.<sup>30</sup>

The letter to Sumner Welles, sent on June 1, 1943, reflected the deep dilemma in which the Jewish organizations found themselves. They earnestly wanted to cry out to Welles and to all the citizens of this nation about America's apathetic attitude toward the destruction of European Jewry, but at the same time they wanted to stay in the government's good graces. The letter opened with the statement that the Joint Emergency Committee had refrained from public comment after Bermuda but "we would be failing in our duty to our Government, to the Jews of this country, and to our kinsmen abroad" if the "deepest distress and apprehension" were not conveyed about the results of Bermuda. The only result of Bermuda was the plan to help refugees of all faiths who were already

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29 For a summary of the many editorial criticisms of the results of Bermuda, see "Critical Views of Bermuda Conference", *Congress Weekly*, vol. 10, no. 17 (April 30, 1943), 19.

30 "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee . . .," unpublished minutes, May 24, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

safe in neutral countries while millions of Jews, “unlike any other group, face imminent total destruction”:

To relegate the rescue of the Jews of Europe, the only people marked for total extermination, to the day of victory is, therefore, virtually to doom them to the fate which Hitler has marked out for them.<sup>31</sup>

The letter ended on an encouraging note, hoping that the government would do better in the future. The Committee realized the difficulties involved in rescue but believed that “partial rescue” was possible without affecting the war cause.

By the summer of 1943, the Joint Emergency Committee was being criticized by the Jewish press for its silence and ten-month lack of response to the verified reports of mass murders. At the July 15, 1943 meeting the delegates were thoroughly condemned by two of their invited guests. Dr. Wise had invited Rabbi Berlin and Mr. Jaffe, a Jewish poet, to address the meeting about their visit to the Jewish community in Palestine. Instead of hearing a Zionist travelogue, the delegates were presented with a bitter harangue about the “indifference, inadequate action, and lack of feeling on the part of American Jews” compared with the Jews of Palestine. Rabbi Berlin told the assembled delegates that the Palestinians had engaged in street demonstrations, shop closings, and other mass manifestations of their feelings about the Allies’ lack of rescue activity. Both speakers suggested that American Jews should emulate Palestinian behavior in the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Joseph Hyman, the Joint Distribution Committee representative, challenged the statements made by Berlin and Jaffe. He felt that the committee “exercised a tremendous moral influence on Jews, non-Jews, and government circles.”

All our suggestions concerning the sending of food, rescuing of people, sending of money, have been rejected because they are against the general policy of the governments of the United Nations. The small things that could be done were done.

Even Nahum Goldmann of the WJ Congress, rarely a defender of American Jewish behavior,<sup>33</sup> defended the Joint Emergency Committee. He argued that many of the proposed rescue plans such as the sending of food packages and the shipping of Jews

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31 Joint Emergency Committee to Sumner Welles, unpublished letter June 1, 1943 R.C. Joint Emergency Committee file.

32 Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee . . . unpublished minutes, July 15, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

33 In his autobiography, Goldmann criticized American Jewry for its lack of unity and timidity in times of crisis. Nahum Goldmann, *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann* (New York: 1969).

across the Atlantic proved to be impossible, but that the rescue of Jews from Bulgaria, Spain, and Sweden was in progress. He did not believe that renewal of mass meetings throughout the country would be of much use and he now agreed with the AJC that it would be more advantageous to try to influence small numbers of prominent non-Jews to take the lead in the rescue effort.<sup>34</sup> It was rather unusual to find the AJC and WJ Congress agreeing so closely on rescue strategy. It had not been too long before when the AJC would refuse to collaborate with the WJ Congress in any joint venture at all.

At the August 10, 1943 meeting of the Committee, after the usual discussions about new appeals to government officials to drop warning leaflets over Germany, the subject of the discussions changed. Some of the delegates once again challenged the sacrosanct suppositions upon which the activities of the JEC were based; but to no avail. Jacob Pat of the JLC stated that the Committee must take more forceful action, even if it meant doing things illegally. He spoke of the refusal of the JDC to send money to the Jewish underground movement in Poland because of "legal difficulties" with certain government agencies. As so often before, the Joint Emergency Committee postponed any difficult decisions by agreeing to set up a special "Committee of Three" to take up Mr. Pat's suggestions. When other delegates expressed the belief that the warnings given to Germany were insufficient, they decided to send one more delegation to Washington to confer with Secretary of State Hull.

It was at this point that Rabbi Heller, another one of those troublesome visiting guests, made a most remarkable and revolutionary suggestion.

He was of the opinion that no public meeting will change the temper of our times and was in favor of organizing underground channels in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

What exactly these "underground channels" were supposed to accomplish, Rabbi Heller never stated. To men like Morris Waldman of the AJC, whose whole philosophy of Jewish survival was based upon the premise that the Jew was safe only if he could prove himself to be a loyal, respectable citizen perfectly assimilated within American society, Heller's proposal was very disturbing. Surprisingly, Miss Shultz of the AJ Congress partially agreed with Heller's suggestion.

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34 July 15, 1943 minutes.

35 Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee . . . unpublished minutes, August 10, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.



. . . under the pressure of circumstances, we have put all our eggs in one basket, and that on the assumption that there is a friendly administration in Washington, our proposals for action were couched in terms of appeal. The time has come . . . to be critical of lack of action. . . .

Miss Shultz stopped short of approving of an underground rescue effort contrary to American law, but she did suggest that the "large and influential" Jewish communities should register at the polls "its dissatisfaction over the failure of the administration to take any effective steps to save the Jews of Europe."

As before, Rabbi Heller's proposal for illegal rescue activities and Miss Schultz's call for a political offensive upon the Roosevelt Administration were turned over "for consideration" to a "Committee on Program," to be appointed in the future. That was the last ever heard about either item. The "responsible" Jewish organizations never broke the law in their rescue efforts and the American Jewish organized community never ended its uninterrupted support for the Roosevelt Administration. The Joint Emergency Committee continued upon its chosen path until its dissolution, caused by the renewed outbreak of inter-organizational warfare in late 1943.

By the middle of 1943 the Zionist organizations had succeeded in establishing a new all-inclusive umbrella organization, the American Jewish Conference, with which they hoped to win over the American Jewish community to the Zionist cause. The various Zionist organizations attempted to enhance the prestige of the Conference by giving to it a new role as coordinator and ultimate authority for Jewish rescue activities. Since theoretically there already existed such an organization, the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs, the Zionists decided to dissolve the JEC.

It was apparent to all the representatives at these last meetings of the Joint Emergency Committee that this latest Zionist initiative signaled a renewed outbreak of the old war between the Zionist AJ Congress and the non-Zionist AJC, which had been in abeyance for less than one year. It was often discussed in terms of a war. In a letter from the President of Agudath Israel, the Orthodox non-Zionist organization, to the President of the AJC, Jacob Rosenheim had warned Judge Proskauer to expect a "Zionist offensive" to subvert the Joint Emergency Committee. The Agudath Israel leader saw the new Conference as a "Zionist device" to "outvote and to terrorize the non-Zionist groups."<sup>36</sup>

The showdown between the Zionist and non-Zionist groups

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36 Rosenheim to Proskauer, unpublished letter, October 28, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.

came at the final meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee on November 5, 1943. The representative of the by now Zionist-dominated B'nai B'rith opened the meeting with a motion that the activities of the Joint Emergency Committee be transferred to the newly created Rescue Committee of the Conference. Dr. Wise added that the JEC should be dissolved immediately. The representatives of the AJC and Agudath Israel argued against this motion, noting that not all Jewish organizations which were involved in rescue were members of the Conference. Bitter arguing then ensued about why the Agudath Israel had refused to join the Conference, why the AJC had dropped out of the Conference, and why the Conference was apparently unable to tolerate the existence of the Joint Emergency Committee and cooperate with it, during which Rabbi Lewin of the Agudath Israel was noted as referring to the "God damned Conference."<sup>37</sup>

When the vote was finally taken, three Zionist organizations were joined by the B'nai B'rith and the Synagogue Council of America favoring dissolution. They were opposed by the non-Zionist AJC, Agudath Israel, the Jewish Labor Committee, and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. Since a majority of members expressed "the view that its work should now be carried on by the Rescue Commission" of the Conference, the Joint Emergency Committee was dissolved on November 5, 1943.<sup>38</sup> There would be no further joint cooperative ventures involving all of the major Jewish rescue agencies for the duration of the Holocaust.

The demise of first the Joint Consultative Council in 1936, then the General Jewish Council in 1941, and finally the Joint Emergency Committee on European Affairs in late 1943 were all casualties in the long war for dominance being waged by the Zionist AJ Congress and its non-Zionist rival, the AJC. The increasingly catastrophic events in Europe rarely diverted either side from their organizational conflict, although it can be said that no matter how bitter the previous break-up may have been, Jewish organizations still felt compelled by events in Europe to try again to find some type of successful formula for cooperative rescue activities. That successful formula continued to elude them.

Dr. Wise's campaign against the Joint Emergency Committee or the AJC's refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Conference were not examples of aberrant behavior among American Jewish organi-

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37 "Meeting of the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs, unpublished minutes, November 5, 1943, R.C., Joint Emergency Committee file.  
38 AJ Conference, *Report of the Interim Committee and the Commission on Rescue* (New York: November 1, 1944), p. 40.

zations. In fact, it could be said that this type of behavior set the norm. The refusal of one group of Jews to work with another group of Jews for various ideological, socio-economic, and at times personal reasons was repeated over and over again before the Holocaust had run its course. Inter-organizational politics were permitted to take precedence over rescue matters. Although they often realized that they were participants in one of the most momentous events in world history and witnesses to one of history's most monstrous crimes, Jewish organizational leaders were rarely able to transcend the ordinary tensions and conflicts present in twentieth century American Jewish life.

Ironically, in the end, the Zionist AJ Congress, the non-Zionist AJC, and the other two members of American Jewry's "big four" had adopted rescue policies that were hardly distinguishable from one another. Although it did not desert its nationalist goals, the AJ Congress and the B'nai B'rith joined the JLC in accepting the AJC's contention that the best way to rescue European Jews was by closely cooperating with friendly government officials.

The failure to achieve Jewish unity ultimately raises the question of whether there really existed one Jewish American community during those bitter years. As each segment of American Jewry pleaded separately for its own position, the widely assumed notion of a unified Jewish world with secret powers and agreed upon goals takes on a more and more unreal aura. Perhaps this world of Jews thinking and acting with one mind existed solely in the imaginations of the anti-Semites, because it certainly was not the real Jewish condition.

Sarah E. Peck

## The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945

In 1943 a group of Palestinian Jews living in the United States formed the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. The group hoped to force the reluctant United States government to rescue European Jews from Nazi extermination. Led by Peter Bergson, the Committee used dramatic publicity to awaken Americans to the plight of European Jewry, and to exert pressure upon the United States government to form an official rescue commission. However, Bergson's independent and unconventional tactics incensed Zionist leaders, who spoke for much of organized American Jewry. By condemning the activities of the Emergency Committee, instead of acting upon Bergson's rescue philosophy, organized American Jews missed an important chance to force United States intervention in the Holocaust.

Throughout the 1930s the United States government remained cautiously aloof from the problems of Jews in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Though reports of Nazi anti-semitic depredations streamed steadily into the State Department, officials reacted impassively and from the outset argued against issuing any formal protest to the German government. Many department authorities viewed such stories as exaggerations or 'horror stories left over from the last war', as one advisor put it.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, officials recognized that challenging Nazi brutality against Jews might oblige the United States to accept more refugees, an unfeasible alternative in view of strong American sentiment for immigration restriction. Worried about the scarcity of jobs, many Americans during the depression saw Jewish and

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other immigrants as economic threats, and therefore favoured strict adherence to existing immigration quotas. Congressmen echoed that sentiment, time and again defeating attempts to liberalize the immigration laws and even sanctioning further restrictions. The depression had also aggravated feelings of anti-semitism in the United States, another factor underlying American reluctance to receive more Jewish immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

The outbreak of war in 1939 fanned restrictionist fires. The notion that Nazis were planting spies and saboteurs in the guise of immigrants gained great popularity. American consuls abroad took their cues from the homefront. They screened visa applicants so rigorously that few could pass the endless criteria designed to prove that they were not 'likely to become a public charge.' To a great extent, their activities were encouraged by the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of all visa-related matters, Breckinridge Long. Long, descended from the aristocratic Breckinridge and Long families, prided himself on his social credentials and personal friendship with Franklin Roosevelt. But his refined manners belied the bitter feelings he harboured toward Jewish and other immigrants. In an effort to diminish further the numbers of refugees entering the country, Long stressed the need for security. Naturally, once the United States had entered the war in 1941, he insisted that any rescue activity would weaken the war effort.<sup>4</sup> In control of all refugee matters throughout the critical years of 1941 to 1944, Long was virtually free to determine United States rescue policy.

Franklin D. Roosevelt had no desire to challenge Long's policies or to question the security argument. With his exquisite political sensitivity, he was aware of public and congressional sentiment in favour of restriction, and throughout the 1930s avoided tampering with the immigration laws or taking a stand on the refugee question. For the President, it was politically expedient to delegate refugee matters to the State Department and allow it to absorb criticism from those disenchanted by United States passivity.<sup>5</sup> Roosevelt, in characteristic fashion, at once appeased restrictionists and maintained his benevolent image in the eyes of American liberals and Jews.

Roosevelt might have responded more boldly to Nazi persecutions of Jews had there existed a political incentive. American Jews failed to provide one. Since the New Deal, American Jews ardently supported Roosevelt; in their eyes nothing could mar his image as a humanitarian and friend. Jewish voting behaviour mirrored that

allegiance, prompting one liberal Congressman from New York to liken Roosevelt to a 'modern Moses.' Unlike the followers of the first Moses, American Jews never lost their capacity to follow and believe. That devotion cost their leaders dearly. The Jewish 'love affair' with Roosevelt, observed one historian, 'meant that political leverage based on the threat of withdrawal of Jewish votes was not available to the Jewish leadership.'<sup>6</sup>

American Jews were also constrained by anxiety about their place in society and were uncomfortable about seeming anything less than '100 percent American.' Concern over national security made Jewish rescue advocates even more suspect of dual loyalty. Even the President's Jewish advisors, sensitive to comments about Roosevelt's 'Jew Deal,' as critics called it, avoided advocating any action that might bias the Administration in favour of Jews.

Those tensions heightened existing divisions among organized American Jews and produced paralyzing disagreement over a response to the Jewish crisis in Europe. The American Jewish Committee, an elite group of influential Jews, favoured restrained tactics such as quiet diplomacy with the German government. Anxious to display impeccable patriotism, the Committee refused to advocate any action that might conflict with United States military and security interests. Central to their anxieties was the fear that a large influx of Jewish refugees would inflame anti-semitism in America. In contrast, the American Jewish Congress, representing American Zionist groups, were more brash and emotional and reacted more militantly to Nazi depredations. In one instance they organized a boycott of German goods and on other occasions, staged protest rallies in American Jewish communities. Zionists were generally less assimilated and less affluent and believed in the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, a hope rejected by the American Jewish Committee.

Despite their vocal, large and well-organized operation, Zionists were ineffective. One main reason lay with the president of the American Jewish Congress, the popular Rabbi Stephen Wise. Wise was both the principal Jewish spokesman to the White House and a personal friend of Roosevelt. The role placed him in an awkward position. Though increasingly distressed by the persecution of European Jews, Wise was anxious to preserve his friendship with Roosevelt; he also firmly believed in working through government channels. Hence, Wise toned down the militancy of Zionist demands. American Zionists, at the urging of Rabbi Wise, were consistently unwilling to annoy the President with unpopular demands,

such as immigration reform or the temporary shelter of Jewish refugees in the United States.

The disunity among American Jews, then, combined with the other domestic factors to produce a relatively apathetic American response to the plight of European Jewry. That apathy characterized the reaction of the United States government to news of Hitler's 'final solution.' In August 1942 the State Department first learned that anti-semitic atrocities and deportations were not random acts of violence but part of a systematic Nazi plan to liquidate all of European Jewry.<sup>7</sup> Reports of exterminations continued to flow into the Department, but it was not until late November that officials confirmed the ghastly news. When it was made public, thousands of letters flooded the White House with suggestions and demands for immediate action to save the surviving Jews.

In December 1942 in response to the mounting pressure, the United States, along with other Allied governments, issued a declaration condemning Nazi atrocities against Jews.<sup>8</sup> But that statement, though it promised future retribution for Nazi war crimes, revealed the reluctance of the Allied powers to take immediate steps to rescue Hitler's victims or to deter Nazis from committing further atrocities against Jews. Within the Department of State and British Foreign Office, officials argued that rescue activity would divert needed resources away from the primary goal of winning the war. All victims of Axis brutality, they reasoned, would be saved through a quick and decisive Allied victory.

In fact, officials found that virtually any rescue proposal could be rejected on grounds of hindering the war effort. Lack of available shipping, for one thing, seemed to rule out the possibility for mass evacuation of Jews. State Department officials also vetoed the idea of harbouring refugees temporarily in the United States, not only because of the security threat it posed, but also because it 'would aggravate the already critical food situation.'<sup>9</sup> Nor would the United States pressurize British authorities to relax their restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. In 1939 a British White Paper limited the number of Jewish immigrants to 25,000 for the next five years, after which all such immigration would cease. Although Palestine represented the only refuge for fleeing Jews, the British feared that a Jewish influx would agitate an already excited Arab population. Arabs might tilt towards the Axis and thus weaken the Allied military position in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

Such arguments, however, failed to stem public concern both in the United States and Britain. To quell the agitation, the British Foreign Office proposed a joint Anglo-American refugee conference. It met in Bermuda in April 1943, but was closed to the public and reporters so that delegates could candidly discuss the limitations to rescue. For one thing, they stipulated, no recommendation could 'interfere with or delay the war effort of the United Nations.' The scope was further narrowed by the refusal of both countries to concede any changes in their respective immigration policies. Nor would delegates acknowledge the uniquely Jewish nature of the refugee problem; the American delegation had come instructed 'to avoid all questions of race and faith,' and Nazi victims were consistently referred to as 'political refugees.'<sup>11</sup> With such constraints, the meeting utterly failed to address itself to the pressing needs of Jews trapped inside Nazi-occupied Europe. As their main contribution, conferees revived the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGC), the powerless and underfunded body whose mandate specifically ruled out actual rescue and whose programme consisted of giving relief to those already rescued.<sup>12</sup>

The delegates were well aware of their feeble performance. 'World opinion will be bitterly disappointed by the results of the Conference if all future action is relegated to the IGC,' the British delegation noted. To avoid another wave of public criticism, the delegates decided to keep the proceedings of the Conference top secret, justified publicly on grounds of 'military considerations.' The tactic seemed to work. Long observed in June 1943 that 'the refugee question has calmed down... Jewish refugee advocates have temporarily withdrawn from the assertion of pressures.'<sup>13</sup>

The secrecy shrouding the Bermuda Conference may have silenced some critics but not a group of Palestinian Jews in the United States. The Committee for a Jewish Army, as that group was called, learned through a contact of the impotence of the Conference and reacted immediately. Less than forty-eight hours after the American delegates returned, the Committee sponsored a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*: 'TO 5,000 JEWS IN THE NAZI DEATH TRAP, BERMUDA WAS A "CRUEL MOCKERY".' The advertisement assailed the failure of the delegates to deal with the unique tragedy of the Jews. 'Not only were ways and means to save the remaining four million Jews in Europe not devised,' it stated, 'but their problem was not even touched upon, put on the agenda, or discussed.' The advertisement



went on to challenge the standard arguments against rescue action and drew attention to the need for a 'program of action, not pity.'<sup>14</sup>

The inspiration for the Committee's maverick action sprang largely from Peter H. Bergson. He was a stocky thirty-three year old firebrand, whose voice tended to squeak when he was excited. Born in Lithuania and raised in Palestine, Bergson had attended the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the late 1920s.<sup>15</sup> There he and a group of fellow students became strongly influenced by 'revisionist' Zionism. Revisionists advocated militant political action to achieve Jewish statehood, a prescription that ran against established Zionist philosophy. Appeasement, Orthodox Zionists held, not antagonism of British authorities would bring about the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Those differences had proved irreconcilable. In 1933, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, Revisionists seceded from the World Zionist Organization and formed the New Zionist Organization. The result was lasting bitterness between the two factions.

Bergson and his friends identified with Jabotinsky and were committed to the idea of a Jewish national homeland defended by a Jewish army. They joined the Irgun Zvai Leumi, a Jewish underground military organization in Palestine and participated during the 1930s in efforts to help smuggle European Jews into Palestine in defiance of the British White Paper restrictions. An estimated 40,000 Jews entered Palestine that way, until the hazards of World War II virtually halted illegal immigration in 1940.<sup>16</sup>

Bergson sensed the urgency of keeping world attention alive to Nazi persecution of Europe's Jews. In April 1940 he came to the United States to join four Irgun colleagues who were already working there. The group sought support for the creation of a separate Jewish army to fight against the Axis powers. In the fall of 1941 they formed the Committee for a Jewish Army (CJA) with national headquarters in New York and local councils in eight major cities. They published a monthly magazine and sponsored local rallies, newspaper advertisements and radio broadcasts to draw support to their cause.<sup>17</sup>

On the national level, the group secured substantial congressional backing due largely to Bergson's single-handed lobbying efforts. He even persuaded over thirty Senators and one hundred Representatives to sign a petition protesting against the 'calculated extermination of the ancient Jewish people by the barbarous Nazis. . . .' In the end, the petition drew signatures from over three

thousand Americans, including religious leaders, diplomats, statesmen and military officials, and even several members of Roosevelt's cabinet.<sup>18</sup> Representatives Andrew Somers (D-NY) and Will Rogers, Jr. (D-CA) and Senators Guy Gillette (D-IA) and Edwin Johnson (D-CO) became especially lasting supporters of Bergson's efforts. Senator Johnson, in fact, assumed the national chairmanship of the CJA. In general, politicians and civic leaders supported the CJA as a politically feasible means of expressing concern for the condition of Jews in Europe.

Meanwhile, the continuing inaction by the United States government in the light of news of Hitler's extermination programme appalled Bergson and his fellow CJA activists. They had come to the United States to raise funds for a Jewish Army but now realized that saving Jews was a more pressing issue. By the spring of 1943, their advertisements, protest meetings and rallies sounded that theme. The group exhorted the United States government to negotiate with Germany and the satellite nations for the release of Jews and to provide a temporary haven for fleeing refugees. They also urged the temporary evacuation of refugees to Palestine, where European Jews were welcomed by the population living there.

A shrewd publicist, Bergson conceived of a new tactic: a theatrical production. In mid-1942 he persuaded Ben Hecht to write a musical pageant commemorating the Jews killed during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Hecht entitled the pageant, *We Will Never Die*, staged it for a mammoth cast and chorus, and enlisted Moss Hart to direct the show and Kurt Weill to compose a score. The production opened at Madison Square Garden on March 9, 1943 and thereafter played to full houses in Washington DC, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, culminating in July at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles.<sup>19</sup>

The wide publicity given to the pageant and to other CJA activities angered American Zionists. They saw the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (ECZA), formed in 1939 to coordinate Zionist political work, as the primary representative of organized American Jews; they resented the presence of any competing body. The secretary of one of ECZA's constituent groups, the United Palestine Appeal, explained their hostility to Bergson's activities: 'The United Palestine Appeal is very much opposed to any new small group attempting to compete with it and detract from the complete unity of its support by the American public.'<sup>20</sup> Bergson's

popularity was worrisome as were his revisionist sympathies and Irgun affiliation. Zionist leaders also disagreed with Bergson's crude publicity tactics which they felt would alienate, not encourage the support of government officials.

As early as 1940 American Zionist leaders began campaigning to discredit Bergson's activities. They wrote to CJA sponsors, informing them of their 'mistake' in supporting the Bergson group. 'You are probably unaware,' wrote an ECZA official to a Bergson contributor in April 1940, that 'revisionists represent a near fascist minority which is disrupting the unity of Zionism.' Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the American Jewish Congress and vice-chairman of ECZA, similarly explained the position of 'responsible' Zionists in letters to every signatory of the CJA petition whom he requested to dissociate themselves from the CJA. By early 1943 the national Zionist body, which now called itself the American Zionist Emergency Council (AZEC), was directing all its members to agitate locally against the Bergson group. Members were instructed to interfere with the group's activities, to generate unfavourable local publicity about the CJA, and to dissuade CJA contributors from further supporting the Bergson group. In addition, Zionists successfully thwarted attempts to stage *We Will Never Die* in various cities including Baltimore, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh.<sup>21</sup>

Bergson resented Zionist obstruction. A united Jewish front, he felt, was essential to press effectively for governmental action. Between 1940 and 1943, Bergson approached the Zionist leadership with several proposals for a rapprochement. The two factions did begin negotiations to form a coordinating committee, but those talks broke down with Zionist unwillingness to tolerate equal representation of the Bergson group. 'For reasons which should be well known to you,' Rabbi Wise wrote to Bergson in 1941, the Zionist leadership 'cannot give their support to the activities of a body . . . which refuses to recognize the authority of the duly constituted national bodies and is responsible to no one but itself.'<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Bergson was determined to continue dramatizing the need for the rescue of European Jews, particularly after the failure of the Bermuda Conference. No other group in the United States, he believed, was effectively pressurising the government to act. Although Zionist groups had submitted a rescue programme to the White House, they had failed to follow it up vigorously. Even by 1943 the ECZA had neither a Washington bureau, nor a

single representative there. So in May, Bergson launched his campaign of full-page advertisements to discredit the Bermuda Conference.

The Senate responded immediately to that campaign. Two days after the advertisement appeared in the *New York Times*, Senator Scott Lucas, one of the three delegates to the Bermuda Conference, rose on the Senate floor to denounce the attack. The advertisement, he charged in a forty-five minute speech, 'infers that democracy in this country is conniving in the slaughter of those poor unfortunate people in Europe.' He condemned the sponsors of the advertisement for attacking the conference without waiting for the facts. 'They are injuring their own case with an advertisement of this kind,' Lucas added. 'This kind of advertisement plays into the hands of Adolph Hitler.'<sup>23</sup>

Senator Lucas' response revealed the impact of the advertisement. However, Bergson had blundered by publishing the names of certain Senators in the advertisement without having secured their advance consent. The names of thirty-three Senators who had signed the CJA petition appeared next to the broadside, thus giving the impression that they endorsed the contents of the advertisement. Infuriated by the deception, several Senators dissociated their names from the advertisement and one Senator, Harry Truman, withdrew his name from the Committee altogether.<sup>24</sup> Despite several written rebukes, Bergson retained much of his senatorial support. But the experience taught him a valuable lesson. In the future, he would be more cautious when publicizing the names of politicians.

The incident did not weaken Bergson's resolve to highlight the need for rescue. He decided to create a new organization devoted exclusively to the rescue issue. For that purpose he planned a large conference which would include military, economic, and diplomatic experts to devise a realistic programme of rescue. The next three months were spent working out the details, and with the help of friends in Congress, the group secured the backing of numerous government officials and prominent citizens.

The Conference was dramatic and well staged. On July 20, 1943 one thousand delegates from around the nation convened at the Hotel Commodore in New York City.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of the Conference, as made clear by a variety of opening speeches, was to prove that Jews could be saved without hindering the war effort. Toward that end, delegates broke up into panels to discuss rescue

problems in specific areas. Significantly, experts on the relief and transportation panel refuted the standard wartime argument that lack of available shipping prohibited the evacuation of refugees. 'Available neutral shipping alone,' they concluded, could 'transport 50,000 persons per month from European countries.'

After six days of deliberation the Conference recommended an eight point rescue programme. Chiefly, delegates urged the creation of a United States governmental agency specifically charged with the task of saving European Jews. Conferees further called upon the United States to grant temporary asylum to fleeing refugees and to put pressure on Britain to open Palestine to Jewish escapees. In addition, delegates proposed that the Allied powers issue repeated warnings of future retribution to Nazi satellite countries for complicity in crimes committed against Jews. For such crimes, they suggested, the Allies should inflict reprisals upon the Axis countries, and should bomb the railroads leading to the crematoria as well as the crematoria themselves.

In an effort to avoid dividing their energies, the delegates ignored the question of a Jewish state in Palestine. That issue, they reasoned, could be settled after the war. Bergson realized that the constant reference to a Jewish national homeland — made in the Zionist rescue proposals — inflamed Arabs in the Middle East and alienated government support. He therefore sought to divorce the question of immediate rescue from Zionist political goals.

The Conference adjourned on July 26 and resolved to transform itself officially into the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. Sponsors immediately began to build a lobby network, relying heavily on contacts made during the earlier CJA campaign. Bergson set up a national office in Washington, DC while his assistants organized chapters in Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. They publicized their cause with leaflets, periodicals and mailing campaigns and also held parlour meetings in the homes of prominent people. The chapter in Washington, DC, for example, was created when Bergson spoke to a dozen interested people gathered in the home of Oscar Chapman, Undersecretary of the Interior. The Committee continued to attract prominent names to its list of honorary chairmen which included Herbert Hoover, publisher William Randolph Hearst and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes.

The Emergency Committee grew quickly for several reasons. Importantly, its non-sectarian nature gave it automatic broad back-

ing. By avoiding an exclusively Jewish affiliation, the Committee attracted non-Jews to the cause, thus underscoring the belief 'that Christians and Jews alike have the moral duty to consider and treat the Jewish problem.' Further, by avoiding the controversial question of a Jewish homeland, the group gained the support of many Jews as well as non-Jews who were alienated by that issue. Orthodox American Jews, vehemently opposed to Zionist political aims, found the Emergency Committee an acceptable forum from which to voice their demand for rescue. Moreover, the Committee was free from any dominant political allegiance and thus drew the support of people from a variety of political backgrounds. Sponsorship crossed party lines and included, for example, Republicans Wendell Wilkie and Governor Thomas Dewey, Democrats Will Rogers and Guy Gillette, and American Labor Party leader Dean Alfange. The Committee's non-partisan nature distinguished it from groups like the American Zionists who were traditionally allied with the Democratic party. Indeed, Zionist leader Rabbi Wise, an ardent political supporter of Roosevelt, was reluctant to jeopardize his status with the President by seeking the backing of prominent Republicans.

In general, the Emergency Committee attracted people dissatisfied with government passivity and tired of the continued bickering among Jewish groups. Senator Guy Gillette spoke for many Committee sympathizers when he explained his support for the group. His 'deep concern' over the Jewish plight had found no 'expression in anything tangible, in anything concrete,' he said. When asked to attend a parlour meeting of the Washington chapter of the Emergency Committee, he declined interest 'if expressions of horror were to be the order of the day, and resolutions of sympathy passed... Fortunately, I found that this group wanted to do something concrete and tangible.'<sup>26</sup>

In line with that activist philosophy, the Committee began publicizing its rescue programme. Under the public relations direction of Samuel Merlin, the group launched a petition drive in a full-page *New York Times* advertisement headed: 'THEY ARE DRIVEN TO DEATH DAILY BUT THEY CAN BE SAVED.' The advertisement asked readers to sign a petition urging the creation of an inter-governmental agency to rescue Jews and to demand the same from their Representatives and Senators in Washington.<sup>27</sup> For the next six months, similar full-page advertisements appearing in over sixty newspapers sustained the petition drive and raised funds

for continued publicity.

While Merlin headed the advertisement campaign, Bergson was in charge of lobbying, and he lost no time in bringing the rescue proposals to the attention of State Department officials. He began in early August 1943 by arranging, through congressional contacts, a meeting with Secretary Hull. Within the Department, officials debated whether Hull should receive a delegation from the Emergency Committee. They believed that 'the imposing list of honorary chairmen and experts. . . is merely window dressing' and feared that 'the delegation will undoubtedly endeavor to embarrass Hull.' Despite all the objections, Department authorities finally consented. 'If Hull does not receive them,' Undersecretary Sumner Welles warned, 'they will allege prejudice or lack of interest on his part.'<sup>28</sup>

On August 12, the Secretary met Bergson and co-chairman Dean Alfange, who presented their rescue proposals. Hull evaded commitment, but did react favourably to Bergson's request for Department assistance in sending an Emergency Committee delegate to Turkey. Such a representative would investigate and report rescue possibilities in the Balkans. As the Committee's choice, Bergson recommended Ira Hirschman, a Bloomingdale's executive with keen interest in rescue. Hull subsequently checked with the Ambassador in Ankara and agreed to send Hirschman to Turkey although the Department, in characteristic fashion, stalled in completing the necessary arrangements for Hirschman's departure.<sup>29</sup>

In subsequent meetings with State Department officials, Bergson continued to stress the need for a governmental rescue commission and for United States denunciation of atrocities committed against Jews. 'Jews within Europe should not be considered potential refugees but potential corpses,' he reminded one official in January 1944, according to a Department memorandum. Bergson insisted that continued American silence was interpreted by Nazis as lack of interest in the fate of the Jews if not passive approval of Nazi extermination efforts.<sup>30</sup>

Bergson's several visits to the Department enraged Breckinridge Long. He was alarmed at the attention being paid to Bergson. The Assistant Secretary opposed Bergson's recommendation for a new rescue agency which, in Long's view, would duplicate the efforts of the IGC. Long had an opportunity to express his displeasure in person when he met Bergson in October 1943. He warned Bergson 'that the publications which his organization was inserting in the

newspapers made it very difficult for the Department and injured the cause which they professed to have so much at heart. . . .’ Long suggested that ‘a lack of publicity would do them more good than it would harm,’ but Bergson made clear his intention to continue such publicity. Infuriated, Long sought to frustrate Bergson’s continued efforts at the Department. When Bergson, along with Representative Rogers, took the proposals in November to the new Undersecretary, Edward Stettinius, Long directed an assistant to forewarn Stettinius that those people ‘lack complete information’ and ‘continue to urge the adoption of extreme measures which were rejected at Bermuda.’ Further, when Stettinius drafted a four page response to the Committee’s suggestions, Long protested. ‘I doubt we should send such a detailed and lengthy letter to Mr Bergson,’ he wrote to Stettinius. ‘He is not an American citizen, yet he demands action by the American government. . . .’ Stettinius heeded Long’s advice and ultimately declined even to respond to Bergson.<sup>31</sup>

Though Long despised all rescue advocates, he especially distrusted Bergson and his companions. Since the Bermuda Conference, the Committee’s activities had irked the Assistant Secretary. The day the *New York Times* printed Bergson’s attack on the Bermuda Conference, Long circulated a confidential memo in the Department. He expressed suspicion that Gestapo agents might be operating in the United States under the guise of rescue agitators. Some connection existed, Long believed, between the group’s ‘action — not pity’ slogan and Hitler’s exhortation in a 1939 rally: ‘action — not moralizing.’ Three days later, one of Long’s subordinates drafted a brief amplifying that suspicion. ‘This idea [action not pity] has been a favorite capital item of the Gestapo and Axis propagandists who have created and instigated. . . .refugee organizations for their ulterior motives,’ the official wrote. ‘We must prevent Hitler from using the refugees once more to break through our defenses and prolong the war.’ He went on to suggest that ‘it may be desirable to explode the myth of the slogan “action not pity” which has become the watchword of pressure groups who are interested only in a particular class of refugees. . . .The Department might instigate a story, for instance, in *Collier’s* which would give a picture of the Department of State in the refugee movement.’<sup>32</sup>

Long never substantiated his suspicions, but the vociferous activities of the Emergency Committee continued to distress him. The



day after Bergson visited Hull, Long intensified his investigations of the Palestinian agitators. He assigned a subordinate, Robert Murphy, to analyze the leading personalities behind the rescue campaign. Murphy drafted a detailed report. 'They are aliens,' he wrote, who 'are attempting to confuse the issue by raising a question whose solution . . . cannot be accomplished without interfering with the war effort.'<sup>33</sup>

Jewish leaders abetted Long's suspicions of Bergson and his associates. They paid regular visits to the State Department to denounce the Emergency Committee. On October 6, Zionist leaders Rabbi Wise and Nahum Goldmann, an executive of the World Jewish Congress, met Long. In Long's words, they 'excoriated' Bergson's group and indicated that it did not represent the thinking of most American Jews. Goldmann, in subsequent visits to the Department, sustained the pressure. On one occasion he labelled Bergson an 'adventurer' and the activities of the Committee 'purely a question of personal ambition on the part of a group of irresponsible young men,' according to one advisor. Non-Zionists found Bergson's activities equally distressing. Dr Maurice Waldman, chairman of the prestigious American Jewish Committee, met Department officials in January 1944. Waldman stated, according to a Department memorandum, that many of the Emergency Committee's activities were 'little better than racketeering.' He 'hesitated' to expose the 'disunity within the . . . American Jewish Community' but wondered whether 'the Department could instigate an investigation of Bergson with a view to curtailing his stay in the United States.' Advisors present replied that 'such a move' would make the Department suspect of 'playing politics.'<sup>34</sup>

While the Department could not actively prosecute Bergson, however, it could encourage and cooperate with investigations by authorized government agencies. Hence Department officials urged Dr Waldman to bring his request for Bergson's deportation to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Breckinridge Long had already alerted the Department of Justice in August to the presence of the Palestinian nationals. Justice authorities began a series of investigations designed to determine whether Bergson and his colleagues could be compelled to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.<sup>36</sup> Such a restriction would have subjected all activities and assets of the Emergency Committee to official scrutiny. The Justice Department never produced sufficiently incriminating evidence, but its Immigration and Naturalization ser-

vice began deportation proceedings against Bergson. Efforts to deport Bergson ultimately failed due largely to the protection afforded him by congressional supporters.<sup>37</sup> Yet, throughout the war years Long and State Department authorities channelled demands for Bergson's deportation to the Immigration and Naturalization service in an effort to step up deportation proceedings.

**In spite of governmental pressure, Bergson never faltered for a new way to sustain the rescue campaign. In early October he arranged a pilgrimage of 450 Orthodox Rabbis to the White House and United States Capitol in Washington, an event that attracted considerable publicity. During the period coinciding with the Jewish High Holy days, the Committee also organized a special week of prayer which an estimated 6,000 churches observed. Three major religious leaders helped out by urging congregational leaders to speak from the pulpit of the need for immediate action to rescue European Jews.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, rallies and demonstrations continued. One rally held at Carnegie Hall on October 31 honoured the people of Sweden and Denmark for their successful efforts to rescue Danish Jews. The event featured speeches by a number of prominent public figures including Leon Henderson, Roosevelt's economic advisor and former member of the Security and Exchange Commission. Henderson accused the Allies of 'cowardice' and condemned 'vague statements of military expediency.'<sup>39</sup>**

Bergson even tried — unsuccessfully — to bring his proposals to President Roosevelt. He did, however, on several occasions meet Eleanor Roosevelt who revealed the effect that Bergson's campaign was having upon her husband. The President had read one Emergency Committee advertisement in the *New York Times*, Mrs Roosevelt once told Bergson. Her husband, she said, had complained that Bergson's group was 'hitting him below the belt.'<sup>40</sup>

Above all, the Emergency Committee continued to drive for the creation of a governmental rescue commission. In the fall, Bergson asked Senator Guy Gillette, an honorary chairman of the Committee and activist in the Washington chapter, to introduce a resolution in the Senate calling for such an agency. Gillette agreed. In early November, 1943 he introduced S. Res. 203 while Representatives Will Rogers and Joseph Baldwin introduced an identical resolution in the House. The bill urged 'the creation by the President of a commission of diplomatic, economic, and military experts to formulate

and effectuate a plan of action to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction. . . ' Gillette made it clear that the resolution focused exclusively on rescue. It 'is not to be confused with the dispute over the future of Palestine, over a Jewish state or a Jewish army,' he said. 'The issue is non-sectarian. The sole object here is to rescue as many as possible of the Hitler victims, pending complete Allied victory.'<sup>41</sup>

In support of the Gillette-Rogers resolution, the Committee unleashed another publicity campaign. Scores of full-page advertisements exhorted readers to pressure Senators and Congressmen to pass the resolution. No appeal was too dramatic. 'HOW WELL ARE YOU SLEEPING?' asked one advertisement. It reprinted a UPS account of the Nazi massacre of Jews in Kiev and then asked, 'Is There Something You Could Have Done to Save Millions of Innocent People. . . from Torture and Death?' Another advertisement was equally sensational: 'THIS IS STRICTLY A RACE AGAINST DEATH,' read the headline. Favourable editorials in at least twelve major newspapers sustained the campaign for the resolution.<sup>42</sup>

American Zionist leaders were distressed. They found it hard to believe that so much attention was being paid to what they considered a marginal group. They resented the competition. 'Instead of cooperating with established and recognized national Jewish agencies,' they charged, the leaders of the Emergency Committee 'have entered into competition and sought to undermine them.' Zionists continued their efforts to dissuade prominent people from backing the Committee. After Harold Ickes had accepted an honorary chairmanship of the Committee, he received a letter from Rabbi Wise. 'The time will come and come soon,' Wise warned Ickes, 'when you will find it necessary to withdraw from this irresponsible group which exists to obtain funds through being permitted to use the names of non-Jews like yourself.' Ickes did not resign, nor did Senator Gillette or Representative Rogers who received similar messages. Nahum Goldmann, after unsuccessfully requesting Rogers to resign from the Committee, later told State Department officials, according to an internal memorandum, that Representative 'and Mrs Rogers harbour a great admiration for Bergson which no amount of persuasion had been able to shake.'<sup>43</sup>

Besides worrying Zionist leaders, the growth of the Emergency Committee precipitated an attempt by American Jewish groups to unite. In August 1943 delegates from sixty-four national Jewish

organizations, excluding the Emergency Committee, held an American Jewish Conference. The Conference represented more than two million American Jews and sought to 'unify American Jewry by the creation of a democratic responsible body which could speak and act authoritatively in meeting the problems confronting the Jewish people.'<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately the primary focus of the meeting concerned 'problems relating to the rights and status of Jews in the post-war world'; the issue of immediate rescue came second. Despite an initial agreement to avoid the political question of a Jewish state, the preponderance of Zionists present forced the issue; the Conference adopted a pro-Zionist plank. That declaration for a Jewish state in Palestine alienated the non-Zionist Jewish organizations present — the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Labor Council. Delegates from those groups balked at what they saw as an attempt by Zionists to bull-doze the Palestine question through the Conference.<sup>45</sup> Again, the issue became a matter of pride, not rescue. Exasperated, the non-Zionists withdrew from the Conference in October, thus undercutting the attempt at a unified American Jewish response to the Holocaust.

The Zionist delegates made Palestine the focus of their rescue proposals for several reasons. Like most American Jews, the conferees were anxious to avoid aggravating domestic anti-semitism, signs of which persisted during the war.<sup>46</sup> Aware of American reluctance to permit entry of more Jewish immigrants, they believed that the Administration and many Americans would instead endorse a Jewish refuge in Palestine. Further, the conferees were eager to display the patriotism of American Jews, and avoided any suggestions considered detrimental to the war effort. 'We are Americans — first, last and all the time,' Rabbi Wise reminded the audience, 'our first and sternest task, in common with all other citizens of our beloved country... is to win the anti-Fascist war.'<sup>47</sup> From both a military and political standpoint, delegates reasoned, a Jewish haven in Palestine represented a practical alternative; it was accessible by land through the Balkans and its population was eager to receive Jewish refugees.

The rationale for attaching Zionist political goals to the demand for a Jewish refuge in Palestine was more complex. At root was the purpose of Zionism, a philosophy which strove to end the basic homelessness of Jews. Dr Abba Hillel Silver, co-chairman of AZEC, summarized that belief during the Conference. 'There is

but one solution for national homelessness,' he declared, and 'that is a national home, not new immigration opportunities to other countries for fleeing refugees, nor new colonization schemes in other parts of the world.'<sup>48</sup> For Zionist leaders like Stephen Wise and Abba Silver, who had laboured much of their lives to realize the dream of a Jewish Commonwealth, the goals of Zionism and of rescue were inseparable. The men saw the plight of Jewish refugees as leverage with which to gain support for a Jewish national home.

Wise and Silver, the appointed spokesmen for the American Jewish Conference, opposed rescue proposals in any form other than emigration to Palestine because alternative plans diverted attention away from that primary aim. Hence they opposed the Gillette-Rogers resolution because it lacked any provision for the creation of a Jewish Commonwealth. Their stance exasperated Peter Bergson who insisted that 'no condition be attached, especially political ones, to the cry "Save the Jews of Europe".' To make his point, Bergson asked Wise during a heated argument sometime after the Conference: 'If you were inside a burning house, would you want the people outside to scream "save them" or to scream "save them by taking them to the Waldorf-Astoria?"'<sup>49</sup>

All the same, the Zionist leadership was determined to fight for a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine and lost no time in making their views known in Congress. Less than twenty-four hours after Gillette had introduced his resolution, he received a series of calls from AZEC representatives. In Gillette's words, they pointed out that Bergson's group 'did not represent the Jewish people; that they were upstarts;' and that 'they were just a little group who desired to aggrandize themselves.' 'We know that if you had realized the sponsors of this proposal,' Gillette later recalled them saying, 'you would not have lent yourself to the introduction of the resolution.' Rabbi Wise himself paid a visit to Gillette expressing opposition to the measure. Agitation against the resolution continued until the day of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee report. In spite of Zionist pressure, the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously reported out S.Res. 203 on 20 December 1943.<sup>50</sup>

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs treated H.R. 352 more roughly. Unlike the Senate, the House Committee held hearings on the resolution. Chairman Sol Bloom, a Democrat from New York and friend of Rabbi Wise, opposed the bill. Bloom had disliked Bergson since the Bermuda Conference when Bergson sharply attacked Bloom, the only Jew of the three United States

delegates to the Conference. Bloom now took the opportunity to return the fire. When Bergson testified before the Foreign Affairs Committee, the *Washington Post* noted, 'The hearing was the scene of heated exchanges . . . between Chairman Bloom . . . and the witness, who, unlike previous witnesses, was sworn in.' Bloom chastized Bergson for his publicity tactics. 'You made a great mistake by giving the impression that it is necessary to use propaganda for a humanitarian purpose,' he told Bergson. Rabbi Wise sounded a similar theme in closed testimony before the Committee on 2 December. He denounced 'rashly written resolutions and rashly publicized advertisements asking for money.'<sup>51</sup>

Witnesses testifying in favour of the resolution included Wendell Wilkie, New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Sigrid Undset,<sup>52</sup> and other Emergency Committee supporters. Dean Alfange also testified, pointing out that 'the doors of escape are bolted not from within but from without by ourselves and our Allies.' Such testimony, however, failed to offset the damage done by Breckinridge Long who testified in closed session. Long's arguments were disarming. He did not, he said, directly oppose the bill but felt that it would hinder future American rescue efforts. As he saw it, 'every legitimate thing' was already being done to rescue Hitler's victims and any additional action by the Congress would 'be construed as a repudiation of the acts of the Executive branch.'<sup>53</sup>

Long's testimony impressed the majority of Committee members. He himself referred to the 'enormously favorable impression made upon the members of the Committee,' and viewed it 'as an indication of the very real public reaction in favor of all our efforts.'<sup>54</sup> On December 26, the Committee on Foreign Affairs voted to shelve the resolution.

To make matters worse, divisions between the Zionists and Bergson group grew sharper. Immediately after the defeat of the rescue resolution, the Interim Committee of the American Jewish Conference issued a scathing denunciation of the Emergency Committee which appeared in the *New York Times* on 31 December 1943. The Conference assailed the Emergency Committee as one of a 'series of fronts' whose leaders had 'constantly assumed to speak for the Jewish people in this country without having or endeavoring to secure a mandate from any constituency', and whose activities had caused 'discord, resulting frequently in a disservice to the cause they had assumed to represent.' The Emergency Committee count-

ered with a statement pointing out that the Committee was 'non-sectarian and non-partisan' and therefore 'could never have assumed to speak for the Jewish people in America.'<sup>55</sup>

The exchange exposed to public view the friction within the Jewish community. The *New York Post* commented on that dissension. 'We want to rescue as many as possible,' it noted, 'and so we hate to see such displays of factional spleen.' Senator Gillette also stressed the need to remember the more important question at hand. 'The problem is big enough for all Jewish groups to solve,' he said.<sup>56</sup>

With continued Jewish disunity and the failure of the Gillette-Rogers resolution, prospects for rescue seemed bleak. But at that critical moment, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. appeared on the scene. Morgenthau had never been a strenuous advocate of United States involvement on behalf of the Jewish victims of the Nazis. But in March 1943 he became aware of unjustifiable stalling by the State Department in response to an approved plan to evacuate 70,000 Rumanian Jews. As evidence of Department indifference mounted, Morgenthau sensed the urgency of removing all refugee matters from its jurisdiction. Based on material compiled by his assistants Josiah Dubois, Jr., John Pehle and Randolph Paul, Morgenthau presented a special report to President Roosevelt on 16 January 1944. It was a damning indictment of State Department apathy and incompetence and ended by suggesting that 'the matter of rescuing Jews from extermination' be removed from 'the hands of men who are indifferent, callous and perhaps even hostile.' Morgenthau reminded the President that rumours of anti-semitism in the State Department 'will require little more in the way of proof for this suspicion to explode into a nasty scandal.'<sup>57</sup>

The warning impressed Roosevelt. The President sensed the political unfeasibility of continuing to delegate refugee matters to the State Department, particularly in 1944, an election year. He decided to heed Morgenthau's advice to form a government rescue commission. On 22 January 1944 the President issued Executive Order 9417 establishing the War Refugee Board and named Secretaries Morgenthau, Hull and War Secretary Henry Stimson to head the Board.<sup>58</sup> Roosevelt gave broad powers to the WRB; it would formulate rescue plans, co-ordinate relief to the victims, find means of transportation to evacuate victims, and set up temporary refugee havens. Significantly, the WRB was authorized to negotiate with neutral countries to absorb refugees, either permanently or

temporarily. Roosevelt appointed the energetic John W. Pehle as acting director of the Board. As Assistant Treasury Secretary, Pehle had helped unearth evidence of State Department procrastination on rescue efforts. Now he threw himself completely into rescue operations.

For the Emergency Committee, the President's executive order was a major, though belated victory. It represented the first genuine effort on the part of the United States to save the remnants of European Jewry, and it challenged the argument that nothing more could be done. The Bergson group played a large role in the creation of the WRB, particularly in 'generating an atmosphere conducive to its formation,' as Josiah Dubois later noted. The Committee's origination of the Gillette-Rogers resolution and its efforts to awaken Americans convinced Roosevelt that he had enough congressional support to issue his executive order. A number of congratulatory telegrams and newspaper editorials echoed that view. The *Washington Post*, for example, credited the Emergency Committee 'with industrious spadework done' and wrote that 'the Committee is . . . entitled to credit for the President's forehanded move.' The *New York Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor* were among other newspapers which seconded that opinion.<sup>59</sup>

The War Refugee Board, under John Pehle's energetic leadership, worked feverishly. WRB agents stationed in Ankara, Istanbul, Lisbon and North Africa tried to expedite the passage of refugees through those critical areas. The Board negotiated with neutral countries to absorb refugees and also co-ordinated and funded relief efforts of various private agencies. Notably, the WRB collaborated with the Office of War Information to beam threats of punishment to the Axis and Satellite government authorities for atrocities committed against Jews. Pehle saw that it was possible to evacuate only a limited number of Jews, so the Board sought at least to arrest further deportations by urging Satellite governments to subvert the Nazi liquidation programme.

Meanwhile, the efforts of the Emergency Committee had not ceased with the creation of the WRB. The Committee quickly offered its services to the Board in propaganda work and in developing specific rescue proposals. Pehle was sympathetic to the Committee. He and Treasury colleague Josiah Dubois knew Bergson well as a result of the latter's frequent visits to the Treasury Department. 'We were seeking the same goals', Dubois later recalled.



'Bergson was one of a small group of us trying to do what we could.'<sup>60</sup>

Now Pehle sought to work closely with the Committee. He agreed to send Bergson's choice, Ira Hirschman, to Turkey as the WRB agent there. Hirschman left in January 1944 and soon began negotiations with Turkish officials to relax the refugee bottleneck and facilitate passage through the Balkans. Pehle also enabled another Bergson colleague, Eri Jabotinsky, to go to Turkey. For the next several months, Pehle allowed Bergson to communicate directly with Jabotinsky via State Department cables. Jabotinsky kept Bergson constantly abreast of changing situations in the Balkans and Bergson was able to sustain pressure for specific rescue efforts.<sup>61</sup>

The Committee also campaigned for temporary rescue camps in the United States, endorsing the suggestion made by columnist Samuel Grafton: refugees could be sheltered temporarily according to the 'free ports' concept, much in the same way that international merchandise was stored in warehouses.<sup>62</sup> It was an important issue for the WRB. Pehle well understood the need for the United States to set an example for other countries to follow by providing temporary havens. He presented his case to Roosevelt, but the President was reluctant to tangle with restrictionists during an election year. During May and June, however, a number of resolutions calling for free ports were introduced in Congress.<sup>63</sup> That demonstrated support, combined with intervention again by Secretary Morgenthau, finally convinced Roosevelt to proceed. On 9 June he announced the preparation of an emergency refugee shelter at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York. The camp would shelter fewer than one thousand refugees brought from southern Italy and Roosevelt made sure to specify that the group 'include a reasonable proportion of all categories of persecuted minorities.'<sup>64</sup> Late July 1944, the refugees arrived.

The Oswego shelter was, at best, a symbolic gesture. 'The opening of our doors to only 1,000,' the *Washington Post* complained, 'is but a drop in the bucket compared with the needs.'<sup>65</sup> The complaint was telling. Oswego did little to convince other countries to follow suit. More important, the failure to obtain assurances of temporary refuge put the WRB in a difficult position. Without them, it had little bargaining power to negotiate with satellite countries for the release of refugees. The problem of where to put the refugees remained unsolved.

That was one of the many, largely insuperable obstacles the WRB faced for the remainder of the war. Though able to carry off several small-scale rescue operations, the Board was simply unequipped to undertake mass rescue of Jews. Unfortunately, it had appeared too late. Absent from the scene, it was forced to 'act by remote control,' as one historian put it. Agreements with satellite governments for the release of Jews were often shattered by the changing whims of officials in power. For example, a WRB plan to evacuate 2,000 Hungarian Jews to Palestine was foiled when the Bulgarian Minister changed his mind and declined to provide the necessary transit facilities. 'Complications arise so suddenly,' the frustrated Hirschman cabled Pehle, 'that the movement of refugees may continue to be delayed.'<sup>66</sup>

Equally unsuccessful were the Board's efforts to persuade Pope Pius XII and the Vatican hierarchy publicly to denounce the Nazi liquidation programme. WRB officials felt certain that such a condemnation would have a great impact, especially upon the large Catholic population in Hungary. But the Pope, for reasons of his own, declined to protest against Nazi barbarities inflicted on the Jews. The Board was also frustrated by the refusal of the International Red Cross to press for inspection of concentration camps or to change the status of Jewish inmates to that of civilian internees so that Jews could receive food packages. Bickering among various private rescue agencies proved yet another stumbling block. Finally, and probably the most exasperating, was the United States Army's rejection of the suggestion of retaliatory bombing. The WRB along with all rescue advocates argued that bombing, or threatening to bomb the railroads leading to the crematoria or the crematoria themselves, would significantly deter further murder of Jews. But military authorities rejected the idea on grounds of the 'diversion of considerable air support' and the 'doubtful efficacy' of such a plan.<sup>67</sup>

With such handicaps the WRB proved hopelessly inadequate. Mass deportations and killing of Jews continued with full force. The case of Hungary's Jews offered sad testimony to the Board's impotence. Throughout the war, Hungary had provided refuge for close to one million Jews. But late in April 1944, even after German defeat was inevitable, Nazis began deporting Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz; the activities of the WRB seemed to have little effect in stemming the liquidation programme. By the time the WRB was terminated in September 1945, less than one third of Hungary's

original 700,000 Jews had survived.<sup>68</sup>

The frenetic rescue efforts of the WRB and the crisis facing Hungarian Jewry did little to bring together Zionists and the Emergency Committee. Zionist leaders resented Pehle's sympathies with the Committee, and Rabbi Wise and Nahum Goldmann each paid several visits to Pehle demanding that he sever ties with Bergson. On one such occasion according to an internal memorandum Goldmann went so far as to threaten, that 'unless the WRB disavowed Bergson it would be necessary for the World Jewish Congress to denounce publicly the WRB.' Goldmann's several visits to the State Department aroused officials there. The Department 'advised' Pehle of its 'objections to transmitting telegrams or performing other services for Bergson.' Such pressure from both Department officials and irate Zionist leaders increasingly constrained Pehle who ultimately was forced to deny the Emergency Committee a license to finance its activities in Ankara.<sup>69</sup>

With the Committee's campaign for temporary havens, Zionists intensified their attacks. Naturally opposed to any measure not calling for revocation of the White Paper and unlimited Jewish immigration to Palestine, Zionists lobbied against the temporary havens resolutions. Zionist leaders had sponsored their own resolutions in February calling for a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. AZEC co-chairmen Wise and Silver hoped to gain Roosevelt's support for the resolutions, but in March Secretary of War Henry Stimson marshalled arguments of military expediency and convinced the Senate to shelve them.<sup>70</sup>

During the summer political conventions, however, both party platforms adopted pro-Zionist planks and in August Zionists succeeded in getting new Commonwealth resolutions introduced into Congress. They rejoiced when Roosevelt made a campaign statement in October vaguely supporting Jewish intentions for Palestine, and when Stimson removed his previous military objections to the Commonwealth resolutions.<sup>71</sup> Still, Roosevelt was unwilling to support the resolution, a gesture likely to inflame an already excited Moslem population. 'Here is the only trouble about action by either House in regard to Palestine at this time,' he explained to Senator Robert Wagner,

There are about half a million Jews there. Perhaps another million want to go... On the other side of the picture there are approximately seventy million Mohammadans who want to cut their throats the day they land. The one thing I

want to avoid is a massacre. . . Anything said or done over here just now would add fuel to the flames and I hope that at this juncture no branch of government will act.<sup>72</sup>

Wagner communicated Roosevelt's position to Zionist leaders who, though deeply disappointed, withdrew their support for the measure. Wise reluctantly accepted Roosevelt's assurance that the Palestine question would be taken up after the war. He rejected the suggestion of AZEC co-chairman Silver to bring 'persuasive influence to. . . bear upon the Administration to change its mind.' As Wise explained in a letter to Roosevelt, 'From the beginning. . . we did not wish under any circumstances to proceed unless we had your clear approval.'<sup>73</sup>

While the Zionists campaigned for a Commonwealth resolution, Bergson subordinated the activities of the Emergency Committee to those of his new organization, the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation. In the fall of 1944 Bergson went so far as to establish a 'Hebrew Embassy' in Washington, a move which raised the eyebrows of even his supporters. Angered by the competing efforts for the creation of a Jewish homeland, Zionists resolved to get rid of Bergson once and for all. In early October, with the help of Representative Bloom, Zionist leaders persuaded the *Washington Post* to publish an exposé entitled 'BERGSON ADMITS \$1,000,000 FUND RAISED, VAGUE ON ITS USE.' The series of articles termed Bergson a 'self styled nuisance diplomat' and raised doubts about the Committee's financing. It also accused Bergson of shirking the United States draft. In response the Bergson group published an 'Open Letter to Eugene Meyer', which labelled the publisher of the *Washington Post* a Zionist stooge. The following week, the *Washington Post* printed an editorial retracting much of what had been said about the Committee. Still, AZEC leaders circulated copies of the original defamatory articles to its membership and to Bergson supporters. The incident substantially weakened the image of the Bergson group.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout 1944 the Zionist leadership stepped up its agitation for Bergson's deportation. In May, they secured the support of Representative Bloom who complained to the State Department that it had 'been remiss in not deporting Peter Bergson.' The Division of Near Eastern Affairs protested. 'The record will show,' it was pointed out in a detailed memo, 'that no official or Division of this Department has been remiss in handling the various aspects of

this case.' The memo went on to outline the history of the Department's cooperation with the Selective Service and Justice Department in efforts to draft, register and deport Bergson. 'Far from protecting Bergson,' the memo added, 'the Department has spent much time in receiving protests regarding him from other Jews.' The memo concluded by encouraging Congressman Bloom to approach the Department of Justice himself with his request for Bergson's deportation.<sup>75</sup>

For the next two years, the Division of Near Eastern Affairs continued to prod the Immigration and Naturalization Department to expedite deportation proceedings against Bergson. As late as May 1945, a department memo indicated that British authorities in Palestine were waiting to arrest Bergson 'who... is likely to be deported soon from this country.' Those efforts failed, however, due to the intervention of several prominent people on Bergson's behalf.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, Bergson's visa status was settled in December 1946 when the Justice Department granted him permanent residency in the United States. He subsequently left the United States, becoming heavily involved in the founding of the State of Israel. Bergson later became a member of the Israeli Knesset.

**In spite of continued government opposition, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe managed to sustain, with a surprising degree of success, its campaign to awaken Americans to the plight of European Jewry. But the efforts and accomplishments of the Emergency Committee seem all the more remarkable in light of additional opposition from organized American Jewry, particularly from powerful American Zionist groups.**

Zionist attacks on the Bergson group certainly weakened the rescue effort. In the first place, the obvious disunity in Jewish ranks relieved pressure on government officials to take action. Time and again, Department authorities took note of American Jewish bickering, factionalism which prompted Breckinridge Long to observe keenly in 1944: 'The Jewish organizations are all divided and in controversies of their own, there is no adhesion nor any sympathetic collaboration — rather rivalry, jealousy and antagonism.'<sup>77</sup> The Zionist anti-Bergson campaign also diverted considerable lobbying resources from the more pressing goal of saving lives. This again diluted the impact of the rescue campaign.

Legislative efforts for rescue were weakened by Zionist lobbying against the Gillette-Rogers resolution, a factor playing a significant role in the bill's defeat in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Moreover, by exerting continuous pressure on John Pehle to sever ties with Bergson, Zionist leaders complicated and strained the efforts of the WRB.

In attempting to explain such actions, it is necessary to examine the sources of Zionist hostility. For one thing, Bergson's perceived sympathies with Revisionism, no matter how far removed from the rescue issue, were abhorrent to the Zionist leadership. Perhaps American Zionists also feared the effects of Bergson's indecorous activities which they felt might tarnish the image of Jews and aggravate American anti-semitism. Rabbi Wise once remarked, according to a State Department memo, that he 'regarded Bergson as equally as great an enemy of the Jews as Hitler, for the reason that his activities could only lead to increased anti-semitism.'<sup>78</sup> Zionists further regarded Bergson's activities as a threat to their immediate campaign for a Jewish Commonwealth, a goal towards which they had laboured long and hard. Finally, Zionists considered Bergson and his companions 'upstarts' and saw the Emergency Committee as a force competing for Jewish influence outside the 'legitimate' and 'democratic' structure of Zionism.

It is impossible to know for certain whether Zionists could have overcome that hostility to unite with the Emergency Committee or to withhold their attacks on Bergson. But it is apparent that for fear of outside competition, of anti-semitism, of angering Roosevelt, and of losing sight of their own long-range goals, organized American Jews missed an opportunity to compel the United States government to take effective rescue action. Zionists never tested the leverage needed to force government action, power they may well have had. Had the Zionists united around Bergson's activist philosophy, they might have brought about an earlier creation of the War Refugee Board. The groups might possibly have forced the United States to condemn the Nazi 'final solution' earlier, or to put pressure on the British authorities to relax immigration restrictions in Palestine. A united effort might have resulted in the United States bombing the railroads leading to the concentration camps, or the crematoria themselves. Or, the groups might have forced the United States to grant temporary asylum to many Jewish refugees, a move which would have encouraged other countries to do the same.

Without strong pressure from American Jews, however, the United States took none of those steps and President Roosevelt was free to leave rescue policy in the hands of men like Breckinridge Long. Instead of intensifying pressure on the government for rescue, organized American Jews stepped up efforts to defeat the one group effectively pressing for action. In later years, Rabbi Wise wrote 'that were it not for State Department and Foreign Office bureaucratic bungling and callousness, thousands of lives might have been saved and the Jewish catastrophe partially averted'.<sup>79</sup> That may well be true. But organized American Jews — disunited, in retrospect unduly cautious, and preoccupied with long-range political goals — must also share the blame for the deaths of their six million brethren.

### Notes

1. For detailed explanations of the factors impeding United States government intervention in the plight of European Jews see the following: Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed* (Detroit 1973); Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died* (New York 1967); David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls* (Amherst 1968). Henry L. Feingold's *The Politics of Rescue* (New Brunswick 1970) provides a particularly lucid and thorough analysis of United States government inaction and is a book on which I have relied heavily throughout my research for this study.

2. Quoted by R. Borden Reams, Division of European Affairs, in memorandum to Edward Stettinius, 8 October 1943, in National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as NA), records of the Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter implied when citing State Department documents), 840.48 Refugees/4683-1/5.

3. For a general discussion of American anti-semitism during the 1930s see John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory* (New York 1976), 172-74.

4. Long confided his anti-semitic and anti-alien sentiment to his diary. See Fred L. Israel, ed., *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long* (Lincoln 1966), 28 November 1941. For representative entries invoking the security threat see *ibid.*, 26, 27 June 1940 and 6 February 1941.

5. Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*. An exception to that policy came in April 1939, following the German invasion of Austria. Nazi persecutions of Austrian Jews so aroused the American liberal press that Roosevelt, with great fan-fare, called an international conference at Evian, France to discuss ways to extricate Jews from Germany and Austria. But the Conference proved wholly inadequate when the United States, along with the remaining thirty-one nations, declined to receive additional refugees or to ease the entry process for immigrants. The delegates did create an Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees (IGC) to coordinate resettlement of refugees, but given a vague mandate and inadequate funding, the IGC proved im-

potent. For the next six critical years, however, the IGC symbolized world concern for refugees, concern that produced no action.

6. The Congressman was Emanuel Celler who later reminded Roosevelt that Celler's heavily Jewish constituency 'voted for you as though you were a modern Moses' (Celler to Roosevelt, letter 15 December 1944, in Yale Manuscripts and Archives, Palestine Statehood Group papers (hereafter cited as PSGP), Box 3, folder 61 (hereafter referred to as 3:61). 'Love affair' quote in Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 7-8.

7. For detailed descriptions of how news of Hitler's liquidation programme reached and was received by the State Department, see: R. Borden Reams, memorandum 8 October 1943, op. cit., note 2. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., 'The Refugee Run-Around', in *Collier's*, 120 (1 November 1947); Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years* (New York 1949), 274-78. See also references in note 1.

8. Declaration on War Crimes, 17 December 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as FRUS), I, 61-67.

9. See Reams, memorandum, 8 October 1943, op. cit. note 2.

10. Wallace Murray to Cordell Hull, memorandum 2 June 1942, in PSGP 3:67; Research and Analysis report 508, Office of Strategic Services (hereafter cited as OSS), 'Assets of the Axis propaganda in the Moslem World', 21 November 1941 in NA; Paul Alling, 'Palestine as a Possible Place of Refuge for European Refugees', memorandum, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, 14 April 1943, PSGP 3:61; Israel, *Long Diary*, 22 April 1943.

11. Agenda for the Bermuda Conference, in PSGP 3:64. See also Hull to Roosevelt, memorandum 7 March 1943, FRUS, I; Reams, Bermuda Conference memorandum, op. cit; *New York Times*, 30 April 1943.

12. See note 5 for discussion of the IGC.

13. British delegation quote in Harold W. Dodds to Breckinridge Long, telegram 21 April 1943, FRUS, I. Long quote in *Long Diary*, 23 June 1943.

14. The *New York Times*, 4 May 1943.

15. Bergson was born Hilel Kook into a family of several eminent Rabbis. He assumed the name Peter Bergson while living in the United States to avoid causing his family any possible embarrassment by his political activities. For biographical information about Bergson and his companions see: the *New York Post*, 11 July 1944; Department of Justice, Memorandum for the Files, 1 March 1944, JRS; JMN/LN 149-893, available in the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs (hereafter cited as MI); Ben Hecht, *A Child of This Century* (New York 1954), 516.

16. On illegal immigration efforts see: Research and Analysis report 2612, OSS, 'Objectives and Activities of the Irgun Zvai Leumi', 13 October 1944, in NA; Y. Ben-Ami to Harry Louis Selden, letter 7 March 1947, PSGP 13:58. Also valuable were conversations with Samuel Merlin and Y. Ben-Ami on this issue.

17. Information on CJA activities in PSGP, Box 1.

18. For list of CJA sponsors see CJA ads in the *New York Times*, 16 February and 4 May 1943.

19. See PSGP scrap book 16.

20. Harry Levinson to Jerome Kobacker, letter 23 December 1940, PSGP 1:4.

21. Quote of EZCA official in Alfred J. Kahn, Executive Secretary of Avukah, to the Honorable Genevieve B. Earle, City Councilor, 18 April 1940, PSGP 1:4. For representative letter of Wise, see Wise to Truman, 20 May 1943, in Stephen Wise papers (hereafter cited as Wise MSS). For evidence of Zionist anti-Bergson activity



see 'History of the Pennsylvania Division of the CJA', 6 June 1943, PSGP 1:9, and 'Attempts to Stage "We Will Never Die",' report n.d., PSGP 13:57.

22. Wise to Bergson, letter 4 June 1941, PSGP 1:5. For reference to efforts at a rapprochement see letters in PSGP 1:5, 1:6, 1:8.

23. Senator Lucas' speeches in the *Congressional Record*, 89, 3, 78th Congress, last session, 6 May 1943, 4044-4017 and 10 May 1943, 4139-4141.

24. Bergson tried to dissuade Truman from resigning from the CJA but the enraged Truman refused. 'This does not mean my sympathies are not with the down-trodden Jews of Europe', he wrote to Bergson, 'but when you take it on yourself without consultation to attack members of the Senate and House of Representatives who are working in your interest, I cannot approve that procedure,' (Truman to Bergson, letter 7 May 1943, PSGP 1:8).

25. Messages of welcome were read from Eleanor Roosevelt, former republican presidential candidate Wendell Wilkie, and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Even President Roosevelt authorized Secretary of State Cordell Hull to wire a vaguely-worded message on his behalf. See *Save Human Lives* (New York 1944). For conference proceedings see *ibid.*; PSGP 4:13; New York *World Telegram*, 21 July 1943; Issac Zaar, *For Rescue and Liberation* (New York 1954).

26. Speech by Senator Gillette to the Emergency Committee, 20 December 1944, PSGP 6:27.

27. See the *New York Times*, 12 August 1943.

28. R. Borden Reams to Mr Gray, and Sumner Welles to Gray, memorandum 6 August 1943, 867n.01/1964.

29. See Cordell Hull to American Embassy in Ankara, telegram 4 September 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4460A; Laurence Steinhardt, Ambassador in Ankara, to Hull, telegram 7 September 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4444 Confidential; Department of State Memorandum of Conversation (hereafter cited as SD memo of conversation) between Long, Bergson and Mr Henry Pringle, 15 October 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4710; and Dean Alfange to Howard Travers, letter 17 January 1944, 840-48 Refugees/5040.

Friedman cites pressure from Zionist leaders as one reason for the delay in Hirschman's departure (Friedman, *No Haven*, 148).

30. SD memo of conversation between Haydon Raynor and Bergson, 13 January 1944, 840.48 Refugees/6420.

31. Reference to Bergson's meeting with Long in SD memo of conversation, 15 October 1943, *op. cit.*, note 29. Reference to Bergson's meeting with Stettinius in SD memo of conversation between Stettinius, Peter Bergson, and Congressman Will Rogers, 8 November 1943, 840.48 Refugees/11-843. Memo forewarning Stettinius about the Bergson group in R. Borden Reams to Stettinius, 8 October 1943, *op. cit.*, Long quote in Long to Stettinius, memorandum 27 December 1943 and Stettinius response in Stettinius to Long, memorandum 8 January 1944, both in 840.48 Refugees/4683-3/5.

32. Long to Howard K. Travers, Chief of the Visa Division, letter 4 May 1943 and Robert C. Alexander Assistant Chief of the Visa Division to Long, confidential memorandum 7 May 1943, in Library of Congress (hereafter cited as LC), papers of Breckinridge Long (cited as Long MSS), available in MI. See also Samuel Merlin, 'A Strange Episode in the Senate of the United States' (chapter from unpublished book), 2; Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 211.

33. R. E. Murphy, Division of European Affairs, to Long, memorandum 23 September 1943, PSGP 3:67.

34. Long meeting with Wise and Goldmann in Long to Hull, memorandum 6 October 1943, cited in Friedman, *No Haven*, 148. Goldmann visit in SD Strictly Confidential Memo of Conversation between Nahum Goldmann and Mr Murray, Alling, Merriam, and Wilson, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, 19 May 1944, 867n.01/2347. Waldman visit in SD memo of conversation between Dr Maurice Waldman and Mr's Murray, Alling, and Wilson, 10 January 1944, 867n.01/2220.

35. Reference to Waldman visit in *ibid*.

36. See Department of State to the Attorney General, letter 6 August 1943, and Attorney General to the Department of State, 13 August 1943, cited in SD 'Strictly Confidential Memorandum of Conversation RE: Activities of Mr Peter Bergson and his Organizations', 22 January 1944, 800.01 B11 Registration/1811. Other SD memoranda of conversions concerning registration of Bergson and his groups are: 23 May 1944, 800.01 B11 Registration/1811; and 17 June 1944, 800.01 B11 Registration/6-1744. See also Division of Near Eastern Affairs to Foreign Office, telegram 24 July 1944, 867n.01/7-2444.

37. See Wallace Murray to Stettinius, memorandum 1 June 1944, 867n.01/6-144. Particularly revealing of the power of Bergson's congressional contacts was a conversation between State Department officials and Mr Nemzer of the Foreign Agents Registration Section of the Department of Justice on 22 January 1944. 'Mr Bergson's activities... presented a rather difficult problem', said Nemzer, since 'he generally uses prominent American citizens, particularly certain members of Congress, as a front for his different organizations. It is, of course, difficult if not impossible to require such persons to register' (see memorandum 22 January 1944, *op. cit.*, in note 36).

38. Information about the Rabbis march in Eri Jabotinsky to Mr Altman, 10 October 1943, PSGP 13:57; Roosevelt to Stettinius, memorandum 8 October 1943, F.W. 840.48 Refugees/4745. Reference to the involvement of American churches in *Save Human Lives*, 14-15.

39. Henderson's speech reprinted in the Emergency Committee advertisement 'Guilty of Cowardice!' (representative insert: the *New Republic*, 10 December 1943). See also Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 222.

Bergson ran into difficulty, though, when the Swedish and Danish ministers proved reluctant to attend the rally. They cautiously sought the opinion of Breckinridge Long at the State Department. Long, of course, refused advice but casually suggested that the Swedish minister 'talk with some of the Jewish leaders,' notably Rabbi Wise, 'and obtain their advice.' The ministers gained rather predictable 'advice' from the Zionist leaders. They declined Bergson's invitation to attend the rally but sent messages of support instead. (See SD memoranda of conversations between Long and the Swedish Minister, 16 October 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4126, and between Mr Brandt, Division of near Eastern Affairs, and the Danish Minister, 19 October 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4684-1/3.)

40. This story is recounted by Hilel Kook (Peter Bergson) in letter to Sarah Peck, 1 February 1978. While I found no corroborating evidence to support the story, it appears plausible under the circumstances.

The advertisement which had so distressed Roosevelt was entitled 'MY UNCLE ABRAHAM REPORTS...' It was written by Ben Hecht in response to the Moscow Declaration on Atrocities of 1 November 1943. That joint declaration by the United

States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, denounced Nazi atrocities but completely neglected to mention Jewish victims. (For the more than 12 national newspapers containing Hecht's ad see PSGP 14:10.)

41. S.Res. 203 introduced 9 November 1943 (see *Congressional Record*, 9 November 1943, p. 9305, and 21 December 1943, p. 10933). See also the *New York Times*, 9 November 1943.

42. 'How Well Are You Sleeping?' representative insert in *New York Times*, 24 November 1943. 'This is Strictly a Race Against Death', see *Chicago Sun*, 29 November 1943. For examples of favorable editorials, see: The *Washington Star*, 28 November 1943; the *Washington Post*, 27 November 1943; the *New York Herald Tribune*, 1 December 1943; the *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 November, 21 December 1943; and others in PSGP 4:1.

43. American Zionist quote in *New York Times*, 31 December 1943. Wise quote in Wise to Ickes, letter 27 December 1943, PSGP 1:10. Goldmann quote in SD memo of Goldmann visit, 19 May 1944, op. cit., note 34.

44. See the American Jewish Conference, *Report of the Interim Committee* (hereafter cited as AJC interim report) (New York 1946), 1. See also Joseph B. Schechtman, the *United States and the Jewish State Movement* (New York 1966), 62.

45. Chairman of the American Jewish Committee, Judge Joseph Proskauer termed the resolution 'unwise because it may carry with it embarrassment to the governments of the United Nations and is calculated to jeopardize the status of Jews' (AJC interim report, 280).

46. Many Americans, for example, believed rumours that Jews were evading the draft. In Boston and in other cities, roaming 'Coughlinite' gangs frequently attacked Jews and looted Jewish-owned stores. See Geoffrey Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph* (New York 1973), 362. See also Blum, *Victory*, 174-5; Friedman, *No Haven*, 112-13; Morse, *Six Million*, 206-19.

47. Wise quote in AJC interim report, op. cit., note 44, 69.

48. *Ibid.*, 99.

49. Hilel Kook to Sarah Peck, 1 February 1978. Bergson's recollection of this conversation is not corroborated by any other documentation that I could find but the story appears plausible under the circumstances.

50. Gillette story recalled in speech by Senator Gillette to the Emergency Committee, 20 December 1944, PSGP 6:27. Mention of Wise visit in Gillette to Harry Louis Selden, letter 1 August 1944, PSGP 1:12.

51. Bloom quote in the *Washington Post*, 24 November 1943. References to Wise's testimony in *New York Times*, 2 December 1943; *Every Friday* (Cincinnati), 12 December 1943, PSGP 4:14; *Contemporary Jewish Record*, February 1944, PSGP 4:15.

52. Sigrid Umdset, a Nobel Prize laureate for literature, was one of the co-chairmen of the Emergency Committee.

53. Summary of Alfange testimony in SD memorandum, Ed. Kruppinger to Long, 22 November 1943, 840.48 Refugees/5029. Long testimony cited in the *New York Times*, 11 December 1943. See also Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 233-234.

54. Long to Winant, Ambassador in the United Kingdom, FRUS, I, 30 November 1943, 227.

55. AJC charges and Emergency Committee response in the *New York Times*, 31 December 1943.

56. *New York Post*, 3 January 1944, PSGP 13:57. Gillette quote in Gillette to Harry Shapiro, Director of AZEC, letter 13 January 1944, PSGP 1:10.

57. For Morgenthau's account of his involvement in the refugee crisis see 'The Refugee Run-Around', op. cit., note 7.

58. Importantly, Roosevelt finally took steps to remove Breckinridge Long from refugee affairs. He rejected suggestions within the State Department that Long be appointed to the WRB.

59. Dubois remarks made during personal telephone interview, 17 January 1978. For congratulatory comments see: the *New York Post* and the *Washington Post*, 25 January 1944; and the *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 January 1944. See also Harold Ickes to Bergson, telegram 26 January 1944, and Wendell Wilkie to the Emergency Committee, telegram 25 January 1944 reprinted in *Save Human Lives*.

60. For references to initial EC contact with the WRB see: WRB memorandum of visit by Rose Kean, representative of the EC, 10 February 1944; Pehle memorandum of telephone conversation with Bergson, 25 January 1944, PSGP 3:64. Dubois remarks from personal telephone interview, op. cit., note 59.

61. See series of correspondence from Pehle to Stettinius, to the Ambassador of Turkey and to others, between 15 February and 14 April 1944 in PSGP 3:64. See also WRB memorandum for the files, 21 March 1944, PSGP 3:64 which summarizes the efforts by Pehle to arrange Jabotinsky's trip to Turkey.

62. The EC's campaign for free ports included another petition drive and series of full page ads. 'TWENTY-FIVE SQUARE MILES OR 2,000,000 DEAD — WHICH SHALL IT BE?' read one caption in the *Washington Post* (see the *Washington Post*, 29 May 1944). For an explanation of the free ports concept see Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 260-61.

63. Senator Gillette introduced one such temporary havens resolution in May 1944. See the Congressional Record, 29 May 1944, 5075-76. A number of identical resolutions calling for free ports were introduced in the House. See *ibid.*, 5498-5500.

64. Roosevelt quote in the *New York Times*, 10 June 1944.

65. The *Washington Post*, 11 June 1944.

66. Quote about WRB powerlessness by Feingold in *Politics of Rescue*, 292. Hirschman quote in Hirschman to Pehle, cable 23 August 1944, *History of the WRB*, vol. II, in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Library (hereafter cited as FDRL).

67. For unsuccessful efforts to involve the Pope see EC to Pope Pius XII, c/o Archbishop A. G., Cicognani, telegram 29 June 1944; Cicognani to EC, telegram 5 July 1944 in PSGP 5:22; Apostolic Delegation USA to Pehle, letter 25 September 1944, *WRB History*, FDRL. For EC communication with the Red Cross see: EC to A. E. Zollinger, delegate to the CIRC in Geneva, telegram 5 June 1944; Zollinger to the EC, telegram 14 July 1944, PSGP 1:2. Zollinger opposed action by the International Red Cross because 'the general situation of the Jews in Axis-held countries would only be made worse. . .'. See also Harrison to the WRB, cable 14 July 1944 in *WRB History II*, Box 10, FDRL. Position of the US Army stated in Assistant Secretary of War McCloy to Pehle, letter 7 July 1944, *WRB History*, Box 10, FDRL.

68. *WRB History*, Box 110.

69. Goldmann quote in SD memo of Goldmann visit, 19 May 1944, op. cit., note 34. State Department action mentioned in *ibid.*, and in Murray to Stettinius, 1 June 1944, op. cit., note 37. Pehle's action to deny the Committee a license cited in Feingold, 186.

70. Zionist resolutions 418 and 419 (Wright, Compton) were introduced in the House while Senate resolution 247 (Wagner-Taft) was introduced in the Senate (see Congressional Record, vol. 90, 1, 856, 963; vol. 90, part 7, 8648). Stimson's rationale for opposing the resolutions is found in the *Stimson Diaries*, vol. 46, 52-3, 14 February 1944, Yale Manuscripts and Archives). Further arguments against the resolutions can be found in an OSS report dated 4 March 1944 which maintained that 'reactions of the Arab world to the Wagner-Taft resolution on Palestine reveal that it is contributing materially to the weakening of the US psychological position in the Near East' (NA Research and Analysis report, para.1090.49).

71. Wise to Roosevelt, letter 16 September 1944; and Senator Wagner to Roosevelt, letter 13 October 1944, in PSGP 3:63.

72. Roosevelt to Wagner, letter 3 December 1944, PSGP 3:63.

73. Silver quote in statement by Dr Abba Hillel Silver, 20 December 1944, PSGP 13:57. Wise quote in Wise to Roosevelt, letter 13 December 1944, Wise MSS, box 68. Wise's position is also revealed in Wise to Secretary of State Stettinius in a confidential telegram dated 4 December 1944: 'If Chief and you still feel that... postponement... remains necessary, I together with many associates do not wish to have action taken contrary to your and the President's recommendations' (867n.01/12-444).

74. Original anti-Bergson article in the *Washington Post*, 3 October 1944. Bergson retort in 'An Open Letter to Eugene Meyer', 3 October 1944, PSGP. *Washington Post* editorial retraction on 13 October 1944. For evidence of Zionist collaboration with the *Washington Post* see Goldmann to Arthur Lourie, Executive Director of AZEC, 16 November 1944, MI.

75. Wallace Murray to Stettinius, 1 June 1944, op. cit., note 37.

76. Quote about Bergson's deportation in Haldore Hanson to A. Macleish, 12 July 1945, 867n.01/7-1245. Other references to efforts to deport Bergson in: Viscount Halifax to the British Foreign Office, 24 May 1944, FO 371/40131.5940, in MI, and J. Balfour, British Minister in Washington to the High Commissioner in Palestine, FO 371/45339.8397, 9 August 1945, in MI. References to intervention on Bergson's behalf in: James F. Burns to David Stern, 14 November 1945, PSGP 1:25; SD memorandum on Peter Bergson, 16 October 1945, 867n.01/10-1645; Hanson to Macleish, op. cit.

77. For observations by State Department officials of American Jewish infighting see: Murray to Hull, memorandum 4 June 1943, 867n.01/2-153; Alling to Stettinius, memorandum 27 October 1943, PSGP 3:61; Murray to Grew, memorandum 10 August 1944, 867n.01/8-1044; Murray to Long, Hull, Stettinius, memorandum 29 January 1944, 867n.01/1-2044; Wilson, 'American Jewish Organizations', SD memo, 10 August 1944, 867n.01/8-1044. Long quote in *Long Diary*, 11 January 1944.

78. Cited by Nahum Goldmann in visit to State Department, 13 September 1944.

79. Wise, *Challenging Years*, 279.

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## Jewish Organizations and the Creation of the U.S. War Refugee Board

By MONTY N. PENKOWER

**ABSTRACT:** Confronted by the Holocaust, the Anglo-American Alliance moved slowly to meet this unique tragedy during World War II. Refusing the initial appeal of Jewish organizations in the free world that food and medical packages be dispatched to the ghettos of Europe, London and Washington argued that supplies would be diverted for the Germans' personal use or would be granted the Jews just to free the Third Reich from its "responsibility" to feed them. A license granted in December, 1942, for such shipments had minimal effect. The World Jewish Congress' subsequent plan to rescue Jews through the use of blocked accounts in Switzerland received the U.S. Treasury Department's approval in mid-1943, but the State Department and the British Foreign Office procrastinated further. Jewish groups failed at times to measure up to the catastrophe but the fundamental obligation lay with the Allied councils of war, which discriminated in their unwillingness to save a powerless European Jewry. The persistence of Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and his staff in bypassing State and ultimately confronting Franklin D. Roosevelt in January, 1944, along with increasing calls from Congress and the public for a presidential rescue commission, resulted in the executive creation of the U.S. War Refugee Board. The lateness of the hour and Hitler's ruthless determination to complete the murder of all the Jews of Europe made the odds for the new board's success more than questionable.

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tory, and Martyrdom and Resistance. A member of the Oral History Advisory Committee of the Holocaust Survivors' Memorial Foundation, he is currently completing a volume of studies in diplomacy during the Holocaust.

This article, first presented to the Association for Jewish Studies' convention in Boston on 18 December 1979, forms part of a broader study on diplomacy during the Holocaust, to be published by the University of Illinois Press.

ONE WEEK before Warsaw surrendered to the Nazi blitzkrieg and the curtain fell on the first act of World War II, German Security Police Chief Reinhardt Heydrich took the initial step to extend the Final Solution beyond the borders of the Third Reich. Empowered by Hermann Goering the previous January to "solve the Jewish question," Heydrich ordered the mass resettlement and later concentration into ghettos of the two million Jews in German-occupied Poland as measures "leading to the fulfillment of the ultimate goal." Until eventual destinations would be approved, the Nazis turned these closed urban centers into death traps. Spotted typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery, and starvation ravaged the inhabitants. By September, 1942, 80,000 had died in the Warsaw ghetto alone. The Lodz Jewish community of originally 160,000 had a death-birth ratio of about 29:1 between 1940-42; its Warsaw counterpart, originally 470,000, registered 45:1. Raul Hilberg has estimated that in the end, one-fifth of Polish Jewry under the swastika died behind such sealed walls.<sup>1</sup>

#### WORK OF THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE (JDC)

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) kept

1. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1973), pp. 128, 140, 144, 168-69, 173-74.

warm a spark of life in this Jewish heartland. The JDC had spent some \$2.6 million in Poland alone during 1933-38; in 1939 its expenditures reached \$1.2 million. In 1940 and 1941, \$859,400 and \$972,000 reached the beleaguered Polish ghettos, respectively. By 1942, one in every nine Jews obtained meals at the JDC soup kitchens in Warsaw; the ratio stood at 1:3 in Lublin and 1:4 in the Radom and Warsaw districts. Medical aid helped 34 hospitals, and 30,000 children received daily care.<sup>2</sup>

Not one dollar of these funds entered Nazi-occupied Poland. Soon after the advent of Adolf Hitler to power, the JDC had decided not to extend aid that might benefit the German economy. All campaign monies raised were placed in U.S. banks while zlotys arrived in Poland through the extension of a financial clearance agreement which the JDC employed with its affiliated groups in the Reich: Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and Bratislava. This insistence on a relief policy "conforming in the closest degree" with U.S. State Department regulations had its drawbacks. For example, the JDC refused to transmit funds from Geneva to Poland at the higher black-market rate or to send foodstuffs there from Bratislava against *valuta* or Swiss

2. Memo, 8 Feb. 1940, Poland genl., American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York (hereafter cited as JDCA); Kahn report for 1941-44, Poland genl., 1942-43, JDCA.

franc payments since this would aid the German economy.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Other organizations*

Other Jewish organizations in the United States felt less constrained in the face of the unparalleled crisis facing their people in Europe. The World Jewish Congress (WJC), through its Geneva RELICO office directed by Abraham Silberschein with the aid of Gerhart Riegner, dispatched food parcels, visas, medicines, and clothing to the General Government. The Jewish Labor Committee and the Bund used contacts in London to forward sums to comrades in Warsaw; Agudas Israel employed ties to the Polish consulate in New York through which messages, monies, and parcels safely arrived in the ghettos.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE BOYCOTT: REACTIONS

Few in the free world grasped in the first years of the war that Germany had consciously made starvation a weapon of annihilation, whereas public opinion felt that the blockade was the deadliest weapon in the British arsenal. "No form of relief can be devised," categorically asserted Prime Minister Winston Churchill on 20 August 1940, in the House of Commons, "which would not directly or indirectly assist the enemy's war effort." The British embassy in Washington reaffirmed this position on 9 March 1941, and in a letter to the Foreign Relations

3. Ibid; Bienenstock report, Jan. 1942, 212/20, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York (hereafter cited as WJCA); Lisbon to JDC, 20 Dec. 1940, Poland genl., 1940, JDCA.

4. Gerhart Riegner interview with Monty N. Penkower, 1 Nov. 1977; K. Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), pp. 228-29; Isaac Lewin interview with Penkower, 5 Oct. 1979.

Committee a half a year later, Secretary of State Cordell Hull opposed plans to feed occupied Europe on the assumption that "the responsibility and manifest duty to supply relief rests with the occupying authorities."<sup>5</sup>

The issue divided the Jewish organizations in the United States and ultimately halted all sending of food packages from there to the Polish ghettos in the summer of 1941. The Joint Boycott Council, formed during the 1930s by the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee to boycott all trade with Germany, opened a drive in July, 1941, to "end the food package racket" and prevent "the feeding of Hitler's war machine." The WJC and the Federation of Polish Jews in America stopped their activities in this regard as a result, while the council boycotted the offices of Agudas Israel of America for disregarding British official requests to halt package service to Poland.

Ultimately, the Agudas Israel Executive in London, under the direction of Harry Goodman, announced at the end of August that it would be "guided entirely by the wishes of the British authorities in Washington" henceforth. RELICO's Dr. Silberschein, aided by Isaac Weissman in Lisbon, continued quietly to send food at the rate of 1,500 food parcels per week, but this could hardly meet a situation where one-third of the Warsaw ghetto could not even afford to pay the two-zloty tax on ration cards imposed by the *Judenrat*, and living corpses collapsed and died every day in ghetto streets.

The inability of Jewry in the free world to ease the Allied blockade

5. A. Leon Kubowitzki, "Survey of the Rescue Activities of the WJC, 1940-1944," mimeographed (1944), 153, WJCA.



was especially frustrating when the Anglo-American Alliance allowed food to reach Nazi-held Greece in early 1942. Fifteen thousand tons of wheat and three thousand tons of other materials could be sent to hold off starvation in Greece with the help of the Allies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), one ship even leaving Haifa Bay, but Jewry's singular agony went unheeded.<sup>6</sup>

#### ALLIED AND RED CROSS AID TO GREECE

At this juncture, the General Jewish Council in New York decided to consider sending a delegation to intercede with the State Department regarding relief supplies for Jews in Poland. On 17 April 1942, the Jewish Labor Committee, B'nai B'rith, and the American Jewish Committee, in conjunction with the American Jewish Congress, drew up a draft memorandum. At the suggestion of the JDC's vice-chairman, Joseph Hyman, the group invited Christian and nonsectarian organizations to the deliberations. The issue, not confined to Jews, presented international, military, and diplomatic questions which had to be viewed "in relationship to the necessities of our country in prosecuting the war," Hyman argued. Delay thereby ensued; on November 13 the memo was ready.<sup>7</sup>

A promising breakthrough occurred simultaneously in London.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)*, 1 April, 10 July, 5 Sept., and 27 Sept. 1941; *Unity in Dispersion, A History of the World Jewish Congress* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1948), p. 175; *Inter Arma Caritas* (Geneva: n.p., 1947), pp. 79-80.

7. Hyman to Baerwald et al., 1 April 1942; Minkoff to Hyman, 17 April 1942; Hyman to Buchman, 1 May 1942; Leavitt to Lehman, 13 Nov. 1942; all in Poland genl., 1942-43, JDCA.

Following a suggestion in mid-February from Agudas' Harry Goodman, the Board of Deputies of British Jews requested its government to permit food shipments to Poland's ghettos along the lines of the Greek relief example. On June 23 the British Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW) agreed to the board's sending one-pound packages from neutral Portugal to specific individuals, with the Polish government-in-exile transferring funds for these shipments, up to a maximum of \$12,000, to its representatives in Lisbon. Whitehall insisted on secrecy as the British authorities were not prepared to sanction the project on any large scale or to encourage the sending of foreign exchange to Portugal. The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)* broke the story, however, on September 10, leading Hyman to insist that the JDC had to be "governed entirely" by American policy, which had not been ascertained.<sup>8</sup>

The WJC in the meantime had independently raised the question in Washington of relief to Jews in Poland. On July 23, the WJC's Aryeh Tartakower and the president of the Central Representatives of Polish Jewry suggested to the U.S. Board of Economic Warfare that two tons of tea be sent to Poland for valuable barter purposes via the Red Cross in Lisbon. James Waterman Wise, son of WJC president Stephen Wise, submitted a memorandum and legal brief to the Washington representative of the ICRC asking that the ICRC ship medicaments and condensed milk to the ghettos and that the Jews there be accorded the treatment demanded by international law under the 1929 Geneva Convention for all war prisoners.

8. *JTA*, 8 Feb. 1942; Rosenheim to JDC, 10 Sept. 1942, and Hyman to Waldman, 14 Sept. 1942, Poland genl., 1942-43, JDCA.

The Wises, father and son, together with WJC administrative committee head, Nahum Goldmann, urged the Greek precedent on Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson. On October 5 they heard from Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., that the State and Treasury departments had agreed "in principle" to follow the British example and to grant licenses of \$12,000 monthly for the Belgian, Dutch, and Polish governments, two other organizations, and the WJC. Elated, the WJC began reporting to its affiliated bodies that antityphus vaccine could be sent to the Warsaw ghetto, and it asked the JDC for financial support.<sup>9</sup>

Hearing this, the JDC promptly notified the other groups of the Central Jewish Council, which quickly sent off a delegation to Washington. Council spokesmen assured Treasury Foreign Funds Control director John Pehle that the JDC, as the oldest and most substantial relief organization in the country, should be granted the license. In the meantime, the WJC and the JDC hurled verbal brickbats at each other with no hope for a mutual settlement. The JDC received the Treasury license on 11 December 1942, just as the Allies first acknowledged that 2 million Jews had already fallen victim to the Nazis' Final Solution.<sup>10</sup>

But the twelfth hour had already struck for Polish Jewry. The license was not even changed to allow pack-

ages to individuals; Portugal also made export of commodities very difficult. Of 12,000 packages of figs dispatched through the Board of Jewish Deputies between February and April, 1943, 7,000 remained unaccounted for; in September, the JDC's Lisbon representative reported that addresses for Warsaw and Crakow, along with Upper Silesia and the entire General Government except for Galicia, had to be eliminated on German orders. "For the time being," the ICRC's Washington delegate concluded in a letter to Agudas Israel two months later, the sending of supplies to Poland was "impossible."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, for the large core of Polish Jewry had long since met death in the ghetto and labor camps or had gone up in smoke in Treblinka, Chelmno, Belzec, Maidanek, and Auschwitz.

The WJC refused to forsake sending packages to Jewry in Poland. It first urged the ICRC to extend the use of its food parcel service from Geneva to Jews in Europe. In February and March, 1943, the WJC pressed the Board of Economic Warfare to extend a new board regulation of the previous November, allowing gift parcels to specified war prisoners and civilian internees, to Jews deported from Allied countries to Eastern Europe and to those in the ghettos. While the board, the State Department's Office of Foreign Relief Operations, and the ICRC delayed their replies, they all cautioned that American authorities would not approve of such schemes without firm guarantees that the Nazis would recognize the Jews as

9. Tartakower to Wise et al., 24 July 1942, 267/46, WJCA; J. Wise memo to Peter, n.d., 212/20, WJCA; J. Wise memo to Peter, 6 and 14 Oct. 1942, 264, WJCA; Susman to Hyman, 9 Nov. 1942, Poland genl., JDCA.

10. Hyman memo, 17 Nov. 1942; Minkoff to Pehle, 17 Nov. 1942; Baerwald to Wise, 27 Nov. 1942; Baerwald to Wise (not sent), 1 Dec. 1942; Hyman to Minkoff, 15 Dec. 1942; all in Poland genl., 1942-43, JDCA.

11. Schwartz to Leavitt, 6 Jan. 1943; Katzki to Brotman, 2 July 1943; Katzki to New York, 19 and 21 Aug. 1943; Peter to Rosenheim, 11 Nov. 1943; all in Poland genl. 1942-43, JDCA.

civilian internees and would not confiscate the parcels. The full burden had again been shifted to the enemy's shoulders.<sup>12</sup>

*Obstruction of aid by the State Department*

But unknown to the WJC, at that very moment the State Department's career officers moved to withhold further information about the Holocaust from the Jewish community and even from certain authorities in the government. State officials had spent three months the previous year before confirming Gerhart Riegner's first report in August, 1942, about a rumored Nazi plan to kill all of European Jewry. On 21 January 1943, Minister Leland Harrison in Geneva forwarded cable number 482 for Wise to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles in which Riegner reported that 6,000 Jews were being killed daily in one Polish town, that Berlin Jews were facing their end, and that of 136,000 Jews deported to Rumanian-controlled Transnistria in the Ukraine, 60,000 had died. Welles passed this on to Wise, and the WJC prepared for a mass Madison Square Garden rally to "Stop Hitler Now!" Yet on February 10, cable number 354 arrived on Harrison's desk, referring to "YOUR CABLE 482, JANUARY 21," and suggesting that he *not* accept reports destined for "private persons" in the United States unless under "extraordinary circumstances." Welles ap-

parently signed this routine-sounding dispatch without realizing its connection to cable number 482, for he sent off a wire on April 10, following Wise's request of March 31, that Harrison contact Riegner for "important information" about the fate of European Jewry that the WJC delegate wished to send to Wise.<sup>13</sup>

Welles's new order bewildered Harrison and especially mystified Riegner, who suddenly found his channel to Wise through Welles open once again. Harrison paraphrased Riegner's detailed two-page message of April 14, and mailed it to State four days later, along with his personal plea that the "helpful information" which Riegner's messages "may frequently contain" *not* be subjected to the restriction imposed by cable number 354.<sup>14</sup>

Riegner's report, dated April 20 from the American legation at Berne, proposed a revolutionary change to WJC headquarters: funds from the United States could bring about the rescue—not just relief—of a substantial number of Jews within Nazi Europe. His report stated that German authorities had approved ICRC collective shipments to the Theresienstadt ghetto and might do likewise for Jewish labor camps in Upper Silesia. Much more significantly, "considerable amounts" of currency could bring about "wide rescue action" in Rumania, especially Transnistria, and France. An urgent appeal from Rumanian Jews for 100 million lei (\$600,000), 60 million immediately to clothe and feed Transnistrian children and orphans who should be transferred

12. Tartakower to Kubowitzki, 9 Feb. 1943, 265, WJCA; Tartakower to Wise et al., 19 Feb. 1943, U-134, WJCA; Tartakower to Peter, 4 March 1943, 265, WJCA; for more on ICRC intransigence, see Penkower, "The World Jewish Congress Confronts the International Red Cross During the Holocaust," in *Jewish Social Studies*, 41: 229–56 (summer–fall 1979).

13. Arthur Morse, *While 6 Million Died, A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1967), ch. 1, and pp. 42–43, 64–65.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 65; Riegner interview with Penkower, 22 April 1977.

to Palestine, could be met by guaranteeing that the funds would be deposited to Switzerland or the United States and paid *after* the war. Large sums, not to be transferred to French territory, would also aid in maintaining Jewish children underground in France and in transferring young people and certain "political friends" from that country to Spain and North Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The WJC central office in New York, seizing this new ray of hope, pressed the State Department to approve the financial arrangements hinted at in Riegner's telegram. Wise wrote Welles to support a Treasury license for food packages to the ghettos. A week later he and Goldmann asked the under secretary in an interview if he would recommend to Treasury that a license be issued to the WJC to deposit a substantial amount of money with the American legation in Geneva for rescue work, as Riegner had outlined. Welles replied that "he saw the point," and asked for a memo on the subject.<sup>16</sup>

Welles then handed the matter over to State's economic advisor, Herbert Feis, who turned to Bernard Meltzer, acting chief of its Foreign Funds Control Division, for advice. Feis and Meltzer, after meeting with Nahum Goldmann on May 12, worded a cable to Harrison which sought information, rather than envisaged "immediate action," about Riegner's scheme. These two Jews in Foggy Bottom, aware of their superior's negative attitude to the relief and rescue of Jewry—as

formulated by Assistant Secretary Breckenridge Long—since the beginning of the war through the recently concluded Bermuda Conference, thereby kept the matter afloat.<sup>17</sup>

Three weeks later, Riegner confirmed through Rumanian sources that wealthy Rumanian Jews could provide the necessary funds to support the 70,000 remaining Jews in Transnistria and would be reimbursed at black-market rates in American dollars or Swiss francs after the war through the American Jewish Congress' blocked account. Wilhelm Filderman, former president of the Jewish communities in Rumania, would disperse the WJC-backed funds via an underground relief agency manned by WJC members in that country; the WJC would try to evacuate immediately as many of these Jews as possible. As for France, at least 15 to 20 thousand francs a month would be necessary. People in Switzerland having francs in France would release these to the underground through intermediaries trusted by the WJC in return for American dollars converted into Swiss francs within Switzerland at the prevailing black-market rate. Harrison, for his part, warned that these sums could not be controlled and that the transfer of enemy funds would be involved. At the same time, he con-

17. Meltzer-Goldmann talk, 12 May 1943, 840.48 Refugees/3827, State Department files, RG 59, National Archives, (Washington, DC (hereafter cited as SD); DuBois memo, 9 Dec. 1943, in Morgenthau Diaries, vol. 688-1, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter cited as MD, FDRL); State to Harrison, 25 May 1943 862.4016/2269, SD; for Long and the Bermuda Conference, see Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue, The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).

15. Morse, p. 65.

16. Wise to Welles, 14 April 1943, Emergency Joint Committee on European Jews, 1942-43, American Jewish Committee Archives, New York (hereafter cited as AJCA); Wise to Welles, 23 April 1943, 264, WJC; Wise-Goldmann-Welles talk, 20 April 1943, State Dept. files, Zionist Archives, New York.

veyed that the Rumanian government had taken a "helpful attitude toward the amicable settlement of Jews."<sup>18</sup>

Riegner's response of June 14 only strengthened the division in State. While Feis and Meltzer favored action to implement the Riegner proposal, Long, his executive assistant, George Brandt, and his specialist on refugee matters, Robert Reams, particularly opposed the step. The trio emphasized that foreign exchange would thus be made available to the enemy, although Meltzer noted that the "economic warfare" aspects of the matter were questions for Treasury's decision. They finally made a slight concession: Meltzer could present the Treasury Department with the economic warfare aspects at stake. Accordingly, John Pehle received a copy of Riegner's cable on June 25.<sup>19</sup> With this step, Treasury had been brought for the first time officially into direct contact with the Final Solution.

#### *Aid from the Treasury Department*

The State Department's decision that the Treasury Department had to be consulted on the WJC rescue proposal for Rumania and France delighted WJC headquarters. When first approached by the WJC to permit a license for food packages to the Polish ghettos, Treasury had unhesitatingly consented. In addition, in the WJC's view, bribery could achieve results: it had just received information that deportations from Slovakia had temporarily

ceased in this manner, and now Riegner's letter suggested further possibilities. The American Jewish relief organizations, which alone had the large sums needed for significant rescue, hesitated to accept the WJC's repeated urgings to take action. The WJC could probably raise the ransom funds necessary to permit the evacuation, but the millions suggested for relief and larger rescue projects would be the responsibility of others. And they refused to apply to the American government for permission to transfer money to Europe for rescue in Nazi-held territory, claiming that such deals, contravening the Trading With the Enemy Act, were deemed unpatriotic. At the end of May, for example, the JDC emphasized to State its interest in offering financial aid for "every possible measure of rescue and relief that will not conflict with military considerations" which the U.S. government "may devise and undertake." Its representative in Geneva, Saly Mayer, hesitated in relaying the \$2 million requested by the Slovakian Jewish "Working Group" partly on the assumption that the Allies would not permit him to make this transfer in the necessary Swiss francs. Consequently, the WJC had no alternative but to challenge the financial blockade on its own. Treasury seemed a far better address than State for this purpose.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, these views proved to be well founded. James Wise and Gold-

18. Harrison to State, 14 June 1943 862.4016/2275, SD.

19. DuBois memo, 9 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL; Harrison to State, 14 June 1943, 862.4016/2274, SD (with notation about Pehle's receipt of same).

20. Tartakower to Wise et al., 12 April 1943, 266, WJCA; "Relief and Rescue" memo, mimeographed (1944), 153, WJCA, pp. 27-28; Nahum Goldmann interview with Penkower, 14 March 1974; Baerwald to Welles, 28 May 1943, Paul Baerwald MSS., Herbert Lehman Papers, Columbia University, New York; Livia Rothkirchen, *Churban Yehadut Slovakia, Taiur Histori BeTeudot* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1961), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

mann met with Pehle and an associate in Treasury on July 1, and they in turn reported to Secretary Morgenthau. Riegner and Harrison in the meantime prodded State for a reply, pointing out that a Red Cross representative could expedite the rescue project. But at a meeting with Treasury on July 15, State officials dragged their feet; Feis and Meltzer could do no more than send a memorandum to Hull against the economic warfare arguments of Long and company.

Wise's intervention with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on July 22, appeared to break the bottleneck, for the chief executive and then Morgenthau approved the proposal in principle.<sup>21</sup> Morgenthau, having learned the previous September of the Final Solution through Wise, subsequently intervened with the Papal Nuncio in Washington to have the Vatican intercede for Jewry's sake and had just sent a personal message to a special "Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe" calling for "every possible step" to "stop this needless slaughter." As State preferred to make "no comments" on the Riegner proposal, however, Harrison only received Treasury's approval on August 6. At the end of September, the minister finally received word that he could definitely issue Riegner the license, and Treasury quickly gave its approval to additional matters raised by Riegner and Harrison "in view of the broad humanitarian considerations involved."

By this time, Treasury officials

had had some indications of State's attitude toward assisting European Jewry: its objections to the immediate release of 1500 Jewish refugees from camps in Algiers, its firm support for a joint Anglo-American statement aimed at quieting public discussion of Palestine during the war, and its stalling in the grant of JDC food packages to Theresienstadt. Foreign Funds Control director Pehle wished now to make sure that State would do nothing further to hold up the Riegner plan.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Hull and Morgenthau*

Suddenly, Minister Harrison mentioned two difficulties concerning Treasury's green light for the proposal: he required specific instructions from State and the British Commercial Secretary in Geneva also opposed the scheme so long as MEW had not given its approval. Pehle, who only heard of this cable through an undercover source in State, informed Long immediately on October 26 that U.S. funds had been transmitted in the past to other foreigners in need abroad whereas British clearance was never necessary after Treasury had exercised its licensing authority in a specific case. Long finally gave a qualified approval, but Harrison, realizing State's dissociation from Treasury's enthusiastic approval, checked with the British commercial secretary. The latter official received word from his superiors—three weeks later

21. Pehle and O'Connell memo to Morgenthau, 1 July 1943, in MD, vol. 646, FDRL; Morse, p. 67; Paul memo to Morgenthau, 12 Aug. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL; Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years, The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), pp. 277-78.

22. Henrietta Klotz interview with Penkower, 14 March 1977; *The Answer*, Aug. 1943, p. 4; DuBois memo, 9 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL; Paul to Morgenthau, 17 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL; Monty N. Penkower, "The 1943 Joint Anglo-American Statement on Palestine," *Herzl Yearbook*, 8:212-41 (New York: 1978); Pehle to Leavitt, 14 Sept. 1943, Genl. and Emerg., Czech., Terezin, JDCA.

—that the proper Washington authorities would have to be consulted before MEW would finally agree.<sup>23</sup>

Morgenthau's circle in Treasury, stunned at State's dilatory tactics, urged Hull to support MEW withdrawal of its objections. On December 6, however, Secretary Hull replied to Morgenthau's letter in the matter by shifting responsibility to Treasury for the delay! Hull countered that the Treasury Department had never formulated a workable proposal for financing the program, and it had never obtained British agreement.<sup>24</sup> The ball was back in Morgenthau's court.

Again, Morgenthau's "boys" provided a strong response. General Counsel Josiah DuBois, Jr., shared with the staff Meltzer's confidences about the division within State during the previous summer, and a 10-page memorandum by Randolph Paul, refuting Hull's contentions, arrived in Morgenthau's hands on December 17. A cable just received from U.S. ambassador in London, John Winant, added fuel to the fire by hinting darkly that, according to MEW, "the Foreign Office are concerned with the difficulties of disposing of any considerable number of Jews should they be rescued from enemy-occupied territory." Recovering from this message, which shocked the normally silent Morgenthau, the Treasury Department prepared a two-page brief for Hull and Roosevelt asking for immediate action on the Riegner proposal. Pehle, DuBois, and the others,

23. Harrison to State, 6 Oct. 1943; Paul to Morgenthau, 2 Nov. 1943; both in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL; Pehle-Long talk and memos of 26 Oct. 1943 862.4016/2292, SD.

24. "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 23 Nov. 1943; Morgenthau to Hull, 24 Nov. 1943; Hull to Morgenthau, 6 Dec. 1943; all in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL.

however, with the strong support of the Foreign Economic Administration's Oscar Cox, urged that the time had definitely come for the president to establish an agency which would deal sympathetically with all rescue possibilities. The secretary agreed, but insisted that he confront Hull with the facts personally before turning to Roosevelt in the last resort. Paul's revised memorandum concluded that the time had come for the State and Treasury departments to "cut the Gordian knot *now* by advising the British that we are going to take immediate action to facilitate the escape of Jews from Hitler and *then* discuss what can be done in the way of finding them a more permanent refuge. . . . Even if we took these people and treated them as prisoners of war it would be better than letting them die."<sup>25</sup>

An even more jolting revelation moved Morgenthau to face head-on what Pehle called the "real issue." In early December, DuBois asked a friend at State if he could provide a copy of the mysterious cable number 354 referred to in Harrison's dispatch of April 20 which Pehle had received in mid-July. DuBois obtained cable number 354 and the telegram to which it referred, 482, thus giving Treasury the sudden realization that State wished to suppress vital information about the Holocaust.

At the meeting with Hull on December 20, Morgenthau read therefore with "astonishment" Hull's sharp cable to the British, refusing to accept the Foreign Office's view about the disposal of many Jews.

25. DuBois memo, 9 Dec. 1943; Paul memo, 17 Dec. 1943; Winant to State, 15 Dec. 1943; "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 17 and 20 Dec. 1943; all in MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL.

Long chimed in, self-defensively, that he had even ordered Harrison two days earlier to issue the license to Riegner. Still, Morgenthau and Paul jointly agreed then and there to show Treasury's memorandum to Hull. After a hasty reading of the document, the genuinely furious secretary of state conceded that the "people down the line" got "hold of these things and didn't understand them. . . . You just sort of have to rip things out if you want to get them done."<sup>26</sup>

#### *President Roosevelt*

Despite this victory, the Treasury staffers decided to bring their righteous indignation to the White House. Morgenthau had taken a great risk in pushing State: Hull might not have wished to be bothered with the issue or anti-Roosevelt congressmen might still get a copy of the memorandum. Yet Cox reported that Welles's newly appointed successor, Edward Stettinius, Jr., had privately expressed sympathy for the Jewish refugee question, while Long sent over cable number 354 to Morgenthau after the State-Treasury confrontation *without* the reference to cable number 482.

Long's continued obstruction for the past eight months over the Riegner proposal, together with his attempt to defend State's miserable record before a closed session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee at the end of November—a statement attacked by the public as soon as his testimony was released—convinced Morgenthau and others on his staff that Long would have to go. A scheduled appointment with Roosevelt was set for 16 January 1944.

Morgenthau's gambit was to be an explanation of the delay between Wise's July meeting with Roosevelt over the Riegner proposal and the issuance of the license on Christmas Eve.<sup>27</sup>

While Paul and his associates revised the memorandum, they heard of additional information about State's willful obstruction to prevent rescue ever since Riegner's first cable arrived in Washington. WJC executives informed Pehle and DuBois about the "run-around" they had received from State and about the way in which State had torpedoed the Bermuda Conference even before it convened. Pehle also discovered that Treasury's approval four months earlier for a JDC license to rescue Jewish children in France had been stymied by the State Department, and he issued the license forthwith on his own.<sup>28</sup>

Meeting with Morgenthau on January 12, Hull agreed with his Cabinet colleague that the U.S. government's record in rescuing the doomed Jews was "most shocking," yet he showed no knowledge of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden's view, cabled by Winant five days earlier, that possible "transportation and accommodation problems" which might be "embarrassing" to both governments could well ensue from adoption of Riegner's scheme. Long sought unsuccessfully to hold back the official record of his suggestion to the British minister in Washington that His Majesty's Government make havens available for Jewish refugees in the former Italian colonies of North Africa and so divert mounting

27. *Ibid.*: Feingold, pp. 230–37.

26. Morse, p. 75; "Jewish evacuation" meetings, 20 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL.

28. "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 31 Dec. 1943, MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL; Paul memo, 3 Jan. 1944, in MD, vol. 690, FDRL.



public pressure away from the most logical refuge, the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Only days earlier, the British had also turned down the JDC's request to set aside sufficient Palestine immigration certificates under the limited quota of the 1939 White Paper, to assure the evacuation from Switzerland of 5000 French Jewish children after the war.<sup>29</sup>

The final brief for the president, authored by DuBois, Pehle, and Paul—three Protestants—flayed the State Department's failure to use the available governmental machinery to rescue Jews from Hitler and its clandestine attempt to use this machinery to prevent the rescue of European Jewry. Included was a most recent revelation about the WJC's inability to obtain Anglo-American funds for aiding European Jewry through ICRC auspices. Goldmann had suggested to Long in September that the two governments contribute \$8 million to the ICRC for medicines and concentrated foods to Jews in central Europe. Long replied then that State had no money, the president possessed limited special funds, and the WJC would have to obtain a congressional appropriation. He agreed, however, to recommend the measure if approved by the Intergovernmental Committee in London, a move which effectively stifled Goldmann's proposal from the start. The JDC, informed by Goldmann of Long's interest, had immediately offered State to make an initial grant of \$100,000 to the ICRC while a decision on the larger proposal

would be pending. While the Intergovernmental Committee had no quick response, the Treasury staff reported to Morgenthau on January 14 that the President's Fund had some \$70 million allocated, and that State officials could get whatever funds they wished "with a snap of their fingers."<sup>30</sup> Long had apparently not made the crucial gesture.

#### CREATION OF THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD

Morgenthau, Pehle, and Paul confronted Roosevelt in the White House on 16 January 1944, as he quickly read the secretary's *Personal Report to the President*. The secretary had condensed the original draft and had altered its initial title, *Report . . . on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of The Jews*, but he had left the original sting intact. The indictment focused on the delays regarding Riegner's evacuation proposal and the fate of his cables about the Holocaust at the hands of men "who are indifferent, callous and perhaps even hostile." The overwhelming weight of the argument and Morgenthau's rocklike stance, along with increasing calls for a presidential commission from Congress and the public after their reading Long's testimony, combined to produce the desired effect.

The president responded with enthusiasm to the group's prepared Executive Order and urged a greatly relieved secretary of the Treasury

29. "Jewish evacuation" meeting and Pehle memo of 12 Jan. 1944; "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 7 Jan. 1944; Eden to Winant, 7 Jan. 1944; and Leavitt to Hayter, 7 Jan. 1944; all in MD, vol. 693, FDRL.

30. "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews," 13 Jan. 1944, in MD, vol. 693, FDRL; Long-Goldmann talk, 16 Sept. 1943, Box 202, Breckenridge Long MSS., Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as LC); Hyman to Long, 6 Oct. 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4556, SD; "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 15 Jan. 1944, in MD, vol. 694, FDRL.

to discuss the proposal with Under Secretary Stettinius. Six days later, Roosevelt announced the formation of the War Refugee Board with John Pehle to be its acting director. Roosevelt assigned the new agency \$1 million from the emergency funds but private rescue agencies would have to cover all expenses thereafter.<sup>31</sup>

With Stettinius's strong support, "the whole government policy," as Pehle put it, began to change in the field of rescue. The under secretary assigned Long, who convinced Hull to keep the "hot potato" entirely out of State, to drop all refugee questions and to shift to congressional relations. Treasury's draft of an unequivocal cable from State on January 25 to all its diplomatic missions abroad—at a record cost of \$10,000—to facilitate by all possible means the War Refugee Board's future work for the rescue and relief of "the victims of enemy oppression" also went forward under Stettinius's guiding hand.<sup>32</sup> This telegram directly reversed cable number 354, as well as State's previous stance regarding the food package program and Riegner's evacuation proposal.

A promising beginning had finally been made. But the lateness of the hour and Adolf Hitler's ruthless determination to complete the murder of all the Jews of Europe made

the odds of success more than questionable.

### RESULTS

Four years had elapsed between the Nazi conquest of Poland and Roosevelt's removing the jurisdiction over refugee activity from the State Department to the War Refugee Board. State's inaction and "gross procrastination"—Morgenthau's characterization<sup>33</sup>—regarding the killing of European Jewry had been clearly reflected in the case of food relief to the ghettos, cable number 354, and Riegner's rescue proposal. Especially striking was State's opposition to the WJC evacuation plan, given Roosevelt's initial encouragement and the support of the State Department's own economic specialists and the Treasury Department's Foreign Funds Control Division. Only Treasury's increasing pressure finally brought about the State Department's retreat in these matters.

The Foreign Office's record suffered even more by comparison. While it approved a limited license for food to Poland and Theresienstadt before State did, Whitehall expressed reluctance on political grounds even to accept its *own* Ministry of Economic Warfare's approval of the preliminary financial arrangements for Riegner's scheme. Morgenthau appropriately termed its views "a Satanic combination of British chill and diplomatic double-talk; cold and correct, and adding up to a sentence of death."

The persistent worry of "disposing" of any "considerable number of Jews" from Nazi-occupied Europe also explains the vexation

31. "Personal Report to the President," in MD, vol. 694, FDRL, pp. 111-18; Morse, pp. 78-81. The effort of Jewish pressure groups, especially the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, regarding the War Refugee Board's creation lies beyond the scope of this article.

32. "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 26 Jan. 1944, Box 202. Long MSS., LC; Fred Israel, *The War Diary of Breckenridge Long* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 337; "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 25 Jan. 1944, in MD, vol. 696, FDRL.

33. "Personal Report to the President," 13 Jan. 1944, in MD, vol. 694, FDRL.

of a prominent Foreign Office official on suddenly hearing of the War Refugee Board's creation: "It is fundamentally all part of a Zionist drive and is liable to make much trouble for us in Palestine and with our relations with America over Palestine."<sup>34</sup> The British never set up a parallel refugee agency to the board during the remainder of the war.

Both British and American governments appeared ill at ease with the possibility of truly aiding the Jewish people in their blackest hour. According to the Allied rationale, supplies to the ghettos would "almost certainly" be diverted for the Germans' personal use or granted the Jews just to free the Third Reich from its "responsibility" to feed them. Either way, the argument could not lose and the Jews died. Actual rescue, on the other hand, raised "technical difficulties" which might be "embarrassing" to both governments. Anthony Eden's choice of words in January, 1944, simply echoed his earlier fear, expressed to Hull and Roosevelt in March, 1943, that acceptance of Bulgaria's 60 to 70 thousand Jews might cause Hitler to make similar offers in Poland and Germany just when shipping and accommodation could not "handle" the Jews. State's European Division had turned down a related offer for Rumanian Jewry in November, 1941, on similar grounds. Both governments jointly took this position at the abortive Bermuda Conference on Refugees, Robert Reams of Long's staff later informing Stettinius that "in the event of our admission of inability to take care of

these people, the onus for their continued persecution would have been largely transformed from the German Government to the United Nations."<sup>35</sup>

Morgenthau and the Treasury circle reacted differently, understanding the moral issue involved and the possibility of helping Jews without sacrificing the major war effort. Realizing, with Cox and Stettinius, that the annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis challenged the basic principles of humanity and civilization for the which the Allies had taken up arms, they argued that bringing the Jews relief and rescue would have the effect of thwarting the Axis and of furthering a fundamental objective of the United Nations in view of Germany's announced policy to annihilate the Jews. A proud American, Morgenthau deeply believed in the concept of the United States as a refuge for people persecuted the world over; as a Jew, the Holocaust shocked him profoundly. Guided by a concerned staff, he displayed courage and statesmanship in first approving Riegner's evacuation project, then challenging State, and finally confronting Roosevelt himself.<sup>36</sup>

Had the definite possibilities of relief and rescue which existed been taken up without delay by the Anglo-American Alliance, as Treasury alone championed, countless thousands of Jews would have survived the German *Götterdämmerung*. Food and medical supplies could have pro-

35. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943*, 3:38, (hereafter cited as FRUS); *FRUS, 1941*, 2:875-76; Reams to Stettinius, 8 Oct. 1943, Box 202, Long MSS., LC.

36. Paul memo to Morgenthau, 26 Aug. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL; "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 2 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL; Henrietta Klotz interview with Penkower, 14 March 1977.

34. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., "The Refugee Run-Around," *Collier's* 1 Nov. 1947; Hankey minute, 4 Feb. 1944, Foreign Office 371/42727, Public Record Office, Kew, England.

vided immediate sustenance throughout Europe, while dollars and Swiss francs would have been used for false documents, South American passports, bribes, and large ransom efforts. Some in the Nazi hierarchy did allow wealthy Jews to buy their way to safety. Taking note of this fact when defending State's "reluctance" to allow blocked accounts in Switzerland, which "apparently could not be used by the Nazi leaders" during the war, Cordell Hull unwittingly admitted in his memoirs the probability of rescue: "The State Department did not have the large sums of money and the personnel needed to carry out a plan of reaching and bribing the German officials in charge of the extermination program."<sup>37</sup> Treasury revealed, however, that the attitude of State and the Foreign Office militated against attempting such plans in the first place.

Some Jewish efforts had shown what successes even limited funds could achieve in underground activities. JDC funds enabled a French interfaith relief organization to shelter thousands of children in Christian homes throughout 1942, until the U.S. government cut diplomatic relations with Vichy and the Trading With the Enemy Act closed off funds in November. The three Palestinian Jewish emissaries in Istanbul, assigned to work exclusively for relief and rescue in Europe, reported to American Jewish organizations in May and July, 1943, how "with money one can save lives." They wrote that bribery had postponed the expulsion of the entire surviving Slovakian Jewish community three times and that Jews could be smuggled out of Poland, Slovakia, and

Hungary. But by the time the War Refugee Board managed to take its first concrete steps to alter the financial blockade, the German armies occupied Hungary and speedily carried out the last act of the Final Solution with a ruthlessness unsurpassed heretofore. And even then, the board favored drawn-out negotiations over Gestapo offers at the end of 1944, rather than allow the payment of ransom for the swift release of Jews in Nazi hands.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Errors in judgment*

Organized Jewry in the United States failed at times to measure up to the unparalleled catastrophe. The inability to grasp that the Third Reich employed starvation as a weapon to destroy European Jewry, coupled with sincere but misguided doubts about challenging the Allied blockade against Germany, ended organized Jewry's food parcel projects in August, 1941. As for the more established JDC, it insisted on complying with all American regulations and refused throughout the war to contemplate some *modus vivendi* with the WJC while Jews abroad underwent mass annihilation. Patriotic considerations not to confront the financial blockade, coupled with fears of dual loyalty charges, overrode the desperate need to raise and transmit through all means substantial funds for ransom and similar activities. A traditional philosophy of relief in accordance with governmental law, rather than obligatory,

38. Morse, pp. 60-62; Pomeraniec to Mereminski et al., 30 May 1943, 266, WJCA; Pomeraniec and Shind to Mereminski, 25 July 1943, Z6/17/9, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; Yehuda Bauer, "The Negotiations Between Saly Mayer and the Representatives of the S.S. in 1944-45," in *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, eds. Y. Gutman and E. Zuroff (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), pp. 5-45.

37. Cordell Hull, *Memoirs* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 2:1539.

large-scale rescue measures, could not cope fundamentally with the unprecedented tragedy.

Even those organizations which challenged the economic warfare argument did not always comprehend the dimensions of Nazi policy. One major Agudas Israel leader, for example, continued to focus as late as March, 1943, on sending the already doomed ghettos food to save the Jews and thereby "disrupt" the Nazi propaganda line in occupied countries: "One Jew less—one bread more!" In mid-July he still pressed the Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs, which covered all the major Jewish organizations, to dispatch food by boat for the "still several million Jews in Poland." WJC headquarters in New York, although maintaining constant pressure on various circles in Washington and elsewhere to save Jewry, also erred occasionally in evaluating the crisis. Thus in a memorandum to the Bermuda Conference, the WJC expressed a conviction that starvation represented the major cause of Jewish death at German hands. It declared that the second factor was the high death rate Jews suffered while being transported from Poland to labor camps on the Nazi-Soviet front.<sup>39</sup>

In the final analysis, however, the JDC correctly concluded that the ultimate solution to helping European Jewry lay "in the hands of governments from which permission must

be secured." Rather than grapple with the "technical difficulties" involved in relief and rescue, the State Department and Foreign Office, the Board and Ministry of Economic Warfare, the ICRC, and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees all passed their responsibilities onto the enemy. Roosevelt did nothing either until pressed in July, 1943, by Wise and, far more importantly, by Morgenthau and political considerations in January, 1944, even though he received an eyewitness report on 28 July 1943, from a Polish underground messenger about the gassing of Jews at Treblinka and Belzec.

"I don't know how we can blame the Germans for killing them when we are doing this," observed Randolph Paul in December, 1943. "The law calls them *para-dilecto*, of equal guilt." At a time when the two closest Allies received accurate information on the full scope of the Jewish tragedy, the *New York Post's* Samuel Grafton raised the issue most succinctly in a column which found its way into Morgenthau's personal diaries: "Either we consider the Jews part of Europe, and therefore we retaliate against their murderers as against the murderers of Europeans, or we must consider them a special case, and therefore devise a special means of rescue. There are no other alternatives, in logic or in honor; only these two."<sup>40</sup> The powers of the free West refused to pick up the challenge.

39. WJC Relief Committee meeting, 24 March 1943, 216A/33, WJCA; Joint Emergency Committee minutes, 15 July 1943, Emergency Joint Committee on European Jews, 1942-43, AJCA; S. B. Beit-Tsvi, *HaTsiyonut HaPost Ugandit BeMashber HaShoa* (Tel Aviv: Bronfman, 1977), pp. 324-26; Wise to Frankfurter, 16 Sept. 1942, Box 109, Stephen Wise MSS., American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, MA.

40. Hyman to Rosenberg-Silver, 6 Oct. 1943, Vaad HaHatsala MSS., Yeshiva University, New York; Jan Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1947), pp. 182 ff.; Paul comment, in "Jewish evacuation" meeting, 17 Dec. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-II, FDRL; Samuel Grafton, *New York Post*, 22 July 1943, in MD, vol. 688-I, FDRL, p. 61.

Confronted by the Holocaust, the American and British governments discriminated in their unwillingness to save European Jewry. State Department wires regularly sent reports from Switzerland to private American and British firms giving the status of their property holdings in Europe, but cable number 354 argued that further cables from Riegner about the Final Solution should be suppressed because such "private messages" might endanger official secret communications. The telegram permitted this service in "extraordinary circumstances," but State did not regard the mass murder of millions of Jews as such. A massive food relief program to Greece could be carried out but not to the ghettos of Poland and only slight quantities to Theresienstadt and elsewhere. (The Jewish organizations, particularly the JDC, immediately covered the substantial cost of these relief services when tardy government approval provided an opportunity to do so.)

Whitehall quickly transferred three thousand pounds sterling to Guernsey to feed English children in the Channel Islands occupied by the Germans without even asking for U.S. approval, but Whitehall turned a deaf ear to similar relief for Jewish children in Rumania, France, and all over Axis Europe who faced certain death. British political considerations kept the people most in need from their national homeland in Palestine, tantalizingly close to the charnel house of Europe. State did finally challenge these considerations over the Riegner proposal, but it acceded to the more basic White Paper at the Bermuda Conference and zealously guarded entry into the United States.<sup>41</sup>

41. Josiah DuBois, *The Devil's Chemists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 188; Paul memo, 2 Nov. 1943, in MD, vol. 688-1, FDRL.

Hidden behind the unique classification "stateless refugees," the Jews could not hope to exercise any meaningful leverage in the international arena. Assistant Secretary Acheson attempted to explain the fundamental differences between the Greek and Jewish ghetto situations in terms of a German perspective, but actually, as Goldmann observed at the end of 1944, the Jews could not duplicate the Greek "bargaining point" with the Allies of ships, a geographic base, and other factors.<sup>42</sup>

Riegner mused after the event that the most expensive cable he ever sent in his life, 700 francs for the April, 1943, telegram about evacuation possibilities, was really his cheapest since it eventually made possible the breaking of the financial blockade and the subsequent sending of large funds abroad by the American Jewish organizations for relief and rescue.<sup>43</sup> But had State and the Foreign Office felt compelled, as they did for other groups of civilian refugees and prisoners of war, to lift such restrictions once they comprehended German designs, the annihilation of the Jews could have been considerably checked before Riegner's first rescue proposal crossed their desks.

By the mutual consignment of the two Western Allies, the unique tragedy of the Jewish people was either lost among "suffering civilian populations" of different nationalities or dismissed as a separate circumstance which could only achieve redress after victory in a new "free society." Other peoples already possessing the benefits of statehood

42. J. Wise memo, 14 Oct. 1942, 264, WJCA; Goldmann remarks, 29 Nov. 1944, War Emergency Conference, 81/1, WJCA.

43. Riegner interview with Penkower, 22 April 1977.

fared far better than the Jews, although operating as governments-in-exile. Even the title of the War Refugee Board, like the camouflaged vocabulary Germans specifically employed for their attempt to kill all the Jews, followed the example of the Evian Conference and the Bermuda Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to disguise its real objective. The WJC, under such circumstances, could do no more in the war years than besiege Washington regularly

and hope that some understanding would result in action.

"Only a fervent will to accomplish, backed by persistent and untiring effort, can succeed where time is so precious," read Morgenthau's January, 1944, memorandum to Roosevelt. That fervent will and compassion were missing in the Allied councils of war. The Jews could not wait for the Allied victory. Adolf Hitler would not let them wait. His grim executioners, working day and night, reaped a bloody harvest.

# What American Jews Did During the Holocaust

MARIE SYRKIN

**T**o the necrophilic digging into the guilt of the victims of the Nazi extermination program has been added another area of research: the behavior of American Jews during the Holocaust. What did Jewish organizations and leaders do to save the Jews of Europe? The question implies the accusations: American Jews were abjectly passive; their acknowledged spokesmen timidly abetted the American government's conspiracy of silence; Zionists ignored realistic rescue plans because of their obsession with Palestine; and, most damning of all, a considerable number of the doomed might have been saved if bolder counsel had prevailed. These charges are being made in good faith by a later generation trying to understand the terrible past, and less purely by groups seeking to revise history for immediate political ends. A substantial literature on the subject is being composed by serious historians, sociologists and psychologists, as well as by self-serving pamphleteers. And an American Commission on the Holocaust with a distinguished membership under the chairmanship of former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg has been formed.

Not that the questions are new. Since the sixties young students with memories of civil rights protests have often asked me pointedly why American Jews were so craven: Why did we not rage in the streets when the *St. Louis* with its freight of 1,000 men, women, and children moved along our shores in 1939 and no country in the Western hemisphere offered sanctuary? Why did we not leap into the Atlantic to free the passengers? Why



did we not stage sit-ins in the halls of Congress to demand the lifting of immigration restrictions? When the full extent of the horror unfolded, where were the human blockades against inhumanity?

This failure appears base and inexplicable to a generation conditioned to direct action. Diligent researchers have come up with dates and quotations that prove incontrovertibly how early American Jews must have known what was happening — from the beginning of 1942 according to Yehuda Bauer, Walter Laqueur, and other historians. All agree that the turning-point came when the Geneva representative of the World Jewish Congress sent a cable on August 8, 1942 to the State Department for transmission to Rabbi Stephen Wise, Zionist leader and president of the American Jewish Congress. The cable informed the State Department of the reality of Hitler's program. The cable was not given to Wise till August 28 with the request that he not publicize the information until it could be confirmed. This was done at the end of November.

Did Jewish leaders docilely remain quiet for three to six months, depending on which dates are accepted? Perhaps only those who were involved in the misery of those years can attempt an answer. A catalogue of dates is no guide to comprehension. Let me begin with a personal experience.

**T**owards the end of August, 1942, Hayim Greenberg and I, editors of the Labor Zionist monthly *Jewish Frontier* were invited by Leon Kubowitsky, a member of the New York staff of the World Jewish Congress, to a small, private meeting of Jewish writers and journalists. He told us of a bewildering report received from the Geneva office: Hitler intended to exterminate all the Jews of Europe; the plan was already being implemented.

We listened in numb disbelief. The individuals who heard these tidings had since 1933 been deeply involved in the struggle against Nazi persecution through articles, meetings, political pressure. That was why we had been invited. But we could not take in what we heard. It should be noted that Hayim Greenberg, the foremost

Zionist writer in the United States at the time, has been repeatedly singled out by students of the period (most recently by Walter Laqueur in *The Terrible Secret*) as an exception to the supposed apathy of American Jewry. Yet he, too, left the meeting stunned and dubious. All the words we had written about Nazi atrocities had not prepared us for this horrifying revelation.

During the previous week a document from the Jewish Socialist Bund in Poland purporting to be a circumstantial account of the mass gassing of Jews in the Polish town of Chmelno had reached the office of the *Frontier*. Now I come to an incredible disclosure. We were as unable to assimilate the written words as the spoken ones of Kubowitsky. We hit on what in retrospect appears a disgraceful compromise: we buried the fearful report in the back page of the September issue in small type, thus indicating that we could not vouch for its accuracy.

Throughout September information multiplied. Some Polish women, exchanged for German war-prisoners, had reached Palestine in mid-August. They were the bearers of first-hand accounts. There was no further evading the truth. It had to be faced. We skipped the October issue. Throughout that month our small staff gathered whatever material could be found at the time. Our special November issue appeared in black borders. The editorial minced no words:

In the occupied countries of Europe a policy is now being put into effect whose avowed object is the extermination of a whole people. It is a policy of systematic murder of innocent civilians which in its ferocity, its dimensions and its organization is unique in the history of mankind. . . . We print this somber record to acquaint the free world with these facts and to call on the governments of the Allied Nations to do whatever may be done to prevent the fulfillment of the horror that broods over the blood-engulfed continent of Europe.

The document from the Bund which a month earlier had been relegated to the back appeared in its proper place.

The September and November issues of *Jewish Frontier* only a month apart, indicate dramatically the emotional space that had to be traversed before even those who, whatever their failings, could not be accused of

indifference to the Jewish tragedy were able to assimilate the idea of total extermination as a considered program. Even in retrospect I think that this inability reflects more on our intelligence than our moral obtuseness. Today when genocide, gas-chamber, and mass-extermination are the small coin of language, it is hard to reconstruct the more innocent state of mind when American Jews, like the Jews in Europe's ghettos, could not immediately grasp that the ascending series of Nazi persecutions had reached this apex.

If such was the psychological unreadiness of sophisticated publicists whose overriding concerns since the advent of Hitler had been to expose each new phase of the Nazi terror, what could be expected from a less informed general public? We sent our special issue to major radio stations and the newspapers. The information was buried or ignored, but from this point on the Yiddish and the Anglo-Jewish press, admittedly in varying degrees, made the Holocaust their major theme. I should also add that, as the credits indicate, we had compiled our material from sources in the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress who knew and sympathized with our purpose. No one recommended silence until further confirmation. Therefore blame for a *month* of doubt may be assigned, not for three months of deliberate deception.

Another factor should be mentioned. Paradoxically the elaborate legal trappings, beginning with the Nuremberg Laws, in which the Nazis had enveloped their assault on the Jews seemed to assure a threshold Hitler would not cross despite his rhetoric. Unlike previous acts of terror and despoliation, the Nazis sought to keep the Final Solution secret. In the ghettos deluded Jews were promised that deportation meant resettlement. Consequently, though reports of wholesale massacres in particular communities had reached American Jews, as they had Jews in the Nazi charnel house, these were interpreted as pogroms, more terrible than any in the course of Jewish history but still to be viewed as savage aberrations rather than as evidence of a master plan. Furthermore, the reports came from areas involved in active warfare. Newspaper stories did not differentiate among atrocities against Jews, Poles, Russians, Letts, or Ukrainians.

Thoroughly documented studies, beginning with Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died*, have given devastating proof of the American government's attempts to suppress information in regard to the progress of extermination so as to mute any outcry on the part of American Jewry. The delay of the State Department in transmitting the original cable stemmed from two contradictory motives: the report was too "fantastic" for credence; if true, why hasten to alert American Jews, "in view of the impossibility of our being of any assistance." The fact that Assistant Secretary Breckenridge Long and his deputy, Robert Reams — the latter ironically in charge of the desk for Jewish questions — had been steadfastly opposed to any special consideration of the Jewish plight indicates the temper of the State Department.

**T**here is little point in stressing the ignominious role of the United States and the other democracies. This well-authenticated record is a separate subject with no bearing on my theme except insofar as it affected Jewish response. What did the Jews do? Wise had written of his agony while he waited for official release from silence. It came at the end of November from Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. On December 2, Wise wrote to President Roosevelt "about the most overwhelming disaster in Jewish history" and asked him to meet a Jewish delegation. On December 8, representatives of Jewish organizations brought Roosevelt a 20-page document, "Blue Print for Extermination." The rabbinate proclaimed a day of mourning and fasting. The protests and demonstrations Jews had been organizing for the past eight years assumed a new urgency. At a huge "Stop Hitler Now" rally at Madison Square Garden on March 1, 1943, Chaim Wieszmann, president of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, called on the democracies to negotiate with Germany through neutral countries for the release of Jews: "Let havens be assigned in the vast territories of the United Nations. . . . Let the gates of Palestine be opened."

The demand for havens and the liberalization of immigration quotas in various countries had been pressed throughout the thirties without success. As early as

1934, Assistant Secretary Carr expressed his dismay at “the aggressiveness of our Jewish friends”; it might result in a “commotion” in regard to the immigration laws. When the international Evian Conference on Refugees finally convened on the shores of Lake Geneva on July 6, 1938, the results were minimal. Of the 32 nations present, all, with the exception of Holland and Denmark, announced that their countries could offer no sanctuary. The United States, in a belated grand gesture, at last agreed to accept its full legal quota of 27,370 annually from Germany and Austria — for transparent reasons the quota had gone unfilled during the crucial years. Hitler had confidently predicted the outcome — the hypocrites who assailed him would admit no Jews. Golda Myerson (Meir), who watched these proceedings as “a Jewish observer,” drew the inescapable conclusion: only the Jewish homeland would venture to act for rescue.

When indignation at the ongoing extermination and the failure of the Allies to undertake any rescue measure could no longer be suppressed, the Anglo-American Conference on Refugees was convened in Bermuda on April 19, 1943, during the very days when the Warsaw Ghetto revolt was in its death throes. Breckenridge Long, the steadfast opponent of any liberalization of the immigration quota and strategically in charge of the Visa Department division of the State Department, noted bleakly in his *Diary* for April 20:

The Bermuda Conference on Refugees has been born. . . . One Jewish faction under the leadership of Rabbi Stephen Wise has been so assiduous in pushing their particular cause — in letters and telegrams to the President, the Secretary and Welles — in public meetings to arouse emotions — in full-page advertisements — in resolutions to be presented at the Conference — that they are apt to produce a reaction against their interest . . . one danger in it all is that their activities may lend color to the charges of Hitler that we are fighting this war on account of and at the instigation and direction of our Jewish citizens.

Obviously Long found Jews uncomfortably active — in fact, pushy — rather than the reverse.

Jewish organizations had formulated detailed memoranda that called for liberalized immigration quotas in the United States and Latin American countries, the establishment of havens in neutral countries,

and free immigration to Palestine. All these proposals were ignored. The conference lost no time in agreeing that shipping was unavailable in wartime, and that quotas were sacrosanct; otherwise Congress might enact even severer restrictions. The head of the British delegation warned that "one must not be betrayed by feelings of humanity or compassion into a course which will be likely to postpone the day of liberation." The head of the American delegation, president of Princeton University, concurred: "The solution to the refugee problem is to win the war."

The bitterness of American Jewry at this abdication can be gauged from editorial responses. "Would opening the gates of Palestine beyond the restrictions of the White Paper hurt the war effort? Would the granting of havens in neighboring countries hurt anyone except the Nazis? Would the adequate utilization of the United States immigration quotas permitted by law postpone the day of liberation?" (*Jewish Frontier*, May, 1943). Only a small fraction of the 153,000 allowed annually had entered the country. Since 1933, the United States instead of being overrun by immigrant hordes had actually admitted one million fewer than legally permitted. Why were the unfilled quotas of various countries not used? Why could not cargo ships returning empty carry refugees? Nor did the sorry role of the one accredited Jewish participant in the conference, Congressman Sol Bloom, go unnoted: "The living as well as the dead were buried in Bermuda and the Jewish congressman added his spate of earth." Demands that Roosevelt disassociate himself from the bigots in his administration were direct and insistent. Stephen Wise unsuccessfully asked to meet Roosevelt to protest "the inexplicable absence of active measures to save those who can still be saved." Jews were not silent. They were disregarded.

**A** crucial question remains unanswered. If the traditional methods of advocacy failed why did the Jewish community not resort to the unorthodox tactics of civil disobedience familiar since the sixties? Some six months after the August day on which we had drawn back from knowing, Hayim Greenberg denounced American Jewry in a much cited article, "Bankrupt" (*Jewish Frontier*, February, 1943). He attacked every Jewish organi-

zation and party from the Zionist American Jewish Congress to the staid American Jewish Committee, from Jabotinsky Revisionists to the Leftist Bund, for their failure to unite in a common, unswerving program. He called for a day of prayer for the degraded state of American Jewry: "Never before in history have we displayed such shamefully strong nerves as we do now in the days of our greatest catastrophe. We have become so dulled that we have even lost the capacity for madness, and the fact that in recent months Jews have not produced a substantial number of mentally deranged persons is hardly a symptom of health." Yet despite his anguished *J'accuse*, Greenberg essentially demanded only a more concerted and unremitting effort at political pressure. He concluded in a tragic anticlimax: "If it is still possible to do anything then I do not know who should do it and how it should be done. I only know that we are all — all five million of us, with all our organizations and committees and leaders — politically and morally bankrupt."

His indictment is periodically echoed by critics of American Jewry as evidence of a course that might have been taken. Actually it is a searing confession of impotence. To understand why American Jews were "bankrupt" one must first honestly assess the political as well as spiritual capital at their disposal.

I recall no time when American Jews felt as helpless as in the thirties and later, for different reasons, in the forties. The rise of Hitler had inspired isolationists, reactionaries, and rabid anti-Semites openly to espouse Nazi doctrine. The anti-Jewish tirades of radio priest Father Coughlin were popular fare and his magazine, *Social Justice*, with its unrelenting incitement was hawked along Main Street. A huge rally of the German-American Bund in New York's Madison Square Garden was conducted with full Nazi punctilio — S.S. uniforms, swastikas, and orations about the Jewish menace. All this under the protection of free speech in a democracy! Why did New York Jews not try to break up the meeting in approved sixties style? *Because it was the thirties*. The fact that Mayor LaGuardia sent Jewish policemen to keep law and order at the meeting was hailed as a legitimate, brilliant pro-Jewish stroke.

Powerful isolationist sentiment in the country was constantly being fanned by warnings not to let America be dragged into a Jewish war. After the attack on Pearl Harbor overt vituperation ceased. It was patriotic to be anti-Nazi. It was not patriotic to engage in "special pleading."

These are the commonplaces of recent history. They do not convey the suffering and apprehension of Jews subjected to this barrage at a time when Hitler's armies were subjugating Europe. Nor do they present the sharpness of the Jewish dilemma. Every measure in the thirties, when rescue through immigration was still possible, had been defeated by a hostile Congress responding to adverse public sentiment. The most harrowing example was the fate of the Wagner-Rogers Bill introduced in February, 1939. According to its terms a total of 20,000 German children, 14 years old or younger, would have been admitted outside the quota over a two-year period. Though Jewish children were not specified, an alert public suspected the worst. A phalanx of patriotic organizations from the American Legion to the Daughters of the American Revolution fought the bill on the grounds that poor American children might go hungry because of imported aliens. The opposition did not come from the crackpot fringe; it reflected the mood of the country. A Gallup poll taken in January, 1939, revealed that 66.5 percent of those questioned opposed the admission of 10,000 children from Germany. Other polls yielded no more generous results. Despite the support of prominent liberals, educators, and clergy the Wagner-Rogers Bill perished because of a genuine fear that any tampering with the quota would lead to even more restrictive legislation. Among the spate of anti-alien bills introduced in Congress, one advocated the reduction of the quota by 90 percent.

In that climate should American Jews have marched on Washington in righteous fury as contemporary wiseacres suggest? The doors would have been slammed tighter. Should Roosevelt have been personally attacked for his failure to intervene in behalf of the Wagner-Rogers Bill? Here we come to the heart of the affair. With the isolationist tide rising who would have gained from an effort to discredit Roosevelt? What if he



had been forced to champion measures he considered politically risky for his chance of reelection? Those who viewed Roosevelt as the chief bulwark against the spread of Nazi dominion were trapped. Though in retrospect the Roosevelt aureole has dimmed, his role in aligning the United States with Great Britain in the struggle against Hitler is hardly open to question.

Even after Pearl Harbor, when Jews thought themselves free of the charge of war-mongering, anti-Semitism, though not as blatant as in Father Coughlin's heyday, continued to sap Jewish morale. A whispering campaign that Jews were getting cushy desk-jobs poisoned the air. Jews found themselves defensively noting Jewish names in the casualty lists to squash the libels. But this psychic unease was trivial compared to the paralysis engendered by the argument that all considerations were subordinate to the defeat of the Axis. An America whose sons were dying on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific was not inclined to distinguish among war casualties, atrocities reported from every country the Nazis invaded, and the extermination of the Jews. Furthermore, according to polls taken throughout the war, Americans gave little credence to the reality of the extermination program. The American people, some Jews among them, had no comprehension of the Final Solution until Eisenhower's armies entered the death-camps and the devastating documentary unrolled before the world.

**N**evertheless, the "aggressiveness of our Jewish friends" — to quote an unhappy American official, Assistant Secretary Carr — continued. The full-page advertisements that Breckenridge Long had found so disturbing were repeatedly placed in major newspapers — attention had to be bought. As one who wrote some of the copy (as yet we had no professionals) I know how vainly we strove to arouse an indifferent world. Not only at Madison Square Garden, but at less publicized assemblies in synagogues, schools, and meeting-rooms Jews gathered week after week to mourn, pass resolutions, collect money, and send telegrams to Congress. They did not riot, however abject that may sound today.

On January 16, 1944, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, prodded by a letter from Stephen Wise, addressed Roosevelt with a "Personal Report" to protest the obstructionist tactics of State Department officials, particularly Breckinridge Long. Five days later, Roosevelt, by Executive Order, established the War Refugee Board to rescue victims of oppression and to give relief "consistent with the successful prosecution of the war." By then two-thirds of the six million were already dead. Some could still be saved. But when actual measures were proposed the old arguments were resurrected. Suggestions by the Jewish Agency for Palestine that the crematoria of Auschwitz and Birkenau be destroyed were rejected by the War Department as impracticable. Chaim Weizmann, who had made such proposals in July, 1944, was informed that the "technical difficulties" were too great. The Soviet Union in particular objected to any diversion from the war effort. The Allied obituary for the Jews remained unchanged — the corpses would have to wait for victory.

The ill-fated negotiations of Joel Brand with Nazi henchman Adolf Eichmann for the ransom of one million Hungarian Jews are a case in point. Eichmann demanded 10,000 trucks to be used on the Eastern front and several tons of food. "Goods for blood," as he put it. Brand was permitted to leave Budapest to bring his proposal to the underground rescue mission of the Jewish Agency in Istanbul. There he was seized by the British as a possible Nazi agent. Despite the pleas of Moshe Sharett and Weizmann the British denounced the offer on the BBC as blackmail. The details were not specified. This publicity doomed the proposal. The killings of Hungarian Jews, temporarily halted by Eichmann, resumed.

I interviewed Brand in Tel Aviv in 1945 shortly after his release from British detention. He conceded the possible pitfalls in the scheme. Perhaps Eichmann had been scheming to create a rift among the Allies with the demand that the trucks be used on the Russian front. On the other hand, perhaps he was actually trying to protect himself in view of imminent Nazi defeat. Here again was an illustration of Jewish impotence before the determination of the Allies to allow no distraction from

the war effort no matter how great the gain in human lives or how slight the risk to the war effort. Nor can one forget the query of a British official, "What would we do with all these Jews?"

Why did American Jews not cry to high heaven at this cynical forfeit of so vast a scheme of salvation? The negotiations were secret — so secret that when the manuscript of my book on the Holocaust (*Blessed Is the Match*) was about to be published in 1946 by Knopf and the Jewish Publication Society an editor of the latter objected to my chapter on the Brand negotiations as too sensational for credibility. Only the lucky appearance of Ira Hirshmann's *Lifeline to a Promised Land* that month — Roosevelt had sent Hirshmann as his representative to examine Brand — overcame the misgivings of the skeptical JPS editor. How then could American Jews in 1944 have protested the rejection of a rescue scheme of which they had no knowledge? In any case the surest way to puncture sensitive negotiations with potential Nazi defectors would have been public clamor.

**W**hat merit is there to the charge that Zionist leaders, intent on securing a Jewish state and channeling immigration to Palestine, neglected realistic avenues of rescue? Such interpretations put the cart before the horse. Every rescue proposal offered by Zionist bodies had stressed havens in *any* part of the world as a major demand. We know the response to this plea. In 1943, Golda Meir, who five years earlier had watched the funereal proceedings at Evian, defined the mission of Zionism: "There is no Zionism except the rescue of Jews." The slogan of the Jewish struggle against the Mandatory Power was not "A Jewish State" but "Open the Gates." The primary impulse behind the call for a Jewish commonwealth issued by the American Jewish Conference in August, 1943, was a disillusioned awareness that no country would admit Jewish refugees. The original plan of the conveners (see Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*) had been to concentrate on rescue operations and not raise the divisive issue of a Jewish commonwealth among the 500 representatives of American Jewry who embraced a wide political spectrum. But in view of the obdurate rejection of any res-

cue measure by the international community, there was no gainsaying the argument of Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver: "We cannot truly rescue the Jews of Europe unless we have free immigration into Palestine." The conference established three commissions: one for rescue wherever possible; one for Palestine; and one for post-war problems. Nevertheless, despite this clear record, the current dossier against American Zionists includes the canard that the commission on rescue was slipped in as a casual afterthought. Such distortions savor more of belated psychoanalysis than objective history.

In 1945, a Haganah activist asked me why five million American Jews had been less directly involved than 600,000 Palestinian Jews. He answered his own question: "Because we are a people and act as a people when threatened." Indeed, throughout the war, Jewish Palestine had the tragic distinction of standing alone in trying to save Hitler's victims through personal action. Emissaries of the Jewish Agency, from their secret network in Istanbul, burrowed their way into the ghettos. The Haganah, the people's army of Palestine, organized and conducted illegal immigration; it should be added that individual American Jews took part in this heroic enterprise and that funds from American Jews helped purchase the leaky ships. Parachutists from Palestine were dropped behind enemy lines to reach Jewries immured in the Nazi fortress. But the parachutists could not take off till the British gave their reluctant consent to the mission: airplanes and landing fields are the prerequisites of national sovereignty. However Jewish Palestine offered a welcoming shore and a population ready to battle for the right of the refugee ships to enter — a right impudic in the concept of a Jewish homeland.

No one can seriously suggest that an American Jewish minority — 2.5 percent of the population — should have challenged their government in the middle of a popular war on whose outcome hung the fate of the free world, that they should have sabotaged troop-trains or tried to force refugee ships past the Statue of Liberty. We could not emulate Palestine. On the other hand, were we too scrupulously conscious of what could and could not be done? Supposing our protests had been

more daring and imaginative? Recently I was asked why Jews did not immolate themselves on the White House lawn? Would 1,000 burning Jews have singed the equanimity of Congress, Breckenridge Long, Roosevelt? Sadly, I still believe that even if we had been psychologically ready for such acts, the only practical effect would have been to infuriate the hostile majority: "our Jewish friends" were too flamboyant.

An indefatigable exponent of militancy, Peter Bergson, member of the Revisionist Irgun and organizer of an Emergency Committee to Save the Jews in 1943, is presently offering the unvarnished truth about the Jewish "establishment." A film devoted to his achievements (*Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die*) peddles a simple thesis: only the Irgun group tried to save Jews from extermination. Jewish leaders, among whom non-Begin Zionists were the chief malefactors, cared more about "getting into the Harvard club" than about rescue; they deliberately thwarted Bergson's valiant efforts. From the screen, an aging Bergson admonishes a shocked audience: Wise should have torn his coat; Jews should have stoned the White House. If not for Jewish obstruction, he, Bergson, might have saved a million Jews.

Such revilings have long been Revisionist stock-in-trade. Ben Hecht, who joined the Bergson group, set the tone in his book, *Perfidy* (1961); there the theme of the Zionist leadership's criminal disregard of European Jewry already appears in full bloom. In Hecht's unabashed account only "Lion of Judea Begin" and a "handful of the Irgun" won independence from the British. Ben-Gurion, felicitously characterized as a "lambkin," had only wanted a "British-Jewish suburb"; the notion of Jewish independence had never entered his head. When the British "decamped" Ben-Gurion unexpectedly found himself head of state. Presumably the Irgun let the dazed poltroons of the Labor Party assume authority out of modesty.

The Bergson script maintains a similar standard of accuracy. True, the Bergson committee ran advertisements and held meetings — as did the despised establishment. Why were Bergson and company not welcomed with the enthusiasm their zeal merited? Because

they jeopardized the cause they sought to serve through a penchant for publicity and provocative gestures characteristic of Revisionism to this day. For instance, in 1943, the Bergson committee ran a full-page advertisement (in which they still take pride) with a glaring headline: 70,000 Rumanian Jews "For Sale at \$50 apiece." No surer way of destroying ransom negotiations could have been imagined. In the same vein, though the Irgun played a minor role compared with that of the Haganah in organizing illegal immigration, the Bergson group did not refrain from advertising its exploits, so facilitating detection and seizure by the British. Bergson's tactics certainly aroused attention; unfortunately, the method was self-defeating. Not Irgun boldness but irresponsibility worried the Jewish leadership.\*

In his published account of the negotiations with Eichmann (*Desperate Mission*) Joel Brand unwittingly evaluated the practical worth of the group's passion for publicity. In Istanbul, Brand met Erik Jabotinsky, son of the Revisionist leader: "He [Erik] was obsessed with the idea of forming a Jewish legion, and he showed me the proclamations he had inserted in several American

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\*The following letter to *The New York Times Magazine* written in response to Lucy Dawidowicz's article on American Jews during the Holocaust (April 18, 1982) was not published. It is here cited with Professor Macarov's permission.

"Lucy Dawidowicz's article will undoubtedly bring protests from those who never understood the damage done Jewish rescue efforts by the self-seeking efforts of the Irgun Zvai Leumi. Hence, the following footnote:

I was one of those engaged in buying ships for the so-called illegal immigration into Palestine in 1946-47, under the aegis of the Haganah — the legally-constituted defense force of the Jews of Palestine — and those Americans who supported it. These ships went to Europe to take refugees to Palestine, some of whom were waiting in remote and uncomfortable places, hiding from local authorities, and keeping their ultimate destination secret. In fact, I made out the check which bought the *President Warfield*, which later became the *Exodus 1947*.

Our activities were often illegal — I used to carry the bribes to the consuls of certain countries in order to get the flag papers necessary to

newspapers. 'This one cost three thousand dollars,' he declared, 'and for this we had to pay five thousand dollars.' But he showed not the slightest understanding of our critical situation."

**W**hat in summary was the Zionist record? In the period before full understanding of the nature of the Nazi extermination program had been reached, Zionists championed the Jewish homeland as the natural refuge for persecuted Jews. When in the thirties an assortment of devil's islands in remote, undeveloped regions from Madagascar to British Guiana were suggested as possible territories not only Zionists questioned the feasibility of such settlements for urban European Jews and insisted that the White Paper barring free immigration to Palestine be lifted. Furthermore, in each instance the various proposals — Rhodesia, Kenya, Tanganika, Angola — proved to be chimerical. Neither South America nor Africa was ready to welcome refugees. In 1938, even the suggestion that unpopulated Alaska, a territory under U.S. control, fell through because State Department oppo-

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sail our ships. The Merchant Marine officer who inspected and certified ships before we purchased them insisted on using an alias. We formed a new corporation as the owner of each ship, to avoid tracing back. In addition to possible illegalities, we were attempting to hide our activities from British Intelligence, who were concerned with intercepting the ships. I was also in charge of laundering the money, from bank to bank and stockbroker to stockbroker, to protect our nervous sources.

It was during this period that the Irgun Zvai Leumi bought the yacht *Abril*, renamed it the *Ben Hecht* for the playwright who has raised money for them — much through the Broadway play he wrote and produced — and invited the press to a Bon Voyage party on a Brooklyn pier. The ship sailed off to an undistinguished future, but the publicity caused our sources of supply to close down almost entirely. For some months we could hardly get funds, flag papers, supplies, or sailors to continue rescuing refugees, and we will never know the damage and anguish caused the refugees during this period, or the number who did not get to Palestine while it was still possible.

David Macarov, The Hebrew University"

nents feared that the scheme was an indirect way of circumventing American immigration laws. Proponents who argued that the admission of European Jews would be a positive factor in the development of Alaska were disregarded. Nevertheless, as the record shows, from the outset, Zionists consistently pressed for havens. As the situation worsened Zionist demands for areas of resettlement outside of Palestine were as insistent as their calls for free immigration to Palestine. The Jewish proposals to the Evian and Bermuda conferences speak for themselves.

In other areas too the efforts of the Zionist leadership foundered on the indifference or hostility of the State Department and the British government. In September, 1943, Nahum Goldmann, as representative of the Jewish Agency, asked for the shipment of food to the starving Warsaw Ghetto; the State Department had to agree to the transfer of funds for the purchase of food parcels. The Rescue Commission of the American Jewish Conference urged that since Red Cross food parcels were reserved exclusively for prisoners-of-war and civilian internees, the status of concentration camp inmates would have to be changed to that of civilian internees through the influence of the International Red Cross. What Leon Kubowitzki called the "fetish of economic warfare primacy" stymied these efforts until it was too late. Joint requests of John Pehle of the War Refugees Board and of Goldmann and Kubowitzky of the World Jewish Congress to bomb the crematoria voiced from 1943 on, were turned down by John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, as were the subsequent later ones of Weizmann.

The most dramatic and effective rescue efforts were those conducted by the already mentioned underground network of the Jewish Agency with headquarters in Istanbul. The variety of attempts to burrow into the Nazi fortress and to establish contact with the Jewries there immured have been frequently and circumstantially described. The straightforward, factual statement of Henry L. Feingold, a historian of the period, refutes current libels: "Interestingly enough, [Ira] Hirshmann in his account of the events in Turkey,



*Caution to the Winds*, and the War Refugee Board in its unpublished three-volume history of its activities are careful to acknowledge the primacy of the Zionist rescue efforts in occupied Europe." (*The Politics of Rescue*) Neither Hirschmann nor the War Refugee Board had any interest in stressing the "primacy" of the Zionist rescue effort except historic truth.

American Jews used the orthodox means at their disposal and were consistently defeated by an unheeding country. Those who cite the civil disobedience of the sixties as a feasible tactic draw no meaningful parallel. Apart from the revolution in every sphere of conduct, from political activism to sexual latitude, that differentiates the two periods, there was no similarity in the objective situations. During the hated Vietnam War disparate segments of the population were engaged together in an American cause that vitally affected the country. In the war against Hitler, when Americans suffered the daily dread of losses, American Jews were rebuffed not only by official policy but by the almost total absence of comprehension and sympathy among the general population. Civil disobedience and disruptive protest are only tolerated when they enjoy wide public support, as in the case of the Blacks — again an American cause. Such support was not forthcoming for remote European Jews. Social scientists who *ex post facto* speculate on the quantity and quality of Jewish pressure that might have been exerted, misgauge both the extent of Jewish influence and the solidity of American, not Jewish, indifference.

Current analysts who survey the past with an incriminating calendar proving on what date Jews should have raised the alarm have no true sense of what was felt, thought, or endured on the days they summon as evidence. Within the limits of their knowledge, capacity, and political constraints American Jews did what seemed possible at the time. That this was tragically little is their sorrow, not their shame. The shame must be assigned to the Allied governments who refused to employ the power at their command. Contemporary Jewish factions who revise the past for their own self-aggrandizement and unscrupulously distort the historic

record add a shabby footnote to the great catastrophe of our time.

Shame also attaches to groups who revise the past for their own self-aggrandizement and unscrupulously distort the historic record. ■

# The Goldberg Report

YEHUDA BAUER

Recently, a spate of publications has appeared in Israel, in the U.S., and among the enemies of the Jews dealing with the problem of the behavior of the Jewish leadership during the Holocaust. They come from such opposing camps as the Agudath Israel, liberal secularists, the PLO, and the Soviets. The basic tenor of these publications is that the Jews of Europe were murdered not only by the Nazis, but also with the collusion or inadvertent collaboration of Jewish leaders in the free world. The motives that are alleged are of different types. Thus, a publication of a group called the Young Agudath Israel (Tzeirei Agudath Yisrael) calls the Zionists responsible because they wanted a Jewish state ruled by the Zionists in Palestine at the expense of saving the Jews of Europe. A similar line is pursued in Soviet publications. Others, such as writers associated with the Zionist camp, whether of the Right or of the Left, will argue rather indiscriminately that the Zionist and the other leaderships are responsible, at the least, for non-action, missed opportunities, and the like.

The reason for these outpourings seems to be related to the feeling of powerlessness of the Jews then, and at least retrospectively, now as well. Somebody must be responsible for the murder of millions of Jews. The Nazis are distant and departed; the Allies should be blamed, of course, but were not the Jews at fault for not pressing them enough? There is, to be sure, a real problem there, and a

very serious one. It requires careful examination, a passionate dispassion. But the simpler way to deal with it is to make a blanket accusation — surely the Jews themselves must be responsible.

This is, at bottom, an acceptance of anti-Semitic notions by Jews. The Jews are powerful, and were so during World War II — another anti-Semitic formula — so why did they not help? Emotional fury by Jews, ultimately caused by a deep and insurmountable sense of loss, leads to these blanket accusations, which are then utilized by various enemies. A response to these accusations may lead one to a blanket defense of the Jewish leadership, which would be the same kind of trap with a different value sign; if such a defense says that of course they could have done more, but on the whole they were all right, it is not made more convincing.

It is essential to expose these evaluations for the incompetence of their arguments, to insist that the very grave problem of Jewish leadership during the Holocaust must be addressed in a responsible manner. In the U.S., the kind of emotional attitude briefly outlined above has resulted in the so-called Goldberg Report,\* by a committee under former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg.

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\**American Jewry During the Holocaust*. New York: Ralph Bunche Institute on the U.N., 1984, 400 pp., \$14.95.

**A** self-appointed committee of enquiry decided to examine and pass judgment on one of the most difficult questions of contemporary history — the attitude of the Jewish leadership in the U.S. to their brethren in Europe during the Holocaust. I was invited by Seymour M. Finger to be part of a panel of historians who would advise the commission. After one meeting, and having read a preliminary report, I resigned — for several reasons. One was that I do not happen to think that historical facts can be established or interpreted by a quasi-judicial process. I prefer to leave both fact-finding and interpretation to historians who, by mutual disagreements publicly arrived at, may slowly forge a historical consensus. I was afraid the Goldberg group would become either a kangaroo court or a tepid exercise in the careful balancing of opposing pulls — or a mixture of both. All three phenomena can be found in the report as published. I also objected to the system whereby people with sizable axes to grind, or, alternatively, inexperienced enthusiasts would, in brief and inadequate papers vie with solid historians to submit findings adding up to conclusions that would, at best, leave us exactly where we started. This, too, has happened.

What were some of the questions addressed by the commission? There was the question of the exact time when information became available to American-Jewish "leaders." There was the problem of effectiveness vis-à-vis the U.S. government. There was the question of what could or should have been done. All this was viewed with the

benefit of informed hindsight, and with a minimum of presentation of context in which all this took place. The result is, charitably put, a mess.

There is no table of contents, no consecutive pagination (perhaps in order to discourage the reader from pressing on), and, of course, no index; nor is there a bibliography. Finger's summary defines Jewish leadership, more or less, as the Zionist, Orthodox, and non-Zionist liberal organizations and their heads. He leaves out the Bergson group, thus avoiding an important controversy that rent the American-Jewish community over ways and means of aiding rescue efforts. His summary is vacuous: yes, they all did what they could, and they had some successes, but they could have done more had they been united and directed. Did we need a commission to arrive at a conclusion of this kind?

On the way, Finger commits the common fatal mistake: "The record shows that all allied governments were well aware of Hitler's extermination policy but, for a variety of reasons, were reticent and evasive about calling attention to the fact that his target for genocide was the Jews. Finally, in December 1942, the United Nations 'issued a statement acknowledging the murder of Jews.' This was a full 18 months after it had begun." So, they knew for a full 18 months, and never said or did anything. More, there is an implication here that there was an extermination policy for a very long time, and the governments purposefully hid it.

The Allied governments could hardly have known about the annihilation of the Jews before it began

in the summer of 1941. Contrary to some recent sensationalist writing, the mass murders by shooting were not known to the Western Allies in the autumn of 1941; when the reports were published, in part, by the Soviets on January 6-7, 1942, they were discounted as Soviet propaganda. The first solid information, the Bund report of May, 1942, published in Britain late in June, spoke of a plan to annihilate Polish Jewry, not of an overall genocide, and 700,000 victims were mentioned. This was, again, dismissed as Polish and Jewish propaganda, but it was certainly not hidden. Anyone who had eyes could read it, anyone who had ears could hear it over the BBC. But people did not, perhaps could not, believe. This was as true of Jews who in May were being transported to Belzec or Auschwitz, as it was of American, Palestinian, and other Jews, as well as of the officials of Allied governments.

Then came the Riegner telegram of August 8, 1942, duly mentioned by Finger, and by most of the papers that follow his report. But Riegner's cable was far from clear. It stated that there was "an alarming report that in Führer's headquarters plan discussed and under consideration" to murder 3.5 to 4 million Jews at "one blow" in the coming autumn. So — this was a rumor, perhaps there was a plan, and it had not happened yet — this is over a year after the beginning of the mass murder! And Riegner added — because he had not himself met Eduard Scholte, who had brought the information — "we transmit information with all necessary reservation as exactitude cannot be confirmed," though the

informant was "stated" to be generally knowledgeable and reliable.

**T**his is the cable Sumner Welles held in his hands when he met Stephen S. Wise on August 28, 1942. What should he have done, on the strength of an alarming report that should be treated "with all necessary reservation," according to the sender of the cable himself? Go out and shout? And if it were proved to have been an error, would anyone believe the U.S. government reports on German atrocities? Should Welles have told Wise to go and alarm the Jews? Millions of them had relatives under the Nazi heel. And if there had been a panic, and suicides, in August, 1942, just as the U.S. was feverishly marshaling its strength in a war which at that moment saw Japan in control of Southeast Asia, and the Germans on the point of conquering Stalingrad and the Caucasian oilfields, and it then turned out that the news was false?

Welles did what any U.S. government official would have done: he decided to check the information. This is in fact what the Riegner cable itself implied. The Americans received very limited confirmation from the Vatican. Their chief sources were an interview by Paul C. Squire, U.S. vice-consul in Geneva, with Carl Burckhardt of the International Red Cross, on November 7, 1942, not mentioned in the Goldberg Report, and the information transmitted by the Polish government-in-exile, based on the report of Jan Karski, its emissary who had just arrived from Poland.

Until November, 1942, American

government officials could not have been and were not convinced of the Nazi murder plans; when they became so convinced, they told Wise as much, and on December 17 made the declaration Finger alludes to. His statement about the Allies, so symptomatic of much uninformed and sloppy writing, is then compounded by sheer nonsense: "many reports in 1942 came from deportees who had escaped from the death squads," and so on. I have dwelt on this one crucial point of information not only to show how a pompous claim of impartial investigation can mislead all who read it, but also to show that the justified criticism of Allied behavior cannot be based on statements such as Finger's. The point is not that they did not do anything about the information. Prior to the autumn of 1942 they did not know about planned total annihilation, but they did know about deportations, ghettos, starvation, and disease. They knew, and the public, Jewish and non-Jewish, knew that the Jews were being singled out. They could not have saved millions, to be sure, but they could have smoothed the way for escape. Beyond that — and this is not explicitly stressed anywhere in the report — the Jewish leadership, and the Allied governments, were fully aware of the vacillating policies of Germany's allies, and save for one wonderful American diplomat, Pinkney S. Tuck in Vichy, no attempts were made to influence the satellites — until very late in the war.

Finger then gingerly makes his way along the slippery path of the contradictory papers submitted to his group. Jewish leaders did all

kinds of things, and he does not really know how to evaluate them. The 180,000 or so Jews of Budapest who were saved are used over and over again by his sources, and they are rescued, according to Finger and his papers, by different organizations: the World Jewish Congress, the Orthodox groups, Kastner, the Zionists — everybody is in on it. We learn that Ira Hirschmann rescued "large numbers of Jews from Rumanian ships in Istanbul harbor" — surely a startling revelation to anyone who knows that Hirschmann tried to organize ships for exit from Rumania and failed. Rickety Rumanian boats went to Istanbul in an effort organized by Rumanian Jews with the help of the Mossad (Illegal Immigration Organization) from Palestine prior to Rumania's switching sides in the war on August 23, 1944. A prime example of mis-information is Finger's claim about the "breakup of the death camp in Transnistria and release from there of tens of thousands of Jews" in return for four U.S. visas arranged by Hirschmann. I cannot go into detail here, but there were no death camps in Transnistria; there were terrible ghettos and camps where people starved and died of typhoid. These places were not broken up, the Jews were not released, except for small numbers of children and some special groups, and Hirschmann's influence was marginal.

There is a lot more of the same. Finger is indeed impartial; his errors are distributed equally over the whole article, and include most Jewish organizations, with no apparent bias. His conclusions resemble what is attributed to the late Levi Eshkol:

half coffee and half tea; or, more traditionally, neither meat nor milk.

**N**ext come Arthur Goldberg and Arthur Hertzberg. Why they should have insisted on a separate statement is beyond my comprehension: they say exactly the same as Finger, and repeat some of his worst howlers. They imply that after *Kristallnacht* (November 10, 1938) people knew that Hitler was bent on "total elimination" (murder?) of the Jews — which is simply not so. "The news of extermination which began in mid-1941 reached the West almost immediately" — if by "immediately" they mean the autumn of 1942, not 1941, then of course they are right. Riegner's cable is called an "account of the extermination camps," and there is more nonsense of this kind. When they mention the British decoding operation which (in 1942!) produced lists of transports to Auschwitz, they fail to mention the fact that these were lists of Poles destined for the concentration camp at Auschwitz, not of Jews for the gas chambers. The first reliable information about gas chambers in Auschwitz was received in the spring of 1944. Their earth-shattering conclusion is that Jewish leaders did not cry out effectively enough because they concluded that there were not many who would listen. Do we really need this kind of banality?

Some of the members of the commission who are not historians could not make head or tail of the finished papers; like Elizabeth Holtzman, they admit that there is no "comprehensive or final analysis of the response of American Jewish organi-

zations and leaders to the Holocaust." Some, like Morris Sherer, make special pleas for their own organizations. Others mouth platitudes.

The papers, on which the report is supposedly based, vary in quality, and some are very good indeed. Monty Penkower's analysis of the American and World Jewish Congress groups is balanced and well-documented — one can read the full analysis in his recent book, *The Jews Were Expendable* (University of Illinois Press). One need not agree with everything, but here at least is a scholar who, in a limited sphere, gives us some solid information.

David Kranzler writes on the Jewish Labor Committee and the Vaad Hahatzalah of the Orthodox group. His two papers are very angry and very determined; the angrier they are, the less convincing they become. However, Kranzler certainly says clearly who, in his opinion, the hero was: Orthodoxy, with its unorthodox ways, not bound to legality. The problem with Kranzler's sources should be mentioned. We in Israel face the scandal of the unavailability for historical research of the archives of Nathan Schwalb, the Hechalutz emissary in Switzerland. Kranzler claims, no doubt rightly, that the voluminous documentation in his possession provides the key to the understanding of the rescue attempts by the Orthodox section. One can only hope that all this will be or is deposited in a public archive where other scholars can check his footnotes. His account of the Musy negotiations with Himmler is in my view factually correct, but mistaken in interpretation. The same applies

to other parts of this very interesting case of what one might call "well-informed special pleading," but this requires precisely the kind of scholarly discussion that is by definition impossible in the framework of a quasi-judicial report.

Edward Pinsky writing on the Joint Distribution Committee starts off a section entitled "Critique of American Jewry and the Holocaust by Yehuda Bauer" with the words "Yehuda Bauer is known to be a steadfast apologist for American Jewish responses," etc. The section was not written by me, as one might erroneously infer, and as for my known apologia for American-Jewish leaders, Pinsky would do well to consult Samuel Merlin's paper, which follows his, and other analyses of my views in the different papers. There I emerge as a merciless critic. If they all attack me, I must be doing something right. The rest of Pinsky's contribution is not dissimilar to Finger's. Hasia Diner is equally weak on B'nai Brith. It is a relief to turn to the three papers of Hava Eshkoli, who deals with the Transnistrian problem; Livia Rothkirchen, who treats the Europa Plan with considerable expertise; and Bela Vago's piece on the Horthy offer of July, 1944, to let fairly large numbers of Jews escape from Hungary. The common denominator of these papers is that they have very little, or almost nothing, to do with the subject at hand. The only real issue is that the Europa Plan was brought to the knowledge of the JDC and WJC in New York — Gerhardt Riegner in Geneva seems to have had no inkling of it at the time — and nothing was done. These three papers are very useful

indeed, but do not help us in understanding Wise, Goldman, Baerwald, Proskauer, or Kalmanowitz.

Perhaps the most interesting paper in the Appendix to the Report is that of Saul S. Friedman, which discusses the problem of Jewish powerlessness. Friedman, too, is very angry, and he slips occasionally, sometimes very, very badly. Typical is his statement that while Wise procrastinated, between August 28 and November 24, 1942, "five to ten thousand Jews, victims of what Laqueur terms the ineptitude and naivete of Jewish leaders, are being evacuated daily from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka." I do not know how happy Walter Laqueur is to be used in this fashion, but the innuendoes and implications of Friedman's statement come very close to a blood libel. He says, in effect, that had Wise not procrastinated in those weeks Warsaw Jewry would not have been murdered. Or in other words, had he told American Jewry of the Riegner cable, pressure on the White House, between August 28 and September 13, when the deportations from Warsaw stopped, would have caused the U.S. government to stop Himmler's henchmen from murdering Warsaw Jews.

One wonders how this preposterous piece of irresponsibility found its way into the Goldberg Report, and can only hope that Friedman will recant — preferably in public. There are more statements like this, though not quite as bad; some result merely from ignorance, for instance those regarding Hungarian Jewry. But the main thrust of his contribu-



tion is to examine, in a comparative analysis, claims that Jews could not have influenced the American government. Whatever one thinks of his analysis, and I for one have serious reservations about it, it is methodologically quite legitimate.

Friedman compares possible Jewish attempts to open up the U.S. for Jewish immigration with actual pressure by other ethnic groups in America. One might object that the Irish and the Chinese are quite different both from each other and from the Jews, but the comparison is instructive. He also makes some interesting proposals of his own as to what American Jews should have done: for instance, they should have beamed radio broadcasts to Europe warning of death in Poland. Perhaps Friedman is unaware that this was in fact done by the BBC in several European languages, in July, 1942, and again in 1944. It did not have much effect, unfortunately. Other proposals include the tragicomic proposal of an ardent Zionist, M. Newman, who in December, 1943, promised to transfer two million Jews from Europe to Palestine — in two months. But Friedman also presents some more serious ideas, and these should be investigated: that American Jews had a real chance of changing immigration laws (very doubtful); that they should have voted Republican, or at least should have threatened to do so (who would have organized a bloc vote?); and that a conscious effort should have been made to counter the argument that the only way of saving Jews was to win the war. I think Friedman is right in saying that the latter was the most deadly argument of all, and I

think a case can be made that this is not an anachronistic point of view, but was actually voiced at the time. The whole problem of how much power the Jews had bears re-examination. I myself have written a book which Friedman apparently has missed, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness*, in which I take a perspective diametrically opposed to Friedman's. But contrary to some of the writers of the Goldberg Report, I do not claim absolute wisdom, and if somebody can prove I was wrong I will readily admit it. For the moment, Friedman is very stimulating, but totally unconvincing.

**T**he Goldberg Report is a flop. We have gained little insight into the motivations of American-Jewish leaders at each turning-point during the terrible years of the Holocaust. We have no greater knowledge of the constraints under which they operated. We have no analysis of the reasons behind the failure to unite in a meaningful way. The Zionists are supposed to have concentrated only on Palestine, but we know that the World Jewish Congress, which was a very active element in trying to implement rescue actions with destinations other than Palestine, was led and manned by Zionists. We have no better answer to the question whether Palestine — to which, after all, some at least were safely transported and which could have harbored more had the Zionists been more successful than they were — was not a more realistic answer to the cries of rescue than was, say, the Dominican Republic or the U.S., with its stringent quotas. We have a seemingly

contradictory picture of central figures such as Wise — the emotional, empathizing leader of anti-Nazi mass demonstrations, the subservient politician vis-à-vis Roosevelt, the fighter for Jewish rights, the man who prevented united action with the Bergsonites; we are no nearer to an understanding of his role. The same applies to the other central figures.

Finally, the question is — what could they have done? I myself am very doubtful indeed whether even a sympathetic America could have saved millions. I am convinced that they could have saved some, perhaps many, lives. That the Jewish leaders, in America and Palestine, could have done more, even within the narrow constraints they had to work in, is clear. It is necessary to see exactly where and why they did not do so, who proposed what and when and where, recognizing at the same time what they did do. My own work on the JDC shows that a compliant and unimaginative policy at the center was not necessarily followed in the field. The Europa Plan, for instance, despite what Merlin and

many others say, was rejected by the JDC and the WJC in America, at least initially, but Sally Mayer in Switzerland switched his views and undertook to send the money. In actual fact, the money — almost \$200,000 — was sent from Istanbul by representatives of the mainstream Jewish Agency there. We do not know whether it arrived.

The story is complicated, and the last thing we needed was a self-appointed committee with no knowledge of the background, backed by a mixed group of scholars, dilettantes, and students projecting conflicting images onto a misty screen. What we do need is more scholarship, and mutual fructification of divergent viewpoints. From such a process, we will, in the long run, learn more about ourselves and about our leadership, then and now, than we have from Arthur Goldberg's failed attempt. ■

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*iv Other Jewish Communities*



# Iraqi Jews during World War II

by Harold Paul Luks

The origins of organized Jewish life in Iraq coincided with the collapse of Jewish sovereignty over Palestine. Following their conquest of Judah in 587 BC, the victorious Babylonians had deported the vanquished Jews to the lands between the Tigris and the Euphrates known today as modern Iraq. Granted communal autonomy and religious toleration in exile, these Jewish captives found security in dispersion. Following the Persian conquest of the Babylonian Empire the Jews received permission in 538 BC to return to Jerusalem. But only a minority chose repatriation.

The Babylonian Jewish community continued to increase in numbers and wealth until the early Middle Ages. Through its rabbinic academies and by commentaries on the oral law, it exerted an inestimable religious and intellectual influence over the Diaspora. But it was only in the last decades of Ottoman rule that the Jews began to emerge from their medieval isolation and look to the future with optimism. Beginning in 1839, a period of Ottoman reform, the *Tanzimat*, was set in motion. The Ottomans sought to centralize the administration of their empire, primarily in order to arrest the corrosive effects of venality and maladministration which were destroying it from within and also to counter the threat of territorial encroachments by European powers. The new legislation was, in part, a demonstration to Europe that the empire could indeed administer its own affairs<sup>1</sup> and protect the status of its Christian and Jewish minorities. It should be remembered that in the nineteenth century the non-Muslim religious minorities were the principal agents and benefactors of European influence.<sup>2</sup>

Another objective of the *Tanzimat* was to redirect loyalty away from religious affiliation (through the *millet* system of non-Muslim

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religious communal organizations) towards identification with the Ottoman state. However, by seeking to restructure the traditional pattern of inequality between the Muslim majority and the non-Muslim minorities, considerable resentment was engendered. For Muslims, both tradition and religion established the superiority of Islam which now appeared endangered by the *Tanzimat*.

Nevertheless, reorganization of the *millet* system proceeded apace. To gain more control over the millets the state bureaucracy appointed governing councils with a greater number of laity than religious personages. The object of this reform was to break the hold of the priesthood and the rabbinate over their respective *millets*. Within the Jewish *millet*, this was tenaciously resisted. But an emerging class of Christians and Jews did support these changes. For example, in 1879, a serious dispute arose in Baghdad over the right of the Jewish community, led by secular elements, to remove the local chief rabbi.<sup>3</sup> These and other reforms, while expanding the role of the Ottomans, revolutionized and revitalized the infrastructure of Jewish communal life. Supported by financial contributions from an expanding Jewish merchant class, exposed to the ideas of the West, a variety of social, medical and educational organizations were developed. Assisted by the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and the Anglo-Jewish Association, modern schools were established in Baghdad and other cities. Versed in Western languages, the Jews, and to a lesser extent the Christians, were able to participate fully in the social changes which modernized nineteenth-century life in Iraq. By the middle of the century Jewish merchants in Baghdad already exercised considerable influence over Iraqi commerce.<sup>4</sup>

The traditional ruling class, composed of Sunni orthodox Muslims, was not prepared, however, to acquiesce in its subjection to increasing Ottoman control and its loss of supremacy over Jewish-Christian enterprise. The Jews, on the other hand, sought to preserve

a balance between the benefits they derived from modernization and westernization, while increasing their participation in the life of the empire. But the events immediately preceding World War I rendered this virtually impossible.

At first, both Arab and Jew welcomed the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and the restoration of constitutional government which had been suspended since 1878. The American consul in Baghdad reported that the Jews 'were enthusiastic over what they believed to be the future of Turkey'. In contrast, a number of Arabs had begun to voice demands for autonomy within the empire. Others called upon the Turks to end their presence in Iraq.<sup>5</sup> To this end a representative of a secret Arab nationalist society approached a group of Baghdadi bishops and rabbis who were asked to sign a petition requesting regional autonomy. Fearful of Turkish reprisals, the Christians and Jews declined to participate.<sup>6</sup> The policy of forced centralization adopted by the Young Turks, however, spelled the end of Ottomanism. As Arabs in Iraq pulled away from Istanbul and threatened rebellion, non-Muslims discovered that their security was endangered by political instability. With the unity of the empire disintegrating, the Jews were soon caught between Arab and Turkish nationalism.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 exacerbated existing political and religious rivalries in Iraq. Arab demands for autonomy continued unabated and appealed to an ever-growing audience. Yet, in spite of Turkish-Arab political differences, the defeat of Ottoman troops by Christians in the Balkans was insufferable to Muslims in Baghdad. This Islamic reaction, voiced at public meetings and in the press, generated fear among Christians and Jews for their continued safety. In Iraq, the defence of Islamic interests in the Balkans was sufficient to overshadow for a time an emerging Arab national identity.

With considerable prescience, the United States consul in Baghdad discerned the fundamental cause of this early incompatibility between the Muslim majority and the religious minorities:

'Because of their wealth and standing in trade, the native Christians and Jews would under a foreign non-Mohammedan country



probably rise to a prominent position. Under present conditions they are extremely apathetic so far as political affairs are concerned. . . . In theory all races in Turkey are equal before the law, but this is not true in practice. Mohammedanism looks down upon the *Rayas* [non-Muslim minorities] as they are taught to do, not because of their political but because of their religious ideas. Prejudices between the communities can wear away gradually and when all races are drawn together by common interests'.<sup>7</sup>

The experiment in creating a common Ottoman identity had failed. The attempt to forge an Iraqi nationality, out of all the races and religions from Mosul to Basra, was to meet a similar fate.

The *rayas* did not anticipate any benefit from Arab-Muslim rule. In view of the continuing public agitation against them, this was regarded with trepidation. The minorities, especially the Jews, were the victims of a not unwarranted communal paranoia. Many Muslims in Baghdad also believed an outburst of violence against the *rayas* probable. The American consul reported to his ambassador in Istanbul that

'as late as 10 years ago the life of a native Christian or Jew was never safe in Baghdad. If a Mohammedan wanted to put him out of the way, he could do so without fear of punishment. . . . This state of affairs was finally put an end to until Nazim Pasha became Vali [local governor] in 1909. As the old mistrust of the races has not yet disappeared, they probably would not unite in a move for independence or autonomy'.<sup>8</sup>

A general disillusionment with the 1908 revolution and the effects of World War I turned nearly all sections of the population against the Young Turks. Yet not everyone agreed that Ottoman sovereignty should be superseded by Arab independence. The war resulted in a constriction of trade, confiscations by the military and the enforced collection of exorbitant war taxes. Life in Iraq was difficult for all, irrespective of religious confession. However, inspired by the Turkish persecution of the Armenians, local officials in Baghdad began to arrest and deport leading Christians and Jews. 'Is it any wonder', wrote the US

consul, 'that these people consider this action as religious persecution?'<sup>9</sup> The silence of the Muslim gentry during these oppressions reinforced the isolation of the minorities.

Anglo-French wartime assurances of support for Arab independence gave way in peacetime to the imposition of the League of Nations' mandates. This European partition of the Middle East shattered Arab nationalist hopes for a pan-Arab state incorporating Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Among Iraqi leaders the concept of Arab unity was temporarily suspended but not abandoned. Following the occupation of Iraq, the British, plagued by inefficient administration and nationalist agitation, were forced to suppress a bloody insurrection. To enhance control over the country, the Foreign Office favoured the creation of an Iraqi monarchy under British sway. To this end, Feisal, eldest son of the politically powerful Hashemite family from Mecca, was elevated to the Iraqi throne in 1921.

Within one year of Feisal's accession, prominent Shiite leaders (more numerous in Iraq than the orthodox Sunnis) were arrested and deported, and others fled the country. From the outset of British tutelage over Iraq, the Kurdish tribes and Christian Assyrians remained 'unanimously opposed to coming under Arab rule'.<sup>10</sup> Misgivings within the Jewish community also led many to prefer a British protectorate over Iraq. In fact, the Jews began to commemorate the British occupation as a modern *Purim*, or deliverance from tyranny.<sup>11</sup>

Anglo-Iraqi relations were regularized by a treaty signed in 1930, which also provided for the maintenance of British military bases and transit rights for Commonwealth troops. In return, London terminated the mandate and sponsored Iraqi membership in the League of Nations. In the process, the British ignored Iraq's long history of inter-communal animosities. Testifying before the League's Mandates Commission, the High Commissioner for Iraq declared that he 'had never found such tolerance of other races and religions as in Iraq'.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, from the perspective of the Jewish community, the years of the mandate had not been unfavourable. They saw in the British a restraining hand preventing overt discrimination against them. The reliance of the Mandatory Power on the loyalty

of the minorities was based on this assumption. Thus, many Jews were employed in the sensitive ministries of posts, telegraphs, railroads, ports and finance.

Following the British retreat in 1932 from active intervention in the administration of the country, the Sunni Muslims, though numerically a minority, were able to reassert their traditional control. As if to seek revenge for their years of political impotence under Turkish and British rule, they undertook a discriminatory political programme of their own. A United States Central Intelligence Group study noted that since the early 1930s

' discrimination against the Jews has become noticeable. They are treated with exceptional strictness in the matter of income tax assessments, and are discriminated against in government employment and in admission to government schools. The proportion of Jews in government service and institutions of higher learning . . . has been rapidly declining '.

Officially inspired discrimination, the study concluded, was less apparent ' because the Jews are content to remain within their own community and eschew government service and the government-sponsored schools ' .<sup>13</sup>

Jewish communal self-reliance was encouraged in 1931 with the enactment of a new regulatory law for the organization of the community.<sup>14</sup> Replacing older Ottoman legislation, it sanctioned a modern variety of the *millet* system. Undoubtedly welcomed by the Jews, the law was an anomaly within the context of the nationalist Iraqi state, but recognized the centrality of religious affiliation in Middle Eastern history. It might have proved a satisfactory arrangement if the Jews had been permitted to participate, through their communal institutions, in the development of modern Iraq. The overwhelming majority of Jews were, however, denied access to the benefits of government services and the Iraqi government made it impossible for them to sustain their own communal institutions.

During the prelude to independence, Iraqi nationalists began to fuse pan-Arabism with anti-Zionism. More often than not, the latter was simply a cloak for antisemitism. In 1929 the American consul in Baghdad observed an early anti-Zionist demonstration. He saw it as

'inspired partly by sympathy with the Arabs of Palestine' and also by 'a desire to make political capital out of Palestinian developments'.<sup>15</sup> Thus the future status of the Jewish minority depended on Middle Eastern diplomatic developments no less than on domestic politics.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II a coterie of Arabs, expelled by the British from Palestine, arrived in Baghdad. Led by Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, they were intent upon continuing their agitation against the British and the Jews in the Middle East. In Iraq they felt encouraged by 'sympathetic surroundings'<sup>16</sup> in which they could draw support from Arab nationalists and anti-Zionists. There was, however, another aspect of the Mufti's mass appeal. US military intelligence in Cairo judged that Haj Amin's

'anti-British attitude was adopted before Nazism was heard of and was solely activated by his hatred of the Jews. . . . He has intimates in responsible positions in Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Egypt and Iran. The binding influence in these friendships is a common antisemitism'.<sup>17</sup>

The penetration of German influence into Iraq further amplified the Mufti's message. Pro-German, anti-British officers in the Iraqi army, influential student leaders educated in Germany, Axis radio propaganda and the presence of German agents helped to poison the atmosphere for the British and the Jews. The nationalist press, led by the Baghdad daily *Al-Istiqlal*, further unsettled local conditions by charging the minorities with undermining the security of the state. Western diplomatic observers understood such articles to be 'directed against the Jews'.<sup>18</sup> They also believed that the continuing victories of the Axis in Europe would provoke an anti-Jewish outburst, eventually engulfing the Europeans. In combination, these factors threatened to undermine the political stability of the country and did not augur well for Iraq remaining outside the Axis camp.<sup>19</sup>

In the evening hours of 2 April 1941 Rashid Ali al-Gailani, a former Prime Minister, and four colonels staged a *coup d'état*, forcing the resignation of the government. It soon became apparent that the new regime was contemplating a defection to the Axis. The *putsch* and

Rashid Ali's refusal to permit the passage of British troops across the country was given prominence in the German press. This constituted a clear repudiation of stipulations in the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and provided the British with a pretext to invade and occupy the country.<sup>20</sup>

The reconquest of Iraq by Britain had immediate repercussions for Jews in the Middle East and North Africa. Axis radio exploited the news of the invasion which helped to incite a riot in Gabes, Tunisia. Six Jews were murdered as they left a synagogue and 16 others were wounded.<sup>21</sup> In Baghdad on 1-2 June 1941 as the British army advanced to the outskirts of the city, serious rioting erupted. Although it enveloped some British-owned property, the focus of the disorders was against the city's Jewish residents. Several hundred Jews were slaughtered, many more wounded, and a considerable amount of property was looted and destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

American diplomatic and military despatches, largely derived from information supplied by the British, alleged that the pogrom was 'instigated by agents of Rashid Ali'.<sup>23</sup> This explanation avoided the actual causes of the outrage against the Jews. By blaming the riot on the machinations of a few individuals, the British absolved the general population of responsibility for the murdering and pillaging. With this aim in mind, Britain did not want to appear as the protector of the Jews by ferreting out the perpetrators of the bloodshed.

Writing two years after the event, the US Minister in Baghdad further exonerated the local Arab masses. 'According to Moslem-Arab sources, one of the immediate causes of this attack on the Jews by the mob was the jubilant attitude . . . of the Baghdadi Jews, many of whom openly celebrated the British victory and did not conceal their scorn and contempt for Arab-Moslems in general'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the Jews were blamed for their own destruction. In its way, the Minister's report revealed the wide popularity enjoyed among the masses by the pro-Nazi Rashid Ali regime.

Throughout the remaining years of the war, the British and the Americans in Iraq observed the anti-Jewish manifestations with circumspection. Deserted by the British and nearly

isolated from the Jewish community in Palestine, the Jews of Iraq were forced to survive on their own resources which were increasingly taxed by the Iraqi administration.

The initial military triumphs of the Axis led many Arabs to conclude that the Allied cause was lost. This emboldened their support for the Nazis which was, in part, animated by their detestation of the British. But the pronouncements of the Mufti and the Axis, equating the British and Jews as enemies of Islam, increasingly directed Arab hostility against the Jews, who were in a far more exposed position. British military intelligence reported the existence of 'hostile cells working on behalf of the enemy and ready to create disturbances when a suitable opportunity presents itself'. It was this underground which printed and distributed leaflets denouncing the Jews. One of these proclaimed that 'Rashid Ali, the Leader of the Arabs, is returning with ropes and gallows to hang a number of criminal Jews, Christian traitors and other enemies of Islam'.<sup>25</sup>

It was not, however, the rightist underground which constituted the most serious threat to the security of the Jewish community. Their safety was ultimately contingent upon the willingness of Premier Nuri es-Said, backed by the British, to keep anti-Jewish activity in check. In December 1942 the Ministry of the Interior, which censored the press, permitted the circulation of a 'bitterly anti-Zionist article'. This article, analogous to the underground leaflets, fused political prejudice with religious intolerance. Imputing Zionist disloyalty to the Allied war effort and affirming Arab fidelity, the article asserted that this was racially determined. 'International Jewry is still the same in its principles, selfishness, and intrigues, still the same as generations and ages have known it'. Significantly, the US Legation believed 'that Nuri Pasha was directly responsible for the publication of this inflammatory article'.

American diplomatic observers foresaw the possibility of a renewed anti-Jewish campaign which 'would not require much fuel to burn bright'. The Iraqi government's preoccupation with creating a Jewish Question was seen as an attempt to divert 'the minds of the populace from the nation's pressing internal problems'.<sup>26</sup>

Anti-Zionism facilitated identification with

the government by those Iraqis previously attracted by similar protestations from Rashid Ali and Haj Amin al-Husseini. The Nuri es-Said government, as if to deny the nationalist charge of subservience to the British, appointed Hisam ud-Din Jum'a, a former confederate of Rashid Ali as Director-General of Supply. Simultaneously, the British were urging his internment as having been 'among the fascist premier's right-hand men'. This was not the kind of reassurance the Iraqi Jewish community required in the aftermath of the most violent pogrom in its modern history. Jum'a was among those held responsible, by an official Iraqi investigatory commission, for having failed to order the police to fire on the Baghdadi mob run amuck. If such action had been taken the rioting and bloodshed of June 1941 would have been forestalled.

The anti-Zionist campaign coincided with the submission by Nuri es-Said of his plan for a Fertile Crescent Federation to the British government. For several months, in both London and Baghdad, Arab unity was an increasingly important topic for serious consideration. Hence, it was no coincidence that the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, announced his support for Arab unity as British troops advanced on Baghdad in May 1941. The plan diminished the effectiveness of Axis propaganda favouring a union of the Arabs and other promises of political support. The new emphasis on Pan-Arabism led, however, to a growing preoccupation with the Palestine Question and with Zionist endeavours to create a Jewish state, which was seen as threatening Muslim Arab unity. In wartime Iraq, opposition to the development of a Jewish national home provided a platform from which Nuri es-Said and the British could advocate the concept of a pan-Arab federation.<sup>27</sup> It suggested a renewed British ascendancy in the Middle East through the extension of Iraqi-Hashemite control over Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and possibly Trans-Jordan.

Whether or not pan-Arab unity was politically realizable, its advocacy helped to consolidate divergent Muslim groups within Iraq behind the government. Religious hatreds had for centuries prevented common action between Shiites and Sunnis. Yet both branches of Islam displayed a tendency to unite when

facing non-Muslims. If a pan-Arab state had been created in the post-war years, the Shiites would have been reduced from a majority in Iraq to a religious minority in a pan-Arab state. Anti-Zionism was, therefore, a convenient device by which to submerge Shiite opposition to a Sunni-dominated Arab federation.

It was similar reasoning which made the promotion of anti-Zionism attractive in the region of the lower Euphrates. Here the direct rule of Baghdad was circumscribed by the independence of the tribal sheikhs. In this region the assistant US military attaché found intense antagonism towards Zionism. Encouraged by the Iraqi government, and perhaps by British political officers in the countryside, anti-Zionism enabled the authorities to present themselves as the guardian of Islam against the Jews and thereby to merit the allegiance of the tribes.<sup>28</sup>

The British also believed that their advocacy of pan-Arabism and approval of Iraqi anti-Zionism would be politically productive. Through propaganda and diplomacy they sought to divert Iraqi nationalism into championing the cause of Arab unity. Moreover, against the background of Anglo-French rivalry for influence over Syria and Lebanon, Nuri es-Said's proposals worked for the British against the French.<sup>29</sup>

The most difficult problem confronting Britain in the Middle East remained, however, the Palestine deadlock. In 1943, Colonel S. F. Newcombe, a former associate of T. E. Lawrence, travelled to Baghdad. His unofficial visit was designed to convince the Iraqis of the merits of the 1939 White Paper on Palestine which formally ended Britain's commitment to a Jewish state. His lectures and discussions assiduously avoided any reference to the Balfour Declaration. The object was to demonstrate London's understanding and sympathy for the Arab cause in the Holy Land. Parallel with his visit, the Baghdadi press, with the encouragement of the British embassy, began printing articles emphasizing American support for Zionism, in order to deflect Arab frustration over Palestine away from Britain.<sup>30</sup>

All these diplomatic manoeuvres were not particularly favourable to the Iraqi Jews. Moreover, it was evident that if Palestine were to be incorporated into an Arab federation this



would effectively end the prospects of a mass Jewish emigration to that country. True, the Iraqi press did periodically stress that Arab antipathy was directed only against Zionism and not toward the indigenous Jewish community. It was claimed that Jews and Arabs had throughout their history maintained amicable relations 'until the development of political Zionism'.<sup>31</sup> British and American officials resident in Iraq accepted this Arab assertion that Zionism and Judaism were completely distinct.

However, in 1943 when the anti-Zionist press campaign reached its peak, US military intelligence confirmed a suspicion held by many Jews. Based upon accumulated evidence, it was reported to Washington that the 'anti-Zionist campaign in the Baghdadi press and radio was a well-organized propaganda scheme' originating with the Prime Minister 'and approved by [the] British Embassy'.<sup>32</sup> Despite all denials, the Baghdadi press became 'sporadically anti-semitic'. Even so, the British continued to express exasperation over Jewish inability to 'believe that any distinction is made between Zionists and Jews'.<sup>33</sup>

But this distinction ignored the fact that for Iraqi Muslims, the entire Jewish community was tainted with Zionism until proved otherwise. When the Iraqi government announced an anti-hoarding campaign it was 'directed exclusively against Jews and Shias'. This was seen as the beginning of 'serious anti-Jewish treatment' chiefly by 'means of confiscatory taxation',<sup>34</sup> which threatened to undermine the foundation of Jewish communal life. Following independence, Iraq had pledged itself to support the educational, religious and charitable institutions of her racial, religious and linguistic minorities. In those areas where they formed a considerable proportion of the population, the state was to provide assistance from public funds. But these were never forthcoming. Compounding the payment of national taxes, the Jews had to impose additional taxes upon themselves which were by no means sufficient to cover the operating costs of the community's schools and hospitals. These latter expenses were covered by voluntary contributions from their own merchant class, and this alone permitted communal viability.<sup>35</sup> Economic discrimination by the government inexorably led, however, to the

closure of Jewish-sponsored schools and hospitals. Denied the benefits of government services and unable to sustain their own communities, Iraqi Jews found themselves once more in the impoverished and isolated conditions of the early nineteenth century.

Writing in 1945, Loy W. Henderson, the US Minister in Iraq, conceded 'that Jews are treated with exceptional strictness in the matter of income tax assessments' and denied equal access to government employment and schools. But the serious effects of this discrimination were belittled by ascribing to the Jews atypical and abnormal characteristics. Unequal treatment against them, according to Henderson, was 'compensated for to a large extent by their amazing adaptability and dexterity in attaining their aims in the face of legal and other obstacles'.<sup>36</sup> Such diplomatic myopia prevented a critical evaluation of the Jews' predicament in Iraq.

Arab-Muslim enmity towards Jews and Judaism was brought into focus whenever it justified opposition to Zionist claims in Palestine. An agent for the American secret service, the OSS, discerned that many Arabs regarded Judaism as

'the oldest religion and a backward one. Arabs tend to judge the Zionists by the colony of old-time Jews in Baghdad. Most, in the Arab mind, are miserly, cowardly, and unclean. So the idea of a portion of the Arab world being governed by Jews is intolerable. Palestine, therefore, has become more than a remote political problem, it is now a question of personal religion and honor'.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately for Jews in Iraq this was indeed an accurate description of Arab-Muslim prejudice.

The assassination of Lord Moyne, the British Minister of State for the Middle East, by Jewish terrorists in Egypt in November 1944, intensified the consternation among Iraqi Jews. A viciously antisemitic article now circulated in Baghdad characterized them as

'the only people who always cause mischief to every nation which renders them any good; people without any feeling of gratitude whatever . . . they are the main elements of vice in the blackmarket, a bloodthirsty element in all the countries of God's earth,

the only nation which knows no Home Country to which it belongs and can seek refuge and which is composed of evil, crime and vice'.<sup>38</sup>

Such antisemitic invective was by no means limited to the uneducated masses or to individual government officials but was also voiced by the intellectual elite. One case in point was the nationalist leader, Dr Sami Shawkat, who had advocated pan-Arab unity throughout the 1930s and was a leading critic of British dominion in the Middle East. Initially, a supporter of Rashid Ali, he later identified with Nuri es-Said's Pan-Arab scheme and was brought under the Premier's wing. He was prominent in efforts to introduce Nazi ideology into the state school system and to promote the *Muthanna* student movement which was 'the centre of pro-Axis propaganda in Baghdad'. These undertakings, in which he was aided by his collaborator Fadhil al-Jamali, were not without substantial effect.<sup>39</sup>

During his tenure in Iraq, Loy W. Henderson reported that al-Jamali was one of the 'leaders of a group of youngish Iraqi intellectuals . . . whose influence in the country is gradually increasing' and whose views represented those 'held by thousands of intelligent Iraqis'.<sup>40</sup> During his political career, which stretched into the 1950s, al-Jamali was to hold the posts of Ambassador to the United Nations, Foreign Minister and the Premiership. His attitude towards Iraqi Jews synthesized Muslim political and religious sensibilities over Palestine with an economically motivated antisemitism.

'The Jews in Iraq, with the help of international Jewry and the moral support of Great Britain, began to dominate the economic life of the country. Imports and exports became concentrated in their hands. This led to a Jewish scare not only in Palestine, but also in Iraq. Many Iraqis thought that the fate of Iraq would not eventually be any better than that of Palestine. This Jewish economic domination certainly led to an increase of anti-British and anti-Jewish feeling'.<sup>41</sup>

American diplomatic and psychological warfare specialists chose to play down this indigenous anti-Jewish feeling in the Middle

East. The Western orientation of the region, it was argued, depended on denying 'all allegations of an Allied interest favourable to the Jews' and the resolution of the Palestine conflict in such a way that the Arabs would be the principal beneficiaries.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, Muslim 'toleration' of the Jews was emphasized and Arab nationalist xenophobia minimized. The apotheosis of this reasoning was contained in a report by Loy Henderson which was forwarded to the Secretary of State. Commending al-Jamali's economic antisemitism, Henderson asserted that the Arabs were aroused 'by the public dishonesty, profiteering and greed of some of the Jewish merchants who play a leading role in the retail trade'.<sup>43</sup> Such an interpretation altogether ignored the Nationalist motivations of Iraqi politicians.

Pan-Arab nationalist policy was to hold the Iraqi Jewish community hostage, while calling for the termination of Zionist activities in Palestine. At the same time, American diplomats and Iraqi leaders continued to blame Zionism for the deteriorating conditions of Jewish life in Iraq. Loy Henderson stated that

'the number of instances . . . in which violence has been done to Jews is surprisingly small when one takes into consideration the bitterness which Zionist activities has aroused among Iraqi Arabs; the feelings—not entirely unfounded—that many Iraqi Jews are secretly sympathetic to Zionism, which they hope will result in Jewish ascendancy in the Near East'.<sup>44</sup>

Anti-Zionists in the US foreign policy establishment clearly hoped to use the Middle Eastern Jewish communities, as an instrument to forestall Western support for a Jewish state. In 1943 President Roosevelt authorized Lt.-Col. Halford B. Hoskins, a veteran of diplomatic service in several Arab countries, to undertake a fact-finding mission to the Middle East. Among his conclusions, Hoskins predicted the massacre of Jews in Iraq and Syria should Arab-Jewish fighting erupt in Palestine.<sup>45</sup>

The most widely known of Arab wartime leaders, Nuri es-Said, publicly voiced the same warning. In August 1944, while imploring other Arab leaders to join a Fertile Crescent Federation, he underscored the danger confronting Jews in Arab countries. 'Reaction to

the "Nazi-like proposals" of the Zionists for Palestine', he declared could turn the wrath of the Arabs against the Jews. Iraqi Jews were strongly urged to dissociate themselves from Zionism and thereby ensure their safety since Arab leaders made it clear that the fate of the Jews in their countries would depend on achieving Arab supremacy in Palestine.<sup>46</sup> Thus at the UN in 1947, Al-Jamali, remarked that the interests and welfare of 600,000 Jews in Arab countries would be jeopardized if 'Zionist aggression' was successful.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of these unsettling conditions for the Jewish minority, Anglo-American diplomats and Iraqi leaders did not foresee the possibility of Jewish emigration to Palestine or other countries. Ostensibly, conditions in Iraq did not yet warrant an exodus of Jews. Reports to Washington claimed that 'since the last war many Iraqi Jews have visited Palestine and have stayed there for varying lengths of time; few have remained'. This was attributed to the impression that 'European Jews have a tendency to look down upon the Iraqi Jews as an inferior breed'.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, between 1924 and 1944, 5,581 Iraqi Jews had legally emigrated to Palestine. This was the second largest number of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, exceeded only by those from Yemen.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, these official statistics did not take into account Jews who had left Iraq clandestinely during the war years, when the government imposed a virtual ban on Jewish emigration. They were smuggled into Palestine by Palestinian Jewish units serving in Britain's Middle Eastern armies.<sup>50</sup> Significantly, almost none of the Jews who chose Palestine elected to return to Iraq.

The number of Jews who left Iraq during World War II, either legally or covertly, did not truly reflect the Jewish response to the incessant pressures of anti-Zionism and anti-semitism. Within the Jewish community there was a constant searching for alternatives, none of which provided an answer to the ultimate question of how the community could guarantee its survival in Iraq.

The few countries accepting Jewish refugees reserved their immigration quotas for the survivors of the Holocaust in Europe. Understandably, clandestine travel to Palestine across the Iraqi and Jordanian deserts was fraught

with dangers and difficulties. In any event, it was a journey few could undertake. There simply was nowhere to go.

As with members of the Christian and Kurdish minorities, a small number of Jews turned towards the Iraqi Communist Party, and in 1945 organized an Anti-Zionist League. Officially, the Jewish communal leadership neither approved nor condemned the League's activities. The government permitted it to function for a short period before proscribing the organization. Evidently fear of a communist-inspired association outweighed the showcase advantage of Jews denouncing Zionism.<sup>51</sup>

Others, mostly young people fearful of another pogrom, sought out representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, who were operating undercover in Iraq. But for the majority of Jews, Zionism as a political ideology held little promise of improving their deteriorating conditions. Convictions for Zionist activities by Iraqi courts carried heavy criminal penalties. Moreover, the new passport regulations, which applied only to Jews, required a deposit of 5,000 Iraqi Dinars (\$20,000) as a bond ensuring their non-emigration to Palestine. The American legation, in one instance, was prepared to issue US immigration visas to a Jewish woman and her daughter provided they obtained validated Iraqi passports. This proved to be an impossibility, as they could not afford the equivalent of \$40,000, even though 'it was perfectly obvious that they wished to travel to the United States'.

By the end of the war, most US diplomats stationed in Iraq agreed that large-scale violence might explode at any time against the Jews. The head of the US Legation telegraphed Washington requesting instructions on the admittance of Jews into the US compound, should anti-Jewish rioting occur.<sup>52</sup> William Moreland Jr, second secretary of the Baghdad legation, predicted that if Iraqi economic conditions deteriorated 'there would be no doubt the usual search for a convenient whipping boy with mob appeal. The Jew has filled this role before'.<sup>53</sup> Most Jews foresaw a similar eventuality.

In a private interview with a member of the American consular staff, a leader of the Baghdadi Jewish community admitted that a

small number of Jews had already received material assistance from the Jewish Agency to begin a programme of self-defence training. However, he recognised that the Jews would be helpless in the face of large-scale rioting. With a pessimism nourished by years of official discrimination and violence, he had little faith in the readiness of the state to protect its Jewish minority. He was convinced that the army and police would even participate in plundering the Jews, as they had done in 1941, should a new wave of rioting occur.<sup>54</sup> This understandable fear of violence and apprehension for the future eroded for most Jews any remaining semblance of their Iraqi identity. Iraqi domestic politics and international diplomacy had made it impossible for them to make the transition from participation in the Ottoman multi-national empire to assimilation in a nationalist Muslim state.

The Jewish question in Iraq was eventually resolved by the emergence of Israel. By no means the cause of the crisis besetting Iraq Jewry, Israel provided a refuge from an increasingly unbearable situation. After 14 May 1948 Jews began escaping by the hundreds to Israel via Iran.<sup>55</sup> On 4 March 1950 this haphazard exodus was legalized and 113,545 Iraqi Jews were flown to Israel by the end of December 1951. Only a very small number remained behind. Nevertheless, 2,538 years of Jewish communal history in the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates were at an end—only to begin anew in their ancestral homeland.

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**PATTERNS OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP IN GREAT BRITAIN  
DURING THE NAZI ERA**

*Bernard Wasserstein*

The response of Anglo-Jewry to the crisis of the Nazi period differed significantly from that of other major Jewish communities. The differences arose to a large extent out of the unique social and political context within which the leadership of Anglo-Jewry operated and from the special characteristics of the communal structure. Indeed, the very nature of Jewish leadership in England, as well as its *modus operandi*, diverged fundamentally from the patterns of other major communities. A comparative assessment of the role of Jewish leadership must begin by taking account of the unique social and political culture of Anglo-Jewry.

Perhaps the most salient distinction between Anglo-Jewish and American-Jewish leadership was that in England the Jews did not function politically as an ethnic group. Indeed the whole notion of ethnic politics is alien to English political culture (even today in spite of the large influx since the 1950s of West and East Indian immigrants). There was no organized Jewish vote in England; there were no significant Jewish issues in politics; there was no sense of the Jews as an ethnic lobby. Jewish leaders in England, unlike the U.S.A., could deliver nothing by way of votes, money, or organization to those in high places whom they courted. Probably for this reason Anglo-Jewry did not have leaders who acquired importance in the non-Jewish world simply because they were Jewish leaders: there were no British equivalents of Stephen S. Wise or Abba Hillel Silver, nor of David Ben Gurion or Moshe Shertok.

Jewish leadership in Britain between 1933 and 1945 may be divided into two types. First, there were those who held elected or appointed positions of importance within the Jewish community and who consequently exercised some external representative function. Examples of this type were such figures

as Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz and Professor Selig Brodetsky, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews from 1939. Second, there were those who derived their internal importance as Jewish leaders from the external prominence they had gained or inherited in the non-Jewish world. Examples of this type included politicians such as Viscount Samuel, former Home Secretary and High Commissioner in Palestine, and businessmen such as Sir Robert Waley Cohen, one of the creators of the Shell Oil company. Although some self-made men were beginning to make their appearance in the Jewish community in this period—for example, Sidney Silverman in politics and Simon Marks in business—the second category still consisted in the main of members of the old-established Anglo-Jewish gentry affectionately portrayed by Chaim Bermant in his amusing book *The Cousinhood*.<sup>1</sup> The difference between the two types was thus also frequently one of social class and this fact gave a special flavor to the internal debates of Jewish leadership in England.

The case of Chaim Weizmann might, at first sight, appear to constitute an exception to the pattern described. But it is not, for his external importance derived not from his role as a leader of Anglo-Jewry but rather from the perception of him by the British political elite as the major representative figure of that mythical unity, “world Jewry.” For this reason, although often regarded as the most important Jewish leader resident in Britain in this period, Weizmann cannot properly be regarded as an Anglo-Jewish leader, and a consideration of his very important role falls outside the framework of this analysis. So too does that of émigré Jewish politicians who had found refuge in Britain. Important though their activities were, particularly in the dissemination of news from Europe of Nazi atrocities, they cannot be viewed as part of the Anglo-Jewish leadership.

In its organizational structure the Jewish community in Britain was much more centralized than that of the U.S.A. Leadership was concentrated in one dominant religious institution, the United Synagogue (whose head, the Chief Rabbi, was recognized by many congregations which were not members of the United Synagogue), and one dominant secular body, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which has had statutory recognition as the representative organ of the community since 1836. In its centralized structure Anglo-Jewish leadership appears closer to the pattern of the *Yishuv* (Jewish community) in Palestine. But such a comparison points immediately to the fundamental weakness of the Anglo-Jewish structure: unlike Palestine, where the central institutions of the *Yishuv* commanded the primary political loyalty of the majority of the community, and where the leadership could mobilize its members (albeit on a voluntary basis) politically and even militarily, the

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Anglo-Jewish leadership commanded no such automatic loyalty. In a liberal, assimilationist environment, Jewish loyalties competed with others in the marketplace of political and social solidarities. The ability of Jewish leadership to mobilize the community in Britain was inferior both to that of Palestine and, because of the absence of the ethnic political dimension and because of its much smaller size, to that of the U.S.A.

The special character and structure of Anglo-Jewish leadership helped to determine the ground rules of political action. The weakness in capacity for mobilization meant that the Anglo-Jewish leadership could not operate through institutions characteristic of Palestinian Jewry such as mass political parties, trade unions, and underground military forces, nor through public meetings, propaganda, and ethnic political lobbying after the fashion of American Jewry. However, in the context of British political culture, the inability to mobilize constituted in many ways less of a drawback than might appear. For in spite of the superficial democratization of British politics, concepts such as the "corridors of power," the "establishment," and the "magic circle" still had life and meaning in the 1930s and 1940s. The passion for secrecy which the late Richard Crossman detected in British political life as late as the 1960s was still omnipresent in the earlier period. Decisions of importance were still being taken in Pall Mall clubs rather than in public forums. The effectiveness of political action by the Anglo-Jewish leadership consequently depended less on its ability to mobilize its constituency than in its access to influential quarters; in this its centralized nature (and its deployment of the "notable" category of leaders, those with an external, non-Jewish basis of importance) served the community well. Professor Lewis Namier, who as a historian had such an unerring eye for the real locations of power, betrayed a similar capacity when, in his work for the Zionist Organization during the war, he made a habit of standing in the hall of the Athenaeum Club, ready to waylay any unwary Colonial Office official who might enter. In the British context such buttonholing might be as effective as a monster demonstration in Madison Square Garden in the American.

The effectiveness of the Anglo-Jewish leadership's response to the European Jewish crisis was, as elsewhere, predicated on its information about and understanding of Nazi policy toward the Jews. In the prewar period, when there was free communication between Germany and Britain, information about Nazi atrocities was extensively published both in the general press, most notably the *Manchester Guardian*, and in the *Jewish Chronicle*. The national character of a greater part of the British press and the special position of the *Jewish Chronicle* as a nationally distributed newspaper of the Anglo-Jewish community meant that information about the Jews in Europe was

often more readily available to the Anglo-Jewish leadership than was the case in the U.S.A. with its localized and often parochial press, both general and Jewish. From 1933 onward the Board of Deputies published pamphlets containing extracts from reports in such papers as *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Daily Telegraph* that detailed the persecution of Jews in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

After the outbreak of war, although the free flow of news from Nazi Europe was impeded, it did not dry up. The *Jewish Chronicle*, indeed, published remarkably early and accurate accounts of the stages of Nazi mass murder. On November 10, 1939, it carried the headlines: "Forcible Exodus: Nazis Send Thousands to Lublin: Ghetto-State of 4 Million?" On December 15, 1939: "Mass Murder in Poland: Three Thousand Suicides: Burials Day and Night." On January 12, 1940: "'Annihilating Polish Jewry.' Nazis Boasted Aim: Over 120,000 Victims Already: Nazi Atrocities Confirmed: Mass Slaughter of Polish Jews." On October 24, 1941: "Ghastly Pogroms in Ukraine: Thousands of Corpses in River Dniester: 8,000 Slain in Synagogues." On November 7 it reported: "Almost One Third of the Entire Jewish Population of Bessarabia Was Exterminated." On November 14 it reported a ban on all Jewish emigration from territory controlled by Germany. In January 1942 it reported that poison-gas experiments had taken place in the Mauthausen camp. Throughout 1942 the development of the Nazi mechanism of systematic destruction of the Jews continued to be reflected in the *Jewish Chronicle*. On December 11, 1942 the newspaper appeared with a black border and the headline: "Two Million Jews Slaughtered: Most Terrible Massacre of All Time: Appalling Horrors of Nazi Mass Murders." And on May 7, 1943: "Warsaw Ghetto Battle: Jews Went Down Fighting: Nazis Use Tanks."

The archives of the major Jewish organizations reveal the wealth of information available to them from a variety of quarters concerning the Jewish position in Europe. Thus the report of the Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association for November–December 1941 stated: "It is reported that after the occupation of Kiev, the Nazi authorities deliberately murdered 52,000 people—Jews and non-Jews."<sup>3</sup> The report for July–August 1942 stated:

An order for the deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto was issued recently, and daily about seven thousand were being removed to "an unknown destination." There seems to be reason for believing that these deportees are being killed before they reach any destination. The Chairman of the Council of the Warsaw Ghetto, Engineer Chermiakow (*sic*), whom the Gestapo tried to compel to prepare the

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daily lists of the people to be removed from the ghetto, refused to give them those lists and took his own life rather than comply.<sup>4</sup>

The archives of the British section of the World Jewish Congress contain the reports from Switzerland of Gerhart M. Riegner, including his famous message of August 1942 to Sidney Silverman, Chairman of the British Section, and Stephen S. Wise. Although the British Foreign Office regarded the account of a Nazi plan for total elimination of the Jews as a "rather wild story" it did permit Riegner's message to be communicated to Silverman.<sup>5</sup> The message was succeeded by others, such as Riegner's letter to Silverman of October 3, 1942: "Deportees (*sic*) are going on in an accelerated way from Belgium, France, Holland, Germany and all countries in the East including Poland. There are only two countries where until now these measures are not yet applied, i.e., Italy and Hungary."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the Zionist Organization office in London received a stream of reports from Richard Lichtheim, the Zionist representative in Geneva. For example, on September 26, 1942, Lichtheim cabled to London: "All information lately received confirms previous reports about extermination Jews following deportation from various countries to Germany or Poland."<sup>7</sup> And three days later Lichtheim wrote that the "total destruction of the Jewish communities in Belgium and Holland" was nearly complete and that "the most gruesome reports" were coming out of Poland.<sup>8</sup>

Of course it was not merely a matter of information but also of understanding, and in this respect the Anglo-Jewish leadership was in general no more foresighted than Jewish leaders elsewhere. When representatives of the Anglo-Jewish community wrote to the Home Secretary in April 1933 about Jewish refugees from Germany they estimated that the numbers coming to Britain "might be as many as 3,000 to 4,000."<sup>9</sup> By the outbreak of the war the number of arrivals had reached 50,000. Studies recently published have analyzed the process whereby information about Nazi mass murder reached the West during the war, and these have stressed the gap between information and understanding.<sup>10</sup> This gap is evident in the records of the major Jewish organizations. In spite of the massive information at the disposal of the Zionist Organization it is not until November 25, 1942 that the "Extermination of Jews" first appears on the agenda of the meetings of the Zionist political "high command" in London.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, until then the subject is hardly referred to in the minutes of these meetings. With hindsight, it is of course easy to criticize the myopia of these Jewish leaders. In this connection one should bear in mind, however, the stages of development of Nazi policy: there was sporadic persecution from the outset; the Nuremberg

Laws were promulgated in September 1935; the Nazi expansion into Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938–39 brought hundreds of thousands more Jews under Nazi rule; the concentration of Jews in ghettos began after the outbreak of the war; the slaughter by the *Einsatzgruppen* began after the attack on Russia in June 1941; the Wannsee Conference on “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question” took place on January 20, 1942. What appears in retrospect as a logical progression could not be forecast in advance, as Professor Jacob Katz has pointed out.<sup>12</sup> At any rate such forecasts were not made by any responsible Jewish leaders in Britain.

This tendency, evident until late 1942, to underestimate the nature and dimensions of the problem, did not, however, diminish the speed and energy with which Jewish leaders in Britain applied themselves to the task of rescue and relief. The Anglo-Jewish effort on behalf of German-Jewish, and later European Jewish refugees was characteristically centralized in specialized institutions which drew support from broad sections of the community. Of these the most important were the Central British Fund for German Jewry (later known as the Council for German Jewry), the Jewish Refugees Committee (headed by the merchant banker Otto M. Schiff), and the Academic Assistance Council (supported by many non-Jews) which was concerned with the needs of academic refugees from Nazism. All these organizations were formed in early 1933, shortly after the Nazi seizure of power.

In their proposals to the British Government in April 1933 the Anglo-Jewish leadership (Neville Laski and Lionel Cohen of the Board of Deputies, Leonard Montefiore of the Anglo-Jewish Association, and Otto Schiff) laid down a central principle which was to prove of vital importance in facilitating the entry of Jewish refugees to England. They undertook, on behalf of the community, that “all expense, whether in respect of temporary or permanent accommodation or maintenance will be borne by the Jewish community without ultimate charge to the State.”<sup>13</sup> This was a guarantee which was highlighted by the Home Secretary in his report on the subject to the Cabinet Committee on Aliens Restrictions.<sup>14</sup> A Home Office memorandum in September 1935 noted that the guarantee had been “fully implemented.”<sup>15</sup> Although the capacity of the community to maintain the guarantee was strained to the limit, particularly after the *Anschluss*, the undertaking was honored until the outbreak of the war in spite of the fact that the number of refugees arriving was more than ten times that originally expected.<sup>16</sup> Without this assurance it is very doubtful if the British government would have admitted such substantial numbers at a time of mass unemployment and considerable public anti-Semitism.

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This guarantee could be maintained only on the basis of a massive fund-raising effort. Between 1933 and 1939 the Anglo-Jewish community spent more than £3,000,000 on the reception and maintenance of Jewish refugees in Britain.<sup>17</sup> This was a very large sum for a community of some 330,000. The 50,000 Jewish refugees from the expanded Reich who were admitted to Britain between 1933 and 1939 compared favorably with the figures for other countries: in the same period an estimated 57,000 were admitted to the U.S.A. and 53,000 to Palestine. The comparison with the U.S.A., with a Jewish population more than fourteen times the size of Anglo-Jewry, is particularly revealing.

The achievement of the British community is perhaps best highlighted by the success of the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany in securing the admission of nearly ten thousand children—nine tenths of them Jewish—to Britain in 1938–39. Again, the contrast with the U.S.A. is poignantly revealing. In February 1939 Senator Robert F. Wagner and Representative Edith Nourse Rogers introduced identical bills in the Senate and the House of Representatives which would have permitted over a two-year period the entrance outside the normal immigration quotas of a total of 20,000 German refugee children. But, as has been recorded by David S. Wyman in his book, *Paper Walls*, by June 1939 the Wagner-Rogers Bill had been effectively defeated and its supporters never dared revive it.<sup>18</sup> As A. J. Sherman has pointedly commented:

One reason for this state of affairs, often obscured by the continuing uproar over immigration to Palestine, was the curiously negative attitude of the American Jewish community to the prospect of any large influx of refugees into the United States, and the resultant refusal of the community's leaders to urge more than token changes in immigration law or procedures.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever explanation may be adduced for the attitude of American Jewish leaders (and it must be recalled that the socio-political context in which they were operating differed radically from that in Britain), there is a clear contrast here with the attitude and achievement of Anglo-Jewry.

However, upon the British entry into the war on September 3, 1939, a new period began in which the capacity of the Anglo-Jewish leadership to influence the British Government over the questions of Jewish refugee admissions or relief was sharply diminished. This was partly a question of finance. After September 1939 the number of Jewish refugees requiring financial assistance greatly increased while the resources available to the Jewish voluntary organizations were, under wartime conditions, inevitably



reduced. In 1940 it was agreed that the government would henceforth share the cost of maintenance of destitute refugees on a 50/50 basis. By 1945 the government was paying the entire cost, although by then the expense had been much reduced as refugees had been integrated into the economy.<sup>20</sup> The government recognized that the lapse of the Jewish community's guarantee was, given the changed circumstances, inevitable. But the new arrangement further limited the negotiating power of the Jewish leadership. Henceforth there was little that they might offer to the British government as an inducement toward a more generous policy on the Jewish refugee issue.

For this and other reasons the number of Jewish refugees admitted to Britain after September 3, 1939 showed a dramatic fall from the prewar figures. Although no precise figure is available a reliable estimate is that the net increase in the Jewish refugee population of the country during the war was no more than 10,000. Increasingly during the war it became clear that the government was particularly reluctant to admit Jewish, as against non-Jewish refugees. The figures of those admitted provide an indication of the dramatic change from the prewar period. Before the war some 90 percent of refugees from Nazism admitted to Britain were Jews. During the war more than 80 percent were non-Jews.<sup>21</sup> In the spring of 1940, at the time of the invasion of the Low Countries, the government was said to have plans for the admission of as many as 300,000 Dutch and Belgian refugees.<sup>22</sup> Yet later in the same year, when an appeal was made for the admission of two thousand Jewish refugees from Luxemburg, the request was rejected, a Foreign Office official noting that "They are covered by the Home Office prejudice . . . against people from enemy-occupied territory; and in any case we simply cannot have any more people let into the United Kingdom on merely humanitarian grounds."<sup>23</sup>

Jewish organizations made repeated efforts to persuade the government to relax the rigidity of its immigration policy as applied to Jews. This was particularly so after the United Nations declaration of December 17, 1942, denouncing Nazi mass murder of Jews, a pronouncement which evoked widespread public sympathy in Britain for the Jewish plight. But there was no significant relaxation of the government's policy, for as the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, pointed out to a Cabinet Committee on December 31, 1942: "There was considerable anti-Semitism under the surface in this country. If there was any substantial increase in the number of Jewish refugees or if these refugees did not leave this country after the war, we should be in for serious trouble."<sup>24</sup>

The "fifth column" scare of 1940, and the question of the internment of aliens highlighted the changed circumstances brought about by the war, and

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the constraints upon effective action by Jewish organizations. When the government, in response to a wave of xenophobic panic among the general public, decided in May 1940 to intern most adult enemy aliens, including Jewish refugees, the initial response of the Anglo-Jewish community was remarkably muted. The *Jewish Chronicle*, on May 17, 1940, approved the measure, declaring in an editorial that it could not "be resisted, least of all at this juncture when the very life of the nation is at issue." The chairman of the Defence Committee of the Board of Deputies expressed great concern at the "thoughtless behaviour of so many of them [the refugees] in areas where they are concentrated, namely Golders Green, Hampstead, North London, etc."<sup>25</sup> The passive policy of the Jewish leadership in the first stages of the mass internment policy aroused criticism from a prominent Manchester Jew, Nathan Laski, who complained that the Board had not done enough to counter the injustices of the policy and who wrote to the Board's secretary: "We can no longer put these poor people off by saying the Board of Deputies has it in hand."<sup>26</sup> Laski took matters into his own hands by writing directly to the Prime Minister, with whom he was personally acquainted.<sup>27</sup> The passivity of the Jewish leadership aroused comment even from non-Jews: Sir Andrew McFadyean wrote to Neville Laski on August 29, 1940: "I hear from more than one quarter, in fact I think it was stated in the House, that prominent British Jews have encouraged the Government in their internment policy. This is so shocking that I hesitate to believe it."<sup>28</sup>

The Jewish attitude toward the internment of enemy aliens soon changed. The *Jewish Chronicle* rapidly switched from approval to strong condemnation of the indiscriminate nature of the policy and its several manifest absurdities and injustices. The Jewish Refugees Committee and the Board of Deputies took up such questions as conditions in internment camps, the internment of some Jewish refugees in the same camps as pro-Nazi Germans, the deportation to Australia and Canada of many of the internees, and the physical violence and robbery to which some internees and deportees were subjected. This change of attitude reflected a general public reaction against the earlier "fifth-column" panic and fierce criticism of the mass internment policy in the national press. In the House of Commons Jewish M.P.s such as Sidney Silverman were joined by many non-Jews in their criticism of the policy. As a result, within a few months the majority of the internees had been released and some of those deported were permitted to return to Britain. The episode is revealing of the weakness of the Jewish leadership in Britain in wartime and of its dependence on the support of non-Jews for effective political action.

The sense of desperation and urgency which enveloped the Anglo-Jewish leadership as news of the Nazi horrors was confirmed emerges clearly from the minutes of an emergency meeting convened on December 3, 1942 by the Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Congress, and the Agudath Israel, as well as by the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish members of the Polish and Czechoslovak governments in London. The purpose of the meeting was stated as being "to consider action to be taken to meet the situation described in the recent reports on the wholesale extermination of the Jewish population in the areas occupied by the Germans." The meeting opened with a statement by the President of the Board of Deputies, Professor Brodetsky, outlining the efforts that were being made to secure a government declaration condemning the atrocities, the approach made to the Archbishop of Canterbury to gain his support, and the work being carried out by the Board in order to enlighten public opinion on the issue. Brodetsky added that "in addition to all the above, it was necessary that the *Jewish Community* itself *should express their sense of horror* and sorrow at what was happening, and express it in such a way that the general community should really be startled out of their complacency."

The discussion which followed was revealing of the inevitable limitations upon effective action. The Chief Rabbi called for "some *manifestation of a religious character—a day of mourning and a Fast* with Services in the Synagogues." It was agreed that "the matter was too urgent to be postponed till a date next year, and that the *Jewish manifestation* should be *more drastic*, and should at least include *the stoppage of all functions such as dances, picture going, wedding ceremonies, and so forth.*" Noah Barou of the World Jewish Congress suggested a Jewish demonstration in Trafalgar Square and another suggestion was made of a Jewish procession from Whitechapel to Whitehall. The minutes continued: "These suggestions were discussed, and several opinions were expressed that the organisation of *marches and demonstrations* was full of difficulties, and seemed to be *out of keeping with the general mood of the country.*" After further discussion of the point a telephone call was received from Sidney Silverman M.P. who said that he thought a demonstration necessary. Barou warned the meeting that "feeling in the East End ran so high that, if the Executive [of the Board] decided against a demonstration or taking any drastic action, there may be spontaneous outbreaks of feeling which might prove embarrassing."

The conference then moved on to consider what action should be taken to get as many Jews as possible out of Europe. Berl Locker, representing the

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Jewish Agency, urged that Jewish and non-Jewish delegations be sent to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary; debates should be initiated in both Houses of Parliament; the Pope should be approached as should other neutrals and the International Red Cross; the BBC should be induced to broadcast on the subject in its European services. Other suggestions included an attempt to obtain for Jews in Nazi Europe the status of prisoners of war, the dropping of leaflets over Germany, and efforts to secure release of Jewish children through the Red Cross and neutral countries.<sup>29</sup>

All the Jewish organizations moved fast to put these efforts in motion. The Chief Rabbi proclaimed a "Week of Mourning and Prayer," beginning on Sunday, December 13 with a service in the historic Bevis Marks Synagogue. On December 17 the Women's International Zionist Organization held a mass meeting at the Wigmore Hall. On Sunday December 20 the Board of Deputies held a public meeting, with Brodetsky in the chair and Count Raczynski of the Polish Government-in-Exile, Lord Nathan, Eleanor Rathbone M.P., Professor A. V. Hill M.P., Sidney Silverman M.P., and Berl Locker among the speakers. The British section of the World Jewish Congress held a meeting in the House of Commons. On December 22 a deputation of Jewish leaders, including Brodetsky, James de Rothschild, the Chief Rabbi, Lord Samuel, Sir Robert Waley Cohen, Sir Simon Marks, and others met with Foreign Secretary Eden, and urged various practical steps to save Jewish lives. The Archbishop of Canterbury publicly urged the government to take action to save Jews. An all-party deputation of M.P.s met the Deputy Prime Minister as well as the Foreign, Home, and Colonial Secretaries.<sup>30</sup> Approaches to the Pope, neutrals, the Red Cross, and others were duly made. The BBC was persuaded to make some broadcasts. Leaflets were dropped over Germany and elsewhere. Immediate efforts were made to secure the release of children. The government's declaration denouncing atrocities was made in the House of Commons on December 17, 1942 in reply to a question put by Sidney Silverman M.P. Following the declaration a short, but deeply moving, speech was made by James de Rothschild M.P. Upon the suggestion of a Labour member the House rose for a minute's silence, an unprecedented act. Lloyd George commented to Eden: "I cannot recall a scene like that in all my years in Parliament."<sup>31</sup>

However, the hopes that these efforts, the government's declaration, and the widespread public sympathy might yield some tangible results were soon dashed. Responding to the public concern the British and American governments convened a conference at Bermuda in April 1943 to consider the refugee issue. But, as we now know, the two delegations were hemmed in from the outset with instructions from their governments which reduced

their deliberations to a virtual nullity. Efforts by Jewish organizations to secure representation at Bermuda were rejected on the ground that "to admit a Jewish representation would open the door to a request for similar favours from other interested parties."<sup>32</sup> The two governments forebore from publishing the report of the conference, ostensibly in order not to prejudice planned action in favor of refugees, in reality because the conference's decisions were embarrassingly barren of substance.

The failure of the government to translate the declaration of December 17, 1942 into effective action evoked deeply felt responses from Jewish leaders. Eva, Marchioness of Reading, President of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress, wrote direct to Churchill: "In other days I would have come to you in sackcloth and ashes to plead for my people. . . . Some can still be saved if the iron fetters of red tape can be burst asunder."<sup>33</sup> In an uncharacteristically bitter speech in the House of Lords on 23 March 1943 Lord Samuel demanded that a sense of urgency be infused into government policy:

The declaration of the United Nations was made on December 17. Today is March 23, and, so far as is publicly known, nothing has happened except discussions, conferences and exchanges of notes. We are glad to learn that measures are afoot for securing close cooperation between this country and the United States. But there seems to be a great danger that action is liable to be lost in the sands of diplomatic negotiations. . . . While governments prepare memoranda and exchange notes and hold conferences, week after week, month after month the Nazis go on killing men, women and children.

Pointing to the shortage of labor which existed in Palestine, Lord Samuel conceded that it was by now unlikely that more than a small number of Jews could be expected to escape from Nazi control to contribute to the war effort. But he continued:

So small is the number that it seems monstrous to refer to difficulties of food supply, in this country of forty-seven million people, or to difficulties of employment, when we know that here also there is a shortage of labour. . . . There is still in this country, however, a rigid refusal to grant visas to any persons who are still in enemy-occupied territory.<sup>34</sup>

Some minor concessions were made by the British government in 1943. The administration of the immigration provisions of the Palestine White Paper of May 1939 were slightly eased; but by now it was virtually

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impossible for Jews to escape from Nazi Europe. Camps for Jewish refugees were set up in North Africa. The Jewish issue was for a while given a higher priority in war propaganda. Lengthy negotiations led to permission being granted for small numbers of relief parcels to be sent through the economic blockade of Nazi Europe, via Lisbon, to Jewish addressees in occupied territory. Some of these reached their destinations and helped save a few lives, but many were found to be undelivered because the addressees had already been killed.

There were several reasons for the failure of the Anglo-Jewish leaders to make a significant impact on government policy. On the Palestine issue there was the overriding wartime concern of the British defense and foreign policy establishment with the precarious military and supply position in the Middle East and the consequent importance, as they saw it, of avoiding any action in Palestine which might antagonize Arab nationalists there and elsewhere. In Britain itself there was an increased level of public anti-Semitism after the outbreak of the war, noted by many observers, including the Home Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Information. In an interview with a representative of the Board of Deputies in February 1943 the Director of the Division summarized the grounds for the increase "as being due to allegations that the Jews were predominant in the black market and, secondly, to the further allegation that Jews were not doing their full share in the Services."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, whereas the British government had believed, rightly or wrongly, during the First World War that "world Jewry" was a powerful force which was worth courting, this attitude had by now given way to the view that, as one Foreign Office official put it in 1941: "When it comes to the point, the Jews will never hamper us to put the Germans on the throne."<sup>36</sup> Underlying everything was the priority to be accorded to the war effort, encapsulated in Churchill's dictum in October 1943: "Everything for the war, whether controversial or not, and nothing controversial that is not *bona fide* needed for the war."<sup>37</sup> The distasteful decisions to which this often led were regarded as unpleasant necessities of war. A senior Colonial Office official, Sir John Shuckburgh, put it well when he wrote in May 1941: "These are days in which we are brought up against realities and we cannot be deterred by the kind of prewar humanitarianism that prevailed in 1939."<sup>38</sup> This was in a minute supporting the policy of firing on Jewish immigrant ships in order to drive them away from Palestinian ports. Against entrenched attitudes of this kind the pleas of Anglo-Jewish leaders could make little headway.

An overall assessment of the Anglo-Jewish leadership's reaction to the crisis of the Nazi period must be grey rather than black-and-white. There were several negative aspects. There was the general failure to realize until

too late the true nature and dimensions of the problem. There was often a paternalist attitude toward the refugees. There was sometimes a shortage of Jewish families willing to take in Jewish child refugees who were therefore sent to non-Jewish families; some of these children were, not surprisingly, left with very bitter feelings toward the Jewish community. There was, in the initial stages of the internments of 1940, far too acquiescent an attitude by the community's leaders—although this soon changed. And, as one distinguished community activist, Professor Norman Bentwich, noted in his memoirs, there was too often “unhelpful competition” between the various Jewish organizations. “We wasted hours protesting, and composing and criticizing memoranda which had no hope of serious attention by the Governments.”<sup>39</sup> The differences of outlook among the community's leaders, particularly over Zionism, bubbled under the surface throughout the war. In 1943 they came to a head when the Zionists succeeded in capturing a majority in the Board of Deputies. As the Palestine conflict degenerated into open civil war by 1945, grave strains emerged within the Anglo-Jewish elite. On October 6, 1945, Chief Rabbi Hertz sent a telegram to all synagogues under his jurisdiction calling for “a day of Jewish solidarity with the remnants of European Jewry,” and adding that the “Jews of England expect the government to keep faith in regard to Palestine as the only haven of refuge to survivors of Nazi bestiality.” The President of the United Synagogue, Sir Robert Waley Cohen, together with a Vice-President, sent a counter-telegram warning that the “last sentence of Chief Rabbi's telegram to your Minister . . . may be misinterpreted as advocating introduction of politics into our religious services.”<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, such strains should not be exaggerated; by and large the community's central institutions showed a remarkable degree of cohesion, particularly by comparison with those of other Jewish communities. Moreover, on the positive side of the ledger must be stressed the speed and efficiency with which the community adapted to the emergency in early 1933 by creating specialized central institutions which, in spite of the enormous pressure of numbers of refugees by 1939, coped until the outbreak of the war without having to default on the community's guarantee to the government that no refugee would fall on the public purse. The declaration of December 1942 and the ensuing public clamor for government help for Jews would not have occurred without the pressure of the organized institutions of Anglo-Jewry. The efforts of the Anglo-Jewish leadership to enlist the active support of broad sections of the political elite and of public opinion were, particularly in late 1942 and early 1943, highly effective.

The prewar record, particularly as measured by the numbers of refugees whose admission to the country was secured, was impressive on any comparative examination. If during the war the record of achievement was slight, the primary explanation must be sought in the altered circumstances of wartime Britain in which the capacity of the Jewish organizations to exercise real influence on the government was minimal. Of course, in retrospect, against the background of the full magnitude of the horrors as we now know them, all that was done was too little and too late. But seen in context the Anglo-Jewish leadership's achievement compares favorably with that of any other major Jewish community. And if the results, particularly during the war, were disappointing, it must be said that this was not for want of trying.

In recent years it has become increasingly fashionable to criticize the Jewish leadership of the war years for supposed sins of omission and a general over-passivity. In the case of Anglo-Jewry, at least, this accusation has little basis in reality. The admonitive words of Ahad Ha-am are apposite here:

Nothing is more dangerous for a nation or for an individual than to plead guilty to imaginary sins. Where the sin is real, the gates of repentance are not locked, and by honest endeavour the sinner can purify himself. But when a man has been persuaded to suspect himself without cause, how will he be able to purify himself in his own eyes?<sup>41</sup>

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## SWITZERLAND AND THE LEADERSHIP OF ITS JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*Gerhart M. Riegner*

### Switzerland at the Crossroads of Great Powers

A discussion on the attitude of the Swiss Jewish community and its leadership during the World War II must by necessity start with a short description of the position of Switzerland during that period.

This small, picturesque country, in the heart of Europe, is the guardian of the great passageways linking the north and the south of the continent. It prides itself on being the oldest democracy in Europe. It is organized on a federal basis and for centuries has adopted a policy of permanent neutrality in armed conflicts—a neutrality which has been guaranteed by the European powers since the treaties of Vienna in 1815, and which it is committed to defend against any violation.

Economically, the country was very poorly endowed by nature. It possesses practically no raw materials and its only important natural resources are the water sources in the mountains, which allowed it to develop quite early an important network of electric power stations. It has no access to the high seas and its welfare therefore depends to a great extent on the good will of its neighbors as far as import of food for its inhabitants and the export of goods produced by them are concerned.

In spite of this, it has acquired a high standard of living. But this has not been a gift from heaven. It has been obtained through long centuries of hard labor, by the industry and the energy of the inhabitants who, with the

endurance of the peasants of the high mountain valleys, have built up their country and its riches brick by brick and step by step. Their reliability, their energy, the precision of their work have made them some of the best workers of Europe and have helped the development of some of the most modern industries on the continent.

Its prosperity is based on the stability of its institutions—it had not known war since Napoleonic times, with the sole exception of a short internal military expedition in 1847—and on the moderate conservatism of its own population, notably in the rural districts, to which the federal constitution gave considerable weight. With the exception of short periods of tension, labor and management have observed peaceful relations and labor relations have been regulated by collective agreements.

Nevertheless, in the decades before World War II, the country could not feed all its inhabitants. Every year about 50,000 Swiss people left the country and sought work in foreign lands, and these *Auslandschweizer* contributed considerably to the good reputation of Swiss labor and to the establishment of international commercial relations throughout the world.

This whole political system with its permanent neutrality was based on the political equilibrium between the European great powers that surrounded the country, namely Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and France. Slowly this equilibrium broke down, with the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian empire after World War I and subsequently of the small Austrian republic in 1938. The pact between Hitler and Mussolini for all practical purposes brought the Northern, Eastern, and Southern borders of Switzerland under German influence, and the defeat of France in 1940 eliminated the last independent factor on its borders.

These developments, of course, also had their deep repercussions on the home front and the relationship between the various ethnic and linguistic communities constituting the Confederation. World War I had already put considerable stress on the internal peace between the ethnic groups, as each cultural and linguistic group tended to support the power beyond the border with which it had close cultural ties. It is obvious that this did not help the cohesion and integration of the national community. But, contrary to what had happened during World War I, the political trends and tendencies in the country during World War II worked in the opposite direction. While there definitely existed both in the German and French speaking areas an aggressive fascist and national socialist movement which sought to extend the blessings of the Third Reich to the Confederation, it never represented more than 10 percent of the population. The great majority of the German-speaking population was definitely anti-Nazi and anti-German while suffering acutely from the interruption of the close cultural links. The nearer one went to the German borders, the more anti-German and anti-Axis the population felt, and the same was true of the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland.

A different attitude prevailed in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, where the bourgeoisie was accustomed to look for guidance to the Third Republic and the French Radical Party, with which it had very close ties. The sudden French catastrophe in 1940 created a deep shock for the leading factors in Suisse Romande, which continued to look to France for guidance, and sympathy for Pétain and his policies prevailed for a long time in higher political circles and among the population of French-speaking Switzerland before the cause of the Free French captured their imagination.

The foreign policy of Switzerland was, of course, greatly influenced by these events. Since the coming to power of the Hitler regime in Germany, the Swiss Confederation had been following a very careful policy not to offend its Nazi neighbor. At the same time, Swiss diplomacy made a special effort to maintain and develop close and friendly relations with Fascist Italy. When Nazi Germany encountered great hostility in the League of Nations, Swiss diplomacy did everything it could to prevent the German delegation from feeling completely isolated. The Swiss authorities were quite tolerant with regard to Nazi propaganda in Switzerland up to the murder of *Gauleiter* Gustloff in 1936. But they took a courageous and energetic attitude vis-à-vis the Third Reich after the abduction of a German Jewish refugee, Berthold Jacob, from Swiss territory in 1935, and obtained his extradition by the German authorities.

After the fall of France, the political situation of Switzerland became extremely difficult. Now constituting a small democratic island in the midst of a sea dominated by the Axis forces, it had to use great skill to maintain its independence and its institutions and to resist the constantly mounting pressures from the Axis forces and their ambassadors.

Economically, Switzerland was now practically completely dependent on the Axis powers because there was no other foreign market it could reach. Its industries had the choice of working for the Axis forces or facing large-scale unemployment which might bring with it deep social unrest and as a consequence, perhaps large support for the forces supporting *Anschluss* (Annexation) to the Third Reich.

Switzerland continued its close diplomatic ties with France and tried more and more to develop its relations with the United States. The slogan about the friendship of the "oldest" and the "greatest" democracies in the world was quite popular.

On the other hand, during that whole period Switzerland had no diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, since Soviet Russia had declared a formal boycott of all relations with Switzerland after the acquittal of the murderer of Worowski, the Soviet delegate to the international conference on the straits between Greece and Turkey, held in Lausanne in 1923. The Swiss foreign minister used the platform of the League of Nations repeatedly for determined anti-Russian pronouncements, particularly when Soviet

Russia entered the League of Nations in 1934. This policy would cause considerable embarrassment to Switzerland at the end of World War II.

### The Swiss Jewish Community

Let me now say a few words about the Swiss Jewish community. The history of Jews in Switzerland is long and not always very happy. The first Jews arrived in the third and fourth centuries with the Roman armies and settled in the cities built by the Romans. There is a long history of expulsions and persecution, particularly in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The seventeenth century saw the settlement of Jews in two villages of the canton of Aargau—Endingen and Lengnau—and it is from the families settled in those two little villages that the core of Swiss Jewry descends. Later immigration brought Jews from southern Germany and from Alsace-Lorraine; and still later, with the upheavals of World War I, came the beginning of consecutive waves of refugees, including Jews from Czarist Russia and Poland.

The Swiss Jews were one of the last Jewish communities in Central Europe to acquire full equality of rights. It was only after fierce and dramatic fights in the 1860s that the Jews of the canton of Aargau finally achieved their emancipation, and a partial revision of the federal constitution in 1866 eliminated the restrictions on freedom of residence and on equality before the law. These rules were then included in the new constitution of 1874. At the time of these legislative acts about 7,500 Jews lived in the whole of Switzerland.

However, in 1893, a new restriction was imposed on Swiss Jews. By a popular referendum an exceptional article outlawing *shechita* (ritual slaughter) was included in the federal constitution. This prohibition, although eliminated a few years ago from the constitution, exists *de facto* until the present day.

The Jews of Switzerland have always constituted a very tiny minority of the population. During the first half of this century, there were approximately 20,000 souls; the number has remained rather steady since 1910. This means they constitute less than 0.5 percent of the total population. During the period under consideration nearly half the Jews did not possess Swiss nationality. In 1930, 45.5 percent of the Jews were foreigners, in 1941 47.1 percent; this figure fell to less than 40 percent in 1950.

The Jews of Switzerland thus had little influence, playing only a limited role in politics, the press, and in the economy. In parliament there were one or two Jewish members, serving in the Socialist Party and thus most of the time sitting on the opposition benches. In the press Jews were conspicuously absent. In the management of the great financial and industrial institutions

Jews were almost never represented. But the Jews constituted an active element in trade and in the professions. They created some private banks of good reputation, some of the enterprises in the clothing industry, and established a number of small watch factories.

Living in a great number of small communities, the largest of which were in Zurich, Basel, and Geneva, the Swiss Jews in 1904 created the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, the *Gemeindebund*. Their major task at the beginning was to fight the prohibition of *shechita* and the concern for kosher meat. Slowly, the Federation developed into the representative body of Swiss Jewry.

In the 1930s, the rise of Nazism in Germany and the arrival of the first refugees, the growth of the Nazi-oriented Frontist movement in Switzerland, and the spreading of Frontist anti-Semitic propaganda created new and important tasks for the Federation. Some of its activities during those years are memorable, among them the filing of the defamation case against the circulation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* before the courts in Berne.

It is noteworthy that the financial support granted to the newly arrived refugees and the cost of its fight against anti-Semitic assaults practically exhausted the whole capital of the Federation in 1935.

### **The Swiss Jewish Community and the Refugees**

When war broke out, the Jewish community of Switzerland was thus already embattled in the struggle against the small but aggressive Nazi forces symbolized by the Frontist movement and struggling with the difficult problem of supporting the several thousand Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria who had found asylum in the country.

With the increasing military successes of the German army, the Frontist forces and the Nazi sympathizers became more and more arrogant and benefited fully from the support they received from the agents of the Third Reich.

As to the problem of Jewish refugees, the Swiss Jewish leadership found itself in an extremely difficult position. While Switzerland prided itself as a country of asylum and often stressed the important role it had played, particularly in the nineteenth century, as a land where many European revolutionaries and victims of autocratic oppression had found a haven from persecution, its attitude toward the Jews from Germany, and later Austria and Czechoslovakia, was extremely careful and hesitant and lacked the warm generosity it had shown on other occasions. This careful and hesitant attitude was certainly due to a deep sense of anti-Semitic prejudice prevailing among a considerable part of the population and at the same time to the serious

economic and social situation, which was not helpful in encouraging a more generous attitude. While a limited number of German Jewish refugees were admitted in the first years of the Nazi regime, it was clearly stated that Switzerland could only be regarded as a temporary land of asylum and that the refugees had to prepare actively for their emigration overseas. Moreover, it was made clear from the beginning that these people should not become a burden to the state and all costs of maintenance and upkeep therefore had to be covered by the refugees themselves and their friends, or the Jewish community.

An eyewitness, Mrs. Georgine Gerhardt, a non-Jewish member of the *Zentralstelle für Flüchtlingshilfe*, the central body in charge of refugees of all denominations and of all political shades, recalled later a meeting with the Swiss foreign minister Motta in the summer of 1933, in which the latter adopted a sharply negative attitude toward all requests that the Swiss government take a more friendly and understanding attitude toward the refugee problem. "The question was distasteful to him," she reported, "and we did not obtain anything." A Socialist member of parliament, Guido Muller, in one of the great parliamentary debates on the refugee question, summarized the situation as follows: "There is no question in my mind: In the federal rules concerning the entry of non-Aryans, one senses a strong dose of anti-Semitism."

This became especially obvious after the *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938. The waves of Jewish refugees who presented themselves at the Swiss frontier created great excitement in Swiss police circles. The Swiss authorities protested to the Germans and threatened to require a visa for German nationals wishing to enter Switzerland. This led to secret discussions—which were not even revealed to the Swiss parliament—between the German and Swiss authorities in Berlin and to an agreement whereby the passports of German Jews would henceforth be specially marked, and German Jews had to obtain special visas for entry into Switzerland. The role played in this matter by the head of the Swiss police, Heinrich Rothmund, is well known, and although the Swiss authorities always denied—even in parliamentary debates after World War II—that the initiative in this matter came from them, the diplomatic documents available today do not exonerate the Swiss from a great part of responsibility in this matter. While the head of the Swiss police, at the time of the *Anschluss* and on later occasions, stated that he had only the interests of Swiss Jews at heart and that the admittance of a too large number of foreign Jews would create increased anti-Semitism in Switzerland, the fallacy of this argument is obvious: Jews were simply not desirable in the country.

There exists a very curious document from the time of the *Anschluss*: the head of the Swiss police, Rothmund, in a memorandum to his Minister dated September 15, 1938 argued at that time against the acceptance of the German

proposal suggesting the special marking of the passports of German Jews and the limitation of the visa obligation to Jews. The proposal, in his view, made Switzerland dependent on the German authorities and did not cover all cases. In the memorandum he admitted, however, that the Swiss had in previous negotiations with Germany made proposals which were identical with the present one, with the exception of the question of reciprocity.

Then, however, Rothmund went on to state that the introduction of the compulsory visa for Jews would not be understood in foreign countries and the German press would accuse the Swiss of anti-Semitism. "It looks generally," he stated, "that Germany tried with its last proposal to push us toward an attitude of anti-Semitism or at least to make us appear so in the eyes of other countries." And then he went on: "Since the creation of the police for aliens, we have maintained a clear position. The Jews were considered, together with other foreigners as *Überfremdungsfaktor* [an element endangering the Swiss character of the country]. By a systematic and careful effort we succeeded until now to prevent the Jewification of Switzerland (*die Verjudung der Schweiz zu verhindern*). Today we have assumed our part in the care for emigrants and we want to do this in a humane, but also in a strictly orderly way from the point of view of the police for aliens. The Swiss Jews help us in this attempt and consider this to be in their interest."<sup>1</sup>

The last curious remark is ambiguous insofar as it is not clear whether it refers only to the sentence which immediately preceded it or to the whole passage. In the later alternative it constitutes really a statement accusing the Swiss Jews of helping to keep Switzerland *Judenrein* (Jew free).

Later, however, during the secret negotiations in Berlin, Rothmund changed his mind with regard to the German proposal. In Berlin he learned that the Germans, in application of the Nuremberg Laws, now intended to issue specially marked identity cards to Jews and so called non-aryans inside Germany and specially marked passports outside Germany. He now felt suddenly that the proposal was acceptable because it showed that the Germans had themselves a direct interest of their own in marking the documents of Jews—a strange attitude as in this way he was now actively cooperating with the Germans in the implementation of the racial legislation.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude that the Jews were simply not desirable in the country became more and more evident and led finally during the war years to the fateful differentiation in the federal police rules between "political refugees" and "refugees for racial reasons," denying the right of asylum to the latter.<sup>3</sup>

The same attitude was evident even with regard to the treatment of military refugees, as shown by one of the department's circulars of July 1942 containing guidelines on military refugees and providing the following interpretation of Article 13 of the 1907 Hague Convention:

General rules for admittance can therefore not be established. Every single case is to be decided according to the circumstances.

Generally, however, undesirable elements (Jews, political extremists, people suspected of espionage) should be kept out.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the hesitant and restrictive attitude of the Swiss authorities vis-à-vis the admittance of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in the prewar period, at the outbreak of the war, of the approximately 8,000 refugees on Swiss territory, about 5,000 were Jews.

The refugee problem was discussed several times in the Swiss parliament and although individual legislators belonging to various political parties voiced some criticism and advocated a more liberal attitude, there is no doubt that the policy of the federal authorities had the support of the great majority of the parliament and probably of the population.

This did not facilitate the position of the Swiss Jewish leadership. Their position became even more delicate as the financial responsibility they had undertaken with regard to Jewish refugees became an increasingly heavy burden. In spring 1938, they had formally assured the Swiss authorities that the Swiss Jews, with the help of foreign Jewish communities and particularly American Jewry, could finance the assistance to the Jewish refugees and that they would not turn to the state. Their fundraising for this purpose were quite successful. They raised SF 1,700,000 in 1938, about SF 1,100,000 in 1939, approximately SF 700,000 in 1940, and about SF 500,000 in 1941. But the more refugees entered the country, the more difficult the financial situation became, even with the considerable help the Swiss Jews were already receiving from the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). This created an increasingly critical situation: they had to plead with the authorities for the admittance of more refugees without knowing how to cover the expenses and without firm commitments from the American Jews, whose contribution also depended on fundraising income. The great financial contribution that the Swiss Jews themselves made to the refugee problem, however, should be acknowledged. There is no doubt that by their sacrifices they helped to save thousands of Jewish lives.

### **The Jewish Leadership**

Thus, the Swiss Jewish community found itself in an extremely precarious position when the hostilities began in 1939. Those who were entrusted with its leadership at that time<sup>5</sup> included notably the president of the *Gemeindebund* (Community Federation), Saly Mayer of St. Gallen, who had taken over the presidency in 1936 from the banker Jules Dreyfus Brodsky (Basel);



Saly Braunschweig, the president of the Zurich Jewish community; Georg Guggenheim, its vice-president; Armand Brunschvig, president of the Jewish community of Geneva; and Alfred Götschel, president of the Basel Jewish community. Silvain S. Guggenheim, as president of the *Verband Schweizerischer Israelitischer Armenpflegen*, in 1943 renamed the *Verband Schweizerischer Jüdischer Fürsorgen*, directed the activity in favor of Jewish refugees. The work of the *Verband*, which comprised the various local committees for refugees established in the different communities, was carried out under the guidance and general supervision of the SIG, which remained responsible for general policy. Guggenheim thus became one of the most important members of the Board of the *Gemeindebund*. All those leaders were very honorable people, deeply devoted to their cause. Whether they were the best prepared for the quite extraordinary situation to which they were exposed is a question which is not so easily answered.

Their major tasks were, however, quite obvious:

1. To defend the full equality of rights for the Jews in the face of the internal and external pressures;
2. To obtain the admission of the greatest number of Jewish refugees in view of the catastrophe that had overcome the major part of European Jewry;
3. To assure the morale of the members of the Swiss Jewish community in an extraordinarily serious situation.

It was not easy to discharge these functions in a steadily deteriorating atmosphere. The defeat of France in the summer of 1940 created a panic in large sectors of the country and produced considerable population movements. The famous radio speech by the president of the Confederation, Marcel Pilet Golaz, on June 25, 1940, in which he invited the Swiss people more or less to adapt itself to the new order of things, created deep feelings of defeatism. The appeal by General Guisan, the commander-in-chief of the army, on the Rütli on July 25, 1940, in which he declared that "there was no reason to abandon ourselves to defeatism and to doubt our mission" served as a serious check and counterweight to these sentiments.

The Jewish leadership was of course deeply affected by these developments. One observes their mounting concern and their helplessness in the minutes of the SIG Central Committee of the time. There are discussions about the transfer of the secretariat of the *Gemeindebund* to Lausanne, followed by the granting of full powers on this and other matters to a small board. There are expressions of deep anxiety about the future, about the reception of the Frontist leaders by the government, fears of new legislation on naturalization and deprivation of nationality, and of the anti-Semitic utterances in the press.

The leadership tried to take a low-key stand in this difficult situation. This attitude is perhaps best characterized by the following words of Saly Mayer at the Assembly of Delegates in May 1941:

If we have already been modest in our requests in the past, we have not only remained so, but have become even more modest.

Our behavior follows the same line Switzerland follows with regard to the outside world, particularly its neighbors.

We believe the less is said about the Jews, the fewer points of friction are created.<sup>6</sup>

The leadership tried to maintain good relations with the authorities, to deal with the most pressing problems concerning the admittance of refugees with high officials in the Police Department, and to settle the current questions quietly in direct discussions with the Department. This led not only to a certain dependence on the goodwill of the high officials of the Department, but also to a certain secrecy in these relations. This attitude apparently fit in with the character of the president of the *Gemeindebund* who lacked the gift of easy communication, was distrustful of his colleagues, and in the increasingly delicate general situation acted more and more without consultation. This created considerable difficulties in his relations with some of his colleagues, who felt that they were not being kept informed and could not adequately inform the members of their communities. Some of them repeatedly offered to resign.

### Swiss Jewry During the War

But the *Gemeindebund* could not remain silent and inactive in the face of several situations which affected the very basis of the legal position of Swiss Jewry.

Thus, for example, it had to intervene strongly in February 1941, when a violently anti-Semitic article appeared in *Heer und Haus* (Army and Home), an official publication of the army, in which, among other things, the Jews were declared "unassimilable" and special statutes for Jews in different cantons were envisaged. Upon the intervention of the *Gemeindebund*, the head of the Military Department (the Minister of Defense) expressed his regrets over the incident and announced that the people responsible for it would be punished and that a correction would be published.

Another example in which the SIG had to act was occasioned by the reply of the Swiss government to a parliamentary written question submitted by

National Councillor Paul Graber in 1941, concerning the rights of Swiss Jewish citizens in occupied France whose enterprises had been sequestered.

In its reply, the Swiss government had stated, *inter alia*, that in occupied France, as in other countries, the Jews were subject to special rules which were considered as part of the *ordre public* (public policy) and therefore also applied to foreign citizens. Thus the Swiss Jews could not claim a treatment different from that accorded to the citizens of the country in question. The government added that nevertheless the Swiss diplomats were trying to assist in defending their interests.

This was an extremely dangerous precedent. It meant that Switzerland accepted that rules relating to *ordre public* in a foreign country had priority over the contractual obligations resulting from treaties between Switzerland and the country in question and from the general rules of international law. Moreover, the governmental reply seemed to accept the applicability of foreign discriminatory laws to Swiss citizens by a foreign country. To accept this without protest meant at the same time the introduction of discrimination between Jewish and non-Jewish Swiss citizens by the Confederation itself.

On the suggestion notably of Professor Paul Guggenheim, a well-known international lawyer, the SIG in December 1941 submitted a memorandum and a very well argued advisory opinion by Professor Guggenheim to the authorities, in which it took strong exception to the written reply by the *Bundesrat* (Federal government). It stated that the concept of *ordre public* could not be opposed to the contractual rights and obligations resulting from the bilateral treaty between France and Switzerland on the reciprocal treatment of nationals and that the acceptance of special treatment of Jewish citizens would be a serious violation of the principle of equality guaranteed by the Swiss constitution.

A preliminary reply by the federal authorities was considered unsatisfactory and after further discussions a solution to this matter was finally found: the authorities recognized that the statement contained in the reply to the parliamentary question was not to be considered as a legal opinion binding for the future, but as a statement of fact reflecting the impossibility of protecting the interests of Jewish citizens in the prevailing situation.

On another occasion, the SIG had to intervene on behalf of 30 Swiss Jewish citizens who had been arrested in occupied France, and who were later released.

The military censorship introduced at the beginning of the war with regard to all publications and strictly exercised in order to maintain political neutrality also created problems for the Jewish community.

The news bulletin published by the press office of the SIG (JUNA) was repeatedly censored by the army authorities. Thus it was prohibited from disseminating the message of the Polish minister in Berne, addressed to the

Polish Jewish military internees on the occasion of Rosh Hashana in 1941. On another occasion, the JUNA bulletin was censored because it had circulated an article of the *Glarner Nachrichten* (Glarus News) under the title: *Gehetztes Volk*, which contained very friendly observations on the fate of the Jewish people. Upon appeal, this order was later rescinded.

Moreover, on June 29, 1944, the reproduction of an article by the JUNA on the anti-Jewish persecution in Hungary "Pray for us that we may die soon! The extermination of the Jews of Hungary," containing details on these persecutions, was prohibited by the military censorship.

### **The Question of Jewish Refugees**

Developments in the question of the admittance of refugees led, however, to much more dramatic events. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, the Swiss authorities reformulated the rules concerning refugees, notably in the Federal Council decree of October 17, 1939. This decree clearly provided, in Article 9, that foreigners entering Swiss territory illegally could be expelled from the country without any procedure. This clause, however, had not been too rigidly applied. From the beginning of the war until July 31, 1942, a total of 1,200 new refugees had been admitted.

In view of the mounting deportations from Germany, the Central Committee of the SIG in November 1941, on the proposal of Saly Braunschweig, adopted a series of guidelines defining the categories of persons whose admittance the SIG should negotiate with the authorities.<sup>7</sup>

The tragic events of the summer of 1942 led to a constant flow of refugees who presented themselves at the Swiss borders. On August 4, the government was informed, and agreed to a stricter application of Article 9 of the 1939 decree. On August 13, 1942, the head of the Police Department issued a circular which in practice closed the frontier to all Jewish refugees. A clear distinction was made between "political refugees" and "strictly racial refugees," e.g., Jews, and asylum was clearly refused to the latter.

When the adoption of these new rules became known, they provoked an outburst of protest and indignation in the whole Swiss population and also created a deep crisis in the Jewish community.

The new regulations had not been discussed in advance with the leadership of the Jewish community. The president of the SIG invited the head of the Police Department to a meeting of the SIG Central Committee on August 20, 1942, at which the official tried to justify these new regulations. This initiative was later strongly criticized because it could create the impression that the *Gemeindebund* was in agreement with the authorities.

Both Saly Braunschweig and Silvain Guggenheim pleaded with Rothmund not to close the borders to the newcomers. There could be no doubt about the fate threatening those who would be refused. They referred to the many

terrifying reports about the deportations and the fate of the deportees. They were convinced that expulsion meant certain death for them and they could not cooperate in denouncing illegal refugees to the authorities.

Rothmund maintained that it was known to him that hundreds of thousands of Jews were in danger and that millions of others felt they were in danger. Switzerland, however, was not able to receive all the refugees from its neighboring countries. It was better to care for those who were already there.

It is strange to note in the minutes that Mayer himself remained completely silent during this discussion.

Information on the terrible fate of the deported people had definitely reached Switzerland during the second half of 1941 and in the first months of 1942, and news about the plan for total extermination had reached Switzerland at the end of July 1942. The Swiss authorities received knowledge of this information during August and September, mainly through the representatives of the Christian churches, to whom all reports on the fate of the Jews were constantly communicated. The Swiss authorities also had their own sources of information about the massacre of whole Jewish populations on the eastern front by spring 1942, when a Swiss sanitary mission returned from the Russian front.

News about the *refoulement* of many Jewish refugees at the Swiss borders and particularly the expulsion of a great number who had already entered the country provoked a deep malaise in the country and many soldiers at the frontiers felt a serious conflict of conscience when called upon to execute the government's orders. I can only briefly mention here the daily fights that the local Jewish refugee committees had to go through with the military authorities in their efforts to help refugees and the conflicts that arose with some of the commanding officers who did not hesitate to deprive some of the Jewish leaders like Armand Brunschvig of their right to visit the camps.

A wave of protest struck the country and those who lived through this period remember with emotion this unique and exhilarating experience. The newspapers from right to left violently criticized the attitude of the government. There was a near unanimous outcry to uphold the principle of the right of asylum and many political, civic, and religious bodies voiced their vehement protest.

A very stormy meeting of the *Zentralstelle für Flüchtlingshilfe*, which was held on August 24, asked at least for certain changes and corrections in the regulations. Many interventions were undertaken with the government and the Minister of Justice and Police, von Steiger. They were not completely without success. On August 23, von Steiger gave instructions that in special cases expulsion should not take place.

The Swiss parliament held a debate on the refugee situation on September 22, and while the three government parties officially supported the policy of the government, the Democratic and Socialist parties clearly supported a more liberal policy. Of the 17 speakers who took part in the debate, nine attacked the government position, among them the following well-known members of parliament: Rittmeyer, Maag, Oeri, Muschg, Bringolf, Meierhans, and Graber. They did not consider that "the lifeboat was full" and that Switzerland had reached the limits of its humanitarian action.

This finally led to new instructions which, while maintaining the fateful distinction between political and racial refugees, provided for the admission of hardship cases: sick people, pregnant women, refugees over 65, unaccompanied children under 16, parents with children under 16, and refugees with close relations in or special links to Switzerland.

These rules were changed further from time to time, not always favorably, but it would lead too far afield to describe here the developments in all their detail. It was only at a later stage in the war, after the breakdown of Fascist Italy, that a more liberal attitude concerning the admittance of refugees came to prevail.

It should, however, also be mentioned that as a result of the pressure in the summer of 1942, the police made some agreements with the churches, as a result of which lists were established periodically, containing names of persons recommended by the church authorities for admission at the frontiers. The Jewish organizations made use of these facilities in order to save additional people. This procedure, however, was distasteful. Every name that was put on the list condemned others who were omitted or forgotten. It was another way of becoming obliged to the police authorities.

One fact, however, was conspicuous: The complete silence of the leadership of the Jewish community during this whole period. Or, as one of the leading members of the *Gemeindegemeinschaft*, Georg Guggenheim (who at that time belonged to the opposition), said at a meeting of its Central Committee: "The Swiss people were up in arms, but we missed the expression of the official position of the competent organs of the *Gemeindegemeinschaft*."

One of the private interventions which had been undertaken with von Steiger and had obviously helped in modifying the attitude of the government was that of Paul Dreyfus de Gunzburg, the Basel banker and son of the second president of the SIG, who together with Gertrud Kurz of Berne—a Christian lady with a fantastic record of work in behalf of Jewish refugees and commonly called "the mother of the refugees"—visited the vacationing von Steiger in August 1942 at Mont Pélerin. Years later, in a letter written in connection with the elaboration of the Ludwig Report, Vera Dreyfus de Gunzburg recalled her husband's intervention, adding: "It was an altogether private intervention, which, however, shows very clearly that one had to take such steps without, and indeed despite Saly Mayer."<sup>8</sup>

### Intra-Communal Tensions

The events of the summer of 1942 deeply troubled the Jewish community and created a serious crisis of confidence in its leadership. It was particularly in the intellectual circles that a profound malaise manifested itself. Professor Paul Guggenheim again emerged as the spokesman for these circles, but he was by no means alone. Erwin Haymann, Veit Wyler, Jacob Zucker, David Farbstein, Judge Max Gurny, Georg Guggenheim, Benjamin Sagalowitz, the writer of these lines, and others shared his great concern. In a lecture before the Zionist Association of Zurich on October 31, 1942, Professor Guggenheim raised some of the fundamental problems facing Swiss Jewry during the difficult war period and criticized the lack of a clear policy and the political methods used by the *Gemeindebund*, notably its president. He attacked particularly the reliance of the leadership on its good relations with some of the high members of the federal bureaucracy, whatever the results this might produce, and the leadership's complete failure to keep in contact not only with the Jewish community, but with Swiss public opinion and the active political forces in the country. A small minority could defend its basic rights and interests under the prevailing circumstances only by appealing to the deeply entrenched democratic forces in the country, and the failure to inform the public was a grave political mistake.

This malaise manifested itself also within the organs of the *Gemeindebund*. For quite some time the relations among several members of the Board had been deteriorating, due partly to the rather autocratic methods of the president and partly to differences of opinion on some important issues, notably on the work of the defense and press department. Since 1941 several changes had occurred in the composition of the Board and since then some members had offered their resignation. But all attempts to overcome the personal problems and the differences of approach failed, and for several months the Board was deeply divided and unable to function normally; and the Central Committee, in spite of new elections, was not in a position to settle the problem.

Under these circumstances, an extraordinary Assembly of Delegates was called on December 13, 1942. The Assembly heard reports by the presidents of the *Gemeindebund* and the *Verband* about the events and developments since the summer, and for the first time some information was given to a wider Jewish circle on the action that had been taken. Again it was Professor Guggenheim who made himself spokesman for the critics. In an interpellation submitted together with 11 other delegates, he forcefully restated his position and raised in particular the following questions: 1. Why had the SIG not sought contact with Federal Counsellor von Steiger after the negative position taken by Rothmund became known, and why had the initiative been left to

a private person? 2. Why had no information been given during the whole period to the Jewish public or to Swiss public opinion and particularly to the members of the federal parliament before the great parliamentary debate? (He felt that the legislators had not clearly understood that deportation meant annihilation and that the *Gemeindebund* had failed to make this absolutely clear to the members of parliament.) 3. What had motivated Rittmeyer, member of the Swiss parliament, to speak in the debate of the *sacro egoismo* (sacred egoism) of Jewish organizations? 4. How did it happen that one repeatedly heard remarks in church circles about the negative and unfriendly attitude toward the refugees on the part of those who directed the policy of the *Gemeindebund*?

At the same time Professor Guggenheim submitted a number of positive suggestions addressed to the Central Committee of the SIG concerning future policy and methods of work. The SIG president and several members of the Board replied to the interpellation. Their most important point was that both the direction of the SIG and of the *Verband* considered that the situation in the summer of 1942 had been a problem for Swiss public opinion and that they should therefore act through the *Schweizerische Zentralstelle für Flüchtlingshilfe* and its president, Briner. It was also stated that since August 20, 1942, there had been no direct contact with the federal authorities and everything had passed through the *Zentralstelle*. They flatly denied the fourth of Guggenheim's questions.

There followed a passionate debate in which a great number of delegates participated. During the last part of the Assembly, organizational and personal problems were discussed. A proposal of the Central Committee to express confidence in the president and the Central Committee was submitted. In view of some opposition and a request to withdraw the proposal, the Central Committee finally agreed to postpone the vote on the proposal to the next Assembly of Delegates.

At the same time a letter from Saly Mayer was read, announcing his irrevocable decision to resign as president from the next Assembly of Delegates.

The next Assembly of Delegates of the SIG took place on March 28, 1943. On this occasion Saly Braunschweig, former vice-president of the SIG and president of the Zurich community, was elected president in place of Saly Mayer. Thus ended a very dramatic chapter in the history of the *Gemeindebund*. At the same time, the SIG Central Committee replied in detail to the various proposals made at the previous Assembly by Professor Guggenheim and accepted a number of them. The Assembly also decided in favor of a revision of the statutes of the SIG, to lead to a democratization of its working methods—a revision which was finally adopted in May 1944.

With the assumption of the presidency by Saly Braunschweig, a new period began. Having served for years as president of the largest Jewish



community, that of Zurich, with its democratic traditions introduced under the influence of David Farbstein and others, Braunschweig had a much greater understanding than his predecessor of the political game, of the necessity of working with the political forces, of having recourse to public opinion, and of trying to mobilize its support. His was a much more open and democratic management and he quietly succeeded in overcoming the dissensions and obtaining a broad consensus in the community.

As an ironic epilogue to these developments, it should be noted that, having resigned as president of the *Gemeindebund*, Saly Mayer was appointed by the American Joint Distribution Committee as its representative and entrusted with a great part of its activities in Europe. He thus assumed much more important responsibilities than he had held before.

He did not, however, depart from the *Gemeindebund* scene without writing an effusive letter of thanks to the head of the federal police, Rothmund, in which he expressed his deep appreciation to him and his colleagues for their understanding and helpfulness.<sup>9</sup> In the light of history this letter represents one of the strangest documents in the entire record of this period.

### The New Jewish Leadership

Under the new direction of the *Gemeindebund*, relations with the federal government were soon reestablished, so that by the time of the Central Committee session of June 7, 1943, Braunschweig could report in detail on his discussions with Federal Counsellor von Steiger on May 26, 1943. The question of refugees continued to occupy the authorities of the *Gemeindebund* as their first priority. The efforts to have more refugees admitted continued, with varying success. The problems concerning the refugees in the country, the situation in the refugee camps, abuses by camp officials or local military personnel, the problem of the labor service required of refugees, the conditions for liberation from the camps, and the question of uniting families remained on the agenda. Slowly the military situation changed and the repercussions on the political front became evident. In July 1943, the Frontist movement was dissolved. When the Fascist regime in Italy collapsed and the short lived Saló republic emerged, regulations regarding Italian and Yugoslav Jewish refugees became much more liberal. The fateful distinction between political and racial refugees was ultimately abolished in August 1944. Thus, in the later part of 1944 and in 1945, transports with 2,830 refugees from Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt were allowed to enter Switzerland.

The SIG resumed its relations with international Jewish organizations, notably with the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency, which the previous administration had practically suspended for reasons of "neutrality."

In June 1943, for the first time the SIG and all its member communities observed a national day of mourning for the Jewish martyrs in occupied Europe. In 1944, also for the first time, the Swiss Jewish community made a public declaration protesting against the anti-Jewish persecutions in Hungary.

Slowly the SIG began to approach the problems of the postwar period. It established a special commission to this effect and published a study, *Jüdische Nachkriegsprobleme* (Jewish Postwar Problems), containing a number of contributions on some of the major problems that world Jewry was to face after the war. At the same time it prepared itself for postwar assistance to the devastated communities.

### Switzerland and the Refugees: An Overview

By the end of the war, 6,654 so-called Jewish emigrants (old refugees) and 21,858 Jewish civilian refugees, a total of 28,512 Jews, had found asylum in Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> Compared with the figure of 7,000, which was considered as the maximum tolerable in 1942, this was not a negligible result. It was also not a result with which one could be satisfied, particularly if one thought of the many people who were refused entry at the frontiers and the many thousands more who, because of Swiss policy, gave up all attempts to penetrate Swiss territory. However, there are not many countries that can say that they have saved a greater number.

It is this writer's opinion that with a more liberal attitude, several tens of thousands more could have been saved without any serious consequences to the Swiss population, to its food situation, its labor market, its security problems. This writer is all the more convinced of this as the political situation forced Switzerland to accept at certain moments, and to keep during the whole war, large numbers of military refugees; and at the end of the war it harbored within its frontiers more than 100,000 people in this category—internees, escaped prisoners, deserters, and hospitalized people—and there was never any doubt that they should be admitted.

The Swiss position on the refugees is eloquently reflected in the following quotation from the monumental work on the history of Swiss neutrality by the eminent Swiss historian Edgar Bonjour:

The Swiss boat was not "overcrowded"; it was not "even full" and would have been able, even in politically stormy seas, to take on a far greater number of refugees without sinking. It is true that compared to former periods of Swiss asylum policy, the most recent one was both more variable and more intricate. . . . But as far as the spirit of sacrifice of the authorities or of private persons is concerned, this war period comes off badly when compared with earlier ones. The

severe measures taken by the authorities and the inadequately expressed will to help on the part of private persons can be understood in the context of an external political situation periodically fraught with great danger, as well as of a precarious supply situation. However, whether this fact leads one to approve of the official attitude of reserve shown to asylum seekers hotly pursued by certain death, is a question each one has to decide for himself. That some of those looking back refuse to give their approval, is their legitimate right both as citizens and as human beings.<sup>11</sup>

Those who evaluate the activities of the Swiss Jewish leadership during World War II will have to take these observations into consideration. Swiss Jewish leaders did not live in a vacuum. Those who stood the test and those who failed were deeply marked by the events around them. That they tried their best is not in doubt. But finally, we are to be judged by what we achieve.

1. *Ludwig Report*, p. 118/9.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
3. "Strictly racial refugees, e.g., Jews, are not to be considered as political refugees." *Ibid.*, p. 205.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
5. The composition of the Board was changed somewhat on November 2, 1941; further changes occurred, notably on March 25, 1942, and on March 28, 1943.
6. Minutes, SIG Assembly of Delegates, 25 May 1941.
7. Minutes, Central Committee, SIG, November 2, 1941.
8. Files of the "Ludwig Report dossier" in the archives of the SIG.
9. The letter was quoted in full in the Swiss parliamentary debate of June 8, 1954, on the origins of the introduction of the regulations requiring the marking of passports of German Jews with the letter *J*. It was obviously intended to show the close association of the Swiss Jews with the authorities. The *Ludwig Report* mentions in this connection an article published in the Swiss Jewish paper *Schweizerisches Israelitisches Wochenblatt* (Swiss-Jewish Weekly) on the parliamentary debate. It stated that the attitude of the representative of Swiss Jewry at that time and now deceased to whom Rothmund had referred was not approved in large circles of Swiss Jewry. This had led to internal differences and finally to the resignation of the person in question. (*Ludwig Report*, p. 150)
10. *Ludwig Report*, p. 318.
11. Edgar Bonjour, *Geschichte der Schweizerischen Neutralität*, 6:39-40.

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by David S. Wyman, continued from page 749.

1942, p. 16; *Bulletin of the World Jewish Congress*, Jan. 1943, p. 1; *PM*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 12.

20. Gottschalk to Waldman, Nov. 27, 1942, AJC papers, General Record, Germany Nazism 42-43; *PM*, Nov. 26, 1942, 12; Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee . . . Nov. 30, 1942, AJC papers, JEC.

21. Gottschalk to Waldman, Nov. 27, 1942, AJC papers, General Record, Germany Nazism 42-43; Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee . . . Nov. 30, 1942, AJC papers, JEC; *CW*, (Dec. 4, 1942) 9(37):15-16, (Dec. 11, 1942) 9(38):8-11. The limited news coverage obtained can be seen, e.g., in *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 4; *Washington Post*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 198; *Boston Herald*, Nov. 26, 1942, p. 46.

22. AJYB 45:193; *CW* (Dec. 4, 1942) 9(37):16; Minutes of Dec. 2, 1942, Jewish Labor Committee papers (in Yiddish); Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee . . . Nov. 30, 1942, AJC papers, JEC.

23. AJYB 45:193; *CW* (Dec. 18, 1942) 9(39):13; Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee . . . Nov. 30, 1942, AJC papers, JEC.

24. NYT, Dec. 9, 1942, p. 20; *National Jewish Monthly*, (Jan. 1943) 57(5):146; [Adolph Held], Report on the Visit to the President [Dec. 8, 1942], Jewish Labor Committee papers, Communications with the White House 1942; Wertheim, Wise, et al. to the President, Dec. 8, 1942, Blue Print for Extermination [Dec. 8, 1942], FDR papers, OF 76-C.

25. [Adolph Held], Report on the Visit to the President [Dec. 8, 1942], Jewish Labor Committee papers, Communications with the White House 1942; MD 68811/243; *Washington Post*, Dec. 9, 1942, p. 18; NYT, Dec. 9, 1942, p. 20; Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs, Sept. 28, 1943, AJC papers, JEC.

26. Barou/Easterman to Perlzweig, Dec. 17, 1942, WJC papers, 177A/50; Easterman to Perlzweig, Jan. 15, 1943, WJC papers, U-142N13; Fox, *English Historical Review*, (Jan. 1977) 92(362):98-103; FRUS (1942) 1:66-67.

27. NYT, Dec. 18, 1942, pp. 1, 10, 26; *Kansas City Star*, Dec. 17, 1942, p. 1; *Denver Post*, Dec. 17, 1942, p. 1; Proposals [Dec. 10, 1942], WJC papers, 264/1; *Bulletin of the World Jewish Congress*, Jan. 1943, p. 2.

28. Proposals [Dec. 10, 1942], WJC papers, 264/1; *Bulletin of the World Jewish Congress*, Jan. 1943, p. 2.

29. Proposals [Dec. 10, 1942], WJC papers, 264/1.

30. *Ibid.*; Shultz, Memorandum, Dec. 10, 1942, WJC papers, U-185/3; Planning Committee on the European Situation, Dec. 14, 1942, WJC papers, U-186/A; Activities of the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress with Respect to the Hitler Program [mid-Jan. 1943], WJC papers, U-185/2.

31. Activities of the American Jewish Congress [mid-Jan. 1943], WJC papers, U-185/2; NYT, Dec. 28, 1942, pp. 5, 13; draft form letter on American Jewish Congress stationery, Dec. 28, 1942, Wise papers, American Jewish Congress, Shultz.

32. Minutes, Special Committee on European Situation, Dec. 14, 1942, WJC papers, U-185/3; Activities of the American Jewish Congress [mid-Jan. 1943], WJC papers, U-185/2; Greenberg, *Midstream*, (Mar. 1964), 10(1):8-9; Joseph Tenenbaum, *Yad Vashem Bulletin* (Apr. 1957) 7(4):4.

33. *Opinion*, (Jan. 1943) 13(3):5, 16; *Jewish Forum*, (Dec. 1942) 25(12):193; *Christian Century* (Jan. 6, 1943) 60(1):26.

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35. NYT, Feb. 13, 1943, p. 5, Feb. 16, 1943, p. 11; MD 611/275; Welles to Wagner, Mar. 10, 1943, Robert F. Wagner papers, Palestine files, box 2, folder 23; Welles to Davis, Mar. 11, 1943, SD file 840.48 Refugees/3608.

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38. NYT, Feb. 16, 1943, p. 11.

39. *Opinion*, (Mar. 1943) 13(5):14; NP, (Mar. 5, 1943) 33(9):4; Minutes of Meeting of the Z.O.A. Executive Committee, Feb. 20, 1943, p. 9, Wise papers, Z.O.A. Exec. Comm.; *NY Herald Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1943, p. 16; *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 22, 1943, p. 8; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 23, 1943, 15; *Chicago Daily News*, Feb. 25, 1943, p. 13.

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41. American Jewish Congress Press Release, Feb. 22, 1943, WJC papers, U-222/3; NYT, Mar. 2, 1943, pp. 1, 4; *CW* (Mar. 5, 1943) 10(10):15.

42. NYT, Mar. 2, 1943, p. 4; *CW* (Mar. 5, 1943) 10(10):16.

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70. Based on information reported in several parts of my forthcoming book on the American response to the Holocaust. Shown, e.g., in Summary of Position of American Jewish Committee [Nov. 8, 1943], AJC papers, Proskauer, Emergency Committee 1943.

This conclusion is also supported, in general, by Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), pp. 240-49, 536, 552, 555.

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