



Samuel Merlin

WITHOUT A MANDATE

With an introduction by Rafael Medoff

WITHOUT A MANDATE

The story of the “Bergson Group” and its campaign for
a Jewish Army to save the Jewish people of Europe, and
the establishment of a Hebrew Republic in Palestine

The evolution of a delegation of the Irgun Zvai Leumi
into the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation

S. Merlin

With an introduction by
Rafael Medoff



The Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism
University of Haifa

Samuel Merlin
WITHOUT A MANDATE

Editor: **Rebecca Kook**
Copy editor: **Renate Schein**

Cover photo: In 1944 the Bergson Group purchased the former Iranian Embassy in Washington, D.C. and renamed it the Hebrew Embassy. It became their headquarters. Courtesy of the Nurenberger Family.

ISBN: 978-965-92974-1-2

© Copyright 2022 by Rebecca Kook

Printed in Israel 2022

Table of Contents

Editorial note	11
Prologue	13
Introduction – Samuel Merlin, Thinker and Activist ...	15
Preface	21
Foreword [<i>Missing</i>].....	33
Introductory	35
On generalizations	35
The Explanation of the Holocaust	37

Part I: “Dos Yiddishe Folk”

Chapter 1	The People (The Hebrew Nation)	43
	“Dos Yiddishe Folk”	45
	On top of a live volcano	52
	Three fatal weaknesses	55
	Bontzie Schweig [Bontshe Shvayg]	56
	Between the devil and the deep blue sea	58
Chapter 2	Setting the stage for Hitler	60
	The British and German peoples supported their governments	61
	From Évian to Bermuda	65
Chapter 3	Hebrew Liberation Movement	75
	Hebrew Committee of National Liberation	75
	Political activism	80
	From Legionism to resistance	81
	The formative years of the Hebrew resistance	85
	The Irgun’s young leadership	91
	Reevaluation of Zionism’s main premises	95
	Liberation versus colonization; repatriation versus immigration	99
	An alliance that came too late	102
	Collapse and revival	106

Part II: The Hebrew Emissaries

Chapter 4	A sketch of the emissaries	113
	The first steps	115
	The stampede	119
Chapter 5	The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine	121
	The beginning	121
	The Struma	127
	The survivor	127
	The Rumanians	129
	<i>The Turks</i>	130
	<i>The British</i>	130
	<i>The explosion</i>	131
	<i>Humanity</i>	131
	Wanted for Murder	132
Chapter 6	Innovations, a new approach and unprecedented methods	134
	Internal modus operandi of the group.....	134
	The key that opened the gates of the “Golden Ghetto” ..	136
	Storming public opinion by mass advertising	139
	The non-sectarian organizations	140
	Cooperation with leaders of subjugated nations	143
Chapter 7	The Committee for a Jewish Army	145
	The announcement in Parliament of a Jewish Brigade....	145
	The [Jewish Army] Committee in Great Britain	150
	The end of a five-year campaign	151
	An incredible visit with the British Ambassador	152
	To fight as a Nation	154
	The repercussions	154
	The Zionist position	158
	The debates in Congress and Parliament	159
	Besieging the White House	164
	The attempts to apply censorship to the campaign for a Jewish Army	166

	Why did the Allies reject a Jewish Army?	169
Chapter 8	A proclamation On the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews	181

Part III: The Holocaust

Chapter 9	Could the Jews have been saved?	185
	The Wannsee Conference	185
	Was the catastrophe unavoidable?	197
	Did the Nazis want to kill the Jews or to get rid of them?	198
	The vice of selectivity	201
	The Yishuv and the Holocaust	207
	The unmentionable	221
	The Memorial Pageants	222
	70,000 Jews for sale	224
Chapter 10	The Bermuda Conference	229
Chapter 11	A Strange Episode in the U.S. Senate	233
	<i>Missing in the Manuscript</i>	
Chapter 12	The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe	234
	The conference	234
	The detailed plan how to save the Jews	240
	Military and Political Measures	240
	Treatments of Jews	240
	Palestine	241
	Transportation	241
	Mission to London	242
	Delegation to Palestine and Turkey	243
	A Presidential Promise that was never kept	244
	The Rabbis' pilgrimage to Washington	245
	Day of intercession	246
	What Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin overlooked	247
	Tribute to Denmark and Sweden	252

Chapter 13	The Struggle for a Special Agency	254
	A Resolution in both Houses of Congress	254
	Vengeance by a Jewish Congressman	255
	Zionist opposition and Rabbi Wise's testimony	256
	The State Department's efforts to kill the Resolution in Committee	258
	The debacle of Long's testimony	259
Chapter 14	Three Protestants and One Emancipated Jew	262
	The mystery of State Department's cable exchange with the American Minister in Bern	263
	Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner	266
	A letter from Rabbi Wise to his "Boss"	268
	Morgenthau's final conversion	276
	Secretary of the Treasury accuses his government of acquiescing in the murder of the Jews	278
	A decisive meeting with the President	281
Chapter 15	The War Refugee Board	284
	FDR's Executive Order	284
	Emergency Committee given full credit	285
	Statement by the Emergency Committee about the implications of the WRB	287
	It was no triumph	295
	"One victory for Hitler?"	297
Chapter 16	Did the WRB Live up to Expectations?	305
	The Record	305
	"Please, take us seriously!"	308
	The "Jewish Commonwealth Committee"	310
	A disastrous offer by the Jewish establishment	310
	An admission of failure	313
	Zionist obstructionism	315

Part IV: Campaign to Save the Last Two Million Jews

Chapter 17	"Free Ports" for Human beings	323
	The WRB's greatest dilemma	325

	Resolution in the U.S. Senate urging President to establish temporary havens	335
	Oswego, a cruel gimmick	336
	The farce	339
	Temporary shelters in other countries	342
	Zionists oppose the principle of temporary shelters	342
	The people of upper New York State welcomed the refugees	343
Chapter 18	The Campaign to Save the Jews of Hungary	344
	<i>Missing in the Manuscript</i>	
Chapter 19	Horthy Announces His Readiness To Let All the Jews Leave	345
	<i>Missing in the Manuscript</i>	
Chapter 20	U.S. and Great Britain Were Avers (or Recoiled from) To Accept Horthy's Offer	346
	<i>Missing in the Manuscript</i>	
Chapter 21	Temporary Shelters in Palestine	347
	Bergson offers Churchill an astonishing compromise	347
	President urged to intercede with the British	350
	CBS censored a speech by Senator Thomas	351
	Resolutions in both Houses of Congress demand immediate establishment of emergency shelters in Palestine	352
	500,000 petitioned the President	354
	Zionist dogma vs. saving human lives	357
	Of what use is the Atlantic Charter?	360
	Jewish leadership preferred the Jews to remain where they were to regain equal rights after the war or to live in their own "commonwealth" in Palestine	362
	Switzerland	367
Chapter 22	The Eri Jabotinsky File	368
	His mission to Turkey	368
	His rapport with Ambassador Steinhardt	369

	His evacuation plan to shuttle Jews weekly from the Balkans to Palestine	372
	His relations with the Turkish authorities and the British intervention to expel him	375
	His arrest	376
	Ben Hecht to Lord Halifax: "A Friend of Mine was Arrested"	376
	Zionist pressure to disavow him	377
	The true facts of the WRB's official involvement	379
Chapter 23	The Arrest and Deportation of Aryeh Ben-Eliezer ...	381
Chapter 24	Negotiating with the Enemy	383
Chapter 25	Retaliation: The Proposal to Use Poison Gas Against the Germans	393
	State Department's routine hypocritical answer to all retaliation proposals	393
	Bergson's radio address demanding to warn the Germans that unless they cease gassing Jews, retaliation will be in kind	397
	The Emergency Committee's previous retaliation proposals	397
	The Chiefs of Staff's deliberations, minutes of their meetings and conclusions	400

Part V: Conclusion

Chapter 26	Reflections on the Holocaust	409
	Why the code language? ("Sprachregelung")	409
	Beyond imagination	415
	Germany, a country gone mad: an epidemic of violence and murder	416
	The banality of evil	429
	Fathers and sons: contradicting attitudes towards Hitler ..	435
	The all-engulfing nemesis	436
	From enemy of mankind to ally	437

Editorial note

Overall, this manuscript has been treated as an original. Thus, punctuation and wording has been left as given by its author. However, certain insertions indicating an intended line of thought but left unrealized have been left out, as have certain pages presenting an alternative account, but without adding substantially to the content.

Respecting the author's original manuscript, no editorial changes whatsoever were made to accord with the current stance of historical research.

Apart from the existing footnotes, the author most probably indicated further ones by putting asterixis *) in the text as well as an intended (but never realized) 'Appendix', which all have been left untouched.

The only editorial intervention made concerns the spelling of personal names, locations, and names of organizations. They have all been adjusted to a contemporary spelling thus making it easier for the reader to retrieve them in different search engines.

All other editorial insertions or clarifications are clearly marked in brackets.

Prologue

The document which is presented in this volume is most probably the last and close to final draft of a comprehensive historical manuscript, written by Samuel Merlin, aimed at telling the story of what came to be known as “the Bergson Group” – the political group active in the United States from 1940 until 1948, that is during World War II up until the founding of the State of Israel. Upon arrival in Israel, Merlin served in Israel’s first parliament from 1949-1951. After retiring entirely from public life in 1953, Merlin turned to writing, researching, and teaching. For a few years he tried his hand at publishing, and then, in 1958, along with Hillel Kook, established a research institute in New York City called The Institute for Mediterranean Affairs. The Institute was active for a bit over a decade, producing policy papers and political reports on topics relevant to the region. It produced its last report in 1975.

Merlin’s true passion, however, was writing. After the Institute’s activity ceased, and for the remainder of his life, Merlin wrote. He worked on multiple manuscripts and projects simultaneously, on topics as diverse as literary history (a manuscript on Shakespeare), religion (on Jesus Christ), and Jewish history. The document brought to light in this volume represents most probably his most cherished work, and the one closest to his heart, at once a historical analysis of the conditions that led to and enabled the Holocaust, as well as a detailed account of the many forces and historical circumstances that combined to obstruct the tireless and dedicated efforts of the Bergson group to promote rescue of the Jews as a major war goal. His erudition, his perfectionism, and his passion for historical accuracy are probably what prevented him from feeling that he had ever completed the manuscript. Version followed version, and revision followed revision. Sadly, Merlin passed away in 1994 without seeing the manuscript in print.

In 2011 Rafael Medoff compiled a revised and abridged version of the

manuscript based on a careful reading and painstaking editorial overview of a number of the versions. This volume is a companion to Medoff's work, bringing to light the original manuscript – as a historical document. The document gives us a taste of Merlin's unique style, historical acumen, and intellectual worldview. We publish it as a tribute to Merlin's scholarship and commitment to historical research.

Rebecca Kook

July 2022

Herzliya, Israel

Introduction

Samuel Merlin, Thinker and Activist

Over the course of his remarkable life, Samuel Merlin was at times a journalist, a refugee, a political activist, and a member of parliament. But through it all, he was, first and foremost, a thinker. A keen observer of the crises engulfing the Jewish people in the 1930s and 1940s, he devoted himself to conceiving ways to ameliorate their suffering. He pondered, he discussed, he debated, he searched.

Yet Merlin was no armchair intellectual. As much as he would have enjoyed wiling away the hours in discussions of political and philosophical issues with friends in their favorite European cafés, he would not have been content leading that sort of life. He felt too strongly to limit himself to theorizing. He was determined to see his ideas implemented in the real world.

The transition from theory to practice was a recurring theme in Merlin's life. He did not merely join the nationalist Betar youth movement; he traveled the regions near his native Kishinev to organize Betar chapters. He enrolled at the Sorbonne – which must have been a source of great intellectual stimulation for him – but then abandoned his studies in order to become secretary-general of the Revisionist Zionist movement in France. Soon he rose higher in its leadership ranks, first to the position of secretary-general of the World Zionist-Revisionist Executive, and then secretary (senior aide) to Revisionist leader Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky.

When Merlin became convinced, in 1938, “that political activity had run its course” (as he put it), he left the Revisionist movement to join the underground Irgun Zvai Leumi and devote himself to preparations for an armed revolt against British rule in Palestine. Not that the bookish Merlin hardly was cut out for the life of a soldier. But he had an important role to play in the revolution; he served as co-editor of the

Irgun's Yiddish-language newspaper, *Die Tat* (The Action), honing its message to the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe.

The focus of Zionist political activity shifted from Europe to the United States when World War II erupted. The trajectory of Merlin's work as an activist echoed that change. Fortuitously, he departed from Warsaw just hours before the German invasion of Poland in 1939, and then left Paris just weeks before the German invasion of France the following spring. Merlin then found himself in the right place at the right time: he took up residence in New York City, the heart of American Jewry, just as American Jews were most needed to mobilize on behalf of their European brethren.

The obstacles to such mobilization were numerous and formidable. Many American Jews, as immigrants or the children of immigrants, did not yet feel fully accepted as Americans and thus were reluctant to be seen as advocating controversial causes. In addition, the mood in America was strongly isolationist, which made it difficult to rally public support for a U.S. role in Palestine or in European affairs.

To make matters worse, Merlin and his closest colleagues – Hillel Kook (better known as Peter Bergson), Yitshaq Ben-Ami, Eri Jabotinsky and Alex Rafaeli – had no financial or other backing from established Jewish organizations. They ventured into the public arena with barely any of the organizational apparatus typically needed for political advocacy. They had only the most cursory knowledge of American political culture. English was not their native language.

How, then, did they manage to accomplish all that they did?

The answer to that question is connected to the role of Merlin as a thinker at the pinnacle of his intellectual prowess. He and Kook proved themselves to be political strategists of the first order, conceiving unique and effective ways to confront the crises of their time.

Merlin and Kook began their campaigns in America with the understanding that the Jewish state-to-be would require an army. So they lobbied the Allies to create a Jewish fighting force that would assist in the Allied war effort – and then later could form the nucleus of the army in Jewish Palestine. Their efforts arguably played a significant role in the creation of the legendary Jewish Brigade.

When news of the mass murder of Europe's Jews was confirmed in 1942, Merlin and Kook shifted their agenda accordingly. Now their first

order of business became alerting the American public, and American Jewry, about a catastrophe that was being ignored by the news media.

In the years to follow, their political action committee, popularly known as the Bergson Group, placed more than 200 full-page advertisements in America's leading newspapers. It is hard to imagine, today, what a revolutionary development that represented. In general, American political and social advocacy groups did not utilize newspaper ads to spread their message. U.S. Jewish organizations, handicapped by fears of stirring up antisemitism, were especially reticent about utilizing the medium of advertising. Those fears were not shared by Merlin or Kook, who were not Americans and did not care about the question of gaining acceptance in American society.

Merlin authored many of the group's newspaper advertisements. Their messages were cogently argued and passionately presented. But, to Merlin's credit, he recognized that the pen of a veteran American dramatist would be even more effective. So they recruited the irrepressible Pulitzer Prize winning screenwriter Ben Hecht, who wrote the most controversial, and most impactful, of the ads.

If the Bergson Group's advertisements were a radical innovation, so were its other tactics, including staging a dramatic protest pageant at Madison Square Garden, organizing a march of 400 rabbis to the White House, and establishing political alliances not only with Democrats with whom most Jews felt comfortable but also Republicans with whom Jews shared little common ground on most issues.

These novel undertakings proved enormously successful. The "We Will Never Die" pageant brought the plight of the Jews to the attention of millions of Americans. The rabbinical march elevated the demand for U.S. action to rescue Jewish refugees. The bipartisan lobbying efforts turned Congress from a passive bystander into an active source of pressure on the administration to help save Jews.

The Bergson Group's campaign played an indispensable role in forcing President Franklin Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board in early 1944. In the last fifteen months of the war, the Board helped rescue some 200,000 European Jews.

The manuscript which follows concludes in 1945. But a brief look at Merlin's post-1945 work sheds additional light on the ways in which his ideas reshaped Jewish history.

As gratified as Merlin was by the belated rescue of some European Jews, he and his colleagues understood that the end of the Holocaust did not represent the end of their mission. Thus they turned again to the task of mass mobilization, this time rallying the support of American Jewry and the U.S. public for the creation of a Jewish state.

During those years, 1946-1948, the Bergson Group's efforts were relatively small compared to the massive information and lobbying campaign undertaken on behalf of Jewish statehood by the mainstream American Zionist organizations. Nonetheless, the unique contribution that Merlin and company made to that effort should not be overlooked.

Palestine was in flames as three underground militias, the Haganah, the Irgun, and the Stern Group, battled the British for Jewish independence. The U.S. government was in a position to influence British policy. American Zionist leaders utilized the conventional methods and channels to plead for Jewish rights. But Merlin recognized that those efforts represented only part of what needed to be done in the Diaspora.

To bring about more substantial public support for Jewish statehood – and thereby to increase the pressure on the British to withdraw from Palestine – the American public needed to understand the justice of the Jewish fighters' cause. To do this, it would be necessary to explain the Jewish Revolt in uniquely American terms.

The result was a slew of Bergson Group newspaper ads, articles, speeches, and rallies presenting the Jewish underground's fight as "1776 All Over Again." Irgun leader Menachem Begin was touted as a kind of latter-day George Washington, battling the British for independence just as the American colonists had done. Merlin's broadsides invoked Thomas Jefferson, Nathan Hale, and Paul Revere.

After the establishment of Israel, Merlin the thinker continued to leave his imprint, albeit in less tumultuous ways. As a member of Israel's First Knesset, he wrestled with his parliamentary colleagues over the identity and governance of the new State of Israel. As the director of a small think tank, he promoted innovative ideas concerning Arab-Israeli relations. In his final years, he assisted the American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust in its assessment of the community's response to the Nazi genocide and participated in spirited public debates over its findings.

Without a Mandate is Merlin's posthumously published account of the Bergson Group's campaigns for U.S. government action to rescue Jews

from the Holocaust. It offers an insider's perspective, a chronicle of a battle by one of the combatants. As such, it is a vital historical document and contributes to our understanding of one of the most consequential eras in modern Jewish history.

Rafael Medoff

* * *

Dr. Rafael Medoff is founding director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, and author of more than 20 books about Jewish history, Zionism, and the Holocaust. He edited and annotated the 2011 book *Millions of Jews to Rescue: A Bergson Group Leader's Account of the Campaign to Save Jews from the Holocaust*, which featured Samuel Merlin's manuscript.

Preface

To begin an introduction to a collection of documents with a polemic is a risky thing to do; it may cast doubts upon the objectivity of the story. The justification for doing it nonetheless is that the narration of the methodological difficulties the author was faced with is an integral part of the story, and perhaps its central part to boot.

This book was not written in a spirit of self-justification or motivated exclusively by the desire to relate the struggles and achievements of a dissident group to save the Jews of Europe, and after the war to establish a Hebrew republic in Palestine. It was written with a view to shed light on the Holocaust from a non-conventional, historic perspective, and to advance several theses, chief of which is that the Jews of Europe could have been saved, at least in their vast majority.

This writer was confronted with a puzzle which seemed impossible to solve; for the last thirty odd years scores of histories, monographs, memoirs, autobiographies and essays were published either about the general events during the war years when the Jewish people of Europe perished; or about the action or inaction of each of the great powers, mainly of the Western democracies; the Vatican; the churches of other Christian denominations; the international Red Cross; about the attitudes of certain neutral countries; about public opinion --- its mood, prejudices or compassionate reactions; or about a specific country under German occupation; or works focused on a certain aspect of the catastrophe; and in rare cases the position of the Jewish and Zionist organizations in the free world.

The puzzle is that in this vast literature the only group which played a central role in all the struggles for the rescue of the Jews and the liberation of Palestine during the cataclysmic decade of 1939-1948 is not mentioned at all, or barely. There were some exceptions among historians who did relate some activities of this group, but they referred to it

marginally, *en passant*, without ascribing to it great historic significance; and when references and sources are given, they are often erroneous or distorted (The six-teen volume Encyclopedia Judaica all but ignores it).

Occasionally the campaigns, the frustrations and rare successions of this group are reported in a way as if they refer to the group's adversaries, the Zionists.

None of the historians and writers of a memoirs told the amazing story of the sustained crusades for: a) the illegal immigration before the outbreak of the war and sometimes afterwards; b) a Jewish army; c) to save the Jewish people of Europe; and d) the struggle to liberate Palestine from British rule --- all carried out by the various organizations initiated and inspired by the Bergson Group. The work of these organizations commanded the attention of millions of people and governments of all the allied nations, mainly the US and Great Britain. The writers never revealed who was responsible for the major achievements of breaking the conspiracy to keep the destruction of the Jews a secret, by forcing the Allied governments to end the anonymity of the victims of the Nazi's Final Solution, and the establishment of the War Refugee Board. All this is usually ignored as if it never happened, or as if all the records were lost. One is reminded of the yokel in Krilov's fable who went to town to visit the zoo and came back full of enthusiasm for the marvelous sights he saw, describing the reptiles, parrots, turtles, birds and monkeys, but when asked about the elephant replied: "That I didn't noticed."

The fact is that none of these writers can claim ignorance or blame it on the lack of records and official documentation. It isn't that the events related by contemporary writers happened in the Middle Ages or in deep antiquity and hence the historian has to reconstruct past events from disparate fragments physically damaged by time, or incomprehensible to the modern researcher, requiring long and laborious study and specialization. The public records of the Bergson Group flew in the face of anyone who has written about that period. They are available in the Library of Congress (Manuscript Division) in Washington; National Archives (State Department records, Washington); collections of manuscripts and Archives in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (Hyde Park); in the many volumes of declassified material and documents published by the State Department under the title Foreign Relations United States (FRUS); in the Public Record Office of Great Britain in London (PRO); of

declassified documents of Foreign and Colonial Offices of the American and British intelligence services; in the Zionist Archives in Jerusalem and New York; and in the Library of the Hebrew University (Jerusalem). There are special collections of the Bergson Group's record at the Manuscripts and Archives of Yale University Library (Palestine Statehood Papers, Manuscript Group No. 690); in the Jabotinsky Institute in Tel Aviv; and dozen other places. There are literally tens of thousands of documents in the files of the institutions available to the researcher. Apart from all this, the Committee's¹ activities were reported and commented on over a decade, often on a daily basis, in the American (and to a lesser degree the British) press. (Comprehensive stories, columns, profiles, interviews, etc.) Blazing Broadides appeared in full page (sometimes smaller) advertisements in a score of leading newspapers of the U.S. and Canada, including the prestigious New York Times and Washington Post. Dozens of resolutions were introduced in both Houses of Congress.

The major Allied governments saw in the Committee not just a nuisance but a threat. British officials, including members of the Cabinet, were often more preoccupied with the group's activities than with all the Jewish and Zionist organizations combined. The amount of time, thought and paper work by the British Government and its Embassy in Washington is astonishing. Had they not given so much time and attention to this, perhaps they would have won the war sooner. The same can be said about the administration in Washington. There was not a Department that wasn't preoccupied with that group: the White House, State Department, Department of War, both Houses of Congress, Department of Justice, the FBI, ambassadors from several countries, the Military Intelligence Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the National Induction Service, etc. What is more, the Zionists and leaders of other Jewish organizations gave so much time to discrediting the Group in the eyes of the Allied governments and the public at large, that one understands why they had little time to do anything else. Incredible as it may sound, the truth is that everything stated here in general terms

1 We will use in the text intermittently the term 'Committee' referring to the Bergson Group, or the names of the three organizations which functioned under the inspiration of that group.

is strictly borne out by thousands of declassified documents of various Western governments.

* * *

What were the reasons for this determination to ignore the activities and achievements of a group responsible for the most dramatic and effective campaigns on behalf of the Jews during the years of unprecedented cataclysm? Try as one may, it is impossible to give a satisfactory answer. One can only make a tentative effort to penetrate the motivating forces behind this phenomenon. For this purpose, it would be helpful to distinguish between two kinds of historians about that period.

One is strictly partisan, and having written their stories from a partisan point of view, in the belief that for the greater glory of the “recognized” Zionist and Jewish leaders: Dr. Weizmann, Dr. Goldman, Moshe Shertok [Moshe Sharett], Ben-Gurion, Stephen Wise, Rabbi Hillel Silver, Judge Proskauer, et al, – the best thing would be not to notice “the elephant.” In the meantime, a new generation of scholars and historians grew up and they are, subjectively speaking, not partisan in a narrow sense. They bear no exaggerated loyalty to the memory of the famous leaders of the past (most of whom are now dead), nor to those who head the present Zionist and Jewish establishment. Nor do they share the passions of the past controversies among the opposing Zionist camps, which often took on a violent character. Most of them don’t exactly appreciate the nature and emotional depth of those controversies. They sincerely believe that they are independent scholars trying to write their essays on history without bias or malice. But this is true only from a subjective point of view. The fact remains that most, if not all of them, were brought up within the framework of Zionist tradition and mythology – they knew no other. To them what existed, or what the influential Jews said existed, was real. It did not occur to them that to have the right perception of contemporary events one must start with questioning the very assumptions accepted for more than half a century; to check the very foundations on which the edifice of the Jewish and Zionist establishment was built. Since this did not occur to them, they wrote about what was accepted, “recognized,” what they considered to possess “authority” and was “representative” of the Jewish people in Palestine and diaspora. They were psychologically and

intellectually incapable of transcending their personal background education, the myths and assumptions of their parents and their environment. They were educated – as far as the Jewish people were concerned – on the literature and mysticism of Zionism, especially Socialist Zionism – in fine, on the preconception of Jewish historiography. Whatever didn't "belong" they skipped or whatever they couldn't understand – as far as past, pre-war party struggles are concerned – they decided not to get involved, seemingly. Without grasping that most of the material was partisan to begin with.

However, when writing about the controversies in the 1940s, they were confronted with new issues within a different historic context. In fact, the unprecedented events, apocalyptic in character, required a radical reassessment of accepted premises which the Zionist and Jewish organizations refused to do, or were incapable of doing. They didn't even try to make adjustments required by the new circumstances.

The Bergson Group stepped in because they realized the full scope of the emergencies and that only urgent and unprecedented measures are necessary to meet the requirements for survival and liberation. It insisted that the measures to adopt must be commensurate in scope with the disaster. The historians seemed bewildered by the fact that instead of being welcomed and supported by the Jewish organizations, they instead unleashed a fierce campaign of vilification and character assassination against the Group, especially its leading member – P.H. Bergson. Though the Jewish leadership remained passive to the inhumanity of the democratic government of the Allies, and almost thoughtless about the indescribable suffering of their fellow Jews, the historians, in the light of their upbringing and tradition, failed to appreciate that such behavior was normally and politically possible. They tried to rationalized and conjectured that there must have been reasons justifying the leadership's behavior and wrath. They were seeking not for a true understanding – perhaps it was beyond their capability, but a way out of their dilemma as historians.

It seems that one of the most difficult things to do is free oneself from the shackles of tradition and to break the mold of thought it created. The prestige, the presumed "recognition" by the powers that be, the considerable financial resources of the entrenched Jewish establishment, despite its unforgivable passivity in fields where they had to leave no stone unturned

and their sudden upsurge of passionate activities in fields which were irrelevant to the situation at hand, despite their obstructionism of initiatives undertaken by the Committee; despite all this the new historians, with the exception of those one can count on the fingers of one hand, did not tell the story of the behavior of the Jewish leadership in its true light. It seems that it requires a heroic effort on the part of a Jewish historian to challenge the moral integrity and stamina of the traditional leadership, and treat them, on the basis of massive documentation as a nullity – as far as an instrument of rescuing the Jewish people of Europe was concerned.

II.

One historian who does not ignore the Bergson group is Walter Laqueur. In his book “A History of Zionism”² he treats at length the period of the “Europe Catastrophe,” and dedicates twenty-one lines to the totality of the group’s activities during a decade. Though only a paragraph, at first glance it does not sound antagonistic, and it is worthwhile to reproduce it:

There was in Jewish circles much resentment against an indifferent world which ignored the Holocaust. There was also mounting anger against Jewish leaders who refused to speak out, apparently in fear of having their American patriotism questioned. These moods were exploited by a young Palestinian Revisionist leader named Peter Bergson (Hillel Kook), who found a valuable ally in Ben Hecht, a successful playwright and Hollywood figure with connections of Broadway and in Hollywood, as well as Madison Avenue. With the help of several devoted colleagues these two, initially operating on a small budget, organized a public relations campaign for the immediate establishment of a Jewish army which all but overshadowed the activities of the official Zionist movement. Bergson and Hecht received the support of the secretaries of the army and navy, the chief justice, many congressmen. They put on.... pageants (‘We will never die – a memorial to the two million Jewish dead of Europe’), and in general created a great deal of commotion. The direct political results of these activities were nil, but, for all

2 Walter Laqueur: **A History of Zionism**; New York; Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1972, 640 pp. He brings the story up to the proclamation of the State of Israel and its recognition by the various great powers.

the self-dramatization, shrill language and distortions, the Palestine Liberation Committee (which at various times also called itself 'Committee for a Jewish Army' and 'Emergency Committee to save the Jewish people of Europe') helped at this stage to stir up American Jewish awareness of the extent of the catastrophe.

There was the risk that the Zionist Organization would be outflanked by the revisionists, but a much more formidable danger facing American Zionism was the lack of unity among the various Jewish bodies.³

* * *

Reading these lines, one can get the impression that they contradict what we said about the way historians treated the Bergson Group and the position of the Jewish leadership during the war years. Such impression is erroneous.

For the moment I don't refer to the ignorance disclosed by the learned professor in referring to Bergson as a "Revisionist leader": he never belonged to that party let alone being its leader. At times the Revisionists were among the most extreme adversaries of the Bergson Group, yet he ascribed all these campaigns to them.

Something has to be said about the disparaging tone, presenting the tremendous and sustained efforts of the Committee as some kind of public relations gimmick by Hollywood and Madison Avenue advertising and publicity people. The truth is that hundreds of important Jewish personalities renowned in the world of art, literature and philosophy who had nothing to do with the motion picture industry or public relations firms, associated themselves with the work of the Committee; not to speak of the active support of the quasi-totality of Orthodox Judaism as well as many Rabbis of all three denominations, and the sponsorship of gentiles, famous in their respective professions and official positions. However, this is not our main criticism: It is more important to analyze the underlying substance of the excerpt just quoted.

It seemed to us that when a historian makes a statement, though only in a cursory manner, he should substantiate it. When he writes that the campaign of the Bergson Group for the immediate establishment of a

3 Pp. 551-552.

Jewish army “all but overshadowed the activities of the official Zionist movement” and that it “received the support of the secretaries of the army and navy, the chief justice and many congressmen,” it surely is an astonishing statement. One would expect a more detailed explanation how a small group of foreigners, or two people, one a “Revisionist” from Palestine and one an American Jew from Hollywood succeeded to achieve such a tour de force; to cause the near eclipse of the mighty leadership of the largest and most powerful Jewish community in the world and of all times? One would think that his sensational revelation deserves a more serious analysis of the circumstances that brought it about than his few derogatory remarks. This method makes his own assertion both enigmatic and somewhat absurd. He thought there was no need going into any greater explanation how this phenomenon occurred because, despite the seemingly spectacular success of the group, “the direct results of these activities were nil...” Nil in what sense?

What is the historian’s criterion to judge success or failure if not in a comparative sense? Is there ever total success or total failure in human affairs? When and where is one to draw the line between the two and say that’s that? (These questions should be somewhat qualified. There are rare exceptions but only in the negative. For instance, the nearest thing to total disaster was the Holocaust; yet tens of thousands of Jews were saved by the efforts of others.)

The question arises: who is more guilty – those who try and fail, or those who not try at all? The generally accepted opinion of philosophers and men of action that there is always a second chance, is more often a fallacy than reality. Experience points in the opposition [opposite] direction: there is seldom a second chance. The first chance usually decides the issue; the second can retrieve some but not all of the losses, and it can no longer apply to the original issues, whose integral force is diminished not unlike the second law of thermodynamics. This is especially true concerning the major challenges and opportunities.

The primary issue at the outbreak of WWII was the imperative to include the survival of the Jewish people of Europe as one of the war aims of the allies, as explicitly as their elimination was one of the major war aims of the Nazis.

The Bergson Group believed this could be achieved first of all by an explicit proclamation of the Allied governments to that effect. In addition,

it required more concrete manifestations, mainly the formation of a Jewish army large enough (15 or 20 divisions) to be of strategic significance and bear upon the military considerations of the chiefs of staff of the Western powers. Apart from that, it relentlessly insisted until the end of the war, that the armed forces of the Allies undertake specific military acts of retaliation against the Nazis and their satellites as a publicly proclaimed policy in answer to the persecutions and atrocities against the Jews. Simultaneously, the Committee aimed at influencing the Allied and neutral countries to open their frontiers to those Jews whom the Nazis, but mainly the satellites, were willing to let go, and for those who by their own daring and resourcefulness succeeded to escape the territories under Hitler's control. The agitation was not for mass immigration but for temporary shelters, including Palestine; the fate of the refugees to be decided after the war. These were the main issues, and it was for these purposes that special organizations were set afoot to propagate them in public and exert pressure on the Allied governments.⁴

There are several reasons underlying Laqueur's cavalier dismissal of all these dramatic and desperate undertakings: One is not peculiar to him – and though debatable is legitimate: he seems to believe that all these ideas and plans were not realistic; that the global circumstances were such that no force in the world could have moved the Allied governments to accept them; and even if these ideas had become the consensus of the leadership of all the Jewish organizations, and these would have activated all their followers and the masses of unaffiliated people, both Jews and gentiles, it would not have made one iota of difference.⁵ The conclusion

4 Here we enumerated only the issues of the war years, leaving the struggle of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation for a Free Palestine and Hebrew Republic for a later discussion. The narrative of that last phase will include the activities of the American League for a Free Palestine, which played a decisive part in that campaign.

5 A somewhat similar process of reasoning was prevalent in Israel, including some of the leading doves, at least until the peace treaty with Egypt was concluded. For instance, Prof. Ya'akov Talmon, one of the severest critics of the Israeli governments for their policy vis-à-vis the Arabs, accused them of short sightedness, outrageous insensibility to the feelings of the people with whom they are destined to live together, and of having consistently committed the gravest mistakes for all the three decades since the State was established. I was rather surprised to hear this fierce critic and intrepid fighter for peace with the Arabs telling an academic audience in New York that objectivity compels him to state that even if the governments of his country had followed a different policy and had committed none of the mistakes he criticized so vehemently for years, and instead would

is that nothing could have been achieved so why lose space (in his book) and time talking about “the sound and fury” of the various Committees and organizations? It would be an exercise in futility.

The second reason is less tolerable: it is a reflection of his personal partisanship and deeply ingrained bias, a hangover of times past when he was officially affiliated with the Zionist-Socialist parties in Palestine and worked for the semi-official Zionist daily, the Palestine Post (later changed to the Jerusalem Post). For the partisan writer it was not enough to assert that the ideas of the Bergson Group and the organizations that implemented them were of no practical value, but he also felt the need to disparage their modus operandi and style of propaganda, accusing them of distortions without indicating what they were, and all in all presented a picture of a group that was not to his personal and political liking. To be educated by such teachers is not very felicitous.

Other historians have written less partisan and more lengthy accounts of the Committee; perhaps with one exception, they are misleading in at least one important point: they include the Bergson group – inasmuch as they describe its varied activities – in the framework of American Jewish organizational and political life, as if it was part of internal bickering and strife for prestige and leadership. This was not the case. The group had no intention of becoming a part of the Jewish establishment in America. It was not a political party and its members were not American citizens; all were Palestinians and one was stateless. They were a unique group without roots in the American establishment, having no affiliation with any of its organizations, associations or political parties. Acting independently without a mandate, they initiated several non-sectarian organizations which soon became the storm center of various campaigns, and acquired a mass following.

The Bergson group felt committed to do certain things which others were unwilling or afraid to do. At the time of the group's struggle, the organizations it established on its own initiative reached the minds, hearts and pockets of almost a million people who contributed to their work. Among friends and supporters, practically none were previously

have adopted all the ideas that he and his fellow doves advocated, in reality it would have made no difference as far as peace with the Arabs is concerned: they – the Arabs – would have rejected them all regardless how conciliatory and painful the concession offered to them.

active in Jewish or Zionist organizations – the exceptions being few though significant. There were also the non-Jews, remote from the routine obligation to be “O.K. with the ‘official’ Jews.” They were mostly new people in the public arena and not very comfortable at it. But the Bergson Group caught their imagination, won their understanding, forged their commitment; and in the process their loyalty became abiding.

Why is it important to tell the story? Perhaps it is not. It is a story that was all but forgotten because it wasn’t written; and too many power groups are interested that it should not be recalled just by ignoring it until no one will remain to remember that such a thing existed. This determination by the Zionist and Jewish establishment to obliterate it from memory is in itself a good reason for telling it. Why should they be so frightened? They are frightened for good reason: not only because of the sense of guilt, of their record during the Holocaust of their having no answers to their children’s questions: what did you do when millions of your kin were systematically put to death? An answer can be invented, in embarrassed stammering tones as long as the story of the Bergson Group is unknown. But if the story is told, the situation is changed. This group and their American friends have shown how the Jews could have been saved; they blazed the trail; they appealed; they aroused public opinion, sounded the alarms, they presented blue prints; but the Zionist organizations were too jealous of their own prerogatives (which nobody tried to deny them); too timid, and prisoners of abstract ideologies; their skepticism that anything can save the Jews except admitting them into Palestine. They were almost totally concerned with postwar solutions for Jews who will no longer be among the living. They were too pusillanimous to ask the American administration for emergency measures lest they arouse the displeasure of the mighty, especially their idol FDR.

* * *

The Zionists leadership doomed the Jews, ideologically and spiritually, long before the enactment of the Final Solution. Hence they were psychologically unprepared for extraordinary measures, campaigns and sacrifices. But in retrospect when one reads the experts on the Holocaust as mentioned before they expressed doubt that regardless what the Jewish organizations and the masses of their followers would have done, nothing

would have been achieved because the Jews were caught in a death trap and, with the best of will, nothing could have saved them.

Time and again we shall debunk this thesis, but in this preface it is enough to say that the concern of the government of the free, democratic nations of the West – the U.S. and Great Britain was [not] that nothing or very little can be done. Their main worry, indeed their panic was that too many Jews could be saved, “and what are we going to do with so many?” The reason the Jews perished was not the lack but the abundance of possibilities of rescue.

The question is whether the Jews and the world needs an accounting of their behavior during the years when the quasi totality of the Jews under Hitler in Europe were exterminated, or would it be better to forget about it? To answer the latter in the positive would be tantamount to forget perhaps the most significant event in the history of modern man. If this is forgotten, then it will be repeated in different forms, not necessarily against the Jews (examples of such repetitions are already recorded in history starting with Hiroshima and Nagasaki and ended in the Khmer Rouge Regime). The very fate of Western humanism depends upon this issue.

* * *

One of my great difficulties in writing this chronicle, which perhaps caused its delay, was the uncertainty of our Group's identity. Who were we? An Irgun Delegation? Revisionists or a splinter of the Revisionist party? Imposters? “Who appointed you?” “On what authority do you do all these things?” was the recurrent outcry of our adversaries. In putting these questions in perspective, we were probably what Jabotinsky once referred to as “a cut-off battalion,” except we were not of battalion strength. We were both smaller and larger; weaker and stronger. We could not be imposters simply because we did not pretend to represent anybody. When required by law to register as “foreign agents” we declared that our principal was “The Hebrew Nation of Europe and Palestine whose interests we tried to serve as best we could to defend.” But it is true that we acted without a mandate. The Bergson Group was autonomous in developing its ideas and in carrying out its self-imposed tasks.

Foreword

MISSING

Introductory

On generalizations

Generalization is both the weakness and strength of analytical and historical narrative. Everyone knows why it is a weak method – it is sweeping, all inclusive, hence invariably imprecise and often invidious. When in this book it is said that the Jews were exterminated while the world looked on indifferently, it is a generalization with all its weaknesses. In that world in the midst of which the Jews were annihilated were individuals and groups and even governments who made heroic efforts to save them, and in some rare cases succeeded. There were countless individuals who actually sacrificed their lives in the process. But the strength of the generalization is that without it one could hardly convey a trend and the temper of a generation, a society. In the last account the fact remains that the quasi totality of the Jews was exterminated in the 20th century despite the humanist tradition and what we call Christian civilization, the democratic regimes, the philosophic and ideological creeds formulated and popularized in the wake of the American and French revolutions – despite all these the Jews perished without the mighty as much as lifting a finger to prevent it. Not to use a generalization, sweeping though it is, is just to distort the truth. Technically to dispense with it would be as impossible as for mankind to function without the Kantian categories. Thanks to them intellectual chaos is avoided. Otherwise the details would be overwhelming like some of the modern streets and byways, irremediably congested, with traffic almost coming to a standstill.

However, generalizations, though imperative, can and must be used on condition that one is not carried away by them as if they were the absolute truth. They are legitimate if one is aware, and makes the reader aware, of the many-sided qualifications, exceptions and even contradictions without necessarily specifying each of them, which would make the narrative unmanageable. A truth, if there is such a thing in history, will be more

easily perceived when it is being stated in a sweeping generalization rather than by a jumble of detailed exceptions and qualifications. As a reader of poetry I often find many a poem more evocative of truth though it uses language of metaphor, symbols and ambivalences than in a learned professorial treatise.

The tragedy of the Jews was that in the time of greatest crisis and peril to the Western world and civilization (whatever this may mean), posed by Hitler's onslaught, certain priorities slowly crystallized in the minds of its leaders, though they shifted and were amended. In this process of Allied thinking and strategic planning a certain attitude or, if you prefer, an assumption became quite clear: that the Jewish people in Europe were expendable; their survival was of no great importance, in fact of no consequence. Barely perceptible old and suppressed phobias became activated in the twilight sphere between consciousness and the subconscious – that the Jews are after all a nuisance, that the world might be a better place without them, that they were the main object of Hitler's hate and declared war on a world dominated by them. Hence with their disappearance his attitude may soften, and his aim to conquer the world in order to get rid of the Jews may become obsolete. In declaring war against the world Hitler proclaimed that the Jews dominate its two social- political systems – the capitalistic through Wall Street, and the Communist through the Kremlin and the Comintern. Is this not true? Or at least, and let's face it, isn't it at all events partially true? And if it were not for the Jews there would be no Communist (Bolshevik) Russia, hence no hatred of the Communists, hence no Hitler, no war, and no danger. And what about the "fact" that the Jews killed "our Lord" – and thus brought about a curse upon themselves? Didn't they cry out to Pilate – crucify him! shouting "His blood will be on us and our children?"

It is not easy to pinpoint all these assertions in conscious and formulated policies. Such documented assertions are scattered throughout a large literature about the Holocaust and we do not intend to gather them here as proof of our contention. It seems that it is almost self-evident. Otherwise it would be inconceivable that the Nazi's demonic plan to murder all the Jews (after robbing them of all human attributes) could have taken place. With few exceptions all free men were guilty: civilization itself should have been put on trial, perhaps with no less rigid moral criteria than those applied at Nure[m]berg. That it wasn't done does not

mean that it succeeded to escape, not at all. There is no perfect crime, not even that in which a whole civilization is an accomplice.

The Explanation of the Holocaust

When used the conventional terms: evil, anti-Semitism, lawlessness, etc. Hence it can happen again, because it happened once. Anti-Semitism breeds it. Of course all this is an effort to escape from realities – more than that: an escape from personal responsibility, cowardice, inhumanity.

Language and terms are patient and malleable. They cannot talk back. All the terms used about Z[ionis]m: “Never again!” “The Land was promised by God to Abraham,” all the fanaticism, all the terrorism, the demonstrations against K [Henry Kissinger] calling him “Jew Boy” & “Nazi,” and now calling Zbig [Zbigniew Brzezinski] an anti-Semite, as they have done before that against Rogers. All these have two purposes, not necessarily conscious: one, to avoid the question how to reconcile “El Rakhum vekhanum” with the Holocaust, with the Nazis playing football with babies before the eyes of their mothers; or throwing them into a fire place in a house they broke in, or throwing them before hungry dogs.

By yellings and shoutings and being hysterical perhaps their own youngsters, their own generations will be diverted from asking the question: “Where was God?” By transferring the blame on “the whole world is against us”; “that K [Kissinger] prevented us to encircle and destroy the Third Army” (of Egypt, during the Yom Kippur war) one may divert the minds from asking: “Where were you when Hitler’s Germany exterminated the J[ew]s? Where were you before the Yom Kippur War of 1973?”

Could the blood have been avoided then as the Holocaust could perhaps been avoided if the Jews were, where they were supposed to be – on the moral and political front to wage war against massacre.

As the blood of millions may be on the heads of the Z[ionist] leadership in the 1930’s & 40’s so is the blood of each soldier on the hands and conscience of Golda and Dayan, as the blood of the future evils be on the hands of Rab[b]in, Peres and B[egin] & Sharon & Ezer, et al.

All their babble, phrases, imperatives of national interests, their fears of what will happen if they make peace giving up the West Bank, about their fear of having women and children killed – but not in our

generation – “never again!” are auto-suggestions, self-delusions, unconscious and compulsive doing the things, making the wrong decisions – to escape hard individual thinking, existential decisions, freed from strict statistics, kilometers, dunams, etc.

The fear to face the truth, and vague awareness that truth would reveal the abyss of their own pusillanimity and the hell of their own guilt.

Giving the Holocaust a happy ending they absolve FDR from at least part of the guilt, hide their cowardness & impotence, and appear as heroes & conquerors, which in isolation is true; if not a recompense for the Holocaust, or if not to show that they are no longer the same Jews whom Hitler destroyed, would be one [of] the glorious pages written in history by human courage – a gigantic struggle between the few & the many. But they claim more. And by claiming more they forfeit what they really achieved.

The Z[ionist]s did not value the life of the J[ew]s as the greatest value – as the one exclusive aim of their strivings, the object of their dedication.

The Z[ionist]s thought & taught that the life of the J[ew]s *en masse* are[is] useless, ugly, parasitic. They hated the J[ew]s of Eastern Europe, either because they were luftmenschen [*luftmentsshn*], or socialists, or Bundists or Orthodox.

In the West and Central Europe they hated them because they were assimilationists.

This does not mean that it was wholly one sided. In many instances it was reciprocal. But this does not change the fact that the hatred of the Z[ionist]s minority against the vast mass of the Jewish people was not the best spiritual & psychological attitude to win them over to their side.

Besides they valued less the life of the J[ew]s rather than the ideals, the pure & exalted ideas. The metamorphosis of the parasitic, cowardly, old fashioned obscurantist J[ew] into a self-reliant, productive and intrepid J[ew].

They developed ideas with religious connotations – the “religion of work,” Socialism, the redemption of the individual (“ge’ulat haprat”) rather of the communality (“Haklal”). The redemption of Judaism [the Judaic] spirit (“ge’ulat ha’ya’hadut”) rather than the redemption of the Jews as people, as persecuted and suffering masses. At any event the redemption of the spirit comes before the saving of the J[ew]s (Ahad Ha’am). The

redemption of the inner (spiritual) freedom rather than guarding the conquered civil liberties of the Jews in the West. This is not to say that all these ideals were not admirable – but the price of their attainment was the Holocaust.

The ideas of Eretz Israel Haslema are in all probability not admirable at all, but rather verge on idolatry foreign to the essence of true Judaism and Judaic tradition – but the price will be prohibitive just the same (May 1988).

Part I

“Dos Yiddishe Folk”

Chapter 1

The People (The Hebrew Nation)

To read Jewish history is a disconcerting experience in more than one respect, but mainly because it often reads like a monotonous catalogue of pogroms, rape, murder, oppression, persecution, expulsion – an ever-recurring cycle, century after century, generation after generation, sometimes one generation having met with several disasters.

All this is true and one cannot exaggerate these almost permanent outrages and the never-ending agonies which came to a climax in the gas chambers under Hitler, with the annihilation of the quasi totality of the European Jewry.

Yet this is not the whole story. In fact, this is a distorted picture of the history of the Jewish people throughout the generations. Whether Jewish historians meant it that way or not is immaterial, but children as well as adults studying their works mainly get the impression that the Jews for thousands of years, anyhow since the exile, did nothing else but suffer; that their lives were one long uninterrupted and unalloyed agony. To give such a picture of the life of the Jews is like telling, let's tell the story of the French or the British only in terms of their revolutions and wars. And even this is an inadequate analogy.

The historic truth is, that the Jews, despite defeats and conquests (when they still lived in their own country, and then in exile), despite oppression, persecutions, expropriations, slaughter and expulsions and all the accompanying agonies and humiliations, have in the meantime succeeded to create several authentic civilizations not only in their historic land but also in Babylonia, Alexandria (in antiquity), in Spain (in the Middle Ages), in Eastern Europe (in modern times), not to speak of the authentic geniuses who appeared in various countries in Europe both East and West, like Rashi, for instance, in Provence. All this in addition to the

collective contributions, directly and indirectly, to universal civilization and the individual contributions by geniuses in the fields of the arts, sciences, literature, statecraft and technology. The Jews distinguished themselves by their vital contribution to the upbuilding of modern capitalism; they played a decisive role in the accumulation and distribution of capital, both nationally and internationally; they created the monetary and credit system; the banking institutions; the method of financing great enterprises of development. They were the great importers and exporters, and were the pioneers, if not the inventors, of modern distribution methods of consumer goods. They were a vital force in building great cities which developed into the metropolises of the Western world. They were also the catalyst of the revolutionary movements in various countries.¹

In this chapter we are concerned with the condition of the Jewish people – the Hebrew Nation – of Eastern Europe for whose vast majority Zionism presumed to offer a solution.

It is worthwhile – not only because of nostalgia and inconsolable grief – to cast a backward glance upon the panorama, the way of life of that people. Its woes and misfortunes as victims are profusely recorded in the books of Jewish historiography. Hence we will not concentrate on that but rather try sketchily to recall the spiritual and mental climate of the people who were about to achieve their greatest glory – the grand exodus and the great return to a liberated fatherland. But they missed the historic moment. Their conversion to the revolutionary concept of liberating Palestine by force of Hebrew arms came too late, and their Great Executioner beat them in the race of time, perhaps by five years. This catastrophe was a combination of fate and their own peculiar characteristics. One of these we have mentioned in the beginning of this volume was their sense of timing and their excessive reliance upon a benevolent providence; and partly because of their traditional loyalty and trust in their leadership. Though on the whole, the Jews of Eastern Europe were bitterly divided into various political and religious parties, in savage partisan war against one another, and competing for the support of the masses, they all shared the same fundamental weaknesses: no sense

1 To read, for instance, the German economist Werner Sombart's work on the development of modern capitalism, is more illuminating than the works of Jewish historians (see especially his **The Jews in Economic Life**). It is especially regrettable to make reference to this scholar since, with the advent of Hitler, he accepted National Socialism.

of urgency, and a fanatic belief in their respective ideologies and blind trust in their leaders. All were in their own separate ways conservatives. When the Hebrew revolution began to capture their imagination, it was almost too late.

“Dos Yiddishe Folk”²

In 1939, at the outbreak of the War there lived in Eastern Europe roughly speaking about ten million Jews, *) of which more than three million were cut off from the mainstream of Jewish life and forced to stagnate under the knout of Bolshevik totalitarianism in Russia. About seven million continued the process of Jewish vitality and creativeness.

From the point of view of historic precedent, they did not seem to fit into any familiar national, ethnic, religious or any other pattern.

Though to their Christian neighbors the Jews seemed like a ghost sprawling among the nations, they were not ghosts at all. They lived a rich and diversified life, and, all things being equal, were full of *joie de vivre*. Since everything in life and history is relative and despite their condition being in many basic respects abnormal, they were to an astonishing extent well adjusted.

Sure, they lived under ever growing economic distress, various forms of discrimination and endless strains caused by widespread anti-Semitism. But significantly enough – and paradoxically – these disabilities and stresses did not handicap the genius of the Jews: They seemed to prompt them to great artistic and literary creativeness rather than to develop neurosis. Though Freud and his Jewish colleagues created psychoanalysis as a therapeutic science, however it was applied elsewhere. There were few, if any, practitioners of psychoanalysis among the Jews in Eastern Europe. Had some been imported and willing to offer their services free, it is not probable that they would have had any patients to speak of. As Freud himself asserted, those who have to fight hard for a living are less likely to need psychoanalysis than the well-to-do. Besides, for the “talking

2 This Yiddish expression employed by the Jews in Eastern Europe in reference to themselves. It simply means “The Jewish People,” but it seems to this writer that it connoted the qualification of self-identity rather than integralism.

cure,” hundreds of thousands of Chassidim *) went to their wonder Rebes (whom they often referred to simply as “a guter yid” – a good Jew).

A people who produced Shalom Aleichem *) (though he claimed to have laughed through tears – what humorist doesn’t make this or similar claims?); a Zalman Shneour *) and a Der Tunkerier *) could not have been totally unhappy. Actually, the Jews were predominantly a laughing people, not a people with a smirk on their face but with guffaws bursting from their chests. They developed a language with so many witticisms and funny colloquialisms that it is probably rare to find a similar phenomenon to such a degree in any other language. In Yiddish one often doesn’t have to possess a particular sense of humor and yet speak wittily – the funny colloquialisms are so many and handy one needs only to help oneself. They have created an endless variety of jokes concerning all kinds of situations and people, human foibles and vanity, the rich and the poor, the dreamers and “Luft Menschen” [*luftmentshn*]³, the regime, their enemies, but above all about themselves – their condition and predicament. Even when they tried to deprecate or qualify their delight and predilection in being funny, calling it “to laugh with yashcherkers” (to laugh with leeches), or “golgen humor” or “tate to lackhest!” (“Father, is an occasion to laugh?”) or “a way iz to dem gelekhter” (“what a pain it is to such a laughter”) – these very colloquialisms (whose flavor it is difficult to translate) were in themselves funny enough, and far from conveying a melancholy note they usually, instead, only added a new dimension of mirth. As a matter of fact, this writer does not remember having partaken in or witnessed such boisterous, free and uninhibited laughter since he left Warsaw at the outbreak of the war.⁴

This does not mean to say that conditions were not tragic, though this too is a concept that escapes precise definition. The Jews encountered ever increasing difficulties in this most important field of the human condition – to make a living. The economic policy of practically all the governments in Eastern Europe was such as to gradually handicap and

3 Literally “air people,” meaning living on air, without substance, regular income or occupation.

4 By comparison, Israel is a humorless and cheerless lot. The most popular comedians there are Dzigan and Schumacher who came from Poland where they held the Jewish audience in hysterics. American Jews laugh but their humor is more often than not “second hand” and “third class.” We may have something to say about it elsewhere.

then squeeze out the Jews from their traditional positions as tradesmen, middlemen, artisans and professionals in order to enable non-Jews to take their places. Politically too, they were handicapped by manifold governmental or government tolerated instrument of discrimination, bias, exclusion. Popular anti-Semitism was rampant. Yet the Jews developed in their mental make-up a unique instrument of psychological self-protection called in Yiddish “Bitochen.”⁵ It is a compound of optimism and faith and an ever present, inner prompting not to become despondent, and not to surrender to despair. Sholem Ash tells somewhere in a short story, I believe, that he visited a shtetl (townlet) after a pogrom. He found all the stores in the market square closed because they were pillaged of their merchandise the day before, except one. He went in to that store and looked around and saw no merchandise whatsoever. He asked the shopkeepers: Reb Yid, what do you sell? And the answer was: “Bitochen.”

One of the reasons for their optimism and good humor was naturally another Jewish defense mechanism developed slowly but powerfully through thousands of years – to live as much as possible a life on more than one level; to live as much as possible a life of the spirit simultaneously with that of the senses and material requirements. Freud might have referred to it as sublimation, though this would not exactly fit the Jewish reality, nor what he had in mind, but it is significant that he claimed that all civilization is a result of sublimation. And indeed the Jews lived a civilized life. In spite of all the economic, political and social handicaps, the Jews created in most of the countries of their concentration a dynamic cultural environment in three languages – Yiddish, Hebrew and in the language of the nations among which they lived. Though in Poland there were two Jewish dailies in the Polish language, the creative talents of the people expressed themselves in Yiddish and in Hebrew. Space does not permit us a more detailed summary of the cultural, artistic and political life of the Jews in Eastern Europe but it is worthwhile to mention that hundreds of thousands of Jewish boys and girls went to exclusive Hebrew or Yiddish schools (where all the curriculum was taught either in Hebrew or Yiddish); that

5 Though etymologically it is a Hebrew word meaning security, especially in a military sense, as a verb it means in Hebrew to be certain. It has little, if anything, of the Yiddish connotation.

in all the larger cities were one or more Yiddish dailies with a mass circulation in the hundreds of thousands of copies sold; there were large scale publishing houses and theatres. The Yiddish and Hebrew literature produced in the second half of the last, and the first decades of this century the greatest classics in prose, poetry, philosophy and history.

One of the reasons for Jewish steadfastness and comparative lack of inhibitions was the fact that they spoke their own language. The Jews, to the mind of this writer, suffer greatly by the fact that many of them speak and have to create in an adopted language. It probably takes two generations until one assimilates [into] a new language, making it an organic instrument of man's spiritual and psychological make-up, until it functions like a conditioned reflex, freely and naturally as one breathes.

Even Israel is still greatly handicapped by the fact that the majority of the Hebrew speaking people speak it as an acquired language and not one born into. Only those who were born in Palestine in a purely Hebrew environment begin to use Hebrew with the freedom and ease of other normal people speaking their mother tongue. The Jews in Europe spoke their mother tongue and were perfectly at ease.

Jewish life on the whole, the assertions of the anti-Semites and dogmatic Zionists to the contrary notwithstanding, was permeated with an aristocratic spirit of nobility. Ceremonial, etiquette and ritual are both causes and in turn manifestations of nobility. Jewish life was in many respects a continuous panorama of varied ceremonies, etiquette and ritual: in the synagogue, in the Houses of Learning, the Chassidic courts, at home, at the youth organizations, many of which were along the pattern of a para-military hierarchy; at the student fraternities and the Masonic lodges. In the Betar hymn composed by Jabotinsky, there is an exalted line which conveys this quality of Jewish life and society: "Though a pauper, a Jew is still a prince." Of course, not everything was noble and aristocratic. The struggle to eke out a living was exhausting, and often involved cunning and coarseness and even, in some cases, unethical behavior. In this respect, life was grinding, cruel and nasty.

At the bottom of the social strata there was the famous Jewish underworld – burglars, thieves, prostitutes and swindlers, but even they, though outcasts and beyond the law, were part of the Jewish scene, and there was even a kind of public communication with them, on a business-like basis, so to speak. One could read little ads in the daily

Yiddish papers running somewhat like this: “Very Honorable Thief. Last night a pair of earrings disappeared from our apartment which have a special sentimental value for our dear wife, long should she live, because she inherited them from her grandmother; ready to compensate 30 zlotys. Discretion guaranteed.” Or something of the kind. This writer thus recovered half a dozen typewriters which were stolen from the offices of the Revisionist World executive. After due contact were initiated by a “third” party, he was told to visit a neighborhood “Rabbi” where he found them intact. The police also had to be compensated later for what they called “services of being dumb.”

Jewish life was both politically and socially stratified and vocationally diversified. It was also divided and subdivided into sects and movements, representing a kaleidoscopic view of contrasts and struggles and strife, yet of overall unity and consensus. All Jews were, and the vast majority of them considered themselves as a people “Dos Yiddishe Folk” – a national entity. There were the Chassidim flocking in the hundreds of thousands to their respective Rebbes to seek comfort and solace in their personal grief, misfortunes and their financial trouble, the difficulties to make a living. They went to their good mentors both to have it off one’s chest, to pour out all before the wise and innocently astute Rebbe their griefs and disappointment while at the same time, as well as to forget for a few days the trouble of this world by immersing oneself in the dynamic stream of exultation in mystical communion with the other Chassidim who came to the “regal court.”

There were the more somber and sterner Misnagdim (protestants [opponents]) who traditionally though as time went by, with abated vehemence than originally, looked askance at the Chassidic way of life and adoration of the Rebbes, considering it a deviation from authentic Jewish tradition – of rationalization – not to revere men but only the Law. These continued to persevere in the attitude that only through continuous study of the Torah *) and in obedience to its commandments the Jews will bridge over the valley of tears towards redemption. The very act of study was an exhilarating experience and its own reward in an otherwise life of misery and suffering, they asserted. And this was true of the way of life of the Chassidim as well. Their quarrels became somewhat obsolete and their spiritual vendetta had little justification in real life.

There were the Zionists and anti-Zionists, the first ranging from the

extreme leftist Poale Zion to Jabotinsky's Revisionism.⁶ The anti-Zionists ranged from the Jewish Communists to the ultra-orthodox Agudath Israel. The inter party strife was vehement and fierce in the tradition of and in accordance with the proclivity of the Jewish temperament to deliver oneself somewhat sensually to the pleasures of "machloike" – quarrels – a weakness of the Jewish character since the days of "The Judges," throughout all the generations till this very day, and also a political handicap. The genius of political compromise was never part of the Jewish make-up. Yet it is a great necessity for political success and achievement. Then, on the other hand, the intransigence in the Jewish character probably played a decisive part in making the Jew what he is, a fighter for truth, justice and human dignity on the battlefields throughout history, the staunch, unflinching destroyers of idolatry throughout the ages.

The Social Democratic Bund was a sworn enemy of the Zionists and fought them with rage and outrage. But it, too, was part of "dos Yiddishe Folk", part of the nation, except that it was socialist, didn't believe in the Zionist solution to the abnormal conditions in which the Jewish people found itself and, instead advocated cultural autonomy with Yiddish as an official language. In the last account what they demanded was national autonomy alongside other ethnic groups in those regions which made up the two pre-World War I empires – the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian and Czarist Russia. The Bundists would certainly have been outraged had someone referred to them as part of the Hebrew Nation. But historically speaking, they were just that, though they didn't believe in a Zionist solution and instead advocated autonomy in the lands of their concentration.

The Communists, of course, were no part of the consensus because they didn't believe in nationalism (except, perhaps, Russian nationalism); they were convinced that after the revolution there will no longer be a Jewish problem since all men will become equal.

Yet with the exception of the Communists there was a Jewish consensus. It consisted in the simple and natural awareness that all of them were a

6 Jabotinsky's Revisionism (he referred to it as Monism), was, and still is often compared by his opponents to the philosophies of the reactionary right-wing movements in contemporary Europe. In fact, he was basically a liberal of the 19th century type. It would be closer to the truth to range this spectrum of party lines from minimalists to maximalist political demands as far as the aims and aspirations of Zionism concerning Palestine.

national entity, a community with its own distinct personality that cannot and should not be assimilated into their environment. Presently we will discuss analytically this phenomenon of the national character of the Jews in Eastern Europe. Here it is enough to sum it up by saying that the Jews in Eastern Europe in many respects lived a full, self-sufficient, national life; they spoke and wrote in their own two languages; were remarkably creative in their own literature and art; constructed their own social and political frameworks; and their religious milieu was unique. On the whole they were an exuberant people not lacking in fun on various levels of human experience.

Of course, there were tens of thousands of assimilationist or emancipationist Jews in Eastern Europe, some very successful in business and the professions. But these were marginal groups not typical of the condition or character of “dos Yiddishe folk.”

* * *

The Jews certainly suffered. They were aware of the injustice and cruelty and hatred of the world around their ghettos. But it would be a mistake to think that these preoccupations, these resentments made their daily lives a perpetual Tisha Be'av (the day The Temples were destroyed). Life had to be lived, and what is most remarkable was that they lived rather joyfully and decorously.⁷ More remarkable was the fact that it was difficult to say whether many of them mourned the destruction of The Temple 1900 years ago more than the misfortunes of their own generations, of which they were the immediate victims. Or, maybe this grief over misfortunes in a remote past was nothing but a sublimation of their present suffering.

* * *

It all ended in total disaster. What went wrong? What was it that brought the hurricane that swept away and engulfed everything?

Chagall, the artistic insight and genius, perhaps not even being conscious of it, painted his canvasses with practically all of his Jews in

7 Such folk songs as “Di Mezinke oysgegeb” and “Der Rebbe Elimelech” or even “Oyfn priptchik brent a fayerl” do not reflect a melancholy state of the popular mood.

the air, over roof tops, in the clouds, or topsy-turvy. Though they fiddle, study the Torah, make love, get married, argue with each other, they are always in the air, never on solid ground.

Another artist and inspirer of a generation to rebellion and conquest – Jabotinsky – used another metaphor. He told the Jews in Eastern Europe that they live on the crater of a volcano which may erupt at any moment. He was the only one who voiced the warning, sounded the alarm. This they were reluctant to accept as an imminent probability. On the contrary, their leadership – of all parties, movements and persuasions – were outraged at this kind of metaphor and its implications. Whether the Jews weren't really aware of it, or refused to be aware of it, makes little difference. The result was the same.

The reality of the situation was that in Eastern Europe the Jews were not wanted, – under any and all conditions. There were no plans of genocide or pogroms or physical violence. But there was a determination by Governments and people alike to make life for the vast majority of the Jews unbearable. And in many respects and for too many of them life became increasingly intolerable, to the point that a denouement had to be expected.

Why, and how it came to pass the way it did, with this whole world going up in flames is the subject of another chapter.

On top of a live volcano

Actually the Jews found themselves in a *cul-de-sac* even before the volcano erupted. All the political theories propounded by the Zionists and anti-Zionists alike proved bankrupt by events. All the panaceas were illusions. The anti-Zionists though divided into two parties – the Bundists and the Volkists – (the former hitched their wagon to the Socialist star, and the latter had no star to hitch onto) both represented fundamentally the same ideology: that the Jews are a national entity and as such they should live and develop in the countries of their habitation, and as such they should fight for national minority rights along with other ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe. These rights were guaranteed by the Principal Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference.⁸ But these

8 A special Minorities Committee of the Paris Peace Conference formulated in December

recognized and “guaranteed” rights were of no avail and were considered by the governments concerned, especially in Poland, as a provocation to their dignity, an insult to their sovereignty and an interference in the internal affairs of their state. Thus these rights more often than not were a source of friction rather than harmony and cooperation. The incorrigible hope of Jews the world over that Socialism, or Liberalism, or enlightenment will bring about the millennium was shattered by historic reality. It is not possible to offer an exhaustive analytical appraisal here of the reason why the ideology and the program of the “national autonomists” proved worse than futile. It is enough to say that this ideology and program did not meet with a sympathetic response either in the liberal circles of Poland, or among the working classes, even those who sympathized with Socialism. The environment in those countries remained hostile regardless of party and class.

* * *

The controversy that raged among the Jews in Eastern Europe concerning “giving up positions” was pathetic and confusing. The arguments for national autonomy were solid and plausible but outside the context of realities. In the long run it couldn’t have worked even had Hitler not appeared on the scene. The Jews were not only faced with prejudice and hatred, but economic problems which had no solution in an unfriendly environment.⁹

The argument that one should fight for individual rights was of course incontrovertible, yet there was a speciousness about it because the case of East European Jewry was not like that of Western emancipated Jews in

1919 the basic provisions of guarantees of ethnic minorities in East European countries who gained independence as a result of the collapse of the Habsburg and Russian Empires. After protracted resistance the successor states agreed to sign the guarantees because the Principal Allied Powers made such agreement a firm condition to recognize the sovereignty of these states each of which had national minorities. However, the phrase “national rights” was not included, only the specific elements which make for quasi cultural autonomy. The suggestion that a special article be included in the Covenant of the League of Nations guaranteeing these rights was abandoned, but the supervision of the implementation of the treaties was delegated to the League of Nations. *)

9 See the chapter Anti-Semitism of “Men” and “Things” in Jabotinsky’s “The War and the Jew.”

France or England. The Jews in Poland or Rumania did not argue that they are Poles (or Rumanian) in every respect: "that we are born here; this is our country, our language, our culture, etc. and we will fight for our right to stay here because this is our nation (though our religion is Jewish and we are proud of our spiritual heritage)." The Polish or Rumanian Jews could not say all this. They couldn't and didn't (with some exceptions) because they considered themselves a **national minority** with their own language (or languages in case they were Zionists), culture and aspiration. The majority were more or less inclined to immigrate overseas, many of them to Palestine if there would be a chance.

Nor were they like the Negro minority in the U.S. even long before the Civil Rights movement triumphed. Not even the most rabid segregationist in the South said that they don't want the Negroes in America. What many American whites did not want, was to treat the blacks as equal. They wanted them there but with an inferior status.

With regard to the Jews in Poland and other East European countries, it was not only a matter of rights, but chiefly a mass refusal to accept them on any basis; not even on a basis of inferiority of rights, status and opportunity.

As to Zionism, its political bankruptcy became no less evident. The programs of all the Zionist parties – from the Leftist Poale Zion to the Revisionists – were tried but with no visible success. Money was raised through the Keren Kayemeth (Jewish National Fund) to buy land, and the Keren Hayesod to build the land; youths were trained on a mass scale for pioneer life and work in Palestine; they learned to adapt to arduous physical labor as farmers; they learned Hebrew; they attended protest meetings and signed petitions; the Betar youth were instructed in military discipline: how to use weapons, and jiu-jitsu in self-defence. The Socialist Zionists cultivated friendship and connections with their comrades, the Socialists in England and France. Jabotinsky tried to stir up public opinion in practically all the countries of Europe and beyond, winning friends in Great Britain – in Parliament and the press. But it was of no avail. It all led to the White Paper (May 17, 1939) which, for all intents and purposes sealed the doom on any hopes for the Zionists to ever achieve a Jewish National Home in Palestine, whatever that might have meant.

The Mandate became a scrap of paper, while in London and Jerusalem

anti-Semitic British politicians and officials pursued a policy of conniving (consciously or unconsciously) with Hitler's plan of war against the Jews. *) This was the time when the Führer ruled over Germany for six years and had absorbed Austria. This was the time of contagious madness on an international scale, barbarism was rampant, and humanity abdicated decency and common sense in the most elementary way. It was the time of a wholesale sellout by everybody. On September 29, 1938, the betrayal in Munich took place. On May 17, 1939 Chamberlain's White Paper was issued. On August 23, 1939 the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed. In the beautiful spring of that same year the ghost ship St. Louis with about a thousand Jewish refugees from Germany tried entry at every port in the Western Hemisphere, and though all passengers had visas to Cuba, the then Government of Havana decided to cancel the visas upon arrival of the ship. The St. Louis, in spite of all the pleas and despair was sent back to Europe and most of the refugees were trapped in Hitler's noose.

Three fatal weaknesses

On the very threshold of total crisis in Jewish history it was proven once more that the Jews, talented in so many ways and having made tremendous contributions to human civilization throughout the ages, suffered from three disastrous weaknesses: First, they lacked to an astounding degree a sense and an understanding of political and social realities around them. Their genius stopped short of that. They had no built-in alarm mechanism or, if they had, something went wrong with it and it ceased functioning. The State of Israel, after all the catastrophic lessons and despite its miraculous achievements in many a field of national endeavor, still suffers from the same fatal weakness which is its greatest threat.¹⁰

The second weakness was their mystique of timelessness; the Zionists and the Orthodox preferred to call it "a sense of eternity." It was an aptitude to expect good things to happen; that the inevitable will be avoided; that one should have the patience to weather the storm, if a storm is expected; that the proper opportunity will offer itself at some indeterminate future. This counsel of patience and waiting was at the root

10 After the Holocaust the alarm mechanism started to work but in a confusing manner. It goes off at the wrong time. This anomaly is dealt with in another part of this essay.

of the history of all Jewish trends and movements for the last hundred years or so. The Emancipationists counseled their fellow Jews in Eastern Europe to wait for the rise of Liberalism and Enlightenment. Socialists (the Bund and others) waited for the Revolution. The Orthodox for the Messiah. The Zionists always advised to wait for the outcome of some scheme of diplomatic negotiations, or until the World War (the first and second) is over. The writer heard Dr. Weizmann tell an audience of American Zionist leaders in 1943 that Churchill asked him to personally convey the message to American Jews not to embarrass the British (and the Allies) with their political agitation during the war; but after the war he, Churchill, promises to see to it that the Jewish people will be given satisfaction in their aspirations. Weizmann said he believes Churchill and pleaded with his audience to do likewise.

F.D. Roosevelt spoke to the American Zionists in the same vein. This was the slogan, the catchword, the promise: If you don't embarrass us **now**, then **after the war** the problem will be solved satisfactorily. The Zionists and the Jews in general went for it until it was too late. Then they woke up, and this, too, with great difficulty. (This is an astonishing story which we are writing about in a separate volume.) The sequence was disastrous: even when absent-mindedly becoming aware of the dangers ahead, they nonetheless were patiently and fatalistically waiting for things to take a turn for the better. It left the Jewish people unprotected and unprepared when the volcano erupted.

Bontzie Schweig [Bontshe Shvayg]¹¹

The third weakness was their uncritical trust in the established leadership. And this is puzzling. In antiquity the Jews were considered, and with great justification, a spiritually and intellectually independent if not a rebellious people. Moses called them both rebellious and stiff-necked. Yet throughout their long dispersion and persecution they seem to have undergone a radical change of character as far as attitude to their leadership

11 A hero of a parable by the great Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz. He bore all the miseries and indignities of life without ever complaining or asking any questions. Working as a porter, he fell and was crushed under a heavy load. No one paid attention that he lay dead there on the sidewalk. If it were a dog people would stop. In heaven they wanted to compensate him, and when asked what was his desire, he answered: a warm, buttered roll.

is concerned. Whoever appeared as their representative and “shtadlan” (an intercessor with gentile authority) – usually self-styled – they accepted him rather gratefully and with a feeling that the leader (or “shtadlan”) **knows best** what was good for them. Throughout the centuries they became conditioned to the almost absolute prohibition of questioning not only the motives but even the wisdom of their leaders. (At the threshold of the disaster with the advent of Hitler, they were also over-organized in the various political parties and religious institutions. Hannah Arendt in her **Eichmann in Jerusalem** claimed that this over-organization and registration greatly facilitated Hitler’s task to be totally successful.)

This unqualified acceptance of leadership throughout the ages, but especially in the 20th century, plagued not only the Jews but almost all mankind.¹²

This attitude inescapably leads to trouble, upheaval and almost invariably to war, and often to revolution. Maybe it is in this sense that the Talmud contains the cryptic and agonizing aphorism: “Very well means death.” Some interpret it to mean that when a man as an individual, or men as a group, a party, a nation begins unquestionably and unconditionally to say “aye, aye” to the leaders, it is almost like issuing a death sentence upon themselves. When uncritical “aye, aye” enters, death is its companion.

Freedom, survival are conditioned upon refusing to take things for granted. Policy and leadership must be scrutinized. Even when one risks one’s life in the process of examining the important issues of existence,

12 To name the best known: Lenin, Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Franco, Pilsudski, Salazar, Chamberlain, Daladier, Attlee, Bevin, Nasser, Ben-Gurion, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Eisenhower and Dulles, Begin and the couple of scores of dictators – usually of mini size – in Black Africa, South America and Asia. The objection that most of them are dictators installed by force and kept in power by terror is not much solace. However, some of them, including Lenin and Hitler were brought to power on waves of popular enthusiasm. The saying that a nation has the leaders it deserves is probably true. In the last account, when a nation wishes to regain its liberties it finds ways and means to achieve it – sooner or later. In modern times people don’t try. Would a few thousand Russians try, the Kremlin rule would probably collapse. With all our admiration for the Czechs under Dubcek, we nonetheless wonder what would have happened if a thousand of them were willing to give their lives? Brezhnev’s tanks would in all probability have withdrawn; at worst there would have been a universal uproar on such a scale that the concept of “Proletarian Internationalism” would have been rejected then by the Communists all over the free world. In some democratic countries the people would like their leader to last forever. In political parlance they call it “stability.”

as Socrates did (he was the greatest questioner of all time, somebody computed, if I am not mistaken, that he asked 34,000 questions) – his death, too, becomes immortal.¹³

Between the devil and the deep blue sea

The Jewish people of Europe found themselves caught between British denial that Palestine was ever intended as a solution to the Jewish problem and Hitler's determination to get rid of the Jews by any means. For lack of an alternative in Hitler's fiendish mind, the solution wound up to be the gas ovens.

* * *

Only one man of stature, Jabotinsky, saw the situation realistically, and warned the Jews of Eastern Europe that the[y] live on the crater of a live volcano. He called for mass evacuation of the Jews from Europe, and offered a political plan how to achieve it. This vision by necessity and logic implied readiness to win the cooperation of the Eastern European governments, first and above all the Polish Government. The organized spokesmen of the Jewish organizations from the Communists to the Zionists, the full gamut of them, raised such a hue and cry with accusations of betrayal, that Jabotinsky once more became an outcast from the Jewish consensus. The Zionists as well as the Anti-Zionists were against any hint of the necessity of Jewish mass emigration because, according to their views, this meant giving up the struggle and renouncing the "national" rights of the Jews in the countries of their dispersal. If this animosity towards Jabotinsky by the anti-Zionists was at least consistent with their ideology, then that of the Zionists must remain puzzling unless one attributes it to their perennial inclination both to want to eat their cake and have it.

* * *

13 Moses' relations with God started with questioning the Burning Bush; he insisted to know the name and nature of Him Who spoke to him. Otherwise, he implied, it is [a] no go. See also Heine's poem on the Right of Man to Question (R.B. under question).

As time passes Jabotinsky's image grows in stature, though not always for the right reasons. His former detractors who now pay homage to his memory and achievements, misunderstood him in his life time and now try to glorify those attributes they falsely ascribe to him, which really were no part of his make-up. Though in the evaluation of the writer he was the greatest Jewish leader since the destruction of Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago, in the context of this survey we should like to draw attention only to what was perhaps his most important innovation in Jewish history (except the false Messiahs which belong to a different and opposite tradition): the sense of urgency (and emergency) he imparted to a considerable number of Jews in Europe. I think this was the cardinal issue between him and the vast majority of the Jews. They were **confident** that eternity was on their side. But **he felt that time was running out on them**. His insistence that it was imperative for the Zionists to at least define their "final aim" was not that he was a maniac, "meshuga le'oto davar" (a man with an idea fix) as his opponents claimed, but because he thought the definition of the aim in unambiguous terms was the only possibility of forcing the Zionists to apply means which would bear realistically upon the course of immediate historic events. The Zionists thought they had at their disposal all the time needed. Therefore, they advocated the system of "another dunam and another goat"; by the same token and in the same spirit they preached "ge'ulah haprat" – the redemption of one soul and another soul, or small groups of them to live, if possible, in Kib[b]utzim. Simultaneously, the Socialist Zionists preached world revolution. They didn't know that as far as the Jews were concerned there just was no time for all that. Jabotinsky tried to convince them that the hour is late; he tried to disabuse them; to make them snap out of their stupor which they thought was eternity. He thought that if only he will sell them the "final aim" imperative they will, in the nature of things, begin to concentrate their energies on practical ways and means to obtain that goal. He tried to impress them by the imminence of the disaster, and appealed to them to prepare fast but orderly for a mass evacuation. It was of no avail.

Chapter 2

Setting the stage for Hitler

A crucial decision in the months preceding the outbreak of the war was taken not by the Nazis but by Great Britain by issuing the White Paper precisely on May 17, 1939, when the survival of the Jews under Nazism hung in the balance. In a sense it was the British who have shown the world, and Hitler took notice of it that as far as the Jews were concerned, one can with complete impunity violate solemn international commitments,¹ defy world public opinion (and to a great extent, opinion in their own country), act in defiance of explicit decisions of the League of Nations' Mandate Commission and, in fine, get away with murder. It was the British Government, next only to Hitler, that demonstrated that in the wider scheme of British imperial interests, Jewish survival was of little or no consequence. More than that, to sacrifice Jewish survival on the altar of the unappeasable gods of Empire may actually serve the best interest of their colonial hold over vast territories.

The decision at the Wannsee Conference should be viewed against the background of Great Britain's policy towards the Jewish people. The Nazi policy of total extermination would probably have been inconceivable without the British having set the stage for it both in Munich (September 29, 1938) and then in Chamberlain's White Paper.

1 The Jews and world public opinion understood the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate as an internationally sanctioned commitment. The League of Nations conferred the Palestine Mandate on Great Britain as trustee to facilitate the establishment of the Jewish National Home. This was quasi-universally understood as national independence and eventual Hebrew sovereignty. The British on their part built in into the documents loopholes and deceptive ambiguities. (See the Chapter dealing with the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.)

The British pronouncement that Jews are undesirable in Palestine (of all countries!) may have sparked Hitler's fiendish imagination: if they are not wanted in Palestine, the Promised Land of their National Home – *a fortiori* he could argue with greater vigor, that they are not wanted in the countries where they may be considered, and many did perceive themselves, foreigners.

The British and German peoples supported their governments

In the years of Munich, the White Paper and the Holocaust there was a frightening similarity between the British and German peoples; each supported by a vast majority their respective Governments. Of course, in Germany the support was frenzied, hysterical and quasi total, and those who did not share the enthusiasm cowered in silence; while in Great Britain there were many loud and eloquent dissenting voices. But they were in the minority and ineffective; they didn't cause any change in Government policy. Even worse, as was later discovered, much of the opposition was opportunistic and partisan. The same Labor leadership that denounced the White Paper in 1939, carried it out with staggering brutality when it came to power in July 1945. Bevin, the foreign secretary and the dominant figure of that Government, revealed himself as a notorious antisemite admonishing the pitiful remnant who survived the crematoria and wished to go to Palestine to live out their traumatized lives, not to push to the head of the queue (what queue?).

Winston Churchill who considered himself an abiding Zionist, criticized the White Paper when it came up for debate in the House of Commons (on May 22, 1939) with his usual rhetorical power:

The pledge of a home of refugees, of an asylum, was not made to the Jews of Palestine, but the Jews **outside Palestine**, to that vast, unhappy mass scattered, persecuted, wandering Jews whose intense, unchanging, unconquerable desire has been for a National Home... That is the pledge which was **given**, and **that** is the pledge we are now asked to break...

I feel bound to vote against... As one intimately and responsibly concerned in the earlier stages of our Palestine policy, I could not stand by and see solemn engagements into which Britain

has entered... set aside for reasons of administrative convenience or – and it will be a vain hope – for the sake of a quiet life. I should feel **personally** embarrassed in the most acute manner if I lent myself by silence or inaction, to what I must regard as an act of repudiation... a plain breach of a solemn obligation... a breach of faith...

What will the world think about it?... What will our potential enemies think?... Will they not be encouraged by our confession of recoil? Will they not be tempted to say, 'They're on the run again. This is another Munich', and be more stimulated in their aggression by these very unpleasant reflections which they make?... May not this be a contributory factor... by which our potential enemies may be emboldened to make some **irrevocable** action and then find out, only after it is too late, that it is not **this government, with their tired Ministers and flagging purpose**, they have to face, but the **might** of Britain and **all that Britain means?**... *)

By the end of May, the House of Commons approved the White Paper by a slim majority: out of a total strength of 413 members, 268 voted for, 179 against, and 110 abstained (such a large abstention was unprecedented). *)

Chamberlain's Government also needed the approval of the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations. It convened in June 1939 and devoted three sessions to the subject. Though the Colonial Secretary, Malcolm McDonald, appeared in person to plead the case, the Commission did not accept his arguments. In their report to the League Council, they declared that "the policy set out in the White Paper was not in accordance with the interpretation which, in agreement with the Mandatory Power and the Council, the Commission had placed upon the Palestine Mandate." *) The British Government paid no attention. With the outbreak of the war the League was dead.

* * *

Churchill made his memorable speech on May 22, 1939. On September 1 of the same year Hitler invaded Poland. Two days later Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. The same day, September 3, Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. On May 7, 1940, less than a year after the speech just quoted, Churchill became Prime Minister and

formed a National Government. Most of its members were on record as earlier having voiced bitter, often devastating denunciations of the White Paper. Churchill remained in power till the end of July 1945, when the war was over and Hitler committed suicide. During all these years of the Holocaust, the White Paper was rigorously and mercilessly enforced. In the meantime, Jews perished by the millions.

Martin Gilbert, the definitive biographer of the Prime Minister, views Churchill not only as a great leader on a global scale and intrepid war lord, but also as a moral figure of rare ethical and spiritual qualities. He seems to regard it as one of his tasks to rehabilitate Churchill's behavior and policies concerning the Jews during the Holocaust. In March 1978 he appeared before an audience of survivors of Hitler's death camps and told them that according to documents now made available by the British Government to researchers, Churchill's Cabinet colleagues and subordinate officials kept from him vital information concerning the mass destruction of the Jews. As a result, he really didn't know the true story and the nature of the Holocaust. Generally, the policy of these officials was to keep secret the events of the Holocaust from the Prime Minister. The pertinent documents requiring his opinion were not shown to him. And if a question of possible rescue policy came up, knowing their boss' sense of compassion for the Jews and his hatred to Hitler, found a way to deal with it on an "administrative" rather than a political level.

Whenever by chance Churchill heard or read something about the unspeakable atrocities and brought it to the attention of Cabinet members or high officials of the Government, they invariably tried to explain it away as propaganda, or as exaggerations, and otherwise minimized the significance of the news story – and besides, they argue, even if it were true, what can be done? Nothing, except to fight until the "scourge" of the human race is removed.

They never failed to point out that any concern with alleviating the plight of the Jews would inevitably lead to the question of admitting numbers of them to Palestine. Were the British to launch upon such a policy it would lead to disaster. The Arabs to a man would rise up in arms and join the enemy. This certainly is not what the Prime Minister would wish. These arguments we know, not from Mr. Martin Gilbert, because they are on public record. But what Mr. Gilbert did tell us (though not in so many words) was that though Churchill tried hard

he never succeeded to convince his colleagues of the necessity to do something to stop the slaughter.

Though the outrageous behavior of the British Cabinet ministers and high officials is certainly true – and this we have from a plethora of public and primary documentary sources – it does not stand to reason that this was enough to keep Churchill ignorant of what ordinary citizens knew well to be a reality. A similar school of historiography tried to prove that Hitler didn't know what his subordinates were doing to the Jews, and that he learned about the horrors of the Holocaust only in October 1943. When David Irving's controversial book came out in 1977 containing the assertion of Hitler's ignorance of the Holocaust, historian A. J. P. Taylor, reviewing the book, sarcastically asked: "Is it really conceivable that Hitler was the only man in Europe who did not know what was happening to the Jews, or that the gas chambers existed?" Without trying to make invidious comparisons, and being fully aware of the main differences between the British leader and Hitler, who were separated by an unbridgeable abyss, one nonetheless, due to the workings of the mind in the form of association of ideas, cannot escape the temptation to paraphrase Taylor's rhetorical question and ask whether it was possible that only two people were not aware of the nature and dimensions of the Holocaust: Hitler and Churchill? *)

Yet, it would be incorrect to look at it as an exclusive British-German duet. Not only Palestine was shut off: all the gates of escape and rescue were closed. The hearts of those in power, almost everywhere, who could help, were like stone; their conscience dead. It was one of the bleakest eras in the annals of Man. It couldn't but be considered the incubating night of the atomic monster. Through the mass bombings of civilian populations and the pulverizing of the cities, it leads to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The fate of all mankind is still shrouded in darkness and many a rational man, including the realist and pragmatic Kissinger has forebodings of impending doom of our civilization. Doomsday may not be just a nightmare, but an apocalyptic denouncement of a tragedy that began in the early 1930s which, at the time, the world thought of as marginal.

From Évian to Bermuda

Though this writer had written about the Évian and the Bermuda conferences at the time when the latter took place in April 1943, I don't think that my description of Évian which was distributed by the Committee for a Jewish Army is adequate to convey the moral climate that prevailed in the "free world" in 1938, and which was epitomized in Évian in 1938. The Évian Conference was an omen of dark things to come – first and above all for the Jews, and then inescapably for the whole world. I think that no one has succeeded to capture and describe that climate, in strictly factual terms, as did Peggy Mann in her extraordinary piece of historical narrative "When the World Passed by on the Other Side" published in the *Weekly Guardian* May 7, 1978.

It would be futile to summarize what she said, or to write an independent version. One couldn't do better. Nor would it do to place it as an appendix. Her essay belongs in the text right here, and we are reproducing it in full with the permission of the author and the *Guardian*, to whom we are extremely thankful.

WHEN THE WORLD PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE

It is thirty years this month since the State of Israel was proclaimed. It is forty years in July since delegates from 32 nations met at Évian to see what they could do to help the Jews then being persecuted by Hitler's Reich. They decided to do nothing.

by Peggy Mann

Évian-les-Bains, France – I stood on a lawn overlooking Lac Lemman where tiny sailboat triangles moved slowly through the evening. Behind me rose the white splendor of the Royal Hotel. It was a setting epitomizing peace, wellbeing. Yet, this is the place where, in July 1938, the Holocaust – the murder of two-thirds of Europe's Jews – could have been halted.

Here, in the famed French resort, 15 weeks after Hitler annexed Austria, delegates from 32 nations met to determine how they could rescue the Jews of the Greater German Reich, help them to re-establish their lives elsewhere.

Never before in history had nations of the world gathered together for the single purpose of saving a doomed people. "Nations of Asylum" they called themselves.

The conference had been organized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who appointed Myron C. Taylor, former president of US Steel, as his special ambassador. All of the delegates were important men; three ambassadors, three ministers, 13 envoys and 13 other diplomats of high status. They settled into their luxurious suites at the Royal Hotel buoyed by the aura of expectancy and good will which news of the conference had engendered.

Reporters from the 32 nations attended. Two days before the opening of the conference, Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote in *The New York Times*: "It is heartbreaking to think of the queues of desperate human beings around our consulates in Vienna and other cities waiting in suspense for what happens at Évian. But the question they underline is not simply humanitarian... It is a test of civilization... Can America live with itself if it lets Germany get away with this policy of extermination, allows the fanaticism of one man to triumph over reason, refuses to take up this gage of battle against barbarism?"

Who were these "Nations of Asylum"? Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Columbia, Denmark, the United States, Great Britain and her commonwealth countries, France, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, nations of Latin America and Africa. Only two countries, Italy and South Africa, turned down the invitation, but South Africa sent an observer.

There also was a contingent of uninvited observers: Nazis. No one knew quite what to do about this, so they were allowed to remain. They showed up at every session, most of them dressed in mufti. And they took careful notes during all the proceedings.

Also attending were top officials of 39 refugee organizations, including 20 Jewish organizations, who had come to present the delegates with eyewitness accounts, reports, statistics, all of which culminated in one irrefutable conclusion: the Jews of Hitler's Reich were doomed unless they could get out of Germany and Austria.

And they **could** get out --- then. Indeed, the official German policy in 1938 was to make the Reich **Judenrein** – purified of Jews – by getting the Jews out. There was only one problem. Who would let the Jews **in**?

A sad joke was making the rounds in the Reich. A Jew goes into a travel agent; he wants to take a trip. The agent sets a globe on the counter before him. "There, The World. Choose." Slowly the Jew turns the globe, studying it carefully. Finally, he looks up and says: "Have you got anything else?"

There was, in fact, only one spot in the world where Europe's Jews **were** welcomed. Palestine. At least they were welcomed by the Jews of Palestine, not by the Arabs of Palestine. And not by the British who held a League of Nations mandate to rule over Palestine. Just prior to the Évian Conference, the deputy head of the British delegation, Sir Michael Palairet, succeeded in winning a promise from Taylor that the world's most eloquent spokesman for increased Jewish immigration to Palestine, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, would not be allowed to speak. Not only was Dr. Weizmann an eloquent spokesman, he also was the most official spokesman the Jewish people had. He was president of the World Zionist Organization and president of the Jewish Agency, the widely recognized government of the Jewish people. A 40-year-old woman named Mrs. Golda Meyerson (Meir) had been sent to Évian by the Yishuv, the Jews of Palestine, because of her direct forcefulness as a speaker. But she also was not allowed to speak.

A heated debate took place during the first 2 days of the conference. The subject: which of the three main powers, the United States, France or Britain, should chair the proceedings. It was finally decided that the honor should go to the United States.

Then the representatives of the 39 refugee organizations were heard. All of their presentations were scheduled for a single afternoon. Each representative was given 10 minutes. As the afternoon wore on, the time allocated was cut to 5 minutes. The World Jewish Congress, which represented 7 million Jews, had 5 minutes. The Association for Aid to German Scientists had 5 minutes. The delegation of Jews of the Reich did not receive any time at all. They were told to submit a written memorandum to be included in the minutes.

Horrors in Austria

In the limited time at their disposal, the advocates of Jewish survival detailed horrors which had been happening for the past 3 months in Austria; tens of thousands of Jews thrown into concentration camps... men, women, even small children cornered on the streets, beaten, kicked, whipped by black-booted SS men... rabbis sent to clean the SS toilets... Jewish women forced down on their knees to scrub the gutters, often with acid added to the scrub water... throughout the country civilians “cooperating” with the SS by beating up Jews, evicting them from their flats, breaking into Jewish shops and homes, carting out anything of value. The explosion of terror and sadism even exceeded what had been seen in Germany.

Newspaper reports also were distributed to the Évian delegates. For example, two weeks before Évian, the London Times Vienna correspondent had written about “the constant arrest of the Jewish population. No specific charge is made, but men and women, young and old, are taken each day and each night from their houses or in the street and carried off... There can be no Jewish family in the country which has not one or more of its members under arrest. The state of hopelessness and panic which is engendered can be imagined...”

In Austria, it had been happening for 3 months, since Hitler took over that country. In Germany it had been happening for 3 years, starting officially with the Nuremberg Laws of Sept. 15, 1935. The German Jew was not recognized as a citizen. All Jews in the civil service had been fired. Jewish teachers had been fired. Jews were excluded from the entertainment industry, from journalism, radio, the stock exchange, law. Indeed, by 1937, half of the Jews in Germany were unemployed. And signs had started appearing throughout the country, signs on butcher shops, dairies, groceries, pharmacies: No Jews Allowed. Thus, in many towns, Jews could not buy milk for their children, medicine for their sick. Jewish children had to attend segregated schools and even kindergardens bore the signs: Jewish Scum, or Cursed Be the Jew.

Meanwhile, a brand new First Reader had been issued for small German Aryans. In the section on religion, for example, the youngsters read: “Remember that the Jews are children of the devil and murderers of mankind. Whoever is a murderer deserves to be killed himself.”

A month prior to the Évian Conference, the Great Synagogue of Munich was destroyed on Hitler’s personal orders, followed by the destruction of synagogues in Nuremberg and Dortmund. Two weeks before the conference, 15,000 Jews were arrested throughout Germany, sent to concentration camps. In Buchenwald, Jews were whipped, tortured in the daytime. And all through the night a recorded voice kept shouting through the loudspeaker: “Any Jew who wishes to hang himself is

asked first to put a piece of paper in his mouth with his number on it, so that we may know who he is.”

Today, when asked how many of the 6 million annihilated Jews came from Germany and Austria, most people answer, 3 million, 4 million or more.

The fact is that at the time of the Évian Conference there were only 350,000 Jews in Germany and 220,000 in Austria. The 32 “Nations of Asylum,” many of which had vast areas of unpopulated lands, could easily have agreed to save every Jew in the Greater German Reich. How many did they agree to save?

What the U.S. Did

Taylor was the first to speak on the subject. His words were awaited with great anticipation. Not only had the conference been called by the American president, but, in his opening address, he had exhorted the delegates to uphold “those principles which we have come to regard as the standards of our civilization.”

Some delegates wondered whether the United States would agree to accept all the Reich’s 570,000 Jewish refugees. (A generation later, the United States accepted 585,000 Cuban and Vietnamese refugees, with no noticeable ill effects on the economic life of the nation.)

Carefully, Ambassador Taylor explained that the United States had its quota system which could not be changed. However, an important new step now would be taken. Although the total German quota was 25,957 per year, it so happened that a total of only 27,000 Jews had been admitted to the United States during the past 6 years. (This had been brought about through a number of factors. They ranged from a “roadblock” set down by President Herbert Hoover in 1932 with the intent of discouraging immigrations to the depression-ridden United States to the outright anti-Semitism of certain local U.S. consuls who made the on-the-spot decisions as to who should be granted visas.) Although, said Ambassador Taylor, unused quotas of previous years could not be used in subsequent years, U.S. consuls were being advised that the severe restrictions they had imposed upon Jewish refugees should be lifted for the current year, so that the full quota of 27,730 German and Austrian immigrants would be admitted each year. (This included, of course, any Christians who wished to come.)

There was a stunned silence as the Ambassador set down. **This** was the great gesture of hope and help offered by the nation populated by immigrants, the nation which for generations had offered asylum to Europe’s oppressed?

Why had Roosevelt called the conference if this was the example the United States planned to set? Countless polls had shown that Americans, on the whole, were dead set against any increase in immigration quotas. On the other hand,

the Nazi annexation of Austria had brought about increased pressure from many organizations, congressmen and reporters (notably Dorothy Thompson) for a State Department action to aid the refugees. According to an internal State Department memorandum the Évian conference would enable the United States to “get out in front and attempt to guide the pressure, primarily with a view toward forestalling attempts to have the immigration laws liberalized.”

Roosevelt sincerely hoped that at the Évian conference, large under-populated countries would accept the Jews of the Reich. Indeed, he previously had proposed this idea to Brazil.

The United States was only the first nation to be heard from. There were 31 others, some of them the largest and least populated countries in the world. Surely, **they** would find room for the refugees. Canada, the second largest nation in the world; Brazil, the fifth largest; Australia, the sixth largest. Between them they could easily absorb all the half-million would-be refugees.

The delegate from Canada explained that Canada could accept only experienced agricultural workers. (Columbia, Uruguay and Venezuela, it turned out, also had the same immigration restriction.)

What of the vast and underpopulated nation of Brazil? When inviting countries to the conference, the U.S. State Department had made it clear that no country “would be expected to make any change in its immigration legislation. And just before coming to the conference, Brazil had enacted a brand-new law --- henceforth, every visa application must be accompanied by a certificate of baptism. So, unfortunately, Brazil could not accept any Jews at all.

The entire continent of Australia had a population of the city of London today. “Populate or perish” was a popular Australian slogan. Politicians were warning that if Australians did not populate their own 3 million square miles, someone else would do it for them. Yet, the Australian delegate, Lt. Col. J. W. White, minister of commerce and customs, explained that Australia could accept only 15,000 Jewish immigrants over a 3-year period. “As we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one.” (Actually, from 1933 to 1943 only 9,000 entered the country.)

The British delegate had similar worries. A rush of Jewish refugees from the Reich “might arouse anti-Semitic feeling in Great Britain.” Nor did the British colonial empire contain territory suitable for the large-scale resettlement of the refugees. (No mention was made of Palestine.)

The French delegate announced that his country had already taken in 200,000 Jews and “had reached the saturation point.”

Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, all classified intellectuals and merchants as undesirables. Unfortunately, half [of] the Jews in Germany and Austria fell

into the “intellectual” category: doctors, lawyers, professors, most of the rest were businessmen.

The Swiss delegate spoke about the “inundation” of Jewish refugees after the fall of Austria to Hitler. Three or four thousand had already fled across the border, and unless the flow stopped, he warned, “Switzerland, which has as little use for these Jews as has Germany, will herself take measures to protect Switzerland from being swamped by Jews with the connivance of the Viennese police.”

And so it went during the final days of the conference. One delegate after another rose with a similar message: The situation for Jews in the Reich was, indeed, horrendous. Unfortunately, his country’s laws prevented any concerted aid. But he was certain that other nations would open their doors.

Three small countries did express willingness to help. Holland, the most densely populated of the Évian nations, with some 800 people per square mile, had already taken in more than 25,000 Jewish refugees, but offered itself as a country of temporary asylum. (The Germans invaded 2 years later, and by the end of the war, 75 percent of the Jews in Holland had perished.)

The Danish delegate stated that his overcrowded country would continue to accept refugees. (And Denmark took in – and protected – 1,500 Jews.) The Dominican Republic announced it would settle 100,000 refugees. (However, due to innumerable roadblocks, only 500 found a home there.)

Even the positive proposals put forth by these three small nations at Évian were drowned out by an official resolution passed unanimously on the final day of the conference: “The delegates of the Countries of Asylum are not willing to undertake any obligations toward financing involuntary immigration. In simpler words, only Jews who could afford to pay their way would be accepted. Since it had been clearly brought out at the conference that no Jew was permitted to leave Germany or Austria with more than 10 Reichsmark – less than \$5 – that single resolution made every Jew from Germany and Austria officially and automatically unacceptable to “the Countries of Asylum.”

Furthermore, at the request of some of the South American delegates, “contentious allusions” to the Third Reich were omitted in the final resolution.

The delegates then appointed a committee to study the matter further: The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees. The director was an American lawyer, George Rublee, a friend of FDR. The committee set up headquarters in London.

1938 German Pogrom

On Nov. 9 and 10, four months after Évian, came the Kristallnacht (crystal night, so-called after the glass that littered the streets from the windows of Jewish homes

and businesses), the ghastly government-sponsored campaign of arson, mayhem and terror aimed exclusively at Jews and carefully organized throughout every village, town and city of Germany and the country which had been Austria. Some 267 synagogues and congregational buildings were razed, and 7,500 Jewish shops were damaged, virtually the entire number which remained in the Reich prior to Nov. 9. A few Jews were thrown out of apartment house windows and from moving trains. Some were shot while trying to escape. Nearly 30,000 Jewish men between 16 and 18 were arrested on Nov. 10 and sent to concentration camps, 10,911 to Dachau, 9,845 to Buchenwald and 9,000 to Sachsenhausen.

In the villages, Nazi **gauleiters** held competitions to see which community should be “purified” of Jews first. Men, women, even small children were dragged from their homes, driven and whipped through the streets.

The **Kristallnacht** was the worst pogrom the modern world had, as yet, known, and outrage replaced apathy as tens of thousands of citizens of the Countries of Asylum petitioned their governments to immediately open their doors to the imperiled Jews of the Reich. Britain took in 9,000 Jewish children; Holland took in 1,700; Belgium accepted several hundred more. And George Rublee felt that now, finally, the time had come. Now the 32 nations must act. He put forth a simple plan. Each of the 32 nations should at once accept 25,000 Jews.

If only half of the 32 nations had agreed, every Jew in the Reich could have been saved.

None agreed.

Four days after the **Kristallnacht**, Rublee wired Secretary of State Cordell Hull: “The attack on the Jewish community in Germany on the one hand and the indifference of the participating (Évian) governments to the fate of the victims on the other has brought the affairs of the Intergovernmental Committee to a critical state where, in our opinion, immediate action is required if the president’s initiative is to lead to a positive result...”

“With the exception of the United States, which has maintained its quota and the British Isles, which are admitting immigrants at a current month’s rate equal to the rate immigrants are being admitted to the United States, doors have been systematically closed to involuntary emigrants since the meeting at Évian.”

Indeed, during the four months since the Évian Conference some of the Nations of Asylum, including Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Uruguay, had adopted new and even more restrictive immigration regulations, specifically designed to keep out Jews.

On Nov. 15, the day after Rublee’s urgent cable to Hull, President Roosevelt held a press conference. His prepared statement on the Kristallnacht included the realization that “The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked

public opinion in the United States... I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a 20th century civilization.”

When a reporter asked whether the president would recommend a temporary change in the immigration laws so that more refugees would enter the United States, he replied that no such changes were being considered.

Was the United States contemplating breaking trade relations with the Third Reich?

“No,” said the president.

Similar reactions were forthcoming from other “Évian nations.”

German Reaction

What if the Évian Conference had proceeded according to the desperate hopes of European Jewry? What if the delegates of the Nations of Asylum had stood up, one after the other, to announce their nations’ horror at what was happening to the Jews of Germany and Austria? What if each nation at Évian had immediately agreed to take in 17,000 Jews at once? Every Jewish man, woman and child in Germany and Austria could have left for a new homeland.

But, as Golda Meir later wrote, “After the conference at Évians-les-Bains, it became chillingly clear that the Jewish people were entirely ‘on their own’.”

The Évian Conference took place 8 months before Germany’s annexation of Czechoslovakia, 14 months prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland and the outbreak of World War II. During all those strategic months, it was only the Reich’s 570,000 Jews who were in dire danger. Their lives, in any case, would have been saved.

Could the Holocaust have been halted in Évian? No one can second-guess history. But after a staunch expression of world opinion regarding the horrors being perpetrated on the Jews of the Reich --- world opinion backed by world action --- it seems almost inconceivable that Hitler would have proceeded with his “final solution to the Jewish problem.”

What is certainly clear is that, in Hitler’s view, the Évian Conference gave him *carte blanche* to go ahead.

Just prior to the conference, Hitler had said in a speech at Königsberg, “I can only hope and expect that the other world, which has such deep sympathy for these criminals, will at least be generous enough to convert this sympathy into practical aid. We, on our part, are ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries, for all I care, even on luxury ships.”

In a speech made immediately after the conference, Hitler derided “the other world” which “is oozing sympathy for the poor, tormented people, but remains hard and obdurate when it comes to helping them.”

The Danziger Vorposten summed up reaction in Nazi newspapers in a single sentence: “The Évian Conference serves to justify Germany’s policy against Jewry.”

After the conference, when French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet informed German Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop that France’s great interest in the Jewish problem was “not to receive any more Jews.”

On Oct. 14, 1938, the French wrote an explanatory memorandum to the German Foreign Ministry about the intergovernmental Committee on Refugees which had been born at Évian. This document stressed the purely humanitarian function of the committee, and reassured the Germans that “none of the states would dispute the absolute right of the German government to take, with regard to certain of its citizens, such measures as are within its own sovereign powers.”

Hitler then informed the South African defense minister, Oswald Pirow, “We shall solve the Jewish problem in the immediate future... The Jews will disappear.”

On Nov. 22, 1938 – 4 months after Évian – a front page article appeared in *Das Schwarze Korps*, [the] official newspaper of the Gestapo: “Because it is necessary, because we no longer hear the world’s screeching and because, after all, no power on earth can hinder us, we will now bring the Jewish question to its totalitarian solution.” Steps toward the final solution were outlined, concluding with the sentence: “The result would be the actual and definite end of Jewry in Germany and its complete extermination.”

There are few people today who even remember the momentous conference which, perhaps, more than any other single factor underwrote the death warrant for 6 million European Jews. However, when I visited Évian last summer, I did find one man who remembered: Rene Richier, the elderly concierge at the Royal Hotel. He was a concierge then, at the time of the conference.

“Oh, yes,” Richier told me, “I remember the Évian Conference well. Very important people were here and all the delegates had a nice time. They took pleasure cruises on the lake. They gambled at night in the casino. They took mineral baths and massages at the **Etablissement Thermal**. Some of them took the excursion to Chamonix to go summer skiing. Some went riding; we have, you know, one of the finest stables in France. Some played golf. We have a beautiful course overlooking the lake. Meetings. Yes, some attended the meetings. But, of course, it is difficult to sit indoors hearing speeches when all the pleasures that Évian offers are waiting right outside.”

Chapter 3

Hebrew Liberation Movement

Hebrew Committee of National Liberation

Of all four consecutive and, at times, overlapping revolutions in modern Jewish history, the most decisive was the last one, expelling the British from Palestine and forcing a hesitant, divided, if not actually counter-revolutionary Zionist leadership to proclaim the State of Israel.

The role played by the Irgun delegation in the U.S. which established the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, though central to the unfolding events of that phase, is not yet recorded systematically and in full.¹

1 For some years a small if somewhat disorganized team is at work on a three-volume history. Nonetheless there are a few published works available which deal either exclusively with the work of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation or in the framework of a general survey of that period, relate to one aspect or another of its activities. Isaac Zaar has written a book about the Committee: **Rescue and Liberation**, – America's part in the Birth of Israel (New York, Bloch Publishing Co. 1954). In Ben Hecht's autobiography, **A Child of the Century** (a best seller), the sixth part titled "The Committee" is totally devoted to his work with the "Bergson Group" (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1954). In another work by Ben Hecht, **Perfidy**, about the Kastner Case, the author refers in detail to the activities and the **dramatis personae** of the Committee (published by Julian Messner, New York 1961).

Several students, both in the States and in Israel, have chosen as a topic for their academic thesis one phase or another of the Committee's activities. Among these are most noteworthy: **The Irgun Campaign for a Jewish Army** by Marcia Feinstein (The City College of New York, June 1973, unpublished). **Propaganda Techniques of the Bergson Group: 1939-1948** by Charles Jacob Levine (The University of Texas at Austin 1974, unpublished). **The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the Rescue of the European Jews** by Aaron Berman (Hampshire College – not published).

Among the new historians who deal with various aspects of the group's activities in a professional, matter of fact way, without malice, are Judd L. Teller's **Strangers and Natives** – The Evolution of the American Jew from 1921 to the Present (New York, Delacorte

This group was a somewhat freakish phenomenon in history that to various people seemed different and diametrically opposite things, ranging from the heroic and awe-inspiring, to fraudulent and treasonable – according to the sympathies or hatreds of the involved and the bystanders alike.

One of the confusing elements for the historian's clear perception of this phenomenon is that it had no single name or designation to go by. At the time of its varied activities, the contemporaries – the press, political figures and the public alike, referred to it as the "Bergson Group." Some called it in popular parlance "The Ben Hecht Group." Ben Hecht himself referred to it in "A Child of the Century" as "The Committee"; often it was referred to affectionately or disparagingly as "the boys"; while the

Press, 1968). Robert Silverberg's **If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem** – The Dramatic Story of How American Jews and the United States Helped Create Israel (New York, William Morrow & Co, 1970). Henry L. Feingold's **The Politics of Rescue**, – The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945 (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970). Saul S. Friedman's **No Haven for the Oppressed**, United States Policy towards Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945 (Detroit – Wayne State University Press, 1973).

Two important book length manuscripts are ready for publication: one by Prof. David S. Wyman – a sequel to his **Paper Walls** – America and the Refugee Crisis. (The first volume was published in 1968 by the University of Massachusetts Press.) The other manuscript dealing exclusively with the activities of the Committee is by M. J. Nurenberger, and the title of the book is **The Jewish Civil War and the Holocaust** – The Story of the Scared and the Doomed. It will be published by the North American Press Ltd., Canada.

An important book just appeared, Winter 1977, in Hebrew by S.B. Beit-Tzvi: **Post Uganda Zionism in the Holocaust Crisis** – a Study of the Causes of the Blunders of the Zionist Movement in the Years 1938-1945 (Tel Aviv, Bronfman Publishers).

A detailed bibliography of several items referring in one way or another to the Committee's work is to be found in Yaakov Amrami's **Practical Bibliography – Nili, Brit Habiryonim, Irgun, Lekhi** (Hadar, Tel Aviv, 1975).

Interesting information and documents relating to the Committee are to be found in the declassified material by the British Foreign Office and the US Department of State. The American material is contained in the volumes **Foreign Relations of the U.S.** dealing with the Near East (1940-1948).

Archives of the Committee are at the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs in New York; at Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscripts and Archives, Manuscript Group Number 690, New Haven, Connecticut. The catalogue is titled: **Palestine Statehood Papers** compiled by Katharine Morton, 1973. A somewhat more comprehensive collection is at the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs in New York. By far the largest part of the archives consisting of many thousands of items are at the Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv, but they are not classified and no catalogue is available.

mass of America supporters prided themselves on belonging to “The American League for a Free Palestine.”

Actually, there were a variety of organizations under different names functioning between the years 1939-1948, either successively or overlapping.² But they were all organized, inspired and guided by a small group of half a dozen comparatively young men (and fleetingly, one young woman) who appeared as if from nowhere; their names were never heard of before by the general public, and they were penniless. Some were detained on Ellis Island. Mighty pressure groups tried incessantly to influence the State Department, the Department of Justice, the FBI

2 The Irgun emissaries were faced with many complex tasks. To meet the essential ones, they created organizations to deal with a specific aspect of the tragic Jewish problem. As a result of this policy, the following organizations came into existence:

1. **The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine** (1939-1941). Apart from other achievements, it chiefly assisted financially and through mobilization of public opinion, the Hebrew underground then active in Europe and Palestine to evacuate thousands of Jews from the danger zone and bring them “illegally” to Palestine.
2. **The Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews** (1941-1943), which was instrumental in influencing both governments and public opinion in favor of a Jewish military force to fight side by side with the United Nations. This Committee functioned both in the U.S. and Great Britain. After long procrastinations and broken promises (given to Weizmann and the Jewish Agency), the British halfheartedly first agreed to the formation of a Palestinian Regiment and then to a Hebrew Brigade.
3. **The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe** (1943-1945), whose principle achievement was the creation by President Roosevelt of the War Refugee Board. This Board saved tens of thousands of human lives. The Committee had its representative (Eri Jabotinsky) in Istanbul, Turkey, the center of Jewish rescue operations. Dr. Reuben Hecht was its representative in Basel, Switzerland, another center of rescue activities.
4. **The American League for a Free Palestine** (1944-1948), whose mass membership and active sympathizers numbered almost 250,000, supported the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation with a view to bring about full repatriation of the homeless part of the Hebrew Nation and to win independence for Palestine.
5. **The National Jewish Council** (1944-1945), the only exclusively Jewish organization initiated by the Irgun emissaries. Its purpose was to seek support among Yiddish intellectuals, writers, journalists, artists and the Orthodox Jewish Community. This council was almost exclusively devoted to the rescue campaign.
6. **The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation** (1944-1948), though it was officially organized last, it was the guiding force responsible for the formation of all five organizations. Each dealt with a separate and distinct phase of the Jewish problem, and was a necessary and integral part of one and the same movement. They all had in common the inspiration and determination to achieve the dual purpose of rescue and liberation.

and other governmental agencies to deport some of them, at least their leader. Who were they?

They were emissaries of the underground resistance movement in Palestine. The purposes of their mission were varied and changed according to circumstances, but the reason for sending them in the first place was that the Commander of the Irgun, David Raziel, and some of his colleagues had the perception that sooner or later, in one way or another, America will have to become the center of operations and hinterland on behalf of the Hebrew national renaissance. Though no one actually foresaw the annihilation of the Jews of Europe, the ideas, nonetheless, slowly crystallized in the minds of the Irgun Command that whatever happens to European Jewry, America is destined in any event to become one of the most important centers of activity and perhaps the most important one. It was thus visualized that American Jewry will in all probability achieve precedence, if not ascendancy, over any other part of world Jewry. Hence the first emissaries arrived here when the main center of the Irgun's activities outside of Palestine was still Eastern Europe. Besides, they followed a pattern: they knew they were not the first representatives of a foreign freedom movement to come to the U.S. to plead the cause of an oppressed and subjugated people. Other preceded them in the past: Free Czechoslovakia and Free Ireland were examples. For, like their predecessors of other nations fighting for freedom, they knew that America, too, was born in a revolution against foreign oppression and tyranny.

In a short time this group became the storm center of Jewish international life in the U.S. – the only country where a mass Jewish community could function freely – with thunderous reverberations in the highest spheres of power, both in America and abroad: Presidents, Congress, Parliaments, Prime Ministers, the press, and various mighty organizations. The leading member of the group, as mentioned before, was Peter H. Bergson (which is not his name at all) who became famous or infamous according to personal bias. In the span of the single decade of activity the group mobilized the sympathy and support of at least a million people (not all were Jews, there were also thousands of gentiles); raised millions of dollars; introduced novel political concepts and a new terminology; applied completely unconventional methods of reaching mass public opinion. They broke the conspiracy of silence around the cataclysm

which befell the Jews of Europe, agitated and influenced world public opinion concerning the scandalous British policy of repression in Palestine, **thus enabling the Hebrew underground to make the Mandatory regime untenable. It combined strategy with the armed Hebrew rebellion to bring about the liquidation of the Mandate, and the withdrawal of British forces from the land.**

Having proclaimed the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation with implications and functions of a Government in exile, in the process of events it forced the vacillating and frightening “Jewish Agency of Palestine” to proclaim the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Under the impact of all these developments, American Jewry gained new dignity and greater self-confidence, free from previous inferiorities and complexes. With a generous heart it opened in subsequent years its purse strings in an outburst of charity unprecedented in history, financing the transfer and settlement of hundreds of thousands of Jews, and putting the newly born State on its feet.

So forceful was this chain of campaigns by the Hebrew Committee and its related organizations, that the British Empire, long after it recognized the State of Israel, entered into diplomatic relations with her, made peace with the leaders of the underground in Israel, still continued to wage a partisan war *à l'outrance* against **one** man, the major American champion of the Hebrew Committee movement, Ben Hecht. They boycotted all the motion pictures he was connected with, one way or another. This resulted in blacklisting him from the motion pictures industry and thus deprived him of his main income.

On the other hand, Zionist leaders who became members of the Government of the new State, in line with the deep psychological law never to forgive those most instrumental in the build-up of their own grandeur, tried with one coup to do away with the leading members of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the Commanders of the Irgun by the simple expedient of firing “a holy cannon” on the Altalena (the ship sent by the Hebrew Committee of the Irgun with a thousand fighters and large quantities of arms. The drama is told later in this chapter. *) Thirty years after the establishment of the State of Israel, and almost forty years after these events in the late thirties and forties do not seem to be enough of a cooling off period for the surviving Zionist leaders or their successors to “forgive” this little group. It hit a raw nerve;

it challenged their authority in the past; and called into question their most sacred dogma. Though the authority of the Israeli Government can no longer be challenged, its dogma is as disastrous today as it was before and during the Holocaust.

Political activism

The slow emergence of the Hebrew liberation movement was a reaction, indeed a rebellion against self-illusions and false hopes of all the political parties including the Revisionists. The young, pre-World War II generation which Jabotinsky inspired knew that the Jewish people is faced with a total crisis, and the only thing left to do was to take fate into their own hands. Theoretically this was not an entirely new perception. No doubt Pinsker in his [Auto-] Emancipation and Herzl in his **Judenstaat**, and some of the Hebrew poets, novelists and publicists from the last quarter of the 19th century onward, were all prompted by the same psychological impulse and gave expression to the same awareness. What was new and revolutionary in the 1930s and 1940s was the means to be employed: active resistance which included **violence**. Ultimately the Jews will have to rely upon their own determination to fight with weapons in their hands, and willing to risk their lives in the struggle for liberation. Such an idea could hardly have occurred in Pinsker's or Herzl's time, when the mere concept of a political campaign on behalf of the Jews as a national entity was new, never tried before. The founders and shapers of Zionism were revolutionary in two respects: first conceptually; auto-emancipation, not to wait for outside help to bring salvation, but achieve it by the efforts and will of the Jews themselves; and second, the means: by international, diplomatic, political and propaganda efforts. Half a century passed and there was little to show for the effort; not that the results were not of great value; they were; but not in proportion to the need. They didn't advance the cause of the Hebrew Nation to national independence. The young generation of the 1930s threw themselves body and soul into the battle of a new type of political activism initiated by Jabotinsky; the young men and women who flocked with enthusiasm to this banner were a new breed of Jews never known in the history of the Diaspora; disciplined wearing uniforms, undergoing para-military training for the defense of the nation (in Palestine); they were incorporated in units of a military

pattern; they marched in parades. They transformed their manner and body posture; they learned to take orders from superiors; they prepared for Aliyah. Politically they were the backbone of Jabotinsky's movement – the Zionist Revisionists: They organized mass meetings, engaging in a recruiting campaign on an unprecedented scale. A million Jews in Eastern Europe became supporters of Jabotinsky, listened to his oratory, sang his songs, were enthralled by his personality. This lasted for about a decade, and slowly it became clear to some of his most ardent and loyal followers that even **his** activist Zionism: in the sense of proclaiming officially for the first time statehood as the aim of Zionism; of organizing a mass movement of Jews to identify themselves with this aim; to undertake a mass propaganda campaign to make the world understand it; and to try independent diplomatic activities based on this premise of statehood; – all this and much more that Jabotinsky and his movement undertook, though it captured the imagination and enthusiasm of a great many of the masses, didn't achieve a breakthrough.

The Revisionist leader saw no way to transform the World Zionist Organization from within, and consequently broke away from it. In 1935 he created the New Zionist Organization. 713,000 people voted in the election to its Constituent Congress which convened in Vienna in September of that year. (The 19th Zionist Congress held about the same time in Lucerne was elected by 635,000 voters.)

This extraordinary demonstration of mass support and organizational strength did not bring the hoped for results. On the contrary, the new movement began somehow to share the fate of the old organization led by Weizmann and the Zionist Socialists, and to end up in the same blind alley which Zionism of the official traditional school maneuvered itself into.

From Legionism to resistance

What was the magic which drew so many of the young to Jabotinsky, and what was it that later caused their disenchantment which gradually turned into a discreet and muffled rebellion?

The idea of armed resistance and violence was the brain child of Jabotinsky, but in a sense an illegitimate one. It sprang from a misunderstanding as to the meaning of Legionism. It was never cleared

up in his lifetime. Jabotinsky caught the imagination and fired the enthusiasm of the young Jews in Eastern Europe with the idea that in their struggle for liberation they must not only include the military factor, but make it their cornerstone. He preached this idea with the full force of his personality. Probably 95% of the young who joined one of his organizations, but especially **Betar**, did so because of this vision of Jews wielding military force. This was the great emotional impulse that impelled them to gather around his banner.

But this enthusiasm surged to a great if not decisive extent from a certain incomprehension of what it was all about. His insistence on militarism both as an ideology as well as practical training; his Legionism that was almost an obsession with him; was an expression of two related concepts. One was that a military force, an army, both symbolize and concretize the notion of nationhood. Even in the process of achieving legal international status, a nation can best be characterized by being able to take care of its own security militarily. The second and simpler concept was self-defense *per se*: to defend Jewish life whenever and wherever attacked by enemies. This was purely a humanist attitude: Jewish life is of the greatest importance and must be defended under all circumstances, even if it involves making a deal with the devil, as was the case in December 1921 when he attempted to come to an agreement with Petliura, the White Russian general whose armies engaged in systematic pogroms while fighting the Bolsheviks. But he didn't care who Petliura was, what his feelings were, or his political ambitions. He wanted to make a deal with him that a Jewish gendarmerie should defend the Jews against his own soldiers. Nothing came of it. But late in his life he said that if asked what epitaph he wishes on his tomb, he would suggest: "This was the man who made the pact with Petliura." *)

In the spring of 1903, at the age of 23, not yet a Zionist, he organized the first Jewish defense group in his native Odessa in anticipation of a pogrom. Since that date he remained dedicated to Jewish military defense. Years later, again anticipating anti-Jewish outbreaks by Arab mobs in Palestine, he organized the first Haganah units which he led during the bloody Jerusalem riots in April 1920.

A military court sentenced him to fifteen years at hard labor. (Under the pressure of a wave of indignation and protest in Palestine and England,

Lord Samuel amnestied him on July 18, 1920, and next year the verdict was annulled.) He was the first “Assir Tzion,” Prisoner in Zion.

These were all bold, innovative, heroic moves, but **defensive** in nature. Their aim was the **protection of Jews**. At the same time, he considered his initiatives not only as a practical means to defend Jewish lives, but also a matter of pride and esthetics. He hated to see Jews attacked, humiliated, cringing, waiting for the Russian Gorodevoy (policeman) or soldier to save him (usually late in the process of a pogrom), and especially Jews in Jerusalem and Jaffa, walking on the sidewalks close to the front doors of buildings, making it easier to escape when an Arab attacks, expecting the British to do their duty.

* * *

During World War I he fought almost single-handedly and succeeded to create Jewish units within the British army known as the Jewish Legion. His personal campaign is an **epopee** of heroism and vision, a determination to crusade for an issue against all odds, against emancipated Jews and fellow Zionists; against the reluctance of the British Government and against the stateless Jews from Eastern Europe who immigrated to England before and during the war, and who simply didn't want to be inducted in the British army because, like most Jews everywhere they didn't consider the Entente with the hated Czarist Russia as an ally on **their side**. Their enemy then was not Germany – but Russia, of the pogroms, of the Pale of Settlement, of the persecutions, of official antisemitism. But Jabotinsky, in his vision, saw the Entente victorious and the partition of the Ottoman Empire as a foregone conclusion, and was sure that if the Jews participated in the war, especially in the conquest of Palestine, it will be counted possibly as the greatest asset during the deliberations about the future status of Palestine. That the Jewish units played a major part in the political and psychological climate of the time, and had an impact upon some British statesmen who were responsible for the Balfour Declaration, there is no doubt. But Jabotinsky's hope and dream that the Legion will remain a permanent institution after the war, with a lasting participating role in the occupation and then in the defense of the country, was not materialized. The Legion was disbanded. As mentioned above, for organizing the Jewish defense during the riots

of 1920, he was court martialed. His plans for the future status of the Legion did not work out. Why? For the same reason that nothing, or precious little, worked out in Zionist enterprises as hoped for. Everything was contingent upon the good will, honor and friendship of imperialist Britain. Well, that glorified Britain had none of these, neither good will, friendship nor honor in abundance. It was with many notable exceptions anti-Zionist and in some cases antisemitic from the beginning to the very end.

Jabotinsky continued during all his life to fight for the Jewish Legion, and made it the central plank in his political platform. But it was an object to be achieved by British consent. He wanted a charter for a Jewish Army, as Herzl wanted a Charter from the Sultan for a State, in whatever guise it was deemed possible. It did not work.

The idea of conquering Palestine by military force was not foreign to him. More than once it crossed his mind, but somehow, he could not reconcile the violence it involved with the legality of his approach: that the aim of national independence in the last account can be achieved politically. He thought perhaps a symbolic act should be undertaken; for instance, a military attempt to occupy Jerusalem, or part of it, to raise the Hebrew flag and hold it for a short time, if only for a few hours, and he himself would be in command of the operation. This would symbolically set the precedent of Hebrew sovereignty in Palestine. It never came to fruition, for a variety of reasons we cannot enumerate here. He always reverted to his credo that the main thrust of the movement must be political. It can to some extent and moderately be supported by controlled acts of violence. But when he listened to the arguments of his young disciples, they angered him and almost drove him to despair. At times he thought they were absurd.

This does not diminish Jabotinsky's greatness as the father of the Hebrew Liberation movement and its spiritual Commander in Chief. He was its greatest hero. He united the virtues and talents of all the other Zionist leaders combined, and then if you multiply them many times over, they are still dwarfed by him. He remains a giant standing out above everyone else. But he did not come to the last logical and desperate conclusions – that the liberation of the Jews is contingent upon an independent military force, organized not by permission or “charter” from the British, but forged independently. His disciples and followers of

the young generation of the emerging Hebrew nation, both in Palestine and in Eastern Europe, whose imagination was fired by the idea of military action (Legionism), came to a completely unexpected revolutionary conclusion: this military force has to be organized independently, regardless whether the British consent or not. It must not be defensive only. It has to be the instrument and means to liberate Palestine from British rule altogether. This was the aim and therein was the solution.

Simultaneously they came to the conclusion – also inspired by Jabotinsky – that a military force fighting to liberate the country from Colonial rule could succeed only if accompanied by a vigorous propaganda and diplomatic campaign to explain and back up the military activities. The imperative was to put the British on the defensive diplomatically; disarm them politically; pillory them morally. All this was achieved in a comparatively short time by the combined efforts of a military struggle by the Hebrew underground in Palestine, and the political, diplomatic and propaganda campaign of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation in the U.S. and later in France.

The formative years of the Hebrew resistance

When did the Hebrew resistance movement begin? Chronologically the answer is quite clear: When Abba Ahimeir organized the first anti-British demonstration in 1930, on the occasion of the visit to Palestine of Drummond Shiels, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and was arrested. (We will say more about him presently.) But ideologically and politically the answer is less clear. The genealogy and evolution of ideas and concepts is always more difficult to establish than that of events. It is difficult to state which came first – the deed or the idea.

Jabotinsky liked to quote from Goethe the lines about Faust's uncertainty as to how to translate the opening verse of St. John:

It says: 'In the beginning was the **word**'.
Already I am stopped. It seems absurd.
The **Word** does not deserve the highest prize.
I must translate it otherwise
If I am well inspired and not blind.
It says: in the beginning was the **Mind**.

Ponder that first line, wait and see,
Lest you should write too hastily.
Is mind the all-creating source?
It ought to say: in the beginning there was **Force**.
Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen,
That my translation must be changed again.
The spirit helps me. Now it is exact.
I write: In the beginning was the **Act**.³

If Jabotinsky was enchanted with this passage it is because it reflected his own doubts, though more often than not he was inclined to accept that at the beginning was the word, the concept, which is the father of the deed. This is a moot theory, unless it means that every deed to be of significance must stem from a concept. But it definitely does not mean that every concept leads to action.

Hegel rightly claimed, that in a man's mind all kinds of ideas cross and crisscross, but as long as they are not related to a concrete deed to follow, the ideas mean nothing. Actually, man often acts out of intuition rather than rational thought, out of obscure, inexplicable promptings. Perhaps it would not be a wild statement to say that all knowledge, or most scientific achievement, is a result of experimenting on hunches rather than *a priori* conceptions. Life and history probably result from that composite dynamism that makes up man's essence, which is both thought and intuition, which are inseparable and unreal in isolation.

In the formative years of the Hebrew Movement of National Liberation, its ideas and concepts were vague, inarticulate, somewhat self-contradictory, still overlaid with traditional Zionist preconceptions, terminology and inherited clichés. In some instances, it was influenced, to a degree, by the then current slogans of Mussolini's Fascism and authoritarian nationalist movements abroad, as that of Pilsudsky in Poland. But its inspirations, though varied, sprang from Hebrew original sources and personalities. Apart from Jabotinsky – their spiritual father and idol of the National liberation

3 Jabotinsky translated parts of the opening scene of Faust and, as usual in his translations from several languages, improved upon the original; probably a unique feat in the history of the art of rendering poetry from one language to another.

movement – there was the Hebrew poet H. N. Bialik, who castigated the Jews in the Diaspora for taking it lying down, and who in the style of the ancient Hebrew prophets of wrath, fulminated against Jewish cowardice and lack of dignity, extolling the heroism and daring of the mythological giants who rebelled against Moses and attempted to take Palestine by storm, before the time was ripe. There was Tchernichovsky – perhaps the greatest poet of the early decades of the 20th century – who extolled the virtues of the ancient Greeks, along with the heroic deeds of the ancient Hebrew heroes. Dr. Joseph Klausner wrote a multi-volume history of the commonwealth during the Second Temple, from its beginning until the country was conquered by the Romans. In his books he vividly described the Zealot's fight for freedom. A poet of lesser stature, Ya'akov Kah[a]n, in one of his poems coined the phrase: "In blood and fire Judea fell, in blood and [fire] flames it will rise again." It became one of the unofficial hymns of the liberation movement in the early period.

Drawing its inspiration from poetry and history, rebellious youth (with rare exceptions belonged to the movement created by Jabotinsky) engaged in a campaign of resistance and then of violence against the British, connected with *ad hoc* purposes to let the authorities know how the Jews feel about their policy. It had no clearly defined philosophy and aim. The ideological and conceptual crystallization was a slow process.

* * *

It is not our intention to relate in detail the history of the various and consecutive avatars of the Hebrew National resistance movement and Jabotinsky's role in each of them. However, it can roughly and somewhat arbitrarily be divided into three phases: **The Romantic** (from 1930 to 1937) started with Ahimeir. The second was **The Break** with the past, and the decision to become self-reliant organizationally, militarily and ideologically. This period started in 1937 with the rebellion of the majority of the **Haganah Bet** against its commander, and the establishment of the independent military organization – the Irgun. It lasted till the outbreak of World War II. The third phase was that of **Crystallization**. It was during the years 1939-1944 that a coherent and integrated philosophy of National Liberation was formulated.

In analyzing and evaluating the evolution of the liberation movement

in its successive phases and its new forms of struggle adopted by the young generation of Hebrews, one is struck by a dramatic paradox: Jabotinsky was both the inspirer, often the initiator of the Resistance movement and its program, and at the same time he was its inhibitor, at times, in his heart of hearts its opponent, for reasons too complicated to explain here, except one major one given earlier in this chapter.

* * *

As mentioned, the first manifestation of rebellion against conventional methods of the Zionists took place in 1930 under the inspiration of a young journalist and historiographer Abba Ahimeir, who held extreme anti-Socialist convictions. He organized the first anti-British demonstration in Jerusalem and was the first political prisoner in Mandated Palestine. (Jabotinsky's imprisonment in Acre was under British military occupation and not under British Mandate.) He formed an illegal group called *Berit Habirionim* (the name of the extreme Zealots who fought the Romans in the First Century of the C.E.). His group was small but undertook several spectacular demonstrations against the British. (Later, they also removed banners flying the Swastika from the building of the German Consulate in Jerusalem.) These activities though limited in scope, with no military resistance or violence involved, had great reverberations in Palestine and the Diaspora, and were the expression of a new spirit and form of struggle. The British persecuted and harassed Abba Ahimeir and his group, whom they arrested and re-arrested. When the Chief of the Political Department Dr. Chaim Arlosoroff was assassinated in June 1933, the authorities arrested Ahimeir, accusing him of being the "spiritual instigator" of the murder.⁴ Though acquitted of the charge, he was re-arrested for belonging to an "illegal terrorist" organization.

4 The mystery of the murder was never cleared up. It was one of the great dramas the Zionist movement went through. Apart of Abba Ahimeir, two other Revisionists, Abrasha Stawsky and Zvi Rosenblatt were arrested and tried. Abba Ahimeir was acquitted of the charge on May 16, 1934, but Stawsky was sentenced to death by hanging. Rosenblatt, though accused of the actual shooting, was acquitted. On July 19, 1934, Stawsky, too, was acquitted by the Court of Appeals. The shocking factor of these events was that the Zionist Socialists were the accusers, and made every imaginable effort to influence the courts that the young Revisionists were the murderers. Several essays based on meticulous research have since been written about the case. Most imply that the Arlosoroff affair was

Jabotinsky's attitude to Abba Ahimeir was somewhat ambiguous, as it was to remain all his life to the latter day evolving resistance organizations. He enthusiastically approved of what he did, and referred to Abba Ahimeir as "Morenu verabenu" – our teacher and mentor, but not of what he wrote. Ahimeir's journalistic diaries were of extreme verbal violence, and conveyed a strong note of sympathy with Mussolini's fascism. At that time, it was not a rare phenomenon in the Western world, and many intellectuals from the left of the period expressed admiration for the Italian dictator's rule. Abba Ahimeir, too, before joining the Revisionist movement, belonged to the Zionist-Socialist camp. But it was not to Jabotinsky's taste or philosophy, being an inveterate liberal of the 19th century school of Mazzini, and an uncompromising libertarian.

Ahimeir's group was active for a few years, and then gave way to other formations of a strict military character.

* * *

In 1931-1932 there was a split in the Haganah, which was exclusively under the control of the Zionist-Socialist leadership, – in fact it was a branch of the Histadrut. A group of Haganah members who belonged to other parties seceded, and under the leadership of Avraham Tehomi created a clandestine, self-defense organization called Haganah Bet ("Second Haganah" – it seems that already at that early period the name of Irgun Zvai Leumi was intermittently used). Though the vast majority of the rank and file of the new organization were followers of Jabotinsky, it was an independent, non-party outfit in every respect. It was not controlled officially or unofficially by the Revisionist Party, or by Jabotinsky personally.

Realities in Palestine in general, and in the new military organization in particular made it imperative to reorient Haganah Bet from a non-partisan entity, to one acting in accordance with Jabotinsky's views. On December

an enterprise of the Zionist Socialists, to discredit Jabotinsky's movement which was on the ascendancy and threatened to break the hegemony of the left in the Zionist organization. Though they did not succeed in what at the time was referred to as the "blood libel" of Jews against Jews, the Arlosoroff case probably more than anything else brought about Jabotinsky's breaking away from the World Zionist Organization. During the trial which lasted more than a year, an atmosphere of civil war prevailed in Palestine. *)

5, 1936, Avraham Tehomi was appointed commander of the Irgun by Jabotinsky. However, only a few months later Tehomi reached an agreement with the leadership of the Haganah to merge the two organizations. The vast majority of the Irgun membership (estimated at the time to be about 3,000) refused to follow their commander; rebelled, and on April 10, 1937, issued a statement expelling him and his followers from the organization.⁵ The Irgun Zvai Leumi ("National Military Organization"; its acronym ETZEL; also called Irgun for short) was officially created as a military, underground force. The new leadership also decided to institutionalize its relationship with Jabotinsky. He was asked to be its formal Commander-in-Chief. Jabotinsky hesitated but in time accepted the arrangements according to which he would accept the position of Commander-in-Chief; his orders on major policy were to be obeyed, and he would appoint the Commander in Palestine. But he would not interfere in anything else. The Command in Palestine would be free to act according to their lights and their evaluation of conditions prevailing at each particular time.

This arrangement did not work out smoothly. There were tensions between the Command in Palestine and the Commander-in-Chief, which were not resolved until the end of his life. Being banned by the British from Palestine he could not exert direct control. Communications were poor, not for objective reasons only but because the Command in Palestine tried to circumvent the necessity of getting official approval from him for plans of activities which they suspected (for good reason) he may oppose to. Some of the operations they undertook went against his grain and his inner convictions on ethical and not only political grounds. There were rivalries between the Command and the Executive Committee of the Revisionist Party on the one hand, and with the leadership of **Betar** on the other. All three organizations were interested to take an active part in "illegal immigration." There was a need for coordination and it did not always work out harmoniously.

Jabotinsky did not try to return clandestinely to Palestine because he was primarily a political leader rather than a chief of an underground

5 Tehomi did not prove much of an asset to the Haganah. Many of the people who at first went with him, later found their way back to the Irgun. In the Haganah he was downgraded and eventually he quitted, a very disappointed and lonely man. In the 1940s he served for a while with the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation.

terrorist organization. He never changed his mind that “B’reshit bara Elohim et ha-politica” – in the beginning God created politics. *) Gradually it became ever more difficult to reconcile the two positions he held. At the end the relations with him were not only strained, but artificial, and his authority became nominal. He died on August 3, 1940, at a time when the Hebrew underground which he inspired and brought into being was fragmented and demoralized at the nadir of its history.

The Irgun’s young leadership

Among the young members who created the independent Irgun were several who later became historic figures of spectacular achievement. Among others they were David Raziel, Avraham Stern and Hillel Kook. At the beginning they were not at the top of the hierarchy. The first Commander of the Irgun, Robert Bitker, was replaced by Moshe Rosenberg whose span in office was rather short. Late in 1937 David Raziel became commander of the Irgun (before that he was commander of the Jerusalem district, and member of the High Command). Apart from his military qualifications he was a natural leader of men, an intellectual, a Hebrew scholar, a stylist of exceptional eloquence, and a powerful personality of character and inspiration. Jabotinsky, it is reported, after having met him and heard about his exploits, supposedly said: “This is the man I was waiting for, for the last fifteen years” or words to that effect. The other was Avraham Stern, known as Yair. He was a poet, a linguist, a theoretician and had great personal charm. One of his songs “Khayalim Almonim” (“The Unknown Soldiers”) of great beauty and power, became the hymn of the fighting underground. It was often attributed to Jabotinsky who felt he ought to deny it, and published a statement saying he wished he could write as excellent a poem as that of Yair’s. About Hillel Kook we spoke already in the introduction, and will meet him again in the course of this narrative.

Raziel and Stern, who together with other members formed the High Command, succeeded to instill into the rank and file a new spirit of dedication, high morale, indoctrination of a superior intellectual and ideological level. They succeeded to increase the membership and intensify the activities of the organization in Palestine, and expanded the work with spectacular success into the Diaspora.

At that phase, in the last two and a half years before the outbreak of World War II, the leadership of the Irgun, though aware of the fast-deteriorating situation in Palestine and the Diaspora, and despite their frustration with the lack of tangible achievements of Jabotinsky's political offensive, did not fall into a mood of despair. On the contrary, precisely because they were educated and inspired by Jabotinsky, they refused to share the fatalism of the Zionists and the Jews in general, and to feel defeated before the battle was really under way. They did not reconcile themselves with the idea that nothing can be done. They grew ever more conscious of the underground's potential military strength and its growing popularity in the Yishuv, which increased in numbers (by the late 1930s it was about 600,000 strong). The bleaker the conditions of the Jews in Europe became, the greater was the appeal of the Irgun to the young generation both in Palestine and the Diaspora.

Yet the break with the Zionists and the increased alienation from Jabotinsky and his movement, made the Irgun's task extremely complicated and seemingly impossible. Its Commanders put themselves outside the mainstream of Jewish and Zionist life and thought. The decision to make that break, to take that leap in the dark, refusing to recognize any authority except their own conscience; to rely upon their own efforts; contained the danger that the Irgunists would act irresponsibly, – that they would become anarchists or lawless desperados, as the British and the Zionist authorities were wont to characterize them. In **that** formative phase none of these fears materialized. The young Irgun Commanders realized from the beginning that whatever they intend to undertake could not be achieved in an atmosphere of moral and political chaos. They knew that they would have to act as fighters for the survival and freedom of an ancient people. What did they do? What form did their activities take?

It was at this second phase that the Irgun was already engaged in a struggle in three different but co-related fields: 1) acts of violence in Palestine; 2) defying and breaking the British blockade against Jewish immigration by bringing in Jews "illegally" – "Af al pi" ("despite" the White Paper regulations);⁶ and 3) organizational, propagandistic, and

6 The epic story of "Af-Al-Pi" will be related as part of another volume. It has many heroes,

military training in Poland, and diplomatic contacts with East European governments, especially with that in Warsaw.

Being engaged simultaneously in so many activities it is inconceivable that all this was done without planning and a historic perspective. Strands of a philosophy began to be discerned and the various acts fell into a certain ideological pattern. Or conversely, the various activities undertaken *ad hoc* out of necessity and under pressure of external events, created in themselves a pattern and resulted in a conceptualized approach to the crisis in which the Hebrew Nation found itself, both in Palestine and Eastern Europe.

Beyond doubt the Irgun in 1938-1939 developed a dynamism which was truly revolutionary in the history of the Jews in the Diaspora. Members of the High Command: Avraham Stern and Hillel Kook (and for a short visit by Raziel) went to Poland and began to organize a movement both as a reservoir of manpower as well as active supporters of the Hebrew Resistance in its many manifestations. Contacts were made with those elements in the Revisionist movement (especially the young Betarim, but not exclusively) who became disenchanted with "old-time" activities and entertained doubts as to the prospects and effectiveness of radical political activities alone. Discreet cooperation developed between these elements and the Irgun emissaries. The result was a network of clandestine cells.⁷

The circle of supporters grew larger. New people, mostly "assimilationists," converted to the cause of Hebrew national liberation.⁸ These three elements: the Irgun Commanders, the disenchanted Revisionists (mostly

but the pioneer of that form of Hebrew resistance was certainly Avraham ("Abrasha") Stawsky, the forgotten hero of the "illegal" immigration. He deserves credit not only for having been the first to engage on a large professional scale in what Jabotinsky called "the national sport," but also because without him it is difficult to visualize the victories it scored at a time when not only the British but also the Zionists were dead set against it. Hopefully the story of this fascinating personality, his character, inventiveness, daring and adventures, his extraordinary life and death which surpasses fiction at its most spell-binding, deserves to be told in a comprehensive biography.

7 In charge of these cells was nominated a Betari by the name of Nathan Friedman-Yellin. After Stern was assassinated by the British, he became head of **Lekhi**.

8 In the center of these activities were Mr. and Mrs. Strassman. An officer of the Polish Army, he perished in the mass murder in Snatia. Mrs. Strassman and her children reached Palestine. She died in the 1960s.

Betarim), and the newly acquired active supporters from among the Jewish-Polish intelligentsia, held long discussions, arguing various aspects of the movement, its ideology, strategy, apart from the practical problems at hand. An ideological primer of thirteen lessons was composed for the edification of the members of the cells; propaganda material was published in Yiddish and Polish. First, special editions were printed twice or three times a week, and then a daily paper in Yiddish, **Di Tat**. A semi-monthly magazine **Jerozolima Wyzwolona** appeared in English. Propaganda was launched on a mass scale.

All this, especially the Irgun's daily, was a bitter disappointment to the Revisionists and Jabotinsky personally, because at the time the party was in control of the long established daily **Der Moment**, a newspaper of great prestige and large circulation. The Irgun's daily was a direct challenge to the Revisionist leadership and in a sense to their Commander-in-Chief, whose mouthpiece was **Der Moment**. The two papers appeared in the same city – Warsaw, except that the older was a morning paper, and **Di Tat** an afternoon daily.

* * *

This short period in Poland was one of the most exhilarating and promising in the history of the Irgun. They discovered the tremendous human potential both for the fighting forces in Palestine, as well as for the immigration. They obtained a far-reaching understanding with the Polish Government both as to training of an officer corps as well as providing large quantities of weapons. Though all this was revolutionary – incredible in the realities of the Zionist environment – the philosophy of national liberation was only in the process of maturing, of being formulated in a way that was free from the taboos of the past, from basic tenets of Zionism, from the ideological absurdities and social bias of the various Zionist parties. Despite all the propaganda and educational efforts, the Irgun was still mainly action-oriented, that is, first action, then explaining why and what for. An integrated philosophy of national liberation, a perception of sovereignty in a country free from foreign rule, on the pattern of liberation movements of other peoples; a conceptualization of the complex and unprecedented situation, and of the task at hand, to represent and defend a leaderless nation in

distress, was achieved at a later stage – the third and final phase, that of **Crystallization**.

It was not to be accomplished in Palestine or in Poland at the pre-World War II period. When war broke out, the leading members of the High Command were in prison in Palestine. Politically and ideologically they were in disarray; they were not prepared for that cataclysmic event. In fact, the Irgun for all intents and purposes disintegrated at the end of 1939. Its center of gravity and its activities were shifted, half by design, half by chance to the U.S.A.

Reevaluation of Zionism's main premises

Before starting the narrative of subsequent events, it is proper to relate the conceptual developments which took place in the last two years before the outbreak of World War II.

The Hebrew liberation movement rejected practically all the main premises of the Zionist movement. It saw the root of the Zionism's failure in the unconditional orientation upon one power: Great Britain. Even the Revisionists, let alone the Zionists, never questioned the justification of British rule in Palestine. They only claimed that the British abused this right, and that with the White Paper of 1939 they flagrantly betrayed their trust. But it was always their idea that whatever the policy of this or that British Government may be in Palestine, the basis of Jewish claims is still embodied in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. Hence the political aim of all the Zionists, and foremost of the Revisionists, was to bring about a **revision** of British policy in favor of Zionism; but in essence the assumption still was to perpetuate British tutelage over Palestine, at least until such time as the Jews will be strong enough (a majority) to rule Palestine as a Jewish State. It is true that Jabotinsky thought the Jews should not consider themselves irrevocably bound to the exclusiveness of the British presence in Palestine. He insisted, somewhat forlornly, that it is not a wise policy to stick to a principle of being irrevocably committed to the British Mandate. He suggested instead that the Jews should look to somebody else who would be available to take over the Mandate – maybe Poland, or a condominium. The Jews should behave like a maiden who had not yet made up her mind in a final manner, but should let it be rumored that she is available to other suitors. In the

concluding paragraphs of his testimony on February 11, 1937, before the Royal Palestine Commission presided over by Lord Peel, he expressed the same idea but in blunter terms. The bond between the British and the Jews in Palestine is not a Catholic marriage; it can be dissolved by mutual agreement. It is worthwhile to quote these paragraphs because they convey Jabotinsky's attitude as well as his predicament:

It is my very unpleasant duty to wind up by taking into consideration a melancholy pessimistic contingency: What will happen if what the Jews desire cannot be conceded by Great Britain? I wish I could omit mentioning that contingency for many reasons, personal reasons, Jewish national reasons, but to omit it is impossible. We are asked very often: "Whatever is meant by the Balfour Declaration was promised in 1917, but since then perhaps the British people have honestly come to the conclusion that they cannot do it." I deny it. I affirm they can; but when I am asked, when any Jew is asked: "What, are the Jews going to pin us down to the promise and to say – you have promised the pound of flesh, pay us the pound of flesh?" Gentlemen, here I answer you in the name of the most extreme of Zionist parties: "No!" if Great Britain really is unable to do it (not unwilling, but unable) we will bow to her decision, but we then shall expect Great Britain to act as any Mandatory who feels he cannot carry out the Mandate: give back the Mandate...

Sir Laurie Hammond: To whom?

Answer: And do it in a way which will not harm the safety of the Jews who trusted you and came to Palestine on the chances of a Zionist future. This means letting a certain time elapse while the Mandatory together with the Jews will look for the alternative. I hope that time will never come. I am fully convinced that it will not be necessary. I believe in England just as I believed in England twenty years ago when I went, against nearly all Jewish opinion, and said: "Give soldiers to Great Britain!" because I believed in her. I still believe. But if Great Britain really **cannot** live up to the Mandate – well – we shall be the losers; and we will sit down together and think what can be done; but not that Great Britain

should go on holding the Mandate and pretend it is “fulfilled” while my people are still suffering in the Diaspora and still only a minority in Palestine. No, this cannot be done. This is not cricket. Therefore, Gentlemen, I submit it cannot be done, and it shall not be done.

I thank the Commission very much for the kindness and attention. I beg your forgiveness for having kept you for an hour and a half.

What he hoped was, that under such circumstances the British may become worried, have a change of mind if not of heart, and hence be more willing to live up to their original pledges under the Mandate. If worse came to worse Palestine should perhaps be entrusted to another more suitable, friendly, interested Mandatory. From a practical point of view there was little chance in the middle and late 1930s that anybody would agree to take over the Mandate. But this is not the main point. What was so significant in Jabotinsky’s attitude of looking for a substitute to Great Britain as Mandatory, was that he took it for granted that though it may be necessary to substitute the British for somebody else, Palestine must still remain under foreign tutelage. In the minds and the psychological make- up of the commanders of the Hebrew underground and their emissaries and friends abroad, a new attitude gradually developed: why should Palestine be ruled by a foreign power and not by the people concerned – the Hebrew Nation?

* * *

The rebellious generation which brought into existence the Hebrew liberation movement was not inhibited by political sophistry and legalese double talk about British rights and prerogatives in Eretz Israel, except those conferred upon her by the League of Nations to sponsor and facilitate the building-up of the Jewish National Home. Regardless what the term National Home implied, one thing it certainly could not mean: exclusion. Nor could it mean that the Jews already living in Palestine should be left to the outrages of Arab terror and not be protected. He pleaded with the British to **permit** to Jews to defend themselves **legally**. In that testimony before the Peel Commission:

As to keeping the country quiet and avoiding disturbances: I have already submitted – try what has never been tried – try re-establishing the Jewish Regiment as part and parcel of the permanent garrison. Try legalizing Jewish self-defense. It is anyway almost inevitable. Jewish self-defense is “practically” legalized today; it is and it is not; it “should not” exist, but it does exist; it “should not” be armed, but if it is armed, well... and so on. Well, I think the decisive step should be made in the necessary direction.

If you cut down the troops in Palestine far beyond the limit of safety, and the explanation is that the British taxpayer does not want to give his money nor his sons, that is quite natural, but we – the Jews of all parties – have for years been demanding: “Why have you disbanded the Jewish Regiment? Why not allow the Jews to take over: our men and our money under British command and under British military law?” I do not claim a “Jewish Army” before there is a Jewish State; we want the Jewish Regiment just as it existed during the War, rendering decent service. Why should the impression be created in this country that we want Johnny, Tommy, and Bobby to defend us? We do not. If, in the building of Palestine, sweat and gold have to be employed, let us give the sweat and let us give the gold; if blood has to be shed by the defenders of Palestine, let it be our blood and not English blood. But that suggestion has always been turned down.

* * *

The Hebrew resistance forces which started to organize into an underground military framework took place in the middle 1930s. From the beginning they were determined to rely no longer on the British for the protection of Jewish life and property. The Haganah, the self-defense organization controlled by Socialist-Zionists, practiced “havlaga,” an untranslatable term but whose essence is to restrain one’s self from reacting, in this case from reacting to the Arab terrorists who made the highways and market places in Palestine extremely dangerous for the Jews. The Irgun Zvai Leumi rejected Havlaga and answered terror with terror: as long as the highways and market place remain unsafe for the Jews, they will also be unsafe for the Arabs.

This was not the only objective of the Hebrew resistance movement. A

second one was to remove from the hands of the British the jurisdiction concerning Jewish immigration. Arab terror was chiefly aimed at forcing the British to close the gates of Palestine to any Jewish immigration, which they finally succeeded in doing. The Irgun decided to take the matter of immigration into their own hands by bringing in Jews “illegally” on chartered ships. The Hebrew resistance forces could not accept the British argument nor those of the Arabs that this will change the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs and eventually affect the political status of Palestine. All legal and international considerations apart, regardless whether or not the apprehensions of the Arabs were justified (they certainly were justified), the Jews had no choice – the alternative was death. They literally ran for their lives. The right to live transcends every other consideration. For the Jews who tried to flee, it was a matter of life and death, as subsequent events proved true beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Liberation versus colonization; repatriation versus immigration

In the course of time the Zionists were conditioned and enslaved by a concept they called colonization – “hityashvut”: settlement. In Hebrew the word “hityashvut” has overtones of Jewish wanderers who at long last arrived at a destination, to find peace of mind in the security of having settled down. There is a romantic quality to it and a mythic promise.

Weizmann and Jabotinsky, though opposed to each other in fundamentals, their differences were in some respects only a matter of method: what is the surest and fastest way of achieving “hityashvut” – colonization. Weizmann, by a curious working of his mind, thought that the “dust Jews” who in themselves are good for very little, could be good enough in performing a great task – they can give money generously and repeatedly, enabling the “elite” Jews, the chalutzim (the pioneers) to settle in Palestine. Hence, the paramount importance of the Zionist funds like the Keren Kayemeth, the Keren Hayesod, etc.

Jabotinsky argued that no amount of money would suffice were it to be poured in into a country whose government is bent upon a policy to put all colonizing efforts to naught. He deprecated the method of “buying” colonization and instead demanded as a prerequisite, as a *conditio sine qua non*, a change of British policy in Palestine: to substitute one of sabotage

and obstruction, with one that is committed to carry out the spirit and purpose of the Mandate.

Appearing on January 24, 1930, before the Palestine Inquiry Committee, headed by Sir Walter Shaw, he stated:

When we started our movement in 1925 (the Revisionist Movement), the official point of view as expressed by Dr. Weizmann and his associates was this: the business of Zionism can be completed and achieved simply by the process of the Jews pouring money and energy into Palestine, and it ought not to matter at all what the attitude of the (Mandatory) Government was, provided that Government has a decent European Administration. We (Revisionists) demanded a revision of this point of view, saying that large-scale colonization cannot be conducted independently of a Government, that it is a Government enterprise by its nature, and can only be complete if the government supports it by legislative and administrative action. *)

The Irgun leadership and their supporters in Poland felt that both perceptions became obsolete regardless of their erstwhile merits. While Weizmann's concept of "buying" up piecemeal a National Home could be considered from the beginning a curiosity in the history of national movements, Jabotinsky's insistence to fight for a "colonizing regime" seemed to them too unrealistic in the light of developments in Palestine from the time the Mandate was granted to Great Britain by the League of Nations. They did not perceive how, after all the experiences with British repression and sabotage, one can still hope to persuade or compel them by mass political action to change their policy. But apart from practical considerations, the Irgun leadership did not think that the very concept of "colonization" applies to the aims and spirit of a liberation movement. Colonization is an enterprise by imperial powers in a far-off land inhabited by natives. The Hebrew liberation movement did not consider this the case of Zionism. Palestine is not a foreign land but the patrimony of the ancient Hebrew nation. Hence the concepts of "colonization" and "immigration" do not apply. Instead, the terms of Liberation and Repatriation began to pop up in the thinking and ideological vocabulary of the Irgun.

The interests of the Hebrew liberation movement clashed with those of

Great Britain, who were interested in keeping Palestine under their control out of strategic considerations, seeing in that territory one of her imperial “vital stakes,” while the Hebrew liberation movement saw in it the only means of survival. It therefore became clear that if there was ever a chance to achieve a solution to the problem of national Hebrew liberation, in the very nature of things it cannot be done in cooperation with the British, but against them: first, by defying their restrictions, and then getting rid of them altogether. The country had to be liberated from colonial rule.

This trend of thought inevitably brought about a new concept in the relations with the Arab population. If the country is to be liberated, it must be clear that the aim is liberation not from the native population, which would be an absurdity, but from the foreign oppressor, from colonial rule; liberated equally for the benefit of the Hebrew nation and the Arab population. Within the frame of such a strategy the Arabs cannot be considered an eternal enemy but potentially as fellow citizens of a common homeland, and perhaps under certain circumstances as *frères d’armes* in the fight for liberation. During the underground and later, after the establishment of the State, there were cases when Arabs took part in the activities of the Hebrew underground; and the Druze are among the most brave and loyal men and officers in Israel’s armed forces.

* * *

This is not to imply that the concepts of colonization and immigration were wrong from the very beginning. On the contrary, when the Hebrew community in Palestine was insignificant, these concepts might have been more sensible and appropriate from a practical point of view. But in the late 1930s the question was whether these concepts were still valid in the context of the latest developments. The people responsible for the formulation of the Irgun’s ideological premises and the planning of the armed resistance came to the conclusion that the Zionist concepts of colonization and immigration became obsolete and ineffective.

At the Fourth Revisionist World Conference in Prague (August 1930), Jabotinsky, answering the expressions of an ever growing discontent and impatience among some of the younger delegates, especially those from Palestine, with the Zionist and Revisionist insistence on continuing the “partnership,” stated:

It is true that distrust of England is now prevalent among world Jewry, but we must keep calm and make a *last experiment* with England, which will have to determine whether or not she is willing to cooperate with the Jews in creating a Jewish majority. The time may come when England will lose every moral right to remain in Palestine. Should this *misfortune* occur, the Jewish people will not remain *alone* in Palestine. (Italics mine)

By 1938 the last experiment, whatever that might have meant, proved that there is nothing to hope for from England, except further repression. The Irgun, in contradistinction to Jabotinsky's feelings, however, did not regard the necessity to get rid of England as a misfortune, nor did it look forward to someone else replacing England as the ruler of the country. Its aim started to crystallize in a new vision – that of “finding ourselves alone” in Palestine and becoming “responsible for our destiny.”

An alliance that came too late

In conveying the conceptual and ideological development of the Hebrew Liberation Movement I am somewhat inhibited by the uncertainty of the chronological sequence. To rely only on documents could be misleading. In our case it might give the impression that the whole theory of national liberation was born on May 14, 1944, with the proclamation of the establishment of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. Without diminishing the revolutionary character of the document, it would be wrong to assume that the ideas were born then and there, or in the last days or weeks preceding publication. This is not true. They were the crystallization of thought stemming from confrontation with realities, from special situations. Much of it was new, hence innovative, and some of it was just a redefinition of ideas and premises which were not original but were at the root of Zionism, and certainly at the root of Revisionism and the Irgun in its formative years.

Therefore, before coming to the story of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and its proclamation, we will try to relate further conceptual developments which at least in part belong to the pre-World War II years.

A conclusion drawn from the realities of the situation at that period

was that, since the fighting underground and its associated movement in the Diaspora is the instrument of a subjugated and besieged nation in Palestine, the Jews who consider themselves part of that nation, though physically not yet there, cannot and should not be regarded as immigrants whose admission has to be granted, but as repatriates whose return is a matter of inalienable right. Though this was also a radical innovation in traditional Zionist thinking, it was not, however, a departure from Revisionist policy which proclaimed, in the early 1930s, though not yet crystallized in political terms, the necessity of “Af Al Pi” (immigration despite British prohibition) – what Jabotinsky called the “national sport” in which the young should engage on an ever larger scale. In fact, this “illegal” immigration was somewhat haphazardly organized with the approval of the Revisionist executive, and at first it had somewhat the character of “free lancing.” It was a dangerous “sport” involving dealings with unscrupulous ships owners and captains of various nationalities, men who were buccaneers. But on the whole it worked internally. It was coordinated between the Revisionist Executives and the Command of the Irgun. The headquarters of this particular department of the liberation movement was in Warsaw, headed by Joseph Katznelson who enjoyed the confidence and respect of all the three partners involved: the Revisionists, Betar and the Irgun. When the Nazis invaded Poland he was trapped, and died shortly after the outbreak of the war.

* * *

In the years before the outbreak of the war, a new approach was developed vis-à-vis the Polish Government. Until then, the Jewish consensus concerning the relationships with the Government in Warsaw was in the nature of adversaries. The resentment and hostility of the Jews to their Government was shared by practically all elements of the Jewish population. To put it simply: the Jews considered their Government antisemitic, inhuman, cruel, devoid of any sense of decency. This attitude, based as it was on criteria of justice and human rights, was fully justified, except that it ignored the objective socio-economic environment in which the millions of Jews lived. Besides, what were the options: fight for changing the socio-economic conditions, or solve the problem by evacuation and national independence in Palestine? Since the first was

seen by Jabotinsky and the Irgun as beyond the context of reality, then the second option could be implemented not in an atmosphere of hostility towards the Polish Government, but with its active cooperation. At all events, this attitude of abstaining from treating the Polish and other East European Governments with hostility, and instead seeking to win their cooperation was not only in line with Jabotinsky's analysis and views, but goes back to Herzl when he affirmed "there will be a Jewish State because the world needs it." We mentioned Herzl's trip to Russia and his conversations with the Tsarist ministers Wenzel von Plehve and Count Sergei Witte. This reference is not made to compare the two governments – Tsarist Russia and that of Warsaw, with whom Jabotinsky and the Irgun dealt. While the Tsar's government was an active instigator of violence against the Jews, keeping them confined in the Pale of Settlement, and persecuting them in an endless variety of ways, Warsaw's antisemitism was mild by comparison and never instigated violence. There were no pogroms in Poland after World War I. (They occurred only under the Communist regime after the Holocaust, when there were only a few survivors.) The antisemitism of the Polish Government in the late 1930s was mainly of an economic character: The Poles trying, with Government approval and regulations, to squeeze the Jews out from their positions where they were concentrated in great numbers.

Jabotinsky analyzed the situation on several occasions including [in] his last book **The War and the Jew**. Another occasion was his testimony before the Peel Commission. In the same appearance, referred to the above, he quoted the New York Times, describing the position of Jewry in Eastern Europe as "a disaster of historic magnitude." And he explained his analysis of that disaster:

...I am very much afraid that what I am going to say will not be popular with many among my coreligionists, and I regret that, but *the truth is the truth*. We are facing an elemental calamity, a kind of social earthquake... It would be naïve, and although many Jews make this mistake, I disapprove of it – it would be very naïve to ascribe that state of disaster, permanent disaster, *only to the guilt of men*, whether it be crowds and multitudes, or whether it be Governments. The thing goes much deeper than that... It is not anti-Semitism of men; it is, above all, the *anti-Semitism of things*,

the inherent xenophobia of the body social or the body economic under which we suffer. Of course, there are ups and downs; but there are moments, there are whole periods in history when this “xenophobia of life itself” takes dimensions which no people can stand...

I do not mean to suggest that I would recognize that all the Governments concerned have done all they ought to have done; I would be the last man to concede that... I think many Governments... ought to do much more to protect the Jews than they do; but the best of Governments could perhaps only soften the calamity to quite an *insignificant extent*, but the core of the calamity is an earthquake which stands and remains.

I want to mention here that, since one of those Governments (the Polish Government) has recently tried what amounts to bringing to the notice of the League of Nations and the whole of humanity that it is humanity's duty to provide the Jews with an area where they could build up their own body social... I think the sincerity of the Polish Government, and of any other Governments who, *I hope*, will follow, should *not be suspected, but on the contrary it should be recognized and acknowledged with due gratitude.* * (Italics added)

In line with this thinking the Irgun emissaries reached an agreement with the Polish Government which was virtually tantamount to an alliance.⁹ We relate elsewhere in this chapter the concrete forms this agreement took. It is probably not a figment of the imagination to say that had the war not broken out, had Poland not been invaded and subdued, the history of the Hebrew nation would not have taken a tragic turn, and the Hebrew republic would have been established in Palestine a few years earlier. The tragedy was not only the outbreak of the war, but also that the Irgun's activities did not start a few years earlier. Had the same activities started not in 1937 but, let us say, in 1934, the Holocaust might have been avoided.

⁹ Although this was in line with Jabotinsky's thinking and his own initiatives, the practical arrangements were secret and often made without duly consulting him, and in some important cases not even informing him.

Collapse and revival

As is the history of all underground organizations, the Irgun, too, was beset from the beginning by internal dissension and crisis at the highest level of leadership. It went through several splits which, in the emotionally supercharged atmosphere of an underground, are invariably of a traumatic nature. In the last months of 1939 the developments were tragic.

When World War II broke out, both Raziel and Stern were in prison. This did not prevent them from continuing to function, and from their cells they remained in contact with their colleagues and subordinates on the outside. The big question was what to do in a situation in which each horn of the dilemma was unbearably painful. One enemy, Great Britain, was engaged in a war with a still greater enemy, Nazi Germany, whose avowed policy was the extermination of the Jews. True, the British were determined to prevent the Hebrew nation from achieving independence in Palestine, but otherwise they didn't care. Many of them probably felt some vague sympathy with the persecuted Jews. Was there a choice for the Irgun on which side to throw its weight and offer its cooperation? The Commander-in-Chief Jabotinsky made the decision for them. He sent a message to Raziel to declare a cease fire against Britain for the duration. The chief enemy was Hitler; he must be crushed. Raziel agreed completely with Jabotinsky and ordered the cessation of all hostilities against the British, and offered the Irgun's cooperation in the common struggle against Nazi Germany. Yair (Stern) saw it as a grave mistake, if not treason, and their relations reached a point of personal animosity of unusual venom. They accused each other of all kinds of evil intent. To read in their letters what each had to say about the other at that time is a melancholy and embarrassing experience.

Raziel was soon released from prison, and in 1941 during the pro-Axis revolt of Rashid Ali [al-Gaylani] in Iraq, he, with a faithful group of followers, volunteered for an extremely hazardous mission of intelligence and sabotage in Iraq. The circumstances of the mission and the tragic death of Raziel and his companions are still shrouded in mystery. It seems they were caught in Baghdad and executed.¹⁰ Another version given by one of the survivors is that the jeep which they drove back to

10 The Iraqi authorities knew where he was buried, and in 1955 his remains, transferred by

Palestine was bombarded from the air by an unidentified plane. Was it an expression of British gratitude?

Avraham Stern (Yair) was also released from prison in June 1940; he split with the Irgun and organized the Lokhamy Kherut Israel (Israel's Freedom Fighters – Lehi is its acronym). His group continued to fight, carrying out terrorist attacks upon British military and intelligence personnel. He reasoned that the war between the Allies and the Axis was a favorable opportunity to fight a weakened Britain. He made no distinction between the belligerents.

He even toyed with the idea that the Axis may be interested to help the Hebrew underground with weapons and funds to overthrow British rule in Palestine, and for that, be willing to pledge Hebrew independence. In 1941 he attempted to contact Otto von Hentig, the German emissary in Syria under Vichy control, in the hope of striking a deal along those lines. *) The memorandum he sent to Syria is available. It now reads as a monstrosity. But in the minds of many young Hebrew patriots at the time, who were convinced the Jews can be saved only if the British will be eliminated from Palestine, Yair's thinking made sense. History proved this to be correct, except he didn't realize that a political-strategic deal with Hitler was an impossibility. Nothing came of it. Another attenuating circumstance was the timing. The scheme was thought of when the British already showed themselves at their worst, while the plan for the "Final Solution" decided upon by the Nazis would be revealed later, and only after they were convinced that the world really would not care what Hitler will do to the Jews. In these lines there is no attempt for an apology. Even without hindsight he was wrong. But the psychological and emotional considerations of the time must be kept in mind to arrive at an objective evaluation.

* * *

After a bomb explosion in Tel Aviv on January 1942, killing three policemen, the British were determined to get him. They did. They found

agreement to Cyprus, were interred in the Jewish cemetery in Margo. In 1961 they were transferred to Israel and buried on Mount Herzl.

his hideout in Tel Aviv, and on February 12, 1942, entered the apartment and killed him on the spot. He was not armed and offered no resistance.

* * *

The two organizations – the Irgun and its splinter, Lehi, never reunited despite their common background. Their relationship on the whole grew hostile and remained so till the very end.¹¹ The two surviving commanders, Begin of the Irgun and Nathan Yellin-Mor of Lehi were not on speaking terms.

* * *

After the split of the Irgun into two hostile parts, it looked as if the Hebrew resistance movement was doomed, and very few could have foreseen that it will ever revive and become a determining force again. The only Irgun group not caught in the whirlwind of dissension and mutual animosity were the emissaries in the U.S. under the command of Hillel Kook. They did not recognize the split, did not participate in its intrigues and accusations, took no sides, and continued to consider themselves a unit of the Irgun. It was precisely during the years of internecine conflict which demoralized and almost destroyed the Hebrew underground in Palestine, that the Irgun emissaries in the U.S. undertook a series of campaigns unprecedented in history and never duplicated afterwards.

* * *

11 They cooperated twice for short periods of time: once when the “Tnenu’at hameri” (the resistance movement) was formed, with a view of combining forces to fight the British under the overall control of the High Command of the Haganah. *) Under this agreement the Irgun and Lehi retained separate identities and command and an organizational framework, but the operations were jointly planned, with each group given special assignments. No operation could be undertaken without the approval of the High Command of the “Resistance Movement.” The cooperation lasted from October 1945 to June 1956. The second time was in 1948 during the armed Israeli-Arab clashes when the Arabs tried, through terror, to prevent the implementation of the UN Partition Resolution. Dir Yassin was a combined Irgun-Lehi operation. So was the attempt to take the old city of Jerusalem.

Though both Jabotinsky and the Irgun emissaries were in the U.S. in 1940, there was little coordination and much estrangement between them. As mentioned, he died in New York on August 3, 1940, when everything he dreamt of and built on seemed to be on the verge of collapse. He was known to have asked on occasion: Are these my children? They were.

* * *

The Irgun unit in the U.S., due to war conditions and with no possibility to organize regular contact by mail or other means, saw itself cut off from home base. Being aware, however, of the disarray in which the Irgun was at that time in Palestine, it decided in October 1943 to send one of its members, Aryeh Ben-Eliezer to Palestine. His task was to reorganize the National Military Organizations; to pull it out of the doldrums; reconstruct its High Command; and to convey to them the philosophy which in the meantime the group in America matured and developed; to serve as a definition of the purpose and nature of the activities for the Hebrew fighting forces in Palestine. Though the task was of extreme complexity, he succeeded to accomplish his mission which achieved historic breakthrough.

* * *

Among other things, Ben-Eliezer was provided with letters of introduction from important American politicians to the U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem, which he used to put him in contact with the Command of the Polish Army stationed in Palestine, and he succeeded in obtaining the discharge of Menachem Begin who served as a private in that army. Ben-Eliezer first thought about an arrangement according to which Hillel Kook (P. H. Bergson) should be the nominal commander of the Irgun, and Begin would be the acting commander in Palestine. But the idea was abandoned for obvious reasons: it would serve no purpose, under war conditions and lack of normal communications (especially with an underground) to have a commander thousands of miles away from the theater of military operations. For Kook to return to Palestine would have weakened the work in the U.S. immeasurably. It was thought that Aryeh Ben-Eliezer should become the Commander, but he rejected the idea,

among other reasons, that it could be interpreted as a self-appointment. Hence the decision was to entrust the task and responsibility to Menachem Begin. In many respects it was a most fortunate choice. It was under Begin that the revolt against Great Britain was declared, and it was under his leadership that it triumphed beyond the wildest expectations. The transfer of authority was not painful because the incumbent Commander Ya'akov Meridor, though a man of great daring, imagination and military ability did not succeed to rehabilitate the Irgun after Raziel's death and the tragic split in the ranks. When relinquishing his command, Meridor seemed to have been relieved. However, he remains a figure of historic proportions not only because of his legendary feats of escape from British prisons and concentration camps in Palestine and Africa, but also, despite the disarray, he nonetheless prevented the Irgun from disintegrating altogether, and kept the flame of hope alive, until more propitious circumstances would permit a spectacular revival.

Aryeh Ben-Eliezer succeeded to reorganize and rehabilitate the Irgun, and provided its new leadership with the appropriate ideological direction which found expression in the famous proclamation in January 1944 of the revolt against the British. Menachem Begin refers to Ben-Eliezer's role in his extremely subjective autobiographical work **The Revolt**:

Arieh Ben Eliezer passed the first years of World War II in the U.S. as a representative of the Irgun. He came (back) to Eretz Israel in 1943 on behalf of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation set up by Hillel Kook and Shmuel Merlin. When he arrived, the Irgun was passing through a severe crisis. And the crisis *was overcome primarily because of Arieh*. He became my close friend from the beginning of our common labors. It was in our never-ending conversations, before and after the declaration of the revolt... that *the foundations of our revolutionary struggle were laid*. *) (Italics added)

It was this reorganized command under the leadership of Begin, and the proclamation of the rebellion against the British, that the Hebrew underground took on the proportions and intensity of an authentic national movement, eventually leading to the expulsion of the British and the liberation of Palestine.

Part II

The Hebrew Emissaries

Chapter 4

A sketch of the emissaries

Both admirers and adversaries marveled that such a small group (never more than half a dozen at one time together in the U.S.) succeeded to become the storm center of Jewish public life in the U.S., to attract many outstanding personalities, and bombard public opinion with an effectiveness never before attempted nor thought conceivable. They influenced policy in the U.S., forcing the President to establish the War Refugee Board, and prevented the British from undertaking acts of brutality of a sweeping nature against the Hebrew people in Palestine, which would probably have made the successful outcome of the liberation fight of the underground impossible. Why did the Administrations of mighty nations both in Washington and London, in collaboration with, and often abetted by the Zionist leadership, find it necessary to devote so much attention and personnel to liquidate them?

We do not discuss here what these emissaries stood for. The whole chapter deals with that. What we mean to ask is what kind of people they were, who could create such a commotion and achieve such results. Why were they undefeatable? Within the framework of this narrative we cannot sketch individual profiles of each of this group of the Hebrew emissaries. But it seems we should attempt to depict some general characteristics which were common to all of them. The group was often referred to in private and in public speeches and articles, especially in the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press as “the boys” because they were almost all comparatively young, in the middle and late twenties or in the early thirties. Almost all had the toughness and recklessness of underground fighters, combined with the polish, wit and graceful manners of intellectual men of the world, a rare combination. All were well educated, most were former university students, some had degrees. They spoke several

languages; they were on the whole, good speakers and wrote well. Their reasoning and dialectics were most persuasive; they had a flare for public relations and a knack for propaganda. Some of them were diplomats – their commander, P.H. Bergson was in more than one sense supreme in this art. All were indomitable; against tremendous odds they were fearless. They never took no for an answer and refused to accept defeat. None ever became panicky. All these characteristics, though common to all of them, were not of equal measure and intensity. They were not only individuals but individualists. Though in the last account none of them succeeded to play a meaningful part in shaping the policy of the State of Israel after it was created,¹ each remained creative in various fields: academia, finance, industry, international commerce both in Israel and abroad.

This is true of the original group of Irgun emissaries who came to the States in 1939 and 1940. Later they were joined by personalities of a different age group and background. Messrs. M. Berchin, A. Kope, Theodor Bar Nahum and Prof. Pierre Delouyaz in the U.S., Dr. Reuben Hecht in Switzerland, I. Rosoff and the brothers Weinshall [Yaakov and Eliezer] in Israel, Dovid Knut and Albert Staraselsky in Paris, apart from being brilliant practitioners in their respective professions: medicine, law, archeology, literature, journalism, economics, history – were also veteran public figures in the Hebrew national movement. (Knut, a distinguished poet, though a newcomer to the movement, was nonetheless head of the Jewish division of the French Resistance.)

The greatest achievement of “the boys” consisted in succeeding to mobilize a distinguished group of Americans. Those of national and international fame will be mentioned in the course of the narrative. But there was a small group of Americans who were not famous but became dedicated to the cause of rescue and liberation to an extent unparalleled in modern history. They literally gave up their businesses and became full time champions and workers involving them in great personal sacrifice, not only because they did not attend to their businesses but because they probably were the largest single contributors of money to the various committees which they helped organize in cooperation with the Hebrew

1 Three were members of the first Knesset but decided that politics, Israeli style, shaped by former foes and counter-revolutionaries, was not to their taste aesthetically or otherwise. It was an episode in their lives.

emissaries. It is an invidious task to mention names, because by mentioning some, one must of necessity leave out most.² Here we will mention only the central figures of the drama as it was played out during the war years and until the State of Israel was proclaimed: Harry L. Selden, a former [associate] editor of Newsweek; Alex[ander] Wilf, a businessman from Philadelphia; Sam Dubiner, a Canadian businessman (and his wife Betty, an activist in her own right); Irving Shendell, a dentist; Nathan G. Horwitt, [a designer] an inventor; Mrs. Louis Untermeyer (wife of the poet).

In the dynamics of the work some of them revealed sparks of genius. Without them, in all probability, none of the undertakings of the Hebrew emissaries would have been possible, at all events not on the scale and with the effectiveness that were the hallmark of the activities of the Hebrew Liberation Movement.

The first steps

In retrospect it is difficult to ascertain with certainty what went on in the minds of people who launched initiatives which in the course of time proved of history making importance. Though we mentioned that as early as 1938 the command of the Irgun discussed the problem of beginning to work in the U.S. because of the realization of the range, influence and power of the Jewish Community there, it would not be correct to say that the mobilization of American Jewry was on the priority list of the Irgun's command. It wasn't considered a manpower reservoir for the fighting forces in Palestine. What compelled the command to start work in the U.S. were several considerations: to cultivate public opinion in favor of the Hebrew resistance movement; but more importantly, to raise funds on a large scale to subsidize "illegal immigration." This was the burning task, transcending everything else. With each passing day the situation became more desperate. The Irgun's emissaries worked on this task of evacuating Jews in most of the Eastern European countries: Poland, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Austria. After the German occupation

2 In the larger work on the history of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, we will have a chance to give credit and honor hundreds of the American friends and co-fighters.

of Austria, the S.S. and the Gestapo cooperated with these emissaries, providing documents and permitting each evacuee a sum of money (it grew smaller as time went on, and then ceased altogether) to pay his fare. The Nazis were matter of fact about these transactions, and eager to get rid of as many Jews as possible. Indeed, tens of thousands were permitted to leave, and reached Palestine by defying the British blockade. Hundreds of thousands more could have been saved had the Zionist establishment not been against it; and when they, too, decided to adopt the system, they acted without the necessary sense of urgency and demanded a monopoly in the field, which was stupid for a variety of reasons, mainly because it was impractical and unnecessary. But as the Zionists wanted to control the “legal” Aliya, so, too, they were determined to totally control the “illegal” immigration; in both cases it was a desire to play God, choosing who shall live or die. In such a frame of mind this was tantamount to dooming the majority of the Jews before the cataclysm took them over. This presumptuous, quasi-Manichean attitude and system of operation prevailed until the end of the Holocaust.

It would be impossible to elaborate here on all the stages and aspects of this dogmatic selectivity, but a few examples will do, starting from a late date in the night of Jewish history. The place is Zurich, the time is August 4, 1937, the occasion, the 20th Zionist Congress. The main speaker is the celebrated leader of the World Zionist movement, the President of the Jewish Agency, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. The debate concerned the report of the Royal Commission (under the Chairmanship of Lord Peel) which investigated the cause of Arab riots in Palestine, and why the Mandate didn't function satisfactorily. The Report suggested a new partition, this time of the West Bank of Palestine, as a result of which the Jews will be permitted to have their state in a tiny part of that territory.³ Weizmann pleaded with the Congress to accept the principle contained in that report, though not the size, which will have to be negotiated. He spoke emotionally about the grim condition of the Jews of Europe and the great responsibility which the leadership has to assume for the fate of millions of Jews. He divided them into categories: those who will have

3 2,955 sq. m. The original territory of the Palestine Mandate was 43,075 sq. m. – Israel's territory before the war of June 1967 was 8,020 sq. m. (the Armistice lines of 1949 and de facto recognized by the U.N.). After that war it extended its jurisdiction over 34,500 sq. m.

to be abandoned and wait for the Messiah at the end of days; and those whom the Zionists would try to help to save themselves by immigrating to Palestine. And he gave estimates of both categories in numbers. He recollected his testimony before the Peel Commission: "God has promised Eretz Israel to the Jews. This was their charter." But this Charter was not utilized. "...they were men of their own time, with limited horizons, heavily laden with responsibility towards the generations to come." At this stage he reported to have told the Royal Commission the hopes of six million Jews were centered in emigration.

He was then asked (by the members of the commission):

"But can you bring 6,000,000 to Palestine?" He replied: "No." He was acquainted with the laws of physics and chemistry (sic!) and he knew the force of material factors; in the depth of the Jewish tragedy he wanted at least two million of youth, with their lives before them... to be saved.

The old ones will pass; they will bear their fate, or they will not (what does he mean by that phrase? – S. M.). They were dust, economic and moral dust, in a cruel world...⁴

He claimed to follow in the footsteps of the Hebrew prophets of old, but his own words only weakly echo what was uttered by the ancient Hebrew judges, singers and prophets – Isaiah and Jeremiah. What they said thousands of years ago he is repeating now: "She'erith hapleytah" – only a remnant, a branch shall survive; two million, perhaps less. They (the majority? the Congress?) had to accept it. The rest they must leave to the future – to the youth... "Be-ackhrith Hayamim" – in the end of days, after suffering, they must find the way to redemption...

How did the elected delegates to the World Zionist Congress react? They rose to a man and sang exultantly the Hatikvah, the national anthem, the Song of Hope. What ideology can do to the minds of people!

The address and subsequent ovation in retrospect are frightening,

4 From the official Zionist organ, the **New Judea**, August-September 1937, p. 215 (f. Chronology and Obstructionists. Perhaps there are more copies). To check whether the text tallies with the official protocol of the Zionist Congress. Does Riebenfeld have a copy of the book? Can one get it at the Zionist library?

passing comprehension. Regardless how one tries to understand the man and his followers, one remains bewildered. Here a revered leader, celebrated for two decades throughout the world as the greatest champion of the Jews, reveals in a speech before the elected representatives of the Zionist movement that he knows what is in store for the Jewish people in Europe; that he is lucidly aware of the danger and anticipates disaster; he was overtaken by a vision of the extermination of millions, in fact the majority of the Jewish people in Europe – but instead of seeking a solution to save them, he offered a vision of doom as a historic imperative, something unavoidable and there is no use trying to fight for a lost cause. (“Jewish history,” he declared in his address, “which, alas... is not ours to mold.”) He surrendered in advance to the preordained catastrophe of the European Jews – psychologically and morally prepared his followers for the event – in a sense sounded as if he justified the cruel destiny of his people, characterizing them as dust, moral and economic dust; and proclaimed that the aim is to save a remnant, a part. Another striking aspect of his approach was that he demanded from the Jewish masses to accept the fate he prophesied for them. Of course we know he meant well; that he did not wish the annihilation of millions of Jews, but concentrated on the best prospects to save at least two million. Certainly this is a substantial number, and even had this aim been achieved the dimensions of the disaster would have been that much less. But the principle of selectivity is both heartless and self-defeating. Already in his speech he said “Two million or less.” It is the principle that counts, and the moment one accepts it, numbers become a matter of secondary consideration. (As Weizmann remarked, it is a matter of physics and chemistry – by the way, what did he mean by these two terms in the context of his address?)

As we shall see, the estimates of how many can or will be saved diminishes continuously as the situation takes on an ever more cataclysmic character. By the end of 1942 the leaders of the Yishuv and the Jewish Agency thought that to speak in practical terms only twelve thousand (12,000) could be saved from all the eight million Jews in Eastern Europe. In 1944 a Zionist leader, Dr. Rudolf Kastner selected 1,600 Jews from the 800,000 in Hungary, to be put on a train to be dispatched to Switzerland – in the framework of a deal with the Nazis, and the others to be sent to Auschwitz. Between Dr. Weizmann’s prophecy that only

two million out of six million will be saved and the 1,600 Jews selected by Kastner⁵ to live, there is a direct line. It is the essence of the vicious ideology of selectivity; the Zionists, from the beginning, having arrogated to themselves the prerogative to decide who should survive. But we are ahead of our story. The Kastner deed took place in 1944. In between, about five million Jews were eliminated from among the living. Here we are only in 1938.

The stampede

The 1930s were a time of trouble for the Jewish people in Eastern and Central Europe and towards the end of that decade it eventually dawned on them that their lives were in danger. This was the time when the British embarked on a policy of drastically limiting entry to Palestine, precisely when escape from Europe for the Jews was a matter of life and death. The few entry “certificates” doled out by the British to the Jewish Agency were insufficient for even a tiny fraction of those in desperate need to flee. By a viciously devised system of partisan distribution of the limited number of these “certificates,” the Jewish Agency became a political monopoly almost amounting to a supra-natural institution with the power to determine who should be saved and who will be left behind. The large masses of Vladimir Jabotinsky’s followers were totally excluded because the Revisionist movement was no part of the World Zionist Organization. Other categories, too, were excluded simply because they did not belong to any official Zionist group. This inevitably caused bitterness and bred rebellion. In despair masses of Jews rebelled against the illegal restrictions of the Palestine Government and against its Jewish Agency, and decided to go to Palestine without asking anyone’s permission. Eri Jabotinsky (the son of Vladimir) who at that time, together with other

5 About the Kastner affair – his deal, his trail and death, see the following works:
Ben Hecht, **Perfidy**, New York, Julian Messner, Inc. 1961.
Shalom Rosenfeld, **The Kastner Trial** (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1956.
Nora Levin, **The Holocaust**, New York, Schocken Books, 1973.
Gideon Hausner, **Justice in Jerusalem**, New York, Schocken Books, 1968.
Hannah Arendt, **Eichmann in Jerusalem**, New York, Viking Press, 1969.
Jacob Robinson, **And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight**, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965.

Hebrew emissaries, was engaged in “illegal” immigration, described in retrospect the situation of that period:

...the Jewish people awoke to the realization that they were no longer subjects of any country; that no government was ready to protect them... that their fate lay in their own hands... Their decision to proceed to Palestine (by any means available) was not reached at any conference or Congress. It was the mute, almost instinctive resolution of a terror-stricken multitude... It rapidly took on the character of a full-scale exodus. At the time I believed that we several Palestinians were instrumental in unleashing that flood. Since, I have often wondered. It seems to me now that we were the servants of this human stampede, rather than its leaders and captains...⁶

During 1936-1940 a group of Revisionists and Irgun emissaries,⁷ working in Eastern Europe, tried to canalize and organize the stream of Jewish refugees who were on the move hoping to be able to reach the shores of the Promised Land. It was clear to them that it could not be managed without large scale financial assistance from the rich Jewish community in the U.S.

6 A memorandum distributed internally by the Hebrew emissaries in the U.S.

7 The Irgun underground engaged in a campaign to bring them into Palestine illegally, and it was a matter of determination, daring and financial means. The first emissaries were sent to the U.S. with the hope to raise large sums for “illegal” immigration. There was no lack of the first two prerequisites, but the third was unavailable.

Chapter 5

The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine

The beginning

In view of the urgency to raise funds to escalate the work of rescue, an exploratory Irgun delegation composed of Col. Patterson, Commander of the Jewish Legion in World War I; Robert Briscoe, the Jewish Mayor of Dublin; and Chaim Lubinsky, an officer of the Irgun, arriving in the U.S. in February 1939, proved to be more than just an exploratory group.¹ They engaged in intensive activities, created the first contacts with a few important Americans, and prepared the groundwork for organizational and fund-raising activities, especially for “illegal” immigration

Y. Ben-Ami arrived in the US in March 1939 as a “resident” emissary of the Irgun, and picked up the loose ends of the initial delegation, cultivating their contacts and creating new ones. He institutionalized the work by creating the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, and opened a modest office at 285 Madison Avenue in New York.

As a veteran of “illegal” immigration, having worked in the “lion’s den” in Nazi occupied Austria, and successfully negotiating arrangements for the departure of thousands of Jews from territories under German control, he saw as his main task, apart from propaganda and organizational activities, to raise funds for “illegal” immigration. This was especially urgent because

1 The group included Abraham Stawsky, Eri Jabotinsky, Yitzhak Rosen (later was known by his underground nickname, Ben-Ami), Jorgewsky, Eliahu Glezer, Nathan Friedmann (later known as Nathan Yellin-Mor, a commander of Lehi – the Stern group), Yosef Katzenelson, and many more, whose names are mentioned and their feats... in Chaim Lazar-Litai’s book **Af Al Pi** – the story of Illegal Immigration in Hebrew published by the Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv, 1957.

he was under pressure from his colleagues in Eastern Europe who faced a calamity. About 2,400 Jews were marooned in ice trapped barges at the mouth of the Danube, who converged there during the summer and autumn months because they heard there would be ships to take them to Palestine. Some came on river boats and made their way down the Danube on barges and rafts, but were not allowed to land. They had come from Vienna and Bratislava, Budapest, Belgrade and other Bulgarian and Rumanian ports, and overland from recently occupied and devastated Poland. Others, more fortunate, camped all over the little city of Salina, all waiting for a ship.

Lying out in the Black Sea, just beyond the limit of Rumanian territorial waters, was the ship SS "Sakarya," a forty years old freighter, displacing 2,800 tons and flying the Turkish flag. The ship was ready to take on refugees and run the gauntlet of the British navy guarding the coasts of Palestine – to land them on a dark night on some deserted Palestinian coast. The only problem was money. The sum needed was 14,500 English Pounds (\$ 58,000). Part of the amount was provided by the refugees themselves and part was at the disposal of Eri Jabotinsky from the movement in Palestine. But he was short [of] \$12,500. He hoped that Ben-Ami would quickly raise this amount of money in the U.S. The owner and the captain were waiting in the Rumanian port of Constanța. It was a matter of the greatest urgency; every day counted in human suffering and tragedy. It was December and the Danube near Giurgiu froze; the refugees were stranded and there was no port which would admit them even on a temporary basis. The experience of the refugees, 30% of whom were women and children, was sheer hell and the stories from their death trap were hair-raising.

Ben-Ami tried desperately to raise the small sum needed but encountered only heartlessness and pathological hostility. Jews are usually obedient to the established leaders, and when approached for a contribution almost invariably answered that they will ask the "right" people whether the new organization of the American Friends is bona fide. They invariably received a negative answer: that these are dangerous adventurers who aim to undermine "the authority of the Jewish Agency." When Ben-Ami directly approached the Joint Distribution Committee, the Zionist leaders said that no funds would be available to dissidents and no help would be given to "illegal immigration." With great difficulty

and at an exasperatingly slow pace, he raised in small contributions the necessary funds, and in January 1940 forwarded it to Eri Jabotinsky in Rumania. The "Sakarya" sailed immediately upon receipt of the money, and two weeks later, on February 1, landed safely in Palestine. Four had died en-route; four babies were born; and 37 couples were married by the Turkish ship captain.

For some of the refugees the whole trip, from the moment they left their towns until they finally reached their homeland, lasted over twelve months. Eri Jabotinsky reported that the weeks and months of weary waiting in the barges and the incredible sea voyage in the old freighter, carrying almost a whole passenger per every ton --- all that only a novelist could describe adequately. Upon arrival in Haifa the British freed about 400 women and children, and the balance -- 1,900 -- were caught and interned in the Atlit concentration camp, but were released after six months of detention.

Eri Jabotinsky, who was on board the "Sakarya," was arrested on arrival, though he was a Palestinian citizen. He was released on August 6, 1940, when the news arrived that his father had died in New York. The British gave him a week's grace because he was to be released on the 12th.²

* * *

It was a success because thousands of lives were saved. But it was an immense effort and the opposition was indomitable. Till 1948 the efforts continued. The "Sakarya" was not the first ship with which the Irgun emissaries in the U.S. were involved. The "Ben Hecht" and "Altalena," bought and outfitted in the U.S., are epic stories in themselves. But the lesson to be learned from these efforts was that though the group scored some successes in raising funds for illegal immigration, it was little in proportion to the need. The main obstacle was the bitter opposition to the very idea of illegal immigration by the Zionist leadership. They argued that illegal activities are a stumbling block to successful political action. Contradicting their own argument, they said that inasmuch as such immigration is unavoidable it must be selective, otherwise there is a danger that "undesirable" Jews will be brought to Palestine. Consequently,

2 See a more detailed account and analysis p. 368ff.

whatever is done must be by permission and under control of the Zionist institutions. The problem was that the Irgun did not think permission and control were imperative or productive, and that these Zionist attitudes were only excuses for not permitting anyone to engage in such “irresponsible” or “criminal” enterprises.

Zionist leaders and those in charge of their fundraising institution made no bones about it. They said it repeatedly orally and in writing. Henry Montor, head of the United Jewish Appeal for Refugees and Overseas Needs (the framework for all the major fundraising organizations in America: the Joint Distribution Committee, the United Palestine Appeal, etc.) wrote on February 1, 1940³ explaining why funds had been refused to the American Friends. A few excerpts will do to convey the Zionist trend of thought to the whole problem:

... Whatever interest in unregistered immigration (that is, without British Certificates, S. M.) may have been exhibited by individuals associated with the Jewish Agency for Palestine was based on a recognition of the fact that *“selectivity” is an inescapable factor* in dealing with the problem of immigration to Palestine. By *“selectivity” is meant the choice of young men and women who are trained in Europe for productive purposes either in agriculture or industry and who are in other ways trained for life in Palestine*, which involves difficulties and hardships for which *they must be prepared physically and psychologically*. *Sentimental considerations* are, of course, vital and everyone would wish to save every single Jew who could be rescued out of the cauldron of Europe.

But when one is dealing with so delicate a program as unregistered immigration, it is *obviously essential* that those people sent to Palestine shall be able to endure harsh conditions under which they must live for weeks and months on the Mediterranean and the difficulties which shall await them when they land on the shores of Palestine...

... even (among) the 2,000 people who were assembled by the Revisionists on the Danube... *a great many of the passengers were old men and women*, whose fate must be the sincerest concern of every Jew, but who were, *obviously*, not fitted for the hazardous

3 The letter is of such important political, ideological and psychological importance that we reproduce it as an appendix.

journey across the Mediterranean in boats whose captains consented to this traffic only because of the exorbitant amounts they could command...

... In public discussion, it is considered inadmissible for a Jew even to conceive of the possibility of criminals in Jewish ranks, but inasmuch as this is a confidential letter, I think it is fair... to point out that many of those who have been brought into Palestine by the Revisionists have been prostitutes and criminals – *certainly an element which cannot contribute to the upbuilding of a Jewish National Home in which Jews everywhere might take pride...* (Italics added)

The letter, on official stationery, listed the names of Presidents and members of the Board of this central fund-raising apparatus (practically all the elite of the Jewish establishment including Rabbis Jonah Wise, Stephen Wise, Abba Hillel Silver) and was signed by the Executive Vice President of the United Jewish Appeal. Though its contents speak for itself, the date should not be overlooked: February 1, 1940. Poland was already overrun and the Jews, **all** the Jews, world famous Chassidic rabbis, academicians, writers, poets, artists, community leaders, millionaires and paupers, industrialists and petty street vendors, as well as thieves and prostitutes, were caught up in the cauldron. All were equally eager to escape – saints and sinners alike. By then there was no possibility to check the moral background of any applicant. Also, before the war, when the stampede began, such a procedure was impracticable and morally unjustified.

Long after the American Friends for a Jewish Palestine ceased to exist, having been superseded by the Committee for a Jewish Army, the Interim Committee of the American Jewish Conference felt it necessary to carry on the vendetta and issued this statement that though “the American Friends... ostensibly organized for the implementation of Jewish rights to Palestine, seemed to have only **one aim** in view, namely, to establish a front against the authority of the Jewish Agency.” In a sense the last part of the statement is partially true; thanks to the activities of the “dissidents” – at great personal courage, suffering and sacrifice, [they] were instrumental in bringing to Palestine tens of thousands of people who built a new and constructive life instead of dying in the Polish slaughterhouses. For years the Jewish Agency did not want to have

anything to do with it, and outlawed those who engaged in this “national sport.” Consequently, it was true that a new front had to be established, not out of a desire to challenge the authority of the Jewish Agency but the authority of the British. It is regrettable that the Zionist leadership served for too long as an agency cooperating with the oppressive colonial regime of the Mandatory power.

As the story unfolds, we will prove that this opposition, which in time took on the character of active and vehement obstruction, cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews who could have been saved by the Irgun and other organizations, as indeed tens of thousands were saved by the Hebrew national movement between the years 1935-1941.

* * *

Significantly enough, while American rabbis and other leaders of the Zionist establishment in the U.S. were obstructing the efforts of the Hebrew emissaries, refusing them any help, the Zionist institutions in Palestine and Eastern Europe, forced by their own members to follow in the footsteps of the Revisionists and the Irgun, eventually embarked on a large-scale program of smuggling Jews into Palestine. Having at their disposal incomparably greater funds, the Zionist apparatus succeeded in getting through quite a considerable number of shiploads of refugees. Unfortunately they started this large-scale traffic too late. The entry of Italy into the war in June 1940, and the subsequent breaking out of hostilities in the Aegean put an effective stop to it by the end of 1940.

The number of people succeeding to break the British blockade and enter Palestine from the beginning of the illegal operations cannot be established with exactitude, but there are several approximate indications. According to official governmental statistics about 150,000 more ration cards were issued to Jews in Palestine in 1942 than the total number of those that should have been there, which means almost 30% of the Jews at that time entered outside the schedules of “Certificates” handed out officially by the Palestine Administration to the Jewish Agency.⁴

4 A comprehensive and magnificent story of the triumphs and tragedies of the illegal immigration is told by Chaim Lazar [Litai] in his monumental survey “Af Al Pi” – full name and editor.

Had the Zionist establishment espoused the concept “Af Al Pi” (defying the British blockade) in the middle 30s, probably hundreds of thousands would have been saved; the stampede at the shores of Palestine, an endless armada of defiers of the restrictions would have created a new dynamic and revolutionized the relations with the Mandatory power: there might have been no Holocaust.

The Struma

The survivor

On an icy morning – February 23, 1942 – a lone man, David Stoliar, was battling the elements in a cruel sea, the Black Sea. A short time earlier – minutes, or was it hours? – he saw phantasmal figures trying to hold on to a plank, but soon, like frozen phantoms were overtaken by wild waves and disappeared from sight. They all drowned. He, however, did not lose grip on his plank: he had an advantage over the others – he wore a knee length fur coat, thus only his legs were exposed to the freezing water, while his torso was somewhat protected. In the twilight he noticed a bench from the ship he was thrown from; he made desperate efforts to get hold of that piece of wreckage; the wind moved it towards him and he grasped it. Now he could use both pieces to support him – his legs and torso. Suddenly he saw another human, the Assistant Captain of the ship, struggling to remain afloat. They tried to come towards each other, and made it. Stoliar took hold of the drowning man and pulled him over on to his “life boat.” For a short while they were together. They promised each other not to fall asleep lest they freeze like the others. With the last of their strength they huddled together to keep warm. But soon Stoliar saw that his companion, frozen stiff, was delirious and said he was joining the fish to play with them. Then he slid off and disappeared.

Stoliar was alone again. Except for the vultures flying overhead in search of corpses of his shipmates, many of whom were his friends and political associates.

Night came and went, the sun arose. But his hopes began to sink, his forces to abandon him. He looked for something in his pockets and found it: a razor blade. He decided to slash his veins. Death was preferable to the prolonged agony.

While brooding over the idea of taking his own life he saw a merchant

ship approaching. With all his forces he shouted for help. The ship, only a few feet from him, did not stop. People on the deck made various gestures which he did not understand.

Soon he saw a little boat approaching. Was it a hallucination? No, it was a real life boat sent from a nearby village on the Turkish shore. In it were Turkish sailors and several dead bodies, among whom was the Assistant Captain who went mad. They took Stoliar on board and brought him to the local clinic. He was barely conscious. Two days later he was subjected to intense interrogation which lasted almost three months. He was treated as a political prisoner, held in solitary confinement though sick and barely able to stand on his feet. Then he was released and found his way to Palestine.

He was the sole survivor of the S/S STRUMA to tell the cataclysmic tale. The others, 428 men, 269 women and 70 children, 767 souls, went down around ten in the morning on that February 23, five miles from the Istanbul coast when the ship was torpedoed or hit a mine, and it sank instantly.

The Struma left the Rumania Black Sea port of Constanța almost ten weeks earlier, on December 12, 1941. It was a ramshackle cattle boat, more than 100 years old, of 180 tons, 16 meters in length, 6 meters in width. It was used to navigate the Danube and seldom, if ever, took to the sea. Its motor was no longer in working condition and couldn't be repaired. Its shady Greek owner found a "new" motor, dismantled from another craft that foundered in the Danube. It was overhauled but did not function satisfactorily. The lower part of the ship was built of metal, but a wooden superstructure was added to make additional room for the human cargo. It was also to serve as a deck to catch a breath of air. It was of such makeshift construction that there was always the danger that a strong wind will blow it away with the people in it. Several tiers of "berths" made of planks were installed. On the top, large wire cages were put up to keep the passengers under control and as an additional precaution from their falling overboard. The STRUMA had no life boats or life belts. It had one toilet for nearly 800 people. By any responsible criteria it was utterly unseaworthy. At best it could accommodate 200 people for a day's outing on a river.

If 776 people eagerly decided to risk the voyage, it was because the alternative was not to stay and suffer persecution – but torture and almost certain death.

The Rumanians

The Rumanians did not wait for orders from their Nazi overlords to begin slaughtering the Jews. They were pioneers in the field. They introduced the obligatory wearing of the yellow star **before** the Nazis made it mandatory in Germany.

In September 1940 a change of sorts occurred. Among chaotic conditions and a multi power struggle sporadically verging on civil war, General Ion Antonescu took over power and established his dictatorship. Although he joined the war against Russia and sent thirty divisions to fight along with the Wehrmacht, he shrewdly hesitated to put all his eggs in the Axis basket. After Pearl Harbor he knew America will soon enter the war against Germany which in turn meant that Hitler was doomed. He therefore tried to inform Washington that despite the immediate restraints and expediciencies he is temporarily subject to, Rumania seeks America's friendship. He thought that by letting the Jews out, he will ingratiate himself with the U.S. He tried, with temporary success, to restrain the excesses of the Iron Guard, and offered the Jews immigration as an alternative to probable annihilation if they stayed. He was disappointed that neither the world nor the leadership of the Jewish community in Rumania were ready to take immediate action for mass evacuation. He seemed to believe that with the help of American Jews and some governments of the Allied nations it could be done.

Meanwhile under the pressure of the Germans advancing East on the Russian front, the plight of the Jews became desperate. The Iron Guard engaged in wholesale massacre. The Government in Bucharest either of their own free will to please Hitler, or on orders from Berlin, began rounding up Jews by the tens of thousands, loading them on freight cars and dispatching them to an unknown destination, actually east of the Dniester (Transnistria), a province overrun by the Germans with the assistance of the Rumanian divisions.

In view of the slaughter and ominous deportations, multitudes of Jews were desperately seeking a way of escape. But there were no ships and there was no help from the outside world.

It is in this atmosphere of panic that on December 12, 1941, almost 800 Jews crowded on the STRUMA. The venture was organized by the Zionist-Revisionists who were the pioneers of running the British blockade

against “illegal” immigration. They decided to try a convoy once more, despite the radically changed conditions of war, disrupted communications, and the mine infested seas. The passengers assembled in Constanța on December 8, 1941, hoping to board ship the same day. But this was not to happen. Everyone underwent a thorough body search; all valuables, money, jewelry, including wedding rings and golden watches were taken away from them. The police then boarded ship and carried off most of the luggage and cartons of canned food under the pretext that the ship was overloaded. It lasted four days and nights. At long last, after these harrowing experiences, and fearful that the Rumanian authorities may at the last minute prohibit its departure, the STRUMA, flying the Panamanian flag, left Constanța.

The Turks

The ship limped along the Black Sea until on December 14, 1941, it entered the port of Istanbul. Though it was only two days since it weighed anchor, the STRUMA was at its journey’s end. It listed perilously to one side, its hull leaked, and the engine broke down. A yellow flag was hoisted and the ship was quarantined.

The captain, a Bulgar, informed the authorities that the ship is unseaworthy and that he could not take responsibility to continue the voyage. The passengers implored the authorities for temporary asylum. The appeal was rejected and no contact was permitted between the ship and anybody on land. The Turks declared that unless they receive formal assurance from the British that the refugees will be admitted to Palestine, no disembarkment will be permitted.

For two months the Struma remained off shore, a floating prison. Aboard the conditions were hellish: hunger, thirst, stench, no medicine, and as time passed, with no word of relief, many panicked, some went mad and others rebelled.

The British

The Jewish Agency petitioned Sir Harold McMichael, the High Commissioner, and the Colonial Secretary Lord Moyne to give the Turks the necessary assurances. The Jewish Agency had a strong case – not

only on moral and humanitarian but also on legal grounds. The official immigration quota (under the draconian White Paper of 1939) was not filled because of war conditions; the entry certificate could be issued either retroactively from the unused “schedules,” or deducted by the British from the next quota, or alternatively be rerouted to the Island of Mauritius. But the British were adamant. Certificates, they said, have to be issued under normal procedure and not under pressure of an emergency. One slight departure from routine may create a precedent. And what if many more Jews will succeed to escape from Nazi dominated countries? Are the British expected to receive them all? And what if their number will snowball from a mere few hundreds to thousands, or perhaps a million? “Where shall I put a million Jews?” Lord Moyne asked a rhetorical question on another occasion. Anyhow, the 767 could not be admitted, first because they had no certificates; second, they were paupers and would become a public burden; third, among them there may be Nazi spies; fourth, the Jews have to be taught a lesson not to organize such ventures with the intention of mobilizing worldwide sympathy for the suffering of the victims under Hitler, and then point an accusing finger at the British why they are not permitted into their National Home. No, these tricks will not work. After two months of pleading the Administration partially gave in, permitting children between the ages of 4 and 16 to be admitted. But the Turks claimed they were never notified, and if they were, it was too late.

The explosion

On February 23, 1942, eighty Turkish policemen forced their way aboard; the passengers tried to bar them but were overcome. The Turks cut anchor, tied the Struma to a tug, without providing fuel, oil, water or food, towed it through the Bosphorus and into the Black Sea. The next morning an explosion was heard and the Struma sank with all hands on board, except Stoliar.

The mystery of who or what caused the ship to sink is still unsolved.

Humanity

But to pinpoint the moral responsibility does not require more evidence than is available. It rests with a plurality of human factors, each acting

separately with a view either to get rid of the Jews one way or another, or to prevent their rescue: the Germans, Rumanians, Turks, the British, the U.S. and some of the neutral countries. They were all, some consciously, others unconsciously accomplices of Hitler. Some were guilty of crimes of commission, others of crimes of omission. The disaster of the Struma was more than an isolated incident. In a sense its victims symbolized the fate not of hundreds but of millions of Jews who perished under unspeakable circumstances: by fire and water and gas, after undergoing humiliation, hunger and epidemics. It was the beginning of Hitler's "Final Solution" and symbolic of an era in a world gone mad, having lost its moral sense and human compassion.

Wanted for Murder

The Hebrew underground in Palestine, though decimated, divided and in disarray, gave a most meaningful and suggestive answer in a poster appearing on the walls of buildings in all the towns and many villages of the country. It carried the picture of the High Commissioner, and in Hebrew and English it read:

Murder

Sir Harold MacMichael, known as the High Commissioner
of Palestine

Wanted for Murder by drowning of 800 refugees
Aboard the S. S. Struma

Justice was grinding slowly but not futilely. Many of the Hebrew community in Palestine, if they still entrained any illusions about the potential benefits of collaborating with the British, began to realize that the solution is no longer in petitions, days of fasting, demonstrations or "diplomatic" contacts. The solution was to liberate Palestine from British colonial domination. It took many months for the two branches of the fighting Hebrew resistance to become fully activated, but the issue was joined and the fight to a finish began. MacMichael had luck and escaped, almost miraculously, assassination by Lehi (Fighters for Freedom of Israel); but the death verdict against Lord Moyne was carried out in Cairo on November 6, 1944. He was shot by two members of Lehi,

Eliyahu Hakim and Eliyahu Bet-Zuri. They were apprehended, and though public opinion in Egypt showed great sympathy for them, they were condemned and swiftly executed. A year earlier the Irgun proclaimed the rebellion against foreign occupation, and in less than half a decade the British were forced to give up the Mandate. This in turn led to the establishment of the State of Israel.

[Handwritten:] We will come back to the projections of the Struma in a later chapter.

Chapter 6

Innovations, a new approach and unprecedented methods

Internal modus operandi of the group

Hillel Kook (P. H. Bergson), the chief officer of the Irgun in the Diaspora, arrived in New York from London in April 1940. About the same time other emissaries joined him including Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, Alexander Hadani (Dr. Rafaeli), Eri Jabotinsky (the son of Vladimir Jabotinsky), Captain Jeremiah Halpern, Professor Delougas, and this writer. In the course of subsequent developments they were joined by Aaron Kope, Michael Berchin, Theodore Bennahum and Dr. David Wodowinsky.¹

* * *

As mentioned, by 1940 a small organization – American Friends for a Jewish Palestine, was already functioning under the directorship of Y. Ben Ami; there was an office, a few loyal supporters, and some friends who volunteered their time. There was no money.

* * *

With the arrival of Hillel Kook, the group began to function as a military unit, though it never intended or indulged in any violence in the U.S. But the principle was that there is a commander who has the last word, and the last word is an order. This does not mean that there were no

1 About the members of the Hebrew Committee who joined the organization in Europe, see p. 150.

lively discussions as to tactics, and formulations of certain propositions or ideological premises. Sometimes the discussion lasted days, even weeks. Hillel Kook, though of a stubborn character and a man of deep, almost unshakable convictions, was nonetheless open minded to the ideas of his colleagues and often accepted their views, retreating from his own position. But if he was not convinced, it was his opinion which prevailed and the decision carried out. Whatever defects inherent in such a system, when applied not to military operations but to political, diplomatic and propaganda activities, it was by far compensated by the results. This was the only group that didn't split, that did not become demoralized, or waste its energies on internecine feuds which plagued the Hebrew resistance movement. It was responsible for the quasi miracle that half a dozen foreigners dared to undertake campaigns on a scope never thought possible. Even such a biased and hostile Zionist historian like Walter Laqueur feels compelled to admit that:

There was (in Jewish circles) mounting anger against Jewish leaders who refused to speak out (against the Holocaust), apparently in fear of having their American patriotism questioned. These moods were exploited by a young Palestinian... leader named Peter Bergson (Hillel Kook) who found a valuable ally in Ben Hecht, a successful playwright and Hollywood figure, with connections on Broadway and in Hollywood, as well as Madison Avenue. With the help of several devoted colleagues these two, initially operating on small budget, organized a public relations campaign for the immediate establishment of a Jewish Army *which all but overshadowed the activities of the official Zionist movements*. Bergson and Hecht received the support of the Army and Navy, the Chief Justice, many Congressmen. They put on mammoth pageants ('We Will Never Die – a memorial to the two million Jewish dead in Europe'), and in general created a great deal of commotion. There was the risk that the Zionist organization would be outflanked... (Italics added)

But according to Laqueur, all these campaigns which he ascribed to the Revisionists (not being aware that the Revisionists were the most extreme and implacable opponents of the Irgun delegation) brought no results except that they "helped... to stir up American Jewish awareness of the extent of the catastrophe." In Yiddish there is a phrase – "a

kleinikeit!”– indeed, to make the Jews and non-Jews “aware of the extent of the catastrophe” while the Zionist leaders, in his own words, “refused to speak out” was a matter of no consequences, a futile exercise. So much for the logic in the evaluation of a Zionist historian who wrote three decades after the events.

A younger and more sympathetic historian, Henry L. Feingold, in his **The Politics of Rescue** *) speaks of the infighting among the long established major Jewish and Zionist organizations and their paralysis at the time when the news about the Holocaust began to percolate and reached the public. Within this context he relates about the Hebrew emissaries:

Meanwhile, on the periphery of Jewish organizational life, almost unnoticed, a new group... began to emerge with a bold new approach to the rescue problem... *it began filling the vacuum left by the bickering major organizations*, picking up support from the large number of *unaffiliated Jews* who were growing impatient with the *inability* of the regular organizations to take effective action. (It) displayed a special skill in mobilizing public opinion through the news media... (it) was a more militant and less anglophile brand of Zionism... but (from 1943 on) focused exclusively on the rescue issue and unhampered by the disputes within the community, its influence grew. It sponsored full page ad(s) in *The New York Times* featuring... a series of strident messages which became its hallmark and caused a good deal of anxiety for the officials of the State Department. *)

The key that opened the gates of the “Golden Ghetto”

The Irgun emissaries found several shocking anomalies in the attitude towards the Jewish disaster in Europe. One was the segregated character of the activities of the Jewish and Zionist organizations. The segregation was both in space – organizational – the Synagogue, the *Landsmanshaft* (people hailing from the same city or town in Eastern Europe), most of the Jewish activities, the congregation of the Yiddish writers and journalists (Café Royal... of the Yiddish press [in handwriting; not decipherable] on the lower east side. The furthest point they dared go to call a mass meeting was Manhattan Center on 34th Street. But the segregation was mainly ethnic: Jews spoke to Jews, Jews quarreled with Jews, Jews pleaded

with Jews, one Jew asked another for money for one purpose or another. The discussions, the disputes, the information – was all served up in the Yiddish press, having a circulation of about 250,000 and a readership of at least a million. There were also about 200 American Jewish weeklies in English. The Yiddish press, in contradistinction to the Hebrew press in Palestine which, for a long period of time practically ignored the events of the Jewish disaster in Europe, was from the beginning of the war quite well informed about what went on in occupied Europe, especially Poland, and gave all the information on the front page and in great detail.

But general public opinion was kept out of all things concerning the plight of the Jews. The Zionists (and other Jewish organizations) did not try to seriously involve Christians in the problems of the Jewish plight, except on rare and strictly pro-forma occasions when, for instance, the Zionists organized a “Christian Committee” which was another manifestation of the same principle of segregation. The basic assumption was that the plight of the Jews of Europe and Palestine was a problem of the Jews alone. On occasion, a Christian *per se* may be asked to say something nice about the Jews, or express some sympathy with their sufferings.

For some obscure reason the Jewish news in the general press was usually relegated to the obituary page, or to the page which carried stories about religious events. The horrors of the Jewish condition were reported spottily and at haphazard intervals.

The first task of the Committee was to desegregate the Jewish problem from the confines of the Ghetto, the east side, the Yiddish newspapers, the Rabbis, the Landsmanshaftn, the charity organizations, and to integrate it into the framework of world problems. To break a tradition of more than a hundred years is not simple. It wouldn't do to explain to the Jewish leaders, to the Rabbis, to the bureaucrats of the institutions, that their approach was ineffective and wrong. This would only engage the numbers of the Hebrew Committee in endless arguments at a time when the ground was burning under their feet. They had to find a system that would work fast, a key to open the gates of the voluntary ghetto, and another to open the minds and hearts of the American people at large, to break the conspiracy of silence, the indifference surrounding the disaster of the Jewish people in Europe, and somehow convey the cry of agony which rose from the valley of tears to an unperturbed humanity in the free and civilized world.

This struggle to arouse a world immersed in moral torpor was extremely complex, especially since the Jewish leadership and their establishment were part of that moral atrophy. The Hebrew emissaries used various means to forge a number of organizational, propagandistic and political-diplomatic instruments, but above all it was imperative to devise a fresh approach.

The single, most effective instrument by which to achieve it was the idea of **non-sectarianism**. Whatever the members of the Hebrew Committee thought should be undertaken, must be the concern and duty not only of Jews but Americans of various denominations. One has to reach public opinion in general; one has to establish contact with leaders, statesmen, politicians, shapers of opinion and decision makers of the American people on the highest level of their cultural, social, professional and political life. One must not only inform them or gain their sympathy, but get them **personally involved** in a practical sense.

Before long, news of the Jews began to appear on the front pages of the most important newspapers. Some New York dailies of large circulation not only reported events connected with the Jewish cataclysm, but gave close and constant attention, treating it with all seriousness it deserved, and also have expressed support. Newspapers of such opposing views and policy as Hearst's **Journal American** and the **Daily Mirror** on one end of the spectrum, and the liberal **PM** and the **New York Post** on the other, became loyal and constant supporters of the ideas, political approach and various campaigns of the Irgun's emissaries.

Soon, there wasn't an important personality in any walk of life or in government who was not approached by the Committee and subject to persuasion. Many were influenced and expressed willingness to help. Many joined and became active, giving of their time and experience. Not only was the cause of the rescue of the Jews and the liberation of Palestine transferred from the Ghetto ("gilded" or not) to the realism of America at large, but it was placed in some respect in the center stage of public awareness and concern, and in many cases of commitment.

* * *

The Zionists inherited to a dangerous extent from previous generations in the Ghettos the instinct that for the Jews the best thing is not to draw attention, not to be spoken of, not to be the center of the public

consciousness. One of the most characteristic and embarrassing traits of Jews, even in their private conversations when only two participate, almost invariably they pronounce the word “Jews” or “Jewish” in a hushed whisper, betraying self-consciousness. With the outbreak of World War II, the situation was quite complex and impregnated with a variety of perversities, one of which was a result of Nazi propaganda that the democracies were fighting a **Jewish war**. Therefore, the Jews in America felt one should do nothing to lend credibility to this accusation. The Governments of the Allied nations who were forced to fight Hitler believed one should abstain from any act or even pronouncement which might give the impression to their respective peoples that they were engaged in a “Jewish War” waged at the instigation of or in the interest of the Jews. This fear, of course, betrayed not only moral stupor but primarily absurd thinking. Hitler’s strategic aim was to conquer the world for the benefit of the Third Reich regardless of what happened to the Jews.

As it was, this attitude of “officially” ignoring the Jewish catastrophe paradoxically enjoyed the simultaneous support both of the rabid anti-Semites, especially the many in high places who were affected by Goebbels’s propaganda, as well as a confused and frightened Jewish leadership.

Storming public opinion by mass advertising

One of the innovations the Hebrew emissaries introduced as a method of propaganda, mass education and mobilization of public opinion was the use of paid messages, usually as full page advertisements in the major general newspapers and national magazines from coast-to-coast. Later it became a commonplace – the Zionists used it, and advocates of other causes of a general character – trade unions, lobbyists, candidates for high office, etc. But at that time, it was a sensation in two respects: first because it was only very rarely used before, and second, the shock of bringing the Jewish problem into the open in such an uninhibited manner.

When the first full page ad appeared in the New York Times on January 5, 1942, under the title “Jews Fight for the Right to Fight”, published by the Committee for a Jewish Army of Palestinian and Stateless Jews, listing the names of Board members and Executives of the organization, it created a sensation. Scores of newspapers throughout the

country published a story about the advertisement and a summary of its contents. Thousands of letters, telegrams and phone calls were received in the offices, expressing sympathy; many sending contributions; but mainly conveying admiration for the courage to speak out so explicitly without self-consciousness or embarrassment. To the Hebrew emissaries this aspect of the reaction was most amazing. They could not understand why this was considered an act of daring and courage bordering on the heroic. But it achieved a purpose: the news of Jewish martyrdom in Europe and the violent deeds of the Hebrew resistance in Palestine was placed on the breakfast tables of millions of Americans, reaching to their collective conscience and urging them to live up to their responsibilities as civilized men. One of the headlines of a full-page appeal asked Americans of all persuasions: "How Well Are You Sleeping When a Whole People is Being Put to Death?"

These hundreds of advertisements took different forms and style, written by various authors (the best and most striking were composed by Ben Hecht and Pierre van Paassen). One of them was a poem by Ben Hecht: "The Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe"; some were illustrated by Arthur Szyk; some were composed by Victor Ratner (at the time the highest paid copywriter on Madison Avenue who volunteered his talents); but they were all discussed from every angle before deciding to send them to the papers. What they all had in common was that openly and in strong, dramatic terms they advocated a clear line of action: a) to secure for the Hebrew nation a chance to form its own Army to fight back against its oppressors; b) to break the conspiracy of silence around the Holocaust; c) to compel the Administration in Washington to commit itself to concrete action to save the Jews of Europe; and d) to win the sympathy of the American people, its leaders, institutions and Government for the armed resistance in Palestine. Simultaneously with these paid messages there was a constant flow of public information and education which overshadowed anything the Jews did in America before or since.

The non-sectarian organizations

As mentioned above, the means to break through the wall of indifference to the Jewish disaster was both to appeal to the general public and to create the necessary instruments in which non-Jews are active participants.

This innovation proved to be most effective. This does not mean the Irgun Delegation (later the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation) did not value the importance of the Jewish community or Jewish personalities. On the contrary, never had a Hebrew group of foreigners succeeded to win the understanding and help of so many prominent Jews both American, and from among those who arrived into the US because of Hitler. In the frame of this narrative it is not possible to name even a good number of them. But it is of interest to mention just a few names of disparate background. Among the supporters of the various organizations inspired by the Hebrew emissaries were Rabbi Eliezer Silver, President of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis and Agudat Israel in America and Dorothy Parker; Isaac Zaar, leader and theoretician of Poale Zion (designated in 1918 as sole representative of his party in the Zionist Delegation – Va’ad HaTzirim – to Palestine) and Emil Ludwig; Sholem Asch and Zalman Shneour; Jakob Klatzkin (the Hebrew philosopher) and Georg Bernhard (the renowned German Jewish journalist, publisher and Social Democratic member of the Reichstag); Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson and the entire Adler family – Stella, Luther and Celia; Louis Untermeyer and Waldo Frank; Babette Deutsch and Lester Cohen; Billy Rose, Moss Hart and Kurt Weill; Henry Morgenthau and Barney Ross; Louis Nizer and Max Lerner; Arthur Szyk and Lion Feuchtwanger; and one can go on and on, their numbers were in the hundreds – 154 Rabbis were among those who signed the Proclamation on the Moral Rights.²

Some of the most active leaders of the five organizations initiated by the Hebrew emissaries were Jews who devoted either part or all of their time on a strictly volunteer basis. Without them the political survival of the Hebrew delegation, let alone the achievements of their work would be inconceivable. Outstanding among them in their devotion, sacrifices, talents and generosity and who carried the burden through all the phases of the decade-long crusade were Harry L. Selden, Alexander Wilf, Prof. J. J. Smertenko, Mrs. Louis (Esther) Untermeyer, Mrs. John (Frances) Gunther, Konrad Bercovici, Sam and Betty Dubiner, Irving Shendell, Gabriel A. Wechsler, Maurice Rosenblatt, Maurice Rifkin, Mordechai

2 In the volumes on the History of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation there will be a comprehensive roster of American supporters of the Hebrew freedom movement among both Jews and non-Jews.

Danzes, Nathan George Horwitt, Betty and Rose Kean, Arthur Szyk, Lester Cohen, Irving Teitel and many more. To list them all would constitute a book of honor of those who cared and tried to do what they could in the face of Zionist and organized Jewish hostility that obstructed every constructive plan to save the Jews and liberate Palestine. *)

Yet with all the devotion and sacrifices of these and hundred more Jews would have been of little avail had they been organized, as all the rest on a sectarian basis. It was precisely their partnership with gentiles in a common, non-sectarian framework that had such a powerful impact both upon public opinion and the Administration, as well as on the Governments of Great Britain and other United Nations.

Among the Christian personalities who supported one or another phase of the activities were former President Hoover (who served as Honorary Chairman of the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe); the Minister of Interior, the celebrated, blunt-spoken Harold Ickes (who was Honorary Chairman of the American League for a Free Palestine in Washington); Louis Bromfield was co-chairman of all four committees; Pierre van Paassen was chairman of the Board of the Committee for a Jewish Army, and its Honorary Chairmen were Samuel Harden Church (President of the Carnegie Endowment) and Col. John Henry Patterson, former Commander of the Jewish Legion.

Among the unofficial supporters of the movement who expressed their sympathy in unequivocal terms were Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Chairman of the War Production Board Donald Nelson (in a statement to the Jewish Army Committee he said: "I have given the matter a great deal of thought and I can say... without hesitation that I am 100% in accord with the principles of your organization"), and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

Among the Honorary Chairman of the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe were such famous names as Senator Elbert D. Thomas; Bishop Henry St. George Tucker; William Green, President of the AFL; Philip Murray, President of the CIO.

On the various panels of the Emergency Conference and then on the Board of the Emergency Committee, famous Christian personalities actively participated, like Sen. Edwin C. Johnson, Chairman of the Committee for a Jewish Army; Senator Guy M. Gillette, President of the American League for a Free Palestine; Congressman Andrew Somers;

and Will Rogers Jr. served in several capacities, took part in the daily activities and life of the movement. Perhaps it should be said here, that now it is the norm that Senators and Congressmen are assisted financially by the Zionist Organization or the United Jewish Appeal either in the form of direct campaign contributions, or fees for speeches at fund-raising or other pro-Israeli functions³ (this is not said in a spirit of criticism or value judgement in any sense, but as a statement of fact which is routine). The Senators and Congressmen who devoted their time and energy and were subject to terrific pressure from various quarters never, to my knowledge, received a penny for any of their public appearances, nor were they financially compensated in any other form.

Among the steady, abiding friends and active collaborators were scores of celebrities about some of whom we will have a chance to say something in connection with specific events. Sigrid Undset, the Nobel Prize winning novelist was active in the various organizations, and so was Quentin Reynolds. People as far afield as William Randolph Hearst and Ted O. Thackrey of the liberal New York Post were staunch supporters of the Hebrew freedom movement. Their sympathies were reflected in the editorial policies of their respective newspapers.

Cooperation with leaders of subjugated nations

The Irgun delegation also established a working relationship and cooperation with representatives of various governments-in-exile stationed in Washington, or with democratic and liberal leaders whose countries were subjugated by Fascist rule. Thus, the members of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation had frequent meetings with the head of the Free French Mission, Mr. André Philip. In fact, the Hebrew Committee helped them out in certain respects, for instance, in getting their mail from abroad. Since the Roosevelt Administration was hostile to de Gaulle, the Free French representatives were harassed in various ways, including the opening and inspecting of some of their mail. The Hebrew Committee on certain occasions offered to send or receive their

3 Senators Jackson and the late Hubert Humphry for instance got as much as \$ 7,000 in fees for each appearance.

mail in a way that was certain not to be intercepted.⁴ After liberation André Philip served in various Cabinets. In this capacity he was helpful when the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation had its headquarters also in Paris (apart from Washington).

Among other leaders of national movements in exile which the Hebrew Committee kept in close touch with was... Singh, who later played an important part in the consecutive governments in India; Syngman Rhee, who later became President of South Korea; Count Carlo Sforza, leader of the Italian antifascist movement; Carlos Davila, former Ambassador of Rumania to the U.S. and quite a few more.

4 F. D. Roosevelt's hostility to the Free French in general, and to de Gaulle in particular, is notorious. In a heated conversation with André Philip at the White House, the President told him:

"France as France does not at present exist. After our invasion, when elections have taken place, we shall know who is France. For the moment there is no France, so de Gaulle cannot speak in her name. I am not an idealist like Wilson. I am a realist. Darlan gave me North Africa; **vive Darlan!** If Laval gives me Paris, **vive Laval!** If the Marshal (Pétain) gives me France, **vive le Maréchal!**"

Roosevelt referred to de Gaulle as "an apprentice dictator."*)

Chapter 7

The Committee for a Jewish Army

The announcement in Parliament of a Jewish Brigade

On July 25, 1944, Major Vyvyan Adams asked Secretary of War Sir James Grigg in the House of Commons, whether he had any statement on the proposals of the Jewish Army Committee. Sir James replied: "I am now examining the possibility of forming a Jewish Brigade, or Jewish Brigade groups." The "considering" was slow, but on September 19, 1944, the War Office announced its decision to form a Jewish Brigade.

Lord Strabolgi, President of the Jewish Army Committee in Great Britain proposed immediately that the Jewish Brigade group be used in the Allied Army of Occupation in Germany, and that it be en-larged by opening it to Jews from neutral countries. *) The London correspondent of the New York Times reported that "Its sponsors hope the (Brigade) group will be available for the destruction of Nazism."

The press, including leading American papers, for reasons we will explain later, generally gave credit for the achievement to the Committee for a Jewish Army. The London correspondent of the New York Times cabled on the same day to his newspaper that after five years the campaign for the creation of a Jewish Army "achieved token success tonight when the War Office" made the announcement about the Brigade. Whatever part the Jewish Army Committee played in bringing this about, the Jewish Brigade was not its aim and had only symbolically to do with what it really tried to achieve. In fact, basically, it was a *non sequitur*. The Jewish Brigade was more or less what the Zionists wanted and what their leaders, Weizmann, Shertok [Sharett] and Ben-Gurion tried for years to obtain from the British. Since 1939 they suggested to Whitehall the formation of a Jewish division under British command. They discreetly approached leading members of the Cabinet through memoranda and in

private meetings, pleading for the Jewish division. When after five years of hesitations, promises made and then withdrawn, and obsessed by fears, the British reluctantly gave their consent, it was not to a division but only to a brigade. At all events, it was too little and too late. (It was a reminiscent of the hesitations, delays and change of position preceding the Balfour Declaration, and the formation of Jabotinsky's Jewish Legion in 1917 at the end of World War I.)

The Brigade, hurriedly assembled from Palestinian noncombatant battalions, barely numbering five thousand men, could not under the best of circumstances play a significant role in the war. When it arrived on the scene of battle at the end of March 1945, the war, though not yet ended, was already decided. (The Germans would sign the unconditional surrender a few weeks later, on May 7.) Germany was defeated. Rome surrendered June 4, 1944, and on June 6, the 'D-Day' landings took place in Normandy: de Gaulle entered triumphantly into a liberated Paris on August 25, and on September 11 the Allied forces crossed the German frontier and advanced with great speed. The Russians occupied about the whole of Eastern Europe including Warsaw and Budapest.

The Brigade had just enough time to be transferred from Israel to Egypt and assembled near Alexandria (October 1944), when early in November it shipped out to Italy where it was incorporated in Montgomery's Eighth Army. Its Commander was Brig. Ernest Frank Benjamin, a Canadian born Jew. After undergoing a short but intensive training it took part in two or three engagements with the enemy and acquitted itself with distinction and honor. *) (In that brief period of combat on the Alfonsine-Senio fronts in Italy, the Brigade had 30 men killed; 70 wounded; 21 were awarded medals, and 78 mentioned in dispatches.) *)

As it turned out, the Brigade did play a historic role at war's end and after hostilities were over, but in quite a different field and for a purpose that was not foreseen: the men discovered the martyred remnants of the extermination camps in Europe and helped them in an endless variety of ways – with food, clothing, bedding, and later it became a chief instrument in the campaign to bring many of them "illegally" to Palestine.

In the summer of 1946, the Brigade was brought back to Palestine and disbanded by the British in an atmosphere of mutual hostility. The Hebrew Resistance was at war with the occupying power. The majority of the Yishuv sympathized with the Hebrew freedom fighters. The Brigade

provided the underground with some of its heroes, the most famous of them – Dov Gruner.¹ It also provided a nucleus of experienced officer personnel and veteran fighters for the incipient army of the State of Israel.

* * *

The fact remains that World War II started and ended without a Jewish Army having taken part in it. This fact is one of the most outrageous manifestations of the moral atrophy of the Western world at that period, and one of the components which made the Holocaust possible. A special study should be undertaken and thoroughly documented as to why a Jewish Army did not come into being. It should be done not only as a subject of scientific curiosity but mainly to shed light on how thoughtlessly the war was fought, how stupidity decided strategy, how expediency challenged not only decency, but also caused unnecessary losses in the battlefields, brought about defeat when victory was possible,² and how despite final victory and ultimate destruction of the Nazi Reich, thanks to the participation of a Hebrew Army of perhaps 200,000 strong, victory could have been achieved a year or more earlier. The Holocaust perhaps would have been prevented, or at all events would have been interrupted before additional millions of Jews had been exterminated. Had the war ended sooner the West would have been in a much more advantageous position vis-à-vis the Soviets than it found itself in [in] May 1945, and would not have been forced to bribe Stalin by ceding half of Europe to the Bolsheviks, and since then living in the shadow of a permanent Communist take-over. These, as we shall presently see, are not vain speculations by this writer, but are in tune with strongly held convictions by military leaders who played a central role in fighting and winning the war. Paradoxically, these are mostly Britishers who advanced their devastating arguments as to how wrongly the war was fought,

1 Hero of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, hanged by the British in 1947, he could have saved his life by appealing his death sentence, but refused to do so since this would have implied recognition of the British judiciary in Palestine.

2 It is the hope of this writer that young historians will soon undertake such a thorough investigation, since by now all or most of the permanent archives are open and the secret documents declassified and available.

though they do not relate at all to the problem of a Jewish Army. Their arguments stem from a conception which is called “The Mediterranean Strategy” as against that of meeting headlong the mass of the German armies in northwestern Europe. We will come back to this controversy. Here we wish only to quote Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who on November 1, 1943, entered in his diary:

When I look at the Mediterranean, I realize only too well how far I have failed. If only I had had sufficient force of character to swing those American Chiefs of Staff and make them see daylight, how different the war might be. We should have had the whole Balkans ablaze by now, and the war might have finished by 1943. *)

A Jewish Army might have tipped the scales in the argument; it might have made all the difference in the priorities the Mediterranean front would have been given, and determined the fortunes of that front. But this is not the point we wish to make here, only to indicate that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and other high authorities thought the war could have ended – or at least been decided – in 1943, even without reference to the weight a Jewish Army would have lent to the strategic positions of the arguing parties.

* * *

What would have been more natural, just and commonsensical than to permit the Hebrews of Palestine and the stateless Jews who fled Hitler, as well as volunteers from neutral countries, to form an army to fight under their own flag and insignia their mortal enemy – Nazi Germany – and thus contribute to and accelerate the victory of the Allies? Yet it never materialized. Neither logic nor justice counted for much. Millions of Jews, of course, fought as citizens in the various regular armies of the Allies; thousands fought with the Resistance organizations of the occupied countries, and with the partisans in Eastern Europe. They all fought anonymously, as individuals, as it should have been. But the Palestinians and stateless Jews were not allowed to fight in an organized manner in an army of their own, except for a fleeting moment in the Brigade, when the war was almost over. Indeed, as soon as the war broke out in

Europe, 136,000 Palestinian Jews out of a Hebrew population of about 550,000 registered for military service, eager to be trained and sent to the battlefield to fight the Axis. They were never called; their service was considered dispensable.

The Jewish people of Europe, almost ten million strong, were the greatest single victims of both World Wars. The first resulted in the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, and thus an Iron Curtain lowered over the several millions of Jews living behind it and brought an end to their Jewish culture in all its manifestations. The second ended in the Holocaust.

In World War I the Western democracies and the U.S. were allied with the greatest enemy of the Jews – Czarist Russia. In their hearts it was very difficult for the Jews, anywhere, principally in America, to identify with the cause of the Entente since this would mean to identify also with one of the main partners of that Alliance – Russia. In World War II their dilemma was more terrible. In each of the opposing camps were their enemies. Among the Axis, the Germans vowed to destroy them; among the Allied Powers there was Great Britain, determined to put an end to Hebrew national aspirations, and barred their entry to Palestine. Yet the Jews did take sides and made a choice, because they thought, and rightly so, that there was no alternative. Between the Axis and the Allies, they threw in their lot with the latter, whose leading power in the first years of the war was Great Britain, under the premiership of Winston Churchill.

But neither Jabotinsky, in the last few months of his life, nor the Hebrew Delegation considered this choice as an act of desperation only. In a sense they also saw in it a great opportunity to utilize the storm and steer the ship of the Hebrew Nation in the desired direction. Their reasoning was that in that war, with the Allies as unprepared as they were, manpower counted for a great deal. The Jews were in a position to offer that manpower. If utilized in a large Jewish Army, perhaps a quarter of a million strong, to fight against Nazis on any front, and especially to defend the Middle East with its Suez Canal, oil, and strategic locations, would contribute significantly to victory. Then this very fact would have overwhelming repercussions, and Great Britain would have had to change its policy in Palestine. But it did not work out that way. The Allies (not only the British) as we shall see, recoiled from the very idea of having

a Jewish Army. They gave all kinds of excuses, one more disingenuous and foolish than the next.

The [Jewish Army] Committee in Great Britain

The Jewish Army Committee in the U.S. was organized on a national and regional basis.³ It also branched out overseas. A member of the Irgun emissaries, Captain Jeremiah Halpern, one of the most colorful and heroic personalities in the Hebrew freedom movement, a legend in his lifetime,⁴ went to London with the task of organizing a branch of the Committee in Great Britain. To facilitate his task Senators Edwin C. Johnson, William H. Smathers and James Murray, Representative John D. Dingell, and the two labor leaders William Green and Philip Murray, cabled an appeal to every member of the British Parliament:

May we extend to you as an outstanding representative of the liberal and gallant British nation, a cordial and urgent invitation to cooperate with us in our efforts to bring about the formation of a Jewish Army? Our Committee is a non-sectarian and non-partisan body made up of public figures from all walks of American life and includes members of both Houses of Congress, military and naval authorities, clergymen, educators, authors, journalists and business executives... It is the considered judgement of the members of this Committee, and of its many thousands of supporters, that such an army, placed under the Supreme Allied Command, will prove of immeasurable value in the defense of the Suez Canal and its surrounding areas recognized as a vital life-line of the United

3 The Irgun emissaries were the moving force on both levels. P. H. Bergson was National Director; Dr. Alexander B. Hadani (Rafaeli), Director of Greater New York; Y. Ben-Ami, Director of Pennsylvania; Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, Director of the Midwest with headquarters in Chicago; Miss Miriam Hayman (not a member of the Delegation), Director on the West Coast (Los Angeles, CA) and Rabbi Baruch E. Rabinowitz (not a member of the delegation), Director of Maryland (Baltimore).

4 He was among the first and main organizers of the Haganah (self-defence) in the old city of Jerusalem during the 1920 riots; in the Betar movement he was the head of a widely ramified network of para-military training courses from which thousands of young men and women in Eastern Europe graduated between the two World Wars. He was also the head of the Betar Maritime School in Civitavecchia in Rome, and Captain of the first Hebrew ship "Sarah."

Nations. The Jewish army could play a signal role in the struggle for the preservation of world civilization... The rehabilitation of the Jews, the most persecuted people on this earth, can be accomplished through the joint farsighted leadership of the British and American peoples. The first essential step towards this goal, we feel, is to give the Jews an opportunity to fight as Jews against the common enemy of mankind... We are sure that with your ability you will succeed in the task of mobilizing public opinion of our great and gallant ally in favor of the common cause.

As a result of this appeal and Cap. Halpern's efforts, an impressive committee was formed in Great Britain under the chairmanship of Lord Strabolgi, and included Aneurin Bevan, leader of the opposition (Labor) in the House of Commons; Lord Davies; Lord Wedgwood; Commander Locker-Lampson; Geoffrey Mander and others. Of great importance was the sponsorship of the project by Ivan Greenberg, editor in chief of the most outstanding Jewish periodical in the world, the Jewish Chronicle.⁵

The end of a five-year campaign

The announcement about the Brigade by the War Office on September 19, 1944, marked the end of a campaign that started with the outbreak of the war. It was initiated by Jabotinsky, sustained by the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, and became the exclusive preoccupation of the Committee for a Jewish Army organized by the Hebrew Delegation.⁶

Jabotinsky arrived in the States in March 1940 and opened his intensive campaign with a press conference focusing on the need of a Jewish army for all concerned. He expressed confidence that it will come into being. The press coverage was unusually impressive and captured the imagination of reporters and commentators. The Zionist establishment

5 He was subsequently a staunch supporter of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation.

6 Jabotinsky, of course, propagated Jewish Legionism since 1914, and together with Colonel Patterson began to campaign for a full-fledged Jewish Army as early as the autumn of 1938. They submitted a memorandum to the British Government for a plan to raise an army of 200,000.

was confused and embarrassed; its leaders debated for many weeks what their position should be.

An incredible visit with the British Ambassador

They decided to organize a counter campaign. On June 18th, 1940, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported from Washington an incredible story titled: "Zionist Leaders Here Frown on Jabotinsky's Army Plan." It reported a statement signed by Dr. Stephen Wise as President of the Emergency Council for Zionist Affairs, Mr. Louis Lipsky, and other prominent Zionist leaders. The beginning of the story read: "Leaders of the Zionist Organization of America, conferring with the British Ambassador Lord Lothian, yesterday (June 17) disassociated themselves from the plan of Vladimir Jabotinsky to create a Jewish Army as part of the Allied Forces."

It is difficult to ascertain the motives behind this move. Probably there were three: 1. To combat Jabotinsky, the dissident leader, regardless what he proposes and does, the merits of the particular project being of little or no consequence; 2. America was still neutral and they were afraid that a campaign for a Jewish Army may cast a shadow upon their patriotism and loyalty vis-à-vis their own country; and 3. there was a breakdown in communication between them and the London and Jerusalem Zionist leaders who favored some kind of a separate Jewish force within the British Army.

Like in World War I this time, too, there were Zionists who opposed not only the creation of a Jewish Army but to "taking sides in the war" altogether. The Zionist Student Organization of America, the AVUKA, published a statement denouncing the Jewish Army idea and defined its attitude in the following slogans:

"Strict American neutrality.

No aid – no men, no money, no ammunition to belligerents.

Guard against war propaganda and hysteria.

Provide for a war referendum amendment."

Under the impact of events and the indefatigable campaign of the Committee for a Jewish Army, the Zionists gradually changed their

attitude. But they did not solve the picky problem of how to treat the activities of the Committee for a Jewish Army who initiated the drive on an international scale. Even after they officially adopted a resolution to advocate the creation of a Jewish division in Palestine, to serve under British command, they still faced the dilemma of how to propagate the idea and yet at the same time combat the Committee for a Jewish Army. They never really found a satisfactory solution to the dilemma, though they thought the best method was character assassination.

* * *

Contrary to the prevailing opinion at the time, the Irgun emissaries did not act hastily. If any reproach can be made as to their method of operation, it is in the opposite direction: they were too deliberate, often they were too slow to arrive at a decision, and acted only after an idea became crystallized in their mind. Thus, the campaign for a Jewish Army, from September 1939 till December 1941 (more than two years) was pursued in the framework of the first organization they brought into existence in the U.S. – the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine.

Though most of the steps undertaken by the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, including mass propaganda and political activities, both in Congress and with the Administration, were most impressive, it became clear to the Hebrew Delegation that one cannot tie-in and identify a Jewish Army with Palestine alone, or with an organization whose very name proclaims a strictly political intent. A Jewish Army must transcend the political aspirations as to Palestine, and should be available to fight on any front assigned by the Allied high command. It was therefore decided that one should create a special organization whose sole aim is the establishment of an army of Palestinian and Stateless Jews, not identified with any political group or party, a framework in which people of various political opinions and aspirations, including those who are not Zionists or Palestine-oriented, can participate and cooperate without prejudice to their personal ideological predilections and political affiliations. After three years of intensive activities the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine seemed, under the circumstances, no longer relevant to the main task ahead, and it was decided to create a new organization.

To fight as a Nation

This organization was first announced on December 2, 1941, from the floor of the House of Representatives by Congressman J. D. Dingell of Michigan. In retrospect, in view of the moral and political climate prevailing at the time, not only among the Governments concerned and public opinion in general, but also among a bewildered and frightened Jewish and Zionist leadership, Dingell's was a startling statement. One essential paragraph of it is worthwhile quoting:

... Recently Mr. Churchill declared that by 1942 there will be a shortage of manpower. We here must also be concerned with another factor. Tomorrow, the Committee for a Jewish Army will convene here in Washington, and I desire to bring before the House certain aspects to be considered. That Committee for a Jewish Army is a non-partisan, non-sectarian group calling upon all humanity now engaged or supporting those engaged in a great struggle, to recognize that the pioneer Jews of Palestine and Stateless Jews of Europe constitute a nation and hence must be allowed to fight as a nation. My colleague, the gentleman from New York (Mr. Somers) has introduced a bill for the purpose of allowing lend-lease equipment to be utilized for the Jewish Army. I trust we shall pass that bill...

The repercussions

The Committee for a Jewish Army of Palestinian and Stateless Jews was officially established on December 3, 1941, at a special convention held at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. Delegates from coast to coast participated in the sessions presided over by Samuel Harden Church, President of the Carnegie Institute. Diplomats of foreign countries and governments in exile attended as an expression of sympathy. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson sent a message of encouragement: "Free men everywhere are arming for the defense of democracy. I send my best wishes for the success of your movement."⁷

7 Though addressed to a convention explicitly called for the purpose of promoting the idea of a Jewish Army, sending his "best wishes for the success of the movement," it does not

Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, in a message, said:

In Palestine, Hitler faces the wrath of the people he has starved and tortured and degraded. Jews over half a million strong, many of whom know the ache of a storm trooper's kick, the agonies of the Schutzstaffel's lash. The Jewish haven in peace time has become a bulwark for democracy in war time. Lend it your strength.⁸

Chief Justice Harlan Stone of the US Supreme Court said:

I am entirely in sympathy with the proposal to raise a Jewish Army to fight side by side with the English Army.

The convention was widely reported by the press agencies and by special correspondents of the leading newspapers all over the country.

A Committee for a Jewish Army was officially proclaimed under the chairmanship of Pierre van Paassen.⁹

contain an explicit endorsement. Indeed, it was later discovered from declassified papers that he was no friend of the Jewish Army plan, giving the same excuse of lack of equipment, ships and what not. *) But at the time it served the purpose. The Committee, especially its branch in Great Britain, made extensive use of Stimson's telegram, both in the press and in both Houses of Parliament here and in London. He never protested or reneged. Only in direct dealings with the State Department, the White House, and the British, he expressed the view that a Jewish Army cannot "for the time being be implemented." Apart from that, Stimson is entitled to full credit for having thwarted a plan by the British and some high State Department and War Department officials to put an end by Government decree to the activities of the Irgun Emissaries, under the pretext that they endanger the Allied war effort. Cordell Hull was willing to be part of the conspiracy. Stimson put a clear-cut end to it.

8 (It may be of some intriguing significance that these two Cabinet members were Republicans in a Democratic Administration.)

9 The National Committee for a Jewish Army comprised 186 members. Among them were 6 military and naval authorities; 6 Senators; 27 Congressmen; 18 leading clergymen; 3 diplomats; 2 labor leaders; 37 educators; 18 authors; 19 professional men; 23 popular journalists; 4 radio commentators; 4 artists; 4 producers; 3 actors; 3 civic leaders; and 13 business executives.

Meir Grossman, the celebrated Zionist veteran and former close collaborator of Jabotinsky from the Jewish Legion struggle during World War I, was Vice Chairman of the Executive Board. Alfred Strelsin, an industrialist and a man of many parts, was Chairman of the Executive Board and the first substantial financial contributor to the Committee. His was more than a rational commitment: his brother served with

The aim, as defined by the conference and propagated by the Committee, read:

To bring about by legal means and in accordance with the laws and foreign policy of the U.S. the formation of a Jewish Army, based on Palestine, to fight for the survival of the Jewish people and the preservation of democracy. The Army, composed primarily of Palestinian Jews and refugees as well as of volunteers from free countries, **will fight on all required battlefield side by side with the U.S., Great Britain, and the other Allied nations.**

In contradistinction to the Zionist positions, the Committee in its intensive propaganda tried to emphasize four points:

First and above everything else, the Committee thought it imperative to bring out the question into the open. Among the Allies there was an unspoken resolve to ignore the Jewish problem as it gradually evolved into cataclysmic proportions, and it was a general agreement that in this war it was not desirable “that the Jews ‘be on the map’ neither as active allies, nor even as fellow sufferers, nor as the subject-matter of any special Allied demands on war aims.” *)

Arthur Szyk, in describing the attitude of the majority of the Allied statesmen and the greater part of the Allied press to this “Jewish” aspect of the war, used the word pornography. “They treat us,” he said, “as a pornographic subject. Pornography covers a most important department of life and nature; nobody denies it, but you cannot discuss it in a polite society – it is not done.” *)

Second, if the Jews were singled out by Hitler as a special target of his global war against the free world, the Jews must be accorded the elementary right to fight back as Jews.

The third point was that the Jews in Palestine should be permitted to defend their country in case of attack.

Fourth, the Jewish Army idea was not just a matter of moral value, a symbol for justice, but of practical strategic importance which, if implemented, may play a significant part in bringing about victory; indeed,

Jabotinsky's Legion and fell in the field of battle. By championing the Jewish Army, he expressed his loyalty to the cause for which his brother gave his life.

under certain circumstances and on a specific front it may tip the scales from defeat to victory. Because the idea was to assemble and outfit an army of at least 200,000 strong, composed of people powerfully motivated by self-preservation and hatred of the enemy.

The opening paragraph of the full-page advertisement in the New York Times of January 5, 1942 (and in other papers throughout the country) asked: "What are the Jews doing in this war? In England, the U.S. and in Russia this question has an easy answer: they are fighting." Hence the question is not about them, but about the tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of other Jews who are not fighting. Who are they? And the Committee's public statement enumerated them:

135,000 fearless Palestinian Jews registered as volunteers for war service as soon as the war broke out... Then there are the Stateless Jews... driven from their homes by the great and evil violence of the Axis Powers. They are scattered in every part of the world, young and courageous, who have only one dream – to fight under a flag that will carry them against the armies of Hitler... There is still another category of Jews – from countries not yet involved in the war – from South America and the Middle East. They feel that they, too, should have a part in the world struggle to defeat the enemies of civilization. All of them are convinced that the Jewish people's place is on all the fronts where the democracies are fighting for those very foundations of society whose Magna Carta is the Bible. They all want to unite in their own Freedom Army and to fight under their own Liberty Flag, under the Supreme Allied Command.

By the time this message was published, the U.S. was already at war with the Axis. It attempted to explain to public opinion that a Jewish Army would be in the best interests of the U.S. also:

... The Committee believes that with America's entry into the war against the Axis, the question of a Jewish Army based on Palestine has become a direct and vital concern to the US since this army, 200,000 strong.

Will consolidate the Allied position around the Suez Canal;

Will release a considerable part of the Anzac forces from the
Middle East for combat in the Pacific, and thus
Will strengthen the defenses of this hemisphere.

The Zionist position

The Zionists, as usual, were of two conflicting sentiments. On the one hand they were for Jewish military units. Yet the demand for these should remain modest, inconspicuous; it should not be dramatic; one should not frighten or arouse undue suspicion. They opposed the very term of Jewish Army. Dr. Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization, referred to it in May 1942 as "somewhat pretentious and somewhat fantastic." It was a new version of the debate in 1917 concerning the formula to be submitted to the British for consideration of issuing a Declaration of endorsement of Zionist aspiration: should they tell them that they aim at a "Jewish State" or hide behind the nebulous and deceptive formula of a "National Home"? They thought in the forties as they did in 1917 that to ask for too much will result in getting nothing. They believed that the more modest their demands concerning a Jewish military force, the greater the chance to get approval from the British.

But it was not only a matter of formulating the aim. There were also differences concerning the methods to be used to obtain the aim, whatever it was. The Zionist leaders believed in secret diplomacy, in private approaches to British officials, and pleading or reasoning with them. The Hebrew delegation and the leading members of the Committee for a Jewish Army did not believe that the British will agree to anything, unless it is subjected to constant pressure of public opinion. The Zionist leaders thought such tactics could only harm the cause. Of the several reasons, though not the most essential one, why they so bitterly opposed the public campaign of the Committee for a Jewish Army was their fear that the British may take umbrage and react negatively.

The second difference was a matter of substance, size and terminology. As mentioned above, the maximum Zionist demand and what they hoped to achieve was a division. The Committee for a Jewish Army spoke about a military force of such a size that it would make its weight felt in the strategic planning of the Allies. The Committee had in mind an army of about ten or even fifteen divisions, perhaps a quarter million strong.

The Zionists considered this, as Weizmann said, “fantastic” that it is not serious because it is not realistic. They refused to understand that it was unrealistic as long as they accepted the excuses and nonsense of the British, and later of the Americans, who were against it not because it was not possible but because it was dangerous. We will come back to this question.

Third, the Zionists made it always explicitly clear that the Jewish unit will be under British Command. The Committee for a Jewish Army spoke of an army under Allied Command.

The fourth difference was the emphasis as to where the Jewish Army would be deployed. The Zionists were mainly interested, and with a great deal of justification, to obtain permission from the British High Command and the Administration in Palestine to organize military units, regardless of size and numbers, to protect the Yishuv in case of an attack. The Hebrew Delegation thought that under the prevailing circumstances, in order to convince public opinion, it was necessary to deemphasize the purpose of defending the Yishuv, which went without saying, and instead underline the concept of a large Jewish Army to be deployed anywhere the Allied High Commander will assign it.

The debates in Congress and Parliament

On November 28, 1941, Representative Andrew L. Somers (a Democrat from Brooklyn, N.Y.), one of the most abiding friends of the cause of rescue and liberation of the Jews, introduced in the House of Representatives a concurrent resolution asking the President of the U.S. to intercede with the British Government to permit the organization of all-Jewish military units in Palestine. This resolution, introduced a few days before the Convention (December 3, 1941) was a tentative and temporary tactic with two special purposes: one was to involve the US Government and the President in particular, in the Jewish Army project. Second, that military-strategic considerations should be given priority instead of the narrow, political-imperialist interests of the British Empire *per se*. In a follow-up speech from the floor of the House, Somers therefore suggested:

... that the President of the U.S. at the earliest possible date negotiate(s) with the British Government in an effort to utilize (the

Hebrew) manpower. And... that he assign(s) an American general to the task of effectively using this (Hebrew) Army, in the hope that military considerations will prevail and that we may drive on to victory and realize in the shortest possible time the complete destruction of the despotic forces that we are called upon to fight.

To buttress his argument and make clear how foolish the British position was, he quoted from a speech by Churchill of the same day, in which the leader of Great Britain declared that “we are likely to lose the war unless we use our combined overwhelming strength and use the multiplying opportunities that will present themselves to us.” From the floor Congressman Somers asked his colleagues that if this is the case, why is the opportunity of having a Jewish Army not utilized?

The immediate mobilization of these people (for a Jewish Army) must suggest itself as a wise course to all who want to see America win this war quickly. Many of our generals and admirals tell us that such an (Hebrew) Army is essential to the protection of the Suez Canal. I don't know whether or not we are sending any men into that section of the globe now, but I venture to assert that it is only a question of a few weeks when American boys will be sent to Palestine to protect that region. Obviously, there is an available army there now: a fierce Army of traditional soldiers, for the Jewish people, [which] throughout the history of their existence, have been a fighting people. Why not use it?

The Committee for a Jewish Army sought to impress upon public opinion and the U.S. Government that the Jewish Army project was not a purely Jewish affair, but must be of concern to Allies from a military and practical point of view as well as from the moral, hoping to refute the arguments of old-time appeasers who were still in control of the Colonial Office.

It was in this spirit that the Somers' Resolution was followed up by speeches from the floor of both Houses of Congress.¹⁰

10 The following Senators and Congressmen took the floor and spoke forcefully in favor of a Jewish Army: Senator Edwin C. Johnson (Colorado); Representatives John D. Dingell [Sr.] Michigan); Thomas D'Alesandro, Jr. (Maryland); George M. Grant (Alabama);

Similar discussions around this project were initiated in Parliament by the British branch of the Committee for a Jewish Army. On June 9, 1942, Lord Josiah Wedgwood and Lord Strabolgi debated in the House of Lords, and on August 6, 1942, members of the Committee did the same in the House of Commons which was led by Ian Hannah, a Conservative MP, expressing puzzlement as to why the British Government did not take advantage of the possibilities to utilize needed manpower for a more successful prosecution of the war. He declared in the House:

There is a broad feeling in Britain and in the U.S. that we are not making the most of the reservoir of good will that exists among Jews in Palestine. The Committee for a Jewish Army has strong support in the U.S. and has received the blessing of members of the American Government and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. *)

Why, indeed, was Great Britain indifferent if not averse to the Jewish Army proposal? Historians prove that Churchill was favorably disposed to some kind of Jewish participation in special units and fighting under their own flag, but each time he suggested doing something about it he was overruled by his colleagues in the Government who opposed it.

The most outspoken opponent for a Jewish Army was Lord Moyne. In the House of Lords debated on June 9, 1942, on the motion of Lord Wedgwood for a Jewish fighting force to be recruited from Jewish refugees from Nazism, and for permission to Palestine Jewry to raise guard, Lord Moyne tried to divert the discussion from the Jewish Army proposal per se by exposing the sinister intentions behind it on the part of its advocates. He delivered a virulent anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish tirade, unprecedented in the annals of the British Parliament:

“The Zionist claim has raised two burning issues – first the demand for large-scale immigration into *an already overcrowded country*, and secondly, *racial domination by the newcomers over the original inhabitants...* If comparison with Nazis is to be made it is surely those who wish to force an imported regime upon the

Richard P. Gale (Minnesota); Elmer J. Holland (Pennsylvania); Herman P. Eberharter (Pennsylvania).

Arab population (and) who are *guilty of the spirit of domination and aggression...*" (Italics added)¹¹

One is probably entitled to take the version of Churchill's submissiveness to his colleagues with more than a grain of salt. He was not known as a weak leader yielding easily to the arguments of others when strongly convinced that he was right on a particular issue. One may perhaps conclude that he might have been sympathetic to the idea of a separate Jewish armed force, but his conviction wasn't strong enough to make it prevail. His sympathy with Zionism from beginning to end was weak and ambiguous, and when it came to the crunch, he permitted the anti-Zionists and anti-Semites in the Government to have their own way. This was not only the case with the Jewish Army but was much more devastating with the issue of permitting Jews fleeing death under Hitler to enter Palestine. The White Paper was in full force throughout his premiership.

Nonetheless the British advocates of the Jewish Army inspired by [Jeremiah] Irma Halpern, continued their battle; they kept hammering away in Parliament, in the press, and in personal encounters with officials.

In the wake of these interventions, Sir James Grigg announced the immediate establishment of a Palestinian regiment in the British Army with purely Hebrew and Arab battalions.

On the surface this sounded like a concession in several respects. First, there was no mention in the announcement about "parity" between the number of Hebrews and Arabs in that regiment. Though Sir Grigg said the regiment would offer Jews and Arabs the opportunity of "uniting in defense of their home land," there was no provision that the Hebrew battalions would be contingent upon the creation of Arab battalions. Past experience has shown that the Arabs were not interested to defend their homeland neither in common with the Jews, nor separately. They, like the Arabs in the neighboring countries, were waiting for an Axis victory and for Rommel to "liberate" them. *)

Second, it was supposed to be a fighting unit, but it soon became clear that this was not the case; it was a deception. They were composed of previous companies in the Buffs, received no additional arms or special

11 In the same speech – to give the text of the Card "Moyné."

new training. It was more or less as before. The Hebrews in the battalions were still treated as inferiors to the British soldiers. They remained embittered and unhappy with the boring and humiliating assignments. Few new recruits joined the battalions which were to comprise about 5,000 men.

Pierre van Paassen, Chairman of the Committee for a Jewish Army, issued a statement that the British decision is an acknowledgment of the public demand in America and Great Britain for a Jewish Army, but not an adequate answer to the problem. He warned against permitting the establishment of the regiment to “sidetrack” the aim of the Committee. A similar statement was published in London.

The campaign was rigorously pursued until Sir Griggs’ announcement about the Jewish Brigade.¹² As indicated above, the announcement marked the end of the campaign for a Jewish Army. There was no use to make additional effort. Besides, the focus of the Hebrew Delegation’s preoccupation shifted to a more urgent situation – the extermination of the Jews in Europe.

Since the Secretary of War made his announcements on both occasions, concerning the Hebrew Battalions and the Jewish Brigade, in the wake of debates in Parliament initiated by the Committee for a Jewish Army, credit was generally given to that Committee. However, it would be exaggerated to say that these achievements, if achievements they were, were due exclusively to the efforts of the Committee. They were a result both of the discreet but persistent efforts of the Jewish Agency leaders who, from the beginning of the war, approached on many occasions various members of the British Government and pleaded for the formation of a Jewish fighting force. From time to time they got assurances from the British which were never fulfilled. Without the public pressure and exposure of the Committee for a Jewish Army their efforts probably would have remained without results. But inasmuch as the Committee played any part, it was paradoxically to strengthen the hand of its adversaries (the

12 In the Fall of 1940 the British permitted the recruitment, on a parity basis, of one Hebrew and one Arab non-combatant battalion within the framework of a British Regiment (the Kentish Royal Fusiliers known as the Buffs). The Jewish companies were assigned to auxiliary tasks of labor, construction, digging ditches, etc. They were in principle not allowed to carry arms. It was degrading. The rules were not always strictly observed, and some Hebrew soldiers succeeded to obtain arms.

Zionist leadership), and helped them to achieve their modest demands; but it did not succeed to achieve its own goal – a Jewish Army. It was precisely because the Zionist leaders were willing to be satisfied with a small Jewish force within the British Army that was probably one of the main causes for the failure of the Committee to achieve the aim.

Besieging the White House

It is worthwhile to cast a glance over the impact the Committee for a Jewish Army had upon the Governments both in Washington and London. On August 31, 1942, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr. informed Under Secretary Welles that:

The Committee for a Jewish Army has been besieging the White House, and (Marvin H.) McIntyre (Secretary to President Roosevelt) eventually sent them to me. They were then thinking of a huge delegation to convince the British that the Jewish Army ought to go forward. They have finally got their suggestions to the point where they wish to send four people, namely:

Alfred A. Strelsin of New York;

Kenneth Leslie of the "Protestant Digest";

Andrew L. Somers, a Member of Congress, and

Peter H. Bergson, a Palestinian expert,

on private passports to England to lay their cases before the British authorities. The chairman of the committee, Strelsin, has been talking at length to Field Marshal Sir John Dill, and this is the procedure finally recommended by him.

I see no reason why we should not grant passports with reasonable priority; but the understanding is that they are merely going to state the case as well as they can to the appropriate British authority and try to persuade the British to make up their minds. This Government does not assume any responsibility for them except as it permits their trip. Do you see any objection?

If the British agree, then of course passports should be issued to the members of the proposed delegation. If they do not, the Committee for a Jewish Army should be advised to get in touch directly with the British Ambassador.

On September 4, 1942, Lord Halifax went to see Berle who raised the question of the mission to London. He informed him of the negotiations the Department had with Mr. Strelsin, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Committee, but he would like to know "whether the British Embassy had any objections." In his report of the meeting with Halifax, Berle relates:

Lord Halifax inquired what I thought. I said that we were worried about the agitation and that the best thing that could be said for allowing these men to go would be that it might conceivably quiet down the agitation here, through a quiet discussion on the technical level in London. I said this apparently had been the view of Sir John Dill, though I had only the report which Strelsin had given me on the score.

Lord Halifax said he thought that conceivably sending these people might do some good if they are sensible people...

Halifax added that he would talk it over with Col. Montgomery, in Dill's absence, and then would let the State Department know whether to put the Committee in touch with him. On October 1, 1942, he received a delegation of the Committee for a Jewish Army and, after a rather extensive exchange of views, and inquiries as to the composition of the projected delegation, and other particulars, he said he would "telegraph to London the suggestions" put forward to him. It seems the answer he got was something approaching panic. Consequently, he wrote a long letter on October 24 to Mr. Strelsin, with an apology for the delay (more than three weeks), explaining that the matter was considered "by a number of different departments, all of whom as you may imagine are now under extreme pressure of work owing to war conditions." All these interdepartmental consultations produced a final "No!" to the projected delegation, to the very idea of a Jewish Army, to everything.

The British Government (wrote Halifax) has given continuous consideration to the proposals which your Committee has so strongly and sincerely advocated; but they have decided, and Parliament has approved this course, that so far as they are concerned they are unable to give support to the proposal for a separate Jewish Army.

The Ambassador thought it incumbent upon him to advise the Hebrews how best they could contribute to the Allied war effort and serve the best interests of democracy **without** an Army, and the letter ended with a nonsensical and apologetic paragraph:

I realize that the attitude of His Majesty's Government as set out above is not fully (sic) in accord with the objectives which your committee favor. But I hope you will nonetheless believe that His Majesty's Government's policy does represent a sincere attempt to reconcile the need for the most efficient mobilization of manpower and resources with the natural desire of Jews everywhere to make their full contribution to the war.

The attempts to apply censorship to the campaign for a Jewish Army

What the British actually wanted was that the Administration use its executive wartime prerogatives to put an end to the activities of the Committee for a Jewish Army. The British thought the best thing would be censorship. Halifax poured his heart out to Sumner Welles, explaining that the propaganda of that Committee became intolerable, Welles advised him to discuss it with Elmer Davis, Director of the Office of War Information, "regarding propaganda appearing in the American press recently, clamoring for the creation of a Jewish Army, and criticizing the British Government for its failure to create such an army."

Harold Butler, Minister of the British Embassy, spoke to Elmer Davis, and the celebrated American liberal radio commentator was nonplussed by the British position. He told Butler that "there didn't seem to be anything very much that he could do about the matter inasmuch as no question of censorship was involved with regard to this problem."

When Halifax related Elmer Davis' reaction to Sumner Welles, the latter became somewhat impatient and told the Ambassador "that of course I had never had the remotest idea of the exercise of censorship in this connection," and that he advised approaching Elmer Davis only because he thought it would be "the best way in which the British Government could make known, through proper channels in this country, its own position with regard to the creation of a Jewish Army and its

own explanation as to what its policy had been in regard thereto up to the present time.”¹³

* * *

But the British did not entertain only one line of communication, but several. While Halifax dealt with Cordell Hull and Welles, other members of the British Embassy with the rank of Minister dealt with the State Department people in charge of Near Eastern Affairs. These officials were anti-Zionist in the extreme and strictly followed the line of the British Foreign and Colonial Offices.¹⁴

Some time at the end of April 1942 Cordell Hull called in this group and inquired what to do about “the harmful effects of the Zionist agitation on the war effort,” or, to put it in simpler terms, the activities of the Committee for a Jewish Army. The meeting concluded with the suggestion to make a public statement about the Middle East, and Wallace Murray was asked to prepare a draft of a statement to be submitted to the President for publication. In June Murray had the statement ready, together with a draft of a letter to be sent by Hull to Roosevelt, explaining the urgency to publish it under the President’s signature. The draft of the suggested letter begins:

Dear Mr. President:

The agitation for the formation of a Jewish Army in Palestine is having such alarming effect in the Near and Middle East that I am impelled to draw your attention to the matter. From the reports of our military and political observers, it is clear that the British

13 Welles nonetheless found it worthwhile to console Halifax by telling him that “there were many Jews in this country who were opposed to the kind of propaganda that was going on...” meaning probably the official Zionist leadership, as well as other influential organizations [such] as the American Jewish Committee and the American Council for Judaism, though he didn’t name any of them. But they are all on the record to have opposed the methods of propaganda and the very activities of the Committee for a Jewish Army.

14 At the time the following belonged to this group: primarily Wallace Murray, Advisor on Political Relations to the Secretary of State; P. H. Alling, Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs; Harold B. Hoskins, Executive Assistant to Assistant Secretary of State Berle; Gordon P. Merriam of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs; James Clement Dunn, Advisor on Political Relations; Green H. Hackworth, Legal Advisor; and others.

and ourselves cannot use these territories (of the Near and Middle East) as bases of operations against Germany, Italy and Japan and as routes of access to the combat in Libya, Russia and China, if, in addition to combatting the Axis forces, we have to defend ourselves against the local populations.¹⁵

... This agitation which has recently taken the form of full-page advertisements in the metropolitan press advocating the formation of a Jewish Army to defend Palestine, and a widely publicized dinner here in Washington, gives the Axis powers **additional** oil to pour on the fire, which is already dangerously high. We have just learned that the Axis powers have promised the Arabs their independence and the elimination of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Doubtless, the Axis will in the near future make public announcement of this promise as further evidence of their friendship for the Moslems.

What the President was asked to do in order to compete with Hitler for that friendship, was to issue a declaration from which it would be implied that the Atlantic Charter will also be applied to Palestine, that is, the Palestinian Arabs who are the majority of the population will be entitled to independence as other free peoples.

Of this attempt as with all subsequent ones to silence the activities of the Hebrew Delegation and their American associates, nothing substantive

15 The reasoning and arguments are typical of those used by the British. Sometimes the phraseology is the same. For instance, as early as August 29, 1939, when the war had not yet broken out, General Evelyn Barker, Commander of the British forces in Palestine, told a delegation of the Yishuv to look at the map of the Middle East on his wall and see for themselves there is no danger that Palestine would be attacked because it is surrounded by countries whose governments are either friendly to the United Kingdom for various reasons, or know better than to engage in any hostile enterprise against Great Britain. The security situation seemed to him almost idyllic. If, however, the Jews are permitted to have their military units, it would provoke an immediate uprising and the British forces will have to be used to put down the rebellions.

If that's how it would work out, we would be fighting one great war, another war against the Arabs all around Palestine, and a third war against the revolting Arabs of the country. Gentlemen, three wars at once are too much for me. One is enough!

Ironically, the countries he enumerated from which no trouble is to be expected in case of war were Syria and Lebanon under French rule, and Iraq. Before long these would cause Great Britain great trouble despite Whitehall's refusal to permit establishing a Jewish force in Palestine. *)

resulted. From the published State Department documents, it is not clear whether this draft was ever sent to the President. But there is a memorandum from Roosevelt to Hull saying that the more he thinks about the Middle East the more he is inclined to say nothing about the whole problem. This was the end, at least for a while, to the initiative of the pro-British and Arabist faction of the State Department.

Why did the Allies reject a Jewish Army?

Looking back almost forty years it is still difficult, with all the goodwill in the world, to understand why the Allies rejected a Jewish Army. In the unfolding events one discerns not only the moral justice of the proposition, but also its usefulness from a practical and expedient point of view.

Long before the war broke out, the British considered the Middle East of vital importance next only to the British Isles. It was the second center of gravity in their strategic thinking.¹⁶ Yet, Great Britain acted against its own avowed strategy and paid a terrible price which, in the long run, was tantamount to the liquidation of its Empire and its decline as a third rate, bankrupt, self-pitying state, looked upon by friends with mixed feelings of contempt and sadness.

Four days before the Germans entered Paris on June 10, 1940, Mussolini declared war on France and Britain. This meant that the Mediterranean became a central front, with the Axis on the offensive. The whole structure of British strategy began to break down simply because it was originally based on the thousand miles of the North African coast and the French controlled Levant. This manpower constituted the main

16 As Michael Howard puts it:

Cairo had been a British *place d'armes* for nearly sixty years. The establishment of British influence in the successor states of the Ottoman Empire, the development of the oil resources of Iraq and the Persian Gulf, the uneasy responsibilities of the Palestine Mandate, all had increased Britain's military involvement in the area years before the war... Egypt was still the theatre where forces could be most easily concentrated from all parts of the Commonwealth with the exception of Canada. Troops from India, Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa and the United Kingdom could be brought into action, if not against Germany, then at least against her vulnerable Ally, who could thus be turned into a liability rather than an asset to the Axis... The defeat of Italy might influence the attitude of the French authorities in Syria, Lebanon and French North Africa. It would be taken into account in Madrid... and would have important repercussions in the Balkan peninsula.

land forces of the Allies in the region. Added to this was the French Mediterranean Navy. Now all these formidable fighting instruments were no longer available. They passed under the control of the defeated yet hostile and mischievous administration of the Vichy Government under Pétain, and supervised by the Armistice Commission of the Germans and Italians who kept close watch over every French move. *)

As early as September 1940 the Italians advanced sixty miles into Egypt. As long as the British had to contend with the Italians alone, they had no difficulties to inflict a shattering defeat upon them both in the Western Desert (that is, West of Egypt) as well as in Africa. The victorious General Wavell had to halt his advance because, on orders from Churchill, a major part of his troops was diverted to Greece to aid them against Mussolini's invading army. He didn't have enough manpower for both.

The situation soon deteriorated and took on almost catastrophic proportions. Hitler decided that he could not leave his friend and ally, Mussolini, in the lurch, and an Africa Corps under the leadership of General Erwin Rommel were formed and dispatched to Tripoli, arriving there on February 12, 1941. From that moment on, until October 23, 1942, when Montgomery launched his attack from El Alamein, the British were mostly on the defensive and at times in mortal danger of being overrun.

It is needless to relate the trials and tribulations the British suffered during that sixteen-month period. Many books were written about these battles; the contending armies being thrown back and forth, in the process of which British commanding generals were nominated and dismissed. But it is perhaps worthwhile to refresh our memory about the events and somber mood prevailing in June 1942, after the British were defeated by Rommel's Panzerarmee and forced to retreat in disarray until they reached the Egyptian frontier. Tobruk fell on June 21, and Rommel took 33,000 prisoners. In a matter of days, the British found themselves pushed back as far as Alexandria.

It was one of the most humiliating hours in the war for the British. Everything seemed to collapse, with the prospect of the Axis conquering the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East from Egypt to Iran, with the Germans sweeping down from the Caucasus, with the possibility of linking up with Rommel's panzer divisions. It was feared that should this happened, it could doom the British Empire and the

Allied cause. The British began mass evacuation of civilians from Egypt toward Palestine. In Cairo the British Embassy burned their documents, anticipating the entrance of the Germans into Egypt and its capital to fall.

As said before, it all started with the diversion of the mass of the British troops in a desperate and futile attempt to save Greece from being overrun, at a time when Wavell was on the offensive, pursuing the remnants of Mussolini's troops (after 135,000 were captured, with only 555 British killed) through Libya. It is conceivable that had Wavell had enough manpower and the ferocious determination of a Jewish Army, the pursuit would have continued into Vichy North Africa and thus achieved one of the decisive victories of the war. As it was, it took the British two years to achieve victory over the Germans in the Western Desert (from April 3, 1941, when Rommel took Benghazi, until April 7, 1943, when the Allied troops converged from east and west: the British from Libya, and the Americans from North Africa at Gabès, Tunisia). The Allied campaign (thanks to a Jewish Army) might have been advanced by a year or more, and created a chain reaction, speeding the subsequent campaigns in Southern Italy, the fall of Mussolini, the unconditional surrender of the Germans in Italy, the collapse of some reluctant satellites in the Balkans, thus affecting all fronts, including the timing and scope of [Operation] Overlord – the invasion of Europe in Normandy. I don't want to exaggerate. The Jewish Army could not have been a decisive factor in the Allied victory. It was won anyhow. The speculations – and they are only that – are about tipping the scales in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Western Desert, perhaps in North Africa. Yet, tipping the scales on one front might have had an effect on other fronts, too.

But a Jewish army was necessary not only for a successful campaign in the Western Desert. It was almost imperative in the Eastern Mediterranean; in almost all the countries in the Middle East. A Jewish army, in all probability, would have changed the political and moral climate in that region. This, in turn, might have had an effect on a post war settlement of the Palestine problem.

In order to understand the meaning and implications of the above statement, it is important to recall what were the arguments of the British against a Jewish Army, and to examine their validity within the context of the then prevailing reality as well as subsequent developments.

We remember what General Barker said about the three wars – that

any Jewish military unit in Palestine will cause an uprising of the Arabs in all the states of the Middle East as well as in Palestine. General Wavell on a later occasion expressed a similar opinion, that if we grant Jews special fighting units "What will the Arabs say?" *) This was the accepted line of the British Government (and the U.S. Government as well) that not only a Jewish Army, but even a limited unit, a division, a brigade, would be a provocation to the Arabs, and they will side with the Axis, and British troops will be diverted from the war against the Axis to put down uprisings in the Arab countries.

The second argument was that a Jewish Army would be dangerous because, after the war (or perhaps in the middle of it) "The Jews might use the weapons given them for evil," that is, they might turn against the British and occupy Palestine, or something to that effect. *)

Reviewing certain chapters in the history of mankind, even that of the most enlightened parts of it, one observes with dismay the behavior and pronouncements of politicians and generals in whose hands the fate of nations is entrusted. The two anti-Jewish Army arguments just recorded now sound as though they were voiced by individuals who arrived from another planet, and not aware of what was going on on earth before their very noses. The Arabs will revolt! They revolted and betrayed the British anyhow, whenever and wherever they thought they had a chance, without waiting for the pretext of a Jewish Army or small military units. The Arabs revolted for a variety of reasons. First, because they didn't like the British presence in their country under any conditions. Second, because they were sure that Hitler would win, and they wanted to be on the winning side. Hence, they tried to convince the Führer that they were his faithful and abiding friends. Third, they had no flair for democracy, and political authoritarianism was natural to them; after the war it became the norm of all Arab states in the region. Fourth, they had no sympathy for nations belonging to what is called Western (Judeo-Christian) civilization, or, of course, at that time, for Communist Russia.

The Arab leaders, from King Farouk to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini, were in direct contact with Hitler, expressing their fervent sympathy and waiting for his armies to "liberate" their countries. The Arab intelligentsia and youth were in their vast majority pro-Nazi, and in ecstatic admiration of the Führer. One of the many was the present President of Egypt Anwar el-Sadat. And so were most of the military,

one of whom was intercepted while flying out of Egypt to transmit to the German the British war plans in the region. When the Germans reached the Egyptian frontier, King Farouk communicated with Hitler through his Ambassador in Teheran, congratulating him on his victorious armies and stating that “he was filled with strong admiration for the Führer and respect for the German people, whose victory over England he desired most sincerely... Now that German troops stood victorious at the Egyptian frontier, the (Egyptian) people... long for an occupation of the country, certain that the Germans are coming as liberators...” But Farouk did not limit himself to words; in order to prove his loyalty to the Nazis he provided important intelligence information on British military dispositions and offered “to come to the aid of the Axis troops at the decisive moment.” It seemed that with the fall of Tobruk the decisive moment arrived.

In Iraq a virulent pro-Axis Government under the premiership of Rashid Ali was installed, and in April 1941 it appealed to Hitler for German “protection.” The Nazis were only too willing to oblige, and began an airlift from air bases in Syria under Vichy’s control. To cope with the situation, the British had to put down the rebellion in Baghdad, and invade Lebanon and Syria in order to do away with the Nazi bases in Syria.

The British had to transfer 2,000 troops from India (mostly from non-combatant services), and a few desultory, small, non-combatant Hebrew units from Palestine to put down the rebellion, occupy Baghdad, and the British air base in Habbaniyah.¹⁷ The entire Iraqi Army numbering 9,000 troops with heavy artillery, and an air force reinforced by German air support from bases in Syria surrendered unconditionally. The entire action took a couple of days, but before the British entered Baghdad, terrible pogroms against the Jews took place on June 1 and 2, 1941.

The invasion of Syria was a more difficult enterprise because the French troops put up stiff resistance. In the end the British (and the Allied forces, including the Free French and Polish units) prevailed. The German airfields were eliminated.¹⁸

17 In all probability Raziel was asked by the British to come to Baghdad and participate in the overthrow of Rashid Ali. ... before he perished in the mission ... [parts of footnote undecipherable]

18 In the invasions and conquests of Syria and Lebanon, the British made good use of a

A Jewish Army could have made things simpler, and operations easier and speedier. It could have played a part in every single operation in the Middle East and the Western Desert, probably in North Africa. It could have affected the nature of the war by eliminating the element of fear of Arab blackmail, that they will transfer their allegiance to Hitler. The British never had their allegiance. But the presence of a Jewish Army might have made it more difficult for the Arabs anywhere to carry out their mischief. They might have developed a healthy respect for the Hebrews and become accustomed to the idea that they will have to live with them in a Free Palestine in a new era after the war. A Jewish Army might have precluded the need of the underground to raise the banner of rebellion against the British. In the presence of a Jewish Army the White Paper would have become an incongruous anachronism, and a satisfactory solution to the Palestine problem might have been found, giving the country a status of independence, with some connections with the British Commonwealth of Nations. The solution would have been based on the principle of repatriation of all the Hebrews from Europe. This would have solved the problem of majority that Nordau, Jabotinsky, Zangwill and probably Brandeis were so anxious about after World War I. This, in turn, would have prevented the Arab-Israeli war and the flight of the Arab population. Palestine would have developed into a bi-national state, based on a partnership to build up a new civilization, combining the genius of the two peoples.

The British were blind to the situation and could not see things in realistic terms, afraid that the Jewish Army after the war might turn against them. What happened was the opposite: because there was no Jewish Army, the Hebrews after the war rebelled against British rule, and having inflicted humiliating blows upon them, compelled them to evacuate the country. All this was not preordained. It was only a result of a benighted policy, carried out by men deprived of vision, a correct evaluation of the balance of forces involved and, of course, with their moral sense atrophied.

The British not only lost Palestine but much more. It was the Hebrew resistance that inspired other peoples under Colonial rule to follow that example, and in so doing brought about the liquidation of the British Empire.

special reconnaissance and sabotage unit of the Haganah. The unit was commanded by Moshe Dayan, and in his operation he lost his left eye. *)

Such speculations are the despair of the historian, knowing quite well how futile an exercise it is. Yet one cannot exorcise them from one's mind. They certainly contain some clues of what might have happened if only politicians and generals were not obsessed with the wrong fears, and had a better grasp of the realities of the situation – not to speak of moral or human considerations.

* * *

To return for a moment to the controversy between the Americans (and the Russians), and the British about the strategy that should have been taken during World War II – whether the Allies committed an irreparable mistake by not having aimed at defeating the Third Reich by invading Europe through its “soft underbelly” (the Balkans); – or, that the only way to destroy Hitler was to invade the Continent from the northwest, coming to grips with the mass of his army and annihilating it; – to those who argue for what is called the “Mediterranean strategy,” that is, the invasion through the Balkans, indicates that had that strategy been adopted, the war would have ended sooner and prevented the Russians from occupying Eastern Europe. Were these critics right, of course the Holocaust would have been cut short before its completion and Europe would not be divided.

As early as 1952 Chester Wilmot wrote in “**The Struggle for Europe**,” that had the Allies accepted the Mediterranean strategy instead of “Overlord,” the Balkans instead of Western Europe:

... In the Summer of 1944 they had it in their power, if not to end the war against Germany that year, at least to ensure that the great capitals of Central Europe – Berlin, Prague and Vienna – would be liberated from Nazi rule by the West, not the East.

Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, made the following entries in his diary:

(25, October 1943) Our build-up in Italy is much slower than that of the Germans and far slower than I expected. We shall have to have an almighty row with the Americans who have put us in

this position with their insistence to abandon the Mediterranean operations for the very problematical Cross-Channel operations. We are now beginning to see the full beauty of the Marshall strategy! It is quite heart-breaking when we see what we might have done this year if our strategy had not been distorted by the Americans...

The Americans opposed this strategy for a variety of reasons: that it was not realistic; it would exasperate the Russians and who knows what their reaction might have been; besides the Americans suspected that the British were interested in it not from an overall Allied point of view, but because it was in the tradition of Imperialist policy.

We are not competent to judge and to have a clear-cut opinion in this controversy. But it is clear to the writer that the presence of a large size Jewish army would have lent the war a new dimension, attuned to moral principles, to compassion for human lives, an outrage against the Holocaust. By affecting the climate of the war, it might also, at least to a degree, have influenced the strategic thinking of those who charted the roads to victory. The Jews of Europe didn't live to see that victory except for a pitiful remnant. And to the amazement of the survivors, they quickly found out that the war against them did not end with the defeat of Hitler, but the beginning of a new phase: the war of the British Empire against them.

* * *

A Jewish Army was not achieved for a variety of reasons, some of which we enumerated in the narrative of this chapter. However, one reason probably stands out over all others: the Zionists didn't ask for it. They never presented a grand design to the British: how the Jews could contribute substantially to victory. Regardless how powerful and impressive the campaign led by the Committee for a Jewish Army in the U.S. and Great Britain, and regardless how much these Committees aroused public opinion and won support, it could not achieve its purpose as long as the World Zionist Organization was not for it. They were not for it because they didn't believe in its feasibility. The agitation of the Committee for a Jewish Army went against their grain and traditional way of handling Jewish affairs. They were against public pressure, against

special Committees, against full page advertisements in the press, against unrestrained and vociferous proclamations; they were for reasonable and responsible 'diplomacy' for discreet pleading and arguing. They were for minimal demands.¹⁹

But, from the beginning of the war till its end, they were primarily preoccupied with a post-war political settlement of Palestine. They eagerly searched for each and every sign that may offer a clue to what Great Britain intends to do **after the war**; what the attitude of the American Administration will be. Or, Weizmann got it into his head that one can strike a deal with Ibn Saud, making him "King of Kings" of all the Arabs, and bribing him with ten or twenty million pounds to agree to a Jewish autonomous commonwealth in the framework of the Arabian Empire.²⁰ He pestered the White House and the State Department about it time and again, until this bubble burst with an angry and indignant denial by King Saud. *)

Of particular interest is that the Zionists' 'Encyclopedic' report characterizes the main force behind the propaganda and the mass campaign of the Jewish Army Committee as a splinter group, refusing to be cognizant of the fact that even sworn Zionist historians agree that the Irgun Emissaries, with their imaginative and bold methods of mobilizing public opinion, dwarfed all the Zionist activities in this field. If anything, in this as in other subsequent campaigns, in the minds of the public at large it looked as if the old-time Zionist organizations were imitators and splinter groups from the main stream of the dynamic movement launched by the Hebrew Emissaries, and not the other way

19 In an exhaustive entry about the Emergency Council for Zionist Affairs in **The Encyclopedia of Zionism in Israel**, it is reported that:

At the beginning in 1940 the Emergency Council for Zionist Affairs fought against the activities of splinter groups, as committees and organizations set up by the Bergson group which pressed for radical action on the Palestinian problem. In a number of publications, including "**A Warning to the Zionists of America**," the Emergency Council urged Zionists throughout the U.S. to mobilize public opinion behind "accredited" Zionist groups and to withhold support from splinter organizations that acted contrary to official Zionist policy and could only serve to confuse the public regarding the aims of World Zionism. These controversies consumed considerable effort and energy.

20 The British and Weizmann had the same illusion during World War I, when they thought that a deal with Saudi's enemies, ..., Hussein meant a deal with all the Arab princes under the... [parts of footnote undecipherable].

[a]round. But the British and the U.S. State Department preferred to adopt the Zionist claim in this dispute.

The American Zionists were mainly if not exclusively preoccupied with post-war developments. Dr. Emanuel Neumann visited the State Department on June 18, 1942, and asked G.P. Merriam of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs whether the Department had any ideas about the post-war status of Palestine, and what solution is envisaged. He also intimated that perhaps the best way to a solution would be in a wide framework within which Palestine would be included. Merriam told him that “most thought and energies of the Department were being devoted to minute-by-minute problems directly connected with the war.”

* * *

This can be documented *ad infinitum*. As to the Jewish Army, the Zionists stuck to their minimal demands and the British refused even these, but the latter could not altogether ignore the clamor made by the ‘dissidents’ and their friends in America. What they decided to do was procrastinate as long as possible, and at the end to defuse the issue by first offering Jewish battalions, and then the Jewish Brigade.²¹

If we dealt at such length with the failure to create a Jewish army, it was for two reasons. First, in all of the Zionist and general history books the problem is not touched upon, or is dealt with in a most insignificant manner robbing it of all meaning. Second, because the same spirit which animated the British in refusing the formation of a Jewish army guided British policy concerning the extermination of the Jews in Europe. As they rejected a Jewish army, they opposed any plan to rescue the Jews, or at least a good number of them, from being annihilated, because in their calculations such a plan would be directly or indirectly connected

21 Perhaps one should append a tragic and fantastic footnote to this chapter: There was a Jewish Army of sorts in World War II, 130,000 strong but in Hungarian uniform, serving in auxiliary units on the side of the Nazis, on the Eastern front against the Russians. They were Hungarian citizens inducted for this special purpose. The writer is not aware of any protests on the part of Hitler against this participation in the war. Those who were withdrawn and returned before the end of hostilities with the Hungarian armed forces were later swept by the whirlwind of the Final Solution, presided over by Eichmann (see pp. 185-197. *)

with opening the gates of Palestine. The motivations behind this policy were the same: a mixture of addle-headedness, fear of the phantom of pan-Arab power, and a streak of cruelty, lack of compassion for the agonies of a whole people being exterminated in the millions. At least in one respect, as far as the Jewish condition was concerned, in this sense the British waged the war as if they were playing chess where wooden figures are involved, and the human dimensions were lacking. More than that, they played all the time into Hitler's hands, letting him achieve one of his main war aims – the physical elimination of the Jewish people from the Continent, if he can get away with it. The British and their allies, the U.S., did just that: They let him get away with it.

* * *

Excerpt from **The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War** – Michael Howard, pp. 24-25 (New York, Frederick A. Praeger publishers).

There was a further reason why the American hesitated to accept British plans. The US Army Planning Staff drew a sharp distinction between the United Kingdom itself, which they were prepared to defend, and 'British interests' – particularly British Imperial interests – which they were not. As early as the autumn of 1940 they had feared that 'as the danger to the British Isles becomes less acute, to support Great Britain might well amount to supporting, at first indirectly and then directly, British positions throughout the world – in short to acquiesce in British grand strategy'. They observed that 'British deployments and operations apparently were undertaken primarily with a view to maintaining the integrity of the British Empire'. They did not want to become drawn into protecting British possessions and interests, either in the Far East or in the Middle East, and operations which derived their rationale from Britain's position in the latter theatre awoke their immediate suspicions. Operations in the Mediterranean and the Balkans were thus peculiarly suspect to them. The arguments which the British advanced at Washington in favor of landings in French North Africa were denounced by one senior US Army Planner as 'persuasive rather than rational', and were generally believed in the War Department to be 'motivated more largely by political than by sound strategic purposes'. There was a very strong fear in influential American quarters that American soldiers were being cozened into picking British political chestnuts out of the fire. Nowhere is this more frankly expressed than in the account which General Albert C. Wedemeyer, then a senior

officer on General Marshall's Operations and Planning Staff, gives in his memoirs of the staff conference in London in April 1942:

The British were masters in negotiations – particularly were they adept in the use of phrases or words which were capable of more than one interpretation. Here was the setting, with all the trappings of a classical Machiavellian scene. I am not suggesting that the will to deceive was a personal characteristic of any of the participants. But when matters of state were involved, our British opposite numbers had elastic scruples. To skirt the facts for King and Country was justified in the consciences of these British gentlemen... What I witnessed was the British power of finesse in its finest hour, a power that had been developed over centuries of successful international intrigue, cajolery and tacit compulsions... It is true, I thought, that the sun never sets on the British Empire. But neither does the dove of peace. Moreover, the wings of justice had constantly been clipped as British influence and possessions were increased all over the world.²²

General Wedemeyer's views should not, perhaps, be regarded as entirely typical; but the fact that they could be entertained at all by an officer of his seniority and influence does something to explain why United States planners were not always prepared to accept British proposals at their face value.

²² Albert C. Wedemeyer, **Wedemeyer Reports**, New York 1958, pp. 105-106.

Chapter 8

A proclamation On the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews

The Irgun emissaries succeeded to fight these inhibitions of the Jews, the timorousness of the Western Allies, and the conspiracy of silence around Hitler's campaign to exterminate the Jews. They used every channel, employed every conceivable method, fought through every obstacle. This struggle took on several forms: organizational, propagandistic, diplomatic. Here we can touch only sketchily on three or four of their innovative methods and instruments of action. First (though not in a chronological order) was the **Proclamation on the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews**, signed by 1,521 outstanding personalities in all walks of American life: members of the Cabinet, Justice, Ambassadors, Senators, members of the House of Representatives, Governors, religious ministers of all denominations, as well as numerous rabbis of all three branches of American Judaism; celebrated authors, artists, stars in the entertainment world, newspaper and radio men, and many executives of large business enterprises. The text was published on a full two page-spread in the New York Times and other leading papers throughout the country as a paid message. The opening and closing paragraphs read:

We, free people of America, a nation proudly fighting under its own flag against the enemies of freedom and civilization in this global war for survival, proclaim to our valiant allies, the British Commonwealth of Nations, to the free peoples everywhere in the world, as well as to our godless enemies:

That we shall no longer witness with pity alone, and with passive sympathy, the calculated extermination of the ancient Jewish people by the barbarous Nazis.

We proclaim the right of the Jews of the old world to live in freedom and equality, enjoying the rights and privileges of all other human beings.

We proclaim our belief in the moral right of the disinherited, stateless Jews of Europe and of the stalwart young Jewish people of Palestine to fight – as they ask to fight – as fellow-soldiers in this war, standing forth in their own name and under their own banner, fighting as The Jewish Army.

We proclaim our belief that to allow these Jews to fight now is a vital contribution to victory and an immediate moral necessity for the cause of world freedom.

... We Americans are now embattled in war to the death in order to determine the fate of the entire world for a time long beyond our own lives.

... But what can we Americans do for the European Jews under Hitler's yoke?

... To commiserate is not enough. Our pity will not stay the doom of millions... To pride ourselves on tolerance and good-will and to make predictions and promises that after the war somehow or other everybody and everything will naturally slip back into place, is tantamount to evasion of harrowing reality. We will be judged guilty if we do not change our present remote attitude to a positive, bold course of moral action.

... THEREFORE, from this day onward... by virtue of the great moral authority vested in our Nation at the present critical historic conjuncture, we, people of America, recognize the solution of the age-old Jewish problem in Europe as one of the objectives of democracy and as a preliminary condition to permanent peace in the world.

... We recognize the right of these Jews to return to their place among the free peoples of the earth; so that the remnant of tortured Israel... may take up life as a free people...

... Thus, in a new regenerated humanity which will arise from the ruins of a world of blood and hatred, an end will be put to the scandal of history, of a great and ancient people compelled to haunt the corridors of Time as ghosts and baggers and waifs of every storm that rages.

Thus our war-torn world will witness the Army of the Fighting Jew marching shoulder to shoulder with the Legion of the United Nations to ultimate victory!

Part III

The Holocaust

Chapter 9

Could the Jews have been saved?

The Wannsee Conference

All historians are in agreement that the fate of the Jews was sealed during the hour and a half conference of second rank officials (mostly Undersecretaries of State) and representatives of the police, the SS and others – all in all there were 24. They assembled on a directive issued on January 20, 1942 by Hermann Göring. The gathering is known as the “Wannsee Conference” because it took place in a house in a Berlin suburb by that name.

It was during that conference that it was decided to exterminate all the Jews in Europe – from the North Sea to the Urals, including those of England, Ireland, Sweden, Turkey and Switzerland, 11 million of them.¹ They also decided the various kinds of death to mete out to the Jews, and it seems they came to the conclusion that gas would be the most efficient and economical way of doing it. The conference entered history as the one that decided upon the “Final Solution” to the Jewish problem.

There was an unanimity in all the major decisions. Some problems like the fate of the Mischlings, descendants of mixed marriage between Jew and Gentile required clarification whether they should be liquidated or only sterilized; and of the elderly Jews who distinguished themselves as heroes during World War I and won the highest decorations. They should perhaps be put in a special concentration camp with no great hardship and suffering.²

Heydrich presided and wound up the meeting with a request for

1 Adolph Eichmann both prepared the statistics and other “research material” and has written the minutes. The statistics contained serious errors. The nature of the minutes will be discussed in the text.

2 See further on the concentration camp Theresienstadt.

support in every possible way in carrying out the tasks connected with the “Final Solution.” In a sense he was greatly relieved and satisfied: before the conference he was worried. Some, if not most, of the participants were civil servants who were not replaced when Hitler came to power. They were not Nazi zealots and not even members of the party. They might have offered objections both out of humanitarian considerations as well as on legal grounds. To his pleasant surprise nothing of the kind happened. They were most understanding and cooperative. After Heydrich’s closing remarks, the participants went into another room for lunch. Liquor was served. The mood was jovial and they spoke of other things.

This macabre conference, though its statistical and factual results are recorded in minutest detail, remains nonetheless beyond human comprehension. We cannot ever hope to understand the meaning, motivations and purpose of the Holocaust, and I doubt whether any sane person will, were he even to ponder over it a hundred years. He may claim or think that he does, but in the last analysis he is deluding himself.

As far as we are concerned, the fact that the Holocaust was a historic reality, haunts us and it will continue to haunt us till the end of our days, and probably to many who will come after us – the question will repeatedly be asked: could the Jews have been saved? We try to find a clue if not an answer in the narrow framework of documents as well as in the events of the time. What did Göring’s directive say? Here is the complete text:

Berlin, July 31, 1941

The Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich

Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan

Chairman of the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich

To: The Chief of the Security Police and the SD,
SS Major General Heydrich, Berlin:

As supplement to the task which was entrusted to you in the decree dated January 24, 1939, to solve the Jewish question by emigration and evacuation in the most **favorable** way possible, given present conditions, I herewith commission you to carry out

all necessary preparations with regard to organizational, substantive, and financial viewpoints for a total solution (Gesamtlösung) of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe. Insofar as the competencies of other central organizations are hereby affected, these are to be involved.

I further commission you to submit to me promptly an overall plan showing the preliminary organizational, substantive and financial measures for the execution of the intended final solution (Endlösung) of the Jewish question.

(signed) Göring³

On the face of it, it is an ominous document portending mass transportation of Jews to unknown destinations. But regardless how carefully one reads and rereads it, it doesn't necessarily sound like an order for mass extermination. In it Göring speaks about a "Final Solution" without specifying the means to be employed to bring it about. Did he leave it to Heydrich, Himmler and the others to figure out, although he certainly knew by that time that mass killings were already carried out by the SS and the Einsatzgruppen (special commandos of killers with no other task). But was it a clear instruction couched in code language, or was it so general that no definitive decision was yet taken as far as he was concerned?

Here perhaps one may relate to the often-expressed theory that the Nazis were not unanimous how to get rid of the Jews. There were at least four schools of thought, not always clearly delineated, sometimes overlapping in content and means of execution, and with the central Nazi figures involved in both arguing their own favorite plan, and then yielding, compromising, or just leaving it up in the air. One cannot detect a coherent and neat schema. Yet there are some indications that such separate "schools of thought" did indeed exist.

The first was represented and actively advocated by Göring. He wanted to get rid of the Jews (from Germany and Austria and wherever the Nazis are in control) by pressuring them to emigrate. In January 1939

3 **A Holocaust Reader** by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, see also the translation by John Lukacs that differs in slight nuances.

he created a Reich Central Office for Jewish immigration, and a week before Hitler threatened “the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe” (January 30, see above page), he ordered Interior Minister Frick “to promote (Jewish) immigration through all possible means.”⁴

John Lukacs’ evaluation is that “Göring did not seem to have had a dominant inclination to inflict systematic cruelties on Jews.”⁵ If by this he meant to say that Göring was not as obsessed with the Jews as Hitler was, Lukacs may be right, but this says little in his favor. He was a war criminal of the first magnitude and in the last account one of the main architects of the Holocaust. What is important is that he thought, at least until late in 1941, that the solution is to expel the Jews. This might not have been much different from what Hitler wanted in practice – independently of or in contradiction to his ideology. At the beginning he, too, probably aimed to expel the Jews and not exterminate them.

Many of his henchmen and satellites wished their Jews to disappear, and with them the Jewish problem. *) In the first years of the war Mussolini not only permitted the Jews to leave Italy, but in fact helped them: he allowed them a favorable exchange rate to obtain foreign currency. By October 1941 6,000 Italian Jews (a seventh of the community) immigrated mostly for America, and with them also left thousands of foreign Jews who lived in Italy. (The attitude of the Rumanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian Governments will be analyzed further in this chapter.)

Anyhow, the point is, that at the beginning, at all events, the prevailing policy in Germany and the satellites was to let the Jews go. But at the same time there was in the Nazi hierarchy a second trend represented mainly by Goebbels, Göring’s implacable enemy. He was against permitting

4 Though the special immigration office was entrusted to the Minister of Interior and Chief of Police Heydrich, Göring took a personal interest in the matter both as to the measures to force Jews out of the Reich as speedily as possible, as well as preventing certain categories of Jews from being sent to death in the East. In 1940 he ordered that expulsion of Jews to Poland to be temporarily suspended; he intervened for a number of individual Jews in the autumn of 1941; he “obtained a respite of rather more than a year for the families of Jewish armament workers in the Reich. *)

5 Others, among them Speer have an opposite evaluation, and consider him as one of the worst criminals in his solution to the Jewish problem. Speer tells “... Once, in the prison yard something was said about Jewish survivors in Hungary. Göring remarked coldly: **So, there are still some there? I thought we had knocked off all of them. Somebody slipped up again**” (p. 512).

the Jews to immigrate, but advocated keeping them as hostages for a potential ransom if and when it will be necessary. What the ransom would be is not yet clear.

The third was a “territorial” solution. Hitler thought about it on occasion. There were in his fantasy several variations. The earliest perhaps was a “Jewish Ghetto State,” a reservation in the Lublin region with some kind of controlled self-rule. This was perhaps a variation of Goebbels’ idea of hostages – to be kept for a possible deal with the U.S. He was convinced that the large Jewish community in the U.S. was also powerful, to a considerable degree runs the American Government and keeps Roosevelt captive, and would certainly see to it that a bargain should be struck with him to save the Jews in the “reservation” from torture and death. But he soon realized that it would not work, not so much because he was disabused about the loyalty of American Jews to their European kin, or their influence over the Administration, but because the organization of “a Jewish State” of perhaps millions of Jews within such a confined area as the projected Lublin reservation is an impossible proposition. *)

There were other fantastic plans for a “territorial solution,” for instance, the evacuation of all the Jews to Madagascar. There are two startling elements about this project. There is a memorandum about it composed at the request of Eichmann by Dr. Josef Löwenhertz, head of the Jewish community in Vienna. Löwenhertz was asked to put down “some basic thoughts” how to organize the evacuation of about four million Jews from Europe after the war, of all places, presumably to Palestine. Why Palestine? Because as we shall see from the minutes of the Wannsee Conference, England will be conquered and thus its colonies and mandated territories will be under Nazi control. But this was in all probability only a ploy and the word Palestine was a code word for Madagascar, which was kept a top Reich secret. The plan seems to have been born in the German Foreign Office and discretely conveyed to other departments for comment. But with all these things we never know exactly what they really meant, and probably they were all intended as a method to indoctrinate the higher hierarchy of the Nazis that the aim is to get rid of the Jews totally, – not a trace of them should remain, if possible by expulsion, but should these means prove impracticable, then, according to Hitler’s and his henchmen’s logic – the only thing left was **extermination**. This was the fourth plan

that was finally adopted. The deed came before the definition. The process of exterminating the Jews started long before the Wannsee Conference. The conference had the task to formulate a coordinated plan.

* * *

The question is whether the Nazis were determined to exterminate the Jews under any and all conditions. It seems to this writer that perhaps with the exception of Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels and Heydrich, the rest of the Nazi hierarchy was not necessarily obsessed, and hence not unconditionally committed. The others – the generals, captains of industry, some financiers, those in charge of arms production and the provision of food, took the extermination policy for granted simply because Hitler so decreed, yet in certain cases viewed it as an interference in their own affairs. It doesn't seem that in Hitler's Germany moral or human consideration play any part in the life of the nation. But for the sake of expediency, the elimination of the Jews was not desirable to everybody, even in the higher echelons of the Reich. If enough pressure and threats would have been exerted upon them individually and collectively, to take at face value the various euphemisms used by the top Nazis, such as immigration, evacuation, expulsion, or mobilization for work in tolerable conditions, they might have done so. There is no compelling reason to think that the top Nazis would not have yielded to pressure under any circumstances.

* * *

The evidence that Hitler gave the order to exterminate the Jews is to be found mainly in the testimony of the war criminals at the Nuremberg trials. Though each of them was an arch criminal and their testimony was aimed at proving their innocence (in the guise of "ignorance") that they did nothing on their own except to obey orders, to obey the law, and Hitler's orders were the law, they in all probability told the truth, that the annihilation of the Jewish people in Europe emanated directly from Hitler. The only document which contains instructions to bring about a "Final Solution" was signed by Göring and addressed to Heydrich.

* * *

Sometime after receiving Göring's instructions, Heydrich summoned Eichmann who told the court in Jerusalem about the "traumatic" experience of this meeting. Heydrich opened the conversation, speaking as the Nazi big-shots usually did when dealing with the Jewish problem, about immigration, and then said: "**The Führer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews.**" After which, "very much against his habits he remained silent for a long while, as though he wanted to test the impact of his words. I remember it even today. In the first moment I was unable to grasp the significance of what he said, because he was so careful in choosing his words, and then I understood and didn't say anything, because there was nothing to say any more. For I had never thought of such a thing, such a solution through violence. I now lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest; I was, so to speak, blown out."

Then Heydrich gave him some practical instructions to acquaint himself with the process of extermination already going on in Poland, told him the jurisdiction under which the plan will be carried out, and that the code name for the extermination of the Jews is "Final Solution." *)

This episode in itself defies the capacity of the human imagination. How can a monster like Eichmann speak such a human language, using phrases and sentences which sound so plausible that we are almost tempted to believe him? But we know he was lying, there was no humanity in him. But the mystery haunts us.

* * *

The minutes of the Wannsee Conference are a phantasmal document. Even though in retrospect we know what the conference was all about – its purpose, the meaning of the code word "evacuation" (Aussiedlung), its persona dramatis, yet, in some respects the protocol contains certain points which are not cleared up in a satisfactory way, at least in the mind of this writer. In the context of our narrative, two elements call for special attention. One is the fact that it is written in code, not that it was translated in code, but the proceedings, the speeches and the exchanges were **spoken** in code. We will discuss this later.

Second is the fact that Heydrich who presided and was the main speaker gave a detailed account of the emigration policy concerning the

Jews, followed by the Nazis up to that time, complete with statistics, modus operandi, financing, etc. The report in itself is very significant and illuminating and we think it is worthwhile, at the risk of repetition, to reproduce most of it as summarized in Eichmann's minutes. It stands to reason that Heydrich found it necessary to go into such detail because he had to convince the participants that until then, the Nazis did everything possible to get rid of the Jews by encouraging and indeed forcing them to emigrate, but now, impelled by changed circumstances and the fortunes of war, this policy had to be abandoned. Now, emigration will be superseded by evacuation which will lead to a Final Solution of the problem. What these code words meant was, that the Jews will be deported to the east, assembled in Ghettos, and then transferred to concentration camps for physical extermination, or brought there directly.

According to Eichmann's minutes, Heydrich in his account of what had been achieved by emigration, listed "two important aspects of this aim:

- "a. Forcing the Jews out of the various areas of life of the German people;
- "b. Forcing the Jews out of the living space of the German people.

(It is not a clearly defined distinction and for the time being let's leave it at that)."

The text of the minutes reads further:

"In carrying out these efforts, acceleration of the emigration of the Jews from Reich territory, being the only possible *provisional* solution, was undertaken in intensified and systematic fashion.

By decree of the Reich Marshal, a *Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration* was set up in January 1939, and its direction was entrusted to the Chief of the Security Police and the SD. *) In particular, its tasks were:

- a. To take all measures toward *preparation* for intensified emigration of the Jews;
- b. To *direct* the stream of emigration;
- c. To expedite emigration in *individual cases*.

(Italics in the original)

The objectives of these tasks were to cleanse the German living space of Jews in **a legal way**.

The disadvantages entailed by such a forcing of emigration

were clear to all authorities. But in the **absence of other possible solutions**, they had to be accepted for the time being.

In the ensuing period, the handling of emigration was not only a German problem, but also a problem with which the authorities of the **countries of destination** or immigration had to deal. *)

Financial difficulties – such as increases decreed by the various foreign governments in the moneys which immigrants were required to have in landing fees – as well as lack of steamship berths, continually intensified restrictions, or **bans on immigration hampered the emigration efforts exceedingly**. *)

Despite these difficulties, a total of approximately 537,000 Jews was processed into emigration between the assumption of power and the date of October 31, 1941, consisting of the following:

Since January 30, 1933: from Altreich (Germany within the boundaries prior to March 1938) approx. 360,000

Since March 15, 1938: from Ostmark (Austria) approx. 147,000

Since March 15, 1938: from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia approx. 30,000

Financing of the emigration was handled by the Jews or Jewish political organizations themselves.

To avoid a situation where only the **proletarized** Jews would remain behind, the principle was followed that well-to-do Jews had to finance the emigration of destitute Jews. To this end, a special assessment of emigration levy, staggered by property levels, was decreed, the proceeds being used to meet financial obligations in connection with the emigration of **destitute Jews**. *)

In addition to the funds raised in German Marks, **foreign currency was needed** for the moneys which emigrants were required to have for landing fees. *)

To conserve the German supply of foreign currencies, **Jewish financial institutions** abroad were prompted by the Jewish organizations in this country, to see to it that appropriate funds were obtained. *)

Through these foreign Jews, a total of approximately \$ 9,500,000 was made available by way of gift up to October 30, 1941. *)

Since then, in view of the dangers of emigration during wartime and in view of the possibilities in the East, the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police **have forbidden the emigration of Jews.** *)

III. Emigration has now been replaced by evacuation of the Jews to the East as a further **possible solution**, in accordance with the previous authorization by the Führer.

However, these actions are to be regarded only as **provisional options**; even now practical experience is being gathered that is of major significance in view of the coming final solution of the Jewish question. *)

Why did we reproduce such a long excerpt from the minutes of the Wannsee Conference? Because it not only is **the** document of the greatest horror in the history of the Jewish people in the diaspora but it also reveals, in my opinion, that the disaster might probably have been avoided if the outside world had not stood by in silence. The Nazis cared a great deal about public opinion, not so much in their own country where it was the least of their concerns, but what the world thinks of them. Hence although Hitler was obsessed with the Jews for reasons we cannot figure out – though hundreds of learned people have tried to explain it in books and essays – the Nazis were always of two minds: to let the Jews go, or to exterminate them.

One should bear in mind that the Wannsee Conference was kept a top secret. The planners and architects of the Final Solution were among themselves, *en famille*. The minutes, too, were one of the best kept secrets in the war. It was marked “Secret Reich Business!” This protocol was not meant to be disseminated among other officials, if at all. No doubt it was sent to Himmler and probably to the Chancellery for Hitler. It certainly was not meant for publication let alone propaganda purposes. Hence, we have a document reflecting the innermost thinking of the highest Nazi officials, their expressions and preoccupations, as if photographed, what the French call *sur le vif* (in the nude). Thus, every sentence, every word is important to gain an insight into the Nazi motivation. If our approach is correct, then the long report by Heydrich on emigration is of great significance, showing that for nine years of the Nazi regime emigration was the main instrument in getting rid of the Jews, though

atrocities were committed almost from the beginning. Heydrich calls this instrument – emigration – unsatisfactory, but the only **possible** solution – there were no others.

Why was it the only possible solution? One may infer from his accounts that in the first nine years of their regime (out of a total of 13½ years) the Nazis could not afford to undertake mass extermination: the world would not stand for it. Perhaps the Germans would not have tolerated it either.

It is also significant that at that time they were still preoccupied with the problem of “legality” – to get rid of the Jews has to be done “in a legal way.” But as time went by, emigration became less and less satisfactory and “the disadvantages entailed by such a forcing of emigration were clear to all authorities.” But the Nazis proceeded in the same way as a temporary solution, “it had to be accepted for the time being.”

This period came to an end for many reasons: it was too slow, and it involved complicated administrative and financial arrangements. But the main cause was that in the process it became clear that “the handling of emigration **was not only a German problem**, but also a problem with which the authorities of the countries of destination or immigration had to deal.”

Relations with foreign governments also became more complicated because some demanded that the prospective immigrants bring with them a certain amount of money to show that they will not be a public charge, or officials demanded higher sums in graft to issue visas. As Heydrich puts it in his report:

“... the various foreign governments... continually intensified restrictions or bans on immigration (which) hampered the emigration efforts exceedingly.”

Those difficulties were simply and primarily that the other countries did not permit the Jews to enter. Some Nazis in charge of Jewish emigration were particularly worried about this fact. In October 1940 when the Foreign Office proposed that the citizenship of all German Jews abroad be cancelled, Eichmann protested vigorously that “such a step might influence other countries which to date were still ready to open their gates to Jewish immigrants...” *) In the late 1930s Eichmann actively cooperated with the Jewish organizations who were engaged in “illegal immigration” from Germany and Austria. He provided them with

various facilities which in retrospect would be unbelievable, if they were not well documented by living witnesses and historians.

So far, the financing had been solved by two factors – the Nazis compelled the rich Jews to pay the expenses of the poor; and foreign Jewish philanthropy paid the rest, as far as foreign currency was concerned. The report indicated that in the period from January 30, 1933 to March 15, 1939, 537,000 Jews emigrated from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Czechoslovakia at a cost to the Jewish philanthropic organizations of \$ 9,500,000 (about \$ 20 per Jew – if the sum is correct).

With the outbreak of the war emigration became quite difficult for the reasons given above: the unwillingness of the countries to admit Jews, and also due to lack of shipping. The Germans were unwilling to provide ships for a variety of reasons, and were not eager to venture out to sea and run the British blockade by submarine and other warships.

The Nazi leadership decided to end the policy of emigration and instead instituted a policy of “evacuation” to the East, which, in the course of events, meant the physical extermination of all the Jews the Germans could get hold of. It is for this purpose that the Wannsee Conference was held, the “administrative” responsibilities allocated, and the cooperation obtained of all the governmental departments not directly charged with this task.

The task was facilitated by two factors: one was that with the occupation of Poland, the invasion of Russia, and the subjugation of the Balkan countries, the Nazis did not need any assistance from foreign governments to dump the Jews there. The Nazis could send them East, and they did. But even this was not a very smooth operation, since some East European countries argued they have enough Jews of their own and did not view favorably the transfer of Jews from the West.

Yet there was a second factor that facilitated extermination. The governments and most of the conquered people in the East, far from caring that the Germans are killing the Jews, themselves plunged into this enterprise with gusto without waiting for instructions from the Nazis. These East European governments were not only collaborating but in some cases served as an example to the Nazis how to do it.

Hence the history of the Nazi policy towards the Jews should be divided roughly into two parts, each part with its subdivisions. From 1933 till the end of 1941 the Jews with some effort could emigrate

from Germany, Austria, the Czech Protectorate and Western Europe and perhaps, also from occupied Poland and the satellites. Instead of 537,000 Jews, perhaps three times as many could have been saved. One reason this did not happen was that the Jews, especially those in Germany and Austria, did not believe the alternative to emigration would be death. There were many German Jews who just refused to believe what Hitler said and wrote. Even in times of stress and humiliation before the war, one could hear among Jews in Germany an expression, said half-jokingly, with gallows humor, that if worse comes to worse, Hitler will intervene on their behalf. Yet, there was a tinge of seriousness to it. It is significant that after the first shock, many German Jews gradually became somewhat adjusted despite all the restrictions, expulsions from professions and businesses, and horrible racial regulations. In 1936 and 1937 **fewer** Jews left Germany than in 1933 and 1934. *)

(The other causes why no more Jews left the Reich and its dominion will be discussed shortly.)

Was the catastrophe unavoidable?

This agonizing question will prey on the minds of Jews not only in this generation, but also for generations to come. No one can be presumptuous enough to think that he knows for sure about anything that happened, or whether it was absolutely certain that a given event, in this case of cataclysmic proportions and unprecedented in history, could be prevented from taking place. One can only evaluate according to given data. Having been a contemporary witness of that period, the writer thinks that the disaster was avoidable, if only the Jews had perceived their condition in a more realistic light and had not been addicted to unrealistic ideologies; had they not been dominated by dogma; had they been less optimistic about their future, blessing themselves with the double premise that God and history will not forsake them; that their survival for so many centuries is a proof of their excellent chance to continue to weather the storm; but, above all, had they not blindly followed their leadership, especially the Zionist leadership, which really was not concerned with the fate of the masses, but only the elect, the chosen ones – as we have indicated more than once in this essay.

Did the Nazis want to kill the Jews or to get rid of them?

Against this background one should analyze Hitler's decision which was crystallized gradually and was finalized at a conference held at Wannsee (a suburb of Berlin) on January 20, 1942, almost a decade after his accession to power. At that conference it was decided to exterminate all the Jews under Nazi domination, and the name of the decision was "The Final Solution." Was it unavoidable?

That Hitler had a vision to exterminate the Jews early in his career no one doubts. He confessed it quite clearly in **Mein Kampf**, and on subsequent occasions he either hinted at his aim or was explicit. At the outbreak of the war, he prophesied the destruction of the Jewish people. When he committed suicide in the bunker of his Chancellery in Berlin on October 30, 1945, he took total solace in the fact that at least one of his war aims was accomplished.

This is no proof that the Jews were doomed under any and all circumstances, because the record shows that Hitler tried for years to get rid of the Jews but not to murder them. There is an abundance of proof to support this thesis. In February 1938 an editorial appeared in the **Schwartzte Korps**, mouthpiece of the SS, entitled: "What should be done with the Jews?" The writer complained that emigration fever had obviously not yet infected the Jews. They were not behaving as if they were sitting on their luggage, ready to leave the country at any moment. Prof. Walter Laqueur who quotes the article, conjectures, with a great deal of plausibility, that "to encourage them (the Jews) new draconian measures were adopted, culminating in the 'Kristallnacht' in November 1938, the burning of the synagogues, mass arrests, and a huge collective fine." *)

* * *

At the beginning the Nazis thought one should send the Jews to Palestine if this was practicable. Thus, one can understand the "transfer agreement" of 1934, and Eichmann's cooperation with the Irgun and Haganah representatives in organizing "illegal" immigration to Palestine. Characteristic of those negotiations was that the Haganah representatives wanted a slow and gradual process, and asked the Nazis to permit training camps for Aliya candidates so they could arrive prepared for productive

life in the Kibbutzim, or engage in other forms of agriculture. But the Nazis were in a rush; they wanted the thing to be done fast.

As mentioned before (see p. 118), when the Nazis were already at the end of their rope, they still tried to make a deal and offered more than 800,000 Jewish survivors concentrated in Hungary to be traded for trucks and other goods. They sent Joel Brand to talk to the Jewish Agency representatives in Turkey. They gave him two weeks to conclude the deal. He arrived to Istanbul on May 13, 1944, and met the next day with Jewish Agency officials in charge of rescue operations. He was astonished at the coolness of the reception. They told him they had no authority to negotiate with him. Bewildered and dismayed, he left for Palestine to negotiate with the Heads of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. But he never reached his destination. Moshe Chertok (Sharett), head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, together with agents of the British CID waited for him in Aleppo, Syria, where the British detectives took him off the train for interrogation. He was arrested and sent to Cairo. Why was Chertok in the company of British secret agents? What was his purpose? It is an obscure story still shrouded in mystery, though there is widespread opinion that Chertok either went of his own free will or was forced by the British to be part of the procedure of arrest. It had a sequel several years later: on June 27, 1955 the Government he headed fell, as a result of a chain reaction no one at the time could foresee. The story is told by various authors and by Joel Brand himself, but the most authenticated and documented one was not by a historian but by a man of letters, Ben Hecht, in **Perfidy**. *)

Hecht analyzed in great details the psychological reasons why Weizmann avoided seeing Joel Brand. *) Perhaps it is relevant for our purpose to reproduce Weizmann's letter to the emissary from Hell, carrying with him a proposal to save almost 900,000 Jews:

Rehovot, 29th Dec. 1944

Mr. Joel Brand
Tel Aviv

Dear Mr. Brand,
I beg you to forgive me for having delayed answering your letter.
As you may have seen from the Press I have been traveling a good

deal and generally did not have a free moment since my arrival. I have read both your letter and memorandum and shall be happy to see you sometime the week after next – about the 10th January.

Miss Itin – my secretary – will get in touch with you to fix up the appointment.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,
Ch. Weizmann

Ben Hecht analyzes every phrase of this letter. We ask the reader to judge for himself and keep in mind four things: 1) The date – 29th December, 1944, that is, seven and a half months after Brand's arrival in Istanbul on his mission to the Jews; 2) after being held prisoner by the British in Cairo, he was released and came to Tel Aviv. He wrote to Weizmann receiving a belated answer several months later. The distance from Rehovot to Tel Aviv is a 30 minute drive; 3) Despite the promise Weizmann never saw Brand; 4) In the meantime the Jews were sent from Hungary to the gas ovens at the rate of 12,000 per day. The upshot was that 434,000 Jews from Hungary had been shipped to Auschwitz and murdered. The rest were saved when the Red Army entered Budapest on February 13, 1945.

* * *

This trend of trying to dump the Jews in Palestine, or for that matter in any other country of the Allied nations, persisted till the very end, and since each attempt met externally with rejection, the Nazis fell back on the alternative: extermination. The Holocaust must be seen in the light of these two alternatives: rescue by the Allied nations, primarily in Palestine; or annihilation. Since rescue was rejected, it was extermination. But it was not preordained; it could have ended differently. There is no solace, no compensation and no excuses for anybody involved.

Had the Jews an opportunity to reach a haven in Palestine (or for that matter anywhere else), it is doubtful if Hitler would have embarked upon the policy of total extermination. It was a climate of quasi global inhumanity whose pioneers and main practitioners were the British (next only to the Nazis and the notorious Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini) that Hitler's fiendishness could come into full implementation.

Great Britain's White Paper of 1939 and Hitler's "Final Solution" though completely different in their respective causes and motivations, cannot but be considered as two sides of the same moral coin. In true historic perspective, they cannot be isolated. They did not emotionally and politically aim at the same thing, but in combination they achieved the same results.

The vice of selectivity

That Zionism did not succeed in time to solve the Jewish problem was a result not only of the vagaries of historic events which could not be foreseen or avoided, but to a significant degree it was also a result of Zionist ideology and *modus operandi*. As a consequence, the Jewish people in Europe were overtaken by the Nazi fury and almost completely wiped off the face of the earth. Though leaders and ideologues of the World Zionist Organization and most of its affiliated political parties used rhetoric, propaganda and dialectics, conveying the impression that their aim was to liberate the Jewish people from oppression and save them from cataclysm, it was, in reality, the opposite of what it presumed to be. In some respects, the established Zionist leadership was motivated by an anti-humanist ideology, viewing the masses of Jews as unworthy, unproductive and degraded human beings whose ultimate fate was of limited interest to them. What these leaders and ideologists were interested in was the spiritual and economic transformation of the Jews into a productive, morally superior, nationally self-conscious and proud people who in Palestine will practice social justice, free from the vices prevalent in other societies. Since such a transformation would require generations to achieve, if at all, the urgent and threatening condition of the Jews was ignored. The exclusively preoccupation of the world wide Zionist apparatus was to spiritually and physically educate a small group ("Khaluzim" – pioneers) to become worthy of redemption, an elite which would set an example for others to imitate or to be excluded. As to the Jewish people as a whole, it was left to its own fate. The subsequent doom of the Jews also stemmed, *mutatis mutandis*, from Zionist ideology, its own inescapable logic and tenets.

It was the deeply inculcated ideology that nearly atrophied the emotional identification of the Zionist leadership with the martyrdom

of their brethren in Europe. One may justifiably ask: why focus the blame on the Zionists alone? Did the non-Zionist organizations do more in the field of rescue? Was their emotional identification greater? Or their moral-humanitarian commitment stronger? It is not easy to answer without having a picture of the political landscape of Jewish organizational life in the U.S. To begin with, one is rather surprised at the inaccuracy of the description given by historians and essayists that at the time there were a great number of Jewish organizations all fighting with each other, which weakened their forces and almost neutralized them. This is just not so: there was no such a multitude of groups. The Zionists practically preempted what in Yiddish idiom is called “the Jewish street,” meaning the public domain. Though a small minority of the population, they were nonetheless numerically superior for the simple reason that there was nobody else to speak of. It is true that there **was** a multiplicity of groups under different names such as the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Conference, the B’nai B’rith, and various political parties affiliated with them, and there were numerous “Landsmanshaftn,” but one can barely treat any of them as independent entities. They were all indoctrinated by Zionist ideology and toed the line on all major issues. To one degree or other they were Zionist fronts, regardless what the laws and by-laws of each individual organization stipulated. Of course, B’nai B’rith is a Masonic Lodge (there are several smaller ones in this country) with a life of its own. But when it came to the public domain (activities) they invariably found themselves on the side of the Zionists. The Yiddishists and Bundists were marginal groups despite the widely circulated Yiddish daily press, especially the *Forward*, which was particularly close to them ideologically. The Yiddish press in general succumbed to Zionist hegemony. The extremist anti-Zionist [American] Council for Judaism arrived later on the scene and does not belong to the period covered by this chapter. Besides, the Council, despite its name, had nothing to do with Judaism – it was almost totally composed of assimilationists with a strong pro-Arab bias, except for its president Lessing J. Rosenwald.

There was, however, one non-Zionist group to be reckoned with: the American Jewish Committee then under the leadership of Judge Joseph Proskauer (president) and Morris D. Waldman (Executive Vice President). As far as rescue was concerned it did not distinguish itself much from

the Zionists; if anything, it did less. But one should not overlook a mitigating factor: it was not a mass organization and as such it could not mobilize any considerable force one way or another. It was an elitist group of plutocrats, with lots of money and fairly good connections with middle echelon officials of the Administration. Whatever the well-to-do and well-meaning individuals of this Committee have done before the war to help Jews in distress abroad, was undertaken discreetly in the old tradition of charitable Jewish institutions run by Emancipationists (which was all to their credit). But they were not mentally prepared to meet an emergency as overwhelming as the Holocaust; not that they were helpless – they could have done a lot – but they **felt** helpless. Neither their upbringing nor experience made them fit for public agitation; nor did they possess the apparatus to undertake a campaign to stir up public opinion. Besides, they regarded such methods with aversion and thought that to speak out loudly in public for all to hear would do more harm than good. They still believed in a quiet approach to individual members of the bureaucracy to plead for specific things on a small scale. They felt their duty was to help Jews in trouble but not to challenge powerful segments of the American people, or to present embarrassing demands to their own government to rescue Jews from abroad in time of war. These timid individuals were especially self-conscious not to do anything which might adversely affect the status and welfare of the Jews in America. To them it was inconceivable to utter anything which might cause displeasure or provoke a rebuke by the Administration, especially since the head of that Administration was none other than Franklin Delano Roosevelt considered by the Jewish community as a paragon of justice and the greatest friend they ever had. Consequently, they refrained from exerting any pressure on the president in order not to disturb the almost idyllic relationship between him and the Jewish community.

Within their own almost exclusive circle they seemed to worry more about antisemitism in America (a quite legitimate preoccupation) than the destruction of the Jews in Europe. *)

As late as the middle of 1944, when thousands of Jews were annihilated daily under Hitler, the American Jewish Committee found nothing more urgent to do than convene a scholarly conference to analyze the nature and roots of antisemitism and how it could be combatted in America. Nonetheless they did less harm than the Zionists for the reason mentioned

above: they were not leaders of a popular movement. It had no chapters and shunned mass membership. It had no influence on any considerable strata of the Jews and commanded no loyalty on the part of anyone. They were unable to spark the emotions and the imagination of any following; they practically had none.

While they did next to nothing to rescue the Jews of Europe, yet they felt it their duty to combat the Hebrew emissaries and their American friends. But since they had no machinery for such mass action of any kind, their public statements against the Hebrew emissaries were rare. Instead, they vehemently intervened with the State Department, insisting that Bergson and his colleagues be deported or otherwise put out of action.⁶

Then there were the ultra-religious Jews of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis and the "Agudat Yisrael," who cooperated wholeheartedly with the Emergency Committee though being aware it was initiated and directed by extreme Hebrew nationalists. But they quickly perceived the basic difference between the Irgun delegation and the Zionists: while the latter viewed rescue through the prism of ideology, the former laid aside all dogma and politics, concentrating on one transcendent imperative – rescue – with no ideological strings attached. These religious organizations had their own Rescue Committee with a representative in Switzerland – and there, too, the representative of the Hebrew emissaries and that of the orthodox cooperated closely.

* * *

In the last account, history's verdict will reflect the amount of psychological and emotional identification of the Jews – Zionists and non-Zionists alike – with those tortured and burnt in the Hitler era. This verdict may be slow in coming, but in the long run it is difficult to see how it will fail to be pronounced clearly and forcefully. The Holocaust is not an event which can be forgotten or relegated to the past, with no consequences to the living, present and future. It will haunt the Jews and western civilized

6 Memorandum of conversation January 10, 1944 between Morris D. Waldman of the American Jewish Committee and Messrs. Murray, Alling and Wilson of the State Department.

humanity until their repressed guilt will surge to their consciousness and force them to face its implications.

Dante was capable of writing about hell because it was sheer imagination. The Holocaust was reality that transcends human imagination. It is doubtful if it will ever be adequately written about. More probably it will recede into the subconscious of civilized humanity, that is, if civilization will survive.⁷

Someone remarked that the difference between Hell and the Holocaust is that in the former humans don't preside over the ghastly tortures or inflict them. In the latter, humans, there is no use to evoke silly metaphors such as beasts or monsters, they were members of perhaps the most civilized nation in Europe, the nation of Goethe and Kant – did both; the deeds and the supervision of their execution.

The fateful question that we and those who will come after us look for an answer to, is whether it was avoidable. The writer has no difficulty in answering without any hesitation: it **was** avoidable before it started, or it could be halted at any stage, from the moment Hitler took power in 1933 until the last months before his final downfall. In fact, it continued even after Hitler was dead and Germany occupied.

What happened to the victims is beyond human understanding, regardless how febrile or hallucinatory our perceptivity, but we can say something about the living. It is the living who could have stopped the slaughter and didn't, and who will stand guilty forever. They included a multitude of individuals and groups, governments and legislators, civil servants, diplomatic and consular representatives, heads of world religions from top to bottom, writers, poets, philosophers, journalists, plain people. There was the selfishness of the individual, especially the workers who were afraid lest new immigrants will take away their jobs and their bread; a fear proven at least partially false time and again. There are now 8,000,000 illegal Mexicans in the U.S., and 5,000,000 are being accorded

7 The Holocaust cannot be adequately described; we have no proper vocabulary, words or metaphors to convey the reality and meaning of the event. All the stark words were used in their most extreme, but to no avail; they sound hollow and artificial, as if one speaks about something else, some other event with which we are familiar either personally or from tradition, folklore and history. It has nothing to do with what happened. It is as if to call Hitler an anti-Semite, and what he launched a big pogrom. The characterizations or qualifications just don't fit.

legal status to become Americans. Had Roosevelt permitted, in time, half a million Jews to enter the U.S., probably all the Jews would have been saved in a hundred different ways. Among the factors which made the Holocaust possible was also the greed of the financiers and industrialists of the various democratic countries, feeling little embarrassment in doing business with Hitler, strengthening not only his economy but his power over the German nation, and building up his war machine. There were the senile and addle-headed generals of the free world who were mesmerized by the Wehrmacht and just refused to fight, preferring to surrender at the first serious onslaught. There was nothing to hold the democracies together; they were rotten from within and the slightest tremor made them collapse. It was a world in decline on a quasi-global scale, with its moral sense atrophied. Everything converged: inherent antisemitism in Christianity as a religion, the fragility of democratic systems, the appallingly low stature of politicians attaining high office, loss of faith in the most elementary principles of decency, dignity and self-respect and national honor; obsessions with imperialism, colonialism, fears about endangering imaginary lifelines and vital interests, which will be gone with the wind anyhow.

Britain survived for many reasons, some noble and heroic, which we will pay tribute to, but in the last account it was thanks to the U.S. and Russia. But the U.S. entered the war only after Pearl Harbor; and Russia in the later stages of the war fought heroically only because it was attacked; otherwise, it would have remained an obedient ally, a quasi-satellite of the Germans.

One can enumerate numerous other elements which made up the world that found itself facing Hitler and his design to conquer Europe and then the other countries. Volumes will probably be written about these, if not all of them. Some were already written, of different worth. Very few were perspicacious enough to give a feeling that "this is how it was." Perhaps the most important factor has to be mentioned: The Jews in free countries, especially the Zionist leadership. It is a most painful subject but there is no escape of avoiding it.

The Yishuv and the Holocaust

Weizmann's speech was delivered on August 4, 1937; the Haganah's arrangements with Eichmann were made late in 1938; Montor's letter was written on February 1, 1940; but the same attitude to the Jews of Europe – their fate and their “usefulness” prevailed throughout the war, not only in London or New York, but also in Jerusalem. Until November 1942, so it seems, the Zionist leadership prevented the news about the mass slaughter, following the Wannsee Conference, from becoming widely known in Palestine. Until that date the Yishuv could read in the Hebrew press only isolated and haphazard hearsay stories about atrocities and murder, which left the impression of a dubious nature as to their sources and reliability. The reason why the leaders thought it would be better to withhold the news from various sources in their possession since July, if not earlier, was that they believed its publication would divert the minds of the half million Jews living under the Mandate in Palestine from the immediate dangers to the Yishuv itself, since Rommel's panzer divisions after having taken Tobruk in June, reached the gates of Alexandria three weeks later. Had Alexandria fallen, the road would be open to the Nazis to conquer not only Egypt and the Suez, but also Palestine and Syria, a prospect which loomed disastrously. The Yishuv was busy pleading with the British to permit them to help them as much as possible by volunteering for the army, manufacturing war material, and not to disturb their preparations for a last ditch stand, should the Nazis invade Palestine.

But in 1942, at year's end, the tides receded and the fortunes of war, though still grim, began to reverse. Rommel's threat was removed in July after El-Alamein, and in November his Panzerarmee was driven out of Libya; the Russians encircled the Germans in Stalingrad and destroyed Hitler's army (to check the chronology); and the Americans invaded North Africa. Under these circumstances the news about the German plan to annihilate all the Jews under their control was released for publication the last week of November 1942. Shortly afterwards it became known that a Rescue Committee was established by the Jewish Agency. What was the policy of this new body, what was its composition? Its aim?

Arie Morgenstern, a student of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, decided to find out first hand from primary sources, and to his dismay succeeded beyond his wildest expectations. He was the first to come across

the secret protocols of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency, established after the news about the Nazi plan were published. He did not get these protocols in an underhanded way: he asked permission from the Zionist Archives to look into them, and he got it. Those in charge were probably unaware what was in them. He studied them thoroughly and on the basis of these documents and additional evidence, collected from former members of the Rescue Committee, prepared the study as his thesis at the University's Institute of Contemporary Jewish History. It was embarrassing for the Institute's governing body to accept, and still more shocking to publish it. But Morgenstern insisted that his was a scholarly work based on primary documents, whose authenticity could not be doubted. His thesis was accepted after he agreed to make some modifications, and in an abridged version it was published in the periodical **Yalkut Moreshet**, No. 13, June 1971, with a short, qualifying and apologetic introduction by Dr. Yehuda Bauer, a leading figure of that institute.

Though the Rescue Committee was supposed to represent all political and ideological trends of the Yishuv – since at a certain stage (not at its inception) – Revisionists, the Agudat Israel and other groups also were coopted – it was in fact from beginning to end a strictly disciplined instrument of the Jewish Agency, working according to the directives and under the supervision of the Agency. Its Chairman, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, was a prominent member of the Agency; its secretariat were officials of the Agency, and so were its representatives abroad. Funds raised for it were transferred through the Agency.

The prerogatives of the Rescue Committee were never clearly defined, yet one thing was obvious: the Agency had the last word. No independent policy could be adopted, and no decisions were taken before submitting them to the Agency for approval. The latter vetoed those which for one reason or another it did not like. Actually, the Committee did not make any independent decisions because they were not discussed even in the plenary meetings but in a forum called “the Commission of Four,” appointed by the Agency after the outbreak of the war, for the purpose of helping Jewish refugees arriving from Poland to Palestine. Indeed, the official name of the Commission was “The Commission for Polish Affairs.”

In view of the composition and structure of the Rescue Committee,

there was no room for any significant clash with the Jewish Agency. For all intents and purposes the two were the same. The Committee reflected the state of mind, train of thought, the attitudes and policies of the leadership of the Zionist movement and the highest authority of the Yishuv. This can be seen with utmost clarity from a secret memorandum distributed among the members of the Jewish Agency about three months after the establishment of the Rescue Committee.⁸ It was a strictly confidential document, and at the top of its first page it was indicated not to reveal its contents to “non-Zionist” personalities, meaning probably leaders whose organizations were not affiliated with the World Zionist Organization. It was dated April 24, 1944, and signed by A. Hartglass. But Morgenstern believes it reflects the thinking of Mr. Gruenbaum (Hartglass was the latter’s secretary and confidante). It laid down the policy of rescue in ten points:

1. In the territories occupied by the Axis powers in Europe seven million Jews are expected to be exterminated;
2. The rescue of **these Jews** or a significant part of them is not within the realm of possibility;
3. Even if all the Allied powers would be willing to rescue masses of Jews, they could not do it because of lack of sufficient material means;
4. It is possible to rescue only individuals or small groups whose total number would not surpass 12,000 (“a dozen” thousand);
5. There is a possibility to send food parcels to the ghettos and camps. According to the material capability and economic rationing in war time conditions, this kind of relief may help only another 12,000 (“a dozen” thousand) to survive;
6. The plan to save the Jews of Slovakia, known as the “European Plan” is nothing more than extortionism (by the Nazis and local authorities) after which annihilation will follow anyway;
7. To bring Jews out from Bulgaria and Hungary is not practical because of transit difficulties and the absence of places to receive them (“absorb”);

8 For some obscure reason it preferred to be called in English “Relief Committee,” which is a mistranslation of “Va’ad Ha’tzalah.”

8. The Bermuda Conference of the Allied powers has conclusively proven that they do not want or that they are unable to help save Jews;
9. Hence, the activities of the Rescue Committee must of necessity be of a philanthropic nature and **are not at all a public or political campaign;**
10. Apart from those saved by the Rescue Committee it is possible that seven times as many will survive thanks to the natural instinct of self-preservation in man.

This was not only the state of mind of the Zionist leadership in Palestine at the time, but also Dr. Goldman's – the Jewish Agency representative in the U.S., who wrote to Y. Gruenbaum on April 5, 1943:

I am afraid that we have to take into consideration the extermination of the majority of the European Jews, outside those of Russia and Great Britain.

From the very beginning the Zionist leadership was extremely pessimistic and felt nothing can be achieved because of objective circumstances.

In his thesis, Morgenstern writes:

Already on August 26, 1943, Mr. Gruenbaum expressed himself that he does not believe that one can save Polish Jewry or to extend her any help. Hence, he didn't. *)

Gruenbaum did not see any usefulness in noisy campaigns either on the part of the Yishuv or the public in the free world, like protest demonstrations or strikes. Neither did he believe in any of the rescue plans, nor in any negotiations with the Nazis to ransom Jews, and was skeptical as to the Joel Brand Mission (see p. 199f.). "Rescue," he used to say, "will come only in the wake of military victory of the Allies." *) It meant that he, like other Zionist leaders, espoused the excuse of the British Colonial and Foreign Offices and the State Department. They did not have to be converted to the "victory first" thesis; they shared the views of their adversaries with the difference that they did not even need a rationale for this belief. While a Lord Moyne or an Anthony Eden or Cordell Hull etc. were mostly hypocritical in advancing the "win the

war first” argument, in the back of their minds this was not so much a reason as an excuse to cover up other considerations and anxieties – not to make it into a “Jewish war,” or “not to antagonize the Arabs” (in case of saving Jews by admitting them to Palestine), to avoid Congress raising up in arms (in case refugees will be admitted to the U.S. above the usual quota), the Zionist leaders had no reason to share these preoccupations and fears. Nonetheless, if they did it was because they were either stupid or had hidden considerations of their own.

The leaders of the non-Jewish world had to appear pessimistic because they decided to do nothing. The pessimism of the Zionist leaders was not an excuse, it was authentic. It had a logic of its own.

The logical conclusion of their pessimism was that little effort should be undertaken because it would only be an exercise in futility. Whatever energies the Zionists (including the Rescue Committee) could muster should be dedicated to strengthening the Yishuv and preparing it for great things to come. Zionism, said Mr. Gruenbaum at the beginning of 1943, is above everything else. And Zionism means to build up the country. The money of “Keren Hayesod” (the major Zionist fund for settlement in Palestine) will not be diverted to rescue in the Diaspora. “One has to resist with steadfastness this wave that tries to push the Zionist activities to second place.” That is why the first priority was given to various enterprises connected with Zionist planning in Palestine – and not to rescue. This was one of the main reasons, so it seems, why the Rescue Committee’s activities and in a sense the existence of the Committee were kept a secret. If this was the case one can, of course, ask why it was necessary to have a Rescue Committee at all? As just mentioned, the Zionists had quite a few reasons of their own.

First, it was “to appease the Jewish conscience” – to show the Jews both in Palestine and the Diaspora that the leadership is not indifferent; that it is active; it does things to save their brethren. The Memorandum indicates that the importance of the Rescue Committee, though its activities will bring about only the tiniest results as to the number of lives saved, in the long run it can be exploited politically in a big way. The existence of the Committee will be understood by the whole world that the only country willing to receive Jews who succeeded to escape is Palestine, and the only community interested to absorb these refugees is the Yishuv. Apart from that, the activities of the Rescue Committee will cause the

Jews who will be rescued or otherwise survive the Holocaust after the war, to recognize that they remained alive thanks to the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. As a result of all this, Zionism will be recognized as the only factor that solves the Jewish problem. Palestine will be seen as the only country towards which the masses that survived the slaughter should be channeled.

The Memorandum further indicates that since there will be a possibility to save only a limited number of people, it is necessary to try to save first and above all, those who would later prove most useful to the upbuilding of the country and the revival of the nation.

Hence, the Zionist leadership worked out a system of priorities as to who should be saved: at the top of the list were the children, not so much for sentimental or compassionate reasons, but pragmatically they would prove the best element to settle the country. Second, were the young men and women who went through physical training (Hakhshara), the Khalutzim (pioneers) who will be spiritually capable to undertake Zionist work. And the last category were the Zionist cadres, i.e., leaders and dedicated officials in the Zionist movement in the various countries. One owes them a moral obligation, wrote the author of the Memorandum. But then follows an eerie *quid pro quo*: these people will emotionally be ready to forgive the Yishuv, to understand its motives, and perhaps even pay back from the fruits of their labor.

The Memorandum states categorically that the policy of the Jewish Agency is opposed to indiscriminate rescue lest it result in great harm to the Zionist cause. People who have nothing to offer cannot come into consideration in the rescue plans. "If we had the means to save both categories (the useful and the harmful ones)," says the Memorandum, "there is no doubt that we should reconcile ourselves to such a reality. But to our regret we have no adequate means to rescue even the good elements, therefore, we have no choice but to renounce the rescue of the harmful element."

Incredible? Yes, but this is the reasoning and the language of the ideology.

Still, there is a great confusion in this whole presentation. It is difficult to follow the trend of thought of the Zionist leadership. On the one hand they reconciled themselves in advance that all of European Jewry is doomed; that 12,000 could be saved, and perhaps a hundred thousand

will survive the carnage, yet on the other, they speak of building up the country and of the renaissance of the nation. What nation? And who will rebuild the country? Unless they thought that after the Holocaust the Jews in America will be impressed by the activities of the Jewish Agency and its Rescue Committee and in one sweep will be converted to the idea of a mass exodus and will flock to the shores of the Promised Land. It is very difficult to apportion guilt. We have described at length the attitude of the British which amounted to a weird connivance if not collaboration with Hitler to exterminate the Jews. I am aware that this might give a misleading impression. After all, it was the British, who, when all seemed lost and night descended upon the civilized world, stood alone in defiance and did not buckle under. The people under the inspiring leadership of Churchill behaved in a way that won the admiration of free men everywhere.⁹ As far as the Jews were concerned, the British were among the most decent ones, not only because Jews felt almost totally emancipated there and attained the highest positions in many fields of human endeavor, but also because England in the decade since Hitler came to power admitted about 90,000 Jews (to check Lukacz). Yet this is overshadowed by the fact that on a larger scale they were guilty of the Holocaust in almost a direct manner, by slamming shut the doors of Palestine at the time of greatest need, when the alternative was certain torture and death. They were among the main guilty ones. They were not alone; they were in a large company. In it the U.S. under President Roosevelt played a prominent part. To that company belonged the Jewish and Zionist leaderships in the free world, mainly in the U.S. but also in Palestine. What was their guilt, and what were the causes? Before trying to answer these questions, something has to be said to mitigate the guilt of all of us (because in the last account none of us did the ultimate): it took all of us some time to realize what was going on. What went on staggered the imagination; somehow everyone tried to rationalize it is impossible that such a thing really takes place. The difference between the Hebrew emissaries and the leadership of the Jewish and Zionist

9 True, Great Britain didn't surrender and held out (though it was really never assaulted with a view to be conquered); it was its finest hour; but Britain was also the architect of Munich with all its outrageous, moral implications and subsequent horrors. Then it was its good luck to have Churchill on ice. He roared like a tiger (claiming the British were the tiger); and one historian at least (John Lukacz) thinks that he was also the tiger.

establishment was a cardinal one: it was the moment they all realized that the accounts filtering out of Europe are true. Until the very end of the war the latter were obsessed with what was going to be the solution of the Jews and Palestine after the war, as if they took it for granted that the Jews, or most of them, will survive. The former knew that from then on nothing else counted except fighting for a rescue of the Jews. The latter continued to be preoccupied with political, ideological and post-war problems.

The Jewish leadership was handicapped by several psychological inhibitions, preventing them from undertaking the necessary actions, or to join the Hebrew emissaries and lend them their strength, prestige, financial assistance and connections with the highest personages of the Government, including the President. Not all the leaders of the various organized groups shared the same attitudes. The motivations of each group and even each individual differed from one another. There were the Jews in high positions, whether on the Supreme Court or in the President's brain-trust, or otherwise close to FDR, who did not think it politic to bother or annoy him about the tragedy of the Jews in Europe. On occasion they would mention it, with more or less compassion, but they usually did not insist. They did not wish to endanger their positions and status with the mighty personage who was the President. It isn't that they actually thought in these terms. Who can penetrate the mind of someone else? But the record of their behavior gives the impression that they did not go far enough in their intercession with the President to affect his policy, which was one of callous indifference. We have this from first-hand information, members of his family, his wife, and some of the lesser-known people who were friends of the Roosevelt family. There were, of course, exceptions. The most outstanding was Henry Morgenthau Jr., Secretary of the Treasury. There certainly were other exceptions like Bernard Baruch, who preferred to keep their interventions discreet and confidential, as well as men of lesser caliber, but the lot of them cared little or not strongly enough to put their friendship and position with the President on the line.

All the Jewish leaders were aware of the mood of the country – that to a considerable extent was isolationist and xenophobic; at all events against new legislation concerning immigration which could have permitted Jews (in danger of their lives) to enter the country. The Jewish leaders were

inhibited to agitate for any large-scale rescue operation because it might have intensified these feelings among the public at large, and thus increase anti-Semitic sentiments towards the Jews in America in general. They followed the tradition that the less spoken about the Jews the better, and if one speaks it should be in a whisper and not vociferously. They also followed the tradition of the Ghetto in Eastern Europe of interceding privately and discreetly, without any publicity, lest the august personage might be displeased.

The Zionist leadership, among other things, suffered from three inter-related inhibitions. One was that ideologically they were committed to Palestine, to the upbuilding of the country as they understood it should be done. They were not in the “rescue business”; they were builders of a new society. Hence it was mentally and psychologically difficult for them to shift gears and enter a campaign aiming at the rescue of millions of Jews. Second, and as mentioned, it was intimately, almost organically interrelated: the Zionists were not profoundly concerned with the welfare of the large masses of the Jews in Eastern Europe. They looked upon them with embarrassment and annoyance. These were the masses Weizmann characterized as dust – moral and economic dust – who cannot be redeemed. The Zionists were mainly concerned with the select, the young and vigorous, the idealists, the progressives, the pioneers. Having been attuned to such an ideological premise, they were subconsciously incapable to dedicate their energies, time or their welfare to save precisely those whom they have long before morally condemned and doomed to disappearance one way or another. This would require that the Zionist leadership undergo a metamorphosis. This did not happen. Third, they were obsessed with the idea of unity. Nothing frightened them more than independent action by any group not under the control of the Zionist authorities. They could not tolerate the activities of the Hebrew Emissaries because they were independent and acted outside the organizational framework of the Zionist Organization. Hence, they had to be condemned, denounced, obliterated. There was no question of joining them or inviting them to cooperate. Again, in the tradition of one of the ugliest phenomena of the Ghettos, they used the method of denunciation before the authorities. Time and again through hundreds of *démarches*, probably thousands would be nearer to the facts, Zionist representatives used character assassination against the Hebrew emissaries, pleading with

the State Department, Justice Department, the Selective Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, the White House, Cabinet members, members of both Houses of Congress to stop the activities of the group, to induct them into the army, expel them from the country, put them in jail for fraud, silence them one way or another. *) (See p. 316ff. for further Memorandum of Conversation between D.N. Goldman, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, American Branch, with officials of the State Department).

* * *

Having said all this, the paradox of the Zionist leadership's reaction to the Holocaust is still so staggering that in retrospect it defies human credibility. For more than two generations they despised Jabotinsky's insistence upon defining the aim of Zionism as the creation of a Jewish State. But they suddenly awoke to the importance of such a definition at a time when their attention should have been directed elsewhere – to rescue. The more the evidence became clear that Jews are being exterminated by the millions, the less the Zionists were concerned with the fate of their people in Europe, and the more they became enthused about the idea of Jewish Statehood.

[Page 216 in manuscript is missing]

... because he [Jabotinsky] was convinced that only such a definition will galvanize the Jewish people to organize for mass evacuation when there was still time. But he was also the author of the Helsingfors Program, demanding Jewish national autonomy in Russia; he tried to arrive at a deal with Petliura in the hope to defend the Jews in the Ukraine by legalizing a Jewish defense force in territories controlled by the notorious pogromchik.

As to Lucas' statement that Jewish statehood became irrelevant to the Jews of Europe "for whose salvation it had been conceived" is misleading. Conceived by whom: by Ben-Gurion, Weizmann? Or all the other leaders of the Zionist establishment? They not only did not conceive of the idea but were opposed to it through the proceeding decades – and rescuing the Jews of Europe on a mass scale, before Hitler, was the farthest thing in their preoccupations. What they were after was the select. The Jewish masses were mainly an object of criticism and condemnation.

The problems facing the Hebrew emissaries in connection with the Holocaust were simple and at the same time almost insoluble. They were:

1. To compel the free world to become aware of the fact that Hitler singled out the Jews, though they did not constitute a state and had no power either of attack or of defense in the global war into which he plunged the world.

As early as January 30, 1939, seven months before his invasion of Poland, in a speech on the anniversary of his assumption to power, he made an ominous declaration, the full significance of which became evident only in retrospect:

Today I will once more be a prophet. **If the international Jewish financiers inside and outside Europe** should again succeed in plunging the nations into a world war, the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and victory of Jewry, but the **annihilation** of the Jewish race **throughout** Europe.¹⁰

Despite all the evidence that the Nazis embarked on a special campaign to exterminate the Jews, simply because they are Jews, the leaders and opinion shapers of the free world refused to acknowledge it, and pretended that this was a replica of the [undecipherable] ... stories the British fabricated against the Germans during World War I, but this time suspected the Jews doing it. Those who didn't think this was Jewish propaganda invention, considered the Nazi [undecipherable]

10 Though in recent years respected historians try to depict Hitler as a rational statesman, this paragraph is nonetheless the ravings of a madman: (a) When in modern history did Jewish financiers plunge the nations into war? (b) Why should Jewish financiers be interested in the Bolshevization of the earth? (c) Why should a whole people – millions of them – be annihilated because the acts of a few individuals? But the madness was not peculiar to Hitler alone. It was shared by tens of millions of Germans who supported him ecstatically and offered their lives for him; and the words were uttered in a world that was not exactly sound either. It was a world caught up in a mass psychosis, and high ranking Catholic prelates and celebrated personalities of various nations parroted similar words: The Jews were responsible for the war. Whom did they attack? Against whom did they conspire?

... and slaughter as a campaign [that] was in the nature of things of total war; that the Holocaust is one of many manifestations of Hitler's treatment of conquered and defeated peoples; that the extermination of the Jews has nothing special to it. Therefore, nothing special should be undertaken. The fact that the Jews were not a people who fought as a nation against Hitler because they had no state of their own, and therefore were not defeated or conquered in battle; that it was part of the civilian population did not disturb the statesmen and bureaucrats of Great Britain and the U.S. There is nothing more difficult than to explain the obvious. It was a gargantuan task to break this conspiracy, aimed at ignoring the very uniqueness of the Jewish disaster. The spokesmen and policy shapers of the great democratic nations considered the very word "Jew" unmentionable. When they referred to the mass slaughter of the Jews, they persisted in using such anonymous terms as "unfortunate victims of Hitler's cruelty," "poor, helpless souls," "oppressed and persecuted peoples" (usually in the plural).

2. The second problem was even more complicated: to impress upon the mighty leaders of the free world and their subordinates, that though Hitler proclaimed the destruction of the Jews in Europe as one of his war aims, yet in practice the Nazi bureaucracy, on all levels where the Jewish problem was discussed and measures taken, were not so much interested in exterminating the Jews but rather to get rid of them. To get rid of them by any means – if one can expel them and the democracies will receive them and arrange for their distribution outside Germany and the conquered countries, it was acceptable to them. If the nations of the free world refuse, then the alternative was extermination by various means: starvation, overwork, and later the most efficient method – the gas chambers. Practically all through the years of the Hitler regime, the Nazis challenged the nations outside their sphere to accept the Jews, threatening all the while that if the leaders of the states outside those controlled by them, that the fate that awaits the Jews will be catastrophic. The evidence to this, for various periods, are conclusive. Had the Jews a chance to flee they would have been permitted to do so.
3. How to convince the leaders of the free world that whether the Nazis are willing to let the Jews go or not, the Allies must undertake

effective action to force them either to stop the massacre, or let the Jews escape.

4. That such action would not interfere with the war effort, but on the contrary will endow it with an additional moral dimension, which will produce new enthusiasm and generate more dynamic energies converging and speeding the ultimate effort to crush the enemy.

This in itself was a gargantuan task because the leaders of the Allies and their bureaucrats of the various departments stuck to the two contradictory arguments in their stubborn resistance to undertake anything to alleviate the disaster of the Jewish people in Europe. One was that while waging a war one can do nothing about saving Jews; the second was that, of course, certain things could be done but these would impede the war efforts. In either case nothing should be done.

5. To persuade these leaders that the problem is of such magnitude and importance for the very cause the Allies are fighting for, that it can be dealt with effectively only through a special, intergovernmental, or at least governmental machinery on the highest level, specially set up for this openly avowed purpose.
6. To extricate the problem of saving the Jewish people of Europe from ideological, from purely political considerations, that is, to separate it as much as possible from the future status of Palestine as well as from the problem of the status of the Jews who would be admitted to that country, before the Palestine question will be solved one way or another after the war. In fine, to make rescue a task which is not contingent upon anything else, but is an overriding aim in itself.

To tackle these problems singly and simultaneously was an almost superhuman task. In retrospect one is justified to wonder how the small group of Hebrew emissaries did not throw up the sponge in despair, since they faced a coalition of almost the whole world, that is, an almost total identity of views of the U.S. and Great Britain, the neutral countries in Europe and South America, with the Zionists obsessed both by post-war problems as well as the danger that the ideological and organizational control of the Jews in the U.S. may be undermined by the activities of the "interlopers."

It is not our intention to deal here with the story of how these challenges were met, and with what degree of success. This will appear

in another special work containing the story in all its despair. In this chapter we mention only a few highlights.

But it is important to stress that as soon as the news of mass extermination of the Jews in Europe reached the U.S., the Hebrew emissaries, instinctively and practically without debate, decided to give top priority to the task of rescue, and thereafter never wavered in this decision. They were convinced that this was their most immediate and personal duty – to subordinate all their endeavors to the one overriding task – to rescue as many of the Hebrews in Europe as possible. They could not do otherwise for they were flesh and blood of the very people who were being exterminated. However safe and far away from the slaughter camps they have been physically, mentally and spiritually they identified themselves in every waking moment with the agonies and torture of their kin, caught in the death-trap of Hitler's occupied Europe. To them it seemed as if destiny had permitted them to escape so that they might devote their lives to the rescue of their brethren.

In that extra sense that the heart possesses, they could not escape the tormented voices of the doomed and dying, pleading for help and action. These voices haunted this little group of Hebrew emissaries, and they could not rest without seeing a new front opened – a new front against massacre. They called this "The Second Moral Front," trying to convince the mighty of this world to endow a human and moral dimension to the war against Hitler, regardless how much the leaders of the Allies, the statesmen and the Generals were convinced that they were already engaged in a just cause to save humanity from being conquered by the force of evil. That their cause was just there is no doubt. But their attitude to the Holocaust nonetheless compromised that cause to its very roots. It could not triumph by overlooking what happened to the millions of Jews in Europe. The ash heaps of human remnants could not be a badge of honor or proof of victory of the Allied cause. The tragedy of that victory was that a different perception of the moral values at stake would have affected the stamina of the Allied leaders, and in turn this could not have failed to affect the strategy of victory. Alas, it did not happen!

The unmentionable

We mentioned before some of the means which the Hebrew emissaries employed to break the conspiracy of silence around the Jewish disaster; the Proclamation on the Moral Right of the Stateless and Palestine Jews; the shock-producing, full page advertisements in the major American newspapers. We will relate in the sketchiest form further additional means and demonstrations. But the question which remains unanswered till this very day, despite reams upon reams of official documents and data and the apologetic literature, is the following: Why was the word "Jew" unmentionable? Hitler, as we have seen, accused the Jews that it was they who unleashed the war. Which Jews? The Bolsheviks? But he made a pact with Stalin and then invaded Russia anyhow. The financiers? The last thing they were concerned with was to keep Danzig for Poland. Did he invade Poland to trap the Jews, or because it was a phase on his road to conquer the lebensraum in the Ukraine and far beyond until the Urals? Despite this gobbledygook the leaders of Great Britain and the U.S. thought the worst thing that could happen to the Allied cause would be to give the impression that World War II was a "Jewish war" waged at the instigation of or in the interests of the Jews. Unfathomably, they didn't, or rather refused to perceive that Hitler's aim was to conquer Europe and subjugate it, regardless what happened to the Jews so long as he can get rid of them on the Continent. It was the task of the Hebrew emissaries to mobilize public opinion against this fear and against the determination of the Allied leaders and strategists, to make them see the situation as it was in reality; that it would not help to bury one's head ostrichlike in the sand, pretending that what Hitler does to the Jews does not exist, or that taking up his challenge will make it into a "Jewish war." The Allied leaders, spokesmen and bureaucrats tried to cloak the reality of the Holocaust by using anonymous terms in order to smuggle the specific Jewish catastrophe into the general picture of Hitler's persecution of conquered peoples on the Continent. Hitler challenged the leaders of the free world on this question: will they stand by passively while a whole people who have no territory, army, or means of defending themselves are exterminated? Will they permit him to proceed with impunity to put the Jews to death wholesale by torture only because they are Jews?

The Memorial Pageants

Apart from the written word, the full-page advertisements, special press conferences, and contacts with public figures and members of Congress, the Hebrew emissaries and their American friends sought additional means to impress and shock public opinion. Ben Hecht had an idea of presenting a gigantic pageant, which should simultaneously be a memorial dedicated to the martyred Jews in Europe, as well as a call to action to save those still alive. He wrote the script and called it **We Will Never Die**. For its presentation he succeeded to mobilize on a voluntary basis the greatest talent in the theatrical and motion picture industry. It was produced by Billy Rose, directed by Moss Hart, and Kurt Weill wrote an original score which blended traditional religious melodies with refrains of courage and hope. Among its star performers were Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni, Sylvia Sydney and others.

Interest in it was so great that in a few days all 20,000 seats were sold out, and there were still tens of thousands clamoring to see it. It therefore had to be performed twice the same evening – on March 9, 1943. It was performed in all the major cities from coast to coast. Hundreds of thousands of people saw it; many wept. Practically everywhere it made front page. The reviews were wondrous and inspired. The New York Times, no friend of the movement, wrote the next day:

Forty thousand persons listened and watched in emotional silence in Madison Square Garden last night to two performances of “We Will Never Die,” a dramatic mass memorial to the two million Jews killed in Europe. The memorial was staged to stir the Allied Nations to stop the slaughter of a people by the Germans.

The New York Post’s review the same day emphasized the memorial served “among other things, to remind us that there are between four and five million still alive – alive and helplessly waiting for death or deliverance.” On that occasion the Governor of New York proclaimed March 9, 1943 a Day of Mourning, the State Legislature having adopted a resolution to that effect. Incredible as it may sound in retrospect, the American Jewish Congress protested the Governor’s decision, telling him that the tragic memorial was organized by “irresponsible” people

and his action “would offend the great mass of American Jewry.” The courageous and enlightened Governor did not yield to pressure and cancel his decision. He was not alone on the American political scene to resist pressure by those who claimed to be their constituency.

The audience at the memorial presented on April 12, 1943 in Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C. was composed of dignitaries and diplomats. Representatives of forty nations occupied boxes decorated with their respective flags. The First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, later wrote a moving column about the experience. Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone headed a delegation of seven out of the nine Supreme Court Justices (Justice Felix Frankfurter was one of the two missing); the presence of Secretary of Navy Frank Knox and Secretary of Commerce Jesse H. Jones drew special attention in view of their official positions. Thirty-eight U.S. Senators and hundreds of Congressmen and Government officials of various rank showed up to be counted. It was as distinguished an audience as ever attended an unofficial function in Washington.

These and all other campaigns initiated by the Hebrew emissaries and their American friends should be judged not only on their own merits but also for their impact on the established Jewish organizations. The latter, while combatting the “interlopers” and “defiers of authority” tried, at the same time to imitate their opponents and adopt some of their methods of operation. This was also the case with the Memorial. Ben Hecht and his colleagues, like Billy Rose and Moss Hart, believed and rightly so that such an undertaking as “We Shall Never Die” should be sponsored not only by one group but by all the Jewish organized forces in the country. He therefore invited the leaders of all the major Zionist and non-Zionist organizations to join, explaining the purpose of the Memorial and even reading them the text of his script. They seemed to have been moved by the script and impressed with the idea, but couldn’t agree to cooperate or to sponsor the undertaking. In his biography Ben Hecht described with poetic license the meeting he had with those leaders, but basically he gave a faithful report of their unanimous refusal.

Yet the meeting was not without results. They learned about the project, its date and place, and decided to do something dramatic on a mass scale, on their own. They decided to steal a step on the organizers of the Memorial and called a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden – but a few days earlier, on March 1, 1943, under the title of “Stop Hitler

Now.” The hall was packed and resolutions were adopted concerning the rescue of the Jews. The objective historian, Henry Feingold, writes that “the rally seemed to have set the pattern for a regular protest ritual.” He then writes about the Memorial held on March 9, but the distorted picture is simply a result that the background documents relating to these activities, their sequence, etc. were as yet unknown to him. **)

70,000 Jews for sale

On February 16, 1943, an ad appeared in the New York Times covering five full columns on Page 11, under the bizarre, surrealistic headline:

FOR SALE to Humanity 70,000 Jews
Guaranteed Human Beings at \$50 a piece

On a facsimile of the stationery of the Jewish Army Committee¹¹ was typed a letter which read:

To The FOUR FREEDOMS
Care United Nations' leaders.

My Dear Noble State of Mind:

I know you are very busy, too busy perhaps to read the story on the left hand-side of this page.

For that reason, I am writing an ad. Ads are easier and quicker to read than stories.

Your admirer,

Ben Hecht,

(a facsimile of his signature)

The ad itself had a short text, only a few staccato paragraphs. It read in part:

Romania is tired of killing Jews. It has killed one hundred thousand of them in two years. Romania will now give Jews away practically for nothing.

11 The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe was established later in the year (see p. 234ff.). Until then, the Jewish Army Committee tried to do the job.

Seventy thousand Jews are waiting death in Romanian concentration camps:

Romania Will Give These 70,000 Jews to the Four Freedoms for 20,000 Lei (\$50) a Piece. This Sum Covers all Transportation Expenses.

Romania offers to deliver these 70,000 alive to Palestine

... Attention America ! ! !

The Great Romanian bargain is for this month only!

It is an unprecedented offer!

Seventy thousand souls at \$50 a piece!

The Doors of Romania Are Open! Act now!

The publication of this ad exploded like a bombshell. The public response was extraordinary. Literally thousands of letters and contributions to advance the work of the Committee flowed in on the morrow and on the following days.

It was Ben Hecht's own idea and he wrote it in one inspired stroke. Next only to his "A Letter to the Terrorists" published more than three years later, it was perhaps his most famous missive on behalf of the martyred Jews of Europe. It created a tremendous commotion in governmental circles as well as among the leadership and bureaucracy of the Jewish establishment in America.

What was behind this ad, and why was it placed on that particular day? Actually, the story is both incredible and simple. Romania was the most committed among Hitler's satellites both in the field of battle – she sent thirty divisions to fight the Russians along with the Germans, more than all the other satellites combined – as well as the massacring of Jews on their own without the need to be prodded. Yet, they were also among the first to sense that Hitler lost the war, that by the end of 1941 his fall began, and that by the beginning of 1943 his doom was certain, and the best thing would be for her to slowly disengage herself from the doomed Führer. She had good reason not to be frightened to arouse his ire, because she lost half her army in the Steppes and frozen swamps of Russia. She also knew that Hitler's downfall is at least in part a result of the revulsion he provoked by his treatment of the Jews. Hence, why shouldn't she take advantage and offer the free world, as a sign of good will, to release all the Jews

unconditionally, if it would be willing to receive them and place them wherever it will think fit?

The Hebrew emissaries learned about it from their colleague in London, Captain Jeremiah Halpern. Probably one of his sources was the World Jewish Congress that succeeded to establish a contact with the Romanian dictator. Upon receipt of the cable from London, P.H. Bergson contacted Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle to verify whether the information was correct. The next day, though it was a Saturday, he called back early in the morning, and told Bergson on the phone that he "has no sufficient evidence to deny it," a strange way of confirming it, though the intention seems to have been exactly that: in a negative way to confirm it probably because his boss, the Secretary of State and others in the Department, were reluctant to freely circulate such information as was their wont from the beginning of the war.

C.L. Sulzberger, the New York Times bureau chief in London, cabled a detailed report of the offer to his paper, which was published on February 13, 1943. According to the correspondent the Romanian offer was made through the medium of neutral diplomats. The Jews would be released from the Transnistria concentration camps in Romanian ships if permitted to display the insignia of the Vatican to insure safe passage. The Jews would be transferred under the supervision of ecclesiastic dignitaries to Bucharest where special accommodations would be made for them until evacuation. It was also reported that the Bishop of Bucharest and the Papal Nuncio will be in charge of the evacuation arrangements. According to the proposal the Government would levy a tax of 20,000 Lei on each refugee to cover traveling expenses.

According to the news reports, the Romanian officials declared that though the Bucharest Government was ready to release the Jews to any place selected by the Allies, it suggested that the place for convenience sake be Palestine, because of shipping facilities. Other destinations would create a shipping problem which may complicate the whole undertaking.

The Romanian also conveyed a sense of great urgency: The Germans being aware that the Russians may soon break into Romania, ordered to speed up the deportation of the Jews to the death camps. The deadline was May 1, 1943.

Appeals made to the White House and State Department to take up the offer, were to no avail. The background of the failure was first recorded

by Robert E. Sherwood in his book **Roosevelt and Hopkins**.¹² But before quoting him, there is a detail which is perhaps more symptomatic of the attitudes of the leaders of the two greatest democracies: when they came together to deal with the problem none of them were aware of what country the subject of inquiry was about. They discussed the various aspects of it but they thought it was Bulgaria and not Romania.¹³

Sherwood quotes Harry L. Hopkins, the President's chief advisor and confidante:

On March 27 (1943), there was a meeting of (President) Roosevelt, (Anthony) Eden, (Cordell) Hull, (Sumner) Wells, (Lord) Halifax, and William Stand, Assistant Undersecretary of State in the (British) Foreign Office. Hull raised the question of the 60 or 70 thousand Jews in Bulgaria who are threatened with extermination unless we could get them out and, very urgently, pressed Eden for an answer to the problem. Eden replied that the whole problem of the Jews in Europe is very difficult and that we should move very cautiously about offering to take all the Jews out of a country like Bulgaria. If we do that, then the Jews of the world will be wanting us to make similar offers in Poland and Germany. Hitler might well take us up on any such offer and there simply are not enough ships and means of transportation in the world to handle them.

Eden said that the British were ready to take about 60 thousand more Jews to Palestine but the problem of transportation, even from Bulgaria to Palestine, is extremely difficult. Furthermore, any

12 It is true that by the beginning of 1943 the Bulgarian Government, like the Romanian and the others, knew that as far as Hitler was concerned the jig was up and they, too, tried somehow to get in to the good graces of the Allies whose final victory became a certainty to so many. The Bulgarians, too, thought that an opening to the Allies would be an offer to release the Jews before being compelled to ship them to the death camps. But it was not in the first months of 1943 but several months earlier. It dealt with a much smaller number – perhaps 10,000 – and there was only a general suggestion and no detailed plan and commitment as in the Romanian case.

13 Cordell Hull was even ignorant of who was in charge in his own department for dealing with such matters. Henry Morgenthau describes several meetings he had with the Secretary of State in December 1943 and January 1944. He found him “harassed and weary... not well informed as to what was going on... bewildered!” When he asked Hull at one of these meetings to be introduced to the new director of the Visa Division, Howard K. Travers, and the political adviser on refugees, Breckinridge Long, both of whom were in the room, Hull did not appear to know who they were.

such mass movement as that would be very dangerous to security because the Germans would be sure to attempt to put a number of their agents in the group...

Eden said that the forthcoming conference in Bermuda on the whole refugee problem must come to grips with this difficult situation.

Eden said he hoped that on our side we would not make too expansive promises which could not be delivered because of lack of shipping. *)

In speculating on what would have happened had a large Jewish Army been established at the beginning of the war, here we may have an example that a Jewish Army could have played an important part in the Allies' general strategy and also particularly in the dynamics of rescue it would inescapably have engendered. A Jewish Army might have constituted a factor in determining whether one should extend the Italian campaign into the Balkan. Being there, it could have been poised to strike and enter Romania to forestall the Russians or save the Jews, or both.

Chapter 10

The Bermuda Conference

Though the Hebrew emissaries succeeded to arouse public opinion that was clamoring for action, there still remained a tragic discrepancy between the will and the mood of the people in the U.S. and the inaction of the governments of the democratic countries. This discrepancy showed itself in many ways, but most of all at the Bermuda Conference.

The Governments of the U.S. and Great Britain felt under the impact of the campaign organized by the Hebrew emissaries that they must exhibit at least some show of concern. Consequently, an Anglo-American Conference was called for the end of April 1943, to be held in Bermuda (it opened on April 19 and lasted until the 29).

The first impression was that this Conference was called for the purpose of dealing with the problem of the Hebrew people of Europe who were being exterminated according to a deliberate Nazi plan. But such an impression soon proved to be false. There were no grounds for such hope and optimism. On March 3, 1943, Secretary of State Cordell Hull issued the Government's initial statement on the Conference. In it was said:

The refugee problem *should not* be considered as being *confined to persons of any particular race or faith*. Nazi measures against minorities have caused the flight of persons of various races and faiths as well as of other persons because of their political beliefs.
(Italics added)

We will later point out the distortions, evasions and deceptions contained in this short paragraph. But it is also important to know that the two governments agreed beforehand that two questions not be discussed at

Bermuda: the admission of Jews to either Palestine or the U.S. Thus, the Bermuda Conference actually turned out to be a shocking farce. Not only did it not cope with the Jewish problem, but as PM's Foreign Editor Alexander Uhl reported: "It was regarded as almost improper to mention the word 'Jew'." In fact, the Conference had been purposely shifted to Bermuda from the U.S. in order to avoid direct pressure from public opinion, insisting that the Hebrew problem be dealt with in a realistic and adequate way. The admission of the press was limited to a small number of representatives.

This Conference, instead of working out plans for alleviating the plight of the Hebrews of Europe, became a scheme of how to prevent the rescue of Jews and a smokescreen to conceal the wicked inaction of the governments of the Allied and neutral nations. The aim was to divert opinion from the true problem and thus render it ineffective.

To get a full perception of this shocking hypocrisy, one should read the declassified documents concerning that Conference: the instructions to the delegates sent by the American and British governments; the choice of delegates of the two countries – their personalities and opinions; the minutes of the sessions, etc. Perusing even a small part of this material enables one to appreciate the magnitude of the ill will, pretense, make believe and the heartlessness of the inhuman aloofness. One cannot but have a feeling that the gathering in Bermuda may probably be counted among the most shameful acts of deception ever undertaken by Governments considered, not without a considerable degree of justification, as the moral leaders of humanity and champions in the struggle to save Western civilization.

This atrocity had to be exposed for what it was, and it **was** exposed by many means, the most effective of which was a series of advertisements in leading newspapers throughout the country. The headlines of this statement read over all the columns of the New York Times on May 4, 1943 (and in other papers): **"To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death-Trap Bermuda Was a 'Cruel Mockery'."** And in a second headline, it asked: "When will the United Nations Establish an Agency to deal with the Problem of Hitler's Extermination of a Whole People?" The impact of this statement was so great that it provoked a passionate debate on the floor of the Senate. The campaign to expose the Bermuda Conference for what it was – a fraud – was much resented by American Delegates

Senator Scott W. Lucas (D. Ill) and Congressman Sol Bloom, a practicing Jew from New York. Senator Lucas engaged in a variety of activities to compromise the rescue movement set in motion by the Hebrew emissaries. He concentrated his attack from the floor of the Senate as well as through other channels, mainly upon the leader of the Hebrew emissaries, P.H. Bergson, not failing to voice anti-Semitic utterances and threats of personal retaliation.

Yet, under the pressure of the campaign launched by the Hebrew emissaries, both Congressman Bloom and Senator Lucas were compelled to promise a report of the “achievements” of the Bermuda Conference. In spite of their promise, such a report was never really made public for the simple reason that was clear at the time and reconfirmed with absolute certainty, when the State Department documents were declassified, that the participants in that Conference had no intention of doing anything effective to halt Hitler’s campaign of death and destruction against the Hebrew people of Europe.

Bermuda did not have a good press. Its phoniness was too obvious to fool any journalist or editor worth his salt, and even the Anglo-Jewish press that was usually harnessed (not only ideologically but also with financial subsidies) to the established Jewish and Zionist organizations was indignant. A syndicated editorial-column appeared in a number of Anglo-Jewish weeklies under the title: “An Open Letter to Sol Bloom,” of which the final paragraph read:

We would not be very happy in your place, Mr. Bloom. We would have nightmares; our ears would be split by the cries of all the Jews who have perished since Bermuda; and we would feel blood, Jewish blood, on our hands. Blood on YOUR hands, Mr. Bloom?

* * *

The Bermuda Conference was one more unmistakable signal, though not intentionally, to the Nazis that their judgement of democracy’s attitude towards the Jews is justified, and in their criminal minds they understood it as a *carte blanche* to go on with the slaughter.

* * *

Now, to come back to Cordell Hull's original statement about the purpose of the Bermuda Conference: it tried to state that there is nothing special in the plight of the Jews because many individuals of other ethnic or political groups are also refugees seeking asylum. This statement constituted a distortion of the real plight of the Jews as a people singled out for annihilation, and also contained a willful and wicked deception. One of the difficulties the Hebrew emissaries and the leading supporters of their cause in the U.S. had to overcome was to explain that the Jewish problem **was not** a refugee problem; that these two problems should not be confused; that they are entirely distinct. A refugee is a person who already succeeded to escape from a German dominated territory into a neutral or friendly country. Hence, the problem was **not to save Jewish refugees**, but to enable Jews trapped in Hitler dominated Europe **to become refugees**. The imperative was therefore a double one: to halt the slaughter, and compel the Axis Governments to permit the Jews to leave and thus become refugees.

Neither the British nor American authorities were willing to view the situation in these categories. By hypocrisy and deception, they incessantly tried to confuse public opinion. They did not succeed, but nonetheless persisted in their inhumanity until the end.

Chapter 11

A Strange Episode in the U.S. Senate

MISSING IN THE MANUSCRIPT

Chapter 12

The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe

The conference

The Hebrew emissaries came to the conclusion that all these activities: publicity and advertisements, lobbying in both Houses of Congress, regardless how impressive and dramatic, were not sufficient to move the Government to take adequate action to save the Jewish people of Europe. The administration – both the White House and the State Department – were determined to do nothing or next to nothing, having inculcated in their own minds that to save the Jews runs counter to the successful prosecution of the war effort, especially since the British succeeded in persuading the American that any rescue operation is necessarily bound up with Palestine. To permit the Jews to enter Palestine would spell defeat for the Allies, because the mighty Arab world will rise in rebellion and join the Axis.

In view of all this, the Hebrew emissaries and their American friends decided that the previous organizational and propaganda frameworks were no longer adequate, and the campaign to save the Jews of Europe must be pursued by a specially created public body for this explicit task; an organization with no other aim but rescue. Such a new body would take full advantage of the already aroused indignation of masses of American citizens in face of the heartless passivity of the Government. It would not be preconditioned by anything else, and would not concern itself with anything else but rescue; leaving no stone unturned until the Government responds positively and adequately to the pressure of public opinion, to undertake concrete action.

It was with this view in mind that an **Emergency Conference to**

Save the Jewish People of Europe was called. Its preparations required a gigantic effort. It had to be representative of all strata of American society on the highest level. At the time, and even in retrospect of 35 years, the Conference held at the Commodore Hotel in New York from July 20 to July 26, 1943, was a spectacular success. About 125 experts, American and others, in international law, diplomacy, military affairs, transportation, relief work, as well as men and women from the literary and artistic world, representing various shades of political opinion and social philosophy, answered the call and participated.¹ After the solemn opening-session they broke up into panels, each studying a special aspect of the problem concerning rescue.

As in previous months, this conference, too, had to tackle the almost impossible task of overcoming the willful or innocent (if one can call it innocent) prejudices and preconceptions of the major Allied Governments, namely those of Great Britain and the U.S.: a) that efforts to save the Jews would impede the successful prosecution of the war effort, and b) that the extermination of the Jewish people of Europe is one of many aspects of a “refugee problem” which one will be in a position to deal with only after the war is over and victory won. These preconceptions were confirmed at the conference in the so-called good will messages from President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The President’s message addressed to Prof. Max Lerner, Chairman of the International Relations Panel of the conference, read:

In reply to your telegram of July 15th, 1943... I am glad to transmit a message from the Honorable Cordell Hull... which has my full concurrence. You are aware of the interest of this Government in the terrible condition of the European Jews and of our repeated endeavors to save those who could be saved. These endeavors will not cease until Nazi power is forever crushed.

1 Among the eighteen Honorary Chairmen of the conference, such disparate personalities as former President Hoover, William Randolph Hearst, Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, the famous labor leaders Philip Murray and William Green, William Allan White – the man who was perhaps more responsible than anyone else for shifting American opinion at the beginning of the war in favor of actively helping beleaguered Great Britain –, the writers Van Wyck Brooks, Hendrik Willem van Loon, Louis Bromfield, Waldo Frank; Senators Guy M. Gillette, Edwin C. Johnson, Elbert D. Thomas, Bishop Henry St. George Tucker, and others.

Cordell Hull's message to which the President referred, read as follows:

I have received your telegram of July 13, 1943, asking for a message to the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe... I take particular note that the object of the conference is to seek methods by which the Jewish people of Europe may be saved from the massacre to which they are being subjected.

The rescue of the Jewish people of Europe, and of other peoples, *likewise marked for slaughter* by Nazi savagery, is under constant examination by the State Department, and any suggestion calculated to that end will be gladly considered. An intergovernmental agency has been created designed to deal with these problems. You will readily realize that *no measure is practicable* unless it is consistent with the destruction of Nazi tyranny; and that the final defeat of Hitler and the rooting out of the Nazi system *is the only complete answer*. This Government, *in cooperation with the British Government*, has agreed upon those measures which have been found to be *practicable* under war conditions and steps are now being taken to put them into effect. (Italics added)

We reproduce these two messages because they were typical of the hypocrisy and deception of the Roosevelt Administration's attitude towards the Holocaust which prevailed, until public opinion forced the President to change his policy and accept the main proposals formulated at the Emergency Conference.

At the risk of being repetitive, we should point out the deceptions contained in the messages:

1. The disingenuous statements of both the President and Secretary of State pretending how much they had at heart the matter of saving the Jews, and that everything practicable was being done for that purpose. This, of course, was not true despite the self-righteous words of sympathy. The international agency referred to was none other than the fictitious International Committee on Political Refugees (IGC), a do-nothing body created at the phony Évian conference in July 1938, convoked at the initiative of President Roosevelt, supposedly for the purpose of saving lives and helping refugees, primarily Jews who were already then the most threatened as a collectivity. Since the

conference could not agree upon any steps to rescue anyone, it was decided to create the IGC as a decoy for world opinion to believe that something was achieved. The IGC was as good as stillborn, and one forgot about its very existence.

Then there was a replica of Évian in Bermuda (April 1943), and again, since the conference refused to adopt any proposals concerning rescue, it was decided to use the same ploy: to resuscitate the long dead IGC with the clear intention that the new avatar will follow in the footsteps of its own previous incarnation. To state that the Agency mentioned by FDR “has been created designed to deal with those problems” (“the rescue of the Jewish people of Europe” and others) is in plain defiance of historical truth. It was designed for the opposite purpose.

2. Cordell Hull, though forced by the text of the invitation and the name of [the] Emergency Conference to refer to the Jewish people, nonetheless found it necessary to emphasize that the Jewish people was not the only one marked for slaughter by the Nazis. Whom else he had in mind he didn’t reveal, because there were none, regardless how savage the treatment the Germans meted out to conquered peoples. None was explicitly or implicitly chosen for total extermination.²
3. “No measure is practicable unless it is consistent with the destruction of Nazi tyranny,” meant “consistent” with the war effort. The not-so-subtle hint was that measures usually suggested to save the Jews would interfere with the successful prosecution of the war. Great Britain’s favorite excuse was that rescue would involve the smuggling in of spies among the refugees.
4. The gist of the two messages was that though both the President and the Secretary of State are constantly concerned with the problem and wrack their brains how to save the Jews, from a practical point of view nothing can really be done until the Nazis are defeated in the war. That after victory no Jews may be left to rescue was of little concern to them.

2 The Gypsies, too, were persecuted and slaughtered. But it seems that it was a by-product of the Final Solution rather than an aim in itself. In a sense they were not part of the Holocaust, but an incidental victim of it. To my knowledge the story of their martyrdom was not yet thoroughly investigated.

Of course, there were other messages from members of Roosevelt's Administration written in a different vein and motivated by real compassion. Characteristic of this opposite attitude it is worthwhile to quote from Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau:

It is my earnest hope that out of your Emergency Conference will come a specific plan to relieve the critical situation which exists among the Jewish people who are facing complete extinction in Hitler's Europe. Certainly, *every effort must be made to stop the slaughter* which can be expected as the final gasping gesture of the dying Nazi regime. Along with every freedom loving American, I am deeply interested in seeing that every possible step is taken to stop this needless slaughter. And as we all know, if anything is to be done, it must be done quickly, for the corrupt leaders of Fascism must recognize fully that the day of final reckoning is not far off. (Italics added)

Morgenthau saw the situation in a diametrically opposite perspective. Instead of waiting for war's end to take care of the Jews, he implies twice in his message that one has to act quickly to stop the slaughter, and this action, far from delaying victory, will accelerate it by warning the Nazis and their satellites of the day of reckoning and hence they may desist from the Holocaust.

Another contrast to the attitudes of the White House and the State Department was Wendell L. Willkie's message. Among other things it said:

No one can remain aloof... No one is exempt from *individual* responsibility... Truly the last hope of the enslaved Jews of Europe rests with the people of the UN (the Allies). It is they who must *put an end* to the massive slaughter and provide a means for *evacuating* the remaining Jews to places where decency and hope still exists. The creation of a UN Agency, the aim of your Emergency Conference, is one with which I am in complete agreement... (Italics added)

But, as we have seen, the President and the Secretary of State spoke a different language which betrayed, as far as the Jews of Europe were concerned, an ominous intent.

The Emergency Conference refused to be bamboozled by these august personalities and their disingenuous pronouncements, nor did it adjourn without giving them proper answer. Prof. Max Lerner in the closing session of the Conference read the two messages, and after expressing appreciation for the words of sympathy, he declared:

At the same time we wish to state our earnest conviction that the Inter-Governmental Agency, as well as the other steps taken to date, have been *catastrophically inadequate* to cope with the magnitude of the problem, and that *no appreciable saving of lives has resulted from them*. The problem of the European Jews is certainly the problem of those Jews *still remaining in Axis held territory and especially marked for destruction as a people* by Nazi Germany. Only a governmental agency *specifically* charged with the task of saving the Jewish people of Europe and given sufficient authority to act, can successfully accomplish the task. (Italics added)

Prof. Lerner then stated that the participants of the Emergency Conference don't consider their task accomplished by having adopted detailed resolutions which composed a coherent plan how to save the remaining Jews of Europe, The Conference consequently decided to become **the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe**. "We shall continue our efforts," he said, "within the framework of a victory with unconditional surrender, until the job is done."

The various panels of experts, each working within its own frame of reference, but all of them coordinating their findings, formulated a detailed plan aiming to show that there were ways and means of affirmative action to save the Jews **before** war's end.

All the practical recommendations were contingent upon two basic prerequisites:

1. That the Government of the U.S. and other Governments of the Allies must acknowledge in unequivocal terms their concern with the **specific** problem of the Jewish disaster in Europe;
2. That for the tremendous task of rescuing the Jews, **a special Government Agency** must be created, exactly as such agencies and

special machineries were created for any major or even minor war task.

The detailed plan how to save the Jews

Military and Political Measures

1. In line with the announced policy of the United Nations that all atrocities and crimes against humanity committed by the Axis Powers be met with just reprisals immediately, and with punishment of the guilty after the war, it should be specifically declared that such reprisals and punishment will also be inflicted for any atrocities and crimes committed by the Axis countries against the Jews.
2. This policy should be officially brought to the notice of the Axis governments and – through the use of the radio, leaflets and other appropriate means – to the knowledge of their populations...

Treatments of Jews

The satellite governments of the Axis should be urged through the intermediary of the International Red Cross, of neutral countries, or of the Vatican, to guarantee treatment of Jews in accordance with the standards guaranteed to other inhabitants.

All Axis countries should be urged through the intermediary of the International Red Cross, of neutral governments or of the Vatican to permit Jews to leave the territories controlled by the Axis.

The non-belligerent countries in Europe, Sweden, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey, should be urged to grant temporary asylum to all Jews escaping Axis-controlled territory. The governments of the United Nations should undertake to assist in feeding and clothing these refugees, and should further undertake to make arrangements for their evacuation during the hostilities and within a reasonable time after the cessation of the hostilities.

The governments of the United Nations are urged to operate their foreign exchange controls so as to make possible financial assistance to Jewish refugees in non-belligerent territory.

Every government and authority associated with the United

Nations should be urged to grant temporary asylum in territories under its control to all Jews who may escape, or have escaped, Axis-controlled territories, and whom it may be impracticable to maintain in non-belligerent territory; it being understood that such admission shall not constitute a claim to permanent residence after the end of hostilities.

Palestine

Special attention should be paid to the practicability of the admission of Jewish refugees to Palestine – which is close to Axis-controlled territory; can be reached without diverting shipping space; its community having repeatedly expressed readiness to welcome an unlimited number of Jewish refugees, and the country having proven its capacity to absorb Jewish refugees in large numbers.

All non-belligerent countries should be requested to grant transit facilities to all Jewish refugees from Axis-controlled territory who might be en route to any territory controlled by the United Nations, whether as refugees, as immigrants or as repatriates.

Transportation

The following facilities, available at present without interference with the war effort of the United Nations, should be made use of in transporting Jewish refugees from Axis-controlled territory:

1. Road and rail communications operating between Axis-controlled territory and Turkey and between Turkey and territory controlled by the United Nations.
2. Road and rail communications operating between Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, and Axis-controlled territory.
3. Neutral shipping at present idle in United States ports and idle tonnage of neutral registry in other ports.

The Relief and Transportation Panel estimated that available neutral shipping alone could transport 50,000 persons per month from European countries. The number of people that could be transported by rail and roads exceeded this figure many times.

Mission to London

This detailed program comprised the ideas and suggestions of private citizens. Though the latter were famous in their respective fields, they were in no position to implement them. To translate these resolutions into action one had to “sell” them to the Governments who could do it, had they only the will and compassion. The most exasperating task of the Emergency Committee was to convince the British and American Governments that it is their duty to act.

The Emergency Conference was still at work when Congressman Will Rogers Jr. was asked to fly to London to do just that. He came back with no encouraging results. He saw everybody there was to see, conveyed all the arguments with his usual eloquence and sincerity, was listened to with great courtesy, everyone expressing sympathy but no willingness to do anything. The Government of that Great Empire was too busy and too frightened to deviate from the usual course, and the masses, though many of them expressed revulsion at what was happening to the Jews, were too exhausted by rigors of the long years of war to have enough energy left to give forceful expression to their sentiments to pressure their own government to change its policy in this field. At a press conference upon his return from England the young Congressman, sharing his impression, concluded with the following statement:

I have come back from England convinced that it is now up to our own Government to take the initiative and to institute proper action to save the helpless Jews of Europe, and it is up to the American people to see to it, without fail and without delay, that the Government does not continue to ignore this problem. You cannot fight a war against tyranny while you watch with passive acquiescence the greatest manifestation of tyranny. At the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe I said that the problem has to be taken out of the dossiers of the diplomats and placed in the hearts of humanity. Well, the problem is still buried in the dossiers of the diplomats, and for some curious reason it does not disturb the peace of two other documents lying beside it – the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms.

Delegation to Palestine and Turkey

One of the first efforts made by the Emergency Committee was to win the cooperation of the State Department. A delegation of the Committee was received by Cordell Hull on August 12, 1943, and three related topics were discussed at length. One was the need to create a special governmental agency charged with the rescue of the Jews. Second, to establish immediately temporary camps in Palestine, Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal and Morocco for persons escaping from Nazi-dominated territory. Third, sending delegations to Turkey, Palestine and Spain where the Committee could be instrumental in rescue efforts through direct contacts with the Governments of those countries.

The Secretary of State was noncommittal as to the first two questions, but he said he viewed favorably the sending of the delegations. Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, who sat in the meeting, was charged with the details of arranging the necessary wartime travel permits as well as the means of transportation. He sabotaged the whole project and nothing came of it as far as it was contingent upon State Department cooperation. Later-day declassified documents and the private papers of Long proved that he was the main villain (not the only one) at Foggy Bottom concerning any effective rescue measures. He was for the status quo (that is, to let Hitler proceed with the Final Solution); he was against any delegations to study the possibilities of rescue in various neutral and friendly countries. He claimed that everything one has to know is already in the possession of the State Department. There is no need to establish temporary shelters or camps because the countries will not agree, and if they would agree, it would be at the expense of the war effort. There is no need to create a new agency since the IGC, created in 1938 and revived in 1943, is alive and one should have faith in that it will do everything that is "practicable." Generally, he suspected, or he was rather sure that the Hebrew emissaries raise such a hue and cry under the slogan of "Action, not pity!" [because] they are in fact a group of agents implanted in this country by Himmler to disrupt the war effort.

In September, however, the Committee succeeded in obtaining the necessary authorization and transportation facilities for A. Ben-Eliezer, a member of the Hebrew Delegation and Executive Board of the Emergency

Committee, who was delegated to Palestine. On his arrival there he opened extensive negotiations with the British authorities about granting visas from Nazi-dominated countries. He was also instrumental to alert the Yishuv to the scope of the Jewish disaster in Europe and the urgency for mass clamor action. (The establishment institutions were resigned to the idea that under war conditions the Yishuv is hapless and cannot throw its weight in affecting the fate of European Jewry.) His reorganization of the Irgun included a plan of rescue through illegal channels from Turkey. He planned to proceed to Istanbul but was arrested by the British authorities under the Emergency Regulations (see chapter 23).

Mr. I. Hirschmann whom the Emergency Committee recommended as a delegate to Turkey was sent there later in the capacity of an official representative of the War Refugee Board (see p. 380).

Another member of the Hebrew emissaries and the Executive Board of the Emergency Committee, Mr. Eri Jabotinsky, was sent by the latter to Turkey, also through the good offices of the War Refugee Board. He reported that many Jews could be smuggled out of the occupied countries but that considerable financial resources are needed.

A Presidential Promise that was never kept

In Quebec, the summit conference of Churchill and Roosevelt and their military and political assistants, to map out the further strategy of the Allies, began on August 19, 1943. The Emergency Committee thought it urgent to take advantage of this Summit in order to lay the findings of the Emergency Committee before the heads of the two Governments and to insist on immediate action. A letter with a detailed memorandum addressed to the President and Prime Minister, called their attention to the plight of the European Jews and asked that their delegation be received to discuss the matter directly. A full-page ad published in the American and Canadian papers, headed "32 United Nations and One Forgotten People," was an appeal to the two statesmen not to ignore the Holocaust any longer. The delegation left for Canada hoping it would have an opportunity to talk to Churchill and Roosevelt. In the meantime, the Committee received a telegram signed by Stephen T. Early, [Press] Secretary of the President:

As you know, the President is working day and night with Mr. Churchill, Secretary Hull, his personal Chief of Staff, and many groups of the joint U.S. and British military staff. I respectfully request that your delegation arrange to be received in Washington after the President returns here. I assure you that nothing will be lost to your cause by waiting until then, and I am quite certain that Washington consideration will be better from every point of view and much more productive than anything that could be done by a delegation coming to Quebec at this time.

The Emergency Committee recalled its delegation expressing appreciation for the assurance that the delegation will be received in Washington. However, there was no need to express any appreciation because the audience never took place, despite repeated attempts to remind the White House of Mr. Early's specific assurance.

The Rabbis' pilgrimage to Washington

In the less than two years of its existence, the Emergency Committee undertook a score of initiatives with a view to achieving one overriding aim: the creation of a special agency charged with the sole task of saving the Jews of Europe. Within this chapter we refer only briefly to a very few phases of this campaign. The purpose of the Committee's various initiatives was to impress Congress, the Administration and the President of the apocalyptic nature of the Jewish disaster and the urgent need to act without a delay.

A demonstration was organized, unique of its kind: a pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., of more than five hundred Rabbis of the Orthodox Jewish community, including all its leaders. These pious men converged from all over the country upon the nation's capital on October 9, 1943, with the wish to see the President. A communication from the White House indicated that they will be received by him (in that communication there was a common qualifying phrase: "except for unforeseeable developments"). But at the last moment when the Rabbis were already on the way to the White House, it was learned that the President will not be available, the excuse being that he was out of town. Where was he? He visited a Yugoslav training school at an airbase outside Washington.

There was sufficient evidence to believe that this sudden disappearance of Roosevelt from the capital was in large part a result of Zionist pressure exerted through the “good offices” of some Jewish VIP’s around the President. In any case, the Rabbis were received by the Vice President Henry Wallace. On the steps of the Capitol Wallace and a number of Senators and Congressmen heard the Rabbis’ petition to the President and Congress, and later the Vice President read the petition before the Senate. These are the opening words:

In the name of God, creator of the Universe, blessed be He who voiced in our Holy Torah the command: ‘Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor. I am the Lord’.

The petition went on to indicate the lines of actions suggested. Both the general and the Jewish press devoted considerable space to the Rabbis’ pilgrimage.³ Many papers delegated special correspondents to Washington to report on it, and the interest shown during the various ceremonies performed indicated the tremendous effect of the pilgrimage on the people of the capital, legislators, officials, and citizens alike.

Day of intercession

In connection with the Rabbis’ pilgrimage, through the efforts of the Emergency Committee, a Day of Intercession, Sunday, October 10, 1943, the day after Yom Kippur, was promulgated by six thousand Cristian

3 Dr. S. Margoshes, editor of the Yiddish daily *Der Tog* (The Day) wrote: The pilgrimage of the Orthodox Rabbis to Washington to hand President Roosevelt and Vice President Wallace, as well as the leaders of Congress a petition on behalf of the doomed Jews in Nazi-held Europe, will forever stand out in my memory as the most notable high adventure it has been my privilege to witness during a fairly varied and adventurous life. To say that it was dignified and impressive is to be guilty of an understatement. To characterize it as grand and glorious is, to my way of thinking, to come nearer the truth.

This enthusiastic report of Dr. Margoshes is all the more indicative as he is a prominent representative of these Jewish organizations which have been and continued to be till the very end hostile to the Emergency Committee. Other Jewish (mainly Anglo-Jewish) accounts were less favorable, and some who were hostile achieved a *tour de force* by attacking the pilgrimage from every single angle, without mentioning with one word its purpose – to petition the Government to take action on behalf of the Jews in Europe.

churches, to be devoted to prayers for action to save the doomed Jews of Europe. The call of the churches was signed by Henry St. George Tucker, President Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church; Francis J. McConnell, President Bishop of the Methodist Church; Henry Sloane Coffin, Moderator, Presbyterian Church. (The Catholic Church kept aloof, though privately certain priests showed sympathy and were helpful. Later the Papal Nuncio showed concern and acted to bring about practical results, see p. 263).

What Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin overlooked

It is difficult to decide which is the most outrageous of the sins of commission and omission that Allied leaders perpetrated during the war: they were so many. Yet the so-called Joint Declaration on War Crimes issued on November 1, 1943 is outstanding. It was a result of the Tripartite Conference of the Allied foreign ministers held in Moscow (October 18-30, 1943), where it was decided that the leaders of the Big Three, who were also the Allied Supreme Commanders, should issue a warning to the Nazis and their satellites that those who committed atrocities or were responsible for them will be held **personally** accountable. It was a fantastic document. One must make a tremendous effort to believe one's eyes reading it. It was not a general statement but went into detail specifying the atrocities for which the guilty will be brought back "to the scene of their crimes" to be judged and severely punished: "the execution of French, Dutch, Belgian or Norwegian hostages, or of Cretan peasants," or "slaughters inflicted upon the people of Poland," or "the wholesale shooting of Polish Officers."⁴ But there was no mention of Hitler's most hideous crimes: mass extermination of the Jewish people.

The shock and incredibility were so great that the leaders of the Emergency Committee first felt that conventional protests and appeals would be inadequate to express the outrage against the atrocity statement

4 The inclusion of this sentence was a macabre joke worthy of Stalin: It was he who ordered the "wholesale shooting" of the Polish officers (close to five thousand) during the "informal" German-Russian Alliance and the Partition of Poland in 1939. Their mass grave was discovered by the Germans on April 13, 1943 in the Katyn wood near Smolensk. When the Polish Government in exile demanded an investigation by a commission of the International Red Cross, Stalin broke relations with the Sikorski Government.

of the Big Three. The Co-Chairman of the Committee, Ben Hecht, thought that the reaction could perhaps be best expressed in a macabre parable of devastating sarcasm. He wrote it on the spur of the moment and it was published in the New York Times on November 5, 1943, and in a dozen other major newspapers throughout the country. It is worthwhile to reproduce it in full. It still reads as if written yesterday, as a historical evaluation of the attitude of the great powers to the extermination of the Jews. It conveys the spirit of indifference and cynicism of the Big Three, their false fears, inexplicable inhibitions, the moral cowardice and irrelevance of their sanctimonious profession of quasi-Messianic intentions concerning the war they were waging against Hitler. This is how Ben Hecht's parable reads:

MY UNCLE ABRAHAM REPORTS

I have an Uncle who is a Ghost.

But, he is no ordinary Ghost like so many dead uncles.

He was elected last April by the Two Million Jews who have been murdered by the Germans to be their World Delegate.

Wherever there are Conferences on how to make the World a Better Place, maybe my Uncle Abraham appears and sits on the window sill and takes notes.

That's how he happened to be in Moscow a few weeks ago.

My Uncle Abraham sat on the window sill of the Kremlin and listened with great excitement, to one of the finest Conferences he had ever attended since he has been a World Delegate.

He heard every word that Eden, Molotov and Hull spoke.

Last night my Uncle Abraham was back in a Certain Place where the Two Million murdered Jews met. It is the Jewish Underground. Only Ghosts belong to it.

When the Two Million Souls has assembled, my Uncle Abraham arose and made his report to them as World Delegate.

"Dishonored dead," said my Uncle Abraham. "Fellow Corpses and Ghosts from All Over. Of the Moscow Conference I have this to report. The conference made a promise that the world was going to punish the Germans for murdering all the different peoples of Europe – Czechs, Greeks, Serbs, Russians, French hostages, Polish officers, Cretan peasants. Only we were not mentioned.

In this conference, which named everyone, only the Jew had no name. He had no face. He was like a hole in Europe on which nobody looked."

A Ghost from the Lime Kilns of Warsaw spoke.

"Why is this?" asked this Ghost, "why is it that we who are dead are without a Name in the conference of Fine People?"

"This I do not know," said my Uncle Abraham. "I can only report what exists. Jews do not exist, even when they are dead. In the Kremlin in Moscow, in the White House in Washington, in the Downing Street Building in London where I have sat on the window sills, I have never heard our name. The people who live in those buildings – Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill – are afraid to speak of us. Why, I don't know. We were not allowed by the Germans to stay alive. We are not allowed by the Four Freedoms to be dead."

A Woman Ghost from the Dynamite Dumps of Odessa spoke.

"If they didn't mention the two million murdered Jews in the conference, isn't that bad for four million who are still alive? The Germans will think that when they kill Jews, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill pretend nothing is happening."

And from the Two Million Ghosts came a great cry.

"Why is this silence? Why are they afraid to speak of Us?"

My Uncle Abraham raised his hand.

"Little Children," my Uncle Abraham spoke: "Be patient. We will be dead a long time. Yesterday when we were killed we were changed from Nobodies to Nobodies. Today, on our Jewish tomb, there is not the Star of David but an Asterisk. But, who knows, maybe Tomorrow ---!"

This ended the meeting of the Jewish Underground.

My Uncle Abraham has gone to the White House in Washington. He is sitting on the window sill two feet away from Mr. Roosevelt. But he has left his notebook behind.

The emotional impact upon the readers was tremendous. Thousands of them sent in letters and contributions expressing their appreciation and comprehension of the crusade led by the Emergency Committee. Many said that Ben Hecht found the exact words and images to express exactly their own feelings and despair.

The President, reading the add, was angry and disturbed. Putting down

the New York Times he said to Eleanor Roosevelt: "This is hitting me below the belt," *) she told Bergson. Whatever he meant by this complaint, the Emergency Committee was not willing to let him get away with the terrible war crime of omission, of having signed the Moscow Declaration.

The importance of "psychological warfare" methods was obvious to the Hebrew Emissaries from the beginning of their campaign to save the Jews under Hitler. It had been the firm conviction of the Emergency Committee that the situation of the European Jews would have been considerably relieved had it become clear to Germany and the satellites that their crimes against the Jews provoked not only indignation among public opinion in the free world, but that their governments will translate this indignation against the guilty into severe retribution.

It was clear that even if heroic measures were employed to transfer Jews from Nazi-dominated territories to other countries, the pace of rescue would still remain far behind the tempo of mass murder. It was therefore essential to take steps to rescue the surviving Jews on the spot by increasing psychological pressure, particularly by threats of retaliation. Therefore, the Emergency Committee organized a powerful campaign demanding the amendment of the "Judenrein" Moscow Declaration. A telegram to Roosevelt signed by Sigrid Undset and Ben Hecht charged that failure to mention the millions of Jews against whom the worst atrocities were committed "must be considered a fatal oversight or else a grave injustice..."

To the diabolical Nazi criminal mind... (the omission) can suggest but one thing – that the United Nations are completely indifferent to Hitler's proclaimed intention to proceed with the extermination of the entire Jewish people of Europe. There is, therefore, the grave possibility that the statement might thus prompt, indirectly, the barbarous Nazis to intensify the slaughter...

The signatories demanded that the Big Three issue an additional statement which "will make it clear beyond any doubt that for these crimes (against the Jewish people) they, too, (the Nazis) will be punished with equal severity."

This appeal to the President was followed by a nationwide campaign of advertisements, the most effective of which was Ben Hecht's "My

Uncle Abraham Reports.” The Emergency Committee urged the press throughout the country to associate themselves with its demand, as publicly expressed by its various officers and spokesmen. Hundreds of the nation’s newspapers did – in stories, columns, editorials and interviews. The New York Post published (the date...) an interview with P.H. Bergson, in which he explained that the Committee did not consider the Moscow Declaration relevant to the Jews since in it they are assimilated with the nationals of the occupied states.

The Germans call them Jews and kill them as Jews – regardless of whether they consider themselves a race, a religion or a nationality. Unless a special international tribunal is set up to deal **specifically** with atrocities against the Jews, there is no assurance that in a country like Poland the local tribunals discussed in Moscow will ever take action.

The campaign ostensibly brought immediate results. At a press conference on November 5, when Roosevelt was asked about the matter, he said somewhat fuzzily that “the hearts were all right; that it was a question of ways and means.” In his short reply he defended the “hearts” twice but also indicated “that he may have something to say after Secretary Hull returns (from Moscow) on how the UN (Allies) as a result of the Moscow Conference, propose to avenge the Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities...”

Well, he personally said nothing. But on November 18, Cordell Hull, addressing a session of both Houses of Congress, indicated that the Moscow Tripartite Conference definitely kept in view that “Hitler has reserved for the Jews his most brutal wrath.” He added that “sure punishment will be administered for all these crimes.” This declaration was practically the first occasion when a responsible representative of the Allied nations specifically mentioned the atrocities against the Jewish people in a general statement of policy. Some newspapers acknowledged that it came “as an obvious” reply to criticism leveled by the Emergency Committee.

Yet even Hull’s statement was bizarre. Why did the Moscow Tripartite Conference need to keep secret what they had in mind about Hitler’s determination to exterminate the Jews, while they specified so many other crimes? If they had it in mind, why didn’t they say it? Now when Hull **did**

say it, it sounded like an afterthought. They couldn't have been of decisive historic importance because they were half-hearted utterances, extracted under pressure of public opinion, and with an eye to internal politics in connection with the upcoming presidential elections the following year. All this the Germans knew and so did the satellites. Of course, public indignation played a part, especially at the last stage of the war, and these meager and self-conscious statements by American leaders could not be totally ignored. They sowed doubts in the minds of some Germans and many more satellites. But to make a real difference as to the treatment of the Jews, these pronouncements had to be followed up by violent measures, convincing the Nazis but above all the satellites, that the Allies, and in the first place the mighty U.S., mean what they say, and demonstrate militarily to give them an idea what they can expect in case they don't cease the exterminations. Not only what kind of evermore fearful retribution will be meted out to them during the war, but the ultimate punishment in reserve for them after hostilities will cease.

P. H. Bergson and representatives of the Emergency Committee made it clear in a memorandum submitted to the Administration and in conversations with high ranking Government officials, that Secretary's Hull's declaration was not sufficient; that the Nazis and their satellites would be more strongly impressed if a statement threatening severe punishment for crimes against the Jews were to be signed by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Marshal Stalin. Four months later, on March 24, after the occupation of Hungary by the Germans, President Roosevelt made such a statement. The President declared later that his statement had the approval of Churchill and Stalin.

Tribute to Denmark and Sweden

At the time of quasi-global callousness, there were inspiring exceptions in Europe, usually heroic individuals and small groups who endangered their lives to hide and otherwise save Jews. Their roster numbered in the thousands and they can rightly be considered "Khassidey umot ha'olam" – the just among the nations of the world. In the **Yad Vashem** memorial institution in Jerusalem there is a partial list of these heroic souls, many of whom came to the Holy City to get their moral and symbolic awards in the form of a scroll specifying their deeds of compassion. But there was

one shining example during the war when, not individuals or small groups alone but, two Governments of comparatively small nations “conspired” to defy the Nazis. When Germany occupied Denmark, the Swedes warned the Nazis against attempting persecution of the Danish Jews, and should the warning not be heeded they publicly announced that Sweden would receive and shelter all the Jews of Denmark who could escape. When it became clear that the Germans would introduce anti-Jewish laws also in Denmark, the Government of that small country with the help of the Government of Sweden transferred, under the cloak of night, practically the whole Jewish community of Denmark by ships through the Baltic to Sweden. In this act of rescue, the chiefs of the army and navy of the conquered country participated. *)

Thus, one Government of a little country overrun by the mighty Wehrmacht, in cooperation with another small, neutral neighbor, set an example of the action which the Emergency Committee urged upon the giants of the democratic world: let shelter be offered and rescue arranged and the remaining Jews need not perish.

The Emergency Committee decided upon a campaign to pay tribute to Denmark and Sweden, and in a series of full-page, newspaper advertisements welcomed this example, congratulating the Governments and the people of the two countries. A mass meeting was held in Carnegie Hall, New York, on October 31, 1943, and thousands came to pay tribute. Among those who participated, the speakers were Leon Henderson, Orson Welles and Ralph Bellamy.

Tributes were paid to the Swedes and Danes who helped the Jews and managed their escape. These were graciously acknowledged by the Ministers of these countries in Washington.

Chapter 13

The Struggle for a Special Agency

A Resolution in both Houses of Congress

As stated on several occasions the Emergency Committee's major objective was to impel the Government to create a special rescue agency. Conversations by representatives of the Committee with official personages in Washington left no doubt that neither the White House nor the State Department were inclined to concede to this demand. Their answer was invariable: if anything can be done, it **is** by the PGC. But the Emergency Committee, under the inspiration of the Hebrew emissaries, was not willing to take the repeated "no" for an answer. It proceeded to employ various means of enlightening and arousing public opinion to the vital importance of such an agency. These initiatives were intense and multifaceted, finding expression in many documents, both for public consumption as well as addressed to the different Government agencies. They were both of a mass character: petitions (signed by half a million Americans), full page newspaper advertisements, contacts with journalists and editors, with officials in high places, and friends with access to such officials, and with Senators and Congressmen. The volume of their records numbered in the thousands.

These efforts were crowned with success. On November 9, 1943, a resolution was introduced in both Houses of Congress whose operative part reads:

... Be it resolved that the Senate of the US recommends and favors the immediate creation by the President of **an Agency to Save the Jewish People of Europe**. Said Agency to be composed of military, economic and diplomatic experts, and given **full authority** to determine and effectuate a realistic and stern policy of action to

save the lives and preserve the dignity of the ancient Jewish people of Europe whom Nazi Germany has **marked for extinction**, and

Be it further resolved that the Senate of the United States favors the development of the Agency to Save the Jewish people of Europe into a UN Agency.

An identical resolution was introduced in the House of Representatives.

The moving spirit behind the resolution was the indomitable and relentless champions for rescue action in the Senate, Guy M. Gillette (D. from Iowa), and in the House Will Rogers Jr. (D. from Cal).¹

Vengeance by a Jewish Congressman

This resolution was introduced only after consulting various experts in the field which would involve rescue operations, and not until the sponsors became convinced that an overwhelming majority of both houses would favor the measure.

But difficulties became apparent as soon as the resolution was introduced. Resistance came from various quarters, some unexpected. One should first mention the delaying action if not outright sabotage undertaken by Representative Sol Bloom, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Though it was well known that the resolution would have been voted by the Committee as well as by the House, either unanimously or at least by an overwhelming majority, Bloom submitted it to the Committee hearings. It immediately became clear that it was not his intention to clarify the merits of the proposed measures but to delay as long as possible before bringing it to the full House; or perhaps better still to kill it outright in [the] Committee. His tactic was to question the legal status in the U.S. of the head of the Hebrew Emissaries, Peter H. Bergson, and cast doubt upon the witness' integrity and character. But some members of the Committee were rather annoyed by this procedure

1 Co-sponsors in the Senate were: Homer Ferguson (Rep. Mich.); Elbert D. Thomas (Dem. Utah); Robert A. Taft (Rep. Ohio); Allen J. Ellender (Dem. La.); George L.P. Radcliffe (Dem. Md.); James E. Murray (Dem. Mont.); Edwin C. Johnson (Dem. Colo.); Joseph F. Guffey (Dem. Pa.); Bennet C. Clark (Dem. Mo.); Sheridan Downey (Dem. Calif.); Frederick Van Nuys (Dem. Ind.); Joseph Clark Baldwin (Rep. NY) was co-sponsor in the House.

and Bloom was forced to desist [from] the hearing. Instead, the hearing became a platform from which enlightened voices were heard, for the urgency of the proposal. Among these were Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, William B. Ziff Sr., Dean Alfange, representatives of labor and others, all of whom strongly defended the resolution.

In detailed and documented testimony, Dean Alfange, Vice Chairman of the Emergency Committee, proved that the Administration's "good intentions" were of no practical value. Indeed, reality proved that the policy of the Administration, especially that of the State Department, was one of refraining from any serious rescue action if not outright sabotage. "The Doors of escape," he told the Committee, "are bolted **not from within** but from **without** by ourselves and our Allies."

Mayor Fiorello La Guardia's testimony contained a personal tragic undertone since his own sister was in the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

There was however one powerful dissenting voice, that of the venerated Zionist leader and co-President of the American Jewish Conference, Rabbi Stephen Wise, who in his two-hour testimony before the Committee characterized the resolution as "inadequate" because it did not refer specifically to Palestine, and did not call for the lifting of all restrictions with respect to immigration. Congressman Will Rogers Jr., who introduced the resolution, explained that it was not an oversight. Palestine was intentionally not mentioned in the resolution because "anytime you inject that into the refugee situation it reacts to the harm of the refugees." *)

Zionist opposition and Rabbi Wise's testimony

But the Zionists passionately objected such an approach, they and their leaders, especially Rabbi Wise, refused to distinguish political and ideological consideration from the emergency needs of the European Jews to be rescued, regardless where and under what political circumstances. The Zionists did not flinch from the certainty that their attitude would provoke serious complications in dealing with matters of rescue.² Their

2 On the divergence of views between the Emergency Committee and the Zionist leadership, see Henry L. Feingold's "The Politics of Rescue," pp. 211-212; 237-239. This historian notes that it took much courage for such a group of extreme "Zionists" as the Hebrew Emissaries to adopt such a kind of judgement concerning the approach to rescue. He also asserts that it was this approach which in part "was behind the hostility directed by

minds were already preoccupied at that time with various problems which will arise after the war. Late in November this attitude was reported in a dispatch from Washington by Boris Smolar, editor of the Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA):

... Jewish leaders are especially incensed at the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe because of the fact that this Committee was responsible for the introduction of a resolution in the Senate and in the House which urges the creation of a special commission to plan the rescue of Jews in Nazi Europe... Excellent as this resolution may seem, important American Jewish leaders **consider it harmful**... in fact, we understand that Senator Gillette, who introduced this resolution... was asked by well-known Jewish leaders to abstain from doing so... So was Rep. Will Rogers Jr. before he introduced the resolution to the House... Both preferred, however, to act on the advice of the Emergency Committee, and against the will of the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Conference, and others.³

At a later date Senator Gillette, chief sponsor of the Resolution, described the attitude of the Zionist leaders:

I had no conference with Dr. Wise on the matter until some time after the Resolution was introduced, when Dr. Wise called at my office accompanied by two or three other gentlemen and discussed the pending Resolution with me. None of these gentlemen seemed to be enthusiastic for the passage of the Resolution and the tenor of the conversation seemed to suggest their belief that the action as proposed by the Resolution was not a wise step to take, although they professed very strong interest in everything that would look to the saving of the remnant of the Jewish people in Europe from destruction.⁴

the Zionists" against the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (p. 212).

- 3 I could not locate the clipping or bulletin. If I do find it, I will give the date and name of a paper it was published [in], indicating that it was also published in numerous other papers. It appeared in the [Answer] Magazine and in numerous Anglo-Jewish publications throughout the country.
- 4 Gillette to H.L. Selten, August 1, 1944, f* in DR11/20 & ch. See also Senator Gillette's article "Bargaining [undecipherable] of the US, The Answer, April 1945, p. 48.

The State Department's efforts to kill the Resolution in Committee

Rabbi Wise's testimony was not a serious threat to the resolution as it was not convincing; besides the Zionists had already worked out a second line of defense (or was it an attack?) by preparing a special Palestine resolution to be introduced in both Houses of Congress. Hence, in order to kill the resolution, it was necessary to use a more formidable instrument – and such was offered by the State Department. The highest official at Foggy Bottom to deal with the refugee problem, Breckinridge Long, called in to testify in [the] Executive session on November 26, 1943, lasted four hours and aimed at proving two closely related things: first, to display the splendid record of the administration in the field of rescue, the State Department was not only diligent in the task of saving the Jews but also generous beyond the call of duty. Second, that there was no need of a new agency because the work is done anyhow both by the State Department as well as the IGC [Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees]. He provided statistics of the number of victims admitted to the U.S. in the last decade (since Hitler assumed power in Germany). He spoke of the prerogatives of the IGC; he bragged, he was confused; uninformed, and plainly lied. Under questioning by Rep. Rogers, he had to admit that the IGC did not maintain an office in the U.S. To everyone's astonishment he told the Committee that the IGC has the right to negotiate rescue operations with the Germans via neutral intermediaries, which was immediately denied in London by the IGC's headquarters. But his figures concerning the number of Jews admitted to the U.S., and the accompanying technical information he provided were so impressive that the majority of the Commission decided to shelve the resolution though not to reject it out of hand.

Rep. Bloom, having scored a victory of sorts, decided to justify his conduct by releasing Long's testimony. He, as well as Long, thought this will be the *coup de grâce* both to the resolution and the whole idea of a Special Agency. The press published the gist of Long's testimony on December 11, 1943, and indicated it was a fatal blow to the Gillette-Rogers initiative. The New York Times wrote:

The U.S. has admitted 580,000 victims of persecution by the Hitler regime since it began 10 years ago, Breckinridge Long... told the

Foreign Affairs Committee... Mr. Long testified that the majority of the refugees admitted were Jews.

The New York Herald Tribune, reporting the story on the same day, wrote:

The publication of Mr. Long's testimony... not only revealed the progress of the British and American Governments and the IGC in rescuing refugees, but appeared to indicate doubt within the Committee of the need for a resolution calling for an executive commission to rescue the Jews of Europe.

The debacle of Long's testimony

This decision to make public the debate of Long's testimony proved a boomerang and created a scandal. Far from killing the idea of a special agency, it gave it new impetus and a greater urgency. It also marked the beginning of his downfall a few weeks later. It revealed that Long's report was deceptive in so many respects that one cannot enumerate them all. His figures included the number of immigrants who came to the U.S. not as victims of persecution but for personal reasons in time of peace. It confused visitor and immigration visas. It also included returning aliens who were already residents of the U.S. and returned legally in the normal way as holders of the "green card" do. These, too, were included in Long's figures. What it did not include was the number of aliens who left the country permanently in that ten-year period.⁵

The great surprise was the press's revelation that not only was the

5 The foreign editor of PM, Victor H. Bernstein, analyzing Long's testimony in a detailed column titled **Bunk** indicated:

... The following official immigration statistics of the Dept. of Justice reveal that:

Between Jan. 1, 1933, and June 30, 1943 – 476,930 immigrants were admitted into this country for permanent residence.

Of these 476,930 – 209,932 were Jews.

And while these 476,930 persons were entering the country – 243,965 persons permanently left the U.S.A. to take up residence elsewhere.

So, the net immigrant addition to the population of the U.S.A. under our quota laws, was 232,965 in the 10 years. And our quota laws permit admission of some 150,000 annually. But even the 476,930 immigrants who entered the country were not all refugees from

U.S. deaf to the cry of agony of millions of doomed Jews seeking ways of escape, but even the immigration quota was not filled to any considerable degree. Dorothy Norman related in the New York Post on December 8, 1943, that the quota of 1,500,000 immigrants who might have been admitted under the law and peacetime conditions during these last ten years, only 293,882 persons actually were. In other words, less than 1/5 of the quota had been filled. "In the last year only 5.9 of the total annual quota was admitted despite labor shortages (in the U.S.)." She also revealed that a recent "proposal was made in high circles in Washington that something in the neighborhood of a **million Italians** be brought here, on a temporary basis, to fill jobs for which we now have insufficient people in the U.S."

The storm did not abate; more and more protests were voiced against the State Department's deception of public opinion. Even the timid leadership of the Jewish establishment joined the protest including Judge Proskauer, President of the American Jewish Committee, as well as spokesmen for the various Zionist organizations. Long regretted the day he volunteered to testify. Five weeks after the event he confessed in his

Hitlerism. More than half were European who would have come to these shores, Hitler or no Hitler, in the ordinary course of events.

Who is an ordinary immigrant and who a refugee from Hitler? That depends on where the immigrant comes from, and when.

It is safe to say that the bulk of persons who (a) were born in Austria and Germany and came here since Hitler's rise in 1933 and (b) who were born elsewhere in Europe and came here since Hitler overran Europe in 1939, are refugees within the real meaning of the term.

Statistics show that the combined total of these classes of immigrants to date is 182,956. So, Long's figure of 580,000 refugees from Hitler who found asylum in this country is reduced by more than two-thirds.

Where did Long get his figure of 580,000?

Immigration statistics show that 578,397 permanent visas to aliens were given out by the State Department in the 10-year period. But these are non-quota visas and include:

378,468 aliens who were residents in the U.S.A., were travelling or visiting abroad and who have now returned home.

112,692 were immigrants from "non-quota" countries – Canada, Mexico, Central and South America – upon whom the law places no immigration restrictions and who certainly did not come here to save themselves from Hitler.

62,517 students from all parts of the world, including Asia.

Other small categories of non-quota immigrants, including professors, ministers, etc.

diary that he misled the public, but in the very same entry he complained that the Jewish agitators took him up on the fraudulent statistics.⁶

* * *

In the meantime, however, it became clear that American public opinion was overwhelmingly behind the demand for a rescue agency. The Emergency Committee published a comprehensive report in a soft cover book, "The American Press and the Rescue Resolution," quoting editorials and articles from the American, Anglo-Jewish and the Jewish press in favor of the resolution. Practically the entire press came out for it. Members of the Senate and House were deluged with telegrams and letters from all over the country asking for a vote. Wendel Willkie, in a statement to the Emergency Committee, said the measure "deserves the whole-hearted support of every American." Leading Protestant clergymen as well as the Union of Orthodox Rabbis also favored the resolution. Urgent entreaties came from Palestine where the Committee's delegate, A. Ben-Eliezer, succeeded in impressing on public opinion the importance of the resolution and demonstrations were held in Palestine asking for its prompt passage. Very impressive were the messages of the Chief Rabbi of Palestine Isaac Herzog and the prominent historian Prof. Joseph Klausner. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee **unanimously** approved the resolution on December 20, 1943. Some influential American papers expressed surprise at the delay of the vote in the House Committee.

6 I made a statement to the Foreign Affairs Committee which was subsequently printed and in the course of a long four-hour inquisition made several statements which were not accurate – for I spoke without notes, from a memory of four years, without preparation and on one day's notice. It is remarkable I did not make more inaccurate statements. But the radical press, always prone to attack me, and the Jewish press have turned their barrage against me and made life somewhat uncomfortable... Anyhow I have written to Bloom to straighten it out. The Jewish agitation depends on attacking some individual. Otherwise, they would have no publicity. So far, for the time being I am the bull's eye... *) Feingold, p. 237.

Chapter 14

Three Protestants and One Emancipated Jew

Behind the scenes of official Washington there were not only acts of sabotage and conspiracy but somewhat belatedly, a mighty force began to evolve thrusting in the opposite direction favoring immediate rescue. It came from an unexpected quarter, the Treasury Department, more precisely a small group of high-ranking officials and the Secretary himself. Chief among them were Randolph E. Paul, General Counsel of the Treasury; his assistant Josiah E. DuBois; and John W. Pehle, the Department's head of Foreign Funds Control. The three happened to be Protestants. Morgenthau was an emancipated Jew. The problem of rescuing Jews was not new to him; his father, Henry Morgenthau Sr. was ambassador to Constantinople during World War I, and it was due in great measure to his repeated interventions with the Turkish government that the Yishuv in Palestine survived and did not share the fate of the Armenians.

The chain of events leading to the Secretary of the Treasury's passionate involvement in the rescue campaign, endorsing the creation of a special agency to implement any possible scheme to save the Jews are related in his diaries and 800 volumes of personal papers which Prof. John Morton Blum compiled and edited into three admirable volumes **From the Morgenthau Diaries**. *) Since then, young talented historians reconstructed Morgenthau's campaign, especially Prof. Henry Feingold *) and Saul S. Friedman. *) Yet sketchy references to some highlights of these events are called for, if for no other reason than to put them in a truer perspective than was undertaken so far. When the ad written by Ben Hecht "70,000 Jews for sale, \$50 a Piece" appeared on February 16,

1943, the matter was brought to the attention of Morgenthau, who the same day contacted the President who said he knew nothing about the Rumanian offer and advised him to get in touch with Sumner Welles. The latter also pleaded ignorance but promised to inquire. The following cablegram in confidential code was sent the same day to the American Embassies in Ankara and London, reading:

New York Times of February 13 carried story from London by Sulzberger, that Rumanian Government, according to neutral sources, had advised United Nations officials that it was prepared to cooperate in transferring 70,000 Rumanian Jews from Trans-Dniestria to any refuge selected by the Allies. Story states proposal was made in specific terms with suggestion that refugees would be conveyed in Rumanian ships displaying Vatican insignia and that Bishop of Bucharest and Papal Nuncio would be concerned with supervision of the transfer.

Please endeavor to ascertain and telegraph urgently what basis there is for Sulzberger's story in so far as information is available in Ankara. Similar inquiry is being sent to London. *)

The mystery of State Department's cable exchange with the American Minister in Bern

For some peculiar reason a similar inquiry was sent to the American Minister in Bern only on April 10, 1943. This bizarre move on the part of Welles had a strange story attached to it which perhaps became an eye opener to Morgenthau and his assistants.

Harrison answered Welles' inquiry on April 20, 1943, about the Rumanian Jews as well as the fact that Hitler's Final Solution proceeds unabated. His enclosed report, coming from a trustworthy source, told that every day 6,000 Jews were being killed at Auschwitz. But in the same cable Harrison included a puzzling complaint:

May I suggest that messages of this character should not... be subjected to the restriction imposed by your (cable) 354, February 10, (1943), and that I be permitted to transmit messages from R, more particularly in view of the helpful information which they may frequently contain. *)

There are several seemingly curious elements both in Welles' inquiry as well as [in] Harrison's reply, particularly the paragraph just quoted:

1. What was the restriction imposed on the American Minister in Bern on February 10?
2. Who is R?
3. Why does Harrison suggest that the restriction should not apply any longer?
4. Why was it necessary for Welles to inquire from Harrison in Bern about the Rumanian offer in the first place?

We will begin with the last question because answering it bears upon the others. The State Department on February 16 did not need any confirmation about the Rumanian offer. Its files were bulging with sufficient information verifying that it was true. In that phone conversation with Bergson on Saturday, February 10 (a week before Welles' cable of inquiry), Assistant Secretary of State Berle as good as confirmed the authenticity of the Rumanian offer. But the story of the Rumanian overtures to the U.S. dates back as far as November 1941. *) As mentioned, the Rumanian Government was among the first to foresee Hitler's defeat, and though the dictator Antonescu was Hitler's favorite ally, he did not hesitate to warn both Ribbentrop and Hitler himself that with America's entry into the war one should not expect victory in any foreseeable future. "The War would still last a long time." At the same time, he sought some means to ingratiate himself with the Americans and thought there are two things which might please them. One, that the Rumanians would not carry military operations beyond a certain line in Russia. *) Second, that Bucharest was willing to enter negotiations with Allied and neutral countries about evacuating the Jews from Rumania. *) It was along these lines that he spoke to the American Minister in Bucharest, Franklin Mott Gunther *), and expressed his hope to maintain good relations with the U.S. *) Gunther was among the few American diplomats abroad showing real concern about the fate of the Jews (though some of his suggestions at the time were regarded as far-fetched). He sent cable after cable to the State Department (some he also sent to Roosevelt with the hope that they will reach his attention), informing them both about the unspeakable atrocities to which the Rumanians subjected the Jews, without

being prompted by the Germans: starvation, deportation, slaughter. But he also reported that there is a way to stop these atrocities. Bucharest is willing to enter [into] negotiations about evacuation with Governments of countries willing to accept the Jews on any basis. He indicated that Jewish leaders in Rumania will probably appeal to the U.S. for intercession, and that Washington should give it serious consideration. *) This was the most crucial time when the Final Solution was not yet formulated (The Wannsee Conference took place on January 20, 1942) and the Germans still vacillated between extermination and letting them go; the slaughter of the Jews was still haphazard and not a determined policy. It was, so to speak, in a "tentative stage" and will continue to remain so for some time ever after Wannsee.

But the State Department chose to ignore these reports and pigeon-holed them for the duration, the rationale being provided by Cavendish W. Canon of the Department's European Division in correspondence with Gunther and in a memorandum to his superiors, mainly the President. It did not differ much from arguments expressed in the past by the British and that will continue to be used till the end. Eden and his advisors would use them at the Conference with Cordell Hull and his advisor at the Washington Conference two years later, to which we already referred. He would continue using them with Morgenthau as late as August 1944 in his insistence to ignore Horthy's offer to release all the Jews from Hungary. *) Canon argued as early as November 1941 that to take up the Rumanian offer would create a most dangerous precedent. Other countries where Jews are being persecuted and murdered will make similar offers. Doing something for the Rumanian Jews would mean to invite "new pressure for asylum in the Western Hemisphere... So far as I know *we are not ready* to tackle the whole Jewish Problem"¹ (italics added). Thus, Canon created a viciously circular argument: the Allies cannot tackle the whole Jewish problem, but to tackle it only partially is also impossible because it would inescapably lead to having to deal with the problem in all its enormity. *)

Thus, it is obvious that the State Department need not have been surprised by the latest Rumanian offer of early 1943 to release 70,000 Jews.

1 It is often difficult to decide who learned from whom: the Americans from the British or vice versa, how to rationalize their complicity in the Holocaust.

For more than a year since Gunther's first reports, the State Department had been receiving from a wide variety of sources information both as to the slaughter of Jews as well as the possibility to rescue them.

Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner

Now we return to the question of who R was. "R" refers to Dr. Gerhart Riegner who escaped from Germany into Switzerland. But he, or somebody in his confidence, succeeded to make an extraordinarily important arrangement: A German industrialist having close connections with some of the highest officials in the Nazi hierarchy, promised to forward him vital news concerning the fate of the Jews in Hitler's occupied Europe. Dr. Riegner contacted the World Jewish Congress that appointed him as its agent in Switzerland. By the end of August 1942 Riegner, on the basis of well documented information he received from his correspondent (or his friends), composed a report which contained a detailed summary of the Wannsee Conference where the Final Solution was adopted; information of mass executions by means of Zyklon B gas² in specially erected death camps in Upper Silesia, a description of the deportations and slaughter on a mass scale. Riegner asked Leland Harrison, the American Minister in Bern, to send it through the diplomatic pouch with a request that the State Department forward it to Rabbi Wise. In Washington such information was not welcome. It treated the facts with skepticism and some officials in State simply regarded it as "Jewish propaganda" to enhance their case for rescue (as one of them characterized it: "Don't forget, this is a Jew telling about the Jews." *) What should be done with Riegner's report? The best thing was to pigeonhole it so that Wise is left in the dark. But to [e]nsure that his information reaches its destination, Riegner sent the same report to Samuel Sidney Silverman, delegate of the World Jewish Congress in London, and the latter forwarded a copy by regular mail to Wise. It was this copy that on September 2, 1942, the Rabbi has shown

2 John Lukacs in his **The Last European War**, p. 447, remarks: "It is significant that the gas used for the mass extermination of the Jews, 'Zyklon B', was used beforehand in exterminating domestic parasites such as bed bugs. 'Zyklon' was a household trademark word in Central Europe in 1939. Only after 1945 it became known for what purpose it was used during the war." Lukacs is wrong in that. Riegner knew and reported about it in August 1942.

to Welles, who was shocked and promised to verify the report through the Department's channels. There was really no necessity for any verification since the original was in the files of the State Department; besides, the Department was already in possession of a voluminous accumulation of corroborative reports from various other missions. Yet, Welles asked Wise to keep the whole thing secret until the report will be substantiated. Wise promised. Till this very day it is difficult to understand why the Under Secretary was interested to keep the information about the death camps a secret, and even more puzzling why Wise acquiesced. Did their moral scruples bother them lest one would be guilty of unfairness to Hitler, accusing him of crimes that may perhaps prove somewhat exaggerated? More probably the State Department did not want to provide additional fuel to the agitation of the Hebrew Emissaries and their American friends, and to the Jewish organizations in general for demanding Governmental action to halt the slaughter.

At almost the same time that Wise received Riegner's report, he also received a report from Jacob Rosenheim in London that "the corpses of the murdered victims are used for the manufacture of soap and artificial fertilizer. Please do best to arouse American intervention."³

When Wise asked Justice Frankfurter to bring these reports to the attention of the President, Roosevelt told his celebrated Jewish friend that they were false; the deportations of Jews to the East were done simply to use them as laborers in building fortifications on the Soviet frontier. *) This is in crass contradiction to what he told a Delegation headed by Rabbi Wise on December 8, 1942, that for several months he knew from various sources that the Jews were being exterminated on a mass scale.

When Riegner's report was confirmed in all its grisly details, the State Department was still reluctant to release the news or confirm it, and [it was] only after the press obtained similar data from their own sources and published the facts about the ever accelerated pace of the Holocaust, that Welles confessed to Wise in October 1942 that the Government possessed information that "confirm and justify your deepest fears." *) Data about mass deportation from various countries to the death camps multiplied, and reached the State Department from American missions abroad. Of necessity some of these reports were gathered from individual

3 J. DuBois, *The Devil's Chemists*, p. 184.

sources. The Nazis would not send special emissaries to inform the Allies what they are doing to the Jews.

A letter from Rabbi Wise to his “Boss”

Similar reports from various sources kept arriving at the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, Jewish organizations in Switzerland, and the Zionist leadership in New York, the first dating as far back as the beginning of 1942. The reaction of the official institutions of the Yishuv is related in a previous chapter (see p. 207ff.). For our understanding of the Jewish leadership's position in the U.S., nothing can be more illuminating than a letter from Rabbi Wise to President Roosevelt, sent almost a year after the first cataclysmic news about the fate of the European Jews began to filter into his office. This is a bizarre document in more than one respect:

Office of Dr. Wise
40 West 68 Street
December 2, 1942

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Boss:

I do not wish to add an atom to the awful burden which you are bearing with magic and, as I believe, heaven-inspired strength at this time. But you do know that the most overwhelming disaster of Jewish history has befallen Jews in the form of the Hitler mass-massacres. Hitler's decision was to exterminate the Jewish people in all Hitler-ruled lands, and it is indisputable that as many as two million civilian Jews have been slain.

I have had cables and underground advices for some months, telling of these things. I succeeded, together with the heads of other Jewish organizations, in keeping these out of press and have been in constant communication with the State Department, particularly Under Secretary Welles. The State Department has now received what it believes to be confirmation of these unspeakable horrors and has approved of my giving the facts to the press. The organization

banded together in the Conference of which I am Chairman, feel that they wish to present to you a memorandum on this situation, so terrible that this day is being observed as a day of mourning and fasting throughout the Jewish world. We hope above all that you will speak a word which may bring solace and hope to millions of Jews who mourn, and be an expression of the conscience of the American people.

I had gathered from the State Department that you were prepared to receive a small delegation, which would include representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the B'nai B'rith. It would be gravely misunderstood if, despite your overwhelming preoccupation, you did not make it possible to receive our delegation and to utter what I am sure will be your heartening and consoling reply.

As your old friend, I beg you will somehow arrange to do this.

SSW:S

Ever Yours,
President

In this letter three features stand out eerily: one, the apologetic tone, his wish not to add "one atom" to the President's burden, as if the problem of mass murder of the Jews is of marginal significance. Second, he confesses that he not only kept secret the information of the slaughter but saw to it that all the other leaders and officials of the Jewish establishment do not divulge it either. And third, what he wants the President to do was to say a word, not with a view of rescuing the Jews of Europe, but of being a solace to the Jews who mourn in America and also in the free world, Fantastic!

Dr. Riegner continued receiving information from Germany which he compiled and submitted to Harrison, who forwarded them to Washington. Cable 482 arrived on January 26, 1943, containing further details of how the Final Solution proceeds with ever greater ferocity; the Jews are being put to death at the rate of 6,000 a day in camps in occupied Poland. It was at about that time that news came concerning the Rumanian offer to release 70,000 Jews. The combination of the news about the atrocities – and the possibility of saving tens of thousands of Jews was too much for the State Department; certain officials decided they had had enough. Foggy Bottom did not want to hear any more about the gassing of Jews if it can be avoided, and thought the best way to end public agitation

would be to plug up channels of information at their source about what happened to “these unfortunate people.”

As often happens in the bureaucratic labyrinth, the right hand does not know what the left was doing. The State Department sent a cable to Harrison on February 10, 1943, probably formulated by Breckinridge Long and signed by Cordell Hull, asking that he discontinue forwarding Riegner’s reports, qualifying them as “private communications” destined for private persons. This was cable 354. The rationale given for this prohibition was that such a practice may violate the war censorship regulations of Switzerland – a perfect absurdity from every angle.

Meanwhile, Riegner, unaware of Washington’s prohibition, continued providing Harrison with various data he received from Germany about the ever-increasing atrocities perpetrated against the Jews, but also included in his reports to the American Minister detailed information concerning the Rumanian offer. But Harrison, though regretfully, complied with the instructions in cable 354, and didn’t forward Riegner’s reports any longer. When he received Welles’ inquiry about the Rumanian offer, being sure that the Under Secretary knew quite well that his source was Riegner, he was puzzled. He couldn’t understand the logic of it – don’t forward information from this private source, and yet send us the information. He filed a full report in answer to Welles’ inquiry on April 10, 1943, but didn’t hide his puzzlement and annoyance. He asked the State Department to rescind the earlier prohibition contained in cable 354, or explicitly to indicate that it does not apply to Riegner’s reports.

Harrison’s reference to cable 354 aroused suspicion among high-ranking officials at Treasury involved in matters of approving licenses, usually insignificant sums to Europe, mainly Switzerland for small scale rescue initiatives. But the Treasury was puzzled by the fact that even in cases when it approved such licenses, nothing happened to take advantage of them, or that inordinate delays in using them caused the opportunity to be missed.

DuBois tells in “The Devil’s Chemists” about an instance of licensing a currency deal consisting of buying through intermediaries in Switzerland from officials in Rumania and other satellite countries in their local currency and paying for it in dollars. As quid pro quo of such a transaction they would help Jews escape into neutral countries. Various private agencies were willing to put up the money (in hard currency). The

Treasury agreed to license the exchange on the condition that dollars be deposited in “blocked” accounts in U.S. banks to be released only after the war. This would ensure that no dollars are transferred to Nazi controlled territories. Yet many months passed and nothing happened. First, there was opposition and procrastination on the part of the State Department. Then when State gave in, it was a problem of negotiation with the British through the State Department. When the British Ministry of Economic Warfare decided to support the plan, the Foreign Office came out against it, insisting that the “blocked” accounts measure is not a sufficient guarantee that no dollars are made available to the enemy. The most difficult argument to overcome was that of the Foreign Office about the “difficulties of disposing of any considerable number of Jews” should they be rescued from enemy occupied territory. These were the reasons why the Treasury was involved with the State Department’s correspondence with some of its legations abroad.

As far as Harrison was concerned, DuBois noticed that after frequently transmitting certain information about the catastrophic plight of the Jews in Europe and possibilities to rescue some of them, there was silence on this urgent subject for about three months, and he was puzzled by the gap. When he came upon Harrison’s communication of April 10, in which cable 354 was mentioned, he asked for that cable – and was refused – being told that it was of a “purely political” character and had no bearing on the matters the Treasury is interested in. But he went to Morgenthau, expressing suspicion that the State Department for some unknown reason is interested in hiding the cable from them. The Secretary of the Treasury went straight to Hull, and later Breckinridge Long provided a paraphrase which sounded both sensible and innocuous. Precisely because of that DuBois became even more suspicious: if that was all in the cable – not to transfer private messages through the diplomatic code lest it offend the Swiss, why provide a paraphrase and not the original text of the cable? Morgenthau insisted with Hull to see the cable as it was sent. He sent an official over to State to see it. He reported that only eight words had been omitted from the paraphrase. The eight words were the beginning of the cable: “Your cable 482, January 21.” DuBois tells in anger: “What a difference they made!... Anyone reading that message with the eight words omitted would conclude that it was nothing but a message stopping the sending of

routine information. But cable 482 was Harrison's first cable reporting the mass slaughter!"

When Morgenthau and his senior assistants learned about this ruse and the cruelty behind it, they were shocked – and it played an important part in Morgenthau's ardent conversion to the cause of rescue.

In the light of the State Department's continued obstructionism, Morgenthau and his chief assistants sought a radical remedy. This was provided by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe advocating the creation of a special agency to deal exclusively with this problem. They seem to have been impressed by the idea and intensity with which it was championed.

* * *

A week after Long's testimony was publicized, a staff meeting of high-ranking Treasury officials took place on December 18, 1943 at which the problem of practical and legal steps was discussed, to help rescue the 70,000 Jews from Rumania. Since financial transactions under war conditions were involved, clearance by the Treasury was necessary; thus, the offer from Bucharest was brought to Morgenthau's attention. He became interested in the project and was willing to assist in issuing the necessary licenses. The first meeting between the Secretary of Treasury and Sumner Welles took place on February 15, 1944. Since then, a tug of war ensued between Treasury and State, the latter raising ever more obstacles, reneging on agreements already concluded, under one pretext or another, especially the one of safeguards that none of the funds earmarked for rescue should fall into the hands of the enemy. The Treasury was satisfied that all loopholes were closed and there was no possibility that any American currency will go to the Nazis. John W. Pehle made a startling statement, if one takes into consideration the general moral climate which prevailed in Washington at the time, saying that "the question was not one of safeguards, **but of foreign policy**. The problem lay in removing that question from the State Department to some agency more sympathetic to the Jews. For that purpose, Morgenthau's assistants urged him to recommend to the President the appointment of a commission on the refugee problem." *)

Morgenthau was not immediately convinced. His assistants suggested

it to him before on several occasions. Whenever a proposal was made for a license concerning currency transfer abroad to save the Jews, he approved it almost automatically, relying on John W. Pehle, Randolph Paul and Josiah E. DuBois. He could do no less than they recommended. But when urged to attack his colleague, the Secretary of State or the President, he was reluctant. He was not convinced that they are cruel, have no compassion, or that they act in bad faith.

His conversion to undertake a crusade on behalf of the Jews in Europe roughly went through three phases. The first was one of routinely hearing about the problems from his assistants and their complaints about the State Department. The second was his decision to take matters in his own hands and try to convince Hull and the British to be more cooperative, if only the true facts will be presented to them by him personally.

On November 23, 1943, Morgenthau and his assistants reviewed the situation concerning the licenses in connection with the Rumanian Jews. They were transferred to the State Department some time ago, but no action was taken because of Britain's strong objections. Morgenthau wanted to be sure that the licenses were transferred to Harrison in Bern; and as to the British objection he wanted to send a cable to the American Ambassador in London, John Winant, instructing him to have "a sharp and open talk with the Foreign Office." But he insisted that the cable should not only be cleared by Cordell Hull but signed by him.

Pehle, despite his profound respect for his boss, was sarcastic about the idea. He explained that the State Department had worked out a method how to vitiate any decision, communication, instructions, or even licenses concerning rescue coming from the Treasury, to be forwarded through regular channels to the American Missions abroad. It was quite simple and it did not involve holding up any of the instructions indefinitely, though long delays were sometimes involved. The main thing was that cables from the Treasury are being forwarded to their destination with such short remarks like "The Treasury want this, the Treasury desires you do to this... or that..." Pehle told Morgenthau that whole files were filled with such cables and no action resulted, because Harrison (the man to whom the licenses concerning the Rumanian Jews and other matters were directed) "unless he is a dumbbell, can see through it," i.e., that the State Department in fact only perfunctorily forwarded these communications without endorsing them. American missions abroad can act only if they

have explicit instructions from the State Department. This would also happen with the sharp communication to Winant.

Listening to this stratagem and others, as related by his assistants, he became indignant and decided to get tougher. But he still believed these shenanigans were only in the middle and lower echelons and that Hull might not be a conscious part of it. He would try again to move the Secretary of State personally, and if not successful the scandal will have to be brought out into the open. He told his assistants:

No one would like to see this come out in the open more than I. Unfortunately, you are up against a generation of people like those in the State Department who don't like to do this kind of thing (to rescue Jews), and it is only by me happening to be Secretary of the Treasury and being **vitaly interested** in these things, with the help of you people... that I can do it. I am all for you... **I will do everything I can, and we will get it done.** But don't think you are going to be able to nail anybody in the State Department... to the cross...

You are very forthright... very courageous, and I back you up... I will go just as far as you men will let me go... All I can do is to bring this thing and put this thing in Cordell's hands... Then it is up to him to get angry at his people... *)

This monologue reveals how hesitant Morgenthau was. They, his non-Jewish assistants, spoke to him about a matter concerning the life and death of hundreds of thousands of Jews, and specifically about the 70,000 Rumanian Jews, but **he** kept on using "this thing," and "these things," and about himself of being "vitaly interested" because he was a Jew, without saying it. It was thanks to his Protestant assistants that he shed his inhibitions and promised that he will go as far as they will permit him to go in order to see the task accomplished. This phase of his conversion was characterized by his inhibitions of being a Jew which made him the target of antisemitic and Nazi propaganda. Even high officials in the State Department in their annoyance sometimes referred to him as the "Jew Morgenthau and Jewish assistants," for making such a fuss about the issue of rescue. Of course, none of the three Secretary's assistants were Jews. But in those days when Goebbels insisted that Roosevelt was a Jew,

the truth counted for very little. Morgenthau wavered between restraint and all-out attack. Meanwhile, weeks and months passed. He first spoke to Sumner Welles on February 16, 1943, and since then more than half a year passed and the whole matter of licenses concerning the Rumanian Jews was still in the air. Yet, Cordell Hull was still his hope. Randolph Paul prepared a letter in which the Rumanian proposal was reviewed all over again, "lamented the delays that frustrated the program, and solicited Hull's assistance." *) But this letter dealt not only with the Rumanian Jews but also with the matter of Jewish children in France which came up in the meantime, again in connection with requesting permits from the Treasury to convert American dollars into French francs.

Here we touch upon one of the worst scandals in the behavior of the Allies. In the past years among tens of thousands of Jews deported to the extermination camps, were many thousands of children ranging in age from two to fourteen. They were packed into windowless boxcars without food or water and delivered to the death chambers. But cables from Bern reported that six thousand abandoned Jewish children were still in France, hiding in private homes, monasteries and various other places, about half of them in southern France occupied by the Italians. In order to provide for these children, whether in hiding or removing them to other families, or other villages and town where they would be safer, or smuggling them out of the country, considerable funds were necessary. The situation became particularly urgent because by the middle of 1943 the French, under orders from the Germans, began to take a census of the children. Hence the police, too, had to be bribed. The World Jewish Congress from its base in Switzerland figured out that the budget to save these children from falling into Nazi hand amounted to millions of dollars. The money was available both from local sources in France, as well as from abroad, chiefly the Joint Distribution Committee in the U.S., but there was a need to obtain a license to convert American dollars into French francs and other European currenc[ies]. The Treasury, after having examined to its satisfaction all aspects of the operation, approved the licenses as it did in the case of \$170,000 for the Rumanian operation. But nothing budged; the State Department blocked the process.

Morgenthau's final conversion

Here begins the third and final phase of Morgenthau's conversion. On December 6, 1943, Hull answered the Secretary's letter of November 24, 1943. Its contents were disconcerting, and it was the straw that broke the camel's back. Morgenthau came to the conclusion that from that quarter nothing constructive is to be expected.

First, we should note Hull's cant: he professed

"the deepest sympathy for the desperate plight of the persecuted Jews in Europe. I have always been horrified at the unspeakable treatment which these poor people have received, and *it has always been the policy* of the Department to deal *expeditiously* with proposes offering hope of their relief" (italics added).

But as to the practical issues, Hull's tone was quite different. He told Morgenthau that the rescue operations concerning Rumanian and France were not really thought through in their details; consequently, Harrison in Bern had been in a difficult position – on the one hand he was authorized to issue a license, yet he was left in the dark as to what is to be done with it since it was intended to cover arrangements not yet adequately worked out. According to Hull, the American diplomat in Bern is not really convinced that the Treasury's own conditions could be met, in fact he thought they could not. All this is a concoction of deception and shifting the blame to an official of the Foreign Service who was blameless though probably bewildered by the plethora of contradictory and ambiguous instructions. Morgenthau's assistants were outraged. Randolph Paul told his boss that all of Hull's arguments were meretricious and his conclusions tendentious. There obviously developed a crisis in the relations between Treasury and State.

Hull himself was in a predicament on more than one front, particularly in his relations with the British. The Foreign Office was extremely antagonistic to any of these rescue plans, not only for the obvious reasons which they were not inhibited to spell out, but also for one particularly delicate [one] – the unwillingness of the U.S. themselves to contribute anything meaningful to the efforts of rescue. Back in March 1943, when Eden was in Washington meeting with Cordell Hull (see p. 227), he

informed the Secretary of State that the British Government would be willing to admit 30,000 refugee children to Palestine, and asked what the American *quid pro quo* would be. The Americans not only had no answer on the spot but somehow considered Eden's offer as some kind of a provocation.

Now, in December 1943, the British were adamant about doing anything to save Jews. The Ministry of Economic Warfare informed the State Department that "after very full and careful consideration," they agreed to licensing the transfer of funds for the evacuation of Jews from Rumanian and France, but only in the amount of \$25,000, and only on condition that none of it will fall into the hands of the Nazis or "other objectionable persons."⁴ This formula potentially included everyone, especially if one takes into consideration that such activities as arranging identity cards or travel documents, obtaining of visas for neutral countries, and mainly smuggling people out of a country – all this involves individuals who under normal and peaceful conditions might perhaps be considered "objectionable persons." *) Though the sum agreed upon by the British was a mockery in comparison with the many millions of dollars needed even for limited rescue, yet that agreement by the Ministry of Economic Warfare was a deception because it was followed by a communication from the Foreign Office which in fact cancelled it. It arrived two days later and advised Cordell Hull that the Foreign Office was concerned "**with the difficulties of disposing of any considerable number of Jews should they be rescued from enemy territory.**" Then followed the usual excuses that there was no transportation, there were no countries which will receive them, and that among the rescued there will be Nazi spies. Anyhow the British considered the idea of rescuing 70,000 Jews as something fantastic if not madness. In their opinion it was outside the realm of reality; it should not be touched; it can only bring disaster. What will humanity do with 70,000 Jews? And what if it were possible to save more, perhaps hundreds of thousands? Lord Moyne remarked at a later date: "What am I going to do with a million Jews?" speaking as if he were God to determine the life or death of multitudes.⁵

4 Ultimately, after the War Refugee Board was established, high Government officials directly or indirectly engaged precisely in such activities in their line of duty (see p. 305ff.).

5 See references.

He was not God but a mortal, and was cut down by two Hebrew freedom fighters in Cairo shortly after that. Probably this remark cost him his life, more than any cumulative guilt as Minister of State in Cairo (for the Middle East). Nonetheless, mortal though he was, **he did** dispose of the lives of multitudes, contributing to the extermination of countless Jews.⁶

Anyhow in that communication of December 15, 1943, the British told the Americans they were “reluctant to agree to *any* approval being expressed even of the preliminary financial agreements” (*italics added*). *)

Secretary of the Treasury accuses his government of acquiescing in the murder of the Jews

Morgenthau's meeting on December 10, 1943 with Cordell Hull, at which he tried to impress him with the overwhelming evidence of the State Department's inhuman policy, and the sneaky, vicious stratagems aimed at sabotaging rescue schemes, proved futile. One cannot even say that Hull was antagonistic. He was rather bewildered and worried about the stability of his own position as Secretary of State, and the tensions between him and Welles and between him and the President. As to the matter at hand, his mind was not on it and he didn't know exactly what the issue was all about. His attitude was not one of villainy but a state of mind devoid of any moral dimensions concerning a human disaster whose nature and magnitude surpassed his capabilities to comprehend let alone act upon.

This was the final phase of his conversation to the imperative of rescue. Now he would personally present the issue to the President in the

6 To read now the statements by British leaders at the time is an eerie experience. They reveal a startling cruelty and utter hypocrisy, couched in phrases which make no sense at all – just absurdities. Sometimes one wonders whether they knew or ever cared what they were saying. As an example: On June 6, 1942, half a year after Wannsee – Lord Moyne spoke bitterly and contemptuously about the Jews:

The Zionists wish to establish a channel to the compassion on the part of the world in the disaster of the Jews and of their sufferings of their martyrs and thus they reject any other proposal of rehabilitation of these Jews – in Germany or Poland or in such underpopulated places as Madagascar. *)

What did he mean to say? Did he consider the Nazi deportations to the death camps in June 1942 as “rehabilitation”? Or Hitler's fleeting thought of sending them to Madagascar as a “solution”? (to find the source)

starkest imaginable terms. Before starting out on the crusade he wanted to be armed not only with indignation, but with facts and figures in their chronological order. He asked for a report that would prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the State Department was criminally negligent in doing its duty and willfully sabotaging every scheme to rescue Jews; that this was not a haphazard chain of events beyond its control but a consistent policy. He wanted a report that was methodical, solidly documented and its facts irrefutable. Nor should it be just an indictment, but offer a solution: to take away the whole jurisdiction of rescue from the State Department and transfer it to a new, specially created agency. The document was prepared for him by Randolph Paul under the title **“Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews.”** The facts were logically correlated; the chronological sequence most illuminating. Morgenthau studied the document very carefully. He suggested including a section describing the role played by the British in the tragedy. Otherwise, he said, its contents were excellent and provided exactly what he needed. This will be the document he will present under his own signature to Roosevelt, titled: “Personal Report to the President.” He was now ready to go all the way, disregarding risks involved for himself, his position in the Government and his relations with FDR. This was probably one of the instances to which Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt referred when she said her husband and Morgenthau on occasion “differed and were annoyed with each other and probably said things neither of them meant...” *) But in her view Morgenthau above all was “Franklin’s conscience.” *)

* * *

This turn of events was not only unexpected but surprising in more than one respect. An emancipated Jew, aloof from Jewish institutional life and bickering among the leaders of the Jewish and Zionist establishment, became an indomitable champion of the cause for rescue and specifically for the establishment of a rescue agency. In his diaries and later in a series of articles in **Collier’s** Magazine, he summed up his indictment:

America has no cause to be proud of its handling of the refugee problem. We know in Washington, from August 1942 on, that the

Nazis were planning to exterminate all the Jews of Europe. Yet for nearly eighteen months after the first reports of the Nazi horror plan, the State Dept. did practically *nothing*.

Officials dodged their responsibilities, procrastinated when *concrete rescue schemes* were placed before them, and even *suppressed information* about atrocities *in order to prevent* an outraged public opinion from forcing their hand (italics added). *)

At one of his meetings with Cordell Hull, protesting the sabotage at the State Department, Breckinridge Long was present. After the meeting Long in a tête-à-tête with Morgenthau tried to explain the difficulties by passing the blame to subordinates "down the line," who were causing the trouble. "Well," Morgenthau replied, "Breck... we might be a little frank. The impression is all around (that) you particularly are anti-semitic." And he continued: "After all, Breck, the United States of America was created as a refuge for people who were persecuted the world over, starting with Plymouth... and as Secretary of the Treasury for 135,000,000 people, I am carrying out this (policy of helping to rescue the Jews) as Secretary of the Treasury and not as a Jew." *) He used even stronger words speaking to the President and Cordell Hull.

* * *

Henry Morgenthau, powerful Secretary of the Treasury, was the second Jew in modern history who openly accused the Government of which he was a member of antisemitism. The first who did it with eloquence and passion was, as we remember, Edwin Montagu, the only Jew in Lloyd George's Cabinet. Here the analogy ends because circumstances were different and the issues not the same. They fought their battles from different motivations. Montagu was anxious about the status of his own class of Jews, the emancipated ones, those who became successfully integrated in the social and political life of his country, while Morgenthau was anxious about the plight of foreign Jews, trapped under Hitler in Europe, and advocated a policy which in the opinion of many might have adversely affected the status and welfare of American Jews in general and its power elite in particular. It is remarkable that it was precisely two perfectly emancipated Jews who had the moral and civic courage

to fearlessly tell their respective heads of Government, as well as their colleagues in the Cabinet and high echelon bureaucrats that they pursue a policy of antisemitism. Can one imagine a Weizmann or a Sokolov in the first instance, or a Rabbi Wise or Rabbi Hillel Silver in the second, telling Lloyd George and Balfour, or Roosevelt and Cordell Hull, straight to their faces that their respective Governments were guilty of antisemitism; and that in 1943 the American administration was an accomplice of Hitler in the crime of exterminating the Jews? This is exactly what Morgenthau did.

A decisive meeting with the President

Accompanied by Pehle and Dubois, he met the President on January 16, 1944, presented their case and gave him the memorandum, asking him to read it in their presence. The opening paragraph went straight to the point:

One of the greatest crimes in history, the slaughter of the Jewish people of Europe, is continued unabated.

The document then went on to demonstrate how for years the State Department not only willfully failed to act to rescue Jews, but put up all kinds of obstacles of their own. Their procrastination had facilitated mass murder in Nazi Europe. It pointed out the restrictive instructions sent to consular offices concerning the issuance of visas; it revealed that Long and his associates in the Department kept immigration below the available quota; and they tried, and for a time succeeded, to suppress information about the Holocaust at their source. *)

It charged that

There are a growing number of responsible people and organizations today who have ceased to view our failure (to prevent the extermination of Jews in German-controlled Europe) as the product of simple incompetence on the part of those officials in the State Department charged with handling the problem. They see plain anti-semitism motivating (their) actions... *)

The report emphasized that the Department of State was neither psychologically nor administratively suited to carry out an operation which required commitment and compassion to succeed:

The matter of rescuing the Jews from extermination is a trust too great to remain in the hands of men who are indifferent, callous and perhaps even hostile. The task is filled with difficulties. Only a fervent will to accomplish, backed by persistent and untiring effort, can succeed where time is so precious. *)

Morgenthau warned the President that public opinion would no longer tolerate this situation which has all the earmarks of a nasty political scandal; *) and that if he is not going to act swiftly there is an increasing possibility of Congressional action. *) Pehle then amplified the report and gave the President a prepared draft of an executive order creating a War Refugee Board consisting of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of State and Secretary of War.

Roosevelt gave in, without much conviction, minimizing the blame attributed to the State Department in general, and to Long in particular. He did not have a high opinion about that institution and the people who ran it. He thought it was inefficient in everything it touched, but he doubted whether even Long had acted out of inherent animosity towards the Jews. As Morgenthau later put it before his staff, the President

seemed disinclined to believe Long wanted to stop effective action from being taken, but said that Long had been somewhat soured on the problem when Rabbi Wise got Long to approve a long list of people being brought into this country, *many of whom turned out to be bad people...* In any event he felt Long was inclined to be soured on the situation (Italics added). *)

This is another instance of the bizarre workings of the President's mind and of important people in the Administration. Here we observe a President who is inclined to excuse a high official wreaking vengeance on the Jewish people because a few individuals who were admitted to the U.S. on the recommendation of a Rabbi proved not to be to his liking. (We don't even know in what sense they were bad – were they

rapists? muggers? or in any other way criminals?) But what counted was that FDR approved the plan and even agreed that it was possible to facilitate the escape of Jews from Rumanian and France to safety in Turkey, Switzerland and Spain.

As a politician who was determined to perpetuate his Presidency till the end of his life, he thought it the better part of wisdom to go along with Morgenthau and his proposals.

Chapter 15

The War Refugee Board

FDR's Executive Order

Perhaps the Secretary's warning might be right that if he persisted in his present policy it would lead to a public scandal. In fact, the future tense was misplaced because the Emergency Committee already made it a public issue and created an unprecedented commotion, characterizing the inaction of the government as a scandal of historic proportions. A resolution was pending in both Houses of Congress, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had already voted on it unanimously. Wouldn't it be more prudent to avoid a clash with Congress and instead steal a march over the advocates of the Rescue agency, simply by appointing one on his own initiative before it comes up for a vote on the floor? The meeting concluded with the suggestion that the matter should be finalized with the then newly appointed Secretary of State Edward Stettinius Jr., and that the two of them put the idea into concrete form. Morgenthau decided to strike while the iron was hot: he met with Stettinius the same evening and spoke to him in a language no American high official ever heard from a colleague. He told him in plain words that "he was convinced that people in the State Department... were deliberately obstructing the execution of any plan to save the Jews and that forthright immediate action was necessary **if this Government was not going to be placed in the same position as Hitler and share the responsibility for exterminating all the Jews of Europe.**" *) Stettinius read the draft and said "I think it's wonderful."

With the endorsement by the State Department, the President issued an executive order on January 22, 1944 to establish forthwith a War Refugee Board. In an accompanying statement by the White House it was made clear that the main task of the Board was to assist in the

immediate rescue of the Jews of Europe *) and “other victims of enemy oppression.” *) It was given broad powers to specifically forestall “Nazi plans to exterminate all the Jews.” *) The composition of the Board, as suggested by Morgenthau, was of the highest order and included the Secretaries of the Treasury, War and of the State Department. These three top Departments of the Government were asked to lend their facilities and channels of communication as well as some of their personnel abroad to assist in the tremendous tasks of the newly created agency. An order from the Bureau of the Budget set aside one million dollars for initial administrative expenses.

Emergency Committee given full credit

Publication of the President’s decision to establish the War Refugee Board was received with surprise and deep gratitude, and the scope of the individual response was unprecedented. The White House received 850,000 telegrams and letters in praise of Roosevelt’s initiative.¹

The press and leaders from various walks of life considered the creation of the WRB a direct result of the campaign of the Emergency Committee.

1 Senator Gillette congratulated the Committee “for the successful results of their efforts as evidenced by President Roosevelt’s recent action.”

Sen. Joseph Guffey, in his telegram, also emphasized that the resolution sponsored by the Emergency Committee “resulted in the President appointing a special war board to deal with saving the Jewish people of Europe.”

Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, wired to the Committee: “I think that all of the officers and members of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe should feel gratified by the Presidential order...”

Wendell Willkie wrote in a message to the Emergency Committee: “... The justice and merit of the cause which your Committee is seeking to accomplish has resulted in the formation of such a commission.”

The press also gave credit to the Emergency Committee for the President’s act.

The **Washington Post** wrote: “... The industrious spadework of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe has contributed to this prospect, and the Committee is likewise entitled to credit for the President’s forehanded move.”

The **Christian Science Monitor**: “... The President’s move is the outcome of pressure brought to bear by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe...” Another article in the same paper states that the War Refugee Board was “set up at the request of the Emergency Committee...”

The overwhelming majority of the Anglo-Jewish and the Jewish press also gave the Committee credit for the creation of the Board.

Congratulations poured in to the offices of the Committee from such personalities as Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, Wendell Willkie and others. Editorials praise the work of the Committee and credited Roosevelt's decision to the tireless work of its members. *)

From the beginning, the Executive Director of the new agency, John Pehle, and his colleagues established close contact with Peter H. Bergson, developing a friendly relationship which was maintained long after the war was over, as was also the case with Henry Morgenthau. The Emergency Committee suggested that the WRB avail itself of the expertise of three of its members, to be sent abroad to organize rescue operations and the suggestion was accepted. Ira Hirschmann was officially assigned as Special Attaché to the American Embassy in Istanbul. The Board facilitated the dispatch of Eri Jabotinsky to Turkey and Aryeh Ben-Eliezer to Palestine. To some extent certain ideas suggested by the Emergency Committee were tried out with varying degrees of success. *)

Despite the ever increasing pressures by the leaders of the established Zionist and Jewish organizations to discredit Bergson, his colleagues, and the Emergency Committee (see p. 316ff.), Pehle remained steadfast in his evaluation of the organization and the individuals who were responsible for bringing about the establishment of the WRB. As late as August 9, 1944, in a letter of recommendation to the President's War Relief Control Board (dealing with licenses to transfer funds abroad) Pehle wrote:

... It is, I believe, fair to state that the Emergency Committee has been *a singularly forceful* "propaganda" group in calling the attention of a large number of American people to the plight of the Jews in Europe. Through various techniques they have *not only inspired a general emotional interest, but they have stimulated many energetic and important people to push vigorously for various types of action* in behalf of the Jews of Europe.

Since the War Refugee Board was created the Emergency Committee has been *most prolific in helpful suggestions as to rescue and relief programs*. The Board... has been in *close touch* with the Committee...² (Italics added)

2 Addressed to Mr. James Brunot, Executive Director, the President's War Relief Control Board, Washington Building, Washington 5, D.C.
Though in the typed written copy in FDR Library reads:

Statement by the Emergency Committee about the implications of the WRB

January 31, 1944

The Significance and Implications of the War Refugee Board and the Future Position of the Emergency Committee

With the appointment of the President's War Refugee Board, we are entitled to state with gratification that our past endeavors and arduous struggles have been crowned with spectacular success. It is gratifying also that leading men and newspapers of America acknowledge this fact and pay tribute to the Emergency Committee.

Secretary Ickes, in his message of January 26th to the Committee stated:

I think all the officers and members of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe should feel gratified by the Presidential order creating an agency with authority to inaugurate program of action to rescue the victims of Nazi barbarism. The Committee has kept itself free from collateral entanglements and has concentrated on the creation of an official agency to do this job. Now that the War Refugee Board is in existence, the Committee will doubtless direct its efforts to assist the Government in every way possible in the accomplishment of the task to keep alive the hope of rescue in the hearts of Jewish people of Europe.

Wendell Willkie, in a message to the Committee on January 26th stated:

On July 22, [in] a message to the Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe, I urged the creation of a United Nations Agency in order to provide tangible evidence of hope and aid to the embattled victims of Hitler's ruthlessness. The justice and merit of the cause which your committee is seeking to accomplish has resulted in the formation of such a commission. The first step has been taken. We must now exert our energies to implement the

“(signed) J.W.Pehle, Executive Director” the original seems to have been signed by Mr. Friedman. It has a handwritten notation: cleared with Pehle and Tuxford and initialed by them and A.A. Abrahamson dated 8/8/44.

findings of this commission. No mere lip-service will satisfy the awakened conscience of the world...

The Washington Post, in an editorial on January 25th, stated:

... The industrious spadework done by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe had contributed to this prospect, and the committee is likewise entitled to credit for the President's forehanded move...

The Christian Science Monitor, in an article dated January 24th, stated:

... The President's move is the outcome of pressure brought to bear by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, a group made up of both Jews and non-Jews that has been active in the Capital in recent months...

These are a few of the many expressions of tribute to the Committee for its accomplishments.

Taking into consideration the vital historic importance of this achievement, we think it advisable to analyze the significance and implications of the Executive order as well as the future position of the Emergency Committee.

1. This Committee, from its very initiation six months ago, was mobilizing public opinion and negotiating with government officials to create a special agency because we considered the two basic premises had to be acknowledged as the starting point for any real rescue of the Jews of Europe.

First: That the government of the United States and other governments of the United Nations must acknowledge in unequivocal terms their concern with the specific problem of the Jewish disaster in Europe.

Second: That for the tremendous task of rescuing the Jews, a special agency must be created, exactly as special agencies and special machineries are created for any other major or minor war task.

The President's order answered these two basic premises of this Committee. In defining the task of this Board, the President stated:

It was urgent that the action be taken at once to forestall the plan of the Nazis to exterminate the Jews and other minorities of Europe.

Not only was a special board appointed for this purpose, but a full-time Executive Director is going to be appointed with the necessary staff in order "to arrange for the prompt execution of the plans and programs developed and the measures inaugurated by the board."

2. One of the first main practical steps that this Committee suggested could be undertaken was the creation of asylums and places of temporary refuge for those Jewish people who might succeed in escaping from German occupied territory.

The President's order accepted fully this suggestion when he defined among other tasks of the board

the establishment of havens of temporary refuge for victims of enemy oppression.

3. It is also gratifying that the recommendation of the Emergency Conference, that such a board be organized at the initiative of the United States, but cooperate with other governments in carrying out its task, received full consideration.

The President, in his order, states:

... The Board, through appropriate channels, shall take the necessary steps to enlist the cooperation of foreign governments and obtain their participation in the execution of... plans and programs.

There is no doubt that this initiative taken by the United States Government will greatly influence the governments of the United Nations, and will spur them to action and cooperation.

4. The Committee also urged that government activities in the field of rescuing the Jews of Europe must be done as close as possible to the

zone of operations. That is why the Committee sent its representatives to Turkey and to Palestine, and why we asked that our representatives be allowed to go to North Africa and Spain. Again it is gratifying that the President announced in his order that

the State Department shall appoint special attaches, with diplomatic status, on the recommendation of the board, to be stationed abroad in places where it is likely that assistance can be rendered to war refugees.

5. In some respects, the President went further than any of our most optimistic expectations. When the Gillette-Taft-Baldwin-Rogers resolution was introduced, at our initiative, calling upon the President

to create a commission of diplomatic, economic, and military experts to formulate and effectuate a plan of immediate action, designed to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany...

we didn't dream that this commission would comprise such diplomatic, economic, and military experts as the Secretaries Hull, Morgenthau and Stimson.

6. We refuse to share the view of some skeptics that this board will prove sterile like such previous attempts as the Bermuda Conference on Refugees. We, on the contrary, believe that this board will live up to all expectations, not only because of the reasons we mention above, but also because of the extreme importance that the President himself attached to this board. This is witnessed not only by its composition, but also by the following facts:
 - A. "The board shall be directly responsible to the President... and shall report to him at frequent intervals concerning the steps taken for the rescue and relief of war refugees, and shall make such recommendations as the board may deem proper for further action to overcome any difficulties encountered..."
 - B. "The existing facilities of the State, Treasury and War Departments" will be at the disposal of the board." (This provision is reiterated

four time in the President's order and in the accompanying statement.)

- C. That the board's special attachés abroad will be given diplomatic status.
- D. That the element of urgency expressed and stressed in the President's order indicated the desire and determination not to lose time in inaugurating "effective measures" and "prompt execution."

What is still more important is that the board itself wasted no time in starting to translate its sense of urgency into practical and "effective measures."

A few days after the Board was established, it announced that:

"all United States diplomatic and consular offices throughout the world have been instructed to do everything possible to effectuate the Government's new war refugee policy as announced by the President, bearing in mind the urgency of the problem" (from an official statement issued by the Board on January 27).

The Board also announced that "foreign governments are being approached to ascertain the extent to which they are prepared to cooperate." Immediate reports have been requested by the Board from American officials abroad, including information as to the permission granted to war refugees to enter each country, the encouragement and cooperation given to such entry, and the extent to which each country does not cooperate in permitting entry.

"Where refugees are refused entry at frontiers, the facts and reasons for such action have been requested," the Board disclosed. "Recommendations as to a possible line of action have been asked, with notation of special obstacles."

The instructions were dispatched following the first meeting of the War Refugee Board which took place on Wednesday, attended by Secretaries Hull, Stimson and Morgenthau. "All missions were advised that instructions have been issued by the President to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of War to endeavor to effect immediately the rescue and relief of Jews

in Europe and of other victims of Nazi terror,” the announcement of the Board stated.

The instructions to U.S. diplomats abroad for details concerning countries which hinder rescue of refugees may indicate a new policy of “tough talk” to neutrals that seek excuses to exclude refugees.

In the light of these facts, we do not think it fair or advisable to be skeptical or dispirited.

7. Although the Board is a result of our endeavors, it would not be fair to ourselves to say that it is exactly what we wanted. The name of the new board is not adequate and does not do justice to the broad scope of its assignments. It is called the War Refugee Board, while its objective, as already clearly defined in the President’s order, is to save the doomed people of Europe by changing their status to refugees.

It is also to be regretted, as Senator Gillette explained in a press conference in Washington,

“that the name of the Board does not include the mention of the specific Jewish problem, for although there are other peoples persecuted in Europe, yet none but the Jews have been officially and specifically marked for total extermination.”

Not only that, the Jews are the only people whom Hitler is determined to exterminate as a people, regardless of whether he wins or loses, and especially in the event that he does lose. This is his intention of “slamming the door of history.” There is no doubt about it now that he is approaching doom and utter defeat. That is why we would prefer that, in the very name of the board, the task of saving the Jews should be made explicit.

Again, we quote Senator Gillette:

Yet we realize that it is the function and not the name of the board that is important and it is for this reason that we welcome it without any reservations.

Senator Gillette therefore removed his resolution from the calendar of the Senate because “the President’s action attained the goal we are seeking.”

8. The creation of the War Refugee Board does not mean that the race against death is over. Right now, every day and every hour, the Nazis are killing countless human beings only because they are Jews. Therefore, the appointment of the War Refugee Board must immediately be implemented by concrete action.

It took this Committee six months to organize public opinion in order to obtain the appointment of such a special war board. Now, not a single day should be lost before practical steps of rescue are undertaken.

The Emergency Committee has already evolved a complete program of rescue, elaborated by diplomatic, military, economic and transportation experts who made up the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe last July. This program has been submitted to the Government and should be of material assistance to the War Refugee Board in fulfilling its mission.

9. It is in keeping with the President's order authorizing

“the Board and the State, Treasury and War Departments... to accept the services and contributions of any private persons, private organizations, state agencies or agencies of foreign governments in carrying out the purpose of this order”

that the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe should be kept alive in order to supply the War Refugee Board not only with the necessary plans, but also with its assistance in many fields.

Now the Emergency Committee sees for itself a new, tremendous and decisive task on the road to rescue of the Jewish people of Europe. Just because we believe that the President's War Refugee Board is inspired and determined to inaugurate bold and imaginative plans of action to save the Jewish people of Europe, it is imperative that this board be backed by a tremendous movement of public opinion. It has been proved time and time again in this country that in order to enable the President to carry out concrete plans for meeting the world's and humanity's emergencies, public opinion must be mobilized behind him.

Because of the far-reaching plans of the Board, we believe that

new problems may arise, perhaps affecting relations with foreign governments, which would be helped immeasurably to be carried out successfully in an atmosphere of an alert and informed public opinion. This is the main task in the near future for the Emergency Committee.

10. Apart from that, we have to envisage that some steps connected with the rescue work will have to be taken by private organizations because they may be of a rather underground character. It is clear that the government body will prefer not to do this directly unless through intermediary bodies. The Emergency Committee must take preparations to be ready and fit for this task too.

In the light of all these facts, we hail, and most heartily welcome, the President's order. This is the beginning of action which Americans of every creed and in all walks of life have long urged. This official governmental agency, created for a specific approach, is one of modern civilization's gravest problems, has within it the seed of magnificent accomplishment. At long last, we have begun the battle against barbarism. It is with a sense of deepest pride that we hail this leadership of the United States, the world's greatest democracy.

Upon this solemn occasion we must also express gratitude to the twelve legislators in the Senate headed by Senators Gillette and Taft, and Congressmen Will Rogers Jr. and Joseph Clark Baldwin for their staunch stand and unflinching spirit they manifested in the cause of rescuing the Jews of Europe, and for introducing the rescue resolution in both Houses of Congress. We have also to keep in mind, with gratitude, the courageous and splendid cooperation of the members of the Emergency Committee, outstanding leaders from all walks of American life. Surely we should not overlook the fact that this tremendous movement in America for the rescue of the Jewish people of Europe is the answer of America to the plea of those sons and servants of the Jewish people of Europe and Palestine represented in this country by the Free Palestine Committee, under the courageous and far-sighted leadership of Peter H. Bergson. Although, as stated above, it is for the time being only a moral victory, its significance cannot be overestimated.

It was no triumph

The WRB was viewed at the time of its establishment and also by subsequent historians as the single most important accomplishment of the Emergency Committee and the Hebrew emissaries. Yet those who toiled hard to bring about the creation of the new agency, after the first flush of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, soon realized it was no triumph. On the contrary, it dawned on them that the only historic opportunity to undertake large scale rescue is being dissipated, and this time it may be missed irrevocably resulting in final disaster. The last great hope of the Jewish people was in vain.

* * *

That there was such a historic opportunity is certain. One must keep in mind that the creation of the WRB, its most impressive composition, its all-embracing mandate, its far-flung prerogatives as formulated in the President's Executive Order and the accompanying statement, looked like a revolution in American policy towards the problem of the Jewish cataclysm in Europe.³ At long last the U.S. recognized the reality of the Jewish disaster, acknowledged the existence of Hitler's Final Solution, and decided to oppose it by all available means. There seemingly was no longer any beating around the bush. It was universally clear, even to the State Department, that the task of the new agency was to rescue the Jews. No more meaningless and amorphous words were used. The official directive sent by Cordell Hull to the embassies and legations abroad began with the following unambiguous paragraph – a quote from Roosevelt's statement:

The President has instructed the Secretaries of State, Treasury and War **to take action for the immediate rescue and relief of the Jews of Europe...**"

Then come the detailed instructions, chief of which were:

3 See appendix (...): Memorandum submitted February 7, 1944 by the Washington Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europa to the War Refugee Board.

The (President's) order established special, governmental machinery for executing this policy... He stated that he expected the cooperation of all members of the United Nations and other governments in carrying out this **difficult but important task**. He stated that the existing facilities of the State, Treasury and War Departments would be employed to furnish aid to the Axis victims to the **fullest extent possible**. You should do everything possible to effectuate this policy of this government, bearing in mind that time is of the essence.

This was the spirit and letter of the new order concerning the rescue of the Jews. Yet, if looked at the events in their proper historical context, there is no justification to exaggerate its achievements, as of course one shouldn't underrate it either. Perhaps the first one to have a sober appraisal of the events was Morgenthau himself. Prof. J. H. Blum summarizes from the Secretary's diaries:

The terrible eighteen months (of struggle with the State Department) had ended, though *too late to help most of the Rumanian Jews*. Morgenthau then and later grieved over the lost opportunities. As he put it, the fight had been "long and heartbreaking. The stakes were the Jewish population of Nazi controlled Europe. The threat was their total obliteration. The hope was (now) to get *a few of them out*."

With the WRB established, the hope lay "*in the few meagre months remaining*," as it had never before, with "*crusaders passionately persuaded of the need for speed and action*."⁴ (Italics added)

In the final report after the end of the war, the representative of the WRB in Europe (Bern, Switzerland), the first paragraph startlingly begins with a quotation from the Italian critic and philosopher Giuseppe Borgese: "The explanation of our defeat is that we have not yet begun to fight." Then the report continues:

4 To whom did he refer as the "crusaders passionately persuaded of the need for speed and action"? Did he have in mind his young assistants who now comprised the Board, or the Hebrew Emissaries, particularly Peter Bergson, whom he personally befriended?

With respect to the unprecedented campaign of persecution which the Nazis had waged since 1933, first in their own country and later, as the quick succession of conquest brought more and more countries under their domination, in most of Europe, we must truthfully admit that we did not begin to fight until very late.

Very late, indeed. It was too late for the millions already exterminated, but there were millions still alive, and most if not all of them could have been rescued.

“One victory for Hitler?”

This was the headline spread over all eight columns of a full-page advertisement of the Emergency Committee in several leading American newspapers. By coincidence it appeared on January 22, 1944, the day the President announced the formation of the WRB. Its opening paragraph read:

Of all Hitler’s grandiose and megalomaniac ambitions, he retains only one – the complete annihilation of the Jews of Europe. All his other ambitions he has had to abandon one by one, under the irresistible onslaught of the victorious armies of the United Nations. In his gloomy New Year’s message, he announced his intention to win one great victory this year – over the Jews! He declared: “Our whole life, our efforts and our existence must be directed to only one end... the complete extermination of Jewry all over Europe.”

The Emergency Committee’s statement informed the public that the Nazi extermination machinery works full speed and the number of Jews already murdered up to that date exceeds **the combined total of the United Nations’ war casualties** with the exception of Russia and China. The message implored: “Democracy can and must deny Hitler this victory.”

Despite an ever-growing feeling of frustration and despair, the Emergency Committee at that late hour summoned all its human resources in a determination to multiply its efforts to obtain from the Government quick action to save the remaining Jews still alive in Europe before the war is over. (Nobody knew how many survived: the optimistic assumption

was two million, perhaps more.) “For there is a definite danger,” the Emergency Committee argued and pleaded, “that if it is not done now – swiftly – untold thousands of Jews will perish before victory is won.”

Now with the President’s announcement, a new hope appeared. As said before, the first impression was that a new policy was launched with the aim to rescue the remaining Jews of Europe by all means available and possible.

The Emergency Committee and the head of the Hebrew Emissaries attempted to map out for the new agency a comprehensive program of action commensurate with the enormity of the task. On February 7, 1944 the Emergency Committee submitted its first memorandum. Instead of summarizing its contents it is perhaps of sufficient interest to reproduce the document in extenso because it gives an idea what should have been attempted as compared with what was done. The document reads:

MEMORANDUM

submitted by the
Washington Emergency Committee to Save the
Jewish People of Europe
to the
WAR REFUGEE BOARD

As a non-partisan, non-sectarian committee, created solely for the task of mobilizing America’s aid for the rescue of the Jewish people of Europe, we have long advocated the creation by our Government of a specific agency to deal with this problem. Now that such an agency – the War Refugee Board – has been created, we respectfully submit for consideration by the Board some specific measures which are elements of a program which we believe to be necessary to the attainment of the Board’s objectives.

We beg to stress two general points:

- (a) The German plan to exterminate all the Jews of Europe is a challenge to the basic decencies of civilization and human relationship. Consequently, it is a challenge to America. It is both mistaken and dangerous to create the impression that in this country only the Americans of Jewish descent are interested

in a speedy and effective action. The War Refugee Board was created because the vast majority of the American people have been deeply shaken by the German massacre of the Jews. If we were to permit any other impression, we would be doing so to the detriment of the Jews of Europe.

- (b) Only a part of the some 4,000,000 Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe can be evacuated. The salvation of the majority of them, therefore, depends upon the successful creation inside Europe of an atmosphere which makes extermination of the Jews unprofitable, impractical and impossible. Even the Nazis at the present stage of the war cannot miss the significance of American and United Nations large-scale efforts for the rescue of the Jews of Europe.

It is reasonable to assume that the Nazi satellites, aware of approaching defeat, will adopt a new policy toward the Jews of Europe if they feel that by doing so, they might curry some amount of favor with the United Nations. Indeed, some of them have already begun to do so. We believe, therefore, the psychological warfare and propaganda aspects are of immense practical importance in the tasks of the War Refugee Board.

Plans of Action

Steps which may be taken fall into two distinct categories:

- I. Diplomatic and psychological warfare.
- II. Evacuation.

With reference to all possible action, the urgency of the time factor is pre-eminent. Thousands are being murdered daily. It will not take many months to finish the evil work. The Nazis' psychology is such that, if they feel they can do so with impunity, they will accelerate their crimes against the helpless, the more they lose their power to hurt the strong. Consequently, the added force of multinational action will have to be balanced against the greater speed with which our Government alone can be brought into action. Thus it may be well to consider whether we should not initiate a given course and then persuade other United Nations to follow it, rather than to wait for concentered action.

I. Diplomatic and Psychological Warfare

1.

An unequivocal declaration of policy regarding the Jews along the lines of the Moscow Declaration on Atrocities, issued by the United States. Similar declarations from both Great Britain and the Soviet Union would be highly desirable.

2.

A request addressed to all satellites governments (maybe even to Germany) to accord human treatment to the Jews in their domain.

3.

Advice to the satellite countries that forced deportation of Jews from their countries is tantamount to murdering them and will be so considered.

4.

Official pressure exerted upon the governments of the satellites and the people of Europe to help the Jews get out, with emphasis upon the courageous example of the Danes.

5.

A systematic campaign to get the policy and warning across to the peoples of Germany and her satellites through the medium of leaflets dropped during bombing operations and through the radio.

(As part of the general broadcasts by OWI and in special broadcasts. It is also advisable that, since only a few people in Europe receive the short-wave broadcasts from America, the facilities of medium-wave operating radio stations in England, Italy and North Africa be used. It is also advisable to have special broadcasts in Hebrew and Yiddish, directed to give hope and bolster the morale of the Jews inside Europe and improve the relationship between them and their non-Jewish neighbors.)

6.

Establishment of a special dep in the International Red Cross to take charge of and represent the Jews inside Nazi-held Europe.

(A commission of the International Red Cross could proceed

there in order to secure and supervise minimum human treatment for the Jews in general and Jewish war prisoners in particular. It is common knowledge that Jewish war prisoners from Poland, Greece, Yugoslavia, etc. are isolated from non-Jewish prisoners and cruelly treated.)

7.

Permission obtained for the International Red Cross commission to distribute limited quantities of food and medicine designed to equalize the ration of food allotted to the Jews with that of their neighbors.

(This would demonstrate the concern and attitude of the United Nations. Germany has officially fixed the food ration of the Jews to one-fourth of that of their neighbors. The United Nations should therefore make an exception by permitting to feed them as they have done in the case of Greece.)

8.

The utmost use of the existing facilities of the International YMCA wherever it possesses branches in Europe.

II. Evacuation

1.

Creation of Special Rescue Centers in the countries adjacent to Nazi-dominated territories – Turkey, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden.

(Jews from Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and some other countries could easily be brought to Turkey, mostly by land; those from France to Spain or Switzerland; from North Italy through France to Spain; the remaining Norwegian and Danish Jews to Sweden.)

2.

Pressure on these countries to announce to the world that every Jew escaping from the European death trap and reaching their borders would be admitted without any formalities whatsoever.

(These people will of course be guarded and escorted into the Rescue Centers.)

3.

Provision by the War Refugee Board to cover all expanses and to provide all the necessary food for the Rescue Centers. Guarantee by the Board to these governments for the refund of all the expenditures made by them and assurances of the withdrawal of the Jews from the Rescue Centers after the cessation of hostilities.

4.

Arrangements for issuance, by the War Refugee Board, of temporary passports to all Jews reaching the above-mentioned neutral countries upon their arrival at the border.

(Most of the Jews of Europe have been proclaimed and rendered stateless by the Germans. They have no docs whatsoever. Consequently, their emigration has been made virtually impossible. The issuance of such passports will also provide further proof that these people will move on. It will also restore to these badly shaken people some degree of human dignity.)

5.

The steady transportation of the Jewish evacuees into neighboring neutral and United Nations territories (such as Portugal, Palestine, North Africa and Cyprus) so that the rescue centers should be always ready to accept more arrivals from inside Europe.

(Palestine might well be given particular attention. By reason of its geographical proximity, of its international status, of its friendly population and its food supply, it can offer immediate haven to large numbers of Jewish evacuees. Immediate use might be made of the available quotas of the United States and of existing immigration possibilities of Palestine. The British Government has repeatedly announced that it still has in reserve 31,000 immigration visas for Palestine. These could be placed at the disposal of the Board.)

This was the first of a series of memoranda and communications between the Emergency Committee and the War Refugee Board. In the course of subsequent months, the basic points were reformulated according to developing circumstances. One that for understandable reasons was not specified in writing was that alternatively and/or sometimes simultaneously with threats and acts of severe retribution, the Board's representatives should directly or indirectly negotiate with the Nazis and with officials of

the satellites with a view not only to frighten them, but also to persuade them of the futility of their genocidal policy, and convince them that it would be in their best interests to cease their crimes and embark upon a policy which will mitigate their guilt in the day of judgement. If necessary, it was suggested that the deal should be made either by promising to be lenient with them after the war, or paying ransom if it would not significantly interfere with the war.

Still, another innovative suggestion was submitted, namely that for the duration Palestine should not be approached or treated as a political issue from the point of view of historical rights and claims and international commitments, but as a strictly humanitarian matter: to persuade the British to admit fleeing Jews from the Balkans into Palestine as an emergency measure, and place them in temporary shelters; their permanent individual status to be decided after victory when the Palestine question will come up for debate and decision among the Allies.

This was an integrated but not a new plan that was put together on the spur of the moment. For the previous eighteen months the Hebrew Delegation and the Emergency Committee worked on it, revising, adjusting and crystallizing it in memoranda, personal contacts with high ranking officials, press conferences and in full-page paid advertisements, and in full-page paid advertisements, and of course in discussion with members of the War Refugee Board. Had this plan been accepted and serious efforts made to implement it, hundreds of thousands, perhaps two million Jews could have been saved, at all events during the period beginning in 1943, when the Rumanians made their offer to release 70,000 Jews – and [at] the end of the war. In 1944 the climate in Europe changed so drastically among the satellites that the difficulty to obtain their cooperation and acquiescence were reduced to a minimum, if not to zero.

This was not an a priori, unrealistic program. In all probability it could have worked. With the establishment of the WRB the legal framework in the broadest sense of the word was created. The prerogatives of the WRB were almost unlimited. But to take full advantage of the wide prerogatives and the powerful machinery required the most fertile imagination, grasping daring ideas in every field of psychological, economic and propaganda warfare, and in some exceptional cases projects of a military nature. It called for unconventional, perhaps unprecedented diplomacy, and it was imperative for the Board to be conscious that it acts as the instrument

and representative of a power upon whom all the hopes of mankind were focused. It required uninhibited attitudes toward the British, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place. It required the art of telling the neutrals and Axis satellites that, after all, victory will be followed by a day of reckoning with appropriate punishment and reward. Last but not least, all this implied as a matter of course a budget involving hundreds of millions of dollars to be allocated by the U.S. Government and, if possible, by other Allied Governments; otherwise it would have made no sense. To create a WRB with such far reaching prerogatives, entrusted with an awe-inspiring task involving on the one hand the transfer and shelter of multitude, and on the other to convince or bribe high ranking government officials of Hitler's satellites to cease cooperating in the slaughter, without providing the necessary funds, would have been a most cruel mockery perpetrated on the Jewish people of Europe all men and women of compassion who advocated their rescue. One was justified to believe that the "Spirit of Bermuda" was dead and buried.

Chapter 16

Did the WRB Live up to Expectations?

The Record

It is distressing to write about the WRB, not only because of the disaster that overtook the **remnants** of the Jews in Europe, but also because John Pehle was a man of vision and compassion, determined to do the job to the best of his ability. His colleagues in the new agency were most admirable people, inspired by the loftiest ideas and tireless in their efforts. They have to their credit considerable achievements, which Henry Morgenthau summarized:

... All over Europe the Board has carried on its work with the great care necessary in such complex operations. It has *participated* in the rescue of *thousands* from the Balkans across the Black Sea to Palestine – in the rescue of *many* weary victims of Hitler's persecution who had found sanctuary in Sweden and Switzerland. It has *cooperated* in establishing many refugee camps in Africa and, through the President's leadership, an Emergency Refugee Shelter at Oswego in the United States. It has taken *the lead* sending food packages from this country to helpless internees in European camps. In the Hungarian crisis it took *many steps* which undoubtedly *helped* stay the deportation of Jews and relieve their condition. It has used all the old techniques and invented some new ones. It has applied them all to the saving of human life. *) (Italics added)

There is no doubt that Pehle, his colleagues and agents were instrumental in rescuing thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of Jews which was, of course, tremendously important. The life of each individual is precious. As the Talmud teaches, he who saves one life is as if he preserved a whole

world... Yet, it did not live up to what was envisioned by the Emergency Committee, or the expectations of public opinion, or even to its own mandate and vast and far-flung prerogatives. Its creation was not the revolutionary act that one had the impression it was when proclaimed. If one speaks of having saved individuals, groups, including large group, the record is magnificent, but the problem in its larger dimensions – of saving the remnants of Jewish people of Europe, it failed utterly. Why? The reasons were multiple. To mention the most important ones; the objective conditions were extremely difficult: it was a total war and the Board did not and could not control the situation; it could not easily stay the hand of the executioner. The question is, whether it tried to do all that was possible, taking all the necessary measures available to the mightiest nation on earth; a nation which ultimately played the main part in winning the war, and upon whose good will depended the salvation of the Allies, and the fate of the peoples of the Axis and their satellites bound to go down in defeat. The answer is negative.

The WRB was not created because Roosevelt or his Administration experienced a sudden revelation and underwent a transformation. The President's Executive Order was issued under pressure of public opinion, pending Congressional action and Morgenthau's intervention, all to a decisive extent a result of the desperate efforts of the Emergency Committee. Were it not for these efforts, the President would not have lifted a finger. If at last he did, it was not because of personal conviction of its necessity from a moral point of view, but because of expediency and internal political considerations.

There is no indication that even the members of the Board understood that its establishment meant a radical change of attitude and policy. When Hull was informed, he seemed quite pleased, and suggested that Breckinridge Long be assigned to organize the new agency. *)

Another member of the Board, Henry L. Stimson, strongly opposed the idea of admitting Jews into the U.S. even on a temporary basis (in camps), and whose status will be determined at the end of the hostilities – unless it is approved by Congress.¹ Though he was more optimistic than Pehle that

1 "The principal objection which I had to the proposal to bring these refugees into the United States was my fear that the proposal would be considered so at variance with the policy

if presented to Congress with the support of the overwhelming humanitarian reasons and with adequate safeguards for returning the refugees to their own countries, I am not at all sure that the measure could not be carried [out]. If thus presented, the Congress would be able to take such precautions as it would deem necessary and would be consulted in regard to the financial responsibility which is quite evident that this country must ultimately assume.

This, of course, was not a suggestion how to save the Jews but how to doom them by congressional procedure, and it betrayed a lack of sense of emergency and urgency. Were this process tried, Congress would probably have adopted the measure about the time when it would become useless – at the end of the war.

The attitude of the State Department was even more hostile. Howard K. Travers of the Visa Division warned Hull: “Careful consideration should... be given to the question whether you, as a member of the WRB or as Secretary of State, should become involved in the proposed scheme.”

Though we are somewhat ahead of our story, an additional point should be mentioned here. One of the main purposes of the advocates of a special agency was “psychological warfare.” It was obvious that even if heroic measures were employed to transfer Jews from Nazi dominated territories to other countries, only a part could be evacuated. The salvation of the majority of them therefore depended on the successful creation inside Europe of an atmosphere which would make extermination of the Jews unprofitable, impractical and impossible. Even the Nazis at that stage of the war could not miss the significance of American and United Nations large-scale efforts for the rescue of the Jews of Europe. The opening move of a dramatic nature that could have made a deep imprint in this field of psychological warfare was never made. Since the very creation of the WRB was to be the signal for a new, aggressive American policy on the front of Genocide, it would have been natural to appoint as its chairman a personality of international renown who was no part of the Administration that had behind it such a dark record on the moral front. Morgenthau thought he had a brainstorm when

of our immigration laws that the President should not undertake it without conferring with and obtaining the consent of Congress” (Stimson to Pehle, March 31, 1944).

suggesting Wendell Willkie should be invited to take over the task, but the President's advisors – mostly Jews – told him to reject it, there being no need for a political adversary to be given a chance to enhance his already great international prestige. Since time was pressing, Pehle was soon nominated as director, and the idea of finding a big name was discarded as not essential. Whether Willkie or any other personality of that caliber would have accepted is difficult to say, though from what we know of his record we may assume that he would. Whether it would have made a difference is impossible to say; one can speculate either way.

"Please, take us seriously!"

Under the prevailing circumstances, the title and responsibilities for leadership fell on the shoulders of Pehle, head of the Foreign Funds Control who "was often referred to as Morgenthau's fair-haired boy. He **was** blond, not many years out of Yale, and an extremely able administrator." *) He had to overcome almost insurmountable problems, the most difficult, perhaps, was to dispel the conviction held by the British and other Allied and neutral Governments that the new agency was not a repetition of Evian and Bermuda, an empty gesture on the part of President Roosevelt to give the impression that something of tremendous importance was created to alleviate the plight of the Jews, while in fact it was only a disguise to continue doing nothing.

Poring over the documents in the WRB files one feels profound sympathy for Pehle when he beseeches the Allies, especially the British, to take him and the agency he heads seriously. In a very detailed letter dated April 11, 1944, to a prominent New York lawyer interested in refugee problems, who was about to go on a private trip to England, and offered his services to the Board while there, Pehle wrote:

I think that the *greatest single contribution* you can make to the WRB's program... is to convince interested groups (in England), both within and outside the Government, that there has been a *real change* in this Government's attitude on refugee matters, and that the WRB *really means business*. It seems to me that in an entirely unofficial manner *you* may be able to make clear the fact that the creation of the WRB *was not a political move in an election year*,

*but an expression of our determination to do everything in our power to rescue the Jews... who are being systematically exterminated by the Nazis. (Italics added) *)*

He then goes on to explain that there is a substantial body of British opinion which is “thoroughly in disaccord with the official policies which have been followed in the past” and it is therefore “particularly important to convince this group of our sincerity in order that they may support our efforts.”

Despite Pehle’s attempts to convince Great Britain that the WRB is not Evian or Bermuda, he was not very successful.

* * *

Allied strategy never took into account the Jewish dimension, and the war operations from beginning to end were planned and carried out as if there was no Holocaust. No one in high places paid any attention. At best it was considered *fait divers* which deserved an occasional sigh. Throughout the rationale remained: the Jews will be saved by victory. Sometimes it was qualified “by quick victory.” Well, there was no quick victory, and when at last it came there were practically none left to save.

Because the Americans did not want to admit Jews even on a temporary basis, they were not in a very strong moral position to exert the necessary pressure on the British to open the gates of Palestine to admit Jews even on a temporary basis.

Since the two main Allied powers were reluctant to undertake any significant measures to admit Jewish refugees under any conditions whatsoever, they were not in a very strong position to impress the neutrals: Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland to do what they themselves refused to do.

The leadership and members of the established Jewish organizations were too timorous to exert all their influence to pressure the Roosevelt Administration and Great Britain to become more concerned with the Jewish catastrophe.

The “Jewish Commonwealth Committee”

The President’s announcement about the creation of the WRB caught the Zionist establishment by surprise. Their spontaneous reaction was incredulity: how was it that the President did what the Emergency Committee was advocating? What hidden, mysterious power did they possess? Their first inclination was to claim credit: that in fact it was Rabbi Wise who was responsible for the Gillette-Rogers Resolution in the two houses of Congress. When this claim was brought to the attention of Sen. Guy M. Gillette, he denied it categorically, indicating that Rabbi Wise and his colleagues told him that “it was not a wise step to take...”² (see chapter 13, p. 257).

After being in a stupor for years, the Zionist leaders suddenly awoke and with unprecedented energy created a commotion about the wrong issues at that specific historic context. They agitated for the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth – when the desperate need at the time was rescue under any condition, anywhere, with no strings attached, even if one had to agree that the admission of Jews to Palestine would be on a temporary basis, where they could be put up in special camps, and whose future would be decided after the war.

A disastrous offer by the Jewish establishment

The very perception of the Jewish disaster and the means to mitigate it was so warped in the minds of the Allied leaders and the Jewish establishment that it could not but affect the nature and scope of the newly established agency.

As already mentioned, perhaps the decisive reason why the WRB made history only on a small scale was the way it was financed. Since it was a Governmental agency, the initial allocation of one million dollars

2 In the letter already quoted, he wrote:

... may I say that **Dr. Wise had nothing to do** with the... introduction of these Resolutions... My part in the matter came as the result of a meeting called by Washington... branch of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People (of Europe)... a decision was reached to ask for the introduction of a Resolution... Representative Rogers agreed to sponsor the Resolution in the House of Representatives, and I agreed to sponsor the Resolution in the Senate.

to organize its offices was made by the Administration, and one was justified to assume as a matter of course that its budget would continue to be the responsibility of the Administration.

Mr. Pehle and his colleagues started to organize without losing any time. They were also ready to accept, in general terms at least, some of the basic ideas and proposals of the Emergency Committee concerning large scale rescue operations. Then something unexpected happened: the leadership of the Jewish and Zionist organizations, who till then could not have cared less about the idea of establishing a special Governmental agency to rescue the Jews of Europe (indeed they vigorously opposed the idea publicly and privately) suddenly appeared on the scene **after** the WRB was established offering to finance the whole operation of the Board.

It was in the Zionist tradition from Herzl on, to dangle the presumed Jewish wealth when dealing with foreign powers, and in certain cases the Zionists offered what was not in their capability to deliver. At the time the JDC was still a rather modest fund-raising institution and could afford to offer four million dollars but not four hundred million.³

In the history of Zionism this custom often brought more disappointments than results. In this instance the Jewish leaders succeeded to convince the new agency that the Joint Distribution Committee was in a position to take over the financial responsibility of the Board's budget. The executives of the WRB could not withstand the temptation.

3 The total income of the JOINT for the year 1944 was \$15,599,602. Of this \$6,500,000 went to Mr. Saly Mayer, its representative in Switzerland, who was in charge of the upkeep – food and shelter – of 25,000 refugees who succeeded to reach that country. Saly Mayer, a controversial figure in rescue circles in Switzerland, was entrusted with the thankless mission to enter into phony negotiations with Eichmann and Col. Becher about exchanging surviving Jews against goods or money. The intermediary, or perhaps the initiator of these pseudo negotiations, was the bizarre Dr. Rudolf Kastner, later characterized by Judge Halevi in Jerusalem as a man who sold his soul to Satan. The story is told in the chapter “The Reuben Hecht File.”

The JOINT was, of course, the central Jewish fund-raising institution. The Zionist political organizations which also engaged in rescue activities, disposed of infinitely less funds. An idea of the magnitude of their rescue work is provided in a protocol of a meeting of the Planning Committee of the World Jewish Congress (American Section) held on December 29, 1942. Rabbi Miller reported to that session that the Congress cabled to Switzerland \$7,000 (**seven thousand**) to be used by the Red Cross to send food and medicine into the Polish ghettos.

In a sense it was a measure of their devotion that they chose that road, because in their eagerness to start working immediately, they were probably apprehensive that waiting for governmental financing may result in dangerous delay. They might also have entertained the notion that the financial resources of the Jews were unlimited. This was fatal for the future of the Board and the destiny of the surviving Jews of Europe. From that moment on, the Government no longer felt any obligation to find ways and means for large-scale financing: the Jews took it upon themselves to take care of that.

It was not difficult for the Board to find a rationale. Morgenthau presented it to the public as follows:

... Some of you may wonder *why* the work of the War Refugee Board has not been carried on and financed exclusively by the Government. Let me explain why... When the Board was first established, it was obvious that speed was essential. *Millions* of unfortunate people were in danger of sudden violent death or deportation. The pace of the war indicated that sudden military and diplomatic moves were impending. There was the terrible prospect that in the last days of his control, Hitler would suddenly undertake new measures of persecution and extermination. It was imperative that speedy machinery be employed.

In the light of this situation, *the Board decided to rule out*, wherever possible, *all plans and devices* that involved undue delay (italics added). *)

The solution, Mr. Morgenthau explained, was to avail oneself of the funds and organizational facilities of the private Jewish organization and the Joint Distribution Committee "in order that the maximum number of lives should be saved in the minimum time." Of course this was true only in a minimal sense. One cannot speak of the need of rescuing "millions... in danger of sudden violent death or deportation" and to do it fast with the funds and machinery of the private organizations. The rationale, as is usually the case, contained a basic and irreconcilable contradiction. The plain truth was that in the very nature of things this rationale meant that the tremendous task that could be tackled only with financial means available to a government of a rich country like the U.S. would now be reduced to the almost insignificant means available to

private Jewish organizations, which in fact is what happened. The work of the Board from beginning to end was cut to the size of the budget and to the limited conceptions of rescue of the Jewish organizations. *) Since only modest amounts of funds were at their disposal, the Jewish leadership tried and succeeded to win over the executives of the WRB to accept two crucial approaches to the task of rescue. One, that it should immediately begin helping them continue their small-scale rescue activities (often shockingly partisan in nature). Second, that that was about all one could do, except, of course, enlarge to a certain degree the scope of these operations. Though basically there was nothing wrong in asking the Board to lend its facilities and international machinery to help them in their rescue work, every effort to save Jews, regardless how few, was worthy of Governmental assistance. What was disastrous was that the Board made it almost its main if not exclusive task.

An admission of failure

Morgenthau as much as admitted it without realizing it was a confession of failure: In the paragraph quoted above we italicized certain words and phrases which indicated that he didn't claim for the Board any independent initiative. In extraordinary honesty he modestly expressed the limited nature of the Board's activities: It "participated" only in rescue operations in which only "thousands" were involved. It didn't act independently but "cooperated" in the establishment of refugee camps, and in the Hungarian crisis it "helped" stay the further deportation of the remaining Jews.

In the same speech he candidly reported:

In *all* its operations, the Board has worked in the closest cooperation with private agencies. *Many* of its programs in relief and rescue work have utilized *the personnel, the funds* and the experience of those private agencies... The rescue operations from the Balkans *were actually carried on* by the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee. *Part of the expense of feeding persons in Hungary and other occupied countries were met by the JDC. Without the help of such agencies* these activities might have been "too little and too late."

... It was quickly apparent that there were honorable, seasoned

private organizations in this field (of rescue) who were *equipped with everything* except the kind of support which could come only from the Government of the United States. *The main ingredient that was lacking* was a vigorous statement of policy of this Government, and its application in all possible ways. It seemed perfectly logical that a partnership (be) speedily arranged... between the private agencies and the Government... For its part the Government could contribute the weight of its prestige, its diplomacy, its communication channels, its licensing and transportation facilities – wherever these did not interfere with the winning of the war. For their part the private agencies... did *most of the financing* and operating, and attended to those practical matters in which they were experienced... (they) could give detailed knowledge, seasoned personnel, long experience and *quickly available funds*...⁴ (italics added).

Regardless how friendly one is predisposed to the late Secretary of the Treasury and the executives of the Board, one cannot escape the conclusion from his own words that the WRB did not revolutionize the nature and scope of the rescue operations, and it didn't work out any plan of mass evacuation even from countries where this was feasible. Thus its program and activities became confined to a procrustean bed of Allied strategy which was singularly indifferent to what was happening to the Jews. From a Governmental agency whose mandate was "to take action for the immediate rescue and relief of the Jews of Europe," it became an instrument to aid private Jewish institutions in their work, and what it did on its own was more or less on the same pattern of operations as carried out by the Jewish organizations. This about killed the great task and single opportunity of the WRB. It had actually been reduced to the status of a small time, semi-official, semi-philanthropic organization with limited tasks, working on a relatively modest scale. Of course, it differed significantly from the World Jewish Congress and the Joint Distribution Committee that to some degree could avail itself of the services and facilities of the U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad.

Its staff never exceeded thirty-five, some of whom were specialists in

4 The speech was delivered to a receptive audience: a mass meeting of the Joint Distribution Committee. He seemed to have been so impressed by this cooperation that after the war he agreed to become President of the United Jewish Appeal (the successor of the JDC).

rescue techniques and refugee matters. It had representatives in several neutral countries: Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal and Turkey.⁵ Its budget of the original five million dollars was not used up, and when it ceased operations in 1945, it had a sum left over which was reimbursed to the donors. **) All its operations resulted in saving a small portion of those who could be rescued. The shining hopes of January 22, 1944 dimmed and the tremendous task was curtailed. What was expected to be a giant effort became dwarfed and the great opportunity to rescue hundreds of thousands, if not millions, was wasted.

Zionist obstructionism

If what motivated the Jewish leadership was primarily to gain cooperation and influence with the Board, it would have been a legitimated aspiration. But it wanted much more than that: it aimed at controlling the new agency. In this aim there was an obsessive determination to do everything in its power to compel Pehle and his colleagues to sever friendly relations with Bergson and the Emergency Committee, as if the very survival of these leaders depended upon it. Perhaps it did. The credit given the Hebrew Emissaries and the Emergency Committee for the creation of the Board was most disturbing to the Zionist leadership. The question has

5 We have seen that its representative in Turkey was Ira A. Hirschmann, officially assigned Special Attaché to the American Embassy in Istanbul. He was recommended to Pehle by Peter H. Bergson on behalf of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. He was Vice Chairman of the Board of that Committee, and before leaving for Turkey he resigned in view of his new official assignment.

In the summer of 1943, before the WRB was established, he accepted a suggestion of the Emergency Committee to go to Turkey with a view of undertaking rescue operations in the Balkans. The Committee made efforts to obtain priority clearance from the State Department for his transportation by air. After long procrastinations Breckinridge Long agreed to grant the clearance for Hirschmann's departure. But soon after that, the WRB was created.

Mr. Hirschmann, Vice President of Bloomingdale's, had previously spent much time abroad; was the U.S. observer at the Évian Congress in 1938; and subsequently went to Austria to arrange personally for several hundred refugees flight from that country. After he got his assignment from the Board, Mr. Hirschmann felt it would serve his personal career if he turned his back on the people who got him involved in the rescue crusade in the first place. He became inimical to his erstwhile sponsors, the Emergency Committee. After the war he wrote half a dozen books about his experiences and achievements as the representative of the Board in Istanbul.

been addressed to them from their own ranks: “Where have **you** been?” It was in the tradition of Zionist leadership to destroy its opponent on the ascendancy and gain control over his achievements.⁶

In a declassified State Department document, we read a memorandum of a conversation on May 19, 1944, between Dr. Nahum Goldmann, Chairman of the World Jewish Congress and head of the Jewish Agency branch in the U.S., and several officials of the Near East Division of the Department, reporting that Dr. Goldmann complained about the attitudes of the various branches of the American Government to Peter Bergson and the Emergency Committee:

He (Dr. Goldmann) mentioned the support which Bergson had been receiving from the War Refugee Board and said that he discussed this several time with Mr. Pehle, the Executive Director of the Board, who had taken the position that Bergson’s Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe *had inspired the Gillette-Rogers Resolution, which in turn had led to the creation of the War Refugee Board.* In one of their meetings with Pehle, Rabbi Wise had gone so far as to inform Mr. Pehle 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 antisemitism.*

Dr. Goldman said that only yesterday he had again seen Mr. Pehle and had told him that unless the War Refugee Board disavowed Bergson, it would be necessary for the World Jewish Congress to denounce publicly the War Refugee Board... (italics added).

Dr. Goldmann said that at long last Pehle promised “to break with Bergson.” *) This could not be true since nearly three months later Pehle officially praised the work of the Emergency Committee in his letter of recommendation of August 9, 1944 to James Brunot of the War Relief Control Board. Pehle did not succumb to Goldmann’s blackmail, nor did the World Jewish Congress carry out its threat.

6 This became an invariable pattern of Zionist strategy from the Stawski trial in 1934, when Mapai tried to discredit and, if possible destroy Jabotinsky’s movement at the time of its ascendancy, until the sinking of the “Altalena” in 1948, when the provisional Ben-Gurion government was scared stiff that Herut may score a significant success in the forthcoming elections.

Rabbi Stephen Wise was not the only prominent Jew who likened the Hebrew Emissaries to Hitler and the Nazis. There were others who did it with no less ferocity. Thus, for instance, the well-known academician Hans Kohn, Professor of History at City College in New York, and author of several books on contemporary society and “The Age of Nationalism” complained to Secretary Hans Morgenthau in a letter dated August 4, 1944, about Eri Jabotinsky’s mission to Turkey which he heard about from his friends of Rabbi Magnus’ circle of the Hebrew University. In this letter, among other things, he wrote:

... As you probably know there is (in this country) a very active group of extremist Zionist nationalists, who in their philosophy and outlook are **closely akin to fascist nationalism**. Some of them have now in Washington founded a Jewish⁷ Committee of National Liberation. Others in Palestine have carried on for many months a **campaign of ruthless terrorism, reminding, in deeds, thoughts and language, of the worst excesses in central Europe.** *)

What the activities of the Hebrew Emissaries and the Emergency Committee (a non-sectarian organization comprising many world famous Christians) and the Hebrew underground in Palestine reminded him of was Italian Fascism and German Nazism and their “worst excesses” which clearly could have meant genocide and the extermination camps.

* * *

In this declassified files of the State Department and the White House there are dozens of documents on the subject of how the Jewish leadership, trying to bring about the deportation of Bergson and [to] get rid of the rest of the Hebrew Emissaries one way or another, found it disconcerting that the WRB cooperates with people whom they considered “charlatans”

7 Scholar though he was, he nonetheless did not give the right name of the National Liberation Committee, though the distinction between Jewish and Hebrew was a central tenet of the Hebrew Emissaries. It was called Hebrew Committee and not Jewish Committee to emphasize that the American Jews like Morgenthau do not need to be liberated because they are free men in a democratic land. Whether Prof. Kohn falsified the name by malicious intent or through ignorance is impossible at this stage to know.

and “racketeers.”⁸ The State Department tried to help these Jewish leaders, but pleaded impotence. It did not depend on them alone. They could not force their will on other departments of the Government. They hoped Pehle would give in, but they were never sure.

* * *

The truth was that Pehle could not for the life of him see why he should break relations with the man and the group who were directly responsible for the creation of the Board in the first place. Morgenthau was of the same opinion and shared Pehle’s sentiments.

It was a bother to the WRB’s officials and took up a tremendous amount of their time explaining, orally and in correspondence (it was voluminous). Yet the Jewish leaders were the people who offered them

8 See among others: Wallace Murray of the NE Division of State to Stettinius (June 1, 1944) about Blum’s complaints “about the State Department’s not ‘deporting’ Peter Bergson.” A detailed memo with a covering note explaining why the Dept. could not deport him. 867N. Oi/6-144;
Memorandum of conversation June 17, 1944 between Merriam, and Wilson of the NE Division and Bergson Legal Counsel, Attorney at Law Edgar Turlington (copies to Jerusalem) (800.01B11 Registration 6-1744 PS/VL);
Memorandum of Telephone Conversation May 23, 1944 between Wilson of the NE Division with Louis Nemzer, Foreign Agents Registration Section, Dept. of Justice concerning “Registration of Peter Bergson and His Groups Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act” (copies to Jerusalem and VD) (800.01B11 Registration /1811 PS/HS);
Memorandum of Conversation (telephone) June 17, 1944 between Wilson of the NE Division with Louis Nemzer, Foreign Agents Registration Section, Dept. of Justice (copies to Jerusalem) (800.01B11 Registration/6-1744 PS/VL);
Memorandum of Conversation, January 10, 1944 between Morris D. Waldman, American Jewish Committee and Murray, Alling, Wilson of the NE Division (copies sent to London, Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut, Baghdad, Jidda) (867N. 01/2220 PS/MO...);
Memorandum of Conversation September 15, 1944 between Dr. Nahum Goldmann, Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the World Jewish Congress, and Murray, Alling, Merriam & Wilson of the NE Division (copies to Cairo, England, Beirut, Damascus, Jidda, Jerusalem and London);
Memorandum of Conversation May 19, 1944 between Dr. Nahum Goldmann, Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the World Jewish Congress, and Murray, Alling, Merriam & Wilson of the NE Division concerning attitude of Zionists toward Peter Bergson (copies to Jerusalem, VD, WRB [Mr. Warren] and Justice [Mr. Nemzer]) (867N.01/2347 PS/LC).

the money to get going, if only on a small scale. In the last account he went along with them.

* * *

Under the circumstances, what remained for the Emergency Committee and the Hebrew Emissaries to do was advise, offer certain ideas, to act upon them and to put some of their experts at the disposal of the new agency.

The Emergency Committee was convinced that with the establishment of the WRB its own mandate was not yet accomplished: there was still a steep uphill road ahead. As an unofficial organization, without financial means to speak of, it decided to undertake certain initiatives on its own which the WRB, had it lived up to expectations, could have achieved with spectacular success.

* * *

In the first half of 1944, the appalling dimension of the disaster gradually became ascertainable: about half of Europe's Jews were put to death. Even at that late hour counteraction was never undertaken with the fervor and on a scale commensurate with the catastrophe. The British remained adamant and neurotically determined to resist any attempt to rescue the remaining Jews lest Palestine will be considered a major haven. The resistance in Palestine was reorganized by Aryeh Ben-Eliezer and speedily revived its spirit and activities under the new command of Menachem Begin. It is against this background that the Hebrew Emissaries made a historic decision: to proclaim themselves a Hebrew Committee of National Liberation – to speak directly for the survivors in Europe, and the gagged and oppressed Hebrew community in Palestine. Its aim was to bring about a more favorable international climate to rescue the remnants of Jews in Europe, anywhere and under any conditions; and at the same time to prepare for a final political showdown with the British in Palestine. The Hebrew Committee was proclaimed on May 18, 1944.

Part IV

Campaign to Save the Last Two Million Jews

Chapter 17

“Free Ports” for Human beings

In a sense much of the campaign to rescue the Jews of Europe was tantamount to beating around the bush, especially in dealing with the American Administration and principally with the President. At stake were the lives of millions of Jews. Their tragedy was that they were not only trapped from the inside in Hitler occupied Europe, but also and perhaps equally because they were locked out from the outside. This was the devastating indictment made against the Allies by the Emergency Committee. We recall the testimony of Dean Alfange before Bloom's Foreign Relations Committee, when he told the legislators that the **“doors of escape are bolted not from within but from without by ourselves and our allies.”** *)

Time and again this thesis that the Jews could be saved if the Allies had a more humane attitude was confirmed by certain expressions and signals from the Nazis, regardless how crude and vicious. Some were startling. For instance, the **Völkischer Beobachter**, official organ of the Nazi Party, questioned the sincerity of the Allied intentions or willingness to save the Jews, almost in identical terms used by Dean Alfange. As late as June 20, 1943, almost a year and a half after Wannsee, the Nazi paper published an article which said:

Through many years the democracies would have had time to give their professed love for Jewry practical expression by opening their frontiers to these Jews. Yet while on the one hand shedding crocodile tears for the Jews on the other, one made sure – as we have seen from straying Jewish refugee boats – that the door remained locked to all except those with a full purse. *)

The heartless behavior of the Western Allies not only caused the Nazis to consider them hypocrites, but also felt, perhaps with justification, that some of the leaders of the free world, in their heart of hearts, actually don't mind the extermination of the Jews; that in this single field, both sides, though mortal enemies, find themselves in a kind of tacit and gruesome alliance. Goebbels inferred as much in an entry in his diary (December 13, 1942):

The question of Jewish persecution in Europe is being given top news priority by the English and the Americans... At bottom, however, I believe both the English and the Americans are happy that we are exterminating the Jewish riff-raff... *)

* * *

Large scale rescue was possible only if the free world would accept those who succeeded to escape. Were the news spread that Jews are being admitted, it would have galvanized the instinct of self-preservation and multitudes would try to escape, perhaps even using force. On the other hand, it is almost certain that had the Nazis and their satellites seen that the Jews are being accepted, they would in most cases have let them go. Whoever studies the story of the Holocaust should keep this probability before him – to understand what happened: who were the arch criminals, and who were the active or passive accomplices?

The countries that could have received and accommodated refugee Jews can be counted by the dozens, but apart from Palestine the key was America. The U.S. couldn't be a missionary preaching to others what it did not practice itself. In doing so it was sheer hypocrisy, but the main thing is that it didn't work. Everybody understood that it was a trick. Various Jewish organizations, inasmuch as they were concerned at all with the Jewish disaster, were divided into two main schools: the Zionists agitated exclusively for Palestine as if this was their professional specialty, some kind of business. The other worked for the admission to the U.S. of individuals and small groups of Jews on a very selective basis. One had to be an Einstein to be rescued, or at least an important man who achieved a significant career, or one who had some special connection with influential individuals in America. In a way it was not unlike the Nazi

policy of either letting famous Jews out – Einstein, Freud, Rothschild, or those of lesser world renown, sending them to Theresienstadt. In both cases it was the elect who counted. In both cases it was a cover: in Germany for exterminating the masses of the Jews; in the U.S. (and other allied countries and Palestine) for leaving the masses of the Jewish people to their fate, as Weizmann admitted on the eve of the war.

To speak clearly about admitting significant numbers of Jews into the U.S. was almost a taboo; the very notion was unspeakable. With extremely few exceptions everybody was reluctant if not afraid to mention it. The Jewish leaders argued that the mood of America was against immigration, that the people will not permit tampering with the immigration laws; and if legislative changes to amend the law were introduced, Congress will rise up in arms; that it will increase antisemitism to an intolerable degree. The question is not whether all these fears were justified and reflected a true situation. The situation was true mainly to the degree that it was so perceived and evaluated by the American Jewish leadership. Of course it was not sheer paranoia. To a considerable extent the American people at large were isolationists opposed to changing the immigration laws, still suffering from the traumatic effects of the economic collapse of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Had the Jewish leadership not surrendered to these moods among certain strata of the American people (we cannot be sure statistically how widespread they were), making it the basis of their own behavior and policy, and instead tried to convince the President and his Administration that one should not exaggerate the power of the xenophobic and anti-immigration circles; that if the President would assert his moral leadership and act with greater courage and compassion, he and his advisers would be surprised that the word “admission” would not result in calamity; and that the majority of the nation would understand and approve.

The WRB's greatest dilemma

Nobody expressed more precisely and succinctly the Board's dilemma concerning the problem of temporary refugee shelters than John Pehle:

We feel that this (the problem of finding temporary havens) is the **basic problem** before the Board, and that the apparent

unwillingness of the Allies to offer temp haven to substantial numbers of refugees, particularly Jews, is perhaps the **principal** reason why previous rescue efforts have not been effective. It seems indispensable to the success of any effort to get the Germans and their satellites to stop killing Jews and to permit their release, that the United Nations not merely threaten punishment for crimes but also offer to receive all the intended victims into their territories. An offer of temporary asylum also appears necessary if we are to obtain the cooperation of neutral countries in an effort actually to evacuated refugees. The neutrals apparently will not cooperate in this effort unless they are assured that all refugees who enter their territories will promptly be taken elsewhere. In the case of Switzerland, there is the problem of feeding large numbers with no prospect of their removal until the war is over. Spain, Portugal and Turkey, for a variety of internal and other reasons, do not want large numbers of refugees on their soil, except for short periods of transit. At present the only important available havens of refuge are a small camp in North Africa and the approximately 26,000 Palestine entry certificates which are still available under the terms of the White Paper. These limited facilities do not furnish a basis either for effectively appealing to the Germans to release refugees or for successfully requesting the neutrals to permit entry of a greater number of refugees. Accordingly, the Board's principal effort at the moment is being devoted to finding other possible temporary havens of refuge. The Board is presently considering the possibility of admitting refugees to the United States for the duration of the war. The Board is also asking the British Government to share responsibility for the establishment of refugee centers in the old Italian colonies in Cyr[e]naica. While the Board has no intention of taking a position in support of establishing a Jewish National State in Palestine, I personally believe that an offer by the British Government to admit unlimited numbers of refugees to Palestine on a temporary basis would contribute materially to the success of the rescue program. If this were done, the refugees could remain in camps in Palestine until the termination of the war when they would be returned to their homelands.¹

1 Pehle to Ernst, April 11, 1944. FDRL. WRB #6. Ernst file. Also Yale and IMA.

Mr. Pehle and his colleagues wracked their brains how to break the vicious circle. "... It seems necessary," he reasoned, "to assure the neutral countries adjacent to occupied areas that if they encourage the entry of more refugees such refugees will be taken elsewhere." But where "elsewhere" if the two major Allies – the U.S. and G.B. – refuse to accept them in their own territories in significant numbers? Well, for lack of a better solution, perhaps the WRB with the little prestige and power it possesses will try to exert a certain amount of pressure on neutral Governments such as Spain, Turkey, and even Switzerland, and this might result in "obtaining greater cooperation." *)

Any document one reads or any event one considers in connection with the annihilation of European Jews must always be done with the calendar in mind. Without the daily chronology of the years of Hitler's reign, especially after Wannsee, one is incapable of grasping the full significance of what went on. Pehle wrote this admirable document on April 11, 1944. To read it as an analysis of the present and desi[de]rata for the future would be to a considerable degree a distortion. One has to see in it a confession of failure in the past rather than a plan of action, though a great deal could yet be accomplished if the attitude of the big Western powers changed. But primarily we know from Mr. Pehle that all previous efforts of the WRB (which started to function only about two or three months ago) though pursued with great dedication and intensity – were exercises in futility as long as the Allies refused the admission of Jews into territories under their control. The WRB was in a sense in the predicament of the ancient Hebrews in Egypt who were told to make bricks without giving them straw. Without a decision to receive and shelter refugees even on a temporary basis, no agency or human being – regardless of their compassion and zeal – could do anything on a significant scale. As a matter of fact, one is justified to believe, though of course one cannot be certain, that Wannsee would not have taken place if the Jews could find a haven. We dwell on this conjecture in other parts of this essay. But this statement by Pehle was made almost 2½ years after Wannsee. *) During these years as well as all previous years since Hitler ascended to power in Germany, millions of Jews were already put to death because of the obstinacy of the major Allied powers to admit Jewish refugees escaping from Europe. This was why Evian failed. **) That was why Bermuda failed. ***) Had the U.S.

and Great Britain offered asylum, the neutrals would follow suit. Some neutrals did admit certain numbers of Jewish refugees, despite the dismal example of the major western powers, but within the confines of their small countries and small population[s] ****) they could not admit all who could cross the frontiers. Other neutrals were willing to admit only small numbers of a steady flow, if those who were admitted would promptly be removed to areas under Allied control. There was little encouragement to these neutrals if any. The pernicious example of the big powers stood out as a gigantic tower against a bleak background, always of prohibition and warning not to trespass, not unlike Kafka's prophetic vision in his **Amerika** – of the Statue of Liberty not with a torch in her uplifted hand in a gesture of welcome but with a drawn sword.

* * *

Nor were the belated threats of retaliation of much value as long as they were not coupled with an offer of asylum to the Jews who will be permitted to escape. Another reason for the failure of the belated threats and warnings was that they were made without really meaning to carry them out. ****) Worse than that: though the Allies meted out frightful punishment upon Germany and the satellites (during the month of April 1944 alone they dropped 81,400 tons of bombs on occupied Europe), and Budapest was subjected to a particularly devastating bombardment, yet the Allied high command never as much as hinted that this was in retaliation for the annihilation of the European Jews.

* * *

Ways and means could have been to circumvent or obviate existing immigration laws simply by arranging admission of Jews (and other refugees) not on a permanent basis as immigrants but only temporarily, classifying them as a special category whose status will be determined after the war, with explicit provision that the intention is not to let them remain in the country and that after the war their fate will be decided in the light of emerging circumstances. Had the leadership of the American nation acted within such a frame of mind, it stands to reason that the

public opinion would go along and Congress would not have raised insurmountable obstacles.

Under the prevailing circumstances the rescue of the Jews could remain forever a slogan, a matter of lip service if for no other reason than time was running out, and with each passing month less Jews remained to be rescued because millions were already exterminated. Perceptions and states of mind prevailing at the time at the White House and in the State and War Departments found their expression in rhetoric instead of practical terms of how to save the remaining Jews of Europe. The leadership of the Jewish organizations and the Zionist establishment lacked both the courage and convictions to unmask the bluff and cynicism of the mighty personages of the Administration, let alone of the President himself.

The Hebrew Delegation and its associates in America did it instead. One instance created such furor among **all** the Jewish leaders that they thought a calamity was about to happen to the multi-million Jewish community in this country. They regarded the matter as so serious and explosive that they decided to get together – a rare occasion – and invite Bergson and some of his colleagues for a showdown.

What was the cause of the commotion and the near hysteria? Well, the owner of the New York Times, Mr. Arthur H. Sulzberger, divulged to his friend, Judge Proskauer, the President of the American Jewish Committee, that the “Bergson Group” placed an ad in his paper of such dangerous content, that, if published, would create great harm to the Jewish community. He therefore suggested to Proskauer, so it seems, to impress the Hebrew Delegation to withdraw the ad. Violating the ethics or custom of confidentiality, the New York Times sent him the text. When the honorable judge read it he saw red, and immediately initiated a meeting of the leaders of the major Jewish and Zionist organizations to which Bergson and this writer were invited. The people present were so agitated they could barely control their language, nor could they sit down for any length of time around a table. In their agitation they moved around the room, yelling imprecations, threats, but also pleadings for cancel the ad for the sake of the welfare of the Jews, otherwise the results may be catastrophic.

A couple of proof-sheets were on the table; every once in a while one or another participant bent over to have another look at it, and literally reacted with a shudder, with an expression of pain and terror.

What was the text of that most dangerous document? It is reproduced here:

Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe

by Ben Hecht

Four million Jews waiting for death.
Oh, hang and burn out – quiet, Jews!
Don't be bothersome; save your breath –
The world is busy with other news.

Four million murders are quite a smear
Even our State Department views
The slaughter with much disfavor here
But then – it's busy with other news.

You'll hang like a forest of broken trees
You'll burn in a thousand Nazi stews
And tell your God to forgive us please
For we were busy with other news.

Tell him we hadn't quite the time
To stop the killing of all the Jews;
Tell him we looked askance at the crime –
But we were busy with other news.

Oh World be patient – it will take
Some time before the murder crews
Are done. By Christmas you can make
Your peace on Earth without the Jews.

In vain did Mr. Bergson try to allay the fears of the Jewish leadership, explaining that the apprehensions were not warranted. The atmosphere was so tense that the Hebrew Delegates felt that there was no use arguing the matter on the merits and offered to reconsider its publication, though resisting the demand to promise cancellation. We were flabbergasted, yet our worry was not so much the panic of the Jewish leaders, but how to explain to Ben Hecht that his Ballad was not to appear on Friday. It was embarrassing. But after an exchange of views with him and a few

colleagues it was decided to postpone publication only for ten days, and it appeared in the New York Times on Tuesday, September 14, 1943, p. 12.

From this it is evident that the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe was no part of that frightened crowd; it had little respect for the taboos; it didn't believe Americans are really so heartless as the Administration and the Jewish leaders chose to depict them. The Committee did not hesitate to demand from the Government and the American people "Action – not pity!" It persistently called upon Americans to open a "second front" on the battlefield of massacre.

It just didn't make sense to transport, shelter and feed in the U.S. 325,000 German prisoners of war, mostly Nazis *) and not do the same for their victims, the Jews. Those prisoners were brought to the U.S. from Europe and North Africa not on visas, not within the quota system, not according to immigration laws. Why couldn't temporary shelters be accorded the Jews who tried to save their lives in the most literal sense of the word? It was not a matter of violating existing immigration laws or pressing for new legislation, but merely taking emergency measures with a view of meeting a problem which the lawmakers could not and did not foresee.

The objective was not of flooding the U.S. with hundreds of thousands of Jews. It was primarily a vital need of America setting an example for others to follow. Yet it could not just be a token of admitting a handful of refugees but a considerable number proportionate to the size and population of that huge and rich country. To be effective and convincing the admission had to be in the tens of thousands. In such a case the rescued, regardless how numerous could have later been relocated in smaller numbers in several Latin American countries, or wait to decide their ultimate fate until after the war. Such an act of statesmanship and compassion would have given the U.S. greater moral authority to ask neutral countries to do their share, and above all it would have strengthened its hand in dealing with the British in stronger terms asking them to admit, on the same temporary basis as expediency demanded, all Jews who succeeded to reach Palestine by land or by sea. This would have been a great concession not on the part of Great Britain, but on the contrary, a concession to her: after all she was the holder of the mandate whose purpose was the establishment of a National Home for the Jews.

From the beginning of its formation the Emergency Committee campaigned for setting up emergency rescue campus in areas under Allied control as well as in neutral countries. This demand was formulated and reformulated time and again in personal contacts with Administration officials, in memoranda presented to the President, the State Department, as well as in a series of advertisements in the national press. This question acquired a particularly timely character with the creation of the WRB. Because such a plan was explicitly within the purview and prerogatives of the newly created agency. Of course, Turkey, Palestine, North Africa, Spain and Portugal as well as Switzerland were the most logical places for such emergency shelters for escapees from occupied territories both east and west of Europe. But regardless of **geographic** accessibility – (“accessibility” has to be understood here in a most relative sense: still fraught with endless obstacles and the greatest of dangers), without the U.S. leading the way there was little hope, if any, that other countries would agree. Without having created a model, America could hardly influence Allies and neutrals to agree to do what she herself refused to undertake.²

Despite the widespread opinion of Jewish leaders – and subsequent historians – that one could not raise such questions with the American people, the fact remains that when the idea of rescue shelters in the U.S. were presented to the public, it met with a great deal of understanding and sympathy among wide circles of the nation. Major newspapers and magazines supported it. Samuel Grafton, at the time a very popular and influential columnist, coined a phrase for the demand: “Free Ports: A free port is a place where you can put things down for a while without having to make a final decision about them... We do it in commercial free ports for cases of beans so that we can make some storage and processing profit; it should not be impossible to do it for people” (N.Y. Post, April 5, 1944). “Free Ports” was a catch phrase that captured the imagination of multitudes. From a propaganda point of view its impact was tremendous. The New York Times (May 4, 1944) in defending

2 Mr. Pehle, Director of the War Refugee Board, in a memorandum dated May 8, 1944, to the President, expressed this truism forcefully: “The necessity for unilateral action by the Government lies in the fact that we cannot expect others to do what we ourselves will not do and if we are to act in time we must take the lead.”

the idea, reassured its readers that “the plan had nothing to do with unrestricted and uncontrolled immigration. It is simply a proposal to save lives of innocent people.” *)

Significantly, the labor movement that traditionally followed a restrictionist policy as to the admittance of foreigners, enthusiastically supported the idea. Both the AFL and CIO publicly and officially endorsed the plan. So did the Jewish Labor Committee and numerous Jewish and non-Jewish personalities including Lessing J. Rosenwald, David Dubinsky and that American Jewish Conference.

On May 13, 1944, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe sent a cable to the President in which he was reminded of his commitment “to take all measures within (the) power (of the U.S. Government) to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death.” The remaining Jews in Hungary and in the neighboring Balkan countries were in precisely such danger as deportation to the death camps have amply proven. The telegram drew the attention of the President to the fact that

... the German murder squads and gas chambers again show the efficiency they demonstrated in Poland. The WRB... is doing a splendid job under serious handicaps. ... The greatest of these... is to find places for those who can escape if a welcome awaits them on Allied ground.

... We urge you to again take action and provide a place of refuge by establishing temporary rescue camps in the U.S. These “free ports” should also be established by our Allies in Palestine and North Africa and throughout the free world. This would give helpless victims of Nazi frightfulness some chance of survival even though **in effect it is only what we advance to Nazi prisoners of war we now hold.**

Out of all the territory controlled by the UN and by friendly neutrals a total of **25 square miles** allocated for this purpose would provide safety for countless thousands of condemned Jewish people of Europe.

Post war status of people in camps can be settled then and assurance given that no immigration laws will be violated...³

3 The telegram was signed by Dean Alfange, Will Rogers Jr., P.H. Bergson, Sigrid Undset,

Two days later, May 15, 1944, the Emergency Committee published in several leading newspapers a double spread ad under the headline:

25 SQUARE MILES – OR 2,000,000 LIVES...
WHICH SHALL IT BE?

It read in part:

The tragedy of the Jewish situation in Europe has rested not alone upon the cruel strategy of the Nazis – its diabolic success lay with the germs of racial fear that was spread among all the peoples of the earth.

This fear was that a flood of refugees would be loosed upon many nations, complicating not only their internal political stability, but threatening as well their citizens' economic balance with an alien competition.

This fear was always a fiction – for there was always the possibility of setting aside a number of internment camps for people faced with the alternative of death – as there is always room found to contain, temporarily, the brutalized prisoners captured from our enemy.

Now, in the eleventh hour of the reign of death, a way has been found – a political “Penicillin,” if you wish, that can accomplish the miracle of rescue with the guarantee that no after effects at all will be risked by the rescuers.

It is suggested the approximately 25 square miles of rescue camps in the whole world – five temporary mercy reservations, located in Palestine, Turkey, North Africa, and some of our own abandoned military training camps in the United States and some of the territories of Great Britain can hold all the Jews who can immediately escape from Nazi Europe. Assuming that, with the further shrinkage of the German frontier, more can escape – the liberated territories themselves would stabilize the problem.

A PRACTICAL PLAN

These camps – or “Free Ports,” as they have elsewhere been called – would be as temporary as our war prison camps will be.

Louis Bromfield, Maurice William, Ben Hecht, and Li Yu-Ying, co-chairman of ECSJPE, FDRL. WRB File (No. 716).

They can be supervised and guarded by the military establishments of the several countries in which they are created.

They can be administered and financed by funds and the contributions of those men of goodwill who inevitably dedicate themselves to the task of human salvation.

They can be operated from within, by the willing and grateful men, women, and children in whose behalf they are established.

They would be temporary – for God willing, it is only a question of a little time before the powerful armies of freedom will rid the world of the deaths-head that roams the territories of the world.

SURVIVAL – NOT POLITICS

Under the specific plan offered here, neither Great Britain, Turkey, Free France, nor the United States need fear that those who will have escaped to havens in their territory will involve as benefactors with political commitments.

As to Palestine itself, no one but a sadist or a Nazi would suggest that Palestine Jews themselves can put political considerations above the gnawing fear that their parents or children may inevitably perish in the horrible extermination camps of Germany or Hungary – or that they would sacrifice their kin to any postwar ambitions.

The Committee then launched a petition to the President demanding the Establishment of Emergency Refugee Shelters.

Resolution in the U.S. Senate urging President to establish temporary havens

Senator Guy M. Gillette (D. – Iowa) introduced a resolution on June 2, 1944, urging President Roosevelt to yield to “the will of the American people” to set up in the U.S. temporary havens for Jewish refugees and other special victims of Nazi hatred.⁴

4 The text of the resolution read:

“Whereas, the Congress of the U.S. by concurrent resolution adopted on Mar. 10, 1944, expressed its condemnation of Nazi Germany’s mass murder of Jewish men, women and children; and

The resolution had been referred to the Senate Foreign Relation Committee of which Gillette was a member, and he said he was hopeful that it would be given the Committee's prompt attention. A companion resolution was prepared to be introduced in the House.

It should be noted in particular that the Resolution did not speak about one camp or a token admission, but about all Jews who succeeded to escape Nazi dominated Europe and arrived by one means or another "as determined by the WRB..." Upon arrival they should "be received on Ellis Island or other designated *reception centers* for temporary detention and care until the President has determined that they may be returned to their homeland *without undue risk of their personal safety*." There was no restriction as to the number of persons to be given sanctuary, nor concerning the number of "reception centers." These remained open and the Resolution implied an unlimited number of escapees to be admitted in as many reception centers as would be required. These refugees would be brought by the WRB: "*transportation and other facilities (should) be made available for this purpose*, consistent with the effective prosecution of the war." This is how it was understood not only by the Emergency Committee who initiated the resolution, but also by the Presidents in general. **) (Italics added)

Oswego, a cruel gimmick

The pattern of the scenario announcing the establishment of the WRB has been repeated. The President did not wait for Congress to act, but being certain that it would act, he decided to forestall it.

"Whereas, the American tradition of justice and humanity demands every possible measure to save the surviving Jews of Europe from extermination by Nazi torture; and
"Whereas 2,000,000 lives are in immediate peril for want of a temporary sanctuary from their persecutors; therefore, be it
"Resolved, that the Senate of the U.S. urge upon the President of the U.S. that it is the will of the American people, expressed through their elected representatives, that Jews and other special victims of Nazi hatred hereafter escaping from territory occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies, as determined by the war refugee board, be received on Ellis Island or other designated reception centers for temporary detention and care until the President has determined that they may be returned to their homeland without undue risk of their personal safety; and that transportation and other facilities be made available for this purpose, consistent with the effective prosecution of the war."

At his press conference on May 20, 1944, Roosevelt made a somewhat ambiguous statement on the rescue shelters question, saying he favored the establishment of "Free Ports" (he added that he did not like this name) to facilitate the relocation of war refugees, but that these shelters *need not be in the U.S.* This declaration, of course, vitiated the whole meaning of the proposal. There would be no such rescue camps anywhere if the U.S. refuses to establish them in their territory. It was, in truth, a preposterous statement. But on June 2, the day Gillette introduced the Resolution about which he was certainly forewarned, he made another statement which was a reversal of his position a few days earlier: he said that an unused army camp in the U.S. might be converted into a temporary haven for war refugees from abroad. In making this announcement the President declared: "In the face of this attitude of our enemies, we must not fail to take full advantage of *any* opportunity, however limited, for the rescue of Hitler's victims. We are confronted with a most urgent situation" (*italics added*). He made this announcement as if it were an extraordinary act of compassion and world-shaking significance.

Regardless how much one would like to make allowance for a President who carried on his shoulders the many responsibilities of the major belligerent in a world war of unprecedented brutality and carnage, one cannot but react with astonishment at Roosevelt's cynicism concerning the Jewish disaster. To abstain from undertaking any effective steps of rescue was bad enough, but to cloak all this in mantles of righteousness and humanitarianism, as if he were a Messiah, is something abhorrent to the sensibilities of any decent man.

One of the striking documents reeking with righteousness, to conceal cynicism, is FDR's directive of June 9, 1944, to Robert Murphy, his chief representative, agent and ambassador in the area of the southern front in Italy and North Africa. It is reproduced as an appendix, but here we summarize the gist of it. To begin with, it reveals an implicit approval not to permit any more Jews fleeing from Yugoslavia to find rescue in southern Italy. The directive begins with the following paragraph:

Information available to me indicates that there are *real possibilities* of saving human lives by bringing more refugees through Yugoslavia to southern Italy. I am also informed that the escape of refugees by this route has from time to time been greatly impeded because

the facilities in southern Italy for refugees have been overtaken...
*Accordingly possibilities of increasing the flow of refugees to Italy may
be lost.* (Italics added)

This perhaps last escape route was closed not from the inside but from the outside. The entry was bolted. The President's consolation was that some or many of the refugees already in Italy will be removed to other areas, ostensibly to North Africa. So where does the shelter in Oswego near the Canadian border come in? The intention was to impress on others how great and magnanimous the U.S. was. Its practical purpose was minimal, but it was important for public relations purposes. The President explained this to his ambassador:

... I feel that it is important that the *U.S. indicate* that it is ready to *share the burden* of caring for refugees during the war. Accordingly, I have decided that approximately 1,000 refugees should be immediately brought from Italy to this country to be placed in an Emergency Refugee Shelter... where under appropriate security restrictions they will remain for the duration of the war.
(Italics added)

But this pretense of showing the world that America is willing "to share the burden" had to be qualified lest it be considered (by whom?) that the concern is about Jews. In his directive the word Jew is not mentioned once except by exclusion and anonymously. At the height of the war offensive the President and commander in chief had it in mind (or whoever wrote it) to instruct Murphy not to send over a group of refugees composed only of Jews or even mainly. "I should like," he instructed his ambassador, "the group to include **a reasonable proportion of various categories** of persecuted people who have fled to Italy." Murphy tried his best to faithfully follow the President's instructions but could not produce too many non-Jews, so most of the refugees by force of reality had to be Jews. Nevertheless, to satisfy his boss he did the next thing possible – he achieved a reasonable "proportional" representation: the 987 candidates for Oswego chosen from 36,000 internees in southern Italy were of eighteen "nationalities," that is, countries.

Next come the technical instructions of the directive, and reading

them one gets the impression that the subject dealt with is the moving of whole armies and hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war. "The full cooperation," wrote the President, "of our military and naval authorities should be enlisted in effecting the prompt removal of transportation of the refugees."

The President also sent a special directive to the Secretaries of War, Navy, Interior, the Director of the Budget and Pehle of the WRB, attaching his communication to Murphy and among other instructions he made it clear that "the Army shall take the necessary security precautions so that these refugees will remain in the camp and the actual administration of the camp is to be in the hands of the War Relocation Authority."

As to covering the expense, a plethora of Cabinet departments and government agencies will participate: The Bureau of the Budget, the War Department, the War Relocation Authority, the WRB and the Foreign Relief Appropriation Agency, "and if necessary drawing upon the President's Emergency Fund."

The whole enterprise will be undertaken by the same "procedure as... prisoners of war have been brought here." And the camp will be subject to the "appropriate security restriction: and the refugees will remain in the states for the duration of the war... It is contemplated that at the end of the war they will be returned to their homeland." *) The directive stated that since the refugees will be placed in closed camp "under appropriated security restrictions," their selection and transportation should be "uncomplicated by any formalities involved in admitting people to the U.S. under the immigration laws." Yet meticulous checks would be made to "avoid bringing here persons afflicted with loathsome, dangerous and contagious diseases."

The farce

What comes to mind is that if the instructions are so elaborate concerning every phase of the operation and are undertaken "outside regular immigration procedure," why was it restricted to less than a thousand and not to a hundred thousand? Why not empty out all the camps in southern Italy and remove the refugees from Spain, Portugal and Switzerland so that many more could try to reach these countries? If the subject matter were not so tragic, one could characterize Oswego as a farce.

The justification for the small number that may come is the problem of transportation. Where would the Allies find ships to bring over so many Jews? The answer was given by the Allies prior to Oswego: the less than one thousand refugees were brought in by the same procedure as that of bringing in the prisoners of war who numbered 325,000. They were not sent to up-state New York but to the pleasant climate of the West coast. They were treated almost with tenderness because the Americans in charge hoped (and probably to some extent succeeded) to transform Nazis into good, American style democrats. An American writer, Thomas Lask, who observed them wrote much later that they certainly were "in good shape, and from the relaxed and easy way they went about their labors, they looked neither harried nor driven." *)

The Nazi prisoners of war were not the only aliens admitted to the U.S. outside the immigration laws. The Germans and other axis powers sent many thousands of their own nationals to various Latin American countries for subversive activities, espionage, propaganda and perhaps mainly, to influence business people and manufacturers, including many from the U.S., who ignored the war-time boycott and blockade restrictions of doing business with Nazi Germany. This involved all kinds of methods both of strengthening the pro-Nazi elements in those countries, to appeal to the greed of businessmen, falsification of documents of shippers and bills of lading.

The State Department succeeded in making arrangements with some Latin American countries to round up thousands of these undesirable aliens and send them to the U.S. where they were interned for the duration in special camps.

Like the British, so Roosevelt too, knew how to transform great ideas championed by the Hebrew liberation movement into quasi insignificant undertakings: they were the geniuses of too little and too late when it came to the survival of the Jewish people of Europe. The idea of a Jewish army of a quarter million strong, fighting from the beginning of the war, was whittled down to a Brigade, approved by the British War Cabinet in September 1944, when the war was almost over. The Brigade numbered barely 5,000 men all in all. We analyzed the limitations of the WRB being both late in time and restricted in its operations. The agency, especially Messrs. Morgenthau, Pehle and DuBois were sold on the idea of rescue camps as strongly as the Emergency Committee which

advocated it, but the results were minimal, absurd, and in a sense even vicious. The one and only camp opened on August 4, 1944 at Oswego, near Fort Ontario, in New York State, in an 80-acre former army camp accommodating 987 refugees.

The whole project was a travesty of the Emergency Committee's original idea, and developed into a nightmare for the rescued. When the Committee first submitted its systematic rescue plan to the American Government, as formulated at the Emergency Conference at the end of July 1943, the idea of temporary camps had two purposes: first, to let the Jews know that they have places **where** to escape, and second, to obtain from allied and neutral governments the consent to receive those who succeeded to flee. In order to obtain such a consent, it was necessary to reassure them that the refugees will be admitted only on a temporary basis. Countries like Turkey or Spain, where access was easiest for the fleeing refugees, had to be reassured that the burden will not fall only or mainly on them, but that the refugees admitted in their territory will be systematically relocated to territories under the control of the Allies.

The Committee suggested first to the President and then to the WRB that the Allies and primarily the U.S. should undertake to assist in feeding and clothing the refugees accepted on a temporary basis by neutral countries, and should further undertake to make arrangements for their relocation **during** the hostilities and within a reasonable time after cessation of hostilities. It was a vast plan for a mass rescue operation through escape, transfer, evacuation and relocation. What Roosevelt adopted had very little to do with it, and in fact was a perversion of the plan not only because it came so late – more than a year late, the crucial year – but also because the refugees were brought not from neutral countries but from conquered and occupied Allied territory – South Italy. And even these very few were brought from camps in a warm climate to a place with inclement weather, and the refugees not accustomed to the climate of upper New York State suffered from the cold and other inconveniences because the regulations were so strict that they were kept in the camp as if they were enemy captives. They were not only imprisoned in barracks but the treatment was without any regard to human dignity and suffering. They were better off where they came from. Why this mockery? Roosevelt explained it was military necessity: the refugees were now arriving by the thousands daily from Yugoslavia

and other countries, and having swollen the camps in Italy and North Africa were in the way of successful prosecution of the war. It was an absurd explanation because the few hundred refugees brought to the U.S. wouldn't make any difference one way or the other, especially since Roosevelt soon afterwards decreed: no more Oswegos. *)

Temporary shelters in other countries

Though Oswego was a one-time and niggardly gesture, yet the WRB used it to the maximum as an example, a precedent for others to follow. Pehle and his agents abroad exerted all their influence and presumed power to squeeze out of some countries an agreement to establishment Emergency Shelters. The British announced that a rescue camp would be set up in Libya. They subsequently also established a camp in Cyprus and in Egypt, and one was arranged, almost clandestinely, in Palestine. Within days after the President's announcement the WRB also succeeded in convincing the governments of Mexico, Curaçao, Dutch West Indies, Surinam, Jamaica and the British West Indies to follow the Administration's lead. *) Of course, all this was of some importance, but it also proves how many more lives could have been saved had the U.S. acted earlier and on a larger scale.

Zionists oppose the principle of temporary shelters

In the narrative one cannot overlook a strange phenomenon: the Zionist opposition to the temporary sanctuaries for Jews lest they would detract from the efforts in propagandizing a post-war Jewish commonwealth. Both in direct contact with government officials and members of Congress the Zionists expressed doubts and reservations. Feingold, discussing this opposition, writes: "One Zionist spokesman, sensing that the rescue issue had been separated (due to the Emergency Committee) from the Palestine national homeland goal, labelled the plan an 'Audubon Society for Jews'." (That is, an attempt to preserve the Jewish species by saving as one does with animal species threatened with extinction.)

Even those Zionists who favored temporary asylum made their consent contingent on unlimited immigration to Palestine. The result was that they wasted their considerable organizational force and influence on the

political party system in the U.S. on an aim that was irrelevant at the time, and which was rejected by all power centers of the Administration. But at the same time it immeasurably weakened the efforts of the Hebrew Emissaries and the Emergency Committee in achieving a decision from the President to establish Emergency Sanctuaries in the U.S. in the spirit of Gillette's resolution, that is, on as large a scale as possible.⁵

The people of upper New York State welcomed the refugees

There was more than a footnote to the Oswego story, in fact it contained a surprising lesson: the fears that the American people will receive an influx of refugees with resentment and protest were disproven by the event. These Americans who were presumed to be most alarmed by the arrival of the refugees – the inhabitants of upper New York State – did not protest but considered it an honor that their region was chosen for the camp. They formed a special Fort Ontario Citizens' Committee to help the refugees find work and accommodations. The Association of N.Y. State Canners in Rochester offered to employ all the camp inmates in its food processing plans. *) So much for the rebellion of the American people. The only ones protesting the idea about the camps were some important Zionist personalities who thought that "the establishment of such camps would be detrimental to the concept of Palestine as a Jewish National Home where Jews could enjoy complete freedom."⁶

5 N. L. Feingold – **The Politics of Rescue**, p. 264. The quotation about the "Audubon Society for Jews" is an article by Barnet Hirsch, "Free Ports and the White Paper" in "The Jewish Forum," June 1944, p. 115-117.

6 See FDR's cable to Murphy, June 9, 1944 and his letter (the cable enclosed) to the Secretaries of War, Navy, Interior, the Director of the Budget, and the Executive Director of the WRB of the same date.
f. in Documents: "The Advocates of the Doomed" in RB copies and in Winona's folder "copies"; "Advocates of the Doomed.. [Unclear where this footnote belongs]

Chapter 18

The Campaign to Save the Jews of Hungary

MISSING IN THE MANUSCRIPT

Chapter 19

Horthy Announces His Readiness To Let All the Jews Leave

MISSING IN THE MANUSCRIPT

Chapter 20

U.S. and Great Britain Were Avers (or Recoiled from) To Accept Horthy's Offer

MISSING IN THE MANUSCRIPT

Chapter 21

Temporary Shelters in Palestine

Bergson offers Churchill an astonishing compromise

The appeals to the Government of Great Britain were made with even greater passion. Communications were sent both to Lord Halifax, the British ambassador in Washington as well as to Prime Minister Churchill.

On July 24, 1944, Peter H. Bergson, on behalf of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, sent the following cable to Prime Minister Churchill:

In view of repeated threat of German leaders to exterminate all Hebrew people of Europe before hostilities end, the task of evacuating as many Hebrews from Hungary and other Balkan countries as possible is of extreme urgency. The opportunity to save Hebrews of Hungary is at hand. They are permitted to leave and countless thousands of men, women and children can save their lives if only there are permits to enter Palestine. We therefore suggest that his majesty's Government start without delay establishment of emergency refugee shelters in Palestine. Establishment of these shelters should be publicly proclaimed and broadcast to people of occupied Europe so that process of evacuation can start immediately. It is not suggested that financial burden of this program fall upon British people. Though Palestine is not a British colony but a mandated land entrusted to his majesty's Government by the League of Nations, a land in which Hebrew immigration and settlement was officially granted to the Hebrew people as a right and not through tolerance, we offer the compromise of emergency shelters so that task of saving lives be not affected by political or boundary controversies, the settlement of which we are ready to postpone until day of victory. *)

The text of the cable to Churchill was released by Bergson at a press conference on July 28 in Washington, D.C., and the New York Times considered this appeal of such importance that it reproduced it in full in a front page story. It told its readers that Bergson “announced an ‘end of the road’ appeal to the British Government on behalf of the Jews in the occupied and Axis satellite countries.”

Referring to the ICRC announcement that the Jews of Hungary are now free to leave if they could obtain visas to outside Axis territory, Bergson, on behalf of the Hebrew Committee, proposed in this specific case to set aside all political considerations and ask the British Government, as a humanitarian question of saving human lives, to grant the necessary visas.

The proposal puts aside the creation of the Jewish home in Palestine, and asks only for the transfer to Palestine of these refugees on a temporary basis.

“This is not just another routine appeal,” said Mr. Bergson, “T[t]he British Government has consistently refused visas on the grounds that Germany would not permit the Jews to leave. We now have a definite case in which the International Red Cross assures us that they will be allowed to leave if they obtain the visas.

“We have gone from one concession to another over this question, and the British officials of the Colonial Office have not budged an inch. If this appeal is refused, we will know that they decline to take any action at all. We do not ask that these Jews be admitted to British territory, but only that they shall be allowed to have a refuge in Palestine similar to the one declared in Fort Ontario, N.Y., by President Roosevelt. It means really only offering them ‘humanitarian concentration camps.’”

Mr. Bergson said that the British Government was not asked to assume the burden of feeding and transporting the refugees, and that international relief organizations were ready to finance and conduct the entire operation.

He said that the committee first suggested the emergency shelters on June 10, but no answer had been received and no action taken.

“We feel,” he said, “that the British people for generations will be ashamed and regretful if this appeal is refused.”¹

This offer to admit Jews to Palestine on a temporary basis from

1 Bergson sent a copy of this letter to Pehle. In his communication of August 14, 1944, to

Hitler controlled territories seems to have made a particularly strong impression on much of the American press which generally became somewhat disinterested in the ever new stories about the annihilation of the Jews. Bergson's appeal had wide coverage throughout the country. All the Hearst papers reproduced its text, and on August 1 or 2, published an editorial supporting it in the strongest terms under the title: "Well, Mr. Churchill?" The writer declared that to refuse it "would make England *particeps criminis* in the great Nazi crime against European Jewry." He also indicated that it was Churchill in particular who should be sensitive to this proposal, since in the past he proclaimed himself a staunch supporter of the idea to restore Palestine to the Hebrews. The editorialist reminded the Prime Minister of one of his utterances which characterized his commitment, namely the one criticizing Chamberlain's White Paper which he said was "a breach of a solemn obligation." The editorial then quoted Churchill's indignant protest on that occasion in 1939:

As one intimately and responsibly concerned in the earlier stages of our Palestine policy, I could not stand by and see solemn engagements into which Britain has entered before the world set aside for reasons of administrative convenience or for the sake of a quiet life. I should feel personally embarrassed in the most acute manner if I lent myself by silence or inaction to what I must regard as an act of repudiation.

I regret very much that the pledge of the Balfour Declaration, indorsed as it has been by successive governments, and the conditions under which we obtained the mandate have both been violated by the government's proposals.

I select the one point upon which there is plainly a breach and repudiation of the Balfour Declaration – the provisions that Jewish

the director of the WRB in which he enumerated the steps which should be undertaken in connection with the Hungarian offer, he formulated the proposal concerning Palestine:

In view of the present policy of the Mandatory Power which prohibits the further immigration and settlement there of Hebrew people, we propose that emergency rescue shelters – free ports – be established in Palestine into which all Hebrews be admitted on a **temporary – rescue basis**, without prejudice to their future status.

Mr. Bergson suggested that it was a moral obligation of the U.S. "to use (through the WRB) its good offices to obtain from the Government of the U.K. acceptance of this (Hungarian) offer. *)

(PHB to Pehle, August 14, 1944. FDRL, WRB files. Also, at Yale and IMA)

immigration can be stopped in five years' time by the decision of an Arab majority. That is a plain breach of a solemn obligation.

The editorial said that "Mr. Churchill has now a chance to live up to these courageous words."

The next day, July 25, 1944, Bergson wrote Lord Halifax, reminding him that:

On June 10 I had the privilege of addressing to you a communication on behalf of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, to be conveyed to the Government of the United Kingdom, regarding the establishment of emergency refugee shelters in Palestine, to be open to all Hebrews escaping from enemy persecution.

He said that "now it was with great relief that we have received the official communication of the International Red Cross" specifying its contents and implications.

He emphasized that this is "an opportunity which may be denied tomorrow."

Reproducing the contents of the cable to Churchill, Bergson stressed that:

In view of the extreme urgency of the situation, we wish to express our hope of immediate consideration of and action upon our proposal.

President urged to intercede with the British

At the same time the Emergency Committee made the greatest efforts to urge the Administration to intercede with the British to accept the proposal of the Hebrew emissaries concerning the establishment of emergency shelters in Palestine. In his communications of July 24 and August 3, 1944, Prof. [Johan J.] Smertenko pleaded with the President to use his kind offices to make the strongest presentation to the British Government to issue Palestine certificates in "unlimited quantities... thereby enabling (the Jews in Hungary) to leave their country immediately." In these communications it was always emphasized:

... that this step can be taken **without affecting the political situation in Palestine** and it can be clearly indicated that these refugees will be kept in emergency refugee shelters in Palestine for the duration of the war without prejudicing their status or the position of the British Government... Whether they return to Hungary, remain in Palestine, or are settled in other lands can be decided when the danger is past. *)

CBS censored a speech by Senator Thomas

CBS agreed to allocate on August 8, 1944, fifteen minutes of prime time on a national hook-up to an address by Sen. Elbert D. Thomas, Democrat from Utah, concerning the Hungarian situation. The occasion was the Second Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe, held at that time in New York. The central theme of the Senator's address was the proposal to establish "in Palestine emergency rescue shelters – free ports – into which all Hebrews fleeing their German tormentors should be admitted to the emergency refugee shelters..." However, to his surprise he found that his address was censored and three main points were deleted. These deletions were of great significance and it is worthwhile to point them out.

Thomas said that up to several years ago thousands of Jews in Hungary were packed into cattle trains and deported to "extermination camps" in Poland. Since then, he added, the ICRC made public the offer of the Hungarian Government that the Jews in possession of entrance visas to Palestine could leave. The following had been deleted from the prepared text:

This creates an entirely new situation in which the responsibility is thrown on our shoulders and, more particularly, on the shoulders of the British Government.

As an American and as a Christian, I venture to suggest to the British Government, as the mandatory of Palestine, that it is their inescapable moral duty to answer the Hungarian Government – the ICRC – that every Hebrew will be admitted into Palestine.

Thomas referred to the fact that both the Democratic and Republican

national convention adopted platforms urging the British to open Palestine to the Jews. In connection with this, the following sentence was deleted:

This represents the will of practically the entire American nation. Certainly we are all, therefore, for the immediate establishment of emergency rescue shelters.

A third item, one referring to a Jewish Army, was also censored. In it Thomas urged that the UN let the

Hebrew guerilla bands who are today fighting the enemy in Europe, together with the 30,000 Hebrews in Palestine regiments, be given the chance to fight in their own name and under their own banner in a Hebrew Army.

When the Senator was asked about this incident, he said that CBS “didn’t give me any reasons.” (Senator Wagner inserted the speech without the deletions into the Congressional Record of August 28, 1944).²

Officials of the Emergency Committee privately expressed resentment at the network’s action and suggested that the deletions might have been made at the request of the British Embassy, probably through the State Department. They also thought that the censorship might have been exercised at the instigation of some leaders of Jewish organizations either because they thought the Senator’s language too strong and could have an adverse effect on non-Jewish opinion, or by leaders of the Zionists who opposed the idea of emergency shelters in Palestine. *)

Resolutions in both Houses of Congress demand immediate establishment of emergency shelters in Palestine

Because of lack of a satisfactory response on the part of the British, friends and supporters of the Emergency Committee introduced on August 24, 1944, an identical resolution in both Houses of Congress urging Roosevelt and Hull to use their influence in persuading Britain

2 It is reproduced as an appendix, No. ...

to establish immediately mass emergency rescue centers in Palestine for the Jews of Hungary.³

Sen. Elbert D. Thomas, chief sponsor of the resolution, held a press conference the same day, and voiced his hope that “the President and the Secretary of State will heed our call even before the Senate can act on the Resolution.” He emphasized the urgency of the matter and the imperative to take immediate action: “We feel confident,” he said, “that our British Allies will see the wisdom and justice of the demand for immediate establishment of emergency rescue shelters in Palestine for all Hebrews who can get there.”

Rep. John W. McCormack [in manuscr. Joseph McCormack] of Massachusetts attended the press conference and endorsed the resolution, saying that in his view, Congressional adoption of the resolution might move the British to agree to the establishment of war time shelters for Hungarian Jews.

In a joint statement by the sponsors of the resolution it was asserted that “now that victory near on the horizon, a ray of light has been thrust into the horrible position in which the Jews of Europe find themselves.

3 The Resolution was bi-partisan in character, its sponsors were both Republicans and Democrats. Sponsoring it in the Senate besides Sen. Thomas were Senators Homer S. Ferguson, Republican of Michigan; Robert A. Taft, Republican of Ohio, and James E. Murray, Democrat of Montana.

The House sponsors were representatives Andrew L. Somers, Democrat of N.Y.; Thomas J. Lane, Democrat of Massachusetts; Joseph Clark Baldwin, Republican of N.Y., and Hugh D. Scott, Jr., Republican of Pennsylvania.

The text of the resolution reads:

Whereas the Government of Hungary has specifically expressed its readiness to release those Jews who could enter Palestine, which is easily accessible from the Balkan countries by land route and calls for little or no shipping space, and whose 600,000 Hebrews are clamoring for an opportunity to shelter and feed their tormented kin and; Whereas the Government of the U.K. and the U.S. have accepted the proposal of the Hungarian Government made on July 17, 1944, to the International Committee of the Red Cross for the release of Jews, and have officially and publicly stated that they “will find temporary havens of rescue where such people may live in safety”; now therefore be it

Resolved that the Senate – House of Representatives of the U.S. recommends and urges the President and the Secretary of State to use their good offices **to put into effect immediately the solemn obligation by the immediate establishment of mass emergency shelters in the mandated territory of Palestine** similar to the emergency shelter at Oswego, N.Y., so that the Hebrews of Europe find there havens from the ordeals of persecution.”

However, until Germany is finally defeated, the life of every Hebrew in Europe is in danger and his existence threatened with the horror of the fate that has befallen 3,000,000 of his brethren.” *)

Congressman Sommers, one of the sponsors of the resolution, told the press that under the new Red Cross convention the first group of Jews from Budapest arrived in Switzerland and found refuge in a specially prepared camp in Basel. Similar camps, he said, could be easily set up in Palestine to accommodate tens of thousands of Hungarian refugees without delay. “Since Palestine,” he asserted, “it is the nearest safe refuge for the Jews to be evacuated from Hungary, and since it can be reached by overland route, not entailing the danger and difficulties of shipping, it is not only the most natural thing to set up temporary refugee shelters there, but **it most certainly means life or death** for hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings.”

The world famous painter and illuminator, Arthur Szyk, who served loyally on the Executive Boards of the organizations initiated by the Hebrew emissaries, told the press that apprehension and doubts to the contrary, it was the Resolution that expresses the will and sentiments of the American people. **)

500,000 petitioned the President

Congressional action was backed and strengthened by mass support. On August 28, 1944, a petition signed by nearly half a million people appealing for the rescue of the remaining Jews of Europe and their admission to Palestine, had been presented to the White House by Jewish and Christian church leaders.⁴

In a ceremony widely publicized in stories and pictures in newspapers

4 Participants in presenting the petition were: Rabbi Eliezer Silver, head of the Agudath Israel of America; Archbishop Athenagoras, head of the Greek Orthodox Church; Rabbi Ben Zion Notelovitz, vice chairman of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis; Rabbi Ephraim E. Yolles of Pennsylvania; Rabbi Reuben Levovitz of New York; Rabbi Dr. Alexander Rosenberg; Rabbi Benjamin W. Hendeles, former head of the Warsaw Jewish Community; Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Schoenfeld; Rabbi Baruch Korff, chief of the rescue activities of the Emergency Committee ; and Alex Wilf, Executive Director of the American League for a Free Palestine.

(Memorandum from Wm. D. Hassett, Secretary to the President, August 31, 1944).
FDRL. WRB file No. 3186.

throughout the country, the delegation went first to Capitol Hill and was received by Representatives Thomas Lane and Hugh Scott, Democratic and Republican sponsors of the resolution. House Majority leader, John W. McCormack in a statement issued on this occasion, asserted that the Congressional Resolution “marks a milestone in this nation’s determination to save human lives.” A similar statement was issued by Sen. James E. Murray, a co-sponsor of the resolution in the Senate.

The petition asked the Governments of the U.S. and Britain to expedite means of admitting Jewish refugees, particularly from Hungary, to Palestine at the earliest possible moment, and appealed to the President to “convey to the British Government, which is entrusted with the Mandate over Palestine, the conviction of the American people that it is against all justice that Hebrews alone, of all people, are not allowed free entry into Palestine.”

After the ceremony at Capitol Hill the delegation, accompanied by the two Congressmen, went to the British Embassy to convey the appeal of the petitioners and then to the White House where the petition with the signatures was presented to General Watson at the Executive Office.⁵

The reader already knows how averse the Zionists were to the idea of emergency havens anywhere, but the campaign for temporary shelters in Eretz Israel, of all places, in the land promised to become the national home for the Jews, shocked them. It was heresy of the worst kind. Especially puzzling to them was that such extreme nationalists as the Hebrew emissaries whom they regarded as “Revisionists” and knew of their Irgun background and affiliation, could engage in such a betrayal. If there could be an explanation, the Zionists thought it was the corrupt opportunism of the advocates of this proposal. The idea that this might have been the most feasible means to save the Jews of Hungary was of abstract importance – what preoccupied their minds and ruled their emotions was dogma. This attitude is as old as Zionism itself. In our narrative we come across it time and again. Paradoxically, as the danger of the destruction of European Jewry became increasingly more ominous, the more resolute was the Zionists’ adherence to the dogma of the exclusivity of Palestine. When in 1938 both the Nazis and the Western powers were still seeking some far-away jungle territory to deport Jews

5 N.Y.T. August 30, 1944 and other newspapers throughout the country.

from Europe (first of all from Germany and Austria), the Nazis to get rid of them and FDR and Chamberlain as a substitute for letting them in to the U.S. or Palestine – the Zionists indignantly rejected the idea.

A strange though superficial historical parallel comes to mind: In 1903 a British statesman, Joseph Chamberlain (Colonial Secretary) offered the Zionists as a substitute for Palestine which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire – “Uganda”⁶ as a British Protectorate under which the Jews would enjoy a large measure of autonomy including a Jewish administration and a Jewish governor. In view of deteriorating conditions of Russian Jewry, the Kishinev pogrom, and a wave of unbridled, aggressive anti-Semitism in Russia, Herzl was inclined to consider the plan. But the “Zion Zionists” were abhorred by the very idea and threatened to split the Zionist movement. Though a numerical majority was with Herzl, the nay-sayers prevailed and the Zionist leader felt compelled to swear allegiance (in the Hebrew original) to Palestine: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its cunning.” Nothing came of the Uganda scheme and Herzl died suddenly afterwards.

Now, 35 years after that episode, another British statesman – Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Munich infamy (a half-brother of Austen) – suggested a transfer of Jews from Europe to Tanganyika,⁷ a former German colony in equatorial Africa (after WWI it fell to the British under a Mandate) and not far from the territory suggested to Herzl. It is a rich country with tremendous natural resources and favorable agriculture conditions. Though immense (360,000 square miles) it was also populated by perhaps seven or eight million people, but the climate was inclement for Europeans. We are not discussing here whether the plan was serious, practical, and suggested in good faith. What is significant was the reaction of Rabbi Stephen Wise: “I would rather have my fellow Jews die in Germany than live somehow, anyhow, in the lands which may tomorrow be yielded back... to Germany.”⁸ It was a horrifying statement

6 A misnomer; actually what Chamberlain had in mind was a territory in East Africa which is part of Kenya.

7 This was one of a dozen suggested places where to dump the Jews. Vladimir Jabotinsky called them **Fata Morganalands**.

8 Quote by Feingold, “[The] Politics of Rescue”, p. 124. The quote in Wise’s book is [on] p. 110. Feingold states that the same sentiments are expressed in a letter to Myron Taylor (Wise MSS Nov. 23, 1948).

to make, especially by a Rabbi and such a celebrated leader as Wise. His fellow Jews certainly would have preferred “to live somehow,” rather than “die in Germany.” This was in 1938. What is more amazing is that he quoted himself in his autobiographical book: **As I see It**, published in 1944, when he already knew about the dimensions of “the dying” in Hitler’s controlled Europe.

Zionist dogma vs. saving human lives

This dogmatism became especially fierce after the adoption of the “Biltmore Program” (promulgated in New York in the hotel of that name, at a conference held on May 9-11, 1942) which demanded: “...that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world.”⁹

At the instigation of the Zionist leadership, Representatives James A. Wright, Democrat of Pennsylvania, and Ranulf Compton, Republican of Connecticut, introduced in the House on January 27, 1944, two identical resolutions (House Res. 418 and House Res. 419) whose concluding paragraphs read:

Whereas the ruthless persecution of the Jewish people in Europe has clearly demonstrated the need for a Jewish homeland as a haven for the large numbers who have become homeless as a result of their persecutions; Therefore, be it

Resolved, that the U.S. shall use its good offices and take appropriate measures to the end that the doors of Palestine shall be opened for free entry of Jews into that country, and that there shall be full opportunity for colonization so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth.

On February 1, an identical resolution (S. Res. 247) was introduced into the Senate by Senators Robert F. Wagner and Robert A. Taft. *)

9 It is a verbose document and reads strangely out of context of the historic moment (May 1942). Paragraph 2 sounds particularly bizarre: “This conference offers a message of hope and encouragement to their fellow Jews in the ghettos and concentration camps of Hitler-dominated Europe and prays that their hour of liberation may not be far distant.” What hope? What encouragement? What was the message?

(* J. Schechtman, p. 70 and his footnotes)

The commonwealth idea was an obsession with the Zionists. Nothing else mattered. They dedicated almost all their efforts to get an endorsement of that Resolution, which meant very little to begin with because it was a post-war aim, and yet they fought for this passage of the Resolution against all odds, as if not only the lives of the Jews depended on its passage but also their own lives and fortunes. This resolution compelled them for many months, indeed for years, to mobilize all their forces, to draw upon most of their resources, to fight on several fronts simultaneously, causing them to be rebuked by their revered friend and patron, FDR, denounced by the military establishment, and by various political factors until in the end they suffered defeat and humiliation – the resolution was shelved.

This was the crucial time of the whole year of 1944 that was wasted. In their obsession with the Commonwealth Resolution, they opposed any measure suggested by the Hebrew emissaries and their friends of the Hebrew Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe who led the fight exclusively on humanitarian grounds. But the Zionists were critical of the resolutions in Congress in favor of Emergency Shelters in Palestine, as in the previous years they opposed the resolutions in Congress demanding the establishment of a special agency with the explicit mandate to Save the Jewish People of Europe, and indeed were unhappy with the Congressional initiative to establish temporary havens even in the U.S. or anywhere else. Their *sine qua non* was that America forces Britain legally and freely to admit all the Jews into Palestine.

* * *

In this connection it is perhaps worthwhile to relate that the day the resolutions about emergency shelters in Palestine were introduced in both Houses of Congress, the Zionist Congressman from Brooklyn, Emanuel Celler, found it necessary to urge the Dumbarton Oaks Conference¹⁰ to take away from the British the mandate over Palestine. Representative Celler's suggestion that the mandatory system be changed was made in a letter to

10 The site of the estate in the District of Columbia where the conference was held to discuss proposals for the creation of the UN organization, August-October 1944.

Edward R. Stettinius Jr., Under Secretary of State and Chairman of the **Post-War** Peace and Security Conference at Dumbarton Oaks. A copy of his letter was sent to Andrei A. Gromyko, the then Soviet Ambassador.

Stating that the “mandate system that emanated from the League of Nations turned out to be a dismal failure,” Representative Celler suggested that **in the future** the mandate over any country be entrusted to a condominium of two or more states. He recommended that the mandate hereafter be a UN’s trusteeship with a group of at least two major powers combining with a minor power. In his letter he criticized severely Great Britain’s mandate over Palestine, mentioning the White Paper which excludes entrance of Jews in Palestine as “placing property rights about human rights.” **) One can of course criticize the very contents of the letter, as if Jewish immigration to Palestine was equivalent with taking away somebody’s property rights, that being a Zionist he nonetheless conceded that the country belonged to the Arabs, but all this would be beside the point within the given historic context. Celler’s initiative is mentioned because it illustrates with what the minds of the Zionists and their supporters in Congress were preoccupied – with conditions after the war is over. The crucial problem whether there will still be Jews alive to benefit from these remedies didn’t seem to mobilize their attention too much.

* * *

This opposition, though not advancing their own cause one iota, was obstructive enough to be used by the British, the State Department and other agencies of the Roosevelt Administration to be wary of the humanitarian plans and suggestions advocated by the Hebrew emissaries and the Emergency Committee. Symptomatic of the confusion and unconscious obstruction that the Zionists created with their agitation for a Jewish Commonwealth, is a letter of August 30, 1944, from Cordell Hull to the President, relating to the bi-partisan resolution in both House of Congress about the establishment of temporary rescue shelters in Palestine.

Hull expressed his fears and misgivings:

I desire to invite your attention in this connection to the effect that these resolutions will undoubtedly have upon the political situation in the NEAR East. The susceptibilities of the Arabs have already

been aroused by the introduction of the proposed Congressional resolutions of last winter and by the adoption of the Democratic and Republican platform planks all providing for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. These developments have led to considerable criticism of the United States, and it may safely be predicted that our attitude toward Palestine will be one of the main topics of discussion at the forthcoming meeting of the committee which is to organize an Arab Congress. *)

Of what use is the Atlantic Charter?

Generally, the American press had shown sympathy and understanding to the position of the Hebrew emissaries and the Emergency Committee rather than to that of the Zionists. We mentioned before the editorials in all of the Hearst papers. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the New York Post and PM consistently supported the Emergency Committee. Scores of papers throughout the country adopted the same attitude.

Freda Kirchway, editor of *The Nation*, raised her powerful voice in the campaign for rescue, and in an editorial dated August 26, 1944, urged that neutral Sweden be allowed to use Allied transport plans and troopships to rescue Jewish children and adults in Hungary, "even if schedules of troop movements and supplies are upset." As a supplemental action Miss Kirchway demanded that ports of asylum be established immediately in Palestine and other countries to take advantage of Hungary's offer. Anticipating an objection that such suggestions might interfere with scheduled military movements, she said:

This cannot be denied, but the problem is balancing need against need. A spell of bad weather would also upset schedules.

The last opportunity to save a half million or more lives cannot be treated as a matter of minor concern. If the death of these people is of sufficient importance to warrant the expenditure of men and machines and time required for extermination, their life should be worth something to Hitler's enemies.

The blame for the death of several million Jews in central and eastern Europe lies both "on Nazi ferocity and Allied indifference," Miss Kirchway asserted. *)

Here was a celebrated voice, but it is worthwhile to hear what less known or anonymous writers in the American press had to say. Perhaps as a sample of eloquent and logical appreciation of the exertions of the Emergency Committee can be cited in an editorial from the Hastings (Nebraska) Daily Tribune (August 25, 1944), under the headline: "United Nations' Record on Jewish Relief **Nothing of which to be Proud.**" It reads in part:

One of the most distressing manifestations that the chances for a fair and just peace in Europe at the conclusion of the current war **are much brighter in theory than in fact is the appalling lack of honest effort** of the UN to come to the aid of the hundreds of thousands of homeless and persecuted European Jews.

A recent case in point is the month-old offer of the Hungarian Government to release Jews possessing entry visas to Palestine... So far, the British have not yet said anything... (though it) had been repeatedly pressed for a favorable answer... What is even worse in the fact that **our own Government apparently is totally disinterested** in urging the British to cooperate. This may be the land of freedom and the democratic way of life and dedicated to winning a war to put an end to tyranny but we don't seem to care much, officially, about the homeless and destitute little peoples of Europe – even the... poor Jews confined in Hungary and subjected to every indignity and torture the Axis mind can conceive.

The British argument, says the editorial, that admitting the entry of additional Jews into Palestine will alienate the Arabs "becomes totally specious" in view of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation's compromise proposal of admitting the Jews from Hungary into Emergency Rescue Shelters for the duration. "Even so, the British do nothing." And the editorial continues:

... Helping Europe's Jews is purely and simply a question of common humanity and every right-thinking person and every honorable nation ought to concern themselves with the task.

Atlantic Charters, good intentions and high sounding phrases are all right, as far as they go. But what hope is there of solving the intricate phases of an enduring peace if, before the time for writing

it ever comes, **a whole people is doomed to virtual extinction because one great nation is so sensitive of another's feelings?**

Had the Zionist and Jewish leadership reacted the way this unknown writer did, the cause of rescue would have had an infinitely greater chance. But they didn't, and since they didn't, the powers that be, the White House, State Department and mighty personalities remained indifferent if not oblivious. The latter relied upon influential Jews, the Frankfurters, the rabbis, the presidents of Jewish organizations: if they didn't speak the language of the Hastings' editorialist, then there was no urgency for the Administration to act vigorously. And besides, if these formidable Jewish personalities are mum, they probably know best that little if anything can be done to rescue the Jews. That the failure to act made a mockery of the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms, occurred to an anonymous Nebraskan but not to leaders of the Allies and the Jewish establishment, who failed to see the essential connection between the two.

Jewish leadership preferred the Jews to remain where they were to regain equal rights after the war or to live in their own "commonwealth" in Palestine

The American and British Governments' failure to act adequately on the Horthy initiative has to be ascribed not only to their indifference and lack of compassion, but also to the philosophy advocated by the Jewish organizations and their leadership, both the Zionists and their opponents. It was the Zionist philosophy that what counts most is to utilize the Jewish disaster in order to impress the Allies to agree to a favorable solution of the **post-war** Palestine problem. Hence the Zionists' enthusiasm and persistence to have Congress pass a resolution (in various forms) committing the American Government to support the idea of restoring Palestine as a Jewish **commonwealth after the war**. The non-Zionists pressed the officials of the Administration to adopt a policy of restoring the Jews to their rights (where they had them), or to grant them rights (where they never had them) in all the countries of Europe which will be liberated **after the war**. But it was really a matter of emphasis – both Zionists and non-Zionists were concerned about **post-war** reconstruction of the Jews both in Palestine as a Commonwealth, and in other countries

as citizens with guaranteed human rights. There was no clash between the two – they complemented each other and aimed at the same thing: to prepare better conditions for the Jews when hostilities end.

A celebrated publicist and editor of the Jewish Day wrote in his column on August 19, 1944, a day after the Anglo-American declaration was published:

So, after all, the Jews are not to be taken out of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria and removed to the safety of a neutral or Allied country, preferably Palestine, as previously contemplated and as reportedly arranged through the International Red Cross... following Admiral Horthy's offer to let the Jews go... Instead, the Jews... are to stay where they are while an attempt will be made to obtain for them the restoration of the rights they enjoyed before the advent of Hitler.

... I see that the new line to substitute the restoration of Jewish rights in the Balkan countries for the evacuation of the Jewish survivors of the Nazi deportation and extermination policy, is being advocate by such responsible Jewish organizations as the Jewish Agency for Palestine and the Joint Distribution...

Dr. Samuel Margoshes explained the dangers inherent in such a policy on the part of the Jewish organization and the Allied Governments:

... complicating the situation in all these lands (Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria) is the presence of a Nazi army on the spot... Under these conditions, it would seem to me that **the only way** of making certain that the Jews are not going to be made a pawn in the hands of the Nazis, who may send them to the extermination point when it suits the Nazi whim, is to remove them beyond the control of the Nazis... Suppose that the Nazis in Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, driven to despair by their own impending doom, actually decide as they said they did, to take the last remaining Jews with them?

Shall we then be able to appease our own conscience, as some of us and most of the Governments already have done, by citing the difficulties that surrounded the rescue action...?

This is exactly what happened. Dr. Margoshes, though an ardent and loyal Zionist, raised his voice more than once in defense of the perceptions and actions of the Emergency Committee.

* * *

The replies the Emergency Committee received were varied; most were polite but without substance. In plainer language, one could say that in the given context they were not only non-committal but hypocritical. One example of a meaningless answer will suffice. The ambassador of New Zealand, Carl Berendsen, acknowledged the communication from Prof. Smertenko which contained the text of the cablegram from the ICRC, and wrote:

... I have read (it) with interest.

Needless to say, I deeply sympathize with your people who have been subjected to so many years of brutal treatment and oppression, and we all look forward to the day when they will again be able to live in surroundings free from fear and want. I am sure that every member of the Allied Nations will do everything to make this possible.

(The ambassador's note had no date. It seems it was dispatched in a rush.)

What was one to do in such a case? The easiest thing would have been to let it go at that, but one must understand the feelings of the rescue advocates at that time. They saw a plain, realistic opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of people, if only the governments of the most enlightened and democratic countries would make just a small effort. Here was a communication from a representative of a people in so many ways admirable, yet it was heartless. The Emergency Committee could not afford to become discouraged, or permit hypocrisy to pass without challenge. Prof. Smertenko replied to Mr. Berendsen; hypocrisy had to be answered with a modicum of indignation expressed somewhat sarcastically. But the main thrust was to explain once more (how many times more?) what the practical propositions were to save large numbers of human beings who would otherwise meet the same fate as millions of Jews in the past three years.

Anyhow, this is the text of the letter dated July 28, 1944:

My dear Minister:

I have received today your gracious note and a similar letter from Mr. John S. Reid, the First Secretary of your Legation. It is gratifying to know that the Hebrew people of Europe have your sympathy in this day of tragedy. Nevertheless, it is disheartening to know that this sympathy is still expressed in vague good wishes rather than in specific measures to alleviate an appalling situation.

The telegram sent us by the International Red Cross indicates that children under ten years of age can be saved from impending doom in Hungary by the issuance of visas on the part of the Governments of neutral and Allied nations. At the same time, the Red Cross reports the willingness of the Hungarian Government to permit the evacuation of all adult Jews who have Palestine visas. Thus, visas, combined with Emergency Refugee Shelters in Allied countries and Palestine, can actually rescue lives.

The question therefore arises whether your personal sympathy and the good will of your Government will materialize in the saving of any given number of human lives. We hope that you will give this question your earnest and immediate consideration.

It is precisely because the Emergency Committee recognizes the existence of the sympathy you have so graciously expressed that we call in the name of humanity and decency upon all the Governments of the United Nations, which are fighting against Nazi bestiality and oppression, to aid the International Red Cross in rescuing several hundred thousand lives.

To have an idea of the scope of this kind of dialogue between the Emergency Committee and the various Allied and neutral Governments one needs to multiply it by a hundredfold. Several volumes could be compiled if it were not for the uniformity and monotony of it. But one can imagine the frustration and despair of it all, even now thinking of it in retrospect 35 years later.

Some responses, however, were more encouraging and these were treated with utmost care to urge the governments that expressed even if only by implication some willingness to help, to translate their sympathy into concrete action. In communicating with them three points were stressed,

though in each case the emphasis was somewhat qualified according to specific local conditions and political climate: a) visas for children; b) Nansen-type identity and travel documents; and c) the establishment of temporary shelters. Samples of this correspondence are reproduced in an appendix (No. ...).

Very few Governments were cooperative in an exemplary way. The most gratifying was that of Sweden. Secretary P. R. Hichens-Bergström of the Swedish Legation in Washington, D.C. called the Emergency Committee to inform it that his government had instructed its legation in Hungary to issue an **unlimited number** of visas to the Jewish children in Hungary. It also authorized the legation to provide visas for 700 adult Hungarian Jews who were in one way or another connected with Sweden. This was official. But unofficially the offer of the Swedes was much larger in scope. First, the number 700 was a fictitious number as was the condition that these Jews “were in one way or another connected with Sweden.” In reality a Swedish businessman by the name of Raoul Wallenberg received proper credentials from Stockholm to extend Swedish diplomatic protection to tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest who were herded into crowded quarters, a sort of ghetto, established for the convenience of the Nazis as assembly points from where they deported the Jews to the death chambers. After Wallenberg declared that they are under the protection of the Swedish Government, neither the Hungarians nor the Nazis dared touch them, with one exception which is related elsewhere. Almost singlehandedly he saved at least 20,000 Jews. *)

This outstanding action by Sweden was in accord with the policy that Stockholm generously pursued from the beginning of the war. It furnished a haven of refuge for Jews fleeing across the Baltic, for those from Norway, and for almost 6,000 Jews who were evacuated in a joint Danish-Swedish heroic adventure from Denmark, thus saving them from deportation to the East for annihilation.

In February 1943 Sweden offered to provide haven for 10,000 Jews from any country if the UN were able to assure 75% of the maintenance cost. It fell through because although the Government of Great Britain announced its willingness to share these costs, a reply from the U.S. was not forthcoming.¹¹

11 For further details, see the chapter “Salute to Sweden and Denmark,” p. 252f.

Switzerland

A similar offer was made by Switzerland regarding 20,000 refugees. This, too, was not accepted by the Allied Governments. Nevertheless, Switzerland, where the ECSJPE had a resident representative, Dr. Reuben Hecht, had already taken in over 75,000 refugees from adjoining countries. In proportion to her population and means, this was the greatest number of refugees accommodated by any country in the world¹² (It was the equivalent of about 2¼ million had the U.S. taken a similar position.) And the Swiss federal government did it without any fanfare, solemn declarations and high-sounding rhetoric. One feels very uncomfortable, but when one scrutinizes the events, the statistics, the comparative policies of the Allied powers, one cannot but come to the conclusion that the record of the U.S. was quite dismal.

12 See the chapter "The Rudi Hecht File."

Chapter 22

The Eri Jabotinsky File

His mission to Turkey

The Emergency Committee suggested to the WRB to send to Turkey – in addition to Mr. Hirschmann – Mr. Eri Jabotinsky, one of the few experts in organizing migration under emergency circumstances. His record of rescue operations was outstanding, almost legendary, having engaged personally in this kind of work for many years. As a result of these operations tens of thousands of Jews have been rescued from the Balkans before and after World War II broke out. Mr. Pehle was of course eager to dispatch him to Turkey as soon as possible, and asked Mr. Ward Stewart, Assistant Executive Director of the Board to get in touch with the State Department to obtain clearance for a priority flight. On March 24, Stewart reported in an internal memorandum about the failure so far to obtain cooperation from State:

Since February 15, we have been doing everything to clear Jabotinsky's travel to the Near East. During this period of nearly six weeks, we have thought on several occasions that the issue was definitely settled... During the month from February 24 to March 24, Mr. Pehle and I, and more recently Mr. Mann, have checked almost daily with Mr. Warren, Mr. Watson, Mr. Raynor, and others in the State Department to get this matter cleared. The reasons that have been cited...¹ *ad nauseam*, each of which has been overcome (by the WRB) *only to reveal another obstruction* (italics added). *)

1 Stewart enumerates all the excuses including the opposition of the British and the Turks. There are stories which it is difficult to condense in a few lines, and if one wishes to have a real feel of the events, one has to turn to the primary source, that is, to the documents written in the heat of outrage and frustration when the event took place. Hence, we

On April 10, 1944, Mr. J. H. Mann, another colleague of Mr. Pehle, still reported failure. The excuses multiplied and created a vicious circle. It was at last broken after the Emergency Committee threatened the State Department with a public campaign disclosing its obstructionist devices. It worked. Soon after, in May 1944, Jabotinsky left in an Army bomber arranged for by the State Department.

On a stop-over in Tel Aviv he held a press conference informing the public of the activities of the Emergency Committee on whose behalf, and with “full approval of the President’s WRB” he was going on a mission to Turkey to help rescue Jews from occupied Europe or newly liberated ravaged areas.

(Perhaps a chronological background should come here)

His rapport with Ambassador Steinhardt

In Turkey he established cordial relations with the American Ambassador Lawrence Steinhardt. His correspondence with the WRB and the Emergency Committee was dispatched by the Ambassador in diplomatic code and sent in diplomatic pouch. From Jabotinsky’s reports it became obvious that in contrast to other American envoys, who were either indifferent or hostile, this emancipated Jew was dedicated to the cause of rescue and made great exertions for its success, animated by the same spirit as Morgenthau. According to Jabotinsky, “any backing that has been given our work (of all the Jewish and Zionist groups stationed in Turkey) by the local Government is due solely to the personal efforts and prestige of Mr. Steinhardt. To him is also due the credit for all the things achieved by Mr. Hirschmann.” Jabotinsky worked in an advisory capacity, offering his expertise as well as ideas what to do and how to carry them out. He was not only a man of physical courage but also of fertile and original mind. His help was invaluable for the WRB’s work in rescuing some 80,000 Jews from the Balkans to safety. Most important of all, he worked out a detailed plan to evacuate hundreds of thousands of Jews both from countries still under German control (but

reproduce as appendices the two internal memoranda from Ward Stewart on March 24, 1944, and J.H. Mann of April 10, 1944. They are both from the files of the WRB in the FDR Library.

whose stranglehold weakened by the month if not by the day) as well as the survivors from the concentration camps in liberated territories. His reports to the Emergency Committee are rare contemporary, vivid and historically valid records of the Jewish rescue originating from Turkey. Historians should avail themselves of this primary source if they wish to tell their story truthfully without mythology or exaggerated embellishment.

* * *

When he arrived in Ankara in April 1944, he found four representatives of American organizations dealing with rescue, and a motley group of Palestinian Hebrews headed by a representative of the Haganah, all competing for the few opportunities of getting out a limited number of people from Rumania, Greece and Bulgaria. Jabotinsky reports with humor: "Apart of the others, there is of course myself and Hirschmann... Everybody agrees that there are too many of us but each one, including myself, thinks that he is the essential one." What he discovered were both tremendous possibilities of rescue through evacuation, but also forbidding obstacles. He debunked the pretense of the Haganah and the Zionist representatives that they are rescuing Jews through an "underground":

Except for Greece, the word "underground" is not appropriate, for the whole thing is open and above board for all the local and German authorities to see. There exist in every country people who organize the evacuation locally. They are, to an astonishing degree the same people who worked with me on the evacuation in 1937-1940. And even the evacuation from Greece was organized by one of my ex-collaborators – a personal friend of Abrasha.²

The Governments of the satellites not only did not oppose the Jews leaving but encouraged them, and were disappointed at the lack of comprehensive action on the part of the world Jewish organizations. This policy took on

2 Abraham Stawsky, pioneer of illegal immigration to Palestine in the middle thirties, was the hero and central figure of this type of activity until it was adopted successively by the Revisionists, then by the Irgun, and subsequently by the Haganah. He was killed in 1948 when the Altalena arrived with 800 Hebrew fighters, and what was at that time a tremendous amount of weapons and ammunition.

such an incredible form that the Rumanian Government, for instance, sold a charter to a private Greek ship owner to take Jews out of the country. "This extraordinary document," wrote Jabotinsky, "made him an absolute dictator of our work in Rumania."³ He was in this business for financial gain and not for any ideals, but he was considered reliable in the sense that he will "deliver the goods," that is, ships which could be used though not without risk to navigate a couple of days in the sea from one port to another. It seems that at least from the STRUMA onward the method of his business was invariably the same. He made a contract with one or another of the Zionist outfits, told them that the ship's "capacity" is let's say 800, six hundred of which the Zionists can put on whomever they wished – he doesn't care – and he is not charging anything, but the two hundred he will recruit professionally, that is, each will pay such a high sum that it will cover his expenses and profit. It was a racket in a double sense: first, the evacuation was strictly partisan, only Zionists, and at that only those affiliated with certain Zionist parties were chosen as candidates, thus excluding the majority of Jews who did not belong to any party; and second, the profits of the Greek surpassed anything reasonable. No wonder that various Jewish leaders in Rumania protested and even influenced the Government to cancel Pandelis' "charter"; (later it renewed it). This cruel system of partisanship aroused Hirschmann's indignation and he felt he had to do something about it.

Apart from shipping difficulties was, of course, the problem to get people admitted somewhere. The Turkish Government was willing to let people pass through Turkey only if they have some visas for another country. By mid-June 1944 the Turkish Government was spooning out only a limited number of visas a month, and these were not always utilized because of British restrictions to enter Palestine even on a transit basis. Other countries, assuming they were willing to grant asylum to refugees (which seldom was the case), in view of their geographic position were out of reach because of lack of transportation. (From Turkey refugees could reach Palestine by train, which were running.) According to Jabotinsky's

3 The name of this Greek was Pandelis, a notorious character from whom Jabotinsky and his colleagues chartered half a dozen ships back in the late 1930s. The ill-fated Struma which sank in 1942 was his ship.

reports, four factors were involved in order to undertake immediate mass evacuation:

1. Exit permits from the Balkan countries
2. Transit permits through Turkey
3. Entrance permits to Palestine and Allied and neutral countries
4. Transportation

The first two problems were comparatively easy to solve. There were no obstacles to get Jews out of the Balkans. Jabotinsky was confident to get a wholesale exit permit from Rumania. He also believed that, thanks to Ambassador Steinhardt's special friendship with the Turkish Foreign Minister, the transit problem could be solved.

Even the transportation problem was not insurmountable: ships were available but at a premium. In June 1944 the transportation from a Balkan country to Palestine was about \$500.00 a head. He thought it can be reduced to about \$250.00. In simple arithmetical terms to evacuate a million Jews would cost about \$250,000,000. At that time no private institution or Jewish fund-raising apparatus could provide that amount of money. But the WRB worked on the notion that money will have to come from Jewish private organizations, which limited its operation greatly and reduced its potential to a fraction.

To obtain visas even on a temporary basis was entirely within the province of Governmental prerogatives. This problem became almost an impossible task because while the WRB was an American institution, America itself was almost as hermetically closed to the Jews as was Palestine. As long as America did not lead the way, there was little hope that other countries would agree to be more compassionate and generous. Mr. Pehle was aware of it when he declared so at the beginning of his functions as Director.

His evacuation plan to shuttle Jews weekly from the Balkans to Palestine

Nonetheless Eri Jabotinsky decided to jump into his familiar kind of activity – to organize evacuation on a smaller scale from the Balkan countries. He had two ideas how to solve the transportation problem:

The more ambitious one, was to persuade the WRB to have the State Department “offer Turkey as a present or grant or lend-lease a number of railway cars, locomotives and ships to enable her to put her existing service and facilities more completely at our (the rescue organizers in general, not exclusively the Emergency Committee – S. M.) disposal than until now.” He also suggested certain diplomatic activities on the part of the WRB and mainly the State Department in the sense of impressing the Turkish Ambassador in America about the benefits – political, economic and public opinion – which would accrue to Turkey for being generous in permitting Jews transit on a mass scale.

The other plan he envisaged was a more modest one, but which could be carried out almost independently, that is, without intensive diplomatic intervention in Washington, and without close cooperation with the WRB, only with its tacit blessing, taking into consideration that as a governmental agency it had to work within the legal restrictions of British immigration policy in Palestine. In March 31, the quota allocated by the British in accordance with the White Paper of 1939 was practically exhausted. Though 75,000 Jews should have been admitted between the issuance of the Policy Paper in May 1939 until the end of the prescribed five-year period ending in 1944, only about 40,000 were utilized. Tragically, 35,000 were not used up due to war conditions and an endless array of obstacles raised by the mandatory power. One of the sordid arguments was about deducting from the totality of the unutilized certificates the number of Jews who succeeded one way or another to enter Palestine “illegally.” The WRB tried with considerable success to obtain permission from the British to release the unused certificates at the rate of perhaps 1,500 per month to persons chosen by the Jewish Agency or its representatives in the various countries in the Balkans.

At the same time the British increased its vigilance and began to tighten the patrolling of the shores against Jews who tried to enter the country “illegally,” arguing that with victory in sight the emergency is over.⁴ The balance of the 35,000 unused certificates were now exhausted, only about 3,000 remained.⁵

4 The British Foreign Office commented that easing of an emergency after the Nazi ouster from the Balkans had led to tightening up the transfers.

5 John Russel, Second Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, told a reporter of

Jabotinsky planned to expedite the slow, uncertain process by a dramatic undertaking – to challenge the quota system altogether, without waiting for the British to release the last 3,000 certificates. He sought to arrange an “illegal” steamship service to shuttle 2,500 refugees a week from among the 10,000 Jews in Rumania and 50,000 in Bulgaria. It meant about four times as many as all organizations combined did so far, with the help and cooperation of the WRB. The hope was that if it works and financial means are available, the shuttle could be organized twice a week, thus evacuating almost all the Jews at least from those two countries, which will be a pattern to be used in the future also from Hungary and perhaps other parts of Europe. It was intended to defy, once and for all, the quota system by forcing the hand of the British at a time when world opinion would have understood, sympathized and probably would have extended its financial support. The political climate in Europe was propitious. The governments in the Balkans were friendly disposed. At this late hour of the war, they went out of their way to accommodate allied public opinion and believed they can do it by showing understanding for Jewish needs and aspirations. The Rumanian Foreign Minister on November 15, 1944 expressed support for the aim of Hebrew statehood, and promised freedom of immigration for all Jews who will so desire. The Bulgarian Propaganda Minister, Dymo Kadasoss, declared on September 20, 1944: “Bulgarian government has positive attitude to formation of Hebrew State Palestine, because every people has right to its country. Bulgarian Government won’t hinder Jewish immigration to Palestine.”

Perhaps of even greater significance was the attitude of the Russian authorities in Rumania. Their sympathy was unmistakable. Perhaps it was an indication of their attitude they will adopt in 1947 to Hebrew statehood.

On December 7, 1944, Eri Jabotinsky cabled the Emergency Committee that he was expecting authorization (by the) Turkish Government (to) use (the) Turkish ship TARI “for a Constanța-Haifa service.” The operation of the first trip would require \$200,000. The Emergency Committee cabled authorization.

the New York Herald Tribune: “... chances are immigration will be continued on some scale of which we haven’t accurate information yet.”

As long as the actual number of people being rescued through Turkey and sent to Palestine was limited, the British authorities in Turkey did not interfere. When Rumania and Bulgaria were freed by the advancing Soviet Armies, countless thousands of Hebrews in these countries, completely destitute and starving, clamored for a chance to leave the scene of horror and extermination which they miraculously survived, and not be forced to live in the vast cemetery that Europe became for them. The British thought that these cries of despair can be muffled one way or another, and their insistence to get to Palestine could be frustrated by simply ignoring it. Jabotinsky decided to defy the British and mapped out a plan how to help the survivors on a large scale by evacuating them all in the shortest possible time, thus, unleashing a new dynamic and setting a platform to rescue the Hungarian Jews. The British, on their part, decided that this should not happen.

His relations with the Turkish authorities and the British intervention to expel him

On January 1945 the Emergency Committee received a radiogram which said: "Turkish Government was willing authorize use ship of refugees, but British sent note cancelling promise Palestine visas Jews arriving in Turkey, also requested prevent ships from transporting refugees." Dispiritedly Eri Jabotinsky called his mission 'unproductive' and proposed his leaving Turkey. He was instructed by Bergson, Chairman of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation to remain in Turkey to explore further possibilities. But the British intervened with the authorizations to get rid of Jabotinsky. First, they made informal approaches to Turkish officials, suggesting to cancel his visa. But these attempts failed. Consequently, a formal request had to be made on a criminal charge fabricated to force Ankara to deport him to **British controlled** territory under extradition procedure. The Turks told Jabotinsky of the British request and advised him to leave as soon as possible, explaining that since he is a British subject (of Palestinian citizenship) and the pressure on the central authorities is so great that they have no choice but to comply. They did not tell him the nature of the charge.

His arrest

Eri Jabotinsky took the occasion to compliment the Turkish authorities on their courteous treatment, and sent a letter of protest to the British Ambassador. He took a train on February 24, 1945 and when arriving at the Palestine border, he was immediately arrested and transferred to Feru jail. The Turkish Embassy in Washington, in a communication of March 2, 1945, informed the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation: "Upon the request of the British Ambassador in Turkey, Mr. Eri Jabotinsky has been returned to the country he came from (Palestine) as he was believed to have been involved with the assassination of the Late British Resident Minister in the Near East." The accusation was absurd. They used it to impress the reluctant Turks to hand over Jabotinsky: what can be a more compelling reason than involvement in the assassination of a ranking member of their Cabinet? But the moment they had him in their hands, they kept him in prison only a few days and then released him under surveillance. They might have kept him longer, regardless of the fantastic nature of their accusation, had not the Hebrew Committee immediately brought the whole scandal into the open. P. H. Bergson has written a strong and documented letter to the British Ambassador protesting the action of the Colonial Office, indicating the real reason for wanting Jabotinsky out of Turkey. Bergson stressed the highhandedness of British Colonial procedure in disregard of any law and convention when it comes to dealing with the Hebrews, and the lack of any sense of human compassion for the remnants of the Holocaust.

Ben Hecht to Lord Halifax: "A Friend of Mine was Arrested"

Ben Hecht wrote an Open Letter to Lord Halifax: "A Friend of Mine was Arrested...", which was published as an advertisement in several newspapers. It had a powerful impact upon public opinion:

In my bid for information, Excellency, I should like to know particularly whether my friend Eri ran into trouble... because of his work as a refugee-saver. I understand, of course, that the British policy to date has been to refuse haven to the survivors of Treblinka, Maidanek and Oswiecim. As I know, also, that not even

the three million corpses have been able to remove the tweedledum boys presiding over the doors of Palestine. I have read considerable in the past about the antics of the notorious Colonial Office in helping turn back the desperate refugees from Europe – to die at sea – rather than be allowed to defile the shores of a British colonial port – etcetera, etcetera. I am, therefore, not naively excited about the absence of common decency and elementary humanitarianism from the annals of the British Colonial Office...

But Ben Hecht doubted whether this lack of humanity is common to the British people at large. By defying the Colonial Office, Eri Jabotinsky was in fact “struggling as much to restore English honor as to save Jewish lives...”

At the end of his missive, Ben Hecht said:

I know that there is some sort of a bullheaded British determination to chalk-up a bloody and depressing anti-Hebrew record for your Empire. But surely this determination is not as idiotic as it seems. Surely the British know as well as I do that whisking people off to concentration camps and stuffing gags in their mouths at the same time isn't cricket... It would confuse me... to believe that the English have taken to bedeviling fine Hebrews like Eri Jabotinsky – *pour la sport...* *)

Zionist pressure to disavow him

The Turks were subject to pressure not only from the British. There was suspicion based on plausible evidence that the Jewish Agency and the Haganah also exerted pressure to see Jabotinsky out of Turkey. The evidence is indirect. What the Zionists tried to do was impress Ambassador Steinhardt and Pehle that Jabotinsky appears under false pretenses as an official representative of the WRB. Both Steinhardt, but mainly Pehle, were bombarded from all sides by Zionist institutions demanding the disavowal of Jabotinsky, to deny that he has anything to do with the Board. We already know that Dr. Goldmann threatened that unless Pehle does their bidding the Jewish Agency will have no other choice but to denounce the WRB, with the implication that it will withhold the JDC's

financial contributions. Pehle was in a quandary and cabled Steinhardt (through the State Department, under Hull's signature) on June 27, 1944:

Board has received several inquiries as to whether Eri Jabotinsky represents the Board in Istanbul. Impression seems to be rather current that he is our representative. While the matter is not serious enough to warrant a public statement, we, of course, have denied that Jabotinsky represents the Board in any capacity. I would appreciate your advising me whether Jabotinsky is holding himself out as a representative of the Board.

Ambassador Steinhardt answered on June 30, "personal and strictly confidential":

While *I do not know of any occasion* on which Jabotinsky has directly held himself out to be a representative of the Board, there is little doubt that he has sought and succeeded in giving this impression. At his first interview with me he *expressed surprise* that you had not informed me of his impending mission. Subsequently he requested me to transmit to you by Diplomatic pouch which was done, his "preliminary" report to you. However I quite agree with you that *the matter is not sufficiently serious* to warrant a public statement... (italics added).

This diplomatic exchange is somewhat puzzling and evokes a sense of embarrassment. First, about Jabotinsky's connection with the Board: we have seen that Pehle himself and his chief aides pressured the State Department to arrange for him priority air transportation on an Army bomber, indicating the importance and urgency of his being in Turkey in the shortest possible time. The WRB also obtained for him a Turkish visa, though the State Department claimed, probably justifiably, that the Turkish Government was not eager to issue it.⁶

6 On March 29, 1944, J. W. Pehle, in his official capacity as Director of the WRB, wrote a letter to the Turkish Ambassador in Washington, asking for a visa for Jabotinsky:
... As you know, the evacuation of refugees from the Balkans is *most pressing*. Ambassador Steinhardt and the Board's representative in Turkey, Ira Hirschmann, have been working closely with the Turkish Government in this matter.

The true facts of the WRB's official involvement

At the WRB's request, the Treasury Department granted the Emergency Committee a special license to transfer funds for Jabotinsky's work in Turkey, and he was under obligation to submit to the American Ambassador in Ankara periodic reports about his activities, and that money can be spent "only as authorized by the American Ambassador and/or Mr. Ira Hirschmann." *)

The official internal memoranda of the WRB are reproduced in the appendices showing that the agency was genuinely interested to send Jabotinsky to Turkey. There was no doubt that he went there with the full endorsement and assistance of the WRB. But there was no question of giving him an official title. What mattered was to send him there and give him all the necessary assistance he may need, knowing quite well that he is a member of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and will engage in a type of activity which may not be in the purview of the WRB as an official governmental agency. Probably it was precisely this consideration that made Pehle and his colleagues so anxious to dispatch Jabotinsky to Turkey – to do the things the Agency could not.

Jabotinsky never pretended that he was a representative of the WRB. He did not have to, not only because he would have been disavowed instantly by Steinhardt, but also because his semi-official status was evident by the very fact that he was sent by the WRB who arranged for him the necessary transportation and visas as well as the Assistant extended to him by the Ambassador. Why should such an experienced diplomat as Steinhardt spend so much time with a stranger, and forward in diplomatic code and pouch the most confidential information about half a dozen governments and a number of organizations and individuals,

The Board *desires to take advantage* of the service of any private agency which can be of help in this task. I believe that Mr. Jabotinsky, *working in close consultation with the Board's representative in Turkey, could be of assistance* in the efforts of our two Governments to save some of the persecuted people of Europe from death. (Italics added)

On April 5 the Turkish Ambassador informed Pehle that Jabotinsky's visa is ready and he can pick it up any time at the Turkish Consulate in New York.

Pehle's letter leaves very little room to doubt Jabotinsky's status in the eyes of the WRB. Jabotinsky claimed no more than is spelled out by Pehle, and whatever he did was in close consultation with the American Ambassador and the Board's representative.

and even plans of extra-legal activities. He did it because he knew the score exactly. And so, of course, did Pehle. Therefore, both heartily agreed that the matter is not serious enough to warrant a public statement. Why not? – if there appeared an imposter who claims to be something he is not, in such sensitive matters and such a crucial time? Because they were decent people and couldn't do violence to their conscience. But at the same time, they were not courageous enough to issue a statement in defense of Jabotinsky. More than that, Pehle informed the Ambassador that he has "of course denied that Jabotinsky represents the Board." If the thing didn't warrant a public statement, how did he deny it? He told it to the Zionists in secret to appease them. As Steinhardt told them privately, according to his answer of June 30:

... the various individuals engaged in rescue and relief activities in Turkey fully understand that Hirschmann is the only representative of the WRB at present in Turkey.

That is, the Ambassador told the Zionists privately that they don't have to worry about Jabotinsky having an official title of representative; it is Hirschmann who carries that title. Though neither Washington nor the Embassy issued any statement, the private controversy probably contributed to Turkey's decision to yield to the British demand asking Jabotinsky to leave the country and go to Palestine. Having been informed by one party or another that he does not have the protection of the American Government, the Turks decided they will not protect him either. They saw no compelling reason to do it, moral considerations playing little part in those days.

Chapter 23

The Arrest and Deportation of Aryeh Ben-Eliezer

Eri Jabotinsky was not the first member of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the Emergency Committee to be arrested by the British. Another member, Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, preceded him by several months, and his fate was by far more in danger than that of Jabotinsky.

On April 6, 1944 the WRB asked the State Department to instruct by cable the American Consul General in Jerusalem to transmit the following message, signed by Congressman Will Rogers and by P. H. Bergson:

Please deliver the following message to Aryeh Beneliezer, 35 Rashi Street, Tel Aviv, from the WRB. QUOTE Imperative you proceed Turkey immediately take charge of rescue activities there very urgent STOP cable expenses thousand dollars via American Express STOP cable reply stop. Unquote.

The State Department refused to transmit the cable on the grounds that Bergson is a political figure. Hence Bergson's name was removed, and the cable was sent only under Rogers' signature. *)

Upon receipt of the instructions Ben-Eliezer made the necessary preparation to leave for Turkey on April 26, 1944, but two days before his departure he was arrested and deported. The American press had the following story to tell:

Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, of the Executive Board of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe has been "detained

in Tel Aviv under the emergency regulations of the Palestine Government” it was learned today.

He was bearing credentials and messages from Mayor LaGuardia, leading senators and Congressmen and others.

He had been received by the Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government with whom he had discussed rescue problems.

He was also in contact with the American Consulate and some of the Governments-in-Exile...

Mr. Ben-Eliezer was about to leave for Turkey to help rescue Jews from the Balkans.

Reason for his detention is not known. Regulations give the Palestine Government the right to arrest anyone, without the necessity of accusations. *)

He was kept incommunicado and grilled for several weeks by the British intelligence, first in Palestine, then at headquarters in Cairo. After that, he was sent to a special concentration camp in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan desert, and then transferred to another concentration camp in the jungles of Eritrea.

* * *

Actually it was Eri Jabotinsky who informed the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation about Ben-Eliezer's arrest and deportation to concentration camps in Africa. On January 13, 1945, he filed a cable reporting that 279 Hebrew political prisoners were deported from Palestine to the Sudan, where they were deprived of food and medical supplies.

The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation sharply protested these deportations, organized a public campaign to expose their cruelty and violation of human rights. But it was a long, uphill struggle until it could help at least some of them who succeeded to escape to Abyssinia or Djibouti, to bring them to freedom into Europe. This is an *épopée* told in all its dramatic details by Jacob Meridor, about his and his fellow prisoners many escapes, in the book **Long is the Road to Freedom**.

Chapter 24

Negotiating with the Enemy

One of the most formidable obstacles on the road to rescue was the sacrosanct principle not to be in touch with the enemy concerning the rescue of the Jews. “To be in touch” meant negotiating with some officials of the Axis – Nazis, Italians and satellites, with a view to evacuating some Jews and alleviating those who remain. To get relief through in the form of food parcels, medicaments, clothing, or obtain better treatment physically and morally of the concentration camp inmates involved bribery of officials. Near the end of the war, it meant some negotiations with Himmler and other high officials to release all Jews who remained alive and still under Nazi control, in a weird barter Himmler and Eichmann called “Blood for Trucks.” Actually, it involved a desperate desire on the part of some Nazi higher-ups, especially Himmler, to find a pretext for effectuating any contact with the Allies, in the hope to save their skins and perhaps even to be recognized as representatives of Germany in negotiation conditions of surrender. But prior to Joel Brand’s mission, “negotiating” with the enemy meant mainly bribery of German and satellite officials to let some Jews go out, and some food, medicine and clothing parcels for concentration camp inmates to go in. It was never suggested that such negotiations should be direct between the Allies and the Axis. The idea was to negotiate through the International Red Cross and legations of neutral governments in Axis controlled areas, mainly the Swiss. But for years all this was taboo and treated by the Allied governments as if there was something treasonable in it. The arguments advanced were that it would militarily and economically strengthen the Axis; that it might prolong the war, and what not – a position which was not only inhuman and in complete disregard of the agonies of the Jews, but also non-sensical. It would not have prolonged the war by a

half hour. Psychologically and structurally, it might have shortened the war; at all events it would have brought the ICRC into some, if not all of the concentration camps, and it would have enabled the legations of neutral countries to be in closer contact with the Jews. The truth about the death camps and other procedures of annihilation would become known earlier and perhaps to some extent it would have inhibited the Nazi brutality.

It was with these perceptions that the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe argued that it was imperative to abandon this policy of taboo – if taboo can be called a policy – and try to initiate contacts with the enemy, at least for the sake of relief and rescue.

Pehle, despite all the inhibitions and being subject to various pressures, nonetheless espoused the idea that one should try to do something in the field of “negotiating with the enemy,” though when the challenge became strong and the stakes big, the War Refugee Board acted in a bewildered fashion, disoriented and afraid. But in April 1944, he [Pehle] expressed himself favorably:

The Board, since its establishment, has consistently taken the position that, at this stage of the war, the saving of human lives is more important than the possibility that relatively small amounts of free foreign exchange may fall into enemy hands. Accordingly, the Board has, in a number of cases, authorized financing and communications by private organizations in an effort to evacuate people from enemy territory. The Board intends to continue this policy. The British Government, however, continue to express objections to the policy.¹

The trouble with this objection however was that it was strong enough to practically veto any project, or kill it by endless delays. The legal arrangements that nothing could be undertaken without approval of the British who were, or considered themselves to be the deciding authority in matters of the economic blockade was a permanent stumbling block till the very end of the war.

1 Pehle to Ernst. FDRL. WRB #6 Ernst File. Also, Yale and IMA.

Joel Brand's mission

(From Raul Hilberg: **The Destruction of European Jews**, pp. 722-728)

The rescue program had thus been centralized. A specific agency had been created for the task. That agency had centers for the receipt of information, means of communication, and powers of negotiation. Moreover, it could call upon private Jewish organizations for detailed knowledge, age-old experience, and – in the event of ransom possibilities – ‘quickly available funds’² [footnote 26 in original]. The challenge came soon, for in the spring of 1944 Hungarian Jewry was threatened with destruction.

We have already seen what happened in Hungary: on March 19, 1944, the Hungarian Government was overthrown, and the line to Auschwitz was cleared. For the Germans there was no further barrier; for Jewry there was no more protection. Between the Jews and the gas chambers there remained only a series of predetermined bureaucratic steps. However, the activation of these steps required a certain amount of preparation, and the Germans did not have very much time. They were losing the war. Every day the German position was becoming more difficult. The steady buildup of this destructive operation was the work of an administrative machine in which the bolts were already beginning to loosen. Everything therefore depended on the ability of outside forces to recognize these weaknesses and to immobilize the machine before it could deliver its blow.

The outside world was in a position to attempt a rescue effort on two levels, the physical and psychological. Physical action could be implemented from the air. We have already noted that a Slovak official furnished to the Jewish Bratislava rescue committee the routes over which the Jews were to be carried to their death. That information was transmitted to Switzerland, but it brought no results. The railway junctions were not bombed. When the transports arrived in Auschwitz, no bombers appeared over the gas chambers. The opportunity was lost. The notion of stopping

2 The War Refugee Board collected a considerable amount of information. In April 1944, two Slovak Jews escaped from Auschwitz and made their way to Switzerland. They brought with them many details about transport arrivals and gassings in the camp. Not clear is the date on which the statements were received, when they were transmitted to Washington, and what action was based on them. See affidavit by Pehle, November 13, 1947, NI-12545. Further, DuBois, **The Devil's Chemists**, pp. 183-184. Also, the report itself, published by the War Refugee Board in November, 1944, under the title “The Extermination Camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau” (mimeographed). The War Refugee Board could not spend much money. Under the U.S. Constitution federal expenditures must be authorized by Congress; agencies established by congressional statute are usually provided with necessary funds, but the War Refugee Board was set up by the President in an executive order.

the killings by physical means apparently occurred to no one. The outside Jews were not accustomed to think about rescue in terms of physical force, and the outside Christians were not thinking about force for the purpose of rescue. The Hungarian Jews thus had to be saved with psychological methods alone.

We know that in the psychological sphere the Allies possessed a potent weapon. At a time when Hungary was gripped with the fear of Allied war raids, the Hungarian Government was concentrating the Jews in cities of 10,000 people or more. Today one might easily question why no one thought then about the possible consequences of an Allied promise of immunity that would have been honored as long as the Jews remained in those cities. The answer appears to be that Jews could not think in terms of 'interfering' with the war effort, and the Allies on their part could not conceive of such a promise. They could no more take the Jews into account to refrain from bombing than they could think of Jews in planning their missions. The Allied bombers roared over Hungary at will, killing Hungarians and Jews alike.

The world outside was inert. The War Refugee Board and the Jewish offices at its service had posted a receiving organization at the perimeter of the destructive arena. There the rescuers waited for openings, opportunities, and offers. Incredibly enough, an offer was to come.

We have had previous occasion to note that on April 6 and 7, at a time when the German momentum in Hungary was approaching its climax, the Armaments Ministry secured from Hitler himself an authorization to remove 100,000 of the expected Jewish deportees from Auschwitz to construction projects which were then being planned by the Pursuit Planes Staff.³ [27] Two and a half weeks after this diversion had been authorized, Obersturmbannführer Eichmann called to his office in the Budapest Hotel Majestic a leader of the Jewish rescue Committee in Hungary, Joel Brand.⁴ [28] Eichmann received Brand with words in the following vein:

Do you know who I am? I have carried out the **Aktionen** in the Reich – in Poland – in Czechoslovakia. Now it is Hungary's turn. I let you come here to talk business with you. Before that I investigated you – and your people. Those from the Joint and those from the Agency.⁵ [29] And I have come to the conclusion that you still have resources. So I am ready to sell you – a million Jews. All of them

3 See pp. 599-600.

4 Except as indicated otherwise, the entire account of the Brand mission is taken from Alexander Weissberg, **Die Geschichte von Joel Brand**, (Cologne-Berlin, 1956).

5 Reference here is to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

I wouldn't sell you. That much money and goods you don't have. But a million – that will go. Goods for blood – blood for goods. You can gather up this million in countries which still have Jews. You can take it from Hungary. From Poland. From Austria. From Theresienstadt. From Auschwitz. From wherever you want. What do you want to save? Virile men? Grown women? Old people? Children? Sit down – and talk.

Brand was a careful negotiator. How was he to get goods, he asked, that the Germans could not confiscate on their own? Eichmann had the answer: Brand was to go abroad; he was to negotiate directly with the Allies and bring back a concrete offer. With these words Eichmann dismissed Brand, warning him in parting that the discussion was a Reich secret that no Hungarian was allowed to suspect.

Sometime in the beginning of May, following the railway conference in Vienna which determined the routing of the transports, Eichmann called Brand again. 'Do you want a million Jews?' If so, Brand was to leave immediately for Istanbul. He was to bring back an offer to deliver trucks. 'You deliver one truck for every hundred Jews. That is not much.' The total would be 10,000 vehicles. The trucks had to be new and suitable for winter driving. 'You can assure the Allies that these trucks will never be used in the West. They will be employed exclusively on the eastern front.' In addition, the Germans would be pleased if the Allies would throw in a couple of thousand tons of tea, coffee, soap, and other useful items.

Cautiously, Brand replied: 'Mr. Obersturmbannführer, I personally can believe that you will keep your word, but I do not possess ten thousand trucks. The people with whom I must negotiate in Istanbul will demand guarantees. Nobody is going to deliver ten thousand trucks in advance. What assurance can you offer that these million Jews will actually be freed?'

Eichmann thereupon gave a decisive answer. 'You think we are all crooks. You hold **us** for what **you** are. Now I am going to prove to you that I trust you more than you trust me. When you come back from Istanbul and tell me that the offer has been accepted, I will dissolve Auschwitz and move 10 per cent of the promised million to the border. You take over the 100,000 Jews and deliver for them afterwards one thousand trucks. And then the deal will proceed step by step. For every hundred thousand Jews, a thousand trucks. You are getting away cheap.'

Brand had to conceal his excitement. For the first time he saw a way out. If the verbal assurance could be given in time, the Jews could, without delivering a single truck, score a major breakthrough. To be sure, the Germans could change their conditions. So far, they had made no concessions, but if Brand could return

with a promise, the Germans could not kill so long as they wanted the trucks. Without blood, no merchandise.⁶ [30]

The rescue committee now telegraphed to Istanbul that Brand would be arriving there; the answer came quickly, 'Joel should come, Chaim will be there.' To the Committee this could mean only that Chaim Weizmann himself, the President of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, would be on hand.

On May 15, Brand saw Eichmann for the last time. It was the day on which the deportations began. Eichmann warned Brand to return quickly. If the offer came in time, Auschwitz would be 'blown up' (**dann sprengt sich Auschwitz in die Luft**), and the deportees now leaving Hungary would be the first to be sent to the border.

On the following day, Brand secured 'full powers' from the **Zentralrat der Ungarischen Juden**; he also received a companion: a Jew who had served **Abwehr**, Bandi Grosz. The two went to Vienna and, paying for their fare in dollars, left by special plane to Istanbul.

When Brand landed at the Istanbul airport, he made a disturbing discovery. The Jewish Agency had not processed an entry visa for him, and "Chaim" was not there. The man to whom Jerusalem had referred was not the agency's chief Executive, Chaim Weizmann, but the chief of its Istanbul office, Chaim Barlasz, and that man was riding around in the city at the very moment of the plane's arrival to obtain a visa for Brand. Fortunately, Brand's counter-intelligence companion, Grosz, had many connections in Istanbul. After a few telephone calls by Grosz, the two men were allowed to move into a hotel. There the Jewish Agency representatives were waiting for the emissaries.

Brand was angry and excited. 'Comrades, do you realize what is involved?... We have to negotiate... With whom can I negotiate? Do you have the power to make agreements...? Twelve thousand people are hauled away every day... that is five hundred an hour... Do they have to die because nobody from the Executive is here?... I want to telegraph tomorrow that I have secured agreement... Do you know what is involved, comrades? The Germans want to negotiate. The ground is burning under their feet. They feel the coming of the catastrophe. Eichmann has promised us an advance of a hundred thousand Jews. Do you know what this means?... I insist, comrades, that a man come here whom all the world knows. The Germans are observing us. They will know at once that Weizmann is here or Shertok. Even if you cannot accomplish anything concrete with the Allies while I am here, I can go back and tell Eichmann that the Agency has accepted. Then Auschwitz can be blown up...'

To the representatives of the Jewish Agency the matter was not so simple.

6 Brand did not know of the German plan to use up to 100,000 Jews for forced labor in any case.

They could not be sure, they said, that a telegram sent to Jerusalem would arrive there without mutilation. No one had enough influence to obtain a plane. No representative of the War Refugee Board was on the scene. Brand wanted to reach Steinhardt, the American Ambassador in Ankara. 'Steinhardt,' he said, 'is supposed to be a good Jew. And besides that, a good man.' But no plane seat could be bought for a trip to Ankara. The hours began to pass, then the days. Brand, still waiting for someone to arrive in Istanbul, gave the Jewish Agency representatives some important data. 'I gave the comrades an accurate plan of the Auschwitz concentration camp. I demanded the bombing of the gas chambers and crematories insofar as this was technically possible. I demanded diversions and air strikes against the junctions on the railway lines which led to Auschwitz. I gave our comrades accurate information about places where parachute troops could land, and I gave them a list of documents and other things that the parachutists absolutely had to have to get through. I named a number of addresses of reliable helpers on the roads to Budapest.'

Brand had exhausted his mission, and it was exhausting him in turn. In repeated discussions with the Jewish Agency representatives, he gained the distinct impression that they did not quite realize what was at stake. 'They did not, as we did in Budapest, look daily at death.'

As Brand waited for a reply, a number of unexpected things began to happen. For a few days he was in danger of deportation. The Turkish authorities had ordered his apprehension, together with Bandi Grosz, although the latter was a 'director' of a Hungarian transport corporation engaged in discussion with the Director of a Turkish state transport company. Why the deportation of Grosz? Already Brand suspected that the British were controlling the 'main switch,' but he dismissed the thought. 'I could not believe,' he states, 'that England – this land which alone fought on while all other countries of Europe surrendered to despotism – that this England which we had admired as the inflexible fighter for freedom wanted simply to sacrifice us, the poorest and weakest of all the oppressed.'

Soon, however, another curious situation arose. Moshe Shertok, the chief of the political Department of the Jewish Agency, its second in command, was unable to obtain a visa to Turkey. The agency decided to bring Brand to Aleppo in British-occupied Syria; there Shertok was to meet him. On June 5, 1944, after fifteen fruitless days in Istanbul, Brand, with a British visa in his German passport, boarded the Taurus express train. When the train passed through Ankara, a representative of the Jewish Revisionists (Irgun), accompanied by an Orthodox Party man, got on to warn him that he was moving into a 'trap.' Shertok had not obtained a visa because the British wanted to lure Brand into British-controlled territory, where they could arrest him. Britain was in this matter no 'ally' (**Die Engländer sind in dieser**

Frage nicht unsere Verbündeten). They did not want his mission to succeed. If he continued on his journey, he would never be able to return; he would be arrested.

Brand was confused. The train was about to pull out, and he decided to stay on it. On June 7, 1944, he arrived in Aleppo. A porter entered the compartment and took off Brand's luggage. Brand wanted to follow the porter when an Englishman in civilian clothes blocked his way.

'Mister Brand?'

'Oh, yes.'

'This way, please.'

Before Brand knew what was happening, two plainclothesmen had pushed him into a waiting jeep whose motor was already running. Brand tried to resist, but it was too late.

After two days of arrest the British brought Brand to a villa where Shertok was waiting. Shertok invited Brand to tell about his mission again. In the presence of the British, who were listening silently, Brand talked for ten to twelve hours. When the session was over, Shertok went into a huddle with the British representatives. Then he turned to Brand. 'Dear Joel, I have to tell you something bitter now. You have to go south. The British demand it. I have done everything to change this decision, but it is a decision of the highest authorities. I could not alter it.'

For a second Brand did not understand what had been said to him. When finally he caught on, he screamed: 'Do you know what you are doing? That is simply murder! That is mass murder. If I don't return our best people will be slaughtered! My wife! My mother! My children will be first! You have to let me go! I have come here under a flag of truce. I have brought you a message. You can accept or reject, but you have no right to hold the messenger... I am here as the messenger of a million people condemned to death... What do you want from us? What do you want from me...?'

Brand was brought to Cairo for exhaustive intelligence interrogations. He was henceforth a prisoner. Shertok, at the behest of Foreign Minister Eden, flew to London for more 'discussions.' The War Refugee Board's representative, Ira Hirschmann, a New York department store executive not given to diplomatic niceties, told Moyne that he would be ready to take orders from Eden whenever Moyne decided to follow the instructions of Secretary of State Hull. Finally, Hirschmann managed to talk to Brand. By that time, it was July.⁷ [31]

The almost impossible had happened. An incredible German offer had been met with the most unlikely refusal. There were to be no negotiations; there was to be no bombing. Not even the parachutists had been landed in the right place.

7 Ira A. Hirschmann, **Lifeline to a Promised Land** (New York, 1946), pp. 109-132.

Those Jewish volunteers from Palestine were dropped over military targets where most of them could die for England.⁸ [32]

By the beginning of July most of the Hungarian Jews were dead. The Jews of Budapest were waiting for their turn. They were saved at the last moment, when the Regent Horthy had the Sztojay Government, wearied by the protests of neutral states and the Church and frightened by intercepted Anglo-American teletype messages containing among other things the Jewish requests for target bombings of Hungarian government offices as well as the names of seventy prominent officials, decided to stop the operation in its tracks. Two days after the deportations had come to a halt outside the Hungarian capital, Prime Minister Churchill wrote the following letter to Eden:

There is no doubt that this is probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world, and it has been done by scientific machinery by nominally civilized men in the name of a great state and one of the leading races of Europe. It is quite clear that all concerned in this crime who may fall into our hands, including the people who only obeyed orders by carrying out the butcheries should be put to death after their association with the murders has been proved... There should therefore, in my opinion, be no negotiations of any kind on this subject. Declarations should be made in public, so that everyone connected with it will be hunted down and put to death.⁹ [33]

This letter reveals a great deal about the British Prime Minister's thoughts. In these instructions Churchill was not particularly concerned with the safety of the Jews; he was worried about the reputation of the German nation. The culprits had disgraced their race.

The Jews continued to be gassed. Outside Hungary the operation was not over. The Jews were being deported from Italy; they were shipped out from the islands of Greece; they were hauled out of the Ghetto of Lodz; they were thinned out in Theresienstadt; they were moved out of the Polish labor camps. In the fall came the turn of the remaining Slovakian Jews. Once more, ransom negotiators were sent out from Germany; this time the associate President of the Zionist organization in Hungary, Kastner, accompanied by Standartenführer Becher, arrived in Switzerland.

8 Marie Syrkin, **Blessed Is the Match – The Story of Jewish Resistance** (Philadelphia, 1947), pp. 19-35. Veessenmayer to Ritter, July 8, 1944, NG-5616.

9 Churchill to Eden, July 11, 1944, in: Winston S. Churchill, **The Second World War**, vol. VI: **Triumph and Tragedy** (Boston, 1953), p. 693.

They too were negotiating with the wrong party. On the opposite side stood the President of the Jewish community in Switzerland, Saly Mayer. He disliked the negotiations and refused to promise the Germans anything.¹⁰ [34] If Saly Mayer reflected upon his negotiating tactics after the war, his only consolation must have been the circumstances that the SS and Police were determined to destroy the Slovak Jews in any case. The negotiators on the German side had not been the right party either.¹¹ [35]

In Cairo Joel Brand remained in custody. His mission had failed, and his wife and children in Budapest had almost paid the penalty for the failure. He was constantly afraid that they might still have to pay, but the British would not let him go. He was now invited to clubs and hotels, more as an object of curiosity than a source of intelligence information. One day at the British-Egyptian Club Brand was engaged in conversation by a man who did not introduce himself but who, Brand believes, may have been Lord Moyne. The Englishman asked once more about the Eichmann offer and how many Jews were involved. Brand replied that the offer encompassed a million people. 'But Mr. Brand,' the British host exclaimed, 'what shall I do with those million Jews? Where shall I put them?'¹² [36] There were no longer a million; from the moment of Brand's departure from Budapest 500,000 Jews had been killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The entire network of standby organizations had become a vast organization of bystanders.

By the beginning of 1945, five million Jews were dead. There were no more gassings. Auschwitz had been abandoned. But tens of thousands of Jews were still to die. During the shadow months of the Nazi regime Roswell McClelland of the War Refugee Board negotiated in Berne with Standartenführer Becher of the SS and Police for the amelioration of conditions in the camps. In the final weeks the International Red Cross also made itself felt; the Germans began to release thousands of Jews. The Allied armies found the remainder alive, dead, or dying in the camps.¹³ [37]

10 Dr. Rezső Kasztner (Kastner), **Der Bericht des jüdischen Rettungskomitees aus Budapest**, pp. 91-99.

11 See pp. 472-473.

12 Weissberg, Brand, pp. 214-215. Lord Moyne was shortly thereafter assassinated by two Irgunists. Brand speculated that the conversation had been reported in Palestine and that the *Irgun* struck at Moyne in anguish. Ibid, p. 216. Long afterwards, Eichmann said: 'The plain fact was that there was no place on earth that would have been ready to accept the Jews, not even this one million'. "Life", December 5th, 190, p. 148.

13 See pp. 633-634. Kasztner, Bericht, pp. 112-113. War Refugee Board, Final Report, pp. 34, 43-45, 59.

Chapter 25

Retaliation: The Proposal to Use Poison Gas Against the Germans

State Department's routine hypocritical answer to all retaliation proposals

The Hebrew emissaries and their American friends were strongly convinced all along that what was necessary more than anything else to help the trapped Jews of Europe was for the Allies to show in concrete acts that the mass slaughter is a matter of grave concern to them. Every imaginable avenue was explored and a variety of suggestions were made to the President, and later to the War Refugee Board, including the threat of carrying out retaliatory acts against the Germans, explicitly declaring that these were undertaken as punishment for what the Nazis were doing to the Jews.

By the beginning of July 1944 the scope of the disaster was revealed over the Hungarian radio stations: the Minister of Interior informed the public (and the world) that 400,000 Jews in Hungary have already been annihilated and the elimination of the rest 350,000 will be completed by July 24.

The importance of psychological pressure became urgent in the light of these developments. The Allied warnings of retaliation **after** the war did not seem to have the desired effect. The Hungarian Minister who gave the figures on the radio declared contemptuously on the broadcast that British and American warnings to the Hungarian population were "nothing but Anglo-Saxon bluff."

On July 3, 1944 the Emergency Committee telegraphed the President all this information, insisting that "No possible rescue measures can save all these people in the time left... Only official threats of implacable

retaliation **backed up by concrete example specifically indicating that it is made in retribution for mass murder will stop (the) massacre...**"

It was precisely because the Germans were losing the war that they may indulge in senseless acts of atrocities and murder not only against the Jews. The telegram, therefore, emphasized that at that stage "not only these 350,000 Jewish lives are at stake. Absence of retaliation measures has already encouraged to murder prisoners of war and hostages of other nations... Unless similar steps affecting (the) populations (in the) Axis countries are taken immediately, Nazi atrocities will grow progressively worse and may cost lives of all Americans in Nazi hands. Appeal for action now."¹

Simultaneously a campaign was begun to deluge the President with letters and telegrams asking that he take immediate action in calling for a concerted program by the major Allied powers which called for accentuated rescue efforts, stepped-up psychological warfare and reprisals. All these pleas fell on deaf ears. The President never answered letters and telegrams addressed to him. He usually forwarded them to the State Department – passing the buck. To all these communications the Administration formulated one answer and used it continuously as an excuse to do nothing. It never varied except for a word here or there, but basically it was like a taped radio commercial. As an example, it is enough to cite at random one letter which will provide the reader with an accurate idea of the Administration's rationale for its refusal to frighten the Nazis into ceasing the mass extermination of the Jews. Here, with a two weeks' delay, is a letter dated July 19, 1944, from the State Department, answering the Emergency Committee's telegram of July 3:

My dear Mr. Smertenko,

I have received by reference from the White House your telegram of July 3, 1944 suggesting an official threat of implacable retaliation backed up by a concrete example specifically indicating that it is made in retribution for mass murders in Hungary.

The desperate plight of Jews and other minority groups in

1 The telegram was signed by Johan Smertenko, Executive Vice-Chairman of the Emergency Committee and co-chairman Louis Bromfield, Dean Alfange, Ben Hecht, Representative Andrew L. Somers, Sigrid Undset, Dr. Maurice William, Prof. Lu-Yu-Ying and Jo Davidson.

Hungary has been a matter of great concern to this Government for many months. The President, the Department and the War Refugee Board have exerted every effort to bring these barbarous cruelties to an end. Appeals on humanitarian grounds have been broadcast repeatedly to German and Hungarian authorities. Every opportunity for rescue of the victims has been explored and exploited. The expansion of relief measures within Nazi occupied Europe have been facilitated.

Thus, active attention has been given to all means available for combatting these savage practices. In considering the question of applying measures of retaliation, it has been necessary to examine the relation of such measures to the major business of bringing about the early defeat of the Nazi enemy as the really effective way to end the sufferings of the great mass of innocent victims. Anything designed for purposes of retaliation which would divert military energies even momentarily would be inconsistent with the main purpose of defeating the German armies at the earliest possible moment, which must be accomplished if the Jews in Nazi-held territory are to be saved.

Sincerely yours,

George L. Warren,

Advisor on Refugees and Displaced Persons²

This standard rather short reply is replete with cruelty and lies and is altogether absurd. The expression of sympathy and compassion is hypocritical: people who are moved by compassion behave differently. The enumeration of what the Administration has done and continues to do through all its agencies “on humanitarian grounds” – exhortation and relief – is not only exaggerated to the point of being untrue, but is beside the point and begs the issue of retaliation. The plain statement: “Thus **active** attention has been given to **all means** available for combatting these savage practices” is a plain, multidimensional lie. Almost all suggestions were usually ignored, as was this latest one by the Emergency Committee of July 3, 1944, to which this letter is a reply.

2 George L. Warren was a loyal subordinate of Breckinridge Long and one of the three State Department officials who accompanied the American delegation of the Bermuda Conference. *)

As to the proposals to retaliate, the disingenuous State Department official copying the ready-made formula, said that the war itself is the most effective means of retaliation, – as if the war was waged only to avenge the Jews and for no other purpose. The fact was that the Allied leaders panicked at any assertion of Goebbels and Hitler that this was indeed the reason why the Allies are locked in a life and death struggle with the Nazis. Hence, the very mention of the word “Jew” is taboo to avoid the “evil eye.” Slaughter of the Jews was ignored to prove that it was not a Jewish war.

The Hebrew emissaries and their American friends tried to impress upon the Allied leaders – to stop pretending they are not aware that the Nazis singled out the Jews for extermination, and their rescue should therefore be one of the Allied war aims.

But the President and other Allied leaders persisted to the end that only the defeat of Hitler will bring about the rescue of the Jews. The idea that the defeat of the German armies will indeed liberate France, Holland, Norway, Poland and all the other subjugated countries, and remove the specter of defeat from the people of Great Britain, Russia and even America but will not save the Jews, did not occur to them; wittingly or unwittingly they refused to consider such an eventuality. Therefore, the Allied leadership came back to their point of departure: to do nothing. “Anything designed for purposes of retaliation which would divert military energies even momentarily would be inconsistent with the main purpose of defeating the German armies...” The implication was that such a diversion would not only adversely affect the prosecution of the war, but also delay the rescue of the Jews.

* * *

Warren’s letter was the equivalent of a “printed form” in reply to the demand for retribution. This was the familiar voice of the President and the Departments of State and War. However, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff were approached with a most radical suggestion, they evinced a more earnest attitude. A suggestion to threaten the Germans with poison gas unless they stopped gassing the Jews was taken up at a meeting of the highest ranking military leaders.

Bergson's radio address demanding to warn the Germans that unless they cease gassing Jews, retaliation will be in kind

The idea of giving such a warning to the Germans was first publicly voiced by P. H. Bergson on July 19, 1944, at a mass rally organized by the American League for a Free Palestine, in support of the newly proclaimed Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and its revendication of international recognition. In his address, carried live on the New York Times radio station WQXR, he said that the program of the Committee was officially presented to Secretary of State Cordell Hull and the foreign offices of other Allied governments, and seeks recognition of the Hebrew nation as a co-belligerent ally of the United Nations and participation in the various councils of the UN as well as by a Hebrew Army in the field of battle.

At the close of his detailed expose, Bergson formulated a demand that astounded many, as if it were a bombshell. Referring to the repeated warnings of Winston Churchill and Roosevelt that poison gas will be used against Germany if the Nazis use it against any member of the UN, he pointed out that a million Jews (he wasn't aware at the time that the number was more than double) had been reported killed by poison gas in Nazi concentration camps. "Since poison gas," he declared, "has been used against the co-belligerent Hebrew Nation, we of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation demand of the American and British Governments that unless this practice ceases poison gas be used against Germany".³

The Emergency Committee's previous retaliation proposals

Bergson's proposal was not a matter of a public statement only. The Hebrew emissaries and their American supporters of the Emergency Committee submitted it to the President and the War Refugee Board, and ultimately to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As we have seen from Mr. Warren's letter, the President didn't answer the communication of the Emergency Committee of July 3, 1944, but referred it to the State

3 The Emergency Committee heard this argument numberless times and never tired to debunk it from every possible angle. Smertenko's letter of July 24, 1944 was an additional effort of rebuking the Administration's rationale for doing nothing.

Department for handling. On receipt of Warren's unsatisfactory letter, Prof. Smertenko wrote to the President again (on July 24, 1944) taking issue with the contents of Warren's stock-in-trade arguments. The Emergency Committee, wrote Prof. Smertenko, is in complete accord with the view that nothing should be done to hamper the war effort and to achieve victory as soon as possible. "Nevertheless, I wish to submit most respectfully the view of the Emergency Committee that a number of measures of retaliation can be taken that will be consistent with this purpose (of defeating the German armies at the earliest possible moment) and will in fact appreciably aid this purpose." And the letter makes the following suggestions:

1. Railways and bridges leading from Nazi-occupied territory to extermination centers in Poland can be destroyed by bombing, specifying that this action is taken in order to prevent the transportation of the Hebrew people of these Axis countries to Hitler's slaughter house. These railways also serve military purposes and their destruction will be of great benefit to our ally, Soviet Russia.
2. The extermination camps themselves can be bombed, destroying the gas chambers where thousands of people are assassinated daily. This would enable the Hebrew people gathered in these camps to escape and offer them an opportunity to join the underground resistance forces where they can be of help in sabotage and resistance activities.
3. In accordance with the reiterated statements of the American and British Governments that the use of poison gas by Germans and Japanese would be followed by retaliation in kind, a specific statement can be issued that the extermination of Hebrew men, women and children by the continued use of poison gas will be considered a provocation for retaliation in kind. We respectfully call your attention to the fact that authenticated reports from Czechoslovakian and Polish underground sources have disclosed that over a million and a half persons have been murdered in the poison gas chambers of Auschwitz and Birkenau camps and that the threat of widespread use of the same medium upon the German population will contribute

to the disaffection of the German people and may result in a speedier collapse of Hitler's home front.

All these are measures that will not require any additional exertion of military forces nor call for any deviation from the successful military campaigns now in progress. On the contrary, they can be of substantial aid to the campaign of psychological warfare that is being waged simultaneously against our enemy.

In the absence of the President, the White House forwarded the original of Smertenko's letter to Cordell Hull, and a summary of it to Pehle "for attention and appropriate acknowledgement." A staff member of the War Refugee Board wrote a draft for Pehle, but before mailing it, the text was communicated to the State Department for clearance. But then, so it seems, from the documents available, the State Department decided "that in view of the fact that the original letter had been sent to the Secretary of State, the State Department should send the reply to Mr. Smertenko." Mr. Warren asked the War Refugee Board to dictate its draft which he proposed to incorporate in the letter from the State Department. All these shuffling and exchanges produced another standard text (no date, but probably August 4, 1944) of a few lines assuring the Emergency Committee "that ever specific proposal presented in your letter has received the most earnest consideration of the War Refugee Board and that every practicable step will be taken to meet the situation." The letter never refers to any of the propositions concerning retaliation against the Germans for gassing the Jews.⁴

Bergson wrote to Pehle on August 14, 1944, arguing the case of threatening the Germans with retaliation in kind if they do not cease slaughtering the Jews in the gas chambers, saying:

We beg to stress the importance of this not solely because it might induce Nazi Germany to stop the use of poison gas; such a warning is important because of the constant need to impress upon Germany the fact that the governments of the United Nations

4 The writer could not find the actual letter to Smertenko. He is not sure whether the document at hand is the letter, or only a draft.

consider and treat the Hebrew people of Europe as human beings deserving full equality and consideration with other members of the United Nations. *)

Pehle told Bergson that since this proposal is one “involving military considerations, the Board is not prepared to comment on it.” He also seems to have suggested that the shortest and most effective way of clarifying the issue and seeing whether it can be acted upon would be a direct appeal to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Consequently, Bergson wrote the Joint Chiefs of Staff on September 16, 1944, explaining why it is imperative to take extreme retaliatory measures against the Germans – in order to stay the hand of the Nazis in the extermination camps. Bergson expressed the hope that the Joint Chiefs of Staff “will give (the proposal) favorable and early consideration with a view to recommending that action be urgently taken in connection therewith.”

The Chiefs of Staff’s deliberations, minutes of their meetings and conclusions

Though Bergson’s letter came up when war was ravaging on all fronts and required the close attention of everyone on the Supreme Command, the proposal to threaten the Germans with retaliation in kind was taken up at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, for whose consideration several drafts of an answer were prepared and circulated. Brigadier General, A. J. McFarland, Secretary of the Chiefs of Staff, prepared the initial draft which was commented upon and revised in letters by General H. H. Arnold, Commander of the Army Air Force, by Admiral William D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy; Lt. General Thomas T. Handy, Assistant Chief of Staff; and Acting Assistant Chief of Staff Major General (name in the document illegible). General Marshall and Admiral King were informed of the deliberations. So were the chiefs of the various sections, like the Chief of the Policy Section and the Commanding General of the Theater Group in whose jurisdiction such a plan, if approved, would be carried out, and others.

The subject of discussion was officially defined: “Retaliation for the Extermination of Hebrews in Europe by the use of poisonous gases.” The document under consideration was “J. C. S. 1072” which was the code

designation of P. H. Bergson's letter of September 16, 1944. The following is the combined text of two drafts submitted for consideration to the J.C.S. (The text in brackets is to indicate that it is from a substitute draft):

D R A F T
REPLY TO THE HEBREW COMMITTEE OF
NATIONAL LIBERATION

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have given careful consideration to the request contained in your letter of 16 September 1944 that a specific warning be issued stating that unless the practice of using poison gas against the Hebrew people ceases forthwith, retaliation in kind will be immediately ordered against Germany.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff clearly recognize and are in sympathy with the high motive which prompts your recommendation for drastic (retaliatory action against Germany for use by that country of the lethal chamber as a means of executing non-combatants.

The use of poison gas in warfare has been a subject of continuing and careful study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff over a long period of time, and certain well-defined policies have been established. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have re-examined these policies with your proposal in mind and are **of the opinion that from a military point of view it is inadvisable for the forces of the United States to use poison gas at the present time...** (Emphasis in the original)

They cannot support on a logical or realistic basis the proposal that the continued use of the lethal chamber by Germany as a means of executing non-combatants justifies the threat of gas warfare against that country, – for the following reasons:

- a. If gas warfare is threatened, we must be prepared to carry out the threat.
- b. Such action would not prevent the mass execution of defenseless civilians, since, if the Germans under this threat actually abandoned gas as means of execution, other methods could be substituted.
- c. It would remove at once all restraint in the use of gas and possibly other inhumane methods of warfare with a resulting great loss of life, among non-combatants as well as military personnel.

- d. The punishment, generally speaking, would not fall on those primarily responsible for the atrocities.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the vigorous Allied offensives now being so successfully consummated and the announced policy of bringing war criminals to justice will soon bring this deplorable matter to an end.

At the 180th meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff held on October 3, 1944, the matter was discussed and all the drafts examined. They were rejected for various reasons, but mainly two: one, that it was not in the prerogatives of the Chiefs of Staff to decide a matter of high policy; second, that from a military point of view it is not advisable to state categorically in writing that poison gas would not be used against the Germans. To be on record with such an assurance would be wrong because the Germans may, through their espionage apparatus, learn about it. The Germans have to be kept in doubt about Allied intentions.

Here is the text of the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

**RETALIATION FOR THE EXTERMINATION
OF HEBREWS IN EUROPE BY THE USE OF
POISONOUS GASES**

(J.C.S. 1072)

ADMIRAL LEAHY said that in JCS. 1072 the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation requested that Germany be warned to refrain from the use of poison gas against the Hebrew people on the threat of retaliation in kind. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee had recommended a reply by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the appendix to Enclosure "A" to J.C.S. 1072.

ADMIRAL LEAHY then drew attention to a substitute letter proposed by General Arnold in lieu of the draft letter prepared by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee.

GENERAL ARNOLD said that after further consideration he was now of the opinion that the letter from the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation should not be answered.

ADMIRAL LEAHY said that he was unable to understand

why the Committee had addressed the communication to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and expressed the thought that if any reply were made, it should simply state that from a military point of view the use of gas in retaliation would be inadvisable.

GENERAL McNARNEY doubted the advisability of informing the Committee that we would not use gas in retaliation. Such information in German hands might produce adverse reactions.

In response to a suggestion by Admiral Leahy that the communication received from the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation be turned over to the State Department, the SECRETARY said that the Committee, upon the advice of the State Department, had first addressed the War Refugee Board and that this Board had replied that as the proposal was one involving military considerations, the Board was unable to comment on it.

ADMIRAL LEAHY suggested that a reply be made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Committee, advising them that from a military point of view their proposal did not come within cognizance of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

ADMIRAL KING, concurring in Admiral Leahy's suggestion, said that the reply to the Committee should contain a specific repetition of their proposal.

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF: –

Agreed to inform the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation that, from a military point of view, the proposal to issue a specific warning that unless the practice of using poison gas against the Hebrew people ceases forthwith, retaliation in kind will be immediately ordered against Germany, does not come within the cognizance of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The next day an answer was mailed to the Hebrew Committee signed by Admiral William D. Leahy. The answer was in line of the resolution contained in the last paragraph of the minutes.

The question may be asked why it was necessary to report in detail an episode that was without issue? The answer is, to point out, as we have already mentioned briefly before, the contrast between the attitude adopted – in this instance – by the highest military authority of the US and the other Allied Government dignitaries, whether Churchill, Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, Eden, Sumner Wells, and the whole host of

high ranking bureaucrats in the State Department, the Foreign and Colonial Offices, the White House, and including the very influential Jewish advisers (the only exception being Pehle and his colleagues of the War Refugee Board).

In contrast to all those statesmen and high-ranking officials, the Chiefs of Staff gave close consideration to the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation's proposal; and though it was an extreme and dangerous project, they discussed it seriously on its merits, without prejudice or bias. Though all the drafts submitted for consideration suggested to reject the proposal, their contents are nonetheless interesting and significant. They did not betray indifference, hypocrisy or cynicism; they were not composed in a perfunctory manner but with thoughtful concern and the expertise of professional soldiers. The drafts did not contain the routine answer of the civilian officials of the White House or State Department, that one has to wait for victory, but rather formulated arguments which had a point, though in the opinion of the Hebrew emissaries they were not totally convincing.

The documents reproduced above reveal an extremely important fact. Far from viewing with horror and dismay Bergson's proposal, as some if not all the Jewish leaders did, the Chiefs of Staff considered it as a sensible idea in the light of their own contingency plans: "The use of poison gas... has been a subject of continuing study... over a long period of time, and certain well-defined policies have been established. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reexamined these policies with your proposal in mind..." But we also have to take into consideration that the suggestion was of an extreme nature and, if accepted, might have, in the opinion on many, opened up a new phase in the global struggle – the introduction of poison gas in the war, a weapon which was scrupulously avoided – except, against the Jews.

This rather serious attitude of the Chiefs of Staff can be explained by various reasons: one of them was probably the fact that they were not accessible to the pestering interventions of the Zionist and Jewish leaders, of the British Embassy, and in this instance, so it seems, not even of the State Department.

Had the same approach also prevailed in the White House and other branches of the Government; had they had mind enough and compassion to look into the various proposals of an infinitely more simple and

practical character; had they ignored the constant bombardment of the Zionist and Jewish leaders; they would have in all probability taken the right decisions and acted accordingly.

* * *

This episode is related not as an apology for the military. They bore their share in the general guilt of permitting the Holocaust to take place. They didn't bomb Auschwitz, though on several occasions their air bombardment missions were only five minutes away from the crematoria. *) They, too, probably argued that military operation should not be diverted to other than strategic purposes. But their guilt can be mitigated by the simple fact that saving the Jews was primarily a matter of political decisions to be made by the civilian authorities. The military did not make decisions though they might have expressed their opinion and indicated the difficulties. But they had to obey orders – and such orders to retaliate they never received. Whether they would refuse to obey them is unlikely. Their business was to wage war and not to save the Jews. This, above all, was up to the President. His record we know. The lack of compassion shown by the civilian leadership during the Holocaust was sufficiently proved. The frightened and thwarted attitude of the Jewish leadership is a black page in the history of the Jews.

When the military arrived at the death camps, many were emotionally overwhelmed by the horrors. In numerous cases they were helpful to the survivors in various ways. In contrast, even after the war, Roosevelt, Churchill, Atlee, Bevin and the others remained callous, often ruthless when dealing with the fate of the survivors of the death camps. *)

Part V

Conclusion

Chapter 26

Reflections on the Holocaust

Why the code language? (“Sprachregelung”)

It is puzzling why the Nazis used a code in their decisions and plans to exterminate the Jews. Why did the German leadership think it absolutely necessary to keep the “Final Solution” a top Reich secret? From whom did they try to hide it? After all, tens of thousands of Germans were involved in its execution – practically all the departments of Government, the Party, police, Army, the SS – who not. But they all had to give an oath to obey the “language rules” (**Sprachregelung**), which in itself was a code word because it applied only to the Holocaust. *) Such terms as “killing,” “extermination,” “liquidation” were strictly prohibited. The prescribed code names for these were, as we know, “Final Solution,” “evacuation” (**Aus[s]iedlung**) and “special treatment” (**Sonderbehandlung**); “resettlement” and “labor in the East” (*Arbeitseinsatz im Osten*) stood for deportation and annihilation, sending people to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt was called “change of residence.” *)

The enigma is the greater because there is a built-in contradiction in this decision to keep the extermination of the Jews a secret, hidden behind an elaborate code. Hitler openly and repeatedly vowed the destruction of the Jews on the European continent. This was one of his war aims. The Nazi hierarchy was in general agreement with the Führer; Goebbels was enthusiastic about it. Himmler and Heydrich were dedicated to the task. Rosenberg was the official philosopher of the process. So, how come the execution or the translation of the “theory” into practice, the implementation of the professed war aim, had to be kept a top secret and communications about it disguised in code even among themselves, as we have seen at the Wannsee Conference? High ranking officials assembled there spoke in code – the minutes were written in code. The titles of

the individuals in charge were in code, so much so that the men having a certain title did not know what it means.¹ For instance, long before Wannsee Eichmann's title was changed from that of "Jewish Affairs, Emigration and Evacuation" to "Jewish Affairs, Evacuations." But he did not understand the meaning, and continued to think that his task was still emigration and not extermination. Only much later it was explicitly explained to him and he understood.²

It was a phantasmagorical situation in which tens of thousands of people, the officer corps, those engaged in slave labor and in all other strata of the Nazi machinery had to speak in code about things that after the Wannsee Conference became clear to everybody what was implied by the code words. It seems to me that the historiography of the Holocaust did not pay enough attention to this bizarre phenomenon. There was in it not only the paradox of hiding the practical "successes" of the Nazi theory, but also the plain fact that nothing was hidden; almost everybody in Germany and much of the outside world soon knew of the fact. What was not known was the pace of the process and its scope. *)

Of course, we understand that the decision and the program to exterminate the Jews was kept a secret from the victims. This had a pragmatic "justification." By fooling the Jews and telling them that they are being sent to labor camps where they will be provided with food and shelter, enabled the Nazis to carry out the operation smoothly. Otherwise, there might have been resistance and trouble. The secrecy and the code language prevented all these untoward eventualities. But the code was used not only vis-à-vis the Jews, but universally.

Hannah Arendt offers two explanations: One, that it made the officials entrusted with the code feel important, they became the "bearers of state secrets," and two, "... For whatever other reasons the language rules may have been devised, they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity in the various widely diversified services whose cooperation was essential in this matter." It's a plausible argument but not entirely satisfactory. It is an enigma which was not yet resolved. It

1 There is evidence the clerics did not know, until the Vatican made it clear to them in 1944(?). See my transcript of Hannah Arendt.

2 When in Hungary in March 1944 he couldn't deal with the organization that the business of selling out [undecipherable] because his [undecipherable]-vocabulary didn't provide the language necessary for such [undecipherable]. See Hungaria [undecipherable] p. 6.

may never be resolved because the Nazi system was a great deal like a lunatic asylum, and in that institution logic does not count.

The contradiction between proudly and loudly proclaiming the imperative of eliminating the Jews and hiding the fact of its execution cannot be explained by normal logic or by expediency alone.

One of the most revealing examples of Nazi madness and its contradictions are two of Himmler's utterances delivered within a year of one another. The first was a long, rambling speech on October 4, 1943, before a body of SS Gruppenführer (lieutenant-generals) about the virtues and glories of the SS. In this address he also spoke about the annihilation of the Jews, no longer in code but in plain language, though he could not avoid some of the code words because these became more understandable than conventional terms:

... I also want to refer before you here, *in complete frankness*, to a really grave matter. *Among ourselves, this once, it shall be uttered quite frankly: but in public we will never speak of it...*

I am referring to the *evacuation* of the Jews, the *annihilation* of the Jewish people. This is one of those things that are easily said. 'The Jewish people is going to be annihilated,' says every party member. 'Sure, it's in our *program*, elimination of the Jews, annihilation – we'll take care of it.' And they *all* come trudging, *eighty million* worthy Germans, and *each one has his own decent Jew*. Sure, the others are swine, but this one is an A-1 Jew. Of all those who talk this way, not one has seen it happen, not one has been through it. Most of you must know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have stuck this out – excepting cases of human weakness – to have kept our *integrity*, this is what has made us hard. In our history, this is *an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory...* (Italics added)

One year later Himmler knew the jig was up, and he became "the protector" of the surviving Jews, he ordered the dismantling of the extermination facilities in Auschwitz. He also called in Eichmann, with whom he communicated directly only a couple of times in the past, and shouted an order to him: "If up to now you have been busy liquidating Jews, you will from now on, since I order you, take good

care of the Jews, act as their nursemaid... I am the one who gives orders here!”³

There is a great significance in all this, and perhaps it throws some light on the enigma of the code. They knew they were the greatest criminals imaginable and that their crimes are of a kind that cannot be fathomed by the ordinary human mind, hence they thought that the theories will not be believed, they will be dismissed as inconceivable, while their execution, if known, would revolt the conscience not only of the world but even of many Germans. They were both right and wrong on every level. First, they did not really succeed to keep the fact of mass extermination a secret; only, as said before, the scope and pace remained unknown until the end. Second, they exaggerated the revulsion of the outside world. If there was revulsion it was repressed and the rationale was that military defeat will be the due punishment for the crimes. The world really did not react as the Nazis often apprehended it would, had it lived up to fears of the Nazis, their crimes could have been halted at any stage along the road. The Allies certainly could have figured out ways and means to frighten the Nazis out of their wits. Bombarding their cities, because presented as purely military operations, only enraged the German masses and made them more attentive to Goebbles’ propaganda that this is only an inkling of what they may expect if they are military defeated. Had the Allies proclaimed that this was in retaliation for the slaughter of the Jews, and even more frightening punishment is in store for them, they, the Germans, could do something about it – they could complain, protest, even rebel. Because many Germans (it is difficult to estimate their numbers) really did not care much about Hitler’s theories concerning the Jews, and would have felt more comfortable without them. Of course, not all 80 million of them, as Himmler claimed, but enough to make Hitler pause. It does not mean that he would have given the order to “take good care of them, and to nurse them” but the

3 Hannah Arendt who tells this story in: **Eichmann in Jerusalem** (pp. 137-138) remarks that the “sole witness to substantiate these words was the very dubious Mr. Kurt Becher... (but Eichmann) did not deny (at the trial in Jerusalem) that such an interview took place... Himmler was then giving orders right and left that the Jews be treated well – they were his ‘soundest investment’”, (ibid, https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/arendt_eichmanninjerusalem.pdf, p. 67).

death factories would have been abolished, or in all probability never established in the first place.

What the documents reveal and the code which the Nazis employed shows is that Nazi Germany was not a monolith as far as the Final Solution was concerned; there was confusion between one clique and another, and in each gang separately, and even in each of the individual madmen there were two inclinations: to kill or not to kill. Without the world lifting a finger, it was only because of internal pressure that some exceptions were made and a few Jews were spared. An example of these exceptions was first and foremost the concentration camp in Theresienstadt (Terezin), a Bohemian garrison town transformed into a model ghetto, a “Potemkin village” to which outside Representatives like those of the International Red Cross and others were admitted, or even invited to visit. From 1942 onward it was a strictly Jewish community with a semblance of autonomous life: a nominated Council of Elders, a bank, and special currency. Only “privileged” individuals were chosen like decorated heroes of World War I, or persons who have made special contributions to Germany in more recent years, and famous personalities, or as Heydrich told the Wannsee Conference, offspring of mixed marriages. Yet Theresienstadt was intended as a code and a cover for other concentration camps. Those who visited the camp saw with their own eyes that “it was not so bad,” conditions were tolerable; that individuals are treated with some respect. What the visitors did not know was that this was some kind of transit camp; most of its inmates lived there for a while and then were sent East to be exterminated. Only those internationally known in the outside world were spared. Altogether 139,654 Jews were sent there, of whom 86,934 were deported. On Liberation Day there were only 17,320 survivors, among them the world-famous Rabbi Leo Baeck, spiritual leader of liberal Judaism and former Chairman of the Reform Rabbinerverband in Germany. His presence and guidance there were of great consolation to the inmates.

There were some – extremely few – privileged Jews in all strata of Nazi society who not only survived but were permitted to be integrated in that society. That Hitler himself might have been a grandson of a Jewish father is still in the realm of speculation. But it seems true that both Heydrich and Generalfeldmarschall Erhard Milch were half Jews,

*) and Hitler, Goering and Himmler decided to overlook what to them must have loomed as a matter of tremendous magnitude.

Milch was a central figure in the German air force next only to Goering and probably more important professionally and as a personality. Even more significant, according to Hannah Arendt “Hitler himself is said to have known three hundred and forty ‘first rate Jews’ whom he had either altogether assimilated to the status of Germans or granted the privileges of half-Jews.”⁴ David Irving in his controversial book **Hitler’s War** relates that in October 1943 he gave specific orders forbidding the liquidation of 8,000 Italian Jews in Rome. *)

All this is being told and retold with one intention: the Nazis despite their fanaticism and total inhumanity were also a confused, cunning and frightened lot. Much could have been done to confuse and frighten them even more, and [to] force them to desist was not an impossibility.

Can one doubt that the American Jews, more than five million strong, well organized, with their great influence in the press, their voice in the political life of both the Democratic and Republican parties; their tremendous role in the war effort and the presence of Jewish personalities in the highest echelons of the government – can one doubt that such a powerful community could not have impressed the Administration of the necessity to undertake adequate measures to save the Jews? But they were overawed in their reverence for Roosevelt and cowed by him into silence. The Zionists remained dogmatic about Palestine – either the Promised Land or nothing. (Their efforts on the front of rescue were perfunctory, at best.) The American Jews and the Zionist movement failed the Jewish people of Europe by not mounting a political offensive against the Administration, putting their power and influence and, yes, their privileged status, on the line, in forcing the issue of halting the

4 Hannah Arendt remarks that apart from Hans Frank, Heydrich was the only other war criminal “who repented in the face of death... during the nine days it took him to die from the wounds inflicted by Czech patriots... It is an uncomfortable fact, for it is difficult not to suspect that what Heydrich at last repented of was not murder but that he had betrayed his own people.” Though this writer respected Arendt as a profound philosopher and sound critic, he finds this remark ill conceived. Not that she is objectively wrong, but whoever repents crimes committed against the Jews – repents *ipso facto* for everything else.

massacre of a whole people. The Jews of Europe perished while American Jews did not really try to save them.

* * *

In the sense of guilt and in the shame of their children, they will try to compensate at a later date, mobilizing against and storming the wrong foe, at the wrong time, to save Jews who don't need to be saved because they are in no danger of physical annihilation, whatever their other just grievances may be. If the struggle to save Russian Jewry is again mentioned here it is only to serve as an example of what could have been done in the 1940s to save the Jews trapped by Hitler in Europe – but was not done.

Beyond imagination

As the Third Reich recedes into history new documentary material becomes available about that period, the more history books and biographies of Hitler are being published, the less the Nazi phenomenon becomes revealed to human imagination. A great deal was written about the inability of the human mind to grasp the nature and meaning of the Holocaust. Though the destruction of European Jewry is the most telling event of the Nazi period, there are also other aspects of the regime which eludes our comprehension. What baffles us most is the enigma of the working of the top Nazi minds. It may remain an enigma never to be solved. There is just no sure clue to the mystery.

For instance, here is what one may rightly consider a detail of marginal importance, if that, yet it is staggering if one tries to apply reason to it. We refer to an entry in the last installments of Goebbels' diaries which became available to the public only recently. *) The entry is of March 10, 1945 (note the date! In less than two months Germany will surrender unconditionally and Hitler will have committed suicide), and in it he expresses hope that an indignant public opinion in the West will force the Allies to halt the bombing of German cities "*because world public opinion is not hardened yet to the point of welcoming such cynicism without protesting.*" *) (Italics mine) One cannot help being aghast. Goebbels is outraged by cynicism and expresses faith in the moral forces to come to

the aid of Germany; public opinion in the Western democracies will force their governments to desist from bombing German cities. What were the convolutions in his mind to arrive at such a conclusion? What public opinion did he visualize will rebel? – the people of London, Coventry, Rotterdam, or even the supine French, or Norwegians? Why did he expect them to be shocked when the whole world by then already knew the ravages and horrors committed by the Nazis? Is it conceivable to ascribe to Goebbels a feeling of moral indignation? Did he know what moral values are?

Since the workings of such a mind frustrates our perception, we are inclined to take the easiest refuge and ease our bewilderment simply by considering the Nazi gang as madmen. Is it an easy mental escape, or is it a statement or fact? It is the writer's belief that the latter is correct: Goebbels, Hitler, Göring, Himmler, Hess, Eichmann and the others were mad. This is not to excuse them, and here we begin treading on slippery ground about responsibility for the crimes. Are madmen responsible? To choose another characterization and consider them criminals is even a less realistic appraisal. Their crimes were on such a scale and took on forms that surpassed the conventional notion of criminality.

Germany, a country gone mad: an epidemic of violence and murder

This seemingly insoluble dilemma is the bane of most of the historiographers writing about Hitler and the Nazis. Though there were various schools of how to approach that period in modern history – and very few Western historians present an apology for the Nazis and their deeds – yet there is almost unanimity that Hitler and his henchmen were sane. Since all their works are based on this assumption, the reading of these “lives” and histories is a most vexatious experience. The moment one treats Hitler as sane, everything said about him and his regime must inevitably become distorted. Regardless how competent and erudite these historians are – and though in many respects they deserve respect and admiration – their narratives, characterization and analysis however converge into a kind of Alice in Wonderland, a topsy-turvy world, full of paradoxes, and yet outrageous to the sensibilities of the sane and intelligent reader.

One gets the impression that most historians are mainly fascinated

with the manifestations of Hitler's sanity, logic, talents, intelligence and even genius. One also has the feeling that the more their imagination fails to grasp what they study, the greater their ambition to prove that they do understand, and the result is often pathetic. As distinguished an historian as Hugh Trevor-Roper in his masterpiece **The Last Days of Hitler** sketches the following profile of the second most important man in the Third Reich, Reichsführer SS Himmler. Though it may seem an inordinately long quotation, it is worthwhile reproducing the essence of the "portrait" in the historian's own language:

... In the public imagination Himmler is a real and terrible figure, a cold-blooded inhuman ogre ruthlessly exterminating millions of helpless prisoners by every refinement of sadistic torture; not a man, but an impersonal abstraction, a creature to whom the weaknesses of pity and forgiveness are unknown; an inexorable monster whose cold, malignant rage no prayers, no human sacrifices can ever for one moment appease.

Certainly, Himmler was implacable. His power seemed as unlimited as his ambitions of destruction. In the calmest, most dispassionate manner he ordered the destruction of whole races, the extermination of Jews and Slavs. He was quite pitiless; nothing horrified him. The thought of hundreds of thousands of men and women stuffed into "human" gas-wagons – incidents which frequently drove the criminal attendants mad – the knowledge that the torture chambers of Europe were peopled by his victims, and that at every hour of the day his name was being execrated by dying people in a whole continent, – these things (if he thought of them) never interrupted the regularity of his meals, never disturbed the routine of his office, never disconcerted the puffy smoothness of that cold complacent expression.

But Himmler was no sadist. There was nothing terrible or volcanic in his character. His very coldness was a negative element, not glacial, but bloodless. He did not delight in cruelty, he was indifferent to it; and the scruples of others were to him, not contemptible, but unintelligible. "But they are animals," or "criminals," he would say, with ingenuous deprecation, when foreign ambassadors, or even his own subordinates, sometimes remonstrated at some particularly savage holocaust.

In this monster there were many curious qualities, which

have made him to some an incredible, enigmatic figure. He was extraordinarily ignorant and naïve... *) (Our emphasis)

What is one to make of such a “profile”? Does the reader understand what the eminent historian means to convey? This reader, for one, thinks that Trevor-Roper writes, but does not exactly understand what he is saying. If he understood, there would be a very good chance that I, too, would understand him. But I don't. It is a confusing piece of composition devoid of inner consistency on any level of human understanding. One cannot describe Himmler the way he does; all the enormous pain and torture he inflicted on millions of people, and then come to the conclusion he was no sadist – if not he, then who? Trevor-Roper says he was just indifferent. Indifferent to what? To whom? One can perhaps accuse the Western powers of indifference to the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust, or that they were busy with other things – waging a war. But the Holocaust was not undertaken by them. If it were up to FDR or Churchill, or even Chamberlain, they would feel more at ease if the Holocaust did not take place at all. But in the case of Himmler and Hitler, Göring and Goebbels and the rest, one cannot say they were indifferent to something others did, over whom they felt they had no control. Himmler, on Hitler's orders, instigated the Holocaust, organized the concentration camps and the gas chambers. One cannot be indifferent to one's own enterprises, to one's own initiatives. On the contrary, if anything, they were passionate about it and gloried in it.

Because Trevor-Roper could not fathom the character of and the working of the Nazi hierarchy, he spoke about them in double talk. And there is always the honorable and humane excuse that to proclaim them mad would imply exonerating them. He tries to escape the dilemma of making up his mind whether the Nazi top echelon were crazy or normal, by making an astonishing assertion for a historian of his caliber:

Whatever Hitler's psychological condition may have been – and on such a subject, and in so unique a character, it would be imprudent to speculate – there can be no doubt that his physical stamina was exceedingly strong. *)

Prof. Robert Waite remarks somewhat sarcastically in reference to this attempt of the historian to dodge the issue:

To speculate on Hitler's psychological condition may or may not be "imprudent"; it is certainly necessary. To refuse to discuss it is not unlike failing to mention in a biography of Jack the Ripper that he had homicidal tendencies, or in a profile of Caruso to ignore his voice. *)

Trevor-Roper seems to feel all along the inadequacy of his excuse and gingerly approaches the problem of Hitler's sanity and of his faithful subordinates, but then he retreats using a metaphor not very flattering to the subjects of his inquiry. At the end of his extraordinary book which upon publication became a classic, he conveys the events of the denouement of the Nazi regime, and depicts as no other historian succeeded, the surrealistic atmosphere, irrationality and lunacy which prevailed in the bunker under the bombarded Chancellery in the days preceding Hitler's suicide. Yet he refrains from calling it a mad house, which it was, but uses a strange though popular metaphor "A monkey house," and the Nazi hierarchy he calls a "set of monkeys." In the epilogue he writes:

... no one, I think, can have read this account of life in a monkey house without asking... how did such (a set) of monkeys succeed in seizing power...?⁵

5 Trevor-Roper vacillates in describing his subject. On the one hand, he is totally aware that Hitler was driven by furies to achieve an ambition of total destruction, yet he went about achieving it with qualities that the historian cannot choose another epithet than genius:

In the early days of Nazism, Hitler showed a political genius which we are in danger now of forgetting, but which it is very important that we should remember. His ultimate purpose was indeed clear to those who did not willingly deceive themselves: he aimed at the destruction of European civilization by a barbarian empire in central Europe, the terrible hegemony of a new, more permanent Genghis Khan: "a new Dark Age," as Mr. Churchill called it, "made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.["] But when we have admitted the bestiality of his ambition, we must admit that he set to realize it with political genius.

Hardly a monkey!

Now, seriously speaking, what is a “monkey house?” Does he mean to convey that they were sub-humans? Certainly not, because he treats Hitler throughout if not with admiration, at all events with respect. Perhaps respect is not the right word either because he was aware of the abysmal depth of his evil, but he gives him his due as a man of extraordinary brilliance of mind; repeating time and again that he was considered a military genius; that he had hypnotic eyes overwhelming everyone who came in contact with him, including the greatest statesmen of his time. How can such a man be referred to as a monkey? *)

He definitively treats Goebbels as a man of great intellect.

Unlike most of the Party leaders... he was a West German, from the Latin Rhineland; and it was this Latin lucidity of mind, this Jesuit suppleness of argument, which made him so much more successful as a preacher than the froth-blown nationalists of the South... His propagandist principles were also Latin...

Whatever this “Roman spirit” may mean, in the given context it sounds definitely complimentary. One does not describe a monkey in terms of cultural background, Germanic or Latin.

Trevor-Roper introduces the “monkey” metaphor in his epilogue, trying to answer two questions he anticipates his readers will ask after having read his account of the Nazi regime:

Firstly, how did such monkeys succeed in seizing and retaining power; and secondly, how did they so nearly win the war.

Yes, indeed, how is it that a nation of 70 or 80 million people with a long tradition of civilization that produced giants in philosophy, literature, music, the arts and sciences followed blindly and enthusiastically a set of monkeys? The answer, he says, lies in the German frustration and despair of conventional politics. They always failed; their political institutions failed them, too. Therefore, they were willing to accept the non-conventional, the freakish; the man who believed in his own destiny as a messiah and in the destiny of Germans to rule the world. We abstain from passing judgment on this evaluation. As to the second question, “how (these monkeys) did so nearly win the war?”, he answers that Hitler’s regime was not really

totalitarian in the sense of mobilizing all the resources for waging total war and subordinating everything to the war effort. He believes that Nazi regime was badly organized and internally divided and torn between competing power centers. In their chaos, nihilism and corruption they were doomed to lose the war. This is an interesting interpretation and in all probability correct. But this is not the subject of our immediate interest.⁶ What we try to point out is the confusion in the mind of even the most interesting of modern historians. Throughout his book there are contradictions in the analysis and conclusions. He vacillates between the obvious fact that the Nazi hierarchy was a bunch of psychopaths, but he cannot hold to his thesis because of the problem of responsibility. They had to be sane in order to be responsible. He is never conclusive about any single individual except one: Albert Speer.

... In these pages, which describe and illustrate so many varieties of human corruption and human **lunacy**, one figure stands out in extraordinary isolation... it is quite clear that in Hitler's court Albert Speer was morally and intellectually alone...

Because he was so intelligent and understood the fatal philosophy of Nazism which "has made havoc of Germany and nearly shipwrecked the world..." and yet, did nothing to stop the march of madness and destruction, he was "in a political sense the real criminal of Nazi Germany." *) This is a risky statement, not only because of the contradiction and inconsistency it represents within the text of this narrative and analysis, but also because if Speer was "the real criminal of Nazi Germany," is one to deduce that the others were not real criminals because they were crazy? But on the whole he does not consider them crazy at all. It is difficult to sort this all out. Instead of proclaiming Hitler mad, he called him a monkey, which is meaningless and not worthy of such a reputable historian.

On the other hand, he was rigid to attribute the guilt of Nazism not to one man, or to a group of conspirators, but to the whole German nation, as much as one is permitted or forced to generalize. The Germans

6 Of tremendous importance in this characterization of the Third Reich is that in such chaotic conditions prevailing in Germany, the task to stop the slaughter might not have been as difficult as is normally assumed.

in the tens of millions followed their Führer willingly and enthusiastically. He goes even further, saying that Hitler's success was due to his intuition of knowing the character, mood, the cravings of the Germans which he exploited in his climb to ultimate power:

He detected and exploited all the cruel impulses, the irrational beliefs, that atavistic prejudices, the memories and fears of a frustrated people; he discovered a new technique of exploitation; and he used it with skill and daring in the direction of his ultimate aims. *)

The fact that the Holocaust defies human imagination also makes it nigh impossible to fathom the phenomenon called Hitler. The result is that almost all major historians who made a name for themselves in writing about Hitler, fail in their task to tell a plausible story. Among the rare exceptions is probably Robert G. L. Waite who wrote about several aspects of Hitler, his regime, his cohorts and his war. He is not as well-known as some of the others but I believe he shows a better understanding of what historians are faced with and why their works – after everything in their praise was said – remain unsatisfactory and arouse indignation in us. This is a strange reaction on our part because most of the historians cannot be accused by any stretch of the imagination of antisemitism or indifference to the evil deeds of Nazism. Yet their accounts are outrageous because they analyze everything most brilliant but never reach the heart of the matter – Hitler's unfathomable destructiveness. Prof. Robert Waite puts his finger on it in the following way:

The inadequacy of traditional historical methods... in dealing with so patently a pathological subject as Adolf Hitler have been poignantly illustrated in the best-known books on Hitler and the Third Reich. These volumes have been written by distinguished historians with solid and well-deserved reputations. In different ways they have made important contributions to our understanding or – as in the case of A. J. P. Taylor – they have been so clever and perverse that they have forced us to rethink many an important issue. Yet all these books have one thing in common. They ignore

one historical fact of overriding importance about their subject: *he was mentally ill.* (Italics added)

Mr. Taylor does not think so. He prefers to believe that Hitler was really a normal person: a “traditional” German leader who was “no more wicked and unscrupulous than any other contemporary statesman,” and whose ideas were “commonplace.” Hitler’s single most striking characteristic, Mr. Taylor thinks, was his patience. *)

* * *

There are two grave misunderstandings or shortcomings in the historiography of Hitler which are the cause why we are perplexed and offended (at least this writer is) reading the “Lives” of Hitler or the “Stories” of the Third Reich. One is that the historians deal mainly if not exclusively with the “normal” aspects of Hitler and his talents. Time and again he is called the greatest strategist of all time; or the most astute statesman, and what not. Granted, he had some seemingly normal characteristics – almost every mad person has – and that he had outstanding talents; granted, he voiced Germany’s legitimate grievances against the Western powers who imposed the Versailles treaties which were intolerable; (any self-respecting person would resent living under the dictates of Versailles); yet this is not what Hitlerism was all about. While it is true that the Versailles dictate provided the necessary climate for Hitlerism to flourish, the assumption that its aim was to rectify the peace treaties are beside the point. What does it have to do with Jews, Bolsheviks, Wall Street, gypsies, the Slavs, torture chambers, concentration camps, the lethal experiments on human beings, and the Holocaust? It is precisely these latter aspects which are the exclusive characteristics of Nazism. Everything else was incidental, and all the ravings against Versailles were basically window dressing, pretexts and cover-ups for committing all the crimes against humanity. To fight for the revision and ultimate nullification of the Versailles Treaties there was no need of Hitler, the genocide, the terror, World War II. It could have been achieved peaceably – as indeed it started long before Hitler’s advent to power – and even had it led to war it did not have to be the wars Hitler launched. In fact, it was to the East where Hitler led his war most

savagely which had little relevance to the World War I peace treaties. How can one connect the Holocaust with Germany's grievances against France and Great Britain?

Hence the assumption that Hitler acted more or less the way any other German leader in power would have, is part of the distorted perspective and presumption that a civilized nation does not willingly entrust its destiny to a bunch of psychopaths. But here is the crux of the phenomenon: Germany itself was no longer a sane and civilized nation; it was stricken by the disease.

Madness, especially mass madness, is infectious, contaminating like the worst epidemics. The Hitler madness spread like wild fire among the majority of a whole civilized nation; then it infiltrated beyond the borders of Germany, even to the West and the farthest reaches of the earth. Though this phenomenon of mass madness was unique in modern times, it occurred more frequently in the Middle Ages. The most typical were the Chiliastic movements, sweeping along large masses and ravaging considerable part of the continent. Like Hitlerism they, too, as their name indicates, were intoxicated by the idea of bringing about a new order that would last a thousand years.

The Hitler madness of Germany also reminds one of the many outbreaks of Antinomianism, which in fact was total permissiveness, the release of the human being from any moral obligation, defying and destroying any moral standards on the ground that man's redemption stems not from law and morality but faith alone is necessary for salvation. In the second and third centuries justification by faith was to believe that Jesus was God, in the 20th century the faith was in the Führer. This unconditional faith in him – freed the German nation from any other obligation. Men who believe in such an absurdity and act accordingly cannot conceivably be sane. It invariably ends in disaster. If anything is preordained in history is that mass madness leads to catastrophe.

The outbreaks of mass hysteria in centuries past, also have some other common characteristics with Nazi Germany inasmuch as we are capable of thinking of these phenomena in analytical and rational terms of reference, which, frankly, we are not.

The major difference (among several others) between mass hysteria and individual madness is that the latter may be impervious to any

treatment, let alone reasoning. The individual may remain insane all his life and no cure can help him. Mass madness can be more amenable to external intervention, to shock to suffering and defeat on a large scale and when the mass, the collectivity is physically defeated it wakes up to the recognition that the jig is up. The mass or its leaders surrender, and the hysteria disappears almost immediately – the madness evaporates and fades away.⁷

Instead of considering Nazism for what it was, there is now a revival to rehabilitate Hitler as a rational and even a humane person. We are not speaking about this phenomenon in Germany itself, which is related elsewhere in this chapter, but to its conspicuous appearance in the West. For instance, a respected English historian, David Irving, in **Hitler's War**, *) – a best seller – tries to remove Hitler from demonology and bring him back to dimensions of humanity: Historians, he says, have failed to grasp that Hitler “was an **ordinary**, walking, talking **human being** weighing some 155 pounds, with graying hair, largely false teeth and chronic digestive ailments.” *) How more “ordinarily” human can one be? *) He claims that his is the “first objective account” of Hitler in the war years, and all the others were influenced if not motivated by Allied war propaganda and thus their authors were involved in “inter-historian incest.” *) In the 926 pages of his opus, Mr. Irving allocates barely ten pages to the Holocaust, in which he claims that Hitler not only did not give the order to exterminate the Jews, but did not even know about it at least until October 1943, and on that occasion, he gave specific instructions **not** to do it. He concedes that Hitler ordered the Jews shipped to internment camps, but maintains there are no documents linking Hitler to the Holocaust. Irving has since offered \$1,000 to anyone who can produce a single document proving that Hitler knew of the liquidation of the Jews before late 1943.

Historian A.J.P. Taylor reviewing this book for the London Observer, *)

7 We use the terms of mass hysteria and madness almost interchangeably, being aware that professional psychiatrists may strongly object, to begin with, to the whole concept of mass madness, and in particular to use the terms hysteria and madness as synonyms. We agree that they are **not** synonymous when referring to individuals, but when applied to masses (in particular situations) they do become synonymous. At all events, having no professional knowledge in psychiatry, we know of no other way to analyze and characterize the state of mind of the Germans under Hitler. Nor do I think do the psychiatrists.

remarks sarcastically: "Is it really conceivable that Hitler was the only man in Europe who did not know what was happening to the Jews, or that the gas chambers existed?"⁸ Of course he knew and gave the instructions. It was he who said so in **Mein Kampf** and made the extermination of the Jews a main article of faith of Nazi Germany. Albert Speer, an intimate of the Führer, when asked his opinion about Irving's assertion that Hitler did not know, answered unequivocally:

It is impossible. The elimination of the Jews was one of the linchpins of the Hitler doctrine. No one would have dared to assume responsibility for carrying out this extermination **without** an order from Hitler, and nobody would have been able to conceal such a thing from Hitler...

Moreover, there is evidence that David Irving seems to have ignored. Professor (Eberhard) Jäckel, writing in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", quotes the following from Goebbels' diaries... "I have just left the Führer, and he has given his accord on all points." And what are these points, according to the diary? The elimination of the Jews. *)

But since then, new evidence appeared, mainly in the last installment of Goebbels' diaries published only at the beginning of 1978. In an entry of March 14, 1945, (exactly 6 weeks before he committed suicide and murdered his whole family), he notes that though everything looked gloomy and foreboding, he nonetheless expressed satisfaction concerning one subject – the fate of the Jews: "It's necessary to exterminate the Jews like rats, once and for all. In Germany, thank God, we have already taken

8 Some historians are perplexed at the fact of not finding any written document connecting Hitler with ordering the extermination of the Jews. John Lukacs relates that at the same time – December 1941 – when "Hitler ordered a directive to prepare for a long war and for full industrial mobilization... he also tacitly agreed with the implementation of something awful: the mass extermination of the Jews." As a result, the Wannsee Conference took place. **"No document, no written or even spoken evidence connects Hitler directly to the Wannsee decision, but it is not difficult to reconstruct the main lines of his thinking in this regard."** What Lukacs reconstructs is the hypothesis: "England opposed him because behind Churchill stood Roosevelt and **behind Roosevelt stood the Jews. Instead of taking the Jews out of Europe, they had gone to war with him. So, the Jews of Europe will pay the price of this world war.**"

care of that; I hope the world will follow this example.” *) This short entry should be viewed from two aspects. One is that Goebbels, if we read the text correctly, admitted he knew that the Jews under German domination were liquidated. The Nazi Propaganda Minister was one of Hitler’s closest collaborators: if he knew, he probably got the information from Hitler and not the other way [a]round. Yet as in almost all other Nazi documents concerning the Holocaust, Goebbels’ entry has an obscure element. What does it mean: “It’s necessary to exterminate those Jews like rats, once and for all”? Doesn’t he know they were already dead? Doesn’t he state that “... In Germany, thank God” it was already accomplished? (The invocation of God’s help and will in this context is another example of the madness of the man and the gang.) To whom else does he refer? Whom does he address? What does he mean by “in Germany”? Does he have in mind the eight or nine hundred thousand Jews who lived in the Third Reich and Austria before the war, or did he speak about the several million Jews of all of occupied Europe who already perished? But at that time almost all of occupied Europe was no longer “Germany.” And finally, what did he mean by expressing “the hope the world will follow the example”? What world: America? Great Britain, both in England and the dominions, including Mandated Palestine? It just doesn’t make sense. It is a puzzle we stumble upon time and again when dealing with documents concerning the Final Solution.

In reviewing Irving’s book for the Sunday Times, *) Trevor-Roper conceded it would be difficult to challenge the author of **Hitler’s War** by producing written documents establishing a direct link between Hitler and the Holocaust. This is no proof that there was no such link, explains Trevor-Roper: the extermination policy was always disguised by code in official documents. This is not an entirely satisfactory answer because there are no documents in code either to show that he gave any written order to that effect. More relevant is Trevor-Roper’s reference (in D. Irving’s book) to a two-word memorandum dated November 30, 1941, by Himmler: “No liquidation,” summarizing a conversation he had with an SS general in Prague immediately after seeing Hitler. Irving interprets the sentence as proof that Hitler told him specifically to call Prague – not to kill a convoy – because he was against liquidation. Trevor-Roper says, and rightly so, that it proves just the opposite: “One does not veto an action unless one thinks that it is likely to occur.”

Speer, in an interview given to Albert Zarca, does not attach any significance to the fact that there is not a trace of Hitler having ever given written instructions concerning the Final Solution:

Why should there be? Must all decisions taken in a country at the topmost levels always be promulgated in the form of signed notes from the Head of State?... What happened was that Hitler gave a series of daily verbal orders and there was no written confirmation needed, bearing Hitler's signature, to implement these orders... And for all concerned, an order signed by Bormann, Himmler, Göring or Speer was tantamount to an order of Adolf Hitler himself.

This explanation and the rest of what he said concerning Hitler's direct responsibility for the extermination of the Jewish people of Europe are correct but still do not provide a satisfactory answer to the question why the implementation of what Hitler preached as a major imperative of his struggle to conquer the world had to be treated as a secret and conveyed in code only.

* * *

As to Irving's attempt to humanize Hitler in that he was an ordinary, walking, talking man etc.: it is not easy to understand what this had to do with the nature of Hitler as a monster, the architect of the Holocaust. Of course, Hitler had an ordinary, if defective body; it is true that he walked and talked; and when he swallowed cyanide he reacted "normally": his puffy face contorted and turned blue as he strangled and gasped for breath and kicked. Eva Braun shortened the agony by firing a bullet into his left temple which shattered his face, and he died instantly. His body burned in proportion to the amount of petrol poured on him, ignited by a rag, hence he wasn't burned completely as he wished and hoped. The Russians later identified him according to his rotting teeth. *)

One can write a book about his body, its deformities, his bad and rapidly deteriorating health. But it would be of little relevance to his fiendish character – demonic and insane. All despots and mass butchers in history, from the earliest times to Stalin and Hitler had human bodies and no one thought it proof of their humanity. No animal monster, that

is not belonging to the species of man, whether a whale or a frightful jungle beast, or any of the extinguished species, did harm to humanity on a significant scale. None threatened humanity with extinction or total enslavement in a refined, scientific method of torture and death, except men with a human body. Was Genghis Khan, leader of the Golden Horde, human? The Grand Inquisitor, Torquemada? The witch hunters? Those who officiated in the torture chambers in most of the countries in the world? Pain and death were inflicted throughout history for the glory of the true religion or ideals of redemption. The ideologues instituted torture and slaughter as instruments of state to force people's obedience to their exalted purposes. Practically all of them, apart from their biological shape, had other human traits – they had families, friends,⁹ commanded the loyalty and affection of colleagues and subordinates; loved music; were sentimental; loved children and animals.¹⁰

The banality of evil

Another historian and social philosopher faced the same dilemma and the way she tried to solve it brought her to grief. Hannah Arendt shocked most of her Jewish readers throughout the world and many non-Jews as well, with her assertion in **Eichmann in Jerusalem** *) (a masterful work of great scholarship and uncanny insights), that the man in the glass booth was neither monstrously evil, nor insane, but an ordinary human being, who “*to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing...*” (italics in the original). He was not stupid. It was sheer *thoughtlessness* – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period...” (Italics added) She says that “despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man is not a ‘monster’...” and that “with the best of will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann...”

The prosecutor and the judges in Jerusalem were in a psychological predicament. Their instincts clearly told them that they had before them

9 Himmler's wife remembered her husband “as a somewhat insignificant person but a good breadwinner...”*)

10 It is an interesting coincidence that both Robespierre and Hitler when coming home, learned that their pet canary died, were so overwhelmed they wept like children.

a monster. But their professional expertise informed them that on such an assumption they will fail in their task of achieving justice. Therefore, they had to do violence to their own feelings and eschew the monster image, that is, the abnormality, insanity of the accused and construct their case on the basis that they are trying a criminal, true, writ large, but a criminal nonetheless who was sane, hence responsible for his deeds. Otherwise not only justice would miscarry but world opinion may not be interested. After all, this enterprise of capturing Eichmann in the Argentine and bringing him to Jerusalem was not only a matter of meting out due punishment to the defendant, but also to demonstrate before the world what Nazism was, and what it did to the Jewish people.

In her report, Hannah Arendt states that for the Israelis to have admitted that the grand executioner was mad, might have caused the collapse of the case against him and world opinion to lose interest in it.

Surely, one can hardly call upon the world, and gather correspondents from the four corners of the earth in order to display Bluebeard in the dock. The problem with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that many were neither perverted, nor sadistic, that they were, and still are terribly and terrifyingly normal. *)

Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as “normal” – “More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,” one of them said to have explained. *)

Other psychiatrists marveled at his fine relations with his parents and family. One of them said that these relations were “not only normal but most ‘desirable’.”

The judges, reports Miss Arendt, therefore rested their case “on the assumption that the defendant, like all ‘normal persons’, must have been aware of the criminal nature of his acts, and Eichmann was indeed normal insofar as he was ‘no exception within the Nazi regime’.” *)

Hannah Arendt, like other historians, in glaring contradiction to her own central thesis, felt nonetheless ill at ease in glossing over the premise that the Nazis were sane. It flew in the face of common sense and sound intuition. She seems therefore to have questioned the accuracy of the equation: sanity means responsibility, that is, the inherent capacity of normal people to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil.

She explains that the judges in Israel might not have been exactly right when they assumed that Eichmann being sane, *eo ipso* was aware that what he was doing was wrong. Not necessarily:

From the point of view of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgement, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied – as had been said in Nuremberg over and over again by the defendants and their counsels – that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani* (an enemy of the human race), commits crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible to know or feel that he is doing wrong. *)

Seeing no way out of the dilemma how to impute guilt to a criminal being fully aware he is not an outcast of society but a faithful and honorable representative of it, she came to the conclusion that it really doesn't matter whether in a given society the criminal is the exception or the norm; it is not decisive whether Eichmann, being an ordinary normal member of the German nation knew or did not know what he was doing; what matters is that by our (Western? Christian? Judaic? civilized?) standards he was a criminal, was evil and therefore must hang. She accepted the conventional legal premise that being normal or sane is a prerequisite for being responsible for one's deeds, but she rejected the conventional notion that the criminal though normal, is still a freak, or at least an exception within the framework of a normal society. However, under certain circumstances to be a criminal in a given society is the accepted norm of behavior, a certificate of sanity, while the person who refuses to kill or torture or in any way abstain from committing inhuman acts would be treated as abnormal, insane and criminal. She doesn't even see it as a topsy-turvy world. In Nazi Germany at all events – and she deals with Germany in **Eichmann in Jerusalem** – the criminal is not the exception to the rule of law; he is the law-abiding citizen; he is the prototype of normality. This conclusion she developed into an intriguing and provocative socio-philosophical concept: "the banality of evil." In essence, she says, in order to be a criminal even of the dimensions of an Eichmann and perpetrating deeds which the imagination recoils from accepting as possible, one does not have to be freak, a monster. One can

be a mediocrity, indistinguishable from others. Eichmann was no ogre: millions of Germans, in fact tens of millions were both normal and criminal. Evil is not extraordinary, but banal.

Since this is an original concept – unless one identifies it with the Christian theological notion of Original Sin that man is inherently evil, and it does not seem she had this in mind – she went out of her way to prove Eichmann's banality. Even her description of the dignity of his behavior during his last steps toward the gallows was to demonstrate his ordinariness:

He walked the fifty yards from his cell to the execution chamber calm and erect, with his hands bound behind him. When the guards tied his ankles and knees, he asked them to loosen the binds so that he could stand straight. 'I don't need that,' he said, when the black hood was offered him.

He was in complete control of himself, nay, he was more; he was completely himself. Nothing could have demonstrated this more convincingly than the grotesque silliness of his last words: 'After a short while, gentlemen, **we shall all meet again** (emphasis in the original). Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. **I shall never forget them**'... (emphasis in the original). It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lessons of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying **banality of evil** (emphasis in the original).

This is what she discovered in Jerusalem watching Eichmann. It was like an illumination to her: evil is not extraordinary, it is not monstrous, it is not defiance of society – it is commonplace, everybody is contaminated, everybody shares in the crime; among tens of millions of normal human beings crimes become routine, a daily business, banal.

It is a very pessimistic view of mankind; it is the epitome of misanthropy. It is false, yet paradoxically she almost grasped the truth. How can it be both true and false? It may be somewhat complicated to explain, but one should try. To begin with, she is right that Eichmann was not the sole guilty in the Holocaust. Nor was it the handiwork of a small elite, or a large group of SS, or the police, or special squads of

killers – all these were present and active. But they were not alone; almost all the Germans, to whatever rank or strata they belonged, including all the grey mass of ordinary people, were accomplices; some in a more active role, some passively. They were all caught up in the whirlwind of total destruction. The exceptions were few and interestingly, they were not among the intellectuals, the Communists, the Socialists, the academics, the educators and rarely among the writers. The only ones who opposed Hitler and his policies was the elite of the Junkers, the military, but they did not prove to be an effective opposition. The German nation and the Führer were one. In this sense Hannah Arendt is right when she claims that all Germans, or the vast majority of them were guilty of unspeakable crimes and atrocities. This is undeniable. Where she is wrong, dangerously wrong, is to consider a society where everyone shares, to one degree or another, in evil, is a sane society, or is composed of sane individuals. Not at all. Evil and atrocities can take on epidemic proportions only in an atmosphere of mass madness. Only in such an environment crime becomes a daily occurrence on a mass scale.

She almost got the point, an extremely important point, but in presenting it she missed a decisive qualification: the connection between madness and crime; that in certain cases – at all events in Germany – the two went inextricably together. It was madness that produced the crimes and not the other way [a]round. There is another qualification to make; that if the society is mad, it doesn't make the individual or the leaders of that society irresponsible for their crimes, though they acted within the general madness. The individual is sane, only according to the ethos and the norms of the society in which he functions. This does not mean that he is also sane in our eyes, and we judge and punish him according to his actions towards us and not to any other motivations and considerations.

A significant fact was revealed after the Eichmann trial and by no other than the chief prosecutor Gideon Hausner. He presented to the court only those reports by the psychiatrists which proved Eichmann sane. Those who could be interpreted differently he withheld. Thus, according to some psychiatrists, Eichmann was "a man obsessed with a dangerous and insatiable urge to kill," a perverted, sadistic personality; in which case he would have belonged in an insane asylum. But such evidence, Mr. Hausner confesses, he "could not bring out at the trial." It would have destroyed the whole basis upon which the trial was constructed.

This only shows the fragility of the whole assumption of the relationship between guilt and sanity. *)

Of course we know it is slippery ground we are treading on; these are not convictions we can defend without reservations. These are only reflections. But they are important to us because we abhor the idea of classifying the Nazi regime as sane and normal. The Nuremberg and Eichmann trials had among others, four flaws: one was the precedent of the victor judging the defeated enemy. There is little heroism in it. The victors had to develop new concepts of law of questionable validity. It will haunt mankind till the end of time. It introduced confusion in the minds of the immature and irresponsible elements of civilized society. The notion of war criminals is being applied loosely to a variety of people and governments. There were war trials organized by Bertrand Russell and other intellectuals against the American government (in connection with Vietnam) and the verdicts were – guilty! Jane Fonda proclaimed time and again Nixon as the “greatest war criminal” of all time, that is, greater than Hitler and his cohorts.

Two, by declaring the Nazi criminals in Nuremberg and Eichmann in Jerusalem as sane, one also enabled historians to compare Hitler to Napoleon, as if there is any resemblance between the conqueror who spread the ideals of the French revolution throughout Europe, as nobody else did – including all the humanists and philosophers combined. Apart from his military genius, he left to posterity monuments of law and science, while Hitler left behind him death camps, the crematoria, a devastated Europe and a ruined Germany. This is not an apology for Napoleon but there is something shocking in mentioning the two despots together.

Three, by condemning the arch criminals in Nuremberg, one somehow absolved from guilt the 80 million Germans who were part of the Nazi structure. Despite all the subsequent denazification trials, the fact remains that not only the mass of Germans were let scot free but when, after the war, central and regional governments had to be organized by the Germans, they were on the whole composed of former Nazis. (Of course Adenauer was an opponent of Nazism and so was Willy Brandt, and many others, but still they were the exceptions.) And this, too, was “normal” because there were no other Germans. Whatever the prosecutors and judges may have said, and their rhetoric notwithstanding,

the trials absolved the Germans as a nation. The guilty were judged and punished. The others were free to pursue their normal lives, with a clear conscience.

Fourth, the moment one applies conventional legal terms in trying the Nazis, crime not only appears banal, but also the punishment. Even capital punishment is both cruel and banal. It happens in many countries and is applied to a person guilty of one murder. You cannot execute a Nazi criminal hundreds of times in proportion to the number of atrocities and murders he committed. To have hanged Eichmann for his part in the extermination of six million Jews is in itself somewhat of a perversion of common sense and human instinct. It is both banal and surrealistic. It diminishes the monstrosity of the crime and knocks it out of kilter on all levels of human perception.

There is also a misconception in this banal punishment of having hanged some, and putting others into prison. What the judges perhaps did not understand or willingly overlooked, was that the hierarchy of Nazidom at that period were not afraid of death. Those who could, committed suicide: Hitler, Goebbels, Göring and Himmler. It would have been a more meaningful punishment to leave these criminals alive and keep them on permanent exhibition for people to come and look at them. There is no physical cruelty involved; only a reminder to them and others who they are and what they did.

Fathers and sons: contradicting attitudes towards Hitler

There are two trends now discernible concerning the Holocaust. One is the revival of a keen interest and fascination with Hitler – his life and deeds. New biographies, some not devoid of admiration, are published with ever greater frequency; revisionist history books on the Nazi era become best sellers. Memoirs about the Führer, his intimate environment with Eva Braun exuding warmth in an atmosphere of *Gemütlichkeit*; his relations with friends; his love of music, art, architecture and dogs are in great demand in a score of languages. This interest also finds expression in reflective essays, analytical and comprehensive stories in magazines – in words and pictures; movies, old and new, some reproducing the original Nazi propaganda like “Triumph of the Will” about the 1935 Nuremberg rally are shown to packed houses; novels; TV programs; recordings of

Hitler's speeches; postage stamps; coins and other memorabilia of the period are hustled on a mass scale.

This revival is most obvious in Germany both among the senior citizens and the young. Some, especially the former, are nostalgic for the good old times and in their hearts mourn their hero and idol who failed; others, among the new generation, desire to know the truth, and there are even those who wish to become fully aware of their parents' role and how they, themselves, could atone for the iniquities of their fathers.

The all-engulfing nemesis

The other trend is one of apprehension; some leaders of West Germany, like Mr. Willy Brandt, are worried by this phenomenon though on the surface it may look marginal and in many cases innocent. But they are worried that the Führer's ghost is abroad in the land. They are surprised and look for an explanation.

Why should they be surprised? It was unavoidable. The Germans after defeat wished not only to forget but to erase the past as if it never took place. Suddenly, from one day to the next, after the act of surrender, they all – 70 or 80 million – declared themselves innocent of any crime, of taking any part in the avalanche of barbarism. They blamed everything on one evil genius and his cohorts, as if nobody else had anything to do with it; as if they did not bring Hitler to power on waves of popular enthusiasm, expressing their faith in him first in casting their ballots, and then each of them, with extremely few exceptions, took part in building the Third Reich and everything it stood for. Everyone had a share in the total guilt. But then, when the edifice collapsed, they claimed not to have had anything to do with it; never having done anything wrong unless under duress.

They naively hoped that with one sweep they could put under the carpet the most traumatic events the world endured for a dozen years which produced the Holocaust, the most atrocious war in history and the worst tyranny mankind ever knew. In this belief that they can get away with it, there is a reflection of the Hitler technique itself – the Big Lie, the crudeness, the faith that what no other nation can do the Germans can. They decided to achieve this feat by the simple expedient of not to mention the immediate past, not to teach it in the schools. Germany's history begins in antiquity and stops in 1933, and then it

picks up again some fourteen years later. The Hitler period is forbidden to be taught substantively, meaningfully; in fact, often it is not taught at all, as if it never existed, as if there was a vacuum in the time span of the German nation; as if a flood washed away every memory in the German mind and nobody remembers to tell anything of what he did during that time. Frederick Weibgen, a German working in the UN, tells about his post-war education in his native land:

... my teachers... taught me nine years of Latin, six years of Greek, two years of English (oh, yes, a gesture to the new *Zeitgeist*), philosophy, science and fine arts, and yet were so clumsy at the fine art of teaching history.

Two hours were spent on some of the more questionable aspect of the Nazi's reign (including camps), *some days* on the Germany Army's heroic exploits, and *some weeks* on more lasting aspects of the Third Reich like the Führer's doing away with unemployment, building highways and curbing inflation... *) (Italics added)

Comparatively speaking, Herr Weibgen seems to have had an exceptional education because others did not even get that much in school. A recent academic study reveals that German school children, when asked about Hitler, gave such answers as that he fought the Thirty Years' War, was the first man to land on the moon, and founded the present Federal Republic.

But there is no such thing as a vacuum in contemporary history; nothing is washed away. It (?) will come back to haunt Germany and the world that was an accomplice in a thousand forms, with a million faces. The thing will be revived and take revenge upon itself and on innocent bystanders for generations to come.

From enemy of mankind to ally

Even an exceptionally astute historian can sometimes express preposterous ideas. John Lukacs remarks that

Had Roosevelt or Churchill announced that they were ready to suspend the war and sent their ships to transport the remaining Jews out of Europe, Hitler would have responded in an instant. *)

Then, in a footnote, he states:

People who berate Roosevelt and Churchill for not having done this are blind in their retrospect. They do not recognize that such a deal with Hitler, apart from its practical difficulties, would have played straight into his hands: first, in splitting the Western leaders from Stalin; second, because Hitler then would have had convincing proof for his argument that Roosevelt and Churchill were fighting a world war against Germany principally in the service of Jewry. *)

This is a fictitious way of defining the problem. It was never put that way by the Germans, or the advocates of rescue, or by anybody else. It was not a matter of stopping the war but of intensifying it. It was not a matter of making a deal with Hitler but of warning him, frightening him, and mainly to show concern. It would have been enough to take simple measures in warnings, threats or retaliation, recognizing the existence of the problem, and, of course, not to keep all the gates hermetically closed. It would have been enough to admit 500,000 Jews in the first two years of the war in various countries, beginning with Palestine and ending with the U.S., including Great Britain and South America and probably all the other Jews would have found their way to safety. It would have worked simply because Hitler, despite his madness, might not have wished to add additional difficulties to those he already had fighting a war on two fronts. As to his need to prove the argument that Roosevelt and Churchill are fighting a war in the interests of the Jews, for whom did he need the argument? For the Germans? They followed him blindly whether he slaughtered the Jews or not. In many a case they supported him **despite** the slaughter of the Jews. The Germans' crime was that they supported him though they knew what his policy was and what the Final Solution meant. But this was not a major element of their enthusiasm. The satellites followed out of fear as long as he could dominate them, then deserted him. The free world would have been much better served by following some rudimentary moral principles.

What the Nazis, their satellites and accomplices in the free world did not grasp was that in the long run one does not win by exterminating, or permitting the destruction of the Jews. One loses. Hitler destroyed

himself and caused Germany to be prostrated and partitioned because he exterminated the Jews of Europe. As John Lukacs puts it:

At that time, in winter 1941-42, the drafting of the 'Final Solution' was but a minor administrative decision. There is no reason to believe that it gave Hitler a sleepless night or even a difficult hour. Yet it turned out to be the monstrous of all his decisions, the consequences of which would destroy his reputation and that of his Reich for a very long time, perhaps forever.

The accomplices of the West, too, paid a high price. The British lost their Empire and became if not a nation of the "Third World" at all events a third-rate power. The U.S. in the spirit of the times and in the climate of the Holocaust, unleashed the atomic monster, dropping bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The decline of U.S. power and the psychotic element in its foreign policy dates from then. When all is said and done, what remains as an ineluctable fact is that the desperate ambition of the U.S. today is to preserve parity with the half-savage Soviet Union as a super power.

* * *

Kafka, who was a multidimensional prophet, expressed it in the pithy style of his ancient Hebrew predecessors: "They persecute the Jews, and they murder mankind." *)

As the Allies had no really clear strategy how to win the war (it was won more by improvisation than strategy), they had no plan of what to do with Germany either; nor did they have a post war plan for a shattered world. On the one hand Roosevelt fleetingly adopted the Morgenthau plan, which meant to totally dismantle Germany's industrial infrastructure, shut down her coal and iron mines, thus transforming the enemy into an agricultural society. In a sense this idea was the forerunner of the Khmer Rouge system in Cambodia, but, of course, without the violence the Communists apply in carrying out their "reform" or "revolution." *)

That Morgenthau, the Jew, had such sentiments towards Germany is no great surprise. Many Jews at that time felt that no punishment was too

severe to make the Germans, as a nation, pay for their unspeakable crimes. But as a political solution it was unrealistic and had to be abandoned. Instead, the Americans launched a policy of reconstructing Germany as an industrial power, and before long began to court the former enemy with a view of also making her into a military power. With the advent of John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower at the head of the American Administration, they sought to make Germany an ally. These extremes are typical of the fickleness of American foreign policy. If we mention it at all it is only to illustrate the general eagerness among the allies, especially America, to forgive and forget, as if nothing happened. America's preoccupation, if not to say obsession, was how fast and most effectively Germany could be built up into a powerful bulwark against Russia. What was wrong with this policy was that it lacked any moral dimension. Germany was absolved of her responsibility for Nazism; washed clean of all her crimes as if she was a new born babe. No moral atonement was demanded or offered. But such arrangements cannot endure. Germany has not yet spoken the last word in favor of Western Civilization. Not that she is not democratic **now** or peace oriented now. Probably she is one of the most peaceful and democratic nations in Europe but she is mortgaged and has a debt to pay. Her problem is that she is not aware of it: she thinks enough is enough, she has already paid. It is a tragic case of **willed** amnesia.

We do not think in terms of physical punishment and revenge which always proved counterproductive. That Russian soldiers got permission to rape every woman when they entered Berlin was not punishment but barbarism. What mattered was to take stock morally. Even if one regards the Nuremberg trials as a useful and meaningful undertaking, about which this writer has doubts, justice was done to only a number of individuals and the punishment was conventional – imprisonment and death. After a while, the Germans don't talk about it, were able to ignore it and go on with their daily business. Very few of the younger generation know anything about the Nuremberg trials, and outside Germany it is almost exclusively a matter for scholars, historians and jurists. The trial of the victors of the vanquished is still a controversial matter and remains an ambiguity as well as a confusing precedent.

What the victorious powers failed to do was to brand Germany with enduring symbolic marks, as a nation who chose Hitler and made him

their Führer and God, and under his guidance committed crimes never imagined possible in the whole past of human history. Atrocities which defy description, because imagination – even the most fertile and creative – fails to grasp it. We have no language, no words, no artistic capability to wrestle with it. In such a case though victory was imperative, physical punishment was nigh meaningless. The punishment had to be moral and symbolic. The symbols to remind the Germans and the world of the Hitler era should have been enduring and gigantic monuments.

By signing an executive order on January 22, 1944, President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board. It was tasked with carrying out an official American policy of rescue and relief of the Jews of Europe. The overwhelming majority of the Anglo-Jewish and the Jewish press gave the Emergency Committee credit for the creation of the Board.

... The industrious spadework of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe has contributed to this prospect, and the Committee is likewise entitled to credit for the President's forehanded move.

Washington Post
25 January 1944

... The President's move is the outcome of pressure brought to bear by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, a group made up of both Jews and non-Jews that has been active in the Capital in recent months...

Christian Science Monitor
24 January 1944

ISBN: 978-965-92974-1-2



The Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism
University of Haifa