



Post-Ugandan Zionism On Trial

A Study of the Factors that Caused
the Mistakes Made by the Zionist Movement
during the Holocaust

Volume I

S. B. Beit Zvi

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Translation from Hebrew
By Ralph Mandel

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ISBN No.0-9628843-0-8

Publishers S.B. Beit-Zvi
1991, Zahala-Tel-Aviv
Israel

Cover Design : Laurinda Phakos

INTERNET EDITION (Fair and non-commercial use)
AAARGH PUBLISHING HOUSE
2004

CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE

Foreword page iv

Introduction to the English Translation page vi

Introduction: Correspondence and conversations with David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett page vii

PART ONE: THE INFORMATION DEBACLE

Preface page 1

Chapter 1: *The Secret Operation to Destroy the Jews* page 3

Nazi methods to preserve secrecy--Against whom it was preserved--What the Germans knew and what they did not know

Chapter 2: *The Truth Suppressed* page 26

The Zionist movement as a rescuer of Jews, in theory and in practice--Beri Katznelson and the newspaper *Davar*

Chapter 3: *What the Leaders Knew* page 70

David Zakai's sensational revelation and Yitzhak Gruenbaum's reply--Correspondence between Jerusalem, London and Geneva--The November 23 announcement and the Yishuv's response

PART TWO: THE WAR ON TERRITORIALISM

Preface page 124

Chapter 4: *Friendship Only* page 127

Gruenbaum and his colleagues at a session of the Zionist Executive--Melech Neustadt's rhetorical question--The difference between a son and a non-son, a father and a non-father

Chapter 5: *Interim Summaries, Psychology and Ideology* page 165

Chapter 6: *The Uganda Crisis* page 178

Britain's proposal to establish a Jewish state in Africa triggers a crisis--A split in the Zionist movement and the Yishuv--"Ugandists" (Zangwill, Syrkin) vs. "Zionei Zion" (Ussishkin, Chelnov)--Following Herzl's death the two sides part, each pursuing different goals and missions

Chapter 7: *The Evian Conference: An Ideology Incarnate* page 195

In the thirty years since the Uganda crisis, the Zionist movement recovered, expanded and strengthened itself organizationally--Yet the legacy of Uganda left its imprint in the split that occurred in the 6th and 7th Zionist Congresses--Objections to territorialism became second nature for Zionism--When the test came, it emerged that

Zionism was not ready for the task of rescuing Jews unconditionally--Weizmann and Ben-Gurion struggle against the "danger" of the conference--Arthur Ruppin: unorthodox Zionist

Chapter 8: *From Evian to the War* page 240

The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (the "Evian Committee") continues the conference's activity to extricate the Jews of Germany--At Hitler's order, Goering retracts Germany's non-recognition of the Evian Committee and proposes negotiations on the orderly exodus of Jews from Austria and Germany--The Rublee-Wohlthat Plan and the dogged war against it--How many Jews were extricated between August 1938 and the onset of the war

Chapter 9: *Territorialism Vanquished* page 315
(*The Santo Domingo Affair*)

Following the Dominican Republic's generous offer at the Evian Conference to absorb a large number of refugees from Europe, "Dorsa," a subsidiary of Agro-Joint, is set up in the U.S.--In January 1940 a contract is signed between Dorsa and the Dominican Republic on the absorption of 100,000 refugees--The first settlement is established at Sosua--Encouragement and assent from liberal and progressive circles in America--Vigorous intervention by Ida Silverman, associates of Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann, and the commissioned counsel of the Brookings Institution lead to the invalidation and expiration of the plan

Notes and references page 364

FOREWORD

The correspondence and conversations with David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett which serve as the introduction to this book, reflect the two reasons that impelled me to write it: the frustrating results of my efforts on behalf of Russian Jewry, and the Eichmann trial.

In the first two or three years of my activity for the Jews of Russia, from 1958-1961, I spoke about their plight in numerous assemblies throughout Israel--in cities, moshavot, moshavim and kibbutzim. The audiences were attentive and highly responsive--from this point of view the campaign was a success. People heard, were moved, and literally lived the issue. After every lecture I had the feeling that the cumulative activity of myself and my colleagues would effect a shift in public opinion toward readiness to work for Soviet Jewry.

This feeling gradually gave way to a sense of disappointment and bitterness. The desired result was not achieved. I found that people with whom I had often discussed the problem in detail seemed unable to grasp the basic point: that urgent action was required on behalf of Soviet Jewry, and that such action had substantial prospects for success. Some time after each such talk they would ask me rhetorically, 'But what can be done?' Now, as these lines are being written (1977), when the need to pressure the Soviet Union to open its gates to Jewish emigration is clear and obvious to everyone, it is strange to recall that less than ten years ago this view was shared by no more than a handful of people, who were generally considered "extremists." Yet even a cursory perusal of the press from that period will prove the point.

That painful experience led me to reflect that ponderous reasons, which I could not fathom, underlay the disinclination of Israeli society and the Zionist movement to initiate the struggle and sacrifice required to save the Jews of the Soviet Union. That thought was reinforced by the subsequent course of events.

In the Eichmann trial, I was struck by the way Israeli commentary totally disregarded the failure of free Jewry and the Zionist movement during the Holocaust years. While the press was full of accusations against the Gentiles for not helping and not coming to the rescue, not a word was said about those whose primary obligation it had been to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the rescue effort.

It crossed my mind that perhaps the blunders in the Holocaust period and the unwillingness to help Soviet Jewry were in some way interconnected, that perhaps their common origin lay in something organic (if not rooted) in Zionism. Could it be that an egocentric element had evolved within the Zionist movement that shunned concern for diaspora Jewry if this were not *directly* related to Zionism (and Israel)? Had such a trait wormed its way into the foundations of Zionist sensibility, and was it now eating away its moral basis?

These thoughts led me to examine the Yishuv press of the Holocaust years. What I read in those yellowing pages brought me to the conclusions I spelled out in the letters to Ben-Gurion and Sharett that follow immediately. After conversing with these two personages, the most prominent among those connected with the blunders of the Holocaust years, I embarked on the research of which this book is the result.

The experience of my activity on behalf of Russian Jewry may well have helped me to grasp and take in more concretely the "deep silence" described in Chapter 2, and similar phenomena of collective anomaly to which other chapters of the book are devoted. For many years I encountered a similar anomaly regarding the Jews of Russia.

That experience also disabused me of the temptation to seek the reasons for the events of the Holocaust years in negative traits of the Yishuv's leaders. I was well acquainted with the Israeli and Zionist leaders whose attitude toward the plight of Soviet Jewry drew my criticism. And clearly it was not their personal traits that generated their behavior.

The book is intended in the first place for researchers and students of the Holocaust. For this reason it examines in detail several issues which are of importance to these researchers. In the majority of these cases, such as the three-way correspondence between Jerusalem, Istanbul and Geneva (Chapter 3), the reader, I believe, will profit if he "overcomes" the details.

I wish to thank the institutions that furnished me with needed documentary material, and the personages who were kind enough to meet with me concerning matters related to the book. All of them helped me in my work, but naturally, none of them is responsible for the conclusions I reached.

S.B. Beit-Zvi
May 1977

Introduction to the English Translation

The English translation is being published in the full scope of the Hebrew original, save for a few unimportant minor emendations.

For the reader's convenience, it was decided to publish the English edition in two volumes. Volume I contains nine chapters, and Volume II contains six chapters, as well as three articles I wrote after the Hebrew edition had appeared.

Two of the articles-- "Golda Meir on the Evian Conference" and "The Great Erasure"--are devoted to the Evian Conference which took place in July 1938, and to the period from December 1938 until the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. These subjects are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 of the book. Recently, however, I discovered that besides its negative assessment of Evian, the historical establishment in Israel has steadfastly attempted to disregard, and to conceal from Holocaust researchers, important fact and developments relating to the Rublee-Wohlthat Plan. In these two articles, I try to set the record straight.

The article "Sensitive Matters" was written in reaction to the summation speech of Prof. Yehuda Bauer at a conference of Holocaust researchers devoted to the destruction of Hungarian Jewry and to an article he published in the journal *Yalkut Moreshet* in 1978. "Sensitive Matters" is a supplement to Chapter 13 of the book.

S.B. Beit-Zvi, 1989

INTRODUCTION

(Correspondence and conversations with David Ben-Gurion & Moshe Sharett)

1

May 13, 1962

The Prime Minister of Israel,
Jerusalem.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The undersigned, S. Beit-Zvi, is a resident of Tel Aviv and a teacher by profession. Some years ago I published articles in the press under the *nom de plume* "B. Shvivi." In recent years I have been active in "Maoz," the association to aid Russian Jewry. My public interest led me to make a detailed study of the rescue efforts made by Jews, and by the Zionist movement in particular, during the years of the Holocaust in Europe (1939-1945). The research was conducted by examining the press and literature of or about that period and through conversations with persons who could help me and were also willing to do so.

The great amount of material that I perused during my years of studying the subject led me to conclude that the Zionist movement and the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz-Israel sinned grievously against their brethren in Europe, both by omitting to do what was necessary to save them, and by committing acts that seriously harmed rescue possibilities. The following are some of these omissions and commissions:

Upon the outbreak of the war, the rescue of Jews was not posited as the primary goal of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. Indeed, this goal was not even listed alongside the two main objectives which you yourself proclaimed upon the outbreak of the war (the war against Hitler and the war against the White Paper).

Never during the years of the Holocaust, even after the scale of the destruction was known and made public, was the rescue mission, as such, placed at the center of Zionist activity, and never was it a "full-time" concern for the movement's major leaders (yourself, Dr. Weizmann, B. Katznelson). At most, in the "peak" period, it was dealt with on a "part-time" basis by a few Zionist leaders and a few of the movement's marginal institutions. The WZO, which was then the paramount Jewish instrument

in the world, capable of acting and mobilizing others, did not *devote itself selflessly* to the rescue of European Jewry. And without selfless devotion, rescue activity was foredoomed.

Yet with all that was not done, even graver is what the Zionist movement did do that adversely affected the rescue of Jews.

In the emergency conditions that were generated with the war's outbreak, Zionism pursued unabated its war against "territorialism." The Zionist movement declared war on every Jew who would escape from Europe and find shelter elsewhere than in Eretz-Israel. You yourself declared at the Biltmore Conference that "the meaning of these ships *Patria* and *Struma* is simple: Eretz-Israel or death." This statement, although meant as a description of objective reality, was in fact an expression of the Zionist movement's political line. That line finally drove the British government (which in any case was not made up of saints) to become Hitler's concrete allies in the campaign to destroy Europe's Jews (see Lord Cranborne's infamous declaration in the British Parliament and Eden's argument, in his meeting with Roosevelt, against the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry--R. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, Ch. 28).

Nor, with its cruel behavior toward European Jewry, did the Zionist movement hesitate to exploit its calamity to aid and abet its own purposes, even planning openly and publicly the utilization of the post-war period when, it was hoped, there would be a *surviving remnant* whose plight could advance the realization of Zionism. (You will find salient examples of this approach in your own book, *In the Campaign*, Vol. 3, pp.

123, 134; Vol. 4, pp. 31, 90, 102; Vol. 2, pp. 255, 268.) This hope was fulfilled, but that anyone survived was in no way due to the efforts of the Zionist movement.

Overweighing all of these misdeeds was the sin committed by the Zionist institutions and the Yishuv in proffering direct aid to Goebbels' propaganda and deception apparatus in the critical years. In September 1944 you yourself declared that "the reports about the slaughter in Poland reached us late, and even when they did reach us--no one would believe us." Unfortunately, I could find no confirmation of this statement. The truth is that for over three years, until the end of November 1942, *Davar* (and a few other papers) waged a vigorous and systematic campaign against the "exaggerations" that reached Palestine from various sources concerning the destruction of the Jews. You yourself, if I am not mistaken, were in London (or New York) in August and September 1942, when Zygelboim and the Polish government provided the general public with many authoritative reports about the events in Poland; yet it was not until

the end of November that these same reports, unaccompanied by reservations and denials, were made known to the Yishuv. Until then, so "immunized" was the Yishuv against "atrocities propaganda" that it continued to attach a degree of exaggeration to everything it was told, even though hints about the events in Europe could occasionally be found in remarks by Yishuv leaders (such as your own comment in March 1943 on "a great massacre of the Jews--tens and hundreds of thousands"--not yet millions!).

These facts and others, with which I do not wish to weary you, led me to the conclusions spelled out at the beginning of this letter. It seems to me that I also understand the reason for the behavior of the WZO--a reason rooted in Zionism's instinct, not in its nature. I need hardly say that it was with a heavy heart that I arrived at these conclusions, and if I have not exaggerated them, their importance is absolutely crucial. Since I am apprehensive that perhaps I did not take into account something basic that may have escaped my notice, or that I failed to understand something properly, I respectfully request that you receive me for a conversation on this subject.

Yours sincerely and
thanking you in advance,
S. Beit-Zvi

2

The Prime Minister

Jerusalem, July 5, 1962

To Mr. Beit-Zvi, Shalom,

I read your letter with great interest. I understand your bitterness and your contentions--because the Holocaust, which was unexampled even in our history, cannot but overwhelm us whenever we recall it.

However, it is difficult to agree with your accusations against the Yishuv and the Zionist movement. The Haganah made desperate efforts to organize "Aliyah B" ("illegal" immigration); the government was in foreign and not the friendliest of hands; not all the Jews, not the majority and not the greater part, were ready to settle here--and the few who were ready to do so found closed gates. There were many in the country who demonstrated genuine "selfless devotion"--and indeed sacrificed

themselves: Hannah Szenes, Enzo Sireni, and others. What could Weizmann have done in the way of selfless devotion? What could you have done?

It is possible that newspapers and personages in the country did not believe in the gravity of the Holocaust. Even the Jews in the Nazi-occupied countries did not believe it. And I will not dare accuse them--even though I know *now* that they were wrong, but I know this after the fact.

If, heaven forbid, there should be a disaster in South Africa--and the possibility exists--a [future] researcher will accuse people of not having foreseen the disaster. But

I have spoken with intelligent and important Jews from South Africa about a possible disaster, and they are not impressed--they have plenty of excuses: it's not so terrible, it's impossible to get money out, and if things become unbearable, they will escape to Israel or to England.

It may be too late, but that is the nature of Jews (and perhaps also of non-Jews), and you yourself admit that you arrived at your conclusion following research and what you learned from various conversations. That research was not carried out *before* the act. This is not meant as an accusation against you, heaven forbid, but I do not believe in accusations after the fact. I could quote you warnings that were voiced even before the outbreak of the war, but I understand why the Jews did not listen, I know that nearly all the finest Zionist leaders did not leave Russia until they could no longer tolerate the events of the Bolshevik Revolution. Some of them missed the boat--and were thrown into prison.

As for a meeting for a conversation--willingly.

Yours sincerely,
David Ben-Gurion

3

January 22, 1963

Mr. Prime Minister,

Allow me to thank you, sir, for receiving me yesterday, and to sum up the results of the meeting for my research on the Holocaust. I noted your remarks as follows:

(a) You are interested in what relates to the present and the future--ensuring the existence and prosperity of the state, with all the problems

this entails. The question of the Holocaust, which deals with the past, does not fail within these categories.

(b) Whoever has studied the Holocaust and has something to say about it, should publish what he has to say. Since you said this after I had outlined to you again, in addition to my detailed letter of half a year ago, the principal conclusions I arrived at in my research (the obligation of outside help, foresight, selfless devotion, harmful publications, and so forth), I took your comments as assent and encouragement regarding the publication of my conclusions, and I am most grateful to you for this.

I am sevenfold grateful to you, sir, for agreeing to receive from me and to read carefully a memorandum regarding the second subject that was raised in the meeting [i.e., the problem of Russian Jewry]. I shall draw up the memorandum immediately and send it to you soonest.

Respectfully,
S. Beit-Zvi

4

April 26, 1962
Mr. Moshe Sharett
Chairman, Jewish Agency Executive
Jerusalem

Dear Mr. Sharett

The undersigned, S. Beit-Zvi, met with you two years ago concerning "Maoz." You may also perhaps know me by the name "B. Shvivi," under which I wrote articles for *Hador* and *B'Terem*. Lately, my public interest has been focused on the issue of Russian Jewry, and together with my colleagues in Maoz I tried to do something for them.

The failure of the activity undertaken by Maoz, despite the great personal efforts that were expended, led me to seek out and study objective causes for this outcome in Israeli society. The Eichmann trial showed me that in the Holocaust period, too, the rescue efforts of "the state on the way" were incommensurate with what was called for, and, I believe, with the possibilities as well. Similarities between the rescue of

European Jewry, which was neglected, and the saving of Russian Jewry, which I deeply believe is currently being neglected, led me to make a close study of the questions relating to rescue in the Holocaust period.

My study of the issue during the past year has turned up a great deal of material which, in my opinion, enables, with the most cautious

approach, unequivocal conclusions to be drawn concerning mistakes made by the Zionist movement--mistakes which bore disastrous results. These mistakes derived from immanent (not organic) features of Zionism. I fear that these mistakes are now also causing alienation *vis-a-vis* the plight of Russian Jewry.

Because of the public interest in these matters, I am about to commit the results of my work to writing, and publish them. In order to preclude the possibility of conveying imprecise facts related to your activities in that period, as head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, or incorrectly interpreting things you said at the time, I respectfully request that you receive me for a talk on this subject.

If you agree to receive me, I would ask that the meeting be in the evening, so as not to cause me to miss work or deprive my pupils (I am a teacher) of their studies.

Respectfully and thanking you in advance,
S. Beit-Zvi

5

July 20, 1962

My Dear Hirshke! *

The meeting with Moshe Sharett took place today at 12. I immediately launched into my remarks, as I had prepared them, in the following order:

(a) At the beginning of World War II the WZO was the only world Jewish body in terms of its size and strength, and it also exercised great influence on other Jewish bodies (the World Jewish Congress, etc.). Therefore it bore responsibility for the fate of the Jewish people even outside the realization (by mistake I said "implementation" and Sharett corrected me--there were no more corrections) of the Zionist program. The responsibility was not only moral-political but also actual-operational. This meant that against the will of the WZO or without its support, no major project could be executed among the Jewish people (up to this point Sharett listened silently, though he jotted down something). Upon the

 * Hirshke was my good friend, the late Zvi Hagivati, who showed great interest in my research and was its first reader.

outbreak of the war and the destruction, and earlier, upon Hitler's assumption of power, the WZO took a negative stand toward territorialism along the lines of the 1904 debates. The WZO fought against every rescue proposal which did not involve Eretz-Israel and did not help in the realization [of Zionism], as Rubashov put it at the time (I quoted from material I had brought with me): "We will not rest until the gates of the homeland are opened to every Jew who will be saved from the clutches of the Nazis."

At this point Sharett began to get upset and to maintain that I was distorting the Zionist stand. I read him a quote from his own remarks which I had brought with me and which seemed to embarrass him. He began to explain and interpret in a very *routine* and unconvincing way. When I saw that I was not about to hear anything new, I stopped him politely and asked to go on presenting my case.

(b) *The absence of selfless devotion.* Neither he, Weizmann nor Ben-Gurion had been engaged in rescue efforts, but only second-rank leaders, and even they did so on a "part-time" basis. Many possibilities were not followed up, no contact was maintained with the Polish government, with the Soviet government... Here Sharett stopped me: "I reject your contentions" (or words to that effect). He began by declaring that neither he nor Ben-Gurion had been engaged exclusively in establishing the state. Then he abandoned this peculiar statement and reminded me that he had spoken with Maisky

(i.e., contact with the USSR), and in conclusion he insisted ardently (which greatly disturbed me, because I was afraid I would make him lose control of himself) that he had constantly been engaged in rescue work. He spoke a lot about those days and warned against prophets of hindsight who could now tender good advice. I rejected this argument and said that a leadership had the duty to understand, all the more so the leadership of catastrophic Zionism. I quoted Rubashov on Ignominy No. 1 ("Who allowed us not to know"), and that made an impression on him.

(c) *Information.* Here I launched into an emotional attack (I begged his pardon for speaking emotionally). I rejected the contention that others had concealed the facts from us; I reminded him that in June 1942 London was buzzing with the information made public by the Polish government and Zygelboim, while in the Yishuv, for some reason, nothing was said about this. I told him of *Davar's* ploys in that period. This time he was quite affected. He said he did not have a clear memory of the events and

asked me a few questions. I told him that in the Yishuv the reports appeared in November 1942, and I pointed out that according to *Ha'aretz*, the Jewish Agency Executive had held up publication of the reports as long as the North African campaign was being fought. Sharett repeated that he could not recall the exact details.

When I mentioned Zygelboim, I said "Zygelboim of blessed memory" and stressed that I said his name tremblingly and admiringly. Sharett replied that Zygelboim merited this. Then it turned out that he couldn't remember whether Zygelboim had committed suicide alone or with someone else (he did so alone). He also thought Zygelboim had taken his life in Downing Street (no). As for *Davar*, he said that the writer had been Dan Pinnes, and that perhaps Berl had not been in Tel Aviv at the time...

(d) I asked him about the War Refugee Board. He said he could remember nothing. He knew only that it had been and remained of negligible importance. Then it turned out he hadn't understood what I meant, he thought I was referring to the Refugee Department in the *British* Foreign Office. During the conversation, he told me that he had heard the words "what will we do with a million Jews," which many attributed to Lord Moyne, spoken by a senior British Foreign Office official, Randall.

(e) I asked him why the paratroopers had been sent. In reply he told me a long story about how he had managed to push this question through "in two ways" for Churchill's personal decision, and how he had cabled Palestine: "Reached top." I repeated my question: Why had they been sent? The reply: "To try to save." I remarked: "The paratroopers did not succeed in their mission anywhere." The reply: "That is the tragedy of history." He then added that the paratroopers' mission had been to stir up resistance (or as you, Hirshke, say: to incite revolt).

Me: To save Jews by resistance? Maybe the intention was to save Jewish honor?

Sharett: Both.

We exchanged a few words about Jewish honor (our views differed). The talk lasted an hour. When we started Sharett, told someone on the phone that he would be available at 1 p.m. Because of this, and because he was tired and worn out from the talk (that was quite apparent) I thanked him and took my leave.

Sharett: You managed it in just one hour. I thanked him again.

Yours,
Shabtai

N.B. In the part about information and earlier, Sharett emphasized that everyone was then of unanimous opinion and that the people at *Davar* were good and honest, "no worse than yourself." He didn't want to hear about Rabbi Binyamin (and I didn't insist).

6

July 22, 1962

Moshe Sharett
Jewish Agency for Palestine
Jerusalem

Mr. S. Beit-Zvi
95 Shalom Avenue
Tel Aviv.

Dear *Haver*,

Enclosed are notes that you left on my desk in Tel Aviv.

I want to take this opportunity to express my amazement concerning the distinction you drew between saving lives and saving honor. If our people had not preserved its honor--from the revolt of the Hasmoneans, the wars against Rome, martyrdom throughout the generations, defense against the pogroms in Russia, to the heroic exploits of the new Yishuv in Eretz-Israel and the desperate uprising of the ghettos in the diaspora--it is doubtful whether it would have remained alive; that is, whether it would have regarded its life as worth maintaining and preserving for the coming generations.

Sincerely,
Moshe Sharett

7

July 31, 1962

Dear Mr. Sharett,

I would like to respond to the amazement you expressed in your letter of July 22 concerning my comments on saving Jewish lives and saving Jewish honor. Although this subject was marginal to our conversation, and we exchanged only a few fragmented sentences about it,

it can, I believe, serve to exemplify the differences between us which are so much concern to me.

As you will recall, the problem arose in connection with my question on the goal of the paratroopers' mission. You replied that they had been sent "to try to save," and explained that their aim was to get the Jews to revolt against their persecutors. I said that I doubted whether in the conditions then existing, such uprisings could have saved people. I then said: Perhaps the idea was "to save honor." To which you replied: Both. We then exchanged a few remarks about our different approaches to the notion of saving honor. Your letter shows, unfortunately, that my comments could have been construed as suggesting that I was belittling the idea of saving Jewish honor. Naturally, this is not the case.

I agree with you that the revolt of the Hasmoneans, the wars against Rome, the acts of martyrdom throughout the generations, and a similar actions in our people's history, preserved our honor and helped make our national life worthy of being preserved and maintained. Such deeds excelled, among other points, in that:

- They thwarted the designs of our enemies to infringe on our liberty, our faith, our independence, our life.

- In most cases the individual (or the group) who took part in the heroic act had a choice: to sacrifice their lives or to accept the edict of the enemy as the price of remaining alive.

- By sacrificing (or being ready to sacrifice) the life of the individual, many lives were saved, or values which the enemy sought to eradicate.

Jewish uprisings in the ghettos during the Holocaust years did not thwart the designs of the German oppressor--to annihilate us--and were under no circumstances capable of doing so *directly*. (If combined with propitious conditions, such as existed in the Warsaw Ghetto, an uprising could signal the free world to mobilize forces to help, and thereby indirectly bring about a major rescue operation. But thanks to our very great omissions, the signal from Warsaw was not received and no help was given.)

Every ghetto uprising *necessarily* entailed much loss of life, in addition to those actually involved in the revolt. Because of this fact which was very pronounced in the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, not one responsible official in the Holocaust countries held up revolt as an "ordinary" means of salvation. The planners of the revolts always designated them as last-minute operations, [to be carried out only] after it

was clear that the-Jews in the ghetto were doomed to immediate, irrevocable perdition.

Far be it from us today to dispense advice retroactively to our wretched brothers who chose one way or another to inescapable death (in the absence of outside help). All the uprisers are martyrs, and revolt was an act of heroism. But equally heroic is an act, like "the last of the just," of one who gives his life in order to ease the final moments of his dear ones. This was the path chosen by tens and hundreds of thousands of men, women and youth, who of their own volition gave up their final chance for personal rescue and went "like sheep to the slaughter," in the words of those who criticized them from a safe distance.

The ghetto uprisings were not necessary in order to save Jewish honor. They caused the immediate deaths of many precious lives for every Nazi corpse. Had every ghetto taken the road of revolt, absolutely nothing would have remained of Europe's Jews who were trapped by the Nazis (with the exception of the very few who managed to escape to the forests).

Therefore, when you confirmed to me that young men and women from the Yishuv had been sent to sacrifice their lives in order to organize revolts among the survivors of European Jewry, I found this difficult to accept.

I take this opportunity to thank you again for the illuminating talk you granted me.

Respectfully,
S. Beit-Zvi

8

August 5, 1962
Mr. S. Beit-Zvi
95 Hashalom Avenue
Tel Aviv.

Sir,

As regards saving honor, I did not grasp the distinction you draw between different kinds of sacrifice: the collective act of suicide of those besieged on Massada also brought their nation perpetual honor.

So much for the theory, whereas in practice you did not take my precise meaning. Where I said "also" you have me saying "only." I said that the paratroopers were sent first and foremost to try and save, both to organize acts of sabotage, and to stir up revolt--all in accordance

with the circumstances and possibilities. From afar and away from the front and while the events were taking place--not now, when we are all blessed with the wisdom of hindsight and allow ourselves the luxury of prophesying the past--it was absolutely impossible to know in advance what would happen. The general assumption was that if we could succeed in breaching the front even with a handful of people--provided they possessed resourcefulness, daring and intelligence--we might perhaps generate the possibility of action partaking of both salvation and honor. At all events, we did not regard ourselves as exempt from this attempt, with all its attendant risks.

Sincerely,
Moshe Sharett

9

August 15, 1962
Dear Mr. Sharett,

Thank you very much for your letter of August 5. I take the liberty of replying to your contention about "the luxury of prophesying the past." I had thought, during our conversation, that you were persuaded by my comments on this topic. But evidently I was mistaken.

If the argument against retroactive criticism is directed against the critic, it may be justified in certain cases. In my own case this is a personal question without public importance. But this is not the case, I maintain, when those being criticized are the leaders of the nation and bear responsibility for its future. Leaders, I submit, must know what is *liable* to happen, even if things are not inevitable. The destruction of six million Jews was not causally inevitable, just as there is nothing inevitable about a "third round" with the Arabs, or about the annihilation of Russian Jewry in a new

version of the “Doctors’ Plot.” But just as Israel’s leaders do not cease thinking about the reasonable *possibility* of a third round, and just as my friends and I cannot ignore the equally reasonable possibility of the destruction of Russian Jewry, so the Zionist leaders were duty-bound not to disregard Hitler’s threat to destroy the Jews in Europe. It seems to me that Zalman Shazar was absolutely right when in December 1942 he placed at the head of his “Triple Ignominy” the ignominy of not knowing (“Why were we stunned? Who gave this movement.., which is obligated to be aware of all the possible dangers to the nation, permission to be surprised?”).

A few of my interlocutors noted that even the Jews in the ghettos did not know about or did not believe the stories about the destruction. This is understandable. The operation to destroy European Jewry was a well-kept state secret in the Third Reich. Goebbels’ vast propaganda apparatus was mobilized to deny, and to mislead people about the “atrocious propaganda.” It is hardly surprising that the ghetto residents, cut off from the world, did not know about what was occurring in the initial stages of the Holocaust. The Zionist leaders *could have* known about the events had they preoccupied themselves with this and had they been willing to believe what they were told. The fact that they were willing victims and unknowing abettors of Goebbels’ efforts certainly does not make them immune from criticism. The more so because such criticism is valuable for the future.

In fact, Mr. Sharett, “prophesying the past” exists, and in the most outrageous manner--on the part of “official” circles, shapers of public opinion, writers of history, and so forth. That prophecy is expressed in the first place in the anemic argument that our brothers in Europe went “like sheep to the slaughter,” and in the arrogant question: “Why did they not revolt?” As though it was up to *them* to fulfill the task that devolved upon free Jewry. In its “positive” form, this prophecy finds expression in extensive “corrections” of history of which the aim is, ostensibly, to defend those who need no defense. The Holocaust has become “Holocaust and Heroism,” the destruction is now “the Destruction and the Uprising.” Compounded by the political parties’ takeover of the past (*The Book of the Partisans*, one-hundred-percent Hashomer Hatza’ir, *The War of the Ghettos* published by Hakibbutz Hameuhad; and others), prophesying the past has brought about a situation in which a considerable part of our Holocaust literature is unfit for use. A war against prophesying of this kind, I submit, can be of great service to the past and the future.

Respectfully,
S. Beit-Zvi

Part One

THE INFORMATION DEBACLE

Preface

Speaking in a Histadrut Council session in early December 1942, Shneur Zalman Rubashov, who as Zalman Shazar would become Israel's third President, devoted his remarks to the "Triple Ignominy" that had been generated by the destruction of European Jewry. The First Ignominy was the very fact of not knowing. "Why were we stunned?" he asked "Who gave this movement, which is obligated to be aware of all the possible dangers to the nation, permission to be surprised? After all, we were warned that this would be the culmination of their reckoning with us. Pobiedonosdev said it, Lueger said it, and Hitler said it: they said it and prophesied it. So why were our ears deaf to the point where we, too, were surprised, did not know it was possible?"

Anshel Reis, from the Association of Polish Immigrants, who took part in the meeting, went further. Besides the accusation of not knowing, he spoke of the guilt of silence and suppression. He mentioned a pamphlet that had been published in London three months earlier, with a preface by Wedgewood and Zygelboim, that contained a detailed description of the atrocities. "Where were we? Why did our news agencies not report this? What did we do to stop the slaughter?"

Moshe Aram summed up: "Reis is right. For months, we--the Yishuv and the Histadrut and the *haverim* and the functionaries--have been *unwitting accomplices to murder*. Someone concealed things from us...and we went on living, arguing... and at the very same time a people was being destroyed!" (Emphases in the original press report.)

These strong words appeared in the newspaper *Davar* on December 4, 1942, two days after the conclusion of the mourning period declared by the Yishuv institutions following the publication of "authoritative reports" about the destruction of the Jews in Europe. It is a safe assumption that the paper's readers regarded these accusations as exaggerated, of the kind uttered by righteous people when they confess ("we are guilty, we have betrayed....," in the words of the Yom Kippur prayer), or such as people who have lost a dear one torment themselves with. To the Zionist Yishuv, loyal to its institutions, well acquainted with its leaders, knowing their dedication and vigor, it was inconceivable to take seriously the talk about "ignominy," let alone the idea of being "an unwitting accomplice to murder." Very possibly the speakers themselves used deliberate hyperbole. At all events, no opposition to the

establishment arose against this background (with the exception of the minuscule *Al-Dami* group), nor was this the issue or even one of the issues underlying the splits then wracking the Yishuv.

In the course of this book, we will see that the remarks of the three speakers were not exaggerated. Basing ourselves on reliable facts, we will attempt to prove:

(a) That the World Zionist Organization and its leadership succeeded astonishingly well in not knowing about the situation of European Jewry, although, as Rubashov argued cogently, the essence of Zionism obligated them to know.

(b) That this phenomenal state of ignorance was not the result of a paucity or absence of information, but stemmed from a desire not to know, not to investigate, and not to believe, even as numerous reports arrived about the events.

(c) That for months on end the Zionist leadership and the press in the Yishuv effectively served the Nazis' deception campaign which was designed to conceal from the world the facts surrounding the destruction and to downplay it as much as possible. In a crucial and critical period, the stand taken by Zionist papers reflected open and vigorous support for the versions put out by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, in the face of the "exaggerations" and "fabrications" of his opponents in the free world.

(d) That this position did an incalculable service for the Nazi campaign to destroy European Jewry and was in large measure responsible for the failure of rescue efforts which were or should have been undertaken.

It bears stressing here that these appalling acts were committed in good faith and with the actors' certainty that they were doing "what was needed" to the best of their understanding.* They were supported by the various strata of the Zionist public, which willingly followed its leaders and responded forgivingly to its mistakes and blunders. It was this mass support that generated the Zionist leaders' inordinate self-confidence, their intolerance of self-criticism. As in other instances in Zionist (and Israeli) history, the leadership sinned not by being unfaithful to its public, but in representing them instead of leading.

*This feeling was expressed years later in Moshe Sharett's angry comment to the present writer that the people at Davar were good and honest, and "no worse than yourself." (See the Introduction.)

Chapter One

The Secret Operation to Destroy the Jews

It is axiomatic that antisemites everywhere and at all times (excepting only unusual isolated instances) would be delighted if the Jews somehow were to vanish from the face of the earth, or at least from the proximity of the antisemites. Every form of antisemitism bears within it the seed of destruction. The disappearance of the Jews constitutes an “ideal” of Jew-haters across the generations, a “final goal” to which they fervently aspire. However, before this “final goal” becomes the direct objective of immediate actions, certain developments must take place which will help finalize the destruction decision in the hearts of the antisemites and their leaders. Further, special circumstances need to prevail which will enable the decision to be implemented without encountering insurmountable obstacles. The distinctive feature of the Nazis’ antisemitism was its derivation from racist theory. For the Nazis, then, the disappearance of the Jews was not to be effected by means of their religious conversion or their removal from social and economic positions, but by their expulsion or their physical destruction. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War the expulsion of the Jews from Europe (and not necessarily their physical annihilation) was the declared objective of the National-Socialist state. In the course of the war, apparently early in 1941 but certainly no later than the middle of that year, the destruction of Europe’s Jews became a primary war aim for the Nazi regime. The decision rested with one person, Adolf Hitler. What the decisive factors were that led him to issue the destruction order and who the persons were that exercised the crucial influence on him, are not known and may never be known. The comments of Rabbi M.D. Weissmandel are well taken:

“Who can know definitively who it was that spawned the initial thought advocating this notion of the destruction of Jewry? Did the idea really work its way down from top to bottom in the orderly hierarchy of these murderers--or is it possible that it actually began its course from below and rose to the top in the form of a proposal before once again working its way down from top to bottom in the form of laws and clauses and paragraphs and subsections. And who can know how insignificant was each rung on the hierarchical scale and who was the lowest person on it: whether it was the evil Mufti, the inveterate hater of all things Jewish, as Wisliceny always

maintained, or his fiendish German colleague who sought revenge because his craving for wealth was unsated.”¹

¹ Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, *From the Depths* (Hebrew), Emunah, New York, 1960, pp. 44-45. For interesting ideas on this subject, see Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933- 1945*, New York, 1975.

Abbreviations :

- CZA -- Central Zionist Archives
- YVA -- Yad Vashem Archives
- FRUS -- Foreign Relations of the United States
- Br. Doe. -- Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1929
- Ger. Doc. -- Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945
- Record -- Contemporary Jewish Record

It is possible, however, to elucidate the conditions which enabled the implementation of the murder plan and the principal means employed by Hitler and his gang in order to ensure its execution. The objective conditions involved an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances originating in a world war: when great nations fought for their very survival and questions of victory or defeat were being decided in the daily onrush of events; when public opinion fluctuated between apathy and awakening in wild swings of fateful developments; when the communications and information media were skewed and unreliable. Under these conditions--when the act could be isolated and concealed from the view of the world; when the destruction operation was accorded priority over vital wartime necessities (with respect to the use of the railways); when at the Fuehrer's beck and call stood a highly trained and disciplined apparatus, utterly devoid of any moral scruples--under these conditions Hitler succeeded within four years in murdering nearly six million Jews.

The paramount means, without which the exploitation of all the ancillary efforts would have been unavailing, and destruction on the scale that was perpetrated would have been inconceivable, was the *secrecy* of the operation. Manifestly, the plan for the total annihilation of the Jews was a strict state secret of the Third Reich. The Germans who effected it were "bearers of a secret" (*Geheimnisstrager*) and were obligated, under pain of the stringent Nazi discipline, to ensure that the plan remained unknown to all outsiders. Strict rules of conspiracy and of oral and written camouflage were observed by everyone involved from the heads of government to the last of the murderers. Correspondence between the collaborators in the scheme was subject to the same rules. Even in speeches delivered in the innermost circles of the Nazi leadership, euphemism and equivocation were the order of the day. The only exceptions permitted were in practical discussions relating to technical and organizational aspects of the destruction plans, and in reports by the perpetrators themselves. As this facet bears considerable importance for our theme, we shall now proceed to examine it in some detail.

The secrecy began with the source itself. As we noted, the decree of total destruction was contained in a personal order issued by Hitler. This order was apparently given orally on a date and under circumstances which were carefully guarded and which to this day remain unknown. Nor

is it known whether one order only was issued or a series of orders graded according to their decisiveness and scope. Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz, relates that in the summer of 1941 he was informed by Himmler that the Fuehrer had ordered the destruction of all the Jews in Europe and that Auschwitz was designated as one of the operation's centers. It was evidently at about that time that Eichmann learned of the Fuehrer's directive. Earlier, in March 1941, when the plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union--Operation "Barbarossa"--were being drawn up, Hitler had ordered the formation of "strike forces" (*Einsatzgruppen*) which were to advance together with the army and annihilate in the occupied territories the Jews, the Communists and the political commissars of the Red Army. This seems to have been a prefatory order for the general destruction of the Jews. Not long afterwards, the Nazi leader Rosenberg wrote in his diary that the Fuehrer had told him certain things which "I would not wish to commit to writing now but that I will *never* forget."² It is not inconceivable that he was alluding to the satanic plot to murder all the Jews, a decision which even Rosenberg considered too inconvenient at that time to be set down on paper. Seven months later, in November 1941, when Rosenberg was addressing a group of German journalists on the need to solve the Jewish question through total biological liquidation, the secrecy of the topic was underscored by the fact that no one was permitted to take notes.³

The Fuehrer's decision was thus kept secret and for purposes of implementation was passed on orally by the Nazi hierarchy.⁴ It bears noting that among the vast array of papers uncovered from the Nazi era, testimony of Hitler's explicit support for the murder of the Jews is documented in one instance only. The occasion was a conversation between the Fuehrer and the Hungarian Regent Horthy on April 17, 1943.

IMT -- Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal.

² Robert M.W. Kempner, *Profession: Annihilation* (Hebrew), 1964, p. 78.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴ An exception was the letter from Himmler to Eichmann which, according to Dieter Wisliceny, Eichmann showed him when he revealed to Wisliceny the fate of the Jews who were exiled from Slovakia.

Responding to remarks by the latter, Hitler said that because the Jews of Poland did not want to work, it was necessary “to deal with them as with tubercular viruses which are liable to infect a healthy body.”⁵ This admission escaped Hitler’s lips in the heat of the discussion, and even then probably because the Fuehrer was certain that the rumors about the fate of Polish Jewry had surely reached the Hungarian ruler.

The first document emanating from the Nazi leadership alluding to the onset of the operation to destroy the Jews takes the form of a letter dated July 31, 1941, from Marshal Goering to the Gestapo chief, Heydrich. The letter charges Heydrich with the task of heading up “the comprehensive solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe,” and instructs him to submit to Goering a plan setting

forth the operations required “for the implementation of the desired final solution of the Jewish question.” This letter, which constituted the formal basis for the Wannsee Conference, is clearly and distinctly devoted to the topic of the destruction. Yet the word itself appears nowhere in it. Instead we find the euphemism: “the final solution.”

At the conference convened by Heydrich within the context of executing Goering’s order, held on Wannsee Street in Berlin on January 20, 1942, the total annihilation of European Jewry was discussed openly and in detail. Various possible forms of destruction were considered, and special emphasis was placed on the need to refrain from stirring up the non-Jewish population. Yet even in the minutes of this meeting, labelled “top secret,” the word “destruction” is nowhere to be found. In addition to the concept of “the final solution,” the murder of the Jews is alluded to in the notion of “transport to the East.” These two euphemisms were to serve the Nazi apparatus throughout the entire Holocaust period. Indeed, the first of them was actually ingested and put into use by some Holocaust researchers.

The logistics of the destruction engendered a unique lexicon of codewords and euphemisms which were employed by the perpetrators. The letters “S.B.” on the transit papers of a prisoner meant that the prisoner was to be accorded “special treatment,” namely, that he was to be put to death. “Action,” “selection” and “segregation” referred to the rounding up and choice of candidates for immediate destruction. “Transfer of residence” (*ubersiedlung*): transport to the place of murder. Correspondence about the vehicles for asphyxiation by gas referred to “five-ton S vehicles.”⁶ Blueprints of the crematoria were labelled “washing facilities for a special operation.”⁷ The interdepartmental correspondence relating to the destruction is replete with similar euphemisms and codewords.

* * * * *

The operation to destroy the Jews was kept secret from the following: (a) Germany’s opponents in the war; (b) the neutral countries;

(c) Germany’s satellite states and the occupied countries; (d) the population of Germany itself; and (e) in particular from the Jews, both those who were designated for destruction and their brethren living outside the sphere of Nazi rule. It was absolutely crucial for the German authorities to maintain their secret vis-a-vis *all* these groups.

If Germany’s opponents in the Second World War, and the great powers in particular, had been in possession of advance knowledge about what was being implemented and what was being planned, armed with this

information, they could have--with the means at their disposal--effectively disrupted the destruction operation and narrowed its scope considerably, perhaps halting it completely in certain places or even in all locales. This is evidenced by the success of the efforts undertaken--albeit too late--to rescue the remnants of the Jewish community in the Balkans, and in particular the partial rescue of the remnants of Hungarian Jewry, in Budapest.⁸

These operations came very late in the day. An earlier effort would have required the Allies to be in possession of up-to-date intelligence, to be ready to believe the incoming reports, and then be willing to act on them. For the last condition to have

⁵ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, A.S. Barnes, 1961. p. 417 (hereafter: Reitlinger).

⁶ Kempner, p. 74.

⁷ Reitlinger, p. 150.

⁸ For the details, see Ch. 13.

been met in the democracies during the harsh circumstances of the war, substantial public pressure would have had to be exerted on the governments involved--whether their members were righteous, wicked or half-righteous. This would have been possible only if the public had believed the reports about the destruction and identified with its victims. Only, that is, if the treacherous attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and the bombings of London, Coventry and Rotterdam did not overshadow the slaughter in Warsaw and Vilna, in terms of concrete visual impact and in generating moral outrage. To obviate this possibility, the Nazis created a ramified system of concealment, deception and confusion. Their success in this area must have surprised even them.

Today, over forty years after the Holocaust, we cannot imagine how it was possible not to know or, in good faith, not to believe the reports about the destruction. Illustrative of the Nazis' success in the realm of deception, was the reaction of a personality whom everyone would agree was a friend of the Jewish people and could certainly not be suspected of harboring ill will or malice against the Jews. In *HaZman* (May 29, 1944) Yitzhak Gruenbaum related that the exiled president of Czechoslovakia, Benes, did not believe the stories about the destruction; he was certain that after the war all those in the ghettos and labor camps would emerge safe and healthy.⁹ This, it bears stressing, was in mid-1944, when the operation to destroy European Jewry was nearing its completion. The speaker was an exiled head of state who by dint of his situation and position was undoubtedly close to the sources of information about events in Europe. And the place was London which since the summer of 1942 had known no shortage of reliable reports about the annihilation of European Jewry. Yet Goebbels had managed to convince Benes that all these reports amounted to nothing more than atrocity propaganda...

Where the neutral countries were concerned, the Germans had pressing reasons to maintain a veil of secrecy. Reports about the systematic mass murder of civilian populations--not sparing infants, women or the elderly--could have proved harmful to Germany's "image" in those countries in which it had an interest, and indeed could have obstructed the destruction operation itself as well as thwarting other war aims. Had the true situation been known in the neutral countries adjacent to Germany or in the German-occupied lands, the governments there, as well as various public groups, might have been more amenable to smuggling Jews across the various frontiers and offering them refuge. One underlying cause of the appalling cases in which border guards in enlightened lands sent back to the German hell Jews who were trying to escape, was that even these countries considered the risk of death faced by returned Jews to be exaggerated; at all events, they reasoned, it was not worth taking the risk of aggravating their own relations with the immensely powerful Nazi state. It is not surprising that the campaign of deception and deceit launched by the offices of Goebbels, Ribbentrop and Himmler were directed primarily toward the neutral countries and the humanitarian organizations which were active in them. The camp for the elderly at Theresienstadt, with its relatively "liberal" regime, was specially designed at the Wannsee Conference in order to serve as a showcase for Red Cross delegations and other organizations and public figures from countries which were not taking part in the war.

Far more important was the preservation of secrecy vis-a-vis the German satellite states and the German-occupied lands. It bears noting that in all these countries, including Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia and the Ukraine--in the latter Jews were murdered in full public view--the Germans moronically persisted in concealing from the population the *purpose* of the murders and their intended scope. Even in these locales, where the situation permitted, the pretexts offered for the murder of Jews were, on the one hand, that no more than an extended pogrom was in progress, and on the other that these actions were actually aimed against the partisans and the Communists. The transports to the places of destruction were described as transfers to areas in the East. It was common knowledge that the conditions in these "areas in the East" were not exactly luxurious and that a considerable portion of the Jews would not survive there. But the secret itself was preserved meticulously: that the transfer trains and the wagon convoys travelled straight to the gas chambers or to the murder ditches where their occupants were

⁹ Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Destruction and Holocaust (Hebrew), Haverim, 1946, p. 117.

disposed of on the spot. Inevitably, however, in the countries mentioned above, the secret was

soon out. By the end of 1942 every Lithuanian or Ukrainian child knew where the Jews were being taken, as did every Polish *shmaltzobnik* who for money handed Jews over to the German police. If the technical details of the destruction process itself were unknown, they used their imaginations to fill in the gaps and their conclusions were not far from the mark. Thus, instead of execution by gas, they imagined murder by electrocution; extraction of the gold teeth of the dead was “supplemented” by the very widespread stories about the manufacture of soap from the bodies of Jews. Nevertheless, even in these countries the secrecy proved beneficial to the Nazis for the first year or two of the destruction campaign.

In the occupied *Western* countries and in the satellite states the strict maintenance of secrecy played was crucial for the operation of transporting the Jews to the annihilation sites. It is doubtful whether the Germans would have been able to move so many Jews out of Holland, France and Belgium had they not been able, until the very end of the war, to conceal from the local inhabitants the destination of the transports. The same holds true for Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as for the satellite states and Germany’s allies. For all that they were saliently antisemitic, it emerges that several of the satellite and puppet governments nevertheless evinced hesitation or even actual opposition when it came to sending the Jews to certain death. Whether this unwillingness stemmed from humanitarian grounds, from pressure wielded by various elements, or from fear of retaliation and punishment, is irrelevant. The fact is that such unwillingness did crop up sporadically and that the Nazis were compelled to overcome it not by convincing the countries in question of the “justness” of their deeds, but by concealing those deeds. From the wealth of material on this subject, we shall cite two noteworthy episodes: Rome and Bratislava.

Acting under Hitler’s influence, Mussolini in 1938 introduced anti-Jewish laws in Italy. However, during the war itself the Fascist leader objected to the idea of sending Italy’s Jews out of the country, and ranking personnel in the Italian army did much to save Jews in Italian-occupied areas in southern France, Greece and Croatia. In February 1943 the Duce came under heavy pressure from Germany to order his generals to desist from rescuing Jews. Mussolini, who by then was in possession of reliable information about the destruction, rebuffed the pressure.¹⁰ This situation persisted until Mussolini’s arrest by his Italian opponents and his subsequent liberation by German commandos. Following the Germans’ capture of Rome, they moved to round up the Jews for deportation.

However, the Jews, the Italian public and the Catholic Church knew exactly what was at stake. The result: of Rome’s 8,000 Jews (10,000 according to another version) the Germans were able to seize only 1,000 for transport to Auschwitz. The remainder found shelter in monasteries and private homes.¹¹

The second example concerns Slovakia, where the antisemitic government was all too ready and willing to accede to the German suggestion to expel the local Jews and seize their property. In the course of 1942 nearly 60,000 Jews were sent to Lublin and Auschwitz; about 250 eventually returned. It then emerged that the nemesis of the Jews, Prime Minister Tuka, was under the impression that the Jews were being sent to organized labor camps. For two years he pestered the Reich representatives in Bratislava with a request to allow an official Slovakian delegation to visit these camps.¹² It is doubtful whether Tuka himself did not know the truth about the murder of Slovakian Jewry from credible sources of some kind. Still, it is of interest that as late as February 1944 Eichmann was evasive about relating the truth: in place of a tour of the non-existent camps of the murdered Slovakian Jews he proposed that the Slovakian commission visit the show-camp of Theresienstadt. He writes:

“It is likely that this put an end to the concerns--in themselves totally unjustified--of various members of the Slovakian government.” A secret is a secret...

* * * * *

¹⁰ Kempner, p. 260.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 275; on the humane attitude of the Italians--leaders and common people alike--toward the Jews, see also Ruth Bondy *The Emissary: The Life and Death of Enzo Sereni* (Hebrew), p. 388.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 225-227.

We Jews are seriously hampered in attempting to determine whether the German public knew about the total murder of the Jews perpetrated by the German government. One difficulty stems from our justified contention that the entire German nation bears responsibility for the murder of our people. In the light of this, and in view of the impudent denials of thousands of certain murderers who pretend that they "do not know about" or "do not remember" the acts of murder, our attitude is one of suspicion and mistrust vis-a-vis every German who lived through the period and refuses to admit that he knew what was afoot. We find it inconceivable that all or most of Germany's eighty million citizens did not know about this vast operation, in which thousands and tens of thousands took part and hundreds of thousands if not millions benefited materially. So utterly convinced are we of this, that any opinion or even speculation to the contrary arouses in us fierce mental resistance, as though we were denying one of the moral linchpins of our relations with the Germans. However, so crucial a chapter in the annals of our people is the Holocaust, and so fateful for our future, that we are not at liberty to exempt ourselves

from examining thoroughly each and every detail in this horrific episode. And the fact is that the widespread view concerning the Germans' knowledge of the total destruction visited on the Jews is consistent neither with a close study of the facts nor with elementary logic.

In the first place, extensive knowledge in Germany about the ongoing murder of the Jews would have ruled out the possibility that secret could be safeguarded from the international community. The disruptions in communications between countries did not prevent the existence of a broad and many-sided network of contacts between Germans and the residents of the neutral and occupied countries. Had eighty million Germans whispered secretly amongst themselves about the destruction, that whisper would have burst out of the country via thousands of possible channels of communication. In the summer of 1942, when the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland sought confirmation of the destruction from Germany, he was forced to make do with a single individual, a trustee of the Allies, with access to the circle close to Hitler. There, of course, they knew.¹³

It is self-evident that if the German public at large had known about the destruction, that knowledge could not have been concealed from their neighbors, the *Jews of Germany*, who lived among the Germans throughout the country and maintained close touch with them until their very transport to the killing centers. However, the naivete and astonishing ignorance manifested by German Jewry concerning the fate that awaited them at those centers, are well known.

It should also be pointed out that widespread knowledge of the destruction would have been reflected in the diaries and other written records kept by tens of thousands of Germans during the war years. In fact, such references are extremely sparse, if not actually negligible.

As for the arrival of information via the opposite route--into Germany from outside the country--it is as clear as it is well known that such information had no effect whatever on the Germans. The reports that came in via the radio were relatively meager and were countered by a well-oiled deception system aimed at shielding Germans against the enemy's "atrocious propaganda." No great leap of the imagination is required to grasp why and how the Germans believed Goebbels while rejecting as "stupid fabrications" and "malicious lies" the few reports about the destruction that did filter through from outside sources.

The organizers of the destruction operation were well aware that secrecy begins at home, and they acted accordingly. In addition to the concealment modes noted above, an array of secret means was employed

to prevent the reports about the murders from becoming common knowledge among the German public. Some of these means were determined in advance during the planning for the operation. Others were introduced in the wake of practical experience. Vigorous measures for maintaining secrecy were instituted following the commencement of operations by the *Einsatzgruppen*. These squads advanced together with the German army as it invaded the Soviet Union, murdering the Jewish population they encountered on the spot. It soon became apparent that the secrecy in

¹³ Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1968, p. 3.

this case was not tight enough. In the initial days of the operation the regular German troops evinced considerable interest in the murders, gathering around to watch the "shows," photographing the deeds and jotting down descriptions of what they saw. However, the army soon issued orders which put an end to the unnecessary curiosity and the harmful chitchat. It was explained to the troops that the dissemination of photographs and written descriptions of the destruction operations constituted subversion of the army and that the guilty would be duly punished. The military authorities were called upon to collect all the photographs, negatives and written descriptions, and to hand them over to a certain department at general headquarters together with a list of the soldiers from whom the material had been confiscated. The army was also instructed to cooperate with the *Einsatzgruppen* in preventing soldiers from being present during the murder operations. Subsequently Heydrich barred photography even by the perpetrators themselves and ordered searches to be carried out with the aim of confiscating every photograph found in the area of operations of the units involved. The film taken by officially assigned photographers was forwarded to Berlin undeveloped as "Reich secret material."¹⁴

In this manner the secrecy of the destruction campaign was maintained even during the most "inconvenient" period--when it was carried out across broad zones of the battle front. It bears noting that the murder of Jews at this time was perpetrated under the guise of war operations and the drive against Communism; as yet no explicit indication had emerged of an intention to annihilate all Jews everywhere. Maintenance of secrecy was greatly facilitated later in the operation, when the destruction actions were concentrated in a few remote and closed areas, with relatively small team of murderers in charge.

Various evidence suggests that efforts were made to keep the destruction secret even from the staff of the Nazis' administrative apparatus in Poland. One such case involved the Jewish residents of the village of Mielec in the Zamosc district who were annihilated at the

Belzec camp in March 1942. Officially it was said that the Jews of Mielec would have to move eastward in order to make room for German Jews who were slated to arrive in their place. When the officer Richard Turk requested information from the Interior Administration of the Nazi regime in Poland about the current whereabouts of the Jews who had disappeared, he was stonewalled for three full months. Finally he "learned" in July that the Jews had been transferred and resettled in Russia.¹⁵

The testimony at the Nuremberg trials of Hans Frank, the Nazi *Generalgouverneur* of Poland, is not without interest in this connection. Frank related how he was personally prevented from observing the killing of Jews. On one occasion he travelled to Belzec for this express purpose. The head of the murderers there, Globocnik, showed him some Jews who were engaged in digging a huge ditch. To his question about the fate of these Jews he received a standard reply: they would be sent East. On another occasion Frank attempted to pay a surprise visit to Auschwitz. However, his vehicle was stopped at the entrance to the camp on the pretext that an epidemic was raging there. When Frank later complained to Hitler about the abortive visit, the latter told him that anti-Nazi rebels were apparently being executed at Auschwitz at the time. Hitler advised Frank to approach Himmler on the matter, but since it was evidently Himmler who was behind the original order not to allow him into the camp, Frank was back to square one.¹⁶

This testimony is not absolutely reliable. It is possible (albeit not very probable) that Frank invented the story as part of his attempt to escape the hangman's noose. It is also conceivable that Himmler's order stemmed from the uneasy relations that prevailed between him and Frank. True or not, however, the story in all its details is important as a symbolic illustration of the Nazis' camouflage policy in general and vis-a-vis Germans in particular. Hans Frank was among the chief murderers in the senior Nazi hierarchy. His representative attended the Wannsee Conference and demanded "priority" for Poland in the destruction timetable. Frank himself was known, among other remarks, for having told his senior staff--even before Wannsee--that the talk about transferring the Jews to Russia and the Ukraine was fatuous in the extreme and for urging them: "Liquidate them yourselves!" There is absolutely no doubt that he knew why the Jews were being concentrated at Auschwitz and Belzec and

¹⁴ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1967, pp. 213-214.

¹⁵ Reitlinger, pp. 251-252.

¹⁶ Hilberg, pp. 622-623.

what was being done to them. What he wanted--but was denied him--was to see with his own eyes how it was being done. Hitler himself told this confidant of his that any killing that might be taking place at Auschwitz was of anti-government insurgents and not Jews. Both of

them, Hitler and Frank, well knew what was transpiring at Auschwitz. But because this particular conversation was not a "business" talk on the subject, it was incumbent upon everyone, not excluding Hitler himself, to lie brazenly and preserve the "Reich secret."

(One is reminded of a conversation at the other pole of the destruction campaign. In the Kovno ghetto, following one of the mass murders of the ghetto inhabitants at the Ninth Fort, the head of the Judenrat, Dr. Elkes, put a rhetorical question to the local chief killer: "May I ask you where these people were taken?" To which Jordan replied cynically: "They were taken to live elsewhere."17)

To the considerations we have thus far adduced concerning the Germans' lack of knowledge about the destruction, we shall add three testimonies, given in Jerusalem, Bialystok and Warsaw. The first is that of the writer and journalist R. Binyamin, who would later head the *El-Dami* group. In *Davar* of July 30, 1942, Binyamin wrote: "Reports reaching us from the refugees in recent months, testimonies recorded in protocols, confirm that even officers of the Nazi army do not know what is taking place... Is it then so strange to assume that the vast majority of the German people does not know what is going on?" Since Binyamin cites this argument to underscore his demand that leaflets be dropped over Germany from the air, his testimony may perhaps said to be flawed because he was an "interested party"--something which cannot be said about the other two cases.

The second testimony is that of Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamruf, leader of the underground in Warsaw, Vilna and Bialystok. On February 17, 1943, he wrote in his Bialystok Ghetto diary that he had handed over to the engineer Barash, the head of the Judenrat, documents confirming that the Jews being taken to Treblinka were being murdered there. Barash needed these documents in order to show them to the *Wehrmacht* personnel at Bialystok, since "under no circumstances do they want to believe that the Jews are being put to death there. According to their statements and their belief, [the Jews] are being sent to work in Silesia."18 The tone of these remarks, combined with other comments in which he refers to "good" Germans (who advocate leaving the ghetto intact) shows that this sharp-witted and sarcastic writer was, in this case, not seeking to confute the notion that the Germans truly did not know; hence he had asked Barash to furnish the German troops with proof of those events whose existence they refused to believe.

The third testimony, more general and unequivocal in nature, is found in the literary remains of Emmanuel Ringelblum, who took upon

himself the dreadful task of historian of the Holocaust and fulfilled it faithfully until the very moment of his murder. On June 30, 1942, Ringelblum wrote: "Everyone who has had occasion to meet with a German is well aware [in the Yiddish original: *weissen gantz gut*] that the Germans do not know about the killings and the massacres being perpetrated by gangs of murderers outside towns or at killing centers such as Belzec. The occupier is apprehensive that the German population or even the German troops will learn about the slaughters. Therefore he arranges matters so that the killing of the Jews is done covertly."19

* * * * *

At this point it behooves us to determine with the utmost clarity what, exactly, was concealed from the Germans, what it was that they did not know. For the sake of convenience, we shall attempt to answer the reverse question: what the Germans *did* know and of what they were ignorant.

The Nazis made no secret of their active interest in the "Jewish question" and of their intention to "solve" that question urgently and thoroughly. The *Stuermer*, the

17 L. Garfunkel, *Jewish Kovno in Ruins* (Hebrew), Yad Vashem, 1959, p. 84.

18 Mordechai Tenebaum-Tamarof, *Pages from the Conflagration* (Hebrew), Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1948, p. 85.

19 Emanuel Ringelblum, *Writings from the Ghetto* (Yiddish), Vol. I, p.379.

antisemitic weekly that spewed virulence and incitement, continued to appear; Goebbels continued to preach his antisemitism as before; radio and the press were replete with reports and articles which continued to remind the population what they had been taught over the years by National-Socialist ideology and propaganda: that it was the Jews who were to blame for all the troubles afflicting the German people, the Jews who had brought war to the world, the Jews who were Germany's paramount enemy. Above all, they continued to hammer home the fundamental tenet of Nazi doctrine: that the Jews were not like other people but were a unique race of subhumans, *untermenschen*, to whom the usual rules of human relations did not apply. All this was "clear" and "known" to every German man and woman, and as a whole they assented to it heart and soul.

No secret was made of the intention to "solve" the Jewish problem by uprooting the Jews from Germany and from Europe. The German nation was told openly that the conditions of war afforded a suitable opportunity to effect the desired "solution." This was "prophesied" by the Fuehrer himself in January 1939. Three years later Hitler could declare with a victor's delight that his prophecy was being realized and that the Jews were no longer laughing at him. In two statements the Nazi leader made explicit use of the term "extermination" [*Vernichtung*] of the Jewish race." And the Germans heard and accepted what he said.

This much they knew and, according to all the signs, assented to. Yet here we come to the boundary between knowledge and non-knowledge. The German public knew that its government was engaged in implementing the "final solution" of the Jewish question. It knew further that this solution meant the disappearance of the Jews from Germany and from Europe. How this was being carried out, what the technique of the solution was--on these matters they relied on the government and gave credence to its explanations and commentaries. Goebbels told them that in accordance with the Fuehrer's directive, the Jews were being resettled in the East, and the Germans saw no reason not to believe him. It was claimed that the authorities were treating the Jews fairly--far more fairly than they deserved. The Germans accepted this with trust and appreciation. As for the reports about the murders of Jews which were broadcast by enemy radio, these were rebutted by vigorous and credible government denials. Moreover, as we noted, the German citizen rejected these reports, complacently and contemptuously, as atrocity propaganda. Deep in his heart the German knew that there was no basis for torturing himself with doubts that there might be some substance to this atrocity propaganda, after all. In the last analysis, the Jews were subhumans, so there was no reason to expect that they should be over-pampered.

The Germans were well aware of the deportations of Jews, and they knew about the existence of concentration camps where Jews were incarcerated. As for the mass murders being perpetrated in the camps and elsewhere--of this the overwhelming majority of Germans knew nothing.

Morally speaking, it is surely inconsequential that the Germans were unaware of the ongoing total destruction operation and had no knowledge of the techniques being employed. The cardinal sin of the German people against the Jews and against humanity lies in its having accepted and assimilated, as an incontestable and universally valid tenet, the thesis that the Jews were not human beings and that in principle they could be attacked at will. In the conversation with Horthy referred to above, Hitler likened the Jews to tubercular viruses which had to be destroyed. Later in that talk the Fuehrer offered "moral justification" for the murder of Poland's Jews: "There is nothing cruel about this if we remember that even innocent creatures, such as rabbits or turtles, have to be destroyed if they are disease-ridden."

In ongoing Nazi propaganda the Jews were more usually depicted as hyenas or snakes, creatures evoking fear and repulsion. Yet it is probable that during the actual perpetration of the destruction, a comparison with Hitler's "rabbits and turtles" would have been more

appropriate and more convincing, particularly for those who operated the machinery of death and encountered their victims, including women and children, on a face-to-face basis. The experience of the killing squads, the *Einsatzgruppen*, is highly instructive from this point of view.

As will be recalled, three thousand Germans were selected and mobilized for the special task of advancing with the invading army into Soviet Russia and murdering

Jews indiscriminately along the way. To round up the victims and have them brought to the murder sites, the squads sometimes enlisted the help of the regular army. Gangs of murderous Ukrainians and Lithuanians were extensively involved in every stage of the destruction process, including the murders themselves. Nevertheless, it was the *Einsatzgruppen* themselves who did the bulk of the planning, organizing and implementation.

Their officers were selected from among S.S. officials. Many of them held academic degrees and before the war had practiced the free professions, as lawyers, economists, actors, government officials, and the like. Heading them were Nazis from the S.S. elite, "idealists" committed to the National-Socialist "mission." Yet the three thousand soldiers of the killing squads were not Germans of some special breed. It is true that they were selected from the Waffen-S.S., but anyone known to be blood-thirsty or to harbor sadistic tendencies was rejected. Volunteers were not accepted. These three thousand were for the most part relatively older men who were unfit for combat duty. Many of them had families, and as several Holocaust researchers point out, they did not belong to the underworld and were not irresponsible or frivolous young people. They were normal, almost "typical," Germans.²⁰

The *Einsatzgruppen* were not eager to fulfill the duty assigned them, but once they assumed it they carried it out with precision and dedication. Many testimonies suggest that they found the scenes of mass murder disquieting and disturbing. In some instances their mental burden was relieved by having the Ukrainians murder the children, while the Germans executed "only" the adults.²¹ Still, their feelings did not hinder them from searching through attics and basements and checking meticulously every possible hiding place, in the hope of finding and murdering another woman, another old man, another child.

Indeed, their emotional response was wholly divorced from any form of moral outrage against the murder of human beings; it was perhaps more analogous to the notion of "prevention of cruelty to animals," as it were. It was akin to the uneasy feeling that strikes someone who finds himself in a slaughterhouse where large numbers of cattle, sheep and fowl

are being put to death. True to the consensus of the society, this slaughter evokes no sense of moral wrongdoing. But one is nevertheless upset by the sight of the death throes of the animals. Yet despite the feeling of personal revulsion, under certain circumstances this same visitor would consent to take part in the act of slaughter if compelled to do so.

The soldiers of the *Einsatzgruppen* "knew" certain things. For them it was self-evident that loyalty to the Fuehrer superseded all else. It was explained to them that they were part of an "historic" and "grandiose" enterprise for which they would have the undying gratitude of humanity. At the same time, they understood that their "laudable" action called for secrecy, for, as the Reichsfuehrer-S.S. Himmler had told them, "This is a glorious page in our history which we shall not write and which will never be written."²² But above all they were keenly aware--in line with the consensus prevailing in German society--that the Jews were not really people. It was not the death of the Jews that upset them, but the manner in which they were put to death. They felt pity not for the Jews but for themselves, for having to engage in unpleasant work and witness appalling sights. So they did what they did, some out of loathing, some unwillingly, but for the most part they "fell into the task" and became a gang of murderers with an appetite for their work.

These, then, were three thousand ordinary Germans. And surely there is no escaping the conclusion that, with rare exceptions, every other German would have done exactly as they did.

* * * * *

We prefaced this discussion with the comment that without secrecy being maintained vis-a-vis the German public itself, the secret could not have been safeguarded from external elements and from German Jewry. We have just arrived at the conclusion that the cannibalistic consensus among the German people, to the

²⁰ Hilberg, p. 218; Reitlinger, p. 183

²¹ Hilberg, p. 205.

²² Reitlinger, p 297.

effect that the Jews were not people, generated an atmosphere in which every ordinary German who might have been made privy to the Jews' destruction, would have acquiesced in it. Had this ordinary German been assigned the task of assisting in the murders, he would have done so. Yet the combination of these two assumptions is liable to create in the reader the impression that in seeking to conceal the destruction operation from the German nation at large, the Nazis' sole desire was to prevent the spread of information beyond the borders of Germany itself. Such an impression would be quite mistaken.

We shall begin with the simple truth that "every German" is still not equivalent to "all the Germans." We have seen how three thousand ordinary Germans became murderers once they were assigned this task

and after undergoing suitable "treatment." Many instances are known in which individual Germans or groups acquiesced in and assented to the destruction operation and the murders when they learned what was afoot. However, numerous instances are also on the record in which the revelation of the truth produced a profound inner shock, at least initially, until the knowledge could be digested. We can imagine what the spontaneous reaction would have been had the truth been revealed concretely and convincingly to all or most Germans, without the authorities being able to provide intensive individual treatment as they did for the *Einsatzgruppen*.

Moreover, the consensus which held that the Jews were not people, hence putting them to death was not murder, was partially assailed in one area: with respect to the Jews of Germany. Whereas no one doubted for a minute that the "Jews of the East" were subhumans, no such absolute certainty existed with regard to one's own Jewish neighbors and acquaintances, persons with whom social relations in various forms had been maintained for many years. From the abundance of evidence concerning the vacillating attitude of the Germans toward their Jewish neighbors, we shall cite, as especially noteworthy, the well-known complaint of Himmler and the demonstrative stance of Wilhelm Kube, the Nazi governor of Minsk.

In a speech to ranking S.S. officers, Himmler complained that while everyone knew and agreed that the Jews were loathsome vermin, "after all, each of the eighty million honorable Germans has one Jew of his own, whom he makes an exception and considers to be a decent human being."²³ As for Kube, his attempts to intervene on behalf of German Jews who were taken to Minsk are well known, as was his bitterness at the fact that these persons, who came "from our own cultural circles," were being treated identically to "the bestial rabble of the local residents."²⁴

True, it can be argued with some justice that Kube was exceptional in his liberal attitude (speaking in very relative terms) toward the Jews, and that he also protested against the "unnecessary brutality" involved in the destruction of the Jews of Sluzk and other local Jews (he made no objection to the destruction itself). However, what made his deviation from the Nazi norm especially pronounced, was his open assertion of his attitude toward the Jews of Germany, his readiness to clash with *Einsatzgruppen* personnel in an effort to protect six thousand Jews "from our own cultural circles"--moves which could have cost him his career had he not met his death at the hands of partisans.

A unique instance of *publicly* manifested sympathy by Germans for their Jewish neighbors is related in Goebbels' diary entry for March 6, 1943. Many Germans (wrote Minister of Propaganda Goebbels) gathered around an old-age home in Berlin when Gestapo personnel arrived there to seize Jews for deportation. Goebbels reveals that the German crowd "took sides with the Jews" and demonstrated against the deportation. These "regrettable scenes" forced him to intervene and postpone the deportation for some weeks.²⁵ It would be no exaggeration to say that these protesting Germans must have been moved by feelings sufficiently profound and powerful to override their fear and enable them to come out against the Nazi authorities at the height of the war.

Moreover, another anti-government demonstration, unlike the protest at the old-age home, is known to have achieved its purpose in full. The episode occurred in the summer of 1941, when an angry mob stopped Hitler's train in order to protest against "mercy killings" of the mentally retarded and the terminally ill. Hitler had sought to take advantage of the general confusion and tension generated by the war situation in

²³ Ibid., p. 297.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 161; Hilberg, p. 278.

order to dispose of the weak and the wretched. However, after having some fifty to sixty thousand Germans put to death, he was forced to desist from this campaign under public pressure, which reached its peak in the 1941 protest demonstration.²⁶ What these two incidents suggest is that Nazi totalitarianism was not able to reach full fruition in its ten years of existence, and that its rulers remained partially bound to their dependence on the ruled.

The necessity of taking at least some account of public opinion was undoubtedly one of the guiding considerations of Himmler and Heydrich when they planned the destruction of German Jewry. The difficulties this could entail found particular expression in the question of the *Mischlinge*, the descendants of mixed marriages between Jews and Germans. There were about 125,000 such persons in Germany, and the "science" of racism was mobilized to classify and categorize them. In accordance with the conventional division in the Nazi code of law, they were divided into two principal groups: Mischling, first degree (half--Jewish), and Mischling, second degree (quarter-Jewish or less). These partial Jews caused the devisers of the destruction considerable headaches. They were discussed and considered in detail at the Wannsee Conference and in meetings devoted especially to this topic. But no solution to the problem presented itself. At an early stage it was decided to grant "amnesty" to the Mischlings, second degree (some fifty thousand persons) and allow them, with certain restrictions, to mingle with the German

community. However, no solution was forthcoming regarding the half-Jews. It was proposed that they be sent to the destruction centers, but this idea was soon withdrawn. Sterilization was considered, but no inexpensive method to implement this on a mass scale could be found. The half-Jews were relentlessly harassed, humiliated and tortured. Many Mischlings actually carried false papers, purchased from Gestapo agents, stating that they had undergone sterilization.²⁷ Ultimately, most of the descendants of these mixed marriages remained alive and continued to reside in their homes in Germany.

That the guiding factor was not only concern for "German blood" which flowed in part in the veins of the *Mischlinge*, as has been claimed often, is attested to by another and more surprising episode. There were in Germany twenty-eight thousand Jews who had entered into mixed marriages with German men and women. They were wholly Jewish, carrying not a drop of German blood. And the vast majority of them were still alive at the end of the war.²⁸

There is some truth in the explanation offered by Raul Hilberg, to the effect that these Jews survived due to the Nazis' apprehension that their deportation would expose the destruction operation to the German public. However, this explanation would seem to falter with respect to the survival of the descendants of these persons, and in particular the seventy thousand Mischlings, first degree. Actually, it is doubtful whether the secrecy factor constituted the sole consideration. It seems probable that the two demonstrations described above, and perhaps other, unknown, events as well, made it clear to the Nazi rulers that the bitterness and outrage of the tens of thousands of Germans who were relatives of Jews and half-Jews, simply could not be disregarded. If this conclusion is correct, it serves to shore up a contention which was heard during the Holocaust period itself: that if the German public had been bombarded relentlessly with detailed information about the systematic murder of the Jews, combined with warnings and reprisal measures, the resultant shock and fear among the German population might have had the effect of disrupting the destruction process substantially.

* * * * *

If serious obstacles hamper attempts to shed light on the degree of the German public's ignorance about the destruction process, no such doubts or obstacles present themselves with respect to the ignorance of Europe's Jews about the fate in store for them at the hands of the Nazi murderers. Universal agreement also exists as to the crucial importance of this state of affairs for the success of the destruction scheme. If the

²⁶ Reitlinger, p. 132.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

²⁸ Hilberg, p. 277.

following lines and chapters assail conventional opinions in this area, we shall be referring to the fact that, with respect to certain places in Eastern Europe, it is an exaggeration to think that actual knowledge of the destruction was tantamount to salvation from it. For the time being, we shall consider the question in general terms.

Everywhere the Germans tried to conceal from the Jews their intention to annihilate them. The means of camouflage and deception were many and varied. At one pole of the destruction process, Treblinka was disguised as a way station of the train to the "East," complete with appropriate signs and other paraphernalia. The entry gate to Auschwitz solemnly assured those entering that "Work Liberates." There were soothing speeches delivered by a friendly-looking German at Chelmno, just before the Jews were herded into the asphyxiation vehicles. And instructions were given and soap issued to those about to "shower" in the gas chambers in the various camps. At one end of the transport the Jews were told that they were going to be resettled in the East; they were given fictitious letters from those who had gone before and had arrived at a place "where they feel good"; assurances were given of privileged jobs in the new places of residence. In the village of Kolo, whence the Jews were sent for destruction at Chelmno, the sick were specially picked up on the final day of the deportation, and the drivers had orders to drive slowly and carefully.²⁹

The Germans were particularly careful to maintain the secret vis-a-vis those Jews whose time for annihilation had not yet arrived, or had been postponed for some reason. Those who remained after each deportation were constantly reassured that they would definitely be staying "until the end of the war" because they were first-rate workers and a boon to the German economy. Jews who disseminated true reports about the destruction were put to death if the Germans found out. As a result, witnesses to the mass murders were loath to talk about what they had seen before large audiences. The history of the Holocaust is replete with stories of survivors of killing pits who fled to ghettos but told what they had seen only to those closest to them, if they told it at all. Naturally, this atmosphere was of considerable help to the Germans in keeping the secret.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that the Jews in the ghettos who did hear rumors about the mass-destruction campaign were highly distrustful of them even when they originated with persons they had previously considered faithful and reliable. Neither the ordinary Jew nor the leaders of the community believed the tales. A Jew who had escaped to the Shavli ghetto told how he had witnessed the murder of his

interlocutor's sister. Appalled, the latter rejected the testimony as an hallucination.³⁰ Judenrat personnel sometimes barred escapees from relating their dreadful tales--in order to protect their lives, and in order to prevent false panic (as they believed) in the ghetto. The figure of a man or woman who walked about shadow-like, with horror-filled eyes and lips tightly compressed for fear of talking and in despair at not being believed--this was surely a familiar figure in every large ghetto in Eastern Europe.

The phenomenon of disbelief in an atrocity which according to the tenets of human morality is not credible, is not unique to the Jews in the ghettos. An identical reaction typified the attitude of both Jews and non-Jews throughout the world vis-a-vis isolated or initial reports concerning cold-blooded genocide unexampled in scope and ferocity in the entire history of human civilization. When Ya'akov Kurtz, one of the first survivors to arrive in Palestine, encountered disbelief concerning his stories about events in Poland, he defended the reaction of the Jews in the Yishuv by recalling that disbelief had been rampant in Radom and Petrikov as well. "When we were in Poland, we heard rumors about the mass slaughter of Jews in Galicia and elsewhere; Jews who escaped from there gave us details about how Jewish populations were being brutally murdered in towns and villages. And we too did not believe the horrible news!"³¹

The difference between the situation of the Jews in the free world and the Jews in Occupied Europe was that the latter did not have at their disposal the means of mass communication (the press and radio) which the former did. Among the Jews in the ghettos the period of disbelief persisted for weeks or months until the accumulation of reports disabused them of every illusion and doubt concerning what had been done at

29 Dr. Israel Klausner, ed., From the Holocaust: The Extermination Camps in Poland (Hebrew), Reuven Mass, p. 29.

30 L. Shalit, Thus We Died (Yiddish).

31 Ya'akov Kurtz, Book of Testimony (Hebrew), Am Oved, 1944, p.7

Ponary to the Jews of Vilna and at the Ninth Fort to the Jews of Kovno, and until the remnants of Warsaw Jewry were shocked into the certainty of believing that the three hundred thousand Jews removed from their city had not been resettled in the East but had been annihilated at Treblinka.

In Germany and in the occupied countries in Central and Western Europe, the secrecy of the destruction was maintained until virtually the last deported Jew. From the Jewish perspective--that is, from the viewpoint of the prospects and possibilities of salvation--it emerges that it was expressly in these countries that the obsession with secrecy proved to have the most fateful consequences. With the exception of Germany, there were no destruction centers in these countries. In some of them the population was not antisemitic or was actually sympathetic to the Jews;

moreover, hiding places were not lacking had they been sought in the clear knowledge that the alternative to going underground was death. In certain places, explicit and unequivocal knowledge concerning the danger of annihilation would have generated greater readiness to help among the non-Jewish population, and on the part of the Church and various local institutions which, besides hiding Jews, could have placed obstacles in the way of the roundup and transport of the Jews--a case in point being Italy (as we saw above). Had the Jews of France, Holland, Belgium, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Italy and Hungary known definitely what awaited them upon disembarkation from the deportation trains, they would certainly have made more intensive efforts to ensure that they were not aboard those trains in the first place. Some of these efforts would have been successful. If the functionaries of the Jewish organizations in Holland had known what the final destination was of the transports of Jews from their country, it beggars belief that they would have cooperated with the German authorities in rounding up the Jews and organizing the transports. Even in Germany, with its law-abiding citizenry and its enmity toward the Jews, a few hundred Jews who went underground survived the war. Their number would undoubtedly have been greater if more Jews had resolved to live a "submarine" life (the term applied to the Jews who hid themselves) of suffering and danger, knowing what the alternative was to even those harsh conditions. If the Jews of Hungary had known what their leaders in Budapest knew, many of them would definitely have been spared through escape or concealment.

Yet it must also be stressed that, despite the immense importance attaching to the Jews' knowledge of the intention to annihilate them, that knowledge in itself, had it been available, would not have sufficed to prevent the overall calamity. In the face of the vast mechanism of the kingdom of the Reich, and its brutal and relentless operation, the Jews and their neighbors alone could not have thwarted the destruction scheme. The rescue of the small community of Danish Jewry, thanks to the heroism and nobility of the Danish people, was enabled by a rare conjunction of supportive circumstances, geographical and other, which are hard to imagine elsewhere. Nevertheless, in certain countries tens or hundreds of thousands, and ultimately perhaps even more, could have been saved.

In the countries of the destruction centers too--Poland, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic states--considerable importance attached to the Jews' knowledge of what awaited them. Although the relative importance of this knowledge declined as the destruction process gained momentum, a certain number of Jews who were hidden by non-Jews or who fled to the

forests were saved. It is quite likely that had the fact of the destruction process become known at earlier stages, many more Jews would have made desperate efforts to seek rescue as individuals and in organized groups. Some of them would have survived. A cardinal case in point, and one which to this day evokes astonishment and incredulity, is the first liquidation operation in the Warsaw Ghetto, an event to which we shall return.

What characterized these countries was the breakdown in communications between the ghettos and the outside world, and amongst the ghettos themselves. Postal ties were erratic or non-existent. To leave the ghetto without a permit meant hazarding the death penalty; so did travelling from place to place via train or any other means of transport. Information about events in one ghetto would usually become known elsewhere through rumors, some of them accurate, others fragmentary. For example, in many instances the Vilna Ghetto learned late and in truncated form about events in the Warsaw ghetto via broadcasts from London (many ghettos managed to listen to the

radio clandestinely). From the Jewish perspective, then, the constant flow of reliable information was an absolute imperative. As in all the countries of Occupied Europe, a center located outside the occupied zones was required to organize and handle information, along with a public Jewish body possessing resources and international contacts, a body which would regard the rescue of European Jewry as its paramount task, its very *raison d'être* in the years of the catastrophe. Given the situation at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, that task could have been undertaken only by the World Zionist Organization.

Chapter Two

The Truth Suppressed

As 1939 approached, the World Zionist organization (WZO) was at the apex of its organizational development. With the exception of Soviet Russia, it had branches or representatives in every country on earth where Jews resided. It controlled the World Jewish Congress, whose executive was comprised of Zionists and whose president, Stephen S. Wise, was considered a ranking Zionist. It had close connections with the Jewish news agencies, and even had its own news agency (Palcor). Available to it were considerable financial resources, and it maintained political ties--or potential ties--with all states excepting the Soviet Union. And above all, it had an active and dynamic base of operations in the form of the six hundred thousand Jews who constituted the Yishuv in Palestine and who were at the disposal of the Zionist Executive for whatever activity might be required.

Aware of its strength, the Zionist leadership was anything but reticent in asserting its right to represent the entire Jewish people and to speak on its behalf. Unfortunately, the manner in which this right of representation was implemented, was not always congruous with a genuine sense of responsibility for the fate of the Jews in whose name the WZO sought to act. Thus, even before the outbreak of the Second World War, the 21st Zionist Congress in Geneva saw fit to declare, as its president, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, put it, that "the Jews stand behind Great Britain and will fight on the side of the democracies." This declaration, which one month later was conveyed to the British Prime Minister in an official letter dated August 29, referred not to the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine and not even to Zionists, but, explicitly, to "the Jews" as such. Throughout the entire course of the war it was to this Zionist statement of intent that the Nazis always returned to prop up their canard that "the Jews are to blame for the war."

Yet even though a declaration admitting of a bellicose interpretation was issued "on behalf of the Jewish people," there is nothing to suggest that the Zionist Congress gave any thought to the need to set up a body along the lines of a central headquarters which would wage the war of the Jewish people or ensure that the Jews were shielded from the consequences of the declaration. The worried Congress delegates returned to their home countries, many of them to face torture and death together with their entire community. However, in short order the Zionist Executive came up with a narrow interpretation of the bellicose

declaration, to the effect that its referred solely to the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. Accordingly, negotiations were launched with the British government concerning the Yishuv's participation in the war, with all that this entailed.

The decision had been a spontaneous one, stemming from a special feature of the Zionist outlook. The essence of this feature was that Zionism and the Yishuv were adduced *in place of* the Jewish people as a whole. This egocentric perception caused innumerable mistakes and untold damage in the annals of Zionism, and it goes a long way toward accounting for some of the events which this book describes. We shall return to this matter in greater detail; for the moment we shall dwell on one detail of the neglect of the Jewish people. No *information* service machinery worthy of the name was established with a view to the fateful events expected to transpire in Europe and throughout the world--events which were the subject of no little discussion at the Zionist Congress meeting. And when, almost immediately, trying times did arrive, fraught with danger and calling for crucial decisions, not only did the Zionist

Movement lack up-to-date information about the situation of European Jewry, it was actually unable to find secure means to verify the appalling reports reaching it from foreign sources. This state of affairs, and indeed the movement's general tenor of operation in this area, are well illustrated in the testimony of Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who in December 1942 was installed as chairman of the Zionist "Rescue Committee":

"Faint echoes from the slaughter of the Jews in Poland reached Palestine by diverse routes in fall 1942. Since these reports seemed to strain credence, we queried the office of the Jewish Agency in Geneva and the Chief Rabbi of Sweden, Dr. Ehrenpreis. From Geneva we received general confirmation and from Sweden a telegram from which we inferred that fear of the Germans made it difficult to inform us about what had transpired. At about the same time Dr. Kott, a former Polish diplomatic representative to the Soviet Union, arrived in Jerusalem. From the [Polish] government in London he had received reports and reviews conveyed to [the government-in-exile] by the Polish underground which confirmed the general picture of the murder of Jews, incessant maltreatment, and mass deportations. However, detailed confirmation from Jewish sources was provided by a group of Jews, citizens and

residents of Palestine, who arrived at that time as part of an exchange." 1

The first sentence of this statement does not excel in its precision. At the time the article was written (winter 1944-1945) the Jewish Agency was still reeling under the fury of the charge that it had withheld from the public for months reports about the Holocaust. Since this accusation was based, *inter alia*, on a fact which Gruenbaum himself had discovered at the time (see Chapter 3), it stands to reason that he would exercise caution about publishing documentation liable to reconfirm the initial accusation. Sixteen years later the Zionist leader confirmed that the first *direct* reports from Poland had reached the Jewish Agency in 1940 from the Zionist functionaries Hartglass and Koerner who fled to Palestine via Trieste, and again in 1941 from refugees who reached Palestine from Vilna via Soviet Russia.² As for the reports which arrived in the spring and summer--not the fall--of 1942, they were hardly "echoes" and anything but "faint echoes." In July and August 1942 protest rallies against the murder of Jews were held in London following the arrival of detailed reports about the situation in Europe. The press carried reports, articles and proposals on the subject. August saw the publication of a pamphlet entitled "Stop Them Now," with an introduction by Wedgewood and Ziegelboim, containing a detailed description of events in Eastern Europe. Reports of these events, along with detailed accounts received in London from the Vale of Slaughter, were carried by news agencies and duly published in the Palestine press. They were read by the general public, and surely also by officials of the Jewish Agency.

What is most revealing about Gruenbaum's account is that, in order to authenticate the plethora of reports which accumulated over the course of several months, the Zionist leadership in Jerusalem was compelled to turn to its office in Geneva and even to a rabbi in Stockholm. Geneva might well have considerable information about events in Eastern Europe; but no one concerned himself about making arrangements to receive ongoing information from these sources. Only with the tidal wave of reports about the slaughter were the officials forced to seek such verification.

* * * * *

It was only natural that the Zionist Executive should serve as a world center for information about the fate of European Jewry. To that end it had the objective possibilities and possessed the material and organizational resources. Instead, it was, at least until the end of 1942, a

1 Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *Destruction and Holocaust*, pp. 204-205.

2 *Eitgar* (weekly), June 29, 1961 (Hebrew).

passive consumer of information services provided by others. For many, the Zionist leadership was perceived as a channel of information which was in closest touch with events. Although some international elements were inclined to consider such evidence overwrought and tendentious, as it originated with an interested party, it is unlikely that anyone even imagined that the Zionists themselves were not knowledgeable about the subject. Yet that was precisely the situation.

Worse: the fatal results of the war on the battlefield of information between Hitler and Goebbels on the one side, and the Jewish people on the other side, stemmed not so much from the negligence of the Zionist leadership in monitoring events, but principally from its actual *information policy*. We refer to the attitude of the Zionist Executive toward the reports reaching it from the countries of the Holocaust, and to the guidance it accorded the broad public in its sphere of influence. This was the cardinal sin of omission from the Zionist perspective--a blunder which was castigated by S .Z. Rubashov as the most ignominious of all.

Two sides confronted each other. Hitler and his henchmen decided to take advantage of the special conditions conferred by war in order to annihilate the Jewish people in Europe. They understood that a necessary condition for their success was to cloak the operation under a mantle of absolute secrecy. Manifestly, to maintain absolute secrecy in the literal sense of the term--meaning no one would know anything or hear anything--was unfeasible in such an extensive operation. Hence the camouflage and deception campaign conducted by Goebbels' propaganda machinery, calculated to sow confusion and incredulity, and to ensure that people did not understand, heed, or believe any stories they might hear.

On the other side was the Zionist leadership of the Jewish people. The declared mission of the self-styled movement of "catastrophic Zionism" which had arisen at the end of the 19th century was to assure the Jewish people a "secure haven." Established in the wake of the treason plot against Dreyfus in France, Zionism's evolution and growth were attendant upon the Kishinev riots and the Beilis blood-libel in Russia. Its spiritual and ideological underpinnings derived from the collective experience of the Jewish people in the Middle Ages and the disasters of 1648-1649. The names of the antagonists of the Jews cited by S.Z. Rubashov in his speech to the Histadrut Council served as proof that hatred of the Jewish people had not passed from the world and that the dictum that "In every generation they seek to destroy us" remained valid.

The war erupted with a declared and fiercely antisemitic leadership entrenched in Germany. Hitler asserted openly that "the destruction of the

Jewish race in Europe" was one of his war aims. But if the world at large thought (with some reason) that he was not necessarily bent on physical annihilation but had in mind the Jews' general disappearance, the Zionists--the advocates of "catastrophic Zionism"--could certainly grasp that if the possibility arose of being rid of the Jews by means of murder, the Nazi cannibals would not flinch at this.

This consideration necessitated intense alertness and the constant monitoring of developments--areas in which Zionism failed--but it also required the adoption of an intelligent policy vis-a-vis incoming reports. Given the clear understanding that the general tendency was toward destruction, every such report should have been interpreted accordingly. It would have been reasonable, given a Zionist sense of catastrophic danger hanging over European Jewry, to place the emphasis on the more worrisome reports which confirmed the destruction tendency. And even if reports about the destruction were fragmentary in nature and originated with uncertain or unauthorized sources, given a wartime situation, these reports should definitely not have been rejected or not taken at face value, nor should the public have been instructed to treat them with disbelief.

We shall see that the Zionist leadership did just the reverse. To that end we shall first survey the reports that were published and the guidelines issued to the public beginning in early 1942 in the two large newspapers in Palestine, *Ha'aretz* and *Davar*, and particularly the latter, the semi-official organ of the Zionist Executive. The fact that the paper's editor-in-chief was Berl Katznelson, a Zionist leader and theoretician whose moral sway over public opinion extended far beyond the paper's readership, lends additional significance to the items published in *Davar* in these years.

A reading of the wire service reports and other items in *Davar* from 1942 establishes that technically speaking, the paper cannot be accused of withholding from its readers information about events in the countries of the Holocaust. Although the reports are meager in the first month of the year, they grow increasingly plentiful

in February and March. The dreadful news carried by the paper in this accursed year, and the relative prominence accorded such items, expands in direct proportion to the passage of time. The following is a chronological survey:

On January 28 the paper's "Miscellany" feature, on an inside page, reported that the mortality rate among Warsaw's Jewish population was nine times the rate among the non-Jewish residents. July 1941 had seen the deaths of 3,459 persons; the Jewish birth rate was four times lower than that among the general population.

Two days later a brief black-bordered item appeared, citing an item in the Nazi paper *Warsawer Zeitung*, to the effect that "another 15 Jews were executed in Warsaw for leaving the ghetto without a permit."

February 1 --- "Jewish partisans in Minsk" and "Jewish companies from Birobidjan fighting in Crimea" --- according to a report broadcast on German radio.

February 2 -- Terrible mortality among Polish Jewry: 165,000 Jews died in 1941; in Warsaw alone 72,279 Jews died, of them 7,412 in July.

February 3 -- According to the German press there are 173,000 Jews in the Lodz Ghetto. The Nazi press writes that some 20,000 Lodz Jews are employed in productive labor.

A February 4 editorial refers to "a ray of light in Nazi-occupied Europe." In Serbia young Jews had obtained arms and had organized themselves. They had liberated Jews from a concentration camp and brought them to a place of refuge under the control of Commander Michalowitz.

February 8 -- A framed headline: *JEWISH BLOOD BEING SPILLED LIKE WATER*. The number of Jews in Vilna has fallen to approximately 40,000 from its previous 70,000. The Polish circles in London who provided this report add that various stories are circulating in Lithuania concerning the fate of the 30,000 missing Jews. According to one report, nearly 15,000 were transferred to work on the Eastern Front and the rest were imprisoned. However, many were gunned down, 1,000 Jews were executed in Trakai, 600 were murdered in the town of Niemenczyn, 200 in Eishiskes. All the Jews in the town of Zgierz, near Lodz, were deported, according to a report in the Nazi paper *Litsmannzeitung*. The ghetto had been razed and the Jewish residents expelled. The paper saw fit to add the following sentence: "The dreadful oppression and persecutions have not broken the spirit of the Jews in Poland." The same issue carried a report about the murder of captured Jewish soldiers from the Red Army and about the murder of Jews in Bessarabia.

February 9 -- A report from Kuibyshev by the writer Ehrenburg. A horrific account of the murder of children and old men and the rape of Jewish girls in Vinnitsa, in Priluki and around Odessa. The report was given the florid headline, "Lamentations, Dirges and Woes..." [Ezekiel 2:101. Close by was a wire service story in bold lettering which reported a slackening in the deportation of Germany's Jews due to the demand of the military authorities that they be employed in industry.

February 11 -- A report from Sweden about the electrification of the walls surrounding the ghettos in Warsaw, Lublin and elsewhere. Also noted was the transportation of Czech Jews to the already overcrowded Lodz Ghetto.

February 19 -- A report about the distress of Austria's Jews: they are forbidden to purchase coffee, cocoa, fruits, vegetables, honey, fats and milk, except for consumption by infants and small children.

February 23 -- A brief framed report-- "Victims of the Ghetto in Warsaw"-- carrying the names of six women and two men who had been shot while trying to leave the ghetto without a permit.

February 24 -- Another framed report, this time about seven killed in Bucharest.

On February 26 the entire front page of the paper was black-bordered, and the following day an announcement appeared about the sinking of the *Struma*. For the following two weeks the paper carried articles, accounts of demonstrations, reactions and speeches devoted to the *Struma* episode, along with descriptions of the situation in Romania and the other Balkan countries.

A report on March 1 told about the Transnistria deportations, with the numbers involved said to be in the tens of thousands.

March 16 -- A front-page report, once more headlined *Jewish Blood Being Spilled Like Water*: "The representative of the JDC in Hungary, Mr. S.B. Jacobson, who has just returned to America, states that according to the testimony of Hungarian soldiers returning from the front, 240,000 Jews were murdered in the Ukraine after being

deported there from Germany and the Central European countries. The mass murder was perpetrated by the Gestapo.”

Appearing next to this report was the following news agency item, datelined Moscow:

MOLOTOV NOTE ON MASSACRE BY NAZIS IN UKRMNE

Moscow (JTA) - Officials of the American legation in the USSR have devoted much of their time in the past few days to an examination of the material on the massacre which the German army carried out in the Ukraine, and in which according to Soviet lists 100,000 civilians perished, most of them Jews. The material, which was conveyed to the American legation together with an official note from the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, and which will be forwarded to Washington, includes details and descriptions by

eye-witnesses of the mass execution of thousands of Jews and Russians at Kiev, Odessa, Kaminz-Podolsk, Mariupol and other towns in the Ukraine whose populations are largely Jewish. In Lvov, too, some 6,000 Jews were executed following the Nazis' capture of the city. In his note Molotov stresses that "The murder of the victims was perpetrated by means of hanging, shooting, knifing, strangulation and the use of explosives. The Soviet Government will demand payment and compensation, and will also receive them." A special section of Molotov's note is devoted to the appalling massacre at Kiev (some 52,000 killed) during several days in the Jewish cemetery. A similar massacre was carried out at DnieproPetrovsk (15,000 victims), Kaminz-Podolsk (8,500), Odessa (8,000), Karch (7,000), Mariupol (3,000) and in seven other Ukrainian towns. Molotov concludes his note by asserting:

"Never will the USSR forgive or forget these atrocities." [Translated from the Hebrew.]

Afterward the paper continued to publish occasional reports about the mass murders. On March 20 *Davar* reported the murder of 86,000 Jews in Minsk and the liquidation of Estonian Jewry; the same day's paper provided details about the deportation of Berlin's Jews to the Lodz Ghetto. A report on March 22 said that 300 rabbis and religious leaders had been killed or had taken their own lives at Auschwitz. The following day a description appeared of the pogrom at Jassy along with a report about the deportation to Transnistria. On April 3 the deaths were reported of 1,200 Dutch Jews at Mauthausen. May 17 saw the publication of another list of killing sites in Lithuania and Yugoslavia; on May 31 there was a report about atrocities perpetrated against the Jews of Bucharest. On June 18 a quite accurate report appeared stating that no more than 20,000 Jews remained in Vilna after tens of thousands of Jews from that city were put to death.

On June 30 the paper ran a brief four-line item under the headline, "Terror": "A spokesman of the World Jewish Congress said in New York that at least one million Jews have been murdered lately in Europe by the Nazis, at least half of them in Poland." The following day it was reported that the WJC statement had been broadcast by virtually every radio station in America. From this point on, there is an increase in the published reports about persecutions, deportations and murder.

An item on August 16, based on a (tardy) report from Switzerland, recounts the suicide of Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council. A brief report on September 4 describes a London assembly, sponsored by the British Labor Party, to protest the anti-Jewish atrocities in Poland. Shmuel ("Artur") Ziegelboim, who spoke at the rally, gave a harrowing description of the destruction. Two months later, On November 1, *Davar* carried a report depicting an international protest meeting held two days earlier in London's Albert Hall. Ten thousand persons had attended. Speaking at the assembly, the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Sikorski, confirmed in the name of his government the facts about the ruthless mass annihilation.

On November 23, 1942, after a group of Palestine Jews had returned home within the framework of an exchange agreement involving Germans, the Jewish Agency leadership in Jerusalem issued a statement that it had received "from reliable sources detailed reports concerning the acts of murder and massacre against the Jews of Poland and Central and Western Europe." Details were issued relating to specific cities and to Nazi plans to annihilate the Jewish people in a lightning operation. A

campaign of awakening and protest was launched in the Yishuv; four days later, three days of mourning were declared.

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The picture in *Ha'aretz* is essentially identical to that in *Davar*. Again, the reports in January are meager but become more frequent in the coming months. Again we find florid or linguistically innovative headlines framed in black borders, although often the body of the report itself consists of just a few lines. In some instances significant reports carried in *Davar* are not to be found in *Ha'aretz*. Thus, for example, *Ha'aretz* ran not a word about the wire service report from Geneva on the murder of 240,000 Jews in the Ukraine and nothing about Molotov's note. On the other hand, reverse cases also occurred, when *Davar* refrained from publishing certain reports carried by *Ha'aretz*. The many reports emanating from London during the summer months were covered in two wire service items in *Ha'aretz*. On June 28 the paper ran a report datelined London stating that a delegate to the Polish State Council, Shmuel Ziegelboim, had confirmed in a special statement to the JTA the veracity of the reports published in the *Daily Telegraph* concerning the mass murder of Polish Jewry and the annihilation of 700,000 of their number, or one-third of Polish Jewry. The systematic slaughter was said to have commenced the previous summer in Eastern Galicia, spreading afterward to the Warthegau District and elsewhere in Poland. Vague reference is

made in the report to death by gassing. It was also stated that, by special arrangement, the BBC would from the following week devote part of its daily broadcasts to accounts of the Nazi atrocities in Poland. Two days later, on June 30, *Ha'aretz* carried a more extensive report, originally published in the *Daily Telegraph*, on the murder of the 700,000 Polish Jews, including a numerical breakdown by towns and a description of the methods employed. The report appeared below a two-column black-bordered headline: "The Slaughter of the Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland." This report, with its play on words in the headline [in Hebrew], seems to be the longest published in *Ha'aretz* about the Holocaust in 1942--at least until November 23 of that year.

A month later, on July 28, 1942, the paper carried a report bearing special import:

6,800 WARSAW GHETTO JEWS--EXECUTED?

London, [July] 27 (R) - The Germans have begun the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto with the intention of destroying them, according to reports received by the Polish Government in London. Announcements have been posted in the streets referring to an order to deport 6,800 Jews to an unknown destination in the East. It is feared that when they arrive at the site, they will be executed, as was done to other Jews who were deported from other cities in Poland. Near Wlodomicz in Eastern Poland there is a mass grave which is about a mile in length, containing the bodies of thousands of murdered Jews. [Translated from the Hebrew.]

We shall have occasion to return to this item. For the time being, we shall note only that the "R" in parentheses indicates that the report originated with the Reuters news agency and that the question mark was appended by *Ha'aretz* itself. We shall note also that *Davar* did not carry the report.

In general, as we indicated, no substantial difference is discernible in the information service the two papers provided to their readers. In both, this service was on a relatively small scale, in terms of both the number of reports and the prominence allotted them. Prior to November 23, neither paper devoted its lead story to any of the reports concerning the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews. The fact that there were instances in which one of the papers ran an important report which the other did not, or that one of them devoted extensive space to an item

which the other ran in brief and inconspicuously, serves to overwhelmingly refute the allegation that the paucity of reports was the result of faulty wartime communications. Faulty communications there certainly were. Yet our survey of the two papers demonstrates that the principal reports concerning the Holocaust did reach Palestine, most of them without any major delay. Had each of the papers made

extensive and appropriately prominent use of all the informative material which was conveyed to their readers, and had they accompanied these reports with suitable commentary and guidelines, the Yishuv public would not have been outraged and shocked at the Jewish Agency's November 23 statement.

But the country's editors, public leaders and opinion shapers did not believe these reports--and they did not want the public to believe them either. More precisely: until November 23, 1942, it was their explicit desire that the public not give credence to the reports about the destruction. The papers, whose task this was, followed suit with a success which would have been better put to a more noble end. All the reports published about events in the countries of the Holocaust constituted, effectively, not information but *disinformation*. They consisted of a series of items whose objective function was to habituate the reader to the large numbers relating to the murders; to implant in him disbelief regarding those numbers and regarding the reports themselves; to blunt his alertness and generate in him confusion and indifference to the events. This was accomplished through the actual manner in which the reports were edited and served up, by means of implicit commentary, but chiefly by the papers' overt and explicit guidance of their readers.

It was *Davar* which assumed the chief role in this matter. Let us now review what it wrought.

* * * * *

On March 16, it will be recalled, two reports were published in Palestine concerning the murder of European Jews who had been transported to the Ukraine, and concerning the annihilation of Soviet Jewry. These were the first comprehensive reports to emanate from sources affiliated with recognized and authoritative institutions. The first report quoted S.B. Jacobson, the representative of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Hungary, to the effect that 240,000 Jews had been murdered in the Ukraine after being transported there from Germany and Central Europe. This report was based on the testimony of Hungarian soldiers returning from the front. The second report, whose source was circles of the American legation in Moscow, spoke about the murder of

100,000 Soviet Jews in the Ukraine, and added a numerical listing of the number of victims in each locale, this according to the official message received on the matter from the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov.

Patently, these reliable reports ought to have generated shock waves in the Yishuv and galvanized the public into action. Indeed, although *Ha'aretz*, carried neither report, the other three Hebrew-language papers gave them both prominent space. Thus, *Haboker* led with the stories, framing its entire front page in a black border; the report from Geneva was carried in full, with special emphasis placed on the fact that "in an official document Molotov confirms that from among Soviet citizens alone, nearly 100,000 Jews were massacred." A black border across the entire front page was also employed by *HaMashkif* the paper of the New Zionist Organization (Revisionist-Zionists). In *Hatzofeh*, although the reports were accompanied by a question mark, they still received prominent front-page coverage. It was to be expected that this first appalling news about the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews would outrage the Yishuv and spur it to assistance and rescue efforts. (incidentally, the period in question was some months *before* Rommel's advance in Africa, when the imminent danger of Nazi conquest might have, as many believed, diverted the Yishuv's attention from the more "remote" distress.)

In fact, however, because of the vigorous action taken by *Davar's* editor, publication of these reports was transformed into a major signpost in the campaign of disavowal of the vast catastrophe. True, the paper gave the first report a black-bordered headline. But appended to the report was an editorial comment: "There is no doubt that the Nazi murderers spilled blood like water in the areas of occupation. However, all the large numbers cited from 'soldiers returning from the front' must naturally be taken with considerable reservation."

The reader who may have wondered about this puzzling remark had only to wait another 24 hours. The following day, March 17, he was given a reasoned explanation accompanied by detailed guidelines about the attitude he was to adopt toward the "large numbers." The column *Mashehu* ("Something") included the following piece,

which for the sake of historical accuracy we reproduce verbatim. All the emphases are from the original.

JEWISH BLOOD - - "UP FOR GRABS"

Even in a period in which the sword has been unsheathed and blood is being spilled like water, we must have mercy on every drop of blood and refrain from straining nerves unnecessarily. None of us will want to be consoled or to console others to the effect that the Nazi murderers did not harm or trample or run roughshod over Jews. They did so and they are doing so. However, the various *irresponsible* informants are continuing to kill Jews with their own hands. They scoop up every rumor, search high and low for every piece of bad news, for every lethal number--and submit it to the papers and the readers in blood-curdling form and content, and they actually "kill."

Undoubtedly there are those who will say: we here are too complacent, our hearts are closed and insensitive to what is transpiring there in the dark and ravaged Jewish world--and it is not to be regretted if a certain report makes us less complacent. But do the disseminators of the reports about tens of thousands of Jews and about a quarter of a million Jews killed and slaughtered, not realize that many people are not inclined to become overly excited about the facts and figures in these reports because their exaggerated character renders them *untrustworthy*?

For example, someone made a calculation based on "Hungarian soldiers who returned from the Russian front" and found that *240,000 Jews were killed*. He sent the story around the world and it made its way to us via the JTA--and the papers had a "field day." We know how trustworthy the testimony is of soldiers returning from the front, who boast about their great "deeds"--in killing people and Jews in particular. We also know that figures from such "eyewitnesses" must never be added together: one soldier relates that such-and-such a number of Jews were killed at this-and-this place. Comes another soldier and relates that a certain number were killed, and a third has yet a different version: "x" number were killed. And someone writes it all down, adds it up: a legendary total--and the informant cables the report.

We still remember the reports cabled from this country around the world during the days of the Arab Riots. How much exaggeration and inaccuracy marked these reports from

our little land. All the more so from a huge country and [a situation of] great chaos.

Take it easy, informants and journalists, in pouring Jewish blood into your copy!

DP

Perfectly plain: murders, yes; but not on such a massive scale. The reports about "lethal numbers" are the exaggerations of irresponsible persons. It was emphasized in particular that these reports were not to be believed and need not upset people. All this, naturally, on the judicious and faithful responsibility of *Davar*. (The initials "DP" were those of Dan Pinnes one of the paper's editors.)

DP does not especially mention the Molotov note, only alluding to it in speaking about "the disseminators of the reports about tens of thousands of Jews" alongside the disseminator of the report about the quarter of a million. It is self-evident that what applies to ten thousands applies equally to a quarter-million, and that these reports also fall under the not-to-be-believed rubric. Yet to be on the safe side, the Soviet message is given special treatment, evidently meant to illustrate the methodology of disbelief.

As will be recalled, the note of the Soviet foreign minister contained a detailed list of the numbers of Jews killed in the various locales of the Ukraine. Heading the list was Kiev, where the Germans had killed 52,000 Jews. Yet at the conclusion of the wire from Moscow the paper's editors appended the following remark: "We have in our possession a list from *Red Star* about the massacre at Kiev, from which it may be

gleaned that the majority of the victims at Kiev were not necessarily Jews...” (The ellipsis is in the original.)

Two days later *Davar* published the report from *Red Star* (the organ of the Red Army) on which it had based its reservation about the events at Kiev. Actually, this report makes it abundantly clear that the 52,000 persons murdered at Kiev were overwhelmingly Jews. True, the report notes that “not only Jews” were murdered, but goes on to explain that these were non-Jews who had been falsely alleged to be Jews. In fact, this is in one of the rare cases during the war in which a Soviet document, meant for internal consumption, states openly that the “Soviet citizens” being murdered by the Nazis are Jews. Attesting to this are the following two passages:

All the Jews residing in Kiev were ordered to report with their luggage to 79 Melnik Street, corner of 9th of January Street, the former location of the “Party Education House.” The order specified times for registration according to place of residence, and it was stressed that since the registrees would be taken out of the city, they were to bring with a suitcase containing clothing and food. The bastards tricked them. The intention of the hoodlums was not the evacuation of the city, but murder. As was subsequently learned, the Fascists demanded of those who showed up to inform on Soviet activists. They were beaten and tortured, and then taken to the Lukyanovka cemetery and shot. The beasts abused the victims. The children were buried alive, while the adults were forced to dig their own graves. The murders continued for some days.

The second passage:

Every German soldier, every Petlura vermin may stop any passerby on the street, say he is a Jew and take him to the Lukyanovka cemetery. Fifty-two thousand killed, peaceful residents of Kiev: that is the bloody toll of the butchery.

Immediately after this item which was supposed to refute Molotov’s note, the paper struck again, delivering another blow designed to invalidate the contents of that note incontrovertibly. Thus, the same issue of the paper carried an item, undated, which read as follows: “One Thousand Jews Murdered At Kiev. Palcor reports from London:

According to a war bulletin issued today by the Soviet legation, in the terrible massacre perpetrated by the Nazis among the residents of Kiev, one thousand Jews were murdered (and not 52,000, as reported a short time ago). The murder was perpetrated by the Nazis in an extremely brutal manner.

Once again the paper’s editors added an “editorial comment”:

“According to the above report from *Red Star*, it would be assumed that the number of Jewish dead is greater than one thousand...” (The ellipsis is in the original.)

What the ellipsis says is actually this: You see, Jews, how they are driving you crazy? Today they say one thing, tomorrow another. As we said: don’t believe it and don’t get excited. If something really serious comes up, we will let you know.

The mischievous wink of the ellipsis brings to an end the episode of Kiev’s Jews. In time, this episode would enter the annals of the Jewish people and the history of mankind as the massacre at Babi Yar.

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Davar’s artful war to obscure the clear and terrible truth must certainly arouse pity and rage. Yet for the researcher, the moral issue involved is matched in importance by the logical and psychological aspects. Logically, it is difficult to grasp how anyone could imagine that the representative of the JDC collected testimonies about the murder of Jews expressly from their murderers, as DP suggests; or that he disseminated worldwide the horrific news about the murder of a quarter of a million Jews on the basis of frivolous summations, as described by the denier in *Davar*. No less surprising is the manner in which the Kiev massacre is refuted. Where did the paper’s editors get the idea to discredit an official document of an Allied government in the war against Hitler? How did they fail to see that they were attempting to confute the information provided by the Soviet foreign minister with the aid of a report which actually *confirmed* his note? And then why did they complicate matters even further with the Palcor report?

Psychologically, one overriding question arises: How did it come to pass that the terrifying jest of DP and his colleagues achieved its purpose? For, as it turned out, not only did this prank fail to generate any opposition among the paper's readers and correspondents, it actually secured the assent of the other papers and quickly became a guideline for the entire Hebrew press in Palestine. In subsequent numbers of *Davar* we find not a word of objection--not in articles, not in letters to the editor, not in any other way, shape or form. Among the other papers, *Ha'aretz* considered itself exempt from having to react: it did not publish the reports from Geneva and Moscow, it did not publish the Palcor "correction"; it simply ignored the entire matter. What about the three other dailies--*Haboker*, *Hatzofeh*, and *HaMashkif*?

Haboker was one of the principal targets of the accusations leveled by DP against those who were playing up the "exaggerated" reports. Those reports, it will be recalled, appeared on March 16. On March 17 *Haboker's* readers must have been amazed that not one word of comment or reaction appeared concerning the appalling report which had been given so much prominence just one day earlier. The editorial silence was maintained on March 18, and the Palcor denial was published. Then, on March 20, a report appeared concerning the murder of 86,000 Jews in Minsk and about a mass slaughter in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia--but

once more without any comment. Finally, when ten days later the London *Times* confirmed the murder of 50,000 Kiev Jews, *Haboker* carried the item once more, but again without a word of comment in the form of editorials, feature articles or anything else.

As a rule, *Haboker* followed the routine of *Davar* and *Ha'aretz*, as described above. From time to time it printed various reports about the murder of Jews, albeit not necessarily the same reports that appeared in other papers and not necessarily *all* the reports published by the others. Occasionally the paper framed a headline or a report with a black border. It refrained adamantly from offering reaction or commentary. nor would it lend credence to "exaggerated" reports. If we did not err as we perused its back issues, *Haboker* was the only one of the five Hebrew-language papers to evince restraint and not express openly its reservations about the "large numbers." Nevertheless, its incredulity was manifest from the manner of its presentation or non-presentation of informative material.

The reaction of *Hatzofeh* to the comments of DP was, effectively:

We are at your command. On the day following the publication of DP's remarks, *Hatzofeh* printed an unsigned item whose content and generosity of presentation indicated that it was an editorial board statement. Cheeringly entitled "Bloody Treading," the piece read as follows:

We have already remarked more than once in our paper about the unfortunate habit of some of the papers here to inflate every bad rumor about the shedding of Jewish blood, to magnify the number of fallen victims, and to frame it all with a black border in order to blacken the black and intensify the impression. And for what? Does the Jewish people not have enough troubles? And isn't the Jewish blood which is truly being shed everywhere sufficient, that hyperbole and exaggeration must also be employed? This fault is remarked upon by DP in *Davar*.

After quoting DP's comments in full, the paper adds: "Will the informants and the journalists take note... Will they learn the lesson?"

The truth is that *Hatzofeh* published the report about the mass murder in the Ukraine without a black border--and with a question mark in the headline. In so doing it paid more heed to the admonition of Pinnes from *Davar* than did *Davar* itself. In the coming months as well (until November 23) *Hatzofeh* did its best to refrain from running black-bordered headlines, save for a few exceptional cases. Thus, it used a black

border on March 22 for the report about the murder of 300 rabbis in Poland, and did likewise on June 18 for the report about the murder of 60,000 Vilna Jews. The former instance is accounted for by the fact that rabbis were involved; whereas the second instance bears all the hallmarks of a deviation or negligence by the paper's

night-editor.³ As we shall see, the paper's editorial board was quite capable of dissociating itself quickly and decisively from such deviations and putting matters in the proportion it deemed correct.

Of particular interest is the reaction of *HaMashkif* the only daily which took issue with the editor of *Davar*. To elucidate where the disagreement lay and what the argument was about, we shall quote its reaction in full. In the issue of March 18, in the regular department called "Perusing the Press With Scissors in Hand," the paper ran the following comment, headlined "Jewish Blood--Up for Grabs":

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency has carried an appalling report: thousands of Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis in the Ukraine. In fact, there were two reports: one based on the representative of the JDC in Hungary, and the second--on an official message from Molotov.

Was it possible to do otherwise than to use this horrific item as the lead and frame it in a black border? (Even if there was a spark of hope in one's heart that the figure was exaggerated...) But this is not what Mr. DP in Davar thinks.

[After quoting an excerpt from DP's comments, the paper goes on:] One can only wonder: occasionally one receives (... as does Mr. DP) newspapers or bulletins from Poles, Czechs, Greeks, Yugoslavs, and so forth. Every report about the execution of *one* member of their nation (and all the more so when a larger number is involved) is prominently covered in their press and their announcements. For them, every report of this kind at times shunts aside even the most sensational war news. Because they, the gentiles, understand: their blood is not up for grabs. A precise account is kept of every drop of Polish, Greek, Czech, Yugoslav, etc., blood. And they also know it is an elementary duty toward those caught in the bloody pincers of the enemy and toward those still remaining alive, to *take vengeance* for the slaughtered and the killed--not to put out of mind what "Amalek did to them." More than that: to recall, to underscore, to stress.

And while Mr. DP entitles his piece "Jewish Blood-- 'Up For Grabs'" (with the words up for grabs in quotation marks), we ask: is Jewish blood truly up for grabs? [All emphases in the original.]

The emphasized words "take vengeance" reflect a significant and serious subject on which the Revisionists had staked out a position of their own. DP did not touch on this question, and *HaMashkif* adduced it in order to gird its argument in the debate. But in fact, the entire debate was superfluous. DP was not calling into question the need to publish and underscore every instance of the murder of a single Jew or a few Jews; *Davar*, as we have seen, followed this policy in practice as did the other papers in the country. As for the cardinal issue--the ostensible *exaggerations*--*HaMashkif* gave its assent by means of thunderous silence and unmistakable hints. From the outset the paper reduces the number of Jews murdered to "thousands"--not hundreds of thousands, as the reports from Geneva and Moscow indicated, nor even tens of thousands, but thousands only. And when it arrives at the parenthetical remark about one's heart saying that the number of dead was exaggerated, and adds the ellipsis-hint, the true subject of the paper's tirade emerges: true enough, we realize that, naturally, a quarter of a million Jews were not killed, that is of course inane. But what of it? Because such a report was received, are we barred from playing it up? After all, the Poles, the Czechs, and so on and so forth.

Yet another interesting aspect of the *HaMashkif* item is the style in which it is written. Relations between the Revisionist and Histadrut papers were then bitter in the extreme. Every disagreement was a denunciation, every argument was accompanied by vilifications and harsh accusations. While this behavior characterized both sides, it was naturally more discernible in *HaMashkif*, which was a relatively small paper and was in large part devoted to advocacy of opposition to the Zionist institutions. It was while this atmosphere prevailed, then, that an item appeared which on the face of it expressed disagreement but which actually reflected assent and was even marked by an apologetic air; and all this in a quiet sociable-professional, almost friendly tone. Following November 23, the style of the debate over Holocaust-related issues resumed its vituperative character. Even before that date

³ There was a second case of sloppiness in this paper: On April 21 it reprinted, in full, the two reports--on the murder of the 240,000 western Jews in the Ukraine, and on the Molotov letter--against which it had fulminated a month earlier, in the wake of D.P.

there were outbursts of rage and fury over specific topics, such as the question of reprisal against the Germans. However, with respect to information and “exaggerations” in reports about the destruction, the two sides took a uniform outlook and expressed it in

uniform action. Like the other dailies, *HaMashkif* continued to publish the reports about the murders, and, like them, refrained from adding commentary or reaction or from giving the reports credence. The paper’s readers, like those of the other papers, had solid grounds for feeling that the editorial board placed no trust in the horrific reports the paper was printing, and was not asking the readership to evince such trust either. In the future these readers would have an opportunity to see for themselves the degree to which the editors of their paper identified with *Davar* and with other papers in their negative attitude toward the “exaggerations.”

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It would be unjust to assume that the press forced on the Jewish public an attitude of indifference and alienation vis-a-vis the atrocities of the Holocaust. It would be more correct to say that the public got from its press what it wanted to get. The Yishuv wished to *defend itself* against the terrible reports by adopting a primitive mode of self-defense: not to believe the reports and not to listen to them. As Berl Katznelson put it at the Histadrut Convention on April 19, 1942:

“I do not know whether people here want to hear these things. Have you ever had occasion to be next to a radio when many people are straining to hear the news? The moment the world news ends and ‘our’ news begins a total change occurs in listening power. I am not complaining, maybe people have no strength to hear.”⁴

As far as it went, this was an accurate and faithful description. However, in that same speech Katznelson professed to be upset about the paucity of reports reaching Palestine from the countries of the destruction, and following the custom of the period he blamed the non-Jewish world for this state of affairs (“the world does not have much interest in telling us”). Yet the Zionist leader and editor-in-chief of *Davar* was blatantly disregarding the harsh fact that one month earlier two reports from reliable and authoritative sources had reached Palestine concerning the murder of 340,000 Jews, and his own paper had made these reports a laughing-stock and had used them as an anesthetic.

The public wished not to believe. Along came the Zionist leadership and told the public via the press: correct, do not believe. Some especially diligent journalists took the initiative and added: and do not get upset either.

As we have already had occasion to remark, the trouble with the Zionist leadership lay not in its failure to serve its public faithfully, but in marching together with the public instead of leading the way.

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The denial operation of March 16-18 in *Davar* may be regarded as the onset of a deep-sedation program which continued until November 23--akin to an initial injection which dulls the senses and fogs consciousness. Once the condemnation of the “exaggerations” was supported by other papers and encountered no opposition anywhere--not from the press and not from public institutions--disbelief and indifference became the underpinnings of the Yishuv’s mental makeup. For these traits to be maintained in the long term suitable conditions were required, along with additional “booster shots” to strengthen the process of dulling and stupefying the mind. The conditions were preserved, the injections were given. We alluded to some of these conditions above; we shall not attempt to categorize and summarize them.

The first condition for the persistent suppression of the truth was that no public body of any importance act otherwise. This condition was fulfilled absolutely and completely. Not the Zionist Executive, not any of the political parties, no cultural or

⁴ *Davar*, April 22, 1942; see also the *Writings* of Berl Katznelson, Vol. V, p. 53 (Hebrew).

humanitarian association, no *Landmannschaft*: no one expressed outrage against the gross and absurd and glaring fatuousness entailed in the rejection of reliable reports about mass murders only because they disturbed people's inner tranquility. Re[s]ponsibility for maintaining this condition rests, naturally, with the Zionist Executive, to which all eyes were turned. This institution, which dominated the Yishuv's public and political life, was itself silent and, it turns out, imposed silence on public bodies which sought its help and guidance. Yitzhak Gruenbaum relates how he dealt with his comrades from Poland who approached him at that time: "They would always ask me to sound the alarm and I would throw cold water on their ideas and cool their enthusiasm."⁵ In the atmosphere which prevailed in the Yishuv, a tendency to believe the "exaggerated" reports was considered to be so extreme that not even the most extreme among the extremists in public life dared risk a failure of such magnitude.

Probably not even Goebbels in his wildest plans could have elicited the kind of treatment the Hebrew press accorded to information about the Holocaust. Manifestly, the papers could not conceal from the public the reports which were being published around the globe. Indeed, as we saw, they did carry the reports about the mass murders frequently and at times even extensively. However, it seemed as though all the papers agreed amongst themselves to maintain certain rules whose upshot was that readers of these reports might grow angry and upset but would never be seized by genuine concern. Three of the cardinal rules were as follows:

(a) Hardly any major report was published simultaneously in all the papers. There were always one or two papers that disregarded even the most sensational items, and if these included any of the large papers, the public took this as a definitive indication that the report was unreliable.

(b) All the papers heeded the rule of never accompanying reports about mass murders with any reactions or commentary (save for those cases in which the reaction took the form of qualification or denial). This custom underlined the fact that the paper's editorial board placed no trust in the reports and attached no importance to them.

(c) Essays and articles relating to the distress of European Jewry did not base themselves on "exaggerated" reports. The more severe the tone of an article (a description of shocking persecutions, complaints about the apathy of the Jewish public, denunciation of the non-Jewish world for not helping, and so forth), the more powerful was its *calming* influence with respect to the awful reports about the mass murders.⁶

Hints and reservations expressed through tacit comments and mode of style, served to round off the general impression desired and the requisite atmosphere. The horrific reports seemed to constitute a section marked by morbid tension, which the paper's editorial board felt duty-bound to print. Dipping into its stock of stories, the paper on each separate occasion would publish the one it found fit. Patently, the editors seemed to be saying, these appalling tales bear no relation to reality. The paper, evidently, has no choice but to publish them, but the reader definitely does have the choice of whether to read them.

Reinforcing this attitude was direct and open exhortation to the readers not to believe the reports about the murders. Although such calls were few in number, their impact was enormous, and not only on the readers of the particular paper in which they appeared. We have already examined the direct call in *Davar* which opened the campaign of suppression. A similar call appeared in *Ha'aretz* at a later stage of the campaign. On October 15, in reaction to some rare glad tidings, that paper ran an editorial entitled "False Reports." The episode concerned a reporter, B. Zinger, whose wife and daughter were in France. From Shmuel Ziegelboim it was learned that the daughter had taken her own life and the wife had been deported. Zinger then discovered, from a reliable source, that both wife and daughter were in fact alive and well. The paper took the occasion to reflect on the plague of dreadful reports which were coming in, and which it agonized about publishing:

It is quite conceivable that there are no grounds for many of the nightmarish reports which have reached us from the area of Nazi occupation. Naturally, however,

⁵ *Haboker*, December 7, 1942--for details, see Ch. 3.

⁶ The same holds true for protest demonstrations that were held against the persecutions in the Nazi-occupied countries.

there can be no doubting that the Nazis' deeds are terrible. The truth is surely so bitter that there is no need to invent reports about imaginary acts. But it is human nature to exaggerate bad news and to embellish it as it is conveyed from one person to the next.

The paper continued:

It is worth taking this opportunity to remind the reader that *all* the reports from the areas of occupation originate with dubious and extremely uncertain sources, and the reader must treat them with caution and suspicion. Let us hope that at the end of the war it will become clear that most of these reports were as groundless as the report about the family of Mr. Zinger. [The word "all" is emphasized in the original.]

The exhortation "not to believe and to hope" is not wholly identical with the admonition "not to believe and not to become excited," as DP urged in *Davar*, although the difference is not vast. At the same time, the editorial in *Ha'aretz* exposes the elements of the dialogue with the readers which, in retrospect, can be seen to have existed in that paper and in other papers as well. The effect of that dialogue was to divide the reports about the destruction into two types. Reports of the first type were salient fabrications, and the paper did not publish them; should the reader come across them elsewhere, he must take into account that his own paper did not run them because they were unfit for publication. As for the second type, the paper prints these because of its professional obligation; but the reader must know that *all* of these reports are of dubious origin, and if they seem an affront to his reason or his feeling, he will be better off not to believe them.

In this way publication of the reports about the Holocaust became something like a catalogue of false and untrustworthy rumors. Instead of expanding the information about ongoing events, these items became exercises in alienation vis-a-vis additional reports. Instead of a primitive concealment of the truth by simply hiding the facts, came a sophisticated and profound form of suppression, engineered with the help of repeated operations designed to anesthetize alertness and dull the senses. An entire community sunk into a thick fog of mass stupor.

That this description is faithful to the Palestine situation prior to November 23, 1942, is attested to by an astonishing fact which admits of

no other explanation: Following the reports in March about the murder of 340,000 Jews, a report arrived in June which spoke of 700,000 dead, and immediately thereafter another report claiming that one million had been murdered. Detailed statistical breakdowns of the murders by country and by city arrived and were duly published. Between June and November assemblies of protest and shock were known to have been held in England and America. The Yishuv read these reports in the papers and heard them on the radio—and remained calm. Until one fine day the Jewish Agency announced that it was all true. Then the public was jolted awake from its deep slumber, and...began to blame the world for having supposedly concealed the truth.

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Naturally, the task of calming the public was not confined solely to the guidelines issued by newspaper editorial boards. An army of writers, correspondents and commentators injected the drug of oblivion into their readers' veins by means of soothing descriptions and counterfeit commentary. Speakers, lecturers, functionaries and public leaders of various levels were engaged in the work of thickening the narcotic fog which permeated every corner of the society: it's nothing... actually, it's terrible, but not all that much... once the war ends it will become clear... the people will turn up... most certainly..., things will work out...

An especially prominent role in misleading the public was played by the correspondents whose specialty was commentary on the Holocaust. One of them, Moshe Frager, admitted publicly after the shock of November 23: "I was among those who at first did not believe all the atrocity reports of the recent past. I did not believe them and I urged others not to believe."⁷ According to the testimony of Yitzhak Gruenbaum,⁸ the Jewish Agency Executive at that time seems to have considered Frager something of an authority on the destruction. This may account for the fact that his activity in the field

⁷ *Davar*, November 30, 1942.

⁸ *Eitgar*, June 29, 1961.

wielded considerable influence. But he was hardly alone in this, he was but one among many. What is most instructive and most characteristic is that in our perusal of the papers from that period we did not come across even one item, or even the hint of an item, which was directed against the trend of denial and suppression--with the single exception of the writer R. Binyamin, who, as a member of *Brit Shalom* was considered something of an anomaly in the Zionist Yishuv.⁹ The suppression was thorough, all-embracing.

The following story serves as additional proof that *external* elements, no matter how overbearing, were incapable of getting the Yishuv worked up. At the time a so-called "V League" was operating in

Palestine whose aim was to support the Soviet Union in its war against Hitler. Various public groups were involved in this organization, and its activity caused quite a stir. At the end of August the League held a national meeting which was attended by two representatives from the Soviet Union itself. As was customary in those days, the Soviet delegates were welcomed affectionately and admiringly, and people hung on their every word. At a press conference following the meeting a leading journalist of the Yishuv, Yeshayahu Kalinov, asked them about the murder of Jews at the hands of the Nazis. The question was explicitly couched in the form of a request--the aim being to elicit a response of encouragement and comfort, "for perhaps it will contain something calming in the face of the dismaying reports which have appeared to date." Peterenko, one of the Soviet representatives, rejected the request out of hand. He "is afraid that the reports he would give would not have a calming effect." Backing up his answer, the guest cited, as was to be expected, the most reliable and authoritative document possible, namely, Molotov's memorandum about the murders in the Ukraine.¹⁰ Since the reply did not fulfill the request, it was left dangling in the air, without any echo or reaction.

The terrible mistake of the Zionist leadership lay in thinking that in its war against the exaggerations surrounding the annihilation of Jews, the choice was between reliability and unreliability--and that it was safely on the side of reliability. Disastrously, the reliability was on the side of the large numbers, and the Zionist information system was operated in the service of the wrong factual side. Actually, however, the choice at the time lay not between reliability *per se* and unreliability, but between abetting Hitler or the Jewish people.

In conditions of war or looming war, reliable information about the enemy is not only a desirable but an essential commodity. This is especially true with respect to the weaponry at the enemy's disposal and the manner in which he intends to employ it. Yet it can transpire that the information itself, its publication and its presentation to public opinion, itself becomes a cardinal weapon. This was the case in the war between Nazi Germany and the Jewish people--a campaign which Hitler declared openly and which the entire world knew to be an integral part of World War II.

At the outset of this book, we offered an analysis of why the Nazis required secrecy in waging this war. We noted that the World Zionist Organization, which had not hesitated to issue a declaration of war in the name of the Jewish people, set up neither a command post nor an intelligence service of its own. Having no choice, it was forced to resort to

foreign information services. Given the world situation, two such services were particularly active--that of the Nazis and that of their opponents--and each side disseminated its information through its own propaganda machinery. Generally speaking, it could be assumed that each side would wish to publish and emphasize reports serving its own ends in the war and, concomitantly, to conceal or play down reports which might disrupt its war effort. Obviously, neither side was particularly scrupulous about ascertaining the reliability of each and every report which it fed the public, nor was this always possible given the circumstances and the short time available. However, when it came to the Jews, Goebbels' propaganda personnel were not satisfied with underscoring or concealing information they received from their own sources; they actually concocted numerous "reports" designed to hide the truth. Unfortunately, the Nazi demon found unexpected help in the Yishuv and its press.

⁹ See, for example, his article in *Davar*, July 30, 1942. There may have been additional manifestations that escaped our attention. However, the fact that we came across no reactions to such phenomena shows that they had no public impact.

¹⁰ *Davar*, August 28, 1942.

And it was the semi-official mouthpiece of the World Zionist Organization, the newspaper *Davar*, that excelled in proffering this indefatigable help.

There is one key factor which is sufficiently noteworthy to bear reiteration at this point. In the eyes of the non-Jewish world, the Jews were considered a definite side to the conflict--and rightly so. Moreover, many regarded the Jews as an *important source of information*. The attitude toward reports emanating from Jewish sources, and toward Jewish reactions to the acts of murder, was commensurate with this belief. When the Jews put out grave reports, the non-Jews were divided in their opinions. Some questioned the credibility of such reports because they originated with an interested party; others viewed them as reinforcing information precisely because they emanated from a source supposed to be intimately familiar with events. By contrast, Jewish reactions which tended to be dismissive of reports from the countries of the destruction were treated with all due seriousness and were uniformly esteemed. In these cases, friends and enemies, absolute doubters and potential believers demonstrated a rare unanimity: if this is the response of the Jews themselves, who have a vested interest, it stands to reason that the reports are exaggerated or, simply, made up.

Given these circumstances, more than a symbolic link may exist between the dates framing the period of *Davar's* sophistries with respect to the reports about the annihilation of the Jews in the Ukraine, and the onset of the first deportation action from the Lublin Ghetto, an operation which launched the next wave of the destruction: the liquidation of the majority of the Jewish communities in rural Poland and Lithuania.

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Yet another stimulant in the operation of disavowing the Holocaust was provided in the form of a public statement published by the editorial board of *Hatzofeh*. This paper, which had responded enthusiastically to the initiative of *Davar*, now decided to take the initiative itself and put forward its own proposals. Three months later it emulated DP's demurrer with an energy and a dogmatism that might have seemed amusing if it did not involve such sorry matters.

The episode occurred in June 1942. The latter part of that month saw the publication of numerous reports in the Hebrew press concerning mass murders in Poland and the Baltic countries. On June 18 *Hatzofeh* ran the report on the murder of 60,000 Jews from Vilna, which was attributed to an eye-witness from Stockholm. The report was framed with a black border and run on the front page; on June 26 the paper carried a follow-up, and four days after that came a detailed story from the London *Daily Telegraph* about the Ziegelboim Report. Although this more extensive item was shunted from the front page to page four, it might still have evoked terror in the readers had not the paper's editors intervened with words of reproach --and of reassurance.

The editorial in that day's edition of the paper, entitled "The High Price of Blood," opened with praise for the British news agency Reuters:

"for the owners and correspondents of Reuters were particular about every detail and were meticulous about ensuring that their reports reflected concrete reality, the truth taken from life and not rumors flowering from the air."

The paper then went on to settle some accounts with the Jewish news agencies:

We regret that we cannot mete out the same praise to our own news agencies. Neither they nor their correspondents or informants insist on accuracy and on truth in their reporting. They chase after the amazing tale, the sensation, and they often stumble by running reports which are remote from evidence and with informants whose evidence is remote.... A Jewish news agency has a redoubled responsibility to be accurate about every detail where reports concerning the Jewish people are concerned, relating to the nation's body and soul. Reports of this kind must never be based on voices and rumors, on hearsay evidence, on what one reporter told another; news and reports must be accurate and based on genuine solid and verified facts. And if accuracy and

authentication should prove impossible, it is better not to carry the report. It is better not to report anything at all than to report uncertain and doubtful items, or false stories. Indeed, in these cases it is not just *better--it is one's duty* not to report.

The paper goes on to conclude:

Therefore our news agencies are doing a disservice by carrying these urgent and frequent reports about the murder and slaughter of Jews in the countries of Nazi occupation. It is not that these reports are lies. There is no doubt that the despicable Nazis are doing to the Jews as their foul and impure will dictates, killing and annihilating them. However, when these reports arrive in the form of rumors plucked from the air, from one informant to another, one correspondent to another, they create the very opposite impression. For these reports repeat one another. What was published yesterday by a paper in Stockholm is today published by a paper in London. The result is that the killings and massacres assume dreadful dimensions, terrifying numbers, and the readers, be they in the world at large or in our own small world, grow habituated to these reports and read them with their morning meal and with their evening meal as normal, routine matters. But were the reports to be run accurately, backed by the responsibility of the correspondent and the responsibility of the informant, they might cause a sensation. After all, the slaughter in a small town in Czechoslovakia generated a worldwide uproar and brought sharp protests. Whereas the massacres and slaughters in Poland and Lithuania are failing to make an impression. Not because these slaughters are against *Jews* but because the reports about them are conveyed faultily, without the accuracy of truth or the responsibility of speakers and writers of the truth.

“So [the paper continues] our news agencies would do well to give the matter some thought and find the correct way to handle these reports which deal with the entire Jewish people. And until they find the correct and proper way, let them uphold the precept: Sit and do nothing, sit and report nothing...” (Emphases in the original.) The editorial is signed “L”-Mordechai Lipson, the paper’s editor-in-chief.

This constitutes a continuation of the *Davar* argument though with far-reaching conclusions. It was indicated to the reader unmistakably that

the appalling reports published in that same edition of the paper were incorrect because they originated once in Stockholm and once in London. It was due to their lengthy journey--and for no other reason--that these reports about the slaughter assumed such horrific forms and such awesome dimensions. The paper complains that the reports about the murders reach the reader day in and day out, morning and evening. By this logic, the reader’s reaction to the fearful news was liable to be numbed due to habituation. After November 23 *Hatzofeh* of course forgot all about its objections to the abundance of reports, and together with other papers sought to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust became the daily fare of every Jew. But in the meantime, at the end of June, the paper, angry and outraged, fulminated against the news agencies. If they were incapable of providing accurate reports from first-hand sources, let them report nothing. “Indeed, in these cases it is not just *better--it is one's duty* not to report.”

The following day, as though obsessed with the need to reinforce disbelief in the frightening numbers, the paper returned to the Holocaust theme in another editorial: “Whether or not the appalling numbers reported in connection with the slaughters and murders are accurate... it cannot be doubted... that the blood of our brothers is flowing like water, the blood of *myriads* of Jews, men, women and children, our spilled blood... But we here... have not awakened.”

We have emphasized the word “myriads” because it is of special interest in this context. That same edition of the paper carried a report from London about a press conference with the Jewish MP Silverman and with Schwarzbart, a member of the Polish Council in London. The two of them told the assembled reporters that according to the information in their possession, no fewer than one million Jews had been murdered in Europe. Uneasy about this figure, *Hatzofeh* again objected: not one million, not hundreds of thousands, but myriads.

It stands to reason that the pressure exerted on the Jewish news agencies by the Hebrew press in Palestine had an impact, particularly when the supreme institutions of the Zionist movement were behind that pressure. For the JTA the Palestine papers were important clients whose opinions needed to be taken under advisement, while for *Palcor*, they were actually providers of work. Yet it is unlikely that their influence was

all-embracing, since foreign news agencies also operated in the country. Reuters, too, which had been lauded by *Hatzofeh*, had a Palestine office which disseminated its reports among the local press on a daily basis.

However, instances undoubtedly occurred in which the Jewish news agencies tried to bend themselves to the wishes of their clients in both style and content. We have already seen how Palcor supplied the report from the Soviet legation in London which was meant to deny the note of the Soviet foreign minister. On another occasion, a report was edited in a manner calculated to be less upsetting to Jewish readers. The report in question concerned the onset of the major deportation from Warsaw in July 1942. The entire Hebrew press in Palestine carried the item, with the exception of *Davar*. Three papers--*Ha'aretz*, *Haboker* and *Hatzofeh*--ran the report on July 28 using the Reuters version. *Hamashkif* published it the following day in the JTA version. As we found various mistakes and deviations from the original in all the Hebrew versions of the Reuters dispatch, we have compared the original Reuters report, as it appeared in the *Palestine Post*, with the JTA version as carried by *Hamashkif* (emphases have added:)

1. The Reuters version in the *Palestine Post*:

JEWS OF WARSAW IN DANGER

London, Monday [27] (R).

The Germans have begun a mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto *with the intention of exterminating them*, according to reports reaching the Polish Government in London.

Notices appeared in the streets ordering the deportation of 6,800 Jews to an unknown destination in the East. Two trains packed with deportees have already left Warsaw.

It is feared that when they reach their destination, *they will be executed, as happened to the Jews who were deported from other cities in Poland*.

Near Wlodimicz in eastern Poland there is a mass grave which is about a mile in length, containing the bodies of *many thousands* of murdered Jews.

2. The JTA version in *Hamashkif*

POGROM IN WARSAW GHETTO

London 28 (JTA).

The Gestapo has launched a pogrom in the Warsaw Ghetto--this is a report which was received by official Polish circles. Last week notices were posted in the streets of

Warsaw "heralding" the deportation and transport of the ghetto's residents to the East. The first convoy of 6,000 persons is to depart within a few days. Two trains packed and crowded with *Jewish men* have in fact already left Warsaw.

Following a demand for an investigation, it turned out that after the Gestapo had posted its notices to the ghetto's residents to remain indoors, the Gestapo burst into flats one night, selected from among the tenants the *healthy males* who are fit for work, and after this action the elderly among the men were executed.

This was, evidently, an unusual instance in which a Jewish news agency tried to adapt its service to the taste of its client. At the same time, this instance affords additional confirmation that the Palestine press was not necessarily dependent on the Jewish news agencies.

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Hatzofeh's vigorous demand for "solid and verified" reports was hardly the epitome of intelligence or judiciousness. Moreover, it would soon be forgotten altogether once the Jewish Agency Executive ordered that the incoming reports be taken at their face value. However, at the time, in June 1942, when the editorial appeared, until the end of November, this selectivity in believing information was typical of the entire Palestine press of all shades and opinions. The question that arises, is: what confirmation did the papers' editorial boards require, besides that of the Jewish Agency, before they were willing to place their trust in the reports reaching

them? We have seen how a report which was attributed to a JDC representative was invalidated; how an official statement from the Soviet Government was rejected; how Soviet representatives at the "V League" conference who reiterated the Molotov statement were disregarded; how a number of reports on behalf of and with the confirmation of the Polish Government were ignored; how Shmuel Ziegelboim, the direct representative of the Jews who were being butchered, who spoke with his heart's blood and related numbers taken straight from the Vale of Slaughter, failed to make an impression; how the World Jewish Congress issued a report about the murder of one million Jews, also without any impact; how London and U.S. radio networks broadcast reports about millions of slaughtered Jews, and the Hebrew press in Palestine would not be budged: we do not believe, we are not impressed.

Whose confirmation, then, were the papers awaiting in order to accord the reports recognition and belief? This question, which may seem rhetorical, has actually been given a melancholy answer above, though one not without its own inner logic. The answer is: they wanted the confirmation of the Germans. Every report about the destruction emanating from a German source and bearing the confirmation of the Nazi authorities was received without question. Every murder admitted to by the Nazis was given prominent coverage, an emotional reaction, and extensive commentary. Before a report concerning the annihilation of Jews could be absorbed in the country and thereby become a public factor in the Yishuv, it required confirmation by the information apparatus of the Third Reich.

To see how one transgression leads to another, and just how far things deteriorated, we shall return to *Davar*. Following months of proffering no little help to Goebbels' machinery of deception by resisting "atrocious propaganda" and refusing to countenance large numbers, the paper now offered open support for the Nazi propaganda machinery itself. As was the case with the article by DP discussed above, this overt support appeared at a critical juncture in the Nazis' campaign of destruction.

July 22, 1942--the fast day of the Ninth of Av in the Hebrew calendar--saw the onset of the "Big Action" in Warsaw, which launched a crucial stage in the annihilation of the Jews of Poland and Lithuania. On that day announcements were posted in the ghetto stating that 6,000 Jews a day would be "resettled in the East." In the fifty days of the operation, over 300,000 Jews were removed from the Warsaw Ghetto. About three-quarters of them were transported to Treblinka where they were murdered immediately upon their arrival. The rest were sent to Majdanek, Trawniki, Minsk and elsewhere [elsewhere], and were also subsequently murdered. Unlike past operations, the Germans could no longer execute an action of this scale in the center of Poland without the world learning about it in short order. Indeed, the report published in the Palestine press on July 28 (which we quoted above in comparing the Reuters and JTA versions), shows that within five days, or even less, circles of the Polish Government in London already knew about this development and assessed correctly that the objective of the new deportation was total annihilation. At the same time, at Ziegelboim's initiative, a vigorous information campaign in London gained intensity with the aim of informing the public about current and expected future developments.

The worldwide reverberations of the information campaign compelled the Germans to adopt measures of their own in reaction.

Censorship was tightened, postal ties with the occupied countries were cut.¹¹ The German propaganda apparatus floated a series of denials, false accounts and distorted descriptions. For the first time since the beginning of the destruction, a two-sided propaganda war erupted between the Jews and their friends on the one side, and the annihilators of the Jews on the other side. In this campaign, the Jewish side was in possession of reliable and up-to-date information and had the support of leading figures among the elite of the British public.

In this duel the Yishuv in Palestine initially adopted a "neutral" stance, which was tantamount to supporting the German side. Those papers that ran the Reuters report (or the JTA version) carried no follow-ups. *Davar*, it will be recalled, found no room at all for this report. By its behavior, the Hebrew press seemed to be signalling that it was pointless to become overexcited.

¹¹ For a report on this, see Hatzofeh, September 25, 1942.

About two weeks after the commencement of the Big Action, *Davar* abandoned its posture of neutrality and moved openly to the side of Nazi propaganda. On August 7 the paper ran the versions of both sides: on the one hand the statement issued by the World Jewish Congress about the murder of one million Jews, on the other hand a communique issued by Radio Berlin denying the inordinate figure. The German denial was carried under the headline, "The Germans Deny But Admit A Little." The report said: "In the Nazi denial over Radio Berlin the announcer admitted that Jews had been executed as punishment for acts of sabotage, though no details were provided concerning the scale or scope of the killing." As usual, the two reports appeared without any comment by the paper.

Three days later, on August 10, 1942, a reaction finally appeared. In an editorial, *Davar* repeated the German denial and then proceeded to reveal its opinion thereof:

Some of the numbers concerning the slaughter of tens of thousands which were published recently seemed to be exaggerated, and they may well have contained some exaggeration. From this point of view, the Nazi denial may be trustworthy. [Emphasis added.]

The reader will undoubtedly take note of the refined style employed by the paper. It takes issue with reports relating to the slaughter of "tens of thousands," while exaggerations of the order of hundreds of thousands, or one million, are simply too outlandish to merit even a mention. Indeed, no such heady stuff had been seen since the superb piece

By DP.

Anyone wishing to excoriate the act committed by *Davar* will have good reason, and the right words will not be lacking either. It behooves us to examine how the Jewish public, together with its institutions and newspapers, reacted to these terrible words. With that end in mind, we checked both *Davar* itself and the other papers beginning August 11. We found no reaction whatsoever: not in *Davar* itself, not in *Ha'aretz*, *Haboker* or *Hatzofeh*. We found no article, statement, letter to the editor, not one line and not one word expressing shock, objection, or at least reservation. The various papers, institutions and organizations simply disregarded these two or three lines in an editorial, lines which, objectively speaking, it is difficult not to categorize as a knife in the back of the Jews facing annihilation (and a knife in the back of Shmuel Ziegelboim, in both the figurative and literal senses).

* * * * *

We turned to *Hamashkif* in a final hope of finding a respectable reaction; as we noted, this paper conducted a continual ideological battle with the papers of the "old" Zionist Organization. It ran several departments which were devoted exclusively to monitoring--and issuing furious responses to--comments of other papers and of functionaries. One such column, scathingly entitled "Rot in the House of Jacob," was written by the Revisionist leader Aba Achimeir, using the pen name "A. Shamai." *Davar* now seemed to be going out of its way to prepare material which was grist for Shamai's mill.

At all events, we found no direct response to *Davar's* deed. Still, *Hamashkif* did come up with an unequivocal reaction, albeit one which was indirect. On August 25, two weeks after the *Davar* editorial appeared, *Hamashkif* ran the following editorial entitled "Let's Examine the Honesty of the Reports":

The Nazi occupation zone is as a closed book to us, no one can leave and no one can enter, and no authoritative report emanates from there. Everything that is related about the life of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania and in the German-occupied areas of Russia, stems from unauthorized sources, and its degree of accuracy calls for careful consideration. Day in and day out the Palestine press publishes atrocity reports concerning the mass killing of Jews in the cities and towns of Eastern Europe. The numbers begin in the thousands and reach tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands. We

do not doubt for a moment that the Nazi beast of prey is running absolutely wild or that the Gestapo corps is pouring the full measure of its wrath on the Jewish population. To our great pain, there is no basis for hoping that Hitler's henchmen will spare the Jews throughout the occupation zones.

However, expressly because millions of Jews reside in all the countries of the occupation and have relatives in Palestine who are anxious about their fate and await news of them with bated breath, greater caution must be exercised with respect to the reports being published by the [news] agencies.

The impossibility of verifying the accuracy of the information is undoubtedly leading to the publication of reports not all of which are consistent with reality. One day, for example, a report was published stating that the Nazis had ordered the deportation of 100,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto and that the leaders of the Jewish community there had chosen to take their own lives rather than draw up the lists of candidates for deportation. The following day saw [a report] that the Jewish population in the Warsaw Ghetto had increased lately from half a million to 600,000 and that the Nazis were transferring to Warsaw the Jews of the [outlying] towns, where no ghettos exist. And just a short time ago, 3,500 Gur Jews were expelled from their town and thrown into the Warsaw Ghetto. These two reports are contradictory. Which is correct?

Likewise, all the other reports originating in the occupation zones are devoid of an authorized source. Only yesterday a Russian commander, who escaped from the Germans, was quoted as saying that in the Lithuanian city of *Shabli*, a Jewish metropolitan center, the entire Jewish population was destroyed. This sensational item greatly confounded former Lithuanians in this country who have relatives in that city. The question arises: Are we permitted to augment the pain and the grief of these families without being certain that the dreadful reports are actually true?

We have no complaints against the news agencies, which are fulfilling their journalistic duty and recording every rumor about the fate of our brethren in the Nazified diaspora. However, the responsible institutions of the Jewish people are duty-bound to look for ways to collect information about the

fate of the Jews in the occupied zones from more authoritative sources and not base themselves on the testimonies of passersby.

Even today, when the world is divided into two warring camps, there are certain countries which still maintain more accurate channels of information. Would Sweden refuse a request, for example, to "represent" the interests of the Jewish population in the occupied territories and to obtain information through more direct means? And could not the International *Red Cross* be of help in such an enterprise? It seems to us that even the *Vatican* could serve as a more accurate source of information about the fate of the Jews and the number of killed and slaughtered.

Our fate is miserable and bitter enough without having to heap pain on our pain and to keep harping on unverified numbers of the dead and the tortured by the Nazi barbarians. [Emphases in the original.]

To each paper, its own style; to each, its own version of the "booster shot." Like other papers, *Hamashkif* was unable to restrain itself, broke its silence and openly called on its readers to remain calm, not to add more pain. Like other papers, *Hamashkif* scores the reliability of the reports emanating from the Soviet Government, the Polish Government, the JDC and Ziegelboim. It is bewildered by the contradictions between these reports and other reports, and is unable to reconcile them. Like other papers, *Hamashkif* learned very quickly after November 23 how to overcome these contradictions in a simple and natural way: to believe the Allies and not to believe Goebbels. But on August 25, the paper, together with other papers, duped itself into believing that objective information concerning a clearcut war topic such as the destruction of the Jews could be obtained "through more direct means" via the Swedish Government--from the Germans. For this is the only possible interpretation of the proposal to seek information with the help of the Swedes, if we rule out the absurd possibility that the writer intended for the Swedish Government to appoint special attaches who would be present at the annihilation operations.¹² Just as there was unanimity of opinion that the Germans were a source of objective information, so, too,

¹² The proposal to request a neutral country to declare itself the representative of the Jewish people was worthy of attention. The idea of requesting information through the Vatican and the Red Cross was also sound. But it was naive to believe that these sources would obtain information by "more direct" means than the Polish or Soviet governments or Ziegelboim.

there was not one word of condemnation or reservation with respect to *Davar's* deed of August 10.

To sum up: The campaign of disavowal of information about the Holocaust of European Jewry, which was launched in *Davar* on March 16

and reached its nadir on August 10, 1942, gained the full and active support of the other four Hebrew-language dailies. Three of them--*Ha'aretz*, *Hatzofeh* and *Hamashkif* expressed their approval explicitly in editorials. The fourth, *Haboker*, while it ran no special editorials on the subject, backed the disavowal line in practice through its information policy. To the degree that these papers represented the parties, organizations and circles which backed them, and to the degree that they reflected the public life of the country, the supposition is confirmed that the Jewish public in Palestine was in the grip of a hypnotic trance of tranquility and of disbelief vis-a-vis the horrific tidings concerning the fate of their brethren in Occupied Europe.

Let us return to *Davar*. Its overt support for Goebbels in his war against Ziegelboim left its mark on the paper's style. Even earlier, the paper ran without reservation reports from German sources--and it is quite discernible that they preferred these over other sources, since they reinforced mistrust of the "exaggerations." Now, following the guidelines contained in the editorial of August 10, the paper's correspondents and writers seemed to consider it requisite to note particularly from time to time that they were basing themselves on communiques from Berlin and even to stress the praiseworthy reliability of these reports. On September 1, Moshe Frager gave an enthusiastic account of the high birth rate among Warsaw's Jews--according to German data. He added at once that "the German calculations published to date in the field of Jewish demography have been more or less correct." This on September 1, eleven days before the end of the Big Action about which Ziegelboim had warned and which had been totally denied by Goebbels and his henchmen. On November 8 the paper published a report about a meeting of the board of the United Committee for the Aid of Polish Jewry. This article was full-fledged Nazi propaganda regarding the ostensible purpose underlying the transport of Jews to Russia and the Ukraine. "The direction," it said, "is to make use of the Jews" and put them to work on behalf of the Reich. Various other details were added, and it was noted in particular that this information was being supplied "according to German statistics which are faithful in these instances." Numerous examples could be provided of how the paper relied on "faithful" sources from Berlin, from Cracow and from Litzmannstadt [Lodz].

The question that presents itself is: What brought *Davar* to this state of affairs? How did the paper of Berl Katznelson become a help and a prop for Nazi propaganda? In our view, this was a deterioration which resulted from an unfortunate combination of circumstances against a

backdrop of political guidance. The paper's standing in the country and in the Zionist movement, and the fact that it was headed by a prominent figure who was known as a thinker par excellence and as a upright person--this fact, together with the ideational-spiritual development of Zionism (which we shall discuss in the chapters to come) exacerbated the ramifications of the deterioration and transformed it into a general obstacle of the Yishuv. We have no detailed information about internal developments in the paper, nor would such information appear to be crucial for the purposes of this study. We shall make do, then, with one question which we believe is particularly noteworthy: the role and responsibility of Berl Katznelson himself.

As we noted, the World Zionist Organization entered the war without setting up a campaign headquarters and without formulating an information policy vis-a-vis the enemy. As far as is known, this question did not even come up for discussion, and no one had the patience to pause and consider it even when it became urgent and vital. In the absence of an authoritative policy, each paper in the country acted as its own understanding or its editors' feeling dictated. At the same time, it stands to reason that when it came to being in possession of information, greater consideration was accorded the large papers, those which were closer to the Yishuv's institutions and the Zionist movement. We may assume that *Davar*, whose editor-in-chief was considered reliable and was known to be well-connected in the political hierarchy [hierarchy], was particularly trusted.

Two months after the outbreak of the war, on Friday, October 29, 1939, *Davar* ran a major article by the respected writer and journalist, Ya'akov Rabinowiz. It was entitled

“Rumors Are Blossoming,” and its tone was one of absolute sincerity. In a sharply polemical style, Rabinowitz excoriated journalists and papers that were disseminating rumors about the death of famous persons and about mass murders. All the signs are that this was a new round in the writer’s war against certain journalists, a fact which may have contributed to the dogmatic style he adopted.

Earlier, the press had reported the murder of the members of the Religious Court in Warsaw, of Professor Rabbi Moshe Shur from Warsaw, and of the writers S.Y. Imbar and Ber Horowitz in Vienna. Subsequently it was learned that Shur was still alive. Thundered Ya’akov Rabinowitz:

“No, no: I suspect that not only Rabbi Shur is alive, but the Religious Court and S.Y. Imbar and Ber Howoritz will also undoubtedly be resurrected soon.”

Rabinowitz went on to discuss the tendency toward exaggeration:

“Human imagination takes flight and is inclined to ciphers, that is, to volunteer them to us. Ten become one hundred, one hundred a myriad, and so on. It is so easy to add a zero or two, and for a deft informant and a well-known type of journalist, that is a real treasure. Unfortunately, decent journalists also fall into the trap--they fall in and pull others in with them.”

There follow illustrations from the past of exaggerations and rumors that proved false: “In the period of the 1929 riots our Warsaw papers burned down Tel Aviv and filled its streets with 30,000 Jews killed...” In the Spanish Civil War our news agencies flooded the papers with reports about killings and destruction among the Jewish communities in Spain... It later emerged that the disseminator of the rumors was the ‘rabbi’ and ‘town councillor’ Dihan, a Moroccan Jew who ended up in Tiberias, or a Tiberian fellow who ended up in Morocco, who was doing errands for Moscow.”

The mention of “errands for Moscow” was evidently not accidental, but was meant as an admonition against slipups in the present and the future. This becomes clear when the writer lists various sources of information and categorizes them explicitly and implic[i]tly according to their reliability and unreliability: “*Davar* is right to note the source of every report. There are reports from the French high command: pure gold; reports from ‘R’: very thorough; and there are RR and Radio Jerusalem and the “Ahram” agency and there is RK and there is the “Hawas” agency which is also very thorough, and there is RP and there are Russian reports, may heaven protect us from them.”

It was a wretched article and, given the circumstances prevailing at the time of its publication, an irresponsible one as well. Ya’akov Rabinowitz, the veteran journalist who was known for his noble traits and his personal and intellectual integrity, faltered, apparently because of his fervent faith in German culture as he knew it. He was unable even to imagine that a people possessing a culture of such high order could be capable of such despicable crimes.

In the meantime, the daring prediction about Imbar and Horowitz came true. They were “resurrected,” and this was learned in the Yishuv. (Both perished in 1942.) The tough article was bound to influence both the public and the paper’s staff. Most harmfully, confirmation of this stance came from the editor-in-chief, Berl Katznelson. Wishing to express an idea of his own about the reports concerning the fate of public figures in the occupied countries, Katznelson published a piece which could be taken as a continuation of Rabinowitz’s article and as unreserved backing for his

opinions. Katznelson entitled his article, “Something About the Informants Upon Whose Words We Live Or Die.” It opened as follows: “Ya’akov Rabinowitz wrote sparkingly about the informants who kill with their inanities.” The article was signed “Jerubaal,”¹³ Katznelson’s *nom de plume*. Whether or not the paper’s senior staff discussed the topic, it stands to reason that the remarks of the editor-in-chief were taken as a guideline--to oppose the dissemination of exaggerated reports about the murder of Jews.

In 1940-1941, as long as no mass murders of tens of thousands were perpetrated, and as long as (in the latter half of 1941) no reports concerning such slaughters arrived from the occupied areas in the Soviet Union, the line of reliability-at-all-costs caused no immediate damage. The initial test of this stand came in mid-March 1942, when the first reports arrived about the mass murders in the Ukraine. How *Davar* treated these reports and how it acted following this first test--all this has been

¹³ *Davar*, November 24, 1939. See also the *Writings* of Berl Katznelson, Vol. IX, p. 382.

described above. Now we may add that formally, DP had the backing of the editor-in-chief from two years earlier, and that he evidently drew his thesis from the article by Rabinowitz which was also written two years earlier--under conditions which had in the meantime changed for the worse. At that time, in 1939, the *danger* of mass murders existed; now, actual murders were being committed. Then, when Soviet Russia was an ally of Hitler's, an attitude of suspiciousness toward reports originating with Russia was justified; now, with Russia having perforce joined the anti-Nazi alliance, DP continued to belittle and abuse an official Soviet report concerning the murder of 100,000 Ukrainian Jews. Then, there was a bad article and a bad stand, which contained the seed of calamity; now had come the calamity itself.

Throughout the entire period of the disavowal, Berl Katznelson does not appear openly as an active participant. The item of March 17 was written by Dan Pinnes; the editorial of August 10 is signed by the paper's "Editorial Board" and it is not known whether it was written by Katznelson. At all events, the latter nowhere returns to the question of reliability and exaggerations--neither in *Davar* nor elsewhere--not before November 23 and not afterward. But there can be no doubt that as an editor-in-chief with an energetic and punctilious character, Katznelson was well aware of what was being done and written. And since, naturally, he had the possibility to react to and even to change the paper's stand, but did not do so, the unavoidable conclusion is that he considered that stand to be proper and appropriate. Whether or not this conclusion is correct, whether he did not react out of assent, out of distraction, or for some other

reason, the public significance of his silence was: unequivocal support for the line of suppression and sedation.

It cannot be ruled out that, unlike others, Katznelson understood the heavy responsibility devolving upon him, and agonized over it. This possibility, at all events, may be of assistance in understanding a remark he made to the Mapai Council not long before his death:

"And I am not referring now to the rescue efforts, *a subject which I do not consider myself fit to talk about.*"¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Two months after this confession, Berl Katznelson passed away, and his agonizings with him.

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Besides the chief editor, *Davar* employed quite a few other editors and correspondents, all of them good Jews and loyal Zionists. Virtually none of them found anything amiss in the campaign to suppress the knowledge of the destruction of European Jewry. Some of them were personally involved in the campaign, and if any of them raised objections when the paper deteriorated to the point of openly supporting Nazi propaganda, no traces of such objections have survived. What is truly astonishing is that the staff of *Davar*, even as they were engaged in disseminating Goebbels' versions of events, actually believed that they were combatting [combating] and excoriating him. The article of August 10, which condoned the Nazis' denial, was written in order to.. further the propaganda work against them. "The [Nazi] denial proves," the writer states, "that considerable value attaches to a shocked public opinion, and it is essential to continue with the information activity concerning the fate of the Jews in Europe." Yet another typical example of self-deception may be found in a report of October 5:

The Nazis have announced officially the transfer of Jews from Poland to Germany. Over 150,000 Jews were exiled in July alone from Poland to different locales in Germany and were concentrated there in various kinds of forced labor, according to the official Nazi paper *Krakower Zeitung*. This is the first time the Nazis have officially *admitted* the transfer of Jews from Poland to occupation zones in Russia and their employment there in building fortifications and barricades. [Emphasis added.]

Wrong. The Germans admitted nothing, they merely deceived. In response to condemnations of the deportations and murders of Jews in

¹⁴ Berl Katznelson, *Writings*, Vol. XII, p. 97.

Warsaw and many other places, Goebbels' staff disseminated a new fabrication to the effect that the Jews were not being sent to death camps but to Germany in order to work. In *Davar* this disinformation became an "admission" and was served up to the paper's readers together with a reprise of the previous lies about the supposed transports for work in Russia. The staff of *Davar* didn't catch Goebbels out, they themselves were caught once more in his net of falsehoods.

We shall complete our survey with an illustration of a type of journalistic writing which for reasons of economy we were unable to consider in detail. I refer to descriptive journalism, or what was called at the time "reportage." It is not inconceivable that in the last analysis, given the background of the press reports and the attendant commentary, it was expressly this type of journalism which was most instrumental in creating the public's image of the ghettos. When we asked friends of ours who were in Palestine during the Holocaust period how they could have remained impassive about the fate of the Jews in the ghettos, they replied, "Well, why not? After all, we were told that they had all good things there--cafes, delicacies, theaters. Our impression was that things weren't so terrible."

It is true that in some ghettos there were "all good things," materially speaking and even more so spiritually. The smugglers who supplied the Warsaw or Vilna ghetto with flour, potatoes and milk, did not balk at bringing in select wines and other delicacies, for themselves and for other types of ghetto dwellers who still had money or who had grown wealthy in the ghetto itself through any one of a number of possible means (industry, crafts, commerce, extortion, embezzlement, theft). Cafes and bars sprang up in the wake of these smuggling operations, some of them even boasting musical entertainment. For the German authorities these establishments represented a source of bribe money while giving them places to gorge themselves and demonstrate their capacity for drink. Beyond this, Nazi propaganda used these places advantageously:

Goebbels knew that world public opinion could be misled and allayed by reports about the existence of such establishments, even if reports about hunger and death filtered out alongside them.

As for the life of the spirit and public life, it is true that what took place in some ghettos in certain periods can only be described as a miracle of the Jewish genius. Nazi propaganda also seized on these marvelous phenomena to offer false proof of the "normalcy" of life in the ghetto.

Two descriptive pieces in *Davar* will illustrate the assistance the Goebbels propaganda machine received in this area. On Friday, October

16, 1942, P. Heilprin, in an article about the cultural life in the Warsaw ghetto, wrote that 24 book stores and libraries were operating there; four Jewish theaters and a special puppet theater for children were functioning; 127 festive events had taken place to commemorate the 105th anniversary of the birth of the writer Mendele Mocher Sforim; and meetings and ceremonies had also been held to mark the centenary of the birth of the writer Goldfaden and the 25th anniversary of the death of Sholem Aleichem. "Our informants report that all these projects drew packed halls," the writer notes, and he ends on a heartening and calming note: "The image of God has not departed from the ghetto dwellers. The spirit of the ghettoized people has not fallen. In the face of the destruction and annihilation that the enemy is initiating, the nation presents the will and the strength to live. The enemy cannot harm one's soul."

The alleged normalcy of ghetto life is particularly played up in a second article by Heilprin which appeared the following Thursday. This time the focus was on the material side of life. The persistence of a kind of "class war," or, at least, the existence of class differences, is emphasized. "The immense difference between the rich and the poor in the ghetto is flagrantly apparent. The wealthy have their own clubs and their own places of gathering. They can be seen being carried in rickshaws, eating in restaurants, dancing in dance halls." By contrast, the writer mentions the thousands and tens of thousands who are starving and the dead who are lying in the streets. He also relates how Jewish merchants are doing a brisk trade in water and provides a lightly ironic description of a "company for the exploitation of pure air" which is operating in the ghetto. "And the ultra-Orthodox are preoccupied there with the war for the sanctity of the Sabbath. And the community runs a special office with an army of policemen in the war against speculation." He concludes with a quasi-sociological moral: "The Nazi boot has not proved powerful enough to trample life in the ghetto

entirely. Old customs and old ways of life adapt to and maintain themselves within the revolution.”

The articles are written in a lively style and seem to describe things as they were just the day before yesterday. The writer's repeated mention of so-called “informants” bolsters the impression of authenticity and freshness. In fact, the pieces were neither authentic nor fresh. We have no knowledge of persons who arrived from Warsaw at this time. What we do know is that such persons, had they actually come, would have certainly confirmed the reports about the slaughter in the course of the major “Action” which had commenced four months earlier. Moreover a closer examination of the articles shows that the 105th anniversary of Mendele's

birth occurred the previous year, in 1941--which was also the 25th anniversary of the death of Sholem Aleichem. The Goldfaden centenary was actually marked a year before that, in 1940. What we find, then, is not fresh reportage but a journalistic montage accompanied by ready-made conclusions. And those conclusions were, as we saw: there are troubles, yes, but people are getting along. The spirit of the nation has not fallen, life goes on as usual.

We do not know what Heilprin's sources of information really were. Perhaps they were those “experts” who did not believe in the existence of the Holocaust and did not want others to do so either. Given *Davar's* manifest admiration in this period for the reliability of Nazi information, it would come as no great surprise to learn that the description was simply copied from some German bulletin or lifted from a neutral paper which had been fed with news items by the Nazis. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that in the circumstances of October 1942, journalism such as this was a precious gift for Nazi propaganda. In the fierce war between Goebbels and Zygielbojm regarding information about events in the Warsaw ghetto, Goebbels had gained a hefty contribution. Twice within one week the Jews in Palestine read authoritative reports in a reliable paper and learned that while the situation was not rosy, neither was there any call for panic.

What P. Heilprin did in *Davar*, Shalom Gottlieb did in *Ha'aretz* and other journalists did in their own papers. The Hebrew reportage did not lag behind the Jewish news agency reports or the political commentaries. All the forms of publicistic writing in the entire Hebrew press were engaged in lulling the Yishuv in the face of the annihilation of European Jewry. Everyone did his share.

There is no need to dwell on the fact that the suppression operation had the backing of the Zionist hierarchy and effectively constituted the policy of the World Zionist Organization and the Yishuv leadership in Palestine. The suppression of the truth went on until the Jewish Agency executive in Jerusalem decided that the time had come to terminate it.

Chapter Three

What the Leaders Knew

On Monday, November 23, 1942, the press carried a communique issued by the Jewish Agency for Palestine which generated a shock among the public and for the first time placed the destruction of European Jewry on the agenda of the Yishuv. The following is the full text of the statement:

The Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem has received from authoritative and reliable sources detailed reports about acts of murder and slaughter perpetrated against the Jews of Poland and the Jews of Central and Western Europe who have been deported to Poland.

According to these reports, following the visit to Poland last spring by the Gestapo chief, Himmler, the Nazi authorities there began the systematic massacre of the Jews in the towns and villages of Poland. A special government committee for the extermination of the Jews was established, called the *Vernichtungskommission*, headed by the Commissar Feu. This commission is travelling around Poland and overseeing the destruction operation. Children up to the age of 12 are mass-murdered unmercifully. Old people have also been executed.

The Jewish men who are fit for work were registered and sent in groups to an unknown destination, and all trace of them has disappeared. In various places the Jewish women were also rounded up by the Nazi authorities and were also sent off.

It is also reported by eye-witnesses that 27,000 of the 30,000 Jews from the Kielce ghetto were removed for deportation about two months ago. Some 1,500 people were killed on the spot as the deportation was in progress. According to rumors, the remainder were killed during the journey. In Brest-Litovsk thousands of Jews were drowned when the Nazi murderers threw them into the River Bug. In Piotrkow, where 20,000 Jews had lived, only 2,600 remain, and among them only 160 women and children. Of 40,000 Jews in Czestochowa, only 2,000 are left. In the Radom ghetto 3,500 persons remain of the 32,500 who had been there. The

same fate has befallen most of the other Jewish ghettos. In Bialystok the Nazis herded 1,500 Jews into the Great Synagogue and then set it afire, burning the Jews alive. Most of the Jews in the town of Tiktin were seized by the Nazis and buried alive.

Reports from the Warsaw and Lodz ghettos speak about an appalling reduction in the Jewish population there in recent months.

According to reports from these sources, the mass deportations of Jews are continuing from the cities of Central and Western Europe. Only 28,000 Jews remain in Berlin.

In its meeting yesterday, the Jewish Agency Executive discussed these reports and decided on a series of actions and appeals abroad regarding the situation of European Jewry. A special committee was chosen to carry out the actions.

This very interesting document needs to be considered together with its sources and the causes that led to its publication. The “authoritative and reliable sources” on which the report is based consisted of a group of Jews who arrived in Palestine as part of an exchange of citizens of Britain and its colonies with German citizens who were in Allied hands.¹ Of the 114 persons in the group, 69 were Jews: 30 were from Poland, 18 from Germany, 14 from Holland, four from Belgium and three from France.² Thirty-four of the Jews were women, 26 were children, and there were nine men, most of them elderly.³ They had left their places of residence between October 26 and 28 and had been gathered in Vienna. From there the group left on November 9 for Constantinople; they arrived in Palestine on November 16 and were housed temporarily at Atlit.

On the day following their arrival they were visited by Haim Barlas, a senior official in the Jewish Agency. He met with them for three hours and what he heard shocked him.⁴ During the following two days, November 18 and 19, Barlas returned to Atlit together with two members of the Jewish Agency Executive, Moshe Shapira and Eliahu Dobkin. The three questioned the new arrivals and drew up another report to supplement Barlas’s original report.⁵

A group of dozens of Jews from different locales in Poland, Germany and Western Europe undoubtedly constituted a rich and reliable source of authentic information about events. As it happened, one of them proved capable of acting as a mouthpiece for the entire group and for the

Polish Jews in particular. Ya’akov Kurtz, a resident of Tel Aviv, happened to be in the *city* of his birth, Piotrkow, when the war broke out. Kurtz, who came from a wealthy family of merchants, was quite familiar with the community in his own town as well as in the surrounding area and in Warsaw. He was a frequent visitor in the capital and was in constant telephone contact with relatives of his who lived there. In Piotrkow he was active in public affairs, from time to time helping various departments of the Jewish Council (the Judenrat). Because of his social connections and his intense interest in developments--an interest directly related to his efforts to obtain an exit permit for Palestine--he came into possession of much up-to-date information concerning the fate of Polish Jewry. As the book he wrote after arriving in Palestine shows, he was able to select from the flood of rumors sweeping Poland those reports which were reliable and to convey with explicit reservations the rumors which attested not to actual events but to frames of mind among the Jewish and non-Jewish populations.

It was only natural that Ya’akov Kurtz became the chief witness among the group of returning Jews. In Tel Aviv he delivered a lecture about the situation to a meeting of public functionaries. He drew up a memorandum setting forth the main points of the lecture, along with numbers and dates, for the Jewish Agency and for the representatives of Polish Jewry. Kurtz was summoned to meet with a Polish minister, Professor Kott, who was then in Palestine, and at the latter’s request prepared a special memorandum for the Polish government in London.⁶ Spurred by several public officials, and with the assistance of the writer Bracha Habas, he published his testimony in book form.

The *Book of Testimony* by Ya’akov Kurtz was one of the first books about the Holocaust of European Jewry and it remains one of the most reliable. Reading it decades later, one finds that in Piotrkow the author was in possession of considerable accurate information which he brought with him to Palestine. A comparison of the book, which he wrote in 1943, with the memorandum he submitted to the Jewish Agency in November 1942, upon his arrival in the country, demonstrates that the reliability and judiciousness with which he appraised events were not the result of information he had acquired in Palestine, but originated in Poland itself. Indeed, with respect to one key item, the memorandum actually outdoes the book in scope and accuracy. The memorandum to the Jewish Agency contains a faithful description of

1 The Rescue Committee’s report to the 22nd Zionist Congress, held in December 1946, stated: “At that time--fall 1942--a group of Jews from Poland arrived in Eretz-Israel, on the basis of a [population] exchange. It was this group that brought the horrific news about the death camps at Treblinka, at Belzec, at Auschwitz, at Sobibor... about the expulsions from Warsaw... about the annihilation of millions of Polish Jews... A feeling of dread gripped the Yishuv upon hearing these things.”

2 Barlas Report, CZA, File S26/1159.

3 *Ha’aretz*, November 17, 1942.

4 Barlas Report.

5 CZA, File S26/1159.

6 Ya’akov Kurtz, *Book of Testimony*, p. 6.

what was occurring in Treblinka, as related by a Jewish youth from Czestochowa who had managed to escape from the camp and get to Piotrkow:

The laborers who worked with him told him that the room into which the naked Jews were herded was then hermetically sealed and the air drawn out, so that the Jews suffocated. The bodies of the Jews were then burned. Some people claimed that the Jews were suffocated in that building by means of gas. Precise details are impossible to come by. One thing is clear:

no one comes out of there alive and heaps of ashes are constantly being removed from there.

All this was contained in the November 1942 memorandum to the Jewish Agency.⁷ A year later, apparently at the influence of the book's editors, or because of the general atmosphere in the country, the entire passage was omitted "for the sake of reliability," with the exception of part of the last sentence.⁸ At all events, when he arrived in Palestine on November 16, Kurtz knew what was going on at Treblinka and he related what he knew to his interlocutors and interrogators from the Jewish Agency. He also provided a concise and accurate description of the extermination facility at Chelmno, where Jews were murdered in vans by use of exhaust fumes.⁹

Thanks to his frequent contacts with the Warsaw ghetto, Kurtz was able to recount faithfully the course of events there during the "Big Action" and afterward. He also said, basing himself on a phone conversation with an informant from Warsaw, that the Jewish survivors there after the deportation had received a quota of bread-ration cards for 36,000 persons. Kurtz estimated that 420,000 Jews had been deported from Warsaw and that, together with those hiding out, another 100,000 remained there.

In the introduction to his book Kurtz describes the reaction which his vital information met with on the part of the National Institutions in Palestine:

"They didn't believe me! They told me I was exaggerating. They asked questions and carried out interrogations as though I were a criminal out to deceive people for certain reasons, or a libeller fabricating things in order to hurt someone. They asked me: How do you know what happened in the other places, since you were tapped in your ghetto? How do you know what was done to the Jews who were transferred, since you were not there? They worked hard to undermine [undermine] my

certainty, to get me to doubt the veracity of my reports. To make them believe me, I was compelled to tell them all my sources and contacts with the other ghettos, and also to reveal how I had learned what the German murderers did to the Jews who were transferred. And after all this there were some people who still didn't believe! Even today [April 1943], people continue to ask: Is what the papers say about the destruction in Poland really true?¹⁰

The skepticism of the interrogators can perhaps be accounted for by their desire to reach absolute certainty. Thus we should examine what, ultimately, they accepted and what they rejected from the testimony of Kurtz and the other Jews in his group.

A comparison of the Jewish Agency communique with the protocols of Barlas, Shapira and Dobkin, the Kurtz memorandum, and Kurtz's book, shows that the Jewish Agency accepted and published the figures cited by the refugees concerning the Jews still remaining in the various ghettos, with the exception of Warsaw. They also accepted and published the report about the "Extermination Commission" headed by Commissar Feu. However, the Jewish Agency did not accept and did not publish the important testimony about Chelmno and Treblinka. Four months after the appearance of the Zygelboim-Wedgewood pamphlet and one month after the BBC had broadcast to the world (October 27) the report about killings by means of poison fumes,¹¹ the Jewish Agency Executive remained unconvinced that the Germans were truly resorting to the mass murder of Jews. At all events, the Jewish Agency communique contains not one

7 CZA, File S26/1159.

8 *Book of Testimony*, pp. 335-336.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

11 *Ha'aretz*, October 28, 1942.

word about the gassing of Jews at Chelmno, which Kurtz related in detail, or at Treblinka, which Kurtz related from a reliable witness.

Also spurned was the testimony concerning the annihilation of the Jewish community of Warsaw. On this topic the protocols of Barlas, Shapira and Dobkin are replete with impressive testimony provided by some of the other refugees who arrived with Kurtz. According to them, some 25,000 "legal" Jews remained in Warsaw and a like number of Jews in hiding. Despite this testimony, and despite what was already known abroad at this time, the Jewish Agency made do with a laconic statement, referring to Warsaw and Lodz alike, on "an appalling reduction in the Jewish population there."

The striking fact is that in its announcement of November 23, 1942, the executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine had still not

accepted as a fact the Germans' intention to destroy the entire Jewish people. The statement spoke about "acts of murder and slaughter" and about "systematic extermination." Yet at the same time it was explained that children up to the age of 12 and old people were being executed. As for the Jews who were neither children nor elderly, the communique devotes a special section to them which implies that at least the adult males fit for work "were registered and sent" to unknown places of work. As compared with the unequivocal assessment contained in the Zygelboim-Wedgewood pamphlet, the Jewish Agency statement constitutes a serious backtracking from a viewpoint enabling the denunciation of the Nazis' intentions.¹² We shall return below to the significance and the consequences that were entailed in this non-recognition of the Germans' ultimate plans. For now, we shall sum up this part of our survey by noting the following three points:

1) With the exception of the detail about the *Vernichtungskommission*, the Jewish Agency statement added nothing new about the destruction. Indeed, it lagged far behind what was already known internationally and what had been made public in London, New York and elsewhere.

2) Not even for the Palestine press did the Jewish Agency statement constitute any new information. As we have already seen, beginning in March 1942 numerous reports were published in these papers relating to the destruction of Jewish communities and the mass murder of Jews.

3) What was new about the Jewish Agency statement was that the ranking institutions of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv *confirmed publicly* the reliability of the reports and urged the public to believe them. It was this confirmation which brought about the shift in the attitude of the press and jolted public opinion.

* * * * *

There followed a number of public confessions by individual correspondents and by some newspaper editorial boards. We have already noted the *mea culpa* of Moshe Prager in *Davar*.¹³ He was preceded by Dr. Azriel Carlebach, a member of the editorial board of *Hatzofeh*, who appended to the Jewish Agency communique as it appeared in that paper an ambivalent statement of his own from which it was difficult to determine whether he actually acknowledged that he was blameworthy.¹⁴ An editorial in *Ha'aretz* (December 9) noted "the most dreadful rumors which we could not--and almost did not want to--believe (we accused the news agencies that transmitted them of inordinate exaggerations)."

Actually, there were few such confessions, and even those that did appear tended to pin the blame on others. In fact, it was at this time that allegations against the international community began to appear, allegations which became the underpinnings of what would emerge as the conventional Israeli historical treatment of the Holocaust. The active pioneer in this realm seems once again to have been *Davar*.

¹² The booklet stated: "These facts prove that the transgressing and criminal German government is determined to fulfill Hitler's 'prophecy' that five minutes before the end of the war--irrespective of who triumphs--all the Jews of Poland will be annihilated to the last of them" (according to *Davar*, December 4, 1942).

¹³ This writer, it turns out, did not make do with *Davar*, but appeared (under the *nom de plume* of Moshe Mark) also in *Haderech*, an Agudat Israel weekly, where he confessed his guilt: "I admit and confess before the whole community the sin I committed in not believing, and in enticing others not to believe, the awful news that reached us lately" (*Haderech*, 17th day of Hebrew month of Kislev, 5703).

¹⁴ Azriel Carlebach wrote a column entitled "War Diary" in *Hatzofeh*.

As early as November 26, 1942, just three days after abandoning its campaign of silence, the paper mustered up the courage to threaten editorially that "we shall denounce the shame of the world which sees the slaughter of an entire people and remains silent."

In this period, the thesis that it was really the *goyim* who had been silent and had suppressed the truth about the Holocaust was grounded in the allegation that the external sources of information--the foreign-language news agencies, the British Mandate authorities, the British government and other governments--had been remiss in supplying information in time or had helped block such reports from reaching the Yishuv. This allegation was widespread, particularly among the leaders of the Yizhuv and the Zionist movement. It was repeated in writing and in speeches by publicists and speakers. The public appearances of two ranking figures in the National Institutions will serve to illustrate the evolution of this thesis from its beginnings as a hesitant query tinged with confession and regret, to the status of an absolutely unequivocal assertion.

The first case is that of Eliahu Golomb, who in a session of the Histadrut Council in December 1942 (a meeting we mentioned at the start of this section of the book) said: "The most terrible thing is that for weeks [?] the world has known about the atrocities, while we learned about them late, and initially the reports met with doubt and disbelief"¹⁵ Five months later, in May 1943, at a meeting of Po'alei Israel, Golda Meyerson (Meir) declared with her characteristic self confidence and prestige that someone saw to it that the appalling report did not reach us, for fear that we would grow anxious and demand the opening of the country's gates."¹⁶

Golomb's remark is especially noteworthy. Eliahu Golomb headed the Haganah, an organization which was known for its expertise in obtaining what it considered to be pertinent [pertinent] information. The Haganah extracted information from places that wished to conceal it and was adept at winnowing the reliable from the doubtful. In the course of their routine work, Golomb or his senior staff must surely have seen all the reports circulating around the globe concerning the Jews in general and the destruction of Europe's Jews in particular. Thus, when he complains that

he had not been apprised of the relevant reports at the time, there is no alternative but to hoist him with his own petard. In fact, numerous grave reports did arrive, and not only in the course of a few weeks; however, "they were treated with doubt and disbelief" and therefore failed to make an impact. One can only imagine how deep the Yishuv's insensitivity must have been for even the Haganah hierarchy to have fallen under the curse of the prophetic rebuke: "Ears have they, yet they hear not..."¹⁷

As for the allegation of Golda Meyerson, which was transparently aimed at the British authorities in London or Jerusalem, factually it was very short on substance. We did not come across a single instance in which the British blocked a report about the Holocaust from reaching the Yishuv as a whole or the World Zionist Organization in particular. (To the contrary: a case is known in which the British Foreign Office agreed to convey via its diplomatic mail from Geneva to London important information about the Holocaust for a Jewish recipient, which American diplomats had refused to transmit to New York: see below.) But even *if* we suppose that Mrs. Meyerson knew of such a case, this would have no bearing on the question of the cause of and responsibility for the suppression of the truth, and for a very simple reason: increasing reports about the murder operations in Europe were flowing into Palestine. The British government was not a source for these reports and could not have prevented their dissemination even if it had wished to. The Jewish Agency, which had a special unit to monitor foreign radio broadcasts, and which also had its own news agency, was hardly dependent on the British government as a source of information about the Holocaust. There were no wounds for imputing to the British responsibility for the fact that the Jewish institutions and the press in Palestine refused to countenance these reports and treated them as they did.

The truth is that a most unfortunate connection existed between the Yishuv's demand that the gates of Palestine be opened to every Jew escaping from Europe, and the attitude of the British government toward the reports about the Holocaust and, indeed, toward the Holocaust itself. The terrible consequences of this connection were

¹⁵ *Davar*, December 3, 1942.

¹⁶ *Davar*, May 7, 1943.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 5:21.

visible in Bermuda at the very time that Golda Meyerson was addressing her audience. However, this fact bears absolutely no relevance to the explanation which the Zionist leader adduced for the paucity of reports about the Holocaust.

* * * * *

On December 3 *Davar* carried an article which under normal social conditions would have almost certainly generated a public furor and perhaps even brought about a crisis and a spate of resignations among the

Zionist leadership. David Zakai, in his regular "In Brief" column, pointed to certain peculiar circumstances and went on to ask the simple and unavoidable questions. In an item entitled "What Happened?", he wrote:

Now it is clear: in London everything was already known in August. A pamphlet in English issued by a not unknown publisher which reached this country yesterday, attests to this. All the atrocities are described by witnesses: the gas chambers and the death trains and the systematic annihilation. Both Wedgewood and Zygelboim--the latter is affiliated with the Polish government--wrote prefaces to the pamphlet. If so--what happened? The head office of the World Zionist Organization is in London. How did it happen that they did not know there? For it is inconceivable that they knew and disregarded [the reports] and did not inform others and did not raise an outcry and did nothing either in England or in America. How did the news get by them?

It has now been learned that the U.S. State department knew. How did it happen that the Jewish leadership [in America] was not made privy to that knowledge? For it is unimaginable that they learned about it and remained silent. The head of the World Zionist Organization is in America. And Ben-Gurion was there too. How did this remain unknown to them? What happened?

And if they had known--we would certainly have known how to rally our strength in order to act and to help and to put a stop to it. Even now, when we here did everything it was in our power to do the moment the news arrived, and after we sent our outcry to the whole world and to the leaders of the world--we knew... But still and even so, how did this remain unknown to the leaders and the heads of the nation, and as for those who did know--how is it that they did not cry out at once and sound the alarm? For we shall always be haunted by the thought that perhaps, had we acted immediately *then*, three or four months ago, what we are doing today (today, despite everything, there is hope that it will become known to the world, perhaps and perhaps--).

What happened? How did it happen?

[Emphasis and punctuation as in the original.]

We shall not put to David Zakai the awkward question of what happened to him and to his colleagues on *Davar* for over half a year, until November 23. We shall note only that his emotional words remained as solitary orphans in the paper. There was no followup and no response from either the paper's editors or its staff reporters. These words of reproach, which cry out to the very heavens, were left hanging in the air, unanswered. David Zakai himself did not repeat his plaint and the paper forgot about it. Thus this small item remained an isolated instance of a good intention which might have proved providential--had it been realized.

* * * * *

However, within less than a week an impressive reply did appear to the questions which David Zakai had raised, and from a highly authoritative source. On December 7 *Haboker* ran an item under the dramatic headline: "*Sensational Announcement by Y. Gruenbaum: We Knew About the Massacres in August But Didn't Make Them Public. Only After Rommel's Defeat Did Our Heans Turn to the Destruction of Polish Jewry.*" What follows is the entire text of the report as published in the paper, including the subheadlines supplied by the reporter, which undoubtedly reflect his personal reaction to Gruenbaum's remarks:

In a meeting of the supreme leaderships and the central committees of the youth movements in Palestine, held in Jerusalem under the sponsorship of the Youth Affairs Department of the Zionist Executive, one of the speakers was Y. Gruenbaum. He replied to the grave questions being asked of the Jewish Agency: How did it happen that for months nothing was done to rescue the Jews of Poland and the occupied countries and that the Jewish Agency offices in London, New York and Jerusalem were silent while international centers already knew about the terrible fate of annihilation? Mr. Gruenbaum said:

We Knew About It...

"We knew about it, but not the details. At a recent meeting of the Union of General Zionists, I spoke of murder and massacre, but I did not speak about the 'Extermination Commission,' because that fact was not known, either in London or New York. It is only now that we learned about

this. I told about the murders at the meeting of the General Zionists. There was a meeting in New York, to which Roosevelt sent a message, and there was a meeting in London, to which Churchill sent a message. They promised revenge and retribution--but this made no impression.

The Legend of Jerusalem

"It took place in Europe in August and September, and in those months the Germans were advancing on Alexandria, In Russia the Nazis advanced as far as the Caspian Sea and threatened the Caucasian Straits in the direction of Iran. The enemy threatened, and we were concerned not to be as sheep led to the slaughter.

"At that time I had a talk with one of the senior members of our financial establishment. I told him: We cannot withstand the Germans. Perhaps we will not come out alive. But what must remain is the legend of Jerusalem fighting like the zealots who fought in times past, for it is because of them that we live. People had to be made aware that here one must die with weapon in hand, and not extend one's throat for slaughter. And how could we speak *then* about the events in Poland?

Why Did the Jewish Agency Oppose Magnes?

"We hold a pledge: our own homeland. We must preserve it in the storm and afterward, so that we will be ready to receive masses of our brethren who will come here. Because of this, when the *Ihud* of Dr. Magnes spoke about Palestine's "absorption capacity," we asked them, Do you think you will be able to close the gates in the face of the diaspora? What value does Zionism have if after the war we cannot help our suffering masses? This is an elementary matter, above and beyond all the public calculations and doctrines. This was the first reason.

"Now for the second factor: the situation of the democracies was grave. *Could we ask them to stop the slaughter in Poland?* [Emphasis here added.]

Only Now Did Our Hearts Turn To This

"The turning point in the situation came in October. Rommel was thrown back in Egypt. Stalingrad began to be liberated and the Russians burst forward. The Americans and the British struck in North Africa and Darlan joined the Allies. Now the possibilities had been created to insist and demand. Now our hearts were also able to turn to this question.

"Yesterday I met with a delegation of *haverim* from Poland who spoke on behalf of the refugees from that country. They were always asking me to sound the alarm and I would pour cold water on their requests and dampen their fervor. They said: You must swear in the name of the Jewish Agency that there will be no peace and quiet until we put a stop to the slaughter and rescue the surviving remnant of our brothers in the occupied diaspora.

No, I Will Not Swear!

"I replied: No, I will not swear! This may be a paramount question, but it is not the only matter that has to be dealt with. Once again I spoke about the pledge we hold and the need to extricate ourselves from a situation of 'extraordinary people' and become a nation like all others. * Two thousand years of exile are enough. We shall be an equal member in the family of nations on this globe. This is our mission and we are duty-bound to implement it."

 * Yitzhak Gruenbaum was not alone who, to fulfill the precept of being "like all the nations," insisted on regarding the destruction of European Jewry an "ordinary" part of the tragedy of the murder of innocent people in the war, and therefore not something to be especially emphasized. It turns out that quite a few persons in the Yishuv expressed themselves in this vein. "There are devotees of the supposedly 'objective' anti-chauvinism, the 'like-all-nation' types, who know and believe that the Jewish crisis in the diaspora at this time is not one that deserves any special mention" (Idov Cohen, "If I Forget Thee, O Diaspora," *Ha'oved Hatzioni*, July 27, 1942). The reader will find this thesis applied in the Zionist institutions in New York (Ch. 9) and in Geneva (Ch. 12).

What is most surprising is that this collection of sentences which gives the impression of being a lackluster parody of the ostensible stand of a Zionist leader is, according to all indications, is actually faithful to the original and authentic statement. Gruenbaum evidently really said these things, and at all events there can be no doubt that they reflect the essence of his position concerning the problems of the nation, as he was subsequently to give it expression in words and deeds alike.

The reaction of the Palestine press was that Gruenbaum had spoken rashly and had injudiciously revealed embarrassing circumstances and details. In the Revisionist *Hamashkif*, B. Cohen (Binyamin Eliav) cited Gruenbaum's statement to launch a furious tirade against the World Zionist Organization with which he led off an article entitled "Faces."¹⁸ Moshe Shoenfeld, writing in the Agudat Israel weekly *Haderech*, referred to David Zakai's article in *Davar* and then quoted Gruenbaum to rest his case that in their negation of the diaspora and their stand that "Eretz Israel is only built on the ruins of the diaspora," the leaders of the Jewish Agency had been remiss in their duty.¹⁹

The confusion of the non-opposition press was manifested by *Ha'aretz* in its editorial of December 9. Without mentioning Gruenbaum by name, the paper wrote: "It is surprising that a member of the Zionist Executive, in whose name a bizarre and astonishing account was given to the effect that the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem knew about the atrocities as early as August but had kept silent because the situation at El Alamein and Stalingrad was difficult, and so forth--it is surprising that this person has not yet seen fit to deny or issue a correction of the strange statements that were quoted in his name."

* * * * *

Neither a denial nor a correction was forthcoming. Instead, the Jewish Agency resorted to a tried and tested method which had often proved its effectiveness. The matter was simply suppressed. The papers which had carried the report did not repeat it (with the exceptions of *Hamashkif* and *Haderech*). Other papers, including *Davar*, concealed from their readers the entire embarrassing episode. In time, the whole thing was forgotten.

For the present study, however, Gruenbaum's statement served as a kind of catalyst for searching out facts and subsequent developments in a number of directions. In the first place, we sought to shed light on the following issues:

1) When, in actual fact, did the Zionist leadership "learn about" the ongoing total destruction of European Jewry?

¹⁸ *Hamashkif*, December 11, 1942.

¹⁹ *Haderech*, 2nd day of Hebrew month of Teveth, 5703.

2) When it did “learn about” this, did it hide the facts from the public, and if so, what were its reasons for doing so?

3) When Yitzhak Gruenbaum “poured cold water,” as he put it, on his comrades from Poland in order to “dampen their fervor” what, exactly, was he referring to?

The quotation marks around “learn about” are meant to dramatize the fact that in this case the “report” in question was a purely subjective one--exclusive to the Zionists. We do not refer to the arrival--in March 1942, as we saw--of the first reliable reports about the mass murders. Nor do we refer to the period--beginning in June 1942--in which the mass-murder issue was initially broached in the written press and on radio broadcasts in England and America. The reference in this case is to the date on which the Zionist leadership decided that henceforth it would believe the reports about the destruction and consider them as truthful and not to be doubted. As we shall see, this decision was related to a protracted and wearying process which was studded with obstacles and marked by delays and equivocations across the entire spectrum of the WZO's communications and information network. To enable an understanding of the entire process, we made a detailed study of the processes involved in transferring information from Geneva to Jerusalem in the period of August-November 1942--the period, that is, immediately preceding the Jewish Agency's statement on November 23. It is the reader who will be the beneficiary of the patience that was required to read through descriptions and documents which we collected from various archives, since he will gain a better understanding of the events and the participants in this melancholy but highly instructive drama.

This chain of information between Geneva and Jerusalem consisted of three links: transmission, mediation and reception. Resident in Geneva was the official representative of the Jewish Agency, Dr. Richard Lichtheim. Also in Geneva was the Palestine Office headed by Dr. Schepps and Dr. Posner, as well as a *HeHalutz* center run by Natan Schwab. Geneva was, moreover, the location of a World Jewish Congress mission whose chief, Dr. Gerhart Riegner, was to play a substantive role in the incipient stages of the episode under discussion. Working with Dr. Riegner was Dr. Abraham Silbershein, an institution in his own right, both officially (“Relico”--the Relief Committee for Jewish War Casualties), and because of his character and spiritual fortitude.

Sitting at the receiving end of the chain was Yitzhak Gruenbaum. Formally, the addressee of the letters was the secretary of the Zionist Executive, Dr. A. Lauterbach. Designated to deal with them was a

“Committee of Four” for Polish Jewry which had been appointed by the Zionist Actions Committee shortly after the outbreak of the war. Its members were Gruenbaum, Dr. Emil Schmorak, Moshe Shapira and Eliahu Dobkin. All the indications are that it was Gruenbaum whose voice was the most influential and decisive on the committee.

Due to communications problems, the letters from Geneva to Jerusalem were conveyed via the Palestine Office in Istanbul, which was headed by Haim Barlas. As will be apparent from the content of the correspondence, Istanbul's role went beyond the technical transmission of the letters to and from Jerusalem, but consisted also of reading and taking note of what the letters contained. This, at least, was the situation with respect to the exchange of letters which will be described immediately.

The Geneva and Istanbul offices had one thing in common:

extremely limited authority when it came to making decisions and taking any kind of independent action. Although both offices were headed by senior Jewish Agency officials, neither of them was staffed by a member of the Zionist Executive or by anyone with the power to decide and act without awaiting orders from above. Both offices transmitted information to Jerusalem and received in return instructions about how to proceed or not to proceed. If we are right, not a single member of the Zionist hierarchy visited the international information center in Geneva until the end of the war.

The episode began, just as Gruenbaum told the gathering of youth movements, in August 1942. On August 15 a report was drawn up in Geneva concerning the situation of the Jews in Occupied Europe in general and in Poland in particular. The report was written in German and its author appears to have been the director of the World Jewish

Congress office in Geneva, Dr. Gerhart Riegner. The following is the full text of this crucially important document (translated from the Hebrew):

15.8.1942.

Not long ago a certain person arrived direct from Poland and gave a report about the pogroms in Lvov and the incitement of the Polish population, that is, about the unfriendly behavior towards the local Jews there.

Yesterday, 14.8.1942, another person (of Aryan extraction) arrived, again direct from Poland, a well-known and very reliable person, and gave us the following reports:

The ghetto in Warsaw is in the process of being liquidated. Jews, irrespective of age and sex, are taken in groups from the ghetto, shot to death, *and fat is manufactured from the bodies and fertilizer from their bones.* [Emphasis in the original]. It is said that for this purpose, corpses are even removed from theft graves. The mass killings are not of course being perpetrated in Warsaw itself, but in camps especially built for the purpose. One such camp is located at Belzec. In Lvov itself about fifty thousand Jews have been massacred in the past four weeks, and at Warsaw, according to another report, one hundred thousand. In the entire area east of Poland, including the occupied areas of Russia, not a single Jew is left. On the same occasion it was also reported that the entire non-Jewish population of Sevastopol was murdered. The slaughter of the Jewish population in Poland is not being perpetrated all at once, in order not to attract attention abroad. Whereas the Aryan Dutch and French deported to the East are actually exploited for purposes of labor, the Jews who are deponed from Germany, Belgium, Holland, France and Slovakia are candidates for murder. Since these murders are liable to have wide repercussions in the West, the [victims] are first deported to the East, where foreign countries have few possibilities of discovering what goes on. Most of the Jews who were exiled to Lithuania and Lublin were already put to death in the past weeks. This also explains the fact that correspondence with those deported has been prohibited. A large part of those deported from Germany are at Theresienstadt. However, this camp serves as an interim station, and a similar fate awaits the detainees there. As soon as place becomes available following the killings, more deportations are carried out. Frequently entire trainloads of these deportees can be seen being transported in cattle cars. About forty people are herded into each such car. What is especially interesting is that to help transport the candidates for death from the Warsaw ghetto, non-Jewish Lithuanians have been recruited.

It is a tragic fact that the Polish population is being incited against the Jews by the Germans and that the relations between the Polish population and the Jews have deteriorated sharply. This refers particularly to the situation in Lvov. To the question of what the relations are like with the population

of Warsaw, the reply is that no such relations are even possible because in Warsaw no Pole ever has the opportunity to see a Jew. The Jewish population, particularly in Lvov and in the Warsaw ghetto, lives in the single hope that a second front will be opened [in the West] or that the war will end miraculously before the onset of winter. The Jews in Poland are asking the following question:

Over four million Germans live in America. Two million of them identify with the National Socialism. Why does America not take repressive action against them? In this connection the Jews of Poland are very bitter at and disappointed in America. They understand that England is not taking measures for fear of the fate of its prisoners of war. But America has nothing to fear. As for the Jewish population in Poland, things have gone so far that it knows it has nothing more to lose.

Finally, they point out that unoccupied France has promised to hand over thousands more Jews to the Germans. The stand of the government circles in France is, in fact, antisemitic. But if they knew the fate that awaits the deportees, the handing over [process] could perhaps be halted. The above-mentioned American repressive actions could be of singularly crucial value. This concludes the report of the 'informant.'

We should now give consideration to:

1) How can the matter be thoroughly clarified to circles of the French government so that, at least, the Jews of France can be spared from being handed over?

2) By what means can this report be conveyed to the knowledge of American Jewry--without revealing the source of the information? It is true that coded

cables were sent to London,²⁰ but only after some time elapses are these reports publicized through radio broadcasts or by the publication of a "Black Book." Yet American Jewry must not be kept ignorant of the true situation for a period of this duration.

3) Since it has been determined with certainty several times that the non-Jewish population of Poland listens to the Polish-language radio broadcasts from London, it is essential to persuade the Polish government urgently to use these broadcasts in order to call on the Polish people not to assist this appalling operation.

Finally, a further report: From statements made by the secretary of the Apostolic Mission here, Monsignor Martilotti, it emerges that a report has just been received from the Vatican concerning its intervention in behalf of Slovakian Jewry. The Vatican dispatched to Slovakia the representative of the Slovakian government at the Holy See in order to express to [that government] in the name of the Vatican its displeasure at the deportation of Slovakia's Jews. The Slovakian government replied that it did not wish the deportation to take place, but the Germans were exerting indescribable pressure on this matter."²¹

The report's contents suggest that it was written and completed on the day following the arrival of the reliable informant. The Jewish Agency representative, Lichtheim, dispatched it to the Zionist Executive in Jerusalem and to offices in London and New York. However, he did not do so immediately but only two weeks later, on August 30. Lichtheim explains the reason for the delay in his covering letter and afterwards repeats it in letters to Barlas and Gruenbaum. In his covering letter he writes: "So terrible is the report that I had doubts about whether to forward it to you or not." But during those two weeks reports had arrived from various sources confirming several of the facts contained in the report. "The truth is," Lichtheim sums up, "that I believe the report to be correct and definitely consistent with Hitler's declaration that by the end of the war no Jews will be left on the continent of Europe."

The fact that a senior Jewish Agency official decided to delay the transmission of reports about the destruction need come as no surprise. All the indications are that Jerusalem was not eager to receive these bothersome tidings and was quite appreciative of service of the opposite kind. In a letter to Haim Barlas,²² Lichtheim mentions his faithful service along these lines: "In my reports I always scrupulously refrained from forwarding unconfirmed reports, and in some cases I issued denials of false news agency reports." But now, at the end of August and early September 1942, he knew with absolute certainty about the total annihilation being perpetrated in Europe and he possessed a reliable assessment of its scope. In a letter to Dr. Nahum Goldmann he takes issue with the latter's optimistic assessment that two to three million Jews will remain in Europe after the war. According to Lichtheim's estimate, no more than one to two million Jews will be left, and even this on condition that the situation in Hungary, Romania and Italy did not worsen.

Otherwise, in his opinion, no more than half a million to one million would survive.²³

In these circumstances Richard Lichtheim needed two weeks in order to deviate from his usual custom and transmit the report to Jerusalem without a denial, without qualification, and indeed even with an expression of assent, albeit couched in ambivalent terms and based on general considerations. Thus on August 30 the report was dispatched to Jerusalem via the Istanbul office.

Some three weeks later a cable dated September 23 arrived in Geneva from Istanbul. It read as follows: "Re your report 15.8 can inform Nahum and Wise²⁴ stop despite all friends suggest check whether sources reliable [reliable] since certain details seem inconceivable. Cable."

To which Lichtheim cabled back: "No need inform Nahum and Wise they have full information from here stop did report of August 15 with accompanying letter of

²⁰ The cables were evidently dispatched via British diplomatic post and conveyed to the office of the World Jewish Congress in London.

²¹ CZA, File L22/3.

²² Dated September 25, 1942, CZA, File L22/136.

²³ Letter to Goldmann, September 9, 1942, CZA, File L22/136.

²⁴ Dr. Nahum Goldmann and Dr. Stephen Wise, Zionist leaders in the U.S., who headed the Zionist Emergency Committee, *ibid*.

August 30 only reach you now please cable stop report confirmed from various sources details in letter.”²⁵

In a letter to Barlas dated September 25, Lichtheim expresses his amazement that the report was so long in reaching Istanbul. He also confirms that all the reports on the situation in Poland and the rest of Europe are being forwarded from Geneva directly to London and New York. Lichtheim states further that he is cooperating with the World Jewish Congress office in Geneva in exchanging, comparing and transmitting information. He also hints that in addition to the normal and telegraphic means, other possibilities are available for forwarding information to the appropriate institutions.

Referring to the August 15 report, Lichtheim writes that, after all, it was confirmed by a second source which was completely different from the first source. The second source had provided additional details which he had decided not to pass on this time. Apparently, these new details had to do with the production of fat and fertilizer from the corpses of the victims. In this connection he makes a remark which he repeats in his letter to Gruenbaum: “According to this second source, in fact there exist somewhere in the East two factories for the purpose described in the report.” Further confirmation of the report had just been received from sources in Christian welfare organizations and various church groups.

Finally, Lichtheim requests that a check be made as to whether this letter would arrive within the normal time. To this end Barlas is asked to confirm receipt of the letter by cable.

At about the same time another letter from Geneva arrived in Istanbul, one which Barlas understood as calling into question the

information he had received from Lichtheim. Writing on September 20, Dr. Abraham Silbershein, who was in constant postal contact with the Palestine Office in Istanbul with reference to their joint handling of the Jewish refugees, addressed himself, along with various business matters, to the reports and rumors arriving from Poland, resorting to veiled language: “For some time we have had no information from our friends. Rumors abound that nearly all of them have changed their places of residence.” And: “Overall, so badly has the situation deteriorated lately that we must, unfortunately, take into account the possibility that most of our friends and acquaintances are no longer with us. I am making efforts to obtain a more detailed and clearer picture before taking any additional steps.” One sentence in this sombre letter was interpreted by Barlas as offering a basis for relative calm. Silbershein writes (in German):

“Through Mr. Shaliah [emissary] we have finally had a report that in the capital two hundred souls were lacking and that Mr. Grushinski [i.e., deportation] had visited a different city.”²⁶ The figure of two hundred, which flatly contradicts everything that has gone before, seems to have been a typing error. Given the figures which Silbershein cited elsewhere around this time, it is probable that he meant to write “two hundred thousand souls,” or just “two hundred thousand.” For Barlas, however, this distorted sentence became the dominant element in the entire letter.

In his reply to Silbershein dated October 1, Barlas deals only with the business aspects of the letter, and makes no reference to the information about the situation in the ghettos. Then, after receiving Lichtheim’s letter of September 25, he fires off an emotional letter to Silbershein--in Hebrew--on October 3:

Regarding your letter of 1.10, I want to add that in the meantime I have received a letter from Mr. Lichtheim who provides horrific information about the situation in the Warsaw ghetto, mass murders, the emptying of the city and the deportation of almost the entire Jewish population, about crematoria of the bones of the martyrs for industrial uses, and so forth. Even though your own letter of 20.9 is hardly cause for rejoicing, it does not contain confirmation of these reports, which were also conveyed to London and New York, as L. informs me. If the Shaliach speaks about two hundred missing and Mr. Gerush [deportation] visited other places, then there is something to it. Please cable me and inform me, even if by hint, about the true situation if you can. You could, for

²⁵ Both cables are quoted in Lichtheim’s letter of September 25, CZA, File L22/136.

²⁶ YVA, File M20/35.

example, cable, "Confirm my letter of 20.9" or, heaven forbid, "Confirm Lichtheim letter," and the information will be passed on to Jerusalem²⁷ from here, so that we will at least know how great is the catastrophe that has afflicted us.

We did not find the requested cable in the archives, nor did we find the announcement from Istanbul confirming or denying Lichtheim's conjecture that his letter of August 30 arrived there around the 23rd of September. However, we did find indirect evidence concerning this conjecture, which casts doubt on its accuracy. The file of the Rescue Committee in Jerusalem contains a copy of the report and of the accompanying letter together with a note written by the secretary of the Jewish Agency Executive, Dr. A. Lauterbach. The latter passes the material on for the attention of the Executive members; the note is dated September 24. If we take into account the probable time required for the letter to make its way from Istanbul to Jerusalem, and add a few days for its handling in the offices of the Jewish Agency, our conclusion will be that the delay should not be imputed to the postal service between the two non-belligerent countries, Switzerland and Turkey. As is shown by the mailing and arrival dates of many other letters, it is likely that the report took a week to ten days to get from Geneva to Istanbul. As mail was regularly forwarded to Jerusalem, the letter must have arrived at the Jewish Agency no later than about September 20. As for the two weeks that passed between the receipt of the material in Istanbul and the sending of the cable to Lichtheim, this is yet another instance of the same delays and the same indolence that for two weeks held up the forwarding of the report from Geneva. As we shall see at once, the same phenomena prevailed in the offices of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

* * * * *

On October 6, Yitzhak Gruenbaum sent off three cables: to Stockholm, Geneva and Istanbul. The cable to Stockholm was addressed to Rabbi Ehrenpreis and said: "Information from Geneva reports many Jews deported to Eastern Europe also about killing of Jews from Polish ghettos please verify stop all here await your cable."

Gruenbaum sent the following cable to Lichtheim in Geneva:

"Shocked your latest report regarding Poland which despite all difficult to believe stop haven't yet published do everything possible verify cable."

And his cable to Barlas in Istanbul: "Verify if Richard's latest report correct cable."

Gruenbaum's attempt to verify Lichtheim through Barlas is a repeat of Barlas's attempt to verify the same Lichtheim through Silbershein. It is not inconceivable that the underlying motive for both requests was Lichtheim's political affiliations. A former Revisionist, he was at the time of these events connected with the State Party which was close to the Revisionists. This may have led the Zionist apparatus to suspect him (apparently without any grounds) of a tendency towards dramatization and exaggeration. We note this possibility because it may help to account for the astonishing development which followed--namely, that immediately following the semi-active intervention of Silbershein, the exchange of letters with Lichtheim was shunted aside and all but forgotten, while Silbershein, who was not even part of the apparatus of the World Zionist Organization, but was a member of the World Union of Poalei Zion-Z.S., was everywhere (including in the meetings of the Rescue Committee) raised to the status of the primary source who had supposedly provided the report about the deterioration in the situation of European Jewry. However, we shall now return to the correspondence with Lichtheim.

To Gruenbaum's cable, Lichtheim sent the following reply on October 8: "Yours October 6 report of August 15 confirmed by two different sources stop verification extremely difficult witnesses lacking for understandable reasons numbers also not known so do not publish letter follows."

In his letter of the same date Lichtheim repeats what he had written to Barlas two weeks earlier and supplies additional information which confirms the original report. A Jew living in the Aryan section of Warsaw had written (in German) to a friend in Switzerland that "Me' a Bet" (one hundred thousand) had been invited by Mr. X (the

²⁷ Ibid.; Barlas was about to leave for Jerusalem.

Germans) to his country house, "Kever" (grave). In another letter he said that his uncle and "our brothers" were dead. A third letter hints that the Ort-Oze organization in Geneva should be informed that all its activity was pointless because the great majority of the ghetto residents in Warsaw and Lodz were no longer there.

"It is possible," Lichtheim writes, "that this person is exaggerating [sic], but we hear the same things from other sources, particularly with regard to the large number of Jews from Warsaw who have been murdered or sent to other places." Lichtheim points to the stoppage of the exchange of letters and packages with the ghettos, and recalls in particular his own letter of October 5. In it he had provided a detailed report of the destruction of the Jews of Latvia, based on the account of one Gabriel

Zivian, who had escaped from Riga on December 18, 1941, but who had been there on November 30 and December 8 of that year, when the Nazis had massacred the Jews of Riga.

Lichtheim dwelt especially on the manufacture of fat and fertilizer from the bodies of the murdered Jews. As was noted above, he repeats the report that two facilities for this purpose exist somewhere in the East. He stresses that it is impossible to verify this report at the site; the operation is known only to the 55 men who run it and to a small number of workers who are actually engaged in the task, apparently prisoners of war or other slaves. The SS men will certainly not reveal the secret, and the workers will be murdered before they get an opportunity to tell anyone. The only feasible testimony would be that of German officers who were stationed in the East and who saw something or were told something by persons involved in the operation. Lichtheim adds that the report was confirmed by a military source of this kind who possessed reliable information.

In the concluding section of his letter, Lichtheim writes that he had long since foreseen this development. Indeed, he had warned "our friends" in London and New York and had put forward various proposals, "but I always knew that nothing we or anyone else would do or say could stop Hitler." Therefore, he was again making the same suggestion he had made in the past: to try to rescue the Jews in the semi-independent states of Romania, Hungary, Italy and Bulgaria. To this end he has for some months been seeking the intercession of the Papal Nuncio in Berne with respect to the Jews of Slovakia.

Lichtheim concludes: "We must face the fact that the great majority of the Jewish communities in Hitler-occupied Europe are doomed. There is no force which can stop Hitler and his SS men, who are today the absolute rulers of Germany and the occupied countries."

This marked the end of the correspondence between Geneva, Istanbul and Jerusalem regarding the August 15 report. It is noteworthy that the strange delays which manifested themselves in Geneva and Istanbul were replicated in the Jewish Agency's Jerusalem offices. Gruenbaum was "shocked" by the report, but for him this was a process which took no less than two weeks. After the report was conveyed on September 24 by the secretary of the Jewish Agency to the members of the Executive, the three urgent cables were dispatched--on October 6. This may have been due to technical office reasons. Perhaps several days went by before the report reached the file of the Committee for Polish Jewry; another few days until the committee members got around to reading it; and then more time until the committee convened and decided what action

to take. The only problem is that this technical explanation is the most unnatural and perplexing of all. It was to be expected that the secretary of the Jewish Agency Executive or his assistant, or any other official who chanced to open the envelope containing the report on September 20 or 21, and then went ahead and read it, would leap from his place and run in great agitation to the rooms of the Executive members with the dreadful news. And that the Executive would convene in urgent session to discuss what action to take.

It emerges that the Zionist leadership and their staff were immune to agitation and office disorder. After all, the subject was not a new one. And it was a well "known" fact that similar alarms during the past half-year had been proved to be baseless. Order must be maintained.

The matter came up for discussion by the Jewish Agency Executive on October 25.²⁸ At that meeting Yitzhak Gruenbaum told his colleagues that “all kinds of rumors are coming in about the murder of Jews by the Nazis. He had cabled to several places, and all the replies were the same: that the Jews were sent to do forced labor and then disappeared.” He had requested the members of the World Jewish Congress who were in Palestine to approach the WJC leadership and the Committee of Community Emissaries about issuing a manifesto to the democratic nations “not to remain silent about the murder of the Jews... He would be very pleased if the World Zionist Organization were to send a cable along these lines. But at this stage he saw no need to approach the WZO. The [World] Jewish Congress would suffice.”

The Jewish Agency Executive was quite cool to this proposal. Moshe Shapira thought “that all the rumors contained a modicum of well known exaggeration.” Moshe Shertok expressed doubt about the efficacy of the proposed action. “Jerusalem is not a source of reports. These reports--and perhaps more than this--reach London and the United States. It is also odd to propose to the governments of England and the United States to come out against the Nazis. After all, these governments are already in a state of war with the Germans.”

Finally, the proposal was approved but its operating budget was slashed. Gruenbaum had requested 100 Palestine pounds to defray the cost of sending cables, but Eliezer Kaplan would agree to no more than 50. Gruenbaum accepted the decision.

Anshel Reis, who took part in the operation, relates: “So shocking was the cable [i.e., the report] that the public functionaries in Palestine doubted its veracity and did not want to publish it. Finally the committee attached to the Jewish Agency agreed that the report would be sent abroad

together with a manifesto urging protests against the murderers and a campaign of assistance and rescue. Cables were then sent to Jewish organizations in Europe, America, Africa, etc.”²⁹

In other words, in their infinite wisdom these officials decided that the report was not sufficiently trustworthy to be made known to the Yishuv, but that it was truthful and reliable enough for Jewish organizations abroad to be apprised of it. And while in Palestine the line of suppression of and disbelief in the “atrocious propaganda” continued, the Jews of Europe, America and Africa were being urged to raise a hue and cry on the basis of the same reports which were being rejected out of hand by the press and the establishment in Palestine. As for the question of whether Jews were really being mass-murdered, well, perhaps they were being killed and perhaps not...

* * * * *

At the end of October or the beginning of November 1942, a document arrived in Palestine which attracted considerable attention and soon overshadowed the Lichtheim report. This was a circular of October 8 sent by Dr. Abraham Silbershein. Written in Yiddish, the missive opened with the words, “My Very Dear Sir,” and employed a personal style. It was received by Yitzhak Gruenbaum and other officials, and was also apparently sent to several other institutions. Circular No. 5 of October 8 was devoted to the mass murders in Poland. The following is the passage dealing principally with the Warsaw ghetto:

No letters at all from the Warsaw ghetto are received here. The ghetto is evidently closed and sealed off, like the Lodz ghetto. This fact is causing the spread of terrible rumors which are more frightening than anything a human being can imagine. Thus, for example, it is said that in Warsaw alone one hundred thousand Jews have been murdered. According to another rumor the number of victims stands at two hundred thousand: and not long afterward there is already talk of half a million. There are also reports about many transports of Warsaw’s Jews, who were put to death with poison gas; about the exploitation of the bodies of the dead for the manufacture of various fats, and first and foremost, soap; about the use of the bones to produce

²⁸ Minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on October 25, 1942; the remarks of the speakers were recorded in the third person.

²⁹ A. Reiss, *Chapters from the Aid and Relief Operations, Studies of the Holocaust and the Revolt* (Hebrew), Lohamei Hagettaot, Vol. II, pp. 23-24. We believe that Reiss is mistaken in speaking about a cable from Silbershein, rather than the Lichtheim report, as the initial Zionist source regarding the mass killings. We found no trace of such a cable, and at the Jewish Agency Executive meeting only the Lichtheim report was referred to.

artificial fertilizers, and that for this purpose they used not only fresh corpses but removed the bones of many of the dead from cemeteries.

All these reports are based on one, common source, and were transmitted by the Polish legation in Bern. The Reuters news agency also disseminated them. *We did not immediately publish these reports because their details were not confirmed by a second source and because we did not consider the source we mentioned to be sufficiently serious.* We wished to wait until more detailed information arrived. Only lately have reports begun to come in, but not directly from the Warsaw ghetto. Much can be gleaned from them. It can be said with certainty that extremely sinister events are taking place and that a campaign of destruction against Judaism has begun.

It seems certain that at least one hundred thousand Jews have already been deported from Warsaw in an unknown direction and that few of them remain alive due to the attendant agonies. A like number may have perished of diseases, starvation and the terror of deportation, and a few thousand may have been shot on the spot. [Emphases added.]

Silbershein goes on to provide a series of reports about Lvov (expressly the women and children are being deported from there--a sign that they are taken to their death), Vilna (ten thousand Jews remain), and about Przemysl, Rzeszow and Tarnopol (all the Jews had been deported). He also reiterated what Lichtheim's report had said about the hostile attitude of the Poles.

The sentence in italics confirms the error of all those who thought that the initial report (from the Zionist camp) about the mass murders had come from Silbershein and not Lichtheim. Yet the very fact that this mistake was so widespread shows how powerfully Silbershein's circular gripped the interest of the circles dealing with the topic. The Central Committee of the World Union of Poalei Zion-Z.S. gave it wide publication in its Bulletin dated November 20 ("from a survey by our comrade A.S. Magnef"). It was also published by *Davar* after November 23 in the form of a letter dated October 8 and signed *Haver* (issue of November 27). The most intense reaction came from the representatives of Polish Jewry in Tel Aviv. In the month between November 6 and December 7, their organization cabled Silbershein no less than five times, requesting information and confirmation of reports which had appeared in the Palestine press (including also the information contained in the Jewish Agency announcement).³⁰ The correspondence between Jerusalem and

Lichtheim about the credibility of the August 15 report was not renewed.

There is no dearth of reasons to account for the "success" of the Silbershein circular as compared with the Lichtheim report. The political party factor which we indicated earlier would seem to be confirmed by the publication of the circular by the Central Committee of Poalei Zion and by the intense interest evinced in the document by the representatives of Polish Jewry, whose leadership included members of Silbershein's party. Another probable reason has to do with Silbershein's style of writing: being of Polish extraction himself, his style was more detailed and more readily accessible to persons acquainted with the country which was the scene of the mass murders. Notwithstanding its sombre contents, the style in which the circular was couched--in particular the author's manifest hesitations--left an opening for doubts and hence for hope; thus the circular was more readily ingested by readers than was the decisive tone of Lichtheim's report. It is also quite likely that the circular created the impression it did because it arrived after the initial report had shattered the prevailing complacency and prepared the ground for its reception.

In addition to these conjectures, another factor also seems to have played a far from negligible role. We refer once more to the sentence in the circular which we italicized, this time to its last part. It emerges that the fact that Dr. Silbershein had initially rejected the reports because they originated with the Polish legation, was quite consistent with the frame of mind in the circles close to Yitzhak Gruenbaum. And the fact that the very convincing nature of the evidence had forced Silbershein to overcome his distrust of the Polish source, inevitably had a great impact on the officials of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

³⁰ An illuminating detail: in a cable dated November 23 the representation of Polish Jewry requested from Silbershein, among other things, confirmation of a "fresh" report that six thousand Jews were being sent every day from Warsaw "to an unknown destination." The reader will undoubtedly recall that this report had reached Palestine and appeared in several papers on July 28.

* * * * *

When, following the arrival of the refugees, the Jewish Agency officials came to prepare the statement which was eventually published on November 23, they had at their disposal two additional sources of information: Lichtheim's report and Silbershein's circular. We examined above what the statement contained and what it omitted from the testimony of the refugees. It is not difficult to ascertain which sections of the two documents which had arrived from Geneva were made use of. Put simply, it can be said that nothing was made use of, neither from the facts and the assessments, nor from the reports and the rumors. The Warsaw ghetto was not undergoing a process of annihilation, as the report stated, and two hundred thousand Jews had not perished, according to Silbershein's "moderate" estimate. Nothing is mentioned about the fact that expressly women and children had been deported from Lvov, or about

the implications of this development, as spelled out in the circular. And there is not a word about the fact that no Jews at all remained in certain cities and districts--as both of the Geneva documents had noted. There is nothing about murder by gas, as related by Silbershein, and nothing about the manufacture of soap and so forth, as was emphasized in the report and reiterated in the circular.

This characteristic mode of refusing to trust anyone, not even within the WZO itself, and of deciding everything through direct impression and solitary judgment, is something we shall encounter again among the Rescue Committee headed by Yitzhak Gruenbaum, and particularly in Gruenbaum himself. Now, however, we shall examine a serious manifestation of the "do it yourself" syndrome which occurred not in Jerusalem but in Geneva. Although the episode is directly related to the nature of the August 15 report, it also provides compelling evidence of the existence of a unique Zionist perception of the Holocaust. Here we shall have to dwell on one of the most melancholy episodes in the annals of the Zionist movement during the Second World War, an episode whose settings were Washington and New York.

The role which was designated for the Lichtheim report (or, as we have already conjectured, the Riegner-Lichtheim report) extended far beyond its being brought to the notice of senior Jewish Agency officials in Jerusalem. As the report itself said, its authors intended to bring it to the urgent attention of American Jewry. Further, the report constituted a major part of the effort to convince the United States government with all urgency that the Germans were engaged in executing an explicit order issued by Hitler: to destroy forthwith all the Jews in Europe. Arthur Morse's study³¹ shows how the events unfolded.

On August 1, 1942, Gerhart Riegner, director of the World Jewish Congress office in Geneva, learned from a German industrialist that Hitler had issued an order for the immediate extermination of all the Jews in Europe. After verifying the report and being convinced of the informant's credibility, Riegner on August 8 contacted the local U.S. consulate, requesting that the report be transmitted via American diplomatic channels to the president of the American Jewish Congress in New York, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. The request was only half-fulfilled: the cable was sent to the State Department in Washington, but officials there kept it from Rabbi Wise because its contents were deemed to be unbelievable.³²

On August 17 the State Department cabled the U.S. embassy in Switzerland that Riegner's message had not been conveyed to Wise "in view of the apparently unsubstantiated nature of the information."

However, on that same day the London branch of the WJC received a copy of the message from the British Foreign Office which, unlike the Americans, did not block its transmission.³³ From London the Riegner cable was forwarded to New York by Sydney Silverman of the British branch of the WJC via the British War Office, and it reached Rabbi Wise on August 28. On September 3 the secretary of the WJC, Dr. Arye

31 Arthur D. Morse, While Six Million Died. A thoroughly researched study by Walter Laqueur and Richard Breitman--Breaking the Silence, 1986--revealed that the German industrialist mentioned by Riegner was Eduard Schulte.

32 Morse, pp. 3, 7, 9.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Tartakower, wrote Silbershein from New York: "Please inform Riegner that his long cable was received and the necessary measures taken."³⁴

Those measures were: Rabbi Wise contacted U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles and showed him the message from Riegner. Welles appealed to Wise not to make the report public until the U.S. Government could confirm it; the Zionist leader acceded to the request.³⁵

Rabbi Wise received the cable despite the opposition of the State Department. He was not beholden to the State Department for anything, either legally or morally. The undersecretary of state had no authority to prevent Wise from publishing the cable, nor could he interfere with an attempt to apprise the public of its contents. Wise's assent, then, was given of his own volition and with his full responsibility--and that of the Zionist emergency committee. Even as Washington was instructing its representative to the Vatican to inquire whether the Pope knew anything about the "fantastic" order, the Zionist leadership in America decided to conceal the terrible news from American Jewry, the American people, and indeed from the entire world. This it did for three months, until in November Undersecretary of State Welles called in Rabbi Wise and released him from his unfortunate commitment.³⁶

In the meantime, Geneva was collecting evidence that Hitler's order was in fact being implemented by the Germans. Lichtheim and Riegner worked together on this project,³⁷ and they were able to convey to the U.S. legation evidence which they had obtained. "One of the most dramatic [pieces of evidence]," Arthur Morse writes, "was [the report] of two non-Jewish escapees, one from Poland, who arrived in Geneva with details of the German liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, the death of fifty thousand Jews of Lvov, and the German utilization of Jewish corpses for the manufacture of fertilizer."³⁸ The reader will undoubtedly recall Lichtheim's report of August 15.

If the August 15 report was truly the principal element in the verification efforts of Riegner-Lichtheim, it is very doubtful whether the material they collected would have proved capable of breaching the wall of American skepticism. The reports about Warsaw and Lvov were undoubtedly correct. But it was the addenda which were meant to render

the report more "dramatic" and lend it credence, that assured its failure in this regard. Above all, it was the central and most accentuated element in the report: the section referring to the manufacture of soap and fertilizers from the bodies of the victims.

If the Vatican acceded to the U.S. request and queried its emissaries and its agents in Poland as to what they knew about this subject, they certainly received a reply to the effect that Poland was rife with rumors about the use of Jewish corpses to make soap. Jews and Poles alike talked about this. Among both groups the rumors had given rise to a macabre folklore. The Poles took advantage of the rumors to curse, vilify and tease the Jews; among the Jews the subject produced desperate expressions and bitter humor. In one locale it was said that the Germans demanded "soap fees" for transporting the Jews to the killing sites. Elsewhere family members and friends would wish one another: "Here's hoping we meet in the same piece of soap." This kind of talk certainly abounded.

Still, it is most improbable that the Pope's agents would have been able to point to even one solid fact which could authenticate the plethora of rumors. The reason, simply, is that they could not have discovered what has not yet been discovered in the course of the numerous judicial investigations against Nazi war criminals or by historical studies of the Holocaust. If we are not mistaken, throughout all the decades of intense focus on the Holocaust at both of these levels, the judicial and the historical, not a single facility, not one site, has yet been pinpointed about which it could be said with certainty that soap was manufactured there from human bodies; nor have we ever heard of a German being charged with this crime. Cases are known of the use of corpses of murdered victims to manufacture skeletons, of brutal mass experiments performed on living and dead prisoners, of the making of a lampshade from human skin, and of other abhorrent and perverse acts. It is possible that there were isolated

³⁴ YVA, File M20/32.

³⁵ Morse, p. 10.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 17, 18, 20.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

attempts to manufacture soap from corpses. But to date nothing has come to light about the continuous mass production of soap or fertilizer using such methods.³⁹

Persons who were close to the events were able already then to distinguish between rumor and fact. From Istanbul, Haim Berlas reports that he has been in touch with the Polish ambassador there, and that “the report about the exploitation of the bodies to manufacture fat seems to him unlikely.”⁴⁰ The search for “two factories for the manufacture of soap” proved fruitless, and this “dramatic” element inevitably led to the veracity of both the report and the informants being called into question.

And if all this were not enough, the report also contained another item, apparently inserted to make the document more palatable. This was the incidental “fact” that the entire non-Jewish population of Sevastopol had been murdered by the Germans. On this matter, the State Department did not need the help of the Pope. The Allies’ intelligence-gathering services could undoubtedly ascertain that this was a baseless rumor. So the Sevastopol item, too, could hardly add credence or credibility to the document and its authors.

These hitches were the result of misjudgments and unfamiliarity with the subject at hand. Naturally, one can maintain that it is easier to be critical with a few decades of hindsight than it was to avoid such errors during the difficult period itself, when urgency and the rush of events were often bad counselors. However, the problem goes beyond this. In fact, the independent activity of Riegner, Lichtheim and their assistants which was designed to collect supporting evidence for the report about Hitler’s order was not only amateurish and rash but, in a word, superfluous. For plentiful material existed, material that was substantive and credible, concrete and detailed. This material took the form of the information which flowed incessantly to the Polish government in London and to Shmuel Zygelboim from a network of experienced and expert informants throughout Poland and from reliable Jewish institutions. These reports had been publicized far and wide for months in a responsible and authoritative manner--and had been rejected by the Zionist organizations just as they were rejected by the Palestine press. Now that the officials in Geneva had received a report, which they trusted, concerning an order for the total destruction of the Jews, logic dictated that they do what they themselves were urging State Department officials to do. They should have gone back to the information which they had previously spurned, extracted from it evidence aplenty, and served it up to the Americans as incontrovertible authentication of the report about Hitler’s order.

The refusal of the Geneva offices to accept the information supplied by the Polish government and by Zygelboim admits of several possible explanations, both personal and social. The officials involved may have felt uncomfortable making use of information which they had just recently rejected and denounced as false. They may have harbored unfriendly sentiments towards the Polish government, or perhaps party rivalries were at work *vis-a-vis* the Bundist Zygelboim.⁴¹ It is possible that they were mistaken in their assessment concerning the possibility of obtaining urgently trustworthy information from reliable sources. Or it may have been an accidental combination of these or other circumstances.

Actually, however, more than an “accidental” set of circumstances was at work; the entire episode signified and symbolized the existence of a far more entrenched mind-set. Ever since it “recognized” the events in Europe as entailing the total annihilation of European Jewry, from the initial appearances of its representatives in Geneva until the end of the war and afterward, Zionism had been training its sights on a Holocaust of its own, one which was not identical with that perceived by non-Zionists. The principal dangers discerned by the two sides were not identical; the major manifestations of the Holocaust were different; and so were the possibilities of rescue, the modes of rescue, and, not least, the goals of rescue.

The damage wrought by the amateur behavior of the Zionist representatives in Geneva in the case of getting their story across to the State Department was serious and

³⁹ In 1945 a facility was discovered in Gdansk which led to the conjecture that soap or other materials were manufactured there from the bodies of the women prisoners at the Stutthoff camp (see From the Holocaust 3-4: The Extermination Camps in Poland, p. 267). However, this conjecture evidently proved false, and we know of no further investigation of this subject. Hilberg, who mentions the incident in his book, nevertheless believes that the Germans did *not* engage in the manufacture of soap (p. 624).
⁴⁰ CZA, File S26/1 161.

⁴¹ With good intentions, in order to spur his colleagues to take up the work of rescue, Rabbi Sheinfeld declared at a meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee: “I do not want Zygielboim from the Bund to be the rescuer--let the Aguda people be the rescuers” (minutes of the meeting on January 18, 1943).

fraught with harmful consequences. Yet it appears almost inconsequential when pitted against the harm--and the victims--caused to European Jewry until the end of the war by the unique perception harbored by the Zionist movement.

* * * * *

How did the Jewish public in Palestine react to the announcement of November 23? It stands to reason that after months of being immunized and desensitized *vis-a-vis* "atrocious propaganda," the Jewish Agency statement was received with a large measure of inner recoil and mistrust. Even if the implication of the statement was absorbed, the hope certainly prevailed that this was surely another instance of exaggeration. People went to protest rallies, took part in strikes and demonstrations. Inwardly, though, they were not convinced that the situation was as serious as was being suggested. A kind of quasi-concern was generated, a muted shock, a reaction lacking in psychological integrity and devoid of sincerity. The result was depicted, with overtones of anger and vexation, by "Shin" (Shabtal Don Yihyie) in *Harzofeh*:

A black frame in the paper. Horrendous numbers of the murdered. Dreary chronicles. Jews read, sigh, and go about their usual business. In the city I did not see the effects of the news which is coming in from the European diaspora. The speaker who bemoaned the situation in the meeting of journalists was right: he thought that Jews would close their shops of their own initiative, without being ordered to do so, that masses would stream into the synagogues and pour out their distress to our Father in Heaven. That the two hundred

thousand Jews of Tel Aviv would gather in the streets, remove the Torah scrolls from their arks, tear their clothing, sit themselves on the sidewalks and send forth a heaven- and earth-shaking lament at the destruction of our people.

We did not do this. We did not respond with a primal, natural reaction to the slaughter of tens of thousands of Jews:

the shopkeeper went to his shop, the worker to his factory, the teacher to his classroom, the speculator to the black market, and the idlers to the coffee houses and places of entertainment. The love of Israel has been diminished. Those with family in the countries of the slaughter emit a groan from time to time, while the ostensibly happy people whose families saved themselves in the lands of tranquility, are indifferent to the greatest calamity in our history.

What is the explanation for this criminal complacency?⁴²

Yet even as the outraged journalist was castigating his readers for having been influenced by his own and his colleagues' deeds during the previous half year, it is noteworthy that even after November 23 the "optimistic" and heartening hints and signs did not disappear from the press altogether. Quantitatively, they were as a drop in a sea of dreadful news items. But in a public which had grown accustomed to untrustworthy exercises of the kind depicted above, there must have been quite a few who were ready to interpret sign as substance. Thus, for example, *Davar*, in its edition of November 30, 1942, carried on its front page a photograph captioned, "The Jewish police in the city of K. in Poland." The photograph showed a German officer reviewing lines of Jewish policemen. This *prima facie* evidence of Jewish-German collaboration which was almost certainly photographed and disseminated by the Germans themselves, found its way into the paper at the very height of the period of "awakening," when the public was being called on to rend its clothing and sit on the sidewalks chanting dirges. Four months later, on March 23, 1943, *Davar* was reprimanded by Yosef Gravitky, the managing editor of the Jewish Agency's Palcor news agency, for copying from a Nazi paper, *Ostland*, a "report" that two million Jews remained in Poland, after the paper had reported one day earlier on the same page that no more than two hundred thousand Jews were still alive in all of Poland. "The Germans' objective is clear," Gravitky wrote. "They themselves announce the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto but at the same time circulate reports that

⁴² *Hatzofeh*, November 26, 1942.

two million Jews are still alive in Poland. But why should we assist them in this work?"⁴³

The distrust and confusion that prevailed in the Yishuv regarding reports about the Holocaust almost until after the war had ended, is well illustrated by an item published in *Ha'aretz* on June 4, 1944. A resident of Bendin, who had arrived four months earlier, "also encountered the question, which revolts him, about whether the reports concerning the events in Poland are exaggerated." Certainly the man was right when he maintained that "it was because of lack of knowledge that few escaped."

On December 27, 1942, the Yishuv was informed that the mass destruction of Polish Jewry had *ceased*. This news was contained in a statement issued on behalf of the Rescue Committee by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, chairman of the National Council. The whole statement was couched in a tone of concern and alarm. It spoke about mass murders at Belzec and Treblinka. It expressed apprehension that half of Polish Jewry had already been annihilated. Moreover, the report that the destruction had been stopped was accompanied by a warning that this cessation was, according to all the signs, temporary, and that preparations were underway for the perpetration of a renewed butchery which was liable to begin within a few weeks or months. At the same time, it was stated explicitly that the mass destruction had been halted.⁴⁴

What was the origin of this report? Did Jewish Agency emissaries traverse the length and breadth of Poland, visiting its cities and villages, its ghettos and concentration camps, and discover that the mass murders had stopped? Or was the report received from agents of the Polish government or the Jewish organizations on the scene? Naturally, neither the one nor the other. Contact with Poland was extremely limited, if it existed at all. The informants of the Polish government and of the Jewish organizations in Poland certainly did not pass on such patently incorrect information. What happened was that the Rescue Committee had the good fortune to receive from the offices in Istanbul and Geneva copies of a certain Nazi document--and from it they gleaned what they wished to glean.

The editions of the "Official Gazette" of the General Government in Occupied Poland in Cracow from November 1-10, 1942, published the names of 53 (according to Gruenbaum, 55) places which were designated for Jewish residence. A date was set for concentrating the Jews in these places and for the uprooting of their non-Jewish residents. The orders said nothing either about the destruction or about its cessation. However, the interpretation of the Jewish Agency was that so long as the concentration process went on, no destruction would be carried out. It was decided to

inform the public of this development, citing the key details. It was especially noted "that the German orders even allow every Jew to choose which of the 53 locales he wishes to live in, the condition being that he will not be able to change his mind afterward."⁴⁵

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was right in noting that according to past experience, the concentration of Jews was a prelude to theft annihilation. Yet that same experience taught that the very process of concentration itself was accompanied by massacres among those being transported. Moreover, the sole reference in the Nazi paper was to the "General Government." Nothing was said about Latvia or Lithuania, or about the eastern districts, or about the cities that had been annexed to the Reich (Lodz, Bialystok, etc.) Not a word was said about the fate of the Jews who were being sent from the countries of the West to the destruction centers in Poland. But most crucial: since when did public Nazi orders serve as a basis for allaying fears?

It is difficult to say what impact this wretched statement had on public opinion in the Yishuv. Perhaps not very much. Given the atmosphere of bewilderment and confusion that prevailed among the public, it is possible that one more twist in the Jewish Agency's information policy passed without much notice. Especially since the calming statement was, as we said, formulated in a pessimistic style and accompanied by a warning that the murders were liable to be resumed.

What is certain is that the matter of the 53 ghettos had a considerable impact on the Zionist hierarchy in Jerusalem, in terms of information and action alike. At a meeting of the Zionist Executive Committee on January 18, 1943, Yitzhak Gruenbaum made this report the center of the informative section of his remarks, and spoke about the cessation of the destruction without so much as a hint of qualification. "It seems

43 CZA, File S26/1200.

44 *Davar*, December 27, 1942.

45 *Hatzofeh*, December 28, 1942.

that the general and systematic slaughter was halted at the end of October. No day passes without the murder of a Jew, but the mass slaughter has stopped. Apparently the Extermination Commissions (*Vernichtungskommissionen*), as the Jews called them, have completed their operations and are no longer moving from city to city and are no longer selecting the Jews to be destroyed and deported.”⁴⁶

Gruenbaum went on to address the issue of the order concerning the Jewish concentration sites. Expressing concern about the uprooting of non-Jews from their places of residence, he asked those present to imagine “what kind of feeling this will arouse in the hearts of the Poles and the Ukrainians who will be forced to leave their homes for the Jews.” Gruenbaum added that he did not know whether the Poles and Ukrainians

would be removed with the help of the police or would leave of their own volition. He concluded, in reference to this aspect of the matter, by expressing the fear that the concentration process would be accompanied by acts of atrocity.

In the course of his remarks, Gruenbaum revealed, in passing one highly significant fact: “We do not know what happened in Poland in November and December. There are no reports from Istanbul and no reports from Geneva. The last reports are from October.” What happened next was quite interesting. Present in the board room of the Zionist Executive Committee was the entire Palestine leadership of the Zionist movement. Nearly all of the dozen or so participants in the debate were highly critical of Gruenbaum’s remarks and of the commissions and omissions of the Rescue Committee. Yet not one of the speakers or any of those present asked Gruenbaum the simple and unavoidable question:

“Since you have no contact with Poland and you have no idea what has happened there in the past two months, how in heaven’s name do you have the audacity to inform us, on the basis of a public Nazi document, that the mass destruction has been halted? And what led the Rescue Committee to assume responsibility for making public the same notion in the form of a supposedly authoritative and unassailable report?”

Present were quite a number of clear minds, possessing judiciousness, perceptiveness and analytical ability; it is not because of the absence of these qualities that the requisite question was not forthcoming. Our study indicates that the answer is to be sought in two areas, one relatively unimportant but the other extremely meaningful and highly consequential.

The less important factor was that, consciously or unconsciously, those present treated the German document with surpassing respect. Emulating Gruenbaum and his aides, they did not think to cast doubt on what the official German paper spelled out explicitly and precisely. If it was stated that the Jews would be concentrated in fifty or so ghettos, then naturally this is just what would occur. It was inconceivable that they would publish statements cut out of whole cloth...

This is not the first time we have come across this element of respect for the German word. We saw it in the items carried by *Davar* from March 1942 until November 23, 1942. In this instance it seems to us to bear relatively minor importance. We are ready to suppose that among the leaders and the functionaries present at the meeting were also some who were not blind believers in German trustworthiness. Besides, inordinate esteem for German precision does not explain why not a single

one of those present failed to notice that Gruenbaum had expanded the area of the conjectured cessation of the destruction to encompass the entire Vale of Slaughter, whereas the Cracow report referred solely to the General Government in Poland.

The second and more important factor has to do with the personal attitude of the members of the Zionist hierarchy toward information concerning the Holocaust. For the sake of clarity, we shall divide this topic into two separate subsections:

1) During the period under discussion--the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943--there was not a single Zionist leader who knew for certain what was happening in the countries of the Holocaust.

2) In this period, and afterward as well, not one of these leaders attached any great importance to ensuring that the leadership receive detailed and up-to-date information on the events.

This is not to say that the Zionist leaders evinced no interest in what was going on, or were indifferent to the unfolding tragedy. To the contrary: they were full of grief

⁴⁶ Minutes of the meeting, CZA, File S25/1851.

at the calamity. They interested themselves in the reports which arrived from Occupied Europe, and many of them actively sought more and more information. Assistance and rescue were the order of the day--to which end a Rescue Committee had been established. The committee members are in possession of the required details, just as every person is familiar with the details relevant to his own area of activity. And if, let us say, their information proves unreliable at times--well, who would expect otherwise under conditions such as these? This is no reason to complain and to hamper them further in their already difficult work...

At the end of this chapter we shall return to our two postulates and attempt to demonstrate their accuracy by grounding them in facts and in the activity of certain persons. In the meantime, these two postulates would appear to offer a full and complete explanation for the abundantly forgiving attitude with which the members of the Zionist Executive Committee viewed the credulous statement of the Rescue Committee.

At a meeting of the Zionist Executive Committee on February 2, 1943, which was devoted to a discussion of the WZO budget, Gruenbaum spoke briefly about the Holocaust and again mentioned the 55 concentration sites.⁴⁷ Ten days later, at a meeting of the Rescue Committee on February 12, the imaginary cessation of the destruction campaign was finally acknowledged for what it was. This followed the arrival in Palestine of several women from Poland who reported on what they knew. In the wake of their testimony, Gruenbaum stated: "It now

seems likely that the liquidation of these two ghettos [Radomsko and Sosnowiec] means that the Germans have begun to root out Jews in the 55 places in which Jews were permitted to reside under the order of November 15, 1942."⁴⁸ Another ten days would pass before the head of the Rescue Committee would sum up the "cessation" issue at a session of *Asefar HaNivharim* (the 'parliament' of the Yishuv). It was now clear that "the stoppage lasted no more than two or three months, and came to an end in mid-January." In that same speech Gruenbaum announced with absolute certainty, citing "trustworthy witnesses," that the Warsaw ghetto had been liquidated. "The forty thousand Jews who remained there following the large-scale killing of last *August, September and October* [emphasis added] have been deponed to an unknown location... Warsaw is now *Judenrein*... The streets of Warsaw, even those where Jews once thronged, are empty, barren, no Jew is seen there any longer."⁴⁹

That the women refugees provided incorrect information about Warsaw, is hardly surprising. There was no contact between the ghettos in Poland, and their residents fed on rumors which were not always accurate. That Gruenbaum placed too much trust in the personal impressions of these refugees and preferred to believe their testimony above the reliable information which was constantly coming in from Poland and London--this is consistent with the pattern we have already seen. What is surprising, nevertheless, is that Gruenbaum specified the months of August, September and October, 1942, as a period of 'large-scale killing' in Warsaw. What this demonstrates is that as late as February 1943, the head of the Rescue Committee in Jerusalem had not yet absorbed and digested the main facts concerning the "Big Action" in Warsaw which, it is commonly agreed, was the single most tragic event in the series of afflictions which befell the nation. As we have seen (in Ch. II) this operation began on July 22 and was completed on September 12. Stretching things, we may perhaps say that it extended into the final two weeks of September as well. But under no circumstances could it be said to have lasted into October, which was a month of relative quiet after the vast slaughter. Gruenbaum's faulty expertise about this episode shows that even after November 23 he did not take the trouble to get a thorough grasp of the subject for which he bore responsibility in the Yishuv.

As for the halt in the destruction--there was no such respite: not of three months, not of two months, and not of any other period. For a few weeks in October and early November there was, it is true, a slowdown in the pace of the destruction in the small towns due to weather conditions at this time of the year and the resultant poor condition of the roads. This,

however, was totally unrelated to the concentration orders. During this "slowdown" 16,000 Jews of Pinsk were murdered; several thousand Lvov Jews were put

47 CZA, File S26/1852.

48 CZA, File S26/1240.

49 Destruction and Holocaust, pp. 71-72.

to death in an operation which commenced on November 18; and on November 25, the Jews of Bergen, in Norway, were sent to Auschwitz. During and after this period, mass murders of Jews were perpetrated in Lublin, Piotrkow, Rzeszow, Przemysl, and among the remnants of the Jewish population of the cities and towns of Eastern Galicia.⁵⁰ The Jerusalem-based invention about the stoppage was a precious gift presented unthinkingly to Nazi propaganda.

* * * * *

Yet this was not the end of the “cessation” episode. But so astonishing is its continuation that even though we have become accustomed to surprising and even shocking occurrences, we would not have believed the story had it not been related by the person who was actually involved. We shall present it, then, in the original words of the teller, who recounted it in the periodical *Knesset* in 1945.

The time was April 1943. In Bermuda an Anglo-American conference was convened to discuss the measures required to rescue European Jewry. In a cable to the conference, the Rescue Committee in Jerusalem set forth its proposals and requests. The story is picked up by Yitzhak Gruenbaum:

In a telegram of April 17, the Committee summed up its requests in seven points: 1) To demand that the German government permit the departure of the Jews from their country and from the occupied countries; 2) to arrange exchanges of Jews from the occupied countries being held by the Germans with subjects being held by the Allied countries; 3) to open the gates of Palestine to the refugees; 4) to ensure Jewish entry into neutral states on the basis of a pledge that they will leave those countries once the war is over; 5) to ensure transportation and provisions for the refugees during their departure and transfer; 6) to facilitate the shipment of foodstuffs, medicines and necessary goods for the Jews in enemy lands, as was done for the residents of Greece; 7) to set up machinery which will ensure that all this is implemented and to invite Jewish representatives to serve on it.

The reader will immediately note the absence of one key item from this list: a demand that measures be taken to force the Germans to put a stop to the destruction. Gruenbaum himself explains this omission:

It will be wondered why these requests did not include, as the first and principal demand: to force the Nazi executioners to halt the massacre and the deportations to the death camps in

Poland. There were many reasons for this. *It was thought then that the slaughter that took place in 1942 would not be resumed.* It is true that doubts were expressed whether the concentration of the Jews in 55 places of residence did not attest to preparations for continuing the destruction. *But people did not want to believe this,* just as they did not want to understand that we must concentrate first and foremost on rescuing children out of the hope that this request would be accepted by the entire world and would not run up against various insurmountable political and economic obstacles. Against this contention we argued...⁵¹ [Emphases added.]

The author would appear to be overly modest in twice avoiding the use of the first-person plural or even singular (“it was thought...”, and “people did not want to believe...”). Nor does his attempt to link the issue of the “stoppage” with the debate over the rescue of children, help to bring the truth to light. The file of the Rescue Committee contains the minutes of a meeting of a special subcommittee which was entrusted with formulating the requests to be forwarded to the Bermuda Conference. Present at the meeting were A. Reiss, A. Hartglass, B. Mintz, Dr. M. Landau and Y. Kleinbaum. The proposal which this committee submitted for the approval of the “narrow committee” (apparently the presidium of the Rescue Committee) included the following clear and explicit demand: “To take vigorous steps for reprisal measures which could force the oppressor to halt the slaughter of the Jews.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, p. 266 (Ch. 10) and the book’s chronological table.

⁵¹ *Destruction and Holocaust*, p. 206.

⁵² CZA, File S26/1241. This demand appears also in the cable of the representation of Polish Jewry that was sent from Tel Aviv to Bermuda on April 18, 1943. See *In Those Days*, World Federation of Polish Jewry (Hebrew, English, Yiddish), p. 13 (Yiddish), p. 15 (English).

Hence, the omission of this demand was the result of a decision by the Rescue Committee's presidium which included, besides Gruenbaum, Eliahu Dobkin, Bernard Joseph (Dov Yosef), Moshe Shapira and Dr. Emil Schmorak. It is difficult, indeed all but impossible, to believe that these of all persons compelled the head of the committee to omit the demand in question against his will. To the contrary, it is far more probable that the members of the presidium evinced no substantial objection to Gruenbaum's pressing suggestion that the demand be dropped--a suggestion made on the basis of the mirage of the "55 places of residence." And this, two months after he had agreed to "terminate" the imaginary stoppage. Whatever the case, the cable emerged from the authorized Zionist body without a demand for measures to be taken to stop the destruction. We shall have occasion to examine (in Ch. XI) how this cable from Jerusalem dovetailed well with the arguments adduced in memoranda submitted by other Jewish organizations.

We shall return now to the two questions that remained open concerning the remarks by Yitzhak Gruenbaum at the meeting of the youth movements' leadership.

The first question was whether Gruenbaum actually said, or implied, that so long as Rommel had not been defeated in North Africa, his heart (according to a different version, the heart of the Yishuv) would not be free to deal with the rescue of European Jewry. The answer to this is positive. All the signs are that the head of the Rescue Committee did in fact say what *Haboker* attributed to him. At all events, such a remark would be consistent with Gruenbaum's feeling as he gave it frank expression four years later. In December 1946 the official report of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine was submitted to the 22nd Zionist Congress. The report stated, black-on-white: "At that time [Autumn 1942] the threat of an invasion of Palestine had already been lifted and the war front was distanced from the country following the victory at El Alamein. The Yishuv was then able to turn its heart to concern for its brothers in the grief-stricken diaspora of Europe." The same idea, the same feeling, the identical wording.

The second question, it will be recalled, was: What was the actual nature of the "cold water" which Gruenbaum would, as he put it, pour on his Polish associates in order to "dampen their fervor"? A clear and unequivocal answer to this question was forthcoming from one of the leaders of Polish Jewry's representation at that time. It emerges that whenever they would urge Gruenbaum to launch rescue operations, he would remind them that the reports about the mass murders were atrocity propaganda disseminated by the Polish government for its own political needs. The effect of this reply on the representatives of Polish Jewry was apparent from the very conversation we had with the functionary in question. Although he was in fierce opposition to Gruenbaum at the time, and was highly critical of him during our talk, he maintained that where the Polish propaganda was concerned, the head of the Rescue Committee was substantially correct. To convince us, he pointed out that the Polish government for months concealed from the world the report about the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. He desisted from this line only after we reminded him that it was expressly the Polish government radio station which had been the first to broadcast the news of the revolt.

Thus we come to one of the blackest points of the entire Holocaust period. To dramatize it, we shall focus on deeds and reactions in the span of three or four days in three cities: Jerusalem, London and Warsaw.

The time was five months before the November 23 announcement.

In Palestine and in the Zionist movement, according to the conventional formulas, they still "did not know" and had 'not heard' anything. On June 29, 1942, the following telegram was dispatched from Jerusalem to Rabbi Ehrenpreis in Stockholm: 'Please cable immediately truth of report of 700 thousand Jews murdered in Poland especially truth of report about 300 thousand killed in Vilna and Kovno areas. Gruenbaum.'

No reply to this cable arrived, and nothing further took place in Jerusalem until November 23, as we saw.

We have already described, citing reports in *Davar* and *Ha'aretz*, the developments in London in this period (Ch. II). We shall not repeat that description here, but will look at the course of events from the perspective of the Warsaw ghetto. Before this, a few preliminary remarks are necessary.

The Polish government received the estimate of 700,000 Jews murdered in Poland and 300,000 in the Vilna and Kovno regions from a May 1942 report of the Bund Central Committee in Poland.⁵³ At the same time considerable factual material came into the possession of the Polish government from a second Jewish group. This was a group code-named *Oneg Shabbat* ("Jay of the Sabbath"), or O.S., which set itself the goal of recording and perpetuating the events in the Warsaw ghetto and, where possible, other communities as well. At the same time, O.S. tried to get information to the outside world in order to enlist help. Heading the project was the historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who did the lion's share of the work and kept a running diary of events beginning in September 1939. Excitement can be felt in every word of Ringelblum's diary entry for June 26, 1942:

June 26, 1942 -- Friday, June 26, 1942, is for O.S. a day of a great event. This morning British radio broadcast to the Jews of Poland. Everything we knew so well was reported: about Slonim and Vilna, Lvov and Chelmno, and so on. For months we grieved that the world was deaf and dumb to our tragedy, which is unparalleled in history. We were furious at the Polish public, at those who are in contact with the Polish government: why is there no announcement about the slaughter of Polish Jewry; why does the world know nothing of all this? We blamed the Poles *for* deliberately suppressing our tragedy so that it will not cause their own tragedy to pale in comparison. It appears that at last our demands have

achieved their goal. In the past weeks British radio has broadcast a series of reports about the acts of cruelty being perpetrated against the Jews of Poland: Chelmno, Vilna, Belzec, and the rest. Today there was a broadcast summarizing the situation: seven hundred thousand Jews, the number of Jews killed in Poland, was mentioned. At the same time, the broadcast vowed revenge, a final accounting for all these deeds of violence.

The O.S. group has thereby fulfilled a great historical mission. It alerted the world to our fate and thus perhaps saved from destruction hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews. Whether this is really so, the near future will, of course, tell. I do not know who among the group will remain alive, who will be privileged by fate to work on the material we have collected. But one thing is already clear to us all: we have fulfilled our duty. We have overcome every obstacle to achieve our end. Our deaths will not be meaningless like the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews. We have struck the enemy a hard blow. We have revealed his satanic plan to annihilate Polish Jewry, a plan he wished to complete in silence. We have run a line through his calculations and have exposed his cards. And if England keeps its word and takes immediate measures, then perhaps we shall be saved.

But no such immediate measures were forthcoming, neither by England nor by America. Nor were they called on to take such measures by those who naturally should have had the greatest interest in this. For some time to come, the BBC continued to broadcast reports about the destruction. The Polish government and Shmuel Zygelboim continued to make public the considerable information they were receiving from the areas of the slaughter. Detailed lists were published specifying the number of those saved according to cities and districts in Poland. Intellectuals, statesmen and religious figures in England began to evince interest and anxiety. A concerned and active public opinion began to form. But the process of this coalescence of public opinion could not keep pace with the rate of the destruction. Public opinion was unable to become a constant source of pressure on the government and thereby force it to take urgent measures before it was too late. In the absence of a strong central force capable of guiding the public, such activities as did take place were

sporadic and fragmentary. Precious months were wasted on organizing and acquiring strength.

At the same time there were islands of composure and salient disbelief. These were located in the offices and branches of the World Zionist Organization. They were able to take the measure of the Polish atrocity propaganda; they knew that no drastic action was called for. We have seen how Lichtheim chalked up to his credit his

⁵³ In the *Years of the Jewish Destruction, Voice of the Bund from the Underground* (Yiddish), Unser Zeit, New York, 1948, pp. 20-23.

disbelief and his non-transmission of “unreliable” reports. Even Silbershein placed no credence in them. Had the Zionist movement offices in London and New York believed the reports, they would have undoubtedly convinced Geneva and Jerusalem as well.

Since they did not believe, they could not conceal, even had they wished to, their reserved attitude and their self-control in a situation where this reaction went against nature. Cold water was poured not only in Jerusalem, and had a dampening effect not only on Jews. The appalling information which was collected with such agony by the *Oneg Shabbat* group and which overcame so many obstacles and barriers, ran up helplessly against a wall of entrenched alienation.

In what bad dream, in what nightmare-within-a-nightmare could Ringelblum imagine that there were places, that there were people--not Poles, not British, but Jewish Zionists--who were preoccupied for months on end in undoing the fruits of the heroic labors of the martyrs in Warsaw...

The enemy's calculations were not erased, his plans were not exposed and were not interfered with. Three weeks after Ringelblum recorded his emotional diary entry, the “Big Action” was launched in Warsaw. It would be a great relief to us and to our readers if someone could say in all sincerity and with a clear conscience that there was no connection whatsoever between that development and the cold water in Jerusalem.

* * * * *

Following the publication of the November 23 announcement, the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Moshe Shertok (Sharett) left on a mission to England and America. On May 18, 1943, he reported on that mission to the Zionist Executive Committee.⁵⁴ This report, part of which was devoted to the Holocaust, is a treasure trove of the concepts and outlooks which prevailed among the Zionist leadership at that time. It illustrates how distorted perceptions led to wrong moves and reveals the kinds of self-deceptions, exaggerations, and blurring of facts and dates which the Zionist hierarchy resorted to in order to adapt reality

to their own concepts. The personality and standing of the author lend this document particular value. His knowledge of and accuracy in using the Hebrew language reinforce the content of what he had to say by eliminating the possibility of a careless or imprecise comment.

It was an intelligent and seemingly substantive survey, presented by a person who knew a fact when he saw one and could describe it properly. Particularly noteworthy is the plastic depiction of the pressure exerted by British public opinion on the British government with the aim of forcing it to take action to rescue Jews. There were three waves of public opinion directed at the government, and each wave brought about certain government action which was followed by a temporary respite in the pressure as the public awaited the results of the government's moves while anticipating that it would persist with the required activities. The third and most energetic wave followed the reports about the latest massacres, and it achieved the final result: the British government decided to initiate a meeting with representatives of the American government in order to plan and implement concrete measures to rescue European Jewry. This initiative engendered the Bermuda Conference.

Considerations of space preclude our quoting more than the opening of the Shertok report. For the sake of convenience, we shall divide this into three sections and consider each section separately. All the emphases have been added. The first passage:

Gentlemen, it is my duty to give you a report of my visit to England and America. When I left Palestine at the end of November, I took with me the *first concrete* news of the atrocity which reached Palestine via witnesses, namely, the Palestine refugees whom we managed to liberate from the Nazi hell and bring to Palestine as part of an exchange. I had thought that the shocking picture which was revealed to us would come as something of a *surprise* to the *haverim* in London. This was not so. I found there not only among our comrades but among the public a far more extensive and more detailed view of the events in Europe.

⁵⁴ Minutes of a meeting of the Smaller Zionist Actions Committee, May 18, 1943, CZA, File S25/1853.

Patently, if Sharett learned a good deal about the Holocaust, he learned nothing about himself or his associates in Jerusalem. Fully half a year after November 1942, he still thought that the information which had been received from the refugees constituted the first concrete reports. The implication is that the whole flood of information which inundated the

Yishuv beforehand was non-existent, or at least non-substantive. And if his expectation of surprising London with his late and fragmentary reports was naive, his inability to admit to himself and to his colleagues their collective failure to absorb for months on end the reliable reports which reached them, attests to a psychological-public defect.

The distorted picture is evident also in the final section of the passage quoted above, which implies that the London Zionists were the pioneers of information about the Holocaust. The truth is that they were consistently a delaying factor in the British public's awareness of what was being perpetrated against Europe's Jews. Like their colleagues in Geneva, New York and Jerusalem, they heard but "did not hear," knew but did not know.' Where Sharett could have surprised this audience was in announcing that Jerusalem had finally acknowledged the substantiveness of the reports from Europe.

We turn now to the second excerpt from Sharett's report:

In those very days the press of the great city of London and the papers in the provinces were flooded with reports and articles about the atrocity in Europe, and this subject was at the center of public interest. This was not something gradual, but *seemed to come all at once*. It is true that reports had arrived gradually in the course of *weeks* or perhaps *months* beforehand, but they were unable to get [the reports] into the press, at least not on a large scale. It proved impossible to attract the public's attention to this topic. There was a *kind of conspiracy of concealment*. There was a lack of desire to bring the matter to the public's knowledge and to underscore the Jewish people's distress.

At a certain burning point in the war, things reached a pass where a body which was set up to sound the alarm about these troubles and to consult on what to do about rescue, a body which was headed by the leaders of the various faiths and whose president was the Archbishop of Canterbury-where this body, a few weeks prior to the surging wave of reports was for the first time unable to secure the participation of a government representative in a meeting; the government did not even send a message of sympathy to this meeting, and it was only following special efforts by the Archbishop that matters were sorted out. The reason given by government circles for this first refusal was that it would not be helpful if

this card were placed in the hands of the antisemites in England, thus allowing them to intensify their propaganda to the effect that this war is a Jewish war.

The focal point of the distortion in this passage lies in the words 'weeks or perhaps months.' Sharett was well aware how many weeks there are in a month and how valuable 30-day months could be in rescuing Jews from mass destruction which was being perpetrated at a furious pace. The blurring of months and weeks and the emphasis on the idea that the public awakening had supposedly occurred "all at once" covered up the fact that for months the Zionist office in London had not taken part in rescue moves, even when these were initiated by others. It did not support the public awakening which began in June-July, did not lend a hand to the efforts to enlist public opinion during August-September and which found their expression, among other ways, in the Zygelboim-Wedgewood pamphlet.

Since it is inconceivable that Sharett's serious deception was undertaken in order to mislead his colleagues, the conclusion must be that his perception of reality was gravely flawed. He absorbed the facts in a uniquely subjective manner. Reversing the well-known aphorism of Ben Katznelson, he adapted the "constellation [of events]" to the "ideology." Not only in the present but in the past as well, he saw what he wanted to see, what "deserved" to be seen, in order not to destroy or shake received opinions and ingrained attitudes.

The allegation of "a kind of conspiracy of concealment and the story that this allegation needed to be verified, illustrate an unusual mode of perceiving reality. An unbiased researcher would accept that at *this time* in England there was no conspiracy

or "quasi-conspiracy" of concealing the Holocaust, at all events, not by the British government. And if certain circles felt that the distress of the Jews should not be played up in order not to bolster the contentions of the antisemites (a tendency which was considerably stronger in government circles in America), then the government behaved at this time *contrary* to such apprehensions. Attesting to this are the BBC broadcasts we have mentioned, as well as the "successful outcome" of the meeting referred to by Sharett. In that assembly, which was held on October 29, a message of sympathy from Churchill was read out. This was a few weeks *before* the last wave of reports, and the government did not hesitate to give the event the imprimatur of the prime minister himself.

It is difficult to imagine that Sharett did not hear about another assembly which had taken place two months earlier, on September 2. This was a protest rally sponsored by the Labor Party. Present were the foreign ministers of Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Norway, and senior representatives of other states. The keynote speaker was Shmuel Zygelboim, who according to press reports "gave a harrowing description of the methods of the destruction of the Jews." Representing the British government was a senior minister, Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary.⁵⁵

Had Sharett interested himself further in events in England prior to his visit there, he would have discovered that two months before the Labor rally, the British Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, had confirmed to reporters in the name of the British government the murder of 700,000 Polish Jews. At that press conference Bracken was quoted as saying: "When all the atrocities committed by the Germans in Poland are known, the world will hear a nightmarish account unexampled in history."⁵⁶ It is difficult to reconcile these facts with the thesis of a "conspiracy of concealment," but they were not made known to the members of the Zionist Executive Committee.

Moreover, Moshe Sharett, who was well acquainted with the British political system, surely knew that even if the British government had wished to conceal from the public the truth about the Holocaust, its means for doing so were extremely limited. It could not impose silence on the Polish government-in-exile which was based in London and was the principal source of the information. Nor could it foist censorship on the press with respect to a non-military matter such as the murder of Jews. If Sharett had desired an objective view of the actual state of affairs, he would easily have discovered the cause of the disastrous failure--that the grim news of June and July did not capture the attention of the public and the press in Britain soon enough.

* * * * *

We turn now to the third and last passage:

The *conspiracy of concealment* was broken by the pressure of the reports. In this a crucial role was played by the Polish message to the Allied countries. *In this closed forum* I will not venture an analysis of the reasons that led the Polish government to raise this question, to place it on the international stage. But to its credit is its great deed in dispatching the message which compelled all the Allied states

to pay special heed and enabled the entire matter to gain greater publicity.

Notwithstanding that the "kind of conspiracy of concealment" has now become an unqualified conspiracy, the fact related in this passage is correct. On December 10 the content of a Polish government message to the Allied governments concerning the slaughter of Polish Jewry was made public in London.⁵⁷ This led to the publication, On December 17, of a joint declaration by the Allies denouncing the murders and pledging that "all those responsible for the extermination of the Jews will be punished." The BBC broadcast the declaration in 23 languages.⁵⁸ In England public reaction was intense; Parliament rose in silent memory of the murdered Jews. The public

⁵⁵ Davar, September 4, 1942.

⁵⁶ Davar, July 10, 1942.

⁵⁷ Davar, December 11, 1942.

⁵⁸ Davar, December 28, 1942.

movement for action against the destruction assumed dimensions which compelled both Parliament and the government to take note of it.

At the same time, it is somewhat surprising to read Sharett's hint concerning "the reasons that led the Polish government to raise this question"--reasons which deserved special mention and which it was impossible to cite openly, as the meeting was a closed one. Logically, one would think that a closed session would be more amenable to a thorough clarification than an open meeting. Thus Sharett's reference to "this closed forum" would seem to be a startling rhetorical blunder on the part of a person known for his cautious formulations. The hint implies that the Polish government's action was an unusual one on its part, and hence required a special explanation. The truth is that the Polish message was the continuation of an information policy concerning the destruction of the Jews which the Polish government had embarked upon nearly a year earlier. Had Sharett been as informed as he should have been, he would surely have been able to relate to his colleagues that the new Polish action, together with the latest wave of public arousal, had been triggered mainly by the receipt of another report from the *Oneg Shabbat* group dated November 15.⁵⁹ This report rounded out the information brought in October by a special emissary of the Polish government, Jan Karski, who had returned to England after spending a year in Occupied Poland. At all events, there were no extraordinary factors involved which required special mention or which had to be concealed in a fog of silence and suspicion.

If there was something different about the public furor of December 1942, it lay in the fact that for the first time since the commencement of the Holocaust, the entire Jewish spectrum took part in it

unreservedly, including the Zionist movement under one of its best known leaders, Moshe Shertok.

The reader who thinks that we have been unwarrantedly harsh regarding the Shertok report must take into account the unique status of this document. In fact, this is the sole "authorized" description of the Holocaust drawn up during the actual period of its occurrence by a figure with the standing and repute accruing to the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. For his audience in the board room of the Zionist Executive Committee and for his colleagues in the Zionist hierarchy whose knowledge of events was meager and whose study of the subject was far from thorough, Sharett's remarks and hints were authoritative signposts. The hints became facts, the assumptions were transformed into solid truths and tenets of faith. From the board room these tenets spread via the press, books, lectures and personal contacts, to become the underpinnings for the chronicles of the Holocaust, accepted by the Yishuv and the Zionist movement.

Sharett's standing and personality undoubtedly helped the report to be accepted without question. That this is more than an assumption is shown by the following episode. In a previous session of the Zionist Executive Committee, held on January 18, Eliahu Dobkin, a member of the Rescue Committee, announced that a slight possibility existed of sending food packages to certain locales in the countries of the Holocaust. Dobkin phrased this statement in a way which implied that this possibility had only now arisen and had not existed previously. He was corrected on the spot by Executive Committee member Melech Neustadt: "Dobkin said today that a crack has been opened, that we received a report that a crack has been opened for sending food packages. I want to state: no crack has been opened, it was always there; we did not know because we did not want to know; previously it was wider, now it is narrower, but it was there all along."⁶⁰

By his correction, Melech Neustadt, one of the few who objected to the minimal-action line of the Rescue Committee, prevented a distortion of reality which could have covered up a serious blunder in the past. Yet neither Neustadt nor any of his colleagues had a single word to say in contravention of Sharett's report, which contained distortions far graver than anything Dobkin had said, and which bore profound ramifications for past and future alike.

It seems likely that the virtue of Sharett's report lay not only in the standing of its author, but perhaps principally in the convenient character of the report itself. It was, as we have said, consistent with ingrained

⁵⁹ Ringelblum, Vol. I, p. 17 (Introduction of Aharon Eisenbach).

⁶⁰ CZA, File S25/1851.

attitudes. It ruffled no feathers and generated no feelings of guilt and contrition. For the Zionist leaders it was convenient to note that an authoritative official had made a thorough study of the matter, and had discovered persons guilty of a conspiracy of silence and other sins. And the guilty parties were them--not us, not the Zionists. A version of official credibility had been served up, one which could be digested with absolute confidence. Moshe Sharett could be trusted and so could his report.

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It would come as no surprise to learn that the categorical statement made by Golda Meir which we cited above, and which was made two weeks before Sharett's report to the Zionist Executive Committee, had its source in information she received from Sharett upon his return to Palestine. Her statement goes beyond Sharett's "kind of conspiracy of concealment." If this was the case when everything was still fresh and the "truths" were in a process of formation, it is no wonder that two years later, when solid and sacrosanct patterns had already formed, the chairman of the Zionist Executive, David Ben-Gurion, did not hesitate to declare that "the reports about the slaughter in Poland reached us late, and even after they arrived, *it was a long time before others would believe us*"⁶¹ (emphasis added). Those were his exact words: they would not believe us, the Zionists. For a long time they refused to believe...

It is possible that despite everything known to the reader, Ben-Gurion had his own truth. He was in America when Riegner's cable arrived concerning Hitler's decision to carry out the destruction of the Jews forthwith. He undoubtedly heard from Rabbi Wise about the stubbornness of the State Department officials who refused to accept the veracity of the report or to be convinced by the evidence submitted to them. This may have underlain his rash statement.

If so, we shall not be exaggerating by much if we suppose that the report about the German Fuehrer's decision exhausted the sum total of the expertise which Ben-Gurion brought back with him from his mission abroad. At all events, this is the only item of information he talks about with any confidence in his one and only public appearance devoted to the Holocaust. That this is so is confirmed by a review of his appearances following his return to Palestine on October 2, 1942, after an absence of several months.

On October 8 Ben-Gurion met with reporters for the first time since his return. The meeting took place in the large hall of the Jewish Agency building. Present were local and foreign journalists as well as officials of various ranks. The encounter lasted for over an hour.

In the press conference Ben-Gurion dwelt at length and replied to questions on the following topics: America in general and American Jewry in particular, antisemitism in America, the Biltmore Plan, a Jewish army, the Hadassah organization, the Magnes group, and the proposal of the Peter Bergson group to establish "a free Jewish government-in-exile." As for the Holocaust--not a word. Nothing was said, nothing was asked; the subject was simply not on the agenda.⁶²

On October 15 a meeting was held of the Zionist Executive Committee. The principal speaker was David Ben-Gurion. In his lengthy and detailed address, on the subject of "A Zionist Plan of Action and American Jewry," the Holocaust of European Jewry is referred to in just one sentence: "In view of the calamity which befell Polish Jewry, many Bund leaders came to America." Beyond this, not one word about the Holocaust.⁶³

On November 10 the Zionist Executive Committee convened once more to continue the discussion begun at the previous session. Ben-Gurion took an active part in the proceedings. Again, not a word about the Holocaust.⁶⁴

On November 30 an extraordinary meeting of *Asefat HaNivharim* was held in Jerusalem, to protest the destruction of the Jews in Occupied Europe. At this assembly,

61 David Ben-Gurion, *In the Campaign* (Hebrew), Vol. III, p. 175.

62 *Ha'aretz*, October 9, 1942.

63 *In the Campaign*, Vol. IV, pp. 43-56.

64 CZA, File S25/1848.

at the height of the wave of detailed information which was flooding the world, Ben-Gurion was able to provide the following information:

We do not know exactly what is occurring in the Nazi Vale of Slaughter; how many Jews have already been butchered, murdered, burned alive, and over how many the sword of destruction still hangs. The Nazi scaffold is surrounded by a wall of machineguns and expert hangmen, and no one enters or leaves. *But we know what Hitler is plotting for our people* and what he wrote in his book, *Mein Kampf*.

A few sentences in the speech were devoted to listing the means required for rescue (principally, bringing out the children and opening the gates of Palestine), Ben-Gurion used most of the speech to press his case for his chief demand, the creation of a Jewish army. He concluded with an appeal to the Jews in the ghettos of Europe: "And our final words are addressed to our dear brothers and sisters who are being martyred in the Nazi ghettos: Your calamity is our calamity, your blood is our blood. We will do what we can to exact retribution and we shall not be silent until we

have redeemed you from the Nazi hell and from the degenerate diaspora *and until we bring you all to us, to our land which is being built up and redeemed.*"⁶⁵ (Emphases in the original.)

As the reader can see, there is one thing that Ben-Gurion knows with certainty: that Hitler is plotting to destroy the Jews. On the other hand, he is far from certain about the credibility of the reports which speak of millions dead. The optimistic note at the end with its promise to redeem and bring to Palestine all those in the ghettos only underscores the negation of urgency.

A further reference to information about the Holocaust is found in Ben-Gurion's speech at the annual Tel-Hai assembly, held in 1943 on March 18. A month and a half earlier, the world press had reported that the number of Jews massacred stood at several millions and that three-quarters of European Jewry had already been decimated. Ben-Gurion dissociates himself unequivocally from these figures, asserting: "For we know days of great slaughter of Jews--*tens and hundreds of thousands*, women, children and infants--and we do not even know their numbers."⁶⁶

Ben-Gurion truly did not know. He knew even less than others. He did not know because he did not wish to know, because he took no interest in "details."

Since the chairman of the Jewish Agency made relatively frequent public appearances, and since many of those appearances were chronicled in the press, in books and in various protocols, his lack of expertise concerning events during the Holocaust and his surprising acquiescence in this paucity of information is more apparent than it is with respect to other Zionist leaders of the period. A lack of interest in these events and his overt unwillingness to occupy himself with Holocaust-related matters is more conspicuous in Ben-Gurion than in others. With the exception of his speech, quoted above, at the special meeting of *Asefat HaNivharim* which was devoted to the Holocaust, we found not a single instance in his public appearances in which he dwelt on the destruction of the Jews as a subject of dread on its own account. In the rare cases when he mentions the Holocaust, he is fearful that the total destruction of the European Jews will have a deleterious effect on the Zionist enterprise, or he expresses the hope that the survivors of the slaughter will contribute to the realization of the Zionist goal.

We shall examine these and related matters in the next chapter. We shall conclude the present chapter by citing an example of gross ignorance and a regrettable contempt for facts, a testimony which was given a quarter of a century after the events occurred. In his book, The State of

Israel Restored, Ben-Gurion provides what could be a substitute description of the Big Action in the Warsaw ghetto: "The head of the ghetto council, Adam Czerniakov, committed suicide together with his wife as early as July 1942, when the Germans demanded that he come up with additional Jews for 'transport.' In September 1942 over one hundred thousand Jews were collected. Thirty thousand were sent to do labor and the rest were sent to death camps. The revolt in the ghetto then broke out." (P. 666, Hebrew edition.)

⁶⁵ In the Campaign, Vol.111, pp. 114-119.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

That Czerniakov's wife was "put to death" eight years before she actually passed away⁶⁷ is not an irrevocable historical error. But the reduction of the Action from two months to one and from 310,000 to one hundred thousand, as well as the entire manner in which the Action is presented, show that Ben-Gurion's vaunted meticulousness and diligence failed him in a sphere which he suppressed consistently during years of difficult decisions. If he had read at least one of the numerous books which treat of the entire Holocaust, he would have spared himself this public presentation of his astounding ignorance. However, although Ben-Gurion immersed himself in books and documents which enabled him to deepen his knowledge of subjects which interested him, the Holocaust was not one of these. On this subject he made do with what he himself knew, as he did during the Holocaust period itself.⁶⁸

Ben-Gurion towered above his contemporaries. What they had, stood out in him; and what he had, served others as a model for emulation. Not all the Zionist leaders abstained from learning about the Holocaust as Ben-Gurion did. But the overwhelming majority were characterized by defective knowledge of events and a stubborn refusal to delve into the subject.

⁶⁷ She died on February 24, 1950. Adam Cziernakow, *Warsaw Ghetto Diary* (Hebrew), p. 344.

⁶⁸ We will return to Ben-Gurion's inadvertent "contribution" to the history of the Holocaust in Ch. 14.

Part Two

THE WAR ON TERRITORIALISM

Preface

In the previous chapters we accumulated almost as many questions as revealed facts. The thrust of all the questions and puzzlements is the same, and we may encapsulate them in the terms employed by David Zakai in the article already cited: What happened? How did it happen? How could it have happened? As we advanced in our examination, amazement grew and the questions became more acute. Perplexedly, we asked ourself what possessed the journalist "D.P." to treat as he did the authoritative reports about the mass destruction which reached Palestine in March 1942. Subsequently it turned out that he was hardly the only one at fault--the entire *Davar* editorial board was implicated. So we asked, What happened to *Davar*?

A detailed analysis left no room for doubt that *Davar* was hardly alone in suppressing the truth about the Holocaust. It became clear that the whole spectrum of the Zionist press in Palestine--encompassing all wings and branches of opinion--was engaged, from March to November 1942, in lulling public opinion through the use of means and methods which could have been specially conjured up and ordered by the Nazi propaganda machine. And again we asked ourself, What happened to the Zionist press?

A further clarification revealed that the source of the alienation regarding the information about the Holocaust lay in the Zionist leadership in Jerusalem, which until the arrival of a group of refugees in November 1942 consistently rejected all the grave reports that had arrived by various routes. At this point our question was divided into two: besides the initial puzzle--what happened to the Zionist leadership--a second query had to be posed: How did it happen that no one in the Palestine press corps showed even an iota of independence and non-conformism in this fateful period? We were especially surprised by the behavior of the Revisionist paper *Hamashkif* which was at odds with the Zionist leadership and the establishment press on virtually every possible question--with the exception of one subject: suppressing information about the Holocaust. On this one topic, it conformed well with the chorus of deniers and calmers. And this brought us to the concluding question: What happened to the Zionist Yishuv in Palestine?

Subsequently it became clear that the suppression syndrome was not confined exclusively to Palestine, In London and New York, too, the

Zionists emulated the behavior of their colleagues in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The British Zionists, who were close to the principal sources of information, failed to ingest that information any better than the Jewish Agency officials in Jerusalem. As for the Zionist leaders in America, it was they who did the terrible deed of concealing for three months the report about Hitler's extermination order--a report which was unavailable to the public from any other source. The official representative of the Histadrut in Geneva chalked up to his credit the fact that for lengthy periods he did not transmit to Jerusalem "false" reports--which later turned out to be true. The letter of the Jewish Agency representative in Istanbul which we quoted shows that he sincerely did not believe the "atrocious propaganda" and that he, like his colleagues, was living on a unique Zionist planet. Even Abraham Silbershein, who more than any other Zionist leader maintained contact with European Jewry during the Holocaust, failed to take in at an early stage the descriptions of the actual situation which were conveyed by *Oneg Shabbat* and the Bund, and were given wide publicity by the Polish government-in-exile and by Shmuel Zygelboim.

Manifestly, something had happened to the Zionist tribe of the people of Israel. Something powerfully malignant. Something that suppressed natural feelings and overrid plain common sense. Something highly tangible, whose existence is not in doubt.

In the previous chapters we touched on several aspects of this "something." Besides the original sin of suppressing the bad news, we found a surprising measure of forgiveness among the Zionist leaders toward themselves and toward those of them who directly handled Holocaust-related matters; we noted the striking restraint evinced by the majority of the Zionist leaders when it came to delving into the ongoing events; we saw how several of them, spurred by their ambition to adapt reality to their own perceptions, became entangled in twisting and distorting the past and the present alike. We hinted that Zionism in fact perceived its own Holocaust with its own attendant dangers, its own problems, and also its own prospects. We shall continue to address these questions in the chapters which follow. And as additional aspects of the malignancy which gripped Zionism during the Holocaust are revealed, we shall attempt to further confirm the explanation we are adducing for this phenomenon. That explanation holds that the trouble with the Zionists lay not in their possessing a superfluity of Zionism, but--in their gross absence of that concrete Zionism which was placed on the stage of Jewish history in the first Zionist Congresses.

Since the roots of the phenomena under discussion are social in nature, it will not prove beneficial to train our sights on the "bad guys" as bearing sole responsibility for the direction taken by events. The truth is that such persons were not lacking, and to the degree that matters were placed in their hands we are obligated to elucidate what occurred without regard to place or personal affiliation. It is also true that the responsibility of these bearers of evil is not diminished because they represented an entire sector of the public which followed them. But any attempt to limit the explanation of the events exclusively to the behavior of specific leaders, functionaries or institutions is, we believe, following a barren approach which is incapable of producing true fruits of research.

Yet the opposite method--to disregard the at times crucial impact of leaders or functionaries on the course of events--is just as worthless. Instances of this kind of impact may be gleaned from the events we have already discussed. Thus, for example, we believe that the conspiracy of suppression engaged in by the Hebrew-language press for the eight months leading up to November 23, 1942, could not have taken the ruinous form it did had it not been for the personal "contribution" of the journalist "D.P." writing in *Davar* on March 16 and 17 of that year. Given the situation as it existed on March 16, when the Palestine press gave prominent coverage to the initial reports about the mass destruction, their retractions two days later were not inevitable--were it not for the highly authoritative guidance they received from Berl Katnelson's paper. In our view, to disregard this fact is as harmful to the search for the truth as is the method of looking for "material" with which to excoriate the leadership.

Chapter Four

Friendship Only

Two months after the publication of the November 23rd statement, the issue of the Holocaust came up for discussion by the Zionist Executive Committee. This session, which took place on January 18, 1943, was the fifth since Ben-Gurion's return from the United States and the third since the November 23rd announcement. The sole item on the agenda was "Diaspora Affairs." The principal speaker was Yitzhak Gruenbaum, and the following are the main points he made:

He opened his speech by describing the course of the destruction since 1941 and recalled the reports which had arrived and had been published in Palestine. At the same time he castigated the Yishuv for having evinced apathy and disbelief. "The public did not quake... the public did not quake and it did not shake... And when I asked myself then, and still ask myself today why this happened, why did the Yishuv not quake and shake then--the same Yishuv that is now hurling so many serious accusations that the bloody events were concealed from it--I have an answer to this. In that period the Yishuv was anxious about its own fate, fear gripped the Yishuv in the face of the German attacks in Libya and Greece."¹

Gruenbaum did not mention anything about having "poured cold water."

After relating how the vast numbers which were cited in connection with the destruction had been met with disbelief, and how he had tried to verify them through Rabbi Ehrenpreis in Stockholm, the speaker moved to a fierce attack against none other than the Jews of

Poland:

There is one thing in this whole picture which I cannot separate from the feeling of grief and burning pain it causes me... that the Jews went to the slaughter without any zeal arising in any of them to defend himself.²

[The behavior of the Jews generates in him] a sense of shame and disgrace... people became doormats and not human beings. This is our education--our education dating back to the pogroms in Russia...the Zionist education, the socialist education, the Communist education. None of this stood the Jews in good stead in this horrific hour.³

¹ Gruenbaum, *Destruction and Holocaust*, p. 63.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³ Minutes of the meeting of the 28th Zionist Actions Committee, CZA, File S25/1851. These lines were omitted in the collection *Destruction and Holocaust*.

...I did not think that the Jews of Poland would fail to defend themselves in such cases, that not one leader would emerge who could arouse them to defend themselves even if it meant death.⁴

In the course of these harsh words, Gruenbaum notes the “cessation of the destruction” and the 55 places of concentration, discussed in the previous chapter. He then goes on to the question of what to do--and what not to do.

He prefaces this topic by rejecting again the public’s allegations and by appealing to his fellow leaders’ sense of collective solidarity.

After all, we have one medicine, a universal medicine, for every calamity, every holocaust. First of all the leaders come under attack. Naturally, it is they who are to blame: the Jewish Agency is to blame, the Zionist Executive is to blame, the National Council--for it is perfectly clear that if we had wished to, if we had cried out... if we had shouted, if we had demanded, then everything needed for rescue, for help, would have been done immediately...!

I do not want to shatter this illusion. It makes these Jews contented, for who will they shout to? They can demand that I resign because of what happened. But can they demand the same of Roosevelt, of Churchill?

When it comes to tangible possibilities of rescue, Gruenbaum is skeptical to the point of despair. He proposes that the Yishuv raise its voice in outcry. “We must demand reprisal operations, to add our forces and our influence to their forces and to the influence of the Poles, who are demanding this. We must demand [population] exchanges, we must demand an opening of the gates, we must exploit every possibility, every crack and every hole in order to come to the aid of those in agony. Even with all this, I very much doubt whether through our demands and outcries it will be possible to halt the slaughter, to effect a rescue. If the slaughter stops it will be thanks to the victory of the Russians, the English and the Americans.” Gruenbaum is pleased with the Allied declaration concerning the punishment to be meted out to the Nazi murderers, “but it is clear that this will not be able to stop the slaughter, and is incapable of saving even one Jewish life.”

On the question of financing the rescue operations, Gruenbaum dwells at length on what must not be done. He lashes out at his colleagues in the Zionist leadership who left him in the lurch in his battle against heavy public pressure. Since money had not yet been raised from other sources, a proposal emanating from the community had been made to use the various Zionist funds for this purpose. Gruenbaum is vehemently opposed to this idea. In the meantime,” he says, “a frame of mind which I consider very dangerous for Zionism has begun to assert itself in Palestine.”

I cannot comprehend... how it could happen that in an assembly in Jerusalem, people should call out to me: “If you don’t have enough money, take from Keren Hayesod, take money from the bank--after all, money is at your disposal.”

I considered it my duty to withstand this wave... And when I was asked, “Surely you can give from the funds of Keren Hayesod to save Jews?”, I replied: No. And I say again: No. I know that people find it surprising that I saw fit to say this. *Friends tell me that even if the reports are true, they should not be made public at a time of sorrow and concern such as this.* I cannot agree. In my view, we must stand up to this wave, which is pushing Zionist activities into second place... And the *haverim* should not have abandoned me in this battle. (Emphasis added.)⁵

And he declares: “Of course they [the means] will suffice if we take the funds of Keren Hayesod. But we will not take the funds of Keren Hayesod, and with those means pursue our war of redemption.”⁶

“War of redemption” meaning activities related to the realization of Zionism.

In the concluding passage of his remarks Gruenbaum states his credo:

⁴ Destruction and Holocaust, p. 66.

⁵ Destruction and Holocaust, pp. 68, 69.

⁶ Minutes of Zionist Actions Committee meeting. These lines were also omitted in Destruction and Holocaust.

Zionism above all else--this must be asserted every time a great calamity diverts us from the course of the war of our redemption in Zion. Our war of redemption does not derive directly from, and is not integrated directly into, activities for the benefit of the diaspora--that is our tragedy. Nothing like this exists in any other nation or language. There are two areas of activity, and they are areas which in theory are perhaps

intertwined but in practice are distinct. And we must, in my opinion, maintain--especially in times such as these--the precedence of the war of redemption.⁷

* * * * *

Fourteen members of the Zionist Executive Committee took part in the discussion following the speech. One supported Gruenbaum, one said he would not involve himself in the argument, and a third did not refer to the issues in contention. The remaining eleven all opposed Gruenbaum in varying degrees of vehemence and expressed their opposition in differing degrees of frankness. The following are passages from their remarks (all emphases have been added):

Dr. Rufeisen: Regrets that the question did not come up for discussion until now. "I do not know who is to blame for this--the Zionist Executive or the presidium of the Zionist Executive Committee; but finally the diaspora is being discussed by the Zionist Executive Committee too."

Melech Neustadt: "I do not blame anyone in particular, I blame all of us--myself." He proposes that the rescue activities be set apart, that they be engaged in *by people who are not occupied with other matters*. "There should be a limited committee of seven people at most, and not an Actions Committee of three or four people *who do nothing*."

Y. Suparsky: "It is very bad that there was an Actions Committee but no secretary." As for those engaged in the rescue activity: "*These people should resign from their current positions for three or four months*, and their positions should be given to others." He is outraged at Gruenbaum's refusal to take money for the rescue from the various Zionist funds: "That is anti-Zionism, Mr. Gruenbaum? A budget of 1,150,000 Palestine pounds now exists. Is it not possible to take from that budget hundreds of thousands of pounds for rescue activity? That is anti-Zionism? That is Zionism!"

Yosef Sprinzak came to the defense of the Jews who were demanding that the Zionist institutions act. "Jews are besieging this House and insisting on action. What's wrong with that? Where is the injustice in that? Why should this not be understood?" "Of course the World Zionist Organization is the address. Where will they direct their outcries? To whom will they put their demands? Naturally, to this House." He urges "*a warim Iddishe hertz*" (a warm Jewish heart). His proposal: "To mobilize a group of respected, important and active people who would, in respect *of the diaspora*, fulfill the precept, And you shall study it day and night... *and only this*."

Y. Zerubavel: "This is a bankrupt attitude, Gruenbaum's whole attitude today." "If nothing can be done, *if you do not see a way--then it is not that anyone is demanding your resignation... but...*" He argues that Gruenbaum "is now in the grip of that exaggeration which holds that Eretz-Israel will be built on the ruins of the diaspora."

Rabbi Neufeld takes issue with Gruenbaum: "But what is Zionism for if not for the Jews? And what is the Yishuv, what is the path of Eretz-Israel when it is cut off from the affairs of those masses?" On the money issue he maintains that money is available, not only from Keren Hayesod but also from the Zionist Bank. There is money aplenty belonging to Polish Jews in bank deposits, and no one knows what will finally become of this money, or whether these people will return to claim it. (Dobkin:

You would take expressly the money of these Jews?) And what is the function of a Zionist bank in a period like the present? His proposal: a fund of 50,000 pounds to be set up, at least for the initial period.

Moshe Kolodny points to the contradiction between Gruenbaum's situation appraisal and the actions he is proposing. "Between the proposals you put forward in the name of the Executive, and the grounds you cited before making the proposals--

⁷ Minutes of Zionist Actions Committee.

some kind of abyss has opened up. *You spoke out of desperation but you still proposed taking these actions.*"

Ya'akov Hazan takes Gruenbaum to task: "It is clear to me that without a diaspora Zionism will have no point, there will be no Zionism. And it is clear to me that the question we are discussing here today takes precedence over every issue of political Zionism." He proposes the establishment of a large fund to save the diaspora.

A. Reis also comes out against Gruenbaum: "And what is above Zionism if not Jews? What is Zionism without Jews? How will we realize Zionism?"

I. Idelson (Bar-Yehuda) delivers a sharp and emotional statement.

With us, "judiciousness" often becomes "injudiciousness." We are now ashamed of what happened to Polish Jewry. I don't know whether we shouldn't first of all be ashamed of what happened to us. I say to you that *I am ashamed of myself, of my kibbutz, of my Histadrut, of my World Zionist Organization Executive. I am ashamed of each and every one of you.* Because what did we do? Doubt was expressed here about whether the Polish Jews defended themselves. Did anyone address them, make contact with them?

Today the Jewish Agency has already dispatched its emissaries, far too late, to a few places from which letters can be sent to various places in Europe. Is there a representation of the World Zionist Organization in any of these places, one who could also consider things and act on them, and not just write letters that will take months getting here before a reply can be received, if one is received at all? Does anything like this exist today?

For the author of the present book, the following words of Idelson bore special significance: "I do not say of you alone, Gruenbaum, but I also, we also, abandoned them. We had a little training for this from years past *with regards to our comrades in Russia.* For the World Zionist Organization it was 'good' training."

Dr. Stoup: "After all, when all is said and done, we are the 'supreme' command of the Jewish people. There is no one else to deal with these matters in concentrated fashion. How is it possible to wage a war so cruelly and not to see to it that there are accurate reports about the millions who are on this front?"

Shmuel Dayan complains that action has been late in coming. He proposes "to send emissaries who *will be authorized to make decisions by themselves.* I would disperse a good many of the members of the Zionist Committee Executive and the Jewish Agency Executive to serve as representatives in the places of danger."

Against the eleven who criticized and objected to Gruenbaum's ideas, one person spoke in favor of Gruenbaum's version of "Zionism" and also justified, albeit indirectly, his refusal to provide money for rescue work from the various Zionist funds. This was S. Zokhovitsky (Zakif), who argued: "Obviously, without a nation there is no Zionism, but without Zionism there will be no nation." As for the refusal to provide money: "The fact is," he maintained, "that there were no activities related to concrete possibilities of rescue to justify using this money. Was there really anyone that could have been saved and was not? Tell me! I will be the first to protest." (Neustadt: "When you have to save your son, do you ask whether a possibility of rescue exists?")

Last to speak in the discussion was the Jewish Agency Treasurer, Eliezer Kaplan. He saw fit to preface his remarks with the declaration that *"I have no wish to get involved in this whole debate,* but I do consider it my duty to make a few remarks." Firstly, he was against the idea of placing the rescue activities within the purview of the Jewish Agency, nor

should they be "attached" to the Jewish Agency. Secondly, he pledged: "As long as no other money is available, if we are presented with some essential activity, we shall undertake it."

Thirdly, Kaplan argues that "the trouble lay in our not finding a few people *who would devote their time exclusively to this.*" He reiterates: "If a few people had shown the way, the question of the means would never have arisen, either here or abroad."

In this manner Kaplan sought to "amend" what Gruenbaum had said and to allay the bitterness of the Zionist Committee Executive by supporting Zokhovitsky's idea, namely: We will give money if we are shown concrete actions to take. As the official responsible for the funds, Kaplan's words carried considerable weight. As we

shall see, in his statement of summation Gruenbaum adopted (verbatim) the Zokhovitsky-Kaplan amendment.

To sum up the discussion: eleven of the fourteen speakers were critical of Gruenbaum, his doctrine of Zionism, and his mode of operation. Overwhelmingly they rejected his concept of the "precedence of Zionism" over rescue operations. Some of them pointed to the contradiction between Gruenbaum's pessimistic assessment of rescue possibilities, and the tasks confronting the rescue campaign. Not one of the fourteen backed Gruenbaum in his refusal to make available money from the Zionist funds for rescue work. It could be inferred from the comments of the majority that in their view Gruenbaum was unsuited to head the rescue organization. Virtually all the speakers, Kaplan included, insisted that those engaged in rescue work devote themselves exclusively to that task and divest themselves of all other responsibilities.

In his reply Gruenbaum employed a sharp tone, which at least once slid into rudeness. He argued with everyone and stuck to his guns on every point at issue, with the exception of a verbal concession on the money question. He even rejected Sprinzak's call for "a warm Jewish heart," saying: "I remember you, Sprinzak, when you went as an emissary to Poland and faced a wave of people with a *warim Iddishe hertz*, and you said, as I do, as every Zionist does, that there are times when one must overcome a *warim Iddishe hertz*." At this point the chairman of the meeting, S. Z. Robashov, intervened and asked the speaker: "I want to understand--what is it that you are referring to?" Gruenbaum cut him off rudely: "Why are you all jumping up? I am not speaking in half-sentences. I cannot jump ahead in my explanation."

Gruenbaum did not backtrack one iota from his version of Zionism. He dwells on it at some length and reformulates it: "What does

Zionism mean--the precedence of the war of redemption over all other wars."

On the money issue he adopts Kaplan's approach, and on the spot translates it into practical terms. It now turns out that this is precisely how he had acted in the past. An illuminating exchange followed between Gruenbaum and Anshel Reis: "I ask you, Neustadt, I ask you, Reis: Whenever you had some concrete or nearly concrete proposal, did you ever meet with rejection or refusal? (Reis: I have to say that that was the case.) From me? (Reis: That was the case.) You did not propose anything concrete. (Reis: What does concrete mean? There is a war, [there are] borders.) You did not propose that this had to be done. It was always known what 'this' referred to. When 'this' was known there were no rejections, not even from Kaplan. But what was the problem? The 'this' was vague and incomprehensible."

On the question of whether he would continue to head the rescue organization, Gruenbaum's response seemed to be clear enough: "You talk about new people who are not burdened with other matters, who could devote themselves fully to those affairs. Good, have it your way. For my part I will not interfere. *I am stepping aside*. Do what you please about this. I jumped into this matter because I felt that I had to do it. If you think that more strength, more energy and more time now have to be devoted to it, maybe you are right. Please, go ahead and do this thing."

Seemingly the issue concluded with this. Gruenbaum "stepped aside." New people would be placed on the Actions Committee who would devote themselves fully to this question and give it more strength, more energy and more time. The rescue work would enter a new period. But no, far from it...

Following Gruenbaum's concluding remarks, the floor was taken by David Remez in order to inform those present about the conclusions reached by a joint meeting of the Jewish Agency and a committee of *Asefat Hanivharim*.

Like Kaplan, Remez opened his remarks by declaring: "For a number of reasons *I did not wish to become involved in the actual discussion*." Again like Kaplan, he pledged financing for rescue operations "if an opening were to emerge," but then immediately qualified this in a statement formulated in polished Hebrew: "But there is as yet no opening even as wide as the eye of a needle. The paths of help are still doubtful, unlikely and potholed."

Remez then went on to state, on behalf of the joint meeting, that "we decided to build on what already exists." He explained: "The Actions

Committee will be composed [as before] of members of the Jewish Agency Executive and members of the National Council Executive, together with two more members: one from the National Council and one from the Political Department of the

Jewish Agency. An expanded Actions Committee will also be set up to meet at regular intervals, let us say once a month.”

Remez suggested that the composition of the committee should be entrusted to the Jewish Agency Executive and the National Council Executive. Concerning the controversy over who should head the committee, he promised that “the committee will have a coordinator--a public figure who will volunteer wholly for this work during a specific period, as far as needs will dictate.”

The Zionist Executive Committee made no objection to the decision of the Jewish Agency Executive, and the status quo was retained. Five places on the Rescue Committee were allotted to the Jewish Agency Executive (Gruenbaum, Dobkin, B. Josphe, M. Shapira, E. Schmorack). A volunteer was found for the position of coordinator. True, this volunteer would not consent to forgo his numerous tasks on the Jewish Agency Executive, either “during a specific period” or at any other time. However the Jewish Agency Executive accepted this. As the reader has undoubtedly surmised, the “volunteer” was none other than Yitzhak Gruenbaum.

The discussion at the 28th session of the Zionist Executive Committee demonstrated that Gruenbaum was unfit to head the rescue work for the following reasons:

1) He did not regard the rescue work as overriding in urgency and importance every other endeavor at that time.

2) He objected to the idea of supplying the requisite financing for the rescue operations from the various Zionist funds, as long as no special rescue funds had been established.

3) He refused to forgo his many tasks in the Jewish Agency and devote himself exclusively to rescue matters.

4) He did not believe in the real possibility of rescue on a mass scale.

With respect to the first three points, he was opposed by nearly all the participants in the discussion, and on the fourth point by a few of the discussants. On the second point, the question of financing, his fellow members on the Jewish Agency Executive were able to temper his extreme statements and force him to make a verbal concession. We shall see to what degree Gruenbaum changed his stand and his actions regarding the other three points.

The factual evidence concerning the third point is quite straightforward. Did Gruenbaum consent to devote himself wholly to the rescue activities at the expense of his tasks on the Jewish Agency Executive? He came under heavy pressure on this matter from the hierarchy of the Zionist movement, including some of the front-rank leadership. Four months later, in an Executive Committee meeting held in May 1943, Melech Neustadt complained that “because of the heavy burden of work imposed on the key people, this matter [the rescue activity] does not come up for serious discussion or serious action.” In that same forum Anshel Reis stated that “a month and a half has gone by without a meeting of the plenum of the Aid and Rescue Committee.” In contrast to these polite comments, David Remez spoke forthrightly and addressed himself directly to Gruenbaum: “What right do you have to make demands of the *goyim* if we could not get one of our own people to deal henceforth with rescue [exclusively]? The Jewish Agency Executive should have a Minister for Rescue, who would devote himself to this day and night. It is essential that someone go to London. It will be the person the Executive appoints to present the case.”

To Remez, Gruenbaum retorted: “We have no objection at all to such a resolution being passed--on the contrary.” And added immediately:

“I think the chances are that this will not be necessary.”

The “chances” proved to be as predicted. To forgo his other tasks in the Jewish Agency would “not be necessary.” Gruenbaum did not buckle under the pressure and his colleagues gave in to his stubbornness. Thus he continued to head the Rescue Committee until the end of the war, at the same time having his hands full as head of the Works Department, as one of the heads of the Jewish Agency’s Organization Department, and also as director of the Bialik Institute.

No “Ministry for Rescue” was established in the Jewish Agency. The Rescue Committee, in accordance with the wish expressed by Eliezer Kaplan, was not within the purview of the Jewish Agency and was not attached to it, but existed as a separate entity devoid of any organizational base, and lacking its own bureaucratic machinery and budget. For a long time it lacked even an official permanent name (Rescue Committee, Committee for the Jews of Occupied Europe, Actions Committee, Committee

for the Jews of the Diaspora, Rescue Committee). Externally, it came across as a public body composed of representatives of various organizations: the Jewish Agency Executive, the National Council, Agudat Israel, and others. Its internal relation of forces made its activity dependent

on the Jewish Agency Executive, and that body placed the responsibility in the hands of Yitzhak Gruenbaum--along with all his many other tasks.

* * * * *

Gruenbaum did not backtrack one iota from his opinion regarding the subordinate place of the rescue enterprise as compared with the "war of redemption." Following the detailed discussion in the Zionist Executive Committee and Gruenbaum's concluding remarks, the Zionist leadership was confronted with a choice: to disqualify Gruenbaum as a candidate for the head of the Rescue Committee because of this abhorrent outlook, or to accept his ideological deficiency and let him remain as chairman. As we know, the latter option won the day. Let us now see whether changes occurred in the fourth shortcoming we noted--Gruenbaum's disbelief in the concrete possibilities of rescue.

His pessimistic approach was based on the underlying assumption that the Allied governments--the U.S., the U.K., and others--were not ready to aid in rescue efforts. This assumption, which from certain standpoints and at certain periods contained truthful elements, Gruenbaum regarded as a fixed and unalterable truth, one which could not be annulled or moderated by means of appropriate activity, and one which was in no danger of being aggravated through harmful actions or blunders. Hence, the constant despair of the head of the Rescue Committee regarding the possibility of rescue on anything approaching a large scale. This despair, which was given its keenest expression in Gruenbaum's non-public appearances--in the closed meetings of the Zionist institutions--was not absent, whether openly or tacitly, in his public appearances as well.

As we have just seen, in the 28th session of the Zionist Executive Committee, Gruenbaum shrugged off the substantiality of the joint declaration of the Allied Powers against the destruction of the Jews as "incapable of saving even one Jewish life." Elsewhere in the same speech, Gruenbaum spoke of the Allies' unwillingness to work for the rescue of Jews.

"I do not wish to enter into a clarification of the programs, the demands and all manner of ploys suggested to us orally and in writing. Among them are some things which should be given due consideration. There are also things which do not merit even a moment's consideration. They all have one thing in common: we do not ask ourselves what the true attitude of the Allies is." To instance this "true attitude" he related the story of how the Allied governments rejected the suggestion of the Poles to bomb Germany in reprisal for the Germans' acts of cruelty in Poland.

In the next session of the Zionist Executive Committee, in February 1943, Gruenbaum again raises the subject of the Allies' rejection of the Polish suggestion, and sums up: "We are at an impasse. Most unfortunately, I must say once more that *I do not believe that we will be able to accomplish anything concrete*. I do not believe that the [Allied] governments will do anything substantive, and I find it difficult to believe that the German government, or Hitler, will permit the Jews to leave. We are obligated to clarify and to try everything that is suggested to us. But *the hopes are negligible*."⁸

As an example of Gruenbaum's remarks in his public appearances, we quote from his speech to *Asefat Hanivharim*, as reported in *Ha'aretz* on January 13, 1944. According to the paper, he stated: "I envy those who still harbor some shred of faith in the 'enlightened' world. I call out to the Yishuv--*what we ourselves do not rescue, will not be rescued*." (Emphases in the original.)

"We ourselves" means bringing refugees by sea and land from the Balkans. This activity was directed from Istanbul by a team of emissaries who managed to bring about 6,000 Jews to Palestine by the end of the war. In addition to this "do-it-yourself method," Gruenbaum was aware of only one other rescue mode, namely, exchanging Jews in Europe for Germans held by the Allies. The option of mobilizing various forces

⁸ CZA, File S26/1852.

in the world seems not to have existed for him. From time to time he paid lip service to actions that should be undertaken, “despite everything” or he speaks of some “crack” that has been opened, or an “opportunity” that has presented itself for possible rescue work. But as Moshe Kolodny summed up accurately in the discussion quoted above, an “abyss” existed between the proposals for action and the declarations of despair of the head of the Rescue Committee. Moreover, the remarks about “cracks” or “opportunities” were often made without anything substantial to back them up, or they referred to the rescue via Istanbul.

Since the “we ourselves” route combined with the exchange of nationals could produce no more than a few thousand survivors at most, there were solid wounds for Gruenbaum’s despairing posture. And since he held out no expectations for positive results from activities in the international arena, the lack of importance he attached to the mobilization of public opinion is also understandable. When the American Zionists rejected a proposal to stage a mass demonstration in Washington ending at the White House, Gruenbaum duly reported the development to his colleagues without any anger or outrage. Once he declared his intention of going to the United States “to exchange information” on rescue matters.

But when Dr. Goldmann told him politely that he must not let himself in for wartime travelling difficulties “due to his age” (Gruenbaum was then 63 or 64), he accepted this and did not make the trip.⁹ In any case, what would he do there? Ships from the Balkans did not go via New York.

Gruenbaum was unmistakably reserved regarding manifestations of public protest in the Yishuv. It is true that as a public figure he was compelled to attend and speak at public protest assemblies, in extraordinary sessions of *Asefat Hanivharim*, and the like. Nevertheless, he made no secret of his opinion that “cries and outcries” would be of no avail. On several occasions he spoke mockingly of the Jews’ fealty to the concept “the voice is the voice of Jacob”—a feeling he did not share in the least.¹⁰ He understood, and assented readily to rallies aimed at raising money for rescue operations. But rallies for their own sake, protest for the sake of protest—this he himself did not advocate and was unwilling to bother the public with such matters.

One of his public statements on this topic triggered a furious riposte on the part of ranking members of the Zionist hierarchy. At the 18th session of the Zionist Executive Committee in May 1943, it was suggested that the Yishuv mount an impressive reaction to the negative results of the Bermuda Conference. Different possibilities were mentioned, such as circulating a mass petition, and mass stoppages at places of work for a few minutes each day. In his summation speech, Gruenbaum spurned all such suggestions:

“I am not narrow-minded or narrow-hearted, *and I do not think it is our mission to call a strike in normal life* in one corner of the world on the Old Continent where normal life exists. And I am not so narrow-minded or narrow-hearted that I cannot see that the Jews are a little happy with their lives. It is good that there is one corner in the world where the Jew feels himself free as well as a little happy in life. And I do not know *why I should call a strike against his happiness with his life*. What will we gain from it? Nothing except self-satisfaction for those who will say: Look, we cried for five minutes and thus something will change.” (Emphases added.)

This was too much for Golda Myerson. Taking the floor immediately after Gruenbaum had concluded, she said:

“I, like Mr. Gruenbaum, am not sorry that there is a large Jewish population living in peace. But I must say that what I do not understand—and I think it will also not be understood by anyone else in the world—is how this Yishuv went on living through the week or ten days of Bermuda as though nothing had happened. I do not know how valid it is to demand of other Jews and of the *goyim* to help, if nothing happened in the Yishuv when the gentlemen met there.”

⁹ *Etgar*, No. 8, June 29, 1961.

¹⁰ CZ A, File S25/1853.

We may conjecture that Gruenbaum was more than a little taken aback by Golda Myerson's tirade. From his point of view, his stand was not devoid of logic. Whether "anyone else in the world" grasped the matter was for him of little importance. "From *goyim* and others" he expected nothing, having long since concluded that salvation would not come from that quarter. On the other hand, to enable the rescue machinery in Istanbul to function smoothly, there was hardly any need for disquiet in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Indeed, perhaps the reverse was true and all the noise and fuss would attract attention to the activity of the emissaries, best performed clandestinely. Then why bother people and upset their contentment with life?

This was the logic of a frame of mind divorced from reality, of a mood totally liberated from "a warm Jewish heart." The remarks that outraged Golda Myerson should have shown the Zionist leadership once again that if there was one person who absolutely should not head the rescue committee, that person was Yitzhak Gruenbaum.

In practice they did nothing, although Gruenbaum was forced to compromise with Golda Myerson. The normal life of the Yishuv was brought to a standstill once more a month later, on June 15, when a protest strike was held. On that same day a petition was circulated which contained the signatures of 250,000 adults and 60,000 children when it was handed to the British High Commissioner. This was the last time the public was "bothered for no good reason." The next appeal to the public was made three months later, but this time for a clear practical purpose: fund-raising.

* * * * *

The revelation of Yitzhak Gruenbaum's negative qualities as head of the Rescue Committee had no effect on his position as its chairman. The reasons for this were both personal and social. Gruenbaum's stubborn refusal to budge undoubtedly played a considerable part, as did the tradition in the National Institutions not to remove people from top

positions unless they resigned voluntarily. Other factors may have been at work as well, but these are unknown to the present writer, who was unable to delve deeply into the course of events and the personal relations within the Jewish Agency Executive. We turn now to two other factors which we believe were in themselves capable of preventing Gruenbaum's dismissal.

The first, visible, factor lay in the fact that not one of Gruenbaum's senior colleagues on the Zionist Executive wished to succeed him as head of the Rescue Committee. Some among the lower-ranking functionaries might have been willing to assume the position, but they certainly had no chance of budging him. As for the high-ranking echelon of the Zionist movement, not a single person among those possessing the requisite political standing, ability and ideological prowess showed an interest in the rescue operation to the point of devoting himself to it as the primary component of his tasks, to say nothing of concentrating on it exclusively. Most striking in this regard were the two leaders of the Yishuv from the ideological and practical standpoints, Berl Katznelson and David Ben-Gurion.

Berl Katznelson, it will be recalled (Ch. 2) declared in June 1944 that he did not consider himself worthy of speaking about the topic of rescue. Whether this was a modest pose of self-righteousness or a tacit admission of blame and responsibility for what he had wrought in *Davar* under his editorship, the fact is that for five years, from the onset of the Second World War until his death, Berl Katznelson maintained a persistent silence concerning rescue work. With the exception of editorials, some of which he may have written, and the unfortunate article (cited above), "On the Informants Who Kill With Their Empty Vanities," not a single article, essay or speech of Katznelson's is known which was devoted explicitly to the destruction of Europe's Jews. The entry for "Holocaust" is absent from the index to the twelve volumes of his collected writings and speeches. All told, we were able to find seven instances in which the Holocaust is mentioned, in passing, in just a few lines. In the three meetings of the Zionist Executive Committee described above, Berl did not say a word-if, indeed, he even attended the meetings.

We noted Ben-Gurion's phenomenal abstention from dealing with rescue matters at the end of the previous chapter. Here we shall point out that like Berl Katznelson, he took no part in the debate in any of the three Zionist Executive Committee sessions referred to above. The questions at issue were urgent and substantive, and it was to be

expected that the chairman of the Jewish Agency would take a stand on them. But Ben-Gurion, who was generally alert and active in similar situations, remained

absolutely silent in these meetings and did not commit himself to any position whatsoever. Manifestly, he was no candidate for chairman of the Rescue Committee.

It is difficult to resist the temptation to conjecture that the silence of “the two great ones” sparked a kind of fashion which was emulated by their colleagues in the Zionist leadership. Moreover, this speculation is seemingly confirmed in the form of a bizarre phenomenon which occurred twice during the Zionist Executive Committee session of January 18, 1943. Eliezer Kaplan and David Remez were called on to speak about matters close to their areas of responsibility (Kaplan on financial matters, Remez about the joint meeting with the National Council). Each saw fit to declare, one after the other, that they were “not intervening in the debate.” These were demonstrative reservations which were not germane to their remarks. It was as though a curtain had been drawn regarding their behavior as leaders who do not get involved in the game which “the young men were playing before them.”

The two of them, Kaplan and Remez, were each close to the rescue enterprise by virtue of the positions they held. Eliezer Kaplan was responsible for financing and even visited Istanbul and Egypt in this connection. At one point he also ruled in favor of sending money “into the fog” of the Holocaust countries for rescue purposes whose outcome was far from certain.¹¹ Yet he was unwilling to “take part in the debate,” to delve into the issue of the Holocaust overall. Certainly there was no chance that he would consent to abandon the Treasury to chair the Rescue Committee.

David Remez was involved in rescue affairs in the final phases. As head of the National Council, he was responsible for the refugees who managed to get to Palestine or close to the country. He experienced the nightmare of the *Struma* and the failure of the *Patria*. There were some matters which he grasped far better than his colleagues did. He demanded the establishment of a “Ministry for Rescue” to be headed by a minister who would devote himself exclusively to this one topic. But he seems not to have considered the possibility that he himself might be a candidate for this ministerial post. He was too busy with other matters which he considered to be of greater importance.

It was the same with others as well. Moshe Sharett, it will be recalled, visited London on a special mission. There he looked into rescue-related affairs as well as dealing with a number of other subjects. When he returned to Palestine in mid-April bearing a wealth of reports and personal impressions concerning commissions and omissions over a period of

weeks and months, he did not consider it a calamity that his report was made to the Zionist Executive Committee a full month after his return. As part of his duties as head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, he had occasion from time to time to intervene in Holocaust-related matters. Like Kaplan, Sharett also visited Istanbul and from there sent a letter “To the Faithful of Zion in Nazi Europe.” In this letter he emulates Berl Katznelson in saying that where the Holocaust is concerned, “I am unworthy of the very responsibility which devolves upon me”¹²--and also like Katznelson, in the light of this serious assertion he does not devote himself to rescue activity in the scope and depth which would match the extent of his responsibility. He too would not compete for the post of chairman of the Rescue Committee with a person who was not overly exercised by the problem of responsibility.

The third person, Israel Idelson, was quite close to the front rank of the Zionist hierarchy, and both his standing and character made him a natural candidate to succeed Yitzhak Gruenbaum. However, even had he wished to, he could not have devoted himself to rescue affairs because he was deeply involved in a serious rift that was afflicting Mapai, and which within a year would generate a split in the party.

The list of rejecters and the unwilling could be extended. Suffice it to say that in the archives and newspapers of the time we found no indications that anyone among the leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement made any effort to take over from Gruenbaum as head of the Rescue Committee.

The second, and more important reason which accounts for Gruenbaum’s retaining the position, is that beyond the dispute about dropping his other tasks,

¹¹ Menahem Bader, *Melancholy Missions* (Hebrew), Sifriat Hapoalim, p. 60.

¹² *Secret Shield* (Hebrew), Jewish Agency, 1952, p. 250.

Gruenbaum's stands, both practical and ideological, did not seem to his colleagues in the Zionist leadership to be negative to the point where they would interfere with the execution of his duties. They were embarrassed by his frank and unrestrained style of speaking. They objected to his sharply worded and, in their perception, exaggerated comments, and his sometimes tactless public behavior. However it emerges that the reason for their unwillingness was the fact that they saw in him an unattractive reflection of themselves. When it came to the central questions relating to the Holocaust, Yitzhak Gruenbaum represented the stands of the Zionist establishment faithfully, albeit too emphatically.

The exposure of and stress placed on the embarrassing aspects of the Zionist stand sparked anger and controversy. Thus, for example, we saw that in the matter of his refusal to allocate money from the Zionist

funds, his colleagues cautioned him that even if he was right he should not talk about it so bluntly. It stands to reason that his admission in the speech he delivered to the youth movements leadership in December 1942 (Ch. 3) generated much anger and caused quite a problem within the Jewish Agency Executive. It can also be assumed that they were not pleased with the anti-religious outburst he permitted himself in a public meeting devoted to the rescue of European Jewry.¹³ On the major question, however--priority for the "war of redemption" over rescue tasks--evidence abounds that despite the verbal resistance he encountered from some of his colleagues, Yitzhak Gruenbaum gave expression to theft true innermost feelings and, more importantly, to what guided them in their actions. We will now examine this matter in some detail.

* * * * *

In fact, the great majority of those present in the meeting hail of the Zionist Executive Committee and outside it as well, would have given their assent to the feeling of helplessness and would have been ready to accept and adopt the contention that "there is nothing that can be done." Acceptance of the idea that in any event nothing of any import would result from the rescue efforts, constituted the emotional underpinning of all the clarifications. This feeling was almost always concealed not only from others but even from the speakers themselves. To admit it would be tantamount to acknowledging the blood that was being spilled while they avoided taking practical action. The "abyss" Kolodny saw between Gruenbaum's pessimistic assessment and his proposals for action existed also in all but a very few of Gruenbaum's critics--between what they said and what they felt inside. They did not dare admit this to others or even to themselves.

That such a feeling did actually characterize the Yishuv leadership is evidenced by direct and indirect testimonies alike.

The most convincing indirect evidence is that without the premise that a frame of mind was created of helplessness and inaction born of despair, the events of that period are inexplicable--most particularly the fact that Gruenbaum was permitted to remain at the head of the Rescue Committee. We have noted some of the direct reasons for the profuse forgiveness by the members of the Zionist Executive Committee of the mistakes and blunders of those engaged in the rescue work. These reasons in themselves gain reinforcement against a psychological background of despair and powerlessness. Yet they can be said to exist and have validity only until the moment of the reappointment of a person who declares in

the most open and most vehement manner that he does not believe in the success of the mission that has been entrusted to him.

It stands to reason that the decision to retain Gruenbaum derived from the feeling that it would be pointless to replace him, since no one else would be able to accomplish "the impossible" either.

As for the direct evidence, we shall begin with the clear admission of Pinhas Rosenblitt (Rosen) at a session of the Zionist Executive Committee. Of himself Rosenblitt says: "I have to admit that I am at a loss, I have no counsel to offer." And of the general atmosphere: "A mood of pessimism has been generated which brings in its

¹³ On June 5, 1944, Gruenbaum refused to put on a head covering at a public meeting in which the cantor was about to recite a memorial prayer (Ha'aretz, June 6, 1944).

wake a state of despair, and this state of despair gives rise to all kinds of dangerous frames of mind.”¹⁴

Yitzhak Tabenkin, in a speech defending Gruenbaum, speaks of “appalling helplessness.”¹⁵ In that speech Tabenkin argued that “nothing will save us except for the Zionist enterprise, and that enterprise will be realized in combination with the change that will be wrought in the world as part of the global revolution.”

If Tabenkin’s comment is not sufficiently clear--what kind of salvation did he have in *mind?*--*Davar* preached a self-despair which was absolutely unequivocal. The paper began with an editorial on November 24, 1942--the day following the Jewish Agency statement--which asserted:

“Tongue-tied and at a loss we bend under the burden of the frightful news... And who should we cry out to? Where is the ear that will hear? Where is the hand that will offer help?”

This is perhaps understandable as a first emotional reaction, prior to recovery from the “unexpected” information. Yet three months later, following careful consideration and clarification, *Davar* declares that this is in fact the true situation, one devoid of reasonable hope. The paper’s editorial on February 16, 1943 (devoted to the rescue operations) opened as follows: “Can any of us guarantee with certainty that if we arise and mobilize *all the possibilities...* that we will then succeed in reducing the continuing slaughter there?” (Emphasis added.) Despite the qualifying “with certainty”--this is an absolutely fatal judgment. If mobilization of “all possibilities” does not ensure a diminution of the slaughter--not to mention its cessation--what is the point of seeking such possibilities altogether?

* * * * *

It was the defeatism at the top that brought about a surprising ploy on the part of Melech Neustadt (Noy), Secretary of the World Union of Poalei Zion-Hitahdut, and one of the few leaders who strove with all his

might to activate the rescue. The story is as follows. The excuses for the do-nothing approach initially revolved around two main arguments: 1) nothing was known of possible rescue modes; and 2) nothing can prevail against Hitler and his murderous henchmen. Following publication of the Jewish Agency statement on November 23, 1942, a third argument was added: everything is lost, the Jews are already annihilated, there is nothing left to do. This frame of mind spread despite Gruenbaum’s optimism about the “55 ghettos” and the simultaneous existence of two diametrically opposed viewpoints was made possible by the indolent information service. In February 1943 Gruenbaum offered *Asefat Hanivharim* a colorful description of Warsaw’s “deserted and abandoned” streets following the “liquidation” of the ghetto--three months after its actual liquidation. According to all the indications, there was no dearth of reports and rumors at that time which preceded the reality. In a desperate attempt to overcome the new pretext, Neustadt resorted to a ploy which reveals the plight that was the lot of everyone who sought to swim against the tide of do-nothingness. Neustadt, who according to the testimony of informed persons among our interlocutors, was among those who at the time helped terminate suppression of the truth and helped bring about the watershed of November 23. He suddenly shifted gears in the meeting hall of the Zionist Executive Committee and tried to persuade the Zionist leadership that the reports about the mass murders were exaggerated and that the situation was less desperate than it was being made out to be. Bolstering his resistance “to the psychosis that all is lost and there is nothing left to do,” he protested against the dissemination of exaggerated reports. Like “Daf” before him he reminded those present of the rumors which had been disseminated in the past about the destruction of Jews but had been exposed as unreliable. This time he pointed out that in 1918-1919 a protest rally had been held against the murder of two thousand Jews by the Polish army under General Heller. Subsequently it emerged that the actual number of Jews killed was (only...) two hundred.

Citing this doubtful example, Neustadt sought to draw a moral:

¹⁴ CZA, File S25/1853.

¹⁵ “Bitter Loneliness,” from remarks made at the Kibbutz Hameuhad Council, January 2, 1943, “Cluster of Letters” No. 131 (Hebrew). The passage will be quoted in full later.

“Our point of reference now should not be to count the dead. We should not accept this idea and tell the world that two million Jews have been murdered. Our reference point now should be who is still alive, not who has been killed and what to do about those who remain alive.”

Neustadt goes on to provide “heartening” details culled from letters received from there: “I tell you altogether, if we were dealing with individuals, with the living, what strange things would be revealed to us. Those who remain alive want to live. A young man from Bratsilava [Bratislava]

writes: ‘Incidentally, I got married.’ A second young man, who was deported from Berlin to Lodz, informs his acquaintances that he has married. This shows us, in the first place, that a connection exists between Lodz and Berlin. There are Jews alive who cherish life. This is what we should be talking about.”

Of the Jews of Warsaw, most of whom had already been murdered by this time, Neustadt is able to say, “Who did not know that the Jews of Warsaw are dying of hunger? They have been dying of hunger for the past two or three years.” This is what he had to say about the Jews of Warsaw in mid-January 1943.

Four months later, on May 18, at another meeting of the Zionist Executive Committee, Neustadt reiterated his reservations concerning terrifying reports about the Warsaw ghetto--although by then the entire world knew of its final liquidation. Neustadt: “The Warsaw ghetto may have been liquidated, or perhaps not. Nothing can be said with certainty.” He continues: “How many times did you read in the press that there are no more Jews in Lublin? It [the Lublin ghetto] was liquidated once, liquidated twice, [but] suddenly a letter arrives from there saying that there are Jews there.” Neustadt believes that the Nazis are “disseminating rumors: this has been liquidated, that has been liquidated--and they want to see what impression we will form about all this.”

It is most unlikely that Neustadt’s remarks influenced his audience in the direction he wished. There can be almost no doubt that this was a ploy on his part, adopted out of despair, and that he himself did not believe the descriptions he served up. Evidence of this is furnished by an article he wrote in the period between the two sessions of the Zionist Executive Committee. In the article, entitled “Beyond the Wall,” published in two parts in the February 18 and February 25, 1943 issues of the Mapai weekly, *Hapoel Hatsa’ir*, Neustadt provided a detailed and substantive survey of the situation of the Jews in Occupied Europe, based on the information in his possession. As head of the World Union of Poalei Zion, he was the recipient of letters from members of the movement in various countries. In addition, he regularly exchanged information with the Kibbutz Hameuhad and Kibbutz Ha’artzi movements.¹⁶ Evidently, then, Neustadt had more current information than most, and had plenty to tell.¹⁷

In the first part of the article, which focuses on Poland, Neustadt reiterates his demand for increased aid to the Jews there, and deplores the excuses cited by those who are holding up such assistance. As he did in the speeches already mentioned, Neustadt quotes a figure of 40,000 Jews still alive in Lvov and, in two other places, 19,000 and 17,000 Jews,

respectively. “In Poland,” he writes, “there is no doubt that many hundreds of thousands of Jews remain, and hundreds of thousands of our *haverim*.” Here, too, he warns that “we have no right to count them and to make the scale of the help conditional on ‘the results of the count.’” Yet the tone of the articles differs from his style of speech at the Zionist Executive Committee meetings. Now there is no place for questioning “exaggerated” numbers or appalling reports. Certainly there is no repetition of the optimism and the “heartening” evidence about the situation that were gleaned from the stories about the weddings. To the contrary: “Surely we will not be relieved to hear that in Warsaw, for example, not 300,000 but 200,000 Jews were murdered.” Neustadt adds:

The intention here is not to calm anyone or to diminish in the least our anxiety concerning the fate of our brethren. As is known, the tragedy in Warsaw is hardly the only one. Eyewitnesses tell about terrible and perhaps even crueler atrocities--if greater cruelty is possible--elsewhere. We shall not repeat the descriptions already

¹⁶ From testimony of Mr. Azriel Begun to the writer, October 29, 1970.

¹⁷ The survey “Beyond the Wall” was published as a special booklet by the Mapai Central Committee, 1943.

published in the press. But we do wish to emphasize and re-emphasize that the feeling that all is lost is causing a great setback for the Jewish survivors in the ghettos of Poland. Since the initial conclusion is liable to be that if all is lost and there is no way to help, then we are, as a result, exempt from every effort in this direction. It was the same a year ago and a year and a half ago, when good and faithful *haverim* asked: Is there still any way to help?... But these same things come up year after year and we forget that we are caught in a vicious circle. There is no smooth way to render assistance, but in the given conditions *it is the means themselves* that pave the way and create possibilities. (Emphasis added.)

Neustadt devotes the entire second part of the article to a demand for increased help. He points out that Zionist movement activists in the countries of the Holocaust are angry and embittered that no help is forthcoming. He reveals the full content of a letter from Tussia Altman, written in April 1942 and published--with numerous omissions--in *Hashomer Hatsa'ir* in December of that year. One of the deleted passages was the letter's conclusion, which Neustadt now quotes: "Send regards to no one. I don't want to know about them." Neustadt admits: "Do not think that this is characteristic of just one movement. This is the opinion of all

the *haverim* in all the movements." To reinforce this assertion, he quotes similar letters written, by activists in a number of movements, and concludes with a crushingly unequivocal statement: "If I knew they were not right, I would think--they are bitter, their situation is hard, they have the right to write these things; but when I am convinced in my heart that they are right, and the help that was forthcoming from us and from the entire Zionist movement was so miniscule, how is it possible to read these letters and find consolation and expiation?"

The two concluding paragraphs of Neustadt's article show clearly the kind of help he was urging and reveal how deeply moved he is by the entire episode:

Nor should we mix this task of [providing] speedy help with other tasks, this is not a matter of political efforts, of talks with consuls. Confronting us is a very straightforward matter:

immediate help for ongoing life. If we do this, we shall be renowned everywhere. We have no conception of how great will be the reverberations and the rejoicing there, across the walls. For these are our own *haverim*, the members of our own family. After all, it is pure chance that we are here and they are there. It might have been the other way around.

And let us no longer hear what we have already heard:

let us help when the possibility arises. This was said two years ago, the matter was checked, examined--and no progress was made. A year ago--again they waited. Let us not forget that the possibility is created together with the means that are placed at its disposal.

* * * * *

Certain passages in "Across the Walls" shed light on an important phenomenon which we have not yet dealt with. It emerges that Melech Neustadt's initial and urgent demand was relatively limited in both goal and scope. Unlike Silbershein, Zygelboim and several others, who sought rescue for *Jews*, Neustadt called on his comrades to extend help in the first place for "ongoing life" for *Zionists*. In itself, this approach would be justified psychologically and organizationally if the generous and vigorous aid extended to the *Zionists* had served as a preface and an instrument for assisting the whole House of Israel. In fact, a rigid demarcation existed between the two types of help, though this was concealed under a fog of double-talk and unclarity of thought. A closer examination of the discussion at the January 18, 1943, meeting of the Zionist Executive

Committee reveals that all the expressions of regret, shame and general emotion uttered there referred, above all, or exclusively, to the blunders made in extending help to members of the Zionist movement. It was also in this respect that Kaplan made his tight-fisted concessions on funding. Moreover, it was in line with this limited goal that the machinery of practical help had been built in Istanbul in the form of a

representation staffed according to a party key. To proffer help, to save members of the Zionist movement--this was considered a sacred and unassailable duty. Failure to fulfill this duty generated bitterness. Involved here were, as Neustadt put it, "our own *haverim*, members of our family." As for the whole House of Israel--that was a different matter.

It was Melech Neustadt who in an interjection (already quoted) during a session of the Zionist Executive Committee put his finger on the very essence of the problem of the behavior of the Zionist movement during the Holocaust. To Zokhovitzky's qualified comments regarding rescue possibilities, Neustadt retorted, as will be recalled: "*When you have to save your son, do you ask whether a possibility of rescue exists?*"

Indeed, there is an immense difference between a son and a non-son, between a father and a non-father. When a son's life is in danger (seriously injured, mortally ill, held captives by murderers, etc.) his father does not cease to act. When the people helping him (doctors, policemen) tell him that the situation is hopeless, the father does not accept this. He tries to enlist more help and looks for additional sources of aid. To save his son he is ready to set aside all else and he does not let up until the danger has passed or, in the worst case, until the final moment. He is fearful for his son's life but he is incapable of imagining coolly what it will be like when, heaven forbid, the dreadful end comes. And he is certainly not ready to make accounts and to plan in advance arrangements which will be required when the tragedy strikes.

When it comes to someone who is not one's own son--a neighbor's son, say, or the son of a friend or even of a close relative--the situation is different. A loyal friend will proffer help to the best of his ability, he may even drop everything else for a time in order to render more intense help. But if he is engaged in urgent affairs, he cannot neglect them. And if he has worries of his own, these will probably push to second place someone else's troubles.

The good friend, with all his loyalty and devotion, does not cease thinking about the tangibility of the fatal result. He is capable of regarding it as an inevitability which must be accepted in advance, with all the pain and grief that this entails. He does not avoid thinking in terms of the post-

tragedy period, and if necessary, he is capable of planning in advance things which will have to be done when the bitter end comes.

The World Zionist Organization was always a good and faithful friend of the Jewish people. For the Jewish people it drew up a great plan which assured it of redemption from the diaspora and its travails. To realize this plan it worked devotedly and persistently for many decades. It forged and educated generations of fighters and fulfillers who were ready to make every effort and every sacrifice to achieve the Zionist ideal. In Palestine the WZO created a new Jewish society on the foundations laid by its pioneers and its loyal adherents.

With all this, however, the WZO was a friend and not a father. This fact was revealed unequivocally during the Uganda crisis. In that period the Jewish people was in distress--there was no holocaust, but the distress was quite genuine. Its life in Eastern Europe had become insupportable and large numbers of its people wandered about the globe seeking shelter and refuge. The founders of Zionism, Herzl and Nordau, who initially conceived of their movement as the "administrator" (*negotiorum geseor*) of the Jewish people could not remain indifferent to the "plight of the Jews" which was being played out before their very eyes, and they proposed acceptance of the Uganda Plan in order to set up in that land a temporary "night haven" until the time became propitious for the realization of Zionism in Palestine. Their proposal was passed by the Zionist Congress but was overturned at the last minute under the vigorous pressure exerted by the Russian *Zionei Zion* group. For the purposes of our discussion, it is quite immaterial whether the concern of Herzl and Nordau was as sincere as they made it out to be, or whether the "plight of the Jews" was merely a pretext to cover up the failure of their policy and to cast aside Palestine-centered Zionism, as was alleged by the extremists among *Zionei Zion* (one of whose members was the young Yitzhak Gruenbaum¹⁸). In itself, the plight of the Jews was certainly no fabrication, and the Zionists were compelled to cope with it in practical terms. Yet the Zionist movement emerged from the enormous jolt of the Uganda crisis different from what it had been at its inception. After the wandering Jewish masses were left in the lurch and the territorial elements were plucked out of the movement, it was

18 Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Test of a Generation (Hebrew), pp. 32-57.

determined once and for all that fulfillment of the Zionist program in Palestine was the *sole* objective and could not be derailed by other problems, no matter how serious these might be. From its status as the general custodian of the Jewish people, responsible for the wellbeing of Jews wherever they might be, as Heil had conceived of it, the Zionist movement metamorphosed into an

organization for the fulfillment of a Zionist “project,” a kind of limited company.¹⁹

In the meantime the standing of the World Zionist Organization within the Jewish people underwent a sea-change. It became the strongest and most ramified of the organizations, and because of this it was, during the Holocaust, the natural place for expectations of rescue to be addressed--rescue pure and simple, not necessarily in connection with the realization of Zionism. The intensity with which the Zionists sought to spurn this task is attested to in the remarks of Eliezer Kaplan and Yosef Sprinzak at the January 18, 1943 Zionist Executive Committee session already referred to above.

Sprinzak, it will be recalled, offered justification for the Jewish public’s turning to the Zionist institutions with a demand for rescue. This, however, he did not do like his colleagues who expressed their shame and regret. Since the matter involved the whole House of Israel, there was no place for moralizing or citing one’s duty. Instead, Sprinzak called for “showing understanding” for persons who had no place to turn to “other than this House.” The ground cited by Sprinzak for responding to the peremptory demands is not unassailable responsibility but a “warm Jewish heart,” that same heart which had so riled Gruenbaum. Sprinzak speaks explicitly about the observance of a “precept” and not about the fulfillment of an obligation. Implicit in his words is that the act in question is one of mercy beyond what is strictly required, and due to extraordinary circumstances.

The unmistakable unwillingness of the Zionist leadership to assume responsibility for the rescue operation was evinced at that meeting by Eliezer Kaplan when he urged that the operation be done not “within the Jewish Agency framework and not [through a body] attached to the Jewish Agency.” This insistent refusal to accept organizational responsibility indicates quite clearly a desire on the part of ranking leaders to distance themselves as far as possible from a matter which was not within the purview of Zionism. This desire was manifestly unfulfillable. Unlike the Uganda crisis forty years earlier, this time the plight of the Jews who were pounding on the doors of the Zionist offices could not be disregarded. The aim of drawing an absolute separation between Zionism and rescue was unachievable. Involved was the rescue of Zionist functionaries and of bringing pioneer-oriented youth to Palestine; involved was a “warm Jewish heart;” involved was instructing those in the ghettos how to behave so as not to shame Zionism; and involved were other direct and indirect interests concerning events in the ghettos and developments in the rescue

sphere. Reality forced on the Zionist movement close and active participation in Holocaust-related matters. But even that reality could not force on it the attitude of a “father” when it was only a friend, and a friend, moreover, burdened with worries and troubles of his own.

* * * * *

The Zionist movement’s dissociation from responsibility for rescue work took several forms. The most glaring and overriding phenomenon was the failure of the movement’s leaders to stand at the head of the rescue operation, or even to engage in such work, with the exception of isolated passing instances. We examined above in considerable detail the circumstances surrounding the activity of the sole exception to the rule where a leader was concerned--Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who did occupy himself with rescue work. It was Joel Brand, in his testimony given from the other side of the wall, who strikingly dramatized the gross mismatch between the scope of the task and the standing of the persons who were placed at its head. When functionaries in Budapest informed the delegation in Istanbul of a forthcoming visit by Brand, they received a cable in reply: “Let Joel come, Chaim is waiting for him.” Brand relates:

¹⁹ For details, see Ch. 6.

"It was clear to us that this referred to none other than Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization. In other words, those in Istanbul understood what was afoot."²⁰

However, expectations notwithstanding and despite the fatefulness of the hour, it was not Chaim Weizmann who awaited Brand but Haim Barlas, a senior Jewish Agency official in Istanbul. With him were other officials, emissaries and functionaries, representatives of departments, parties and organizations. Not one of them possessed the standing of a leader or decision-making and representational authority exceeding those of a low-ranking agent. This deficiency was the subject of public criticism in the Yishuv which at least on two occasions assumed the dimensions of a scandal.

In June 1944 the head of the *Al Dami* group, Rabbi Binyamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldman) caused a furor during a public assembly devoted to the rescue operation (the "Rescue Conference of the Jews of Palestine") by provocatively demanding the floor "at the wrong time" (i.e., before the resolutions were read out). After he was persuaded to speak following the reading out of the resolutions, he delivered an invective-laced speech and called on those present to "Stop your Bermuda." Rabbi Binyamin lashed out particularly at Chief Rabbi Herzog who had recently visited Turkey. Rabbi Binyamin told him: "Your place is not here, but there [in Ankara, Istanbul]."²¹

Two months later a public storm erupted in the wake of an article published in *Haboker* by the journalist Dr. Herzl Rosenblum.²² The author was apparently in possession of information concerning improper actions with respect to the Zionist leader in Romania, A.L. Zissu, and about the neglect of Hungarian Jewry. Rosenblum employed a highly abrasive style and we may take it that the article contained exaggerations and inaccuracies. Thus, for example, we find exaggerated the allegation that the Jewish Agency representatives in Istanbul led "lives of waste and profligacy" in terms of their mission. And when the writer maintains that the officials there were "of the most modest caliber" as regards quality, we may doubt whether he was acquainted with all of them and whether he measured their "quality" according to the criteria of the tasks assigned them by their superiors. It is not clear whether Rosenblum's assertion that "our officials in Turkey have no access to any place--least of all to Ankara," was actually based on substantive information. Or whether the author took into account the special "approaches" which the Istanbul staff developed for their task, which was essentially organizational-practical. It cannot be said whether the article also contains other facts which are open to challenge.

However, what interests us in the article is described with absolute accuracy. The following passage contains not one word of exaggeration:

Is it these technical officials who should be representing the Jewish people *in this place and at this hour*? Must it be they who are obligated to influence, make contacts, overcome difficulties and win friends at the most painful and most dramatic juncture in the annals of the Jewish people? Is it they who are entrusted with evaluating events and giving advice and making decisions on matters affecting tens of thousands of living people?

A concrete illustration of the justness of the complaint sounded by Rabbi Binyamin and Dr. Rosenblum is the story of how Menahem Bader, emissary of the Hashomer Hatsa'ir movement in Istanbul, sought to exercise his influence with the Papal Nuncio in Turkey, Angelo Roncalli.²³ The visit was undertaken while Barlas was absent from Istanbul and triggered his displeasure. Bader relates: "He [Barlas] reacted as he did and viewed my visit as 'an act of trespass imperilling the prestige of the Jewish Agency.' I begged his pardon."

That Bader begged Barlas's pardon may have set things right between the two officials, but it is doubtful whether it could have righted the principal fault of the entire episode: that it was expressly the representative of a party advocating militant atheism who sought to wield his influence with a representative of the Catholic Church. And with all due respect to the Jewish Agency official and his aides, it is highly doubtful whether any of them was a suitable choice to conduct this talk in the

²⁰ Yoel Brand, *Mission for the Condemned* (Hebrew), Aivot, 1957, p. 94.

²¹ *Ha'aretz*, June 6, 1944.

²² *Haboker*, August 18, 1944.

²³ Bader, *Melancholy Missions*, pp. 51-53.

first place. The fact that the Nuncio was a distinguished personality, one of the Righteous Among the Nations--he was the future Pope John XXIII--reinforces the likelihood of the deep inner reverberation which could have been generated between Catholic and Jew had the latter been, let us say, Rabbi Herzog, whom Rabbi Binyamin castigated for not remaining in Turkey as long as the current situation lasted.

This is one of any number of examples. It may be conjectured that had it been Chaim Weizmann and not Haim Barlas who awaited Joel Brand's arrival, events would have developed differently. Had Ben-Gurion or Weizmann been in Turkey when the *Struma* dropped anchor in the port of Istanbul, who can say whether the Turks would have dared send the ship on its way? And had Eliezer Kaplan or Moshe Sharett, or even Yitzhak Gruenbaum for that matter, been based permanently in Istanbul, numerous missed opportunities, along with various mistakes and blunders, might have been avoided.

It is noteworthy that the situation in Istanbul was "ideal" as compared with the other center for contact with the Holocaust countries, Geneva. Istanbul, at least, saw occasional visits by leaders from Jerusalem. The delegation staff there were specially picked for the missions assigned them, and brief contact, at least, was maintained with them. Some of them were even replaced.

Geneva lacked even this. There were plenty of emissaries there, and more than enough Zionist and Jewish institutions. These were emissaries who happened to find themselves in Switzerland when the war broke out, and for the most part remained there until it ended. All of them engaged in rescue work, each within the framework of his office. There was an alarming lack of coordination between the activities of institutions and of various emissaries. The tensions and quarrels among officials and between offices were routine affairs. This important site, perhaps the principal nerve-center in neutral Europe, did not see the visit of a single Zionist leader throughout the entire period of the Holocaust

The truth is that neither Rabbi Binyamin nor Dr. Rosenblum said anything that the Zionist hierarchy did not already know. Everyone knew

and many spoke about the need to place leaders of stature at the head of the rescue organization. Some of the Zionist leaders said as much in the Zionist Executive Committee meeting we have already referred to. Shmuel Dayan even suggested "dispersing" to the places of danger a large part of the Zionist Executive Committee, including the members of the Zionist Executive itself. No one objected to this idea. Everyone seemed to grasp the need for it. Yet...nothing came of it.

The situation of friendly interest in the Holocaust and inability to come to the aid of its victims is illustrated by a case related by Rabbi Binyamin in his journal *Mishor*.²⁴ On one occasion he approached Ben-Gurion with a certain proposal relating to rescue. Ben-Gurion heard him out and replied: "Do it, I am busy, but do it, and I will help you." He also advised Rabbi Binyamin to visit American Jewry, and added: "If you call a meeting, I will come. You may say so in the invitation."

Rabbi Binyamin did not go to America, and not because he did not wish to. Nor could we find any trace of a meeting which Rabbi Binyamin organized and which Ben-Gurion attended--this, too, it seems probable, not because a lack of desire on Rabbi Binyamin's part. Despite the generous assurances, no help was forthcoming from Ben-Gurion, because Ben-Gurion was "very busy." Once again we see where a road paved with good--but unrealized--intentions leads.

* * * * *

A clearcut expression of the friendship-only approach to the problems raised by the Holocaust was visible in the failure of Zionism's principal leaders to incorporate rescue work into the operative program of the Zionist movement. The occasional public declarations made by the leaders concerning "the tasks of Zionism at this time" never included an assertion that the main task at that hour, or one of the main tasks, was to save Jews who were in distress. Appeals were made to the nations of the world for help, there was a feeling of bitterness when no help was forthcoming. There were statements of encouragement for and commiseration with the Jews in the ghettos. But we did not find a single direct call to the Zionists themselves to look on rescue work as an integral

²⁴ *Bamishor*, April 6, 1944.

part of the Zionist agenda. This surprising phenomenon bears even greater ramifications if we take into account that declarations by the leaders in various countries were often delivered spontaneously, without coordination between them. The contents of these declarations often differed from one another, but the absence of rescue work as a Zionist task was common to all of them.

Upon the outbreak of the war, following Weizmann's pledge that the Jewish people would take part in the war against Nazi Germany, Ben-Gurion declared that Zionism would fight Hitler as though there were no White Paper, and would fight the White Paper as though there were no war. This statement, including both of its sections, became the banner and program of the Zionist movement throughout the entire course of the war. When reports about the destruction began coming in, no third section was added to round out the statement, to the effect that Zionism would fight to save Jews as though there were no other problems.

In May 1942, two months after the receipt of the first reliable reports about the mass murder of Jews in Occupied Russia, Abba Hillel Silver, leader of the American Zionists, asserted that two principal tasks devolved upon the Zionists in the United States: 1) to step up the pace of our people's national education; and 2) to make it clear to non-Jews that the tragic lack of a homeland for the Jewish people was a major world problem.²⁵ As for rescue--not a word.

At the beginning of 1942 Emanuel Neumann explained to a conference of American Zionists the tasks of the Zionist Emergency Committee which was formed in the U.S. upon the outbreak of the war. This committee helped bring Zionist leaders from Europe to America. It worked for the immigration to Palestine of members of pioneer-oriented groups in Europe, and helped arrange the importation to Palestine of needed raw materials for industry. However, the committee's paramount mission was to assist the Jewish Agency Executive in matters related to policy.²⁶

In May 1942 another Zionist leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, addressed himself to the tasks of the American Jewish Congress, a branch of the World Jewish Congress which was under saliently Zionist leadership. Again, not a word about rescue.²⁷

Rescue activity was placed beyond the pale of the Zionist activity of David Ben-Gurion in the clearest and most concrete manner at a session of the Zionist Executive Committee on October 15, 1942. In a lecture he delivered at this meeting, which was devoted to the Biltmore Program, Ben-Gurion discussed the tasks of Zionism in that period, as he saw them.

"I based it [the plan] on three elements," he said:

- 1) Opposition to the White Paper.
- 2) Establishment of a Jewish army.
- 3) Establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth after the war as part of the solution to the Jewish plight in this period.

About rescue--not a word. This, in October 1942, when the destruction of Europe's Jews was at its most intense.

In fact, as we saw, it was impossible to avoid dealing with rescue work, and not only "outside the Jewish Agency sphere" and not only in a manner not "attached to the Jewish Agency." It was dealt with by the Zionist Executive in Jerusalem, as well as in New York and London. It was dealt with by the Zionist Emergency Committee in America and by the World Jewish Congress. But because rescue activity was not considered to be among the direct tasks of the Zionist operations, it did not occupy its appropriate place in the thoughts of the leaders and functionaries of the Zionist movement. Not once did these leaders, whether of the front rank or lower rank, find the time to hold a thorough discussion of the question of what, despite everything, could be done in order to save as many Jews as possible. These persons, who for decades excelled in their intellectual and mental ability to weary their brains, to engage in hair-splitting analyses, and to search for ways out of the desperate situations in which Zionism sometimes found itself, were this time not ready to sit down and think about how to prevent the annihilation of millions of their brethren.

Nor was this all. It turns out that not only the search for modes of rescue hampered them. Those leaders and functionaries who were entrusted with rescue affairs did not evince sufficient forbearance to examine proposals made by persons

²⁵ According to Davar, May 28, 1942.

²⁶ Davar, January 8, 1942.

²⁷ Ha'aretz, May 19, 1942.

who had devoted thought, study and sensitivity to their ideas. They were particularly bothered by “non-concrete” proposals--those which did not assure immediate results in the form of rescued refugees. These proposals, which called for persistent and widespread propaganda activities, were rejected out of hand as “insubstantial.” This is related in a powerful moral tone and with pent-up bitterness by Professor Fischel Schneerson of the *Al Damig* group.

Writing in *Davar* on November 8, 1943, Schneerson describes the reaction of Zionist leaders and functionaries to the proposals put forward by his group. These officials, he says, are “men of action” and possess “common sense” which is a “nihilistic sense,” and they are gripped by a despair complex “which results in negative viewpoints and opinions concerning the prospects for a war of rescue, and from the outset defers any idea which pushes for bold and tremendous actions at any price and under any conditions.”

Professor Schneerson’s chief complaint against the Zionist functionaries is their refusal to hold consultations with people who are ready to give the matter thought. He notes that President Roosevelt formed

a “brains trust” in order to solve the problems posed by the economic crisis in America in the early 1930s. He points out that every doctor who despairs of curing a patient accepts with willing understanding the suggestion of the patient’s relatives to convene a consilium of doctors “nonetheless,” or to call in a famous specialist.

Then why should the Rescue Committee, for example, not enlist the best minds in the Yishuv, writers and scientists, to serve as a permanent advisory committee to work out plans for modes of rescue though arousing [public opinion] which, while seemingly small in scale, will as a whole and by persistence assume great scope? And why should we not found a special institute for rescue propaganda, so that this vital work of propaganda, which in our time is becoming a serious profession, will here, too, not be carried out by chance improvisation, but systematically and professionally? But these and other similar proposals find no response in the hearts of the leaders and the circles of functionaries. The men of action who represent “nihilistic” common sense examine every means on its own and do not consider them “substantial, “ and with a sweep of the hand they brush away all the [proposed] modes of activity together as the fantasies of “idlers”... And if one of the idlers should try to prove that “it is nevertheless feasible”... the men of action immediately get upset and drop the whole discussion... Our men of action have no time or patience to enter into debates and discussions because they are truly more than ever burdened with much work, and especially now, when they are “also” dealing with the war of rescue.

We shall return to Professor Schneerson’s illuminating essay in the next chapter, and note that with all his with and his professional perspicacity, he short-changed his own study of the subject by confining himself to normal psychology and stopped short of delving deep into the special psychology of Zionism. Otherwise, he would surely have paid heed to the semantic disparity which existed between him and the Zionist leaders and functionaries with whom he discussed rescue work. Whereas his intention was to engage in simple, ordinary rescue work, his interlocutors were referring to special, Zionist rescue--i.e., *aliyah* (immigration to Palestine). The truth is that for the sake of this special rescue activity they spared no effort or thought--not in Jerusalem, not in

Tel Aviv, not in Istanbul and not anywhere else. However, as we are putting the cart before the horse here, we shall make do with this remark, which we shall try to prove in the coming chapters.

An emphatic indication of the nature of the mental attitude of Zionist leaders toward the Holocaust is evidenced by the freedom with which they spoke about its conjectured results. Even as they were disregarding the “exaggerated” reports about the mass destruction, they were soberly assessing the scope of the slaughter which was to be expected in the war’s final phases. At the Biltmore Conference in July 1942, when the number of murdered stood at between 700,000 and one million according to non-Zionist estimates, and when the Zionist offices were rejecting these figures completely, Chaim Weizmann presented to his colleagues a forecast that twenty-five percent of the Jews of Eastern Europe will undergo physical destruction.”²⁸ This percentage, which

²⁸ *Davar*, July 14, 1942.

was one and a half to two times the actual figure at that time, was cited by Weizmann without any signs of recoil or reservation.

Three months later, at a Mapai conference held at Kfar Vitkin, Ben-Gurion, basing himself on a British politician, stated that “when the war ends... it will be necessary to find a haven for over three million [Jews].”²⁹ The context of this remark shows that Ben-Gurion was referring to the survivors of the destruction campaign and that he drew encouragement from the forecast that millions would remain alive and not less.

Outdoing both of these leaders in sobriety was Dr. Nahum Goldmann. As early as May 10, 1942, he was able to predict that only two to three million of Europe’s Jews would survive the war,³⁰ whereas George Lichtheim, the Jewish Agency representative in Geneva, who for a long period refrained from conveying to Jerusalem exaggerated reports about the destruction, thought (as we saw) that Goldmann’s assessment was overly optimistic and that in fact fewer Jews would survive.³¹

What made these forecasts so terrifying was that even as they were being uttered, many of the objects of these prophecies were still alive and clinging desperately to the hope that help would arrive. Whereas as those whom fate had ordained as providers of help and as rescuers decreed in advance that salvation would not come. The meaningful psychological explanation is that the doom-laden forecasts were given not within the framework of discussions about the Holocaust but as a highly significant factor in the discussion on the future of *Zionism*. Goldmann, for example, issued his appraisal of the scope of the destruction in order to demonstrate how gloomy were *Zionism*’s post-war prospects. Lichtheim went so far as

to congratulate him for his courage and expressed a mocking hope that the “mandarins” (*Zionism*’s leaders) would forgive him for placing the item on the agenda. Weizmann cited his 25-percent figure in a discussion on the Biltmore Program, and Ben-Gurion occasionally brought up the issue of the survivors in his appearances on *Zionist* issues. This fact hints at something of an explanation for the contradiction between the cloudy disregard of the subject and the sober-eyed view which coexisted in the same people at the same time. When it came to the fate of the Jews one could shudder at the horror of it yet not believe in its existence. But when it came to the prospects of *Zionism*, there was no place for evading reality: things had to be seen for what they were, developments had to be assessed with cold logic. The Holocaust as the annihilation of Jews was for the *Zionists* a tragic problem of good Jews. The Holocaust as a factor liable to affect the realization of *Zionism* was for them the fateful problem of existence or nullity.

The essence of the problem and the response to it by Ben-Gurion may be gleaned from a perusal of his speeches from this period. The first and most crucial question was whether enough Jews would survive to enable the realization of *Zionism*. Ben-Gurion’s formulation of the issue is nothing short of pellucid:

No one knows how many more will be annihilated before this war ends once and for all. This is dreadful propaganda, atrocity propaganda which is difficult to imagine, but what shall it profit us if we disregard it. If, heaven forbid, there is no *remnant* besides the Jews of America and Soviet Russia, it is possible that there will be no Jewish *aliyah* after this war, and our own future here in this country will resemble the future of Yemen’s Jews and the Assyrians in Iraq and Germany’s Jews before Hitler.³²

And again:

Hitler is liable to do away with the “bothersome problem” by destroying the Jews of Europe. This is the only real danger, the most horrific danger now facing *Zionism*. Without large-scale *aliyah*--who can know whether sooner or later the fate of the Jews of Palestine will not be as the fate of the Jews of Poland.³³

Activists in the World Union of Poalei Zion-Hitahdut wrote tremblingly to a conference of their party in March 1943: “All our post-

²⁹ Ben-Gurion, *In the Campaign*, Vol. IV, p. 90, emphases in the original.

³⁰ CZA, File L22/136.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *In the Campaign*, Vol. IV, p. 90. Emphases here and in all subsequent passages added unless otherwise specified.

³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 255.

war achievements depend on whether we will succeed in preventing the destruction of our people during the war!"³⁴ This was the problem that troubled the sleep of Zionism's leaders, whether they were engaged in rescue work or not. It is these fits of anxiety which can account for the spontaneous cry which escaped the lips of Eliahu Golomb not long before the end of the war--that "more Jews than we thought survived in Europe."³⁵

Ben-Gurion was optimistic.

At the Biltmore Conference he declared: "We believe in our victory. The arm of Nazism will be lopped off and the *remnant* of Israel will rise up."³⁶

At the Kfar Vitkin conference he reiterated: "But let us hope that there will be a *remnant*, that not all of them will be decimated. What will be the fate of the survivors? They may number millions, let us hope that they will be millions."³⁷

At the annual Tel-Hai assembly that year he pursues the same line:

"We hope that the hand of the Nazi executioners will not reach the *entire* Jewish people and that a *remnant* will survive for a diaspora."³⁸

He addressed the problem again that Passover, and once more offered an optimistic appraisal: "There is one mystery which no one could have conceived of several years ago, and that is: *How many Jews* will remain in Europe... We have not written off European Jewry, a *remnant* will arise--and for this remnant there will be only one salvation: Palestine."³⁹

At the Zionist Committee Executive session in July 1943 Ben-Gurion once again gives expression to his hope and dwells on the prospects these developments hold out for Zionism. "However, if there is a *remnant* of European Jewry, and we hope despite everything that there will be, and perhaps not a small one, at the end of the war the victorious nations will face an acute and tragic Jewish question such as never existed in the past."⁴⁰

In almost every one of his speeches, Ben-Gurion speaks about the prospects the Holocaust may open up for Zionism. As early as 1941 he reminds the participants in a Histadrut seminar in Rehovot how important the distress of Jews is for the realization of Zionism: "If you examine the history of Zionism, you will find that all the significant steps in the progress of Zionism were always related to the intensification of Jewish distress."⁴¹ He took up this question several times in his Kfar Vitkin speech. At one point he pledges: "There will be a shortage of workers? The ghettos will fill this shortage."⁴² At another point he explains that

after the war the Jewish question will, in addition to its historical background, finds its place "also against the backdrop of the new reality--as a question of millions of destitute refugees who were uprooted and ruined to the very foundations in the course of the war."⁴³ Later he urges a "speedy transfer of the masses of Jews to the homeland" after the war.⁴⁴ Concluding his speech, Ben-Gurion enunciates a clear plan with a view to the end of the war:

And if it be asked: What is different now? Why will we succeed this time in something which we did not even imagine in the last war?

This is the answer: We have two things now which we did not have then--*a great Yishuv in this land and a great calamity in the diaspora.*

...And with the force of a redemptive idea the great tragedy of our nation in the diaspora can be transformed into a tremendous lever for deliverance. The tragedy of millions is also the redemptive power of millions. And it is the word of Zionism... to cast the great Jewish tragedy in prodigious moulds of redemption.⁴⁵

This program was implemented after the war and brought about the establishment of the State of Israel. Its wonderful success did much to make people

³⁴ *Iddisher Kempfer*, April 2, 1943.

³⁵ *Haboker*, October 19, 1944.

³⁶ *In the Campaign*, Vol. IV, p. 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 123.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 134-183.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 255.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Emphases in the original.

forget the mistakes and blunders which preceded it. At the same time the ostensibly profound thesis that the Holocaust was a necessary precursor of the State--though expressed in embarrassed whispers--gained credence.

Since the greater part of the anxiety about the lives of the Jews stemmed from concern about the realization of Zionism, it is no wonder that at the height of the destruction, in the midst of hope and apprehension, Ben-Gurion presented the current task of Zionism as follows:

And the first thing we are called upon to do is to pay heed to those groups which the Hitler danger did not reach, and they are the few, those who have already been spared the danger--these are the Jewish groups in the East... There is in the East a series of Jewish groups which are not very big, neighbors of ours: in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Perhaps in another few months--in the Balkans as well. We are obligated to show special concern and urgent

and vigorous treatment for these groups--in order to save them in time and bring them to this country.⁴⁶

These words were spoken at Passover 1943, when the Warsaw ghetto was in flames. Ben-Gurion seems to have expected that the Balkans would be liberated within a few months. In the countries of North Africa the expulsion of the Germans was about to be completed with the surrender of their forces in Tunisia within a matter of days. Nor were there any Germans in Iraq, Syria or Egypt. In some of these countries the situation of the Jews was insupportable, although the danger of total annihilation had passed. These Jews were available for rescue, meaning for *aliyah*. It was toward them that the Zionist movement directed its energies.

As for the Jews of Occupied Europe--what could be done? Gruenbaum was dealing with them. And the boys in Istanbul would save as many as they could. Let us wait and let us hope that a remnant survives, perhaps a large remnant...

The Zionist movement, whose standing and strength within the Jewish people thrust upon it the task of rescuer and savior, took a friendship-only attitude toward the plight of Europe's Jews.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 133-134.

Chapter Five

Interim Summaries, Psychology and Ideology

In his letter to the present writer (see Introduction), Moshe Sharett takes him to task by hinting transparently that he (the author) has only now come out with his criticism, "when we all have the wisdom of hindsight and can allow ourselves the luxury of prophesying the past." Similarly, David Ben-Gurion, in his letter, suggests, albeit with polite reservation, that he does not "hold with accusations after the fact." In the author's reply to Sharett of August 15, 1962, an initial, general response was adduced to his and to Ben-Gurion's argument. Its gist was that prior ignorance of what is liable to occur is not only an unacceptable argument for national leaders, but in fact constitutes a serious accusation. This is particularly true with respect to the Zionist leaders whose duty it was, as S.Z. Rubashov said, to have been aware of the dangers lurking for the nation and did not have the prerogative of being taken by surprise. One cannot but be apprehensive lest the same line of reasoning put forward separately and, in their own eyes, convincingly, by each of the two leaders mentioned, will occur also to at least some readers and will become an intellectual barrier against their grasping the thesis being propounded by the author. This apprehension in itself would justify devoting a special chapter to a clarification of one major question: What should and what could the Zionist movement have done during the Holocaust years to rescue Jews?

In addition to constituting an attempt to overcome this baffler, where it exists, this chapter will serve also to deal with what we believe to be the "easy" answers out forward in the face of the problems of rescue from two opposite directions. On the one hand, there are those who view the failure of the Holocaust years as a "conspiracy of betrayal," and so forth; while on the other hand, efforts are made to resolve the grave questions through recourse to objective factors such as psychology, war conditions, and the like. Nor shall we refrain from putting forward our own answer which, we believe, can contribute to understanding the Zionist failure in the Holocaust.

One introductory remark: since we are dealing expressly with the Zionist movement, and not with merely one more Jewish rescue organization, we wish to spell out clearly that this movement did not have to forgo either Zionism or the aims of Zionism, nor to relinquish the immediate objectives created by the situation and by the prospects which were opened up to the movement. To the contrary, as we have already

indicated several times, in order to fulfill its duty to the Jewish people in that terrible period, the movement should have been more Zionist and not less so. With this premise as our point of departure, we shall rephrase our original question thus: What needed to have been done (and by whom?) for the Zionist movement to fulfill its obligation of rescuing Jews during the Holocaust years? For the sake of completeness, we shall take the liberty of recalling some of the points we have already made in earlier chapters.

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Outrage at “prophesying the past” is a legitimate stance when it refers to criticism which castigates people for faults of commission or omission stemming from a failure to foresee events which were difficult to forecast, or from an ignorance of certain facts which should have been known. But outrage is inadmissible when the criticism is directed above all at the ignorance itself; and when that ignorance, moreover, was the result of an unwillingness to know and to believe information which others, who were concerned parties, knew and believed. We have seen how the WZO, its newspapers and its institutions, worked for at least nine months in an effort to void the credibility of the reports about the destruction. We saw how the American Zionists consented to conceal from world knowledge for three months the report--which was in their exclusive possession--concerning Hitler’s decision to annihilate forthwith all of Europe’s Jews; how, even after November 23, the Zionist institutions continued to base themselves on and support Nazi information, of all sources (e.g., the issue of the 55 ghettos). One can try to explain these and other acts and blunders: but to try to erase the “original mark of shame” by delegitimizing the criticism as “prophesying the past”--this is not to be taken seriously.

A second element of outrage against prophesying the past could stem from the well-known syndrome by which the researcher of past events finds it relatively easy to say what was “right” and what was “wrong” in the behavior of the actors in the events. Thus, one argument holds, the researcher should not hasten to judge mistakes which were made under intense pressures and in the rush of events, basing himself on criteria which he evokes in a state of tranquility, sitting in his easy chair at his desk, and in full knowledge of the outcome of the decisions. Manifestly, this rule is useful for every historical study, and naturally for the study of the Holocaust as well. Below (Ch. 15) we shall have occasion to consider the perversion of history and of justice being wrought by researchers who set themselves up as moralizers and judges *vis-a-vis* those

who were trapped in the ghettos and imprisoned in the concentration camps. At the same time, we believe that as regards the persons and organizations who were supposed to act as *rescuers* from the Holocaust, the “wisdom of hindsight” is not only justified, it is absolutely essential.

A *post factum* examination of this issue is justified because second only to the obligation of knowing what was occurring, which we put to the appointed rescuers, was the obligation of judiciousness and of a search for ways and means to perform the task assigned them. In other words, the heads of the movement, its leaders and thinkers, should have thought the matter out and launched their own search, and not dump the rescue mission in the laps of a few functionaries. Yet the very opposite process occurred. The debate at the January 18, 1943, session of the Zionist Actions Committee dramatizes how the task of thinking about what to do fell on Yitzhak Gruenbaum and half a dozen second- and third-rank functionaries, while the likes of Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, Chaim Weizmann and others with proven powers of conceptualization “did not intervene in the discussion.” At a time when the emergency situation and the scope of the calamity demanded unequivocally a deviation from normalcy and from routine, the behavior of the appointed rescuers continued to conform to the thought and speech patterns of priority for the “war of redemption” over anything that was not a war of redemption. Because they made no effort to breach the walls of normalcy, nothing innovative was attempted, and indeed nothing substantive was accomplished.

It is right and proper to “come with complaints” to the Zionist movement and to cast a powerful light on their mistakes--and not only for the sake of doing historic justice to the annals of the Holocaust. This clarification is required because the history of our people in exile has not yet run its course. The dangers lurking for the Jewish people in certain situations in various lands still exist. No guarantee has been given that what happened to the Jews of Europe in the early 1940s will not threaten some Jewish community sometime in the future with some form and degree of disaster. The successors of the original Zionist movement--the State of Israel and the World Zionist Organization--continue to be the rescuers *in posse* of Jews everywhere. As long as the causes of the blunders during the Holocaust have not been exposed and expunged, they are liable to generate new versions of estrangement from the distress of the Jews,

whether out of a frivolous attitude, or because priority is given to a “war of redemption” in new incarnations.

Because the Zionist movement was unable to come up with and implement appropriate means of rescue, Holocaust researchers, who have before them the full story of this unfortunate experience, have the duty to avail themselves--explicitly--of the wisdom of hindsight in order to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the events, grasp their significance, and draw the lessons from what took place, lest the experience of the past be lost for future generations.

* * * * *

Those wishing to adduce a psychological explanation for the behavior of the Zionists during the Holocaust, will arrive at no productive conclusions unless and until they pinpoint the one special factor which exerted a crucial influence on that behavior. Without taking this factor into account--and in our opinion, it does not lie in the realm of psychology itself--no substantive results are possible. At best, psychological explanations have been able to put forward a description of what happened, but not an exhaustive explanation. They discovered *indirect* psychological reasons for certain behavior, but not its root cause. In this way they provided an answer to the question of “how” but did not reach the “why.” In any case, a clarification of this kind would be incapable of offering a sufficient answer to the question of what should have been done in order to remove the causes of the blunders and failures. This assumption is equally applicable to the major blunder in the sphere of information, and to the many failures of commission and omission. From this point of view, it is immaterial whether the purpose of the clarification is justification, accusation, or objective elucidation. Nor is it germane whether the clarification was carried out after the fact or at the height of the Holocaust.

In the previous chapter we referred to the psychological essay of Professor Fischel Schneerson. In it he describes most illuminatingly the inability of the Zionist leadership to cope with the problems that confronted it. Schneerson depicts the psychological backdrop to this gross impotence, and he offers convincing proposals for a change of approach and for dealing with current events. Yet the author seems not to have considered that, above and beyond this, he should have searched for and found a way to ensure that the points he makes would in fact exert an influence on his readers and that his proposals would in fact be accepted by the decision makers. Had he set himself this task, he would very likely have posed the question: Why was it that all these people suffered from the psychological affliction which he describes in his article? The quest for an answer to this question might have revealed the prop and the lever

which were required to get things done. But Prof Schneerson did not set himself this additional task and therefore did not pose the critical question or find the answer.

Prof. Schneerson's essay focussed on the failures of commission and was written from a critical perspective. For the sake of completeness, we shall turn to another attempt at a psychological explanation, this one devoted to the *information* blunder, and written from a clearly apologetic stance. We refer to the short and trenchant replies of Yitzhak Tabenkin and Yitzhak Gruenbaum to an attack by Meir Yaari. The story of the tripartite polemic between them is instructive.

On January 6, 1943, the weekly *Hashomer Hatzair* published an article by MeW Yaari entitled “In the Face of the Calamity.” In the concluding section Yaari set forth his reaction to the report describing Gruenbaum's appearance at the youth movement meeting, writing:

We confront a mystery which disturbs our rest. According to some newspapers, Gruenbaum related on one occasion that the Jewish Agency Executive received reports about the atrocities some months ago, when the Germans had advanced to El Alamein. It is reported in his name that the Jewish Agency suppressed these atrocity reports to spare the Yishuv additional consternation in the period of the siege of Egypt. Knowing Gruenbaum as we do, we find it difficult to accept the proposition that he was capable of arguing with us about the Biltmore Plan and about political perspectives without revealing something of these dreadful reports. Yet even if I assume that the Jewish

Agency was not fully apprised about the situation in Poland, I will now face a dilemma in trying to determine which of the two accusations is the graver: that it knew, or that it did not know? If it knew, we are confronted with a virtually unexampled act of public fraud; and if it did not know, that is an act of criminal negligence which also is probably unexampled. Two months ago the pamphlet of the Bundist Zygelboim, with an introduction by Lord Wedgewood, was published in London, containing a detailed description of the destruction campaign. Residing in London was Berl Locker. The pamphlet was widely disseminated, and only the Jewish Agency's news service, Palcor, seems to have missed it completely. This pamphlet was published by a Bundist and not by Dr. Schwartzbart and not by Berl Locker,

and in the meantime Ben-Gurion sat in Washington discussing a Jewish army and the Biltmore Plan. *You ask yourself in astonishment: What happened to the Zionist movement? Have we lost all proportion and direction? (Emphasis added.)*

Forthright words. Yaari reiterates the charges voiced a month earlier by David Zakal, Anshel Reis and Moshe Aram, but aims them directly and deliberately at the Jewish Agency and the Zionist leadership. From our perspective, the authenticity of his argument seems to be somewhat undercut by the fact that he does not hesitate to vent his moral wrath in the midst of the war against the establishment of a Jewish army and a Jewish state; at the time, however, when these two issues--army and state--were still under debate, this stance did not detract from the force of the attack, and in some quarters undoubtedly even strengthened it. At all events, in this case serious allegations were levelled not by private individuals and not from outside the Zionist camp. The harsh critique by the head of a major land-settlement movement and the leader of an important political trend obligated a clear and convincing reply. The reply came--quite convincingly.

Two weeks after the appearance of Yawl's article, the journal of the Kibbutz Hame'uhad movement published a speech delivered by Yitzhak Tabenkin at a meeting of the kibbutz movement council held at Ramat Hakovesh.¹ In this speech Tabenkin sets out to explain--and defend--the information failure, and to account for the attacks on Gruenbaum. Like Rubashov a month earlier, Tabenkin bemoans the *fact* that the destruction of the Jews had been perceived as a surprise despite Zionism's doctrine of catastrophe: "After all, we knew, we warned and we were warned. The disciples of Borochof, the disciples of Syrkin, the disciples of prophecy and the disciples of the movement of world revolution, who knew that one effect of the revolution would be the collapse of Jewish existence in the world--how was it that they did not raise the banner of catastrophe Zionism day in and day out!" Unlike Rubashov, however, Tabenkin does not speak about an "original mark of shame" but seeks to explain, to understand, to justify.

It is not true that we did not know what the Jews of Europe were undergoing. We knew everything! And now we seek out the blame amongst ourselves! *But this is an expression of appalling helplessness: we know who is to blame, but it is difficult to punish him. So we look for the blameworthy*

amongst ourselves. What did Gruenbaum do that we should blame him? Look at *Davar* for the past half year and you will see that we knew everything: gas, electricity, hangings, massacres. Everything was known. But when we encountered the people who came from there, from the Vale of Slaughter, we underwent a powerful experience. And we felt the full terror of the horror. (Emphasis in the original.)

Tabenkin's comments were not aimed directly at Yaari; indeed, the speech was delivered a few days before Yaari's article appeared.² Yet in retrospect, they do constitute a reply to the latter's attack. Then, in a meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum quoted Tabenkin in order to castigate Yaari in no uncertain terms: "Yaari wrote, if I am not mistaken, that if these things were known and not made public, this was a sin which cannot be atoned for. If these things were not known and therefore were not made public, this was a sin of negligence. And I say to

¹ "Bitter Loneliness," "Cluster of Letters" No. 131, January 22, 1943.

² Tabenkin spoke at the Kibbutz Hameuhad Council on January 2.

you, Yaari, you read but you paid no heed [to what you read]. You heard[?] that these were merely fine but empty phrases.”³

This is exactly what he said: you paid no heed... empty phrases...

We came across no documentation to the effect that Yaari accepted the rebuffs of Tabenkin and Gruenbaum, but it stands to reason that he was quite impressed by them. Certainly it was made clear to him that if there was something amiss, he, too, was an accomplice. Like Tabenkin, Gruenbaum and others, he had known what was taking place. Like them, he “paid no heed,” gave no warning. What gave him the right to be critical of others?

Yaari concluded his January 6 article by noting that it was “to be concluded” in a future issue. But there was neither conclusion nor continuation. Not in *Hashomer Harzair* and not, as far as we have been able to ascertain, anywhere else. The very serious question of deceiving the public and of losing all proportion and direction, remained pending. (Interestingly, when Yaari’s article was reprinted in two collections, one of his own writings [1947] and the other in a *Hashomer Hatzair* anthology [1956], the passage quoted above was omitted.)

By assailing Yaari’s fight to act as a moralizer, Tabenkin and Gruenbaum did not lighten their own responsibility or their joint blame with him. Tabenkin’s reference to the powerful experience which accompanied the encounter with the refugees is barely a description, and certainly cannot constitute an explanation. Thus, the question which is implicit in the criticisms levelled at that time remains unanswered: Why

did the intensity of the experience not suffice for the Zionists, in a place and under circumstances which offered a surfeit of experiences for non-Zionists? The case of Zygelboim-Schwartzbart is a striking illustration. Both were in London; both were members of the Polish National Council (the parliament-in-exile); both were close to the Polish government and had access to its sources of information. For the Bundist Zygelboim, the “experiences” were sufficient to spur him to set in motion feverish rescue efforts, and ultimately, when these efforts proved unavailing, to impel him to take his own life. For Schwarzbart, the Zionist, the experience proved not sufficiently intense for him to take part in disseminating authenticated and reliable information, like his Bundist colleague.

As for Tabenkin’s attempt to adduce a psychological explanation for the criticisms levelled at Gruenbaum, no clarification of this is required because no special explanation is required either. Gruenbaum was blamed because he was a clear and palpable bearer of blame. It was only natural for the criticism and rage to be laid at his door. What was not natural, and what therefore does require an explanation, is why, despite everything, Gruenbaum continued to fulfill this particular task throughout the years of the Holocaust.

* * * * *

As unconvincing as the psychological explanations are, the psychological-circumstantial, or purely circumstantial, explanations are even less credible. Essentially, this refers to various versions of the argument that the information blunder resulted from the fact that in 1942 the Yishuv, faced with the danger of occupation by Rommel, was mentally incapable of absorbing the reports about the destruction in Europe. All the indications are that the copyright for this theory is held by Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who first propounded it at a meeting of youth movement leaders in early December 1942 (see Chapter 3), a few days after the November 23 announcement. So great a public success did the theory enjoy, that four years later, in December 1946, its conceiver did not hesitate to serve it up to the 22nd Zionist Congress in Basle. In the report of the Rescue Committee to the supreme institution of the Zionist movement, Gruenbaum explained: “At that time (fall 1942), when the tenor of an invasion of Eretz-Israel had already been lifted, and the war front had become remote following the victory at El Alamein, *it was possible for the Yishuv to turn its heart to concern for its brethren in the dying diaspora of Europe.*”⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Nor is this all. If the report of his speech at that meeting, as published in *Haboker*, is accurate, Gruenbaum also adduced a

³ CZA, File L25/1851.

⁴ Report of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the 22nd Zionist Congress, December 1946.

psychological-circumstantial explanation for the failure to take action in that period. It emerges from his remarks that in the severe military situation in which the Allies found themselves, it was inconvenient to bother them with the troubles of Jews.

The situation of the democratic powers was difficult! *Could we request that they put a stop to the slaughter in Poland?* The turning point came in October. Rommel was beaten back in Egypt. The liberation of Stalingrad began and the Russians burst forward. The Americans and the British assaulted North Africa and Darlan joined the Allies. *Now the possibilities were forged for requesting and demanding. Now our hearts were also free to turn to this matter.* (Emphases added.)

During our years of work on this study we also encountered other versions of the hearts-that-were-not-free theory, both verbally and in written material. One of our interlocutors, a person who at the time engaged in an impressive effort to ask questions and arouse people's conscience, came up with a somewhat far-reaching notion. The whole episode, he said, was an act of divine mercy for the Yishuv: the Yishuv was encased in the armor of insensitivity in a period of great mental distress, in the face of the enemy approaching via North Africa, and in this way it was saved from a total collapse. However, we found it impossible to accept this idea, which would make the Lord of the Universe a partner to the sin of (p. 142 in book, end of 3rd paragraph).

Given the detailed description in previous chapters of the information blunders, no herculean efforts seem called for in order to reject the hearts-that-were-not-free argument as unproductive, inconsistent with the facts, and, indeed, as explaining nothing. Suffice *it* to recall that the denial and suppression of the reports about the destruction began in March 1942--three months *before* Rommel's offensive. Moreover, the suppression extended not only to the papers and institutions in Palestine, but to the Zionist offices and institutions throughout the free world, including areas that were in no danger of German occupation. Furthermore, even after the Rommel threat no longer existed, and even after November 23, there were striking instances of close recourse to Nazi propaganda. Manifestly, then, this generally accepted argument is refuted in terms of both time and place.

In passing, it bears noting that even from the standpoint of psychological theory, it is far from certain that apprehension about the fate

of the Yishuv would have been a disruptive factor in absorbing the truth concerning the events in Europe. True, it is probable that the concern and preoccupation regarding the immediate future of the Yishuv could have diverted attention and energy from actual *operations* to rescue Jews from the countries of the Holocaust. But we can find no logical basis for the argument that the looming troubles from the direction of Egypt would necessarily blunt the sense of belief and understanding for the troubles occurring in Europe. In *fact*, it seems to us that if the opposite development had occurred, and instead of denial and suppression a wave of awakening and solidarity would have surged up, this would admit of a clearcut psychological explanation--how the approaching calamity from Egypt opened people's eyes and hearts to the distress of others. To illustrate the point, we will note that serious accusations of indifference and failure to help which were voiced against American Jewry both during and after the war, were usually accompanied by the contention that the geographical remoteness of these Jews from the actual scene of the troubles sealed their hearts to the distress of their European brethren.

As for Gruenbaum's argument that the Zionist leadership could not request help from the Allied powers out of consideration for their dire military straits, this is triply refuted by reality. First, the help required was not military as such but political-military, with the political aspect clearly dominant. No one was about to demand the immediate liberation of Warsaw or Bialystok in order to rescue the Jews imprisoned there. Indeed, in this period the idea of bombing the concentration camps had not yet been put forward, and not enough was yet known about the sophisticated destruction installations located in the camps.

Second, it bears recalling that precisely the period of June-August 1942 saw the first wave of public awakening in London regarding the destruction of European Jewry. As we saw, it was then that the detailed reports arrived from the Bund in Poland, the *Oneg Shabbat* group in Warsaw, and from Polish government sources. The awakening encompassed enlightened and influential groups in the Jewish and non-Jewish populations alike, who issued calls for help to the British and American

governments. The reverberations of this arousal reached New York and other major centers of the free world. Yet at this very time the Zionist institutions everywhere stood out by their reserved and moderate attitude. They demanded nothing from others, or from themselves.

Third, when it came to matters of genuine substance, the Zionist leaders were not exactly known for their hesitation or faint-heartedness in their relations with political elements of all kinds, at any time and under

any circumstances. The war years saw no backtracking from the principle of Zionism's precedence over absolutely everything else. The very fact that Gruenbaum could put forward this concessionary argument, shows once more just how far the rescue mission was from being a Zionist mission in his eyes.

The argument of pure circumstance, without the element of psychology, relates to the poor communications facilities. Postal and telegraph services, it was said, were faulty everywhere. No regular contact was possible with the countries of the Holocaust. Under these circumstances, then, it was only natural that people did not know what to believe or what to do. This version of events is in fact implicit in Sharett's wisdom-of-hindsight argument and in Tabenkin's story about the experience which was not intense enough. Like the hearts-that-were-not-free descriptions, it bases itself on one part of reality but disregards the second and more crucial part. It is true that communications were poor. It is true that regular contact with the Occupied Europe could not be maintained. Worse: Nazi propaganda added a deceiving and confusing element. All this is true and well-known. However, also well known is the fact that, despite everything, numerous reports arrived from reliable and authoritative sources, and why these reports were rejected is quite incomprehensible. Why did the information received from Ringelblum in Warsaw or from Zygelmboim in London have to be cross-checked with Rabbi Ehrenpreis in Stockholm? Why were the Poles and the Russians not believed--while the Germans, of all people, were believed? Why, instead of becoming a faithful source of information and an inspirational center for activity, did the WZO become instead an obstacle to the reception of the truth about the events in Europe and to the proffering of aid and rescue? These and similar facts, as related above (and more are yet to come) refute the poor-communications argument, just as they refute other apologetic explanations. Facts are stubborn: an attitude of forgiving justification does not annul them, just as a furious attack, as such, does not relegate them to their proper place. Facts, after they have been determined and authenticated, need to be explained.

* * * * *

No great perspicacity is required to answer the question of what the Zionist movement should have done during the years of the Holocaust. The answer can even be formulated in varying styles of speech, in accordance with differences in habits of thought and with the manner in which different people absorb such statements. It can be said that it was Zionism's duty to place rescue at the head of its concerns; that to this end

it should have mobilized all the human, material and intellectual resources at its disposal; that modes of rescue should have been sought by means of relentless activity in various directions and by means of intense thought day and night. In negative terms, it can be said that non-action based on pretexts of any kind, such as "There is nothing that can be done," should have been studiously avoided; that noting, no matter how important, should have been allowed to divert attention from the goal of rescue. Using a "traditional" style, it can be said that such activity should have been carried out with absolute dedication. And, again in negative terms, it can be recalled that "A precept for which the Jewish people did not lay down their lives, is as tough not carried out by them."

But the fact is that these things, and others like them, were said, and not only by "prophesiers in hindsight." In the very period of the Holocaust they were voiced by persons inside and outside the Zionist camp: they were uttered by Melech Neustadt and Anshel Reis within the rescue establishment; pleas came from Prof. Schneerson and his colleagues in the "El-Dami" group; excoriation was heard from the "Baderech" group in Agudat Israel; and contrition was expressed by Zalman Rubashov and Israel

Idelson. In London Shmuel Zygelboim cried out from the depths of his heart. And from the countries of the Holocaust were heard the agonized voices of Rabbi Weissmandel, of Tussiah Altman, and of others. Some of these people were highly articulate and spared no effort to get their message through to the public at large and to the Zionist leadership. But they managed to change nothing, neither in deed nor in thought. The dislocated mind of the Zionist society, encompassing all its levels and all its ranks, simply did not ingest these simple and logical remonstrances. The leaders and the functionaries disregarded them or rejected them as exaggerated and absurd. The sources of these descriptions were treated, at best, forgivingly, and in many instances with disbelief and suspiciousness. This attitude persisted throughout the entire Holocaust period, before November 23 and thereafter as well--until the end of the war and the cessation of the destruction.

We return, then, to the question which, we believe, should have been posed at the time by Prof. Schneerson, namely: What should, and what could, have been done in order to imbue the Zionists with the capacity to absorb his contentions? Following the image we posited in the previous chapter, we shall rephrase the question as follows: How could the Zionist movement have been transformed from a *friend* of Europe's Jews,

a friend busy and preoccupied with his own affairs, into a *'father'* who would know no rest in looking for ways to rescue his sons?

Two conjectures present themselves concerning the essence of the task. First, it may be taken for granted that the answer to the question would entail imbuing Zionism with new qualities of character which it had always lacked. Second, we can investigate whether the alienation, as described in Chapter 4, is not actually an inherent quality of Zionism but an acquired trait, a kind of deformity caused by a serious illness. The first conjecture, if correct, would all but rule out any great hopes. While the second assumption, if verified, would suggest that the task was in fact a very formidable one, but not without prospects of success. As we indicated earlier, we believe the second conjecture to be the valid one: the illness that afflicted Zionism was the Uganda Crisis. The Zionist movement emerged from that fateful episode wanting and deformed--a deformity the movement retains to this day. The next chapter, then, is devoted to an examination of the Uganda Crisis and its consequences for the behavior of the Zionists during the Holocaust.

Chapter Six

The Uganda Episode

In his opening speech to the 6th Zionist Congress, on August 23, 1903, the president of the Zionist Organization, Dr. Theodor Herzl, took the delegates by surprise with a bombshell announcement: the British government had offered the Zionists a region for autonomous Jewish settlement.¹ The area in question, it later turned out, was located in East Africa, between Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, and a place known as the Mau Escarpment²--an expansive area in which the Jews could carve out a suitable territory.

The Congress was overwhelmed at the news, and the hail and galleries resounded with waves of applause. "Three cheers for England!" the delegate Israel Zangwill cried out. And the Congress responded fervently. Everyone present rose. Hats and handkerchiefs were thrown into the air. The crescendo of applause lasted for several minutes.³

Thus began the fateful crisis which struck the Zionist movement and changed it irrevocably. Although the proposed territory was located in Kenya, it was referred to, apparently mistakenly, as Uganda--the neighboring territory--and the dispute over England's offer entered history as the Uganda Crisis.⁴

There was plenty to be overwhelmed about. Great Britain, which ruled seas and continents, the world empire on which the sun never set--this great power had generously responded to the distress of the Jews by placing at their disposal an extensive territory, sparsely populated and boasting a comfortable climate. The British had recognized Dr. Herzl and his organization as the representative of the Jewish people for the purpose of this settlement. The Zionist Organization thereby reached a new zenith of prestige and representation, immeasurably exceeding its actual numerical size and its organizational strength. Following a series of failures and disappointments in diplomatic negotiations with the mighty of the world, Herzl had finally achieved a palpable success.

In his opening address Herzl several times pledged that the East African territory was not intended to supersede Palestine and would not detract from the aspiration of the Zionist movement for "the land of our forefathers." On the other hand, "Naturally this is not Zion and it cannot become Zion."⁵ The movement would not call on the Jewish people to leave their homes and come in their masses to this place. The

¹ Stenographic minutes of the 6th Zionist Congress (German), pp. 8-9 (hereafter: 6th Con.).

² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ In the 6th and 7th Congresses the speakers generally referred not to "Uganda" but about "East Africa."

⁵ 6th Con., p. 9.

importance of the proposed territory lay in its ability to serve the urgent needs of the emergency afflicting the Jewish people. Nor was Herzl asking the

Congress to accept the British offer immediately. He proposed that a special commission be set up to visit the site and investigate the matter thoroughly. It was over this proposal--the selection of a commission and the determination of its powers--that the first act of the Uganda Crisis was played out.

The preliminary discussion took place within the framework of the *Landsmanschaften*, delegates grouped in accordance with countries of origin, which made up the Congress. Within two hours of Herzl's speech, all the groups with the exception of the Russians had given their assent to the establishment of the commission.⁶ However, when the question was raised in the plenum a vituperative debate ensued which was destined to rage for two full years after the 6th Congress and not to be concluded until the 7th Congress.

According to all indications, Herzl's close associates were under heavy pressure from the leaders of the movement. His distinguished friend, Max Nordau, supported him in a manner redolent more of loyalty than of sincerity.⁷ Nordau, in his major speech on the second day of the Congress, devoted only a few concluding sentences to "Uganda" while coining the term which instantly caught on as the watchword for the scheme: the East Africa territory could serve as a *Nachtsyl*, a "nightsheller," for the masses of Jews who were wandering about the world seeking a roof over their heads.⁸ In a second speech, shortly before the vote, Nordau put forward two additional arguments. One was that the Jews could use Uganda as a site for training in good citizenship; and the final reason, "which no one had thought of," was that a yes vote (for the establishment of the commission) would express the Congress's confidence in its leader and enable *it* to give a courteous reply to Britain's generous offer.⁹ Following this Nordau took almost no part in the debate over Uganda, although he would be the target of an assassination attempt by a crazed zealot. At the 7th Congress Nordau, who served as president, fulfilled his duties in administering the debate and the voting on the Uganda question, but once more did not participate in the debate.

The explanation for Nordau's unusual behavior apparently lies in the fact that out of loyalty to his friend Herzl he forced himself to defend an idea with which he was not in wholehearted agreement. In contrast to Nordau, however, the great majority of the participants in the debate evinced profound mental and intellectual sincerity. The Uganda Episode bared the deep-lying roots of the opinions and feelings which prevailed in the Zionist movement, and as such provides a key for understanding events which occurred decades later.

At the outset of the debate, in the 6th Congress, both sides had a common point of departure. Both held as self-evident the proposition that the Zionist movement was the *sole representative of the Jewish people*, the single authorized guardian, whose task it was to administer the affairs of the nation in all matters. This assumption was given explicit expression by several of the speakers on both sides of the question,¹⁰ and is implicit in the speeches of others. It was on this underlying premise that the supporters of the Uganda proposal based their argument: The Jewish masses are in distress; they are wandering about the earth in search of a place to live; they cannot wait until Zionism is realized in Palestine; the Zionist movement now has an opportunity to create for these Jews a night-shelter in East Africa; its obligation is to seize that opportunity.

This argument, when combined with the constantly reiterated pledge that Uganda would have no adverse effect on the affinity for Palestine, made a powerful impression. Indeed, it threw the opponents of the Uganda scheme into confusion, as they were unable to counter it clearly and convincingly. The urgent need for a night-shelter was obvious, and the situation made it difficult to spurn the tempting offer. When Dr. Bernstein-Kohan, the avowed dissenter to the policy of the leadership, first heard about the Uganda offer in a session of the Zionist Actions Committee, his response was that in their present straits the Jews of Russia would go anywhere, "even to

⁶ Ibid., p. 154, speech by Dr. Wordsman.

⁷ Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *Development of the Zionist Movement* (Hebrew), Part II, Reuven Mass, 1953, p. 65.

⁸ 6th Con., p. 71.

⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰ Max Nordau, pp. 64, 69; Shimon Rosenbaum, p. 179; Nahman Syrkin, p. 178.

hell,"¹¹ and his words were taken as signalling his assent to the plan. Dr. Chaim Weizmann, who would eventually vote against the plan, had stated two days earlier that he took a "positive attitude" towards Herzl's proposal.¹² Dr. Heinrich Loewe, later a firm opponent of Uganda, originally registered for the debate among the plan's backers.¹³

The replies to the plea of an urgent need for a night-shelter--as far as such replies were forthcoming from the plan's opponents--did not excel in persuasiveness or in fidelity to the actual situation. Dr. Bernstein-Kohan, as an experienced physician, argued in favor of "treating by starvation:" the troubles afflicting the Jewish people "strengthen the Jewish ideal." Compromise plans must not be accepted from a position of distress. Hence, the Uganda plan should not be raised for discussion.¹⁴ However, the courageous healer by the "hunger method" bore no message for the myriads of Jews who were wandering across the continents and the oceans. Nor did the other advocates of this stance (with one exception) argue cogently for it. The gist of their case was that Uganda would harm the Zionism of Eretz-Israel. In this domain they did present a solid case, and some of their arguments were grounded in reality.

Among the plan's detractors were some "extremists" who suspected Herzl and his colleagues of nothing less than betrayal. They hinted that the Zionist Executive was leading the Congress astray and that its intention was, simply, to destroy the affinity for Palestine. The leading spokesman of this group was Menachem Shenkin. Delegate Shenkin pointed to a surprising, and in his eyes suspicious, phenomenon: *Die Welt*, the organ of the Zionist Executive, carried alongside its main headline the text of the Basle Program. Yet during the Congress itself, when the paper appeared on a daily basis, the words "Eretz-Israel, were omitted from the text. Shenkin drew Herzl's attention to the fact that Eretz-Israel was not only "the land of our fathers" but "our land" as well. In fact, Shenkin, said, he wished to hear an explicit statement from the Executive concerning its attitude towards Eretz-Israel. "We were told what the Sultan's attitude is towards Palestine, but not what the attitude is of the Zionist Actions Committee."¹⁵

Other delegates, while not so inordinately suspicious, were nevertheless quite concerned. Dr. Yehiel Tshlenov, who was in the forefront of the opposition to Uganda, was moderate, cordial, and...shocked. He declared that he did not fear the movement would abandon Palestine, but he was apprehensive about a development which would bring about a dangerous enfeeblement of the Zionist enterprise. The realization of Zionism was a formidable task, and in order to advance towards the goal it was necessary to mobilize all the means and resources at the disposal of the Jewish people. One obstacle to this mobilization of forces was, in his view, the illusions concerning a solution of the Jewish question by means of equality of fights, emancipation, and so forth. The territory in Africa would only bolster that illusion and would become yet another obstacle because it would divert energies from Palestine. Tshlenov was also against having the Jewish welfare organizations, such as the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) and others, occupy themselves with Uganda, because the means at their disposal were also needed to develop Palestine.

As for the distress of the homeless Jews, Tshlenov asserted that there was nothing new in this. The Jews had always known troubles. The solution to all the problems would be effected via the first clause of his program--the Basle Program.¹⁶ But Tshienov gave no answer to the question of where the homeless Jews were in fact to go.

A clear answer to this question came from a Minsk attorney, Shimon Rosenbaum, whose two speeches to the Congress¹⁷ will repay study by those who wish, decades later, to "take a stand" on the Uganda Episode. Rosenbaum pointed to the simple fact that the African territory in

question, in its present state, could not serve as a land of mass immigration. It was barren and undeveloped. It contained no industrial plants, no infrastructure of crafts or commerce such as could supply employment to the masses in search of a night-shelter. To prepare the region for large-scale immigration would require time

11 Minutes of Zionist Actions Committee meeting, August 2 1-22, 1903, Michael Hayman, ed., The Uganda Dispute, Vol. I, p.

102. Confirmation of this reaction is found in his speech at the 6th Congress, 6th Con., p. 165.

12 6th Con., p. 101.

13 Ibid., p. 175.

14 Ibid., pp. 165-166.

15 Ibid., pp. 106-107.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., pp. 73-75, 147-150.

and massive funding. In its present state, Uganda was incapable of constituting an immediate haven for hundreds of thousands of Jews who could wait no longer. And since Palestine in its present state could not serve the Jews as a shelter either, "it would be best to send them to America or to London."¹⁸

According to the minutes, Rosenbaum's remarks drew an angry response from the delegates. Unlike the majority of the cases in this deeply divided Congress, nothing is said in the minutes concerning expressions of agreement alongside the cries of protest. Indeed, not only the proponents of Uganda were outraged by Rosenbaum's presentation, but so were those who agreed with him. At all events, if anyone saw fit to defend him against the cries from the floor to end his speech immediately and leave the podium, the minutes are silent about it. And even though he spoke *before* the special debate about Uganda, the plan's disparagers (with the exception, again, of Rosenbaum himself) showed no inclination to make use of his realistic argument in that debate. His words seemed to be heresy, beyond the pale.

In *fact*, this was a perfect expression of the complete Zionism which Hehl had written about in *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), in the name of which he was now seeking a temporary shelter for the immediate needs of the Jews. Rosenbaum was among those who insisted that the Zionist movement was the sole custodian of the Jewish people. Basing himself on this premise, he believed, like the Ugandists, that the Zionists could not simply disregard the current crisis of mass emigration. Unlike the Ugandists, however, he viewed the temporary haven as it was in reality, and did not seek to transform it into a national goal. Like Tshelnov and others, Rosenbaum opposed the "transferral" of Uganda to the hands of the philanthropic organizations, but in contrast to Tshelnov he did not stress the practical aspect (mobilization of all resources for Palestine)--which was valid in itself--but concentrated on the principle:

what the Jews genuinely needs will be done by us, the Zionists, and we will not entrust others with carrying it out.

* * * * *

Tshelnov's assumption, that the Zionist movement would remain faithful to Zion even if it preoccupied itself with Uganda, was overly

optimistic. This was apparent already in the 6th Congress. The case was convincingly put by the Berlin delegate Heinrich Loewe who, it will be recalled, originally registered on the list of speakers in favor of the Uganda commission, but then joined the opponents. When his turn to speak arrived, near the end of the debate, Dr. Loewe explained that his change of heart had not been influenced by the speakers who opposed the plan, but had been caused expressly by the speakers who advocated the plan. "The later a delegate spoke, the more he outdid his predecessor in advocating Africanism. With every speaker Zion receded farther and farther into the background... The issue in question is not a port of distress and not a station for accumulating strength, but a substitute for Zion."¹⁹

The metamorphosis undergone by the Ugandist camp must have been an impressive process. Although they paid lip-service to their fidelity to Palestine, the Uganda advocates began to voice remarks and hints about "exaggerated idealism," "excessive sentimentality," and the "detachment from reality" of the Zionist idea. Some among this group, such as Dr. Fink, from the Mizrahi leadership, were more forthright:

On the one hand we see the millions of wretched [Jews] in Romania, Galicia and Russia fighting against death by starvation, and on the other hand we are fearful lest the acceptance of this project will bring about the dilution of our idealism. In that case, I ask what we can tolerate more easily:

that thousands and thousands, perhaps millions of Jews, will descend to the netherworld, or that we witness, let us say, the death of some pair of ideals?"²⁰

When the results of the roll-call vote were made known (295 in favor of setting up the Uganda commission, 178 against, 100 abstentions), pandemonium broke out.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 201-202.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

Yehiel Tshlenov, the most senior and the most moderate of the plan's opponents, who had been sitting on the platform, walked out of the meeting. He was followed by all the "Negatives." A fifteen-minute break was announced which lasted a full hour. Herzl went out to speak with the secessionists. He found them in an adjacent room, some of them seated on the floor, in the traditional mourning posture. A few of them were weeping openly.²¹

Eye-witnesses and historians alike point out that both sides were frightened. The fear of a split and of the movement's disintegration led to an atmosphere of self-restraint and mutual conciliation. The following day the nay-sayers returned to the Congress hail, declaring that their spontaneous walkout was not to be interpreted as a demonstration against

the Congress itself. Herzl for his part, at the insistence of the minority, agreed to an additional limitation on himself in the form of a commitment not to make use of Zionist funds to finance the investigative commission to East Africa. In addition to the prohibition on using funds of the Keren Kayemet and of the Zionist Bank--which had already been declared before the vote--Herzl now also undertook not to use the Shekel funds for this purpose. It was also agreed that where the dispatch of the expedition and the handling of its report were concerned, the powers of the Smaller Actions Committee (the Zionist Executive) would be narrowed to the benefit of the Greater Actions Committee. Following a further day of general discussion on various questions the Congress dispersed in an atmosphere of puzzlement and uncertainty.

* * * * *

Herzl did not send a delegation to Uganda. He died at a young age of illness and heartbreak. At the conclusion of the Congress it soon became apparent that the organizational reconciliation with the minority at Basle had not led to their acceptance of the Uganda plan. The "Negatives" began calling themselves *Zione-Zion* (Zionists of Zion). Menahem Ussishkin published an "Open Letter" against Uganda and against Herzl. The Zionist leaders in Russia convened at Kharkov and fired off a string of ultimatums to Herzl. The sin of Uganda was co-joined to the accusation of neglect of settlement activity in Palestine and to the charge of an undemocratic administration of the affairs of Zionism. Herzl was called upon to undertake in writing that he would never again put before the Zionist movement proposals of settlement outside Palestine or the neighboring areas (Syria, El Arish). The prestige of Zionism's leader was seriously undermined, conciliation efforts on the part of his admirers notwithstanding. In the meantime it was learned that the white settlers in East Africa were adamantly opposed to the entire plan and were bringing pressure to bear on the British government. According to one testimony, whose reliability is far from clear to the present writer, Herzl at a certain stage wanted to drop the entire Uganda project and asked his representative in London, Leopold Greenberg, to announce this at a public assembly in the British capital.²² But it soon turned out that this course of action was also problematic. For in the meantime a powerful group had arisen within the Zionist movement which supported the idea of East African settlement and was engaged in intense lobbying to that end. The group maintained centers in every country where the Zionist movement maintained a base of operations. In Russia the Uganda project enjoyed the spirited backing of the Zionist socialists headed by Nahman Syrkin. In the

West, Zangwill drew mass support. Indeed, such fervent Ugandists did the Zionists of England become, that non-support for Uganda was considered a betrayal of Zionism's ideals.²³ Most members of Mizrahi, at that time the only international party in the Zionist movement, were advocates of the Uganda plan. Surprisingly--and shockingly--a strong center of Ugandism developed among the Jewish settlers in Palestine itself. Farmers in Rishon LeZion and other agricultural settlements united in support of the "redeeming" idea of a territory in East Africa, following the lead of the Hebrew-language paper *Hashkafa* edited by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.²⁴ The Zionist

²¹ Chaim Weizmann, Trial and Error (Hebrew ed.), Shoken, 1949, p. 93.

²² Gruenbaum, Development of the Zionist Movement, p. 85. Greenberg's story at the 7th Congress contradicts this testimony.

²³ Weizmann, Trial and Error, p. 100.

²⁴ Shlomo Tzemach, First Year (Hebrew), Ch. 7, "Debaclé."

movement split into two increasingly warring factions. "The road splits, and that split passes through the heart of the leader."²⁵

This was the situation when Herzl passed away. He had not revoked the Uganda plan, but neither had he hastened to act in its behalf—and not only because of the state of his health. A striking example of his inactivity on the subject was the fact that he did not engage in fund-raising in order to finance the expedition, even though the Congress had launched such a drive with vigorous determination. According to Greenberg, Herzl, acting "under the influence of Kharkov," did something which seriously undercut the value and the prospects of the Uganda plan. Instead of dispatching a delegation to select appropriate sites in the vast territory offered by the British government, he asked London to determine on its own the final location within its final, narrow borders. As a result, the British proposed a limited area of 5,000 square miles, which could not be replaced by a more suitable region.

Following Herzl's death the struggle between *Zione-Zion* and the Ugandists intensified. But now the conditions had changed radically. The power of the Eastern European Zionists had grown immeasurably. Zionist diplomacy virtually ground to a halt with the passing of the movement's master-diplomat. In Palestine the "little colonization" was resumed—the practical labor which had been relegated to the status of a mere stepdaughter of Zionism in the period of Herzl's political Zionism. In London there was growing dissent from the Uganda plan on the part of the British society in general and the British government in particular. Herzl's coterie of supporters from the Western countries, deprived of their leader, found themselves having to show increasing deference to the leaders of the *Ostjuden*, the representatives of millions of deeply rooted Jews and who evinced the virtues of persistence and capability. Rampant insincerity marked the handling of the Uganda plan.

The expedition to East Africa set out at the end of 1904, financed by a British Christian philanthropist. Of the expedition's three members, only one, Nahum Wilbusch, was a Jew. After a six-week sojourn in the

area, two of the members, Wilbusch and Professor Alfred Kaiser, concluded that the country was unsuited to Jewish settlement. The most negative report was drafted by Wilbusch, whereas the expedition's leader, Major A. St. Hill Gibbons, saw *fit* to emphasize the comfortable climate, adding that even though it was true that the territory would not be amenable to mass agricultural settlement, it was fit for the settlement of several thousand persons. Gibbons also published a separate opinion in which he took Wilbusch to task for his pessimistic report.²⁶

The 7th Zionist Congress, which convened in Basle in July 1905, voted by a large majority to reject the Uganda plan and to put an end, once and for all, to territorial compromises within Zionism.²⁷ This decision generated a split at the Congress and within the Zionist Organization. Nachman Syrkin declared on the spot that he and his comrades from the Zionist-Socialist Workers' Party were seceding from the Congress and calling on all the "truly democratic" elements to follow their lead.²⁸ Israel Zangwill, the great friend of Herzl and Nordau, asserted that Herzl had once told him that the seventh Congress would also be the last one. "I hope it will be so," he added.²⁹ Others also withdrew, including some who had been close associates of Herzl's such as Dr. Max Mandelstamm from Kiev and Isidore Yassinovsky from Warsaw. The dissidents established "territorialist" parties and organizations in various countries, and formed a World Territorialist Association. These groups competed with Zionism and hampered its progress in the coming years.

We shall begin by clarifying an inaccurate but widely accepted notion about the Uganda crisis. It is generally thought that the 7th Congress rejected the Uganda plan on the basis of the report submitted by the expedition which visited the territory. This is not the case. The resolution, as passed by the Congress, was directed against territorialism as such and did not concern itself with Uganda specifically. A draft resolution was proposed by Ussishkin on the first day of the Congress and was adopted by the Zionist Actions Committee, which then submitted it to the Congress in its name. The resolution's second clause, which refers to the British government, does make

²⁵ B.Z. Herzl, "Letter to the Jewish People."

²⁶ Stenographic minutes of the 7th Zionist Congress, pp. 65-66 (hereafter: 7th Con.).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134. Syrkin returned to the Zionist fold in 1909, Zangwill in 1917.

courteous mention of the Uganda Commission's report, but nowhere says that the decision was taken as a result of that report. The key clauses are the following:

1. The 7th Zionist Congress declares that the Zionist Organization is unswervingly faithful to the basic principle of the Basle Program, which aspires to secure by public law a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine, and rejects,

both as an end and as a means, all settlement activity outside Palestine and the neighboring lands.

3. The 7th Zionist Congress reiterates that in accordance with Article 1 of its regulations, the Zionist Organization encompasses those Jews who declare their assent to the Basle Program.

The words which we have emphasized in the first clause may be construed as the absolute rejection of the "night-shelter" doctrine and of the unequivocal adoption of the stand espoused by *Zione-Zion* regarding Palestine's exclusivity as the object of Zionist activity. It is self-evident that this resolution is totally divorced from both the overall quality and the specific contents of the Uganda commission's report. It would probably be more correct to assume, without suspecting anyone of deliberate deception, that the composition of the expedition, the manner in which it was dispatched, and the report it submitted, were influenced by a desire to do what was obligated by the resolution of the 6th Congress and to be rid of the Uganda Episode as honorably as possible. Professor Otto Warburg, who headed the committee which dealt with sending out the expedition, was accused by a Ugandist from the Congress podium of having said to someone, "Let us *first* of all be rid of the Uganda bluff."³⁰ The charge was not denied, and seems to have had some basis in fact.

The cleavage in the Zionist movement actually occurred not at the 7th Congress but at the sixth. The vote at the 7th Congress caused a *parting of the ways* between the two rival sides, which had spent the previous two years locked in bitter warfare within a single organizational framework. But the war began in the meeting hail of the 6th Congress, and the dispute there intensified as the debate over whether to dispatch a delegation dragged on. We have seen how the Uganda advocates became increasingly estranged from Zionism as the debate progressed. At the same time the sustained shock experienced by the opponents of the East Africa enterprise finally peaked with their unceremonious departure from the hail.

From the 6th Congress the shock waves reverberated throughout the entire Jewish world. An abyss of alienation and betrayal opened up before the eyes of the horrified Zionists. Herzl, Nordau and Zangwill, the three pillars of Zionism, were advocating a substitute for Eretz-Israel. Comrades and friends became hostile adversaries. The propaganda for the new ideal of Uganda swept the Jewish street like a flood carrying everything before it. Despair gripped loyal Zionists. Ardent young people translated the despair into the language of decision: to realize Zionism

physically at once. Shlomo Zemah, who was among the leaders of the Second Aliyah, related 65 years later that the crucial factor in his decision to immigrate to Palestine was "the despair over Uganda."³¹ On the same occasion he also told how he and his friends in Plonsk, Poland, had read in *Hatzofeh* Herzl's opening speech at the Congress, "and our eyes filled with tears." David Ben-Gurion describes how this group of young people from Plonsk swam in the Plonka River and discussed how they could fight the Uganda trouble. "Our conclusion was that the most effective way to combat the Ugandists was by immigrating to Eretz-Israel."³²

The signs of shock from the "despair at Uganda" were quite discernible at the 7th Zionist Congress. Menahem Ussishkin, leader of the *Zione-Zion* "extremists," represented the Russian Zionists in putting before the Congress the draft resolution which they had formulated in their Freiberg meeting and which was passed by the Congress, as mentioned above. Ussishkin demanded that no special debate be held on the subject but that the Ugandists be expelled forthwith from the hail.³³ Ussishkin's behavior reflected the dominant frame of mind among the Congress delegates. Whereas the presidium treated the Ugandists with great liberality, showed

³⁰ 7th Con., p. 94, speech of the delegate Chazan.

³¹ Radio talk, Israeli Army Radio, August 15, 1971.

³² David Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs*, Am Oved, p. 11.

³³ 7th Con., p. 46.

forbearance at their outbursts, and allowed them to defend their position by allotting them time in excess of their numerical strength, the delegates in the hail found their presence insufferable. The bitterness of the harsh debates in Warsaw and Minsk actually found their most acute expression in the remarks of Dr. Tshlenov, previously known as a man of peace and compromise. In the 6th Congress, as we noted, Tshlenov had believed the assurance of the Ugandists that they would not abandon Palestine as a central goal of Zionism. Now he spoke out of the experience of the two strife-filled years that had just gone by. With a wholly characteristic thoroughness, Tshlenov dramatized the danger of Ugandism by citing the change which had occurred between the two Congresses in the behavior of the delegate Chaim Hazan.

In the minutes of the 6th Congress Hazan appears as an above-average orthodox Zionist. This trait was well reflected in his appearance at the conclusion of the debate between Herzl and the oppositionist groups of Davis Trietsch and Alfred Nossig. Herzl, who handled the debate with patience and forbearance, gained considerable support from delegates in various parts of the hail. Hazan apparently thought that the leader's parliamentary victory was insufficient. Because the oppositionist delegates had, in his view, spurned the elements of the Basle Program, with one of them even stating in writing that the attainment of a "charter" for Palestine was impossible, they deserved to be expelled from the Congress.³⁴ In the

6th Congress Hazan supported Herzl's proposal and like him pledged faithfully that Uganda would not adversely affect Palestine. Tshlenov quoted what Hazan had said at the time: "The aspiration of the Jewish people for a state in Palestine will exist eternally, and therefore the apprehension that the East Africa plan will dilute the importance of the Zionist idea is incorrect."³⁵

Hazan came to the 7th Congress in a combative and uncompromising mood. Along with Syrkin and Zangwill he was very active in the efforts to thwart by any means possible the passage of a resolution against territorialism, but he outdid them in his estrangement from Zionism. He referred to Palestine in a tone of outspoken hostility. In principle, he was not opposed to Palestine; it was a country like others. But "not a single person sitting here can maintain that Palestine is the most appropriate location for a new Jewish center... a land whose size does not exceed 10,000 square miles, a land housing a population of over 600,000 inhabitants, a land without water."³⁶

Tshlenov commented: "In Mr. Flazan we see the ripened fruit of Uganda and Ugandisin. We see the direct transition from Ugandism to territorialism. If we do not free our movement of this, we can expect many more fruits of this type."³⁷

In what was form him an unusually invective tone, he warned: Do not think that it was only here that the Hazans blackened and slandered our land, to the point where considerable efforts were necessary in order to hear these things out calmly. The Hazans also did this energetically in a great many cities in Russia.³⁸

Indeed, there were many "Hazans" and they were "energetic" wherever there were Zionists. And everywhere they caused cleavage and frustration. In the cities and towns of Eastern Europe, in student assemblies in the West, Syrkin and his colleagues explained Uganda "from a class viewpoint;" the religious Mizrahi organization supported Uganda; the majority in Poalei Zion followed Zangwill's lead. And in the Bilu settlement of Rishon LeZion the farmers were pleased at the news that at long last the Uganda investigative expedition had finally set out "despite all the scheming and subversions of the opponents." "On the same occasion the 'slandorous words' (as Shlomo Zeniah termed them) of Israel Zangwill in a speech he delivered in Philadelphia are translated into Hebrew, and strong agreement is expressed for the quip that Zionism without Zion is better than Zion without Zionism."³⁹ In Russia especially, although not only there, the Ugandists became territorialists, former Zionists were transmogrified into haters of Zion, adversaries became full-fledged enemies. The flood assumed the dimensions of a tidal wave.

Now, on the eve of the vote which could put an end to Ugandism within the Zionist movement, Tshlenov was well aware that the external problems were far from being

³⁴ 6th Con., p. 98.

³⁵ 7th Con., p. 116.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tzemach, Ch. 7.

resolved. A rough contest could be expected with the territorialists--vigorous in battle and convinced of their righteousness. For the fact was that the dissidents counted among their number the young and revolutionary element of the Congress and of the entire Zionist movement.⁴⁰

So there was place for concern, and there was justification for using unusually harsh language.

It was this same Dr. Yehiel Tshlenov, whose sincerity, sensitivity and sense of responsibility are still palpable across a baffler of decades, who pinpointed the phenomenon which few at the time took notice of, and which has led us to incorporate a detailed account of the Uganda Episode into the present study. We refer to the *immunity* of the Zionist movement against territorialism. Tshlenov, a physician by profession, likened the Uganda crisis to a two-year illness. "We who have gone through this illness, are immune to further contagion. This is perhaps the only comfort which I as a physician can derive from the Uganda Episode."⁴¹

Tshlenov touched on this phenomenon only in passing and for a reason which is the opposite of our own. He appealed to the Congress to adopt Ussishkin's unbending resolution in order to protect from contagion those who in the future would affiliate themselves with Zionism but who had not been immunized against the "disease" It is immaterial whether the experienced physician perhaps underestimated the resilience of the immunization. For the passage of the proposed resolution served as a booster shot, as it were, which activated additional powerful antibodies. These did their work in those persons who had themselves undergone the painful crisis, and were passed on to the coming generations via the mother-milk of the movement. Ever since, the Zionists have been absolutely determined that a Uganda affair, in any version whatsoever, will not recur. Territorialism became danger number one and enemy number one. Opposition to foreign territory became the very linchpin of Zionist ideology. Every organized settlement of Jews outside Eretz-Israel, in any form and under any circumstances, was impure to the touch and required suspicion-laden ideological isolation.

This immunity did its work faithfully for decades. It acted as a protective shield preserving Zionism from possible deviations and harmful influences. It helped focus the movement's energies and resources on a single goal. In this way it served Zionism and the Jewish people alike.

Until the advent of the Holocaust, when its longstanding benefit quickly became a bane.

* * * * *

While the Zionist movement was undergoing this deep immunization, it also experienced a fundamental change in terms of its standing among the Jewish people. It was now tacitly agreed, beyond any possibility of challenge, that the movement no longer constituted the people's one and only custodian. The role of "manager of the interests" of the Jewish people which Herzl refers to in *Der Judenstaat*, was at the time considered the principal element in the infrastructure of the movement which he founded in 1897. In the 6th Congress numerous delegates were still acting on the basis of this principle; Herzl and Nordau cited it in explaining the need to seek a night-shelter for a people in distress. Nor did the opponents of Uganda question the underlying premise that the Zionist movement constituted the sole authorized representative of the Jewish people. In contrast to their rivals, however, they found it difficult to reconcile this basic premise with the rejection of the temporary haven in East Africa. Bernstein-Kohan's notion of "healing by starvation" was, of course, rhetoric pure and simple, which solved nothing. And Shimon Rosenbaum's forthright proposal--to tell the Jews simply that for the time being, until Palestine was ready to absorb them, they should go to America or London--was shouted down. Beyond this realistic proposal and beyond accepting the night-shelter concept, the Zionists could offer no answer to the distress of the masses.

At the 7th Zionist Congress the victorious majority no longer spoke in terms of the "sole authorized representative"--neither Nordau nor Tshlenov nor others. In vain did Zangwill argue that "The British government has recognized us as the representatives

⁴⁰ 7th Con., pp. 118-119, speech by A. Stend.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.116.

of the Jewish people. Are we going to value ourselves less than the British government values US?"⁴² But the majority was under no obligation to respond to this charge, because it had voluntarily withdrawn from the role of "manager of the Jewish people's interests."

This was far more than a mere verbal shift. It was a substantive change which was to determine the character and the road of the Zionist movement for the long term and leave its mark on its day-to-day activity. In the first place the change was reflected in Zionism's attitude towards Jewish welfare organizations which were active in various countries.

Until this time that attitude had been negative in the extreme. Herzl and his colleagues had frequently lashed out at the operations of philanthropic societies and of Jewish philanthropists, whose money was expended wrongly on goals which were not useful. The thrust of the

criticism was that philanthropic activity made no contribution to the resolution of the Jewish question and diverted attention from the proper way to achieve that resolution. As late as the 6th Congress a brilliant speech to this effect could still be delivered by Israel Zangwill (and then re-delivered by Max Nordau in German translation). According to all the indications, the Congress organizers had meant this lecture to serve as the high point of the proceedings, and their plan would have succeeded but for the storm which erupted over the Uganda issue.

But with a view to the 7th Congress, when the Zionist Actions Committee decided to recommend that the Uganda plan be abandoned, a second resolution was added: "To ask other organizations, which interest themselves in Jewish problems, whether they would wish to take on themselves this proposal of East Africa."⁴³ In fact, the Actions Committee, without even awaiting the decision of the Congress, directed the proposal to various philanthropic organizations.⁴⁴

This sensational appeal was tantamount to the following message:

We, as Zionists, find Uganda unsuitable. But perhaps you will find it suitable? Please, gentlemen, take it up and act on it. If it relieves the distress of the Jews, no one will be more pleased than we.

It was a major turning point, hinting at numerous intentions and amenable to various interpretations. The most durable of these--those that met the test of reality--were two in number and were mutually complementary. First, legitimation was accorded, from the Zionist standpoint, to the existence and activity of the welfare organizations. Second, and more important, the Zionist movement declared to the entire world that it was no longer to be regarded as an all-embracing organization tending to all things relating to the Jewish people. Henceforth it was one more organization with its own specific goal: to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. It would direct all its strength towards this goal and would not let itself be diverted therefrom, either by its own doing or by the actions of others. In the future it would extend help to Jews only on condition that such activity was commensurate with its activities towards the attainment of Zionism's goal. In other words, the Zionist movement did not bear overall responsibility for the vicissitudes experienced by the Jewish people, and certainly not exclusive responsibility.

Nevertheless, the World Zionist Organization did not become "just another organization." In the tiny-five years that elapsed between the Uganda Crisis and the Holocaust, it expanded, strengthened itself, and became a dominant force in the life of the nation. Twelve years after the

end of the Uganda Crisis the Zionist movement received from Great Britain a second offer to establish a national home--this time not in East Africa but in Palestine itself. Since then the Yishuv in Palestine had developed and had become a faithful and forceful partner to the movement. The Zionist movement was active everywhere that Jews were to be found. Had it so wished, its strength and its standing enabled it to assume the role of leader of the Jewish people. But this task it spurned. Circumstances forced it at times to engage in what was called "current work" (*gegenwarts-arbitten*)--dealing with the immediate needs of the Jews where they happened to reside. Nor did the Zionists abstain from getting involved in local politics in their countries of residence. But these matters were explicitly and expressly subordinate to the central

⁴² 7th Con., p. 70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 68, in Greenberg's speech.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and exclusive mission of the movement. The Zionist leadership, which in its youth experienced the shock of Uganda, instinctively recoiled from dealing with “side” issues and from assuming responsibility for such matters. In the eyes of the generation which came to maturity in the post-Uganda years, the tenets and principles of *Zione-Zion* became unassailable articles of faith: the Zionists would engage exclusively in Zionism; energies would not be expended on matters which were not Zionism. And above all, especially and particularly--great care must be exercised in the face of anything that smacks of territorialism!

* * * * *

We shall conclude this chapter by noting an event the timing and direct causes of which were not related to the Uganda Crisis, but which was made possible by the change that occurred in Zionism in 1903-1905. At the 6th Congress, when Zionism’s role as the sole representative of the Jewish people was not yet in doubt, Shimon Rosenbaum opposed the idea of convening a *general* Jewish congress which would decide in the matter of Uganda. “The moment we differentiate between a Jewish congress and the Zionist congress, we shall thereby acknowledge that we are not the leaders of the Jewish people and that we are incapable of deciding on practical questions which are of importance for the Jewish people.”⁴⁵

At the 7th and subsequent Zionist Congresses, the underlying premise on which Rosenbaum had based his remarks no longer existed. To the contrary: the tendency to make a distinction between Zionism and non-Zionism had intensified. Thirty years later, when the skies darkened with the looming Holocaust, and when many practical questions of major import had to be dealt with, the exact type of Jewish congress against which the veteran Zionist Shimon Rosenbaum had inveigled, was established. In August 1936 the World Jewish Congress came into being, separate from the Zionist movement. In striking contrast to the period of

Herzl, the Zionist leadership not only expressed no resistance to the creation of a parallel institution, it actually dispatched a series of Zionist functionaries to serve as *its* founders and leaders. Thus was it assured that the WJC’s principles and actions would be consistent with those of Zionism, thereby precluding the danger that anti-Zionist trends would develop in the new body. During the Holocaust years the leaders of the new organization displayed loyalty to their wellsprings in everything, but especially in their unceasing alertness to the danger of territorialism.

45 6th Con., p. 150.

Chapter Seven

The Evian Conference: An Ideology Incarnate

The *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* defines “ideology” as “a systematic and cohesive set of ideas, concepts, principles and imperatives through which the unique worldview of a sect, party or social class is given expression.” The very terms of this definition obviate the need to discourse at length on the power of ideology as a motivating factor in history or its impact on human behavior. If for the purposes of the present study we confine ourselves solely to well-known manifestations from the Holocaust period, we can adduce a wealth of factual evidence to illustrate concretely how ideology influenced the behavior of those who were caught up in this horrific tragedy. Such phenomena could be discerned among Jews on both sides of the wall: the victims of the Holocaust, and their would-be rescuers (not to mention the German side, which is not our concern here). Public activity in the ghettos took place largely along party lines or within youth-movement frameworks, and was based on pre-war political affiliations. It was only natural and human for welfare activities and rescue efforts to be directed in the first place towards like-minded colleagues whose experiential world was similar, and for party frameworks and affinities to be exploited for this purpose. The “ideas, concepts, principles and imperatives” cited in the definition above played a preponderant role in determining the behavior of people who were caught up in the Holocaust, both as organized bodies and, to a large degree, as individuals. This mindset was particularly noticeable in cases where decisions concerning a certain mode of behavior interacted with political assessments. Such questions as whether to operate from the forests, or whether to organize armed resistance and under what circumstances to use it, were for the most part decided by public bodies which were guided by ideological-party lines.

As for the would-be rescuers, Meir Yaari, in a moment of truth, was right to contrast the activity of the Bundist Zygelboim with the inaction of the Zionists on his side of the great divide. A more unequivocal stance was taken by the American Zionist leader Haim Greenberg, who lauded Agudat Israel as the only group to adopt a decent stand and undertake concrete action in the episode of rendering assistance to the ghettoes (see Chapter 12). If we rule out the possibility that the only decent and devoted Jews in America were members of Agudat Israel, it would seem to follow that something in the organization’s ideology made its members deserving of Greenberg’s encomiums. As for Zygelboim’s

“Bundism” as the fount of his activity and supreme courage, his own spontaneous sincerity generated shocking testimony about this connection. Before

sacrificing himself on the altar of faithfulness to his people, Zygelboim sent a detailed farewell cable to the Polish Bund delegation in the U.S. explaining the motivations underlying his suicide. No fewer than three times he reiterates that he was fearful for the *fate of Polish Jewry*, without so much as mentioning the Jews of any other county. Anyone acquainted with the ideological conceptions of the Polish Bund will readily grasp the significance of this surprising lacuna in the love of the Jewish people in one who demonstrated that love unsurpassably and who ended his parting message with the words, "Long live the Bund!"¹

An even more revealing example of what ideology can do to people is provided by the split in Mapai in May 1944. While the destruction of the Jewish people in Europe was at its height, a large group, largely from kibbutzim, though some also from the cities left the Party of Eretz-Israel Workers. Heading them were Yitzhak Tabenkin, Israel Idelson (Bar-Yehuda) and others; their principal adversaries among the party majority were Berl Katznelson and David Ben-Gurion. A rather odd collection of issues, ranging from complaints about an absence of democracy in the party, to the ban on forming separate factions, served as the immediate pretexts for the resignation. However, the root cause of the rift was disagreement concerning the "world of tomorrow," meaning Communism and the Soviet Union.

The split which was set in motion in May 1944 did not come out of the blue. It was preceded by several years of intensive polemics and energetic debates in the press, at public assemblies, and in various smaller forums. Indeed, in the very period when the leading party of the Yishuv should have been devoting itself to rescuing Jews, the party's hierarchy, activists and rank-and-file were preoccupied with clarifying the burning question of whether the Soviet Union was a true light unto the nations, or perhaps not so much. Some years later this trenchant issue would resurface and consume the Kibbutz Hameuhad movement like a fire out of control, splitting kibbutzim, destroying families, and in some instances producing appalling manifestations of extreme fanaticism to the point where people found it impossible to live together (temporarily) or to part honorably.

It can be said that the impact exercised by the heritage of the Uganda crisis on the behavior of the Zionists was immeasurably more logical than that of the ideological caprices which generated the split in Mapai and Hakibbutz Hameuhad. Whereas Communism and the Soviet Union were external factors, as remote from the Yishuv reality as the

Volga is from the Jordan, the ideological conclusions drawn from the Uganda episode were based on concrete experience and at the time seemed inescapable. The opposition to territorialism withstood the test of years of public struggle against deviationists and other rivals. The alienation from all things not Zionist led to the consolidation of the authorized thesis as a virtual axiom: what's good for Zionism is good for the Jews.

That thesis is *almost* correct. In "normal" times, with their ordinary troubles, the narrow brand of post 7th-Congress Zionism could be followed, in the expectation that ultimately it would bring redemption to the entire Jewish people. But when the crisis exceeded its normal bounds and became a genuine calamity, Zionist doctrine required a thorough revision before it could incorporate the Holocaust. What was needed was a return to the Zionism of Herzl---all-encompassing, pan-Jewish--so that the movement could fulfill its task as the "managing director" of the Jewish people. No such revision was undertaken, and if any efforts were made in this direction, they have left no traces. An endeavor of this kind seems to have been beyond the capacity of Zionism's leaders, and the party lacked the vitality to produce new leaders who could face up to the truth of the overwhelming crisis. Neither Weizmann nor Ben-Gurion, both of whom had been scathed by the Uganda episode, were likely candidates to foment the necessary radical shift of direction. On the face of it, there was one person among the movement's doctrinal leadership whose entire life seemed to have fitted him for this task. As a young man, Berl Katznelson had for some years espoused the territorialist (not the Ugandist) approach, and anti-territorialist zealotry seemed foreign to him. His writings and memoirs show that he took an interest in everything Jewish, even matters unrelated to the Zionist program. But Berl did nothing and made no effort to do anything. Who can tell whether he had this terrible failure in mind as well in his pathetic confession that he was unworthy to talk about the Holocaust?

¹ Zygelboim Book (Yiddish), Unser Zeit, New York, 1947, p. 366.

In fact, we can conceive of a course of events which would have brought about a pragmatic watershed in the rescue efforts, even without ideological clarifications or a doctrinal revision of Zionism. We refer to a hypothetical situation in which persons of the likes of Mordechai Tenenbaum, Tosia Altman, Yitzhak Katznelson, Frumka Plotnicka and Chaika Klinger would have escaped from the countries of the Holocaust, reached Palestine, and stated their case publicly and vigorously. A much later episode--the shift in the attitude towards the plight of Russian Jewry in 1969--shows that a *large* number of such refugees is required to effect a

genuine turnabout. Fired by their inner fervor and driven by their faithfulness to the mission, these persons would have exposed the intellectual perfidy of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement, and effected an abrupt and crushing turnabout in that attitude. Had this occurred at a fairly early stage, the history of the Holocaust and of the rescue efforts would very likely have been different. But events took another course. The testimonies of the few survivors who did manage to make their way to Palestine bore little impact. Their efforts were easily subdued by the ideology and the movement apparatus. Because no "little" miracle occurred, no big miracle was possible.

* * * * *

The decision by the Zionists early in the century to turn their backs on all things unrelated to Zionism had little if any effect on the course of events. The furious cries of objection to Shimon Rosenbaum's proposal--that Jews should go to America as long as Palestine was unable to absorb them--did not deter Jewish immigration to the land of opportunity. Large-scale migration to the United States continued unabated, and after the Holocaust the Jewish community which had been established there remained as the largest in the world. Looked at from a historical perspective of decades, America served millions of Jews as a haven from certain destruction; in a broader perspective, it perhaps constitutes a "recuperative" station for European Jewry en route to Eretz-Israel. These developments occurred against the will of the Zionists, in the very teeth of their ideological opposition. The Zionists were unable--nor did they even consider the possibility--to take practical measures against the Jewish migration to America.

By the time the 1940s loomed on the horizon, this state of affairs had been altered radically. Pioneering activity had made Palestine a possible mass haven. The Zionist movement saw it as an urgent mission to bring Jews there as rapidly as possible. Unrelenting propaganda urged Jews everywhere to settle in Eretz-Israel. Every potential emigrant, every Jewish refugee was yet another candidate for *aliyah*. Every Jewish community which was in more than the usual distress, was an object of strenuous Zionist activity. And no longer did Zionism refrain from opposing in practice every Jewish migration movement which was not directed towards Palestine.

At the same time, the efficacy of this Zionist opposition increased as the movement's strength and relative influence grew among the Jewish public. Nor was it always necessary to launch a desperate campaign to thwart a non-Zionist immigration or settlement program. In some cases, all

the Zionist movement had to do was raise verbal objections, whether publicly or behind the scenes, or simply fold its hands and offer nothing in the way of public support, in order to abort such plans or to ensure that they would be tripped up as soon as they got off the ground.

An enlightening instance of Zionism's ambivalent stance towards the plight of Jews, and its crucial influence in determining the course events took, is provided by an effort to extricate German Jewry which was undertaken on the very eve of the Holocaust and which is known, on the basis of its initial stage, as the *Evian Conference*. To judge by the reports and the reactions of the Zionist papers and their editors during and after the conference, that event was destined to serve as convincing proof of the indifference and hypocrisy of the world towards the fate of the Jews. A summary of the reports published in the Zionist press during the conference evokes the following picture: Representatives of the international community met in the French town of Evian in July 1938 in order to draft a plan for extricating 500,000 Jews--actual and potential refugees--from Germany and Austria. Yet no sooner did the deliberations begin than it became apparent that everyone at the conference was ready for his fellow

delegates, but not himself, to obey this imperative. Every speaker began by expressing his sympathy for the refugees, and nearly all of them offered elegantly worded explanations of why his own country could not absorb them. Hypocritical, uncaring addresses followed one another in rapid succession. Following ten days of meetings and consultations, the conference ended in abject failure. A few resolutions were passed, a committee was formed. The conference disbanded without accomplishing anything substantial, leaving in its wake a residue of disappointment and frustration among the Jews of the world who had expected concrete actions.

This was the standard version of events as reflected in the articles and dispatches published in the Palestine press in July 1938 and afterwards. A (very) few reports and some isolated reactions which went against the general line were lost in the flood of negation and disappointment, and have since been shrouded in oblivion. The official Zionist version entered the history books and the memoirs of the actors, and in time became the universally authorized, unassailable truth. The degree of uniformity and general concurrence can be illustrated by several examples.

Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who together with Dr. Arthur Ruppin was a member of the Zionist delegation to the conference (as well as leading the World Jewish Congress delegation) declared in 1972 that the Evian

Conference was “a shame and a scandal for the entire progressive world.”² In his memoirs, published in Hebrew in that same year, Goldmann writes:

Much can be told about that wretched and tragicomic spectacle which has entered history as the “Evian Conference.” From the outset there was no place to doubt the unreadiness of the family of nations to provide substantial help to the downtrodden refugees... Having experienced five years of bitter activity in this area, I came to Evian without any great expectations. Yet my blood still boiled at the sight of immensely powerful governments which were ready to abandon the Jews of Europe and ease their conscience by empty gestures and illusory actions. This, they thought, was sufficient to enable them to say that they had discharged their obligation.³

The editors of the diary of *Arthur Ruppin*, published in 1968, add the following to the descriptions of the conference by the person who served as head of the Zionist delegation: “At the conference it became obvious to everyone that no country was willing to accept a substantial number of refugees.”⁴

Professor Arye Tartakower, a sociologist and historian who was a senior figure in the World Jewish Congress and was at Evian as the representative of a Jewish emigration society in Poland, testifies: “It is known that overall the Evian Conference ended in dismal failure.”⁵ Elsewhere he remarks of the conference: “The insulting episode of the civilized world’s reaction to the Nazi regime’s criminal atrocities left a lasting imprint on the memory of the generations.”⁶

Dr. Yosef Tanenbaum, author of books and articles on the Third Reich and the Holocaust, speaks at one point about the “gloomy failure of the Evian Conference,”⁷ asserting also that “there the simple truth emerged that no country wanted to open its gates to the Jews.”⁸

The author of the standard history of the Haganah, *Dr. Yehuda Slutsky*, refers to the “failure of the Evian Conference” and relates: “High-sounding, emotional declarations were voiced by the participants, but when it came down to practical plans they became evasive, and the results were, in the words of C. Weizmann, that ‘for the Jews the world is divided into two types of countries: those from which we are expelled and those which will not allow us to enter’.”⁹

² Program broadcast on Israeli Army Radio, January 16, 1972: “Friends Talk About Arthur Ruppin.” Dr. Goldmann confirmed his earlier evaluation in a recorded interview with the author on May 15, 1972.

³ Nahum Goldmann, *Memoirs* (Hebrew), Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Jerusalem, 1972, p. 158.

⁴ A. Ruppin, *Chapters of My Life* (Hebrew), Am Oved, 1968, p. 301 (hereafter: Ruppin).

⁵ Recorded interview with Dr. Tartakower. Department for Oral Documentation, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tape No. 1820.

⁶ A. Tartakower, *Jewish Settlement in the Diaspora* (Hebrew), M. Newman, p. 268.

⁷ Joseph Tenenbaum, “The Crucial Year 1938,” *Yad Vashem Studies* II, p. 46 (Hebrew).

⁸ Joseph Tenenbaum, *Race and Reich* (Hebrew), Yad Vashem, 1961.

⁹ *History of the Haganah*, Vol. II, p. 783. It is noteworthy that Weizmann’s words (which were not quoted accurately) were spoken to the Peel Commission, i.e., before the Evian Conference. See Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 375.

Shaul Esh, a prodigious researcher of the Holocaust, who was tragically killed before making a study of the Evian Conference, throws out a passing comment about “the well-known Evian Conference which reflected all the impotence and inaction of the world’s nations.”¹⁰

The most impressive testimony (and, it should be added immediately, the most enlightening) is that of *S. Adler-Rudell* in his substantive article on the Evian Conference.¹¹ Adler-Rudell, as the delegate of the “representation of German Jewry” affiliated with large Jewish organizations in London, took an active part in the preparations for the Evian Conference on the Jewish side. His ramified connections made him privy to the behind-the-scenes actions of both the Jewish and the non-Jewish sides. Moreover, as the representative of German Jewry, he embodied the fervent desire of his dispatchers for the success of conference. Important material concerning his quest and his efforts towards this end is contained in an exchange of letters between Adler-Rudell and *Hans Schaefer*, the Jewish manager of the Swedish match concern, with whom Adler-Rudell consulted and to whom he reported on the plans and preparations for Evian. Adler-Rudell published the exchange of letters in 1967,¹² and the following year his article on Evian appeared, in which he sums up his description of the conference as follows: “The unanimous decision--to establish a permanent bureau--was the one positive result of the conference. It offered small comfort to the refugees, the potential refugees and the Jews in general, and was a cruel disappointment to the Jewish representatives who came to Evian.”¹³

If to all these pronouncements we add the reserved appraisal of *Mark Wischnitzer* (“it emerges that in general the stand of the conference proved extremely disappointing”),¹⁴ the description provided by Arthur Morse in his book,¹⁵ and other, similar assessments scattered throughout the relevant literature, it is glaringly apparent that in the Jewish collective memory the Evian Conference became a symbol of the gentiles’ indifference towards the Jewish people.

However, a close analysis of the episode undermines the ostensible verities underlying these assessments, as well as the credibility of the descriptions cited to shore them up. In fact, what we are dealing with is a “general assent” to a salient distortion of history. This is not the place to present a detailed description of how this distortion came about and why it continues to flourish despite a wealth of unequivocal historical documents which refute it completely. It seems to us that the events which followed Evian have cast their dark shadow over the conference and deter scholars from reexamining an episode about which everything is in any case “clear

and known.” For some authors this distorted version of events may even be advantageous, as it affirms their thesis of the gentiles’ hatred of the Jews or conforms with the fashion of disparaging Roosevelt. Other factors which we did not discern may also be at work.

One thing seems certain: the principal and primary cause, if not the sole one, which from the outset underlay the historical perversion of the Evian Conference, is rooted in the tendentious manner in which Zionism perceived the events as they were unfolding. An examination of the contemporary reports and commentaries in the Zionist press during and after the conference, reveals that the compilation of the *facts* was selective and the attendant commentary appallingly subjective. Manifestly, the deficiencies of the Zionists’ information during the Holocaust, as described in the preceding chapters, had actually appeared some years earlier--under conditions of a wide-open world of information. Already then reality was depicted as it “should be” according to Zionist doctrine (the narrow version). What did not fit was excluded from the field of vision and omitted from the reports and the commentaries. Even as the events were still unfolding, a distorted picture was created on the spot which in turn became the source and basis for a historical rendering detached from what actually happened. Unfortunately, the conference was also marked by numerous *external* phenomena which caused much resentment among the participants and the observers, and provided a convenient pretext for disparaging the proceedings. As we

10 Shaul Esh, “Between Discrimination and Extermination,” *Yad Vashem Studies* II, p. 81 (Hebrew).

11 S. Adler-Rudell, “The Evian Conference on the Refugee Problem,” Leo Baeck Institute *Yearbook* XIII, London, 1968 (hereafter: Adler-Rudell).

12 S. Adler-Rudell, “The Emigration Problem in 1938,” Correspondence with Hans Schaefer (German), *Bulletin* of the Leo Baeck Institute, 38-39, Tel Aviv, 1967 (hereafter: AdlerRudell/Correspondence).

13 Adler-Rudell, p. 259.

14 Mark Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, p. 202.

15 Morse, *While Six Million Died*, Ch. 9.

shall see, these phenomena were the result of organizational negligence and mistaken judgments by the conference organizers.

* * * * *

At the initiative of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the representatives of 32 countries convened at Evian; there were nine from Western Europe (excluding Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal), 21 from the Americas, and Australia and New Zealand. A few countries (Poland, Romania, Hungary, South Africa) sent observers. Also participating was the League of Nations' high commissioner for German refugees. The purpose of the conference was to seek means and places for the absorption of the refugees who had left or were about to leave Germany and Austria. Although officially the conference was meant to deal with refugees as such, it was clear to all concerned that virtually all of the refugees in question were Jewish, and that in fact the conference sought a solution to the plight of German Jewry. Evian marked the one and only instance in human history in which representatives of the gentiles from around the world met for the sole purpose of rescuing Jews.

Roosevelt's initiative generated worldwide reverberations. Besides the official government delegations, about 20 Christian, liberal and socialist humanitarian organizations sent representatives.¹⁶ Distinguished practitioners of the arts, sciences and politics attended. The news agencies and the press of the free world were represented by some 100 journalists. This impressive gathering, not far from Germany itself, acquired importance by the very fact of its occurrence: as a demonstration against the acts of the Nazis and as testimony to the fact that the world was aware of the persecution of the Jews and was sympathetic to its victims. The free countries, led by the three great powers of that time--America, Britain and France--evinced for all the world to see their opposition to Jew-hatred and their readiness to work for the relief of Jewish suffering. How substantial this demonstration of international solidarity was, became evident several months later, as we shall see in the next chapter.

A letter sent by U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull in March 1938 to the conference invitees stated that the U.S. neither requested nor expected them to accept refugees in numbers in excess of the limits determined by their existing immigration laws.¹⁷ A more detailed position on this and the other central issues of the conference was contained in a resolution of the United States Government of June 14. This paper, which was the result of considered judgment and of negotiations with the participating governments, served as an agreed proposal for the conference agenda. According to this official document, the conference was to take up the following questions:

1. To clarify what measures can be taken in order to facilitate the settlement in the United States of political refugees from Germany (including Austria). For the purposes of this conference, the term 'political refugee' shall refer to persons seeking to leave Germany, and those who have already done so. It is taken for granted that the conference will take into account, as merited, the work being done by other agencies operating in this area, and will seek measures to supplement their work.

2. To clarify what immediate steps can be taken within the framework of the immigration laws and immigration regulations of the receiving countries in order to solve *the most urgent cases*. It is assumed that to this end each government will submit, *for the absolutely secret knowledge of the committee* [i.e., the conference],¹⁸ a declaration of the

laws and immigration procedures for their country and their current policy regarding the acceptance of immigrants. It would be desirable for the committee to receive a general statement from each participating government on the number and type of the immigrants it is ready to accept at this time, or whose acceptance it is ready to consider. (Emphases added.)

¹⁶ Adler-Rudell, pp. 253-254.

¹⁷ FRUS 1938, Vol. I, pp. 740-741.

¹⁸ In this and in other contemporary documents, the conference is variously called the "Evian Conference," the "Intergovernmental Committee," or the "Intergovernmental Assembly."

3. To clarify the documentation system which will be acceptable to the participating governments for those refugees who are unable to obtain the appropriate papers from other sources.

4. To discuss the establishment of a permanent body of government representatives whose seat will be in one of the European capitals and which will draw up and execute, in cooperation with the existing agencies, a long-term program for the solution and relief of the problem in its broad sense.

5. To prepare a resolution which will incorporate recommendations to the participating governments concerning the subjects specified above and concerning other subjects which will be brought for discussion before this intergovernmental meeting.¹⁹ [Translated from the Hebrew.]

This document was intended to determine both the agenda and the results of the conference. The conference was to accomplish two principal tasks: (1) carry out a preliminary examination of the possibilities of *immediate* refugee absorption, in line with the existing immigration laws in various countries (Par. 2); and (2) create a standing international body which would deal with the situation in the longer perspective, in accordance with the guidelines in Pars. 1 and 3 and in the wake of the resolutions to be passed at the conference. Incidentally, it bears noting that a comparison of the first two clauses implies that the regular, non-immediate activity of the new organization would no longer be restricted by the existing immigration laws, as had been the case in Cordell Hull's letter of invitation.

For obvious reasons, a third task of the conference was left unmentioned. The meeting at Evian was to be an impressive demonstration of sympathy for the persecuted Jews and readiness to help them. Because of an organizational mistake by the conference directors, this objective suffered somewhat. Although this affected mainly those who were aware of the matter, the damage done was still considerable.

* * * * *

That the preparations for the conference were marked by irregularities and deficiencies was known long before the proceedings actually opened. A committee headed by James McDonald which was appointed by Roosevelt to advise and assist him in planning the conference, evinced a good deal more good will than good judgment and organizational ability. On June 3 Adler-Rudel complained in a letter to Schaeffer that "unfortunately this conference is a total improvisation."²⁰ At that stage Adler-Rudel was referring to the absence of a working plan for the proceedings. Surprisingly, not much improvement was discernible when the American program was published. On June 27, at a meeting of the Council for German Jewry held in London, a representative of the American Joint Distribution Committee, Harold Ginsburg, related that following a conversation he had held with the members of the American delegation, it was his impression that they wished to allow the conference itself to decide on its agenda and working procedures.²¹ The previous day, Eliahu Dobkin, speaking at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem, declared that in his view the conference was doomed to failure because it was not being prepared properly.²² A member of the Zionist delegation who travelled with McDonald from Lausanne to the conference at Evian found that even he, the head of the President's advisory committee, had no clear conception of how the proceedings would be conducted, the duration of the sessions, or the results expected from the conference.²³

The effects of the negligent preparations were immediately apparent on the opening day of the conference: a titanic struggle was waged over who was to serve as president of the meeting. The Americans proposed a French representative, the French supported an American delegate. Finally, the French "won" and the head of the American delegation, *Myron Taylor*, took up the gavel.²⁴

¹⁹ FRUS 1938, Vol. I, p. 748.

²⁰ Adler-Rudell/Correspondence, p. 171.

²¹ Adler-Rudell, p. 240.

²² Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, June 26, 1938.

²³ Adler-Rudell, p. 240.

²⁴ Morse (p. 212) provides a highly sarcastic account of the debate, complaining that it took up two days of the conference.

This wrangle was followed almost at once by a hitch in the proceedings which was to prove extremely detrimental to the image of the conference as it became an inexhaustible source of accusations and demagogy. In total contradiction to the declared program, a *public* discussion was held during four full plenum sessions in the course of which representatives from the overwhelming majority of the delegations (25 of the 32 countries present) addressed the conference.

According to the American plan (Par. 2) the conference participants were to submit preliminary declarations concerning their countries' immigration laws and procedures and to indicate the number of refugees they would be prepared to accept immediately. However, it was

stated explicitly that this information was to be made available "for the absolutely secret knowledge" of the conference. The need for secrecy was understandable, particularly in the light of what happened after it was violated. At all events, these declarations were not intended to become the *result* of the conference but to serve as preliminary material for its functioning and as an immediate instrument with which to solve extremely urgent cases which did not admit of delay.

Roosevelt, who was acquainted with the international situation concerning emigration and the possibilities of immigrant absorption, knew that intensive and patient work was needed in order to achieve concrete results. His personal experience as a head of state had brought home to him forcefully that the desire for restrictions on immigration laws, and public opinion opposing the entry of foreigners were very palpable matters, especially in democracies, and could not be undone by a few speeches. This approach dictated that the proceedings of the Evian Conference, which was intended as the first stage in an ongoing campaign, be held *in camera*, with the exception of the opening session, which would be devoted to public declarations of a general character, and the closing session, at which the conference resolutions would be made public.²⁵ This procedural framework was published as part of a statement to the press issued a few days before the opening of the conference, in which President Roosevelt was quoted as saying he wanted "deeds and not speeches" and that as far as he was concerned, the primary result of the conference should be the establishment of an intergovernmental body with broad powers which could implement the resolutions to be adopted.²⁶

A special "Technical Subcommittee" was appointed in order to receive the secret information from the various delegations. However, this committee found itself made redundant by the actual proceedings: after the delegates addressed the plenum publicly, they had nothing more to add for the committee's secret sessions. Speaking from the rostrum at the fourth public session of the plenum, the chairman requested some 20 delegations (whose names he read out) to send representatives to the second meeting of the Technical Subcommittee in order to submit their declarations, or, alternatively, to inform the committee that they had nothing to add to their public statements. Finally, it was decided that the material in question would not be considered secret and that the Technical Subcommittee would publish a survey of the information made available.

The origin of the delegates' speeches, as related above, also sheds light on their quality and their moral value. At all events, we find no reason to follow the conventional history of Evian and view speeches of

this kind as being inevitably hypocritical and alienated. No hypocrisy is necessarily involved if a person expresses his identification with homeless people and his readiness to help them, but is unwilling to put them up in his own home. To exemplify, we will make reference to a current event in the realm of international relations. When these lines were first being written (late 1971) the number of refugees who crossed into India from East Pakistan (which subsequently became Bangladesh) as a result of the India-Pakistan war totalled approximately ten million. They were in severe distress and experiencing great suffering. Had a special ten-day international conference been convened to seek ways to help the refugees, it is very probable that Israel would have attended this major humanitarian gathering, with its delegate expressing, on behalf of his government and his nation, sincere identification with the suffering of the refugees. He would likely have offered aid in the form of food,

²⁵ Adler-Rudell, p. 251.

²⁶ *Davar*, July 3, 1938.

clothing, medicines, medical teams, and so forth. But if the Israeli delegate had been called on to declare then and there that his country was ready to absorb, even on a temporary basis only, let us say one-tenth of one percent of the refugees, i.e., 10,000 persons, it is extremely doubtful whether he would have complied with this request. had he then asked his government to approve this plan, it is unlikely that such approval would have been forthcoming while the conference was still in session. And if it had been suggested that he address this issue in public, he would have undoubtedly tried to explain the difficulties which this matter posed for the Government of Israel. However, whether his remarks had been convincing or had sounded evasive, we in Israel would have known that his stance did not derive from an absence of sympathy for the refugees or from an unwillingness to help. It is also possible that despite everything, the constraints of the situation and Israel's international ties might have led it to offer a temporary haven to a certain number of refugees. But clearly, this would have been preceded by detailed negotiations with key bodies directly involved in the matter.

The Evian delegates were for the most part embassy staff or senior foreign ministry officials; not a single prime minister or head of state was present. To expect a gathering of this nature to give immediate and binding responses at the preliminary stage of clarifications was both unreasonable and unjust. To say this is not to deny that the uniform style of the speeches left a bad taste at the time--and one which lingers to this day. Along with expressions of sympathy for the refugees, each and every speaker went into immense detail about his country's immigration laws and about the rigorous regulations in force to prevent the entry of

undesirable foreigners. We know now that this section of the speeches was requested by the conference organizers for the discreet use of the Technical Subcommittee as factually informative material. Because of the organizational foulup, this material became part of the conference's external facade, and was seized on by all those who were seeking just such an outcome.

* * * * *

The Jewish world responded with surprised delight to the Roosevelt initiative. Expressions of gratitude and appreciation poured into the White House from numerous Jewish communities. The Jewish federations in Poland issued a joint proclamation expressing Polish Jewry's deep esteem for President Roosevelt in the wake of his welcome initiative.²⁷ The editor of *Ha'aretz*, Moshe Glickson, wrote that "the initiative of President Roosevelt... has generated immense esteem and admiration throughout the Jewish dispersions."²⁸ A highly expressive statement reflecting the emotions and the expectations which were aroused by the initiative is found in the memoirs of Dr. Mordechai Ehrenpreis, Chief Rabbi of Sweden, who attended the conference as an observer:

On my way from Stockholm to Evian, I could not overcome a sense of growing optimism, although this was hardly consistent with the spirit of the time--evil omens seemed to crop up everywhere, every newspaper reported some new calamity. Yet from afar there shone the thought of Evian as a star of hope. I thought to myself: this conference at Evian is no ordinary meeting. It could become *the conference of the world's conscience...* Now it seemed that the conscience of the world had awakened. Finally the voice of humanity was raised aloud, at long last downtrodden and oppressed Jewry would hear words of compensation. President Roosevelt deserved our thanks! The very fact of the meeting at Evian was a resonant act which heartened many people who were desperate for living faith in a better future."²⁹ (Emphasis in the original.)

Together with the entire Jewish people, the Zionist organizations were also overwhelmed with enthusiasm. The national conference of the Zionist Organization of America announced a special volume of the Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund in which President Roosevelt's name would be inscribed. The citation stated that "his

²⁷ *Ha'aretz*, July 7, 1938.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1938.

²⁹ Dr. Mordechai Ehrenpreis, *Between East and West*, Am Oved, 1957, pp. 223-224.

activities and efforts on behalf of Eretz-Israel and Jews everywhere deserve to be engraved in

the hearts of the Jewish people.”³⁰ The speakers at the conference, among them Dr. Stephen Wise, Louis Lipsky and others, expressed their hope and request that Palestine occupy prime place in every plan for the solution of the Jewish refugee problem.³¹ The Jewish Agency was engaged in drafting a special memorandum on the possibilities of Jewish settlement in Palestine and Trans-Jordan. On behalf of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. Nahum Goldmann submitted to the American delegation a detailed paper setting forth the political and financial potential which existed for expanding the absorptive capacity of Palestine for large-scale Jewish immigration.³² Britain’s Zionists urged their government to declare at Evian its readiness to admit to Palestine a large number of German and Austrian Jews in the immediate future.³³ Every speaker, every article in the press, exuded hope and expectation that the conference would open wide the gates of Eretz-Israel.

These expectations were not to be fulfilled. At the opening session, the head of the British delegation, Lord Winterton, whose speech was awaited by the Zionists “in great tension,”³⁴ detailed the actions which his government had taken and intended to take with the aim of absorbing refugees at home and in the overseas colonies--but without so much as mentioning Palestine. Britain’s chief allies, America and France, each spoke about itself but refrained from exerting pressure on the British in this regard. Similarly, the other delegates also spoke about their own countries and did not mention Palestine.

Some history books aver that Britain made its attendance at Evian conditional on there being no discussion of Palestine as a place of haven for the refugees.³⁵ We were unable to locate a reliable source which could confirm this notion. It stands to reason, however, that Britain could only have put forward a condition of this kind to America and perhaps to France as well, the two other senior participants at Evian. It is highly doubtful that Britain could have prevented the other 29 delegations from talking about Palestine had they wished to do so.

Nevertheless, we do not rule out the possibility that we are mistaken on this point, and that Britain, with U.S. support, did in fact manage to convince all the conference participants not to raise the subject of Palestine and that so secretly was this was done that it left no traces whatsoever. The unfortunate truth is that no such lobbying was needed. While the conference was in session, Palestine was being wracked by bloody unrest. Arab terrorism outdid itself in ferocity. A large number of Jews were murdered throughout the country. Three days before the opening of the conference, the underground Irgun Zva’i Leumi (National

Military Organization), which was in opposition to the official Yishuv institutions, carried out reprisal operations against Arabs in Jerusalem and Jaffa. The opening day of the conference saw a harsh reprisal raid in Haifa. Day after day the headlines around the world reported dozens of dead in Palestine--Jews and Arabs alike. As is inevitable in circumstances of this kind, true accounts were augmented by a rash of false rumors and fabricated tales. Thus, for example, the French news agency, Havas, reported that a Jewish settlement had been totally overrun by Arabs and its 60 inhabitants butchered.³⁶ Against a backdrop of this kind, no special pressure was required in order to ensue that Palestine would not be cited among the potential ports of haven for the refugees.

The claim which was later voiced--that the WZO was insufficiently involved in the conference preparations--may be justified with respect to information activity among the minor delegations.³⁷ However, the charge that the WZO took a passive

³⁰ *Davar*, July 5, 1938, special evening edition.

³¹ *Ibid.*, morning edition.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, July 4, 1938.

³⁴ Letter from Evian, *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, July 22, 1938.

³⁵ *History of the Haganah* (Vol. II, p. 782) does not note the source of this report. Adler-Rudell (p. 237) relates that Britain set three conditions for its participation in the conference: (1) that invitations be sent to countries of immigration only; (2) that the conference deal solely with refugees and not with persons threatened by persecution; and (3) that Palestine not be a subject for discussion at the conference. He bases himself on Wischnitzer’s book cited above. Wischnitzer does in fact put forward the same version, basing himself on an article by B. Akzin, “The Great-Power Game with Our Refugees,” in the Yiddish paper *Der Tag*, April 13, 1947.

³⁶ Ruppin, p. 333.

³⁷ Yitzhak Lufben in *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, July 22, 1938.

posture vis-a-vis the leading states--the U.S. in particular--seems unwarranted. The contemporary reports indicate that in addition to its public efforts, President Roosevelt's close advisers were the targets of vigorous behind-the-scenes lobbying. As a result, Rabbi Stephen Wise was able to inform the ZOA conference in July 1938 that President Roosevelt's advisory committee on refugees (of which Wise himself was a member) had agreed to an appearance by Chaim Weizmann "in the name of the Jewish people."³⁸ It is conceivable that pledges made by these circles account for the report published in the press on the eve of the conference to the effect that at Evian a program would be adopted for the settlement of 400,000 refugees within four years: 100,000 per year, 50,000 of them in Palestine, 30,000 in the U.S., and the remainder in other countries.³⁹

In fact, no such program was adopted, or, indeed, even raised for discussion. Britain, the Mandatory power in Palestine, did not propose that land for refugee settlement, and, as we saw, no one tried to bend its arm in this regard. Lord Winterton's speech at the opening session put a swift end to the expectation that Evian would herald the opening of the gates to Palestine.

The upshot was that the attitude of the Zionists towards the conference swung to the other end of the pendulum. Admiration yielded to anger, hopes to bitter disappointment. Besides the criticism levelled at Britain for disavowing the content and purpose of the mandate entrusted to it, convenient grounds for bitterness were also found in the delegates' speeches. The reports from Evian played up the reservations contained in the speeches, and the commentaries could be summed up in Weizmann's

famous remark, quoted above. Moreover, if the contemporary analyses still contained sporadic half-hearted acknowledgements of the importance of the event *per se*, the passage of time consigned this approach to oblivion. What remained for "eternal memory" was a picture of hypocrisy, disavowal and treachery on the one hand, and bitter frustration on the other.

Outward manifestations of the disappointment and outrage were not lacking. The Zionists' contemptuous attitude towards the conference was reflected in the most demonstrative manner imaginable by the cancellation of the scheduled appearance of Chaim Weizmann, the president of the Zionist movement. Weizmann's participation at Evian had been the centerpiece of the pre-conference activity by the Zionists, and it was attended by great publicity in the Yishuv and in Jewish communities overseas. On July 5 the front page of *Davar's* evening edition carried a two-column photograph of Weizmann, captioned "Ch. Weizmann, looking forward to his appearance at the Governmental Commission for Refugee Affairs at Evian." Three days later *Ha'aretz* carried a "special" cabled report from London to the effect that Weizmann had been officially invited to Evian and was about to depart for the conference. However, no such special invitation was forwarded to Weizmann, and he did not attend the conference. The Jewish Agency's memorandum to the Technical Subcommittee was submitted by the expert economist Dr. Arthur Ruppin. It spoke of the exit of 200,000 Jews from Germany and 100,000 from Austria, while stressing the vital necessity for negotiations to be held with the German government on the transfer of capital in the sum required to enable their absorption. According to the press reports, the subcommittee members heard him out attentively, and thanked him politely for the information and for his important proposals.⁴⁰ But Britain did not agree to open the gates of Palestine. The Jewish Agency memorandum was left hanging in the air, and Weizmann did not depart for Evian.

To prevent any possible misunderstanding about the meaning to be read into the cancellation of Weizmann's appearance, the Zionist representation at Evian issued a special statement: "The Zionist delegation decided that it would not be worthwhile to trouble Dr. Weizmann to appear before the subcommittee of the refugee conference as one of 50 representatives of other private organizations."⁴¹

This communique is more revealing than its authors intended. The Evian Conference attracted dozens of well-known personalities: the Spanish cellist Casals, the Italian historian Ferrero, the exiled Italian statesmen Nenni and Sporza, the chairman of the Pan-European Alliance,

³⁸ *Davar*, July 5, 1938.

³⁹ *Ha'aretz*, July 3, 1938.

⁴⁰ *Davar*, July 10, 1938.

⁴¹ *Davar*, July 14, 1938, and other papers of the same date.

Count Condanhove-Kalergi; distinguished welfare officials who were numbered among the “righteous gentiles”; and heads of humanitarian, political and religious organizations. It is doubtful whether any of them received a special invitation--or any invitation at all. For many of them, the chances of actually addressing the conference were negligible. All of them sought by their presence to encourage and hearten the conference participants, and to imbue the proceedings with an aura of luster and prestige. All of them wished to help persecuted Jews, and they viewed their participation, where this was possible, as a privilege and not a bother. Not SO Dr. Weizmann. His attendance would not be in order to be of help like the others, but with the aim of solving once and for all the Jewish problem by channeling the Jews to Palestine. Since this proved unrealistic, it was not worthwhile to trouble him. After all, he would not be dealing there with territorialist solutions. To denounce the closed world which had no use for Jews it was not necessary to go to Evian, of all places.

The wounds which were supposed to serve as justification for Weizmann's non-attendance reflect well the anger of the statement's authors but do not constitute a very convincing case. If it had been thought that Weizmann's presence could serve the cause of Zionism, it is unlikely that his attendance would have been passed over because an appearance before a subcommittee was allegedly beneath his dignity. The truth is that by the time the statement was issued, on July 12, the need no longer existed for his appearance before the subcommittee, Ruppin having fulfilled that task four days earlier. For formal reasons, Weizmann could not address the plenum, which had been declared an inter-governmental meeting and was confined to the participation of representatives of governments only. Nevertheless, if Weizmann had wished to plead the Jewish people's case before the entire world, he could have done so successfully at Evian by making a public appeal at a press conference or in some similar fashion--provided he had something to say and something to propose.

* * * * *

The Zionist statement's mention of the “50 representatives” among whom Weizmann considered it imprudent to appear is related to a noteworthy element in the Zionist version of the history of the Evian Conference. It is in fact an element characterized by partial veracity and by a far-reaching distortion of the truth in its broadest sense. We refer to yet another fault in the conference arrangements, caused in part and indirectly by the representatives of the Jewish organizations, but for which direct responsibility was borne by the conference organizers.

Thirty-nine delegations of “private” (i.e., non-governmental) organizations, among them 20 Jewish delegations, were registered with the conference secretariat. A special subcommittee was set up just to deal with these groups. It was agreed that each organization would submit to the conference a memorandum containing its comments and declarations, and that the representative submitting the memorandum would be able to address the Technical Subcommittee for a limited time.

The plethora of Jewish organizations, each espousing its own separate ideas and proposals, was a source of discomfort and embarrassment among the Jewish public. The contemporary Jewish press carried numerous expressions of outrage by journalists and functionaries over the rifts among the representatives of the Jewish organizations and their refusal to enter into constructive dialogue. A later Zionist historical work evaluates the behavior of the Jewish emissaries at Evian as follows: “The appearance of the Jews at the Evian Conference was that of paupers. Numerous associations and federations came separately and presented their claims before the nations of the world. It was not a united nation but a homeless group of lobbyists that appeared before the conference representatives.”⁴²

Notwithstanding the „anti-exilic” style, redolent with disparagement of those homeless lobbyists, this assessment does contain a partial truth; but, as we said, it is hardly the whole truth. It is known that the Jewish Agency leadership in London proposed to the British Council for German Jews, and perhaps to other groups as well, that all the Jewish organizations meet together prior to the conference in order to consolidate a coordinated plan of action and dispatch a joint delegation to Evian. The Council rejected the idea and the Jewish Agency made no further efforts in this

⁴² History of the Haganah, *ibid.*, p. 783.

direction.⁴³ The reason adduced for this refusal to cooperate was that a joint representation of the Jewish organizations was liable to confirm the existence of “an international Jewry.”⁴⁴ This rationale certainly does not attest to the intellectual resilience of the non-Zionist groups, whose behavior, indeed, shows that they had fallen into the trap of Nazi demagoguery and been pushed into a defensive posture of denying their “terrible crime.” This same ludicrous reasoning was to be voiced by the leaders of these organizations again at a later stage, as a pretext to justify their failure to act on urgent and vital matters. Overall, this episode reinforces the assessment that the relative weight of the WZO at this time was so great as to preclude the possibility that without it--and certainly not in an adversarial stance to it--Jewry was capable of implementing any large-scale programs. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

What the writers of history have ignored is the attempt that was made to forge unity at Evian. The dialogue between the various organizations, which the Jewish Agency had sought to bring about in London, took place at Evian and produced substantive results. The delegations of five major affluent and influential organizations reached agreement on a joint memorandum and on its joint submission to the conference. A typed copy of the memorandum, which we found in the Central Zionist Archives, bears the representative signatures of these organizations: (1) The Council for German Jews; (2) the ICA; (3) the emigration society HICEM, run jointly by HIAS and ICA; (4) the joint external affairs committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jewry and the Anglo-Jewish Association; and (5) the World Center of Agudat Israel.

The text of the memorandum, which was drawn up by S. Adler-Rudel, a member of the Zionist Actions Committee, was not exclusively Zionist in character, nor was it purely territorialist or assimilationist. It addressed itself to organizational and monetary questions relating to emigration without espousing a specific ideological orientation. A special clause (XII) was devoted to “Palestine as a land of immigrant absorption.” The memorandum cited statistical data on the role of Palestine in the absorption of Jews in the past, and put forward two demands with respect to that country. The first was of a general nature: “That full advantage be taken of the contribution Palestine can make towards the solution of the refugee problem.” The second demand, which was highly concrete and should be seen against the backdrop of a dispute which existed between the Zionist movement and the British government, urged “restoration of the principle that the determining factor with regard to the entry of Jews into Palestine be [solely] its economic absorptive capacity.” These two demands were satisfactory to the Zionist delegation headed by Arthur Ruppin. As a result, a note was appended to the memorandum below the signatures of the submitters. It read: “The Jewish Agency for Palestine, which is submitting a separate memorandum, devoted to Palestine, expresses its concurrence with this memorandum” The U.S.-based Joint Distribution Committee also affiliated itself with the memorandum.⁴⁵

The joint memorandum radically changed the atmosphere among the Jewish delegations at Evian. A document had been adopted with the assent of all the non-Zionist representative organizations at the conference (with the exception of the Alliance Israelite) and which had received the formal consent of the Zionist movement. Besides the vocational aid organizations Ort and OSE, only a number of small bibles, whose impact among the Jewish population was minimal, remained unrepresented on the

memorandum. The situation which emerged need not have created an impression of rift and separation, and certainly the depressing and humiliating experience which was the lot of the Jewish representatives would have been avoided, had it not been for the (second) hitch in the conference procedures.

In order to lend added weight to their presentations, and perhaps also to augment the impression of unity and cohesiveness, the representatives of the large federations sought to prevent the appearance of the small organizations before the conference. However, the objections of these groups to this move were accepted by the organizers, and the conference chairman announced that the second subcommittee would hear presentations by *all* the organizations wishing to appear before it. This liberal decision would undoubtedly have proved propitious had sufficient time been allotted for its

⁴³ Second report of N. Goldmann from Evian, CZA, File S25/978, and Rosenblitt's letter to Ruppin, CZA, File S7/693.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Adler-Rudell, p. 239.

proper implementation. This, however, was not the case. Of the ten days of the conference, only one session of a few hours was devoted to hearing the various representatives. So that all 24 organizations which turned up for the session could present their case, the committee gave each just a few minutes. The result was chaos.

We have a vivid description of what happened, written while the events were still fresh in the author's mind:

The reception of the delegation representatives was a truly melancholy affair. The delegation spokesmen stood by the door of the meeting room. Everyone who entered was given 3-4 minutes to make his presentation. No questions were asked. The first few had their remarks translated into English or French; for those who followed even this gesture of courtesy was omitted. Spokesmen found themselves back in the waiting room before they even grasped that they had already appeared before the committee.⁴⁶

Numerous similar descriptions can be found in the contemporary press.

Thirty-four years later, Professor Benjamin Akzin, who represented the Revisionist Zionists (the New Zionist Organization, or NZO) at Evian, recalled from memory the course of events:

Now there is another dimension, that of representation. These four or five associations, which were headed by Bentwich, saw themselves, by themselves, as the representatives of the Jewish people, and they were extremely displeased that all

kinds of other associations had arrived, of which we in the NZO were one. For them, we were "minor-leaguers," trespassers, and they wanted to be rid of us. First they proposed that only one representative, or two or three representatives, appear before the Evian Conference in the name of all the Jewish federations. I was somewhat active in organizing the opposition to this plan, and in the name of democracy and of other considerations I insisted, as did others, that others also be allowed to participate... A struggle ensued, and finally we succeeded in convincing the Evian Conference that a representative of each Jewish organization be permitted to speak. But the truth is that here was here, that what took place was a tragicomedy, with plenty of the comedy element. I do not remember how many associations--twenty, you say? perhaps--each of us was given five or ten minutes, I don't recollect, and the entire thing was not serious. It was clear that the committee did not take it seriously.⁴⁷

From the perspective of the decades that have elapsed, S. Adler-Rudel surveys once more what happened at the conference:

The hearing was a humiliating procedure. Nobody was prepared for it, neither the members of the Committee, nor the representatives of the various organisations who had to queue up at the door of the meeting room to be called in, one after the other, and to face the eleven members of the Sub-Committee whom they were supposed to tell their tale within ten minutes at the most. There were very distinguished public figures amongst the petitioners--scientists, authors, politicians etc.--none of them accustomed to any kind of interrogation procedure in front of a Committee, before which they felt rather as though they were on trial, without time to bring forward their plea, as they had soon to make room for the next of the invited spokesmen. All left the room disheartened and disillusioned.

This effect was certainly not intended. But the Committee members had little knowledge of the complicated details of the problems. They were pressed for time and had not anticipated so many memoranda and so many speakers who all started their addresses with the same remarks. The Jewish

organizations are not free from blame for the lack of method and preparedness. Accustomed to the traditions of their own organisations, their spokesmen found themselves stranded on unfamiliar ground and were not given time to adapt to the new surroundings and to a diplomatic atmosphere. It would have been far better *if*, by some sort of agreement reached beforehand, a limited number of delegates had been empowered to represent all the organizations concerned before the Committee and had

⁴⁶ Adler-Rudell/Correspondence, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Recorded interview of the author with Prof. Benjamin Akzin, September 7, 1972.

submitted a joint plan for the practical solution of the problems under discussion. This opportunity, alas, was missed.⁴⁸

In the last paragraph, Adler-Rudel seems to be inadvertently continuing the debate which raged at the time over the joint memorandum, of which he was the author. Taking into account the actual conditions that prevailed, it would appear that the centralization of the Jewish representation had reached a level beyond which few possibilities remained. In particular we find it difficult to see how the partnership between the Zionist and non-Zionist organizations could have been expanded and tightened on the basis of a joint plan for a practical solution.

But the attempt to pin the blame for the hitch on the Jewish organizations seems wholly absurd. Simple logic shows that since the number of delegates could not be reduced--and in any case, with respect to the non-Jewish humanitarian organizations, this would have been undesirable--the pressure should have been avoided by allotting sufficient time. If we multiply 24 organizations by five to ten minutes, we find that the committee sat for between three and four hours. Had the number of sessions been doubled and the total hours tripled, each representative would have been allotted 20 to 25 minutes. The representatives would not have had to wait in line by the door in expectation of being summoned at any moment; the committee members would not have hurried the speakers and would not have limited them in subject matter;⁴⁹ and the speakers would have had ample time to accustom and adapt themselves to the atmosphere and surroundings without being pressured by the time factor or prodded by the committee. In other words, the event would have been an honorable one, conducted to the satisfaction of all the participants, and beneficial to the cause at hand.

It was an *organizational* flaw that caused the hitch with the committee, just as it was another organizational defect that brought about the superfluous series of speeches and turned the public sessions into a

harmful episode. Indeed, the two blunders were probably not unrelated. Two of the conference's ten days could easily have been given over to the committee sessions, had the proceedings been conducted as originally planned. But after four public sessions were added, the available time was diminished and the temptation grew to "lighten the burden" of the committee members by slashing their working hours.

We have dwelt on this episode not because it was important *per se*. No great harm was caused. We will not be off the mark if we assert that, in contrast to the failure which produced the superfluous speeches, the hitch in the proceedings of the subcommittee did not exercise a substantial influence over the conference and its outcome. There are clear indications that those who were affected--the representatives of the delegations who were interested in the success of the conference--were able to overcome the transitory impression left by the episode, viewing the matter as a regrettable bureaucratic incident which did not reflect the spirit of the conference.

Not so the writers of history. In their eyes the incident took on the dimensions of a full-fledged historical event. From being an ephemeral impression, the sense of insult and the feeling of disappointment became the melancholy symbol of everything that happened at Evian. The hitch in the subcommittee became additional evidence of and testimony to the „failure" of the entire conference.*

* The degree to which the incident in the subcommittee had become identified with the "failure of the conference is attested to by the spontaneous reaction of Dr. Nahum Goldmann in a conversation with the author. At the time, Goldmann wrote from Evian that the reception of the representatives by the committee "bordered on farce" (CZA, File S25/9778). Asked about Evian 34 years later, and after confirming his evaluation regarding "the shame and scandal for the progressive world," he added immediately: "We were also a bit to blame [for the failure], because too many organizations applied and wanted to be heard, so there was no united front, and the *goyim* said, 'To hell with all of them!'"

⁴⁸ Adler-Rudell, p. 255.

⁴⁹ Arthur Rupp, who was allotted ten minutes and was listened to attentively, was stopped by the members of the committee when he wanted to discuss the transfer of the refugees' capital assets. Rupp, p. 302.

A second, equally characteristic example is the following description, which encapsulates the memory of the Evian Conference:

“The course which the Evian Conference took, the undue haste with which the Jewish representatives presented their comments on their memoranda to the president of the conference, Lord Winterton--everything within just a few minutes (since it was impossible to hear 30 delegations at length)--all of this brought home to us the tragedy which was nearing its clear peak, the annihilation. The gates had already been closed before us.” (Ernst Marcus, “The German Foreign Office and the Palestine Question, 1933-1939,” *Yad Vashem Studies* II, p. 177 [translated from the Hebrew].

* * * * *

The first indication calling into question the credibility of the reporting and the Zionist history of the conference is found in a JTA wire report which appeared in the Palestine press following the conclusion of the conference. In *Davar* it ran as follows (emphasis added): “*The majority of the Jewish delegations left Evian in a good frame of mind and full of hopes for the future (? -ed.)*.”⁵⁰ The editor’s question mark is readily understandable. The report flatly contradicted everything that had been published during the ten days of the conference. Reversing the well-known quip, one could ask, If everything is so bad, how can it be good? The researcher of the episode in our own day adds his own puzzlement to that of the *Davar* editor. Like him, he places a question mark of doubt over the accuracy of the information. However, his doubts are directed also at the other side of the testimonies: if we reject the possibility that the JTA report was falsified--which is inconceivable--it is difficult to reconcile it with universally accepted verities. Where are the disappointment and the frustration? Where is the sense of insult at the reaction of the civilized world? How do the great hopes *fit* in with the lament of despair, “no pity,”⁵¹ with which the Zionist press summed up the conference?

A second report which widens the breach in the credibility of the Zionist version of events appeared in *Haolam*, a Jerusalem weekly edited by Moshe Kleimnan which was the central organ of the WZO. Where the Evian affair was concerned, it stood out from other papers in the Yishuv by virtue of the relatively objective information it provided. According to *Haolam*, the World Jewish Congress was also satisfied and hoping for the best. A column entitled “Evian Echo” relates that the statement issued by the WJC executive stood “in contrast to the despairing opinion.” The WJC expressed the hope “tat the Inter-Governmental Committee [which was established by the conference] will fulfill its task at an accelerated pace. The circles represented by the WJC are certain that one of the principal tasks of this committee must be [to bring about] cooperation between governments and private organizations in order to resolve the refugee problem.”⁵²

Thus we find neither disappointment, despair, nor a sense of insult, but good hopes and a call for speedy action and cooperation. And this from the World Jewish Congress, an offspring of the WZO, whose leaders were well-known Zionist functionaries.

The WJC’s head of delegation at Evian, Dr. Nahum (Goldmann, who worked together with Dr. Ruppin on the Zionist representation, also

expressed himself in the spirit of the WJC’s statement. In his second report to the Jewish Agency Executive, on July 20, Goldmann wrote: “The conference undoubtedly marks progress in the effort to solve the problem of the Jewish refugees in Germany.” Moreover, he added, the new organization might prove helpful when conditions permit increased immigration to Palestine. “Therefore,” he concludes, “it is our task to ensure that we maintain constant contact with it.”⁵³

⁵⁰ *Davar*, July 17, 1938.

⁵¹ Yitzhak Lufben, *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, July 22, 1938.

⁵² *Haolam*, July 28, 1938. We received a copy of this optimistic declaration of the World Jewish Congress courtesy of Mr. Adler-Rudell, from his personal archive.

⁵³ CZA, File S25/9778.

Nor did Dr. Ruppin, the head of the Zionist delegation, fall prey to bitterness and despair. "Despite everything," he wrote in his diary, "I believe that something positive may come out of this conference, if the permanent committee, to be established in London, is blessed with a gifted director."⁵⁴ He reiterated this thought about the desirable personality of the director in a letter to the Jewish Agency Executive.⁵⁵ Like Goldmann, Ruppin also appreciated the importance of continued contacts with the Evian participants. Following a post-conference meeting in Paris with the U.S. representative, Myron Taylor, Ruppin recorded in his diary his favorable impression of the man and of his attitude towards the refugee problem.⁵⁶ Thus, Ruppin, too, expressed no disappointment, only concern for the effective implementation of the resolutions.

Neither Goldmann nor Ruppin held decision-making positions in the WZO at that time. Their impressions of the conference did not determine the stand taken by the Zionist movement *vis-a-vis* the resolutions adopted at Evian, or regarding cooperation with the body set up to carry them out. Their letters were not made public, and neither of them raised an outcry when their views did not become the official stance of Zionism. But both of them had formed their impressions and opinions--and these were definitely not negative. As far as is known, the two men differed in character and in outlook. Both of them went through the Evian Conference from the inside, experiencing first-hand both its successes and its failures. And both of them emerged in a frame of mind which was at least not pessimistic, and with hopeful plans for the future.

Also at Evian was a member of Zionism's intellectual elite, Zalman Rubashov (who, as Zalman Shazar, would become Israel's third President), who covered the conference for *Davar* and as such was privy to its inner workings. Rubashov's personal qualities lend his direct reactions to what he witnessed unsurpassed documentary, moral and historical worth. In his concluding article,⁵⁷ he describes the new organization to be created as a "third side" which will mediate between the persecutors (the Germans) and the persecuted (the Jews). He commends both America and France for their actions and intimates that

Zionism will also be able to benefit from the new organization. In his view, Zionist policy is crucially important for American Jewry, which will be able to steer the organization "both towards rescue [exiting German] and towards redemption [immigration to Palestine]." Rubashov concludes with an emotional appeal to the Zionist movement: "The Jewish question was revealed to this international forum in all its layers of tragedy, both externally and internally, but not without a way out. Only the tasks facing the struggling people have multiplied. It is our obligation not to buckle under them and not to neglect the mission with which we have been entrusted. *We must not be the neglecters.*" (Emphasis added.)

Symbolically, Rubashov, to reinforce his words, quotes Herzl's words to his son concerning the need to be able to meet every test in life. But Herzl was long since dead. And with him expired his brand of integrative Zionism.

Rubashov's public call had no more impact than the substantive recommendations of Goldmann and Ruppin. Just as their ideas were filed away never again to see the light of day, so the appeal to the Zionist movement published in the paper was ignored. It elicited no reaction, either positive or negative. The call generated neither debate nor support. In short order the fervent words became forgotten lines in yesterday's newspaper. The Zionist leadership had no wish to shoulder new tasks. It had no desire to take part in the enterprise of rescuing German Jewry if this did not dovetail with bringing Jews to Palestine. Zionism went to Evian with faint hopes and heavy fears, and when the hopes remained unrealized, all Zionism wanted was to shrug off the entire matter with all possible speed.

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Haolam's ambivalent attitude towards the conference was already evident on its opening day. Its editorial (written by Moshe Kleinman) welcomed the expected

⁵⁴ Ruppin, p. 303.

⁵⁵ CZA, File S25/9778.

⁵⁶ Ruppin, p. 303.

⁵⁷ *Davar*, July 22, 1938, signed "Listener."

appearance of Weizmann and praised the conference and its organizers. "We are all grateful to that good man, President Roosevelt," and "we appreciate the historic importance of this conference," he wrote. At the same time, he was apprehensive about "the further *dispersion* instead of the *ingathering* we are striving for." His greatest concern was that Palestine would be unable to absorb the refugees. "It will be able to absorb them only conditionally: if this is accompanied by a radical and total solution of the question of the 'national home' in Palestine. How will Eretz-Israel be able to sustain a large-scale immigration if this is intended in advance to enlarge only the urban population? How will we be able to acquire land for agricultural

settlement in the face of the harsh laws which tie our hands, the high cost of land, the absence of protection for our produce, etc. etc., not to mention the constant opposition of the Arabs?"⁵⁸ (Emphases in the original.)

It is highly unlikely that the editor on his own could publish a public pessimistic evaluation in the official organ of the Zionist movement without the support or inspiration of the movement leadership. That an objection was raised specifically to urban *aliyah* suggests that the source of the inspiration was the President of the movement, who was known for his consistent opposition to mass urban settlement and had not hesitated to speak his mind on the subject with regard to the immigration of Polish Jewry in the 1920s⁵⁹ and the immigration of German Jewry in the following decade.⁶⁰ Indeed, our research turned up a preliminary paper written at Weizmann's directive which explains quite a few matters described above and others which will be recounted below. This was a letter from Dr. Georg Landauer to Dr. Stephen Wise who, it will be recalled, was active in preparing the conference in America. The letter is dated June 13, 1938 and its full text follows (translated from the Hebrew; emphases added):

Dear Dr. Wise,

I have discussed at some length with Dr. Weizmann the subject of the Conference which it is proposed to hold at Evian at the beginning of July in connection with the Jewish refugee problem. Dr. Weizmann knows that you are associated with the preparations that are being made in America for this Conference, and I presume that you yourself are informed of the preparations that are going on in Gt. Russell Street [the office of the Zionist Executive in London], as well as by the Council for German Jewry. Dr. Ruppin is taking a deep interest in the forthcoming Conference and is preparing a memorandum on the role of Palestine vis-a-vis the refugee problem.

I am writing this letter to you at the request of Dr. Weizmann *as we are very much concerned in case the issue is presented at the Conference in a manner which may harm the work for Palestine*. Even if the Conference will not place countries other than Palestine in the front for Jewish immigration, there will certainly be public appeals which will tend to overshadow the importance of Palestine. *Since* our aim is to turn the Conference into a force which would influence

the Jews as well as the British Government to do something real for the Jewish people, we must do our utmost to bring Palestine to the fore and stress its importance and its capacity to absorb large numbers of Jewish refugees.

We feel all the more concern as it may bind Jewish organizations to collect large sums of money for assisting Jewish refugees, and these collections are likely to interfere with our own campaigns. It may be that the British delegation to the Conference will receive instructions not to give specific assurances as regards Palestine. Such an eventuality makes it all the more imperative for us to stress the importance of Palestine both during the period of preparation and at the Conference itself.

We are convinced that Palestine offers possibilities for the immigration of *tens of thousands* of Jewish refugees who can be absorbed in agriculture, in new industrial enterprises, and in various public works, provided the necessary number of certificates [entry permits] will be obtained and funds are placed at our disposal.

We know that you are watching the situation and would be much obliged to you if you could inform us of the attitude of our American friends towards the Conference, and whether you and any other of our friends from America will be there.

Yours sincerely,

⁵⁸ Haolam, July 7, 1938.

⁵⁹ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 296.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

Dr. Georg Landauer⁶¹

The letter reflects the confusion and hesitations that were rampant in the Zionist hierarchy and found their public expression in the *Haolam* article cited above. From what the letter says directly, what it intimates transparently, and from the conclusions that follow inevitably from both what was stated and what was implied, a picture emerges of the Zionist movement's stand *vis-a-vis* the Evian Conference according to Dr. Weizmann. That stand is encapsulated in the sentences we have emphasized. First, there was serious concern that the conference would have an adverse propaganda effect on Zionism. Against this danger, Weizmann held, vigorous steps must be taken to bring home the Zionist message to the nations of the world and to transform the conference into a positive element for Zionism's realization. Weizmann indicated the principal argument to be adduced--that Palestine was capable of absorbing

tens of thousands of refugees--so that it would not be rejected in favor of other lands of absorption. It is difficult to know what hopes Weizmann entertained that he could succeed in the propaganda war; what is known is that he himself was ready to take part in it personally by appearing before the conference.

If the sphere of propaganda and politics offered a mixture of both fears and hopes, Weizmann's apprehension in the practical realm seemed devoid of all hope: What if the conference participants should agree to offer the Jews shelter in their own countries? The transfer and absorption of these Jews would require immense funds. If the Jewish organizations sought to abet this enterprise by raising large sums of money, this could well be detrimental to the Zionist fund-raising campaigns...

Weizmann has no counsel to offer in the face of this possible adverse development. He is content to note that he is "especially" concerned at this possibility. The only solution implicit in the letter is the hope that this will not happen.

It is not difficult to understand the mental anguish which engendered this letter. The addressee, Dr. Wise, was an adviser and aide to President Roosevelt, serving on the special commission which had been set up to prepare the conference. While he is still engaged in planning the enterprise which would evoke the sympathy and admiration of the progressive world, a letter is dispatched to him by the President of the World Zionist Organization. The letter is not written by Weizmann himself and contains neither greetings nor wishes for success. It is written on behalf of the President by Georg Landauer, Dr. Ruppin's assistant in the Zionist movement's Central Office for the Settlement of German Jews, and it contains a dire warning. It turns out that if the conference succeeds in achieving the objectives set for it by the organizers, incalculable damage will be done to Zionism. In contradistinction to a Roosevelt-style success, a Zionist goal is now posited: to transform the conference into a force that will impel the Jews and the British government alike to do "something concrete" for the Jewish people. There can be no mistaking both what is needed for the accomplishment of this purpose, and what would detract from it. First, the conference participants must exert pressure on the British government to issue a large number of Palestine entry permits. And second, under no circumstances whatsoever must the representatives of the participating governments demonstrate generosity and invite the Jews of Germany to settle in their countries--for in that event Palestine could be shunted aside by other lands, the Jews would not contribute sufficient funds to enable its development, and the British

might well grant even fewer certificates. On the other hand, if the Zionist goal were to be achieved, the participants would all go their own way, the nightmare of other territories would be expunged, the Jews would give more money and the British more certificates, and the Jews of Germany and Austria would immigrate to Palestine--as far as they had the means to do so.

Landauer's letter was not made public, but its dissemination was not confined to the addressee alone. A copy was sent to the American Zionist leader Louis Lipsky⁶² and perhaps to other American Zionist leaders. In Jerusalem its contents were made known to a number of ranking Jewish Agency officials--and to Dr. Moshe Kreutzberger, a Jewish Agency official who was slated to be a member of the Zionist delegation to Evian. The letter provided important food for thought and was a useful guideline.

⁶¹ CZA, File S53/1552a.

⁶² CZA, File S&/693.

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The Jewish Agency Executive discussed the Evian Conference at its meeting of June 26, 1938.⁶³ The first speaker was Arthur Ruppin, who presented a three-point plan which was recorded in the minutes as follows:

(1) Properly organized emigration from Germany and Austria, and perhaps also from Poland and Romania; in other words, the countries participating at Evian will reach an agreement with Germany that during the coming ten years, let us say, a [certain] number of Jews per year will be permitted to leave Germany and take part of their possessions. (2) That the [various] countries will absorb the Jewish emigration. In 1933, when Hitler assumed power, Dr. Ruppin had said” that

Palestine could absorb 50 percent of the Jewish emigration from Germany. Now he sees fit to request that only one-third of the emigration go to Palestine, one-third to the United States, and the remainder to other countries. (3) To highlight the [development of the] Jewish problem and to demonstrate that because of Germany's deeds this problem has become a global problem.

Dr. Landauer put forward a proposal of his own: In order to occupy the refugees who will, presumably, arrive in Palestine, “We will have to propose organizing in Palestine huge work camps, in which the

** The remarks of the speakers in this and other Jewish Agency sessions are set down in the third person.

residents will engage in public works, private jobs, and so forth. Naturally, vast sums will be required to this end.”

Eliahu Dobkin: Based on the experience of the past five years, of the 10-13,000 Jews who will come to Palestine from among the 40,000 who will leave Germany (according to Ruppin's plan), 40 percent will be well-to-do. “Efforts should be made to let them take with their capital, because otherwise they will not be able to immigrate here.”

The floor was taken next by two veteran fighters against territorialism, Yitzhak Gruenbaum and Menahem Ussishkin. Both of them rejected Ruppin's plan out of hand.

Gruenbaum:

“Immense dangers loom from the Evian Conference: (1) It could mark the end of Palestine as a land of immigration. In 1933 Palestine headed the list of countries to which the German emigration went, and he greatly fears that at this conference it is liable to find itself at the bottom of the list... (4) A danger exists, namely, that in the course of their search for a way out, they will find some *new territory* to which they will want to direct Jewish emigration. We must defend our principle--that Jewish settlement can succeed only in Eretz-Israel, and therefore no other [place of] settlement can be considered.”

Although Gruenbaum vigorously opposes the diversion of two-thirds of the refugee flow to locations other than Palestine, he does not ignore the situation in the country--and this leads him to reject the mode of absorption proposed by Landauer. “He only wants to point out that he finds Dr. Landauer's proposal unacceptable. What kind of work will we give these people? After all, there are [already] people here who are out of work and we do not have even a day of work to offer them. And what will we do with huge camps of additional workers?”

Ussishkin:

⁶³ Minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive held in Jerusalem on June 26, 1938, No. 55 (hereafter: Minutes No. 55).

He is very much concerned by the Evian Conference... He supports wholeheartedly the majority of Gruenbaum's remarks. Mr. Gruenbaum is right in saying that there is a danger that Eretz-Israel will be dropped from the agenda of

the Jewish people, and we must view this as a terrible danger for us. He thought to hear at Evian that Eretz-Israel will remain the central land of immigration for Jews; none of the other countries of immigration interest him... Dr. Ruppin told us that he was ready to propose to the conference that one-third of the emigrants from Germany should go to Palestine. In his (Ussishkin's) opinion, that proposal should be left to others. It is possible that after we propose one-third, others will come up with a proposal of only 10 percent. The greatest danger is that they will try to find a *territory* for Jewish immigration...

He [Ussishkin] does not place much value in making a speech to the conference... It is therefore very important that our representatives there wield some influence *and explain to the representatives of the states that there is no country in the world which accepts immigrants enthusiastically*. And as for Eretz-Israel, Britain and all the countries in the world have a certain commitment to facilitate Jewish immigration.

Eliezer Kaplan:

"He doubts whether the government of the United States will agree to exert pressure on Britain at Evian. Naturally we must ensure our presence at the conference. But it is our duty to cut down the number of those going there."

David Ben-Gurion, who spoke after the others, took Ruppin's plan apart piece by piece and also poured cold water on the hopes held by some of his colleagues, that some way could be found to benefit from the conference. Like Kaplan, he did not anticipate that at Evian the United States government, or any other government, would press Britain with respect to Palestine. No information efforts could transform the conference from being harmful into being useful. What could and must be done, was to keep the damage to a minimum. "He does not know whether the Evian Conference will open the gates of other countries to Jewish immigration, but his fear, like Gruenbaum and Ussishkin, is that at this time the conference is liable to cause immense harm to Eretz-Israel and to Zionism."

It seems to Ben-Gurion, [the minutes of the session continue,] that our main task is *to reduce the damage, the danger and the disaster that can be expected from the Evian Conference...* From a Zionist perspective, the Evian Conference is liable to be the opposite of San Remo. It could remove Palestine from the international agenda as a factor in the solution of the Jewish question. Because at this time Palestine is not serving as a haven for masses of immigrants. The *haverim* who propose to highlight at Evian the question of the Jewish people are making a mistake. That question needs no more "highlighting." The entire world is aware of the issue and its acuteness. What needs to be highlighted is the *solution* [emphasis in the original] to the question. And this is not a propitious hour for a solution. Because in the eyes of the world at large, Palestine now resembles Spain [where a civil war was raging]. In a country where there are riots and where every day bombs are thrown, people are murdered, and unemployment and economic stagnation are rife--political questions cannot be resolved. The more we highlight the terrible distress of the Jewish masses in Germany, Poland and Romania, the more damage we will do at this time to the negotiations [with Britain]... No government will come out against Britain for us...

In my opinion, we should play down the image of the conference. As far as it depends on us, it is desirable that the conference not make decisions on its own but establish a commission to discuss matters... It is doubtful whether President Roosevelt, who convened this conference, had Palestine in mind. Some time ago, Roosevelt told one of our friends that Palestine could not solve the Jewish question and that a different way had to be sought. We must see to it that this dangerous tendency does not find expression at the conference. Therefore our best people must go to Evian. In his view, it was essential that Dr. Weizmann be there. It is also important that Ruppin and Ussishkin go there, because we must be on our guard."

The meeting ended with a verbal clash between Ben-Gurion and Dr. David Sontor, the only non-Zionist member of the Jewish Agency Executive. His exchange with Ben-Gurion can be read as a symbolic

encapsulation of the divergence of outlook between the Zionist movement leadership and the Jewish people as a whole at this fateful hour. The minutes of the meeting have perpetuated this brief dialogue:

Dr. Sontor: We are all agreed that matters relating to Palestine should be given prominence at Evian. However, he warns that there must be no dissociation from another Jewish representation, which would also propose different partial solutions. He would regard such dissociation as disastrous.

David Ben-Gurion: The Zionist movement never dissociates itself from any Jewish activity. The Zionists are fighting no less than others for equal rights and also for the right of Jewish immigration to all countries. It only insists on the special Zionist task which befalls us at this moment.

That "special Zionist task... at this moment" was, then, to play down as far as possible the image of the conference and to bring about a situation in which it would make no decisions at all.

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The Jewish Agency Executive did not pass a formal resolution; thus it would be inaccurate to say that it adopted Ben-Gurion's plan of action. A second and supremely important fact in this connection, is that it proved impossible to put together a delegation which would assume responsibility for executing the directives of the Jewish Agency chairman. The chief cause of this situation was the stance of Dr. Ruppin.

Arthur Ruppin, a member of the Jewish Agency Executive and the longtime head of its Settlement Department, was a highly unorthodox Zionist, and because of ideological differences he often found himself a conditional partner in the leadership. (A typical instance: at the 20th Zionist Congress, Ruppin was co-opted to the Zionist Executive in a slot earmarked for the non-Zionists. Ruppin, p. 283.) Since Hitler's assumption of power, Ruppin had headed the Central Office for the Settlement of German Jews, which was attached to the Jewish Agency, and at this time he was wholly preoccupied with the refugee problem. For years he held negotiations on this issue with various personalities and organizations on behalf of the Jewish Agency.⁶⁴ His views on the solution of the problem were undoubtedly well known to those who dealt with the question at the international level.

In all of Ruppin's plans and calculations--which were subject to occasional changes in line with the shifting circumstances--Palestine occupied an honorable place in the absorption of the refugees: it would take in up to half of the total number. The other half was earmarked for three principal countries: the United States, Argentina and Brazil.⁶⁵ Perhaps because he was not an orthodox Zionist, Ruppin was not prey to the nightmare of territorialism, and he presented his calculations without worrying that they could prove harmful to the Zionist enterprise. When Germany annexed Austria, thereby increasing by 200,000 the number of Jews who needed to be extricated, Ruppin did not hesitate to reduce the share of Palestine in absorbing the refugees to one-third of the total, based on the assumption that the exodus from Germany would be a ten-year process. Ruppin submitted his new plan to the Jewish Agency Executive not long before the Evian Conference.

Ruppin's standing and his position as head of the Office for the Settlement of German Jews, ruled out the possibility of his non-inclusion in the Zionist delegation to Evian--notwithstanding that the Executive had rejected his plan. Since at the session described above it turned out that none of those who outranked him in the leadership hierarchy were willing to "stand on guard" as Ben-Gurion had requested, it was immediately evident that Ruppin would serve as head of the delegation. It is not

⁶⁴ Ruppin, pp. 233, 251.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 229.

known when and how Ben-Gurion spoke with him about a compromise regarding the plans, but it is clear that as the session drew to a close, Ben-Gurion did not want any further clarifications to be held on the topic without his personal participation. When Kaplan and Gruenbaum proposed setting up a special committee to deal with the subject, Ben-Gurion dismissed the idea in his concluding remarks: "When the Executive receives additional information, it will reconsider this question," or, even better, "Prior to the departure [for Evian] Dr. Ruppin will hold a meeting on the plan of action, and all the members of the Executive who so desire will be able to participate." With the support of several members of the Executive, Ben-Gurion tried to get Ruppin's assistant, Dr. Landauer (who, it will be recalled, wrote the letter to Wise on behalf of Weizmann), to accompany him but Landauer refused and Ruppin did not press the issue.

A few days after Ussishkin changed his mind about attending the conference, it was learned that Stephen Wise also did not intend to participate.⁶⁶ The two were not replaced by other leading personalities likely to attract international interest. The Hadassah Women's Organization proposed that the celebrated Zionist activist Henrietta Szold be asked to go to Evian. She expressed her readiness to attend the

conference "if the Executive decides that her [participation] is necessary."⁶⁷ But the Executive somehow did not decide, and Henrietta Szold stayed home. The delegation that was finally put together was quite modest in stature. Joining Arthur Ruppin was Nahum Goldmann, who would be in Evian in any case representing the World Jewish Congress. The third delegation member was Martin Rosenblitt.⁶⁸ Several advisers and other staff⁶⁹ were also dispatched, and while they may have helped make the delegation's work more efficient, there were no well-known figures among them. From this point of view David Ben-Gurion's wish was indeed realized: to play down the image of the conference as much as possible. Shortly before the conference opened it was still not known whether Weizmann would change his mind about appearing at Evian in order to highlight the Jewish problem; but that question was also soon resolved.

The memorandum (signed by Weizmann) that Ruppin submitted to the conference on behalf of the Jewish Agency made no mention of the original one-third/two-thirds refugee absorption plan. It referred to the plight of the Jews, the Zionist enterprise, and Palestine as a land of refugee absorption. The memorandum contained not a word against the sending of refugees to other countries. The concluding paragraph stated explicitly:

The Jewish Agency for Palestine seriously hopes that this conference will find ways and means to ease the fate of the suffering Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, find productive prospects of entry into various countries, and pay special heed to the great possibilities offered by Palestine for the solution of the Jewish question.⁷⁰

No one who recalls Weizmann's fear at the idea of settlement in countries other than Palestine, and Ben-Gurion's fervent desire to ensure that the conference would not find concrete ways and means to that end, could doubt the seriousness and sincerity of those hopes.

Another mention of countries other than Palestine in this document also bears noting. Ussishkin's proposal at the Jewish Agency Executive session, "to explain" to the conference participants that emigrants are not wanted anywhere, evidently did not fall on deaf ears. The authors of the memorandum, as though apprehensive that its concluding paragraph would generate an overabundance of liberalism among the conference delegates, decided to precede it with a dose of toughness wrapped in righteous rhetoric. Thus, Par. 5 of the memorandum stated: "Likewise, it is

also our hope that states which *are capable* of continuing to accept refugees, *without adversely affecting their own citizens*, will adopt a *more courageous* method of absorption. By doing so, they will immediately help a larger number of victims of the

⁶⁶ See Stephen Wise's cable to Ben-Gurion on June 27, CZA, File S25/9778.

⁶⁷ Minutes No. 55.

⁶⁸ Report to the 21st Zionist Congress by the Central Office for the Settlement of German Jewry, CZA.

⁶⁹ Kreuzberg's letter, CZA, File S7/693.

⁷⁰ According to *Davar*, July 12, 1938.

persecutions and will also bring a blessing to those countries in which the emigrants will settle.”

This was “lobbying” which came across as a harsh warning to governments which were hesitant and chary about entering into injudicious commitments.

In his speech while submitting the memorandum to the conference reception committee, Ruppin also failed to mention his proposal to direct two-thirds of the refugees to countries other than Palestine. He cited a round figure of potential emigrants: 300,000, of whom 200,000 would leave Germany and the rest from Austria. He surveyed the history of Jewish immigration to Palestine and submitted to the committee a pamphlet he had written containing statistical tables on the Jews. He dwelt on the need for negotiations with the German authorities concerning arrangements for the large-scale “transfer” of capital in order to ensure the economic absorption of the refugees. He also noted that the Jews of Eastern Europe should not be dropped entirely from the conference agenda, even if they were not explicitly part of it.⁷¹

There were three striking omissions in the explanatory remarks of the noted economist and statistician. Not a thing was said about annual emigration quotas in Germany, no estimated distribution was mentioned for the absorption of the refugees in various countries (nor was it stated unequivocally that Palestine would be the sole or chief country of absorption), and no general timetable was offered for executing the emigration plan. This triple omission, the inevitable result of Ruppin’s hands being tied by the Jewish Agency Executive, robbed his appearance of any substantive content. Indeed, this posture was characteristic of the situation and standing of anti-territorialist Zionism at Evian. The conditions then prevailing in Palestine meant that it could contribute nothing to the solution of the problem to discuss which had drawn the international community to Evian. As Ben-Gurion said openly and lucidly, Zionism had nothing to offer in terms of absorbing the half a million Jews who were compelled to leave Germany urgently. The Zionists were well aware that even if the British were to accede to their demand to open the gates of Palestine, the problem could not be solved under the conditions existing there. In a press conference held by the Zionist delegation a few days later (see below), Ruppin was forced to spell out the number of refugees Palestine was capable of absorbing per annum--and the figure he

cited was ten thousand.⁷² The fear of territorialism obviated Zionist participation in attempts to effect an immediate solution outside Palestine. All that remained for them to do--in addition to pressuring Britain--was to talk, to engage in “politicking,” and to maneuver as best they could, in order to try to delay the intended actions until conditions in Palestine changed.

Dr. Ruppin’s activity as head of the Zionist delegation provided no satisfaction to his dispatchers. His Zionism turned out to be insufficient to enable him to overcome his territorialist deviations. True, he carried out faithfully the mission entrusted to him, and in public did not advocate the immigration of German Jews to the U.S. and Latin America. Privately, however, he made no secret of his views and even carried out certain activities with a view towards their materialization. He signed his assent to the joint memorandum with the non-Zionist organizations. *** He rushed delightedly to a meeting with the head of the Brazilian delegation, *Helio Lobo*, who expressed himself positively with respect to the entry of large numbers of refugees into his country. (In his speech to the conference Lobo suggested that under “certain conditions” Brazil could take in 44,000 refugees a year). With satisfaction, he assured his colleagues on the Zionist Executive that in addition to Palestine and the U.S., Brazil could well prove to be a country that would absorb large numbers of Jewish refugees.⁷³ Congruent with this “harmful” activity, he was busily engaged in lobbying for a doubtful cause which sparked controversy within the Zionist delegation and among some of the other Jewish groups represented at Evian. Together with the representatives of four other large organizations, Ruppin approached Lord Winterton, the head of the British delegation, with a request that the conference also include the Jews of Eastern Europe within its frame of reference. Ruppin acted as the spokesmen of this group, but the attempt failed abysmally.****

71 Ruppin, p. 302; *Ha’aretz*, July 10, 1938.

72 *Haolam*, July 14, 1938.

73 Ruppin’s letter of July 18, CZA, File S25/9778.

*** This signature represented, at most, the Zionist delegation on the spot and not its dispatchers. It seems probable that Ruppin signed the document on his own, without consulting anyone. At all events, we found no further traces of this act in the commentaries written while the conference was in progress or in the delegation's reports and correspondence.

**** Ruppin, p. 302. Incidentally, the fact that it was Ruppin who spoke on behalf of this group casts doubt on one version we heard, to the effect that the proposal made at the Jewish Agency Executive session to send Dr. Landauer with Ruppin stemmed from concern that the latter's deafness would prevent him from being able to handle the negotiations on his own.

In the meantime, an important Zionist matter had arisen which brooked no delay. Following Lord Winterton's failure to cite Palestine as a possible haven for the refugees, it soon turned out that not a single one of the other delegates had done so, either. The conference was drawing to a close, and there were growing fears that this major international forum would disperse without mentioning the Zionist enterprise. We may conjecture that in order to prevent this outcome, the Zionist leadership decided to try to compel Lord Winterton to bring up this subject no matter what, although the character his remarks would bear was an unknown factor. A substantial reinforcement to the delegation was rushed in for this urgent operation. Golda Meyerson (Meir) arrived in Evian and on July 11, together with Ruppin and Goldmann, held a press conference devoted to a frontal attack on the British delegation and its chief representative, Lord Winterton.

The results exceeded all expectations. In his concluding speech Lord Winterton gave considerable time to Palestine, and what he had to say was satisfactory to the Zionists. "A listener" (Zalman Rubashov) in *Davar* reported that

the general papers took the speech as a pro-Zionist declaration, because he spoke with pride about the Jewish enterprise; because he made no mention of the Arabs' terrorist resistance as a factor limiting *aliyah*; because he stated explicitly that it was solely due to the inquiry currently underway in Palestine that he could not speak more clearly, but with the conclusion of the inquiry the enterprise would regain its original footing; [and] because he differentiated between the Palestine enterprise and the possibility of its solving immediately the whole question of Jewish emigration in its entirety--but about the enterprise itself he spoke firmly and confidently.⁷⁴

Others were more reserved, but did not conceal their satisfaction. Dr. Goldmann wrote that the Winterton statement "could have been better, of course, but in the existing conditions it is impossible to say that it was bad." He also related how he had expressed his satisfaction to Winterton personally. Following the session he approached Winterton and said, "I want to tell you, Lord Winterton, that I am extremely pleased." To which the latter replied, "I am pleased that you are pleased now."⁷⁵ Moshe Shertok (Sharett), head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department,

chastised Goldmann: "I was a little surprised to see that you commended Lord Winterton for having mentioned Palestine in his final speech, without adding a critical remark concerning the contents of what he said." At the same time, he added with satisfaction, "And I can imagine that Lord Winterton will hear no praises from the colonial secretary for having let the cat out of the bag."⁷⁶ In the same spirit Ruppin wrote: "Lord Winterton based himself on the instructions of his government, but the spirit of his declaration was far more his own spirit than that of [the British colonial secretary] Malcolm MacDonald."⁷⁷

The weekly London-based *Jewish Chronicle* of July 22 reported that a feeling of satisfaction and optimism prevailed among the states which had sent delegations to Evian. In an article entitled "A Spirit of Optimism," the paper's special correspondent to Evian wrote: "The agreed view among the participants at the Evian Conference is that the conference marks an important step forward. Several of the leading

⁷⁴ *Davar*, July 22, 1938.

⁷⁵ CZA, File S25/9778.

⁷⁶ CZA, File S25/9779.

⁷⁷ CZA, File S25/9778.

participants expressed to me their satisfaction with the results achieved.” The practicality and sincerity of the remarks made by the Norwegian delegate Dr. Hansson left a particularly convincing impression. Hansson was also president of the International Nansen Office for Refugees and at Evian served as the chairman of the Technical Subcommittee which, it will be recalled, was responsible for collecting the information concerning the readiness of the various governments to absorb refugees immediately. The representative of a small nation, he was less suspect of partiality because of vested interests of his country. Dr. Hansson told the *Jewish Chronicle*:

The results are encouraging, especially if we take into account that the conference was convened hastily and that not all the governments had sufficient time to study the material closely... But already now I can say that certain governments told us (the Technical Committee) that they are ready to accept a considerable number of refugees. It is still too early to name the countries or state the number of refugees. [Translated from the Hebrew.]

One of the principal sources of optimism was Myron Taylor, the U.S. representative, who served as conference president. His closing speech exuded satisfaction and confidence. He noted the “serious spirit of cooperation which breathed life into this first intergovernmental meeting” and had enabled the establishment of the Inter-Governmental Commission--“and if the wheels of this machine can be kept turning, it

will improve the lives and prospects of millions of our fellow human beings.” This, indeed, is precisely what he pledged:

Our work must continue untiringly and unceasingly, and it will... This intergovernmental meeting is only a beginning. Henceforth the Inter-Governmental Commission will be in constant session. I expect that the participating governments will remain in close contact with the chairman in the period of the break between the closing of today’s session and its reopening in London.⁷⁸

Taylor made additional remarks in the same spirit to the press upon the conclusion of the conference.

The declarations of the American delegate were more than a conjecture or wishful thinking. Coming from Roosevelt’s personal representative, they constituted a commitment by the President of the United States to continue his active support for the success of the cause. It was not for nothing that Henry Berenger, the head of the French delegation, pointed out with satisfaction that this was the first time the U.S. had affiliated itself with a permanent body dealing with non-American problems.⁷⁹ In this lay the uniqueness and the strength of Evian, as distinguished from similar international organizations dealing with refugee problems.

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On the Jewish side, the results of the conference actually provided sufficient cause for satisfaction in both camps--of the Zionist leadership and of the non-Zionists. The Zionists could welcome the fact that it was all over, that nothing adverse had befallen Zionism, that no territorialist actions had been undertaken. Lower-ranking Zionist functionaries bemoaned the fact that this important international forum had not been exploited to strengthen Zionist information efforts and to step up the pressure on Britain. But the officials of the Jewish Agency, having, as we saw, harbored no exaggerated expectations in this regard, were not disappointed at the results, either. For them it sufficed that Ben-Gurion’s scenario of “damage, danger and disaster” had proved unfounded. All Zionists, irrespective of standing, saw in the reserved speeches of the government representatives further evidence to justify anti-territorialist Zionism and demanded of themselves and others “to learn a lesson.”

The non-Zionists, including salient sympathizers of Zionism, left the conference, as was mentioned, “in a good frame of mind and with

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Evian Conference.

⁷⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, July 22, 1938.

many hopes for the future.” The events of the conference which the Zionists perceived as gloomy and despairing, were regarded by the non-Zionists as an opening for important rescue activity. There were varying degrees of expectation among them, ranging from solid confidence to cautious optimism.⁸⁰ As we saw above, at least three of the Zionist leaders who had been first-hand witnesses to the events at Evian were also numbered among the optimists. As far as we have been able to ascertain, two of them, Zalman Rubashov and Arthur Ruppin, never recanted the views they expressed at Evian, whereas the third, Nahum Goldmann, underwent a polar shift of opinion.

An interesting illustration of radical differences of perception between orthodox Zionists and non-orthodox sympathizers with Zionism is found in the Hebrew-language American weekly *Hadoar* of July 29, 1938. In an article entitled “Magnanimity of Nations,” I.Z. Frishberg sets forth his disappointment at the conference. In a sardonic style he writes: “Based on its spirit and its deeds, the Evian Conference should be called the ‘Evyon’ [Hebrew for beggar, wretched] Conference”--and so forth, in the same vein. The paper’s editors comment:

It seems to us that the distinguished writer is unduly pessimistic in his evaluation of this important conference. At Evian a beginning was made and the cornerstone was laid for work. But the words of Myron Taylor, Roosevelt’s faithful emissary, indicate that America will not be satisfied with words and will impose the pressure of deeds on the entire conference. And there are favorable signs that this is so.

What remains is the need to clarify one important testimony which on the face of it contradicts the conclusion we are about to reach. At the time of the conference, S. Adler-Rudel was an active Zionist, a member of the Zionist Actions Committee. But he was certainly not afraid of territorialism, as is evidenced by his work with the non-Zionist organizations, described above. We quoted his article about Evian as a credible and reliable source. Yet in it he refers to the “cruel disappointment for the Jewish representatives who came to Evian.” How so?

This quandary is unequivocally resolved in another Adler-Rudel source, which we also mentioned. His exchange of correspondence with Hans Schaeffer during the conference is an authentic document of prime importance. In a letter to Schaeffer dated July 26, his first following

the conclusion of the conference, Adler-Rudel writes: “First, I want to say that I am *definitely pleased* [*absolut zufrieden*] at the results of the conference; they are consistent, approximately, with what I had expected from the conference, and I think that no intelligent thinking could have expected more.” He goes on to explain why he is satisfied and offers his forecast concerning the permanent institution which was established in order to succeed.⁸¹ In reply, Hans Schaeffer writes that he has met with Otto Hirsch, one of the heads of the “representation of German Jewry, and with Natahn Katz of the Joint. Both of them had attended the conference and had conveyed to him their impressions. He had also read the stenographic reports of the conference proceedings. “My general impression,” he writes, “as far as this can be formed at second-hand, is perfectly consistent with your own... Everything that could be expected in the existing conditions was achieved.”⁸²

Adler-Rudel’s 1938 testimony is vital and enlightening. It attests not only to what happened thirty years ago, but what the course of time and the “general assent” wrought to highly reliable witnesses. It is not surprising that in the post-war sources we found not a trace of the situation which actually existed, as emerges without a shadow of doubt from all the testimonies dating from the period of the conference itself and immediately afterward: from all the testimonies we turned up, without exception.

And this was the situation: All the Jewish organizations that truly and sincerely wanted the conference to succeed in its goal--the speedy and orderly rescue of Germany’s Jews--were pleased with the results of the conference, as were the conference organizers and the official delegations of the various participating governments. All of them regarded the conference as a major step forward and hoped for further

⁸⁰ One example of cautious optimism was the assessment of Rabbi Jonah Wise, who represented the Joint Distribution Committee at Evian: “The Evian Conference which opened in an atmosphere of pessimism and gloom, closed with a dawning ray of hope.” Record, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 40.

⁸¹ Adler-Rudell/Correspondence, pp. 192-193. Emphases added.

⁸² Ibid. p. 196.

developments towards the solution of the problem. All of them expressed their unequivocal satisfaction and their favorable expectations.

The Zionists, who did not share in the general sentiments, were also not interested in the attainment of the goal the conference had set itself. The overwhelming majority of them, with the exception of the leaders at the very top of the movement, hoped for a side-effect--pressure on Britain--which would promote the cause of Zionism and direct to Palestine a flow of refugees which, because of the conditions prevailing in the country, could not possibly assume the dimensions enabling a solution of the problem. Their bitter complaints well reflected their sincere disappointment at an unrealized hope. But their laments concerning the "insult" and the "pain" they felt because the nations of the world were not

allowing the Jews into their countries, were remote from truth and from sincerity. It is not difficult to imagine their reaction had those reserved speeches concluded with a call to Britain to open the gates of *aliyah* to Palestine. In that event the speakers and their governments would have been instantly transformed from indifferent evil-doers into the righteous of the earth.

To adduce the Zionist complaints as the reaction of the Jewish people to the Evian Conference is, of course, a complete distortion which perverts reality and rules out any possibility of genuine historical study. As we remarked above, this distortion was abetted in no small measure by the calamitous chain of events which brought about the destruction of German Jewry and which thereby constituted psychological "proof"--a view of the past refracted through the prism of the present. It is a view which is willingly accepted by the preachers of the "all the world is against us" school of thought. Its root source lies in the territorialist fears of post-Ugandan Zionism.

Chapter Eight

From Evian to the War

Concerning two of the active figures at Evian,¹ we noted that a contradiction exists between their current testimony and the opinions they expressed in the immediate aftermath of the conference. The excuse cited by both of them to reconcile the contradiction was that only over a long span of time had they been able to evaluate the conference accurately. Indeed, one of them said it had been a mistake to believe Roosevelt, who had pledged to allow the full quota of 27,000 refugees to enter the United States but then had reneged on his promise. *

In our opinion, both personalities were wrong, for it is not a question of an evaluation, but *testimony* concerning the reactions and assessments these persons offered at the conclusion of the conference--and these are irrefutable facts.

At all events, the responses and the specific arguments put forward by these personalities reinforced our feeling that in order to round out the picture we should try to determine whether objective justification existed for the sense of satisfaction and optimism evinced by the participants at Evian and by others who followed the meeting closely. Our analysis shed light on several facts, concepts, and circumstances which enabled us to answer a second, and even more significant question for our study: Is there any political-moral justification for the behavior of the Zionist movement in this affair?

It will be useful to preface our discussion with a comment about the title of this chapter. We place the commencement of the Holocaust of European Jewry in summer 1941, when the *Einsatzgruppen* (special-duty groups) whose explicit assignment was to destroy Jews only because they were Jews, and to provide statistical reports on their operations, entered the Soviet Union together with the invading German army. These units were engaged not in persecutions, pogroms or murders but in *annihilation--total*, systematic, planned slaughter.

This distinction, simple and straightforward though it may be, was initially not perceived by the would-be rescuers due to the Germans' deception policy and due to inadequate information--topics discussed in the opening chapters. The horrific reports about the destruction were grasped in the conventional terms of persecutions and pogroms. It was those concepts, almost a commonplace in Jewish history, that formed the

* In fact, as we will show, Roosevelt *upheld* his pledge in the period between Evian and the U.S. entry into the war.

¹ Dr. Nahum Goldmann and Mr. Shalom Adler-Rudell: see the tape-recordings of the author's conversations with them.

point of departure for the negligent and impotent reactions which followed.

Nowadays Holocaust researchers sometimes display faulty perception in the opposite direction. By projecting images belonging unmistakably to the Holocaust on pre-Holocaust events, they forge a distorted background which can lead to hasty judgment. A few examples will show what we mean.

In January (or early February) 1940 Shmuel Zygelboim tried to enter Holland from Germany. He was told by the Dutch border official who examined his papers that his transit permit did not grant the bearer the right to enter Holland and he must therefore return immediately to Germany. Zygelboim asked but was refused permission to remain at the border crossing for a few hours in order to clarify the matter and obtain the missing permit. Further pleas fell on deaf ears, and when he tried passive resistance he was dragged to the train, put aboard forcefully, and sent back to the German side.² Such incidents were fairly common along Germany's borders. But those sent back were not always solitary adult males, as in Zygelboim's case, nor was the final outcome always so fortunate (following a series of adventures and much wandering about, Zygelboim finally managed to leave Germany and enter Belgium). Women, children, the elderly and the ill were often denied entry. Their forced return to Germany exposed them to immeasurable suffering--mental, material, and bodily--in some cases arrest or even murder. This was the situation in the years preceding the Holocaust.

During the Holocaust period things changed. Jews still tried to escape to neutral or semi-neutral countries--Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Spain. At certain times their aim was to get from places where the death machine was operating in full gear, to locations where the killing was temporarily in abeyance. Thus, different periods saw Jews flee from Poland to Slovakia, from Slovakia to Hungary, from Hungary to Romania, and from the German- to the Italian-occupied zones in France, Greece and Yugoslavia. In these years refugees who were turned back were, to all intents and purposes, condemned to death, perhaps immediate death. Jews sent back from the Slovakian border into the hands of German police in Poland were murdered on the spot or transported to death camps. The same situation prevailed, with different degrees of immediacy, on other borders.

In effect, in the last years before the war the fate of refugees who were turned back at the border was the same as it would be in the Holocaust itself. The difference lay in the motivation and moral

responsibility of the officials in charge. It was one thing to act "according to the law" or follow the orders of one's superiors and cast helpless refugees to their fate on the other side of the border; it was something else entirely after it had become clear and obvious that those sent back faced certain death. In the former case one's motivation might be a disposition "to go by the book" in performing one's duty, even if this entailed indifference to the distress of fellow human beings. Although there were probably some who were spurred by hatred and took a sadistic pleasure in their work, such traits were not a *sine qua non* for the job. It was enough if one's sense of humanity was not developed to the point where one was ready to sacrifice one's personal interests and convenience for another's good. In other words, an evil nature was not a necessary qualification for this work: not to be among the righteous, to be impelled by humanity's primitive egotism--this was sufficient.

The distinction we have drawn regarding border police is equally applicable in other domains. Manifestly, there is a difference between the turning away of the famous ship the *St. Louis* from Havana in June 1939, and the case of the *Struma* at Istanbul in March 1942. The difference lay not only in the fact that the *St. Louis* was a luxury liner whereas the *Struma* was a bare hulk of a vessel; and not only in the fact that, unlike the human cargo on the *Struma*, the passengers on the *St. Louis* found shelter in Europe within a week of being denied entry to Cuba. The paramount difference lay in the fact that the *Struma* was forced to enter a region where Jews were murdered simply for being Jews. Had the *St. Louis* been forced to return to Hamburg its passengers would have found themselves in dire straits, but the threat of physical destruction did not yet hang over them.

² *Zygelboim Book*, pp. 278-282.

The passengers on the *St. Louis* and their benefactors in the Joint were not exaggerating in their description of the harsh conditions and the dangers awaiting them in Germany. They were not misusing words when they pitted extinction against rescue. This was the situation in both bad times and ordinary times. The advent of the Holocaust engendered a modification in the criteria of evil, and the old terms were vested with a different, unmediated content. Extinction now meant extermination, pure and simple; and rescue meant escape from slaughter. The "old" form of rescue, in the pre-Holocaust era, had amounted to no more than extrication from certain kinds of troubles and dangers.

It is only natural that studies of the Holocaust should attach to words the significance they assumed in that harrowing period. However, when these unique meanings are overlaid on events and motives that

antedated the Holocaust, the words become charged with meanings inconsonant with reality and the general picture is perforce distorted.

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An assessment of the Jewish Agency's stand *vis-a-vis* the Evian Conference is disheartening. To put it bluntly, the Jewish Agency was fearful of a positive outcome; its wish was for the conference to fail abysmally. That its bark was worse than its bite does not mitigate its responsibility. If we were to fall into the trap of anachronism, as explained above, we would accuse the Zionist leadership of preferring to let the Jews remain in Germany and be destroyed by Hitler rather than generating possible harm to Zionism by enabling them to immigrate to lands other than Palestine.

Such an outlook, however, would be detached from reality, for the simple reason that in summer 1938 no one thought that for the Jews to remain in Germany was tantamount to their destruction. No one, not Zionists or non-Zionists, not Jews or non-Jews, even imagined this. It was not that they rejected or ignored the idea, or that they did not want to believe in the possibility--the fact is that idea was not even considered because rational beings were incapable of conceiving it.

By 1938, the year usually cited by Holocaust researchers as the climacteric, it was apparent to many that the only way to avoid the plight of Germany's Jews was to emigrate from areas under the control of the Reich. Clearly, the anti-Jewish decrees were not temporary; the only realistic course was to accept the Nazis' demand and evacuate the Jews from Germany. Following the massive, country-wide pogrom in November, the need for *urgency* was plain. Yet even then, after dozens of Jews were murdered and tens of thousands thrown into concentration camps, the nightmare of the Holocaust was beyond the imagination. The American journalist Dorothy Thompson, well-known for her sensitivity to the anguish of Germany's Jews and her campaign on their behalf, spoke in February 1939 about the danger of "mass suicides," but not about destruction.³ Fears were voiced of oppression and torture, of murder, of death by starvation; these travails, it was thought, were liable to set in motion processes eventuating in the extinction of the community. But no one, not in his worst nightmares, conjured up systematic mass destruction.

This was the situation among non-Jews and Jews, among non-Zionists, and, tragically, among Zionists, too. To maintain, in the light of these conditions, that indifference existed to the possibility of destruction, or that it was preferred over some other scenario, is an insufferable fabrication.

Nevertheless, even at this stage the Zionist leadership bears culpability for a lack of foresight. No blame is involved, but a failure of the leadership certainly occurred. To facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon and place things in perspective, we will draw a comparison with a similar argument that is often voiced in certain Jewish circles. One of the allegations hurled by Zionist functionaries at Agudat Israel and other ultra-Orthodox groups is that in the decades preceding the Holocaust, rabbis and other spiritual leaders in Europe opposed settlement in Eretz-Israel by their followers and the members of their communities. Until Hitler came and murdered them all.

³ *New York Herald-Tribune*, February 17, 1939.

If the point here is to accuse the ultra-Orthodox leaders of dereliction of duty dictated by their Conscience and understanding, then the charge is unjust. These rabbis functioned entirely according to their Conscience and understanding, and their decision was made for the good of their communities, as they saw it. They cannot be faulted for not foreseeing what others also failed to foresee or even imagine. Therefore, as far as ordinary human criteria go, they are undoubtedly blameless.

On the other hand, if the point being made is that the ultra-Orthodox leadership was unable to look beyond day-to-day experience and envisage what the future held, and was therefore deficient in guiding those who relied on them--then the allegation is not entirely groundless.

Bet that as it may, the argument is highly applicable to the Zionist leadership. The rabbis of Agudat Israel were perhaps led astray by an arbitrary interpretation of the Jewish people's eternity; or they may have placed inordinate reliance in the incantation they recited every year: that in every generation the enemies of the Jewish people seek to destroy it but the Lord delivers us from their hands. In contrast, the Zionist leaders were raised and educated according to a philosophy that leaves no room for complacency. The fathers of catastrophic Zionism taught that the violent liquidation of the Jews in the diaspora was both possible and feasible. The Zionists' gut-feeling should have alerted them to the impending event before non-Zionists sensed it.

The absence of an instinctive Zionist premonition of calamity attests to the insensitivity of the flawed post-Ugandan Zionism, which was concerned primarily for the Zionist enterprise and not directly for the fate of the Jewish people. To this must be added the period of difficulties and dangers which Zionism underwent during and after Evian; these generated deep unease and could have diverted attention from "side" dangers. The growing Arab terrorism was followed by difficult negotiations with the British Mandate government which had just retracted the partition

proposal of the Peel Commission and was bent on hobbling the Jewish Yishuv. Less than a year after Evian the White Paper of Malcolm MacDonald was issued; its clear aim was to eradicate the Zionist enterprise.

In this grim situation it was only to be expected that the suspiciousness toward territorialism would grow even more intense. Zionism in this period perceived territorialist competition not only in the program of mass agricultural settlement aimed at establishing a Jewish national entity, but in every plan that entailed emigration outside Eretz-Israel. From this point of view, the Evian Conference was one continuous territorialist scheme.

Indeed, the conference had been permeated with genuine, classical territorialism on the model of the Uganda Plan. Not only Jews, and not necessarily opponents of Zionism had been involved in it. The urgent need to find a haven for hundreds of thousands of Jews, at a time when Palestine could absorb tens of thousands at most, spawned territorialist plans some of which were advocated by good friends of the Zionist movement. A characteristic example is afforded by a British MP, Captain Victor Cazalet, an ardent supporter of Zionism before, during and after Evian. According to Chaim Weizmann, Cazalet was "one of the few who never missed an opportunity to defend Zionism and who did all he could to present our cause openly to the public."⁴ Cazalet was a member of the British delegation to Evian and lent a friendly ear to the Zionist delegations. At the same time, he gave his enthusiastic backing to a plan for mass Jewish settlement in northern Rhodesia, whose initiator and orotund prophet was a well-known Hungarian, Count CandenhoveKalergi.⁵ An atmosphere such as this was bound to arouse considerable anti-territorialist alarm in a veteran Zionist--unless that Zionist were Zalman Rubashov or Arthur Ruppin.

To sum up: in the light of subsequent developments, the stand taken by the Zionist movement was most unfortunate, and the plans hatched by the Zionist leadership for Evian were little short of outrageous. Still, that leadership cannot be held accountable for a sin it did not commit. The Zionist leaders did *not* abandon the Jews of Germany to destruction. They sincerely believed that the anguish of the German Jews was a passing thing and that ultimately they would find rescue--and redemption--in Eretz-Israel.

⁴ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 392.

⁵ Norman Bentwich, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 280-282.

Another mitigating factor was that in July 1938 the Zionist position did no serious harm to the conference. Indeed, Ben-Gurion's wish that no immediate and "substantial" resolutions be adopted was consistent with

Roosevelt's plan and was realized at Evian to the satisfaction of those who were interested in the success of the conference.

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That the possibility of annihilation was so remote as to be beyond the realm of imagination, is indicated by the programs which were put forward at Evian and in the subsequent negotiations held with the German government. The number of those slated to leave Germany in the plan adduced by Dr. Ruppin on behalf of the Jewish Agency Executive was 300,000. The explanation for why this figure was lower by 200,000 than the total number of Jews then residing in Germany and Austria is to be found in the calculations Ruppin set down in his diary three months earlier, following a visit to Germany:⁶

There are still some 360,000 Jews in Germany (530,000 including Austria). Among these 530,000 the mortality rate is increasing over the birth rate year by year, and deaths now exceed births by at least 10,000 per year, or 100,000 in ten years. If 20,000 a year immigrate to the United States, South America, and Palestine, within a decade no more than 230,000 Jews, most of them elderly, will remain in Germany and Austria. The government will not bother them; after all, with the exception of a few tens of thousands, they will all die within another twenty years and their absorption will no longer constitute a problem.

Today, after these elderly people were murdered and their bodies consumed in the satanic conflagration, it is difficult to understand how anyone could have thought to help solve the problem by leaving them in Germany. At the time, however, in 1938-1939, this line of thought seemed quite logical. Other plans which were proposed or mooted during the conference spoke of 400,000 Jews who would leave within three or five years, but all the plans took as their point of departure that about 200,000 would remain in the Reich. These same figures, including the 200,000 who were to remain, appear in the Schacht plan which was later proposed by the Nazi government and rejected by public opinion in the free world. The numbers also recur in the Wohlthat-Rublee plan which was accepted by the Intergovernmental Committee: 400,000 to leave, and 200,000 to live out their lives in Nazi Germany.

In retrospect, with our knowledge of the gas chambers, the forgoing of the 200,000 old people appears to be a culpable omission

caused by an absence of foresight. Yet in the situation then prevailing this posture seemed perfectly consistent with the interests of those who would remain, and an important concession *by the Germans*, for reasons we will now explain.

The Evian Conference was not confronted with the problem of free departure from Germany. Not only were the gates open, but the Nazis did what they could to expedite the Jews' exit: the expulsion of the Jews from Germany was a major plank in the Nazi platform. But it must be borne in mind that this expulsion was to be implemented by a country situated in the center of Europe. To round up the Jews and throw them across the border was out of the question. Other measures were therefore adopted which also served important Nazi objectives in themselves: the Jews were placed outside ordinary law, they were cut off viciously from cultural life and socially ostracized, their day-to-day life was rendered intolerable and their sensitivities [sensitivities] were mercilessly abused. These restrictions fulfilled an ideological precept of the Nazis' racial doctrine while generating a powerful impulse for emigration. That the Jews were dispossessed and deprived of sources of livelihood were major factors in the thrust for emigration. These measures, which were imposed in stages, had at least three underlying aims: the starving of the Jews could serve as an effective spur to their emigration; the expropriation of their property provided material backing for Hitler's rearmament plans; and the absorption difficulties in the countries admitting the impoverished Jews would heighten antisemitic feeling.

⁶ Ruppin, p. 299, entry for April 11, 1938. The calculations were made for a plan Ruppin submitted to the adviser to the British embassy in Berlin, after the two agreed that the British government would propose it to the rulers of the Reich when suitable political conditions developed.

Not all of the relevant decrees had been promulgated when the Evian Conference convened. The latter part of 1938 and the following year would see additional oppressive measures that would make the life of the Jews in Germany a veritable hell and motivate them to get out of the country without delay. Prior to these developments, in the first five years of Nazi rule, the German Jews evinced surprising resistance to the authorities' expulsion efforts. The emigration of 37,000 Jews in 1933 was followed by a decline to 20,000-25,000 in each of the next four years- by the end of 1937 the total number of emigrants stood at 130,000, or less than 25 percent of the Jewish population.⁷ The vast majority of the German Jews assiduously exhausted every possible outlet for continuing to live in the country, adapting themselves to the inhuman conditions created for them by the Nazis.

The Jews were guided by emotional and practical reasons alike. Many refused to leave a country which they regarded as their homeland and to which they were bound by powerful ties. Ironically, one reason for

the slow pace of their departure was the superb organization of Germany's Jewish communities, which provided for the Jewish community's wants faithfully and efficiently. There was also the fear of the unknown in a new country. There were few countries available for immigration, their absorption infrastructure was primitive, and transportation was scarce in any case. Some hoped that the current difficulties would prove to be temporary and believed that the best course was simply to ride out the storm. There was near universal certainty that the cruel laws promulgated so far had exhausted the whole dosage of evil intended by the Germans-- the outer limits had been reached, things could not get worse. ⁸

In the meantime the Nazis began to show signs of impatience. The slow pace of the Jews' departure was an intolerable delay in the execution of their anti-Jewish policy. In June 1938 the authorities rounded up 1,500 Jews whose names were on record as having committed offenses of some kind, including traffic violations. They were locked up in concentration camps and released only after undertaking to emigrate immediately.⁹ Two months earlier, in panic-stricken Vienna, Eichmann had set up the "Central Office for Jewish Emigration" which soon became a model of efficiency in the rapid expulsion of tens of thousands of Jews who had been stripped of all their belongings. In late October of that year 12,000 Jews would be brutally deported to the town of Zborszyn in Poland. Two weeks later, on November 10, the massive pogrom was perpetrated which set in motion a terrified mass flight of Jews.

A major aim of the Evian Conference was to place the Jews' departure from Germany on a business-like footing. The conference resolutions, denuded of their diplomatic niceties and translated into ordinary language, conveyed a clear and direct message to the German authorities: If you have decided to force the Jews out, we, having no alternative, are willing to pay the costs. We are ready to help you implement your plan, on condition that needless suffering is avoided beyond the suffering inherent in the emigration itself. We will guarantee the emigrants places of refuge, which will encourage them to leave Germany as expeditiously as possible. But you must cooperate with us by ensuring that the emigration process is an orderly one, with a reasonable timetable and on an acceptable scale, and you must not embitter the Jews' lives excessively while they are waiting to leave. You must also allow the emigrants to leave with their possessions in order to facilitate their absorption in their new homes.

It should be said at once that as regards the last condition few illusions were brooked. It was agreed at Evian that part of the German

Jews' property would go toward underwriting the emigration and absorption processes. But even though the confiscation measures had not yet run their course, no inordinate expectations were entertained about how much of the Jewish property the Germans would be willing to release. On June 3 one of the conference participants wrote that "in effect, emigration together with property is already now out of the question."¹⁰ A few days after the conference he wrote: "Even if the Germans agree to forgo 25 percent of [the Jews'] property in return for legal approval in the eyes of the

⁷ Shaul Esh, "Between Discrimination and Extermination," p. 75; Adler-Rudell, p. 271.

⁸ Esh, p. 76.

⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰ Adler-Rudell/Correspondence, p. 178.

world to plunder the remaining 75 percent, the foreign-currency situation is such that Germany will not be able to do so immediately. "11

The upshot was that the conference was forced to work in two directions. On the one hand it had to ensure sufficient places for absorption at the appropriate times. But at the same time it was necessary to curb the sadistic impulses of the German rulers and obtain their assent for an orderly, agreed departure process including the release of as much as possible of the emigrants' property and abandonment of the scheme to flood the countries of destination with destitute Jews. It turned out that the most realistic element in the anticipated dialogue with the Germans—a condition to which they agreed without any haggling at the very outset of the negotiations—was that 200,000 elderly Jews whose age precluded their gainful absorption elsewhere, would remain.

The conference participants, whose primary concern was to evaluate its results in securing places of refuge for the emigrants, were faced with the need to find 400,000 such places within a period of three to five years—let us say, within four years on the average. The number was daunting, but the prospects for implementing the project were deemed realistic. Those at Evian were conscious of the fact that the conference was largely a preparatory stage leading to the substantive work which would be done by the permanent Intergovernmental Committee. Intensive behind-the-scenes lobbying was known to be in progress, backed by American diplomatic pressure. But even in this preliminary stage, behind the somewhat forbidding exterior of mostly non-committal speeches, as described in the previous chapter, promising initial results were achieved.

First, the United States pledged to admit annually the full joint quota of immigrants from Germany and Austria, a total of 27,370 persons, or about 109,000 in four years. Reinforcing this pledge was the fact, undoubtedly known at Evian, that the American consuls in Germany were issuing entry permits to German Jews at twice the rate of the previous year and four times that of 1936.

The Brazilian delegate at Evian, Helio Lobo, indicated in his speech that his country could accept over 40,000 emigrants a year. Although he gave no explicit assurance, there was no reason to think that he had voiced this figure solely in order to impress his audience—Brazil it seemed, genuinely intended to admit refugees on a scale at least approaching this number, if not the entire figure. As we saw, this was also the understanding of Ruppin, who met with Lobo and reported to his colleagues on the Jewish Agency Executive on prospects for substantial Jewish immigration to Brazil.

The Dominican Republic indicated that it would agree to accept 100,000 refugees, and submitted an official proposal to this effect two weeks later in London. But it may be assumed, especially after the highly sympathetic speech of the country's delegate to Evian, that the conference was aware of this general intention, if not of the details.

These three pledges, if carried out in full, would have provided for three-quarters of Germany's refugees within four years. To this we can add the more reserved pledges of Uruguay and Argentina, the probability that Palestine, all the difficulties notwithstanding, could absorb a few tens of thousands, and the promises of the Western European countries to go on giving the refugees temporary refuge until they could find permanent homes. Taking into account that all this was meant to be only the commencement of the operation, we must conclude that the satisfaction and optimism expressed by everyone interested in the success of the conference were grounded in reality—the reality of July 1938.

The turbulent events of the months and years that followed showed that some of the assessments had been mistaken, and that some of the expectations were not realized. But a close analysis will demonstrate that the success of Evian was not of an ephemeral character. The outcome of the effort made by 32 countries that convened in order to help the Jews held out rescue possibilities on a large scale, and perhaps also the possibility of averting disaster on a vast scale. But all this was dependent on the non-interference of organizations whose affiliation could have been expected to make them the most interested of all in rescue.

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11 Ibid., p. 193.

At this juncture we are compelled to turn to a subject of which our treatment is liable to conflict with conventionally accepted views-in addition to the many other controversial stands contained in this study No examination of the Evian episode and its aftermath-commissions and omissions alike-can be complete without an assessment of the part played by *President Roosevelt*. We have already seen that Roosevelt's initiative

in convening the conference and the probability that he would take an active role in fulfilling its objectives, were a major spur for the hopes and expectations entertained for the meeting's success. The editor of *Hadoar* reflected a widespread sentiment when he expressed the hope that Roosevelt would "impose the force of deeds on the entire proceedings." Yet we also saw the excuse given thirty years later by one person who at the time was "definitely satisfied" with the results of the conference for changing his mind: Roosevelt, he averred, had not honored his pledges. Now, as then, Roosevelt's actions are the linchpin without which those fateful days can be neither understood nor evaluated.

It is no easy task to enumerate the deeds that Roosevelt did and omitted to do. Much valuable material on this topic has been unearthed in the decades since Roosevelt's death by both trained scholars and gifted amateurs. Paradoxically, however, the wealth of material does not facilitate unerring judgment. Some of the studies in question were conducted with the preconceived goal of besmirching their subject. This is accomplished through a hostile interpretation of the facts and the "discovery" of new facts and documents which, these researchers maintain, make a mockery of the positive assessments which were the rule throughout his lengthy public career. The prying and the excoriation take place at various levels, from academic studies conducted under the aegis of distinguished institutions, to frivolous and flippant newspaper articles. As a result, Roosevelt is often perceived as a hypocritical, vacillating figure about whom there is nothing good to be said.

The present writer does not claim sufficient expertise concerning Roosevelt's life and deeds to pass authoritative judgment on most of these matters. We do not know what the truth is of the allegation that he was a secret Communist or that by his guile and cunning he induced the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor. Nor does the present work obligate us to take an interest in these and similar issues. But this is not the case when it comes to Roosevelt's involvement in and attitude toward the plight of the Jews. This is a subject which we studied thoroughly-and on which we reached conclusions vastly different from Roosevelt's detractors. Where the Jews are concerned, Roosevelt comes across as a personality imbued with a love of humanity and with a deep empathy for the suffering and the persecuted. These traits, we believe, exercised a crucial role in his actions on behalf of the Jews, beginning with his initiative for the Evian Conference in 1938, and ending with the creation of the War Refugee Board six years later. This opinion is based on the factual material we perused and on judgments which we believe are objective. Confirmation

of these findings exists in various testimonies we recorded or that are found in the literature, and in conclusions reached by several of those who have studied the actions of the U.S. Administration during the Holocaust years.

To help substantiate our opinion, it is crucial that we adduce cogent motives that spurred Roosevelt to organize the Evian Conference Like the entire enlightened world, which at the time welcomed the surprise initiative ardently, we believe, even now, that the primary motive for this great act was the noble humanitarian feeling of the "righteous President " as the Zionist weekly *Haolam* described Roosevelt. This humane stimulus seems to us the only satisfactory explanation for the President's decision to cast on himself and on his country the burden and responsibility for a project unprecedented in human history. Not even the "revelation of the truth" in Arthur Morse's book *While Six Million Died* can convince us otherwise.

In his well-known study Morse writes that "The reaction to Roosevelt's proposal might have been less exuberant had the public known the motives behind it." He then proceeds to reveal those motives as he dredged them up from the recesses of the government archives. Morse rests his case on a memorandum written by an official in the State Department's Division of European Affairs. The paper, undated and apparently also without any indication of its author's identity, was discovered attached to another memorandum prepared by the Division of the American

Republics, from November 1938. Morse describes the content of the memorandum as follows:

The Nazi absorption of Austria had brought about increased public demand for State Department action in behalf of refugees. "Dorothy Thompson and certain Congressmen with metropolitan constituencies were the principal sources of this pressure," says the memorandum.

To counteract this outcry, Secretary Hull, Undersecretary Welles and two lesser colleagues had decided that it was preferable for the department to "get out in front and attempt to guide the pressure, primarily with a view toward forestalling attempts to have the immigration laws liberalized."

It was Sumner Welles who had come up with the idea of an international conference and the President had approved. On this noble note the Evian Conference was born. It would be

months in planning, would silence the critics of apathy, and if all worked well, would divert refugees from the United States to the other co-operating nations.¹²

Thus does Arthur Morse conclude his story about the memorandum. It is unclear where his description of its content ends and his own interpretation [interpretation] begins. Implicit in his words is, at the least, assent and identification with the author of the memorandum. The passage's explicit intention is to demonstrate conclusively how far wrong the enthusiastic public of the day was in attributing to Roosevelt lofty motives—which he did not have.

Another researcher, Dr. David S. Wyman, who also deals with the memorandum, is less peremptory in his conclusion and less eager to identify with the author. Summing up his discussion of the memorandum, he writes: "A humanitarian motivation on Roosevelt's part may by no means be ruled out."¹³

One can accept this conclusion, even if it is couched in the language of understatement. The memorandum in question—if there really was a memorandum, and not just an exercise in self-expression by some junior official—tells us nothing about Roosevelt. It is an attempt to cast Roosevelt in the guise of a clown according to the taste and understanding of State Department officials. It is a fatuous, not to say wicked interpretation of the facts, and moreover flagrantly contradicts the contemporary reality.

It was ludicrous to present Roosevelt as a tool in the hands of State Department personnel in the perpetration of a plot they had cooked up for their own convenience. It is absurd to think that the organization of an international conference was less of a bother and less taxing than "pressure" exerted by Dorothy Thompson and a couple of Congressmen with large Jewish constituencies. As for the intention to channel the flow of refugees away from the United States and into other countries, a scheme imputed to Roosevelt by the memorandum (or by Morse's reading of it), this brings to mind a comment by another "righteous man," Ernest Bevin, who once said that Truman was demanding 100,000 entry permits to Palestine so that the Jews would not come to America.

A survey of the pressures wielded by the U.S. Administration for the liberalization of the immigration laws will prove instructive. Various circles in America, Jews and non-Jews alike, were at the time clamoring for the freer entry of refugees into the country. They set their sights on the annulment of bureaucratic regulations and other obstacles in the refugees'

path. They urged the complete fulfillment of the existing quotas, but did not even consider the possibility of demanding their enlargement. Maverick efforts by individuals were doomed to quick failure and retreat. The memorandum we have been considering alludes to one such attempt.

Following the annexation of Austria, two New York Congressmen Emanuel Celler and Samuel Dickstein, proposed legislation that would facilitate somewhat the entry of refugees. The House Immigration Committee scheduled a preliminary public hearing for April 20, 1938. It never took place. It was scuttled in the wake of a meeting of Jewish Catholic and Protestant welfare organizations which decided unanimously that the hearing was liable to prove harmful to the refugees' prospects. A letter to the

¹² Morse, pp. 203-204.

¹³ David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1968, p. 44 (hereafter: Wyman).

Congressmen drawn up by the representatives of 14 such organizations, requesting that they abandon their legislative initiative had the desired effect.¹⁴

In January 1939 Celler came up with an idea for similar legislation. However, he quickly dropped the plan after being warned by some of his Congressional colleagues that if his mooted legislation ever reached the floor of the House, they would counter it with a bill calling for the halving of the quotas, or even a total closing of the gates. Given the mood in the Congress, Celler's opponents might well succeed.¹⁵

The unresponsiveness of the House of Representatives reflected the frame of mind of the voters. In June 1938 the magazine *Fortune* conducted a poll on public attitudes toward the admission of refugees. Two-thirds (67.4 percent) of those who replied said that "with conditions as they are, we should try to keep them out"; 18.2 percent expressed the President's view that the entire refugee quota should be exhausted, but should not be enlarged; 4.9 percent thought that the quota should be enlarged; and 9.5 percent said they had no opinion on the subject.¹⁶ Similar results were obtained in polls conducted in March and November of that year,¹⁷ and in 1939.¹⁸ The American people wanted no part of the refugees.

There were several reasons for this, and one of them was undoubtedly antisemitism. But this was not the only reason, and was probably not even one of the main reasons. And not because antisemitism was then lacking in the United States. To the contrary: the evidence suggests that in the period from 1938-1945 anti-Jewish sentiments in the U.S. reached new heights.¹⁹ Vigorous antisemitic incitement was conducted by internal elements that drew encouragement and inspiration from Germany. Father Charles Coughlin's antisemitic paper *Social Justice* had a circulation in the hundreds of thousands and in summer 1938

published extracts from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Coughlin also broadcast his virulent ideas in a weekly radio show.²⁰ The German-American Bund fouled the atmosphere with its propaganda and its storm-trooper tactics. All these phenomena had a cumulative effect, and the anti-Jewish feelings undoubtedly helped reinforce America's wish to keep the refugees—most of them Jewish—out.

Yet there is also considerable justification for discerning a reverse influence at work, in which deeply rooted, more durable traits in the American society abetted external elements in their antisemitic instigation. Attesting to this is the fact that at the conclusion of the war, when the events of the Holocaust were fully revealed, the tide of antisemitism gave way to a wave of sympathy for the Jews, while the general rejection of refugees went on unabated.

The conjunction of two factors led to the imposition of immigration quotas by the United States in the 1920s. There was the chauvinistic-racist patriotism which was predominant among America's WASPs of the time, who feared that the entry of foreigners would prove "detrimental" to the country's ethnic composition. And there was the opposition of American workers to the entry of a cheap-labor force that would compete with them and finally lead to the worsening of their working conditions. These two factors led in 1921 to the imposition of an entry quota which limited annual immigration from Europe to 3 percent of the population of the United States. Moreover, the general quota was divided among the countries of Europe in accordance with the numerical proportion of the ethnic groups in the U.S. as it had stood in 1910. As unemployment increased in America, the quota was perceived as overly generous. On July 1, 1929, the general quota was cut in half, to stand at 154,000 persons annually. This time the division was made according to the ethnic makeup of the American population of 1920. As a result, England and Ireland received a quota of 84,000 persons, over half the total. The quota for Germany was 26,000, for Poland 6,000, and for Italy 5,500; France, the USSR, Holland and Czechoslovakia were assigned quotas of 3,000 persons each; Norway was entitled to 2,000 entry permits, Denmark and Austria 1,000 each, Romania and Lithuania 400 each, and so forth.

Just after the law took effect America was hit by the economic depression which caused unemployment to assume the scale of a national disaster. Every destitute

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁸ Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970, p. 14 (hereafter: Feingold).

¹⁹ Wyman, p. 14.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

immigrant became an onerous public burden. To reduce immigration to a minimum, President Hoover ordered the American consuls abroad to place the broadest possible interpretation on a

clause in the law denying a visa to anyone liable to become a "public charge." This ploy all but put an end to immigration to the U.S. In 1932, the year Roosevelt was sworn in as President, only 35,576 immigrants entered the United States.²¹

Roosevelt's economic and social policy extricated the U.S. from the economic crisis. Life returned to normal. But the scars of the hard years did not heal so quickly. In particular, unemployment remained high. Unfortunately, 1937 saw the onset of a new economic recession which, even if it did not become a full-fledged depression, persisted stubbornly until America entered the war.²²

Under these conditions no special propaganda was required for the majority of Americans on a large scale to oppose the entry of foreigners. Propaganda, nonetheless, was not lacking. A large and vociferous group of ultra-nationalist "patriotic" organizations raised high the banner of immigration restrictions, in effect urging a total halt to immigration. Countering the call for a humanitarian attitude issued by the refugee aid organizations, was the harsh dictum that "charity begins at home"—let the unemployed first be tended to before compassion was shown for refugees. The National Commander of the American Legion, Stephen S. Chadwick, declared that "In 1939, with 13 million unemployed, the country's responsibility to its citizens requires that the gates [of immigration] be shut." Similar arguments were voiced in the press, in public assemblies, and in both Houses of Congress. In the Senate, indeed, a proposal was made to terminate immigration altogether.²³

It is no wonder, then, that those who spoke for the refugees proceeded cautiously and with pronounced moderation. Manifestly, if the immigration regulations were to be eased, the road lay through the White House and not through the Congress. Fearful of sparking a confrontation with dissenting public opinion and with a hostile Congress, the advocates of immigration seized every opportunity to explain that it was not their intention, heaven forbid, to flood the country with immigrants; and they constantly declared that they did not seek an enlargement of the entry quotas. Such a demand would have been "political dynamite," as Dorothy Thompson said.²⁴ The joint appeal to Congressmen Celler and Dickstein by 14 welfare organizations, already mentioned, was typical of the behavior of such groups.²⁵

For the sake of clarity, an unambiguous answer must be given to the central question raised by these events: If Roosevelt had so wished, could he have enlarged the entry quotas for the Jews of Germany and Austria? The unarguable answer is that he could not. That course of action

was absolutely out of the question. Certainly as long as he was determined to go on serving as a legally elected President of the United States and not dissolve the Congress and annul the constitution...

The interpretation of the State Department memorandum cited above notwithstanding, the international-conference initiative neither assured nor brought about a lessening of the pressure on Roosevelt. To the contrary. As could have been anticipated, it caused him both immediate and long-term difficulties. The convening of the conference and the enlargement of the immigration quotas to their full number, two actions which the public perceived as interlocked, exposed the President to fierce domestic criticism.²⁶ The internal situation was compounded at the international level, as the Evian Conference was the first time since its withdrawal from the League of Nations that the United States had entered into undertakings on a matter not directly affecting its interests.

As an experienced politician, Roosevelt knew which way the wind was blowing, and he moved energetically to enlist the greatest possible public backing. One of his major successes in this regard was to secure from the president of the American

²¹ Morse, p. 136.

²² Wyman, p. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵ Other cases: a representative of the Christian humanitarian organization American Friends Service Committee, which was very active on behalf of the refugees, declared after the November pogrom that they did not intend to propose raising the quota. *Ibid.* At the same time Sumner Welles told the British ambassador to the U.S. that "it was my very strong impression that responsible leaders among American Jews would be the first to urge that no change in the present quota for German Jews [should] be made." Joseph Tenenbaum, "The Crucial Year 1938," *Yad Vashem Studies* II, pp. 68-69 (Hebrew).

²⁶ Wyman, p. 45.

Federation of Labor, William Green, a declaration of support for the entry of the refugees, though with one clear, explicit and emphatic proviso: that their number not exceed the quota determined by law.²⁷

* * * * *

Dr. Nahum Goldmann wrote of Roosevelt: "President Roosevelt, whose attitude to Zionism has been the subject of a great deal of controversy in recent years, actually was not pro-Zionist. Such was my impression. His approach to Jewish problems was guided first and foremost and above all else by humanitarian motives."²⁸

What is most striking about this assessment is the contrast between the hesitant tenor of its opening and the definitive tone of its ending. The conclusion that Roosevelt was not pro-Zionist is reached on the basis of no more than an "impression," and this on the part of a person who moved in circles which were in personal contact with Roosevelt for years. These persons often expressed publicly their admiration for and gratitude to Roosevelt for his sympathetic attitude toward Zionism-until he made his famous remark in the wake of his meeting with Ibn Saud,** followed by

 ** In their meeting Roosevelt asked Ibn Saud to support Zionism. The king refused in no uncertain terms, and revealed to the President the depth of his opposition to Jewish settlement in Palestine. In his report on the meeting to the Congress, Roosevelt said that he had learned more about Palestine from Ibn Saud in five minutes than he had in his whole life until then. This was followed by Roosevelt's public declaration to Stephen Wise that he would uphold his pledge to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, Ch. 36; Zelig Adler, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and Zionism," *Judaism*, 83, 1972, p.268.

his sudden death a few weeks later. Then it "emerged" that things had not really been what they seemed.

Roosevelt's attitude toward Zionism, as an important element in the vilification campaign against him, continues to preoccupy historians. Archives are scoured for every last scrap of paper. Every letter ever sent or not sent is examined, so is every draft of every conversation or speech; every passing thought during consultations with aides or friends is searchingly analyzed; every comment and every statement is the subject of minute exegesis. The upshot is that Roosevelt's hypocrisy is so convincingly proved that one is at a loss to decide which is more astonishing: his capacity (and his motives) for lying to his Jewish friends during his ozen [dozen] years as President; or the willingness of the Jewish public to be deceived but delighted for such a lengthy period.

It is difficult to determine to what extent Goldmann's testimony based on his "impression" constitutes still more documentary evidence about Roosevelt, or is merely a verbal concession to a fashionable mode of thought. As far as we are concerned-and in this work we do not intend to be diverted by irrelevant material-it is sufficient that in the same breath with this testimony, Goldmann expresses himself unequivocally concerning Roosevelt's humanitarian attitude toward the Jewish people. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that this positive testimony was influenced to a certain degree by the witness's personal gratitude. If we are not mistaken, Goldmann was one of the thousands of public activists, intellectuals and scientists to whom the President granted emergency visas above and beyond the official quotas. Nevertheless, in this case the evidence of a beneficiary is valid.

Another witness, also owing a debt of gratitude. Prof. Arye Tartakower, describes what Roosevelt did for him and his colleagues:

Roosevelt ordered that visas be issued to several thousand Jews in excess of the quota. This applied principally to important Jews... At that time Roosevelt was interested in rescuing these people even if this meant bringing them to America, even in the face of opposition from senior officials in the government. There were

²⁷ Morse, p. 203.

²⁸ Goldmann, *Memoirs*, p. 188.

difficulties. The bureaucracy supported the law. Public opinion was also afraid... Roosevelt

at that time went against public opinion. He acted as a great humanitarian.²⁹

If it was our thesis that Roosevelt's attitude toward the plight of the Jews was dictated exclusively by humanitarian considerations, we should have to delineate the outer limits of the help that could be expected from him. We noted above (Ch. 4) that the Zionist movement's approach toward the Jews was that of a friend and not of a father. The same can be said of Roosevelt. But the two cases are very different. Zionism's "friends only" attitude toward the Jewish people had catastrophic results, because there was no other "father" but Zionism to care heart and soul for the people. Whereas in Roosevelt's case faithful friendship was as far as he could go. In our terms, Roosevelt was a "father" to the American people and to his country. It was his duty to be vigilant to ensure that no harm befell them. Where American was concerned, he had to be fully informed at all times about current events and future prospects. Under no circumstances could he tell himself or others that he had not known or could not have known about something that was liable to harm his country's peace and wellbeing. For he was, as we said, a "father."

But when it came to the Jews, or for that matter any other people besides the Americans, it was a different story. If he were benevolent and humanitarian, he would be responsive to their tribulations and their cries for help. He could allow himself to be loyal and generous in his assistance. What could not be expected of him was to be constantly on the alert in examining the situation and in searching feverishly for ways to help. Here he would rely on the Jewish leaders whose duty this was. They were naturally vigilant and also the most authoritative source of information on the subject. Their appeals would generally suggest the maximum extent of the help required; their testimony would be considered to reflect accurately the situation—albeit, with a natural and understandable tendency to overstate the case.

This, as we said, held true on the assumption that Roosevelt was guided strictly by humanitarian motives. But that, of course, is an unrealistic proposition. Roosevelt may have been a faithful friend, but he was also a politician responsible for governing a vast land democratically. During the periods of the Depression and the Holocaust he ran for reelection twice, while his supporters in the House and among the state governors contested no fewer than four elections. His constant dependence on voters and elected representatives alike was bound to guide his attitude toward public opinion and the mood in Congress. This situation, together

with the fateful circumstances that dominated the people and the country to which he was the "father," caused him on several occasions to submit to pressures and to backtrack from plans that were put forward by his confidants, in the government and in the public alike. We will briefly survey three such cases.

In August 1939 the Department of the Interior proposed a plan for the development of Alaska, at that time an American "territory" and not a full-fledged state. Following consultations with Roosevelt, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes suggested, contrary to the opinion of the State Department, that within the framework of the plan 10,000 refugees a year be allowed into Alaska; only after five years would they be permitted to enter the United States, and even then only on account of the quota for their countries of origin. The plan was ardently welcomed by part of the American press, but was deplored by the inhabitants of Alaska and in both the House and the Senate. Faced with opposition of this intensity, Roosevelt deemed it unwise to lay his prestige on the line openly. Ultimately the plan was buried in a Senate subcommittee.

A second case concerned possible entry to the Virgin Islands, another American "territory." In an emergency, the governor there was authorized to permit visits without visas, by administrative fiat. In 1940 the governor was on the brink of declaring free entry for refugees who had undergone an appropriate selection process. But unremitting State Department pressure forced Roosevelt to scrap the idea.³⁰

The third instance, well-known and extremely illuminating, concerns the Wagner-Rogers Bill. Senator Robert Wagner and Congresswoman Edith Rogers introduced legislation in both Houses simultaneously according to which a total of 20,000 children from Germany would be permitted to enter the country during 1939 and 1940. The bill had the support of influential Jewish, Catholic and Protestant

²⁹ Recorded interview of the author with Prof. Arye Tartakower, August 17, 1972.

³⁰ Wyman, pp. 100-112.

humanitarian organizations. Thousands of Americans expressed their willingness to adopt the children. A leading advocate of the plan was the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, who sought to exploit her closeness to the President to garner his support. But in vain. Her exchange of cables with the President while he was on a Caribbean cruise is well-known. To her request for his go-ahead to tell Secretary of State Sumner Welles that "we [i.e., she and the President] approve passage" of the bill, he replied: "It is all right for you to support the Child Refugee Bill, but it is best for me to say nothing till I get back."³¹ Concurrently, Roosevelt's secretary was explaining in a letter to the popular actor Eddie Cantor why it was advisable to tone down the vigorous campaigning for the bill: "There is a

very real feeling that if this question is too prominently raised in the Congress during the present session we might get more restrictive rather than more liberal immigration laws and practices."³² Sixty anti-alien bills had been submitted to the Congress.³³ Roosevelt had already been forced to veto one bill passed into law which called for the deportation of several categories of foreigners.³⁴ In these circumstances even the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees thought it best for Roosevelt to refrain from giving his overt support to the bill.³⁵

The protracted deliberations concerning the bill ended with a headlong retreat by its sponsors. The subcommittee that considered it recommended its adoption with one "amendment"-that the 20,000 visas for the children be deducted from the overall quota. Had the bill been passed into law in this form, it would have placed a new restriction on the quota instead of enlarging it. At all events, Senator Wagner quickly announced that he was abandoning the bill and the entire matter was soon forgotten.

Referring to backtracking like this, one of the researchers of the period maintains that the results could have been different had Roosevelt behaved "more like a lion and less like a fox."³⁶ Where the cases of Alaska and the Virgin Islands are concerned, this conclusion may not be far off the mark-but the metaphor requires some elucidation. Roosevelt's "fox-like" behavior stemmed not only from his propensity to subterfuge but was also dictated by a harsh and cruel reality. From that isolationist 70th Congress of 1939-1940 he had to extract an allocation of half a billion dollars for the expansion of the air force and the construction of naval bases to ready the United States for the impending war.³⁷ This in itself would be sufficient to explain Roosevelt's reluctance to generate faction with the House and Senate. As for the President's "lion-like" qualities, these came to the fore during this hostile Congress in two vigorous operations when Roosevelt was convinced of their necessity and urgency.

Testimony concerning one such action has already been quoted above from the thankful refugee Prof. Arye Tartakower. The event occurred in summer 1940 following the German occupation of France. Fearful for the fate of statesmen, artists and scientists who were trapped in unoccupied Europe, Roosevelt ordered that they be admitted to the U.S. outside the immigration quotas. As a result, some 2,000 political refugees and scientists entered the U.S. by the end of 1941.³⁸

Two years earlier, after the great pogrom in Germany in November 1938, Roosevelt had acted on an even broader scale. In view of the

situation in Germany, he declared then, he was extending by six months the visas of 15,000 German and Austrian Jews who were in the United States as visitors, since it would be "cruel and inhuman" to send them back to a place where they faced certain arrest or incarceration in concentration camps.³⁹ In fact, these persons remained in America "temporarily" throughout the entire war, eventually finding ways to become permanent residents.

On the face of it, the assessment that Roosevelt was "treading the outer limits of Congressional toleration"⁴⁰ and of American public opinion would seem to be well-founded. But this is an objective-friendly appraisal, not that of a "father." Had Roosevelt been more than a friend, he would have restructured his scale of priorities

³¹ Ibid., p.97.

³² Morse, p. 255.

³³ Ibid.,p. 256.

³⁴ Feingold, p. 137.

³⁵ Wyman,p. 97.

³⁶ Feingold, Foreword.

³⁷ Morse, p. 255.

³⁸ Wyman, p. 149.

³⁹ *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 40, p. 379.

⁴⁰ Wyman, p.211.

and expanded the parameters of the risk he was willing to take in the Congress and among the public. Perhaps he might have taken the risk of issuing the administrative fiat regarding the Virgin Islands, and he might even have fought Congress over the Alaska plan. However, since by definition Roosevelt was not a "father," this fateful task fell on the shoulders of the Jewish leaders who were in contact with him. By their words and their deeds, they should have ensured that the President was aware of and felt palpably how concrete and grave the dangers were; how urgent was the help required; that this must shunt aside a whole array of considerations; and, not least, how ready they, the Jewish leaders, were to make whatever sacrifice was needed to help their brethren in distress. We will have occasion to see how remote was the Jewish leaders' behavior from this description.

We will also return often to President Roosevelt. In the meantime, we will conclude this survey with a statistical table showing the fulfillment of the immigration quotas (in percentages) from Germany and Austria during Roosevelt's tenure as President:41

1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
13.3	20.5	24.3	42.1	65.3	119.7	95.3	47.7	17.8	4.7

Two comments are called for concerning this table. Firstly, the surplus of 19.7 percent (5,389 persons) in 1939 is accounted for by the fact that these persons received visas at the end of 1938 but used them in 1939. Thus the 1939 figure is lowered to 100 percent while that for 1938 rises to 85 percent.⁴² Secondly, the figure for 1940 does not reflect those emigrants who arrived directly from Germany or Austria. The great majority of the incoming emigrants at that time consisted of German

refugees who were in England or Cuba.⁴³ Since these countries were not subsequently conquered by the Nazis, the fact that the refugees left them did not increase the number of those saved from destruction.

The table shows that with respect to what was agreed at Evian concerning German Jewry, the U.S. lived up to its commitments for three years, when it was still possible to leave Germany or Europe freely or relatively freely. At the same time, it constitutes pointed evidence of the possibilities that existed for rescuing tens of thousands of Jews after 1940 if only in addition to a friend in the White House the Jewish people had had a "father" in America.

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The above lines had already been written and edited when the possibility arose of our perusing the minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive meetings during the years of World War II. It was in the minutes to one such meeting that we found David Ben-Gurion's assessment of Roosevelt in 1941:

To avert any chance of error, I must say a few words about Roosevelt, I have no doubt that he is one of the righteous of the world, a person free of any taint of antisemitism, and, moreover, he is sympathetic toward the Jews. He is also ready to take certain steps for the good of the Jews. Regarding the appointment of Frankfurter [to the Supreme Court] was a demonstrative act on his part, even though there was pressure by the Jews against the appointment of a Jew. He has a liking for Zionism but he does not believe in Eretz-Israel. He regards the Jewish question as a terrible and gigantic question of millions of Jews; and in his opinion some tens of thousands of Jews can be settled in Palestine, no more than that. Therefore another country must be found. One can fight opponents, but he is a friend, albeit a friend who does not believe in Zionism. There are some good Zionists among the Jews in his immediate circle--Ben Cohen, Frankfurter and Brandeis. Whether they have any great influence on him I don't know... Yet I doubt whether the two of them [Cohen and Frankfurter] can imbue him with belief in Eretz-Israel, because I do not know how imbued with this belief they themselves are. Nor should we overlook the fact that Roosevelt also has non-Zionist friends and perhaps even opponents [of Zionism], some of them quite influential."

41 Ibid.,p.221.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p. 170.

It emerges that as early as 1941 there was one person, at least, whom Roosevelt "did not mislead" about his supposed Zionist proclivities. Yet a clear knowledge about the stand of the U.S. President did not prevent this person from regarding him as friend, a righteous person, sympathetic to Jews. We second every word of this clear-headed and accurate assessment by the chairman of the Jewish Agency.

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The Zionists were not the only ones who maintained--and believed--that the Evian Conference had failed. They were affirmed, as it were, in their view by a group at the opposite pole. The Nazis were nervous about and somewhat embarrassed by Evian. They condemned the conference in advance, but remained fearful of its possible results. Their ambivalent stance was reflected in their decision to permit a delegation of the "Representation of German Jewry" to attend the conference and submit a substantive memorandum couched in a spirit of cooperation. However, the Nazis soon found that they had nothing to fear. They saw only the conference's deceptive external manifestations, and these seemed to confirm their belief that the Jews were unwanted everywhere; this point they pressed home in a vociferous propaganda campaign. That the conference ended without visible results only heightened their delighted arrogance. Goebbels' paper *Der Angriff* described the conference as mere verbiage aimed solely at ensuring Roosevelt the Jewish vote in the next election. The paper harped on the point that not a single conference participant wanted to admit Jews to their country--each was waiting for someone else to take the first step.⁴⁴ This line was parroted by the entire regimented German press and by every Nazi representative who could corral someone ready to listen. Thus, for example, Foreign Minister Ribbentrop told his French counterpart, Bonnet, according to the former's report to Hitler: "I replied to M. Bonnet that we all wanted to be rid of our Jews. The only trouble is that there is no country willing to receive them."⁴⁵

According to all the signs, the Nazis succeeded in convincing themselves that their appraisal was correct. Their perception of the conference's outcome became an additional endorsement of their doctrine and spurred them to find their own "solutions." Their conclusion from the conference's (supposed) failure was that nothing would be gained by negotiating with the body that had been established. Thus, when the newly chosen director of the Intergovernmental Committee sought to visit Berlin for this purpose, the Nazis refused to receive him.

Assessing that the fate of the Jews was of no concern to anyone, the Nazis concluded that Jewish blood was expendable and that the most brutal methods could be employed to expel them from Germany without fear of adverse international reaction. (From this point of view Holocaust scholars are correct in maintaining that the Nazis' evaluation of Evian was a contributing factor to the decision to step up the persecutions and perpetrate the November pogrom. However, in contrast to the Nazis' themselves, who realized their mistake a few months later, these researchers fail to point out that the results on which the Nazis based themselves were illusionary and their assessment faulty.) Having reached this conclusion, they felt free to carry out a massive and savage expulsion in October followed by the devastating pogrom the next month.

On November 9, 1938, a young Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, the son of a family which had been deponed to Zbonszyn, assassinated an official of the German embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. The report of his death triggered "spontaneous" anti-Jewish riots across Germany--riots which were well-organized and directed from above to the last detail. During the night of November 9-10, 1938, at least 36 Jews were murdered and about the same number injured. One hundred and nineteen synagogues were torched and 76 others totally destroyed. Some 7,500 shops were pillaged and looted. One hundred and seventy-one residential dwellings were burned or destroyed. Twenty thousand Jews were arrested and thrown into concentration camps.⁴⁶ The Nazis dubbed their successful operation *Kristallnacht*, an allusion to the vast amount of broken crystals and glass from shattered chandeliers and shop windows.

⁴⁴ According to *Haolam*, August 4, 1938.

⁴⁵ Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Vol. 4, p. 481.

⁴⁶ IMT, Doc. Ps-18 16.

At Hitler's order the pogrom became the point of departure for an additional stage in the systematic persecution of the Jews. On November 12 a meeting was convened of ministers and senior officials under the chairmanship of Goering and with the participation of Goebbels and Heydrich. Goering briefed those present on a series of new decrees issued by the Fuehrer's chancellery. As further punishment for the murder of vom Rath a collective fine of one billion Reichsmarks would be imposed on the Jews. Moreover, the Jews themselves would see to repairing the damages caused by the pogrom; the insurance payments due them would be confiscated. The plans to transfer Jewish-owned industrial and commercial enterprises to "Aryan" hands would be executed forthwith. Goebbels proposed additional measures: Jews would be forbidden to attend the cinema or the theater, to travel together with Germans in the same train compartments, to walk in the forests, and the like.

In the meantime the free world began to react to the pogrom. It was soon apparent that the barbaric riots were more than public opinion in the democracies was ready to tolerate. In these countries the news of the pogrom hit like an earthquake which sent tremors through Nazi Germany's public relations edifice. The world press was horrified and revolted. Speakers in numerous forums denounced the event fiercely and categorically. The free world was outraged by the atrocity. The British ambassador to Berlin seems to have been on the mark when he said that from the point of view of the Nazis themselves the pogrom had been an act of unbelievable folly, comparable in its impact on world public opinion with the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the execution of the nurse Edith Cavell in World War I.⁴⁷

Public reaction was strongest in England and America. The feelings and conscience of the British public—which just a month earlier had acquiesced in its government's betrayal of Czechoslovakia—were aroused by the anti-Jewish rampage in Germany. "Here in England" an eye-witness wrote in a letter describing the reactions and the mood in the country, "the events aroused tremendous resentment on the part of all decent people. There is great readiness to do something and to help."⁴⁸ The British parliament passed a special resolution deploring the riots. Circles generally supportive of Germany added their voices to the bitter condemnations. The chairman of the Anglo-German Friendship League Lord Mount-Temple, resigned in protest. Lord Londonderry, an ardent exponent of friendship with Germany, openly condemned "Germany's medieval cruelty."⁴⁹ The German ambassador to London reported to Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that the British public's reaction to the pogrom precluded the possibility that Prime Minister Chamberlain would be able to enter into negotiations based on the Munich Agreement and that even the advocates of friendship with Germany were pessimistic on this score.⁵⁰

A similar report was filed by the German ambassador to Washington. In America, too, the anger and outrage were widespread encompassing groups which had previously been indifferent to anti-German propaganda or had even supported an alliance with Germany. What particularly strikes me," the ambassador wrote, "is the fact that with few exceptions, respectable patriotic circles which are thoroughly anti-Communist and, for the greater part, anti-Semitic, also begin to turn away from us... That men like Hoover, Dewey and Hearst are now publicly adopting so violent and bitter an attitude against Germany is a serious matter."⁵¹

In contrast to England, the U.S. administration did not have to be pushed to react by public opinion, but took the lead itself and guided the public's response. American Jewry noted with satisfaction that their President was the only head of state in the world who ignored diplomatic niceties and openly gave expression to the pent-up fury and resentment of the American people at the unbridled Hitlerian vandalism.⁵² Of the pogrom Roosevelt said that he could scarcely believe that such things could occur in twentieth-century civilization.⁵³

To drive home the point, Roosevelt ordered the recall of the American ambassador to Berlin for "consultations"—a form of diplomatic protest second in harshness only to a severing of relations. A few days later Interior Secretary Harold Ickes stated in a public

47 Sir Neville Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p. 172.

48 Adler-Rudell/Correspondence, p. 211.

49 Joseph Tenenbaum, *Race and Reich* (Hebrew edition), p. 497.

50 Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Vol. 4, p. 334.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 639-640.

52 *Jewish Frontier*, December 1938.

53 *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 41, p. 192.

speech that "Hitler is a cruel dictator who robs and tortures thousands of people." The protest lodged by a German representative to the State Department was sharply rejected, "since these words [of Ickes] express the feelings of the overwhelming majority of the American people who have been deeply outraged by the riots in Germany."⁵⁴

Germany's foreign trade was hard hit. A boycott of German goods hitherto applied in several countries largely by Jewish circles and exercising a direct impact—such as it was—only on consumers, overnight became a crucial international factor, and was joined by merchants and importers as well as consumers. Contracts with German firms were cancelled *en bloc* by companies in France, England, the U.S., Canada, Yugoslavia and elsewhere.⁵⁵ Many German firms lost from 20 to 30 percent of their trade. What the Germans found particularly incomprehensible was that pure "Aryan" firms were taking part in the boycott; in Holland, for example, a major corporation cancelled its representation agreements with Krupp and other German industrial giants.⁵⁶

This impressive reaction surely sprang from the groundwork laid at Evian, which brought the distress of German Jewry to every home, every newspaper reader, every listener to the radio. In contrast to the Munich affair, when the ordinary citizen in most countries was insufficiently informed about the geographic aspects of the issue, uncertain as to whether the Czechs were right, and had been misled into thinking that the agreement with Hitler assured peace in Europe, everything about the November pogrom was as clear as a bell. The detailed reports concerning the Evian deliberations, even if they were not unanimous about the conference's effectiveness, left no room for doubt about where the evil lay and who the innocent victim was. Thus, by the time the pogrom was

perpetrated, the public did not need lengthy explanations to grasp the issues.

The global outrage stunned the Nazi leadership. After recovering from their initial surprise they tried to "explain" matters, as they had previously explained the imagined indifference of the world to the plight of the Jews. Hitler himself maintained that the reaction demonstrated the scope and power of "the Jewish world conspiracy."⁵⁷ Conspiracy or not it was essential to see the situation as it was and proceed within the parameters of the existing conditions.

Soon afterward the Nazis "discovered" the Intergovernmental Committee which had been established by the Evian Conference. They now turned to this body, which they had refused to recognize for five months, with an offer of cooperation for the orderly departure of the Jews from Germany—the so-called "Schacht Plan."

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For the sake of continuity we will now return briefly to the Evian Conference. As will be recalled, the conference defined itself as an intergovernmental committee which was to be maintained on a permanent basis with the same composition as the conference. The chairman was to be the British representative. Lord Winterton, with deputy chairmen from America, France, Brazil and Holland. Also appointed would be a special administrator with broad powers who was not officially accredited to any government. The first plenary session of the Intergovernmental Committee was held, as scheduled, on August, 3 in London.

At that meeting it emerged that despite the location of the organization's office and the nationality of its chairman, the true leadership remained in the hands of the Americans. The moving spirit continued to be Myron Taylor, who had served as chairman of the Evian Conference and was now deputy chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee. George Rublee, an old friend and confidant of President Roosevelt, was appointed committee director, and his deputy was another American, Robert Pell. As before, it was the White House that pulled the strings. As fate would have it, Roosevelt had a highly influential partner on whom depended in

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 193.

⁵⁵ Hilberg, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁷ William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (Hebrew ed.), Vol. I, p. 352.

large measure the realization of the intentions and decisions. As Zalman Shazar had foreseen at Evian, it was American Jewry which ultimately tipped the scales.

The two paramount tasks facing the Intergovernmental Committee were to obtain an agreement with the German government for the orderly departure of the Jews, and to find sufficient places of haven for them.

Naturally, priority was accorded to reaching an agreement with Germany which would put a halt to the persecutions and ensure, through the utilization of Jewish property, funding for the Jews' emigration and for their absorption in other countries. It was estimated that the project would cost billions of Reichsmarks, and it was clear that the availability of this money would be a crucial factor in persuading governments to admit emigrants with means instead of destitute refugees.***

Notwithstanding the logical order of things, negotiations with Germany did not get underway. The reason was simple: the German government refused to enter into negotiations with the Intergovernmental Committee. Repeated entreaties by American, British and French diplomats were of no avail. The Nazis would not allow Rublee to visit Berlin and would not talk to him. Indeed, in the first days of the Evian Conference Ribbentrop had informed the British ambassador to Berlin that the German government would not cooperate with interested countries on the question of German Jewry. This was an internal German affair, he insisted, and as such was not subject to discussion with outsiders.⁵⁸ The Nazis would not budge from this hard line.

The change was triggered by the international outcry following the November pogrom. The Intergovernmental Committee, or the "Evian Committee," as the Germans called it, suddenly became an acceptable [acceptable] and desirable partner for negotiations. Hjalmar Schacht, the president of the Reichsbank, was instructed to draw up a plan on behalf of the German government. After being approved by Hitler, the Schacht Plan was submitted on December 15 to Rublee and Winterton in London.

The critical fact in the events that followed is that there was not one plan but two plans, separate in time, different in content, and with totally different histories. The first plan--the actual Schacht Plan--was submitted by its author on December 15, 1938, and was under consideration until January 19, 1939, the date of Schacht's final meeting with Rublee. Discussion of the second plan commenced on January 21, with agreement reached between the sides on February 1. This second plan took its name from the negotiators--the *Wohlthat-Rublee Plan*, or as it is more commonly known, the Rublee Plan.

For reasons that are unclear, the Holocaust literature of the past 30 years has consistently confused the two plans, with the result that a distorted picture has emerged of the facts and events. Astonishingly, this

 *** Taylor: "Most of the countries are ready to admit involuntary immigrants with property, but are not ready to admit persons who will be a burden on society."

mistake even found its way into the most detailed and comprehensive works on the Holocaust, including the best-known among them--by Reitlinger and Hilberg--and remained uncorrected until the appearance of David S. Wyman's book in 1968. A major contribution to this distortion of history was undoubtedly made by Schacht himself, when he declared in his final statement to the court at Nuremberg, that after his removal as head of the Reichsbank, "the matter was dropped from the agenda."⁵⁹

The German whose name can be linked with both Plans was not Schacht but the Nazi leader Goering. It was evidently Goering who was responsible for the German's change of attitude toward the Intergovernmental Committee and Goering who got Schacht to draw up the plan and negotiate its execution. Goering also renewed the negotiations immediately after Schacht's dismissal and engineered an agreement within ten days.

Moreover, direct evidence indicates that the man who was second only to Hitler in the Nazi hierarchy acted with the energetic encouragement and close cooperation of the Fuehrer himself. The reason for our hedging in saying that it was "evidently" Goering who engineered the shift in attitude, is that we are uncertain that it was not

⁵⁸ From a circular of the German Foreign Office, June 8, 1938. Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Doc. No. 895.
⁵⁹ IMT, Vol. 22, p. 395.

Hitler himself who initiated the change of approach and ordered Goering to implement it. At all events, it is known that both Nazi leaders were personally involved in the matter, agreeing on the steps to be taken and maintaining close coordination.

Something of the nature of their contacts and involvement may be gleaned from a telephone conversation between Schacht and the State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, von Weizsaecker, as subsequently recorded by the latter.⁶⁰

Foreign Minister Ribbentrop first learned about Schacht's London talks from a report in a Swiss paper, the *Boersen Zeitung*. Furious, the minister ordered von Weizsaecker to call Schacht "in order to demand an explanation" (according to Weizsaecker's notes) about the negotiations the press report, and above all about the report's concluding sentence, which assailed Ribbentrop's current foreign policy and offered a dire prediction concerning the future. Weizsaecker relates that the minister was astonished at the report and by the manner in which such a basic foreign policy issue was being handled in London. "For six months the subject was under discussion between the Foreign Office and foreign diplomatic missions, and hitherto it was dealt with in a totally negative light." Weizsaecker was instructed to inquire of Schacht whether the Fuehrer had ordered the negotiations without consulting the Foreign Ministry. If so,

Schacht would have to go on conducting negotiations with foreign governments... Such was the tenor of Ribbentrop's angry remonstrations.

Schacht (Weizsaecker relates) admitted frankly that he was the source of the report. The Fuehrer had entrusted him with this mission and he was fulfilling it in accordance with his instructions. He had been ordered to report on the mission's completion personally to Hitler, and this he hoped to do within a day or two. Following this he would willingly brief the Foreign Minister. In the meantime, he could say no more about the talks before reporting to the Fuehrer.

Schacht added that Field Marshal Goering had told him to conduct the talks in London. Goering and Schacht had discussed the subject at length. Goering wanted to depoliticize the issue and place it wholly on an economic footing, *and he claimed to have an explicit order to this effect from the Fuehrer*. As for who bore authority to deal with the issue, he, Schacht, knew only what Goering had told him. Therefore he believed he had acted properly in deliberately refraining from entering into political questions during his London talks, even though pressed to do so by British officials. Schacht said he had gone to London at the invitation of the banker Norman. In the talk between the two bankers the question of Jewish emigration had been no more than a side issue (sic!). And turning once more to the central issue: despite the explicit orders he had received from Goering, he had not made do with them, and on his way abroad had met in Munich with Hitler, who had reaffirmed the instructions.

Finally, in reply to Weizsaecker's query as to why he had not apprised Ribbentrop of the plan prior to his departure for London, Schacht said that his travel schedule had precluded this, "even if he had thought that the matter was within the purview of the Foreign Minister."

Schacht's pretentious attribution to himself of a crucial role in the plan that bears his name is, we believe, without foundation. Whether or not he spoke to Hitler in the manner and under the circumstances he describes in his memoirs, **** or whether he did not dare speak without a prior hint from his superiors, is immaterial. The attitude toward the Jews was a cardinal element of Nazi policy and the economist Schacht had absolutely

 **** He claims to have told Hitler: "If you won't formulate some legal basis for the Jews in Germany by which they can live their lives in decent conditions, you must at least facilitate their departure." Hitler, still shaken by the worldwide outrage at the atrocities of November 9, asked: "Have you any suggestion?" Schacht unfolded his plan and to his great astonishment Hitler declared he did not object to these ideas being tried in practice. Hjalmar Schacht, *76 Jahre meines Lebens* (German), pp.481-3.

no authority to involve himself in it, and certainly not to alter it. Decisions of this level could be made only by the Nazi leaders, and they hardly needed the moralizing of the president of the Reichsbank. What they expected from Schacht was that in return

⁶⁰ Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Vol. V, Doc. No. 655.

for Germany's agreement to abandon the worst excesses against the Jews, he would extort from world Jewry the maximum benefits for Goering's policy of military aggrandizement. So the "financial wizard" put all his skills to work and concocted a suitable plan.

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Schacht explained his plan orally to Rublee and Winterton; he did not provide them with a written memorandum. The plan and the meeting with Schacht are described briefly in two letters from Rublee to the U.S. Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles,⁶¹ and in a detailed British memorandum.⁶² According to these documents, the plan was as follows:

There were in Germany (to which the Sudetenland had been annexed) some 600,000 Jews as defined by the Nuremberg Laws. Of these 200,000 were elderly and would have to remain in Germany, 150,000 were young and healthy wage earners, and 250,000 were dependents--women and children. The wage earners would emigrate within three years at the rate of 50,000 per year, and their dependents would join them once they were fully settled in their new homes.

The backbone of the plan lay in the mode of its financing. To this end one-quarter of the value of the Jewish property in Germany--estimated at six billion Reichsmarks--would be utilized. The German government would waive the confiscation of 1.5 billion Reichsmarks, out of which each emigrant-provider would be given a loan equal in value to 10,000 gold marks (\$4,000).

But... and here is where Schacht's financial "wizardry" began. Since Germany did not want to expend such a large amount of foreign currency within three years, the 1.5 billion marks would be deposited in a special trust fund whose directors would include one Jewish representative. Against this internal fund, world Jewry would raise an external loan in the same amount from which the emigrants would receive their money. The external loan would be defrayed *if Germany's foreign trade increased to the point where additional foreign currency reserves became available*. The export monies would be paid to the borrowers, the internal fund would be used to pay the exporters; as for the emigrants, in due time they would pay their debt to the Jewish property owners--and all would be well.

Schacht prefaced his remarks by saying that his plan was acceptable to Goering. He was putting it forward "for humanitarian reasons." The Jews had no future in Germany, and if no action were taken to change the situation, they could expect further trouble. Finally, he assured his interlocutors that if the plan were accepted no harm would befall the Jews waiting to emigrate. The 200,000 elderly Jews slated to remain in Germany would be allowed to live out their lives peacefully. A speedy decision was required, Schacht stressed, because of the unstable situation in Germany.

Rublee commented that the plan seemed to hold out certain possibilities. At first hearing he saw certain difficulties which would have to be discussed. It was essential to study the plan together with the British and the Americans and submit it to other interested governments. Should it be decided in principle that the plan merited further discussion, he, Rublee, would like the next round of talks to be held in Berlin. Schacht assured him that this would present no problem.

At the close of the meeting Lord Winterton requested Schacht to inform Goering that both the Evian Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee had dealt and would continue to deal with the problem from a strictly practical and business-like point of view. He and Rublee had refrained at the time from expressing political assessments concerning the attitude toward the Jews in Germany, even though they had drawn criticism as a result. Thus ended the meeting.

Jewish and liberal public opinion in the democracies rejected the Schacht Plan out of hand. Extortion, ransom, slave-trade--these were the commonest reactions. The plan's ulterior motive--to exploit the plight of the Jews in order to better Germany's balance of trade--was obvious. The activists behind the economic boycott of Germany saw the plan as proof positive that the boycott was working, and urged that it be intensified. Knowledgeable persons said that the 1.5 billion Reichsmarks (\$600 million) that world Jewry was being asked to cough up would not be a loan but an

61 FRUS 1938, Vol. I, pp. 873-874.

62 Br. Doc., Third Series, Vol. III, pp. 677-875.

outright tax: they placed no faith in the Nazis' realizing the German-Jewish property they held. Experts who were consulted by the relevant bodies in the United States were unanimous in their opinion that under the proposed terms world Jewry could not possibly raise the vast sum in question or even a substantial part of it.⁶³

According to Rublee, once he realized the implications of the plan he was not eager to ask the Jewish organizations to set up a committee to handle the practicalities. When he nevertheless did so, at Winterton's behest, his request was flatly rejected. Jewish community leaders in

London and Paris opposed the creation of the proposed committee for fear it would be construed as admission of the existence of "international Jewry"...

On December 20 a committee of experts from England, France and Holland, under Rublee's chairmanship, convened and announced their opposition to the idea of utilizing confiscated Jewish property as a means to increase German exports. The committee resolved that the financial terms of the plan, as proposed, were unacceptable.⁶⁴

The Schacht Plan, as the public knew it, was an abysmal failure. It was unfeasible under the existing conditions and it lacked support among the Jews and their supporters. Nothing positive, it seemed, would issue from Schacht's cunning.

Rublee thought otherwise. The important thing for him was that the Germans had initiated the negotiations, and he was interested in pursuing the talks. As we saw, in his first meeting with Schacht he hinted at certain "difficulties" concerning the plan. Nevertheless, he said the negotiations should continue and he emphasized his desire to be invited to Berlin for that purpose.

On January 10, 1939, Rublee arrived in the German capital and began a series of meetings with Schacht. Rublee rejected completely the plan's proposed loan of 1.5 billion Reichsmarks, and Schacht accepted his position.⁶⁵ The talks focused on a substitute for the loan, on the standing of the Jews in Germany once an agreement was reached, and on other details. According to Rublee the talks progressed satisfactorily until, in the last session, on January 19, the Nazi stand hardened. Schacht put forward a plan which, he said, had been approved in inter-ministerial consultations. His style of speech at this meeting bore unmistakable signs of the influence of Ribbentrop, who had been brought into the picture a few days earlier. Schacht, Rublee writes, "defended the German position vigorously," and declared openly that the German government might carry out the proposed plan unilaterally. That Rublee was being apprised of the details was purely a gesture of courtesy, so that foreign governments could decide on how to handle the emigration from Germany.⁶⁶

The presentation of this ultimative proposal was Schacht's final act in this matter. The following day he was dismissed from his post as president of the Reichsbank and removed from the negotiations about Germany's Jews.

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In his statement at Nuremberg, Schacht sought—evidently with some success—to use the episode of the plan in his defense. He presented

his own version of the events, one that was at odds with that of the prosecution—and with the truth. We have already noted his false claim that his removal from the Reichsbank brought about the abandonment of the plan. Of his other claims the most striking is the concluding—and most insolent—one: "Had the plan been fulfilled, not a single Jew would have lost his life."

This was an empty statement, devoid of a convincing basis. Schacht could never have proved that if the Jews had assented to his extortionate plan. Hitler would have implemented it in the war years Schacht wanted to take the judges by surprise at the eleventh hour of the trial, and there was no better way than to make an impressive, dogmatic statement. Schacht will no longer concern us.

Yet even though we have rejected Schacht's unfounded conjecture, we are not exempt from positing a reasonable scenario which might have unfolded if the Jews,

63 FRUS 1938, Vol. I, p. 876.

64 Br. Doc., Third Series, Vol. IV, p. 677.

65 Memorandum from Schacht to Ribbentrop, January 16, 1939, Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Vol. V, p. 921.

66 FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 71.

despite everything, had raised the required sum and the Schacht Plan had been executed. For the sake of logic and convenience, we will present our hypothetical version of events following our discussion of the Wohlthat-Rublee Plan. In the meantime, the following observations will suffice:

The \$600 million for the "external loan" was an absolutely *prodigious* sum. The potential purchasers of the emissions did not believe that they would see a return on their investment. And for a philanthropic venture the amount was totally disproportionate. If we take into account that during the first five years of the Nazis' rule all the Jewish welfare organizations devoted a total of \$50 million to refugee aid,⁶⁷ we will get an idea of how difficult it would have been to raise an amount twelve times as great in just three years.

Nonetheless, it is improbable that the Jews and their supporters would have been so disdainful of the Schacht Plan if the alternative had been known to be physical destruction. The fact that the plan received no backing is additional evidence of how remote even the very thought of this dreadful possibility was at the time.

Secondly, if under these conditions one can understand the refusal of the Jewish organizations to lend a hand to the Schacht Plan, the reason they adduced for that refusal was extremely dubious. Their argument, it will be recalled, was that they did not want to create the impression that "international Jewry" existed. As we will see, this fatuous reasoning was later to serve as the pretext for inaction on a truly fateful occasion.

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When Rublee learned of Schacht's dismissal, he asked the German Foreign Office, through the American and British embassies, whether the Germans intended to continue the negotiations.⁶⁸ In response he was summoned to a meeting with Goering the next day. The Nazi leader expressed his wish that an agreement be reached with all due speed, and announced that his representative in the negotiations would be Helmut Wohlthat, a senior official in one of Goering's ministries.

Unlike Schacht, Wohlthat did not bear the title of minister and left the conduct of politics to others. He functioned as Goering's personal emissary and served as a direct go-between with Rublee. As a result, the pace of the discussions and of decision-making were quickened. Immediately after his meeting with Goering on January 21, Rublee travelled to Paris for a session of the Intergovernmental Committee. Following his return to Berlin on January 25 the talks with Wohlthat went into high gear and culminated in full agreement within a week.⁶⁹ A few days were required for translation purposes and for a close reading of the text of the accord. On February 7 Rublee presented the final agreement to the Intergovernmental Committee.⁷⁰

The Wohlthat-Rublee Agreement, or the "Rublee Plan" for short, might have made a genuine contribution had Germany's Jews been luckier. We will now review the main points of the agreement. In addition to the text itself, which appears in the exchange of letters between Rublee and Wohlthat, we will enlist the aid of a report and commentary published in the New York Times on February 14, 1939, and subsequently incorporated in the Contemporary Jewish Record.⁷¹

Like the Schacht Plan, the new plan also spoke of 150,000 wage earners, 250,000 dependents, and 200,000 persons categorized as elderly and ill. In this definition the wage earners were between 15 and 45 years of age, while the elderly were those aged 45 and above. The dependents were the close relatives (wives and children) of the wage earners, as distinct from the elderly and the ill. The wage earners were to leave the country within "a period of three years, but not to exceed a maximum of five years." The dependents would emigrate once the wage earners were settled in their new homes and were able to provide for them.

The emigration was to be organized with the cooperation of the Jewish organizations in Germany, under the supervision of a German government official. The organizations would be aided by foreign experts and representatives of private

⁶⁷ Adler-Rudell, p. 241.

⁶⁸ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, pp. 71-73.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 77-81.

⁷⁰ Feingold, p. 60.

⁷¹ Record, March-April 1939, pp. 77-78.

groups dealing with emigration which would enjoy the trust of the absorbing countries and be acceptable to the Germans. The emigrants would be provided with passports, and

appropriate papers would be supplied to stateless persons.

A special clause in the agreement pledged, in classic diplomatese, that upon the implementation of the plan, "the conditions which brought about the holding of Jews in concentration camps will automatically disappear." This pledge dovetailed well with Nazi practice of the period: to release Jews from concentration camps on condition that they emigrate.

The candidates for emigration were to receive professional training in agricultural centers and vocational schools. The German government would encourage the establishment of institutions for vocational training. The elderly and those awaiting their turn to leave would be allowed a peaceful existence "as long as nothing abnormal happens" (which was taken to mean: as long as no more Nazis are assaulted by Jews). The Jews would not have to live apart and would be permitted to move about freely. Jews able to work would have the opportunity to earn their living. However, in plants where both Jews and "Aryans" were employed, the two groups would be segregated.

The elderly and those too weak to work would receive welfare aid derived from Jewish property in excess of the proportion of the Jewish assets (25 percent) set aside to finance the emigration. Should this source prove insufficient, they were assured a decent existence from the sources providing welfare to needy "Aryans." Under no circumstances would these people find themselves in need of assistance from extra-German sources.

The principal difference between the Rublee and Schacht plans lay in the means for financing the emigration. In the Rublee Plan the "external loan" of 1.5 billion Reichsmarks was replaced by the *Haavarah* ("transfer") principle. Both sides to the negotiations recalled the arrangement which had been worked out some years earlier with the German government for affluent Jews who had immigrated to Palestine. Under that agreement the Jews had transferred their assets to Palestine in the form of German-made goods. Thus the Jews retained their belongings and the Germans' foreign trade benefited. In the original "transfer" arrangement the Jews who emigrated at the outset of the program lost 5 percent of the value of their assets, and those who departed in the latter stages lost 50 to 95 percent. Under the Rublee Plan three-quarters of the Jewish assets would remain in Nazi hands, with the fourth quarter earmarked for underwriting the emigration. As in the Schacht Plan, this property was to form the basis for the creation of a special fund to be administered by three trustees, two Germans and one foreigner "of recognized standing." In contrast to the Schacht Plan, however, the fund

was not intended to guarantee an external loan, but would serve as a direct source of financing for the emigrants' travel and settlement expenses.

The trust fund would provide the money for the purchase of supplies for the emigrants and for the development of the settlement facilities to be established for them. These funds would also go toward defraying travel expenses and toward the transfer of their belongings inside Germany and via German ships. Only goods not containing a high percentage of imported materials imported would be purchased, or, alternatively, a high-import content would be compensated for through payment in imported foreign capital. The German government expressed its readiness to facilitate the purchase of goods of a suitable quality and in the quantities required commensurate with the number of emigrants. The price of the items in question would not exceed that of goods and services current in Germany.

In addition to their purchases via the trust fund, the emigrants would be permitted to take, without payment of tax, their personal belongings (with the exception of jewelry, objects of art, and valuables purchased specifically with a view to emigration), their household articles, and professional equipment and instruments in their possession or purchased by them, in reasonable quantities. The emigrants would be exempted from payment of the *Reichsfluchtsteuer* (a tax imposed on refugees leaving Germany) and from all other similar payments.

The purchases originating in the trust fund were to be carried out by an "outside purchasing agency" which would represent the non-German side in the plan. This

agency would maintain contact with the German government and would handle the monies of the trust fund and the overall financing of the emigration.

Actually, the "purchasing agency," which was mentioned in passing in the course of a lengthy clause detailing the financing arrangements, was to play an immeasurably more important role than might be gleaned from its modest name. This was due to the deal's character and structure. For formal reasons, stemming largely from legal considerations of the American government and prestige considerations of the German government, no bilateral agreement was signed between the Intergovernmental Committee and the Germans. The document to which Rublee and Wohlthat affixed their signatures was a "Statement of Agreement" summing up their negotiations. Officially, there were two parallel but unilateral actions, to be executed congruently by two unrelated parties. The German government would implement the plan concerning the Jews' departure, while the Intergovernmental Committee and/or

private organizations would carry out a corresponding plan involving the emigrants' absorption in their new homes.⁷² The Statement of Agreement that was devoted to the German part of the plan made no reference to the role of the other party. It was of no concern to the Nazis which body would carry out that aspect of the project. Its composition and working methods, as we noted, had nothing to do with the Germans. But its establishment and the onset of its activity were essential to set in motion the German part of the plan. In the protracted discussions concerning its establishment conducted by the Intergovernmental Committee and the Jewish organizations this body was called the "Coordinating Foundation," the "Refugee Foundation," or, simply, the "Private Foundation."

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The initial reactions to the plan were surprise, astonishment and suspiciousness. The press and those in the know were amazed at Rublee's success in extracting improved conditions out of what seemed to be hopeless circumstances.⁷³ His overflowing optimism and the concessions he extracted from the Germans made a deep impression. Still, the outrage generated by the Schacht Plan was still fresh in people's memory, and in Germany itself the situation continued to deteriorate. In this headlong rush of events and considerations it was difficult to know for certain whether the new plan marked a positive shift or was actually a carefully laid trap.

The confusion and hesitations among the public were cogently expressed in an editorial in one of the two political-literary journals of Chaim Greenberg, the leader of the Poalei Zion movement in America.⁷⁴ The editorial took note of the fact that the plan "marks an extraordinary event in German politics—a concession on the part of the Nazis." The Germans' declared readiness to allow the Jews to work and to assure them a peaceful life was given particular emphasis. At the same time, the writer quoted the classical phrase, "*timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*" (I fear the Greeks even when they are bringing gifts). It is no coincidence, the editorial asserted, that the tranquil life promised [to?] the Jews was contingent on an absence of "abnormal" events. The continuing persecutions offered no place for optimism. "The agreement presents some gains if carried out," the writer asserted. "The main question is: will it be carried out. We frankly express our skepticism." The editorial, entitled "A Doubtful Plan" ended on an inconclusive note.

In contrast, the organizations behind the economic boycott of Germany took an uncompromisingly negative stance from the outset. They saw the Rublee-Wohlthat Plan as a German stratagem aimed at breaking the boycott by ensuring the export of German goods through the refugees

and calming world opinion. In the view of these organizations and their supporters, acceptance of the plan was liable to give the free world's moral sanction to the Nazis' act of oppression and plunder, constitute acquiescence in the murderous regime in Germany. The very formulation of the plan, it was argued, attested to the success of the boycott and the serious economic difficulties it had caused Germany. Thus the plan must be rejected and the boycott intensified.

⁷² FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 105.

⁷³ Wyman, p. 54; Feingold, p. 60.

⁷⁴ Jewish Frontier, March 1939.

These arguments were all correct--with the exception of the conclusion. The Wohlthat-Rublee Plan was far from heartening. At bottom it was a deal entailing the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of persons from the country in which they were born and raised and which they regarded as their homeland. The plan cast an aura of ostensible legality over the expulsion and over the nearly total dispossession of the emigrants. It was a clearcut ransom deal: the great bulk of the hostages' property in return for their lives.

There is no doubt that the principal reason (or, let us say, one of the principal reasons) for both the Schacht and Rublee plans lay in Germany's economic crisis, which was caused in part by the boycott. It is true that implementation of the Rublee Plan would have resulted in a certain expansion of Germany's foreign trade, albeit to a lesser extent than under the Schacht Plan. But execution of the deal would have brought with it a calming of public opinion vis-a-vis Germany, and as a result a weakening of the commercial boycott and its moral foundations. The opponents of the Nazi regime had to take this into consideration. Moreover, the fact that those behind the plan on the German side had shown themselves to be devoid of morality and totally untrustworthy, shows clearly that those who assailed the plan knew whereof they spoke.

These truths and considerations formed the basis of the arguments adduced by the opponents of the Rublee Plan and by those looking to justify their unwillingness to act for its implementation. Nor were the plan's supporters and proponents unaware of its deficiencies. They however saw other facts and truths which, while not fundamentally disposing of the negative arguments, seemed to dictate a totally different course of action. The basic fact which concerned them was the plight of Germany's Jews and the moral obligation to help them.

Everyone agreed that the ransom deal was both reprehensible and unlawful. But no one would even think of condemning a person who agreed to pay a ransom in order to save the life of someone dear who was being held hostage. In such cases, if the authorities are unable to guarantee the safety of the hostage, they rarely interfere in the execution of the deal.

They themselves will not officially be privy to anything illegal, But in general they will not pursue the criminals if by doing so they place the life of the hostage in even greater danger.

The expulsion of German Jewry was an atrocity that provoked outrage and condemnation. To aid the Nazis in the implementation of their scheme was not an attractive proposition. But the true choice for the Jews lay not between being expelled or remaining; it lay between being extricated from an intolerable situation or remaining in a situation of which the final outcome was totally unclear. It was awareness of this *fact* that six months earlier had brought the representatives of 32 states to Evian, where they had resolved unambiguously that the good of German Jewry required cooperation with the Nazis to ensure an orderly exodus.

The argument that acceptance of the Rublee Plan constituted acquiescence in the Nazi regime had also been answered at Evian. The conference's deliberations and resolutions affirmed implicitly that the interests of German Jewry were not to be sacrificed on the altar of the struggle to eradicate the Nazi regime. This had been the guiding principle behind the conference and its resolutions, and it was in accordance with this principle that the Intergovernmental Committee was obligated to operate. Whoever questioned this principle was *ipso facto* calling into question the entire Evian enterprise.

The Rublee Plan had a vigorous and very influential champion in the journalist Dorothy Thompson, who earlier had been ardently opposed to the Schacht Plan. To those who assailed the plan in the name of antifascist principles she replied that "it is easier to tell people under siege to die for a principle than to accept a compromise." To the activists of the economic boycott she declared: "It is argued against the plan that it will aid German exports, but it will also prevent wholesale suicides." The plan, she insisted, was advantageous for the emigrants because they would be able to remove a large part of their assets in the form of goods, whereas otherwise they could take no more than a miniscule part of their property, if anything. ***** "It was precisely in this manner that the *Haavarah*

***** This fact was well known to those concerned and was confirmed officially by Schacht. In his London meeting with the Intergovernmental Committee the Reichsbank president described the details of the highway robbery to which the departing Jews were subjected: 25% of their assets were taken as "capital flight tax," another 25% was lost when they sold their property; of the remainder, 90% went for foreign currency exchange. *British Documents, Third Series, Vol. III, p. 657.*

managed to get 45,000 persons out of Germany in 1933 and helped build Palestine."⁷⁵

The most ardent supporter of the plan was Rublee himself In his first report to the U.S. Secretary of State he notes that the agreement was a major departure from the Nazis' former policy and represented "a *totally new position on the Jewish problem.*"⁷⁶ He reiterated his optimistic expectations to the press without hesitation. ***** So impressed by the agreement was Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles that he saw a basis for recommending to Roosevelt to return ambassador Wilson to Berlin from where he had been recalled three months earlier as a protest against the November pogrom.⁷⁷

The President, for his part, regarded the agreement as contemptible but unavoidable.⁷⁸ The apprehension that from the legal point of view the United States would find itself party to a ransom deal was alleviated in formal terms when, as will be recalled, instead of a bilateral contract a Statement of Agreement was signed under which parallel and congruent unilateral actions would take place. Protected by this formal ploy, Roosevelt had no hesitation in giving the plan the green light.

The Intergovernmental Committee approved the Wohlthat-Rublee Plan at its plenary session of February 12, 1939.⁷⁹ In this meeting the committee also accepted Rublee's resignation. His replacement was Sir Herbert Emerson, who also served as representative for refugee affairs on behalf of the League of Nations. The new deputy director was Rublee's aide Robert Pell, who was entrusted with maintaining contact with the Germans. Both sides, the Nazis and the Intergovernmental Committee, agreed to hold regular meetings in order to coordinate their activities. The operational stage was at hand.

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 ***** In the light of Rublee's pronounced and well-known optimism, it becomes possible to assess properly Yosef Tanenbaum's statement (p. 219) that "at this time the despairing and beaten Rublee handed back his mandate." Rublee was not despairing and was hardly saw himself as beaten. He resigned from his position as director of the Intergovernmental Committee in accordance with the condition he had set to Roosevelt and Taylor when, at the age of 70, he assumed the post for a limited time. In December 1938 he informed Taylor of his intention to resign after concluding the negotiations with Germany. By the end of December Roosevelt had already chosen the persons who would replace him. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1938, Vol. I, pp. 883, 885.*

The implementation of the Rublee Plan depended above all on the active cooperation of the Jewish organizations. Once the Evian governments had arrived at a satisfactory agreement with the German government, there no alternative remained but for a dedicated and deeply involved public body to go into action. This body was to

⁷⁵ *Herald Tribune*, February 17, 1939.

⁷⁶ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, pp. 82-84.

⁷⁷ Feingold, p. 60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷⁹ *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 41, pp. 380-381.

set up the Coordinating Foundation and supply the people and the means that would set the wheels of the non-German side of the plan in motion. The problem was not only or even mainly financial. Unlike the Schacht Plan, in the new program part of the property of German Jewry was to serve as a primary and direct source of financing for the emigration process. The additional funds that were called for could serve to supplement the principal source in the organizational stages of various settlement programs, but mainly in the opening stage of the overall plan. Views differed concerning the amount required. Late in the discussions there was general agreement that to set the project in motion a central fund of no more than \$1 million would suffice--an amount that was clearly within the financial capabilities of the Jewish organizations.

The paramount need was for total identification with and faithful representation of the cardinal interest of German Jewry: to leave the country of the Nazis as speedily as possible. A body possessing these characteristics would *ipso facto* become one that initiated, spurred and determined the actions to be taken. Instead of being a mere emissary of the Intergovernmental Committee, this body would very quickly take center-stage in planning and executing the required activities. It would consider judiciously the stand of the Nazis and weigh the proposals of help of the Evian governments. It would assess correctly the supreme importance of the time factor, and it may well have been able to achieve results exceeding the direct objective of the plan.

No such body existed. To be sure, there was the World Zionist Organization, whose personnel had the requisite qualities of energy and dedication. But the Zionists were hostile to Evian's objectives and, as was to be expected, now became full-fledged centers of resistance. As for the major welfare organizations, their leaders were unaccustomed to tasks of this kind. It took them a long time--too long--to overcome their own hesitations and the interference by the plan's detractors.

The Zionist opposition to the Rublee Plan did not immediately assume its subsequent uncompromising posture. There were weeks of agonized bewilderment, particularly at the lower levels of the movement. There were even moments of grace when it seemed that the plan was gaining the support of Zionist organizations. We have already seen the

equivocal reaction of the *Jewish Frontier*, which regarded the plan as too good to be realistic. In contrast to the equivocations of that journal, an expression of provisional support appeared in the weekly of the American Jewish Congress whose leadership, it will be recalled, was identical with that of the American Zionist leadership. The issue of February 24, 1939, made several references to the Rublee Plan, and always of a positive character. The journal quoted Rublee, then in America, as saying he had "every hope that the plan will be successful and that the Jews of Germany will be helped." Also noted was the fervent support of Dorothy Thompson, which we have already mentioned. A report from London quoted Dr. Stephen Wise, who was in the British capital as a member of the Zionist delegation negotiating with His Majesty's Government on the Palestine issue. Wise cautioned against prejudging the plan and promised that "we will consider the plan in America and be sure that the heads of English Jewry deliberate on this plan as earnestly and impartially as we mean to do."

Heartened by Wise's remarks, the journal's editors sought to contribute to the public discussion of the plan by refuting the arguments adduced against it by the organizers of the economic boycott. An article entitled "Boycott and Refugees" took exception to the perception of the boycott as overriding every other goal. "The Sabbath was created for humanity and not humanity for the Sabbath... The plans now being considered by the Evian Committee [will enable] the bulk of 150,000 wage earners to leave Germany within the next five years [and go] to the Philippine Islands, to the Dominican Republic, to British Guiana (if the report of the survey Commission is favorable), to Palestine. The very *fact* that the Jews are being given a chance for a planned and orderly emigration instead of a panic-stricken flight is regarded by the Evian Committee as an important accomplishment... It is a matter to be considered."

It was a propitious moment that never again arose. The editorial board soon concluded its debate with the boycott advocates, in abject surrender. Never again would the paper have a good word to say about the Rublee Plan. Indeed, it raised growing objections and condemnations of its own and quoted others to the same effect.

Stephen Wise, who was a member of the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees, could not openly oppose the plan--which the committee had approved--

without imperilling his own position. The direct attack on the plan was levelled by another Zionist leader, Louis Lipsky, Wise's deputy in the American Jewish Congress. Lipsky, who was also in

London as part of the Zionist delegation, returned with an unequivocal message concerning his own stand and that of British Jewry. The latter's attitude toward the plan, he said, was "definitely negative." He himself thought the Rublee Plan would require an outlay of \$100 million and that the Nazis would release no more than 5 percent of the assets of German Jewry. In return all the Nazis' sins would be condoned and forgiven. "The question, then, is whether Jews abroad should contribute \$100 million or more to purge the Nazis of all the episodes of blood and murder. So there is little inclination to enter into a deal of this kind with the Nazis."⁸⁰

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Lipsky's comments undoubtedly reflected accurately the stand of the highest levels of the Zionist movement. There were no hesitations and no agonizing at those levels. The Zionist leaders were pleased, as we saw in the previous chapter, that the Evian Conference had ended "in nothing" and did not want to hear any more about it. When Ruppin returned to Jerusalem and asked to deliver a report on the conference, he was permitted to do so out of courtesy. His speech was listened to politely and entered in the minutes. There was no response to his statement that "in the last analysis we achieved something positive [at the conference]" or to his proposal to make contact with the Intergovernmental Committee in London. No discussion followed the speech, and that was the end of the matter.⁸¹

A month earlier a cable had been received from Abba Hillel Silver regarding an allocation from the Jewish National Fund for maintaining the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees. The Joint had already contributed \$4,000, and Silver was apparently requesting a like amount from the JNF's Zionist partner. Although the sum was a paltry one relative to the scope of the JNF, the Jewish Agency Executive accepted Ben-Gurion's suggestion to inform Silver that "our view is negative." If nevertheless the American Zionists wished to go ahead, they were free to do so.⁸² Manifestly, it was pointless to expend funds to maintain a body that had been established in connection with the Evian Conference and was liable to carry out undesirable actions.

Additional light on the Jewish Agency Executive's attitude toward the plight of German Jewry is shed by the minutes of a meeting of that body held in London on November 13, 1938. The meeting took place three days after the Nazi pogrom, and officials and functionaries who dealt with German Jewry were asked to attend.

David Ben-Gurion, chairman: Opens with comments concerning relations with the Arabs.

Dr. Weizmann: "He had thought that we would discuss only the situation of the Jews in Germany." [As we have already noted, the minutes were phrased in the third person. Thus, "he had thought" means "I thought."] In the light of this observation, the meeting immediately begins to discuss the situation of Germany's Jews.

Dr. Martin Rosenblitt: Tells about the request to the British government to increase *by a few thousand* the number of entry permits to Palestine in order to save German Jews.

Moshe Shertok (Sharett): "Tomorrow Dr. Weizmann will take part in an assembly for German Jewry, and we must determine our stand already now. The assembly will undoubtedly discuss plans totally unrelated to Eretz- Israel. *He does not think that the Jewish Agency can participate in activity for emigration to other countries.* But we must take pan in this meeting in order to step up the pressure on the government to increase immigration to Palestine."

Dr. Sentor: "In his view we must conduct negotiations for the removal of all German Jews to various countries, including Eretz-Israel, on condition that we keep them *in large camps* and during the coming 7-8 years divide them among the different counties. Naturally a plan like this will cost 10-12 million Palestine pounds. But he

⁸⁰ Herald Tribune, March 17, 1939.

⁸¹ Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, August 21, 1938.

⁸² Minutes, July 17, 1938.

thinks the money can be obtained. He suggests that an effort [Ndlr: be?] made to work through the committee that was set up at the Evian Conference.”

Dr. Goldmann: “Is vehemently opposed to Sentor’s proposal. These proposals are not only fantastic, they are also dangerous. Tomorrow other countries will follow Germany’s lead in order to get the Jews removed. Where will we place them?”

Yitzhak Gruenbaum: Agrees with Dr. Goldmann. “In his opinion we must cease the ‘*Haavarah*’ and not wait until the Germans do so. *We must commence an open war against Germany without consideration for the fate of the Jews in Germany... Of course the Jews of Germany will pay for this, but there is no other option.* If we do not do it now, tomorrow the Jews in Poland and Romania will suffer the same fate as Germany’s Jews today.”

S. Adler-Rudel: “Perhaps we will have to turn to Lord Winterton, too, to activate the committee that was chosen at the Evian Conference... We should try to get 5,000 young people out of Germany for pioneer training in the neighboring countries, provided they settle in Eretz-Israel within 2-3 years.”

At Ben-Gurion’s suggestion two committees were formed to look into the matter. Thus ended the discussion.

Some of the views expressed at this meeting of ranking policy-makers bear stressing as reflecting both personal traits and characteristic trends in Zionism. It does not occur to David Ben-Gurion that the Jewish Agency Executive, then in London for talks with the British and the Arabs, should hold a special session wholly devoted to the distress of Germany’s Jews. Two participants, the non-Zionist Sentor and the experienced functionary Adler-Rudel, propose that contact be made with the Evian committee. Moshe Sharett reaffirms that even under the aggravated conditions in the wake of the horrific pogrom, Zionism is determined to resist any activity related to emigration other than to Palestine--and this at a time when the Jewish Agency was requesting no more than a few thousand *ô*aliyah certificates for the Jews of Germany.

Dr. Sentor’s “fantastic” proposal was not his own invention. He was preceded by the expert on refugees Sir John Hope-Simpson, who completed a detailed and substantive book on the refugee problem about a month *before* the November pogrom. Taking note of the tense situation in Germany, he proposed the immediate removal of one-quarter of the Jews to camps that would be established in neighboring countries--France, England, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, Norway and Finland--from where they would gradually be transferred to permanent absorption sites.⁸³ This proposal, which Dr. Sentor extended to encompass all the Jews of Germany in the wake of the pogrom, incorporated important elements which could have produced beneficial results had they not been ignored by both Jewish and non-Jewish policy-makers.

The principal representative phenomenon at the meeting (with the exception of Dr. Senior) was Sharett’s declaration. Sharett was understating the case when he spoke about non-participation in activities aimed at emigration to countries other than Palestine. Non-participation was the most moderate and most dignified expression of the opposition to this idea. As was unmistakably implicit in the line of action adopted *vis-a-vis* Evian, this passive response was liable to be followed or accompanied by sharper and more active expressions of opposition and preemption. At Evian, as we saw, actions of this kind were not required because the conference did not spill over into the realm of immediate activity as the Zionist leadership had feared. However, now that the situation of the Jews in Germany had deteriorated, the posture of non-participation was tantamount to indifference to Jewish distress. Weizmann himself espoused this stance unflinchingly. According to the minutes of his November 17 meeting with British Prime Minister Chamberlain, also attended by the Jewish members of the House of Lords: “They spoke about the rescue of

Jews--he spoke about their immigration to Palestine.”

Given the political and economic conditions then prevailing in Palestine, this stand was tantamount to laying a siege on Germany’s Jews. Some months later, when concrete emigration plans were broached, a period began in which what had been implicit became unequivocally explicit. The policy of non-participation gave way to an aggressive policy of interference which constantly intensified until its culmination in unbridled incitement.

⁸³ Sir John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem*, London, 1939, pp. 548-9.

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Had the Jewish public alone been involved, Zionist policy need not have gone beyond non-participation in order to thwart the Rublee Plan. We noted above that the standing of the Zionist movement in world Jewry, notwithstanding its numerical minority, was such that without it--and certainly not against its will--it was impossible to organize a successful Jewish initiative on any reasonable scale. Some evidence suggests that the leaders of the Jewish organizations also evinced hesitation and unwillingness prior to the Evian Conference. In a letter of May 26, 1938, marked "personal and confidential," Adler-Rudel wrote to Georg Landauer that "the official Jewish circles [in America] are not especially enthusiastic about the President's activity. However, since public opinion welcomed it so warmly, they feel they are obligated to cooperate to secure the best possible results."⁸⁴ Eliezer Kaplan, perhaps basing himself on the same source, told the Jewish Agency Executive that "for unknown reasons, prominent Jews in England have decided not to go to Evian. We have had similar reports from America... Personnel of the Joint say that their government is represented at the conference and that regarding these matters they will make direct contact with their government."⁸⁵

At the conference itself, things were set fight. The welfare organizations overcame their reluctance "to engage in politics." The leaders of major London societies attended the conference and, together with the Joint, acted as representatives of the private organizations.

Now, where the Rublee Plan was concerned, a great deal more was being asked of them. It was up to them to supply the means and assume the responsibility for a gargantuan task which went far beyond their normal sphere of activity. Two months earlier they had rejected the far harsher Schacht Plan. Some of the grounds for that rejection seemed to tern valid with regard to the new plan. They reiterated the ludicrous argument that the creation of the required body was liable to be construed as confirmation of the Nazis' allegation concerning the existence of "international Jewry. Two additional reasons were also adduced: (1) the

apprehension that the creation of the body would be interpreted as acquiescence in the Germans' racial policy and their confiscation of Jewish property; and (2) the possibility that implementation of the program would have the effect of strengthening the Nazis.⁸⁶

What all three arguments had in common was their total disregard for the fate of German Jewry. Coming from Jewish leaders these were hollow excuses, behind which was a desire, whether conscious or not, to avoid action of any kind. Unlike the situation during the period of preparation for Evian, solid and substantial opposition now existed, and nothing could be done unless it was overcome.

The work of trying to overcome the indifference and unwillingness of the Jewish leaders was undertaken assiduously by a group of Christians--personnel of the Intergovernmental Committee and members of the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees. The driving spirit was Myron Taylor, who had served as chairman at Evian and was now a member of both committees.

The impact wielded by this group becomes clear from a letter which is relevant even though it refers to a later period, when Taylor had already secured Jewish help. Henry Montour, the director of the United Fund for Palestine, describes how the mood changed among the Jewish leaders who participated in meetings convened to establish the "Private Foundation" called for by the Rublee Plan. Initially, he relates, fierce opposition was expressed. But subsequently the opponents came round to a positive view. His explanation: several important Christian personages, Myron Taylor in particular, showed an interest in the plan. Seeing this, the Jews realized that "it would be neither fair nor wise to let them fail."⁸⁷

Myron Taylor plodded ahead stubbornly. On April 15, following two months of persuasion, he succeeded in convening about seventy Jewish leaders and extracting from them a unanimous resolution in favor of creating the private body. Eleven

⁸⁴ CZA, File S7/693. The name of the addressee, which does not appear on the letter, was supplied to us by the writer of the letter.

⁸⁵ Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, June 26, 1938.

⁸⁶ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 105.

⁸⁷ Henry Montor to Eliezer Kaplan, June 5, 1939, CZA, File G4/17441.

persons were chosen to serve as the group's coordinating committee, and Taylor took them with to a meeting with Roosevelt on May 4.⁸⁸ After Roosevelt's personal pep-talk, things began to move--though terribly slowly, with incessant obstacles and interference of all kinds having to be overcome at every stage.

The active Jewish opposition to the Rublee Plan was concentrated at two focal points: the World Jewish Organization, and the movement for the economic boycott against Germany. In the United States, the center of activity of the boycott movement, there was considerable overlap between the two organizations. The first boycott committee had been established by the American Jewish Congress in 1933; three years later it merged with

a likeminded body, the "Jewish Workers Committee," to form the "United Boycott Council." The council was headed by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, a Zionist functionary who was previously chairman of the AJC's Emergency Committee and chairman of the Jewish Workers Committee, and who would later serve as vice-president of the Zionist Organization of America.⁸⁹ At the beginning of 1939, as the events described in this chapter were unfolding, two non-Jewish organizations joined the council and a roof-organization, the "Committee for Boycott Coordination," was formed. Dr. Tenenbaum continued in his post of chairman and ideologue of the new body.

The true motive for Zionist opposition--the fear of territorialism--was generally hidden behind an exterior of arguments borrowed from the anti-Nazi boycott movement. But whenever it seemed that settlement anywhere other than Palestine was about to be realized, the anti-territorialist position emerged in its most fiercely unadulterated form. Together with the reasons relating to war, another argument was put forward which gave the impression of showing concern for the fate of Eastern European Jewry. The exodus of German Jewry, it was argued, was liable to spur certain governments--Poland, Romania and others--to demand and work for a similar "solution" for their Jews. And then, it was asked, where would all these millions go?

This was not a new issue. It had been considered by Jewish organizations at Evian. Yet no one had suggested that this possibility precluded the rescue of the German Jews. And certainly it did not occur to anyone to imperil them in order to prevent a speculative development, as Gruenbaum had suggested to the Jewish Agency Executive. On the contrary: the written memoranda and oral presentations to the conference's subcommittee contained, as we saw (Ch. 7) proposals to expand the conference framework to incorporate Eastern European Jewry in the rescue plan.

The militant slogans brandished by the boycott activists were a continuation of anti-Nazi activity which had obtained impressive results. Like others, they regarded the Germans' accession to the Rublee Plan as deriving from the economic difficulties caused by the boycott. Since so much had already been achieved, why not press on with renewed vigor until the whole goal was attained?

What was that goal?

The Jewish boycott movement had been launched five years earlier in reaction to the persecution of the Jews in Germany; its natural purpose was to force the Germans to desist from the persecutions. In the meantime

far-reaching changes had occurred, and the free world now accepted the idea of the Jews' exit from Germany. Did the boycott movement still aspire to prevent the expulsion and to effect a radical change in the Nazis' attitude toward the Jews?

In fact, they wanted far more than this. Heartened by their successes and by the greatly increased public support following the November pogrom, the boycott movement now posited as its goal nothing less than the eradication of the Nazi regime. Speaking at the unification meeting with the non-Jewish organizations, Dr. Tenenbaum put it in perfectly clear language:

"The boycott will go on until the Nazi Government will collapse out from sheer economic exhaustion and mankind will be freed from the menace, madness, tyranny and terror of the Nazi Government... this is the only bloodless road to peace and liberty of all men irrespective of race, creed or belief."⁹⁰

This prospect was hard to resist. The *Congress Bulletin*, which had once dared instruct the boycott movement about the Sabbath that was created for man, was

⁸⁸ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 105.

⁸⁹ Joseph Tenenbaum, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States," *Yad Vashem Studies* III, pp. 129-130 (Hebrew).

⁹⁰ *Congress Bulletin*, May 12, 1939.

impressed: "The plan of the Intergovernmental Committee may not represent the sole solution for the problem of the Jews under the rule of Nazism. The collapse of the regime which the boycott movement seeks may constitute a less immediate solution, but it bespeaks a great deal more."⁹¹

The Zionist journal *New Palestine* took a clear and unequivocal stand. It had no doubt that Myron Taylor and Rublee had done everything in their power to extort certain concessions from the Nazis. But in the past month conditions had changed. Any agreement now signed with the Nazis "is not worth the paper it is written on." With the entire democratic world organizing to stop Hitler, this was not the time to enter into a partnership with him "for the sake of a slight advantage for the refugees."⁹²

The event alluded to that had occurred in "the past month" was the conquest of Czechoslovakia. This act of aggression had caused resentment and outrage throughout the free world, and there was much talk about the need "to stop Hitler." But between talk and action the way was often long. Certainly between "stopping" Hitler and "eradicating" the regime. At this time, when Hitler was at the height of his power, a group of humanistic Jews decided that by implementing the economic boycott they could bring about the collapse of the Nazi government and liberate the world from the blight of despotism. All the 600,000 Jews of Germany needed to do was to wait until this came about...

* * * * *

A public debate along these lines accompanied the efforts of Myron Taylor and his aides to set up the Refugee Foundation. Since officially the agreement with Germany was considered secret until its publication with the agreement of both sides, the negotiations had to be conducted *in camera*. This fact produced propaganda advantages for the plan's opponents. The secret talks were depicted as the weaving of a conspiracy behind the public's back. The critics did not balk at exploiting unfounded reports or at *ad hominem* attacks bordering on incitement. An example of what we are talking about appears in an editorial in the Yiddish-language paper *Der Tag* whose editor was the well-known Zionist official Shmuel Margushes. The paper was reacting to a report that a group of Jewish leaders had gone to London in order to negotiate with the Anglo-Jewish group on the creation of the Refugee Foundation. In this connection the paper related that not long before, three Jewish "dignitaries" from London had visited America for the same purpose--to negotiate behind closed doors for the rescue of Jews.

"But they did not rescue a single person, because their public reception was such that they had to pack their bags and return home."

Now we are informed [the editorial continues] that a group of American leaders has gone to London for the same purpose. We may well ask: Who are these unknown leaders of American welfare organizations who have taken it upon themselves to negotiate the rescue of refugees on their own responsibility? Who empowered these "leaders"--if such they really re--to make plans without the people's knowledge and consent? Who permitted these "leaders" to agree that various countries, such as the Philippine Islands and British Guiana, would become the new home of the refugees?

Not so long ago it was a matter of national honor not to pay Hitler ransom for granting permission to extricate the Jews from his grip. Even non-Jews understood this. Now, as the YTA reports, this ransom method has been revived and become the subject of discussions. Therefore the question becomes even more pressing: Who are these unknown rescuers?⁹³

In addition to harassment in the press, attempts were made to thwart the Rublee Plan in other ways. For example, Shmuel Margushes and Dr. Tenenbaum put forward a proposal to bar the Refugee Foundation

⁹¹ Ibid., March 10, 1939.

⁹² *New Palestine*, April 21, 1939.

⁹³ *Der Tag*, June 7, according to *Congress Bulletin*, June 9, 1939.

from making use of its funds to purchase German goods.⁹⁴ These obstructions proved quite embarrassing to those engaged in the work. Thus Paul Baerwald, chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee and a prominent advocate of the plan, once revealed to Stephen Wise that the heavy pressure being exerted by the plan's Jewish opponents was causing him to ponder whether he should assume responsibility for the project, particularly in view of the fact that the support--and money--of non-Jews was about to be solicited. Baerwald was apprehensive that the ongoing pressure within the Jewish community would lead to the project's cancellation.⁹⁵

Authentic evidence concerning the WZO's attitude toward the Rublee Plan is provided by the episode of the plan's financing. As was mentioned above, the organizers had concluded that a fund of no more than \$1 million would suffice to get the project off the ground. Half the amount, it was decided, would be raised among American Jewry, and half among British Jewry. In America the plan was to obtain the \$500,000 from the UJA, to which end its chairman, Abba Hillel Silver, was approached. Silver objected to the allocation formally and on principle. The principle was that it was undesirable for the Jewish national funds to express their assent to the plan through financial support. As for the formal aspect, Silver said that the UJA was authorized to distribute its monies among three parties only: the Joint, the Palestine Fund, and the Foundation of American Communities. Funds could not be distributed to any other organization, and certainly not to the Refugee Foundation, which was not even a recognized Jewish body.⁹⁶ Silver revealed the true reason for his opposition to Stephen Wise when the latter approached him: the allocation was liable to adversely affect Eretz-Israel.⁹⁷

Stephen Wise having failed to win over Silver, additional advocates were dispatched. The first was James McDonald, head of the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees. Silver reiterated the formal reason and the argument of principle, and indicated quite transparently that he objected to the Rublee Plan ("without mixing in my own personal opinion of the plan--either positively or negatively"). Silver said that only the UJA's three partners could decide how to allocate the funds, each organization separately. Would the Palestine Fund agree to divert part of its money? No, he could not make such an undertaking without a directive from Weizmann or Ben-Gurion.

The pressure on Silver continued unabated that day. He was invited to a meeting with Henry Ittleton and two other functionaries--Louis Strauss and Rabbi Jonah Wise. After Silver had repeated his reasons

yet again, Ittleton suggested that perhaps the Joint would provide the necessary funds and then be reimbursed by the UJA's Allocations Committee.

Somewhat annoyed, Silver replied that the Joint had the fight to do so, but in that case the Palestine Fund would also make demands of its own. Still, Silver seems to have grasped the significance of the new idea. If the Joint were to provide the money and then be reimbursed by the UJA, the Palestine Fund would perforce find itself contributing to the plan, resulting in a loss of prestige and a possible falling out with the Roosevelt administration.

Silver suggested to his interlocutors that they draft a formal letter to the Palestine Fund which he would dispatch immediately to Jerusalem and London for the decision of the central Zionist institutions. Would he append to the letter his own assent and personal recommendation? No, he was not ready to give the plan his agreement or his recommendation. However, if the authorized leaders in Eretz-Israel accepted the idea, he would not stand in the way. Nor would he advise them not to accept it.⁹⁸

The pressure on Silver paid off. In a memorandum to Eliezer Kaplan he wrote that there was no choice but to approve the allocation from the Palestine Fund. Kaplan informed the Jewish Agency Executive about the Joint's intention to provide the money out of its coffers. "But this would mean that the money would come from the Distribution Committee (of the UJA) and we will be seen as the spoilers... Following consultations with Mr. Silver it seems to us that we will have to inform them of our negative grounds and to add that, in consideration of the request emanating from the

⁹⁴ Feingold, p. 74.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Abba Hillel Silver, June 2, 1939, CZA, File G4/17441.

⁹⁷ Feingold, pp. 73-74.

⁹⁸ Silver memorandum, *ibid.*

President's committee, we agree to allocate the funds on condition that when the money is distributed we also receive a larger percentage."99

One can imagine how grieved and hurt the Zionist leaders must have been when they were forced to show generosity for an enterprise they regarded as alien and fraught with danger. It is not impossible that Yitzhak Gruenbaum remembered this embarrassing situation three years later, when he shut tight the redemption funds in the face of the urgent needs of the rescue...

But even in 1939 the gesture of generosity was not translated into the language of action. Over a month went by between Silver's conversation with the two advocates of the plan (June 2) and the decision of the Jewish Agency Executive (July 9). We do not know when, or if, the parties concerned were informed of the generous decision. In the meantime, the interminable negotiations on the creation of the Private

Foundation dragged on, and at their conclusion it emerged that the entire million dollars was being provided by the Joint. Certainly it would be reimbursed by the UJA, and the Zionist funds would perforce bear part of the expenditures.

On July 20 the presidium of the Intergovernmental Committee met in order to set up the Coordinating Foundation, as it was finally named. Twenty persons, Jews and non-Jews, including ten Americans and eight British representatives, were elected to the foundation's board of directors.100 A former Prime Minister of Belgium, van Zeeland, was asked to serve as director. It took the new body about two weeks to organize itself procedurally and juridically. Four weeks later World War II broke out.

The unwillingness of the Jews to set up the Refugee Foundation at an early stage was not the only delaying factor. Disagreement existed between America and England as to whether the refugees should be settled in large centers (as the U.S. thought) or in relatively small groups (as the British thought); and whether the governments should contribute from their own funds to underwrite the settlement plans (Britain) or impose the funding exclusively on the private organizations (the U.S.). There were clarifications and uncertainties about the form and size of the initial financing, and other problems. These clarifications in themselves were liable to cause delays. But the major delay to the plan stemmed from the Jewish opposition. The truth is that because of that opposition the establishment of the Refugee Foundation was delayed for five crucial months and the Rublee Plan was not implemented.

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In assessing what Zionism did to German Jewry in this stage, we will once more refrain from accusing the Zionists of abandoning the German Jews to a violent death. Even then, in the spring and summer of 1939, no one was thinking along the lines of total destruction. Nonetheless, it is no exaggeration to describe what was done as *laying siege* to a Jewish group which was in terrible distress. The situation of Germany's Jews was thoroughly known from the accounts of visitors and of refugees who managed to get out of the country. The Jewish Agency Executive heard an updated report from Eliahu Dobkin who had just visited Germany and Austria.101 According to Dobkin, less than 1 percent of the wage earners were in fact earning a living, and over half of them were employed in community and Zionist institutions. Two-thirds of Austrian Jews and one-third of German Jews were living on charity. Many had been able to manage only by selling jewelry and other valuables. But

the authorities had now ordered the Jews to hand over all the jewelry in their possession, and he, Dobkin, had witnessed the despair that had seized the Jews at this decree.

Dobkin also related that officially, every Jewish emigrant could take with him 6 percent of his capital, but in practice not even this was allowed him. Every Jew in Germany and Austria was thinking about escape. The Nazi authorities were not talking about the liquidation of the Jews within three years--their intention was that the majority should leave within one year. Not even Dobkin's shocking account impelled the Jewish Agency leadership to budge from its position. The chairman of the

99 Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, July 9, 1939.

100 *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 41, p. 390.

101 Minutes of Jewish Agency, March 19, 1939.

session, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, thanked Dobkin “for his excellent and exhaustive talk,” and that was the end of the matter.

Concurrent with its vigorous war against the Rublee Plan, the WZO pursued the *Haavarah* deal.¹⁰² Its representatives also made useful deals with the Gestapo in Berlin and Vienna aimed at bringing about the immigration to Palestine of Zionist pioneers, the establishment of training facilities for the pioneers, and the liberation of potential Palestine settlers from concentration camps.¹⁰³ When it came to *aliyah*, deals with the Nazis were not unconscionable and the Jews were not compelled to wait until the collapse of the regime.

* * * * *

The formula of “what would have happened if...” is not generally conducive to fruitful reflection. However, when the goal is to learn a lesson, a clarification of this kind is both essential and justified, provided one’s conclusions are not taken as verified proofs but as reasonable suppositions. With this demurrer in mind, we will try to answer the question of what the Jewish people lost because of the five-month delay in organizing for the implementation of the Rublee Plan. In other words, what prospects did the plan hold out, had the Jews moved to implement it speedily?

A few clarifications will be helpful in our discussion. Firstly, it turns out that the *principal and critical* motive for the Nazis’ assent to the Rublee Plan was neither a desire to extort ransom payments nor even a wish to improve Germany’s balance of trade; the compelling reason was the Nazis’ keenness to see the Jews leave the country as rapidly as possible. Unlike the original Schacht Plan, world Jewry was not called upon to come up with 1.5 billion Reichsmarks, and the release of one-quarter of the Jews’ assets was not made contingent on increased revenues from German foreign trade. It was the economist Schacht who wanted to please his masters by extorting economic benefits. This line of thought

may have played a certain part in Goering’s decision and in the winning over of Hitler. But confronted with the absolute objection of the Intergovernmental Committee, Schacht himself was quick to revoke the most blatantly extortionist elements of the plan, before being dismissed.

To be sure, the Rublee Plan seemed to legitimize the plunder of the greater part of the Jews’ property. The possibility existed that the relatively calm atmosphere of the talks regarding the Jews’ orderly exodus would have an adverse effect on the economic boycott. Yet these indirect results, important as they were, could never have the same significance of such a central plank in the Nazis’ platform as the expulsion of the Jews from German soil. When it emerged that the Jews were not leaving at the desired rate and that actions intended to accelerate their departure, such as the November pogrom, were causing undesirable international reverberations, Goering took matters into his own hands and opted for the most effective course of action as he saw it.

The second question that requires clarification relates to the influence of the forces inside Germany that were behind the Wohlthat-Rublee Plan. In the view of Rublee himself, Goering represented “conservative elements” which, in contrast to “radical elements,” wished to alter the policy vis-a-vis the Jews because they were aware of its harmful impact on Germany and the country’s foreign trade.¹⁰⁴

We need not concur in Rublee’s impression that Goering was motivated by humanitarian impulses. He could not have known at the time that two years later Goering would order Heydrich to execute “the desired final solution” and thereby set in motion the general annihilation of European Jewry. The truth is that his description, in itself accurate, has to be rounded out in various places in order to prevent the emergence of a distorted picture. The notion of a social struggle between conservatives and radicals--or as they are more usually called, “moderates” and „extremists”--as this occurs in a democratic society, can prove quite misleading if applied indiscriminately to the Nazi society. In that society there was no *public* contest between different opinions, and it was not public opinion which tipped the scales. The German public that read the papers and listened to the radio knew of a single policy and a single “truth”--that of the Fuehrer. The struggle between opinions was not

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Jon and David Kimche, *Secret Roads*, pp. 15-44.

¹⁰⁴ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 83.

decided by enlisting public support but by obtaining Hitler's consent. The Fuehrer's support was an irresistible force. An explicit decision made by him and then made public became the law of the land, a totalitarian substitute for public opinion.

Once Goering had secured Hitler's support, no one could interfere with the process of attaining an agreement with Rublee. At the conclusion of the talks Wohlthat announced that the agreement had been approved not only by Goering but also by the other ministries involved.¹⁰⁵ Some had given their assent reluctantly, but had submitted to Goering's pressure. Of these the most prominent was undoubtedly Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, who was revolted by the entire episode. We described above how Schacht bypassed him in going to London at Goering's behest. Following Ribbentrop's angry remonstrations a representative of the Foreign Office, Eisenlohr, was added to the team negotiating with Rublee. This however failed to increase Ribbentrop's concrete influence. For proof of this it is sufficient to read the virulent circular of January 25, 1939, disseminated by the Foreign Office among German missions abroad and frequently quoted in Holocaust studies, and compare it with the text of the Wohlthat-Rublee agreement. Additional proof derives from the Foreign Office directive to Eisenlohr "not to make any kind of promises to Mr. Rublee concerning the handling of Germany's Jews in the future."¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, as we saw, the final agreement contained explicit pledges and commitments. Ribbentrop was forced to give his assent.

Another Nazi leader who found himself compelled to submit--officially, at least--to the pressure exerted by Goering with Hitler's patronage was the Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels. When Rublee's successor, Robert Pell, complained that antisemitic propaganda was hindering the absorption of refugees in certain countries, Wohlthat informed him that he had received an "extremely explicit assurance" from Goebbels that if the Intergovernmental Committee pointed to a country which showed an inclination to accept refugees in substantial numbers, an order would be issued to desist from propaganda in that country.¹⁰⁷

A typical example of a Nazi concession toward the attainment of the Rublee Plan was the verbal retreat demonstrated in the following case. In the second half of February German ships packed with Jews who had no visas for any country appeared in the Caribbean, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean. Attempts to land the Jewish passengers at various ports, especially in Latin America, triggered negative reactions which were liable to torpedo the prospects of an orderly absorption of immigrants. A request from the British ambassador to the German Foreign Office to put a stop to these sailings was rejected out of hand. The German authorities, he was told, were not willing to assume responsibility for directing the Jews to their target locales. Since they were leaving Germany, their destination was of no further interest to the

authorities and they could not stop the emigrants from purchasing passage on German ships.¹⁰⁸

An identical request, this time made by the Intergovernmental Committee, did produce results, albeit not immediately. At a meeting with Pell in late April, Wohlthat informed him that the Ministry of Transport had issued strict orders barring the transport of passengers without visas and imposing heavy fines on ship owners and travel agents found guilty of abetting this practice.¹⁰⁹

Particularly interesting was the fact that these "wildcat" ships were dispatched with the encouragement and support, if not at the initiative, of the Gestapo chief Heydrich. A week before the finalizing of the Wohlthat-Rublee agreement Goering appointed Heydrich head of the Reich Main Security Office with the task of "accelerating the emigration of the Jews." Among the ships' passengers were Jews who had given up hope of a more dignified departure, concentration camp inmates who had been released on condition that they emigrate, and persons arrested or rounded up in special Gestapo operations--abduction on the street, "emigration quotas" imposed on communities, and the like. In the light of the Intergovernmental Committee's reasoned

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ger. Doc., Fourth Series, Vol. III, p. 925.

¹⁰⁷ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 92-94.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 104. It stands to reason that the British request and the firm German reply were related to the problem of illegal immigration to Palestine, which the Nazis supported in this period. This conjecture does not detract from the significance of the accession to Pell's request which referred, substantively, primarily to Latin America. See *ibid.*, p. 93.

opposition, Heydrich made a gesture of backpedaling which was meant to display the good will of the German side provided the other side also fulfilled its obligation. The sailings of the "wildcat" ships, at all events, were not completely halted. Moreover, to prevent any misunderstanding of his concession, the Gestapo chief dispatched a Jewish delegation to London to warn those concerned that if the Intergovernmental Committee did not take immediate steps to find places of haven for the number of emigrants that would satisfy it, and if "international Jewry" did not immediately set up the "Private Foundation," the German authorities would revert to violent methods of removing the Jews.¹¹⁰

As long as the secret contacts continued, no signs of "moderation" could be discerned in the German authorities' attitude toward the Jews. Hitler's support eliminated the potential obstacles posed by the opposition of the "extremists" in the negotiations, but was oblivious to the declared ongoing policy. The policy of persecutions and oppression continued unabated. Goebbels' propaganda apparatus continued to spew out venom and incitement. The dispossession of the Jews' property and businesses intensified after the November pogrom and was accompanied by physical abuse and humiliations. The atmosphere of malice and threats was consonant with Hitler's famous declaration on "the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe" in the event of a war--a warning he sounded a few

days prior to the conclusion of the Wohlthat-Rublee Statement of Agreement.

As Wohlthat had promised in Goering's name, everything was apt to change radically once the arrangement became publicly known and the appropriate edicts were issued over the Fuehrer's signature or approval. On Saturday, April 29, Wohlthat was to be received by Hitler in order to report on the negotiations with the Intergovernmental Committee and to present him with a series of orders for his approval. These orders, Wohlthat told Pell, had been approved by the relevant ministries. The orders concerning the organization of the Jews with a view to the implementation of the arrangement, if approved by Hitler, would take effect the following week. Those concerning the establishment of the trust fund would be temporarily delayed until the non-German side carried out concrete actions leading to the creation of the Private Foundation.

Wohlthat, Pell Later reported, allowed him to read the orders regarding the organization of the Jews. "They are very detailed... They accord the Jews legal status in Germany... If these orders take effect and are properly carried out, *the Jews will receive a totally new status in the Reich*. Wohlthat assured me with the greatest solemnity that Goering intends to enforce these orders in their full meaning."¹¹¹

* * * * *

The prospect that in "the following week" the Jews were to be granted an entirely new status, and that Goering, with Hitler's backing, would impose the change on the Nazi state--this was a prospect which even 35 years later cannot leave the Jewish researcher indifferent. The more so when a few months later everyone saw that an instantaneous extreme change of attitude toward people and values was easily implemented in a totalitarian regime. When in August 1939 Hitler and Stalin ordered their nations to change overnight their attitudes toward Communism and Fascism, respectively, this was effected without any difficulties or crises on either side. In each country the propaganda machinery revised its style and no great effort was required to convince the people of the justness of the new "truth." As one who was then living in the Soviet Union, the present writer can testify to the fact that the abrupt shift did not entail any arduous labors of persuasion--noting beyond the removal of stacks of posters, leaflets and books espousing the old line and their replacement by propaganda material reflecting the new line. As far as we know, the same process unfolded itself on the German side.

Had the change in attitude toward the Jews occurred, as anticipated, in the first week of May, it would have been less ideologically

fundamental and wielded a more concrete influence on the behavior of the Germans, than the change that was generated by the sudden flareup of friendship

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-114. Details about the delegation's visit below.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.103.

between the two dictators. The change would not have touched on the roots of the Nazi doctrine and would not have required the abjuring of declared principles. On the other hand, it would have encompassed broad circles among the German population. The scientific institutes of racial doctrine would have continued their activity, and thick journals would have gone on explicating the diverse aspects of the inferiority of Jewish blood. Goebbels would have continued to explain why there was no place for the Jews in German society. Yet at the same time, he would have been compelled to explain why the leader of the German people had decided to enter into an agreement with international Jewry, and what every German should do in order to fulfill the Fuehrer's will. Under Goering's close scrutiny, Goebbels would have had to instruct the citizens of Germany how to reconcile themselves to the proximity of the 200,000 elderly Jews whom Hitler had decided to let live out their lives in the Reich. With great dissimulation, at the least, he would have urged Germans not to over-abuse those Jews who were awaiting their turn to leave. The Gauleiter Streicher would have been compelled to tone down his *Stuermer* or even discontinue it altogether...

Even if all this had come to pass, Germany's Jews would hardly have found themselves in an earthly paradise. Their life in Germany would still have been founded on the premise that they were inferior, subhuman creatures, with their presence in the country endured on a temporary basis or, in the case of the elderly, thanks to the Fuehrer's generosity. From the viewpoint of normality, the whole array of benefits and facilitations would not have revoked the brutal expulsion.

Manifestly, no certainty attaches to Schacht's dogmatic assertion that had the plan--either his or that of Wohlthat-Ruble--been implemented, not a single German Jew would have lost his life. As we noted above, there is no proof that Hitler, an inveterate violator of agreements and undertakings, would have chosen to honor precisely this agreement in the war years.

Yet all the qualifications notwithstanding, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the benefits that the plan's realization might have brought to Germany's tormented Jews. The "totally new" status envisaged by Robert Pell was not lacking in substantive content. It might have found expression in any number of realms. For the first time since the establishment of the Nazi regime, directives were to be issued dealing not with [what?] was *prohibited* for the Jews, but with the rights being granted [to?]

them by the government--which was also the guarantor of their fulfillment. In the situation of German Jewry, the most significant of these rights was, surely, the right to *certainty*. An explicit legal status would have done away with the constant expectation of frequent new edicts and curbed the arbitrary behavior of local rulers. According to the report of Pell, who read the drafts of the orders, this status was to be determined in accordance with Chapter I of the memorandum signed with Rublee. Henceforth every Jew, as well as every German, would have known that the Jews of working age and their families were in Germany on a temporary basis; that during the waiting period they would be allowed to earn their living; that the government would assist them to acquire the professions they would require in their new homes; and that while they remained in Germany no change would accrue in their status and no harm befall them. Whoever recalls the fear- and surprise-laden situation of Germany's Jews can appreciate the promised changes.

The new situation would surely have exercised a profound influence on the 200,000 elderly Jews who were to be accorded a new status and would remain in Germany for the rest of their lives, some of them working and the rest enjoying defined and agreed social welfare. Two hundred thousand Jews, most of them deeply involved in the German milieu, would carry on with their regular life, walk about freely, and maintain daily contacts with their German neighbors. This with the explicit assurance of the authorities that so things should be and so they should remain, at the will of the Fuehrer. Even if we take into account all the explanations and rationalizations likely to attend this sharp shift, it is not difficult to imagine the vast effect it would have exercised on the mood and behavior of the German population. For the first time since the establishment of the Nazi regime it would be seen that the perpetual presence of a large Jewish group inside Germany and its permanent residence among Germans under tolerable conditions, need not conflict with the rules of behavior of good Germans. This state of affairs, when applied to hundreds of thousands of Germans who had personal contact with the Jews, and millions more who were aware of the surprising development, would inevitably modify the monstrous

image of the Jew created over the years by Nazi propaganda and cause breaches in the wall of loathing and blind revulsion *vis-a-vis* the Jews.

If any reader wishes to object to the above description on the ground that it reflects no more than wishful thinking, his objection will not be accepted. We are not describing a *necessary* train of developments, but one that was *possible* and probable. Nor do we wish to exaggerate the

stabilizing effects of the new atmosphere: we are well aware that four months after the conjectured change war erupted, and “the Jews’ blame for the war” became a permanent theme in Nazi propaganda. We did not forget that once war broke out between them the sudden friendship between Hitler and Stalin, which we cited to demonstrate the probability of the shift, ended as abruptly as it had begun and left no trace in the Germans’ outlook.

The point we wanted to make is that in addition to the immense immediate relief for Germany’s Jews that the implementation of the Rublee Plan under Goering’s active auspices would have brought, it might also have caused a major disruption in the brainwashing of the German people regarding the supposedly base character of the Jews and in the rules of behavior toward them.

Furthermore, it is our assumption that an improvement in the attitude toward the Jews would have struck a chord in various sections of the German society, particularly the adults. From the abundance of testimonies confirming this hypothesis we will cite only two, taken from the opposite ends of the Holocaust chronicles. In his well-known speech at Poznan, at the very height of the destruction, the arch-butcher Himmler complained that each of the 80 million Germans “has one decent Jew of his own” whom he praises and wishes to spare.¹¹²

The second testimony is to be found in Shmuel Zygelboim’s book on his wanderings across Germany in an effort to get out of the country. After being rebuffed at the border with Holland, he found himself in the town of Bentheim, exhausted, hungry and penniless. The ticket-seller at the train station (perhaps not realizing he was Jewish) gave him, in return for a punched ticket, a sum equal to the cost of the trip from the border to Amsterdam. After spending most of this amount on a ticket for Berlin, he did not have enough left for food and a hotel. In his distress he offered the hotel owner, an old German, his watch in lieu of payment. Just then a passerby appeared and the hotel owner barked angrily, “Don’t you haggle with me, Jew!” But the moment the third person went on his way the old man’s face became human again, he said a few words of sympathy, returned the watch, and gave Zygelboim back one Reichsmark of his payment. “Good luck. One day, if you get the chance, you’ll pay me back.” The chapter in Zygelboim’s book devoted to this incident is entitled “Man Is Good.”¹¹³

The interface between the inner mental inclinations and an external factor--the government--urging a change in attitude toward the Jews might have wrought in the German psyche a shift far deeper and more extensive

than either Goering or Hitler had intended. A social factor might have emerged which the government would have been compelled to address. We saw (Ch. I) that the Nazi regime was forced to back-pedal in the face of certain frames of mind in German society and to abandon its plans for “mercy-killing” and for disposing of the members of mixed-German-Jewish families. We saw how a crowd of Germans outside a Jewish old-age home in Berlin forced the Nazis to postpone for several weeks the transport of the inmates to death camps. Would it be exaggerated to think that a dissident, more active public opinion might have exercised a concrete influence on the entire operation?

Moreover, no one knows precisely when and under what circumstances Hitler’s depraved mind decided to execute the plan for the total destruction of the Jews. But it stands to reason that the background to this vicious scheme was the near universal consensus among the German people that the Jews were not true human beings but debased and incorrigible subhuman creatures. Is it really far-fetched to think that the decision might have been postponed or never made at all, had the wall of hatred and revulsion been breached by broad cracks of human feelings?

112 IMT, Ps-1919.

113 Zygelboim Book, pp. 300-306; A. Stein, Comrade Artur, pp. 224-229.

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According to the report of Robert Pell, the Germans intended to delay the establishment of the Jewish-property fund until the Intergovernmental Committee took concrete steps toward creating the foundation of private organizations. This delay, he noted did not apply to the orders regarding the revised status of the Jews in Germany: these would take effect immediately after being approved by Hitler. It emerged, however, that before such approval could be obtained, Hitler had to be shown proof of progress in the establishment of the Private Foundation. Pell said that Wohlthat was bitterly disappointed when he had nothing substantial to report... He and Goering were placed in a difficult position *vis-a-vis* the Fuehrer. Beginning in February they assured him that something was about to be done, but nothing concrete was done. In the meantime the elements seeking to destroy Jewish property in Germany are active. The value of Jewish property decreases from day to day. Those who derided Goering's program to solve the Jewish problem are beginning to claim: 'We told you so.'

What response could Pell make? The only sign of progress he could show was a letter proposing officially that Professor Paul Brin be appointed the third--non-German--trustee on the directorship of the trust fund. As for the creation of the private foundation, no substantive beginning had yet been made. The Jews in America, who had been

assembled with such great effort by Myron Taylor, had not yet been taken to meet with the President in order to hear one of his pep-talks. The secret preparations were being made under the watchful eye of the hostile Jewish press, accompanied by denunciatory vocal opposition...

Pell did not conceal the situation from Wohlthat. He told him frankly of the fierce resistance that had to be overcome, and assured him that vigorous efforts were underway toward the establishment of the foundation. With this general pledge Wohlthat went to Hitler, but it was not enough to secure approval of the orders.

If instead of the gentile Robert Pell, Wohlthat's opposite had been a Jewish functionary, flesh of the flesh of the troubled Jews, the results might have been different. Because of the grave dangers and the unique opportunity, a Jewish official might have decided to embellish things and provide a progress report more optimistic than was warranted by the facts. If for the sake of the rescue he had used the past tense to tell Wohlthat about things that would--that must!--be done tomorrow, he would not have looked on this as a culpable offense. Certainly he would never have allowed himself to reveal to the Nazi the antagonisms and divisions among the would-be rescuers. And then, who knows--we saw above that the Nazis had made the implementation of the orders contingent on less stringent conditions than the establishment of the Jewish-property fund. Goering's eagerness to advance the plan is a matter of record. If Wohlthat had gone to Hitler not "disappointed" and downcast but deeply impressed by an optimistic report from a Jewish representative, the orders might have been signed and developments might have taken a different course.

For a gentile to have engaged in a stratagem like this was inconceivable. With all his good will and sympathy toward the innocent victims, he would never allow himself to exaggerate or, heaven forbid, to deviate from the truth. Nor would his superiors countenance this. Who ever heard of such a thing?...

These reflections are substantially strengthened by the case of a confrontation between Jewish functionaries and non-Jewish benefactors not all of whom were blessed with Robert Pell's integrity. We refer to the German-Jewish delegation that was dispatched to London by the Gestapo chief, Heydrich. As will be recalled, the delegation was instructed to hasten the work of the Intergovernmental Committee and warn it that if it did not fulfill its mandate, the Nazis would revert to their shock-tactics of removing Jews from Germany. The delegation suggested a timetable for the departure of all the Jews within three years and asked the committee to approve this or a similar program. The head of the delegation, Wilfrid

Israel, emphasized that he did not doubt Goering's sincerity in this matter, but Goering was fighting a rearguard battle against the plan's opponents. Israel related that Hitler, after receiving Wohlthat's report on the insufficient progress made by the

Intergovernmental Committee, had refused to allow publication of the orders until more substantial results were achieved.

The delegation met twice with the Intergovernmental Committee. The first meeting (May 18) was attended by the committee's ranking members--Winterton, Emerson, Pell, and others. The remarks of the senior member, Lord Winterton, came as a rude shock to the delegation. Winterton explained that neither the British government nor the Intergovernmental Committee had any intention of allowing the German police to tell them what to do and what not to do. The committee, he said, had evinced much good will and patience in its relations with the German authorities. It had done everything possible to find places of shelter for the refugees. He, Winterton, believed that the financiers were doing all they could to underwrite the program--but the committee should not be asked to do the impossible. The violent methods resorted to by the Germans in expelling the Jews had greatly impeded the work of the committee; a return to those methods would render that work impossible. He also reminded the delegation that the German authorities had once declared their intention to do a great many things, such as introducing vocational training for the emigrants, creating a Jewish organization, and so forth--but in practice they had done nothing. Nevertheless, he did not doubt the Germans' good intentions and was ready to demonstrate mutuality in this matter.

It was this declaration by the British lord, instead of a timetable, that the delegation would be compelled to take to the impatient chief of police who held in his hands their fate and the fate of their brethren...

Faced with the visible gloom of the delegation, the committee chairman nonetheless decided to ask Emerson and Pell to meet again with the German Jews in order to clarify with them what could be done toward acceding to its request.¹¹⁴

In the second meeting, held the following day, the already wretched delegation was subjected to unmerciful chastisement. This time it was Sir Herbert Emerson who was the ranking and deciding figure, and he taught the Jews a lesson in the meaning of nobility. Pell's comment that Emerson was "adamant" was really an understatement.

The delegation said that if they returned to Germany empty-handed, the Jews would be subjected to cruel methods of deportation,

certainly in the provinces and perhaps throughout the country. They asked for an emigration timetable for 1939 only, or, at least, a proposed program with a pledge that it would be submitted to the governments concerned.

Emerson was firm in his refusal. While he had every sympathy for the Jewish community in Germany, he would not submit to blackmail. He would not be a party to a fraudulent statement, and any statement which might lead the Germans to think that the governments would take a certain line of action in the future, especially where numbers were concerned, would be dishonest. He read out to the delegation parts of Pell's April 6 memorandum to Wohlthat, and asserted that the assurances it contained represented the outer limit of the committee's capabilities.

"The group from Berlin was obviously very distressed," Pell notes. They pleaded with Emerson to at least write a letter to Lord Reading stating that the committee would try to bring out a certain number of Jews that year. The delegation would then take a copy of the letter to Heydrich. Emerson refused.

Finally Wilfrid Israel made one last entreaty: that a letter be sent to Lord Reading stating that the Intergovernmental Committee was proceeding in line with the April 6 memorandum and hoped that the plan could be implemented. Openly bitter, Pell wrote in his report that "Emerson refused even to consider this minimum plea."

Indignant as he was, however, Pell did not assail Emerson for his vicious behavior toward the Jews. Firstly, it is doubtful whether his intervention would have helped. And secondly, he probably thought that at bottom, Emerson was right: there should be no submission to blackmail, and nothing should be said that was liable to result in duplicitous behavior. After all, he, too, Pell, had followed this rule in his talk with Wohlthat three weeks earlier: he had spoken frankly about everything, without deviating from the pure truth. As for Emerson's spurning of the delegation's last request, that was quite unpleasant. Sir Herbert was not a very congenial person. Really, it was a pity...

¹¹⁴ FRUS 1939, Vol. II, pp. 110-112.

Absent from this human drama was one of Anglo-Jewry's devoted and wise leaders who could have reminded Emerson and his colleagues of a few home truths: that the German chief of police, Heydrich, was the real and most commanding authority concerning German Jewry; that in certain circumstances a resolute stand against blackmail was not the highest moral or even utilitarian imperative; that the rule forbidding duplicity in negotiations lacked moral validity when the other side was a gang of cutthroats; and above all, that the refusal to confirm the April 6

memorandum was a case of petty revenge against defenseless and innocent persons, an act devoid of humanity.

But there was no Anglo-Jewish leader who empathized with the plight of the wretched delegation to the point of coming to its aid.

A similar incident occurred in the final stage of the Intergovernmental Committee's pre-war activity. When the Coordinating Foundation was finally established and had organized itself, the committee's director, Sir Herbert Emerson, instructed the director of the new Foundation, Paul van Zeeland, to refrain from making contact with the German government until it demonstrated its readiness to implement its part of the agreement. This took place on August 1st. Emerson's country was on the brink of entering the war. Van Zeeland's country was in danger of invasion. Both men were worried and distraught. For both, the rescue of Jews was an important precept, but one that bore delay. Perhaps an appeal at such a late hour would have been ineffectual. But the appeal was not made for the opposite reason: the hour, it was argued, was too early. And not a single Jew objected to this strange logic.

These events, together with many others, exemplify a bitter and persistent truth which is deeply interwoven in the episode of the Rublee Plan. That fact--which cannot be expunged or obliterated from the annals of the Jewish people--is that for nearly a year a group of American non-Jews headed by Myron Taylor under the active auspices of President Roosevelt engaged in considerable efforts to extricate the Jews of Germany. The dedicated activity of the Americans had the vacillating aid of British representatives and, to a lesser degree, of other countries.

Throughout this entire period the attitude of the Jewish organizations swung between total opposition on the part of the overwhelming majority, and constrained and reluctant cooperation on the part of a few functionaries whose true motivation was opposition to rival Jewish organizations. And on the issue that is of primary concern to us:

the Zionist movement vigorously opposed the Rublee Plan and did all it could to thwart its implementation.

* * * * *

We will conclude this chapter with a survey of the situation concerning the extrication of Germany's Jews on the eve of the war. In a report to the 21st Zionist Congress in August 1939, the Jewish Agency's Central Office for the Settlement of German Jewry stated as follows (emphases in the original):

In the past two years the United States of America applied the administrative immigration procedure so that at least the maximum immigration quota from Germany and Austria permitted by law was fully utilized... In the first weeks after the annexation of Austria and the November riots, Belgium, Holland, France and Switzerland absorbed thousands of refugees who crossed the border legally or illegally, and they are trying to overcome the refugee problem which, in the wake of these developments, was greatly aggravated in their countries, by setting up *transit camps* where the refugees will remain until they immigrate overseas.

In *England*, the events of November prompted the entire public, both Jewish and non-Jewish, as never before, to demand the absorption of refugees, and with the explicit assistance of the government, operational means were set up to transfer thousands of refugees from Germany to England. Thanks to the Lord Samuel's initiative, a movement was created to transfer children and youth, which so far has been able to bring *7,000 children and youth to England*. The vast majority were placed with families that undertook to receive them and see to their education, while the remaining few were sent to special centers. Temporary-residence permits were obtained for 1,500 *halutzim* so that they can receive or complete their agricultural

training here. Women and young women who are willing to do household work generally receive entry and work permits from the British government, if it can be proved that they have employment; and finally, every refugee who has a solid prospect of immigration and who is guaranteed financially during his temporary stay, generally receives an entry permit. Today there are over 35,000 Jewish refugees [in England], including children and youth--more than twice as many as before the events of 1938.

England's sympathetic attitude toward the plight of the refugees was noted also by Eliahu Dobkin in the report to the Jewish Agency Executive already quoted: "England is one of the countries most admired by Vienna's Jews... Generally speaking, it is less difficult to obtain a visa for England than for other countries, and this is greatly appreciated by the Jews."

England has no land border with Germany, and virtually all the refugees entering the country did so legally, with the prior assent of the British government. Germany's neighbors also took in considerable numbers of refugees, even though some of them had crossed the border illegally. Heading the list was France, where some 45,000 Austrian and German Jewish refugees resided on the eve of the war.¹¹⁵ Holland and Belgium each took in 30,000 refugees, Switzerland 8,000.¹¹⁶ All told, upon the outbreak of the war, there were in Western Europe approximately 150,000 refugees, of whom a third hoped to settle in their present country of residence while the rest were intent on immigration overseas.¹¹⁷

From 1933 until the start of the war some 350,000 Jewish refugees left Germany and Austria.¹¹⁸ Of these, 143,000 had left by July 1, 1938.¹¹⁹ Thus, within the following 14 months--from the Evian Conference until the outbreak of the *war--over 200,000 Jews left Germany*. Even though the Rublee Plan was not implemented, European countries did not waver in their readiness to take in tens of thousands of Jews--many times more than had been suggested by the niggardly speeches of their representatives at Evian.

Not everywhere were the Jews received with the same willingness as in England, and no government encouraged them to come. Still, they came, and the majority were not sent back. In fact, 1938 witnessed the extrication of German Jewry along the lines put forward by Sir John Hope-Simpson and proposed by Dr. Senator to the Jewish Agency Executive--but in the reverse order. The transit camps were established not *prior* to the planned arrival of the refugees, but afterward, in order to cope with the growing problem posed by their influx in the thousands and tens of thousands.

As regards Latin America, testimony exists which seems to describe definitively the behavior of the countries there in the fateful period. The historian and sociologist Mark Wischnitzer, who had firsthand knowledge of the events when they occurred, relates: "Of the ten South American republics that were capable of absorbing a considerable number of refugees--Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and Uruguay--only Bolivia showed relative liberalism in its immigration policy in the years 1938-1939."¹²⁰ This testimony of a well-informed and reliable source sounds like a final and irrevocable judgment. But it is not.

In the first place, Wischnitzer's data are incomplete. Had he extended his period of scrutiny by another six months, Bolivia, too, would have been listed with the rest of the non-liberal states. On May 6, 1940,

the Bolivian government issued an order barring the granting of all entry visas and laissez-passers "to persons of Semitic origin."¹²¹ Bolivia thus joined the other countries of South America, which closed their gates after having given shelter to thousands of Jewish refugees.

Secondly, it emerges that Bolivia is actually a salient example of the Latin American countries (excluding Argentina and Brazil) which were characterized by the *opening* of their gates after July 1938. These states had always been known for their

¹¹⁵ Mark Wischnitzer, *Visas to Freedom: The History of HIAS*, p. 162.

¹¹⁶ *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 42, p. 600.

¹¹⁷ Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, p. 221.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Werner Rosenstock, "Jewish Emigration from Germany," Leo Baeck Institute, *Yearbook* I, 1956, p. 377.

¹²⁰ Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, p. 205.

¹²¹ Dr. Jacob Shatzky, *Yiddishe Yishuvim in Latein-Amerike* (Yiddish), 1952, p. 89.

strict restrictions on the entry of foreigners, and their actions following the Evian Conference were highly unusual from this point of view. Afterward, once a few thousand refugees had entered, these countries began to close their gates one after the other, though subject to vacillations and hesitations due to internal and external pressures. We turn now to a brief survey of the developments in the various countries.¹²²

For hundreds of years there had been no Jewish community in **Bolivia**, ever since the Inquisition had forced the assimilation of the remnants of the Spanish and Portuguese *Marranos* who had sought refuge in Bolivia. Before 1938, the country's Jewish population stood at no more than 200. In 1938 the government began to absorb Jewish refugees--as farmers. Agricultural land was allocated and organizational arrangements made to establish a Jewish colony. By the end of 1939, over 9,000 refugees had entered the country. In February 1940 (as will be related below) it still seemed possible to bring in another 4,800 families under certain financial conditions. Three months later Bolivia's gates were sealed shut.

Two thousand refugees entered **Chile** in 1938. In May 1939 an order was issued barring the entry of immigrants for one year. Nevertheless, that year saw the entry of an additional 8,000 refugees, both before and after the publication of the order. In February 1940, entry was again temporarily prohibited, and in the following month entry quotas were proclaimed, with priority to agricultural workers. All told, Chile's Jewish population doubled within two years--from 10,000 to 20,000.

Paraguay admitted 1,000 refugees before closing its gates in September 1938.

Uruguay allowed 3,000 refugees to enter in 1938, 2,000 of them bearing transit permits. An additional 2,200 entered in 1939.

Peru admitted 2,000 refugees, the majority on a temporary basis.

Colombia took in 1,200 refugees, at a rate of 50-60 per month.

It is known that 1,000 Jewish refugees settled in Guayaquil, one of **Ecuador's** main cities.¹²³ Quito agreed to allow mass Jewish

immigration, but the plan came to nothing after the Jewish emigration organizations in Germany found that climatic and other conditions in Ecuador were unsuitable for the refugees.¹²⁴

Cuba, which was not included in Wishnitzer's list and which had gained some uncomplimentary publicity in the wake of the *St. Louis* episode, in 1938 admitted 3,000 refugees, and by July 1, 1939, their number stood at 6,000. Many of the refugees were totally destitute and were aided by Jewish welfare agencies in the U.S. Cuba was in the midst of a severe economic crisis. In May 1939 the immigration laws were greatly toughened, and stringent controls were introduced in the granting of visas. All previously issued visas were cancelled. Ten days after the official order was issued, the *St. Louis* set sail from Hamburg with 900 refugees bearing visas that were now invalid. A worldwide furor erupted when the refugees were not allowed to disembark in Havana. At the end of 1939, 2,900 refugees remained on the island, following the departure of some of them for other destinations, principally the United States. In May 1940, Cuba closed its gates to refugees.

Divergent appraisals, some of them highly contradictory, exist concerning the part played by the two largest Latin American countries, Argentina and Brazil, in refugee absorption, and regarding the total number of refugees who found shelter in Latin America. We had no choice but to select two general assessments which, in addition to the reliability of their sources, are rendered more credible by their specification by county. According to the *first* assessment,¹²⁵ 26,150 refugees were absorbed in the countries of Latin America as of July 1, 1938. Another source¹²⁶ estimates the number of refugees in these same countries at 83,000 *toward the end of 1939*. This source¹²⁷ provides a table showing the worldwide distribution of Jewish refugees as of December 31, 1939, and includes also Latin America. The combination of the two sources yields the following picture:

¹²² Data based on surveys in various volumes of the *American Jewish Year Book* and other sources cited individually.

¹²³ J. Cohen, *Jewish Life in South America*, p. 162.

¹²⁴ Artur Prinz, "The Role of the Gestapo in Obstructing and Promoting Jewish Emigration," *Yad Vashem Studies*, II, p. 193 (Hebrew).

¹²⁵ Rosenstock, p. 387.

¹²⁶ *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 42, p. 455.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

Country	July 1, 1938	Dec. 31, 1939	Difference
Argentina	13,000	25,000	12,000
Bolivia	--	9,000	9,000
Brazil	7,500	15,000	7,500
Chile	1,000	10,000	9,000
Cuba	--	2,900	2,900
Paraguay	--	1,000	1,000
Peru	250	2,000	1,750
Uruguay	1,500	3,500	2,000
Colombia	1,400	--*	--*
Others	1,500	14,600	13,100
Total	26,150	83,000	56,850

* *Colombia was included under "others."*

The table for December 31, 1939, refers explicitly to Jewish *refugees*, not just ordinary immigrants. The data in the table for Europe, Palestine and Shanghai, show that it refers solely to German and Austrian refugees. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the figures for Latin America include a certain number of refugees from Czechoslovakia, which Hitler conquered in March 1939, and from Poland, which fell to the Germans four months before the table's final date. On the other hand, it is possible that the figures for July 1938, which refer exclusively to Germany, should be augmented by the addition of refugees from Austria. The two corrections could well reduce the overall difference by a few thousand, but this is immaterial for our purposes, since not only was the precise origin of the Jewish immigrant of little importance for the absorbing countries, but even the conjectured decrease will leave impressive numbers attesting to a concrete readiness among South American countries to absorb German Jews after Evian.

It is true to say that following the Evian Conference the majority of these countries closed their gates. But this is not the *whole* truth, if it is not noted that before the gates were closed--or even as they were being closed--some 50,000 refugees were admitted; and if it is not noted that in order to absorb immigrants on this scale, several countries *opened* gates which had hitherto always been closed.

Various reasons underlay the stoppage in the admission of immigrants. One prominent cause, which is invariably mentioned in descriptions of the events, was the intense antisemitic propaganda conducted largely by the German minorities in these countries, with the aid and support of Germany and local elements. This propaganda impacted on the population at large because of the traditional suspiciousness of foreigners and a generations-long antisemitic tradition dating from the Catholic Church's persecution of the Jews. Scandals broke out when it was discovered that forged visas had been purchased, or that visas had been granted in contravention of government orders. "Wildcat"

ships that tried to land immigrants without visas also elicited outraged reactions from the authorities.

Yet all these and similar reasons, substantive as they may have been, were supplements to and catalysts of the root cause, which provides the key to an understanding of the situation. This lay in the fact that the Latin American countries (with the possible exception of Argentina) were poor and undeveloped. They were incapable of absorbing rapidly large populations and providing them with adequate means of subsistence, unless their arrival was accompanied by the import of capital and an initiative for the development of adequate sources of livelihood. The situation was particularly difficult for the non-agricultural immigrants, who sought to pursue urban businesses which were undeveloped in these countries and consequently generated no demand. Naturally, most of the German-Jewish immigrants fit this category.

The events surrounding Jewish immigration to Latin America from 1938-1940 reflect the fluctuations between the response of these countries to the moral pressure of

the Evian Conference and the lobbying of the big neighbor to the north, as well as the effect of local socio-economic conditions. The minimum required for success, or at least to forestall a rapid deterioration, was the provision of money and guidance. Had every immigrant family arrived with the 10,000 Reichsmarks it would have received under the Rublee Plan, and had it been given proper guidance in the choice of a profession according to the local conditions, better results could have been expected, perhaps even a totally different outcome.

But the Rublee Plan was thwarted, precluding the utilization of the large reservoir of funds that was to be placed at the immigrants' disposal with the assent of the Nazi leaders. Nearly all the refugees arrived destitute and without the benefit of constructive guidance. At most, the Jewish welfare organizations covered travel expenses and supported a few thousand refugees who were in danger of starvation. They could do no more because they lacked funds and lacked the readiness to raise the needed money.

Even at the purely financial level the Rublee Plan was irreplaceable. If we add to this the negative effects of the disorganized emigration, which was unavoidable under the circumstances, we reach the conclusion that in the countries of South America, as distinct from Europe, the failure to adopt the Rublee Plan caused immense *immediate* damage by bring about the closing of the gates and by preventing rescue.

Chapter Nine

Territorialism Vanquished *(The Santo Domingo Affair)*

Against the backdrop of the unsavory spectacle of the public discussions at the Evian Conference, the representative from the Dominican Republic stood out because of his sympathetic and promising attitude. His country, he told the delegates, contained “vacant areas of fertile land, excellent roads, and a police force that maintains law and order.” The Ministry of Agriculture, he pledged, would provide settlers not only with land but also with seeds and technical advice. His government was ready to offer special conditions to well-known professionals who would undertake to instruct their Dominican counterparts. He concluded his speech with an orotund flourish: “I hope that our conference will be as a calm lake whose pure waters can quench thirst and also render its shores fertile.”¹

At the inaugural session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees in London, the Dominican government proved as good as its word, putting forward a clear and explicit proposal. On August 5, 1938, the Dominican representative informed the committee chairman as follows:

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to inform you that the government of the Dominican Republic is ready and willing to accept a certain number of refugees, provided these refugees have sufficient means to be placed both in agriculture, commerce and industry, and in the free professions. Therefore, under these conditions, and without the government undertaking any commitment whatsoever for implementing the immigration (in accordance with subsection (4) of Par. 8 of the resolution adopted at Evian on July 14, 1938), the Dominican government can accept between 50,000 and 100,000 refugees.

[Signed by the head of the Dominican delegation]²

Thus began an affair which we will now attempt to recapitulate with the help of all the details we were able to collect. Of the two figures cited in the Dominican proposal, the lower (50,000) was quickly shelved. When Alfred Houston, a

¹ Minutes of the third public meeting of the Evian Conference, July 9, 1938, CZA, File S7/693.

² CZA, File S7/693; FRUS 1938, I.

representative of President Roosevelt's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, visited Santo Domingo in January 1939,

he was told by the country's ruler, General Rafael Trujillo, that the Dominican government intended to absorb 100,000 refugees, "if not more." Houston was given a memorandum outlining the conditions set by the Dominican government for accepting the refugees:

1. That the majority of the refugees actually engage in agriculture.
2. That the refugees pay the residence tax of \$6 per annum.
3. That the settlement be financed "on a sound basis" so that the refugees would not become public wards.
4. That arrangements be made "to prevent these refugees from reclaiming German citizenship in the event of a change of regime in Germany and thus creating a minority problem" in the Dominican Republic.³

As the contacts between the sides progressed, two of these provisos (items 2 and 4) were dropped and the other two rephrased less stringently.

At the invitation of the Dominican government, a commission was dispatched to the island to conduct a preliminary survey. The commission went under the joint auspices of Roosevelt's Advisory Committee and the New York-based Refugee Economic Corporation of America. Its three experts--in agricultural production, forestry, and lands--were selected by the president of Johns Hopkins University.⁴

The commission arrived in the Dominican Republic on March 7, 1939, and returned on April 18. Seventeen different sites were examined, of which six were chosen as suitable for settlement. The commission's positive report evoked the interest of Agrojoint (the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation), whose top officials, James Rosenberg and Dr. Joseph Rosen, undertook to direct the planned project. On September 22 Agrojoint and the JDC *signed* an agreement to share responsibility for financing the project.

A series of meetings with representatives of the State Department and members of the President's Advisory Committee resulted in the unreserved support of the U.S. administration. The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees gave its ardent assent to the plan. The proposal of the Dominican government, which was made "with generosity and foresight," was noted with deep satisfaction at a meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee held on October 17 at the White House.⁵ The host, President Roosevelt, also took note of "the generous *stance*" of the Santo Domingo government.⁶

In the meantime, intensive contacts were held with the Dominican ambassador to Washington and with General Trujillo himself, who was

then in the United States. In a meeting held on October 19, a letter from the ambassador to James Rosenberg was read out, containing the main points of the agreement subsequently signed. Trujillo, who addressed the meeting, promised large-scale assistance for the settlement project.⁷ In the wake of this meeting, the "Dominican Republic Settlement Association" (Dorsa) was formed. James Rosenberg was chosen as president and Dr. Joseph Rosen as vice-president. Two hundred shares of the company at \$1,000 per share were purchased by Agrojoint, the resulting \$200,000 serving as the project's founding capital.

On December 12 President Roosevelt wrote James Rosenberg that the Santo Domingo plan could be seen as a "turning point" in the efforts to assist the refugees.⁸

That same month Dr. Rosen, an agronomist by training, along with a fellow colleague, went to the Dominican Republic in order to choose the plot of land for the first colony. They decided on an area in the District of Sosua, in the northern part of the island. The 26,000-acre property was offered as a gift by its owner, President Trujillo. In response to this generous offer, Dorsa persuaded Trujillo to accept company shares in the value of \$100,000.⁹

³ FRUS 1939, II, 70.

⁴ Mark Wischnitzer, "The Historical Background of the Settlement of Jewish Refugees in Santo Domingo," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. IV, January 1942, p. 46 (hereafter: Wischnitzer, "Historical Background;," Brookings Institution Report on the Dominican Settlement, p. 281.

⁵ Record, II, 1939, p. 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Wischnitzer, "Historical Background," p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*

On January 16, 1940, a large delegation arrived in the Dominican Republic, comprised of representatives from Dorsa, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, and a representative of the State Department. Following detailed negotiations, an agreement was signed on January 30 between Dorsa and the Dominican government.

Under the terms of the agreement, the Dominican Republic undertook to grant the settlers and their offspring "full possibilities to pursue their lives and businesses without interference, discrimination, or persecution." The Republic assured them freedom of religion and worship, and guaranteed them absolute equality of civil, legal and economic rights, "and of other inalienable human rights" (Par. 1). Dorsa was to select candidates "according to their suitability and their technical qualifications for agriculture, industry, crafts and commerce." Lists of candidates would be submitted occasionally to the Dominican Interior Ministry and Police, which would approve them within a brief and reasonable time. The Foreign Ministry would then issue them visas "without requiring any payments from them. The first group will comprise 500 settlers, with the overall number to total 100,000 in stages to be determined jointly by the Republic and Dorsa" (Par. 2).

In a special clause the Dominican government undertook to submit in the country's Chamber of Deputies (parliament) a bill annulling the

immigration tax and similar taxes for Dorsa settlers "in the present and future." The settlers would also be exempted from the financial surety required of other immigrants for their boat passage. In addition, they could bring with them, tax-free, their personal belongings, furniture, and the tools, machines and materials they would need to begin their economic activity in their new home (Par. 3).

In an extraordinary session on February 20-21, both houses of the Dominican Congress approved the agreement and passed the law exempting the settlers from customs and tax payments.

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The "witnesses" to the signing of the agreement were ranking members of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and a representative of the Coordinating Foundation headed by Paul van Zeeland, U.S. government representatives did not sign the agreement, but were present at the ceremony. The Secretary of State sent a cable of congratulations in the name of President Roosevelt.¹⁰ The preamble to the agreement made special mention of Roosevelt's initiative in convening the Evian Conference and of General Trujillo's proposal to take in 100,000 refugees. In this manner the agreement assumed the character of a quasi-dialogue between two senior personalities and a matter under the personal patronage and protection of President Roosevelt. This contributed in no small measure to dissipating the atmosphere of mistrust and reservation that progressive circles in the U.S. harbored toward Trujillo and his despotic regime.

The first defense of the plan and its Dominican partner was offered by Freda Kirchwey, the editor-in-chief of the liberal weekly *The Nation*, who visited the Dominican Republic and accompanied the three first settlers to the Sosua colony. Her first-hand experience resulted in positive conclusions which she shared with her readers.¹¹ Kirchwey was favorably impressed by the beauty of the spot, the manifest fertility of the valleys, the plentiful water and the forests of mahogany trees. She remarked on the orderly houses, equipped with running water and electricity, that Trujillo had placed at the settlers' disposal together with his estate at Sosua. Nor did she have any qualms about lauding the motives of the Dominican ruler.

True, she wrote, Trujillo was a dictator who was answerable to no one, but he was not a fascist. He had backed the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, and following Franco's victory had given shelter to thousands who had fought on the Republican side.

Kirchwey described Trujillo as a "purely personal" dictator who was not bound by any particular ideology. Behind him was a lengthy list of arbitrary persecutions of his

¹⁰ Berl Locker, "Exit San Domingo," *The New Judea*, March-April 1943.

¹¹ Freda Kirchwey, "Caribbean Refuge," *The Nation*, April 13, 1940.

detractors and actions to enrich himself. Behind him also was the massacre his troops had perpetrated two and a half years earlier against thousands of blacks from Haiti who were living in the Dominican Republic. On the face of it, this history was liable to arouse apprehensions concerning the safety of the refugees who were fleeing tyranny in Europe. "But it is not wise to go merely by the record. Trujillo can be magnanimous when he happens to feel like it; and he can be a statesman. He has used his power to build up his country as well as himself." Overall, the editor of *The Nation* went on to write,

The country needs settlers; it is rich [in natural resources] and undeveloped. Above everything else, Trujillo desires to make it a "white" republic. The obsession with color in Santo Domingo dominates every upper-class mind. White or near-white workers are held to be vastly superior to the obviously colored ones. And Haitians, in their country or in Santo Domingo, are looked upon with fear and abhorrence.

Along with Trujillo's paramount motive--his desire for white settlers--Kirchwey lists a number of secondary considerations: the likelihood that the Dorsa settlers would generate an influx of capital, enhancement of Trujillo's standing in the U.S., and so forth. These motives are no better and no worse than those of most governments, Kirchwey maintains. Indeed, their very selfishness is a guarantee that Trujillo will fulfill his promises. Therefore, she concludes, "the refugees, especially those who come in under the wing of [Dorsa], stand a good chance of peace and happiness--at least as long as Trujillo holds power."

Then, as though to do her duty, the editor of the liberal journal winds up her case for the defense with an implicit warning to Trujillo:

"And interested persons in all countries will watch with close attention to see how the Dominican government carries out the terms of its own agreement."

Trujillo's motives for making his generous offer exercised people's thoughts and imagination. The efforts to come up with a "satisfactory" explanation went so far as to conjecture (wrongly, it seems) that the Dominican ruler had a Marrano ancestry and was prompted by feelings of national solidarity to help his fellow-Jews.¹² Trujillo himself explained his motives officially twice. The letter of the Dominican ambassador in

Washington to James Rosenberg which was read out in Trujillo's presence on October 19, 1939, stated:

We wish to make it clear that the government of the Dominican Republic is acting not only out of humanitarian motives but [also] in the awareness that, just as the United States became a great nation thanks to the entry of industrious and useful settlers, so too our own country regards it as desirable and ne-cessary that refugee-pioneers settle in it and take part in its uninterrupted upbuilding, which was rapid and substantial in the past decade.

In June 1940 Trujillo revealed another of his motives:

Our essential purpose in opening the doors of the country to immigrants is purely humanitarian. Naturally, we also saw in this policy an opportunity to contribute toward the solution of one of the fundamental problems of our country--the sparsity of population in comparison with the extent of our territory. The natural increase of our population is quite satisfactory, but the size of our country, with a superabundance of cultivable lands, permits us to look forward to a progressive increase in population such as would place us on the same level of demographic intensity as other neighboring countries in the Antilles. ¹³

According to Freda Kirchwey, this line of thought was not confined exclusively to Trujillo. Testimonies from other sources indicate that expectation of a large-scale population increase through the entry of productive elements was shared by the Dominican authorities and general population alike. James Rosenberg described the mood among the Dominican population regarding the Dorsa plan at a meeting in New

¹² Bitzaron, April 1940, p. 80.

¹³ *New York Times*, June 11, 1940.

York in February 1940: "The usual questions asked were: when will the settlers begin arriving, and in what numbers? When we said that for the time being we have to act slowly and begin with a few hundred carefully selected pioneers, there was disappointment everywhere that we could not begin with large numbers. They need us. They want us. They tell US so."¹⁴

Additional testimony is contained in the resolution of the extraordinary session of the Dominican Chamber of Deputies already mentioned. Upon the ratification of the agreement with Dorsa, the lower

House adopted a resolution congratulating General Trujillo for having undertaken a step "that constitutes a most effective means toward an intensive increase of the population and the nation's resources, and at the same time affords shelter to many families that cannot pursue their way of life in their own countries."¹⁵

When the parliament in a dictatorship expresses its admiration for the ruler's actions, one need not be impressed or read anything into it. In this case, however, the *reason* for the encomium is noteworthy. As far as the Chamber of Deputies was concerned, humanitarian considerations and the prospect of enriching the country's national resources, took second place to the desire for an intensive increase in the country's population as a task of paramount urgency. Even if this motive was adduced under the sway of Trujillo himself, it is quite plausible that the idea reflected the wishes of the general public.

The probability that this was so is reinforced by what Mark Wischnitzer relates in the article cited above. In connection with Trujillo's offer, Wischnitzer tells about a similar proposal made 60 years earlier by a liberal Dominican politician, General Gregorio Luperon. Luperon, who took part in the political struggle against the dictator Baiz, served for a time as a Cabinet minister in the Dominican government, and temporarily held the post of President. In these capacities, he encouraged immigration from Cuba and Puerto Rico to the Republic, whose population had become depleted. While in Paris, Luperon maintained friendly relations with Victor Hugo, Leon Gambetta, and other noted liberals. Upon learning of the pogroms against Russian Jewry in 1881, he proposed that the victims settle in the Dominican Republic, holding negotiations to this end in Paris with the "Alliance Israelite Universelle" (AIU) and the Rothschild family. Two hundred families were to be the pioneers in this venture. The AIU representative in the talks was Charles Netter, the founder of Mikveh Israel. When Netter died, in 1882, the talks were broken off.

Wischnitzer points out that the news of the Luperon plan was enthusiastically received in Santo Domingo, sparking public festivities. Assemblies were held and committees chosen to receive the refugees and arrange work for them.

The "obsession with color" mentioned by Freda Kirchwey requires an explanation. In the Dominican Republic, where most the inhabitants were mulattos, racial discrimination did not exist either by law or by custom, as it did in the United States in this period. Such discrimination as did exist in various areas of life was rooted in the fact that the blacks belonged to the lower classes. President Trujillo was a mulatto, and at

least one member of his family (his brother, Hector) was black. There were some mulattos and blacks in the government and the parliament.¹⁶ The Republic's desire for "white or near-white" immigrants was shared by many other countries in Central and South America. However, there were no laws on the books to prevent the entry of non-white immigrants, as was the case, for example, in Australia and New Zealand.

Yet a powerful psychological factor was also at work, expressed in what Kirchwey called the "fear and abhorrence" Dominicans felt for the blacks of Haiti. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the Dominican Republic was repeatedly invaded and conquered by its Haitian neighbors. For 22 years (1822-1844) it was occupied by and formally annexed to Haiti. Under the conquerors' brutal rule thousands of Dominicans fled, leaving the country economy in a shambles. During the period of the conquest attempts were made to "Ethiopize" the country, such as by importing freed blacks from

¹⁴ Iddisher Kempfer, April 12, 1940.

¹⁵ Wischnitzer, "Historical Background;" Locker, "Exit San Domingo."

¹⁶ Rayford W. Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Oxford University Press, 1968.

the United States.¹⁷ By 1844, when the invaders were forced out and the “Second Republic” established, the country lay barren and depleted. The bitter experiences of the years of terror left a deep imprint in the soul of the Dominican people, as, for example, the Tatar conquest did in the Russian soul. The fact that Haiti, with a population density three or four times as great as that of the Republic, lay across the border, meant that the trauma was permanently evoked and that fears of a renewed population influx, such as had once caused a national disaster, were never far below the surface.

Dorsa’s settlement project got off to a good start. The first fifty settlers arrived in Sosua in March and April 1940, and in September Dr. Rosen was able to tell a press conference that they had successfully adapted to the subtropical conditions and had begun to earn a living. At Dorsa’s recommendation, the Dominican government issued 2,000 visas, and this could be increased. Dr. Rosen reconfirmed the possibility of settling 100,000 refugees in the Dominican Republic, which needed and wanted them. Letters from the settlers to their families in Europe, he said, attested to a keen spirit among them.¹⁸ Dr. Rosen took the opportunity to reemphasize the project’s non-political character. “The Dominican program makes no attempt to solve the Jewish question or do anything that conflicts with any ideological conception in Judaism. It is, simply, one of the lifeboats on which thousands of our brethren who are being expelled from their country in these dark days and condemned to despair, will perhaps be able to find the possibility to begin their lives anew.”¹⁹

At Sosua, matters continued to progress well. The hundreds of refugees who arrived were absorbed in work and training programs. In

January 1941 Trujillo donated another 50,000 acres of his land to the Dorsa project, in recognition of the settlers’ excellent performance. There were approximately 300 settlers at this time, and their success story was the subject of frequent articles in the world Jewish press. The colony’s superb organization and its agricultural achievements were noted, along with the ardent spirit of the settlers. Special attention was paid to the successful efforts of the directors and settlers to introduce innovations and improvements and thereby to advance Dominican agriculture. One such description found its way into a Yishuv newspaper, either translated or copied. The author (conjectured to be Shimon Ravidowitz) has reservations about the possibility of absorbing 100,000 refugees in the Dominican Republic, but overall his report is substantive and sympathetic. The following are excerpts, with minor omissions.

On the colony’s organizational structure:

The Jewish colony sponsored by the Joint in the Dominican Republic is divided into two types. The first is organized as a cooperative and the second is based on individual farms. When a group of settlers arrives at Sosua, they must first work for six months in the fields of the cooperative, where they learn the work. During these six months they are observed by an agricultural expert, who determines which branch of agriculture is most suitable to each person. After the six-month period he leaves the cooperative, receives a plot of land and a small amount of money, and begins to work on his own...

The cooperative and the individual farmers have worked the land superbly, and the local inhabitants are amazed at how within a single year these new farmers have transformed a wilderness into a blooming garden, growing crops they never imagined could flourish in the soil of Santo Domingo. The cultivation of the land is being directed by well-known agronomists who are experimenting with new types of agriculture, employing all manner of ploys--and successfully.

The author goes on to enumerate some of the innovations and achievements at Sosua:

Many areas of Santo Domingo are planted with sweet potatoes. But their potatoes do not resemble those in the United States and Europe. Those from overseas are for them a luxury item. The Jewish settlers undertook many experiments and obtained fine results. A potato of this kind, to which the soil of Santo Domingo was thought to be inhospitable, is now growing in abundance. Not long ago the new Jewish colony held a

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸ *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 43, p. 335.

¹⁹ *Haolam*, December 19, 1941; *Davar*, December 16, 1941.

celebration in honor of the victory of the potato. The local inhabitants looked on this as a miracle of nature whose very essence had been transformed...

There is a bean that grows in the tropical lands, from which oil is made. This bean grows in Brazil. Until the outbreak of the war, Brazil exported this bean all over the world, particularly to the United States. Brazil is farther from the United States than Santo Domingo. Experiments undertaken in Santo Domingo proved successful. Those in the Agrojoint colony who conducted [the experiments] are satisfied with the results. An order was received for 7,000 tons of oil beans. Naturally, the colony in its present state cannot produce a large amount of beans. At most, it can produce 1,000 tons. But there is a whole series of other colonies that are ready to grow beans and complete the order. Agrojoint takes a very high view of this type of produce. Because of Santo Domingo's proximity to the United States and Europe, they think they will be able to market the oil-bean easier than from Brazil...

The tropical climate affects not only human beings but animals as well. They are lean here, and live off pasture. To sow fodder for animals is a complex problem for the Dominican. He thinks to himself: why should I sow when the whole year is one long summer? The fields are always green and the animals have plenty to eat. Agrojoint introduced a new culture. In the first place, they began cross-breeding. Studs were brought from the United States, and a new, healthier generation is being bred. Thus better and more abundant commodities are produced.

On the number of settlers according to the plan: "The Republic aspires to bring 100,000 settlers to the country, Jews and non-Jews. This

may be a distant dream, but there is no doubt that 10-15,000 Jews can be brought in within a few years given Jewish immigration."

Finally, on the settlers' adaptation: "Eighty percent of the settlers have adapted well to the work, even if they do not have an easy life. Many of them formerly practiced the free arts in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria. But they remember their seven years under Hitler and are content. Twenty percent are not content and would like to abandon agriculture. That is definitely normal. Everywhere the proportion of embittered people is greater."

* * * * *

The explicit dissociation of Dorsa's officials from territorialist intentions was confirmed in the conclusions reached in a visit to Sosua by a second American woman journalist. Marie Syrkin, a Zionist leader, was sent to the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Poalei Zion monthly *Jewish Frontier*. The visit by Syrkin, whose tone suggests that she had been influenced considerably by Kirchwey, was meant to grant the Sosua settlement a Zionist imprimatur, to complement the liberal seal of approval bestowed by the editor of *The Nation*.²⁰

In contrast to Kirchwey's voyage to Sosua with the first three settlers, Syrkin in January 1941 visited the twelve settlers who had already managed to set up their private farms, including residences. Employing a tone of courteous esteem, she describes the homes that were built and outfitted for a comfortable life by the settlers and their wives. "It must be borne in mind..., that these twelve homesteaders represent the best equipped and most energetic of the immigrants. The fact that within a comparatively short time they were already on their own small farms is evidence of this. To what extent these twelve are representative of the remainder is a matter of conjecture."

Like other visitors, Marie Syrkin is full of praise for the fine planning of the colony (the barracks and cottages attested to "intelligent planning" and consideration for climatic conditions, "the maximum of ventilation," and so forth). Syrkin reports on the initiatives to develop industry in conjunction with the colony--large-scale cheese production, bamboo for furniture, boat building, and the like. She also notes the settlers' good spirits and their excellent physical condition. "One cannot transplant Europeans of various preoccupation origins into a tropical climate without a struggle of adaptation. Nor will a former lawyer or accountant be transformed [easily]

²⁰ Marie Syrkin, "Rebirth in Santo Domingo?," *Jewish Frontier*, February 1941. A condensed translation appeared in *Davar*, May 30, 1941.

into an agricultural worker..." The complaints Syrkin heard were of various kinds. "Some people objected to the type of work assigned... some objected to the communal fare." And it

was not surprising that "a few of the settlers wished to leave, having found the life too rigorous. A number of misfits were bound to form part of any group."

Toward the end of the article come the summations and conclusions:

The Sosua project should not be confused with a territorialist venture... [like] Zion outside of Palestine. Such is not the case in Sosua. [Dorsa] is avowedly non-sectarian... The Dominican Government has stressed its desire for refugees who will become in every sense an integral part of the country, in short, 100% Dominicans...

No reasonable prospect of rescue can be dismissed. So far, the grandiose schemes for 100,000 settlers have boiled down to fewer than 300 souls. However, Dorsa, with the aid of interested governments, hopes to increase the flow of immigration rapidly. There can be little question that Trujillo is at present anxious for settlers, and that his professions may now be taken in good faith. His word is law, and his administration and people will be sympathetic to the precious venture in the precise measure that he is. Of course, a dictator's policy is subject to caprice, but one can hardly ask for guarantees in the present world. What will be the future attitude of the ruler or the native population should a sizable community succeed in establishing itself and prospering, is not a question of immediate concern to the man who is fleeing death or torture.

The main point was saved for last:

Assuming that it will be possible to increase the tempo of immigration, Sosua can in no sense be viewed as a rival of Palestine. It does not pretend to solve the Jewish problem or to build a Jewish future. If it is successful, it will give some Jewish refugees a chance to reestablish their broken lives and to become good Dominicans, far from the great current of European and American civilization. Such a prospect fails to fill me with enthusiasm, but then I live in the United States, not in Germany.

Marie Syrkin's somewhat caustic remark about "the grandiose schemes that boiled down" did not have (at the moment) a basis in reality. When she visited Sosua in January 1941, the settlement was in the midst of a pre-planned experimental stage, and the number of settlers, some 260--by year's end they totalled 450--was reasonable and consistent with the plan. It is conceivable that by making these unjust comments the journalist paid inadvertent lip service to the hostile attitude prevailing in circles of her Zionist colleagues. Yet even with this comment and one or two other minor slips, Syrkin's article was an exceptional humane phenomenon in the Zionist movement, a voice of reason crying in a wilderness of fears, suspicions and alienation.

In the view of the Zionist movement, its American branch in particular, the Dominican episode was a continuation of previous territorialist schemes" in the war on which it so far had the upper hand. External circumstances had aided the Zionist movement--both its active and its merely declarative wings--to scuttle three projects on the eve of the war and in its initial stages. The settlement in British Guiana, proposed under generous political terms by London, aroused apprehensions, not wholly unfounded, of an underlying design to cover up and "compensate" for the breach of trust implicit in the publication of the White Paper. Zionism's vigorous opposition to this plan contributed to its abandonment when the war's outbreak caused incipient difficulties in its implementation. Similarly, the plan involving Mindanao, in the Philippines, was shelved due to the site's great distance and because it now lay in the midst of a war zone. A third plan, truly territorialist in character, entailing settlement at Kimberley, Australia, never reached an advanced stage of practical discussion because of the weakness of the territorialist organization ("Freiland") sponsoring it.

The Santo Domingo plan, in contrast, was free of the flaws that marked the other schemes and possessed advantages they lacked. It was proposed by a country that was neutral as regards both the war and Zionism. The country was crucially situated at the juncture of the waterways between Europe and the Americas. On the Dominican side the plan was backed by a friendly government and a sympathetic population. The leaders of the Jewish organization involved enjoyed public credibility as reliable

officials and experts in agricultural settlement. They spared no effort to explain that the project was based on humanitarian considerations of saving Jews and was totally devoid of territorialist intentions. If we add the fact that the U.S. administration and Roosevelt personally gave the plan their declared and unreserved support, we will readily understand that

in the initial stages some American Zionists were confused and hesitant. As with the Rublee Plan, there were some who favored the Dominican project at first, only to oppose it later, citing various excuses. The Yiddish weekly *Yiddisher Kempfer* editorialized on April 12, 1940, that all the possible reservations notwithstanding, "it is impossible not to wish the Agrojoint officials success in their new venture. For it involves saving Jews--men, women and children threatened by physical annihilation." Yet in its very next issue, dated April 19, the paper lashed out at Dorsa's director for not telling the Jewish public the truth: that Trujillo's agreement to allow the Jews in originated "in the curse and disgrace of his racist hatred for the Negroes of Haiti." True, at this stage the paper did not yet reject the plan "which enjoys the support of the American government and Washington's guarantee." In time, however, it would willingly and ardently join the ranks of the project's opponents and like them draw negative conclusions.

The unequivocal support evinced by the Roosevelt government was a major cause of the restraint the leaders of the anti-Dominican camp showed in their public attacks. As Stephen Wise was urging Chaim Weizmann to appear before the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees (see Ch. 10), that same committee, of which Wise was a member, was engaged in the final stages of drawing up the text of the agreement with the Dominican government. The public meeting in February 1940 at which James Rosenberg spoke on the prospects of settlement at Sosua, was chaired by James McDonald, the chairman of the Advisory Committee. As he had during the debate over the Rublee Plan, Wise moved cautiously. To help discredit the new plan he enlisted the support of high-ranking figures and other personages who would not jeopardize his own standing on the blue-ribbon committee. Where no tactical considerations were required and no bewildered hesitations prevailed, the Zionists' hostility was naked and uncompromising. A salient illustration of this attitude is provided by the poem "In Santa Dominga," by the poet Israel Efrat, published in the Hebrew journal *Hadoar*. The poem, which in the Hebrew has Ashkenazic intonation, leaves nothing to the imagination, as the following excerpts show:

*In Santa Dominga, in Santa Dominga,
What do Jews do, they dance and sing-a*

*So come all ye wretched, redemption is yours,
A wonderful state opens its doors.*

*Rejoice Reb Nissi, Reb Pinni, Reb Alter,
You can have ten minyans if you don't fatlter.
Or in your hearts do Zion and Galilee still suit,
And words of vision, with shepherd and flute?
Dreams and vanities, a dream more beautiful
We took for you from a devil quite dutiful.
With wild hairy savages you'll soon worship
And apes and baboons you'll soon call Your Lordship.*

*Wretches, what will you do? You'll dance and sing-a Redemption, redemption in
Santa Dominga.*

The Holocaust knows a second instance of a similar outbreak of poesy, this time in Sephardic Hebrew and without devils and baboons. In 1944 the poet Natan Alterman lent his voice to the chorus of those attacking the War Refugee Board established by Roosevelt. But that story will be told in due time.

* * * * *

The World Jewish Congress's official frontal assault on the Dominican plan was launched in December 1941. It took the form of an article in the *Congress Weekly* written by Ida Silverman, a Zionist functionary who was close to Wise and Nahum Goldmann.²¹ A prefatory remark to the article notes explicitly that Silverman visited Sosua on behalf of the WJC. The article itself bears an aggressive style, and is studded with *ad hominem* attacks and vulgarities.

Like other visitors to Sosua, the author begins by describing the conditions at the settlement. But this time the description is tailored to fit the conclusions. The colony's agricultural activity is boiled down to the statement that in the first six months the settlers learn how to handle hens, cows, and...pigs (other articles make no mention of this stertorous beast), while in the next six months they prepare the ground on a two-hectare plot which is to serve as their land for cultivation. (According to Marie Syrkin, the private plots covered an area of 8-10 acres, or 3.2-4 hectares.) As for other activity engaged in by the settlers, there is not a word.

For a year, Silverman says, the settlers live in barracks. (Both Freda Kirchwey and Marie Syrkin had praised the fine housing placed at the settlers' disposal.) Regarding the economic relations between the settlers and the colony, the article states that the settler "becomes indebted to the colony immediately on his arrival" and that he "cannot leave the colony until his indebtedness is fully paid." Moreover, Sosua is said to be

subject to malaria and other tropical diseases-- "but a start is being made toward cleaning up the swamps." (According to Marie Syrkin, there had been a few cases of malaria, though not of yellow fever, but not so many as to constitute a problem. Dr. Rosen vehemently denied the existence of tropical diseases at Sosua. No other source mentions the draining of swamps.)

The thrust of the article and its focus of information lie in the project's national aspect. Formally the Santo Domingo plan, like the Evian Conference and indeed like all the activity of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, was non-sectarian in character. Dorsa's full name made no reference to the settlers' Jewishness, and the agreement with the Dominican Republic spoke of "Jewish and non-Jewish" refugee-settlers. The non-sectarian cover fooled no one. It was accepted by Washington and useful in contacts with Christian charitable and welfare organizations. It was agreed that at Sosua, along with Jews, a number of non-Jewish refugees, should there be any, would be able to find a haven. In Marie Syrkin's eyes, this stipulation only enhanced the non-territorialist credibility of the project. But for Ida Silverman this was a sure road to assimilation.

She wrote that "at least ten percent of the settlers are non-Jews" (one's impression from other sources is that this is an exaggeration) while also noting (correctly) that women were in the minority among the settlers. Silverman maintains that there were "many" mixed marriages in the colony (according to the Brookings Report--see below--two of 20 marriages there were between white settlers and native women). All of the above lead her to the conclusion that the plan was tantamount to race suicide for Jews." Her prediction: "It is inevitable that under the conditions that prevail at Sosua, a generation will see the Jewish settlers lost to Jewish life..."

On the basis of her findings and forecasts, the author raises some rhetorical "questions" that encapsulate her arguments:

The first question that raises itself is this: how long will American Jewry permit a few private individual Jews, acting solely for themselves, to undertake schemes and make contracts with governments, which schemes they subsequently turn over to the entire Jewish community to honor and to maintain?

The second question is: have Jews a right, in the face of the miserably inadequate resources at their disposal and the

swelling number of those who need assistance, to appeal for funds to the Jewish community as such for *non-sectarian* [emphasis in the original] colonization enterprises--particularly when what is at stake is the survival of the Jews as a people, and not merely their existence as individuals?

²¹ Mrs. Archibald Silverman, "Colonisation in Sosua," *Congress Weekly*, December 1941. As is customary in America, the author uses the first name of her husband.

The third question is: considering the climatic conditions, the special governmental background and the Jewish problem involved, should the Jewish people--and not merely individual Jews--finance this uncertain experiment in Central America?

The author reiterates these questions several times, in increasingly severe terms. Reminding the Agrojoint officials of the sin of their participation in the agricultural settlement project in Crimea and Birobidjan, and accusing them of "cold philanthropy and feverish anti-Zionism," she sums up this part of her diatribe:

Never before in Jewish life have so-called Jewish leaders so brazenly dared to appear before the Jewish world--after they personally had made all the commitments and the promises--to proclaim that now it was the obligation of the Jewish people to finance a non-sectarian colonization enterprise! Their previous failures as colonizers are blandly overlooked--no one deems it necessary to explain the why and the wherefore--we are simply told what we must do!

And another "question": "is it not time that a long-suffering Jewish public should ask for explanations from those Jews who, without knowledge or experience, without Jewish consciousness or Jewish responsibility, are always prepared to foist their pet private schemes of salvation on Jewish givers everywhere?"

Silverman's basic attitude toward the plan is reflected in her sarcastic jibe that 450 people have been "saved" (in quotation marks) by being brought to tropical Sosua. In contrast, she asserts, "we, as Jews, must take into consideration certain values which transcend mere statistics."

Toward the end the reader is served up her forecast and ideological evaluation:

Large-scale settlement in the Dominican Republic is, at the best, a matter of hundreds, not hundreds of thousands as its champions have so irresponsibly claimed. Its value to the Jews as a people is definitely negative, because it rests on the assumption that as long as a few Jews can be rescued from present misery their fate as Jews is unimportant.

And a final conclusion (following a gushing description of the virtues of settlement in Palestine):

Nothing of the kind can be said with respect to Sosua, except in propaganda booklets. Jewish strength is too fragmentary, Jewish monetary sources are too limited to indulge every self-appointed Messiah--regardless of the sincerity animating his philanthropy--who conceives a new phantom to save the Jewish people. Hell is paved with good intentions [sic]. There are too many Jews already in that nether world for more to be added by the good intentions of a few Jews who, exercising their whims first as private ventures, now transmit them as public responsibilities.

* * * * *

Later references confirm that the public accepted Ida Silverman's article as an authoritative expression of the American Zionist leadership's position regarding the Santo Domingo plan. How the readers of the *Congress Weekly* reacted to the warnings of spiritual perdition is difficult to say. It cannot be certain that they were convinced by the argument that Jews were not obligated to finance an enterprise ostensibly intended to deal with refugees irrespective of religion and race. But more important than Silverman's persuasiveness was the authoritative assertion of a stand--for the information of Zionists and non-Zionists alike. That an unequivocal stance was required for the guidance of non-Jews had become clear, among other occasions, a month earlier when Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles had appeared before a pan-American Zionist conference and unwittingly lauded the settlement project in the Dominican Republic.²² True, the conference delegates had responded fittingly by unanimously dismissing the plan as worthless and declaring that Jews must not contribute one cent. Still, it would be best to avoid all such possible

²² Tsivyon in *Forverts*, November 29, 1941.

misunderstandings, at least on the part of administration officials who were among Zionism's sympathizers.

The article's appearance was particularly important in terms of bringing order to the Zionist movement. As Louis Lipsky had done regarding the Rublee Plan, Ida Silverman, the writer and Zionist functionary, now did with the Santo Domingo project: with the declared approval of the leadership of the World Jewish Congress (which, as will be recalled, was largely identical with the American Zionist hierarchy), she called things by their names and removed all doubts. The Zionist movement was adamantly opposed to the Santo Domingo plan. However feeble the ideological rationale might be, the underlying cause of the opposition had a solid and very concrete basis: Zionists were resistant to anything liable to jeopardize their fund-raising revenues. Territorialism or not, assimilation or not—if the Jews of America contributed to the colony in the Dominican Republic they might give less to the Jewish National Fund or Keren Hayesod. The reader will remember that in 1938 Chaim Weizmann had been apprehensive that the Evian Conference projects would adversely affect Zionist fund-raising (Ch. 7). By 1941 such fears had become more tangible than ever, and the movement was called on to repulse the danger.

It is possible that to view the article as a signal to the Zionist movement does not exhaust its qualities. Perhaps it can also be regarded as an indicator of vigorous activity being undertaken at that time in certain key areas. We shall return to this hypothesis later in order to solve a knotty historical riddle. But more on that in due course.

For the purposes of the present study, the Silverman article provides unequivocal evidence of the Zionist stand concerning the rescue of Jews at the end of 1941. The world was as yet ignorant of the total annihilation of Jews underway in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. But everyone knew about the persecutions, the murders, the concentration camps. Everyone was aware of the terrible danger that loomed for every Jew who remained in Europe under Nazi rule—the subject was on everyone's lips. At this very hour the Zionist movement waged all-out war against an attempt to provide a haven for tens of thousands of Jews in a country that had opened wide its gates. The reasons and considerations are less important than the basic fact: for the first time in the history of the Holocaust, Zionism had taken a stand against a rescue program that was operating in practice. Since no one imagined that all of Europe's Jews could find immediate shelter in Palestine, the inevitable and manifest alternative to the rescue of each and every Jew was perdition and extinction. Zionist leaders and the Zionist rank-and-file could not help but see this, had they given the matter a moment's consideration. However, in

the atmosphere of alienation then prevailing (see Ch. 10) that perception was not forthcoming. The moment of grace that follows realization of the truth did not arrive.

Historical justice requires us to point out that some Zionists opposed the cruel line adopted by their movement and even tried to make their views public. One of them was Charles J. Rosenbloom, a Pittsburgh businessman and a member of the ZOA executive. His article to this effect, "Jews Should Be Saved Anywhere," appeared in a Canadian Jewish journal.²³ His remarks were straightforward and, one would have thought, self-evident. He pointed out that the settlement project in Santo Domingo was not in competition with Palestine, and that if Jews could be saved in the United States, by the same token they could be saved in the Dominican Republic. Responding to Ida Silverman's argument on the danger to the Jewish people, Rosenbloom said that rescued Jews meant there would be a Jewish people.

"No responsible Zionist," he wrote, "takes the position that a Jew who wants to escape the inferno of Europe must go to Palestine to be saved or he cannot be considered a responsibility of American Jewry."

Charles J. Rosenbloom and his few like-minded colleagues were, of course, mistaken. Zionists whose obligation it was to serve as the embodiment of responsibility were afflicted with factional blindness, and in the name of (imaginary) Zionist interests set out to do battle against the "dangerous" nuisance. Rosenbloom and his colleagues, the just men in Sodom, were unable to alter the course of events.

23 "Charles J. Rosenbloom, "Jews Should Be Saved Anywhere: Another View of Sosua," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, January 2, 1942.

A year after the publication of Ida Silverman's article, a powerful bombshell exploded in the form of a report prepared by the Washington-based Brookings Institution entitled "Refugee Settlement in the Dominican Republic."²⁴ The prestigious institute had been commissioned to conduct the survey in fall 1940, and its voluminous report, couched in objective scientific language, appeared two years later. According to those who visited the colony immediately after the report's publication--and their account has never been refuted--the report spelled the end of the Santo Domingo project by showing beyond any doubt that it was divorced from the reality of the country and could never be implemented. We turn now to examine the report and the validity of the standard opinion of its merits.

The study was initiated by a Pittsburgh businessman, Leo Falk, who originally supported the settlement project. Falk believed that a more extensive survey was required than had been conducted by both Dorsa and

experts from Johns Hopkins University. To finance the study, Falk drew on a family fund, the Maurice and Laura Falk Foundation. According to Berl Locker,²⁵ Dorsa agreed that further examination was necessary, and this is plausible given the relations among the plan's advocates. However, Dorsa did not go beyond polite concurrence. At all events, Dorsa is not mentioned in the foreword to the report as having commissioned the study, nor for that matter is reference made to any other public body with the exception of the Falk Foundation, the report's sponsors.

The foreword concludes with the demurrer that although the study was made possible thanks to funds provided by the Falk Foundation, "the Foundation serves neither as the author, publisher, nor owner of this publication. Nor should the grant as such be regarded as its confirmation or rejection of the conclusions and opinions expressed in it." Nothing is said about the identity of the report's owners, to whom it was submitted, or who commissioned it.

Particular importance attaches to the social proclivity of the whoever actually *commissioned* the report, as he also formulated the questions the researchers were to answer. Those questions were as follows:²⁶

- (1) What is the attitude of the Dominican plan to the refugee problem as a whole?
- (2) Is the Dominican Republic a suitable place to settle refugees?
- (3) How will the refugee-immigrants earn a living?
- (4) How many refugees can the Dominican Republic absorb?
- (5) What effect will the settlement project have on Dominican society?

The first question was blatantly provocative: Dorsa officials had already said that the Santo Domingo plan was not in competition with any ideology whatsoever or with any other programs aimed at sheltering refugees. This question had engaged neither side, the Jews or the Dominicans. The only group to evince an interest in it were the Zionists, who saw the entire project as competing with their own program--and with their fund-raising. The fact that this question was placed at the head of the study virtually ensured that the treatment of other questions, which were more substantive and more relevant, would be tilted so as to obtain a satisfactory answer to the first question--satisfactory, that is, to whoever formulated the questions.

No expense was spared in drawing up the report. Its 20 chapters, covering 410 pages, provide comprehensive data on every aspect of life in the Dominican Republic, from the country's history to its people's way of

life and culture. There are chapters devoted to climate, agriculture, industry, commerce, foreign trade, financial system, and so on and so forth. The detailed descriptions are accompanied by tables, diagrams and photographs. Material that could not be incorporated into the main body of the book was presented in four special appendices.

A perusal of this vast compendium reveals that the overwhelming majority of its abundant information is totally unrelated to the subject and conclusions of the study. The report is actually composed of two separate, virtually unconnected sections. The first section, which includes all the report's investigations and conclusions, consists of the first three chapters (pp. 1-53) and Chapter 19 (pp. 309-332). These chapters,

²⁴ Refugee Settlement in the Dominican Republic, a survey conducted under the auspices of the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., published August 1942.

²⁵ Locker, "Exit San Domingo."
²⁶ Introduction to the Report, p. 8.

which for the sake of convenience we will call "Investigative Chapters," were written by one Harry B. Smith, formerly of Case, Pomeroy and Company.²⁷ All four chapters are marked by a striking style and unique methods of reasoning. Smith's evidence for his conclusions is contained in the four chapters themselves, and he does not draw on the information furnished in the rest of the report (and the appendices), which we will call "Descriptive Chapters." With some justice, the entire report may be regarded as the creation of one person--the author of the Investigative Chapters.

Two chapters bear mentioning because they deviate from the norm. Chapter 20, "General Conclusions," which was apparently written with the participation or under the guidance of the study's director (Dana Munro of Princeton University), takes a sympathetic approach to the Sosua colony and refers courteously to Dorsa. The style here differs markedly from the Investigative Chapters, and in two places at least this chapter could have fomented a revolution had the appropriate mental background existed.

Chapter 17 is also unusual. It deals with the development of the colony at Sosua and logically should have been part of the Investigative Chapters, or served them as a source for evidentiary material. In practice, the Investigative Chapters make very little reference to Chapter 17, and then without noting the source of the information. We shall have more to say about this chapter and its author below.

* * * * *

The underlying premise of the study is to be found in the reports' first chapter. Here the situation of European refugees in the event of a German *victory* is discussed twice in unemotional language. And twice the opinion is given that a Germany *loss* will make no great difference in terms of the question under discussion. One way or the other, the report says, fewer and fewer people are immigrating from Europe, and the probability is that immigration will cease completely. The conclusion is

that the resettlement of Europe's "surplus population" has "already become one of the *postwar* problems" (p. 7). This premise, which effectively meant that rescue was no longer on the agenda, rendered the study irrelevant to the plan it was supposed to assess--a plan geared to rescue in emergency conditions. However, this striking fact bothered neither those who drew up the study nor its ardent exegetes.

One of the unique methods employed by the Brookings Institution scientist was what, for want of a better epithet, we will call the "Togetherness Approach." Essentially this meant that the investigation of the conditions in the Dominican Republic was wrenched together with an examination of other islands in the West Indies, or indeed tropical countries in general. The overall conclusions were then perfunctorily projected on to the Dominican Republic. The dextrous use of this method produced some impressive results. The situation was as follows: there was the Dominican Republic, situated on the island of Hispanola in the West Indies. With an area of 50,000 sq. km. it was larger than Belgium and Holland, yet its population was only 1.5 million. The country was situated in the tropics, but thanks to unique meteorological conditions the climate in most of the country was comfortable for Europeans. *Unlike the majority of its neighbors in the West Indies*, the country was highly fertile and rich in natural resources. As a result of historical circumstances, its population was sparse and it was desperate to increase the number of its inhabitants. The country's economic development in recent years had been satisfactory, but the government hoped greatly to intensify the pace of development by increasing the population. These facts were known to all concerned. It had to be shown that the reverse was true.

The execution of the task using the Togetherness Approach produced the following results (all emphases in quotations from the report added):

"The first [problem] is that *all tropical countries* open to large-scale settlement are poor" (p. 39).

"Except perhaps for Cuba and very limited areas elsewhere, the soil *in none of the West Indies is rich*" (p. 48).

²⁷ In addition to the four "Clarification Chapters," Smith wrote a chapter on the financial and banking system in the Dominican Republic, a subject which was perhaps closer to his field of expertise.

“The fact is that there is very little additional crop land available *in the West Indies* for the rapidly rising population. *In most of the islands* the native food supply is deficient, particularly in fats. The future of export crops is obscure” (pp. 48-49).

“From 1929 to 1939 the *combined* population of Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico increased from about 4,458,000 to about 5,230,000... Taking the f.o.b. Cuba price as the

base value of sugar for the entire area, the per capita value of total sugar production declined from \$10.00 in 1929 to \$7.37 in 1938” (p. 50).

Here there appeared a hitch liable to ruin everything. For even as various sources were being cited to demonstrate how the West Indies were becoming bankrupt and were ever more dependent on food imports, one country stood out as the exception. The Dominican Republic had greatly increased its food crops, resulting in a 75 percent *decline* in food imports between 1929 and 1938 (p. 50).

Similarly, the population density table provided by the author to bolster his case shows clearly that the Dominican Republic was also exceptional in terms of its sparse population. Its 85 inhabitants per sq. mile compared with 100 in Cuba, 264 in Jamaica, 300 in Haiti, 500 in Puerto Rico, and 1,163 in Barbados (p. 47).

However, these embarrassing phenomena did not prevent the “objective” scientist from concluding his extensive and tortuous investigation with scholarly comments formulated with Olympian composure and detachment.

“There is a grave question as to whether the future of the European refugee can be made secure by transfer from one area of *population* pressure to another; from an area of political pressure to an area of economic pressure, *each equally ruthless*” (p. 52).

In this context, “political pressure” on a “surplus population” meant the Nazis’ actions against the Jews. In the view of the report’s author, this was no more ruthless than the anticipated economic pressure in the West Indies. Under the Togetherness Approach, this enlightened conclusion applied also to the Dominican Republic.

* * * * *

The report’s consumers were particularly pleased by its reference to a subject that was raised and discussed in the document as a gesture of good will and industriousness. The race/color problem was not included in the list of questions submitted to the Brookings Institution. But its appearance in the report was amazingly consistent with, and even outdid, the fears of Ida Silverman. Where she had been concerned that Jews would become non-Jews, the report purported to prove that white settlements in the Dominican Republic were doomed to become colored.

The underlying basis for this argument was a theory concerning white settlement in tropical regions developed by the well-known geographer Archibald Grenfell Price. The difficult conditions prevailing in these regions, Price maintained, meant that it was principally persons able to function at a low standard of living who could survive there. In the

end, Price says, these people “will usually drive out or absorb people of a higher standard, unless the latter increase their number through immigration or protect themselves by political supremacy, social barriers or laws.”²⁸ Price then goes on to formulate a kind of demographic Gresham’s Law:²⁹ “In most parts of the tropics the colored people with their lower standards of living and culture are absorbing the whites.”³⁰

The Brookings researcher needed no more. Using the Togetherness Approach, he drew up a table incorporating Barbados, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, worked out the decline of the white population relative to the overall population *in percentages*, and served up the results:

“In the past 150 years the white population of Barbados has fallen from 20% of the combined white and colored to 8% and in Jamaica from 8% to 1.75%. But in the Dominican Republic the population of whites has declined from somewhere between 70-80 per cent to 13 per cent in 1925.”

²⁸ Grenfell Price, *White Settlement in the Tropics*, p. 178.

²⁹ “Gresham’s Law” (named after the 16th century English financier) states that “bad money drives out good.”

³⁰ Price, p.9.

The word “but” was evidently intended to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that proportionately the decline in the Dominican Republic (sixfold) exceeded even that in Barbados (2.5) and Jamaica (4.6). Could anyone still doubt that there was no difference between Santo Domingo and other tropical countries?

A glance at the table reveals a considerable difference. In Barbados and Jamaica the period in question had seen an *absolute decline* in the number of whites, whereas in the Dominican Republic their number had almost *doubled* (from 103,000 to 192,000). Moreover, it turned out that the increase in the number of blacks in the country was largely due to the entry of tens of thousands of Haitians during the period of conquest, and the entry of non-white workers from neighboring islands--factors totally unrelated to the absorption of whites. Nevertheless, loyal to his method, the researcher concludes: “There is a rising tide of color that must *inevitably* engulf any but the most carefully prepared and protected white settlement” (p. 46).

As for how to defend against the inevitable, this depended on the whites maintaining a proper balance between men and women. The author explains:

“There is no assurance that a fairly equal selection of both sexes for white colonization will of itself defeat racial mixture in areas of high color density, but there is every reason to expect a mixture unless a reasonable balance is maintained from the first.”

And what is the situation at Sosua?

“The first group of Sosua settlers was composed of 27 men and 10 women. Over a year later, with a total of some 324 adults in the colony,

only 88 were white women, of whom all but 23 were married. Of the 20 marriages recorded, two were between native women and white settlers.”

(p. 46)

This was a highly innovative study. Somewhat disgruntled, the author asserts that “modern colonization continues to ignore this aspect of the settlement problem.” But his scientific contribution bore fruit. The Zionist commentators were most appreciative. The statistical coupling of 13 vs. 70-80 was quoted enthusiastically. The data on the mixed marriages dramatized the abyss lying below the settlers. Berl Locker sums up his commentary on the subject with a sarcastic quip meant to express the depth of his shock: “What a wonderful prospect of preserving the Jewish people by a multiplication of Sosuas in San Domingo and similar territories!”

* * * * *

A point of particular interest to the report’s eager interpreters was Dorsa’s severe mistake in saying that the cost of establishing a farming unit at Sosua was \$1,600, whereas p. 19 of the report showed definitively that the true cost would exceed \$3,000. One commentary after another took as its point of departure this disparity, as proof positive of the unreliability of the project’s managers.

A reading of p. 19 shows that it was far more equivocal than the commentators would have one believe. The language is not clear, ambiguity abounds. After citing settlement costs elsewhere (in Palestine, from \$2,500 to \$6,000), the author asserts that the Sosua project contemplates a “*repayment*” of \$1,600 from each settler, “although actual costs to date are undoubtedly at a rate considerably in excess of that figure.”

A footnote provides data on calculating the outlays per unit. Until June 1941 expenditures at Sosua totalled \$650,000, including \$111,000 for transporting the refugees from Europe which was covered by other organizations. The list of the 352 settlers on June 30, 1941, included 234 men. If one divides the total expenses by the number of men, the resulting figure is approximately \$3,000. “This, of course, is a very rough measure of unit cost,” the report adds, “but it is one that tends to understate rather than overstate the actual cost.”

The estimate was “very rough” indeed, and not only because each male was considered a separate settler. The cutoff date, June 1941, was chosen arbitrarily and the data were not corrected for the report’s publication a year later. Was there any justification for including in the Sosua account the entire \$63,000 for Dorsa’s general office costs in New

York (p. 296), or the entire \$45,000 in expenses for contacts with the Dominican government (ibid.)? It was totally inconceivable, from the viewpoint of the settlement association, to include the \$111,000 in transportation costs from Europe which were defrayed by Jewish welfare organizations. Yet all this is of secondary importance. The report itself does not say clearly that under the Dorsa plan the settlers' repayment was meant to cover all the costs involved. Elsewhere (p. 289) it is stated explicitly that the association did not intend to recover from the settlers their travel costs from Europe or the costs of maintaining them during their first year at Sosua. The report also expressed concern (p. 329) that the large disparity between expenses and repayments would devolve on the association and was liable to affect settlement "in other places." Hence there was no justification for pitting one sum against the other and then to claim that the difference showed the failure of the projects' planning.

Nevertheless, the hostile commentators seized on the obscure contradiction and turned it into the focal point of their campaign to discredit Dorsa's directors. And even if their reliance on this particular finding was doubtful, the report generally furnished them with plentiful material that undercut the credibility of the settlement association. Some of this material is to be found in Chapter 17, but most of it lies in sarcastic comments and transparent hints scattered through the Investigative Chapters.

Chapter 17, which describes Sosua's development, notes several mistakes some of which were due to insufficient guidance by the instructors at the settlement. This chapter, which is thought to have been written with the participation of Atherton Lee, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture experimental station in Puerto Rico, bears a substantive style and refrains from drawing conclusions regarding the future. Its mistakes are nearly all ephemeral in character and cast no aspersions on the project's directors.

In contrast, implicit attacks on Dorsa abound in the Investigative Chapters. They begin with a declaration of dissent tailored to fit the leaders of Dorsa and the Joint as they were depicted by their (moderate) opponents in the Zionist movement: "High purpose, beneficent intention and unselfish labor are no substitute for the experienced direction and technical supervision that every phase of such an operation requires" (p. 28). In addition to this remonstrance, which reappears near the end of the report (p. 332), the concluding passages of certain chapters and sections contain explicit warnings against bad management. These are couched in positive language--for example, "this is possible provided there is sound

management"--or in a style of reproach ("bad management is liable to ruin the entire project"). So systematic are these pronouncements recur that the reader may well think that the deplorable management encountered by the investigator at every turn was of such magnitude as to all but distract his attention from other issues.

The Zionist commentators willingly assented to the deprecatory comments against Dorsa, and added plenty of their own. The disparagement of the settlement association was an accepted means to scuttle the hated project.

* * * * *

The reckoning of the number of refugees the Dominican Republic was capable of absorbing appears in the course of a few pages in the final Investigative Chapter, and is totally unrelated to earlier data. The researcher accepts the fact that the country's population density is lower than that on the neighboring islands, both in the number of inhabitants per sq. mile (85) and the number of acres per inhabitant (7.5). However, he says, these figures are "somewhat deceptive."*

The underlying premise of the investigation was that the country's capacity for absorption would be determined "*upon the basis of existing conditions*" (p. 326). This rule of thumb applied to agricultural and industrial development, methods of soil cultivation, work productivity, expansion of the domestic and external market, and so forth. Naturally, an analysis based on a freezing of the situation would be at total variance with reality. As we shall see, even some of the researchers tried to dissent from this bizarre principle. But for the author of the Investigative Chapters it proved most helpful.

As befits a discussion devoted principally to agriculture, the author begins with a table showing the different types of land in the country. The table (p. 325, note) is here reproduced in its entirety:

 * The author of the report's fifth chapter sought to make his contribution by trying to prove that the population density of the Dominican Republic was too high. To that end, he calculated the number of *rural* inhabitants per square mile (68) and found that this exceeded the density in certain other countries. His conclusion: the Dominican Republic "does not suffer severely from over-population as Haiti and Puerto Rico do, but it cannot be said to have a great amount of unoccupied land for new immigrants" (p. 85). Two of the commentators, Berl Locker and Joseph Schechtmann, were delighted with this finding, but Harry Smith, the author of the Investigative Chapters, ignored it, preferring his own proof.

Thousands of acres

Now cultivated crop and planted pasture	2,500
Potentially plowable	500

Total arable area	3,000
Suitable for range	1,500
Suitable for tree crops	1,500
Forested or suitable for forest	4,000
Arid, abandoned or unfertile	2,000
Lakes, cities, towns, villages, roads, military areas	370

Total national area	12,370

The investigator asserts that only 25 percent of the total area "is suitable for cropping" and that the "cultivated land per inhabitant" stands at 1.5 acres. The population, which is growing at a rate of 50,000 per year, will, therefore, "require all idle or unused arable acreage for its own subsistence within the next five to ten years" (p. 325). This ambiguous phrasing leaves it unclear whether, as logic dictates, supplying the needs of the growing population in agricultural produce will, in five to ten years, require ("under existing conditions") the cultivation of the unused land, irrespective of the cultivators' identity; or whether it is being hinted that the local population requires the available land for itself and cannot concede it to foreign settlers. A further calculation indicates that the author has in mind the latter version. Refugee-settlers, the report relates, receive five acres of arable land. Thus the 100,000 refugees referred to by the Dominican government were liable to seize all the fertile land and leave nothing for the needs of the growing population. "It is clear, then, that the Dominican capacity to absorb permanent settlement is substantially smaller than this number" (p. 326).

Once again, we find misunderstandings stemming from ambiguous language. In the first place, nowhere was it said that all 100,000 refugees would be absorbed in agriculture. Secondly, was every *refugee-settler* to receive five acres, or every refugee even if he was a member of the settler's family? We will have occasion to see that the relationship between the concepts of "settler" (or household) and "refugee" afford our researcher wide latitude for statistical ploys. We turn now to the Dominican Republic's capacity to absorb new immigrants as determined by the Brookings report.

In addition to the five acres currently being allocated to each settlement unit, the report explained, an area of similar size would be required "for settler training and experimental and commercial crop purposes." On top of this, ten more acres would be needed for orchards and forests, and 15 acres for "natural range." All told, then, each settler would account for 35 acres.

Nor was this all. Since every agricultural settlement must comprise at least 300 farm units, each "settler community" would need a total of 3,000 acres of "good arable

land," 3,000 acres for tree-crops and forest, and 4,000-5,000 acres of "natural range." The aggregate: i 1,000 acres. The report continues:

In the entire Dominican Republic it would be extremely difficult to find more than 12 such areas where juxtaposition of land types, adequate rainfall, pure water supply, communication, and healthful climate are combined within the limits of effective community operation and administration. The colonization capacity of the Republic may therefore be placed at around 3,600 settler units, or based on current refugee immigration, a total of about 5,000 refugee immigrants. (P. 327)

The ratio of 5,000 to 3,600 is approximately 1.14:1. As the report explains, this was arrived at based on the composition of the immigration to Sosua, where women and children accounted for 30 percent of the total population. Immediately it is remarked that the ratio of women must be higher "if a sound community life is to be established." Why, then, was this unsuitable ratio adduced for the "proper" settlement that was to be established (after the war) according to the Brookings formula? Why not a ratio of 2:1, with a wife for every settler, or 3:1, with a wife and an average of one child? One's impression from the calculations that follow is that the low ratio was required so that it could be corrected without violating the statistics.

The following are the "practical" corrections to the above calculations:

(1) Of the 12 areas designated for settlement, several are too remote and isolated, and settlement in them could prove prohibitively costly. On the other hand, larger areas existed enabling the establishment of more farms than mentioned above.

(2) The allocation of ten acres of arable land per settler does not allow for a sufficient safety reserve. The amount should be increased to 15 acres.

(3) The low ratio between the number of farming units and the number of dependents could produce an unbalanced community. It should be raised.

Summing up, the researcher proposes a series of changes designed to balance one another, so that the overall number of refugees absorbed will remain constant. Seven settlements would be established housing 2,500 heads of families and 2,500 dependents. All told, the Republic would absorb 5,000 refugees. (P. 328)

This was the end of the calculations. In their wake it was not difficult to provide the desired answer to the leading question of those who commissioned the study. The Dominican Republic, the report stated in no uncertain terms, would "never be more than a minor factor in refugee settlement," adding sternly that this "cannot be ignored with impunity" (p. 331).

The concluding words of the Investigative Chapters deserve to be quoted verbatim:

General Trujillo generously offered to receive 100,000 [refugees] into the Dominican Republic. But allowing for its own increasing population, the capacity of the Republic to absorb and support refugee colonization is now found not to be in excess of 5,000 persons, about evenly divided between heads of family and dependents. In two years of settlement activity only about 400 persons, or less than one tenth of this capacity, have been moved into the Republic, and at that the colony is overcrowded. On this record alone, it seems fairly obvious that a successful solution of refugee distress depends upon something more than the compassion of statesmen, the generosity of philanthropists, and the unselfish efforts of humanitarians. The war stoppage of refugee emigration, tragic though it be, at least provides an opportunity for a reorientation of approach and reorganization of the method.

(P. 332)

Thus end the Investigative Chapters of Harry B. Smith.

* * * * *

The report's concluding chapter was written from the heart, not the head. The tone is positive and respectful, marked by an openly

sympathetic attitude toward the Sosua colony, along with constructive criticism of certain actions taken there (based on Chapter 17, which describes the situation),

proposals for improvement, and appreciation for the experienced management of the settlement association.

According to the author of this chapter, the local climate does not present a serious obstacle. The average north-European can live comfortably in the climate of the Dominican Republic. In fact, in the summer the average farmer in the United States works longer hours in greater heat than the settler at Sosua.

The anticipated influence of refugee settlement on the Dominican society is deemed positive. The thousands of European immigrants could raise the level of agriculture in the country. If their farming enterprise succeeds, their Dominican neighbors will learn from them improved working methods and better farm management. The considerations cited here in terms of the expected development of the country's economy are at a polar remove from the thesis propounded in the Investigative Chapters based on a freeze of the existing conditions.

Similarly, Harry Smith's descriptions of the dangers facing white society and the white man in the tropics are politely dismissed as unconvincing. Indeed, the concluding chapter argues, "from the standpoint of the individual settler, life in the tropics *will be far better than the conditions which he leaves behind him*" (p. 333). In addition to this transparent hint, the events of the Holocaust are referred to twice in a manner which should have opened people's eyes, had the hearts not been shut of both those who commissioned the report and its consumers.

One of these occasions is intertwined with appreciation expressed for the Sosua enterprise. The Sosua plan could play a crucial role by showing that refugees can be settled in tropical or subtropical regions and that the establishment of such colonies contributes to the prosperity of the country involved. Should the plan succeed, the hope is that other republics in the Americas will follow in the footsteps of the Dominican Republic and absorb refugees on a large scale. "*The hope that they may be induced to do so, plus the fact that every individual who does find a home in the Republic is a human being saved from death or degradation, more than justifies the effort and expenditure that the Sosua project has involved.*"

The other reference is contained in the conclusions regarding the country's capacity for immigrant absorption. Despite the noble qualities manifested by the author of the concluding chapter, these conclusions were taken *en bloc* from the Investigative Chapters, albeit phrased more moderately, and additional disheartening points were added to the list. The

number of refugees likely to be absorbed was estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000. It was "probable" that the Sosua colony could not support additional settlers, hence it would be "inadvisable" to try to step up settlement activity. "*Unless it seems imperative to bring large numbers of people to the Republic simply to save them from persecution, it would clearly be better to establish a small successful colony on a sound basis than to take the chance of failure by over-rapid expansion.*"

With these highly meaningful reservations, the report of the nonJewish institution was submitted to the Jews who were interested in it. They shocked no one, fomented no revolutions. Because people's hearts were closed.

* * * * *

The first breach in the learned front of the Brookings report appears on page 341, in connection with the definitive assertion that the Dominican Republic could "ultimately" absorb 3,000 to 5,000 immigrants in agriculture. A footnote to this pronouncement states: "*In Mr. Lee's opinion the Republic could accommodate around 10,000 settlers.*" Whoever has fathomed the language of the report understands that Lee's estimate is not two or three times greater than that of the report but four to six times. The report speaks about 3,000-5,000 *immigrants*, while Lee mentions 10,000 *settlers*, meaning households (families). And even the statistical calculations of the Investigative Chapters finally accepted that a settler family is comprised of two people.

The reader discovers Lee's identity in the introduction to the report. As mentioned, Atherton Lee was the director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's experimental station at Puerto Rico. He also headed the agricultural section of the Brookings study. Patently, his opinion would be worth something. Yet his assessment, at such variance with that of the report, is cited offhandedly in a footnote and without an explanation of its underlying reasoning.

Some light on this is shed by a *counter-report* drawn up by Dominican experts and published by the Dominican government in response to the Brookings study. According to one of the appendices in the Dominican report, the comments by Lee quoted in the Brookings report are the conclusion of a detailed survey he submitted to the directors of the study, but which was not incorporated into the final report. The reason for this is not hard to understand when one reads Lee's findings and opinions.

Lee asserts that the Dominican Republic (at that time) was exploiting less than half of its good agricultural land, with the remainder available for cultivation (pp. 102-103).

Secondly, according to the agricultural expert, even in the existing situation and without expanding the cultivated area, the Dominican Republic could support a population twice the size of its current population by a suitable selection of grains, improved utilization of irrigation water, and intensified industrialization.

And third, Lee says, the full exploitation of the available soil would, "according to a modest estimate," enable a population of 5-6 million to be maintained--four times the current number (pp. 104, 105).

As for the absorption of refugees in the agricultural sector, Lee provided a detailed table showing where they could be settled in the conditions of 1941. The sites are listed according to their order of priority and for each location Lee gives the area of cultivation, the type of agriculture recommended, the estimated price of the land, and the number of households designated for settlement. The first two places on the list are Lower Sosua (already in existence) which would accommodate a hundred families working 800 acres of vegetable gardens, and Upper Sosua, where a thousand families would earn their living from 15,000 acres of orchards and forest.

All told, Lee saw room for over 10,000 refugee families, or about 40,000 people (pp. 100-101,107).

In a detailed letter to Dorsa director James Rosenberg (pp. 108-112), Lee refers to several points on which he dissents from the Brookings report. He rejects out of hand the report's principal premise that the island's capacity for absorption should be calculated in terms of a freeze of the "existing conditions." He dismisses the contention that the absence of a sufficient local market would limit the possibilities of agricultural development. In addition to the domestic market, which was developing at a satisfactory pace, the Dominican Republic could, in Lee's view, become an important supplier of agricultural foodstuffs and raw materials to the United States, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean islands.

A note of bitterness and affront is discernible in Lee's claim that he investigated the question of available land "more than any of my colleagues." He was the only researcher to visited a certain area, where he found extensive tracts of unused fertile land and plentiful water. The letter concludes with a somewhat surprising revelation: "I wish to express my great regret at not having an opportunity to examine the manuscript of the report prior to its publication, with the exception of the agricultural

chapters... I thought it my duty to write this letter to apprise you and your colleagues that the report differs considerably from my views."

A year earlier, Atherton had predicted a "brilliant success" for Sosua (while arguing with the Dorsa experts about the type of produce that was desirable in the colony) and advocated the immediate expansion of the settlement project by acquiring and developing new locales.³¹ This fact renders doubly significant the rejection of his contribution regarding the county's capacity for absorption and his effective removal from the discussion through the shelving of his survey.

* * * * *

The response of the Dominican expert commission to the Brookings report bristles with indignation and amazement that the well-known scientific institution had published a book "overflowing with mistakes and wrongheadedness." The authors of the Brookings report are accused of ignorance, superficiality, and maliciousness. The bulk of the criticism is directed at the chapter dealing with the island's capacity for

³¹ Capacity of the Dominican Republic to Absorb Refugees, findings of the commission appointed by the executive power of the Dominican Republic to appraise the report of the Brookings Institution concerning the colonization of refugees in Santo Domingo.

absorption. In a report crammed with “departures from common sense,” the Dominicans say, nowhere are they more flagrant than in this chapter. Of the three agricultural experts included in the Brookings study team, only Atherton Lee actually conducted a land survey, and none of the three took part in writing the chapter under discussion. As for the chapter’s author, Harry Smith, he is said to have seen Dominican land “only in the form of city streets and highway paving” (pp. 28, 29).

To illustrate Smith’s ignorance in agriculture, the Dominicans note, among other points, his confused use of terminology relating to types of land. They are scornful of his use of the term “plowable land” in reference to all agricultural land. Not all land suitable for agriculture requires plowing, and not all land that is susceptible to plowing is fit for agricultural cultivation. To prevent confusion, the authors say, accurate labelling is necessary. Thus, “cultivable land” refers to soil that gives yield in the wake of cyclical sowing, a harvest of agricultural value, or fodder for animals (p. 25).

(It bears noting, in this connection, that the table showing the different types of land which, according to Harry Smith, was prepared by the study team’s agricultural experts, does not appear in the chapter devoted to agriculture. Whereas the table that Atherton Lee submitted to the study’s directors was drawn up very differently and is not marred by the terminological confusion of Smith’s chart.)

The Brookings report claim that only 25 percent of the county’s land can produce crops and that no more than 500,000 acres of such land

are still available, is dismissed as absurd and ludicrous. The truth is, the Dominicans say, that anyone familiar with the local agriculture is aware that with the exception of La Vega Real, part of the eastern flatlands, and certain areas adjacent to the main highways, the best land for agriculture is virgin land (p. 26).

The critics base themselves on the published results of studies and surveying carried out over many years by scientists from various countries, some of which flatly contradict Smith’s findings. One of the appendices in the Dominican document provide a breakdown of the country’s land in terms of agricultural value: First-class land--45.1 percent; second-class-- 19.1 percent; third-class--26.1 percent; unfit for cultivation--9.7 percent (p. 54). A vast gulf separates these figures from Smith’s data.

In taking issue with the data on refugee absorption, the Dominicans were objecting not only to the Brookings report, but indirectly also to the vacillating and narrowminded policy of Dorsa. The Dominican response recalls the simple fact: that this was a rescue mission. “The immigration we proposed [at Evian] was, in the circumstances, a rescue immigration and not a transfer of people who could choose freely between a good or a better place” (p. 15). In this connection, the Dominicans see no point in restricting the absorption plan to the settlement of well-to-do farmers possessing 35 acres of land per household, as planned by the Brookings Institution scientist. They do not deny that their own internal plans for immigrant absorption (380,000 persons in 20 years) prefer that the new inhabitants engage primarily in agriculture. However, they add caustically, “we have all understood that *in the existing conditions* it is impossible to realize the ideal. In these circumstances, we accepted the fact that in receiving on our soil human beings expelled by nations for whom science oven-ides their Christian duty, we will offer these wretched people living conditions suitable for ourselves.” (P. 19, emphases in the original.)

Refuting the Brookings thesis that the Dominican Republic is incapable of absorbing more than 5,000 refugees, the Dominicans point out that their country has already taken in twice that number without any difficulties. These refugees arrived totally destitute. Efforts were made to settle some of them on the land. But as nearly all of them were accustomed to non-agricultural pursuits, they had moved to the cities and integrated themselves into the local economy according to their skills. (P. 16, 17)

The Dominicans angrily refute the Brookings report’s false contention that under the terms of Dorsa’s agreement with the Dominican government the settlers are prohibited from engaging in any activity that competes with local enterprises of the same type (Brookings report, p. 317). In fact, as regards competition with local industry, the agreement (Par. 4c) states that materials and equipment imported by Dorsa for plants of this category will not be duty-free, as distinct from goods imported for other settler enterprises. The purpose of this codicil, which affirms indirectly that the settlers may engage in professions that compete with local inhabitants, is to protect the local industries, which pay full tax when importing goods.

The Dominican response reiterates that their country is open to urban immigration. It is asserted that the agreement with Dorsa speaks about the entry of industrial workers, artisans, and (it is stressed) *tradesmen*. Some 80 percent of the refugees who had arrived since the war's outbreak had eventually settled in the cities. The country's economy would benefit from an increase in the percentage of urban dwellers, and European immigrants were especially welcome.

* * * * *

Both documents, the Brookings report and the Dominican response, although drawn up by non-Jewish bodies, are essentially Jewish documents. Their publication was connected with the horrific events the Jewish people was undergoing, and they are evidence of dereliction on the part of those whose standing made it their duty and responsibility to provide help and rescue. Circumstantial evidence and considerations based on openly declared motives leave no doubt that the initiative for the unfortunate study came from Zionist circles. How it came to pass that the highly prestigious and reputable Brookings Institution produced such a deficient and fallacious document, is a question beyond the scope of this book. What is not open to question is that the ardent consumers of that document were Zionists from every faction and every country. We will consider a few of them.

A wide-ranging response came from the Zionist leader Berl Locker, at that time in charge of the Jewish Agency's political activity in London.³² Locker's article included a detailed survey of the Santo Domingo affair and extensive quotations from the Brookings report. There was no nonsense or folly too great for Locker to repeat in the awe-stricken tones of a true believer revealing lofty truths. Here we find the "rising tide of color" that will engulf the refugees and the complacent comparison of the problem of "surplus population" in Europe with the economic pressure

to be expected in the West Indies. Even the thesis of the allegedly high population density in the Dominican Republic, rejected by Harry Smith, is found suitable for serving up to the reader as a surprising truth exposed by the well-known scientific institution.

Locker's effusive delight at the plan's failure is reflected in the waggish title he gives his article, drawn from the world of dramaturgy, "Exit San Domingo"--exit from the stage, that is--and his recounting of the droll tale of a would-be rider whose horse had "ended." This jocular story frames the article. For the analogy is with the various forms of territorialism: "And it is to be hoped that benevolent statesmen, Jewish territory-hunters, dispersed colonization advocates and Palestine-blind philanthropists will ponder over its [the study's] lessons when they come to consider the question: Which horse next?"

A similar conclusion was reached by Dr. Arye Tartakower, writing in the New York weekly of Poalei Zion.³³ As a trained sociologist he does not condone Harry Smith's amazing notions, but he does accept the report's lethal findings as gospel truth: no more than 5,000 refugees can be settled, in small groups and over a lengthy period. The reasons: there is not enough available land, the country is poor, its economic future uncertain. Tartakower is particularly taken with the report's verdict, as he terms it--that the Dominican Republic is unlikely to play more than a minor role in solving the refugee problem. Like his London colleague, he too concludes with a call to arms and a warning. Apprehensive that this will not be the last territorialist plan, he declares: "We must imprint in the minds of Jews and others of good will that only *one* way exists to solve the refugee problem, that all forces must be concentrated around this way, and money not wasted on unproductive side programs."

A tone of total refusal to compromise and unswerving belief in the verities of the report shines through the article by the Revisionist leader Joseph Schechtmann in the journal of the American Jewish Congress.³⁴ The author launches an *ad hominem* attack on Dr. Rosen and, like Locker, loyally parrots Harry Smith's conclusions. At one point he inadvertently hits upon the truth in speaking about the "crushing blow" the Brookings Institution delivered to the Dominican plan. Before the report's publication,

³² Locker, "Exit San Domingo."

³³ Arye Tartakower, "Asof fun nach an Ilusieh," *Ididisher Kempfer*, January 8, 1943.

³⁴ J. Schechtmann, "Failure of the Dominican Scheme: Brookings Report Writes Finis to Colonisation Project," *Congress Weekly*, January 15, 1943.

he points out, “well-founded doubts” had been voiced concerning the plan, but had been denounced as Zionist atrocity-propaganda.

Unlike the two critics cited above, Schechtmann does not ignore the references to the Holocaust in the report’s final chapter.

The authors [of the report] do not deny the purely philanthropic value of the Dominican experiment. They realize that every refugee transferred from the European *inferno* is a human being saved from death and degradation. They are, therefore, ready to consider the effort and expenditure involved in the Sosua project as justified. This friendly concession does not, however, alter to any extent the factual balance of their authoritative report: 474 settlers represent the limit of Sosua itself, and the utmost limit of the whole resettlement work in the Dominican Republic is 3,000 to 5,000 people on the land, with an unspecified additional number scattered in industrial undertakings. This small Jewish minority is doomed to be engulfed by the “rising tide of color.”

To respond to the hint about the possibility of bringing in Jews in order to save them--for this the national sentiment of the Zionist functionary was insufficient.

And in distant Tel Aviv, the journalist Dr. Herzl Rosenbloom was summing up the failure of territorialism from Uganda to Santo Domingo.³⁵ He collected various territorialist schemes until he reached the unlucky number of thirteen. This enabled him to relate some piquant stories about people’s fear of the frightening number and to hint that when it came to immigration proposals for Jews, there really was something foreboding in it. Regarding the Dominican plan, Rosenbloom wrote: “The principal cause of the failure is apparently the cruel climate of the region, from which the natives themselves flee... It was thought that the Jews would succeed where the natives failed. But such thoughts were groundless.”

* * * * *

Concluding his article, Dr. Rosenbloom excoriated certain Zionists who had expressed support for non-Zionist immigration plans. “That the assimilationists should believe--that is to be expected! But that Zionists too should be among the believers... They are a strange tribe, these Zionists: in 1923 they went looking for immigrants. And now, when there are immigrants, they go looking for territories... 13 immigration plans. Whereas I would make do with the 14th plan, which is the first and the last.”

Indeed, there were Zionists, individuals or groups, who deviated from the line at every stage of Zionism’s war on territorialism. Some of

them were leading figures, such as Ruppin and Rubashov (Shazar) during the Evian Conference. But never did their stands bring about a change in Zionist policy. In the case of Ruppin-Rubashov, as we saw, the policy makers simply outflanked the dissenters without engaging them in debate. In other cases, when the exponents of the wrong opinion were liable to take *action*, their superiors did not balk at calling them to order, discreetly or publicly. We learned of one such case, which occurred parallel to the onset of the Santo Domingo affair, from a conversation with one of those involved.³⁶ Partial documentation was also obtained.

When the idea of bringing Jews to Alaska was raised in the United States, a group of Poalei Zion activists there organized themselves to help further the plan. A committee was formed with the participation of Haim Greenberg, Arye Tartakower, David Wertheim, and others. Editorials appeared in the Poalei Zion press advocating the Alaska settlement project.³⁷ “And then,” our interlocutor related, “we were reprimanded by the World Zionist Organization leadership--severely reprimanded.” Letters from the Yishuv demanded that they desist from their harmful activity. Berl Locker in London wrote a blistering article (which, unfortunately, we have not been able to locate). The case against them went like this: “How can you, Poalei Zion members, be propagandizing for Jewish settlement in Alaska? As Zionists, you must surely know that this is simply not done!” Of no avail was the argument that they did

³⁵ Dr. H. Rosenbloom, “13,” *Haboker*, December 11, 1942.

³⁶ Second recorded conversation with Prof. Tartakower, August 15, 1974.

³⁷ *Iddisher Kempfer*, May 17, 1940; *Jewish Frontier*, May 1940.

not intend to send to Alaska people who could be settled in Eretz-Israel, but only those who could not otherwise be saved. The annulment of the plan in the depths of Congressional bureaucracy spared the committee members from having to proclaim their surrender. But their behavior in the Dominican affair indicates that they learned well the lesson of their clash with the Zionist establishment.

There were also some who objected to the Zionists' enthusiasm regarding the Brookings report. The report of the scholarly institution reminded Abraham Revusky³⁸ of the notorious report issued by Sir John Hope Simpson who in 1939 was delegated by the British government to examine the absorptive ability of Palestine and reached the conclusion that there was no room for even one more settler. Revusky saw in the Brookings report the same narrowminded approach, failure of understanding, and absence of vision that marked the Simpson document. The same unbending insistence on the "existing conditions" without consideration for possibilities of development in agriculture and industry.

All told, Revusky writes, the Dominican survey is not as thorough or as convincing as most of the other Brookings Institution studies he has

seen. The reader's impression was that in the view of the report's authors, a general acquaintance with the situation in the country was sufficient to make a judgment on the settlers' prospects for success. The result was a study of which 85 percent could just as well have been written without leaving the Congressional Library in Washington.

At the same time, Revusky takes note of the immense difference between the fate of the Simpson report and the probable impact of the Brookings report. Since the former's publication the Jewish population of Palestine had trebled, and might have grown even more had it not been for the artificial restrictions imposed by the British Mandate authorities. The Zionist movement and the Yishuv had utterly rejected and repudiated the hostile document.

In contrast, no public force existed capable of standing up against the Brookings report. Neither the philanthropists of Dorsa nor, certainly, the settlers themselves had the strength to revolt against the findings. Hence the report was liable to be accepted as "the death knell of the ambitions project." This would greatly grieve Abraham Revusky, an unorthodox Zionist. He could find no justification for a Zionist not to look favorably on any non-Zionist Jewish settlement activity, particularly when supported by people inherently unable to direct their energies to Eretz-Israel.

Thus--Abraham Revusky. This time no reprimand was required, there was no need to argue with him. His article was entitled, "Another Project Fades Out." But the cover of the issue in which the article appeared called it, unemotionally, "Failure in Santo Domingo."

* * * * *

Failure how and why? The first part of this two-pronged question is far more easily and unhesitatingly answered than the second. The plan to absorb 100,000 refugees in the Dominican Republic did, indeed, fail after only 500 refugees had settled there. The direct expression of this failure was the fact that *refugees ceased arriving*. The flow of refugees, never more than meager, gradually became even slower and stopped completely by the second half of 1942. From May 1940 to June 30, 1941, 352 refugees reached Sosua, another 120 arrived between July 1941 and July 1942, and until the end of the war their number never totalled much above 500.

The dates show that the writing of the Brookings report and the downturn in the refugee influx occurred simultaneously. As we saw, Harry Smith pointed to the cessation of immigration as a fact and saw in it confirmation of his views. It was not the report's publication that caused

the stoppage in the arrival of refugees. But this is not to say that the Brookings document did not play a part in the plan's demise. Pursuing Abraham Revusky's metaphor, it can be said that the report fulfilled the role of a highly reliable mortuary that gave the plan an ostentatious funeral. This respectable funeral created the impression that the deceased died a natural death and was not murdered, heaven

³⁸ Avraham Revusky, "Another Project Fades Out," *Jewish Frontier*, April 1943.

forbid, by bandits. Not everyone read the 410-page volume, and very few took the trouble to master it as Revusky did, ** But many heard about the conclusions reached by the prestigious institution following two years of thorough and detailed research. The impressive image of the research institute and the manner in which the report was submitted induced a widespread comfortable feeling that no injustice had been done to the settlement project. Since immigration there had ceased in any case, what more could be done? One way or the other, it had been demonstrated conclusively that the plan was unworkable. The upshot was that potential public criticism of the project's cessation was checked, and no one delved into the reasons for what had occurred.

Here we come to the second part of our question: *why* did the plan fail? Since we have already determined that the symptom of the failure was that the flow of refugees dried up, it remains to look for the cause.

The report's answer is emphatic and brooks no argument the flow of refugees ceased due to transportation difficulties caused by the exigencies of the war. Some historians have repeated this explanation, albeit with reservations.³⁹

The truth is that the cutback in civilian seaborne traffic on the part of the belligerents greatly impeded the transportation of refugees.-The Nazis' conquest of Western Europe in May 1940 and Italy's entry into the war the following month ruled out departures from many European ports. America's entry into the war in December 1941 severely compounded these difficulties. Nevertheless, numerous possibilities for seaborne transportation still existed, and there were tens of thousands of Jews who could have been evacuated. Portuguese and Spanish ships regularly called at Caribbean ports,⁴⁰ and refugees from various places in Europe arrived in those two countries. Nearly 100,000 Jewish refugees passed through Portugal during the war,⁴¹ and many of them waited there months or years for the chance to leave. Until November 1942, and until Germany's

 ** Incidentally, Revusky too was misled by the report's assertion that the agreement with Dorsa forbade the settlers to compete with local industry. He was highly critical of this clause--which was, as mentioned, nonexistent.

conquest of southwestern France, refugees from France and Switzerland could be taken out via Spain and Portugal.

The entry of additional refugees into these two countries was liable to be a function of the rate of evacuation of their predecessors. *** Any delay in removing refugees from there harmed the prospects of saving other refugees. And even though, fortunately, the haven in Portugal and access thereto via Spain were maintained throughout the war, there was good reason to fear that the situation would deteriorate because of the pro-German sentiments in both countries (Spain, it will be recalled, sent the "Blue Division" to Hitler's aid).

It is clear, then, that even without reference to other places and possibilities, there were in the Iberian Peninsula large numbers of refugees anxiously awaiting evacuation, there were free ports of departure and neutral shipping lines, and there was a country ready to absorb the refugees. Yet the refugees did not arrive. Why?

We are compelled to fall back on a *conjecture*, based, we believe, on a high degree of probability and internal logic, but one which is only partially confirmed by the testimonies we were able to collect. Our conjecture is that the same people and institutions that sabotaged the American wing of the Santo Domingo project, also worked to thwart it at its European points of origin. While we lack sufficient evidence, we believe that the officials of the Zionist movement who were connected or involved with refugee relief organizations and Jewish immigration societies, worked to prevent the transfer of refugees to the Dominican Republic. The transportation difficulties served these officials as a pretext and auxiliary means to limit the number of candidates and postpone their departure as long as possible. The reply of our

39 "What was extraordinarily difficult was first and foremost the transfer of settlers from European countries to San Domingo"--Tartakower, *Jewish Settlement in the Diaspora*, p. 169; "The inability of the refugees to leave Europe, particularly following the U.S. entry into the war, worked against the rapid development of the Sosua plan"--Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, p. 236.

40 *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 44, p. 296.

41 Wyman, p.150.

interlocutor, a personage quite knowledgeable in Jewish immigration, when asked whether our conjecture was reasonable, attested to a moral-intellectual effort on his part to adhere to the truth despite psychological and emotional inhibitions. The following are excerpts from our conversation:⁴²

Question: Was there no discrimination against the Dominican Republic among the organizations involved in evacuating refugees--in the sense that they didn't want to send people there?

 *** This was perceptibly illustrated in Spain when the authorities refused to permit the entry of a group of Greek Jews bearing Spanish nationality who were incarcerated in Bergen-Belsen, until the evacuation of a group of survivors who had arrived previously from France. Haim Avni, "Spanish Nationals in Greece and their Fate During the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. VIII, pp. 52-53 (Hebrew).

Answer: I think not. As regards the Jewish Agency, yes. The Jewish Agency was interested, and rightly so, in transferring people elsewhere than to Santo Domingo, and exclusively to Eretz-Israel.

Question: Yes, but this was not possible. The possibility of getting to Eretz-Israel did not always exist.

Answer: As long as the possibility seemed to exist... The Jewish Agency was inclined against Santo Domingo from the beginning. I already said that Mrs. Ida Silverman wrote what she wrote as an emissary of the World Zionist Organization. They opposed the [project]. They saw it as being directed against Eretz-Israel.

Question: Even without heed to the dangers facing those who remained in Europe?

Answer: Even without heed. The Zionists were against that settlement [project].

Later in the conversation, my interlocutor said: "Within the WZO there was a kind of psychosis on this subject. They thought that every Jewish settlement plan was directed against settlement in Eretz-Israel."

A second and more concrete testimony came from a personage who was directly involved in dealing with refugees. This person, at the time a member of the Zionist Actions Committee, was employed by the Office of the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees. As an official representative of that body, he arrived in fall 1941 (in the ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) on the Isle of Man, where 3,000 refugees from Germany were being held as "citizens of an enemy state." He was accompanied by James Rosenberg's daughter. The purpose of their visit was to choose candidates for the Dominican project. At the end of our conversation, after he had endeavored to reconstruct events that had taken place over thirty years earlier, this was the picture that emerged:

His arrival evoked a good deal of interest among the detainees. Many of them crowded around his room. Everyone wanted to talk to him and discover the purpose of his visit. Several hundred people signed up to meet with him.

"And then," he continued, "I called in all those who signed up and I had a personal talk with each and every one of them separately: Why do you want to go? What do you know about it? Do you know that once you get there you will not be able to leave? That you will not be allowed in..."

Question: Wasn't your talk intended as a warning: "Jew, why go there?" Was something like that going on?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: What do you mean, "why"?

Question: Why means... A person wants to go, he will get out of Europe... What do you care if he goes?

Answer: First of all, there were few possibilities to go.

Question: That was because of...

Answer: Because of transportation.

⁴² Second recorded conversation with Prof. Tartakower, August 15, 1947.

Question: Do I understand correctly that you wanted to have the number of candidates tally with the number of available places on the ships? How should I understand this?

Answer: We wanted to have the number of candidates tally with the possibilities, the combination of possibilities: transportation, visas, former profession, and so forth.

Question: What happened after these meetings?

Answer: They were supposed to sign that they would not try to leave [the Dominican Republic] illegally for America. And they were warned that they could not obtain exit papers legally.

Question: How many signed?

Answer: About two hundred people.

Question: And these two hundred went to Santo Domingo?

Answer: Some of them.

He also related that he reported on the results of his mission to Berl Locker. Professor Samuel (Solomon?) Troun, who carried out a similar mission in Switzerland, also spoke with Locker. "We both held the same opinion [about the Dominican settlement project]--that it was very bad."⁴³

* * * * *

At the Sixth Zionist Congress, Dr. Bernstein-Cohen, a fierce opponent of the Uganda plan, spoke in favor of subjecting the Jewish people to "starvation treatment" because afflictions steeled its ideals. Even at the beginning of the century this audacious proposal was marked by a substantial element of cruelty. But surely not even in his worst nightmares could the energetic physician have imagined how the Zionist movement would fulfill his recommendation forty years later, when the afflictions took the form of total destruction and passive posture became active opposition. When in December 1942 Chaim Weizmann cautioned against "diverting the energy of the Jewish people from building Eretz-Israel by dazzling it with the illusion of other lands,"⁴⁴ he was repeating verbatim the emotional call of Yehiel Chelnov at the Uganda Congress. But in the changed circumstances this call took on a wholly different meaning. Whereas in 1903 Chelnov had feared that the nascent Zionist movement

would be stifled by territorialist temptations, Weizmann's remark on the eve of 1943 marked the failure of urgent rescue efforts on the part of Zionism. The pretext was a war on territorialism, and there were many Zionists who believed that rescue missions would in fact endanger Zionism. These fears derived from a narrowminded concept of Zionism and impatience regarding passing difficulties. An inclusive Zionism, a Zionism that was not fragmented, would not have objected to the rescue of Jews, since such rescue is the very essence of Zionism. Yet even the truncated Zionism of the post-Uganda era had nothing to fear in the long term from rescue efforts. Its own direct self-interest should have prompted the Zionist movement to enlist itself in such efforts and initiate them wherever possible. By doing so, it would have helped assure the existence of that *She'erit Hapletah*, the surviving remnant, which was vital for the realization of Zionism, that surviving remnant for which, it will be recalled, Ben-Gurion prayed, but whose actuality was far from assured in the onrushing events. In this case, Zionist participation in rescue efforts would not have harmed the movement, and probably Zionist fund-raising also would not have been the loser. As it turned out after the Holocaust, and as could have been foreseen, every group of survivors, by virtue of its collective experience, was a bearer of the Zionist idea. Moreover, the readiness of Jews in the free countries to contribute capital and energy *increased* as the needs and tasks grew.

These considerations, augmented by a simple Love of Israel, could have dictated to the Zionist movement behavior commensurate with the emergency needs of the horrific hour. Disastrously, no leaders of stature emerged who were capable of seeing the full scope of the problems and the possibilities. No one came forward like Herzl, Syrkin, or Shimon Rosenbaum, who had embodied the pain of the Jewish people during the Uganda crisis. Zionist fund-raisers in New York were practical enough to

⁴³ Third recorded conversation with Shalom Adler-Rudell, October 6, 1974.

⁴⁴ *Davar*, December 10, 1942.

understand the benefit to be derived from integrating the Palestine Fund with the United Jewish Appeal. But in the political realm, no one in New York, in London, or in Jerusalem had the imagination to integrate Zionist activity into the great mission of saving Jews wherever they were and by every possible means. Individuals such as Abraham Revusky had no influence in the movement, while Haim Greenberg and his colleagues, who tried to apply Rosenbaum's doctrine in the Alaska episode, were called to order.

The Santo Domingo affair in all its stages marks a peak in the Zionist movement's cruel attitude toward the distress of the Jewish people. It took place in the atmosphere of alienation that had already engendered

opposition to sending food packages to Jews in Poland and the thwarting of Avraham Silbershein's efforts to extricate Jews from concentration camps. Yet its significance is immeasurably more profound than anything that had gone before. The extenuating circumstances in the earlier cases--lack of knowledge, mistaken assessment, an absence of foresight --had all fallen by the wayside. As the Santo Domingo affair progressed, the situation of the Jews in Occupied Europe became increasingly clearer and better known. And, congruently, whatever might moderate one's assessment of the Zionists' maltreatment of those Jews, faded away.

The absolute height of this development was the Zionists' victory cry upon the publication of the Brookings report. Berl Locker's triumphant article, along with the articles of Schechtmann, Tartakower and Rosenbloom, appeared in the period from December 1942-April 1943--in every instance after November 23, 1942. The details of the Holocaust, the ongoing total annihilation of European Jewry, were known to anyone who took an interest. The existence of the Holocaust had been officially recognized by the Zionist movement and by the Yishuv. Work stoppages and mass meetings of mourning had just been held in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. All over the free world protest rallies were conducted with the Zionists' active participation. In a huge rally in New York's Madison Square Garden, Chaim Weizmann and Stephen Wise accused the nations of the world of showing indifference to the Jewish people's calamity. Six of the twelve demands raised at the rally concerned the need to find havens for the survivors. At the very same time Zionist officials were delighted that they had managed to block one of the most concrete and generous havens in existence.

The Santo Domingo affair, with the Brookings report and the response of the Dominican republic, represents a spectacle whose historical significance and underlying ramifications cannot be expunged from the history of the Jewish people. A small country opening wide its gates to Jewish refugees and remaining steadfast in the face of outside objections and interference--this is not a phenomenon to reinforce the thesis of the world's indifference to the Holocaust. Certainly one cannot ignore the bitter lesson of the behavior manifested by our own liberation movement in this tragic affair.

We will conclude this chapter with a few remarks about the major actor in our story: Dorsa (and its sponsor, the Joint).

The behavior of Dorsa and its founder, the Joint, in the Santo Domingo affair constitutes a salient example of the weakness of the non-Zionist Jewish public during the Holocaust. These organizations bore a

good deal of the responsibility for the project's failure, notwithstanding the good will and great devotion of the officials involved. Their original sin, one they shared with the Zionists, lay in their lack of foresight and absence of a sense of the urgency of the rescue mission. They, like the Zionists, did not see in 1939 what was about to occur and did not grasp what was occurring in the first years of the war. Unlike Zionism, Dorsa and the Joint had no active public rearguard, ready to fulfill missions and serve as emissaries, beyond the collection and distribution of money.

In addition, Dorsa inherited from its founder-progenitor a serious organizational deficiency that hampered it and caused innumerable hitches and blunders. In the Santo Domingo affair the Joint behaved like certain generals who always fight the last war. The JDC had years of experience in settling Jews in the Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. To facilitate this, a special subsidiary association, Agrojoint, had been created which engaged primarily in agricultural settlement. When the Dominican proposal arose, it was turned over to the currently idle Agrojoint apparatus.

Trujillo's special interest in agricultural settlers was consistent with the experience and inclinations of the Agrojoint personnel, who were determined to make

the project a success story of exemplary agricultural settlement. To ensure that outcome, cautionary measures were adopted that stood in flagrant contradiction to the required and potential pace of bringing in refugees. When James Rosenberg related with satisfaction how he had explained to the inhabitants of the island, disappointed at the slow inflow of refugees, that this was a precaution to ensure the project's success, he could not know that within a few years his words would be testimony to an unexpiable sin of neglect. True, the Dominican government preferred agricultural settlement, but under no circumstances did it close the gates to refugees who intended to engage in other professions, including commerce. This was stated emphatically and extensively in the Dominican response to the Brookings report, and explicitly in the agreement with Dorsa (Par. 2b). A special clause (4p) enabled Dorsa to establish in the Dominican Republic centers for the temporary absorption of refugees lacking a profession in order to ready them for integration into the local economy. The Dominican government did not hesitate to issue visas to whoever Dorsa recommended. At one point Dorsa had in its possession 4,000 visas.⁴⁵ In these conditions, many thousands of people could have been brought into the country in 1940 and 1941, too, not to mention 1939, a year wasted on niceties of negotiation.

But Dorsa was in no hurry. Activity that went beyond exemplary agricultural settlement was none of its concern. Apprehensive of interference or of harm coming to its pet project, Dorsa did not bring "superfluous" refugees. There are indications that the precautions were extreme to the point where the vanguard groups did not even include the young settlers' parents or their parents' families.⁴⁶

With some justice it can be said that if for Zionism rescue was synonymous with *aliyah*, for the Joint in the Dominican Republic it meant successful agricultural settlement. And if Zionism bears responsibility for torpedoing the project deliberately, the JDC is not exempt from responsibility for not taking advantage of the existing possibilities due to narrowmindedness and misplaced complacency. It is, moreover, probable that its deficient conception weakened its ability to defend itself against the attacks of the Zionists and the rejection scheme of the Brookings Institution. At the same time, the organization's meager strength was not up to the task of extricating refugees and bringing them to the available haven. When intensive efforts were required to overcome the growing difficulties, the JDC lacked the devoted emissaries of the Zionist movement.

⁴⁵ Herbert Agar, *The Saving Remnant*, New York, 1962, p. 82.

⁴⁶ Chanin, p. 50.

VOLUME I
NOTES

Abbreviations

CZA -- Central Zionist Archives

YVA -- Yad Vashem Archives

FRUS -- Foreign Relations of the United States

Br. Doc. -- Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1929`

Ger. Doc. -- Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945

Record -- Contemporary Jewish Record

IMT -- Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal

* * * * *

Post-Ugandan Zionism On Trial

A Study of the Factors that Caused
the Mistakes Made by the Zionist Movement
during the Holocaust

Volume II

S. B. Beit Zvi

CONTENTS

VOLUME TWO

PART THREE: WITHOUT A COMPASS

Preface page 1
Chapter 10: *Budding Alienation* page 3

War on Agudat Israel and Avraham Silbershein, who sought to aid Polish Jewry--
Nahum Goldmann counsels the Galicians in America

Chapter 11: *"Patria," "Struma" and Bermuda* page 21

Patria and her scuttlers--The double miracle in Haifa port--Sharett and Lavon on the
Patria disaster--Eliezer Kaplan cites a proposal from London on a joint Anglo-Zionist
front against Hitler--The mysterious sinking of the *Struma*--A shameful chapter in
Bermuda--Two presidents meet in the White House

Chapter 12: *Sluggishness* page 55

Adler-Rudell tries to rescue 20,000 children via Sweden--The efforts and partial
success of Rabbi Weismandell-Proposal of the Nazi leadership to halt the annihilation
immediately--The Zionist leadership knew about the offer but paid no heed

Chapter 13: *To the End...* page 85

The American-based Hebrew monthly *Bitzaron* ridicules the rabbis' march in
Washington with the participation of Peter Bergson--Stephen Wise fights the creation
of the War Refugee Board with help from the poet Natan Alterman-Yoel Brand helps
Eichmann sell the Americans the "goods for blood" deal--Kastner organizes the train
of the privileged

PART FOUR : HISTORY WRITING AND LESSONS

Preface: The opinion of my students and the version of Gideon Hausner page 122

Chapter 14: *Writing the History* page 126

The Israeli Holocaust research establishment is erected on the ideological foundations
of the wartime militant minority, from whom they inherited their modes of study and
debate--Censorship and ostracism of those who do not assent or do not fit in exactly:
Tussia Altman, Mordechai TenenbaumTamaroff, Zelig Kalmanovich, Emanuel
Ringelblum--The revolt in the Bialystok Ghetto and in the Warsaw Ghetto (details)--
The versions of Abba Eban, Gideon Hausner and Ben-Gurion--Gruenbaum's demand
that Auschwitz be bombed

Chapter 15: *Summations and Lessons* page 184

Researchers' pretensions in dishing out marks of "good" or "bad" to Holocaust victims--
Moral judgment based on normal criteria generally leads to gross injustice--The focus
of the clarification must be to determine the essence of the Jewish people's vital
interests--There was no question of honor between the Jewish people and the Nazis--
The Judenrats that passed the test--A quotation from Yaakov Hazan--Soviet Jewry

Articles: Golda Meir on the Evian Conference: Metamorphoses of a Testimony page 232

The Great Erasure page 246

Sensitive Matters page 251

Part Three

WITHOUT A COMPASS

Preface

Most of what is related in this section serves to illustrate the premises we have adduced in the previous chapters. There was no need to collect this material arbitrarily in order to fit it to preconceived explanations. All the major events of the Holocaust period involving the Zionist movement and the Yishuv manifest the egocentrism of truncated post-Ugandan Zionism--which recklessly cast off the role of "father" to the Jewish people. In this tremendously fateful period, that reckless behavior bore far-reaching consequences. Indifference turned into alienation, with all that this entailed.

Possessed of a fervent ambition to work for the Zionist cause come what may, the movement lost sight of the boundaries of what was legitimate and what was prohibited as regards the *object* of Zionism. At one and the same time, in a bizarre mixture, there were manifestations of selfless devotion toward survivors who were *olim*, and disregard of the bitter fate of other Jews. Under the circumstances, the latter infinitely outnumbered the former. The survivor-*olim* in the Holocaust years were hundreds who finally totaled a few thousand, while the neglected and abandoned were millions.

Before turning to the descriptions that comprise the following chapters, it behooves us to recapitulate briefly several of the characteristics that typified the events in Eretz-Israel and in the Zionist movement.

(1) The first trait is *sincerity and loyalty* among the overwhelming majority of the officials and activists. Virtually all of them truly believed that they were doing the right thing, were doing what could and should be done, and even more. The doubters and objectors, such as Melech Neusdtadt and Anshel Reis, were the odd men out.

(2) One reason for the confidence evinced by the leaders and functionaries in the rightness of their course lay in the consensus on the part of the Yishuv and the membership at large of the Zionist movement. Bitter disagreement existed in the Yishuv and the movement over a whole range of issues, but there was no discord when it came to the attitude toward events in the European diaspora. On this topic everyone placed his faith in the leadership. With the exception of a few ephemeral crises (following the sinking of the *Patria* and after the revelations of November 23, 1942) the Yishuv showed unreserved trust in the leadership. The Al-Dami group of Rabbi Binyamin and Prof. Schneerson was unsuccessful

because its activity conflicted with the frame of mind in the Yishuv. For the same reason the "personal revolt" of Haim Greenberg in America proved abortive (see Ch. 12).

(3) Following the defeat of the Santo Domingo plan, there was no letup in the war on territorialism. The Zionist movement, which grew stronger and more powerful in the Holocaust years, relentlessly blocked the formation of refugee concentrations outside Palestine.

(4) Even after November 23, 1942, the Zionist movement and its associated organizations continued to serve as a source of unreliable information regarding events in the countries of the Holocaust. In this manner, too, it influenced the course of events.

Chapter Ten

Budding Alienation

On January 15, 1940, Stephen Wise wrote to Chaim Weizmann: "I hope you will agree with me that it would be worth your while accepting an invitation from the President's Advisory Committee for Political Refugees in order that you may represent the case of Palestine. You and I have done it with Myron Taylor and of course with [James] McDonald in earlier years; but in view of the ceaseless persistence of J.D.C. people, Baerwald, Rosenberg and the rest, in urging such *fata morgana* as Santo Domingo, British Guiana and Mindanao, it would be exceedingly important for these people at first hand to hear the story of Palestine from you."¹

This call for help at the top reflected the all-out campaign against the allurements of territorialism that the Zionist movement launched upon the outbreak of World War II. The following pages relate the Zionists' success in this war and the mental traits they evinced during their encounter with the plight of European Jewry.

The war's outbreak was accompanied by a drastic change in the situation of Europe's Jews. To the hundreds of thousands of German, Austrian and Czech Jews were added millions of Polish Jews who suddenly found themselves in a serious predicament, fraught with danger, on both sides of the border between the territories occupied by Germany and Russia. The area of calamity quickly spread to encompass the Baltic states, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and additional areas to the east and south. Tens of thousands of refugees who had fled from Germany to Western Europe found themselves trapped together with their brethren, the local Jewish inhabitants. The scope of the problem increased immeasurably, and took on a wholly new dimension. Troubles became disasters, potential dangers began to be realized.

The growing intractability of the problems was mirrored in the mounting complexity of the remaining possible solutions. Increasingly, to extricate people meant, simply, to rescue them. Considerations of immediate economic absorption were obliged to take second place to the task of saving people from approaching destruction. The need to remove masses of people from areas where catastrophe was imminent assumed tremendous urgency. At the same time, it became clear that the scope of the problem meant that sporadic extrication of Jews could no longer constitute the *only* solution. Above all, it was obvious to anyone with eyes in his head that there was a pressing need for a *Jewish rescue policy*. Such

a policy, adapted to the changed circumstances of time and place, could be conducted only by the Jews themselves. The help of various countries and governments might be required, but the bulk of the work would fall on Jewish shoulders.

As we saw, the WZO did not assume the task of conducting a rescue policy. Ben-Gurion, it will be recalled, had pledged to fight the White Paper as though there were no war against Germany, and to fight Hitler as though there were no White Paper. He

¹ Herman Foss, ed., *Stephen Wise, Servant of the People: Selected Letters*, p. 239.

perceived the war against Hitler in terms of the Yishuv's participation, to the best of its ability, in the Allies' military efforts against Nazi Germany; he did not see that war as encompassing an effort by the Jews to forestall the execution of Hitler's special aim: the annihilation of the Jewish people. Concurrently, the Zionist movement stepped up its campaign against territorialism.

The fear was that Jewish settlement outside Palestine would divert Jewish energies and world public opinion away from the Zionist enterprise and hand England a pretext for not fulfilling its duties as the Mandate power in Palestine. For about a year, since the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee, London had been the scene of activity that to Zionist leaders recalled the dark days of the walkout by Zangwill and his colleagues. When the Intergovernmental Committee scoured the earth in search of refuge for Germany's Jews, the Zionists looked on this as a flagrant act of territorialism. The idea of British Guiana brought to mind the Uganda Plan which had also been proposed by a British government, forty years earlier. And when Roosevelt summoned the Intergovernmental Committee to the White House and spoke to them of the need to find a haven for ten to twenty million people whom the war would render homeless,² Zionist leaders grew alarmed.

Utilizing the full range of its branches and organizations, the Zionist movement demonstrated vigorous and tenacious resistance in the face of such "dangers." The resistance took various forms, ranging from rejection on principle and harassment of individuals, to scale organizational subversion using all possible means. We saw how Shmuel Margushes, writing in *Der Tag*, dismissed the dispatch of the delegation to British Guiana by adducing the principle that those involved had no authority to make a decision. Just before the delegation's departure, Stephen Wise insisted that the renowned expert Dr. Joseph Rosen not take part in it because, according to Wise, he would prefer Guiana over Palestine.³ After the delegation (with Rosen's participation) returned and submitted a basically positive report with some demurrers, the Zionists took a hostile stance toward the implementation of its recommendations.

Behind the scenes Stephen Wise spoke with Abba Hillel Silver about the danger involved--that money for Guiana would be taken from the UJA at the expense of funds earmarked for Palestine--and how to prevent it.⁴ Zionist opposition was a major factor in the scrapping of the British Guiana plan.

The same fate awaited the plan for settlement at Mindanao, in the Philippines, which had been approved by the Philippines government and cited by Roosevelt as a considerable.⁵ A plan for settlement at Kimberly, Australia, was aborted after being approved by the Australian government and enthusiastically received by leading representatives of the local residents.⁶

Chamberlain's suggestion of possible Jewish settlement in Tanganyika, a former German colony, triggered a furious tirade by Stephen Wise: "I would prefer that my Jewish brethren die in Germany rather than live in countries bearing the imprint of German rule of yesterday and which tomorrow are liable to be given back.., to Germany."⁷ This bombastic declaration was uttered at the end of 1938, when the "death" of German Jews was more a symbolic form of expression than a reference to any specific event. At the same time, as we saw in earlier chapters, Stephen Wise and his colleagues differed from non-Zionist functionaries in that the concrete and well-publicized distress of German Jewry did not impel them to forgo their opposition to mass immigration to any country but Palestine. Whether consciously or not, this opposition was based on the expectation that Germany's Jews would somehow survive for a certain period until conditions changed in Palestine, and would then settle there in droves.

Not even the immense changes wrought by the war's outbreak could soften the Zionists' stand. The calamity of the White Paper, together with the vestiges of an obstinate disputatiousness and twisted thinking, caused a worsening in the attitude toward the Jews subject to Nazi rule. Temporary cruelty stemming from ostensibly "good" intentions was replaced by a marked estrangement toward their suffering and indifference to their fate. Once these Jews became an instrument through which their would-be rescuers hoped to achieve political goals, there was nothing to prevent the

² Record, Vol. II, pp. 44-46.

³ Feingold, p. 114.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Record, *ibid.*

⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, November 17, 1939.

⁷ According to Feingold, p. 124.

broadening of goals for the attainment of which the Jews could be treated thoughtlessly and arbitrarily.

The arbitrariness was expressed above all in the continuation of the war on territorialism. In April 1942, when the first authoritative reports about the destruction reached the free world, the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department instructed the Zionist movement not to

engage in rescue which did not involve *aliyah*. Speaking at the 5th Histadrut Conference, Moshe Shertok (Sharett) declared:

"Let us not concern ourselves about other centers of absorption [besides Palestine]. Others will do so. Dislocated, drifting Jews will push themselves into whatever hole or crack they can find, and more luck to them if they save their lives for a day or find food to sustain them for a bit. But our concern must be: a strong and forceful emphasis on the Zionist cause, the positing of Zionism as the sole solution."⁸

Even more uncompromising was the president of the World Zionist Organization, who in this period was engaged in settling accounts with the territorialists. Their mistake, he maintained, was that during Evian "they were ready to send their Jewish brethren to any country on earth, as long as it was not Palestine." With a victor's sarcasm, Weizmann describes the failures of those who sought territories for settlement:

"There is no reason why these geographical exercises should not continue indefinitely. But all these countries, as it turned out, were too hot or too cold. Not one proved to be in a temperate zone."⁹

Weizmann is unmistakably delighted with the failure--in January 1942.

The remarks of Weizmann and Shertok at such late dates were but the tip of the iceberg of the stands adopted and deeds done by the WZO in the war years. In Chapter Nine we saw a striking example of the thwarting of a territorialist plot" with far-reaching consequences. In the rest of this chapter, we will examine two events that exemplify the arbitrary and alienated attitude toward European Jewry in pursuit of aims totally unrelated to the realization of Zionism. One event took place on the public stage, was widely reported, and produced numerous testimonies in the form of documents and articles. The second occurred in back rooms and we came across it while sifting through archival files. What both events had in common was that their fomenters were well-known Zionist leaders.

* * * * *

In July 1941, the anti-German boycott council began picketing the offices of Agudat Israel in the United States. The reason for this extreme action was the Aguda's refusal to desist from sending food packages to Jews in occupied Poland. The council argued that this was a violation of the blockade that England, as a combatant, had imposed on Nazi Germany. All the other public organizations in the U.S. had acceded to the council's request, and only Agudat Israel was proving recalcitrant. The campaign of pressure and persuasion was led by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, who, it will be recalled, was a senior official in the American Jewish

Congress and the Zionist Organization of America. It was an unfortunate campaign, and its organizers later tried to obliterate it from public memory. We have details about the course of events from two complementary sources. The first source is Dr. Tenenbaum himself, who spelled out his version in *Der Tag* of July 22, 1941. He related:

As early as September 1940 the boycott council had sent a letter to Agudat Israel demanding a stop to the food packages because this activity contravened the agreement with the British blockade authorities. That date, Tenenbaum contended, showed that nearly a year had passed before the council was forced to take the drastic step of picketing the Aguda's offices. During the year a number of meetings had been held with representatives of the British government and the Jewish organizations which had been sending packages.

⁸ *Davar*, April 21, 1942.

⁹ *Foreign Affairs*, January 1942.

The Aguda had been invited to all the meetings. But they “could never bring themselves mentally to sit at the same table with heretics like HIAS, the Polish Immigrants Association, and the World Jewish Congress.” The Joint announced immediately that it was not sending parcels but was interested in receiving information about the decisions made at the meetings. The other organizations decided, following a series of protracted sessions, to submit a memorandum to the British authorities explaining why Jewish organizations were sending packages to Poland, and offering a compromise proposal. At the same time, the organizations solemnly declared that whatever the decision of the British government, they would abide by it.

The memorandum was drawn up, and a delegation of representatives from three organizations brought it to the British embassy. HIAS and the WJC had in the meantime ceased to send parcels, leaving only Agudat Israel and the Polish Immigrants Association. Concurrently, reports and paid ads appeared in the press “about the wonderful things the organizations are doing by sending packages to Poland.” The advertisers forgot, first of all, that their act violated the agreement the organizations had made amongst themselves to maintain a low profile while they awaited the British response.

Secondly, “in their great enthusiasm ‘to help their brothers and sisters,’ the senders of the packages forgot to mention that many of the packages do not even reach their destination. Others are emptied of food and filled with paper instead. Moreover, those who receive the packages are deprived of their food-ration cards. The main beneficiary is Hitler--he gets either the food or the money.”

As a result of the press publicity, Tenenbaum continued, London’s reply arrived in the form of an urgent cable stating that the sending of the food packages conflicted with the interests of the British blockade. The proposed compromise was rejected. The British hoped that the Jewish organizations would no longer support the sending of packages to Poland or other occupied countries.

London was particularly opposed to the sending of food packages from or through Portugal. On the one hand, clear proof existed that the packages were either not reaching their destinations or the recipients’ ration cards were being reduced by the equivalent amount. On the other hand, “Portugal itself lacks the means to provide for its own food supply...”

The British cable induced neither the Aguda nor the Polish Immigrants Association to stop sending food packages, leading the boycott council to take additional measures. These were partially successful: “The Polish Association sent an angry reply to our sharp protest, but in the meantime it closed down the package business, and I’m sure this will be for its own benefit.” The Aguda, however, balked, bringing about the situation described above.

This, then, was Tenenbaum’s version of events. The tone of the article is sarcastic and “anti-clerical.” The Aguda’s refusal to submit to the boycott council’s demand is likened to an attempt by the clericals to impose the will of “a few rebbes who are sitting and swaying back and forth in the Central Hotel on Broadway.” By doing so, they bring disgrace and harm to the name of the Jewish people.

Dr. Tenenbaum explains: “At a time when the nations of the world are shedding blood and tears and suffering innumerable casualties, we, the Jews, cannot permit such disarray. As these lines are being written, reports are coming in that residents of Amsterdam shouted ‘well done’ when British bombs landed on their homes. If not more than this, then the absolute minimum that we Jews must do is not to interfere with Britain’s war needs, even if this comes at the expense of victims in Poland or elsewhere.”

In a second article, on August 10, Tenenbaum replied to his critics. To the fine story about the Amsterdamers who were pleased at the bombing of their homes, he now appended a report about similar behavior by the Greeks. And the French, it turned out, had requested explicitly that no more food packages be sent from America, despite the hardship this would entail. As for the argument that the sending of the packages did not violate the blockade, Tenenbaum replied, simply, that since it was the

British government that decided to impose the blockade, it would decide what constituted a violation. He also took the opportunity to publish the text of a statement issued by the British following a meeting with representatives of Agudat Israel in

which they explained Britain's stand. However, the meeting had proved fruitless "because of Agudat Israel's obstinate stand."

Tenenbaum is at pains to present the argument adduced by an Aguda representative in a personal conversation: England, the Aguda man maintained, had no authority to decide what the true Jewish interest was. To which Tenenbaum replied:

In the first place, this is not a matter of Jewish interests only, [but] of global interests to which Jewish interests must either be adapted or forgone. Whatever interferes with British war needs conflicts with the vital interests of the Jews. As a people, or as an organization, we must do nothing that is liable create the suspicion that we constitute a small world unto ourselves. No, in the existing state of affairs, British interests are Jewish interests, just as they are American interests. It seems to me that these are such obvious truths that serious people and good Jews cannot question them.

The historical truth obliges us to note that after saying all this, and after rejecting the argument that sending food to the Jews in the ghettos was tantamount to sending food to prisoners-of-war, the author had a change of heart, did a 180-degree turn, and offered his own solution. It emerged that the Aguda was actually sending *too few* packages which did not meet the immense needs that had arisen. Tenenbaum therefore put forward a "constructive proposal" according to which the appropriate organizations would choose a joint committee to initiate talks with the British authorities with the aim of dispatching large-scale aid for Polish Jewry. "This is the only honorable way for an organized people. I believe we can find the possibility to work together with the Red Cross. But if not, we, the Jews, must not violate the British blockade."

* * * * *

Tenenbaum's articles give rise to two questions:

(1) The first request to Agudat Israel to stop sending food packages was made in September 1940. The war, and with it the blockade, had begun a year earlier, in September 1939. It was precisely then, according

to Tenenbaum, that the food packages had begun to be sent. Why was the boycott council so tardy in its intervention?

(2) Was that intervention taken exclusively at the council's initiative, or were other bodies in America involved?

We received an exhaustive reply to both questions from Professor Arye Tartakower who in a conversation with the author cited the case of the food packages to illustrate a phenomenon we had asked him about. Because of the importance of what he had to say, we will quote the talk verbatim, with a few minor omissions:¹⁰

Question: It is known that to date Dr. Goldmann is the only person who has publicly expressed remorse... I want to ask you, Professor Tartakower, who actually stood in the way? Who blocked things? Let us say there was a person or a group of people *was m'geit un m'shreit: gewald, ratevet!* [who were shouting: help!]--was there someone who said, *ratevet nit* [don't help]?

Answer: There were such people.

Q: Who were they?

A: They didn't necessarily shout in Yiddish, *ratevet nisht*. But there were people who for the interests of the Allies...

Q: Yes, Dr. Goldmann told me that. But who? Who were these people? After thirty years, I think it can be revealed.

A: I will give you an example of what happened in that period, at the beginning of the war. I was in America at the beginning of the war. I was in charge of aid on behalf of the World Jewish Congress. At that time we organized--not only us, some other organizations, too--a project of sending food packages to Poland. We sent these packages to thousands, in the end even to tens of thousands of people... Dr. Tenenbaum was the chairman of the joint committee of the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee in America, that dealt with sending the packages. Dr.

¹⁰ Recorded conversation with Prof. Tartakower, August 17, 1972.

Tenenbaum himself sent packages to thousands. But now I come to your question. One fine day we received a call from the American government, from the State Department, and they indicated to us that the project of sending packages to Jews in Poland went against the interests of the combatant nations, especially England and France. America was not yet in the war.

Q: Maybe you can remember who it was that phoned?

A: I couldn't say. It was one of the officials there. But because the announcement came from the American State Department, we were not going to check their credentials. We were all very impressed by the announcement. The first person who told us to put an immediate stop to our

activity was Dr. Wise. After all, he himself was close to the American government. People in the government were his personal friends. I remember the talk I had with him. Wise explained things to me. He said: even though it is true that this is a great humanitarian enterprise and that help should be given, because the danger existed that the Germans would exploit the project for their own benefit, we must abandon it mainly for the good of England. These comments also had an influence on Dr. Tenenbaum. Dr. Tenenbaum put a stop to the joint project, and from that day we sent no more packages. It is true that some organizations were not willing to follow the orders of the American government. Agudat Israel, for example. And the World Federation of Polish Jewry, which was then in New York, was also not happy about doing this. But in the end the project was stopped. This is just one example of how we were unable to work because of the pressure on us from different sides.

Q: In other words, your explanation is that there was simply American pressure and you gave in to that pressure.

A: Yes.

Q: While at the same time other Jews...

A: Were not ready [to give in].

* * * * *

The phone call from a State Department official put a stop to American Jewry's effort to help their brethren in the ghettos of Poland. Whether we accept that the Jewish organizations did not check the official's credentials, or assume that Stephen Wise asked his high-ranking friends about the call, is immaterial. What is illuminating is that this request was sufficient to do away instantly with the generations-long tradition of not remaining aloof to Jews in distress. The leader of America's Zionists, Stephen Wise, insisted that there was something more important than not abandoning Poland's Jews to starvation. The Zionist functionary Joseph Tenenbaum, who earlier had sent food packages in good faith, now suddenly saw the light. Recalling his position as head of the economic boycott against Germany, he went into action. Heavy pressure was exerted on all the organizations engaged in sending packages. Pressure just short of violence was brought to bear on recalcitrant Agudat Israel. Measures were taken against the Association of Polish Jews, which also remained unconvinced, to bring it into line. The World Jewish Congress (headed by Stephen Wise) was very quickly convinced. The fact that the non-Zionist HIAS also yielded, and the Joint stressed its readiness to give the request its consideration, demonstrates the power wielded by those who initiated the abandonment of the Jews.

On the face of it, it seems pointless to "argue" with Tenenbaum across a divide of thirty years. It is possible that two years after publishing the article, its author was ready to eat the paper it was printed on so that the entire affair could be consigned to oblivion. Nonetheless, it seems to us that a few of the remarks in that miserable piece of moralizing deserve closer examination in order to draw all the relevant lessons.

The Aguda man was undoubtedly correct in saying that the English were not authorized to decide what constituted the Jewish interest. Tenenbaum's reply was too simplistic by half. It goes without saying that for the Jews, it was extremely important that the British defeat the Nazis. However, it did not follow that everything interfering (or seeming to interfere) with the British war effort conflicted with vital Jewish interests. Had Tenenbaum not been engaged in rapid-fire polemical writing, he might have taken into account that the successful prosecution of war includes also refraining from actions liable to bring about an inordinate number of casualties

without absolute necessity. When a war is being fought by two or more allies, each of them sees to it that his partners do nothing liable to harm his own vital interests without solid cause. This is the recognized prerogative of an ally. Yet precisely this prerogative is what deterred Tenenbaum. He was upset at the very thought that the world's nations were liable to suspect the Jews of being "a small world [a *veltel*, in the derisive Yiddish] unto themselves"--in other words, that the Jews were not allies. They would be the beneficiaries of an English victory, and they must simply accept the burden of their victims. This is particularly simple when the accepters are in America and the victims in Poland.

The recalcitrants in Agudat Israel would not submit either to Tenenbaum or to the British. Subsequently, they succeeded in convincing the British government that their cause was a worthy one, and they received permission to send 10,000 packages a month for a year.¹¹ As for the help of the Red Cross, it was obtained, with Allied assent, concretely and effectively, including the dispatch of special food ships for the hungry people of Greece.¹² To this end, the Agudat Israel weekly related, the King of Greece betook himself from one office to another, whereas "it was impossible for Mr. Weizmann or Mr. Ben-Gurion to devote time and energy to obtain a permit for [sending] food packages to those in the ghettos."¹³

Had a special headquarters been established for prosecuting the Jewish war against the Nazis, the need to supply food to the ghettos would not have been regarded as a purely humanitarian act, but as an operation

directed against one of Hitler's declared war aims--the destruction of the Jewish people. In that event, Stephen Wise would not have been able to maintain that he was ready to sacrifice his feelings of compassion on the altar of victory over the Germans. But the actual situation was completely different.

The Zionists were not the only ones who maltreated Poland's Jews. They had partners in HIAS, the Joint, and other non-Zionist organizations. But these were passive partners who submitted to the pressure and accepted the verdict. The initiators, the activists, the wielders of the pressure were the Zionists-- Stephen Wise and his confidants, Joseph Tenenbaum and his aides. It was not Zionism, as a movement, that did the deed, nor did it have any interest in doing it. The matter was not bound up with territorialism or with any sort of threat to Zionism. But those involved were among the leading Zionists in America, and it is not difficult to locate the mental background to their actions in Zionism's attitude toward diaspora Jewry, as this was demonstrated in its stand toward the Jews of Germany during and after Evian. If in 1938-1939, Germany's Jews were destined to go on suffering until place could be found for them in Palestine, why should Poland's Jews not be abandoned to a fate of starvation in the service of other political goals? The Jews having become an object of politics, what was the point in inquiring how that object felt?

* * * * *

There was another stubborn person who was not impressed by the protestations of the British and did not submit to their pressure. In particular, their special request to put a stop to the sending of parcels from Portugal had no effect on *Avraham Silbershein*, who worked out of his Geneva office. The packages were forwarded by Yitzhak Weismann, Silbershein's agent in Lisbon, through the Portuguese Red Cross.¹⁴ For Silbershein there was nothing new in the story that not all the packages reached their destination or about the malicious treatment sometimes accorded their recipients. He was also aware that the packages he sent were just a drop in an ocean of want and distress. But he did not even conceive of desisting from the little he could do. He may also have taken into account that beyond their direct usefulness, the sending of the parcels served additional purposes. The confirmations--or their absence--of the parcels' arrival were a significant means for maintaining contact with the ghettos. The packages heartened those who received them and showed the Nazis the interest and vigilance of world Jewry regarding the situation of

¹¹ *Haderech*, Agudat Israel weekly, 27th day of Tishrei, 5703.

¹² Hilberg, p. 451.

¹³ *Haderech*, 20th day of Teveth, 5703.

¹⁴ Yitzhak Weissman, *In the Face of the Titans of Evil* (Hebrew), p.129.

their brethren in the ghettos. (And, of course, the reverse, when in summer 1941 a drastic falloff occurred in the arrival of packages from America.)

Silbershein, who acted in concert with the WJC, was outside the sphere of the spiritual influence of the organization's leaders in New York, nor did he harbor unwarranted illusions about the character of their activity. Indeed, Silbershein could relate his own personal experience at the hands of one of those leaders about a year before the Wise-Tenenbaum operation.

Dr. Avraham (Adolf) Silbershein, whose activity during the Holocaust years still awaits its chronicler, was a veteran Zionist, a member of the Zionist Actions Committee, and a respected representative of his party, Poalei Zion-Hitahdut in Poland. Following the 21st Zionist Congress he did not return to his home in Galicia but established in Geneva the "Committee for the Relief of War Stricken Jews," or "Relico." Silbershein devoted himself heart and soul to this committee, which directed its activity primarily at Polish Jewry, and thanks to him it became a major center of help and rescue.¹⁵ According to his own testimony, it was a one-man operation--of Silbershein himself. Although he was an official of the WJC and made use of the technical services provided by the WJC's Geneva office, he soon discovered that he could not function as he wished within the organization's framework. Disagreements over aid to Polish Jewry and about rescue methods in general, had generated tension in Silbershein's relations with the director of the Geneva office, Dr. Riegner, and with other Zionist officials in Geneva. Seeking to circumvent these obstacles, Silbershein turned to the Association of Galician Jews in America, and received an affirmative response.

Correspondence of over half a year¹⁶ reveals details of the cooperation between them. Silbershein won the confidence of the Galicians by sending them lists of Jewish refugees from Poland who were located in various places, and a list of addresses in Poland to which letters could be sent. Under the terms of the agreement between them, the Galician group received the lists before other organizations, thus enhancing their prestige in the American Jewish community. Against this backdrop, Silbershein told them about his concerns and apprehensions, and requested their help. In a series of letters beginning in October 1939, he related that the large and wealthy JDC was not cooperating; that the *aliyah* institutions still operating in Berlin were discriminating against Polish Jews; and that the bureaucratic apparatus of the WJC in Geneva, which he was compelled to use to a certain extent, was causing him irksome difficulties. "The impression is that they have not yet grasped the

dimensions of the calamity which has befallen Polish Jewry... My feeling is that I stand by myself, alone." The Galician organization was asked to help by enlisting the support of the large organizations in America--the Joint and others--and by forwarding funds for activity which brooked no delay.

The Galicians responded warmly and wholeheartedly. The chairman of their association, Sol Lau, and his deputy, Flashenberg, heaped thanks and praises on Silbershein for the "good work" he was doing. They sent him \$1,000 for his personal needs and suggested that he forward them a budget and plans. Silbershein, who was not accustomed to living off public assistance, used the money to further his work. If the Galicians were willing to help him personally, what he wanted was to publish, through their mediation, letters and articles, and the royalties would cover his own needs.

In November, Silbershein proposed a joint operation--the ransom from Sachsenhausen of Polish Jews with relatives in the United States. This was to be effected through persons in Berlin working together with a committee called "Special Training." Two hundred dollars was the amount required for the release and removal from Germany of each detainee. The detainee's relatives would deposit the money with the Association of Galician Jews in America. Once the person was out of Germany, the deposit would be transferred to Silbershein's office, which in the meantime would defray the costs in advance. This arrangement, which would impose a heavy financial burden on Relico, was proposed by its director because of his faith in the personal trustworthiness and financial reliability of the Galician group's leaders. The cordial relations between the two sides gave ground for this optimistic belief.

¹⁵ See B. Klibansky, "The Archive of the Late Dr. Avraham Silbershein," *Bulletin*, Yad Vashem, No. 20; Natan Eck, "Silbershein's Rescue Activities," *Galician Chapters* collection.

¹⁶ Silbershein Archive, Yad Vashem, File M20/1.

The idea was received enthusiastically. The Galician organization devoted itself to the redemption of prisoners with a sense of gratitude to the plan's initiator. "This letter is to inform you," Sol Lau wrote (November 10), "that we are doing everything possible. And what is most important, that our Galicians in America have full confidence in your work and in your ability to carry out this important mission." "We hope that we will shortly be able to forward you additional funds" (November 17). "Your letters and cables are creating an excellent impression on our *haverim*... Your work is greatly appreciated here. Even those causing difficulties, are forced to acknowledge that the task you have undertaken is of the utmost importance at this time" (December 2).

Week by week the cooperation tightened, the scope of the activity increased, and with it the Galicians' declared readiness to lend a hand to

further projects as well. In December, Silbershein informed them that in addition to Sachsenhausen, efforts were also underway to obtain the release of prisoners from Buchenwald and Dachau. Concurrently, he suggested that attempts be made to raise funds for the release of detainees *without* relatives in America. He returned to this idea in February: "I already wrote you once that it is not appropriate for me and for you to rest content with the role of middleman for people with wealthy relatives, to save only them and allow the others to die in the camps." The heads of the association were to act as Silbershein's spokesmen within the American-Jewish public, try and raise funds, and make efforts to get the Joint and other large organizations to lend their support.

The Galicians were generous in their response to the monetary needs. With the funds he received Silbershein was able to hire two assistants, and at their request he purchased a Yiddish typewriter. On December 25 he forwarded an itemized budget in the amount of \$1,250 per month, for the Galicians to cover.

The height of the Galicians' readiness to help and cooperate was reflected in Sol Lau's letter of January 20, 1940 (which reached Geneva on February 15). The head of the association undertook to supply the \$1,250 requested each month. Since the request had arrived only the day before the letter was sent, an advance of \$500 was enclosed on account of the first monthly payment. The letter repeated three times the pledge that "the small budget you have submitted" would be supplied faithfully.

"Your plans are wonderful," Sol Lau wrote, "and we hope they can be carried out... We hope that things will now advance faster, and the more information we receive from you, the greater are the results." Lau had spoken with representatives of the WJC, but "unfortunately, they are so confused that I cannot expect any help from them. Especially when people are in need of food and a place to sleep, and have no means of livelihood. Other organizations support them." Overall, he noted, "the situation is very complicated, but matters will soon be straightened out. Nahum Goldmann has arrived here, and I hope that together with Weizmann he will be able to arouse the Jews to proper activity."

The hoped for intervention came soon enough. The first indication Silbershein had of it was in a cable that overtook the letter quoted above and preceded it to Geneva. This was a reply to a cable of his own of February 2 stating: "Opportunities for general arrangements require in coming days five thousand dollars besides relatives deposits. Cable if possible. Silbershein."

The reply came on February 10: "Cannot send 5000. Committee will consult with Goldmann on whole matter. Details in letter. Lau."

It seems unlikely that besides the disappointing refusal to forward the \$5000, Silbershein found anything in the cable to suggest that a change was imminent. Any misgivings he might have felt were undoubtedly dispelled when the cable was followed five days later by the enthusiastic letter expressing the hope for a great improvement that would attend Goldmann's intercession. A letter describing what happened between Goldmann and the Galicians was sent from New York on February 19; a second, more detailed letter, was written on March 8 and arrived in Geneva on the 23rd. Silbershein's initial response to both letters came on April 2. At all events, until the end of February he did not have an inkling that the Galician prop he had built with such toil was collapsing.

In his letters during February, Silbershein continued to put forward proposals for expanding the project. While describing difficulties that had emerged and opportunities that were missed, he could also point to achievements and to new possibilities that had arisen. The first 250 detainees had been released from

concentration camps, and some had already left Germany. At the same time, serious obstacles were impeding his activity. In Germany an order had been issued prohibiting persons under 40 from travelling to enemy countries--meaning Palestine as well. Supervision of the concentration camps had become more stringent ("You undoubtedly take my meaning.") The illegal immigration to Palestine was encountering growing transportation problems.

The difficulty of quickly finding refuge for those released and getting them out of Germany before they faced the threat of rearrest, led to the idea of immigration to Shanghai. Anyone showing that he was in possession of \$400 could obtain an entry visa upon arrival at Shanghai. The cost of the trip was \$200. Clearly, large sums would be required.

Silbershein was particularly emphatic about the need to raise money in order to expedite immigration to *Bolivia*. "The matter is a serious one, and I have investigated it thoroughly. True, it is an expensive proposition, costing as much as immigration to Shanghai. But in return, one arrives in an almost sound economy. The visas are genuine, not falsified as with Mexico. They do not require the approval of the Bolivian government. The consul in Switzerland is authorized to issue visas for up to 4,800 families. The matter is urgent, because I am apprehensive that in the spring everything will be extremely difficult. Everything must be done before the spring."

Silbershein went on to suggest possibilities for extricating people from Poland. Corruption among German officials was rife. Bribery could bring out people with papers, visas, and so forth. Young people could be transferred from Poland to Slovakia in order to prepare them for settlement in Palestine. And there were other possibilities, all conditional on the availability of funds.

But Silbershein soon found that his efforts at persuasion were a waste of time. By then, there was no one to listen to his entreaties in the Galician organization. Sol Lau's letter apprised him of the outcome of the consultation between the association's committee and Dr. Nahum Goldmann. In reply to the committee's complaint about the difficulties entailed in underwriting Silbershein's activities, Goldmann proposed that they cease supporting him. Instead, he said, the operation would be conducted and financed by the WJC. In the wake of Goldmann's promise, the Galicians decided to cancel the monthly allocation for Silbershein and not provide other financial aid. Until Goldmann could get to Geneva and arrange things, Silbershein would receive a final one-time allotment of \$500. Thus ended the episode of the Galician association's aid to Dr. Silbershein.

In his second letter, Lau tried to explain the background to this surprising decision. The committee members were buckling under the heavy burden they had assumed, he wrote, and there was general disappointment at the small-scale immediate results of the ransom project. ("I understand fully that in none of your letters did you promise that everything would proceed as rapidly as planned. You always noted that the situation could change at any moment and that nothing was certain. But please do not forget that the committee members sometimes read the letters but forget their contents. And some of them do not read them at all.") A highly influential factor, Lau wrote, was the widespread fear that fund-raising for Silbershein's project was liable to harm the efforts of the UJA, which had set itself the target of raising \$23 million.

All these reasons undoubtedly played a part, but none of them was decisive. The direct reason for the Galicians' decision, as spelled out clearly in Lau's letter, was that Dr. Goldmann, to whom the committee had turned for advice and guidance in expectation of help in the fulfillment of their mission, told them to free themselves from the heavy burden and assured them that things would work out even without their help. It was with a sense of relief that they accepted the advice of the well-known Zionist official.

Sol Lau himself dissented from the committee's decision. In his letter he related that because of differences with his colleagues, he had decided to resign as president of the association. We do not know whether Lau followed through on this. At all events, the correspondence was continued by the vice president, Louis Rashenberg, who also seems to have left his personal imprint on the course of events.

From this point, things fell apart irreversibly. Regarding the ransom of the prisoners, Flashenberg stated (April 17) that "we here in America are doubtful about this entire project." Pursuing this line, the Galicians took unilateral steps to revoke

their participation and commitments. Deposits were returned to the prisoners' relatives, in some cases without first informing Silbershein. In at least three cases, money was returned to relatives of prisoners who had been released through Relico and had left Germany. In response to Silbershein's protest, Flashenberg informed him (May 17) that henceforth he would cease to transfer the funds from the deposits. His reason:

"The spreading of the war in the past few days does not permit us to assume responsibility for forwarding to countries involved in the war monies that were deposited [deposited] with us out of the best intentions. We will continue to safeguard the money for those who gave it to us."

This was 1940, the period of the German offensive in France, Holland and Belgium--not in Switzerland. Thus it was that the vice president of the Association of Galician Jews in America joined the economic warfare against the Jews in the camps a full year before Stephen Wise and Tenenbaum, and he carried out that warfare unremittingly. Following the exchange of another pair of letters, the two sides broke off contact in an atmosphere of mutual resentment and disappointment.

When Dr. Nahum Goldmann was asked, in 1972, for his reaction to this episode, he replied without hesitation that this was the first he had ever heard of the matter. "But that does not mean it is not true," he added immediately.¹⁷ The apparent contradiction seems to indicate that Goldmann had forgotten the whole matter, but while denying knowledge of it recalled that something had occurred, and quickly corrected himself.¹⁸ This conjecture can assist us in looking for his motivations 35 years ago. Manifestly, Goldmann was not opposed to the release of Jews from concentration camps. Nor, surely, did he object to the extrication of Jews from Poland and other actions planned by Silbershein. The fact that some of those rescued would be forced to settle elsewhere than in Palestine probably would not have bothered him to the point of interfering with the program. What, then, accounts for his behavior?

An examination of the relations between Dr. Silbershein and the WJC raises the possibility that the aim was to humble a person who had rebelled against the organization with which he was affiliated. Whether the object of the exercise was simply punitive, or whether the idea was to return the rebel to the fold and force him to toe the organizational line, is unknown. Nor can we know whether Dr. Goldmann sincerely intended that the WJC would provide Silbershein with the means and contacts of which he was deprived when his relations with the Galicians were severed.

One thing, though, seems certain: whether he thought that his intervention was liable to have an adverse effect on the fate of the candidates for rescue, or did not entertain any such idea--the consequences were irrelevant from his point of view. As a person highly experienced in organizational workings and public ploys, he had executed a clever maneuver that would totally undercut Silbershein's ability to act independently. He thereby chalked up one point for the World Jewish Congress. The matter would now be handled by his assistants, while he moved on to more important topics. Since concern for the fate of the hundreds and thousands whom Silbershein wished to get released did not interfere with execution of the tactic, it stands to reason that in time, the entire affair was simply forgotten.

The Galicians' action did not put a stop to the ransom project. Silbershein's office was also in direct contact with relatives of prisoners--indeed these ties were six times greater than those maintained through the Galicians' association.¹⁹ However, their decision undoubtedly prevented the implementation of other projects and initiatives, and seriously set back Silbershein's activity. The revocation of the monthly budget greatly hampered his work. The WJC did not supply him with the funds he required. Having no other alternative, he was compelled to go on making use of the services provided by the WJC office in Geneva, a situation accompanied by constant bickering and much aggravation.

Whether or not we are right in our conjecture about Dr. Goldmann's motives, the fact remains that he proceeded without giving consideration to the grave consequences his actions entailed for Jews in distress. His back-room stratagem preceded by a year the public ruses of Joseph Tenenbaum against the sending of food packages. The common mental backdrop to the actions of both Zionist leaders was that the

¹⁷ Recorded conversation with Dr. Nahum Goldmann, May 14, 1972.

¹⁸ Dr. Arye Tartakower, who was also asked about this subject, had a vivid memory of the events, and his comments served as supporting testimony for the documents in our possession.

¹⁹ Silbershein letter, May 25, 1940, Silbershein Archive, Yad Vashem, File M20/1.

intensification of the suffering of European Jewry did not prevent them from pursuing their own goals. In neither instance were those goals beneficial to Zionism. But the alienation factor was even more palpable in the holy war against territorialism.

Chapter Eleven

Patria, Struma--and Bermuda

At the Biltmore Conference in May 1942 Ben-Gurion said: “The meaning of these two ships [*Patria* and *Struma*] is simple: *Eretz-Israel or death*--and as soon as the war ends many ships like these will stream to Eretz Israel.”¹ The optimistic conclusion of this sentence suggests that the speaker did not give sufficient consideration to the gloomy significance of its opening. By adducing *Patria* and *Struma* as a model and exemplar for future Zionist activity, Ben-Gurion was in effect underscoring the responsibility he took on himself for the cruel choice facing persecuted Jews: *aliyah* or extinction. There is no doubt that Ben-Gurion did not wish for this alternative, and his comment was intended purely to describe an existing situation. Nevertheless, the statement encapsulated the siege of European Jewry in which the Zionist movement was taking part.

In creating a whole series of dams, as it were, to stem the flow of mass immigration to other places, the Zionist leadership hoped that the stream of refugees would perforce be channeled to a single destination: Eretz-Israel. The dams were of various kinds, ranging from active opposition, such as the thwarting of the Santo Domingo Plan, to political activity at various levels. Thanks to this activity, the Zionist movement acquired an undesirable “partner,” the British government, which lent a willing and effective hand in tightening the siege against the Jews facing annihilation, their chief aim being to *block* Jewish immigration to Palestine. The actions surrounding the sinking of *Patria* and *Struma* were salient initial stages in this calamitous policy, while the Bermuda Conference exemplified all too well its wretched consequences.

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The main details of the *Patria* affair have been known since one of the direct participants in the ship’s sinking published his testimony.² In November 1940 over 1,900 Jewish refugees, the majority from Germany and Czechoslovakia, who reached Eretz-Israel on three ships (*Milos*, *Pacific*, and 136 from the *Atlantic*), were placed by the British authorities aboard a large passenger ship, the *Patria*, in order to transport them to the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The Haganah decided to prevent the expulsion by sabotaging the ship, thereby delaying its sailing from Haifa. The

¹ David Ben-Gurion, *In the Campaign* (Hebrew), Vol. IV, p. 36. Emphasis added.

² *Patria*, by Meir Mardor (Monya), a chapter from his book, *Secret Mission* (Hebrew), pp. 53-77.

decision was approved by Jewish Agency Executive member Moshe Shertok, and Shaul Meirov (Avigur), head of the Mossad le'Aliyah Bet (the "illegal" immigration program) was charged with implementing the plan. A team of engineers set to work preparing a mine that would be

planted on the ship and cripple it. The task of determining the form and size of the mine fell to Yitzhak Sadeh, who had considerable experience in sabotage operations.³ Meir (Munya) Mardor, of the Hagana's Special Operations Unit, was entrusted with the task of smuggling the mine aboard and getting it to the representative of the would-be immigrants.

The mine exploded minutes after 9 a.m. on November 25, 1940. *Patria* lurched over and sank to the bottom of the harbor, a depth of 35 feet. Because of the ship's size, it remained partially above water, but the great bulk of the vessel, halls, cabins, decks and all, sank within 10-15 minutes.

Two hundred and sixty-seven people were listed as missing in the disaster. The number of victims who had drowned became clear as bodies were pulled from the water. By the end of January 1941, when the report of the commission of inquiry appointed by the Mandate government was published, 156 bodies had been recovered. Half a year later the number had risen to 202,4 and in December 1944 212 people were known to have drowned.⁵ In August 1953, during work to dismantle the remnants of ships that were interfering with traffic in the harbor, more skeletons and bones of victims were found.⁶ This reduced the estimated disparity between the number of missing and the number of dead to a few dozen people, who were thought to have slipped by the British authorities and reached shore.

The disaster staggered the Yishuv. The sabotage was kept secret from the public, but various circles knew about it, and not everyone agreed with the deed. About ten years after the event Yitzhak Tabenkin recalled the crisis generated by the act, fuelled by the force of the opposition and the public's condemnation. "The tragedy of the *Patria* did not become known all at once. Day after day for many days bodies were pulled out and their number kept growing. We wanted to curse this sea. It was as though the *Patria* had blown up not just once but day after day. The peaceful Yishuv saw us as having sinned against it, they held us and our movement as to blame for the disaster."⁷

The truth is that not only the "peaceful Yishuv" was outraged. There was no lack of dissenters and critics within the "movement" itself. It was not by chance that Shaul Avigur spoke bitterly about what had happened "in the difficult days that afflicted me and us after *Patria*, when from all sides (even from those who were 'close') the perpetrators of the action were vilified, and one publicist did not even balk at warning in his party's paper--in *Hapoel Hatza'ir*--against the 'criminal hand'."⁸

The affair of the "malicious hand" (the actual quotation) and its surprising fluctuations is typical of the atmosphere that set in after the *Patria* disaster. An article in the Mapai weekly *Hapoel Hatza'ir* on December 2, 1940, stated: "On one bitter and rash day a malicious hand sunk the ship and caused the wounding and death of people." The article was signed "Alshich" and was written by Israel Cohen.⁹ In reaction two young people walked into the office of the editor, Yitzhak Lufban, and one of them, Amos Ben-Gurion (David Ben-Gurion's son), slapped him in the face.

According to the description of the affair in these sources, a misunderstanding had occurred between the two young men and the Haganah chief of staff, Ya'akov Dostrovsky (Dori). Dori's reaction after reading the article was that the writer deserved to be punished. The youths heard him, took his words as an order, and did what they did. Dori said afterward that his remark had not been intended as an order. However, the act having been done, he assumed responsibility. A special committee headed by Moshe Sneh meted out a symbolic punishment of one day's house arrest, and Dori accepted the verdict readily.

Yet this description does not reflect the depth of the crisis that the incident triggered in the senior party of the Yishuv leadership; nor were the events

³ David Nimri: Testimony recorded in February-March 1962, Haganah Historical Archives, File 4037, hereafter: HHA.

⁴ Moshe Basok, ed., "Ma'apilim" Book (Hebrew), p. 260.

⁵ Y. Noded (Yitzhak Sadeh), "The Ahdut Ha'avodah Movement," No. 25, December 22, 1944 (Hebrew).

⁶ Haim Lazar-Litai, *Nevertheless: The Book of "Aliyah Bet"* (Hebrew), p. 459.

⁷ Yitzhak Tabenkin, "Remembrance Day, Judgment Day: The Lesson of the *Patria*," *Al Hamishmar*, December 1, 1950.

⁸ Letter to Meir Mardor, January 13, 1950, HHA.

⁹ *History of the Haganah* (Hebrew), Vol. III, pp. 155, 1633; testimony of Moshe Sneh, HHA, File S 2047.

surrounding the misunderstanding between Dori and his two men sufficiently clear. The following is the story of what actually happened as it emerges from the minutes of meetings of Mapai's Central Committee and Political Committee.

The meeting of the Political Committee held on December 12, 1940, was intended to discuss the expulsion of the *ma'apilim* ("illegal" immigrants) on the *Atlantic*. Following opening remarks by Moshe Sharett, and before the discussion began of the subject on the agenda, Yosef Sprinzak took the floor. Speaking with some emotion, he stated that just a few hours earlier Lufban had been attacked by Amos Ben-Gurion and a second youth, "Motke from Hadera." Sprinzak intimated that the attack was bound up with the incitement being waged in Histadrut and Haganah circles. "As for myself, I have been walking about with a feeling of personal insecurity for a few days." He demanded an unequivocal decision and stringent measures against the "hooligans." "If this act is not unanimously condemned and censured, I will not be able to sit here."

Sprinzak's demand for condemnation and censure was passed with general assent. But opinion was divided about who was to blame for the incident. Aharon Ziesling thought that the Haganah "has no connection with this act... Sprinzak should remove this assumption from the context

of his remarks. I am not acquainted with one of [the boys] but the other one has no connection with the [Haganah]." Eliezer Kaplan was less certain: "I am the person to whom Sprinzak said after the Histadrut Council meeting in Kfar Sava that we may be entering a period of a war of each against the other... We should investigate whether someone was behind this deed, and who it was."

According to the testimony of the victim himself, Yitzhak Lufban, certain signs and circumstances strengthened suspicion of Haganah involvement. "The act was thought out in every detail and ploy... The boys left the main door open, and when the woman working in the office called it to their attention they told her angrily that the door would remain open. It was Amos who did the slapping, then the two fled, they ran all the way to the Va'ad Hapoel building, where they split up. Yosef Irlicht [an official of the Central Committee] caught up with Motke. [Yosef] Harit and Yitzhak Sadeh were standing next to the Va'ad Hapoel. Harit said to Yosef: 'Let him go, we know him'."

In the midst of the confusion and bewilderment a committee of inquiry was selected and a resolution was passed: "To charge *haverim* I. Baratz, E. Golomb and A. Ziesling [committee members] with investigating whether anyone was behind this act."

The reason for the ultimative note of Sprinzak's demand and the basis for the suspicions harbored by him and his colleagues lay in an event he hinted at and which was more explicitly noted by Eliezer Kaplan. In a meeting of the Histadrut Council held on December 9 in Kfar Sava, Berl Katznelson spoke about the expulsion that morning of the *ma' apilim* on the *Atlantic*. The action, executed with appalling brutality, had encountered no resistance whatsoever from the Yishuv. The decision not to resist was made by the Yishuv leadership against the advice of Haganah heads and activists¹⁰ and generated disquiet and dissent within the Haganah. The bitterness was directed particularly against the group of "moderates" in the Mapai hierarchy--Sprinzak, Kaplan, Lubianker (Lavon), Remez and others--who were accused of submission to the hostile government.

And now Berl Katznelson openly lent his support to these grave accusations: "I will not be truthful if I remain silent and do not say this. It is my belief that we could have blocked this [the expulsion], because it was not beyond our power to prevent this disgraceful act."¹¹ If by resorting to this rhetoric he meant to declare himself one of the "accused," the intention was clear and the impression overwhelming. The speech was not published in the press, but hearsay and reports about it spread among

the circles concerned, causing mounting ferment on the one hand and, as we saw, strong suspicions on the other hand.

Against the backdrop of the rising tension, when it was suddenly remembered to punish Lufban ten full days after the article appeared in his paper, and when it seemed, on the face of it, that the Haganah man Harit, and possibly Yitzhak Sadeh as well, were involved in the incident, Sprinzak's apprehensions were well-grounded.

¹⁰ Mardor, pp. 71-72.

¹¹ *Works of Berl Katznelson* (Hebrew), Vol. IX, p. 373.

Three days later, in a meeting of the Mapai Central Committee on December 15, 1940, the committee of inquiry presented its findings. Eliahu Golomb reported: "Indeed, the assailants are both active members in the Haganah. Both admitted the act and both stated that had been ordered to commit it. These *haverim* understood after the event that they had done something impermissible, even if they had received an order, and they expressed their sorrow and regret for the incident, to us and to Lufban. It turned out that they had been misled into thinking that this was a [Haganah] order. But it was made clear to us, the committee, that a person--or persons--used their position to give this order. We were unable to determine their names... We decided to request the Institution [Haganah headquarters] to do everything in its power to fully complete the investigation."

When the Central Committee expressed its displeasure at the committee's intention to delegate the task to the Haganah, Yosef Baratz came to Golomb's aid: "We found it to be true that they were misled by an order... We found immediately that the responsibility devolves not on those who committed the deed but on those who sent them to do it... We asked these people: Why did you do this? They said: Because were ordered to do it. Who gave the order? Those who customarily give us orders. Still, who was it, who customarily gives you orders? That we cannot say."

A letter of apology from Lufban's two young assailants was read out. But the Central Committee was not appeased. Israel Idelson (BarYehuda) insisted that the "Institution" announce the results of the clarification. He was supported by Golda Meyerson (Meir) and others. Objections were voiced to pardoning the two attackers before the entire matter was cleared up. Finally a compromise was worked out: where the two youngsters were concerned, the Central Committee would accept their letter of apology and the committee's conclusions. But the committee was to pursue its investigation until it came up with the name of the person who gave the order. Golomb announced that he would no longer be part of the committee.

The clarification within Mapai continued ten days later.¹² Ziesling stated that the "Institution" had already decided on the person who would carry out the investigation (Moshe Sineh) and would assign two others if the need to pass judgment arose. The Central Committee tried to hold its ground. Levy Shkolnik (Eshkol) demanded that the committee itself pursue the investigation to its conclusion. Shmuel Yavinieli, backed by David Remez, proposed that whoever gave the order be made "to come before a public [Judicial] instance and assume responsibility for his deeds. If he fails to appear within three days he will be considered a person who is not responsible for his actions." It was resolved to give Haganah headquarters a week to complete the investigation and to instruct its committee to apprise the Central Committee of their findings.

To no avail. Golomb reminded those present that at the previous meeting he had resigned from the committee. Baratz followed suit. Thus ended the Central Committee's attempt to impose its authority on the Yishuv's military arm. After the Haganah chief of staff, Ya'akov Dori, revealed to Sneh that it was he who had generated the youngsters' deed, his account of the incident as originating in a misunderstanding was accepted and he was given a symbolic punishment, as mentioned. Sneh informed only Moshe Sharett, the chairman of the Security Committee, about the results of the investigation and the verdict. The matter was not raised again in the Central Committee.

* * * * *

A close look at the circumstances of the *Patria's* sinking leads to the conclusion that what happened was a miracle-within-a-disaster. The surprising thing was not that one out of every eight passengers aboard drowned, but that the other seven were saved. Among the factors that contributed to the high percentage of survivors, one was objective, one can be attributed to the organizers of the sabotage, and a third to the rescuers. The objective factor was that part of the hull of the large ship did not sink. The part of the vessel that remained above water and the adjacent cabins in the fore of the ship acted as a shelter and enabled the rescue work to go on beyond the few minutes of the sinking.

¹² Meeting of Mapai Central Committee, December 25, 1940.

The organizers of the action must be credited with arranging the explosion for 9 a.m., when all the *ma'apilim* were scheduled to be on the upper deck during the daily cleaning of their berths. The previous evening the immigrants' committee had declared a "thorough cleanup operation" and had urged all passengers to gather on the deck no later than 8 a.m. and not to return to their cabins until they were instructed to do so. Early in the morning orderlies were sent from cabin to cabin to ensure that the

ma'apilim were on deck at the appointed time.¹³ Thanks to this sensible measure nearly all the immigrants were on their feet and the number of those trapped below decks was kept low.

A major factor in increasing the number of survivors was the rescue effort organized by the British--policemen, soldiers and sailors--quickly, efficiently and bravely. Their devotion and self-sacrifice gained them widespread esteem. The Mandate government's commission of inquiry termed the rescue effort "excellent." Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan wrote in *Harzofeh*: "With thanks and acknowledgement the Yishuv will remember the Englishmen who evinced a large measure of pure humanitarianism and by their labor and selfless devotion succeeded in saving hundreds from disaster and death. May they be blessed for their great humane act."¹⁴ Other papers and public figures also took note of the successful rescue operation, albeit less effusively. In a report to the Jewish Agency Executive Eliahu Dobkin stated: "The *ma'apilim* and those who witnessed the rescue operation praise the devoted efforts demonstrated in particular by the army and navy personnel. The work was performed speedily and dextrously."¹⁵ The heroic act of a young British officer was particularly singled out. In the midst of the chaos he made his way into the ship's engine room to open the steam valves of the boilers and prevent their explosion. This officer perished in the bowels of the ship, saving many others at the cost of his own life.

The evidence before us shows that to the positive factors cited above we must add a number of ostensibly "negative" points that also contributed to the saving of seven-eighths of the *ma'apilim* on the *Patria*. Twice, at least, they were saved by the thwarting of wrongheaded intentions of the planners and organizers--intentions that were the result of faulty thinking, or of no thinking at all.

The *Patria* sank so rapidly because the mine damaged the ship's hull far more severely than the planners had thought. The blast produced a hole of 2x3 meters¹⁶ and the vast quantities of water that poured in caused the ship to list and sink within minutes. The planners later claimed that their calculations were mistaken because the hull was weaker than they had thought. This may have been so. The mine may have been prepared primarily to achieve a powerful effect and not, as Mardor asked, so that it could be hidden in a leather briefcase and smuggled aboard.¹⁷ However, before this "small" mine was devised, containing, it is estimated, no more than 2 kg. of explosives,¹⁸ there was another, far larger mine. It was shaped like a small barrel and was packed with more than 10 kg. of explosives. ¹⁹ The plan was to smuggle it into the port in a car, get it close

to the target in a boat and then have two swimmers roll it in the water, plant it under the ship, and detonate it.²⁰ Fortunately for the ship's passengers, this plan did not come to fruition because it was impossible to smuggle the mine past the tightly guarded entry to the port. *

The fact that the barrel-mine was not detonated may have been doubly fortunate. It was not only its lethal size that rendered it so dangerous, but also the planned timing of the blast. According to the original plan, the two Haganah men were to get it under the ship and detonate it *at night*, with the darkness and the thin traffic in the port serving as essential conditions for the operation's success.

Had the explosion occurred while the *ma'apilim* were sleeping in their berths it is all too easy to imagine what would have become of both the ship and its passengers.

With the second mine, too, a fateful hitch occurred that saved many lives. The mine was given to Hans Vandell, a volunteer from the *ma'apilim*, on the morning of

13 Gershon A. Steiner, *Patria* (Hebrew), Am Oved, pp. 201-205; Margalit Lichtenstein: Testimony, Yad Vashem, File H/976.

14 *Hatzofeh*, November 28, 1940.

15 CZA, File S25/2631.

16 David Nimri, *ibid.*

17 Mardor, p. 58.

18 Letter from Yevgeny Ratner, one of the designers of the mine, to the author, January 17, 1975.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Mardor, p. 55.

November 21 while Munya Mardor was working on the ship, at his initiative, as a carpenter's assistant. Mardor relates that when he returned to the city and briefed Shaul Avigur about what he had done, everyone grew extremely tense. They spent a sleepless night, not knowing exactly when "zero-hour" would come. The following day, when Mardor was working on the ship, he was told that Vandel had planted the mine in a suitable place and had pulled out the pin as instructed--but the mine had not exploded. To his horror, Mardor heard that Vandel then went back, picked up the mine--with its pin removed--and hid it elsewhere. "I warned him again about the risk they took by moving the mine after the pin was removed, even if it had not gone off. I

 * David Nimri gives a different account of the barrel-mine. He maintains that it was smuggled into the port. "The prospects for success were good. But headquarters was apprehensive about the damage liable to be caused by this very big mine, and ordered it returned." Dr. Yehuda Slutzky, the author of the history of the Haganah that was edited by Shaul Avigur (who, it will be recalled, headed the *Patria* sabotage operation), agrees with Mardor's version, but adds: "It is possible that the two testimonies do not conflict. Initially it became clear that it would be difficult to get the mine in and afterward the additional consideration came up and it was decided not to go on trying to get this mine into the port." For our purposes, there is no difference between the two accounts. Nimri, too, says that a "very big" mine was going to be exploded but that this was prevented, fortunately, because the organizers had second thoughts.

explained the dangers in a mine that does not explode after being activated if it is moved."²¹

David Nimri completes the story: "The intention was for the mine to go off in the evening, and accordingly it was planted in the coal storeroom with the knowledge of the Actions Committee [of the *ma'apilim*]. *Fortunately for us* the clock, which was set for 9 p.m., did not function. We all spent a sleepless night, fearful that the mine would go off while everyone was asleep. We waited for morning very much on edge."

They were fortunate indeed, because had the mine gone off as planned, it is very probable that instead of counting the number of those who perished in the tragedy, they would have counted the survivors, if any.

After a primitive detonation fuse a meter and a half long was supplied, and after the time of the blast was set for 9 a.m., the disaster occurred which cost the lives of 250 *ma'apilim*.

Thus, besides the final mistake, for which these 250 persons paid with their lives, the organizers were at least twice on the brink of a far greater disaster because of faulty planning. This gives rise to much astonishment and some reflections. The whole sequence of events is particularly strange when one considers the Haganah's high operational level and the superb quality of its agents.

Mardor's description of how the mine was smuggled aboard and conveyed to the *ma'apilim* demonstrate the fine qualities that were characteristics of many other Haganah ventures: a detailed consideration of means and obstacles; the precise preparation of the technical and organizational necessities; the adroit exploitation of opportunities; an ability to divert the attention of the British and an intelligent use of their slackened alertness; and above all--a tenacious adherence to the mission and a readiness for personal sacrifice combined with utmost caution to prevent failure.

This, as regards the transfer of the mine; whereas, with regard to the wellbeing of the *ma'apilim*, a chain of mistakes and negligence was apparent. First there was the big mine which could have blown up the ship and its passengers in the dead of night. Then came the "small" mine, successfully concealed among the sandwiches in Meridor's briefcase, but which did not go off as scheduled and remained in the midst of the *ma'apilim* for four days, its pin removed, liable to explode at any moment. The organizers spent a sleepless night in the grip of overwhelming fear when they realized, after the act, that a night-time explosion was liable to prove disastrous. Then, when the mine finally exploded at the proper time

²¹ Ibid., p. 68.

it turned out that the experience of Yitzhak Sadeh and the Haganah engineers in demolition work was of no avail in determining the strength of the blast and that the necessary "safety factor" in an operation of this kind was not taken into account.

A theory that resolves these contradictory manifestations leaps to mind. For the planners and organizers, concern for the wellbeing of the *ma'apilim* was somehow detached from the main mission, which required steadfastness and faithfulness. Two parallel lines of events are discernible. One consists of actions taken as part of a relentless striving for the goal--sabotaging the ship to prevent its departure. The second is made up of a series of careless oversights stemming from lack of attention to a subject which was not considered to be essential or crucial on the road to the main goal. In the final analysis the goal was achieved and the heavy price paid.

* * * * *

The tragic consequences of the *Patria* action and the dreadful scenes played out in the port of Haifa deeply affected those who were behind the operation. Shaul Avigur, who considered himself personally responsible for the affair "from start to finish," said of himself ten years later that "the conscience of any person with a heart will perhaps not be allayed until his last day."²² At the same time he justified the operation, arguing that "we had no other way to wage the fight for *aliyah* and liberty." Seven years after this Moshe Sharett wrote to Mardor in a similar vein. After reading the story of the *Patria*, he related, "I relived the heroism and the tragedy alike--as one whose responsibility for those precious victims has oppressed and will always oppress his conscience, and as one who never took consolation from the approval given at that time." Both confessions came in private letters which did not become public knowledge until years afterward.²³

To this day the public discussion of the affair has been meager and one-sided. As long as the British ruled in Palestine, the opponents of the operation did not talk about its details for fear they would become known to the foreign government. The taboo against airing the subject for reasons of national solidarity was given salient expression in two editorials in *Davar*. Two days after the calamity the paper remarked with feigned innocence: "The investigation will undoubtedly turn up the direct cause of the disaster, and if anyone was guilty will uncover him as well."²⁴ The following day a brief but heady editorial pronounced: "From the dead to the living. We accompanied the dead. Henceforth our anxiety is directed to the fate of the living." The other papers followed suit and the entire public took on itself the obligation not to ask too many questions or talk

too much about the covert topic. (As will be recalled, *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, which broke the self-imposed discipline, was immediately punished for it in a direct action.) From hints in descriptions of the event published by persons close to the Yishuv institutions, it was widely believed that the explosion was set off by the *ma'apilim* themselves who in their despair preferred to die at the gates of the country rather than be sent to their doom.²⁵ Whoever knew the truth kept it to himself.

Even after the British departed the truth was not revealed. Articles published in 1950 to mark the tenth anniversary of the disaster still resorted to oblique allusions about the operation. Even after the publication of Mardor's detailed account in 1957 there were some who, unable to break the habit of caution, or not realizing that the cat was out of the bag, or for other reasons still preferred the language of indirection. The 1964 novel *Patria* by Gershon Erich Steiner, one of the survivors of the explosion, speaks about the cause of the disaster in quite transparent hints. Yet the blurb on the cover of this book, published by Am Oved, insists that the tragedy "remains a riddle to this day: in a mysterious explosion that rocked the ship..." and so forth.

At first glance, the absence of a public debate, a state of affairs that was hardly conducive to the raising of objections, gives the impression of general assent to the *Patria* operation. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization), the military arm of the opposition in the Yishuv, had also planned to sabotage the ship. The Irgun leader, David Raziel, was engaged in

²² Letter to Mardor (Note 8).

²³ In 1972, in *History of the Haganah*, Vol. III, pp. 155, 1633.

²⁴ *Davar*, November 27, 1940.

²⁵ See letter to *Ha'aretz* from Z. Meribovitz, November 29, 1965.

preparations for the operation when he was preempted by the Haganah.²⁶ Political and moral justification for the act seemed to be bolstered by two odious acts done by the British authorities under High Commissioner MacMichael before and after the operation. An official statement about the government's decision to deport the *ma'apilim* concluded with this declaration: "Their ultimate disposal will be a matter for consideration after the war, but it is not proposed that they shall remain in the colony to which they are sent *or that they should go to Palestine.*"²⁷ This provocative "pledge," even though it was thought not to have had London's authorization,²⁸ seemed deliberately designed to infuriate the Yishuv and drive it to acts of desperation.

The truth is that the plan had a good many opponents among the public. In closed forums, out of hearing of the British, these persons gave voice to their stand in no uncertain terms. The record has come down to us in those instances when minutes were taken. In one such debate at a meeting of the Mapai Central Committee, in which minutes were

recorded, three representatives of the "moderates" in the Mapai leadership assailed the operation while three others gave it their backing.²⁹

The most ardent supporter of the operation was *Eliahu Golomb*:

"There are those who regard the *Patria* tragedy as a black day, while for others the case of the *Atlantic* is a black day. For me, *Patria* is not a black day and is not the black day... There are purposeful victims and such were the *Patria* victims. These were victims for the sake of Jewish immigration." And once more, in a slightly softer vein: "The day of the *Atlantic* is for me a far blacker day than the day of the *Patria*."

Moshe Sharett, who opened the discussion, emphasized his own account in assessing the event, and it was this version that was adopted by his like-minded colleagues in the party and which in time became the officially accepted Yishuv version. In accordance with a word stressed by him and noted particularly by his opponents, Sharett's account can be called the "retrospective version." The following are Sharett's remarks in full, his style and emphases retained:

It is essential to distinguish between our attitude toward the *Patria* tragedy *beforehand* and our attitude *in retrospect*. Had we been asked in advance whether it was permissible to delay the ship's sailing and leave the *ma'apilim* in the country at the price of so many victims--it is clear to me that no one among us would have responded in the affirmative. *But this disaster occurred.* It is a fact. It is part of our history, part of the history of the Jewish people. And the question that should confront us is how this chapter will be recorded in history. How it will be assessed by Jewish history. To me it is clear that Jewish history will say the following: In the process of our gaining a hold in Eretz-Israel there was a period in which Jews made their way to the country in various ways and by different routes, with permission and without permission, in peacetime and in wartime, as new immigrants and pioneers who were trained for *aliyah* and also as refugees from the sword and destruction; so fired were they with a desire to enter Eretz-Israel--and there was a fire in the Yishuv to bring them here--that when the gates were shut before them, there arose such a great storm and tidal wave of feeling that brought about what happened on the *Patina*; to such a pass did things come that such a thing could happen!

It is clear to me that not only Jewish history but the rest of the world too will make the same evaluation of what happened on the *Patria*. At all events, it is vital for our future fight that if such a thing happened--and again: it is something that I am sure no one wanted to happen--it is of crucial importance that it be assessed *thus*, crucial for us and crucial for our future war.

²⁶ Nevertheless, pp. 460-461; testimony of Binyamin Lubotzky (Eliav), Jabotinsky Institute, File XX 6-14.

²⁷ Official announcement on November 20, 1940: "*Ma'apilim*" Book, p. 247, and contemporary papers.

²⁸ The *Atlantic* deportees were returned to Palestine by a decision of the British government which was taken no later than February 1945--that is, before the end of the war. See Aharon Tzvergebaum, "The Mauritius Affair," *Yad Vashem Studies*, No. 4, p. 244 (Hebrew).

²⁹ Minutes of Mapai Central Committee meeting, December 15, 1940. Labor Party Archives, Beit Berl. Three other dissenters--David Remez, Avraham Katznelson and Yosef Sprinzak--spoke at a meeting of the Mapai Political Committee on December 12, 1940, *ibid*.

Pinhas Lubianker (Lavon), the most trenchant of those who opposed the *Patria* operation, replied to Sharett: "I want to say to Moshe that if he writes the history of the *Patria*, maybe it will be written *thus*; if I, the little one, write it, it will be written differently, it will be *fundamentally* different. All will depend on the historian. We know how legends are created in the life of a nation. There is not always a necessary connection between the legend and the actual truth. One can create a legend, and I want to tell you, Moshe, that if we write the *Patria*'s history *thus* it will be, as I understand it, a *legend* and not the objective truth."

Lavon saw the *Patria* operation as a political act, part of the efforts to bring about the annulment of the White Paper. He did not believe this was feasible as long as the war continued, and for political reasons he disapproved of the action on the ship.

Yitzhak Lufban, the editor of *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, and the most extreme opponent of the *Patria* operation, delivered an emotional speech condemning the act. He began by saying that he was not the author of the passage about the "malicious hand" but had read it and agreed to print it. Lufban concurred with those of his colleagues who opposed the action for political reasons; however, he wished to dwell on the *moral aspect* of the issue. He felt mortified and morally shamefaced when the act was likened to Tel Hai or to some other manifestation of courage, self-dedication and martyrdom. "With what permission," he asked "may one drown in the sea women, men, old people and youths, none of whom were asked about it, and then say that we are making a sacrifice?... What kind of self-dedication is it when a person, instead of dedicating his own life, dedicates another's? (I. Duvdevani: By what right do we mobilize people?) We do not mobilize by force. Whoever joins up does so because he regards it as his duty and he is well aware of what awaits him. That is how it was at Tel Hai... This is how self-defense in Eretz-Israel was always... That is called self-dedication. The Jews did not want to convert, did not want to fall into the hands of the enemies that tormented them, so they slaughtered themselves or were burned at the stake in the knowledge, in

consciousness, out of the inner decision of each individual. That is called martyrdom. But what does it mean to say that Jews are engaging in martyrdom by means of killing other Jews? When was there ever such a thing in Jewish history? Never was there such a crime in Jewish history!"

Responding to Sharett, Lufban said:

It is of the utmost importance how this event will go down in history. But unlike Moshe, I think that it should be recorded as it actually happened. Our obligation to our own education, to the education of the present generation, to the education of the youth demands this of us. If it is recorded as Moshe wants, it will not be history but the *falsification* of history. Many falsifications were created in the same way. But it is not history, it is not the truth! And falsifications are eventually exposed. Anyone who studies the matter and delves into the circumstances will uncover it...

I am stressing these points because I feel that others have refrained from touching on them. And I have to admit: for me they outweigh any political assessment... If for me the day of the *Atlantic* was a day of pain and anxiety, the day of the *Patria* was the blackest day in my thirty-two years in the country, the blackest day ever since I was old enough to tell good from bad in the phenomena of public life.

Replying directly to Golomb (and to arguments adduced afterward by others) Lufban said: "Eliahu has said that these were 'purposeful victims.' I want to say to Eliahu: every person may bring *himself* as a purposeful victim but he may not bring me or any other Jew without his knowledge and consent. It is not the person who sacrifices or intends to sacrifice *me* who can decide whether there is any point to my sacrifice- *I* will make that decision. And there can be no comparison here with individual or accidental disasters that occurred on other *ma'apilim* ships that reached the country. Naturally, ships can sink. Anyone who embarks on a ship nowadays is liable to hit a mine... Those are disasters. But none of us received permission to be the emissary of the Angel of Death."

Concluding, Lufban seemed to appeal to future historians:

"I must warn against the desire to sanctify the *Patria* issue. And I know that my remarks will not reprove those who have committed themselves to an opinion different from mine or a few who think as I do. But I am speaking for the minutes that are being recorded here, which will

undoubtedly serve as material for writing the history of this period in Eretz-Israel.”

* * * * *

In trying to do our part to executing the historical testament of Yitzhak Lufban, we were rewarded very generously by another of the speakers at that Central Committee session. *Eliezer Kaplan*, who also came out against the *Patria* operation, illustrated his negative attitude toward the policy of his party's leadership by citing a fact which may effectively absolve us of the charge of “prophecy after the fact.” We will return to Kaplan's statement later on, after giving our appraisal of the subject under discussion.

If the Zionist movement perceived the rescue of European Jewry as a prime goal of its war against Hitler, that goal should have been accorded priority accordingly. On the one hand, Zionism should not have done things liable to hamper rescue; and, on the other hand, it should have sought means and partners to further rescue. For the sake of rescue, *everything* should have been exploited, including acts originally done out of hostile intent. At the end of 1940 the movement had the possibility of utilizing the fact that the British Navy was mobilized in the war against violations of the White Paper, and, with the help of British public opinion, which was sympathetic to the rescue efforts, pressuring London to cooperate in transferring refugees to temporary havens. The great majority of refugees would have been taken to locations outside Eretz-Israel, while the minority would have sufficed to fill the White Paper quota (which, it later turned out, was not filled in the war years). Partnership in rescue, like partnership in the military effort, would not have prevented the struggle against the White Paper, with the aid of friendly public opinion in England and the pressure wielded by the reservoir of refugees, but with one essential condition: that under no circumstances would rescue efforts be adversely affected.

It seems that a proposal along these lines was put forward at the time, precisely in non-Jewish circles. According to *Eliezer Kaplan*:

“And what am I asking concerning our political action? By way of explanation I will offer an example. Just today I received a telegram from London stating that non-Jews have come up with the idea that *ma'apilim* ships--those which have arrived and any others to come--will be directed not to Eretz-Israel but to other, more distant parts of the Empire. Their entry to Eretz-Israel will be discussed after the war, while at present children and old people will be given consideration, and they will be allowed to enter the country. I refer also to the *ma'apilim* on the *Atlantic*. I

would like to discuss this kind of idea from a Zionist and Jewish point of view.”³⁰

If implemented, that proposal could have wrought a total change in the relations between the Zionist movement and the British government, to the benefit of both sides. A truce lasting until the end of the war, based on a separation of rescue from the campaign against the White Paper, would have prevented the exacerbation of relations between the Yishuv and the British government and military, and hence averted London's hostile stance toward rescue. Refugee ships bound for Eretz-Israel would have sought out ships of the British Navy instead of trying to avoid them, and would have pursued their journey under their protection. The old people and the children and their mothers would have been brought to Eretz-Israel, with the younger people finding shelter abroad until the end of the war. There was no need to exile them to distant Mauritius: they could have been absorbed in Cyprus, Egypt or another nearby country. Later in this chapter we will see that many tens of thousands, if not more, could have been saved on the basis of such a dialogue.

We were unable to discover who made the proposal or how close its proponents were to the British government. As it turned out, this was of little importance because the proposal itself drew no attention in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. We found no traces whatsoever of a discussion of the idea or a reaction to it--as though it were part of another world unrelated to the burning issues of the time. The dialogue between Britain and Zionism concerning rescue never took place.

The *Patria* affair brought about a nadir in the relations of the Yishuv leadership and the Zionist movement with the Mandate government. In a meeting with High

³⁰ Minutes of Mapai Central Committee meeting, December 15, 1940.

Commissioner MacMichael two days after the disaster, Moshe Sharett was compelled to listen to some harsh words and even harsher news. The man who perpetrated the act should be hanged from a high tree, MacMichael asserted. He informed Sharett of the Palestine government's unshakable determination to deport the *Patria* survivors and the *Atlantic* passengers. No appeal against the decision would be entertained, MacMichael declared.

So great was the bewilderment within the Yishuv and among the leadership that Sharett, reporting MacMichael's announcement to the Jewish Agency Executive, suggested that it be concealed from the public, because "if it becomes known that they intend to send these people away, the public will be so depressed that they will simply accept it."³¹

At the order of the British government the *Patria* survivors remained in Palestine (imprisoned in a camp for a year) but the *ma'apilim*

on the *Atlantic* were shipped to Mauritius. Sharett, seeking to account for the brutality of the British police against the deportees while they were being forcibly moved from the Atlit camp to the ships, noted, among other points, that the behavior of the police "came after the *Patria* affair and perhaps as a result of the *Patria* affair. The overwhelming fact remains that we were put into a position of helplessness in our own land and they were able to treat our sisters and brothers with terrible cruelty without our being able to come to their aid."³²

Not everyone agreed with Sharett. We related above the bitterness of the Haganah leaders who deplored the "disgraceful" lack of resistance to the deportation of the *Atlantic* refugees. According to existing testimony, they did not recoil from the thought of repeating the *Patria* operation if necessary. When in March 1941 the *ma'apilim* ship *Darien 2* entered Haifa harbor and waited for the British to decide its fate, Haganah personnel contacted a group of pioneers who were aboard about the idea of blowing up the ship if the British decided to deport the refugees.³³ On this occasion things did not go so far. The *ma'apilim* aboard the *Darien 2* were not expelled, as it turned out, thanks to the active intervention of the British embassy in Washington, which feared the damage a repeat of the *Patria* or *Atlantic* episodes would cause Britain's good name in the U.S.³⁴ The ship's captain was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment and the passengers were locked up in a detention camp for 17 months. The British government and its High Commissioner in Jerusalem took note of the concession they were forced to make to the Jews. The next chapter in the bitter campaign came ten months later: the *Struma* affair.

* * * * *

On December 16, 1941, the *ma'apilim* ship *Struma* reached the entrance to the Bosphorus after embarking from Romania. The *Struma* was actually a 180-ton cattle boat built over a hundred years earlier and initially used on the Danube. It was 16 meters long and 6 meters wide.³⁵ An old engine that was fitted on its deck broke down several times during the journey from Constanza--which took four days instead of the normal 12 hours.

The *Struma* was vastly overcrowded. Packed aboard were 769 people, including 250 women and 80 children below the age of 15. The voyage was organized by the Revisionists, and about a hundred Betar and Tsohar members were on board, among them the movement's leader in Romania, Dr. Lazerovitz.

For two and a half months the *Struma* was anchored in the port of Istanbul. The Turks would not allow anyone to disembark unless he bore

an entry permit for Palestine, and the Mandate government refused to issue the permits. Toward evening on February 23, 1942, Turkish policemen went on board, raised the anchor, hooked the ship to a tugboat and towed it into the Black Sea outside

31 Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, November 28, 1940.

32 Ibid., December 15, 1940.

33 P. Azai, *Abba Berdichev* (Hebrew), pp. 47-48.

34 *History of the Haganah*, Vol. III, p. 158.

35 Haim Barlas, *Rescue in the Holocaust* (Hebrew), pp. 181-186; Haim Lazar-Litai, *Nevertheless*, pp. 472-476; *History of the Haganah*, Vol. III, pp. 159-161; various documents in CZA File S25/2616.

Turkish territorial waters, abandoning it to its fate. The following morning there was an explosion on board and the ship went down. There was one survivor.

The immediate cause of the disaster has still not been determined to everyone's satisfaction. Unlike the *Patria* affair, we will not enter into a discussion of the probability of the various accounts and speculations that prevailed and continue to prevail. We were forced into this decision reluctantly, because of the research conditions we encountered. Finding that our chances of securing the material relating to the true cause of the sinking were uncertain at best, we saw no point in making excessive efforts to uncover it. We will therefore make do with a brief survey of the diverse accounts put forward in this connection.

Among the possibilities of an *external* attack, the notion of a floating mine quickly gave way to the idea that a torpedo was fired at the ship from another vessel or from a static facility. For years it was widely believed that the torpedo had been fired from a German vessel operating in the vicinity. However, this possibility was finally discounted in the 1960s when it became known that there were no German submarines or warships in the Black Sea during the period in question.³⁶ Since then it has been generally accepted that the *Struma* was sunk accidentally by a Russian submarine. It was also hinted that the fatal torpedo was launched from the Turkish coast, and testimony was cited from the sole survivor, David Stoliar, that the ship's officer, who was killed in the blast, had spotted an approaching torpedo on the shore side.³⁷ But this account was unsupported and was not subjected to public discussion.

Speculations were also adduced concerning *internal* factors that may have caused the disaster. Lord Cranborne said in the House of Lords:

"It is possible that the wretched passengers themselves blew up [the ship] deliberately out of despair, although no proof has yet been furnished for this shocking theory." Indirect confirmation of the suicide theory is contained in a memorandum submitted by the Association of Romanian Immigrants in Eretz-Israel to the Jewish Agency Executive prior to the disaster, stating that "they are all giving the unmistakable impression of a group of people who have determined on collective suicide."³⁸

Circumstances were not lacking indicating deliberate sabotage that "succeeded" beyond expectations, as in the case of the *Patria* but more severely. The journalist Gershon Agronsky (Agron) who happened to be

in Istanbul on the day after the disaster, relates a theory widely circulated there, to the effect that the passengers tried to steer the ship onto a shoal.³⁹ It was known, and confirmed from various sources, that the passengers and/or the captain several times caused the engine to break down and then prevented its repair. In this connection some importance may attach to the testimony of Stoliar, as he heard it from the ship's officer, that the explosion occurred while mechanics were dealing with the stalled engine. But as mentioned, we did not make a thorough investigation of the matter.

The High Commissioner for Palestine found in the *Struma* affair an opportunity to get back at the Jews for the non-deportation of the *Patria* survivors and the *Darien 2* refugees. His hostile attitude was very much in evidence in both his acts and his statements. With the decision in his hands,⁴⁰ he rejected a request to allow the *ma'apilim* in within the framework of the 3,000 entry certificates allocated to the Jewish Agency for this period. He cited two reasons, which were actually three. In the first place, he maintained, it was feared that Nazi agents had infiltrated the refugees. Secondly, and this was his "brilliant" contribution, there was a food shortage in Palestine and the 800 *ma'apilim* were liable to aggravate the situation. But underlying these grounds was the crucial consideration: it was unthinkable that illegal actions should create facts that would force London to act against its laws and methods.

MacMichael's vicious cruelty won the day--the *ma'apilim* did not get to Eretz-Israel. Calamitously, his attitude was bolstered by the gross *torpor* evinced by the Jewish Agency. We learn about the timing of its activities in this connection from a communique issued by the Agency's Information Office in early March "in order to prevent misunderstanding and empty rumors."⁴¹ Reports about the ship's arrival in

³⁶ Juergen Ruber, *The Sinking of the Jewish refugee Ships "Struma" and "Mafkura" in the Black Sea* (German), 1965, pp. 7 1-72.

³⁷ Conversation with David Stoliar in *Ma'ariv*, April or May 1965; *Yediot Ahronot*, February 25, 1966.

³⁸ CZA, File S25/2616.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See Moshe Sharett's clarification at the Jewish Agency Executive meeting on March 1, 1942.

⁴¹ *Davar*, March 6, 1942.

Istanbul, the statement said, “were received by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem *at the end of December.*” However, only in *mid-January*, when the first refugee who succeeded in disembarking reached Palestine, did the Agency find out “clear things.” On *January 19* a talk was held with the First Secretary of the Palestine government, and on *January 30* the Jewish Agency made a written appeal to the government. On *February 10* the Jewish Agency again raised the *Struma* issue in a talk with the First Secretary. Three days later the Agency sent a detailed letter and on February 15 received a reply: the British refused to admit adult refugees but would allow the entry of children aged 11-16. On February 18 the Palestine government agreed to allow children under the age of eleven to enter. Six days later the *Struma* went down.

From August 1940 a special [special] office, set up by Haim Barlas, the director of the Jewish Agency’s Aliyah Department, had been operating in Istanbul.⁴² The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem claimed that for an entire month the office did not convey information about the *Struma* so that it was not until the arrival of the first refugee that Jerusalem came into possession of detailed information. Following this meetings were held with officials of the High Commissioner’s office accompanied by the dispatch of letters at intervals of ten days or more.

On February 16 the British consulate in Istanbul received confirmation of the entry visas for the children, and that very day it was approved by the vilayet (Turkish regional government office). However, for a week Jewish Agency personnel were unable to overcome obscure difficulties in the Turkish bureaucracy--nor did we find evidence of intensive efforts toward this end. A few days before February 23 it was learned in both Istanbul and Jerusalem that the Turks were about to expel the ship. On the day of the expulsion Jewish Agency officials appealed urgently to the authorities to at least allow the children to disembark. But it was too late. They were told at the vilayet that the governor was in Ankara and that there no reply had been received from that quarter.⁴³ Barlas later wrote that “the ship was returned [to the high seas] without any notification, at evening.”⁴⁴ In other words, despite everything the move took the Jewish Agency officials by surprise.

An interesting fact bears noting in connection with the leisurely pace of the appeals to the authorities. A perusal of the Yishuv press reveals that in every paper without exception the first report about the *Struma* appeared on February 10, less than two weeks before the expulsion. Prior to this not a word was said to the press and the public about the extraordinary events in Istanbul harbor. As those aboard the ship moved inexorably toward their terrible fate, two months of precious time were wasted in mobilizing forces to forestall that fate. A day before the expulsion Jerusalem learned that Churchill was showing an interest in intervening on behalf of the *Struma*.⁴⁵ If the prime minister truly intended to help, and thus fly in the face of his ministers and his representative in Jerusalem, he acted too late.

The *Struma* disaster sparked a vigorous and spontaneous reaction in the Yishuv. The Conference of Women Workers broke off their meeting and staged a demonstration in the streets of Tel Aviv. A call was sounded for street demonstrations to be held throughout the country. The Yishuv institutions, however, took a line of restraint. An “internal curfew” was declared for February 26 from around noontime until 7 p.m., the intention

being “that the internal curfew will forestall demonstrations.”⁴⁶ The historian of the Haganah offers the following explanation for the organization’s moderation: “There is no doubt that what was at work here was the consciousness that, when all was said and done, the Yishuv stood in a single front with the British in a fateful campaign against the Nazis.”⁴⁷ If this sober consideration (which did not prevent the sabotage of another war asset, the *Patria*) was the motivating force, it was nevertheless insufficient to halt the campaign to transform rescue into *aliyah*. Moshe Sharett fired off cables to Zionist leaders in London and New York urging them to work vigorously for the return of the Mauritius exiles, as what he termed compensation for the *Struma*

42 Barlas, op. cit., p. 102.

43 Agronsky, *ibid.*

44 Haim Barlas to Moshe Shertok, March 31, 1942, CZA, File S25/2616.

45 Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, February 22, 1942.

46 Moshe Sharett at Jewish Agency Executive meeting, February 26, 1942.

47 *History of the Haganah*, *ibid.*

disaster and in order to prevent a new disaster.⁴⁸ Some of Sharett's colleagues objected to the "compensation for the disaster" concept, with one of them (Eliezer Kaplan) pointing out "that we will not know what to reply if asked what the connection is between the *Struma* disaster and the release of the *ma'apilim* from Mauritius." The Jewish Agency Executive decided to require Sharett to take under advisement the comments that were voiced. But in the meantime a new front, sweeping and public, was developing of which the objective meaning was opposition to saving Jews outside of Eretz-Israel.

The Va'ad Leumi decided to organize a mass petition in the Yishuv against the closing of the gates of Eretz-Israel to the refugees. Addressing Asefat Hanivharm (the Elected Assembly) Zaiman Rubashov (Shazar) described the content of the petition as follows: "...And we will not rest until the gates of the homeland are opened to every Jew rescued from the Nazis' clutches. That is the resolution. This is the reason for the petition in the Yishuv."⁴⁹

In the context of the stands and actions of the Zionist movement this petition constituted a flagrant challenge to the British government. Motivated by a lofty desire to help, the Jews in Eretz-Israel signed their names to a saliently political declaration. A sympathetic public opinion, appalled by the *Patria* and *Struma* disasters, was utilized to declare all-out war on any form of rescue that did not entail bringing new immigrants to Eretz-Israel.

The British government was not composed only of just men, though neither is there any proof that it contained absolute scoundrels. All its members, headed by the avowed "Zionist" Churchill, were firmly determined not to change the immigration policy of the White Paper as long as the war lasted, and they had sufficient means to implement that resolve. The government was dependent on Parliament and sensitive to

public opinion in the country. While neither Parliament nor the public at large opposed the White Paper policy, they were highly sympathetic to the persecuted Jews and concerned for their fate. The *Struma* affair triggered a public furor in England. In an emotional debate in both Houses of Parliament the government was hard-pressed to explain why the Jewish refugees had not been treated, at the very least, like nationals of enemy states--Germans, Italians or Japanese--who, if caught, were taken ashore and locked in detention camps. Embarrassed government spokesmen mumbled words of regret. They expressed the hope that a similar tragedy would not recur and in the same breath announced that the government would not deviate from its policy of restricting immigration--"a policy approved by Parliament."⁵⁰

The British government faced a triple dilemma. It could not afford a repeat of the *Patria* and *Struma* disasters (nor did it wish to), but neither was it willing to abandon the White Paper policy. A compromise solution involving the separation of rescue from *aliyah* was precluded by the active opposition of the Zionist movement. We do not know for certain whether the way out of this tangle of contradictions was found by means of detailed advance planning or by the more pragmatic route of reacting to events piecemeal, as they occurred. Whatever the case may be, the results were the logical ones.

In May 1942 the Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs, Lord Cranborne, wrote to Berl Locker, the director of the Jewish Agency's London office, informing him of a new policy decided on by the British government after the *Struma* disaster. His Majesty's Government, Cranborne stated, would continue to adhere to the White Paper regulations "and will do nothing to facilitate the arrival of Jewish refugees in Palestine." However, if, despite everything, ships carrying illegal immigrants were to reach Palestine, the passengers would be taken ashore and imprisoned in detention camps. Those who passed a security check and were found suitable for the country's economic absorption capacity would gradually be released as part of the entry quota stipulated in the White Paper. The statement was being conveyed on the assumption that it would not be made public and would not constitute a public announcement.⁵¹

On the face of it, this was a welcome declaration. Under pressure of public opinion the British government was being forced to accept a policy precluding additional deportations from Palestine; any Jew who succeeded in reaching the shores of Eretz-

48 Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, March 1, 1942.

49 L. Cooperstein, *The "Struma" Scroll* (Hebrew), p. 104.

50 Barlas, op. cit., pp. 183-185.

51 Letter from Lord Cranborne to Berl Locker, May 22, 1942; Barlas, op. cit., pp. 235-237.

Israel would enter the country, albeit temporarily, as a prisoner. The detention camps would be occupied

by masses of *ma'apilim* who would await their turn to be released, without threat of deportation. Their presence in the country in growing numbers would be a moral-political factor that would help overturn the White Paper. Rescue and *aliyah* would be found to be congruent.

In practice, optimism was unfounded. In this period the sources of "illegal" immigration dried up. The *Struma* disaster sounded the death knell for rescue attempts via the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. A few days after the *Struma* went down a report was received in Istanbul that 300 persons had boarded the *Michael* in one of the departure ports but had immediately disembarked when news of the disaster reached them.⁵² In 1942 the British had the opportunity to fulfill their pledge with regard to just one boat, carrying 15 *ma'apilim*.⁵³ A year later there were renewed prospects that a large number of ships carrying refugees would sail the Black Sea and off the coast of Eretz-Israel. But then, as we shall see, Lord Cranborne's forced concession turned into an impassable obstacle. It was not by accident that Cranborne constantly reiterated his government's tenacious adherence to the White Paper.

* * * * *

The Bermuda Conference is often coupled with the Evian Conference, as though the two were identical twins. This was not the case. What both meetings did have in common was that they were convened by non-Jews with the declared aim of helping Jews. But this is where the similarity begins and ends. Besides this, everything was different. The Evian Conference met at the personal initiative of President Roosevelt and over thirty countries attended with great publicity; the British government was forced into convening the Bermuda Conference by public opinion in England. Only delegations from the U.S. and England took part and it was held on a remote Atlantic island. The Evian Conference, its poor organizational administration notwithstanding, inspired countries in the free world with a readiness to help, and breathed optimism in the delegations of Jewish organizations (including, it will be recalled, the three Zionist leaders who were directly involved). It forged the conditions for the Rublee-Wohlthat and Santo Domingo plans which were pregnant with prospects and possibilities. The very opposite was true of the Bermuda Conference which was empty at its outset and barren at its conclusion.

The story of the Bermuda Conference can be traced to a unique demonstration that we mentioned earlier. On December 17, 1942, when the first declaration of the Allied Powers was read out that contained a description and condemnation of the destruction of European Jewry by the

Nazis, a scene unprecedented in the history of the British House of Commons unfolded: all the Members suddenly rose to express their outrage at the atrocities and their sympathy for the victims.

This spontaneous demonstration by the MPs was a faithful reflection of their constituents' feelings. In Chapter 3 we described the burst of public support in England for the rescue of Jews, beginning in June and peaking in November-December 1942. Moshe Sharett, who was then in the British capital, related a few months later that "a tidal wave of public opinion is surging and has still not abated."⁵⁴ A public opinion poll conducted by the liberal paper *New Chronicle* found that 80 percent of the British public were ready "for great actions" to save the Jews in Europe.⁵⁵ Various organizations sprang up seeking to translate the public sympathy into practical action. The most important of these, a committee of intellectuals and church representatives headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, brought relentless pressure to bear on the government to take urgent and concrete rescue measures. England, fighting for its life, having just gone through the danger of a Nazi invasion and occupation, did not forget its humanitarian obligations.

⁵² Agronsky, *ibid.*

⁵³ *History of the Haganah*, *ibid.*, p. 161. Fifty-five passengers on two other vessels, *Michai* and *Mircea*, were already in detention at the Atlit camp, when the letter was written to Locker.

⁵⁴ Speech at a meeting of the Elected Assembly, *Davar*, May 4, 1943.

⁵⁵ A. Broide, *Davar*, April 24, 1943.

But the British public, while ready to help and rescue, was divided over the question of whether it was necessary to link the rescue with the fulfillment of the Zionists' demands. According to Sharett: "We were told that as long as we were asking for rescue we had everyone's assent. But the moment we *demand that the survivors go to Eretz-Israel* we split the British public and hamper the government in wartime. We did not accept this argument, and neither did many of our British friends."⁵⁶ Opinion, it turned out, was divided among Zionism's friends as well. In a meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee Sharett revealed that "some of our friends urged that we not raise the question of Eretz-Israel in connection with this matter [rescue]."⁵⁷

The Zionist movement would not budge. It did not agree to separate rescue from *aliyah* and refused to consider even compromise proposals such as that adduced by Eliezer Kaplan in the Mapai Central Committee. Rejecting the advice of well-wishers and friends, Zionism stuck to the line it had set itself after the *Struma* disaster: every Jew rescued from the Nazis was a potential *oleh* (immigrant to Eretz-Israel) and every means must be used in the fight to ensure his entry to Eretz-Israel. Among other moves, the Zionists once more demanded the return to Eretz-Israel of the 1,800 exiles on Mauritius.⁵⁸ The movement was bent on exploiting the surging public sympathy for rescue in order to break the White Paper policy.

To this the British government was as opposed at the end of 1942 as it had been at the beginning of that year. Now, as then, Parliament was unwilling to compel the government to deviate from its policy while the war still raged. In March 1943 Lord Cranborne could reiterate in Parliament what he had declared a year earlier: that the government would not "go beyond the terms of the policy approved by Parliament."⁵⁹ Churchill, who had fiercely denounced the publication of the White Paper by the Chamberlain government, now wrote that he continued to have his reservations about the document but *because of war needs* this policy was currently being implemented and it "runs until it is superseded."⁶⁰

The confrontation which had previously found its external expression in the *Patria* and *Struma* affairs now became far more acute, with conditions appearing to have shifted in favor of the Zionist side. The pressure of public opinion, which called for concrete rescue measures, intensified to the point where it could not be mollified with mere declarations of support. Parts of the public and a few MPs insisted that Palestine be designated a major haven for the refugees. Behind the scenes lurked the pledge made to the Zionists in Lord Cranborne's letter to Berl Locker. In the Black Sea countries--Romania and Bulgaria--the prospects grew for a Jewish exodus if the Allies lent a hand.

In this situation the British government tried to maneuver. On the one hand London announced concessions regarding the entry of refugees into Palestine *within the White Paper framework*. On February 3, 1943, the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Stanley, pledged the following steps: (1) 4,000 children accompanied by 500 adults could enter Palestine from Bulgaria; (2) 500 children would be admitted from Romania and Hungary; and (3) if suitable means of transport were found the immigration of children with a commensurate accompaniment of adults would continue until the exhaustion of the White Paper quota for the five-year period ending in March 1944--a total of about 30,000 people.⁶¹

While the public received these assurances (which were not implemented) with satisfaction, the government was busy preparing an impressive campaign intended to induce calm and *reduce Parliamentary* pressure. A memorandum transmitted by the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, to the U.S. State Department on January 20 proposed the holding of a "private conference" of representatives from the two countries as the most effective means of responding to the public demands for rescue. The content of the memorandum, which was couched in amazingly frank language, indicates that at the time it was drafted London had already come up with its cruel "solution" to preserve the White Paper policy: as

⁵⁶ See Note 54.

⁵⁷ CZA, File S25/1853.

⁵⁸ Eliahu Dobkin at a meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee, CZA, File S25/1851.

⁵⁹ *Davar*, March 26, 1943.

⁶⁰ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. IV, p. 849.

⁶¹ Barlas, op. cit., p. 50.

the Zionists were continuing to insist that every refugee be admitted to Palestine, and their supporters in England and America were not relaxing the pressure on the government toward this end, London had decided to ensure that the number of refugees would be as small as possible--or that there would be no refugees at all.

Lord Halifax made the holding of the conference contingent on Palestine's not being considered as a haven for the refugees. No "false hopes" should be raised by the conference, Halifax wrote, cautioning that Germany and its satellites were liable to exchange their extermination policy for an expulsion policy and thus embarrass the Allies by flooding the world with refugees.⁶²

This was the first inking of what was to become the siege imposed by London on European Jewry. Two months later, in a meeting with President Roosevelt, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, took the matter up once more, intoning the cautious language of diplomacy, and citing the shortage of available ships for transporting refugees. When Secretary of State Cordell Hull proposed the urgent removal from Bulgaria of 60,000-70,000 Jews who faced annihilation, Eden replied that caution must be exercised concerning such proposals. "If we do that," he said, "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 are simply not enough ships and means of transportation in the world to handle them."

As an experienced diplomat Eden hurried to placate his interlocutor with the (false) pledge that England was ready to admit 60,000 Jews into Palestine. But transportation from Bulgaria to Palestine was also very difficult. In addition, he said, there was a security risk, namely that German agents would penetrate along with the masses of refugees. Summing up, Eden declared that at Bermuda his country would not make a lot of far-reaching promises "which cannot be kept due to a shortage of ships."⁶³

The siege on European Jewry was carried out against the will of the British people, and the Bermuda Conference was convened first and foremost to mislead the British about their government's intentions and actions. The fact that a proposal of this kind could be sent to and accepted in Washington attests to the nature and character of the American official who dealt with it. The standing and deeds of *Breckinridge Long* in the State Department and in the White House will be related at the appropriate place. Long, who represented the American government in the negotiations on the conference and oversaw its organization and

proceedings, was of one mind with the British concerning the true goal of the meeting.

The preparations for the conference lasted three months, with the British constantly prodding their partners. When at the end of a month there was still no official American assent to the meeting, the Parliamentary Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs complained that "public opinion in Britain had been rising to such a degree that the British government can no longer remain dead to it."

The two sides argued fiercely about details and procedures, of which the true meaning was: the division of responsibility between them before public opinion for a do-nothing posture regarding rescue. Each **side** tried to maneuver to ensure that the other side would bear the greater measure of blame. Endless clashes over these issues also took up a good deal of time at the actual conference, which opened on April 19 and ended on the 28th.⁶⁴

Consistent with its primary goal--misleading public opinion--the conference was held in strict secrecy. Nothing was made public from the deliberations with the exception of the opening speeches delivered by the two delegation heads. At the conclusion of the conference a statement was issued to the effect that the resolutions would not be published until the delegations consulted with their governments. Three weeks later an "interim report" was issued stating that the delegations were at work harmoniously on the final report, of which the details could not be revealed "so long as a knowledge of the recommendations contained therein would be of aid or comfort to our enemies or might adversely affect the refugees."

62 FRUS, 1943, Vol. I.

63 Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, Ch. 28, p. 325 in Bantam softcover edition.

64 A documented description of the Bermuda Conference and the preparations made for it appears in Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, which we have drawn on for some of the information.

It was not until half a year later, on November 19, 1943, that a brief, final communique was issued. Its evasive formulation could not conceal the fact that nothing had been decided and nothing had been done--nothing positive, that is.

From start to finish the Bermuda Conference was a shameful chapter in the attitude of the British and American governments toward the catastrophe of European Jewry. Not all the participants were as blameworthy as the initiators in London and their willing respondents in the State Department. But all bore moral responsibility. Nothing in what follows can mitigate this assertion.

The conference proved a disappointment to all concerned, with the exception of the Nazis. Those who anticipated concrete rescue efforts were disillusioned. Those who hoped that the conference would prove beneficial to the cause of *aliyah* were left embittered and frustrated. But

the greatest failure was sustained by the conference's organizers. Not only did they not obtain their objective of placating public opinion by means of imaginary actions, they achieved the very opposite. The proponents of rescue in England and America did not fall for the secrecy ploys or the vague promises. The publication of the opening speeches opened people's eyes to what was about to be perpetrated at Bermuda. A public furor arose that did not abate until the end of the conference and for many days thereafter. The Foreign Office, it turned out, and to some extent the State Department as well, did not rightly gauge the depth of the public's emotional involvement with the rescue effort.

Paradoxically, the conference's clear and visible failure was its only positive result. When it became universally apparent, without an iota of doubt, that salvation would not come from here, additional forces sprang up to advance the rescue cause. In the United States these forces scored a notable achievement: two months after the publication of the final report of the Bermuda Conference the institution that was generally consistent with the needs of rescue was, at long last and terribly late, established in Washington. (See Ch. 13.)

The conference's failure as a smokescreen for inaction suggests that the defeat of its organizers could have been more tangible. In an atmosphere of public opinion sympathetic to rescue, Bermuda became a focal point of interest and expectation. Had there been a *Jewish* element with public clout and closely affiliated with the developments, and able to properly guide those with good will in the international community, desirable results might well have been achieved during the conference or in its immediate aftermath.

The stand of principle toward the rescue of Jews was a key question that determined openly the reserved stance of the conference participants toward the enterprise they were supposed to advance. The final press release and a number of earlier statements said explicitly that it had been decided not to adopt any rescue proposals whose implementation "will interfere with the war efforts or cause their delay." This was a heartless declaration based in part on the whispered notion that no pretext should be given to antisemites who maintained that the war was being fought for the Jews. In practice the Jews found themselves in a position of extraordinary inferiority as compared with other nations that took part in the war. England, which had launched the war for the sake of the Poles, and America, which had become entangled in the conflict when it placed its resources at Europe's disposal, now decided to make help to the Jews contingent precisely on its not hampering the attainment of their war

goals. They would never have put forward a proviso of this kind with respect to helping the Czechs, the Yugoslavs, or other allies: for in those cases it was self-evident that proffering help to them was itself an important war goal. To the British and Americans, the rescue of Jews was not a political-military mission as it was where an ally was at stake, but a humanitarian problem which, its importance notwithstanding, must not be allowed to slow down the war machine to the point where victory might be delayed. It sometimes happens that the senior partners in a military campaign are reluctant to execute a certain operation for a junior ally, but never would they dare speak to that ally as the heads of the Bermuda delegations spoke to the Jews.

One of the prerogatives of an ally is to call on its partners for help and participation in the form of *immediate reprisal* if the enemy violates the rules of war. When the Germans tried to use poison gas on the southern Russian front, Churchill

wasted not a minute in declaring that the Western allies would pay back the Germans if they did not desist immediately from their criminal action. No one suggested informing the Germans that they would get their just punishment--after the war.

Only immediate, vigorous and cruel retaliation had any chance of putting a halt to the slaughter of Jews. This could have been effected by a massive show-bombing of a civilian German population, accompanied by an explanation and warning as to what was being done and why. Alternatively, repressive measures could have been taken against Germans residing in the free world. Those in the ghettos knew this, and persons well acquainted with the subject also broached this possibility. In the Warsaw Ghetto it was said: "They should have rounded up a few tens of thousands of Germans from America, jailed them in concentration camps behind barbed wire, without food and water, and let them die of starvation and total deprivation, as we are being made to undergo in Poland."⁶⁵ Leon Feiner, the leader of the Polish Bund, told the Polish officer Jan Karski: "They [the Jewish leaders in the free world] know that no political action, no protests or promises to exact punishment *after* the war will help. None of these measures has the slightest influence on the Germans. The only thing that might have made an impression on them, and might perhaps also save the few Jews who will still be alive then, is if a certain number of Germans were executed abroad, with a declaration that if the Germans do not cease slaughtering the Jews, larger groups of Germans will be publicly shot. That is my opinion and everyone else's."⁶⁶

The Germans, for their part, considered reprisals to be reasonable and expected. They feared them and in some cases acted with restraint in

order to forestall them. It was for fear of reprisal that they did not harm Jewish prisoners-of-war from Western armies.⁶⁷ Foreign Minister Ribbentrop agreed to release American Jews from detention to prevent reprisals against Germans in the U.S.⁶⁸ And in Lublin a German officer said that reprisals were being staged against Germans in the U.S. because of German persecution of Jews in Poland--many Germans had been shot to death in America.⁶⁹

The Jewish organizations headed by Stephen Wise complained much about the inaction and unwillingness to help. They emphasized the special situation of the Jews, who alone had been singled out by the Nazis for total destruction. But not once did they exceed the bounds of humanitarian demands, never did they speak about reprisals. Around this time the Polish government suggested to the Zionist movement that it affiliate itself with the Polish demand for the bombing of non-strategic civilian targets in Germany accompanied by an announcement that the bombing was in retaliation for the mass murder in Poland. The proposal was discussed by the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem and a resolution was passed as ruled by Ben-Gurion: "The Executive does not concur in the proposal to demand the bombing of cities in Germany."⁷⁰

The date of this resolution was January 1943--after the famous November 23. By this time the Zionist leaders were supposed to know what was happening in Occupied Europe and believe the reports emanating from there. Now they were confronted with a proposal from a fellow sufferer, the Polish government, whose nation was being annihilated along with the Jews. Poland was an official ally in the war. It could not be put off with the argument that rescue efforts were liable to hinder the prosecution of the war. But Poland was widely suspected (for a long time by Jews, too) of deliberately exaggerating its descriptions of the atrocities, and its voice was not sufficiently heeded by the senior allies. The addition of the Jews, the representatives of the persecuted, who were being borne on waves of public sympathy, might have given the Polish demand a major boost and brought about air raids such as the one carried out against Budapest 18 months later. But the Polish proposal was turned down. The reprisal raids were not executed.

This is the place to note a fact which is not devoid of interest. We related earlier (Ch. 3) that in a cable to the Bermuda Conference from the Rescue Committee in Jerusalem, the passage demanding vigorous steps to put an immediate stop to the annihilation was omitted. We cited Gruenbaum's explanation: that the demand was

⁶⁵ Ringelblum, *Writings from the Ghetto* (Yiddish), Vol. I, p. 372.

⁶⁶ Melech Neustadt, *Destruction and Revolt of Polish Jewry* (Hebrew), p. 70.

⁶⁷ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, p. 401.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁷⁰ Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, January 10, 1943.

left out because it was thought that the slaughter had ceased and would not be renewed. We do

not know exactly what the authors of the resolutions and memoranda in New York thought. But it stands to reason that the considerations guiding them were not far removed from those of their colleagues in Jerusalem. Jewish organizations in America put forward three rescue plans with a view to the Bermuda Conference. Two of them, absolutely *identical* in content, were submitted to the conference by the World Jewish Congress and the Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs in which the eight largest organizations in the U.S. were represented. The third plan (though first chronologically) was incorporated in the mass rally held in Madison Square Garden in New York on March 1, 1943, at the initiative of the Emergency Committee. All three plans, for whom the authorized spokesman was Stephen Wise, were noteworthy for the fact that, like the Gruenbaum cable, they contained no demand to force the Germans to stop the destruction. The Madison Square Garden assembly, whose slogan was "Stop Hitler Now!," made do with a call to the United Nations to set up a "war crimes commission"--in other words, to threaten the Germans *with* punishment after the Allied victory. The two other plans did not even go that far.

* * * * *

One must surmise that the participants in the Bermuda Conference and, in contrast, people of good will who took an interest in events in Europe, were impressed by the moderation of the Jewish groups. At this time Nazi propaganda was engaged in colossal efforts to mislead world public opinion. Parallel to the total denial of the annihilation, different versions of a "compromise" were floated: True, many Jews are dying, but not because we are exterminating them. Or: Yes, there was a period of annihilation, but it was stopped completely. The notion of the "53 settlements" that was received with such fervent belief in Jerusalem, elsewhere sowed confusion and doubts. The fact that Jewish organizations were not demanding, above all, the immediate cessation of the slaughter reinforced the belief that currently, at least, there was no annihilation. For who better than the Jews know the true state of affairs...

Concrete results in forming an opinion of the unfolding events could have been obtained by the presentation of an orderly informative description, based as far as possible on documents and reliable testimonies and formulated in a solid and judicious style. Just such a description was submitted to the Bermuda Conference and also published. It appeared as the first chapter of a memorandum prepared by the World Jewish Congress.⁷¹ This is a document that will repay close study by scholars of the Holocaust.

The first chapter is entitled "Liquidation of Jewish Life in Europe" and it refers to annihilation as well. According to the memorandum, the primary cause of Jewish deaths is *forced starvation*. About half the chapter is given over to a detailed description of the restrictions imposed by the Germans on the supply of food to the Jews; how the Jews are being deprived of vitamin-rich foodstuffs; how small their bread, jam and sugar rations are, and so on. As a result, the memorandum states, over 47,000 Jews died in Warsaw in 1941, about one-tenth of the ghetto population.

In Germany, too, the memorandum relates, the situation is serious. A Hungarian visitor describes the situation of the Jews in Berlin in the following words: "The Jews in Berlin are very pale. Their faces are waxen, as though they already wore the mask of death. As I pass by one of them I can hear a soft rattling of his bones." Moreover: "It is said that last summer the German Minister of Food, Hermann Backe, proposed the mass extermination of the Jews in order to save food."

A second and no less effective means of annihilating Jews, the memorandum states, is their transportation to distant places in freight cars packed to overflowing. Hitler, it seems, was in the grip of *migromania* (transportation impulse) "from which the members of his nation are also not exempt." An expert on transportations on Himmler's staff, *Obersturmführer* Higge, calculated that 30 percent of the deportees died during the journey.

⁷¹ CZA, File S25/5299. The memorandum was first published in *Congress Weekly*, No. 30, April 1943, and appears as an appendix in *The Jewish Refugee* by Arye Tartakower and Kurt Grossmann.

The memorandum cites figures (generally correct) on the destruction of Jewish communities in various locales. A clear answer is furnished to the question of where the Jews have disappeared to: "The Jews are constantly transported from Germany, Austria, and the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to the concentration at Terezin Fort, from there to Poland, and *from Poland to the Nazi-Soviet front.*"

The submitters of the plan surmise that the majority of these people are exploited by the Nazis for their war effort, as long as they can be utilized for this purpose. However, there is no doubt that they are murdered when there is no longer any use for them in the Nazi war machine. In the meantime, their living, housing and work conditions are such that the process of destruction proceeds automatically.

The WJC report paints a grim picture, one that arouses fear and concern. But it was divorced from reality. The report was based on the testimony of the Germans and in fact concurred with their accounts in all important details. The notion of the high mortality rate on the journey as a major cause of Jewish deaths was a Nazi invention. The poet Yitzhak Katznelson, who read about it in a German paper, quotes it thus: "[The

Germans claim]: We did not kill the Jews. The Jews died en route to the concentration camps to which we transported them. This was the fate decreed for them... They died because they are weak. A weak and anemic people. Could we know that they were lacking in strength to this degree?"⁷² In particular, confirmation is given to the Nazi claim that the deported Jews are not murdered but are somewhere "in the East" where they are made to do forced labor for Germany's war aims.

As for the death camps, the gas chambers and the mass murders throughout Poland, Lithuania and Soviet Russia, these *simply do not appear* in the report. They were unconfirmed by the Germans and a "reliable" WJC document omitted them. The fact is that Stephen Wise, Nahum Goldmann and their associates still did not believe, in April 1943, that all these reports were completely truthful.

* * * * *

An epilogue to the Bermuda Conference throws an unexpected glaring light on the stand of one the parties concerned.

Six weeks after the Bermuda Conference a meeting took place in the White House between two presidents. It was to one of them, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a leader of the vast anti-Nazi alliance, that the Jews directed their appeals for help, as though to a court of last resort, and it was on him, ultimately, that the response to such appeals depended. The other, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization, was considered the chief spokesman of world Jewry. Weizmann was one of the main speakers at the Madison Square Garden rally and his remarks there are to this day cited as an epitome of the outcry sounded to the world.⁷³ Now the two men met face-to-face.

The meeting was arranged by Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, and its purpose was to enable Weizmann to explain to Roosevelt the Zionist movement's perception concerning the future of Palestine. However, in the light of the horrific events in Europe, it was only to be expected that Weizmann would take advantage of this singular opportunity to make a personal appeal to the President regarding the catastrophe of his people and the rescue issue, which was of supreme importance and urgency.

The meeting took place around noon on June 11 and lasted 53 minutes. Its content has come down to us from two documents, both written by Dr. Weizmann and preserved in the Weizmann Archives in Rehovot. The first document was written on the day of the meeting and contains a 16-point step-by-step description of the encounter. The second document is a memorandum about the meeting which was submitted the

following day to the Americans and was intended to stamp with an official character the important matters that were discussed. The memorandum was published among the documents in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.⁷⁴

If these two documents faithfully reflect what took place during those invaluable 53 minutes in Roosevelt's office, then there is no avoiding a single unequivocal

⁷² Yitzhak Katznelson, *Last Works*, Hakibbutz Hameuhad Publishing House, p. 196.

⁷³ Abba Eban, *My People*, p. 407.

⁷⁴ FRUS, 1943, Vol. IV, p. 972.

conclusion: *Not one word* was said about the Holocaust or rescue during the entire meeting. Literally so: not a word! The (Zionist) president, it turns out, was busy...

Chapter Twelve

Sluggishness

Weizmann, if asked to explain his blunder of silence in the meeting with Roosevelt, would of course readily have cited any number of weighty reasons. A meeting with the President of the United States is not easily arranged. Its duration is not unlimited and every minute has to be exploited for the subject at hand. The meeting, Weizmann believed, was absolutely crucial for the future of Zionism which then stood at a crossroads. Had he brought up the Holocaust, Roosevelt would undoubtedly have asked questions and gone into the issue at some length--at the expense of Zionism.

It was all a matter of the essential and the non-essential. Because of circumstances, tendencies and twisted thinking, the non-essential became the unimportant, and in certain instances, an object of active opposition. Earlier in this book we examined a number of such cases, all deriving from the fear of territorialism. In the preceding chapter we took note of another phenomenon: Zionism's consistent rejection of any rescue effort that did not involve *aliyah*, and its attempt to secure the annulment of the White Paper through the pressure of Jewish distress.

Alongside active or semi-active interference generated by an imaginary conflict between the aims of rescue and the immediate objectives of (fragmented) Zionism, there was also passive interference, the result of apathy and uncaring. When the Zionists saw no reason to interfere with a specific rescue operation, they did not hurry to carry it out because they were busy with more important matters, and the more they concentrated on their principal enterprise, the more sluggish their rescue activity grew. In this chapter we will examine several cases in which sluggishness played a crucial role in the behavior of Zionist would-be rescuers.

We will begin by mentioning a superb literary-journalistic work by a Zionist thinker who tried to rebel against reality--a composition that is virtually an essay on sluggishness. *Haim Greenberg*, the head of the Poalei Zion party and one of the leading Zionist intellectuals in America, published in the party's weekly an article whose content and style were unmistakably meant to shock his readers.¹ The article was entitled "Bankruptcy" and opened with these words: "Perhaps the time has come for other countries, those few left on this planet in which Jewish communities can still voice their opinions and worship openly, perhaps the time has come for them to declare a public fast and a day of prayer for

American Jewry. This is not a printing error--a public fast and a day of prayer for the five million Jews in America." This, because of the "calamity of vacuity, insensitivity and callousness" that has gripped these Jews in the face of the distress of European Jewry.

¹ Haim Greenberg, "Bankrupt," *Iddisher Kempfer*, February 12,

1943. A Hebrew translation of the original Yiddish, under the title "American Jewry's Failure," appeared in *Davar*, July 30, 1943.

In three densely printed pages the author goes on to excoriate the Jewish organizations in the U.S. for their unconscionable behavior which is totally unbecoming given the needs of the terrible hour. It is behavior marked by apathy, disunity, lethargy, indolence, and other phenomena subsumable under the category of sluggishness. As it begins, so the article also ends on a note of despair: "I must admit candidly that from all of the above I am unable to draw concrete and practical conclusions. If objectively there is something that can be done, I do not know who will do it or how. All I know is that all of us, all five million American Jews with our organizations, our committees and our leaders, have reached a state of moral and political bankruptcy. And I refuse to comprehend over what and why we have all reached this state of nadir and abasement..."

A week later Greenberg published a second piece in the same style. This time he denounced the cruel struggle that his party and movement were waging against the sending of food parcels to Jews in the ghettos. This article was entitled "Break the Siege!",² and in it Greenberg pointed out that in the course of nine months of the previous year 80,000 tons of food had been shipped to occupied Greece for the hungry population there. Why, he wants to know, not for the Jews?

"We ask that at least now, after such a lengthy delay for which history will never forgive us, we begin to understand that an economic siege of one hundred percent [on Germany] is not axiomatic."

Regretfully, he notes: "With the possible exception of *Agudat Israel* [emphasis in the original] we do not know of a single Jewish organization that in the course of the three most difficult years in our history was capable of freeing itself from the fear lest it be accused of Jewish egocentrism. Everyone was afraid that our patriotism, our readiness to make sacrifices for the sake of the general victory, would be called into question, that we would be castigated for seeking excessive privileges for Jews. We lacked the courage to issue a declaration that would have been so understandable: that it was not extra privileges we sought but recognition of our right to live."

Thus, according to all the indications, ended the campaign of rebuke launched by the rebellious Zionist leader. He published no more articles in this spirit. Although he devoted part of his opening speech at his party's convention in April to the Holocaust, he no longer spoke in a tone

of chastisement or as a fighter for change. Haim Greenberg was a thinker and a man of conscience in his party and in the Zionist movement. But when it came to practical politics, others ran the show. A few years earlier he was reprimanded for having innocently supported a plan to resettle refugees in Alaska, and he swallowed the reproof. Now his fighting spirit sufficed for a few weeks, and then faded.

Greenberg's fiery articles in New York, like David Zakai's trenchant piece in Tel Aviv, demonstrate that there were some righteous men in Sodom but that their righteousness did not long endure. Yet unlike Zakai's brief contribution, Greenberg's detailed articles are full of valuable information about developments in the American Jewish community to which the author was a witness. For our purposes, we will quote (from his first article) what he had to say about the Zionists:

"But there are among us Zionists who have accepted the idea that it is in any case impossible to halt the process of destruction and therefore *the opportunity should be exploited* to demonstrate to the world the Jewish tragedy of homelessness and *reinforce the demand for a national home in Eretz-Israel* (a home for who? for the millions of dead in makeshift graveyards in Europe?)." (Emphases added.)

"There are among us Zionists" was a ringing understatement. The entire movement--institutions, leaders and branches--was at this time engaged in feverish activity with a view to the future: the post-war future. In the midst of the propaganda campaign concerning the Bermuda Conference the Zionist leadership published an appeal "To the People in Zion and All the Dispersions." It was signed by Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Professor Brodetsky, and others. Jews throughout the world were called upon to purchase the Zionist Shekel and prepare themselves for the post-war era. "Victory is on the horizon, and discussions are already beginning about the peace alliance and plans are being made for the day of judgment after the war. We, too, must commence these preparations."³

² Haim Greenberg, "Brecht di Blockade!," *Iddisher Kempfer*, February 19, 1943.

³ *Ha'aretz*, March 10, 1943.

In 1943 Zionism was looking to the future--to the fulfillment of the Biltmore Program regarding the establishment of a Jewish state in EretzIsrael. The conditions currently prevailing were viewed as a foundation on which the longed-for future would be built. The catastrophe of European Jewry was part of that foundation and must be exhaustively exploited to ensure success. Ben-Gurion addressed the prospects for such success:

“There are two things now which did not exist then: a large Yishuv in Eretz-Israel and a large disaster in Europe.”⁴

This was a propitious moment for Zionism and it was utilized with un-sparing energy on the internal and external fronts alike. In the decade beginning in 1930 the membership of the Zionist movement in America grew nearly thirty-fold, from 15,000 to 400,000.⁵ And it went on growing in the war years. With this numerical increase came greater strength, more influence--and heightened militancy. The Stephen Wise group, which at one and the same time controlled the Zionist Organization of America, the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, dominated the Jewish public's contacts with the White House and the State Department. In Jewish roof-organizations the Zionists adopted a highhanded attitude and pressured their partners to accept the Zionist policy that yoked rescue together with *aliyah* and the establishment of a Jewish state. The Joint Emergency Committee which was created in January 1943 and operated during the Bermuda Conference collapsed under the weight of internal differences and quarrels. August saw the formation of the American Jewish Conference, under the solid control of the Zionists, their chief rivals having withdrawn.

A similar story played itself out in England. In July 1943 the Zionists took firm control of the Board of Jewish Deputies. Using their majority, they annulled the decades-long agreement with the non-Zionist philanthropic organization Hevrat Ahim under which a joint committee for foreign relations had operated. The Zionist leader Selig Brodetsky became president of the Board of Deputies and the authoritative representative of British Jewry, the counterpart of Stephen Wise in America.

Bolstered by their impressive successes on the internal front, the Zionists pushed ahead with their efforts toward the attainment of their exclusive goal on the external front. The priority accorded to Zionism over rescue, which received its extreme expression in the Weizmann-Roosevelt meeting, runs like a thread through all spheres of the movement's activity. Zionism benefited from unflagging attention, a judicious approach, and a maximum utilization of resources. Rescue efforts, even if they did not conflict (fancifully) with the goals of Zionism, got whatever thinking and doing was left over. Zionism was a vital matter with a clearcut program. As for rescue, it was doubtful whether anything could be done. Zionism could brook no delay; rescue could wait until there was time for it, if time could be made.

* * * * *

In contrast to Haim Greenberg's emotional articles, written with a broken heart, the passages from the memoirs we are about to quote seem taken from an entirely different region on the scale of credibility and

sincerity. Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who on more than occasion after the war denounced the behavior of Jewish leaders during the Holocaust period, apparently decided to introduce some order into these revelations. In his memoirs⁶ he writes that blame attaches to all the leading spokesmen for the Jewish people in that period, and he does not exclude himself. But there were “more and less” blameworthy persons, and Goldmann would certainly have us think he was in the latter category. Once, he relates, a desperate request was received from Polish Jewry to the leaders of the American Jewish community to take drastic and dramatic steps, such as a sit-down strike by a dozen Jewish leaders on the steps of the White House or the State Department, until the U.S. government declared its readiness to take vigorous action to save the Jews of Poland. “Today this demand seems somewhat naive, but I nevertheless believe, *then as now*, in the possibility that desperate and extraordinary actions could

⁴ David Ben-Gurion, In the Campaign (Hebrew), Vol. IV, p. 102.

⁵ Henry Feingold, The Politics of Rescue, p. 13.

⁶ Nahum Goldmann, Memoirs (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1972, p. 186.

ultimately have brought about some action.” The writer does not say with whom he shared these unusual views and under what circumstances, or what the results were. Nor does he mention another Jewish leader, Ziegelboim by name, who advocated desperate measures and when he was unable to find support undertook such a step on his own, without waiting for others. On the other hand, Goldmann emphasizes the firm stand he took on another question: “I insisted repeatedly that the Jewish organizations should undertake negotiations with the Nazis on a *ransom* and offer them large sums of money in return for at least some Jews.” Goldmann also believes that President Roosevelt, had he been asked, would have assented to this plan despite the economic boycott on Germany. “I was unable to convince the leaders of American Jewry of the rightness of my view, and the fact that they refrained from approaching the head of the American administration was what doomed *my plan* to failure.” (Emphases added.)

Amazingly, we could find no traces of a struggle or debate among the American Jewish leadership for or against any “Goldmann Plan.” Dr. Goldmann himself does not reveal whom he tried to convince and under what circumstances or what action he took when his efforts proved unavailing. Instead he gives his account of something that did happen.

“In 1943 I received a report that the Gestapo authorities in Romania were ready, in return for a large sum of money, to permit a group of Jews, mainly children, to emigrate. We immediately asked the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., for permission to transfer the funds. President Roosevelt raised no objections and Morgenthau gave his agreement then and there. Unfortunately, in this case State Department approval was also required. The negotiations with Hull

and his aides dragged on and on, and when the imposed agreement was finally received, it was too late.”

Against Dr. Goldmann’s account, written in very general terms 30 years after the event, we can pit the fresher version of Stephen Wise, published just a few years after the war. In his autobiography Wise devoted a special chapter to what he called “Death by Bureaucracy,”⁷ and the following story is at its center:

“Early in 1943 we were informed by Riegner [Gerhart Riegner, the WJC representative in Switzerland] that nearly 70,000 Jews from France and Romania could be saved and Jews transferred from Poland to Hungary, where organized extermination had not yet begun.” To this end, Wise wrote, funds had to be deposited in Switzerland for transfer to certain Nazi officials after the war. Wise took this proposal to President Roosevelt on July 22, stressing to him that the Nazis would not come into possession of the money before peace was declared. “Our army will see to it that these Nazi mercenaries will not reap the gains of their extortion.”

Roosevelt’s reply came as a pleasant surprise: “Stephen, if this is so, why aren’t you going ahead with it?” Wise said he hadn’t dared put the proposal to the Treasury Secretary before getting Roosevelt’s approval. Hearing this, the President picked up the phone and spoke to Morgenthau: “Stephen is making a fair proposal about ransoming Jews from Poland to Hungary.”

The following day Wise sent Roosevelt a memorandum summing up their talk. It was later learned, from Morgenthau’s diary, that Roosevelt sent him the memorandum, instructing him to convey it to the Secretary of State together with the go-ahead for its implementation.

All this took place on July 22-23. Yet it was not until December 18 that the State Department issued the license for the transfer of the funds. Wise concludes the story in sorrow and fury: “*Five full months went by from the time this license was approved by the President of the United States, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury.* Let history, therefore, record for all time that were it not for the State Department and Foreign Office bureaucratic bungling and callousness, thousands of lives might have been saved and the Jewish catastrophe partially averted.”

It is difficult not to be impressed by the depth of Wise’s bitterness and the justness of his case. But his words give rise immediately to an unavoidable question: What, actually, did Stephen Wise himself do in those five precious months? What did his colleagues and aides do when in their hands was the possibility, in Wise’s own words, to “partially avert”

⁷ Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years*, pp. 274-279.

the Holocaust, and on their side was the support of the President of the United States and two powerful Cabinet ministers?

It turns out that they did nothing. They did not lobby, did not press for action, and according to all the signs they did not know what was going on. Wise's formulation implies that he learned about Roosevelt's relaying of the memorandum to Morgenthau and his order to the two ministers *afterward*, from Morgenthau's diary. It was from that same source that he learned about the delays in the State Department. Neither in Wise's own writings nor anywhere else did we find a mention or even a hint that during these five months Jewish leaders tried to intervene, exercise influence, or even inform themselves about the course of events in such a crucial matter. If we have not failed by overlooking material, it seems probable that sluggishness concerning the rescue of Jews was not characteristic of the State Department alone.

* * * * *

In the following section we consider a story set down in great detail in an orderly and properly documented report,⁸ with supplementary points from a recorded conversation between the author and the compiler of the report.⁹ The subject of the story is an attempt to rescue children.

On November 30, 1942, a week after the Zionist movement officially acknowledged the existence of the Holocaust, the Jewish Agency Executive in London decided to dispatch two emissaries for a limited time to carry out rescue operations, one to Spain and Portugal, the other to Sweden. Two refugee-functionaries volunteered for the mission, Wilfrid Israel and Shalom Adler-Rudell, the author of the report. Wilfrid Israel, who was sent to Spain and Portugal, was killed when the plane taking him back to London crashed, and the little that is known about his mission is contained in a memorandum he left with the British ambassador in Spain and from some incidental comments by Yitzhak Weissman who was in Portugal as the representative of Dr. Silbershein's office and of the World Jewish Congress.¹⁰ Adler-Rudell's mission is the subject of his article.

Regarding the motive that underlay the Jewish Agency's decision to dispatch the emissaries, Adler-Rudell writes: "Frustration and disillusionment moved the Jewish Agency in London to take matters into their hands." In a conversation with the author Mr. Adler-Rudell was more forthright:

"I think that the Executive in London pressured the Executive in Jerusalem [to dispatch the emissaries] out of *shame*. They were ashamed that they had done nothing and wanted to show that they were doing

something. They found two 'crazies,' one named Israel and the other Adler-Rudell. One returned and the other did not. They said they were willing to go."

The Jewish Agency Executive, he says, "was not enthusiastic" about his mission. His budget was limited to £200 and no specific goal was set. Nor did he himself have any definite plan when he set out; the plan he came up with was engendered in part en route and in part after he arrived. That plan was to bring to Sweden 20,000 Jewish children from German-occupied areas.

After much preparation, Adler-Rudell arrived in Stockholm on February 24, bearing documentation and letters of recommendation from various institutions and persons. The story of his exploits in Sweden during two months can serve as an instructive example of the possibilities open to whoever is bent on seeking them out with all his might. Adler-Rudell was not a total stranger in Stockholm, having visited the city on several occasions before the war as the representative of a number of Jewish organizations. Now he renewed his old contacts and feverishly sought additional contacts that could be of assistance to him and put him in touch with the Swedish government. In the first days after his arrival he met with Rabbi Ehrenpreis, as well as with the head of the Jewish Community, the leaders of the local Zionist Federation, and other public figures. He paid several visits to the British and American embassies and to the missions of Holland, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Well-wishers arranged for him to meet with writers and journalists and with influential persons from various public circles.

⁸ S. Adler-Rudell, "History of the Rescue Efforts," *Year Book XI* of the Leo Baeck Institute, London, pp. 213-241.

⁹ Conversation with Mr. S. Adler-Rudell, October 3, 1972.

¹⁰ Yitzhak Weissman, *In the Face of the Titans of Evil* (Hebrew), p.90.

Adler-Rudell notes February 27 as a successful day. Quite by chance that day he met a young Jewish refugee, a social-democrat from Austria who had resided in Sweden for several years and maintained good contacts with the leaders of the ruling Social-Democratic party. This refugee, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, offered to set up a meeting between Adler-Rudell and the Swedish minister of welfare, Gustav Mahler, to whom Adler-Rudell had a letter of recommendation from Mahler's colleague in the Socialist International, Berl Locker.

The meeting took place on March 5. The minister was pleased to get regards from his friend Locker and revealed that he had always taken a sympathetic interest in questions relating to the Jews. The emissary told him about the travails of European Jewry and explained his plan in some detail. The Swedish government would announce officially that Sweden was ready to admit 20,000 Jewish children from Germany and the occupied countries. Adler-Rudell pointed out that on an earlier occasion,

after World War I, Sweden had opened its gates to German children, and now it had the right to expect a quid pro quo for that good deed. The timing for the project was exactly right, Adler-Rudell argued. Sweden had just allowed the Germans to ship iron ore from Norway via Swedish territory and to move German troops through Sweden to Denmark. Relations between the two countries were quite friendly.

The minister was deeply moved by the description of the Jewish catastrophe but saw no chance to implement the emissary's plan. In his view, the German government would most probably reject any discussion about the fate of the Jews while his own government would take no action that was clearly foredoomed.

Adler-Rudell was not to be put off. He reiterated his reasoning from several points of view. At the end of a lengthy and wearying talk Mahler promised to reconsider the points raised by the emissary and to exchange words on the plan with the prime minister. He would inform Adler-Rudell of the results within a few days.

On March 10 Mahler summoned Adler-Rudell to his office and informed him that the Swedish government had rejected the plan. The emissary's efforts had come to a gloomy end. The answer was negative and there seemed to be no avenue of appeal. We will give Adler-Rudell's reaction to this disappointing outcome in his own words: "It was a crushing blow. I was close to despair. All that remained for me to do was to thank him for his support and for the trouble he had taken. But I felt that this could not be my final word. I asked him a question: How would he react if he knew that a malicious force was about to attack Sweden and annihilate its entire population--would he not disregard all the usual rules and try to avert the danger? Naturally, he replied, he would do all in his power to save his people. Well, I said, that is precisely the situation I find myself in. I continued to appeal to him to renew his efforts. Somehow he was touched by my words and he agreed to try again."

Now came a turnabout. The conventional thinking of the liberal ministers yielded to the persistence of the desperate lobbyist... Things began to move in the right direction. True, the movement was slow, creaky and sporadic. But with a devoted and alert approach it was possible to overcome obstacles and achieve concrete results. While the Swedish ministers were reviewing the subject, Adler-Rudell kept up vigorous pressure in various circles of the Swedish public. Through the Jewish Agency in New York he obtained the assent and encouragement of Washington. A month later, on April 13, Mahler phoned to inform him

that the government had decided to accept his plan and that he should contact the government's First Secretary, Eric Boheman.

A meeting with Boheman showed Adler-Rudell that congratulations were not yet in order. Boheman, the "strong man" in the government, gave the decision a reserved interpretation that placed serious obstacles on the way to its implementation. It took a week of intensive clarifications before Adler-Rudell and Boheman agreed on the final version of the plan:

1. The Swedish government is ready to propose to the German government that Sweden admit 20,000 Jewish children aged 5-15 from Germany and German-occupied countries.

2. For practical reasons, the evacuation of the children will be carried out beginning from countries in the west and proceeding eastward. (Boheman insisted on this formulation, as he did not believe the Germans would agree to release Jewish

children from Poland. Adler-Rudell responded by saying that if Jewish children could be saved, he did not think that concentration on one area was worse than another area.)

3. The British and American governments are prepared to defray the costs of maintaining the children and agree to a commensurate increase of Swedish food imports.

4. Following the war those governments will take steps to have the children removed from Sweden.

On that same day, April 20, Adler-Rudell met with the British and American ambassadors to inform them of the final outcome of the negotiations. The two congratulated him on his success and pledged to intercede for him with their governments. A document included in the report shows that the two fulfilled their pledges acceptably.

Unfortunately, Adler-Rudell was compelled to leave Sweden. "My mission to Stockholm," he writes in the report, "had come to an end." The recorded conversation with Adler-Rudell suggests that the funds allotted him had run out and he returned to his family in London. No one replaced him in Stockholm, the central venue of the unfolding events. Coordination of the plan was transferred to London and placed in foreign hands, dooming it to failure.

The mechanics of that failure are not without interest. After receiving Adler-Rudell's report, the Jewish Agency Executive in London decided on a series of measures. Dr. Weizmann, then in New York, was requested by cable to intercede with the State Department to speed up the plan's realization. In addition, Adler-Rudell was to seek help from the

Foreign Office in London, the American ambassador to Britain, and Sir Herbert Emerson.

We found no traces of Dr. Weizmann's efforts in this area, not in his own archives and not in American documents. Undoubtedly Weizmann's personal intervention would very likely have helped. But at this time, in May 1943, matters in the State Department were moving along at a brisk pace in the wake of the shot in the arm injected by Adler-Rudell's activity in Stockholm. The same was true in the Foreign Office, where Adler-Rudell was greeted with congratulations on his success. It seems likely that both powers would have been pleased to lend a hand to a rescue mission that did not demand from them excessive sacrifices. To feed 20,000 children was not an intolerable burden for them, the more so as the Jewish philanthropic organizations in these countries would willingly have participated in this great moral imperative. The Bermuda Conference had just ended without result and its organizers were amenable to presenting the rescue project in Sweden as an achievement of the conference. This readiness was expressed with some fervor by Sir Herbert Emerson, the director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees which was resurrected in Bermuda. Emerson's letter of reply to Adler-Rudell's memorandum on his mission (submitted after he had first made a verbal report) concluded with an ardent appreciation for his accomplishment: "Please allow me to again express my warmest congratulations for the results you achieved in Sweden."

Emerson could have been of immense help in realizing the plan if the Jewish Agency had applied persistent pressure. But this is not what happened. The Jewish Agency Executive made no decision about continuing the activity in Stockholm. Adler-Rudell was not sent back to Sweden and no one was sent in his place. Emerson was approached not to enlist his help but to get him to assume the entire burden. Emerson acceded to this request and did the work--in his own way and fashion.

Weeks and then months went by. The plan to rescue 20,000 Jewish children was a subject of clarifications between American and British diplomats. Both countries viewed the project sympathetically, but they arrived at no final conclusions and achieved no results. The Intergovernmental Committee, which took over the project, was busy with reorganizing itself after some years of dormancy. And most critically--there was no one in Stockholm for whom the rescue of children was more important and more precious than any other consideration.

On August 11 Adler-Rudell met with Emerson. When he opened the conversation by noting that *three months* had passed with nothing to

show for it, Emerson stopped him quite sharply. That is not true, he said. We did not waste a minute. The plan is under constant perusal and the negotiations are continuing. He did not yet know (sic) for certain whether Britain and the U.S. would

want to handle the plan by themselves or charge the Intergovernmental Committee with its implementation. In his view the plan must not be abandoned even though the political situation had changed (for the worse). Once Sweden received from Britain and the U.S. the guarantees it sought, it would have the alternative of taking action or refusing. The Germans too would have the choice of accepting or not accepting the proposal...

A few years earlier, it will be recalled (Ch. 8), Sir Herbert Emerson taught the virtues of nobility to a group of Jewish functionaries headed by Wilfrid Israel (since killed on the way back from his mission to Spain) who came from Germany to solicit his help in allaying the fury of the killer Heydrich. Now he was presented with an opportunity to express amazement and wrath at the impatience of another Jewish lobbyist. For three full months ministers and ambassadors, he himself among them, had been dealing with this matter of 20,000 Jewish children. Issuing instructions and drafting reports. Negotiating in writing and orally. And now this pest was in a hurry, and instead of expressing his appreciation for the trouble high-ranking people were taking over the children of his people, he was complaining about an absence of results...

The diplomatic handling of the "Swedish" plan went on for a few more months, until it became unmistakably clear that there was no prospect whatsoever for its implementation. The plan's fate was sealed the moment the devoted care in Stockholm came to an end. The Swedish government had agreed to the plan after an initial refusal and hesitations. It had done so under the moral pressure of the desperate Jewish lobbyist. As liberal as the government might be, it could not be expected to pursue the project after even the Jews concerned had abandoned it. The generous offer which had its source in the meeting of March 10 died a natural death when such meetings came to a halt. A year later, in April 1944, the Swedish ambassador in London explained cogently to his American counterpart why, with all his sympathy for the plan, he did not think there was the slightest chance that his government would try to execute it. Adler-Rudell sums up his article sadly:

"This was the end of a rescue effort that could have succeeded, as the senior statesmen of the three countries involved--Sweden, America and Britain--agreed to the plan. But its implementation got caught in an indifferent and sluggish bureaucracy, and nothing came of it."

Very true. The details may be found above.

* * * * *

The apprehensions of the Swedish ministers that the Nazis would not agree to negotiate the release of children was well-founded. Those apprehensions stemmed from the cruel image of the Nazis, who made no secret of their enmity for the Jews or of their determination to "deal with" them without permitting outside intervention. In retrospect, the results would seem to endorse the impression that the perception of the impermeability of the Nazi wall was correct and that there was no place for negotiations on the release of Jews, whether children or adults. With only a few very exceptional cases involving no more than tens or hundreds of people, the Germans, from 1941, did not consent to any formal talks that brought about the rescue of Jews in general and children in particular.

In fact this was a slothful concept, of the same species that in Israel was mockingly termed the *konseptzia* ("conception") and which produced the initial failures in the Yom Kippur War. In Israel it was convenient for the heads of Military Intelligence not to overwork their power of judgment and to place a calming interpretation on information about the enemy's war preparations. In the Holocaust it was convenient for friends who were not "fathers" (as we defined that term) to soothe their conscience with the argument that, one way or the other, nothing could be accomplished in the face of the Nazis' determination. The fact that the Nazis never released groups of children in return for some sort of quid pro quo or under the pressure of external forces does not mean that a deal of this kind was out of the question. Clear signs exist that the Nazis themselves took this possibility into account and from time to time prepared for its realization. Of the vast numbers of children who were murdered, one and a half million in all, they kept alive in various places groups of thousands of children who could have served as reservoirs for exchange deals, monetary extortion, or demonstrative "humanitarian" gestures toward free-world

public opinion. In Auschwitz three thousand children remained alive for a certain period, concentrated in two special blocs.¹¹ In Estonia, near Tallin, according to plausible rumors, there was a camp containing two thousand children.¹² In Bucharest the Romanian ruler Antonescu maintained that Hitler had agreed to his proposal to release 70,000 Jewish children in return for a hefty payment to the Romanian treasury.¹³ Nazi officials negotiated with the British government via the Swiss for the transport of 5,000 children from Bulgaria to Palestine, with Eichmann demanding in return 20,000 young Germans of military age.¹⁴ If one can believe the Nazi Wisliceny, Eichmann, at Hitler's order, was going to

gather 10,000 children in Theresienstadt in order to ship them to Palestine, a project that was cancelled at the behest of the Grand Mufti, Amin alHusseini.¹⁵ We know for certain the fate of 1,260 children from Bialystok who were taken from their parents when the ghetto was liquidated, removed from Bialystok on August 17, 1943, arrived in Theresienstadt on the 24th and remained there for six weeks under conditions of relative recovery. On October 3 the children left accompanied by 53 counselors who were made to sign a commitment not to disseminate hostile propaganda against the Nazi regime abroad. All of them, the children and the counselors, were taken to Auschwitz and murdered.¹⁶ These reports, some of which, at least, have been absolutely authenticated, are sufficient to refute the contention that there was no prospect of rescuing children through political means and deals. Along with the lust for murder and the drive to carry out in full the program to annihilate the Jewish people, Nazi leaders at various levels were also impelled by other motives, such as greed, forced consideration for the Allies and public opinion, concern to save their own skins in the event of defeat, and other factors which could have been exploited for rescue.

* * * * *

As fate would have it, along with fragmentary evidence, the history of the Holocaust contains a complete testimony concerning talks on a rescue operation with *leaders* of the Nazi establishment, talks that in their initial, limited version were maintained in practice for two years and in their full scope were brought to an end by the sluggishness of would-be rescuers. The affair in question, which appears in correspondence from those days under the heading of "the rabbis' proposal" or "the proposal of the Slovak rabbis," was described in detail by its initiator and implementer, *Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel*.¹⁷ His account is confirmed in its major details by the Nazi Dieter Wisliceny mentioned above¹⁸ and by the testimony of those involved in the deal on the Jewish side, Dr. Yirmiahu (Oscar) Neumann and the engineer Ondrei Steiner.¹⁹

The events in Slovakia occurred against the backdrop of a unique concatenation of circumstances and factors. There was a saliently antisemitic government that made the expulsion of the Jews a key element in its policy and urged the Germans to remove them as soon as possible. This government even paid (from looted Jewish property) 500 Reichsmarks for every Jew deported. President Tiso, an orthodox Catholic priest, refused to heed the frequent messages from the court of the Pope, who opposed the deportations.²⁰ And there was the prime minister, Tuka, who during two years kept demanding that the Nazis permit him to visit

the camps to which the Jews were exiled so that he could see for himself that the rumors about their extermination were unfounded.

The official appointed by the Nazis to deal with Slovak Jewry, as an "adviser" to the government, was an unusual SS officer. Dieter Freier von Wisliceny was an "extremely interesting" person, according to the Holocaust researcher Gerald

¹¹ Eichmann trial, testimony of Yosef Klinman and Nahum Hoch.

¹² Eliezer Yerushalmi, *The Shavli Register*, p. 358.

¹³ Reitlinger, p. 406.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Confession of Wisliceny while in his Bratislava prison.

¹⁶ Otto Kraus and Erich Kulka, *The Auschwitz Death Factory* (Hebrew), p. 109.

¹⁷ Michael Dov Weissmandel, *From the Depths*.

¹⁸ The passage relating to the subject at hand appears in Livia Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jewry* (Hebrew), p. 243.

¹⁹ Dr. Yirmiahu Neumann, *In the Shadow of Death* (Hebrew). Steiner's testimony is quoted according to Rothkirchen (Note 18).

²⁰ Rothkirchen, op. cit., p. 30. For details, see the article by Rothkirchen in *Yad Vashem Studies* No. 6 (Hebrew).

Reitlinger.²¹ Dr. Neumann, who was in frequent contact with him, attests that he “was unfailingly polite even toward Jews.” In his office, Neumann relates, “an atmosphere of trust was woven” between him and the Jewish officials.²² Observers in Greece said that in contrast to his fellow-Nazis who arrived with him to liquidate Greek Jewry, Wisliceny evinced the manners of a nobleman.²³ Pinhas Freudiger and Israel Kastner, who knew him in Hungary, also note that he was courteous and even affable toward certain Jews.²⁴

Wisliceny’s “liberal” and ostensibly humane attitude proved of considerable help in his efforts to annihilate the Jews of the three countries in which he operated. The expulsion of Slovak Jewry under his command was carried out with maximum efficiency. Contributing to this was the “atmosphere of trust” that Wisliceny forged. He told the Jews that they would establish a new homeland for themselves in Poland and advised them to train the youth in various professions, particularly building. The department for vocational training of the “Jewish Central Organization” (*Judenzentrale*) received crucial aid from him. But there was another large and important department²⁵, that of statistics, which supplied Wisliceny with an abundance of useful information to facilitate the deportations.

It was explained to the Jews that the first to go to the new location would be the young people, who would build the homes for the families to follow. The Jews had no choice but to accept this harsh decree and cooperate. The Jewish Central Organization helped collect the Jews in the transit camps and informed the deportees about the items they were permitted to take with (luggage of up to 50 kg., three suits, eight shirts, 12 pairs of socks, three pairs of shoes, two coats, and so forth). The first transport, which departed for Auschwitz on March 26, 1942, was made up of 1,000 girls and young women who marched to the train on a rainy day covered with blankets and singing *Hatikva*.²⁶ In their wake 16,000 more young people were taken to Auschwitz and Majdanek (Lublin). They were not murdered immediately upon their arrival but were put to work building the camps’ structures and facilities.

Following the young people came the turn for the supposed “family reunification” and the rest of the Jews. The operation assumed a

regular pattern. Every Tuesday and Friday a 40-car train left for Auschwitz or Lublin, 75 persons to a car, 3,000 persons per train.

In the meantime Wisliceny’s direct reliance on the Jewish Central Organization lessened somewhat. His trust and his favors were won by a confused and capricious young man named Carol Hochberg who worked in the statistics department and provided excellent data. Wisliceny appointed him director of the department for “special tasks” and made him his right-hand man. Hochberg, who said he hoped to become the governor of the Jews in Madagascar, became the chief intermediary between Wisliceny and the Jewish community. Rabbi Weissmandel had no choice but to operate through this dubious person.

Rabbi Michael Dov (Michel-Ber) Weissmandel, “an almost legendary figure of nobility during the Holocaust,”²⁷ was the son-in-law of the revered Rabbi Shmuel David Unger from Nietra and active in religious circles in Slovakia. Dr. Yirmiahu Neumann, one of the leaders of the Jewish Central Organization, describes him as follows:²⁸

For those engaged in rescue the most interesting and most important factor was the son-in-law of the elderly rabbi of the Kolel, the Torah sage Reb Michel-Ber Weissmandel. It was he who undertook to be the intermediary for the affairs of the *Haredim* [ultra-Orthodox]. Whoever saw this figure for the first time, with his deformed face, could never have imagined what lofty virtues he harbored. The very appearance of this man, with his unkempt beard and long earlocks, in a Nazified city attested to great courage. Indeed, thugs often taunted him as he walked innocently in the street. But none of this could induce him to effect any change in his external appearance or to stay away from danger. He had a young wife and sons and daughters

21 Reitlinger, p. 386.

22 Neumann, pp. 28-29.

23 Michael Molcho and Yosef Nehama, *The Holocaust of Greek Jewry* (Hebrew), p. 71.

24 Testimony of Freudiger and Kastner in the Greenwald trial, and of Freudiger in the Eichmann trial.

25 Neumann, p. 47.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

27 Joseph Tenenbaum, *Race and Reich* (Hebrew), p. 525.

28 Neumann, p. 89.

to look after, and lived out his days in dire poverty, but never did he consider asking others for help. So thus, by taking part in the relief work in the capital, Rabbi Weissmandel became involved in circles of like-minded people. His shrewdness, his modesty, but above all his humane stance quickly won the hearts of everyone. Thanks to his bold plans and his combative temperament he soon became known as “the rabbi of the partisans.” Although he was unable to appear as a spokesman before the authorities, he was a constant source of energy and initiative for rescue and help.

By chance Weissmandel learned that Wisliceny had released a Jew from deportation in return for a bribe of some not particularly valuable objects. “I said to myself, If he accepts a bribe for a single individual, why should he not take for many people?” On the other hand, he was apprehensive lest an incautious step adversely affect both the *Ostradna* (the Jewish Central Organization) and the Jews, who had temporarily been exempted from deportation because they were “vital to the state economy.”

Weissmandel was not a member of the *Ostradna* and was not known to Hochberg as being close to its staff. One day he presented himself to Hochberg as an individual, a Jewish rabbi, who had connections with leading rabbis abroad. As proof, he showed Hochberg his passport, which indicated that on the day the war broke out he returned from Britain in order, he said, to represent the rabbis of that country. Now, he continued, he had heard from representatives of world Jewry that the Joint Distribution Committee in Switzerland was ready to pay the price required for the total cessation of the deportation of Jews from Slovakia. He wanted Hochberg to ask Wisliceny whether such an agreement was feasible and how much it would cost.

Weissmandel overcame Hochberg’s hesitations by his forceful remonstrations and his persuasiveness. He did not rule out Hochberg’s plans to become governor of the Jews after the German victory, but gradually insinuated the thought that such a victory was not a foregone conclusion. So Hochberg would do well to guarantee his future on both sides: on the German side as the implementer of the deportations and on the Allied side as the savior of the Jews. *Hochberg finally did go to Wisliceny and the reply he brought back exceeded all expectations. Wisliceny accepted the offer, named a price, and outlined in detail the conditions for carrying out the project. The price was \$50,000 and the conditions were as follows:

- (1) He, Wisliceny, would show his ability and his good will by not sending transports on the Friday of the current week or on Tuesday and Friday of the following week--this, even before receiving any payment.
- (2) On that next Friday he was to be paid \$25,000.
- (3) After this there would be no transports for seven more weeks.

 * Hochberg was executed by partisans who captured him in the Slovak uprising of 1944.

(4) At the end of the seven-week period he was to be paid the outstanding \$25,000 and there would be no more deportations.

(5) The Jews must persuade the Slovak authorities to stop demanding that the Germans carry out the deportations.

(6) The money for the payments must originate abroad and proof of this must be supplied.

(7) With the help of generous funds from world Jewry, an effort must be launched to expand the three forced labor camps at Sered, Vyhene and Novaky so that by spring 1943 they could absorb large numbers of Jews and their families as craftsmen who would work for the Slovak government.

We will not weary the reader with the details (fascinating and illuminating in themselves) of how the first \$25,000 was obtained and how the Slovaks were finally persuaded to heed the appeals of--the Pope, and put a stop to the deportation of the Jews. To Weissmandel’s good fortune, he found in the Jewish Central Organization a person who was able and willing to push the project ahead. *Gisi Felischmann*, the head of WIZO and the JDC representative in Bratislava, an indefatigable Zionist worker, became Rabbi Weissmandel’s devoted partner and faithful prop. Despite the social and

political gap between them, they were united by an amazing harmony of outlook [outlook] and willingness to work. Gisi Fleischmann took on herself the main burden of dealing with the Slovak ministers and officials, and was of great help in the correspondence with Jewish institutions in Hungary, Switzerland and Istanbul. A group of people from various parties formed around the two, a clandestine committee that has gone down in Holocaust history as the "Working Group." By general assent Gisi Fleischmann became the group's chairwoman and its official representative vis-a-vis the institutions abroad.

According to Weissmandel's testimony, Wisliceny carried out his part of the agreement to the letter as long as the Jews kept up their part. Following the cancellation of three transports Hochberg gave him the first payment of \$25,000, and the transports were then halted for seven weeks. The Jews now requested, and received, a first and then a second extension for five or six more weeks.²⁹ When at the end of this period the money had not arrived, Wisliceny imposed sanctions in the saliently Nazi manner. From Friday, September 18, 1942, until the eve of Yom Kippur two days later about 3,000 Jews were seized in the cities and labor camps and on Yom Kippur, September 21, were deported to Auschwitz.

In despair, Rabbi Weissmandel on the eve of Yom Kippur sent three cables to the leaders of the Budapest Community. In the name of his father-in-law, Rabbi Unger, he invited them the following day to the "Supreme Court of Judgment." The day after Yom Kippur a special emissary from Hungary reached Rabbi Unger in Nietra with \$25,000. Wisliceny took the money but refused to bring back the Jews who had been sent to their annihilation. From that date, Rabbi Weissmandel notes, September 22, 1942, until the day after Yom Kippur two years later, September 28, 1944--actually until the Slovak uprising broke out at Banska-Bystrica--there were no deportations of Jews from Slovakia.³⁰

Outwardly, the two-year respite in the annihilation campaign resembled such respites elsewhere. For example, it began, as in the Vilna ghetto, after three-quarters of the Jewish population had already been dispatched to their deaths. The relative economic wellbeing that prevailed in the Slovak labor camps was similar to that which was experienced during certain periods in Bialystok, Vilna, Kovna and other ghettos. In fact it exceeded them thanks to the financial support that flowed into the Jewish Central Organization from Jews abroad. But what chiefly marked the respite in Slovakia, in contrast to other places, was the extended and uninterrupted *stability* throughout the period. There were no "small" Actions and sporadic murders such as afflicted other ghettos. Life was hard, the antisemitic laws of the *Judencodex* were implemented. The youths in the Hlinka Guards harassed the Jews everywhere and at every opportunity. But on the German side the respite was unbroken. After getting his money Wisliceny upheld his pledge without deviation and without further extortion. And it turns out that he was able to do so despite interjections and pressures from various quarters. On August 15, 1942, in the midst of the waiting period, Tiso, the president-priest, declared in a famous speech that it was a Christian precept to expel the Jews. On February 14, 1943, Interior Minister Sano Mach stated on Radio Bratislava that in the coming months all the surviving Jews would be transported--yet nothing happened. The German ambassador in Bratislava, Hans Ludin, complained bitterly to his superiors about a "regression in the solution of the Jewish Question"--and still there was no change in the situation. In December 1943 Tiso assured Edmund Veessenmayer, from Himmler's office, that the deportations would be renewed in April 1944--and this assurance, too, was not fulfilled. Only what Wisliceny had promised the Jews was upheld, until, as mentioned, the Slovak uprising broke out, the German Army entered Slovakia, and Wisliceny was removed from Bratislava.

In return for the \$50,000 he was paid, the Working Group was accorded additional privileges and another service. Not only was it permitted to collect money and send parcels to the Slovak deportees in Poland, but through Wisliceny they received thousands of letters from the deportees (from those who were still alive).³¹ Nor did the Germans in Slovakia interfere with the energetic activity of the Working Group in bringing Jews from Poland and transferring them to Hungary, which was then a relatively safe haven. The Slovak authorities carried out investigations and arrested

²⁹ Weissmandel, pp. 90, 94.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

³¹ Rothkirchen, p. 246, Note 18.

activists, including members of the Working Group, in connection with these operations. The detainees and their colleagues often turned to Wisliceny for succor and protection.

Afterward it became known that a unique form of "protection" had been practiced, one unknown to those who benefited from it. The German emissary Josef Winniger, who was the liaison between the Working Group and the Zionist mission in Istanbul, was a double agent in the service of the Gestapo. All the letters for which he was the courier were photographed in Budapest and made available to the interested Nazi institutions. However, unlike similar cases, the functionaries in Bratislava were unaffected. The money that was forwarded to them reached them and the mail arrived at its destinations in both directions. Only once, when the Gestapo got its hands on unflattering letters of Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann did a "misunderstanding" occur, and Berlin ordered that they both be arrested as spies. In return for a payment of \$10,000 to Wisliceny the incident was closed and all went on as usual.³²

Unavoidably we return to the question of Wisliceny's personality and the riddle of the great power he wielded. We cited testimonies to the effect that he was an unusual Nazi. Now, on the basis of additional material in our possession, we will try to round out his portrait with a reasonable degree of probability.

All the indications are that Dieter Wisliceny was by nature and behavior not an orthodox Nazi. He joined the National-Socialist Party in 1931, left, and rejoined two years later, around the time the Nazis came to power.³³ He did not take a fawning attitude before Eichmann, his superior, and behaved with a certain freedom toward SS commanders. His habits and inclinations exuded moderation. He was far from a profligate but he constantly assured himself creature comforts and pleasures of various sorts. He did not abstain from taking bribes in respectable doses but steered clear of excessive blackmail which might have imperiled him.

Wisliceny had pragmatic reservations about the plan for the annihilation of the Jews. He feared that this kind of mass slaughter would

ruin Germany's name in the eyes of the world and ultimately result in punitive measures. But beyond this utilitarian approach based on concern for German interests, there are no signs that the murder of Jews disturbed his rest or that he recoiled from taking part in the annihilation campaign. At the very same time that he was meticulously carrying out the deal with the remnant of Slovak Jewry, he was very efficiently transporting to Auschwitz over 50,000 Greek Jews. Later, in 1944, he would take part in sending to their deaths 450,000 Jews from the Hungarian provinces. The depth of his evil is revealed in his action on Yom Kippur 1942 when he dispatched 3,000 Jews to their deaths in order to "teach the Working Group a lesson" for not having brought the second portion of the bribe money on time.

The riddle of Wisliceny's surprising ability to abide by the terms of the deal precisely has been solved, he himself having revealed the source of his power. In his testimony taken in a Bratislava prison he maintained that he did not take for himself part of the bribe, in the amount of \$20,000, but formally handed it over to a Nazi official in Bratislava. He then went to Berlin with a detailed report about the deal, citing utilitarian reasons. Eichmann gave him a severe dressing down but was compelled to transmit the report to the SS chief Himmler and to agree that for the time being Wisliceny would have a free hand to deal with the matter as he saw fit. Himmler's answer arrived in November 1942: Wisliceny was to deposit the money in a certain SS fund "*and to hear out the Jews' representatives.*"

By chance, Wisliceny's actions conformed with the wishes of the Reich's arch-murderer who at that time was seeking (or perhaps had been inspired to seek by Wisliceny) a route for negotiations with world Jewry. With Himmler behind him and Eichmann constrained to agree, the Nazi Wisliceny found little difficulty in keeping his word to the Bratislava activists.

An important element in the deal between Wisliceny and Rabbi Weissmandel and his friends was the assumption that the ransom money was coming from world Jewry outside the area of Nazi occupation. It was on this foundation that Rabbi Weissmandel based his initial approach to Wisliceny, and the latter incorporated it as a binding clause in the agreement. Weissmandel and his aides labored hard to furnish proof that this condition was being fulfilled, though the funds were coming from

³² Weissmandel, p. 102.

³³ His testimony at the Nuremberg trial, IMT, Vol. III, p. 276.

Hungary, which the Nazis did not consider to be genuinely abroad. To this end a fictitious person called "Ferdinand Roth" was devised--a supposedly sec-ret operative of the JDC in Switzerland who was acting on

behalf of world Jewry. Using various means (including diplomatic emissaries who assisted the Working Group voluntarily or for payment) and clever ploys, Hochberg supplied Wisliceny with letters from this "Ferdinand Roth" to "our dear nephew" in Bratislava. The letters, in fancy envelopes and on stationery from London or Zurich, contained hints which, Wisliceny was told, constituted assent to and approval for the conditions of the deal. Wisliceny accepted these willingly and passed them on to his superior in Berlin.

Rabbi Weissmandel had recourse to the help of this "Ferdinand Roth" when he decided to put forward his major project, the so-called "Europa Plan." One day, not long after Sukkot 1942 (early October), Hochberg brought Wisliceny a letter from "Ferdinand Roth" stating that "the uncle was pleased to hear that little Willy had passed the test in his school and is sending him a present. And when he follows this same path to the high school, he, the uncle, will assume all his needs and make him his sole heir. He hopes to be able to visit the nephew and Willy soon."

Hochberg, who had been briefed by Rabbi Weissmandel, decoded the letter for Wisliceny. The regular school was Slovakia and the high school was all of Europe. The letter as a whole should be read as a proposal by world Jewry for the Nazis to cease the deportation and murder of the Jews in Europe in return for suitable payment.

Wisliceny replied that he was pleased to hear about the offer and would leave at once for Berlin in order to report to his superiors. A few days later he summoned Hochberg and informed him that the Germans accepted the offer in principle but wanted to hear more details--what the Jews desired and what they were willing to pay in return.³⁴ Six weeks later Wisliceny put forward the conditions suggested by the Nazis. These included two clauses: (1) A cessation of the deportations throughout Europe with the exception of Germany and the protectorate of Czechoslovakia and Moravia; and (2) a series of measures to ease the lot of the deportees from Slovakia and other countries in Poland, including cancellation of the "second transport"--to the death camps. Nothing was said explicitly about Polish Jewry.³⁵

At about this time Hochberg was arrested by the Slovaks and incarcerated in an internment camp. To the satisfaction of both sides the mediation between Wisliceny and the Jews was placed in the hands of Ondrei Steiner from the Working Group, with Gisi Fleischmann also taking part in the negotiations from time to time. The talks soon took on a fixed pattern and more exact definitions were formulated. The final wording of the two clauses in the German proposal was as follows:

(1) Cancellation of the deportations from all the Nazi-occupied countries and the countries under Nazi influence with the exception of Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland, in return for payment of two to three million dollars.

(2) Further negotiations regarding a halt to the annihilation in Poland in return for a payment to be determined in negotiations.

(3) The implementation of Clause (1) will commence upon payment of an advance in the sum of \$150,000 or \$200,000. The deportations will be halted for two months and in this period both the arrangement and the size of the remaining payments will be determined as well as the implementation of Clause (2).³⁶

These were negotiations of a unique kind. On the German side the representative was a middle-level officer in the destruction apparatus while behind him were orders of the leader and supreme commander in the Nazi hierarchy--Himmler. Wisliceny's direct superior, Eichmann, it is known,³⁷ was opposed to both agreements, on Slovakia and the Europa Plan. Where Slovakia was concerned he was careful not to violate Himmler's order and he maintained the agreement for two years, but as regards the Europa Plan he had a free hand. As long as it was not formally in effect, he and his aides conducted a demonic race against time.

Wisliceny, the servant of the two masters, executed the orders of both punctiliously. When Eichmann sent him to liquidate the Jews of Salonica he did so

³⁴ Weissmandel, pp. 65-66.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 162, 168.

³⁷ Rothkirchen, pp. 243-244.

ably and efficiently, while at the same time he was assuring Steiner and Gisi Fleischmann that Greece would be included in the Europa Plan the moment the first payment arrived.³⁸

As for the other side, the Jewish side, no such thing existed. There was a rabbi from Nietra and two or three assistants from Bratislava who passed themselves off as representatives of world Jewry without the support of world Jewry. Using all manner of ploys and ruses, including fake envelopes and fabricated letters, they misled Wisliceny and Himmler and negotiated with them in the name of those who had supposedly sent them. They acted on the assumption that once they had achieved the desired results the Jewish institutions abroad would honor their monetary commitments and undertake to fulfill the agreement. But they quickly found that this assumption did not have a leg to stand on. From the moment they managed to conclude successfully the "little" deal, concerning Slovakia, they found themselves in an intolerable situation. World Jewry was in no hurry to defray their commitments to the Nazis

and cover sufficiently the expenses involved in the deal's implementation. Rabbi Weissmandel relates the sequence of events:

The first emissary bearing the news of the ("little") agreement and a request for help set out for Switzerland with detailed letters to the JDC representative there, Saly Mayer, to the Jewish Agency office in Geneva, and a special letter to Natan Schwalb, the director of the Hehalutz office. Within a few days the emissary returned empty-handed, without money and without a letter in return. He had been told that the addressees did not have time just now and they would write at some future date, when an emissary chanced to arrive. "We were panic-stricken," Rabbi Weissmandel recalls, "as though the house had collapsed on us." Gisi Fleischmann sought some comfort: Saly Mayer, she said, was an old and soft-spoken person. Another letter must be written him containing all the details. The Jewish Agency, and particularly Natan Schwalb, could be relied upon. Perhaps, because the matter was so important, one of them had gone to look into it in America, London or Eretz-Israel...

The seven-week waiting period was about to run out. Hochberg was sent to tell Wisliceny that the emissary with the money from Switzerland had broken both legs in a road accident. An emissary would arrive in three or four weeks and Wisliceny was requested to extend the waiting period accordingly, to which he consented.

A second emissary was dispatched to Switzerland with more letters. This time he returned with two letters, from Saly Mayer and Natan Schwalb. Saly Mayer, the JDC representative, stated that no money was available for three reasons: first, Slovakia was a small country and \$50,000 was too high a sum for it; second, he did not believe the tales about the difficult life of the deportees to Poland, as related in the attached letters--the *Ostjuden* (as Western Jews called the Jews of Eastern Europe) tended to exaggerate their troubles in order to solicit money; and third, not one cent could be forwarded from funds originating in America because of the law barring the sending of money to enemy countries. What could be forwarded was money from the remaining JDC funds in Hungary which had been transferred there prior to the imposition of the ban in America.³⁹

The second letter was from Natan Schwalb. He wrote in Hebrew using Latin letters. This letter made a lasting impression on Rabbi Weissmandel, and he has tried to reconstruct it, though with a few stylistic infelicities because the rabbi was not well versed in contemporary spoken Hebrew. We have no choice but to quote it verbatim:

He is taking the opportunity of an emissary's arrival to write to the friends that they must always remember *the most necessary thing* which is the *most important thing* they must always bear in mind, that in the end the allied kingdoms will be victorious and after the victory they will redivide the world among the nations, as they did after the First War. At that time they opened up the road to the first step for us, and now, as the war ends, we must do everything so that Eretz-Israel will become the State of Israel, and important steps in this direction have already been taken. And as for the outcry from our country, we should know that all the nations in the allied kingdoms *are shedding much blood*, and if we do not produce sacrifices how will we acquire the right to approach the table when the time comes to divide the nations and the countries after the war? And if so, it is folly and even arrogant on our part to ask the goyim,

³⁸ Weissmandel, p. 90.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

whose blood is being shed, to give permission to bring their money to their enemy's country *to protect our blood---because rak b'dam tihie lanu ha-aretz* [only by blood will the Land be ours]. This is in general. As for what concerns you, the members of the group, *atem tajlu*, and for this I am ordering you funds via a black route by means of this emissary.

This letter, in which the reader can hear echos that recall what Yosef Tenenbaum had to say against sending parcels to the ghettos or the philosophy of those who defended the sinking of the *Patria* at that Mapai Central Committee meeting, was written, as a reckoning of the time shows, *before* November 23, 1942. The offices of the Zionist movement did not yet believe the annihilation "atrocities." From this point of view the director of the Hehalutz office in Geneva was apparently no different from his colleagues elsewhere. But because of the gross primitivism of his argument, coming as a direct reply to a request for help, his letter deserves to stand as an example and a symbol.

According to Rabbi Weissmandel, he was not deterred by the disappointing letters. It was just bad luck, he thought, that they had run up against two hapless officials. "It was just that one cantor was old and his assistant was a bachelor--the address was wrong. And all even they needed was another letter making the matter completely clear. Mrs. Fleischmann, may she rest in peace, would speak softly and I would write things as tough as sinews, and the gates of the money would immediately be opened

before us." Because when all was said and done world Jewry existed and could not remain indifferent to the possibility of saving Jews.

The gates of money did not open wide and one letter was not enough to hold them open. A protracted and agonizing correspondence was required to get money just to trickle in. Saly Mayer, meticulous and suspicious, demanded for every dollar the presentation of a detailed budget in advance and a documented report afterward. The Working Group did its best to meet his demands, even if only to receive the money in modest doses. Small comfort was forthcoming from the connection with the Rescue Committee mission in Istanbul which occasionally sent funds. Yet as long as matters were confined to thousands and tens of thousands of dollars, things somehow got done.

When the Europa Plan came up, entailing hundreds of thousands of dollars for its realization, it quickly became clear that the activity of Rabbi Weissmandel and his colleagues was unsupported anywhere. In our investigation we could find no traces of any *concrete* discussion in Jewish institutions, not to mention a readiness to become involved in the plan. The upshot was that the only level to make a decision on the subject was that of "the old cantor and the bachelor assistant" who operated according to their authority and their reservations. They and their colleagues in Geneva also acted as a filter that regulated the degree to which the desperate cries from Bratislava reached the relevant institutions.

The first letters about the Europa Plan written by Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann in mid-October drew a prompt and unequivocal response from Switzerland: No! No money can be sent to the German area of influence. If the Nazis want a deal, let them show their repentance by halting the deportations, and then we will talk to them.⁴⁰

On December 1, 1942, a second major letter was sent to Geneva, this one signed by two rabbis, Weissmandel and Frieder. Four months elapsed before this letter reached the executive of the World Jewish Congress in New York.⁴¹ So negligently was it transmitted from the WJC office in Geneva that its recipient, the organization's secretary Dr. Tartakower, did not even know which country was being referred to ("probably Slovakia"). At this time a letter from Berl Locker was received from London in which he emphasized the importance of the plan in his view. A second letter arrived from Dr. Silbershein "who apparently read the document *and is pressing us to implement it.*"

The rabbis' letter was typed in four copies in English translation and these were sent to the WJC leadership in New York: Dr. Wise, Dr. Goldmann, Dr. Perlzweig and Dr. Kubowitzki. Tartakower suggested that

each of them destroy his copy of the letter immediately after reading it. He retained a photocopy of the original Hebrew.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.81.

Jerusalem learned about the Europa Plan somewhat earlier. On January 26 Gruenbaum cabled Silbershein: "See positively Slovakia rabbis proposal brought by Neustadt stop Please check thoroughly if practical and what help needed."⁴² On March 5 Haim Barlas requested from Istanbul, in his name and Eliezer Kaplan's, that Lichtheim and Silbershein cable their opinion of the "rabbis' plan."⁴³

Thus information was available and views were exchanged. But no substantive discussion was ever held. No one expressed opposition to the plan. Some were sympathetic toward it. No one, however, was willing to fight for it, with the exception of Dr. Silbershein, whose stand was not given much consideration by decision makers and donors of funds. In Jerusalem the Jewish Agency Treasurer and the head of the Rescue Committee, both senior members of the Jewish Agency Executive, evinced an interest in the plan, but neither of them put the issue on the agenda of the Executive for discussion and decision. Gruenbaum was at this time preoccupied in a (successful) battle of principle against the use of Zionist investment funds for rescue purposes. And Kaplan, while in Istanbul, seems to have been swayed by the attitude of the mission members there that the plan was impractical. ** At all events, Jerusalem did not deal with the Europa Plan.

Nor did New York. Around the time of the underground ritual of the burning of the letters, as noted above, we came across a telegram to Silbershein requesting that he cable "whether the content of the rabbis' proposal is still relevant."⁴⁴ We found no other traces of activity in this direction. It is possible that our searches were not exhaustive or that we did not peruse some of the sources. We did not see the documents relating to the JDC's decision not to give the money being requested. It is not clear to us why the rabbis' appeal did not reach (if it did not reach) the Rescue

 ** This account is bolstered by the following true story. One of the letters received from the Istanbul mission was addressed to a Zionist functionary from Bratislava, Moshe Dekes. The letter said that the delegation in Istanbul had received a report from some kind of "religious person" about a possible halt to the deportations. As they did not believe religious people, they wished to be informed whether there was any truth to the report. In reply a letter of confirmation was sent to Istanbul signed by three non-religious Zionists: Moshe Dekes (Labor Israel), Gisi Fleischmann and Oskar Neumann (Zionist Federation and the Community). Weissmandel, p. 160.

Committee of Agudat Israel in America. But for the purposes of our investigation we found sufficient testimony. This is a testimony of *silence* by two of the persons concerned. Two Zionist leaders, heads of the World Jewish Congress, Stephen Wise and Dr. Goldmann, wrote memoirs which we quoted earlier in this chapter. It is known for certain that both of them received copies of the rabbis' letter from Tartakower. Yet in their memoirs neither of them mentions the Europa Plan in so much as a word. Either they did not remember it or they did not think it merited mention. Whatever the reason, the inference is that at the time they did not expend excessive energy on it.

Forsaken and abandoned, without help or succor, the members of the Working Group persisted in their efforts to obtain the unattainable. Toward the Germans they kept up the game of pretense that they represented world Jewry. And toward the Jewish institutions abroad Rabbi Weissmandel continued to use the only weapon he had--writing letters--he and Gisi Fleischmann together. In meetings with Wisliceny, who visited Bratislava from time to time, new dates were constantly set for getting the reply and the initial payment of world Jewry. In a meeting on May 19 the amount of the first installment was set, \$200,000 in cash, as was the date for its payment, no later than June 10. Wisliceny then agreed to defer payment until July 1. The meeting scheduled for July 2 was postponed until the end of the month. On August 27 Wisliceny informed them of an adverse shift in Berlin, and on September 3 he told them that his superiors had revoked their agreement to the Europa Plan.

Rabbi Weissmandel's letters, written in a fervor of despair and rebuke, did not achieve their goal. He also claimed that they did not reach their destinations--rabbis

42 YVA, File M20/33.

43 YVA, File M20/31.

44 YVA, File M20/32.

in the free world.⁴⁵ One day these letters may be acknowledged as the most tempestuous to emerge from the Holocaust. As we saw, they made a positive impression on quite a few of their readers and generated no opposition on the part of others. But neither group rushed to help. Among them were sober and cautious friends and well-wishers who consulted one another as to the plan's practicability and as to whether it was worth risking the dollars being asked. No "father," fearful and shocked to his very soul, arose among them who would seize the apparent opportunity and rush to exploit it without asking a lot of questions. Sobriety became apathy, caution turned to sluggishness. Fateful sluggishness.

* * * * *

The feasibility of the Europa Plan can now be reasonably assessed thanks to facts and circumstances that are known today but were not

known, in whole or in part, to Rabbi Weissmandel and his colleagues. The first and most crucial of these facts is that behind Wisliceny in the negotiations with the Bratislava group stood not Eichmann, as Weissmandel believed, but *Himmler* himself. It was not "the head clerk of evil," not "the interested parties according to time and place" who negotiated with Rabbi Weissmandel and his friends but the "proprietor" himself, the most nefarious of the evil men who ruled Nazi Germany, second only to Hitler himself. Himmler was the supreme instance regarding the operation to annihilate the Jews, the final arbiter, who gave orders of what to do and what not to do. This same Himmler, according to Wisliceny's testimony, gave his consent to the "little" version of the Bratislava agreement, and from November 1942 until August 1943 negotiated on the cessation of the destruction of the Jews in Europe. In that year Himmler, acting through intermediaries, proposed to JDC head Joseph Schwartz that they meet in Spain to negotiate a halt to the annihilation operation.⁴⁶ A year later, in October 1944, he ordered a halt to the total annihilation of the Jews, and his order remained in force until the end of the war.

The fact that not Eichmann but Himmler was behind the negotiations on the Nazi side raised the probability of the agreement's realization to a level approaching certainty. Himmler was dependent on no one besides Hitler--who in the nature of things did not intervene in the mechanics of the destruction. The leading murderers, Kaltenbrunner, Mueller and Eichmann, did Himmler's bidding and did not dare disobey. His authority was boundless and his word was law to hundreds of thousands of subordinates.

Although payment was demanded for the cessation of the deportations, it should not be thought that this was Himmler's goal. Two or three millions could not tempt the omnipotent chief of the 55 kingdom. It is more probable that the underlying motive for the negotiations with the Jews was the negotiations *per se*. The very fact that two amounts, of two million and three million dollars, were cited for the overall payment, along with two amounts for the advances (\$150,000 or \$200,000) suggests that money was not the primary objective. The intervals of two to three months between each installment⁴⁷ could have extended the deal across a few years of contacts between the sides and a constantly renewed commitment not to harm the Jews.

As its end points to its beginning, it may be surmised that two years before he called off the "Final Solution" in October 1944 Himmler already harbored apprehensions and doubts as to the practicability of

annihilating the Jews--for Nazi Germany and for him personally. And just as the action in 1944 was accompanied by an attempt to enter into talks with world Jewry through various intermediaries, so the Nazi leader was enthralled by the initiative of world Jewry's representative "Ferdinand Roth," a fictitious figure created by Rabbi Weissmandel.

The sequence of events that paralleled the Europa Plan lends credence to the probability of our thesis. The months of October-November 1942, it will be recalled, were marked by a lively international reaction to the reports about the annihilation of the Jews. The assembly in London's Albert Hall, the emotional discussion in the

⁴⁵ Weissmandel, p. 111.

⁴⁶ Herbert Agar, *The Saving Remnant*, p. 151.

⁴⁷ Weissmandel, p. 160.

British Parliament, and the warning statement issued by the United Nations were salient expressions of the free world's profound shock and mental revulsion. At the same time the first indications appeared of a worsening in the Nazis' situation. On the Western front the Allies landed in North Africa; and in the East the Germans' advance was checked and the great battle for Stalingrad began which ended in a decisive Nazi defeat. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that this combination of events caused Himmler to reflect on the need for far-reaching changes in the policy toward the Jews.

No marked changes were discernible in the annihilation process in the period when the Europa Plan was being negotiated. In that period the Jews of Greece, Thracia and Macedonia were sent to their deaths. The transports of Jews from the Western countries continued. In Poland the ghettos of Cracow, Lvov and of other cities and towns were liquidated. Yet in the immediate aftermath of the plan's failure the pace of the annihilation visibly intensified beginning in August 1943. From that month the three "productive" ghettos of Bandin, Bilaystok and Vilna were liquidated in rapid succession. The remnants of the Minsk ghetto and the other ghettos in Belorussia were razed. The detainees in the concentration camps at Trawniki, Poniatow and Lublin were murdered.

The ultimate significance of the coincidence of events cannot be known. After all, it is not certain that the annihilation would have stopped if the first \$200,000 had been paid, or how long the respite would have lasted. In retrospect, nothing can be known. But one fact is clear and unassailable: for eight months a simple and concrete proposal from the Nazi leadership made the rounds in New York, Jerusalem and London--to cease immediately the murder of Jews. The heads of the Zionist movement, those who were engaged in Holocaust-related matters, knew of the proposal--and paid it no heed.

Chapter Thirteen

To the End...

On October 6, 1943, the residents of Washington, D.C., witnessed a unique procession. * Five hundred bearded and earlocked Orthodox rabbis, heeding the call of their leaders, Rabbis Eliezer Silver and Israel Rosenberg, first gathered at the train station and then marched through the streets of the city, all the while weeping profusely and reciting Psalms. At 11 a.m., after a prayer service at the Lincoln Memorial, they arrived at Capitol Hill, seat of the U.S. Congress. Vice-President Henry A. Wallace adjourned a meeting of the Senate and went out to the demonstrators on the steps of the Capitol. A petition was read out to him concerning the urgent need to rescue European Jewry, and Wallace responded with words of sympathy and commiseration.

From the Capitol the rabbis proceeded to the White House for a meeting with Roosevelt. The White House guards permitted a delegation to enter. Bitter disappointment awaited the group. A White House official introduced himself very civilly and then apologized in the name of the President. The President had intended to receive the group, the official explained, but was prevented from doing so by another urgent commitment. At all events, Roosevelt was not currently in the city and the meeting could therefore not take place.

It was subsequently learned that the White House had hesitated and vacillated about whether the President should meet with the delegation. A day or two before the demonstration, Roosevelt was intent on receiving them. Heavy pressure made him change his mind. Finally, it was decided "because of the delicacy of the matter" not to inform the demonstrators in advance that Roosevelt would not see them, and to "arrange" his absence from Washington. Which is what was done.

A sharply polemical interpretation of the event appeared in the U.S.-based Hebrew language journal **Bitzaron**. Wittily but derisively, the author tried to explain to his readers the "true" motives which in his view underlay the demonstration--and in doing so he inadvertently revealed some interesting and significant information. The following is the full text of the article (emphases added).¹

Taking Washington By Storm

* The author was aided in describing the events by a recorded conversation he held with Mr. Hillel Kook on September 13, 1976.

¹ Bitzaron, September 1944 (Hebrew).

“Our great *ge'onim* rabbis, the wonder-workers and miracle-doers, and their holinesses the *admorim* and the just men of all stripes, and all the sacred vessels, and the Keriti and the Peliti, and all the dignitaries at their feet, suddenly left behind their rabbinical seat and their seat of sanctified sainthood, and they did gird their loins and did curl their locks and did braid their beards and did go up as a wall to Washington the Capital, young and old alike, and they did kick up a storm in the streets of Washington, chanting Psalms and praying and shouting, and did worship at the grave of Lincoln, may his virtue protect us, and they walked upright, round and about, as sages do, don't you know. And the whole people sees the voices and the torches and the splendor and the long coats of those who are great in Torah, and the holy garments they garbed, yea, the people did see and they moved and stood afar, and craned their heads and they did envy the honor of Israel and the glory of its greatness, that thank God we have a rabbi, and not one rabbi but a few hundred rabbis, all of them heroes and fighters in the war of the Torah. Fortunate the eye that sees all this! And so they went, **and they were led by a small boy**, until they reached the gate of the king and the deputy to the king. Because they reached the king's gate they were exceedingly pleased, for were they not right at home with Maimonides' "Gate of the King" and "Second to the King," so it was all a trifle to them. But here they had some bad luck, they found the king's gate locked and bolted before them, as though, heaven forbid, no honor accrued to the Torah, wisdom there be not here, old age there be not here, and not even reciting Psalms helped. The president sent his beadle to tell them that "the man is not at home." Meaning what? In other words, that just now he has no need for questions and responses of what's permitted and what's prohibited, no, not even about the laws of trusteeship--for that, he must have other arbiters whom he trusts religiously and practically. So they went from there bitterly chagrined and went unto the deputy king, known for being a man of faith and religion, and he did come out to them in honor of the Torah, and did nod to them up and down with his head, and moaned about the exile of the *ôsshekhina* and revealed to them a secret, that now there was a war in the world and after the war there would be peace in the world and surely Judah and Israel would be saved and dwell securely.

"And this was the whole extent of the rabbis' Torah, and they did return each to his sackcloth and fasting and the confines of the Halakhah and the gates of Maimonides, where their strength is greater than in praising Washington the Capital.

"Now having called on the president and on whoever is capable of protesting, a large number of delegations and all manner of high-quality people in the name of the whole community of Israel and in the name of all the individuals of Israel and in the name of all kinds of pogroms and all kinds of sects and parties, and even after the delegates of the church went to see whoever had to be seen in the name of all Israel of the Jewish Church of America--all at once the rabbis remembered that if they are here, everything is here, and if they are not here, who is here? That they themselves are the true emissaries of Israel, and that everything that went before is null and void. Ho, what innocents be our learned and sharpwitted rabbis! These *great ones* did not notice or sense that behind them were *little ones*, who had many accounts to settle, *and they it was who turned the rabbis into a tool in their hands*; some had stocktaking to do with the sworn functionaries for having pushed them away, and some took umbrage with the Jewish Church for not inviting them to the feast, and there are also some just plain laymen who go to the head of the line and like to fulfill the injunction to 'create a big hubbub among them' and think there's Divinity in noise, and by the way there's also a well-known verse, 'fasting is the voice of funding,' because when the mood strikes, you can put out a big bowl with a slip of paper saying 'alms for shouting,' and while these boys were 'breaking their heads' over: Who would go? And where to get noisemakers and their clanging-clashing cymbals?--they saw a good thing and went for it. For after all, we have, thank God, rabbis by the hundreds, and their word is our command, streimels they have, and long silken robes and sashes to hold them, and all manner of priestly garb that was never yet seen in Washington. And Psalms they know by heart, thank God, and they'll be reimbursed for travelling expenses too--let's whistle for them and round them up, and they'll be the mouthpieces for all the denizens of the House of Israel! And thus this calf went forth, saying and doing. The rabbis, may they live long, don't like to ask questions, after all, they're used to having people ask them questions. And if you say, didn't Moses himself reply to the Holy One, supposedly, Well, the children of Israel did not heed me and how will Pharaoh heed me, for I am a

stammerer? But this is a verse from the Pentateuch, and it's well known that one doesn't ask questions from the Pentateuch.

"Undoubtedly many of the rabbis thought the president would receive them like the oath-taking leaders of the nation, and that by hearing their voice in the Royal House they would consider how to deal with the children of Israel, all the more so by themselves, and they would heed their counsel and follow them, and henceforth they would be the

emissaries of the House of Israel everywhere, and the Reform and semi-Reform rabbis would have no access to the Senate and the White House. But the many thoughts in the heart of a person and in God did not think well, their counsel was disrupted and their thought spoiled, the head of Agudat Israel himself and in person found the door closed to him, and all his contentions that "I am Solomon" were of no avail, the royal servingmen and the guards did not let them enter. In short, what happened was that the high holy ones and the *geonim* and the just men and the whole distinguished crowd with them retraced their footsteps in great vexation, and all was as yesteryear. The *rabbonim* will again be posers of questions in the White House and the rabbis will be posers of questions in the slaughterhouse.

"Our rabbis are well-versed in the Mishna, but there's one tractate that they forgot, or never learned, and that's the tractate of common courtesy. They didn't know and didn't understand that you can't take Washington by storm. They should have known that there are well-known keys to the White House, external keys and internal keys, and that whichever way you look at it, those keys happen to be in the possession of others. The rule is that whoever takes pains on Sabbath Eve will eat on the Sabbath. Surely they knew that when Zionism faced the danger of boycott, who went to ask for mercy and to uproot the evil decree? Not those who tried to take Washington by storm, *but one well-known rabbi who is always standing in the breach*, for the keys to the kingdom have been transmitted to his hands and to his friends' hands. I am surprised at the rabbis, after all there are among them some who are quite sharp even about worldly [world] matters, and they are aware that just now a church was founded that advocates in the name of all Israel, for many of them were among its members too, and this church already sent emissaries to Washington to speak for everyone, so why did they suddenly, man-like, gird their loins to hightail it to Washington? Wasn't it their intention to suggest there that the act of the church is null and void, and that not its emissaries but we ourselves are the true emissaries of the House of Israel? What do you suppose, if they think they understand both worldly things and the nation's leaders, how do they permit themselves to follow boys to the president before ensuring in advance that the president will receive them? Do they not sense the sacrilege involved, and the desecration of the Torah? If the rabbis seek to honor the Torah above the Jewish people, they themselves must first be fearful for the honor of their Torah, and why should the people complain about them?

"If the rabbis of our Torah thought that the streets of Washington would restore to them the potency of the Torah that they lost in the street of the Jews, this demonstration has shown them how wrong they were.

John Q. Public"

We have quoted this article in full, to the last drop of its "humor," so that the reader can see for himself what it does *not* contain. In the heat of the controversy and denunciation, "John Q. Public" (whose identity we were unable to discover) forgot the reason for the demonstration--the annihilation of European Jewry. So preoccupied was he with arguments, revelations and insinuations that he failed to note that the rabbis had staged a public demonstration of mourning and lamentation in the streets of Washington in order to draw attention to the bitter fate of their downtrodden brethren. The article speaks about quarrels between the Orthodox and Reform branches, about success and failure in the White House, but it makes no mention, not even in passing, of the rescue issue. That was of no concern to the bemused author, but the absence of the subject did not prevent the paper from devoting space to the merry piece.

The article, as published in *Bitzaron* in fall 1943, can be likened to a feast in the midst of the plague. It can perhaps attest to the fact that Haim Geenberg's bitter castigation of American Jewry for its moral bankruptcy was not so exaggerated after all. At the same time, the article furnishes supporting testimony about the fierce dispute that was then raging in the American Zionist camp. The two chief participants

in this debate are indicated in the figures of the rabbi and the “little boy” mentioned in the article.

The rabbi “standing in the breach” with the keys to the White House is, of course, Stephen Wise. As for the little boy of whom it was said that he led the rabbis’ demonstration and together with his little friends made the rabbis of America a tool in his hands--this was the *enfant terrible* of American Zionism, Peter Bergson, or, according to the name that appears on his personal papers, Hillel Kook.

Kook was then a young man of 27, the son of a rabbi from a Lithuanian town, who as a child immigrated with his family to Palestine. He joined the Haganah in the 1930s but left it with a group of like-minded colleagues who founded the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization). In the service of the Irgun he went to Poland and was appointed the organization’s overseas commander. When the war broke out he made his way to the U.S. and there joined what Jabotinsky called the Irgun’s “detached battalion.”

Independence and non-conformism, it turned out, were among the young man’s primary traits. Although he was one of the founders of the Irgun and was a confidant of Jabotinsky’s for two years, he invariably insisted that he was not a Revisionist and did not belong to the Revisionist movement. In the U.S., finding himself cut off from his organization in Palestine, Hillel Kook launched his own field of activity--one that surprised and astonished many people.

A nearly destitute semi-refugee, bearing the borrowed name of Peter Bergson, Hillel Kook gathered around himself a group of loyal and talented people, Zionists and non-Zionists, Jews and non-Jews. He rented an office in Washington and established the “Committee for the Establishment of an Army of Palestine Jews and Stateless Jews.” Among those who joined the group were journalists, writers, artists, actors, Congressmen and judges. With abundant funding, full-page ads were taken out in the big papers. The public was called on “to fight for the right [of Jews] to fight.” Generous financial aid and surprising support from persons close to the Administration accorded the small Bergson group a serious place within the Jewish community, far out of proportion to its numerical size.

The call to create a Jewish army was not the only issue that engaged the group. There were also other plans and calls, such as to establish a provisional Jewish government, open a Jewish diplomatic mission, and other surprising ideas along the same lines.

One day in November 1942, Hillel Kook relates in a conversation with the present author, he happened to see, on an inside page of the *Washington Post*, a statement by Rabbi Stephen Wise that two million Jews had been murdered in Europe. Shocked by this appalling report, he hurried to Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, who received him, and asked Berle whether the report was true. Berle confirmed it and added that the matter was well known to the U.S. government.

Kook-Berson left the Berle’s office determined to devote himself wholly to rescuing the surviving Jews in Europe. At a meeting of friends in New York it was decided to set up a new organization, an “Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe.” All of the group’s other projects took a back seat to this overriding goal--rescue.

To further their purpose the group employed the effective propaganda means they had developed in the previous two years. Following the call “to fight for the right to fight,” the great powers battling Hitler were now urged to regard the rescue of Jews as a genuine war goal--an obligation accruing to the Jewish ally by right and not by favor. In

contrast to the slogan of “rescue through victory”--the Bermuda Conference’s formula for inaction--the Bergson group demanded “action, not pity.” In one case, in connection with the possibility of extricating 70,000 Jews from Romania, a full-page ad was taken out in the *New York Times* which declared, in mock-commercial style, “For sale--70,000 Jews at \$50 each, guaranteed to be human beings.” Similar ads appeared on various occasions and naturally attracted a good deal of public attention. The writers and senators who had previously backed the formation of a Jewish army now lent themselves vigorously to the rescue enterprise.

The energetic activity of Bergson and his friends contributed greatly to the change of atmosphere regarding the Holocaust. An even greater contribution could

have resulted had it not been for the exhausting war on another front--against Stephen Wise.

From the outset the Zionist establishment reacted nervously to the activity of the Bergson group, even before the latter turned to rescue work. The principal reason for this was the deep hostility toward Revisionism and all it stood for (the nuances of Hillel Kook's personal attitude toward the Revisionist movement were irrelevant). The radical suggestions made by the group were vilified as harmful adventures, and, as we saw (Ch. 3), one of the stigmatizers was David Ben-Gurion.

The rescue issue added a new factor to the traditional rivalry, a "trouble" that had not been part of Zionist doctrine since the Uganda crisis. Neither the young people in the Bergson group nor the intellectuals who helped them suffered from an anti-territorialism complex. That they were maximalist Zionists did not prevent them from taking an understanding and positive attitude toward separating rescue from the immediate interests of the Zionist movement. To the chagrin of the Zionist leadership, the proposals they adduced did not so much as hint at exploiting rescue for *aliyah* needs. They did not ignore Palestine as a haven for refugees, and even made a point of saying so on several occasions. But if the demand to open the gates of immigration was liable to have an adverse effect on rescue, the Bergson group consciously and demonstratively dropped the demand. To the Zionist leaders in America, this was an inexpiable concession, and feelings became even more intense when the abhorred Revisionists were involved.

Leading the fierce war against the deviationist group was the elder figure of American Zionism, Rabbi Dr. Stephen Wise. Wise, who was close to Roosevelt, was a master of self-abnegation in the face of his patron, and was overtly fearful of making a nuisance of himself. When he apprised the "dear boss" of the destruction of the Jews in Europe, he

apologized for bothering the President given the important matters he had to deal with.² Wise believed that a major part of his role as a confidant of the President obligated him "to explain to his fellow Jews why the government could not do all the things that were requested and expected of it."³

These qualities of modesty and self-restraint were not visible when Stephen Wise did battle against the dangerous heresy. In their place came an aggressiveness that brooked no compromise and balked at no means. Under his leadership a vigorous campaign of unbridled accusations and vilifications was directed against Bergson and his friends. They were branded as traitors to Zionism and accused of playing fast and loose with the trust placed in them--and with the funds at their disposal. Special "treatment" was reserved for high-ranking personages, senators, judges and Cabinet ministers, who lent the group any support whatsoever. They were bombarded with letters, initially of protest and warning against linking up with the "wrong people," and then of harassment and threats.

Eighty-year-old Judge William Bennet, who, along with his son, a Congressman, assisted the Bergson group selflessly, described at length in a letter to Henry Morgenthau, Sr. (the father of the Treasury Secretary), how Stephen Wise and his aides tried to interfere. "Every time a report appears in the press that a non-Jewish personality intends to make a public appearance at a meeting sponsored by the Emergency Committee, a volley is fired at him from Jewish sources. I could never understand why a Jew has to object to non-Jews devoting their time and money to stopping as far as possible the awful slaughter that Hitler is perpetrating against the Jews... Is there no way to ask Dr. Wise and those connected with him to let up and stop?"⁴

* * * * *

The Orthodox rabbis who demonstrated in Washington were not a "tool" in the hands of Peter Bergson, as "John Q. Public" contended. They were independent, active allies. The Rescue Committee of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel found a common language with the group of extremist Zionists based on activism in the rescue struggle and on agreement that rescue need not be linked to *aliyah*. The demonstration was

² Carl Herman Foss, ed., Stephen Wise: Servant of the People-Selected Letters, p. 253.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁴ Jabotinsky Institute, File HZ/1.

organized jointly by the two organizations and its aim was to induce the U.S. government to act urgently for the rescue of Europe's surviving Jews. It was at this time that the fraud of the Bermuda Conference was revealed for all to see. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., began to take a close interest in the subject of rescue and to collect relevant material. The criminal behavior of Breckinridge Long, the architect of Bermuda and a

Roosevelt protegee who until now had enjoyed the President's complete confidence, became increasingly apparent. As assistant secretary of state responsible for immigration, Long did much to provide the president with distorted information about the situation and to close off sources that could furnish a true assessment of American rescue policy. The disappointment and bitterness generated by the failure of the Bermuda Conference, which soon gained ground among those concerned, undercut Long's position and created convenient conditions to fight him.

In the light of the negative results of the Anglo-American cooperation at Bermuda and the failure of the attempts to spur international rescue organizations to act, the Bergson group suggested separate American activity. Sympathizers in the House and Senate introduced a resolution calling on the president to establish an American government agency that would deal with the rescue of European Jewry, irrespective of what other governments might do. The draft resolution, which detailed the tasks and aims of the proposed agency, said absolutely nothing about opening the gates of immigration to Palestine.

The hearings on the resolution in both Houses of Congress triggered a vicious war between the Bergson group and their opponents in the pro-Zionist organizations of the Jewish establishment (which was itself divided).⁵ In the Senate the resolution's proponents had the upper hand. The deputy chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Elbert Thomas, of Utah, an avowed Bergson supporter, convened the committee, raised the subject, and pushed it through unanimously.

In contrast, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives proved an obstacle difficult to overcome. The committee's chairman was Sol Bloom, a Jew who had taken part in the Bermuda Conference on behalf of the U.S. government under the patronage of Breckinridge Long. Unlike the Senate, Bloom decided to hold a public hearing on the resolution before putting it to the vote. Throughout November and December sessions were held and testimonies heard. A good many witnesses gave the resolution warm and firm support, among them New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, representatives of trade unions and churches, and others. Bloom, however, remained unimpressed. Of particular interest was the testimony of Breckinridge Long--his swan song, as it turned out, in the American immigration service.

In his testimony, Long gave false data which he had secretly been feeding Roosevelt for years. ** Made public, the figures were totally

 ** One striking item was the wholly imaginary figure of 580,000 refugees supposedly admitted to the U.S. since 1933.

denied and were adduced as decisive proof that Long had misled the President. But not even this revelation impressed Sol Bloom. He continued to hold committee hearings with the aim of dragging the issue out indefinitely without a decision.

Stephen Wise fought the Bergson proposal in diverse ways. In Congressional appearances he could not let himself be seen as opposing the creation of an institution to help rescue Jews. But Wise wanted no such institution if it did not promote Jewish immigration to Palestine. Outside the Congress he said so frankly. Before giving testimony before the Bloom committee, he released a statement to the press declaring explicitly that the proposal was "inadequate" and that he, Wise, had an alternative proposal. Before the committee he took a more moderate line. When he sought to amend the draft resolution to include the opening of the gates to Palestine, the committee members remarked that such a change would imperil the resolution's passage. In reply, Wise said: "If we thought the amendment might jeopardize it [the draft

⁵ For details, see Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, pp. 237-239.

resolution] and cause its non-passage, we would naturally reconsider our recommendation.”⁶

He did not “reconsider” his opposition. The campaign against the resolution continued full-blast. On December 29 the temporary board of the “American Jewish Conference” issued a memorandum excoriating the Bergson group and its proposal “which was formulated with the particular aim of blocking the inclusion of Palestine.”⁷ The attacks and slanders continued unabated.

In the meantime a decision was made by a different source. The aides of the treasury secretary had finished collecting the documents that illustrated the State Department’s diversionary ploys in rescue affairs. Morgenthau presented Roosevelt with a thick file of these documents. The President, his eyes opened, decided to act at once, and without awaiting the results of the protracted Congressional hearings. On January 22, 1944, two years late, an Executive Order established the official American institution for rescuing Europe’s Jews, known as the “War Refugee Board.”

* * * * *

Arthur Morse’s highly informative book *While Six Million Died* was published in Hebrew under the title, *And the World Was Silent*. By choosing this title, the publishers ignored the book’s third section, which relates in extensive detail how the world was not silent and did not sit idly by. This part of the book is devoted almost entirely to the activity of the War Refugee Board (WRB) set up by Roosevelt in January 1944.

Just as we argued earlier (Ch. 8) that Morse’s interpretation, in the first part of his book, was wrongheaded, particularly where Roosevelt was concerned, we find that his unreserved praise for the rescue activity of the WRB lacks concrete clarification of a grave fact—one that Morse mentions, it is true, but fails to appraise properly. That fact is the failure to rescue 400,000 Hungarian Jews who were transported to Auschwitz and murdered there within less than two months, beginning May 15, 1944. Nevertheless, just as the faults of interpretation in the book’s first chapters do not undercut the reliability of the information they contain, the important material in the third section also remains basically valid. The Israeli reader can thus find in the book the most detailed description of the WRB’s history extant in Hebrew.⁸

In theory, the War Refugee Board was composed of three Cabinet Departments--Treasury, State, and War. In practice, it was an independent government agency, responsible to the President and enjoying his consistent support. Its operating staff consisted of energetic officials from the Treasury Department, headed by John Pehle. The WRB’s principal driving forces were urgency and stubbornness.

Three days after its creation, the WRB arranged for a cable, signed by the secretary of state, to be sent to all U.S. diplomatic missions concerned. Worded by Pehle, the cable admonished American diplomats that “action be taken to forestall the plot of the Nazis to exterminate the Jews and other persecuted minorities in Europe.” The cable’s orders were received for immediate implementation in all U.S. missions (with the single exception of Spain), and thus the State Department was thrust into rescue activity as an auxiliary force.

To ensure the unmediated administration of the rescue work, the WRB dispatched special emissaries to Turkey, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, England, Italy and North Africa. With presidential endorsement these emissaries were granted rights and powers previously undreamt of. They were authorized to negotiate with enemy agents on rescue-related matters. They were empowered to make contact with underground groups and employ illegal modes of operation. And most important, the restrictions imposed by the economic boycott of Germany were no longer a barrier if the need arose to transfer food or ransom payments in any amount. The funds were supplied by Jewish organizations: over \$15 million from the JDC, \$1 million from Agudat Israel’s Rescue Committee, and \$300,000 from the World Jewish Congress. Money was not lacking.

⁶ Answer, the journal of the Bergson group, January 1944. The New York Times (December 3, 1943) carried a different version, according to which Stephen Wise also argued to the House Committee that the draft resolution was wholly “inappropriate.”

⁷ Jabotinsky Institute, File No. 47.

⁸ The account that follows is based on Arthur Morse and the final report of the War Refugee Board by William O’Dwyer. Additional sources will be cited separately.

The WRB directed its efforts at Germany and its satellites, the neutral countries, and international organizations. An impressive backdrop

to the pressures exerted on Germany and its satellites was a warning issued by President Roosevelt on March 24. Henceforth let it be known, the President declared, that severe punishment awaits anyone who takes part, directly or indirectly, in the extermination of Jews or in their exile to places of extermination. The warning was disseminated by every possible means. It was broadcast over radio in various languages, published in the underground press in the occupied countries, and printed as a leaflet of which millions were dropped by air over Occupied Europe.

The heavy pressure exerted by the WRB's emissary in Turkey on the diplomatic representatives of Romania and Bulgaria produced definite results. Romania announced that it was returning from Transnistria the remaining 48,000 Jews of the 185,000 who had been exiled to that region--the others had perished. The Bulgarian government rescinded its anti-Jewish laws and permitted Jews to return from their exile in the provinces to the capital, Sofia. The pressure on Hungary also produced results, as will be seen below, though not before the WRB enlisted the help of additional elements.

The WRB's emissaries in Sweden and Switzerland were able to make the governments of those countries more sympathetic toward the need for rescue. When information was received about the concentration of Hungarian Jewry in ghettos, the two countries were requested to enlarge their diplomatic staffs in Budapest and to appoint officials to deal particularly with rescuing Jews. The response to this request and the consequent stepped-up involvement of Sweden and Switzerland in rescue work would have results of great importance.

The adamancy of the WRB personnel was reflected in their energetic, aggressive and relentless prodding of persons and bodies that were indifferent or aloof. The British government, which was cool to the creation of the WRB and objected to some of its principles, was compelled to mend its ways under American pressure. In contrast to its earlier refusal to violate the economic siege of Germany, London now agreed to permit a shipment of 100,000 food parcels a month to prisoners in concentration camps. At the urgent behest of WRB emissaries, the British embassy in Ankara assured the Turkish authorities that any refugee reaching Turkey would be granted an entry visa to Palestine.

Special attention was paid to the executive of the International Red Cross (IRC) which throughout the war had adopted an attitude that was hesitant at best. As a result of strong appeals to the IRC, coming against a diminished fear of Germany, the Red Cross in mid-1944 became an active element in rescuing European Jewry. In addition to bringing pressure to

bear on the IRC executive, the War Refugee Board gave its support to extraordinary individuals within the IRC whose work saved hundreds or thousands of people. Thus, for example, JDC funds were provided to *Johannes Schwarzenberg*, who after immense labors succeeded in obtaining the names of 56,000 concentration camp inmates to whom he had individually addressed food parcels sent.

An important objective of WRB pressure was the Vatican. The Pope, whose behavior during the Holocaust period has come in for conflicting assessments, was influenced by Washington's reinvigoration and agreed to lend a hand in the rescue of Hungarian Jewry.

The contacts between the U.S., Sweden, the Vatican and the IRC produced immediate results. In late June 1944, when it was learned that Jews were being transported from the ghettos of Hungary to Auschwitz for gassing, these four elements each sent a protest letter to the Hungarian ruler, Horthy. All four, each in its own style, demanded a halt to the transports. On June 26 Roosevelt informed Horthy that if the transports were not stopped immediately, U.S. aircraft would bomb Budapest. The ultimatum was reiterated the following day by the State Department. When no satisfactory reply was received by the end of the month, 600 American bombers raided Budapest on July 2. A few days later Horthy announced that the stoppage of the transports.⁹

⁹ Testimony of Pinhas Freudiger in the Eichmann trial; testimony of Moshe Kraus in the Greenwald-Kastner trial, according to Shalom Rosenfeld, *Criminal File 124* (Hebrew), p. 165; Menahem Bader, *Melancholy Missions* (Hebrew), p. 108.

By this time--the beginning of July--nearly 400,000 Jews from outlying districts in Hungary had been murdered at Auschwitz. The vigorous intervention saved Budapest's Jews from immediate transport and postponed the struggle for their lives to a later date. That time came following Horthy's ouster and intensified German intervention in Budapest. At this time the rescuers organized themselves in unique fashion. At the initiative of the Swedish diplomat *Raoul Wallenberg*, and with generous JDC funding, a system of defense was created using protective passports and protected houses. Some 13,000 Jews found shelter in these "Swedish houses," and all told 20,000 Jews benefited from Swedish protection. The Swiss embassy housed another 20,000 Jews in its buildings. The IRC extended aid and protection to 30,000, and the Spanish and Portuguese governments gave protection to a few hundred Jews of Spanish origin. The indefatigable Wallenberg saved hundreds and thousands by his desperate intervention in the forced march of Budapest's Jews to Vienna and on other occasions. The struggle continued stubbornly until Budapest's liberation by the Soviet army.

When it came to removing Jews from Nazi-occupied countries, the scope of the WRB 's activity was narrower and its achievements less

visible. Its plans to create free ports of shelter for the temporary housing of refugees fell through, with the exception of a thousand persons who were absorbed in a disused army camp at Oswego, New York. British objections prevented the establishment of a large absorption camp in Cyrenaica, Libya. The effort of Ira Hirschmann, the WRB representative in Istanbul, to organize a large-scale transfer of refugees from Bulgaria and Romania with the Nazis' tacit assent, failed when the Germans withdrew their agreement. Later, when WRB pressure put a stop to the persecution of Jews in these two countries, the need to extricate Jews from them in order to save their lives became less pressing.

The WRB 's final report lists thousands and tens of thousands of Jews who were rescued with the Board's help or were assisted with food and clothing after their rescue. With this, the report notes: "The Board's operations cannot be evaluated in terms of accurate statistics. But it is clear that just as tens of thousands were saved [extricated] thanks to operations it organized, there were also hundreds of thousands who as a result of the tireless efforts continued to live and resist until they were finally rescued by the Allied armies."

In the light of this justified assessment, the troubling question remains: Why, despite everything, did the War Refugee Board not succeed in preventing the murder of 400,000 Hungarian Jews? We will try to answer this question below.

* * * * *

The Bergson group was not pleased with the nondescript name "War Refugee Board." The fact that the rescue of Jews was involved should be stated openly and explicitly, they insisted. Besides this, they celebrated their complete victory, and justly so. The creation of the WRB fulfilled their requests and was the basis for the deep satisfaction they expressed in a letter of thanks to Roosevelt. The group's proposed program of action¹⁰ was put into practice by the WRB. The tight cooperation between the two organizations is exemplified by the appointment of Ira Hirschmann as the WRB 's emissary to Turkey. Hirschmann, a member of the Bergson group, was about to depart for Turkey to represent the group there. Following contacts between the group and the WRB, he was recalled at the last minute from the airport and appointed the "personal representative of President Roosevelt," the title borne by the WRB's emissaries.

The attitude of the Bergson group toward Palestine continued to be one of demonstrative moderation. They took note of it as a place toward which the WRB should devote special attention. "By virtue of its

geographical proximity, international status, friendly population and plentiful food stocks, it can serve as an immediate shelter for a large number of refugees." At the same time, it was hinted clearly that this large number need not exceed the 31,000 immigration permits that remained according to the terms of the White Paper and

¹⁰ Answer, March 10, 1944.

which the British had several times expressed readiness to grant. As for opening the gates to free entry--not a word.***

To the Zionist establishment, this was sheer, unatonable heresy. The Zionist movement in America looked on the creation of the WRB as a regrettable mistake. Since recourse to the WRB on rescue matters was, however, unavoidable, the Zionists saw the new body as a severe blow that they would have to live with. Under pressure of a sympathetic public opinion, they paid it lip service, while expressing the reservation that no concrete results would be achieved unless the gates to Palestine were thrown wide open. In the course of time, recourse to the WRB increased and the declared objections diminished. America's Zionists came to accept the fact that this body existed and that benefits to the Zionist cause had to be looked for elsewhere.

Developments took a different course in Eretz-Israel. There the establishment of the WRB was given a qualified greeting with the expectation of concrete results. The WRB's emissary in Turkey, Ira Hirschmann, who was a source of financial amelioration and political strength vis-a-vis the Turkish government, was well received by the Jewish Agency delegation in Istanbul. His energetic efforts to obtain the return of the Transnistria deportees were lauded by the Agency officials. "Christianu promised to convey Hirschmann's clear and firm words to Bucharest. Not two weeks went by and the counsellor announced the reply: Marshall Antonescu had decided to return the Jews from Transnistria."¹¹ When Hirschmann was about to lease a large ship, the *Tari*, to transfer 10,000 refugees from Constanza to Istanbul under U.S. protection and with a German safe-passage guarantee, "we were extremely pleased and wholeheartedly congratulated Hirschmann on his success."¹² But the idyll was short-lived. Following the cessation of bromide shipments from Turkey to Germany, at Allied insistence, the Germans withdrew their safe-passage guarantee for the *Tari*. The Turkish government cancelled the leasing of the ship and the entire project was scrapped. And when Hirschmann tried to intervene in the priority criteria

 *** The group was similarly moderate toward the Roosevelt government, urging the U.S. to permit refugees strictly in accordance with the immigration quota.

for selecting candidates for rescue ships in Romania, his relations with the Jewish Agency delegation were permanently mined.¹³

On June 22, prompted by the Jewish Agency's Rescue Committee, the Yishuv press launched a frontal attack on the War Refugee Board. *Ha'aretz* pronounced that "with each passing day we are confirmed in our presumption that the Roosevelt Board is not doing anything concrete to rescue Jews from the Vale of Slaughter." *Davar* was outraged at the great publicity the WRB was giving its operations. "Publicity will undoubtedly not be lacking in the future as well. But we still haven't seen concrete actions."

The following day the poet Natan Alterman added his voice to the denunciations. In his best poetically sarcastic vein he published in the Sabbath Eve issue of *Davar* verses on the activity of Ira Hirschmann. The poem, which follows, was called "Publicity" (in Hebrew transliteration):

I
 From America with congrats so numerous
 A rescue committee was sent to the Bosphorus
 A bold and authorized group! Using the president's name!
 Fame!
 Comes the committee and says: I've plans in my pocket with me
 And I'm starting right away--with publicity
 Thus it spoke and as a first step diplomatic
 Declared with trumpet and drumroll: I'm at it
 And as a second step proclaimed every two days
 How it would rescue and who and when and from what place!

¹¹ Bader, op. cit., p. 89.

¹² Ibid., p. 94; Haim Barlas, *Rescue in the Holocaust* (Hebrew), pp. 44,47.

¹³ Bader, *ibid.*

II

Thus did flow communiques and congrats and toasts
 To the pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*
 Until with all its great might the United States
 Purchased a tiny little boatlet from the Turkish potentate.
 And with this a new wave of publicity was ghosted
 For the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

III

And opposite in the ports on the Balkan shores
 Mothers were silent holding babes in arms
 Waiting for a boat they cried in a dream
 Just a single cry: let there be room.

IV

Persecuted! The boat was not sent!
 It was so tiny, it drowned in an advertisement!

But listen: the trumpet sounds another note
 The orchestra plays, the orchestra does gloat!
 It's just the committee preparing another float.

In a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive around this time, Ben-Gurion reaffirmed the underlying principle of his attitude toward rescue affairs: "We must do everything, including things that appear fantastic. But on one condition--that the action does not damage Zionism." And as a topical example of the crucial reservation: "If we could get the Jews moved to Libya and then to Eretz-Israel, I would agree. But the very mention of Libya is inherently subversive--even if unconsciously--of Zionism."¹⁴

It will be recalled that the War Refugee Board wanted to set up a large refugee-absorption center in Cyrenaica, Libya.

* * * * *

Like his colleague Israel Efrat, who at the time used verse to deride the Santo Domingo plan, Alterman was undoubtedly certain that his poetic attack on the WRB represented the pure, unvarnished truth. But he was wrong on several counts. The *Tari*, to which he alluded without naming the ship, was not a "tiny little boatlet" but a passenger liner with a capacity of 1,500 persons and equipped with all the necessary amenities.¹⁵ The cancellation of the lease was due to political reasons, as outlined above, and not to excessive publicity. A major flaw lay in Alterman's timing: the failure of the *Tari* plan occurred in April, while the poem made it sound like fresh news--in late June.

But these defects were negligible when pitted against the poem's principal thesis. Implicit in the fierce condemnation of the publicity that the Roosevelt committee gave its operations was unequivocal advocacy of secrecy under all circumstances. Inadvertently the author took this stand in the midst of a horrific occurrence which might have been prevented, at least in part, had it not been for misplaced secrecy. We refer to the murder of Hungarian Jewry.

On this subject the Holocaust scholar Gerald Reitlinger writes: "News of the annihilation of Hungarian Jewry was slow in leaking through, and it was not until the beginning of July, when they had almost ceased, that the Allied and neutral press reported the massive gassings. *Had this happened sooner, 200,000 Jews or more might not have left Hungary.*"¹⁶ (Emphases added.)

We saw above how the transports to Auschwitz were halted at the beginning of July following vigorous outside intervention led by

Washington. Now an answer begins to emerge to the question of why action was slow in coming, after the Jews from the outlying districts had already been transported and murdered. It turns out that something happened that was utterly incredible for the year 1944. In a lightning operation carried out using a satanic

¹⁴ Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, July 2, 1944.

¹⁵ Barlas, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁶ Reitlinger, p. 429.

deception maneuver, the Nazis succeeded in getting hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz and gassing them before the outside world was aware of what was afoot.

The technical details of the operation are well known. Day after day for fifty days, from May 15 to July 5-6, trains carrying up to 12,000 people each left Hungary. Upon a train's arrival at Auschwitz, the majority of its occupants were sent directly to the gas chambers, with the crematoria functioning at full capacity. Others were left temporarily alive, only to perish from hard labor, hunger, torture and "selections."

All this is clear and known. What is not clear and not understood is how the Nazis were able to keep their murderous program a secret from the free world for well over a month. To answer this question is also to answer the question of why the WRB did not succeed in rescuing the Jews from Hungary's provinces. At the heart of the answer is the sequence of events known as the affair of the Joel Brand mission.

The story begins in the first week of the German army's entry into Hungary, in March 1944, when Eichmann, at the head of a special commando unit, arrived in Budapest with the aim of liquidating Hungarian Jewry. Dieter Wisliceny, who arrived with Eichmann, met privately with the head of the Orthodox community in Budapest and gave him a letter from Rabbi Weissmandel. The Bratislava rabbi wrote that "finally fate has caught up with Hungarian Jewry," and recommended that an attempt be made to negotiate with Wisliceny regarding a ransom, such as the arrangement in Slovakia or the Europa Plan. In Slovakia, it will be recalled, the Jews were at this time protected from deportation, and Rabbi Weissmandel hoped that the Jewish community leaders in Budapest might succeed in employing the same means he had used to secure that result. But Budapest, it soon turned out, was not Bratislava.

On the German side the difference was that in Budapest it was Eichmann personally who oversaw the deportation operation. It is possible that his very presence was sufficient to torpedo any attempt at a ransom deal. Wisliceny evidently thought otherwise--or he would not have transmitted Weissmandel's letter. Be that as it may, there was a vast gulf between the quality of the Bratislava "Working Group" and the human landscape of the Jewish community officials in Hungary.

In the first place, there was no personage in Budapest capable of filling Rabbi Weissmandel's place. Pinhas Freudiger, to whom Wisliceny brought the letter, had, it is true, taken part in securing the funds required for Weissmandel's rescue plans. But according to his own testimony, Freudiger was not disposed to engage in mass rescue efforts, preferring instead attempts to extricate individuals. **** In short order he was removed from the contacts with Wisliceny on a general rescue--by an activist wing from the band of Zionist functionaries.

This group, as distinct from the cohesive group of Bratislava Zionists, was split and divided in an endless quarrel. The intensity of their disagreements comes through in the words of one of the messengers who liaised between them and the Jewish Agency delegation in Istanbul: "Your people there [in Budapest] are fighting amongst themselves over seats. Every party is fomenting intrigues to place its own leader at the top of the heap, as though the heads on their shoulders were still their own and someone hadn't already decided when they would be lopped off."¹⁷

A more severe character reference can be found in an internal Zionist source, from a person universally admired. Gisi Fleischmann, known in the annals of the Holocaust as the incarnation of selfless devotion, courage and personal integrity, visited Budapest as part of the rescue operation of Slovak Jewry. She described her impressions of the local Zionists in unequivocal terms:

"Regarding my visit [to Hungary]... I am forced, first of all, to state with full objectivity that our friends there have no idea of Jewish solidarity, a social sense, or generosity of heart. This is the severe conclusion I must draw."¹⁸

Even if these harsh words were also a reflection of the disappointment caused by Hungarian Jewry's rejection of the request to assist the Jews of Slovakia, we cannot simply disregard Fleischmann's characterization of the Zionist functionaries who were then operating in the Hungarian capital.

The dispute alluded to by the messenger in Istanbul had two primary focal points. On the one side was Moshe Kraus, from Mizrachi, who served as secretary of the Eretz-Israel office and controlled the

¹⁷ Bader, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁸ Weissmandel, op. cit., Appendix 21.

 **** "I always thought it was worthwhile bribing a German officer and that this was far better than the Europa Plan, because one doesn't always succeed in doing big things, and this is my opinion to this day. It is true that by this means it was impossible to save ten thousand. But still, I did succeed in saving fifty people." From Freudiger's testimony at the Greenwald trial, quoted by Shalom Rosenberg, *Criminal File 124*, p. 36.

distribution of *aliyah* certificates. On the other side was a trio from Poalei Zion--Springmann, Kastner and Brand--who founded the "Aid and Rescue Committee" and who started out by smuggling Jews from Poland, Slovakia and other countries.¹⁹ In the course of time, after the Rescue Committee made contact with the Jewish Agency delegation in Istanbul, its disagreements and quarrels with Moshe Kraus intensified. In the period under discussion, spring 1944, the committee usurped the contacts with the Germans. The committee was now headed by Dr. Israel (Rudolf) Kastner and Joel Brand.

Brand's memoirs indicate the nature of the relations that were formed between the members of the Rescue Committee and the German secret service.²⁰ The beginnings lay in the search for ways to forge ties abroad. In summer 1942 a man named Erich Popescu, who was frequently in Istanbul as a German counter-intelligence agent, was sent to the Jewish Agency delegation in Istanbul. The ploy succeeded: Popescu returned with a letter from Melech Neustadt and cash in the amount of 7000 pengu. He was followed by *Bandi Grosz*, at that time a Hungarian intelligence agent who later worked in the service of the Germans. Of Grosz, Brand wrote that "through him we were able to acquire for our service people whose help was of the utmost importance."

The important helpers were nearly all members of the Wehrmacht's counter-intelligence service. There was Rudi Schultz, "the most sympathetic of the German agents," and Rudi Sadelzek, "one of the intellectuals whom Kastner regarded as the most decent among those in counter-intelligence." There was Captain Klausnitzer, "who played a treacherous role on the night of the German entry into Hungary," and there was Jerzy Winniger, "a highly doubtful type, who dominated the contacts with Austria and Slovakia."

The circle was closed when Winniger introduced Brand to his superior, the commander of the army's counter-intelligence group, Dr. Schmidt. Henceforth the Rescue Committee benefited from the services of the entire group. "Schmidt needed money and was ready to do anything. His people also helped us in return for money. It was a saliently commercial transaction."

The Rescue Committee was pleased with the services. Letters reached their destinations smoothly. Money was transferred in full, following the deduction of an agreed commission. The reliability of the German service may be gauged from the following case:

Bandi Grosz received a package for the Rescue Committee which contained over a quarter of a million Swiss marks, \$57,000 and 30-40

letters. He handed over the package to his German masters, and it ended up in Eichmann's hands. Eichmann then summoned Brand to him, and gave him both the money, in full, and the letters, some of which were "extremely dangerous." ²¹

As such, the relations with German intelligence do not annul the value of the work done by Brand and his colleagues. The establishment of the link with Istanbul, with Bratislava, and with other places entailed risks of a very high order. But the benefits reaped by Aid and Rescue were palpable and weighty. At a certain stage (perhaps from the beginning) the agents' greed was supplemented by an established policy of counterintelligence, which chose this method of monitoring the Jews' activities. This policy was a factor in the service's stability and its commercial "fairness."

Moreover, German counter-intelligence extended its protection to Brand, Kastner and their colleagues against the harassments of the Hungarian police. Several times the Germans forestalled their arrest and even extricated them from prison. On the day

¹⁹ Yoel Brand, *Mission of the Condemned* (Hebrew), p. 17.

²⁰ Brand, *op. cit.*, p. 27ff.

²¹ Brand, p. 85; his testimony in the Eichmann trial, pp. 887, 896.

the German army entered Hungary, the counter-intelligence personnel concealed Brand in the home of one of the agents so that he would not be seized by the Gestapo...

When all is said and done, it seems to us that the balance of desires and goals against the agents of German counter-intelligence tilted in favor of the Brand-Kastner group--until the appearance of Eichmann's special commando unit.

* * * * *

Eichmann, as we saw, followed Wehrmacht counter-intelligence in playing the game of protecting Kastner and his friends. The head of the S.S. security office in Hungary, von Klagass, did likewise. The two took a tolerant attitude toward the foreign contacts of the Rescue Committee and on various occasions protected its members from persecution by the Hungarians. However, this was no longer the main thing. Eichmann had not come to Budapest in order to involve himself in the clandestine activities of a group of Jews. His scheme was to exterminate Hungary's Jews in a short time and in the face of detrimental conditions. In spring 1944 the free world knew a good deal about the annihilation of the Jews in Europe, and the possibility existed of active Allied and neutral intervention in defense of the Jews in Hungary, as indeed happened--though very late. On the other hand, the arch-murderer, Himmler, was having hesitations and doubts that threatened to wreck the entire operation. Eichmann, who never hesitated and never doubted, came to Budapest to oversee the operation personally and to overcome all possible

obstacles. He was determined to exploit his relations with the Rescue Committee to further his goal.

In the meantime the standing and behavior of the Kastner-Brand twosome took on a definite pattern. The junior partner, Brand, drew ever closer to the circles of German intelligence. Business transactions were intermixed with social diversions, drunken parties and riotous banquets.²² In his testimony at the Greenwald trial, Bandi Grosz told about a card game played by Brand and Kastner with German agents until 3 a.m.²³ So involved were the two in intelligence affairs that they became part of an internal German dispute. When the S.S. security service decided to oust the army's counter-intelligence group, its agents let Brand in on the secret and induced him to help. Finally two of Schmidt's men were arrested in Brand's apartment, though nothing happened to Brand himself except that he held a get-acquainted talk with the new dispenser of protection, the head of the security service, von Klagass.

Kastner's position was considerably strengthened with the Germans' entry into Hungary. In the face of the torpor and impotence of the non-Zionist population, the Rescue Committee stood out as the only group capable of carrying out purposeful actions. Kastner, who headed the committee, was in control of foreign contacts and of the large sums of money that arrived from Istanbul and Switzerland. His first purposeful step was to channel a great deal of money into an operation which soon produced clear-cut results. When Kastner learned that Wisliceny had arrived in Budapest and had met privately with Freudiger,²⁴ he paid \$20,000 to Dr. Schmidt of the counter-intelligence group and another \$3-4,000 in "pocket money" to his assistants in return for an important service--to set up a meeting between himself and Brand with Wisliceny.²⁵

The meeting was held with the participation of three intelligence agents, two of whom were arrested shortly afterwards. In the presence of these witnesses the head of the Rescue Committee sought to renew the cautious and clandestine negotiations that were conducted previously in Bratislava under the sage guidance of Rabbi Weissmandel. They knew, they said, what requests Wisliceny had made to Mrs. Gisi Fleischmann in connection with the Europa Plan, and they were willing to fulfill them for Hungarian Jewry. They would pay \$2 million in ten monthly installments of \$200,000 each. They were ready to make the first payment immediately if the following four conditions were met:

- (1) No ghettos would be established in Hungary

²² Brand, pp. 19, 30.

²³ Rosenfeld, p. 87.

²⁴ Rosenfeld, pp. 40, 42.

²⁵ Brand, p. 61; his testimony in the Eichmann trial, p. 873.

- (2) Jews would not be executed and no pogroms would be perpetrated against them.
- (3) There would be no deportations from Hungary.
- (4) Jews could emigrate to Palestine.²⁶

This put an instant end to Wisliceny's role as a secret mediator between Himmler and the Jews. His reply, in its form and content, was that of an arrogant and prevaricating Nazi. In a lengthy and twisting speech he promised that no ghettos would be set up, but Jews would be concentrated in communities of no fewer than 10,000 persons "in order to defend them more effectively against irresponsible elements." The Germans would not perpetrate pogroms, but it was self-evident that "he would not impose on the S.S. the task of protecting Jews." The matter of emigration to Palestine was complicated, and he was unwilling to commit himself on the subject. One thing he could promise faithfully, with a full guarantee and responsibility: there would be no deportations of Jews from Hungary. That was entirely out of the question.

He was not sure, he said, whether the proposed \$2 million ransom was sufficient. However, he agreed to take the down payment of \$200,000. This could be also paid in Hungarian currency--at the black market rate.

Kastner did not relent. Perhaps, he asked, the *Obersturmfuehrer* would allow out, on a one-time basis, a group of 600 people who had been assured entry visas to Palestine? Wisliceny did not reject this special request out of hand. He promised to consider it and asked for a list of the candidates for the select group.

Wisliceny did not turn up for the next meeting. As later emerged, Eichmann removed him from the negotiations with the Jews and sent him to set up the ghettos in the provinces. He was replaced by another officer, Krumei, who reprimanded the Jews for not bringing the down payment in full. Krumei refused to talk about the issues that had been raised in the first meeting, with one exception: he announced that his superiors had agreed to allow the exit of Kastner's 600 Jews. Henceforth this would be the main topic of the contacts between the Rescue Committee and the Nazis.

* * * * *

One day (April 15, according to Brand) Eichmann summoned Brand and told him he was to go abroad and make an offer to world Jewry in his, Eichmann's, name: the Nazis would release from their area of control one million Jews in return for 10,000 trucks and a few thousand

tons of tea, coffee, soap and other goods. The Nazis undertook not to use the trucks in the west, but solely on the eastern front.²⁷ On May 18 Brand flew with this proposal from Vienna to Istanbul aboard a German plane; he carried a forged identity card and was accompanied by a professional intelligence agent, Bandi Grosz.

The proposed deal was not consummated, nor was there ever any chance that it would be. When the Western Allies were apprised of the terms, they feared a Nazi provocation and quickly informed the Russians, who, in turn, lost no time in vetoing any further talks on the subject.²⁸ Brand, after spending two weeks in Istanbul, proceeded by rail to Palestine, was arrested en route by the British, and despite the protests of Moshe Sharett, who met with him in Aleppo, was taken to Egypt and held there for over four months. His mission seemed to have ended without achieving any results.

In fact, it did produce results.

Even without the Russians' intervention, the Americans and the British never seriously considered supplying the Germans with salient war materiel such as trucks. Nor did the Jews who dealt with the matter--BenGurion and Sharett in Jerusalem, Weizmann in London, Wise and Goldmann in Washington--make any such request.²⁹ At the same time, both Jews and non-Jews concurred that the proposal should not be rejected outright. Undersecretary of State Edward Stettinius and Dr. Goldmann, with whom he consulted, both agreed that the talks should be prolonged to the maximum

²⁶ Brand, p. 62; Rosenfeld, p. 41. See also The Kastner Report (German), Kindler Publishers, p. 72. There are chronological and substantive differences in the accounts of Kastner and Brand; we find the latter to be more reliable.

²⁷ Brand, pp. 85-86.

²⁸ Barlas, p. 127.

²⁹ The series of relevant documents appear in Barlas, pp. 112-136.

and the Germans led to believe that their offer was under serious consideration. Everyone, in both Washington and Jerusalem, thought that the best move was *to gain time*.

Thus the would-be rescuers walked straight into the trap set for them by Eichmann. Far from gaining, they lost extremely precious time, when no possibility whatsoever existed of reaching an agreement of any kind. Eichmann was not after an agreement: he was after the uninterrupted extermination of Jews. The Brand mission was a fraudulent stratagem to enable him to carry out his mission. Proof of this is not lacking.*****

 ***** In order to get at the truth, we must take note of the corrections to Brand's account that were made in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Brand, in his book, in the Greenwald trial and at the outset of his testimony in the Eichmann trial, maintained that Eichmann had pledged that if he returned from abroad with a positive answer, then he, Eichmann, would provide a "down payment" of 100,000 released Jews and would blow up the extermination facilities at Auschwitz. Cross-examination in the Eichmann trial undercut the credibility of this testimony. This turned out to be a later Brand version, one that had not existed at the time of Brand's talks with the Jewish Agency delegation in Istanbul or in his Aleppo meeting with Sharett. The reports on those talks contain no mention of a readiness to blow up the Auschwitz facilities, and the size of the "down payment" was put at 5-10,000. There is also room for doubt concerning the figure of a million Jews that Eichmann promised to release in return for 10,000 trucks. Sharett's report makes no mention of a million or any other number. Haim Barlas, who held lengthy talks with Brand in Istanbul, quotes him explicitly (*Rescue in the Holocaust*, p. 114) as saying that the negotiations should be held "with the aim of transferring 50-100,000 Jews to Spain," all told. These corrections, if justified, relate to the reliability of part of Brand's testimony, but are immaterial to an Assessment of Eichmann's actions.

The first and most convincing proof is that Eichmann promised to delay the deportations to Auschwitz for two weeks but actually made use of the time to execute a large portion of his scheme. The conditions he dictated to Brand leave no room for doubt that his aim was to render the deal unfeasible. Eichmann was well aware that "world Jewry" could not furnish 10,000 trucks without the consent of the Allies, and that agreement to provide war materiel would not be given. The assurance that the trucks would not be used on the western front injected into the proposal a saliently provocative element--an attempt to drive a wedge between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. And to add confusion and uncertainty, Bandi Grosz was sent along with Brand on a mysterious mission of his own.

That Eichmann was thirstier for Jewish blood than any other Nazi murderer was well known to both Germans and Jews. That he "inwardly opposed any agreement with the Jews" is asserted by the editor of Brand's memoirs in the book's final section, which is based on diaries and notes of Otto Komoly, Pinhas Freudiger and other Jewish functionaries.³⁰ For his aides and lackies none of this was a secret. The Nazi officer Krumei, who drove Brand from Budapest to Vienna airport, assured him that "in the S.S. there are not only officers like Eichmann but also fair officers like him and Wisliceny."³¹

Indeed, Eichmann deceived his superiors, too, besides the Jews. Many testimonies indicate that the initiative for the deal with the Jews was imposed on him by order of Himmler, who was then, as mentioned, in a hesitant and doubtful frame of mind about continuing the annihilation. Eichmann fulfilled the order in a manner ensuring that the rescue deal would stand no chance of being accepted, and exploited the mission as a diversionary operation to serve his murderous actions. Eichmann was not

certain that he could conceal from the world the mass transport of Hungary's Jews to Auschwitz. But Brand now brought a calming piece of news: that the transports

³⁰ Brand, p. 183.

³¹ Brand, p. 103; his testimony in the Eichmann trial, p. 883.

already en route would be held up for two weeks and then, once an agreement was reached, would all be directed toward the border with Spain--and to freedom.

And what would happen after the two weeks, when no agreement had been concluded? Would the rescuers not take vigorous steps to halt the deportations? To this troublesome possibility Eichmann had no answer. Brand brought with him to Istanbul not only false promises to induce calm, but also the actual news that deportations had begun. He said that 12,000 people were being transported every day and also provided reliable information about what was underway at Auschwitz, information learned in Budapest from two young men who had escaped from the death camp. Already in the first days after Brand's arrival in Istanbul, cables were received there from the Rescue Committee in Budapest that "the transports are continuing." It was clear beyond any doubt that the intensive liquidation of Hungarian Jewry had begun.

The time had come to derive some benefit from the functioning of the Jewish Agency mission in Istanbul as an observation point toward the Nazis' kingdom in Europe. Both logic and the bitter lesson of the suppression of the facts two years earlier should have taught the mission's dispatchers in Jerusalem what to do with the vital information they now received: in the first place and without delay, to proclaim it to the world. The report about the incarceration of Hungary's Jews in ghettos and the start of their transport to Auschwitz should have been disseminated to every place where there was willingness to help--to public opinion and to the organizations concerned. Clear knowledge of what was afoot would have enabled help to be enlisted at an early stage. Since it was the Hungarian authorities who were given the task of establishing the ghettos and carrying out the deportations (under the command of a few Nazi officers), it is possible that if strong pressure, similar to that wielded in early July, had been exerted on the Horthy government 50 days earlier, it might have achieved a halt to the deportations and perhaps even the dismantling of the ghettos.

The Rescue Committee in Jerusalem and the Jewish Agency Executive did the opposite of what was needed. They devoted most of their time to dealing with Eichmann's offer. Ben-Gurion and Sharett held two meetings on the subject with the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem. Weizmann met with the British foreign secretary. Sharett went to Aleppo, Cairo and London. All this activity to further a matter which

had absolutely no chance of being realized. And together with the secret of the deal itself they preserved completely *the secret of the transports to annihilation*.

The suppression of March-November 1942 was repeated in May-June 1944 in a shortened version in terms of time and scope, but with consequences every bit as serious. At the time, in 1942, the Zionist movement disregarded reports about the Holocaust that flowed in from various sources. Now the Jewish Agency Executive concealed from the world reliable reports in its possession concerning the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. On May 25 Vanya Pomerantz, a member of the Istanbul mission, informed the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem that beginning the following week 12,000 Jews would be deported to Poland every day (in fact, the deportations had begun ten days earlier).³² On June 11 Gruenbaum informed his Jewish Agency colleagues that 12,000 people a day were being transported to death camps in Poland and were murdered immediately upon their arrival.³³ On June 18 he noted that the deportations were continuing incessantly. But the public and the world were told nothing.

Ben-Gurion summed up the Executive meeting with Vanya Pomerantz in the following words: "We ask the *haverim*, and Mr. Pomerantz especially, to keep these things absolutely secret and not to talk to anyone about them." He surely meant that the deal with the Nazis should be kept secret. But somehow the secrecy about the deportations was linked to the secrecy about the deal. Inadvertently, Eichmann's ploy scored a major achievement: in its desire not to interfere in the negotiations, the opposing side disastrously refrained from revealing the secret of his operation.

The exceptional stand of Yitzhak Gruenbaum deserves special mention. Unlike his colleagues on the Jewish Agency Executive, he viewed the Eichmann proposal as a "satanic provocation" from the first. He argued several times that by the time the negotiations with the different governments were concluded, "there will be no more

³² Minutes of Jewish Agency Executive meeting, May 25, 1944.

³³ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1944.

Jews in Hungary to save.”³⁴ But he did not think of taking the simple action that was required: to break the silence surrounding the extermination operation which was known to him and a dozen of his colleagues.

A perusal of the Yishuv press in this 50-day period shows, among other points, how closely the secret of the annihilation was guarded. The papers do not reveal the death transports of Hungarian Jewry, just as two years earlier they had not revealed the destruction of Polish Jewry. This time, however, all the signs indicate that the editors and reporters were not

to blame. In contrast to 1942, the source of the reliable information was in Jerusalem--under heavy lock.

As in the period of the deep suppression in 1942, the papers now contained reports about the annihilation in general and about Hungary in particular. Then, as now, however, the information being reported lacked a seal of certainty and reliability. On May 31 the *Ha'aretz* correspondent in Istanbul reported that for the past 20 days 10,000 people a day had been transported from Hungary. But other papers did not back up the report, neither on that day nor in the coming days, with the result that it took on the character of a baseless rumor.

A week later the papers carried a proclamation by the “Yishuv Assembly for Rescue” which referred to a “danger of annihilation” facing Hungarian Jewry, but in vague terms, without concrete details. *Davar* wrote in this connection: “Once more the Yishuv’s outcry erupted yesterday.”³⁵ But the outcry of the paper itself was short-lived. On the day following the paper devoted not a word to Hungarian Jewry, or on the next day and the day after that--for two weeks the paper did not carry a single substantive report on the catastrophe in Hungary.

On June 22 *Davar* printed a cabled report headlined, “*Why Don’t Hungary’s Jews Defend Themselves?*” Written by “our correspondent in Ankara,” the item said: “According to reports arriving from Hungary, the Germans are perpetrating their demonic program and sending trains packed with Jews to the death camps in Poland every day... If the Jews put up armed resistance, as they did in the Warsaw Ghetto, the annihilation plan would prove costly to the Germans and they would not carry it out with such ferocity.”

A Holocaust researcher who is familiar with the linguistic style of some of the members of the Rescue Committee in Jerusalem suspects that the “correspondent in Ankara” was none other than Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who was mainly upset that Hungary’s Jews did not show armed resistance. Yet even this worrisome report, whatever its source, failed to convince the editors of *Davar*. Four days later they published, without comment, a soothing report from the JTA, citing a Budapest radio broadcast and Hungarian papers reaching Zurich. “It emerges” that the Jewish men in Hungary were being sent to labor battalions and that the anti-Jewish persecutions were mainly taking the form of confiscation of their property and forcing them to wear the yellow badge.³⁶ Again, it was not clear whether extermination was being carried out.

The equivalent turning point to November 23, 1942, occurred in the last four days of June. On June 27, *Davar*, quoting a Polish source,

reported that 100,000 Hungarian Jews had already been murdered. On June 30 “authoritative sources in Istanbul” were quoted as saying that as of June 19, 400,000 Jews had been transported to Poland and that the following week the deportation had begun of the remaining 350,000 Jews. It was at this time that the War Refugee Board in Washington learned of these events, and took steps that brought about a halt to the deportations, as described above.

* * * * *

The preservation of Eichmann’s secret in Jerusalem was done unintentionally. With Gruenbaum it was the result of a flawed conception, which he frequently and obdurately reiterated, that it was pointless to try and enlist world public opinion on behalf of rescue. With other leaders it was one more expression of their unwillingness

³⁴ *Ibid.*, May 25, June 18 and July 2, 1944.

³⁵ *Davar*, June 6, 1944.

³⁶ *Davar*, June 26, 1944.

to enter into details about rescue if this was not accompanied by *aliyah*. Ben-Gurion and his Mapai colleagues were in the midst of a fierce struggle caused by a split in their party. It was during a heated speech concerning this struggle that Berl Katnelson declared, as will be recalled (Ch. 3), that he did not feel himself worthy to speak about the Holocaust.

In Hungary itself events were taking place that, over and above their lethal consequences, did Eichmann a great service by preventing leaks about his murderous operation. Many of the outlying towns from which deportations were underway were situated close to the borders of Romania, Yugoslavia and Slovakia. A few thousand Jews managed to slip across the border to safety. Had the others known what awaited them, many more would have made the attempt. At the same time, the survivors spread the news about the extermination campaign, increasing the chance that the reports would reach the free world.

But the Jews in the ghettos did not know. The Nazis, following their customary practice, deceived them with assurances that they were going "to work." In some ghettos rumors were spread that the Jews would be concentrated in the Hungarian town of Nyiregyhaza and put to work in various capacities until the end of the war. In the Klocsz ghetto fake letters were circulated which had ostensibly been received from Jews who had arrived in that town and now wrote about the good conditions they found there.

Unfortunately for the Jews of Hungary, the Nazis' deception campaign was aided concretely by the Jewish suppression campaign. Leading the latter was Dr. Kastner, and the story begins with the group of 600 *aliyah* candidates whom he mentioned to Wisliceny.

The Nazis, as mentioned, acceded to Kastner's request and asked him for a list of the 600 persons involved. Eichmann, in his conversation with Brand, increased the list at his own initiative to 800. When the list began to be prepared, and pressure grew in the community for inclusion on it, the Nazi showed unusual generosity. Ultimately, there were 1,685 names on the list. On July 1 they were taken by train to Bergen-Belsen and from there went on to Switzerland in two groups, in August and December.

Kastner and his assistants devoted most of their energies in drawing up the list of those to be allowed out and in the negotiations with the Nazis over this subject. For the Nazis, Eichmann personally oversaw the operation. When Brand failed to return from his mission, the arch-murderer did not punish his wife, Hansi, who had remained in Budapest as a hostage; indeed, he even intimated to her that he was pleased the deal had fallen through.³⁷ In place of the deal for trucks came the deal for the group bound for Palestine, and both sides contributed their share to its success.

The Nazis' contribution was, as noted, generous. The list of candidates grew nearly three-fold as compared with the original number requested. Eichmann, it is true, refused to send the group to Constanza, from where they could embark for Palestine--because of his commitment to his friend the Mufti of Jerusalem, he explained. But with this exception, he upheld what he promised.

The price paid by the Jews was far more generous. Officially, payment was to be in money. Bargaining and haggling went on over the ransom for each individual on the list. In addition to the \$200,000 that Brand and Kastner had already given Krumei, Hansi Brand brought to Gestapo headquarters three valises full of gold and diamonds.³⁸ But money was not the main thing.

The list of candidates for freedom, with all that it entailed, became a crucial factor in the events relating to Hungarian Jewry. It separated from the community a special group, which was assured, with explicit assent, a different fate. The task of drawing up the list devolved on Kastner and his assistants in Budapest, and on functionaries close to him in the provinces. The list included the functionaries themselves and their families (34 from Kastner's family³⁹), and wealthy individuals who contributed large amounts to the ransom. The longer the list grew, the greater became the disparity between the interests of the general populace and those of the group of officials designated to lead them. The direct interest of the privileged functionaries dictated that they ensure that

³⁷ Hansi Brand's testimony in the Eichmann trial, p. 923.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 917.

³⁹ Rosenfeld, p. 115.

nothing occur liable to jeopardize their impending freedom. It was to this concern that all the efforts of Kastner and his associates were devoted.

Eichmann did not make his agreement to release the privileged group conditional on Kastner's cooperation in executing the deportations to Auschwitz. A condition of this kind, if presented overtly, undoubtedly would have been firmly rejected. But a direct condition was superfluous.

The very fact of drawing up the list, selecting candidates and preferring them over others, brought those engaged in the work into cooperation with Eichmann in the area of greatest importance to him--hiding the truth about the fate awaiting the deportees. Otherwise it would have been difficult, next to impossible, to proceed without the rage and despair of the condemned triggering riots and unrest that would hamper the work of choosing who was to live and who to die. No such riots occurred anywhere. It follows that nowhere was the truth known.

This is not to say that all the functionaries who saved themselves and their relatives concealed the truth they knew. Very probably many of them, perhaps the majority in the provinces, did not know and did not understand the full harsh significance of the events. However, it is also a safe assumption that the overwhelming majority unconsciously did not strive at all costs to learn a truth that might have embarrassed them. By means of an enticing stratagem, Eichmann was able to paralyze the entire community's capacity for judicious discernment.

But in Budapest many knew. They knew the deportees were being taken to Auschwitz and they knew what was done to them there. They knew about a letter in this regard from Rabbi Weissmandel,⁴⁰ and there were no illusions. More than anyone, Kastner knew--from Eichmann, whom he took to visiting frequently after Brand's departure for Istanbul. He later said he learned "the whole truth" from Eichmann at the end of May.⁴¹ In his presence, Eichmann said to Hansi Brand: "You may inform your husband that I am operating the mill and that I fear nothing."⁴² "The mill" meant the gas chambers at Auschwitz, which were working at top capacity.

Eichmann had good reason not to fear anything. In addition to the mirage of the trucks deal which was in progress in the west, the active leadership of Hungarian Jewry had been trapped in the web of deception he had woven around the emigration of the privileged. The secret of the extermination was well concealed from the destined victims and from the thousands who managed to escape. The upshot was that it took time for the news to reach the people and institutions who wanted to help and could have helped--but whose help came too late.

We will conclude our discussion of this subject with several observations. Just how far Dr. Kastner had become entangled with the Nazis is illustrated, among other examples, by the affair of the two parachutists Peretz Goldstein and Yoel Palgi who arrived in Budapest in June. When the (unconfirmed) fear arose that Goldstein had been caught by the Hungarian authorities, Kastner could find no other recourse but to send Palgi to the Gestapo and inform the Germans that he and his comrade had come, supposedly, to clarify details about the deal for the trucks. Palgi was later arrested and tortured by the Hungarian secret service, admitted everything, and revealed that Kastner, too, knew the real objective of their mission--but no harm befell Kastner. Finally, in order not to jeopardize the train of the privileged that departed that day for Bergen-Belsen, Peretz Goldstein was forced to turn himself in--to perdition.

Eichmann, before he was seized by Israeli agents, had his own version of his relations with Kastner. In an interview with a pro-Nazi journalist, he had the following to say about the talks between them: "This is how the illegal immigration was usually organized. A certain group of Jews would be arrested and taken to the place that was decided on by Kastner and his people. There the S.S. would guard them so that no harm should befall them. After the Jewish political organizations prepared their departure from the country, I would order the border police not to interfere with the crossing of these transports. They usually moved at night. This was the gentleman's agreement I had with Kastner."⁴³

In the Greenwald trial, Kastner confirmed that after the German invasion, groups of refugees and Zionist pioneers constantly made their way to various border

40 Rothkirchen, Document 101.

41 Rosenfeld, p. 93.

42 Testimony of Hansi Brand, p. 920.

43 Life, February 3, 1961.

points between Hungary and Romania.⁴⁴ Whether this was effected as part of a “gentleman’s agreement” with Eichmann, he did not say.

In his trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann made some comments which can be interpreted as an attempt to return to the subject of his special relations with Kasmer. Referring to his superiors’ order that he lie in order to hide his intentions, he added that there was one Jewish official to whom he had spoken frankly. However, the attorney general, who was cross-examining him, did not ask him to specify who that official was.⁴⁵

* * * * *

Summing up the affair of the Jewish parachutists sent to Europe toward the end of the war, Prof. Yehuda Bauer writes:

Anyone examining the history of the Jewish parachutists cannot escape the impression that, in general, the project did

not win the hoped-for success. Most of the operatives were captured by the enemy. Seven fell. And many of them did not see any action at all until the Russian takeover or later. The big plans--organization of an anti-Nazi Jewish underground, prevention of the extermination of Jews, active war against the German conqueror--were never carried out, mainly because of the tiny number of operatives and their late arrival... The chief positive results were, apparently, the consummate heroism of the individuals involved, Zionist activities in Rumania and Bulgaria after the Soviet conquest, the few military actions to which we have alluded--and that is all.

Is that really all?

The entire operation was elevated to the level of symbol. Tales were woven about the legendary few who risked their lives for the Jews of the Diaspora. The legend entered a generation’s consciousness. It became a powerful national educational force.⁴⁶

We agree with this reliable summation, with the exception of one point. We do not think that the parachutists’ minimal impact was due to their small number or their late arrival. On the contrary, it seems to us that if more parachutists had been dispatched at an earlier stage, when the Russian front was still distant, the failure might have assumed catastrophic dimensions--to judge by the number of victims among the emissaries, and the pogroms liable to have been perpetrated against the Jews in the countries involved.

A review of the parachutists’ activity brings home the scope of the operation’s failure. Nowhere did they succeed in fulfilling their primary mission: to organize armed resistance against the Nazis. In two countries, Bulgaria and Italy, they were unable to begin operating as long as the Nazis and their henchmen ruled. In Yugoslavia they were warmly welcomed by Tito’s forces--who did not allow them to engage in activity of any kind. The three parachutists who reached Hungary were caught by the Germans and Hungarians, and two of them perished.

The Slovakia episode is illuminating. There the parachutists arrived in the midst of the Slovak uprising against the Germans at Banska Bistrica. They attempted to alleviate the plight of Jewish refugees who chanced to be there, and they tried to organize a Jewish fighting force from Zionist youth movements. When it became clear that the uprising was doomed, the difficult question of leaving arose. The parachutists

decided that the group of young fighters, about twenty in number, would take with them some twenty women and adults from the local community officials, and together they would go into the hills to seek shelter and fight for their lives. When the young people heard about the plan, they opposed it fiercely. Fighting in the hills, they argued, was feasible only in small units of strong young men possessing exceptional mobility. The addition of old men and women would rule out combat ability and mobility, particularly in the harsh winter that was just beginning. The plan, they

⁴⁴ Rosenfeld, op. cit., p. 137.

⁴⁵ Eichmann trial, session of July 20, 1961.

⁴⁶ Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, New York, 1973, p. 281.

complained, was unrealistic and attested to its authors' unfamiliarity with local conditions.⁴⁷

The parachutists insisted. Wielding their authority as emissaries from Eretz-Israel and as British officers, who had obtained weapons for the unit, they forced their view on the youth movements. Of the group that left Banska Bistrica, one-third were young people trained in the use of arms, one third were young women, and one-third were middle-aged men and their wives.⁴⁸

They did not get far. On the very first night, as they prepared for sleep, exhausted from their climb in the hills, the camp was attacked by German troops. Some of the group were killed on the spot, others (including three parachutists) were taken captive and executed a few weeks later. Eight people remained. Learning from the bitter experience, they decided to scatter in groups of two or three persons, each group to fend for itself.⁴⁹

The eight parachutists who landed in Romania were more fortunate. Four of them were arrested by the Romanians, but after being moved about a good deal, emerged unscathed. The parachutists involved themselves in the local Zionist movement and even took part in the difficult decision-making regarding the candidates for the rescue ships that embarked from Constanza to Palestine. Together with the pioneer youth movements, they prepared for armed resistance, acquiring weapons and holding training sessions. One Holocaust researcher aptly described this activity as "forbidden games" with potentially disastrous consequences for Romanian Jewry.⁵⁰

In the unstable situation prevailing in the country, the authorities' discovery that the Jews were storing arms with the intention of using them, would have been enough to seal the fate of the Jewish community. Miraculously, no mistakes were made and no armed activity was undertaken. When the Soviet army entered Romania, some of the parachutists engaged in vigorous and effective activity to further Zionism and *aliyah*.

The stories and legends about the parachutists' heroism and self-sacrifice are fully warranted. They were a group of young idealists who took their lives in their hands in order to fulfill their duty. The personalities of some of them--Hanna Senesz, Enzo Sereni and others--virtually ensure that tales of their life and death will long continue to be told in Israel. This is as regards the emissaries.

The case with their senders is different. When Ben-Gurion and Sharett point to the parachutists' project as proof that the Yishuv came to the aid of European Jewry (see the Foreword), they are correct, but only formally. The parachutists, it is true, were sent to give aid. But the nature of the principal aid they intended to offer was not what was required for rescue. Had the plans to engage in armed resistance come to fruition, they would have brought perdition on many more Jews in Romania, Budapest and elsewhere.

The dispatching of the parachutists fulfilled the desires of their senders in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. It was meant to serve as the preface to a large and pretentious plan, one of the plans submitted to the British authorities in 1943 and 1944.⁵¹ According to the final version, presented by Moshe Sharett in July 1944, the parachutists were to be followed by a group of a hundred young people from the Yishuv who would establish a military base and a transit camp at a site where the borders met of three countries, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. This group was to act as a nucleus and gather around them many young people who had escaped from the ghettos. Thus a large guerilla force would come into being that would encourage uprisings in detention and hard-labor camps.⁵² The British rejected the big plan and agreed to the dispatch of the parachutists on condition they serve British intelligence. The preface to the big operation was turned into a fragmented substitute that had no follow-up.

Surprisingly, objections to the parachutists project came from those who were meant to benefit from it. When the Jewish community officials in Budapest learned of

47 Haim Hermesh, Operation Amsterdam (Hebrew), p. 191; Eli Shedmi, Without Finding and Without Surrendering (Hebrew), p. 159.

48 Shedmi, p. 156.

49 Hermesh, pp. 206-207.

50 Theodore Lavi, The Struggle for the Rescue of Romanian Jewry (Hebrew), pp. 131-132.

51 Bauer, pp. 274-282; Shaul Avigur, With the Haganah Generation (Hebrew), pp. 54-55; Secret Shield (collection in Hebrew), p. 215.

52 Secret Shield, p. 215; Hermesh, p. 57.

the plan to send parachutist-emissaries to Hungary, they were quick to register their opposition with the Jewish Agency mission in Istanbul.⁵³ And when the four parachutists arrived in Banska Bitrica, members of youth movements were unabashedly dismayed to see them. The leader of the outraged group, Eugen Roth, one of the heads of Hashomer Hatzar in Czechoslovakia, did not mince his words in this regard:

Really, why did you come? Please, Haviva [Reik], don't stop me. You know what I think, and I am obligated to spell it out

for you. Did all of you, Haviva too, you three also, think it was a kids' game here? You wanted to be heroes? Spies? Why? I know what you'll say: you want to help, to represent the Yishuv in Eretz-Israel. Tell me about conscience and solidarity... Nonsense! Fairy tales! Who summoned you? Who needs you?... You came here to play at soldiering... You're proud and you show off your independence, as though you came to us as representatives of some kind of Eretz-Israel master race. So you'd better know: we are not ashamed to hide, to crawl, to flee and to smuggle, because we want to get one Jew after another out of this huge graveyard. For years we have blessed every new day and we have been planning stratagems to get one person and then another person one step at a time to Eretz-Israel... And suddenly a few 'heroes' sit themselves in a plane and jump into the open grave. Millions are rotting here and they come to add another victim and another victim... Only to march with us to Hitler's slaughterhouse... Excuse me, but I must say that you have done an irresponsible act. In this world blaze every Jew is precious, and all the more so an Eretz-Israel Jew. You should never have come from there to here. And didn't you consider the responsibility you were imposing on us? Until now we have been responsible for our lives alone, and now you also weigh on our conscience. Get out! Get on the first plane and go back to the Holy Land!⁵⁴

When a fifth parachutist, Abba Berdichev, arrived, Egon Roth commented: "Another one of these righteous dreamers who are on a trip to the lion's den, maybe to add sparks in order to bring redemption closer, maybe to find an opportunity for martyrdom, and all this instead of growing tomatoes in Eretz-Israel."⁵⁵

The young man later relented, changed his mind, and even wrote a letter of appreciation to the headquarters of his movement's leadership in the Yishuv. But his point remained valid. He himself perished shortly afterward in an attempt at "soldiering" imposed by the parachutists.

His remark about "some kind of Eretz-Israel master race" was well-taken. Underlying the psychology of dispatching the parachutists was the prevailing belief in the Yishuv that the Jews in Eretz-Israel, or at least the young pioneers among them, were qualitatively superior to the Jews in the diaspora. On the basis of this belief it was assumed that two or three

parachutists could instruct the local Jews in what to do and how to behave. Yet this instruction was not needed by the active Jewish leaderships that already existed in Bucharest, Budapest and Bratislava.

* * * * *

The end of the parachutists project lies in its beginnings. The tasks entrusted to the parachutists were not executed, or they ended in disaster, because they were impossible to execute and conflicted with the rescue needs. After the "big plan" was rejected, no apparent substance remained in the idea of sending two or three parachutists to each country. The planners, who were not properly acquainted with the situation in the countries of the Holocaust, gave the parachutists extremely generalized instructions, trusting that each one "will save Jews according to his understanding and ability."⁵⁶ Only David Ben-Gurion presented them with a clear and realistic mission.

At the conclusion of a long talk with the candidates for parachuting into Europe, after hearing from them plans of all stripes, Ben-Gurion summed up his conception:

⁵³ Vanya Pomerantz in Secret Shield, p. 204.

⁵⁴ Hermesh, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁵ Shedmi, p. 150.

⁵⁶ Hermesh, p. 55.

“At the end of this war we have to establish the Jewish state. The British government has closed the gate on us, and by ourselves we do not have the strength to open it from the inside. We need the Jewish people to knock on the gates of the country from the outside. You must prepare Jews wherever they are. On the day after the victory, all roads in Europe, all the railway lines and all the rivers will witness a vast stream of Jews moving toward Eretz-Israel. Remember: *this is your task.*”⁵⁷ (Emphases added.)

That task was carried out brilliantly. Taking part in it were emissaries who went to liberated Europe, among them some of the surviving parachutists. A new period was launched of extricating the Jewish remnants and getting them to Eretz-Israel by every possible means. This mission saw manifestations of loyalty, self-sacrifice and infinite devotion. This dazzling period in the annals of Zionism cast into the shadows the mistakes and blunders of the recent past, which were expunged from memory as though they had never occurred.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

Part Four

HISTORY WRITING AND LESSONS

Preface

Two events will illustrate concretely the content of the following two chapters. The first was initiated and administered by the author. In 1968, while teaching at two vocational high-schools, I devoted a lesson in one class of each school to a discussion of the Holocaust. In one the discussion was held on "Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day," the 27th of the month of Nissan, and in the other, on the day following. One class was Grade 11 (ages 16-17), the other Grade 10 (ages 15-16).

In both classes the pupils were asked to reply individually to this question: What do you have to say about the Holocaust? They were not told what specific issue concerning the Holocaust was of interest to the teacher, or what the teacher's opinion was on any of these issues. My role was confined to that of chairman, ensuring that the discussion proceeded in an orderly manner, without intervening by expressing an opinion or commenting. (What I said at the *conclusion* of the discussions is immaterial in terms of the purpose behind them.)

In both discussions participation was lively and in both it quickly became apparent that the pupils were interested primarily in one topic: the behavior of the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. On this subject they had a very definite opinion and expressed it bluntly. To a person, they maintained that the Jews in the ghettos were cowards, without honor and courage. They had gone obediently like sheep to the slaughter because that is what they were. Some of the participants mentioned incidents in which hundreds of Jews were led to a killing (or transport) site by only a few guards, yet did not revolt. A few mentioned the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the Jewish partisans as proof that those who wanted to revolt, did so. The Judenrats were brought up, naturally for vilification. One pupil quoted Bialik's poem "In the City of Slaughter" to back up his remarks. The general opinion also adduced an "explanation" for everything that had happened--these had simply been *galut* (Diaspora) Jews...

Twice in two days I witnessed a surge of contempt and condemnation by Israeli youth who did not know whereof they spoke. In one of the discussions an event occurred which seemed to encapsulate the significance of the phenomenon. One boy tried to make a point, broke out in tears, and went on crying until the end of the lesson. Yigal (not his real name) was an intelligent boy and an excellent student. Perhaps he was

more gentle than most boys his age. Before the discussion began, he said, in reply to my question, that his parents were Holocaust survivors. Now this oversized boy sat among his friends and wept uncontrollably. It was really quite extraordinary!

The second event consisted of a story related during a solemn speech. On that same 27th day of Nissan, the Knesset held a special session to mark the 25th anniversary of the ghetto uprisings. The keynote speech was delivered by Gideon Hausner, who had served as the chief prosecutor in the Eichmann trial. Speaking about the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, he quoted the Nazi Propaganda Minister, Goebbels, who in a diary entry on May 1, 1943, referred to “very fierce battles between our forces and the rebellious Jews.” Hausner then went on: “On May 4 [the Nazi General] Stroop was compelled to request additional aid from the army. Three days after receiving it, he reported that he was *approaching* the central bunker of the [insurgents’] command post. And, indeed, on May 8 he *reached* the headquarters of the revolt at Mila 18.”¹ (Emphases added.)

This description, given from the loftiest state platform in Israel, suggests the following picture: In heavy fighting on the streets of Warsaw the insurgents throw back the attacks of the Nazis and prevent (or, let us say, slow down) their advance. Particularly heavy battles rage in the direction of the central bunker of the insurgents’ command post, where the German attacks encounter fierce resistance which they are unable to overcome. Stroop is compelled to ask for reinforcements, and only after they arrive does he succeed, in four days, in reaching his military target.

The truth is completely different.

The factual basis for Goebbels’ diary entry may have been the isolated battle on Muranowska Street on April 27, which possibly continued into the following day (see Ch. 14). This however was at this time the only fighting, heavy or not heavy, between the Germans and the insurgents at this time, with the exception of sporadic clashes between German and Jewish reconnaissance patrols. From April 22 there was nothing to prevent the Germans from reaching any place they wished in the ghetto. All Stroop had to do was dispatch to the place in question half a dozen of the two thousand men under his command. He did not have to resort to street fighting and he certainly needed no reinforcements.

The mention of the bunker at Mila 18 as a military target requires further clarification. The word “bunker,” as used in the literature of the Holocaust, means a *camouflaged hiding place*. In Kovno and Vilna it was known as a *malina*, and in Warsaw as a *skhron*.² Its task was to conceal the occupants from the Germans and enable as lengthy and as comfortable

a stay as possible. Unlike the conventional meaning of the word in German and other languages, the ghetto bunker was not a fortified position access to which was protected by military means. Generally speaking, it had one serious defect—once discovered, it invariably became a trap for those inside. This was true of the bunker of the Bialystok Ghetto fighters (at 7 Kamalna Street) and of Frumka Plotnicka’s bunker in Bendin. It was equally true of the hundreds of bunkers set up in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, and of the bunker at Mila 18. To reach such a bunker, then, there was no need for street fighting; all that was required was to discover its location.

With all his desire to glorify the “large-scale operation” he commanded, Stroop did not go so far as to fabricate the need to “approach” the insurgents’ command bunker. All he said in his report on May 7 was: “The location of the bunker of the ‘party leadership,’ as it is called, is now *known*. Tomorrow we intend to breach it in force.”³

If so, the reader will ask, why did Stroop request help on May 4? As it turns out, the answer to this perfectly logical question is surprisingly simple. All the indications are that he did not ask for help. Stroop did *not* require military assistance and he did *not* ask for any, not on May 4 and not on any proximate day. We found no traces of such a request in his daily reports or in the concluding report he prepared after annihilating the ghetto.⁴ There is no hint of such a request either in the Hebrew translation of the reports⁵ or in the German originals as published at the Nuremberg trial.⁶ The request is not mentioned among the questions Stroop was asked in prison by Holocaust researchers (Dr. Yosef Kermish, Marek Edelman, Rachel Auerbach, Stefan Grajek) or in his replies*.⁷

1 Knesset Protocol. 275th session of the Sixth Knesset, p. 1742.

2 Emanuel Ringelblum, *Writings from the Ghetto* (Yiddish), Vol. II, p. 53.

3 Yosef Kermish, *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the Eyes of the Enemy*, p. 176.

4 Gideon Hausner bases himself on these reports in his book *Justice in Jerusalem* as confirmation of Stroop’s story, which also includes the claim about the “request for help” on May 4, p. 224.

5 Kermish, *ibid*.

6 IMT, Vol. 26, p. 628ff.

7 Kermish, pp. 195-234.

* We asked Mr. Hausner to inform us of his source for the information that Stroop had requested and received reinforcements on May 4. In reply he wrote:

“And here is my substantive answer: In the report of Juergen Stroop, which was submitted to Friedrich Wilhelm Krueger, a senior S.S. and police commander in Cracow, on May 4, 1943, Stroop reported about that day’s “big operation.” He begins by stating that he received reinforcements from the Wehrmacht’s Engineering Corps. In this connection, please see Stroop’s reports of May 1 and May 2, 1943 in which he specified and detailed the names of the units that took part in the battle for the Warsaw Ghetto.” A perusal of these reports, as directed, turned up the following results: In the May 4 report, Stroop wrote that one of the units that took part in the operation was reinforced by an engineering unit “from the Army.” The list of forces put into action that day includes an Engineering Corps unit comprising 41 soldiers and two officers. But the same unit, in almost the same makeup, appears in the reports of the preceding four days, with the May 2 report noting specifically that it was “ from the Army. ” In general, Stroop noted the organizational affiliation of the troops he employed : police, Waffen S.S., Security Police, Army, Trawniki personnel, and so forth. He did so on May 4 as well.

The conclusion : Stroop received no reinforcements on May 4. He *gave* them to one of his units from the forces at his disposal. It is unnecessary to add that there is no sign that he *requested* reinforcements or that he was “ compelled ” to do so.

All told, then, we have a story about something that never happened. The events that actually took place were inadequate for the speaker. Perhaps to magnify the heroism of the rebels he added his own contribution, with the result we described.

The high-school students were unimpressed. For them, the heroism of the young people in the Warsaw Ghetto served as additional proof that the others, those who did not rebel, were cowards. The two events—the unverified account given from the Knesset rostrum and the cruel desecration of the memory of the Holocaust martyrs by Israeli high-school students—represent phenomena at the two poles of a process that has been underway for over thirty years, namely, the writing of the history of the Holocaust.

Chapter Fourteen

Writing the History

It is almost axiomatic that history is “made” by those who write it. It was only natural that the writing of the history of the Holocaust should have devolved mainly on the young people who had been in the ghettos. Thanks to their physical agility and mobility, and because in many places the Germans delayed murdering them in order to exploit their fitness for labor, these young people succeeded in escaping extermination longer than other age-groups. This is particularly true as regards the young members of the resistance groups that organized in the ghettos. In addition to the advantages noted above, they had the mutual support of their fellow organization members, material assistance from various sources, and in some cases were also aided to avoid deportation to the killing sites.

For the most part they were affiliated with political youth movements--Zionist, Communist or Bundist--and sooner or later they made contact with their movement centers beyond the wall. In this manner information flowed to the free world that reflected the situation as it was perceived by these youngsters. In large measure this was *party* information according to its content and character. It played up those aspects of the situation that were noteworthy from the party-ideological viewpoint. Usually, a considerable portion of the questions raised concerned party-related issues of interest to both sides.

What these purveyors of information had in common was that the overwhelming majority of them belonged to the *militant* wing of Holocaust Jewry, a relatively small group composed almost entirely of young men and women and youth. Their behavior and thinking were often a function of their age. Later we will have occasion to ponder this fact in more detail. For the time being, and for the purposes of the present discussion, we will note some of the characteristics of youth in general and of youth-movement members in particular.

Their faithfulness to party ideals and movement frameworks was reflected, among other ways, in the intolerant attitude they held toward anyone who did not accept the “sole correct road” which they, the young people, espoused with certainty. A propensity to “simple” explanations, black-and-white thinking, and perhaps psychological elements deriving from the horrific conditions of the Holocaust, brought about a situation in which adult personages who did not advocate armed battle against the Germans were looked on as traitors or, alternatively, cowards.

Following the arrival of the survivors in Palestine and the establishment of the state, Israel became the main center for Holocaust research. In Israel the tendencies mentioned above were powerfully reinforced. The writing of Holocaust memoirs in the first decade after the war was the almost exclusive domain of youth movement members. The vast majority were absorbed by kibbutzim, and thus, free of the need to

earn a living, were able to write without interference.¹ Two kibbutz associations created centers for Holocaust research prior to the establishment of the state institution. The "Ghetto Fighters' House" was founded by Hakibbutz Hameuhad in 1950. In its first two years of activity the center published two collections on the Holocaust and in 1954 *The Book of the Ghetto Wars* appeared, a vast 800-page compendium containing an extensive description of Holocaust events related to the actions of the resistance movement--as perceived by the participants in that movement.

In this period Hakibbutz Hameuhad published a series of memoirs and diaries written during or in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust by Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof (1948), Tuvia Bozhikovsky (1950), Gusta Davidson (1953) and Batia Temkin-Berman (1955). All of them had taken an active part in the resistance movement.

Hakibbutz Ha'artzi of the Hashomer Hatza'ir movement was equally industrious. Rozhka Korczak's recollections of the Vilna Ghetto appeared as early as 1946. Four years later Haike Grossman's book on the Bialystok Ghetto was published--a work bearing a saliently party-ideological coloring. In *The Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir* (Vol. I), published in 1956, the party image of the Holocaust resistance movement reached its apogee. About half the book is devoted to the Holocaust, as part of the movement's history. The total identification of these events with the movement's activities is exemplified especially in the chronological tables, where the two are intermixed. The content of the material is consistent with the collection's external characteristics.

Two years later Sifriat Hapoalim published *The Book of the Jewish Partisans*, a huge two-volume reader of 1,500 pages. The book's editorial board were all from Hashomer Hatza'ir, as were most, though not all, of the principal authors. Whether or not this was the editors' intention, this immense work offers the most striking example of the description of Holocaust resistance as virtually identical with the activities of Hashomer Hatza'ir. Chronologically, this book can be said to have completed the laying of the militant-party foundation for the writing of Holocaust history.

* * * * *

The truth about the Holocaust, as it was perceived by the young people who took part in the resistance movement, was not the only truth. Many others, both young and not so young, had a different view of the reality and the behavior it obligated. The difference--and the contrast--between the two conceptions is illustrated by the story of a young couple and their children from the town of Tiktin who ended up in the Bialystok Ghetto. Rabbi Eviezer Burstein, who was present during the murder of the seventy young people seized in the bunker of the Bialystok Fighting Organization, relates:

Of all those in the group [of the murdered] I knew only one person. A weaver by profession, he was the son-in-law of the Tiktin ritual slaughterer. His wife, the latter's daughter, I saw for the first time last Shabbat--the first day of the deportations--walking about carrying her two infants. She was looking for her husband, who had left her alone with her children at such a dreadful moment, and crying bitterly. I could not understand how a husband could leave his wife alone at this awful time, the more so when she had to care for a three-month-old baby. Only now have I understood. The weaver from Tiktin went to defend the honor of the Jewish people.²

No one on earth had the right to pass moral judgment between the daughter of the Tiktin slaughterer and her husband. Especially if that judgment comes from one who was not himself in a ghetto. For us, the Jews, both are sanctified, they and their

¹ For important remarks in this regard, see the lecture of Fridka Mazie in the conference of Holocaust researchers held at Yad Vashem in April 1968 under the general heading of Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust, pp. 232-235 (Hebrew).

² Book of the Ghetto Wars (Hebrew), p. 408. Rabbi Borstein's story also appears in the Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir (Hebrew), p. 685. But the passage about the couple from Tiktin is omitted.

children. We are not entitled to judge them or to say how they should have behaved toward each other within the inhuman inferno into which they were cast.

Yet the personal conflict of the Tiktin couple is a mirror of the myriad questions about the way of life and behavior of millions who found themselves caught up in the catastrophe. The question of what took precedence on the scale of values, the order of priorities regarding goals, what was useful and what harmful, what should have been done and what not done--these questions remain valid, they continue to reverberate long after the people who agonized over them were murdered. They are fundamental questions for every nation liable to find itself in a similar situation, and for the Jewish people especially. They demand clarification

and they demand an answer--an answer based, to no small degree, on the experience of the Holocaust.

The weaver from Tiktin and his young friends ostensibly had answers to all the questions, and they adopted a clear and vigorous stand. It is a stand reflected in the published descriptions and memoirs of the Holocaust. A ramified network of research and memorial institutions explains and exalts the deeds of the fighters. But the voice of the young mother from Tiktin, neglected and forgotten, soon fades away.

The militant version of Holocaust history gained much credence from an ostensibly moral thesis which had its roots in the psychology of the young fighters but in the post-Holocaust years became an authoritative and accepted premise. According to this thesis, the Jews in the ghettos and extermination camps had to do something to defend their *honor* (or the honor of the Jewish people); failure to do their duty meant that their honor was vitiated and their memory tarnished.

This demand was made most forcefully of the Jews who were led to slaughter. It was incumbent on them to act urgently in a manner calculated to erase the shame of "going like sheep to the slaughter." They were called on to resist, rebel, flee, or, if there was no other alternative, to strike at the Nazi murderer by spitting in his face, provoking him in some way. And, of course, armed, initiated and organized resistance was considered the very epitome of activity to save Jewish honor.

This argument is void of any *moral* basis. It is understandable as an emotional reaction of the inhabitants of the ghettos and camps to the abuses and humiliations they suffered at the hands of the Germans. A Jewish youth was offended to the very depths of his soul when he was forced to remove his hat for every brutal German soldier; when during an endless round of beatings and tortures he was compelled to hear some Nazi idiot say that he, the Jew, was an inferior and contemptible creature. At a certain moment he throws himself on the German--and is murdered on the spot with agonizing slowness, by means of shovels and clubs. If a Jewish woman with her children on the way to the gas chamber, naked and humiliated, feels a sudden urge to spit in the faces of the murderers, she is torn to pieces by dogs. Youngsters guided by the principles of their youth movement, and influenced by Bialik's "The City of Slaughter" or relying on *samo' oborona* (self-defense) from the days of the pogroms in Tsarist Russia, decide not to go like sheep to the slaughter and to organize for armed resistance--and fall heroically in a clash with the Nazis.

All these emotional responses are totally unrelated to the objective moral reality. The Germans could not despoil Jewish honor because the

two sides did not possess a common value-base for the concept of honor. The humiliations of the Jews joined a long list of Nazi crimes, but did not dishonor their victims. The murderers caused the Jews in the ghettos untold anguish, but they could not bring shame on them. Not, at all events, in the eyes of people for whom the notions of honor and dishonor had not been completely vitiated.

A special place in the thesis of "saving one's honor" is reserved for the idea of going like sheep to the slaughter. This image originates in the Bible, where it appears during lamentations as a powerful description for a *state* of wretched helplessness. The underground organizations in the ghettos employed it as an expression of *behavior* which in their view was susceptible to personal choice. And the interpreters of the Holocaust went one step farther by making it a *pejorative* term implying a negative attitude toward those who did not put up a fight.

This question will occupy us again in the next chapter. In the meantime we will note an undeniable fact: for the past thirty years the notion of going like sheep to the slaughter has served as the central axis around which is concentrated most writing of Holocaust history both in Israel and abroad. It is employed in diverse ways, overtly or

implicitly, directly and indirectly. Some authors take a harsher stance, others are more lenient; some condemn, others defend. The attorney general asks witnesses in the Eichmann trial “why they did not resist,”³ and ardently questions other witnesses on how they resisted and fought.⁴ Some praise the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, others pronounce coldly that the resistance “came too late to change the fundamental Jewish reaction pattern.”⁵

The number of *explainers* is nearly legion: Why did the Jews go like sheep to the slaughter? Why did so few fight? What were the reasons for this behavior? The interpretations and conclusions range across the whole spectrum, from hostile condemnation, based on overt or covert antisemitism, to the forgiving justification of sympathizers and friends. Yet in this vast totality of literature, one simple question has still not been asked: Why, in heaven’s name, were the Jews obliged to fight? To curry favor with commentators and historians?

* * * * *

The Israeli establishment for the study of the Holocaust was established on the ideological foundations laid by the militant wing of Holocaust survivors and stemmed from the frame of mind prevailing in the Zionist leadership. On the question of “saving one’s honor” and “going like sheep to the slaughter” both groups held similar views. We saw above (Ch. 4) how Yitzhak Gruenbaum complained that the Jews of Poland were

being killed “like rags” without resisting. He was overjoyed at the news of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising: “When we received the reports about the revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto a heavy stone seemed to be lifted from our hearts, one that had been weighing us down without letup. We could not understand why the Jews in Poland, who knew how to fight for their honor in the recent past, were being led like a lamb to the slaughter. Had the executioners succeeded in murdering their souls before taking their bodies to slaughter?”⁶

An equally sharp account appeared in a book published by Hakibbutz Hameuhad. Its author, Moshe Prager, saw fit to confess publicly in two newspapers in late 1942 that he had not believed the reports about the extermination and had enticed others not to believe. Now, after the war, he passed moral judgment on the Jews against whom he had sinned, by his own confession, five years earlier. This was his judgment (emphases added): “Painful as it may be, we will remind ourselves and we will say openly: these millions who marched and walked in procession into the arms of perdition, if indeed they were in the grip of various illusions, did so due to *moral breakdown*... The very going of the masses of deported Jews to the death trains, the trains that traveled ‘to an unknown destination,’ this mute and *stupid* going, as it is described by eye-witnesses and exemplified in photographs taken by the observers, is a sharp *expression--disgraceful* and painful--of the disintegration of mental and moral forces.”⁷

Both pronouncements, Gruenbaum’s and Prager’s, belong to the extreme school that finds serious moral shortcomings in the murdered multitudes. This lethal exposition could not be accepted either by the Israeli establishment or by any other Jewish institution. Nor was it acceptable to the remnants of the ghetto fighters, who saw themselves fighting a war of perceptions not with the masses who were annihilated, but with their leaders, who, they believed, had not acted properly. The trends and influences that were operant when the Israeli Holocaust-studies establishment was being founded, ensured that it would be shaped according to these guidelines:

1. The *assumption* that the Jews in *the Holocaust should have saved their honor and the honor of the Jewish people* was taken as a *self-evident, unassailable axiom*. To save one’s honor meant, according to this assumption, to engage in physical resistance.

³ Eichmann trial. Testimonies, pp. 163, 185, 213.

⁴ Ibid., cross-examination of Abba Kovner, Yitzhak Zuckerman and others.

⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, p. 329.

⁶ Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *In the Days of Destruction and Holocaust* (Hebrew), p. 92.

⁷ Moshe Prager, *The Jewish Calamity in Europe* (Hebrew), p. 248.

2. The Jewish masses were absolved of moral responsibility for not having acted to save their honor. That they went like sheep to the

slaughter was not denied but was mitigated through apologetic explanations.

3. The rage of condemnation and contempt was focused on the Judenrats, which quickly became the object of universal loathing.

4. While lethal criticism could and should be directed at the Judenrats and the circles who opposed resistance against the Germans, the actions of the fighters were totally immune to criticism.

5. The Yishuv and the Zionist movement, including all its parties, acted correctly toward the Jews in the Holocaust. Views conflicting with this premise should be discouraged.

6. The nations of the world and their governments stood idly by in the face of the extermination of the Jews, manifesting indifference and even **Schadenfreude**. This fact must be relentlessly reiterated, on every possible occasion.

The most glaring feature of the system of Holocaust research in Israel is the demonstrative and stubborn emphasis placed on the element of heroism. The full name of the central state institution, Yad Vashem, is the "Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority." The 27th day of Nissan was chosen as Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day because it is related to the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. On the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem, where Yad Vashem is situated, stands a 20-meter high "Memorial to Heroism," visible from afar. Heroism has been linked to the Holocaust in every possible way and in every possible place.

Heroism, in this connection, means active combat against the Nazis. Hesitant attempts made from time to time to extend this to passive resistance, spiritual steadfastness, selfless devotion, a struggle for existence, and so forth, fail consistently and unequivocally.* The reason for the failure (besides the vehement opposition of the remnants of the fighters) is that the heroism demanded here was aimed mainly "to save one's honor" and to constitute the polar opposite of going like sheep to the slaughter--demands that other forms of heroism cannot meet.

The linkage of heroism to the Holocaust is not only an external phenomenon. It finds expression in the exclusive preference accorded research studies devoted to manifestations of resistance and revolt. It determines the character of the study of the Holocaust in the schools--based on books that consistently intertwine Holocaust and heroism. It has

* See, for example, the debate between Sarah Neshamit and Leni Yahil in the symposium on "Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust Period," 1968, pp. 52-53.

brought about a surprising paucity in the general literature on the Holocaust in Israel. The three research centers--the state body (Yad Vashem) and the two party-oriented centers (Ghetto Fighters' House and "Moreshet" [Heritage])--were insufficient to produce a work to match the comprehensive studies by Reitlinger and Hilberg on the history of the Holocaust. Hashomer Hatzair's *Book of the Partisans* surveys the resistance movements in the various countries. There is a detailed two-part *Lexicon of Heroism*, but there is no guiding dictionary to supply *faithful and thorough* information on what happened, where, and when.

This meager productivity should, we believe, be viewed in conjunction with two other phenomena that at first glance seem surprising but in fact have strong roots in the reality we have been describing. We refer to *censorship* and *boycott* of undesirable information and ideas. These two forms of silencing others have their origins in the war of accounts, outlooks, and political parties. Lightly felt at the start, they became increasingly heavy-handed, to the point where they are now very weighty indeed.

Initially there were internal matters, "within the family," so to speak, when party or movement leaders abrogated to themselves the right to "correct" or annul, for party reasons, reports arriving from their colleagues in the countries of the Holocaust. Later, when the diaries of *haverim* who had perished began to be published, the editors thought they had the right to delete certain passages. When memoirs or writings of adversaries were published, such as Rabbi Weissmandel's *From the Depths*, they were

boycotted by being suppressed. And for a long time the establishment succeeded in blocking altogether the publication of several important works that were liable to undercut the official "line."

Chronologically, the first victim of intra-party censorship was Tussia (Tova) Altman, a leader of the Hashomer Hatza'ir underground in Poland. In December 1942 the movement's journal in Palestine⁸ published a fragment from a letter she wrote describing in all its shocking horror the destruction of Polish Jewry. "*Israel is dying before my eyes, and I wring my hands and cannot help. Have you ever tried to bang your head against the wall?*" (Emphasis in the original publication.) The powerfully written letter quickly became a prime party document. It was quoted at public events connected with the Holocaust and was quoted to express grief for and identification with the annihilated Jews. Thousands of party members committed then passage to memory and can recite it to this day.

But the Hashomer Hatza'ir editors who published the letter did not reveal to their colleagues *everything* that Tussia Altman had asked they be

told. To inform them about the Holocaust was not the only purpose of her letter, and for that matter not even its main purpose. The writer, it turns out, was certain that her colleagues in the Yishuv knew what was happening. This is the only explanation for her resentment that they were doing nothing to help. She begins by writing: "After all, you have erased me from your memory, and what are we?... It takes all the restraint I can muster not to vent the bitterness that has accumulated for you and your friends for forgetting me so completely... Only the realization and the certainty that we will never again meet led me to write." The letter's final paragraph contains a sentence that is absolutely unequivocal: "*Do not give regards to anyone, I don't want to know about them!*"⁹ (Emphasis added, exclamation mark in the original letter.)

Hashomer Hatza'ir publications during the years of the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath quote the passage in the middle of the letter, omitting the beginning and the end. Four years after the war it still appears in this fragmented form.¹⁰ Only in *The Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir* did we find the letter in its entirety--with the exception of the concluding sentence. The furious outburst condemning the movement and the Yishuv for their indifference and inaction is hidden from the members of Hashomer Hatza'ir to this day.

Another victim of the censorship within the movement framework was Haike Klinger (Rosenberg), a Holocaust survivor who reached Eretz Israel full of despair but with a strong desire to relate her experiences.¹¹ For a few years she tried to publish articles in various journals (*D'var Hapoelet*, *Bahistadrut*, *Mishmar*, *Haoved Hatsioni*, *Hedim*). On April 18, 1958, not long before the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, she took her own life. After her death Sifriat Hapoalim, in conjunction with Kibbutz Haogen, published her book, *Ghetto Diary*, based primarily on material she wrote on the "Aryan" side. The book is jolting in its frankness and authenticity, but even so it underwent severe censorship. A critic who was a witness to the writing of the diary says that because of the deletions, erasures and changes made by the editors, "the researcher should not make do with the *Diary* as edited and published, but consult the original."¹²

Hakibbutz Hameuhad Publishing House permitted itself to censor the posthumously published work of Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof. Tenenbaum was a leading member of the Jewish underground in Poland and Lithuania. His deeds demonstrate that he excelled in independence of spirit and in rare personal courage. In him a deep sense of public responsibility comingled [mingled] with a distinctly Jewish amiable vitality. In his final place of activity, Bialystok, he wrote a personal diary, in addition to

the public archive headed by his friend, Zvi Mersik. The diary was published together with several letters in 1947--with deletions. Conspicuous among the omissions are passages deploring the inaction of "the Yishuv, the World Zionist Organization, the American Congresses [sic], all this big noise."¹³ And: "If you only

⁸ Hashomer Hatza'ir, December 16, 1942 (Hebrew).

⁹ *Letters from the Ghettos*, compiled by Bracha Habas, p. 41.

¹⁰ Reports from Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, *Hashomer Hatza'ir*, April 1949.

¹¹ Menahem Bader, *Melancholy Missions*, p. 90.

¹² Shmuel Ron (Rosenzweig), "With the Publication of the Ghetto Diary of Chaïke Klinger," *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, No. 21-22.

¹³ List of deletions from *Pages from the Conflagration*, File Mil/S, YVA.

knew with what contempt and impatience, with what enmity and *ferachtung* [loathing] we receive every report of protest and academicism--infuriating, just infuriating. What a disproportion between the big 'to-do' and the inaction." Tenenbaum quotes one of his friends: "I don't want some Stephen Wise or another Jew to shed crocodile tears for me; I don't want to give him material for lectures, for recitations." And he adds: "Really, this is what we all feel."¹⁴ These and similar pronouncements of Mordechai Tenenbaum and his friends who perished with him were concealed from the public by his literary executor.

At that, Tenenbaum was more fortunate than others, whose writings went completely unpublished. A list of these is perhaps not lengthy but is extremely impressive, is somewhat equivalent to the Catholic Church's *Index Prohibitorum* (list of forbidden books). Forming the hard core of the list are three of the most important sources for the study of the Holocaust. Added to them are other sources which may or may not be on the list.

Heading the list of those stubbornly denied publication is Emanuel *Ringelblum*. Ringelblum was the well-known historian of the Holocaust in Poland, the organizer and administrator of the *Oneg Shabbat* institution in Warsaw, the author most quoted in works on the Holocaust, a person whose activity is universally praised--yet in the 30 years since Ringelblum's archive was discovered beneath the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, it has yet to be translated into Hebrew. Only after three decades had passed was a monograph of his, on *The Relations Between Poles and Jews During World War II*, published--in English, not Hebrew. To this day his famous diary and all his other writings are a closed book to readers and researchers in Israel who do not know Yiddish.

Second on the list, though not in importance, is Zelig-Hirsch Kalmanovitch, who is less well-known among Holocaust researchers. One of the founders and directors of YIVO--the Institute for Jewish Research--in Vilna, Kalmanovitch was a learned historian and linguist; all his life he had a great fondness for Yiddish and translated into that language several famous historical works (including Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*). Kalmanovitch was one of the intellectual elite in the Vilna Ghetto, heading the Writers' and Artists' Association. Writers of memoirs and histories

about the ghetto never fail to take note of his exemplary behavior in the ghetto and in the camps in Estonia.

In the ghetto Kalmanovitch kept a private diary of his own, without the participation or assistance of public elements. The result is a unique document bearing its author's personal imprint. In the diary he reacts to major phenomena in the life of the ghetto and lays down ethical rules for behavior in the face of the principal problems arising from the dreadful reality. Yet this diary has not found its way to the Hebrew reader.

It bears noting that to publish it in Hebrew would entail hardly any translation. Kalmanovitch, the lifelong Yiddishist, wrote his diary almost entirely in Hebrew. YIVO in America translated it into Yiddish and published it in 1951.¹⁵ The Hebrew portion is in the possession of Kalmanovitch's son in Israel awaiting its turn--but to no avail.

A similar fate has befallen the great diary of Herman *Krook*, the industrious chronicler of the Vilna Ghetto. A former underground leader in that city said of Krook: "He is comparable to Emanuel Ringelblum in Warsaw, the greatest of this marvelous group of Jews, who collected the testimonies and hid the documents and recorded what was permanent in the ephemeral."¹⁶ Like Ringelblum's diary, the road of Krook's work to the Hebrew reader is also blocked.

Krook's diary, written in Yiddish, begins on the first day of the German capture of Vilna and accompanies the life of the ghetto step by step for the next two years. In 1961 the book was published in the original language in the U.S.; a Hebrew version has yet to appear.

The continuation of the diary was written in concentration camps in Estonia. It ends about ten hours before the author's murder. This section is in Israel, and apart from a few pages has never been published in any language. The diary's annotators in YIVO are apparently correct in saying that it is the most reliable document regarding

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *YIVO Bletter*, Vol. 35, pp. 18-92 (Yiddish).

¹⁶ Abba Kovner, in Rozhka Korczak, *Flames in the Dust* (Hebrew), 1965, p. 375.

the events in the Vilna Ghetto. But the Israeli Holocaust research establishment is in no hurry to place it at the disposal of the non-Yiddish-speaking scholar.

We do not know what excuses the heads of the research institute adduce amongst themselves to account for the non-publication of these key sources. It is difficult to grasp that to date young researchers, many of whom surely do not know Yiddish well enough, have not issued a public call for these documents to be translated into Hebrew. Indications exist that internal discussions were held on this subject and that some good intentions were expressed, particularly regarding Ringelblum and Kalmanovitch. The first volume of *Yad Vashem Studies* in 1957 relates (p. 182 in the English version) a decision by the institution to publish a book

of Kalmanovitch's writings to include his diary along with letters and articles. An editor was appointed--but no book appeared.

An announcement about Ringelblum's diary was made in 1968. Nahman Blumenthal, one of the directors of Yad Vashem, told a conference of Holocaust researchers: "We are publishing the diaries of Ringelblum and of Czerniakow. We honor and respect them both."¹⁷ Czerniakow's diary appeared that year in a luxurious edition with photostats of the Polish original. But the Ringelblum diaries have yet to be published. Something is interfering, delaying the process--somehow, things are more convenient without these books.

It is unlikely that the boycott will persist indefinitely. It is a matter of the past and the present--not of the future. It is highly improbable that another thirty years will pass before the ghetto writings of Ringelblum, Kalmanovitch ** and Herman Krook are translated into Hebrew and published in Israel. The works of Mordechai Tenenbaum and Haike Klinger will appear uncensored and the conspiracy of silence will be lifted from the writings of Rabbi Weissmandel. All this will happen when the broad front of Holocaust accounts currently cultivated by the Israeli research establishment becomes enfeebled to the point where it can no longer contain the historical and moral truth emanating from these sources. The new approach can be expected when a change of guard comes and the first generation of researchers and tone-setters gives way to a second generation that will have fewer vested self-interests in the dispute between versions and verities.

That time has apparently not yet arrived. The testimonies of Ringelblum, Tenenbaum and Krook, all three of them active in the fighters' camp, contradict many of the accepted theses. Ringelblum's tremulous words on June 26, 1942, which we quoted earlier (Ch. 3) undermine the Zionists' claim of their supposed alertness in the face of the gentiles' indifference. His solitary thoughts about going knowingly to death without resistance (see below), thoughts which did not long convince even Ringelblum himself, assume their proper significance within the framework of the doctrine espoused by Zelig Kalmanovitch, which is at total variance with basic conceptions of the Holocaust accepted by the research establishment in Israel.

* * * * *

In the passage mentioned above, Emanuel Ringelblum wrote:

 ** Our prediction is apparently about to be realized with respect to Zelig Kalmanovitch: we are informed that his diary is soon to be published.

No knowledgeable person will be able to explain why 40 pioneers from an agricultural kibbutz [collective] allowed themselves to be led to slaughter when they already knew what had happened in Vilna, in Slonim, in Chelmno, and so forth. One gendarme is enough to slaughter a whole city... In Lublin, four Gestapo personnel administered and implemented the entire *Aktion*. The lies manufactured about Nowogrodek and more recently about Kowel will be of no avail--nowhere did Jews resist the slaughter. They went to their death without resistance, and they did it so that others might live, for every Jew knew that to lift a hand against a German was to

¹⁷ Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust, p. 54.

endanger his brothers in another city and perhaps in another country. It was because of this that 300 prisoners of war let themselves be massacred on the way from Lublin to Biala, even though they were soldiers who were known to have distinguished themselves in the fight for Poland's freedom. To be passive, not to lift a hand against a German, this has ever since been the quiet, passive heroism of the ordinary Jew. This seems to be the mute life-instinct of the masses, which dictates to all, as though the matter had been discussed, to follow this course--and it seems to me that neither propaganda nor explanation will help in this case--one cannot fight a mass instinct; one must yield to it.¹⁸

We will consider the philosophic value of these comments at the proper place. Here we will offer a few remarks about them as testimony. The "lies" about Nowogrodek and Kowel were not deliberate fabrications. They were empty rumors that sprang up out of the longing for encouraging news. In Mielnica, near Kowel, a Jew leaped out of the murder pit, hit a Gestapo officer in the face--and was shot on the spot. Something similar may or may not have happened at Nowogrodek. In March 1942 a rumor reached Warsaw that Jews in Nowogrodek had risen against their murderers and killed more than ten German gendarmes. In the Polishlanguage Jewish paper *Yuchina* the number grew to twenty. "Nowogrodek" became one of the most popular rallying calls among the youth movements in Warsaw¹⁹ and was passed on to other ghettos. "He brought [to Sosnowiec-Bendin] the news of Nowogrodek that electrified us all. There the youth took up arms, fighting the Germans with sticks and axes--this is what Mordechai [Anielewicz] told us, and a new spark was lit

in our hearts. Nowogrodek, the little town.., became a sign and a symbol."²⁰

The Nowogrodek affair was the result of the tragic situation in the ghettos in the spring and early summer of 1942. The *Oneg Shabbat* group knew that 700,000 Jews had already been murdered in Poland. Nowhere, as mentioned, did the Jews resist, or at all events, Ringelblum and his colleagues knew of no such case. The inhabitants of the ghettos, suffering anguish, humiliation and murder, thirsted for any scrap of news that might alleviate the nightmare of their lives--a blow the Nazis sustained at the hands of the Allies, the intercession of the international community to rescue Jews, or, if none of these, then, at least, a few Germans killed by insurgent Jews. The unverified report about the events at Nowogrodek fulfilled these desperate expectations and was absorbed like life-giving water in parched soil. Only Ringelblum's unwavering insistence on the truth, together with his single inspired remark against attempts at resistance, ensured that a vigorous denial of the false rumor was committed to writing--to be published twenty-five years afterward. ***

The history of the Holocaust, as it is written in Israel, is replete with stories similar to the rumor about Nowogrodek. Indeed, in many ways that history is the Nowogrodek affair, expanded and diversified. Like

 *** About a year and a half later the Jews of Nowogrodek undertook an action whose character and aftermath were far more typical of the Holocaust than an uprising that never occurred. The remnants of the ghetto, who were imprisoned in a forced-labor camp, decided to join the partisans in the forests. To accomplish this, they dug a tunnel 270 meters long, 60 cm. wide and 70 cm. high. The tunnel's construction presented formidable organizational and engineering obstacles, such as reinforcing the ceiling with boards which had to be stolen from the camp's storehouse, removing the earth from the tunnel, and, perhaps most difficult of all, scattering and disguising the vast amount of earth removed. After four weeks of backbreaking work the digging was complete. At 9 p.m. on September 22, 1943, the inmates began crawling through the tunnel and within two hours they were all out.

And then: "Because of the darkness the Jews could not recognize the place and did not know where they were. Individually and in small groups people tried to make their way. Unfortunately they turned by mistake toward the city and fell into the hands of the Germans. Only 120 people managed to reach the forest. Around midnight Berl Yosselewitz and his group ran into a

¹⁸ Yosef Kermish, "Emanuel Ringelblum's Notes Hitherto Unpublished," *Yad Vashem Studies*, VII, pp. 166-167 (Hebrew).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Fridka Mazie, *Friends in the Storm*, p. 83. On this matter, see also Mazie's testimony in the Eichmann trial.

German patrol. All died a heroic death.” (Eliahu Berkowitz and Portnoy, *Book of the Ghetto Wars*, pp. 493-494.)

the original affair in 1942, it is based on evidence gleaned from wishful thinking. But in contrast to that case, it lacks the element of tragedy--and of naivete. The young people in the ghettos of Warsaw and Bendin who enthusiastically received the news about the uprising at Nowogrodek had no means to authenticate the report. Whereas the historians of the Holocaust, with access to the sources of information, are engaged in glorifying Jewish armed resistance in total disregard of the historical truth. The truth is that there were very few cases of physical resistance against the Nazi murderers. All the attempts at organized revolt in the cities, with the exceptions of Warsaw and Bialystok, and a few small towns, went unrealized or were stifled before they could be carried out. Instances of personal resistance were equally rare. But the historians of the Holocaust are ashamed of this. Like Jew-haters--without comparing them, of course--they believe that the Jews who were being murdered had the duty to defend their honor and that going “like sheep to the slaughter” was not an objective situation but disgraceful behavior to be concealed if possible. Since they expressly linked the Holocaust with heroic battle, theirs was a difficult task: to spread the extremely rare instances of actual heroism across the entire face of the Holocaust.

Israeli Holocaust research has been engaged in this laborious endeavor for the past thirty years. It has produced fruitful results in telling the stories of hundreds or thousands of Jewish partisans who distinguished themselves in heroic combat. But as regards the millions in the ghettos and the concentration camps, the result has been historical blight and a propaganda disaster. The children in the schools have been unimpressed, and so have other nations. Both thoroughly absorbed the “truth” that it was a disgrace to go like sheep to the slaughter, but refuse to be persuaded that the Jews in the Holocaust did actually “save their honor.”

There are many different apologetic methods by which attempts are made to superimpose on the Jews in the Holocaust a combative character, as dictated by the “saving of honor” school. The simple and harmless way would seem to be to meticulously find and note every instance of resistance or attempted physical resistance. In itself, this is a justified and laudable activity within the framework of historical study. Objective and unbiased research would probably produce an unequivocal conclusion confirming what is already clear and well-known: that these manifestations were exceptional in their miniscule scope and uncharacteristic of Jewish behavior in the Holocaust.

But the memoir writers, the commentators and the researchers want to arrive at the opposite conclusion. To that end they bend the truth using the following methods:

Underscoring cases of resistance beyond their true proportion. Organizations and individuals who participated (or intended to participate) in resistance operations are placed at the center of events, with all other elements serving as a nebulous backdrop to their exploits.

Hyperbole in descriptions of the events and in assessing their weight in the life of the ghettos. Extremely serviceable exaggerations were made in statistical evaluations. A consistently fruitful source of wild exaggerations is false testimonies of Nazis.

Fabrications and totally imaginary “supplements” reinforce the two methods already mentioned when they prove insufficient in themselves to lend the events the desired patina. These tales, devoid of any connection with reality, provide plentiful creative license for amending history.

Suppressions and *half-truths* occupy a leading place among the means to metamorphose the face of the Holocaust from what happened to what should have happened. This form of distorting the truth is extremely common, as will be seen, in the dispute among the parties over the privilege of having participated in the uprising against the Nazis. That it is so widespread does not make it more uplifting than the other methods.

A *special style* is an integral part of the attempt to dress the history of the Holocaust in a combative uniform. A high tone and pretentious appellations imbue events with a fictitious meaning of pure and completely successful militancy. The fighters do not hide in bunkers but “entrench” themselves. They do not flee from the

ghetto but “forge a path.” Temporary respites in clashes with the Nazis and their henchmen (which were usually followed by the bitter end) are described extensively and solemnly as a victory of Jewish arms. Every encounter with soldiers or policemen is a “*battle*” and the totality of these “*battles*” is a “*revolt*.”**** We turn now to illustrate these comments by comparing the story and the reality in the two large cities where Jewish resistance was realized in practice.

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 **** It bears noting that the features of Israeli historiography described here were also typical of the Jewish historical establishment in Poland in the first two decades after the Holocaust. In fact, a personal link exists in terms of the continuity between the two establishments, as many of the researchers and writers of memoirs moved from Poland to Israel, where they pursued the line already formed in Warsaw and Lodz.

A survey written on behalf of the Jewish Fighting Organization in March 1944 in Warsaw, and published in 1946 in M. Neustadt’s book *Destruction and Revolt of Warsaw’s Jews*,²¹ says about the uprising in Bialystok that “fierce battles raged for eight days, and the armed Jewish resistance went on for a long time, more than a full month... The Germans torched the ghetto--as in Warsaw--from every side in order to break the fighters’ spirit. The ghetto was burned to the ground.”

In 1944 the writers had no authenticated reports, and in 1946 they had not yet been able to set the record straight. Anyone who interested himself in the subject soon learned that fierce battles did not rage for eight days and armed resistance did not last for a month; the Germans did not set the ghetto ablaze and it did not burn down. Nevertheless, in 1968 Yitzhak Zuckerman spoke about “the great uprising in Bialystok” together with the “defense of the bunkers at Czestochowa” and “attempted revolts in other places.”²²

The trouble was that as far as Bialystok was concerned, twenty years earlier an authoritative person had offered an assessment strikingly at variance with Zuckerman’s. This was a Jewish-Polish historian, Ber Mark, who took on himself the task of conducting an in-depth study for a book about the Bialystok Ghetto revolt. His book, published in 1950, bears all the traits and hallmarks of the combative approach, as described above. What differentiates it from similar works published in Israel is that instead of underlining the role of a specific Zionist party or youth movement, the author praises the heroism and leadership of the Communists. At the same time, the book excels in a methodical and detailed approach such as we found in no other work on this subject.²³

Surprisingly, the author feels the need to confess a sin he committed against the science of history. The armed resistance in the Bialystok Ghetto, Mark says, was undoubtedly second in scope only to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising--but it was not necessarily a revolt. “We realize that from the scientific viewpoint this term [revolt] is perhaps not entirely precise. What occurred in the poor alleys of the Bialystok Ghetto in the latter part of August 1943, was armed self-defense, armed resistance... It would have been more accurate to entitle our work ‘The Resistance Movement in the Bialystok Ghetto.’” If, despite this, he calls the event a “revolt” and uses this term in the title of his book, it is because, as he explains, this is the name by which it is remembered by the nation, and thus it “acquired for itself a certain degree of enfranchisement.”²⁴

Ber Mark did not explain what flaw he found in the Bialystok uprising which almost caused him to deprive it of the title “revolt.” We were not overly impressed by his “scientific” distress and would not have bothered to mention it had we not remembered that in addition to the book under discussion, he also wrote the most detailed, most chronologically precise and best documented book about the Warsaw

21 “The Fighting Jewish Organization, Its Establishment and Development,” survey attributed to Yitzhak Zuckerman, see Kermish, p. 55.

22 *Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust*, p. 20.

23 B. Mark, *The Revolt in the Bialystok Ghetto* (Yiddish).

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

Ghetto revolt. We intend to compare the two events in order to delve more deeply into a question which we believe to be of cardinal importance, namely: What brought the uprising in the Polish capital its great glory, whereas its brother in Bialystok from the outset did not receive proper public attention and was threatened by its researchers with devaluation from a revolt to a non-revolt?

The Bialystok uprising was carried out by an organization of young people numbering, according to various estimates, between 300 and 500 members. It underwent lengthy ideological and organizational preparation and collected a fairly large quantity of light arms--rifles, pistols, grenades, petrol bombs--and even a few machineguns. The organization intended to rise up against the Germans when they launched the final liquidation of the ghetto. The plan was to call on the Jews not to obey orders and not to leave their homes. Together with the masses, they would begin fighting on the streets of the ghetto. The working assumption was that the inhabitants of the ghetto would accede to the insurgents' call and join the fighting.

In reality, everything turned out differently.²⁵ Early in the morning of August 16, 1943, the Nazis ordered the Jews to leave their homes and report by 9 a.m. to a certain street "for transfer to Lublin." Unexpectedly, and despite the suasions of the underground, the ghetto residents obeyed the order and went in their masses to the designated place. In contrast to their behavior elsewhere, the S.S. personnel were courteous and polite in directing the people who arrived. The ghetto's main streets, which according to the plan were to serve as a battlefield, were emptied. The place of assembly was close to a suburb whose small houses were not suitable for battle positions as had been planned. And the people, as mentioned, showed no readiness to fight.

Thanks to their deep mental preparation, and perhaps under the influence of the underground leader, Mordechai Tenenbaum, the youngsters in Bialystok did not forgo their revolt. The original plan was instantly replaced by a new plan even more glaringly suicidal in nature. The object of the operation was the fence separating the place of assembly from the fields outside the city. The aim was to breach the fence and make

for the forest. Still the insurgents did not give up the hope that the masses of inhabitants would be swept up by the current of the fighters and burst out with them. "Thousands of them will fall but hundreds will make it to the forest."²⁶

The plan was carried out tenaciously and with supreme sacrifice. At a signal--the sudden lighting of a fire at certain places in the ghetto--groups of fighters stormed the fence, opening fire with their weapons. The fence was breached but very few managed to get out. The overwhelming majority of the crowd did not join them. The resistance action lasted three or four hours and resulted in a dreadful massacre of the insurgents. By 1:30 p.m. the uprising had been crushed. Two other attempts to break out, on the following night, also failed. Seventy-two of the fighters, the main core of the organization's remnants, hid in a bunker at the bottom of a well at 7 Milna Street. Four days later, on August 20, they were discovered and all murdered, with one exception. The leader of the uprising, Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof, and his assistant, Daniel Moscowitz, also perished.

We will probably not be off the mark in saying that in terms of the determined readiness of a large collective to go as one person to an *immediate and certain* death, the deed at Bialystok was unexampled, even in the horrific period of the Holocaust. The fighters paid the ultimate price for their action on the spot. Mordechai Tenenbaum succeeded in elevating the young people in his adopted city to the sublime height of the conscious self-sacrifice of a whole collective. From this aspect it seems doubtful whether Ber Mark could have questioned the genuineness of the Bialystok revolt in the name of "science."

Still, certain elements of a revolt were lacking or inadequately reflected in the uprising. It was an organized operation that intervened and interfered with the enemy's plans. But the disruption lasted no more than three or four hours and left no mark on the course of events. The uprising did not achieve even a temporary victory and therefore must be considered no more than an *attempted* revolt. Major elements

²⁵ The description of events follows B. Mark, pp. 383-448, and Chaïke Grossman, *People of the Underground* (Hebrew), pp. 275-290.

²⁶ B. Mark, p. 396, according to the testimony of C. Grossman and B. Vinicka. Chaïke Grossman formulates the expectations that prevailed in terms of numbers that are more optimistic than realistic. According to her, it was expected that "If dozens will fall--hundreds will arrive; if hundreds will fall--thousands will arrive," p. 284.

were lacking, such as a fortified center of operations, the hoisting of flags that continue to fly stubbornly in spite of the enemy's efforts, and similar visual and symbolic hallmarks that attract attention and make an impression.

But above all, the Bialystok Ghetto did not have the geographical and political centrality of Warsaw, which served as a fertile backdrop to the story of the revolt in the capital.

* * * * *

The uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto began on April 19, 1943, the eve of Passover, on the day the Nazis launched their operation to liquidate

the ghetto. The two events, the liquidation and the revolt, intermingled and engendered a further development: the liquidation operation became a massacre, accompanied by the total burning of the ghetto. Their intermixture also created the optical illusion that enabled the obfuscation of the developments. While the liquidation action lasted almost a month, the active revolt ended within a few days. But just as an outside observer who saw the flames rising from inside the ghetto could not know exactly what was happening inside, so it is difficult at first historical glance to discern precisely when and how each event occurred. Under the influence of the combative orientation, the tradition took root at all levels of Israeli research that the revolt paralleled the Nazis' murder and destruction. Thirty years were needed until one of the revolt's participants took the first step toward setting the record straight in a book implying that the active revolt lasted only three days.²⁷ As we will see, one more day, April 27, should be added to this number.

The abundance of testimonies in the ramified literature on the subject contain solid facts attesting with sufficient certainty to the activity and situation of the insurgents during most of the event. This is particularly true of the "Jewish Fighting Organization" (JFO, *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, or ZOB, in Polish), on which the great majority of the Israeli literature on the revolt is focused.

As the uprising approached, the ZOB was comprised of 22 party units, 14 from Zionist youth movements and parties, and four each from the Bund and the Communists. The units were divided according to the ghetto's three regions: nine (or ten) units in the Central Ghetto under the command of Israel Kanal; five in the Brushmakers' Area commanded by Marek Edelman; and in the Toejbens-Schultz craftsmen's area, eight (or seven) led by Eliezer Geler. The overall commander of the organization, Mordechai Anielewicz, was in the Central Ghetto during the uprising; his deputy, Yitzhak Zuckerman ("Antek"), was on the "Aryan" side of the wall.

Estimates differ regarding the number of ZOB members. Based on a detailed list of the units including the names of their commanders and areas of operation, and assuming that each unit numbered 12-14 persons on the average, Dr. Yosef Kermish estimates that all told, the organization contained some 300 fighters.²⁸ Stefan Grajek's estimate that each group was made up of 10-15 persons leads to a similar figure.²⁹ Ber Mark, without explaining his calculations, assesses their number at 600,³⁰ Gideon Hausner increases it to 1,000,³¹ while Marek Edelman, a member

of the organization's command, insists that there were no more than 200 members.³²

The weapons at the ZOB's disposal were meager in the extreme relative to the task they set themselves, and as compared with what the Bialystok group would have four months later. The ZOB's deputy commander, who specialized in acquiring arms, relates: "Our weapons were: pistols, one pistol per person; rifles--no more than ten; a revolver, mines that were laid in five or six places; over a hundred home-made bombs with a very large explosive force; Polish grenades for defense and attack."³³ Marek Edelman's account is similar: "Each fighter received on the average one pistol (10-15 bullets), 4-5 grenades, 4-5 petrol bombs. Each area received 2-3 rifles; in the entire

27 Shalom-Stefan Grajek, *Three Days of Battle* (Hebrew), Ma'arachot Publishing House, 1972.

28 Yosef Kermish, *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt in the Eyes of the Enemy* (Hebrew), pp. 36-37.

29 *In Those Days*, a collection, English version, p. 19.

30 B. Mark, *The Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Yiddish), 1963, p. 31.

31 Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem*, p. 223.

32 In the French weekly *L'Express*, May 5-11, 1975; in the German journal *Die Zeit*, April 1976.

33 Yitzhak Zuckerman, "The Revolt of the Jews," in the periodical *Mibifnim*, June 1947.

ghetto there was one automatic revolver.”³⁴ Besides that revolver, the ghetto fighters had no automatic weapons, not a single machinegun, no heavy weapons. When the uprising began they discovered that “the pistol is worthless, we hardly used it” (from the letter of Mordechai Anielewicz--see below). The small number of rifles and the absence of long-range automatic weapons meant that from the outset the uprising’s possibilities were very limited.

The ZOB’s achievements are contained in a document accepted as a letter written by the organization’s commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, to his deputy, Yitzhak Zuckerman, on April 23. Several comments have to be made about this document before we can consider it. The *Book of Ghetto Wars*, edited by the letter’s recipient, relates that it was originally written in Hebrew, translated into Yiddish “with secret and personal details deleted,” and from Yiddish rendered “with changes” into Polish. The Hebrew source went up in flames during the Polish revolt in Warsaw, and the version presented in the book is a retranslation from the Yiddish.

The changes introduced in the letter in the three languages are numerous and diverse, and do not stem only from a desire for secrecy and security. The versions published during and after the Holocaust were marked by some peculiar changes and omissions. To this day opinion is divided as to whether the original letter included a passage praising the aid of the Polish Communists³⁵ and about the place occupied by the passage in the body of the letter.³⁶ Some versions try to “correct” statements by Anielewicz that seem unreasonable or cause discomfort. Thus, for example, his twice-repeated comment that as of the writing of the letter only one of the organization’s members had been killed, was replaced by Ber Mark with the statement that “our losses in people are very small.” The same holds true for the version that appears in the Hashomer Hatza’ir

collection, which differs completely from all the other versions, in both wording and tone.³⁷

When all is said and done, it is difficult to relate to the letter, as it appears in its different versions, as an exclusive document for gleaning facts. Nevertheless, since it seems probable that the letter was in fact written and sent, and that it was composed on or about April 23, ***** we will use it to illustrate facts that are authenticated by more reliable sources.

The following is Mordechai Anielewicz’s assessment of the ZOB’s accomplishments up to the fifth day of the liquidation *Aktion* in the Warsaw Ghetto: “The Germans fled twice from the ghetto. One of our units held its ground for 40 minutes, and the other for over six hours. The mine planted in the Brushmakers’ Area exploded. On our side so far there has been only one casualty. Yehiel. He died heroically manning the machinegun.”³⁸

The detail about the fighter Yehiel as the organization’s only casualty was correct regarding the group of units in which Anielewicz fought personally at the corner of Mila and Zamenhof Streets. It was not correct regarding those who fought elsewhere, including the units whose successes he reports in the letter. The fact that Anielewicz did not know about the death of Michael Klepfisz, a leading ZOB activist and a mainstay in preparing the organization’s ammunition, shows how well-founded his complaint was that he had no contact with the units.

The mention of the machinegun also gives rise to doubt, since according to the dual testimony quoted above, the organization did not have a machinegun. Perhaps Anielewicz was referring to the automatic revolver, or perhaps the ZOB did have, after all, some other automatic weapon that became a “machinegun” in the course of the translations and retranslations. The rest of the information about the successes of the ZOB fighters is basically correct and is confirmed by historians and by witnesses who took part in the actual events.

One operation, which forced the Germans to flee, was carried out by a group of four units that seized positions on the upper floors and in attics of the buildings on the four corners of the Mila-Zamenhof intersection. At 6 a.m. on April 19 39 a German

³⁴ Marek Edelman, “The Fighting Ghetto” (Yiddish), in *In di Yorn fun Iddishen Hurbn. Die Stim fon Untererdishen Bund (In the Years of the Jewish Destruction. The Voice of the Bund from the Underground)*, p. 195.

³⁵ Michael Borvitz, lecture in the *Jewish Steadfastness* conference, p.286.

³⁶ Compare the account in *The Book of the Ghetto Fighters*, p. 158, with that in Ber Mark’s book, p. 260.

³⁷ For details of the letter’s bizarre metamorphoses, see Ber Mark’s article in the quarterly *Bleter far Geschichte*, Vol. 7, No. 1.

³⁸ According to *The Book of the Ghetto Wars*, p. 158.

³⁹ See Haim Frimer, *From That Fire*, pp. 217-218; B. Mark *The Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto*, pp. 42-45; Yosef Kermish, pp. 55-56; *ibid.*, from Stroop’s report of April 20.

column arrived at the site in order to begin liquidating the ghetto. The Jewish fighters hurled bombs and grenades at the German troops and opened fire with the weapons in their possession. The Germans were taken by surprise and suffered

 ***** One confirmation of the estimated date is the letter's statement that "the brushmakers' workshop has been burning for three days." As will be seen, the Brushmakers' Area was torched on April 23.

casualties. Fifteen minutes later a tank and two armored vehicles arrived at the site. The tank was twice set ablaze by petrol bombs and the Germans beat a hasty retreat. Soon ambulances arrived to evacuate the wounded and the Germans then began to shell the fighters with cannons. The Jewish fighters withdrew to a bunker at Mila 29. Anielewicz, who took part in the battle, estimates that the fighters held out for forty minutes, and his testimony is authentic.

Concurrently with the battle at the corner of Mila and Zamenhof, there was a clash on Nalewki Street, near the Gesia-Franciszka intersection.⁴⁰ Events followed a pattern similar to that described above: a surprise bomb and grenade attack was launched from the upper stories of buildings and fire was opened with all available weapons. The results, too, were identical. The Germans suffered losses and backed off quickly. They did not return for two or three hours. It later emerged that during this respite the commander of the liquidation *Aktion*, von-Sammern, resigned and was replaced by General Stroop. The latter ordered heavy fire directed against the insurgents using a variety of weapons. In the ensuing battle both sides sustained casualties. After the Germans fired incendiary bombs into the buildings, setting them afire, the insurgents were forced to retreat to the bunkers.

It is difficult to determine how long the battle (or battles) at this spot lasted. If we accept Anielewicz's estimate that the fighters held out for six hours, many details are still lacking about what occurred during that time. What is not in doubt is that the operations on Nalewki Street and at the corner of Mila and Zamenhof constituted the peak of the ZOB's success. According to Stroop's reports, the Germans and their collaborators suffered 25 casualties (1 killed, 24 wounded) on April 19--the highest figure on any single day.

The explosion of the mine in the Brushmakers' Area is also confirmed by persons who took part in the fighting.⁴¹ This occurred on the second day of the revolt, April 20. At 3 p.m. an S.S. company neared the gate of the Brushmakers' Area at the Walowa-Swietojska intersection. At this spot the insurgents had planted a powerful electric mine beneath the street. When the Germans reached the exact spot, Kazhik hooked up the electricity. The mine went off, causing German losses. In the battle that ensued the Jews defended themselves bravely and stubbornly. The fighting ended when the Germans set the buildings afire from all sides. The fire forced the rebels from the upper floors and attics and they withdrew to bunkers in the burning quarter. At night, when the fire and smoke intensified, they tried to get out of the area. Three units

managed to get to the Central Ghetto where they found shelter in the bunker at Franciszka 30. The fourth unit returned and were killed when the Germans dynamited their bunker.⁴² The Jews had several casualties in the fighting for the Brushmakers' Area, among them, as mentioned, Michael Klepfisz. Stroop's report puts the number of German casualties at 13 (3 killed, 10 wounded), far more than on any subsequent day.

These, then, were the three Jewish operations cited by Mordechai Anielewicz. All three took place in the first two days of the liquidation action in the Central Ghetto and the Brushmakers' Area. On the fifth day of the operation, April 23, Anielewicz had nothing to add about additional noteworthy operations in those two quarters.

In the third area, Toebbens-Schultz, the insurgents on April 20 threw two bombs at a company of gendarmes that was marching in formation outside the ghetto, near the wall. They also tried, unsuccessfully, to detonate an electric mine they had planted under the booth of a German patrol. The following morning, April 21, three ZOB units attacked another German squad that was marching outside the ghetto. In this area the

40 Tuvia Buzhikovsky, *Between Tumbling Walls* (Hebrew), pp. 30-36; B. Mark, pp. 46-48; Y. Kermish, p. 55, and Stroop's April 20 report.

41 Edelman, p. 199; Ratheis-Kazhak, *Destruction and Revolt of the Jews in Warsaw* (Hebrew), p. 192.

42 M. Neustadt, op. cit., remarks in memory of Ya'akov Prashker, pp.411-412.

Germans delayed setting the buildings afire for a few days in order to complete the transport of several thousand artisans to the Poniatow and Trawnicki camps. As a result, the rebels received a reprieve of three or four days in which they were not forced to seek shelter in the bunkers and enjoyed the advantage of positions high above the Germans who were on the street below. Yet that same factor, the transport, tied the hands of the rebels, as they were reluctant to attack Germans mingling among large numbers of Jews. As the transport operation drew to a close, the Germans began to torch buildings and the rebels were forced to take refuge in the bunkers.

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This concluded the military activity initiated by the ZOB. Imprisoned in their places of hiding in the burning ghetto, equipped with only pistols and a few grenades; driven by fire and smoke from one bunker to another; hunger and thirst gnawing at them--in this state of affairs, war is out of the question. The appropriate weapons for the existing conditions were not available. The pistol, as Anielewicz wrote, had "no value" in fighting against rifles and machineguns. The heavy bombs made of steel pipes,⁴³ if any remained, could only be hurled from above. The few grenades and rifles they still had could inflict no substantial damage.

Anielewicz was aware of the new situation when he wrote his letter. It suggests that he grasped that fighting by day was no longer feasible. But he still hoped to shift to "partisan tactics" during the hours of darkness. He promised that on the following night three units would go into action, their mission being to conduct "an armed patrol and to obtain weapons."

No detailed information exists as to the quantity of arms the night patrols managed to get. Not a great deal, one would assume. The truth is that the pledge of "partisan warfare" was not a realistic proposition at that time, just as today there is no factual basis for the claims of commentators and memoir writers that the goal (or one of the goals) of the patrols was to enter into combat with the Germans, steal their weapons, and kill or harass them. If Anielewicz or any other of the ZOB's leaders entertained thoughts along these lines, reality soon contradicted them. In addition to the gross inferiority in arms, the darkness also worked to the Germans' advantage in the burning ghetto. "The German would lay an ambush for us in the dark. He saw us before we spotted him: the burning buildings lit us up and he would fire at us from afar, while we could not guess when and where the ambush would be. The flames blinded us and we could not see where to aim our bullets."⁴⁴ Eventually, when the flames died down, the glare effect was reduced. However, a new and equally dangerous factor now appeared. Beginning on May 1, Stroop dispatched mobile patrols through the streets of the ghetto at night in order to search out Jews who left their places of hiding under cover of dark.⁴⁵ These were not bored sentries standing guard along the perimeter of the ghetto or elsewhere; they consisted of special squads--nine soldiers and an officer--whose mission was what a later generation would call "search and destroy." The soldiers were carefully selected and properly equipped, and their effect was devastating.

The patrols of Jewish fighters occasionally encountered Germans, and they even managed to wound a few of them. But of all the concrete descriptions of such encounters contained in the Warsaw Ghetto literature, we recall only one that was deliberately initiated by Jews--in honor of May Day.

This operation is known from the detailed descriptions written by its two participants.⁴⁶ The operation was initiated and directed personally by Mordechai Anielewicz. He chose seven fighters, six men and a woman, who were equipped with six pistols and one rifle. Their mission, the commander explained, was to ambush Germans in broad daylight, kill them, and escape. And that is what they did. They went out at midnight,

wandered the streets until morning, and picked a convenient site for an ambush. In one account the young man firing the rifle, a superb marksman, hit one German, though another version has him hitting three Germans. The group succeeded in

43 Kermish, pp. 213-214.

44 Buzhikovsky, p. 43.

45 Stroop's report, May 1, 1943.

46 Buzhikovsky, pp. 68-70; Frimer, pp. 232-233.

escaping, and after much wandering about for the entire day, made their way back to Mila 18 in the evening. This, then, is the only concrete description we have of an operation planned in advance to attack Germans.

Also working to the Germans' advantage were clashes fought by Jewish patrols that served no truly essential purpose of the latter. The primary mission was to maintain contact between the bunkers in order to convey information, relay orders, and so forth. Subsequently it became more urgent to look for food in buildings and cellars not yet razed by the fire. In certain situations the need arose to search for a different hiding place in order to escape a bunker that was too hot or that was in danger of falling into German hands. And in short order pride of place was taken by the most pressing mission of all--to find a way out of the ghetto.

The initiative to this end did not necessarily come from the organization's command. On April 24, Bozhikovsky relates, "a group of *haverim* from all the units met for a consultation and decided to send four people with "Aryan" facial features out of the ghetto to get help in extricating the fighters. The four, two men and two women, made their way the following day through the sewage canals toward the Aryan side, but when they tried to get out they were caught and three perished. The fourth, Bozhikosky, survived miraculously and made his way back to his comrades in the ghetto.⁴⁷

After this, contact with the Aryan side to enlist help and bring out the fighters became a crucial necessity. On April 27 three people were sent to the boundary of the ghetto to talk with Polish firemen. The negotiations ended in a new disaster the next day.⁴⁸ On April 29 the ZOB command sent two more people, Simcha Ratheiser and Sigmund Friedrich, out of the ghetto. They succeeded in reaching the organization's deputy commander, Yitzhak Zuckerman, to whom they reported on the situation inside the ghetto. Zuckerman told them about the immense difficulties involved in getting help. "I found that we could not expect any help. We were fated to act alone. Each of us therefore sought to make as many contacts as possible."⁴⁹ After a week of toil, initiative and resourcefulness, they succeeded in obtaining concrete results--which for the majority of those slated to leave the ghetto came too late.

The units in the Toebbens-Schultz area got out of the ghetto early and with relative success. The decision to leave was made in a meeting of

activists in the pre-dawn hours of April 28.⁵⁰ Prior to the meeting and the decision, the area commander, Eliezer Geler, assembled the organization's personnel in one place. He was not completely successful in this, as several units could not be found. In the morning of April 28 they descended into the sewers for the first time. Following a retreat due to a false alarm (they thought the Germans were pouring gas into the sewer) they reorganized and went down again. Forty people were in the group, including a number of non-combatant civilians. At 2 a.m. they emerged on the Aryan side and hid in the attic of a nearby house. After remaining there for a day, they were given transportation outside the city before dawn on April 30.

It was later learned that on the same day members of units in the Toebbens-Schultz area who had not been able to join the escape two days earlier entered the sewers. After reaching the Aryan side they tried to escape on their own, but were all killed.⁵¹

In contrast to the decisiveness and energy that characterized the escape operations in the Toebbens-Schultz area, the organization's leadership in the Central Ghetto was wracked by uncertainty and indecision. This situation developed due to personal and circumstantial factors, one of which strikes us as particularly important. This was a convenient circumstance that was transformed, it seems, from a blessing into a curse.

As they wandered from place to place to escape the fire and smoke, the organization's command happened on the bunker of the Warsaw Ghetto underworld. Their huge bunker consisted of a series of cellars, burrows and caves, well camouflaged and outfitted with all possible conveniences. The occupants received the commanders and other fighters warmly. Within a short time more fighters arrived,

47 Buzhikovsky, p. 48.

48 Frimer, pp. 227-232.

49 Simcha Ratheiser-Kazhik in Neustadt's book, p. 196.

50 B. Mark, p. 102.

51 Aharon Carmi's story, pp. 146-151; Shalom Grajek in Neustadt's book, p. 190; B. Mark, pp. 101-103. Where (insignificant) differences in dates appeared between Carmi and Mark, we accepted Carmi's version, which seems to be more reliable.

until nearly a hundred people were in the bunker--nearly all the remaining ghetto fighters.

Conditions in the bunker were difficult, particularly in some of the sections to which the fighters were assigned. The air and heat in the "Treblinka" and "Piaszci" sections, as the fighters called them, were intolerable; the electricity, which had functioned in the first days, went off; the water tap produced only drops; contamination spread, hunger grew sharper.

Yet these conditions were passable as compared with hundreds of other bunkers. In the "Trawnicki" and "Poniatow" sections the heat was average, and people could occasionally switch from one section to another. The night patrols to search for food were conducted with the

participation and active advice of the bunker's occupants, whose profession made them past masters at this kind of work. Rarely did patrols return empty-handed. The leader of the bunker saw to it that the food was properly and fairly distributed and that people moved about from one section to another.

The agility of the bunker's occupants, their self-confidence and their ability to adapt to the extraordinary conditions of life in hiding made a great impression on the young fighters. The knowledge that the fire and smoke did not threaten them here (the bunker was established under the ruins of a building that had already been razed to the ground) was also a contributing factor. Overall, it seems probable that together with the relief ensuing from the cessation of the unbearable wandering through a sea of fire and death, the fighters began to feel a sense of something approaching security--that in this wonderful bunker and under the protection of its omnipotent masters, no harm would befall them, at least not this day.

This conjectured blunting of the sense of urgency and danger may help account for the passivity that marks the period which the fighters spent at Mila 18. As the days passed, fewer attempts were made to communicate with the "Aryan" side at all costs or to find ways out of the ghetto. After the two boys were sent on April 29, as described above, nothing more was done until the fateful night between May 7 and May 8.

Not only was action paralyzed, so too were thought and initiative. The rank-and-file fighters, under the influence of the dual psychology-- of their commanders and their hosts--spent their time singing, exchanging stories about their experiences, listening to the tales told by the ringleaders among the thieves, and arguing about Yiddish vs. Hebrew, Zionism vs. Communism.⁵² The commanders, for their part, sat about in the bunker's corridor holding endless consultations.⁵³ Various opinions were voiced and diverse proposals were adduced. But no decision was made that necessitated action. The commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, "considers every suggestion, but the truth is that he does not know which way to turn."⁵⁴

This was the situation as the events of May 7 began--the day on which the Germans discovered the location of the bunker at Mila 18. At 3 p.m. the bunker's inhabitants heard heavy movement above them, the stamping of feet and the noise of various tools. Plaster and sand fell on them from the ceiling. The ruckus lasted about three hours. At 6 p.m. the Germans left.⁵⁵

A burst of activity followed. Three missions set out from the bunker that night. Two were dispatched to the Aryan side to look for ways

out and enlist help; both groups were too big for a task requiring maximum mobility and evasive capability. Tuvia Bozhikovsky, who was in one of the groups, and Tzivia Lubetkin, who also went out, explain that only a few, with "non-Jewish" features, were supposed to cross to the Aryan side, while the others were to wait in the sewers until the appropriate message arrived from those who had crossed over.⁵⁶ This testimony suggests that quite a few of the fighters (among them one of the commanders, Israel Kanal, who had unmistakably Jewish features) preferred the agony of expectation and uncertainty in the inferno of the sewers over the continuing wait at Mila 18.

Both missions ended in failure. One group, with eleven members, headed by Aharon Bruskin, was caught as they emerged from the sewers; most of them perished.

⁵² Frimer, p. 226; Zivia Lubetkin in *The Book of the Ghetto Wars*, p. 192.

⁵³ Frimer, p. 232.

⁵⁴ Lubetkin, p. 193.

⁵⁵ Buzhikovsky, pp. 71-72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72; Lubetkin, p. 193.

The second group, containing ten people, encountered a German night patrol while still inside the ghetto. Four of them were seriously wounded but with the help of three others managed to return to Mila 18. The remaining three were pursued without letup from 2 a.m. until 6 a.m., when the Germans changed their guard. During the day they found shelter in a disused bunker and the following night they arrived back at the bunker they had left 24 hours earlier--only to find it in ruins.⁵⁷

The third group completed its mission in full. It consisted of two people, Tzivia Lubetkin and Haim Frimmer as escort. They were sent to the bunker at 22 Franciszkansa Street, where Tzivia Lubetkin was to do three things: meet with the fighters in the bunker; ascertain that the sewers were accessible from the bunker; make contact with a certain youth and send him to guide Bruskin's group; and finally, to convince the bunker's inhabitants (non-combatants) to admit the fighters from Mila 18 so that they could get to the sewers.

This was a saliently solo operation and the available information about it sheds little light on the circumstances of its conception and realization. Incomplete testimonies indicate that the negotiations with the bunker's occupants was the primary mission, and that for this reason a very influential member of the organization's hierarchy was sent.⁵⁸

At first glance it appears that this mission could have constituted a fateful turning point had it been more fortunate. It was totally successful, as already mentioned, and the assent of the bunker's occupants was secured.⁵⁹ True, it later emerged that the exit of Bruskin's group ended in disaster, and the guide was found not to be sufficiently expert in the underground canals. However, confirmation was received that the way from the bunker to the sewers was open and that all could assemble in the bunker prior to leaving.

If Tzivia Lubetkin had *hurried* back to her bunker and reported to her friends about what she had learned, would a miracle have occurred? Perhaps her news would have encouraged more and more of the fighters to leave urgently in the wake of the 21 who had left with the two unsuccessful missions? And maybe the command would have found the mental resilience to shake off its hesitations and decide to leave with all the fighters at the last minute under cover of dark?

Perhaps... But it's doubtful whether the organization's leadership, bewildered and mentally exhausted, could have been pushed to take action beyond endlessly discussing all kinds of proposals. The behavior of Tzivia Lubetkin herself that night was not characterized by a sense of urgency--in terms of hours--such as might have infected her comrades and roused them to immediate action. Testimony does exist suggesting that on the way there she intended to return "shortly after midnight,"⁶⁰ but the emotional reunions with friends brought a slackening of alertness. The conclusion of the mission is related by the two participants simply and convincingly:

Haim Frimmer: "Tzivia met with the command people and they sat down to discuss their business... I washed and drank some good water. I was very tired and I lay down in some corner and fell asleep. The meeting went on for a long time, and when I was awakened after it ended, dawn was already beginning to break. To return to Mila 18 now would mean to move in broad daylight. The danger was great. Tzivia insisted that we return. Her argument was that it would not be fitting for people to think we were cowards, But I considered myself responsible for escorting her, and I was adamant: to return in broad daylight meant certain death. We therefore stayed there the whole day."⁶¹

Tzivia Lubetkin: "The night passes. We want to leave in order to return and report on the situation as regards getting out. But they plead with us not to go. Soon it will be daylight, and we must not walk about the streets! I refused to remain here for a whole day, but I was so tired, the body yearns for a little rest, and even Marek Edelman, the commander of the unit in this bunker, implores us to stay. He too is going out tonight and will accompany us. And the dawn is already visible outside."

The decision to stay saved the lives of the three fighters. The fate of the fighters at Mila 18 was then already sealed, since they no longer had a way out during the daylight hours.

⁵⁷ Buzhikovsky, pp. 72-81.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Israel Gutman, *Revolt of the Besieged* (Hebrew), p. 393.

⁵⁹ Gutman, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Frimer, p. 234.

⁶¹ Frimer, p. 235.

On May 8 the Germans returned to the bunker at Mila 18 which they had discovered the previous day.⁶² They took up positions at all five exit points and called on the occupants to come out and surrender. All (or

most) of the non-combatants complied. Not one of the fighters came out. The Germans injected gas into the bunker, initially in small quantities, in order to force everyone out; then they poured in gas in large doses to suffocate whoever remained inside.⁶³ One of the fighters urged everyone to commit suicide, and many did so. The commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, suggested that they try to overcome the effect of the gas by immersing their heads in water.⁶⁴ He himself put his head in a pail of water that was standing under the tap, and thus died.⁶⁵ The others died of suffocation.

Miraculously, a few people survived. They had been next to one of the openings and the air they inhaled was partly pure. They were found in a semi-conscious state and extricated by Tzivia Lubetkin and her companions who returned from 22 Franciszkanska, and by Buzhikovsky and his friends who returned just then from their unsuccessful mission.

The gassed fighters and their rescuers moved to 22 Franciszkanska. But the events that had occurred at Mila 18 the previous day were now replayed at this bunker: the occupants heard footsteps outside and concluded that the Germans had discovered their location. Immediately Tuvia Buzhikovsky led another group on a third mission to the Aryan side. This time he was surprisingly successful. In the subterranean maze of canals they encountered Ratheiser-Kazhik who said he had gone to the ghetto with two guides in order to rescue the fighters, but after failing to find anyone in the places he looked was about to return to the Aryan side in great disappointment and despair.

On the morning of May 9 all the fighters from 22 Franciszkanska and a number of non-combatants, about 60 people altogether, entered the sewers. A stormy argument preceded the decision to leave when some of the group refused to go without taking the remnants of three units of fighters located at Nalewki 37--which was impossible until after dark.⁶⁶ At 11 a.m. the group reached the opening of the sewer on the Aryan side, where they were told they would have to wait until nightfall before they could come out. When night came a note was handed down saying that the streets in the area were crawling with gendarmes and the exit would have to be postponed until the following night.

Mentally and physically, the fighters were almost at the end of their tether. The rescuers finally yielded to their insistent appeals and agreed to take them out during the day. They left the sewer on May 10. The operation was both successful and disastrous: 32 (or 34) people were pulled on to a truck and got out of the city. When the others tried to follow

they were spotted by Germans and all perished. Nothing is known about the fate of the fighters who remained at Nalewki 37.

* * * * *

The description thus far indicates that the active uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto lasted two or three days. As for the subsequent events, they can be subsumed under the term commonly used by the spokesmen for the Holocaust history establishment: "defense of bunkers." But as we explained, the bunkers were no more than hiding places and they were not fortified. To reach them, the enemy had no need to overcome obstacles, only to discover their location. And once discovered, the bunkers were doomed.

As we pointed out, the great publicity surrounding the revolt was in large measure the result of the optical illusion that *enabled* the blurring of the boundaries between the Germans' liquidation operation in the ghetto, and the Jews' uprising. This blurring was not a spontaneous act and was not effected at the time of the events by the

⁶² Stroop's report, May 7.

⁶³ Lubetkin, p. 197.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Frimer, p. 237.

⁶⁶ "Some of the comrades say: We will not move from here as long as one Jew remains in the ghetto--we will all stay with him. They sat down on the ground and would not budge. Many also threw down their bundles--they are forgoing rescue." Lubetkin, p. 199.

insurgents and their colleagues, who in any case did not think in terms of a “revolt” but took a more modest view of their actions. All the versions of Anielewicz’s letter speak of “Jewish defense,” not a revolt. Nor was a revolt mentioned in Zuckerman’s 1944 survey, later published verbatim in Neustadt’s book.⁶⁷ Batya Temkin-Berman, who wrote her diary on the “Aryan” side of Warsaw, calls the events of April-May “the third extermination operation,” or “the third *Aktion*”;⁶⁸ she reserves the word “revolt” for the Polish uprising in Warsaw in August 1944.⁶⁹

Most convincing of all is the testimony of Emanuel Ringelblum in his essay, *The Relations Between Poles and Jews in World War II*. Ringelblum devotes considerable space to the Jewish resistance during the liquidation of the ghetto, and does not even think of calling it a revolt. Dozens of times he speaks about the “April *Aktion*” and once about a “struggle”⁷⁰--never about a revolt.

Ringelblum is the first to point out that there was one party with a vested interest in presenting an exaggerated description of the resistance and describing it as a revolt--namely, the Germans. According to Ringelblum: “With German methodicalness they laid a suitable foundation for their acts of cruelty. It was to this end in particular that both the German administration and the press maintained that a Jewish revolt was being suppressed. The Jews [the Nazis claimed] had established partisan units to kill German soldiers.”⁷¹

What Ringelblum could not have known was that in addition to the propaganda angle, the ghetto’s liquidator, Stroop, had a strong personal

motivation for inflating the dimensions of the events and their military significance. As is clear from the collection of reports and photographs the Nazi general presented as a gift to his superior, he was determined to exploit the situation to the full in order to advance his military and party career. With this in mind he tried to depict the events as a broad-based military episode. It is doubtful whether he could afford to take the chance of distorting facts and figures--the manner in which the reports were drawn up and sent dictated limitations which he could not ignore. However, he had wide latitude in the area of description and interpretation. Here he could exercise a free hand and his appetite grew. The operation itself, called the “operation in the ghetto” during the first ten days, on April 30 became the “large-scale operation in the ghetto.” As the days went by with the ghetto in its death throes, the reports were increasingly full of descriptions of the Jews’ fierce resistance, the intensity of the operation to suppress them, and the excellent merits of the suppressors. Stroop’s persistence paid off: for his work in liquidating the ghetto he was awarded a high Nazi decoration, the Iron Cross Class A. He was promoted and given important assignments.

In December 1945 Stroop’s reports were submitted as evidence in the Nuremberg trial. During a break in the trial the professional Nazi General Jodl exclaimed: “The dirty arrogant SS swine! Imagine writing a 75-page boastful report on a little murder expedition!”⁷² But the report’s publication had its effect. Alongside the invaluable statistical and factual material, his tendentious tales were absorbed and helped blur the boundaries of time between the liquidation action and the revolt.

* * * * *

But as it turned out, all the ploys were totally unnecessary. The blurring of boundaries and the confusion of concepts, the stylistic and terminological deceptions, all the glorifications resorted to by the chroniclers of the uprising of the young Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, were not needed. The aura of the revolt would not have been tarnished, and historical credibility would have gained immeasurably, if instead of all these ploys the historians and memoir writers had told the simple truth they knew, without concealing a thing.

We turn now to the most illuminating affair in the writing of the history of the Holocaust in Israel. For the sake of dramatization, we will call it a *story about flags that disappeared*.

⁶⁷ Neustadt, pp. 92-118.

⁶⁸ Batya Temkin-Berman, *Underground Diary* (Hebrew), pp. 17, 87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 140, 214.

⁷⁰ Ringelblum, Vol. II, p. 297.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁷² G.M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary*, Signet Books, New York, 1961, p. 68.

When Yitzhak Gruenbaum spoke of the weight that had been lifted from his heart upon hearing the news from Warsaw, he added:

The story is told that the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto heroes entrenched themselves in a building in the ghetto, and among them was the flag bearer. The Nazis were forced to capture it floor by floor. The defenders retreated from the bottom floor to the top floor and kept up the battle until the last fighter. And then the flag bearer, a young pioneer, wrapped himself in the Zionist flag and threw himself from the top floor to the ground and his body was shattered--symbol of the Jewry of Warsaw and Poland that gave its life with the name Zion on its lips!⁷³

The rumor about the flag that reached Jerusalem was flawed. Elsewhere there were reports of *two* flags that had been hoisted, one Zionist and one Polish. The author read about them at the time in the Yiddish-language *Einikeit* published in Moscow. There were probably few Jewish communities outside the wall of Nazi occupation that did not hear about this salient symbol of the Warsaw uprising.

Nor was it an empty rumor. Two flags, the Zionist and the Polish, were in fact raised on the roof of a high building on the edge of the ghetto. They were visible to everyone for two days. Emanuel Ringelblum saw them with his own eyes on the first day of the revolt.⁷⁴ The following day the Germans succeeded in seizing the flags following a fierce battle that made a lasting impression on Stroop. The capture of the flags cost the Germans the life of an officer who was mortally wounded in the fighting--the only German officer to fall during the liquidation action.

Tens of thousands of Warsaw's Polish inhabitants saw the flags flying high along the perimeter of the ghetto, and through them the story was circulated around the world. As a visual symbol of the uprising the flags generated sympathy and admiration among the humanitarian elements in the Polish population and were the subject of a lively response in the underground press. Overall, it can be said with certainty that the hoisting of the flags played a major role in spreading and enhancing the story of the revolt, both in Poland and throughout the world. By the same token, it is safe to say that the vast majority of the historians of the Holocaust must have known about this famous event.

Yet astonishingly, for years the flags were not mentioned by so much as a word in Israeli literature on the Holocaust. The memoir writers forgot them and the researchers did not discover them. For years great efforts were invested in uncovering and commemorating every detail about the revolt. Every fact, every rumor, every scrap of a story was

collected and set down in writing, for the sake of history. No detail was found to be unimportant, unreliable or insufficiently verified. Everything was considered fit for publication and perpetuation. Only one "detail," a solid, well-known fact of far-reaching importance--the hoisting of the flags--was barred from mention in amazing agreement between the community of memoir writers, researchers and commemorators.

The reason, it turns out, is that the flags were flown by the "wrong" people. They were from Betar, the youth movement of the Revisionists, who were passionately despised by their opponents in the Zionist movement. Embarrassingly, besides hoisting the flags, they did other things which, if made public, were liable to wreak havoc in the party alignment which was supposed to represent the revolt in the eyes of the public. Since nearly all the Revisionist fighters, with only a few exceptions, were killed during or shortly after the revolt, they and their deeds could be ignored for years.

The flags that Ringelblum saw from the fourth floor of Nalewki 32 were hoisted in Muranowska Square, a central assembly place of the Betar organization. Its name was the "National Military Organization," or ZZW according to its Polish initials.

The ZZW fighters were for the most part members of Betar, although the organization also had unaffiliated persons and members of youth movements ranging across the entire political spectrum, including Communists, as individuals and as

⁷³ Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *In the Days of Destruction and Holocaust*, p. 92.

⁷⁴ Ringelblum, Vol. II, p. 336.

autonomous groups.⁷⁵ The ZZW had three leaders: David-Mordechai Appelbaum, a former Polish Army officer; Pawel Frankel, a student who was one of the organization's founders; and Leib-Leo Rudell, a journalist who headed the information department. As with the ZOB, the number of ZZW members is in dispute. The historian of the ZZW, Haim Lazar Litai, speaks of an estimated 500 members at the end of 1942, and 1,200 on the eve of the revolt.⁷⁶ Ber Mark estimates that there were 400 ZZW members at the beginning of 1943, and concurs with Litai regarding the number when the revolt broke out.⁷⁷ Yosef Kermish is skeptical about Mark's estimate, hinting that it is exaggerated.⁷⁸

No one, however, disputes that the Revisionist group was well armed. Unlike the ZOB, it possessed a relatively large quantity of weapons and ammunition of various kinds, including automatic weapons, among which was the only heavy machinegun in the ghetto.⁷⁹ The arms were acquired from various sources, thanks, among other connections, to the ZZW's excellent relations with groups in the Polish underground--one of the significant differences between the two organizations. The ZOB

leaders (with the exception of Mordechai Tenenbaum) had a strong proSoviet orientation ("anti-Fascism" in the accepted terminology). This generated suspicion and mistrust among the Poles, who had hardly forgotten the division of Poland by Hitler and Stalin.⁸⁰ The ZZW, by contrast, being composed of diverse political elements, espoused demonstrative Polish patriotism, and indeed started out as a Jewish branch of the Polish underground.⁸¹ Besides a direct supply of arms, the friendship with the Poles opened up other routes of procurement for the ZZW from sources where the ZOB faced insurmountable obstacles.

An important ZZW asset consisted of two tunnels its members had prepared some time earlier, linking the ghetto with the Aryan side. A sophisticated tunnel, the result of a considerable engineering feat, connected the two sides of the wall at Muranowska Square and played an important part in the course of the fighting there. ***** A second tunnel, integrated with sewage canals, joined the two sides of Karmelicka Street in the Toebbens-Schultz area.

Their advantages in ammunition, organization and military planning enabled the Betar group to make impressive visual achievements. At their main place of assembly--Muranowska 7-9 and the corner of Muranowska and Nalewki--they demonstrated the ability to stand up to the Germans in face-to-face combat for hours on end in a battle that lasted for two days. They defended the flags they had hoisted by opening fire with the machinegun in their possession. They repulsed a German assault on the afternoon of April 19 and held their ground until nightfall. The following morning the flags, riddled with bullet holes, were still flying and had not fallen to the enemy.

Only after a stubborn battle involving tanks, cannons and other heavy weapons were the Germans able to take the buildings, seize the flags, and wreak revenge on the defenders. *****

***** It was through this tunnel that Ratheiser-Kazhik and Sigmund Friedrich later succeeded in getting out of the ghetto to enlist help for their comrades at Mila 18.

***** Based on the combination of two Stroop testimonies, Dr. Kermish (p. 130) and Lazar Litai (p. 252) say that the battle to capture the flags lasted four days, until April 22. We find this improbable. In his concluding report Stroop states explicitly that one of his combat units succeeded in getting the flags "on the second day of the operation," i.e., April 20. As for the death of the officer that Stroop notes on April 22, his concluding report says that in the course of seizing the flags he was "mortally wounded" (not that he was "killed" or that he "fell"). As Stroop explained in Maktow Prison (Kermish,

⁷⁵ Kermish, p. 39; B. Mark, pp. 22-27. A detailed description of ZOB was first provided in Haim Lazar-Litai, Massada of Warsaw: The Jewish Military Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, Jabotinsky Institute, 1963.

⁷⁶ Lazar-Litai, pp. 185-219.

⁷⁷ Mark, pp. 11,24.

⁷⁸ Note in the translation of Ringelblum's monograph, p. 176.

⁷⁹ Lazar-Litai, p. 246; Kermish, p. 46; Mark, p. 26.

⁸⁰ On the intensity of the bitterness over the partition of Poland between Stalin and Hitler, see Gad Rosenblatt, Fire Gripped the Forest (Hebrew), 1957, p. 72.

⁸¹ Lazar-Litai, pp. 87- 100.

224), he reported on wounded soldiers who died in hospital as though they had died in battle. The officer in question died of his wounds a day or two after sustaining them.

The purpose of our discussion--to discover how the history of the Holocaust was written--does not require that we elaborate further on the actions of the ZZW. A few supplementary remarks will suffice:

ZZW groups participated with the ZOB in resistance operations at the corner of Mila and Zamenhof and on Nalewki Street. They also operated in the Brushmakers' Area and in the Toebbens-Schultz area.⁸² The battle fought by the ZZW at Muranowska 27 Street on April 27 was especially noteworthy.

A number of sources indicate that during or before the uprising the ZZW supplied ammunition to the ZOB. One account, at least, relates clearly that they brought the ZOB a crate containing grenades.⁸³

As mentioned, all but a very few of the fighters perished in the ghetto or shortly after reaching the Aryan side. Unlike the ZOB, not one of them remained who was ready or able to collect sufficient material on the events in order to record his own and his comrades' deeds.⁸⁴ As for the Holocaust research institutions, nowhere is their party orientation more flagrantly pronounced than on this point.

Quarrels regarding claims of participation in ghetto resistance operations broke out between various parties, and not only with the Revisionists. The annihilation was still underway when Zionists and Bundists started arguing about each other's participation. After the war the disagreements over this issue continued between the Zionists in Israel and the Communists in Poland. Within the Zionist movement, the emphasis on party activity lasted until quite recently. In 1967 Meir Yaari wrote: "Was it by chance that Mordechai Aniewelicz and Tzivia Lubetkin sent a signal to Tabenkin and myself from the burning Warsaw Ghetto?"⁸⁵ And the 16th number of *Yalkut Moreshet* in 1973 sets forth on a special page a series of testimonies meant to prove the extraordinary part played by Hashomer Hatza'ir in the fighting against the Nazis.

But in this dispute the controversy between the Revisionists and their opponents occupies a unique place. Its origins lie in events that occurred long before the Holocaust but which left their mark on the relations between the sides in the ghetto. In the eyes of the ZOB leaders (again, with the exception of Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof), the Revisionists were disqualified as partners because they were the "murderers of Arlosoroff" and "enemies of the working class." Even Ringelblum (who was a member of Left Poalei Zion), while commending the deployment and equipment of the Revisionist organization, does not forget to remind his readers that they "tend toward Italian-style Fascism."⁸⁶

Events come full-cycle: what the remnants of the ZOB (and their researcher friends) did to the memory of their ZZW colleagues reflects their attitude toward them while they were alive. Following their death, almost to the last person, an unrelenting war of oblivion was waged against them. An integrated and coordinated operation involving party institutions and the state institution, Yad Vashem, ensured that their names would never be mentioned, or, at most, would be mentioned in passing accompanied by reservation and condemnation. Better to forgo the benefits to be reaped from glorifying the hoisting of the flags and the fighting in Muranowska Square than to have to specify the names of those involved.

With all our desire to refrain from demonological exaggeration, we cannot but conclude that on this issue there was a deliberately directed and consistent *conspiracy of silence*. The events that were concealed were simply too glaring to have been forgotten right across the entire front of research and commemoration. The operation began with a report (attributed to Yitzhak Zuckerman) sent to London by the remnants of the ZOB leadership in May 1944. This was the first detailed report on the course of the Warsaw uprising, and it contained not one reference to the Revisionists.

⁸² Mark, p. 34; Lazar-Litai, pp. 239-241.

⁸³ Carmi-Frimer, p. 119.

⁸⁴ Before 1959, which (as will be explained) was the turning point, the only source available in Israel on the Jewish Military Organization was a thin booklet called "The Truth About the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt," published in 1946 by the Betar leadership in Eretz-Israel (Hebrew).

⁸⁵ *Ma'ariv*, July 16, 1967.

⁸⁶ Ringelblum, Vol. II, p. 332.

The participation of Melech Noy (Neustadt) in the boycott was typical. Neustadt, who during the Holocaust years was one of the very few who did not accept the indifference of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement to the distress of the Jews in Europe, devoted himself immediately after the war to collecting evidence about the destruction of Warsaw Jewry. Working intensively, he was able to publish in February 1946 a detailed and orderly book, properly documented and containing illuminating notes, based on the material he had managed to collect. The book contains biographical sketches, most of them accompanied by a photograph, of over two hundred fighters who perished in the ghetto or outside it, and of about a hundred public officials, rabbis, writers, scientists, and so forth. Yet this abundance of information contains not a single item about the ZZW, its operations or its members. They did not merit mention and commemoration, either in the first edition or in the expanded and improved second edition that was published after the author visited Poland.

This was the situation right across the board. The memoir writers suffered from amnesia, the historians from blindness. The extensive *Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir* omits entirely the names of the Revisionist fighters, and *The Book of Ghetto Wars* goes even farther.

The editors of the latter volume found an original way to express their opinion of the Revisionist organization. Employing various stylistic and graphic means, they gave the ZZW a dishonorable burial, as it were, the equivalent of the burial "outside the fence" of Jewish criminals. Under the title of "The Fate of the Group on Muranowska Street," the text of the book (p. 177) quotes the statement of the German gendarmerie that in the town of Otwock, near Warsaw, 14 Jews--eight men and six women--who had escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto were caught and murdered. But outside the text, in a marginal note, the editors offer their description of the organization to which these murdered Jews belonged. From this account--a mixture of truth and fantasy, fragments of facts and arbitrary inventions, lip-service and hostile commentary--we will quote the concluding section:

Concerning the "Jewish Struggle Organization," the following bears noting here: In September 1942 the ZOB requested all the parties and youth organizations, including the Revisionists, to join its ranks. The Revisionist youth group acceded to the call and joined. At the same time, the Revisionists began operating separately. Few in number, they sought to expand their ranks, and by acting openly they endangered the entire organization. They demanded that one of their members be appointed commander of the organization; refused to hand over to the organization several pistols they had acquired in the "Aryan" quarter; and made contact with certain elements in the Polish underground without consulting anyone. The organization's command was opposed to these separate operations. Following a concerted investigation, the representatives of the coordinating committee on the "Aryan" side learned that those with whom the Revisionists were in contact were members of the NSZ, and that according to the agreement between them, the Revisionists undertook to acquire money for their Polish accomplices, in return for which they were promised arms and assistance in the Aryan quarter. After the Revisionists rejected the ZOB's ultimatum to accept full authority and sever contact with the Polish Fascists, they were removed from the ZOB and set up a separate organization.

This was published in 1954. Seven years earlier, it had been prefaced with "explanatory" remarks by Yitzhak Zuckerman, deputy commander of the ZOB:

Afterward we had to deal with an organization called "Revenge." There was a Revisionist organization called "Revenge" in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the first liquidation, when we asked all the movements to establish a single fighting organization, we also found a handful of Revisionists. In contrast to all the other movements, who during the war functioned, published papers, educated a generation, conducted underground activity, the Revisionists did not a thing.⁸⁷ We knew they had a few youth and we asked them to join us. As usual, they violated discipline... We feared that Gestapo agents might infiltrate the Fighting Jewish Organization. It cannot be stressed enough that within the Fighting Jewish Organization there was not

⁸⁷ On the ramified press of the Revisionist underground in the Warsaw Ghetto, see the article by Yosef Kermish in *Yad Vashem Studies*, I, p. 91 (English version), and his article "The Fomentors of the Revolt" in *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, No. 19-20 (Hebrew).

a single case of informing, not a single informer, not a single traitor. But the Revisionists had no people, and they began expanding their ranks and taking in people. Then they started purchasing arms on their own and even tried to establish contact with the "Aryan" street. And to their misfortune and ours, they made contact with the Andeks. There was an agreement between this group and the Andeks, and the Revisionists would do things for the Andeks in the ghetto, and the Andeks undertook to help this group when they got to the "Aryan" quarter. They too had ambitions to take control of the ghetto. We acted against them in negotiations and by force and we vanquished them. We gave them part of Muranowska Street and told them: Do not leave this area. If you want to fight--fight! This group fought with selfless courage on April 19 and 20. They did not hold out and on the second day of the fighting they left the ghetto. On that day some of them were liquidated by the Germans and some of them by their Polish partners, the Andeks.⁸⁸

The same hostility, the same contempt and imputation, the same tenuous connection with the truth. The campaign to defame and dwarf the step-comrades-in-arms, the despised partners in battle, went on for years--

a campaign of complicity in expunging their names and eradicating their memory.

The ZZW found succor and salvation from a totally different quarter. The ghetto executioner, Stroop, quickly got to know the Muranowska fighters and to distinguish the organization behind them (which he calls the "Jewish Military Organization" or the "Jewish-Polish Military Organization"). The battle for the flags made a lasting impression on him. He singles it out in his concluding report, speaks of "the Jews' principal fighting group," and returns to it again and again in his talks in the Mukutow Prison. Asked by Marek Edelman about the most difficult battle in the ghetto, Stroop replied in detail: "To the right of the main street, mostly in the plant of the army's warehouse directorate, and afterward the strongest resistance was apparently in the square where [the officer] Demke fell. There was a kind of concrete building there, I still remember it well, and for a long time it was impossible to approach it at all. To get to Mila, Zamenhof Streets through Muranowska and Nalewki Streets was impossible, because the street was under fire. Even I came under fire from here... The strongest resistance was in Muranowska Square." Stroop then goes on to provide a detailed account of the battle.

To another question from the former commander of the Brushmakers' Area--"Where, besides Muranowska Square, did fierce battles take place?"--Stroop gave a somewhat disappointing reply: "Today I can no longer say this as accurately as I can regarding Muranowska Square. I remember also the brush factory, but I cannot give an accurate account."

Stroop's reports also tell about a battle initiated by the ZZW near Muranowska 2 which lasted throughout April 27, stopped at nightfall, and evidently concluded the following day. Heading the fighters in this engagement was the organization's military commander, David Mordechai Appelbaum, who managed to round up 120 survivors of earlier battles in various locations. A group from the Polish underground took an active part in this battle after entering the ghetto for this purpose.⁸⁹ In his reports of April 27 and 28, Stroop names the organization against which his troops fought.

Confusingly, it seems probable that when his men took the bunker at Mila 18, Stroop thought he had managed to seize the headquarters of the organization whose members were fighting on Muranowska Street. In his report of May 8 he boasts that he caught and killed "the deputy chief of the Jewish Military Organization and his so-called chief of staff." To prevent

misunderstanding, he gives the organization's initials in the order he remembered: ZWZ.

The publication of Stroop's reports in Hebrew in 1959 came as a great relief to the Betar fighters. No longer were they held in contempt. Some authors acknowledged that they had been equal partners in the revolt. A few continue to mention them in passing but essentially ignore their existence. Others resolve their discomfort by citing their

⁸⁸ Yitzhak Zuckerman, "Revolt of the Jews," *Mibifnim*, Vol. 12, No. 3, June 1947, pp. 427-428 (Hebrew).

⁸⁹ Mark, pp. 97-100; Kermish, pp. 66, 159.

exploits without noting their party affiliation. It seems likely that following a very gradual and painstaking process, they will be given their rightful place in the literature of the Holocaust.

Not so in the public's consciousness. In the years preceding the turning point, stands were taken, legends woven, conceptual patterns firmly fixed. Mordechai Anielewicz became a legendary hero, streets were named after him in Israeli cities. It was not the two-day battle at Muranowska Square that came to symbolize military valor but precisely the two weeks of waiting and uncertainty at Mila 18. Here the writing of the history completed its work over the years.

The party coloring, its ugliness notwithstanding, is *not* the main defect in the writing of Holocaust history. Far more serious is the trait common to both partners-rivals in the Warsaw Ghetto revolt: the combative version, which we described above. Those who write history according to this approach must cope with its two underlying assumptions. The first is that it was essential to defend the honor of the Jewish people, and the second is that there was nothing to lose since the Germans would have murdered everyone no matter what. It is not difficult to defend the first assumption by referring to conventional opinion (which lacks any moral basis in this case). The second assumption cannot be defended at all, given the fact that some of Europe's Jews survived. The history writers who want to demonstrate that the young fighters were right to act as they did often find themselves confronting the same dilemma that faced the daughter of the Tiktin slaughterer and her husband. They are forced to sift carefully through the relevant facts and deal with them in a manner that does not bring about the collapse of the structure they have so laboriously erected.

It may be the mental tension entailed in this activity that causes the astonishing phenomenon one discerns in Holocaust research. The phenomenon assumes two forms: on the one hand, a slackening of interest in examining numbers and questions, and, on the other hand, infinite forbearance in the face of the inordinate liberty some persons have abrogated to themselves in writing the history of the Holocaust. Both

phenomena are most strikingly reflected in the events surrounding the Warsaw Ghetto revolt.

A few examples will illustrate the first phenomenon. The number of members of the ZOB who perished at Mila 18 has been estimated as follows: 120 (Tzivia Lubetkin), 100 (Kermish), 80 (B. Mark). While Melech Neustadt maintains that no more than 70-80 fighters were in the bunker at the time (including those who were rescued?).

In this way the numbers have been bandied about for thirty years and more--from 120 to fewer than 80. Each person with his own figure and none affected by anyone else.

How many fighters did die at Mila 18? And perhaps not only how many perished, but *who*? Would it not be justified to investigate this central event exhaustively, to draw up a nominal list of those who perished? Of those who were in the bunker at least five settled in Israel. At their disposal was the considerable material of reconstruction and commemoration that Melech Neustadt was able to glean for his book. One imagines that they would not be denied the help of those comrades who did not come to Israel. Yet where Neustadt was able to lay the cornerstone in his solo enterprise within two years, all the organizations and institutions have not completed the edifice after more than thirty years.

Buzhikovsky estimates at seven or eight the number of those who survived the gas attack at Mila 18. But Neustadt and Kermish think there were fourteen survivors. And Tzivia Lubetkin says that 21 emerged alive, including 18 of the fighters. Once more each person remains with his own number, and not one is related to another.

The third figure that has been neglected is the number of German soldiers who were killed during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. This is a matter of cardinal importance. In the ghetto balance of blood, it stands against the 7,000 Jews who are definitely known to have been murdered there, another 7,000 who were sent to immediate death at Treblinka, and 15,000 more whom Stroop estimates were killed in the bombings and the fires.⁹⁰ For those espousing the ideology of "saving one's honor" the number of Germans killed could well be the gauge of the revolt's success. The fighters themselves regarded every Nazi they succeeded in killing as a goal and accomplishment.

⁹⁰ Stroop's report, May 24, 1939.

Based on preliminary estimates of the various clashes (which were naturally highly exaggerated) the total estimate of German losses reached impressive figures. Frumka Plotincka in her last letter to Eretz-Israel expresses her regret that "only a few hundred of the enemy, eight hundred," were killed. Others mentioned far higher numbers. In the first

edition of his book (p. 25), Neustadt says 1,200 Germans were killed.

In the second edition this figure disappears but is not superseded by another number. It had emerged, in the meantime, from Stroop's reports as published in Nuremberg, that 1,200 was the *overall number* of German soldiers who took part in the ghetto's liquidation (along with 900 Poles and Ukrainians). The number of wounded was 88, 72 of them Germans. The number of those killed was 16, of whom 13 were Germans

These figures are extremely reliable. They constitute the sum total of the data contained in Stroop's daily reports and repeated in his concluding report. The casualties are listed by name, rank and unit. Propaganda considerations were out of the question, as the reports were secret. Because of the manner in which the reports were compiled, if Stroop had wished to conceal losses from his superiors, he would have had to enter into a conspiracy of fraud with his subordinates and thereby make himself dependent on their loyalty. It is most doubtful whether this careful Nazi careerist would have risked becoming involved in such an adventure even if he had needed to.

But the writers of Holocaust history have lost all interest in the number of Germans killed. Stroop's figures are not quoted and not contested. A small minority continue to adduce their own figures without reacting to those of Stroop. But the overwhelming majority of Holocaust authors in Israel prefer not to touch the subject at all. *****

* * * * *

The second phenomenon we alluded to above relates to a few widely admired public figures who have written on the Holocaust. Whether out of inexperience and/or for other reasons, some of what they wrote is groundless--but no one objects. The research institutions with their experts and specialists have not only not bothered to correct the mistakes, but in one case at least actively assisted the dissemination of totally unacceptable accounts and opinions. We will examine three cases, in order of gravity.

The subject of the first, relatively straightforward case, is David Ben-Gurion. A passage from his account of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt was quoted above (Ch. 3) to illustrate his inexperience and disinterest in the Holocaust. That passage⁹¹ goes on in the same style and with the same reliability: a mixture of events that occurred and did not occur, confusion

 ***** But not non-Jewish authors. Thus, for example, Willi Frischauer, in his book on Himmler (Ch. 12): "How many S.S. men fell for Fuehrer and fatherland while they murdered 57,000 human beings? Stroop's list provides fifteen names. I repeat: fifteen names."

as to what preceded what, and, as is customary in stories of this kind, reliance on Nazis to authenticate "impressive" figures void of any factual basis.

Ben-Gurion's recourse to the history of the Holocaust was brief. Its influence on historical thought in this connection was undoubtedly negligible, and it might be considered a trivial episode--were it not for the writer's personality. What is surprising and illuminating is that this historical exercise by the country's leader did not generate a response on the part of those in the profession. No astonishment was expressed, no attempt at correction was made--nothing. Since Ben-Gurion's book did not conflict with the tenets of the accepted version, no one was upset.

The second of the writers-cum-public figures was mentioned at the outset of this chapter as the keynote speaker in the special Knesset session to mark the twenty-fifth

⁹¹ David Ben-Gurion, The State of Israel Restored (Hebrew), p. 666.

anniversary of the ghetto revolts. Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, a Knesset Member and a Cabinet minister, is, unlike Ben-Gurion, involved and well-versed in the events of the Holocaust. At the time of this writing, he serves as chairman of the board of Yad Vashem. His involvement and his preoccupations lend what he has to say an aura of knowledge and credibility.

Thus what he said from the Knesset rostrum is all the more serious and surprising. A closer examination of this subject, through reading his book, *Justice in Jerusalem* and perusing his questioning of witnesses in the Eichmann trial, shows that together with his broad knowledge of various aspects of the Holocaust, he has a "blind spot" when it comes to the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. The glaring fact in both the book and the trial record is that he takes no notice of the immense deportation in July-September 1942, the "big *Aktion*," in which 300,000 Jews from the ghetto were transported within three months. By misleading a witness, he gets her to give an artificial account of a supposedly separate instance of the transport of 100,000 Jews in a unique month, an account that serves him, Ben-Gurion, and the third author in the group, Abba Eban, as a replacement for the "big action." The following are excerpts from the trial record:

Prosecutor: How many Jews were transported to Poland in the first operation?

Witness: What do you mean by the first operation? *I do not know what you call the first operation.*

Q: In July.

A: That involved seventy to one hundred thousand Jews.

Q: They were transferred to where?

A: To the extermination camp at Treblinka.

Q: Do you remember the engineer Czerniakow? What happened to him?

A: [The witness tells about his suicide.]

Q: *How did life seem after the removal of these one hundred thousand? Were places of work organized?*

Q: Describe the operation known as the "*Aktion* of The Pot." How many people did it involve, when was it?

A: It was at the beginning of September... The *Aktion* lasted a week or six days... This *Aktion* in the Warsaw Ghetto ended on Yom Kippur 1942 with the liquidation of part of the Jewish Police... And on Yom Kippur there remained, out of half a million Jews in the city of Warsaw, about sixty thousand Jews between the walls of the ghetto.⁹²

To clarify the picture we will quote successively the accounts of the three authors-public personalities as to what occurred in the Warsaw Ghetto in July-September 1942.

The Version of Gideon Hausner

"It started on August 20, 1942, when the resistance set buildings on fire at night to mark the blacked-out city for Russian bombers. In the resulting confusion the first few pistols were smuggled in. Then came the dreadful September "selection" at "The Pot," the corner of Mila and Gesia streets, which lasted six days...About 100,000 Jews were deported, including a considerable part of the Jewish police. When it was all over, sixty thousand Jews remained in Warsaw out of half a million..."⁹³

The Version of Abba Eban

"The Nazi liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto began in July 1942. In one month, almost 100,000 Jews were taken away on the pretext that they would be transported to work camps. In fact, they were taken to the extermination camp at Treblinka and put to death. By the Day of Atonement, 1942, 60,000 Jews were all that remained of the half-million inhabitants of the ghetto."⁹⁴

⁹² Cross-examination of the witness Zivia Lubetkin, Eichmann trial, Testimonies, pp. 254-255.

⁹³ *Justice in Jerusalem*, p. 221. The geographical details about the "pot" are not very enlightening, and the corner of Mila and Gesia is non-existent since these two streets ran parallel.

⁹⁴ Abba Eban, *My People: The Story of the Jews*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 411.

The Version of Ben-Gurion

“The head of the Ghetto Council, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide together with his wife already in July 1942, when the Germans demanded that he produce more Jews for “transport.” In September 1942 over a hundred thousand Jews were rounded up. Thirty thousand were sent to labor. The rest were sent to labor camps. Then the revolt in the ghetto began.”⁹⁵

This triple confrontation leads to an unequivocal conclusion: (1) All three versions resemble one another in that their central axis is the historical golem of 100,000 people in a unique month--which we conjecture to be the accidental handiwork of Gideon Hausner. (2) The Eban and Hausner versions are further similar in that both rely on identical wordings drawn from the questioning of the witness. (3) The “expertise” of Ben-Gurion and Eban is fully exhausted in this examination and does not go beyond it. On this point, the former attorney general served as the sole source of information for his two colleagues.

As for the ghetto uprising, for its aggrandizement the author of *Justice in Jerusalem is unwilling to limit himself by any inordinate adherence to historical prose. He places at Anielewicz’ s disposal “about a thousand youngsters” armed with three machineguns, a few thousand grenades and explosives, and, in particular, eighty rifles* (according to Zuckerman, it will be recalled, there were “no more than ten rifles”).⁹⁶ The problem of the number of Germans killed is solved with Eichmann’s help. The latter is said to have told a journalist once that “Our losses [in suppressing the revolt] were several thousand.”⁹⁷ Simple.

Even if Hausner’s blind spot extends no farther than the Warsaw Ghetto, his inaccuracies and their impact on the writing of Holocaust history cannot be underestimated. That he heads Yad Vashem can hardly symbolize the pursuit of pure historical truth in that state institution. It stands to reason that he, along with others, bears some of the responsibility for the appearance and dissemination of *the* historical work that shows dramatically the state of affairs where the writing of Holocaust history is concerned. The author of the work, as already indicated, is Abba Eban, a former minister of education and foreign minister in the Israeli government. A detailed analysis of Eban’s contribution follows.

* * * * *

Eban’s contribution to the science of the Holocaust takes the form of a chapter in his book *My People*. ***** Even a cursory reading of

***** For the sake of completeness the analysis will be made as a separate subject, notwithstanding the need to repeat certain details.

this chapter shows flagrantly a plethora of mistakes and inaccuracies of various kinds. The following is a selection, starting with minor errors and proceeding to major flaws:

Heydrich and Himmler were *not* Eichmann’s direct superiors, as stated on p. 397 of the book. Eichmann was responsible to the head of the Gestapo, Heinrich Mueller. We would not have pointed out the author’s lack of knowledge on this formal detail had the Eichmann trial not clarified the matter exhaustively for everyone who followed the proceedings.

Goering’s order to prepare a comprehensive plan to implement the “Final Solution” was given on July 31, 1941, and not in July 1939 (p. 400). The two-year error is a serious flaw. In 1939 Goering was dealing with the expulsion of the Jews from Germany, not their total annihilation. This mistake may have been merely the author’s slip of the pen, but it was not spotted and was not corrected. The publication of the book’s Hebrew translation was preceded by the appearance of nine editions of the

⁹⁵ David Ben-Gurion, *ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Justice in Jerusalem*, p. 223.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

English version and its translation into seven other languages. Despite this ramified activity, the author failed to notice the unfortunate error.

On p. 407 we find a mistake-and-a-half, with the “half-mistake” more embarrassing than the full one. Eban writes that “[in] 1943... the United States government set up a committee for the victims of war.” The full mistake lies in the date: the committee was appointed in January 1944. The half-mistake refers to the committee’s title, and creates a bizarre impression, particularly in the English original. As will be recalled, Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board. This name, or the initials WRB, is as well-known to everyone who deals with the Holocaust as the names “Jewish National Fund” or “Jewish Agency” are known to all Israelis. It is difficult to imagine that anyone well-informed about the WRB’s activity and writing in English to boot, would not call it by its proper and accepted name. When “board” is replaced by “committee” and “refugees” by “victims,” one can only be puzzled.

The number of Jews in Austria at the time of its annexation to Germany was 200,000, and not 400,000 (p. 394). This error, too, was not spotted or corrected after the appearance of the book in the English original.

In contrast to the failure to correct these mistakes, the Hebrew edition contains a gratuitous “correction” which is not without importance. To help the Hebrew reader, the author, in discussing the Evian Conference, notes that it was held in “the Swiss city Evian.” The truth, of course, is that the meeting took place in the *French* resort town of Evian-

les-Bains. The initial geographical misplacing of Evian was done, if we are not mistaken, by the well-known author of essays on political geography, John Gunther, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1941. In 1968 the mistake cropped up in *Justice in Jerusalem*, and from there, apparently, made its way into the Hebrew edition of *My People*.

For Gunther, whose focus was not on the Evian Conference, this was an unimportant error of geography. But for a historian of the Holocaust, the inaccuracy is a shibboleth indicating inexpertise. Eban, it emerges, is unaware of two *historical* facts related to the holding of the conference in France and not Switzerland. The first fact is the chivalrous dispute between America the initiator and France the host over the selection of the conference chairman, with each side willing to defer to the other. The second fact is that during the negotiations on the conference, Switzerland hinted that it was unwilling to serve as the host-country.

A total surprise is afforded by the author’s statement regarding Babi Yar. Speaking about the places where mass-murders of Jews were perpetrated, he writes (p. 403): “Sometimes, as in the case of Babi Yar, near Klev, the site of these mass executions was not discovered until years later.” One is hard put to understand where the author dredged up this information, which is totally at odds with facts that are universally known. What book, novel, poem, or work of history that describes Babi Yar asserts what Abba Eban reiterates in every edition of his book? The truth is that the place of the slaughter was known to the residents of Kiev from the first day of the annihilation. The shots were quite audible in the neighborhoods adjacent to the site, and the whole city knew what was afoot. On January 6, 1942, Molotov gave a detailed description of the events in a message to the Allies and noted the precise location. An even more thorough description of the events and the place appeared around the same time in the Soviet Army paper *Red Star* (see Ch. 2, above). In fact, this was one of the first killing sites, if not the first, to become known worldwide.

These flaws that we have cited, from an abundance of “small” mistakes in Eban’s account, show that the author made no great demands of himself as regards expertise in the subjects he dealt with. Self-indulgence and a frivolous attitude toward the facts characterize the chapter from start to finish. These traits are even more pronounced when Eban discusses the activity of the Zionist movement during the Holocaust years.

In flat contradiction to well-known facts and an admission of guilt published by Dr. Goldmann (see Ch. 12), Eban repeats several times that

“Weizmann and his Zionist colleagues were tireless in their efforts to break the public silence on the subject of the Holocaust in Europe” (p. 407). To prove his point, he quotes at length from the “cry of anguish” uttered by Weizmann at the assembly in New York’s Madison Square Garden on March 1, 1943. What he does not relate (or does not know) is that this was the *first* public appeal by the president of the World Zionist Organization and that it came appallingly late. Eban fails to mention that until late

November 1942 the WZO refrained from acknowledging the existence of the Holocaust, unlike many others, non-Zionists and non-Jews. Perhaps Eban is unaware that in August of that year the leaders of the Zionist movement in America acceded to the request of the secretary of state to conceal from the public the report that had reached them on Hitler's decision to destroy European Jewry without further delay. Had Mr. Eban interested himself in the history of the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the "state-on-the-way," he might have come across Weizmann's memorandum concerning his meeting with Roosevelt three months after his Madison Square Garden speech. From that memorandum he might have learned that in an hour-long talk with the person who held the fate of multitudes in his hands, Weizmann said *not one word* about either the Holocaust or the need for rescue (see Ch. 11). Such things could inject a jarring note, and Eban prefers not to mention them (if he is aware of them).

Another example adduced to illustrate the "rescue efforts" of the Zionist leadership is the divided story of the Yoel Brand mission. The story is split into two parts that are separated by some twenty pages. Each part is a subject in its own right with its own lesson. However, if the reader is not familiar with the affair from another source, he will not even imagine that the two stories are actually one.

On p. 407 Eban relates: "When a spokesman for Hungarian Jewry appeared in Cairo to negotiate with the British on a deal for the release of Jews, he was imprisoned by British authorities." Brand's name is not mentioned. The subject of the sentence is the British.

The complete story appears on p. 425: "In May 1944, a Hungarian Jew, Joel Brand, reached Istanbul and contacted the Jewish Agency emissaries. He told a fantastic story." Eban proceeds to give the details of Eichmann's proposal and the response of the Jewish representatives. Here not a word is said about Brand's arrest or his being taken to Cairo. The subject this time is the efforts of the Zionists, and the author goes on to describe them: "On July 6, Weizmann and Sharett carried their plea to the

Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, whom they found maddeningly hesitant."

The author does not relate what happened in the period between May and July, and more specifically what occurred on July 6. The history of the Holocaust affords a clear answer: between May and July 400,000 Hungarian Jews were sent to annihilation in Auschwitz. On July 6 the deportations were halted (temporarily) following vigorous action by Washington and the diplomatic-moral support of the King of Sweden and the Pope (see Ch. 13).

We turn now to the central subject of the Holocaust: the Warsaw Ghetto revolt and the ghetto's liquidation. We have already quoted Eban's account of the "big *Aktion*" in comparison with the "free" versions offered by the other two author-personalities. Neither he nor they, it was seen, demonstrates very deep knowledge or is over-addicted to historical accuracy. The author provides an extensive description of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt from which we will quote two passages. The passage already quoted above continues as follows:

The Germans' *last entry* into the ghetto met with violent resistance from the small combat group. Twice the Germans were forced to retreat; artillery and flame throwers were called in to overcome the Jewish fighters. Finally, the defenders took to the sewers, despite the unbearably overcrowded conditions and the lack of air, they continued to offer savage resistance. Little by little, the organized Jewish resistance was extinguished, and the action was temporarily stopped. But this was only a breathing spell. Every minute was now used to procure and manufacture arms [p. 411, emphasis added].

And the second passage:

Himmler had given orders to destroy the ghetto. Now the eve of Passover, April 19, 1943, was chosen for the final assault. The ghetto was placed under siege and a fierce bombardment began. The advancing troops were supported by tanks, many of which were driven off with home-made bombs. The desperate battle had been joined. Fighting was street-to-street and house-to-house.

The second passage and its continuation are devoted to the uprising that began on April 19. Its content and style represent at its most extreme the braggadocio historiography of the Holocaust which we have already discussed in this chapter. But

the first passage arouses special interest; according to its narrative context it must refer to an event that occurred *before* April 19. The reference might be to the armed resistance offered to the *Aktion* of January 18-21, which prefaced the April events, But in the January clashes there were neither flamethrowers nor cannons. The fighters did not go down into the sewers and did not have to fight in conditions of “unbearably overcrowded conditions and lack of air.” All of this is purely and totally imaginary and to the best of our knowledge is unexampled by any other Holocaust chronicler.

Moreover, the author of *My People* does not indicate explicitly that he is referring to the January uprising. The passage under discussion comes as the direct continuation to the story of the big operation of summer 1942, and its opening words (the Germans’ “last entry”) suggest that the description refers expressly to the final stage of this event. But does it?...

In sum, this is a confused and emasculated account of the events in the Warsaw Ghetto, as of other events in the Holocaust. One’s only conclusion is that the chapter was written without the author having taken the trouble to master the subject, and where his expertise was insufficient he resorted to imagination and rhetoric. And a large dose of courage.

Nor is this all. Not content with serving up “facts” made of whole cloth, the author of *My People* does not balk at making a substantial contribution to the *moral appraisals* of the Holocaust. In doing so he has surely outdone not only himself but everything written on the Holocaust in Israel.

Unfortunately, he came across a passage from the diary of Emanuel Ringelblum that has been quoted on a number of occasions in publications of Yad Vashem. In it Ringelblum points to the tragic fact that the Jews, through their forced labor in the ghettos, are aiding the victory of their implacable enemies, a victory which, if achieved, will mean the total annihilation of the Jewish people. This was Ringelblum’s thesis.

Basing himself on this, Eban propounds a “moral” thesis of his own. According to Eban’s interpretation, “*Jews were forced to sell their souls in order to survive*” (p. 402). Nothing less.

Two years before the appearance of the original English-language version of *My People*, the French edition of Francois Steiner’s *Treblinka* was published. The book contains much folly about Jews in general and

the Treblinka inmates in particular. Steiner views the Jews who were put to work in the camp (those who carried out the prisoners’ revolt) as abettors of the executioners who purchased their own lives at the price of others’ lives. He even provides a statistical reckoning: the staff of Jewish workers in Treblinka is estimated at 1,000 persons. An average of 15,000 people a day were murdered. Thus for each Jewish worker who remained alive, the price was the murder of 15 Jews per day. Thus Steiner’s interpretation.

The educator and diplomat Abba Eban undoubtedly knows the strength inherent in words and wordings. By his fatuous remark, in support of which he baselessly enlisted Ringelblum, he outdid Steiner. The latter talked about hundreds or thousands, while Eban talked about millions. His book, which has gone through numerous editions in English and been widely translated, tells the world that the Jews, all of them, sold their souls. The Israeli schoolchild will commit to memory the short, sharp answer dished up for him by the person who was once the country’s senior educator: What did the Jews do during the Holocaust? Why, they sold their souls...

In one of our visits to Yad Vashem, after going through the Holocaust exhibition, near the exit we came upon a person sitting at a table and offering visitors pamphlets and souvenirs in return for a contribution to the institution. This time he was offering a glossy pamphlet, tastefully presented, containing an English offprint of an essay on the Holocaust by Abba Eban. On the back page of the pamphlet was the name of the publisher: Yad Vashem, the Martyr’s and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority.

* * * * *

Both Eban and Hausner (but not Ben-Gurion, for a reason which will become apparent below) do not flinch from mentioning the event that illustrates most forcefully the reluctance of the British and the Americans to rescue Jews. We refer to the refusal of the governments of both countries to bomb the Auschwitz death camp. The request was submitted to London and Washington in summer 1944, and its

purpose was to prevent the extermination of the remnants of Hungarian Jewry. The representatives of both governments delayed their response for weeks and months, and finally came up with the pretext of supposed technical-military difficulties. To this day the Auschwitz bombing issue serves as a popular subject for articles in the press and programs on radio and television. Invariably, former military commanders of the Allied forces are quoted who insist that technically the camp could have been bombed. It is

usually mentioned in passing that the Jewish Agency Executive was also once at fault for rejecting a suggestion that it request the bombing of Auschwitz. But the impression gleaned is that this blunder was finally set right, since it was the Jewish Agency that asked the Allies to bomb the camp--and immediately.

Gruenbaum is the first to put forward this version of events. In the introduction to a book on the death camps in Poland he recalls testily that in a meeting of "the nation's leaders" a moment came when they voted against requesting the bombing of Auschwitz. "*No majority was forthcoming at that moment for the proposal... When the request was made after a time, it was turned down by those who could have implemented it.*"⁹⁸ Of the two places we italicized here, the first suffers from extraordinary understatement and the second from gross inaccuracy.

The meeting of "the nation's leaders" referred to by Gruenbaum took place on June 11, 1944. It was a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem. Gruenbaum reported on his talk with the U.S. consul-general in Jerusalem, J.C. Pinkerton. He proposed to the consul that the U.S. bomb the Hungary-Poland railway line, in order to hamper the transport of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz. Pinkerton promised to pass on the proposal to Roosevelt's War Refugee Board.

In addition, Gruenbaum asked that Allied aircraft bomb the death camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka and elsewhere. To this the consul replied that any such operation would lead to accusations that the Allies were killing Jews. He therefore requested that the proposal be made *in writing*. Gruenbaum said he would consult his colleagues.

To the Jewish Agency Executive Gruenbaum said: "According to the reports we have, thousands of Jews are being murdered every day in the death camps. Only the members of the *Ordnungsdienst* remain alive for a short time. The victims are not laid to rest. Even if we supposed that these camps will be bombed while Jews are in them, and some of them are killed, the others will be able to scatter and will be saved. If the buildings are destroyed, they will not be able to commit murder for months using their technique."

The discussion was short and lively. Five of the eight Executive members at the meeting took part. All of them rejected the proposal outright. One of them, Dr. Shmorak, took issue with Gruenbaum's information regarding the small population at Auschwitz. Two others, Dr. Joseph (Dov Yosef) and Dr. Senator, were openly outraged that Gruenbaum had made this suggestion to the consul-general. The chairman, David Ben-Gurion, summed up: "The opinion of the Executive is that no

proposals should be made to the Allies to bomb places where Jews are located."

Clearly, then, it was not a case of the momentary absence of a majority in favor of bombing. There was general agreement against Gruenbaum's view and a clearcut decision of principle against making such proposals to the Allies.

And what happened "after a time"? Did the Jewish Agency Executive change its mind, and if so, what was its new stance? In fact, the request to bomb Auschwitz was not made "after a time," as Gruenbaum would have it, but at the very same time and perhaps even before the Executive's negative decision. The documents relating to this episode⁹⁹ indicate that the request was made by Weizmann, who was then in London, concurrently with the rejection of Gruenbaum's proposal by the Jewish Agency Executive. (The possibility cannot be ruled out that the proposal was put forward by Weizmann together with Sharett on June 30, but as will be seen, this is improbable.)

Sharett was not present at the June 11 meeting in Jerusalem. but did attend two other meetings before leaving for London on June 25. Those sessions were devoted to the Brand affair and the resultant negotiations with Britain. The bombing of Auschwitz was not raised again, and no objections were raised to the June 11 decision. It is

⁹⁸ Israel Klausner, ed., *The Extermination Camps in Poland* (Hebrew), p. 8.

⁹⁹ The documents are preserved in the Weizmann Archives in Rehovot and their translation appeared in *Ha'aretz* on June 2, 1961, in connection with the Eichmann trial.

inconceivable that Sharett, who was about to leave for talks with the British, was not apprised of this decision.

In London, Sharett, along with Weizmann, met for the first time with the under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, George Hall, on June 30. Sharett reported to Ben-Gurion on the meeting in a cable of the same date. The cable makes no mention of bombing Auschwitz. A more detailed report was not found.

On July 6 Weizmann and Sharett met with Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Two memoranda on this meeting have been preserved, one by the British and the other by the Jews, which was submitted to Eden. The Jewish memorandum says nothing about bombing Auschwitz but does mention a request to bomb the Budapest-Birkenau (Auschwitz) railway line. According to the British memorandum, Eden said he had already been in contact with the Air Ministry regarding the bombing of the death camps, and would now add also the proposal to bomb the railway line. By implication, then, a request to bomb Auschwitz had been made earlier.

Taking into account Moshe Sharett's famous sense of loyalty, it is difficult to believe that he defied the Jewish Agency Executive and on

June 30 raised the bombing proposal and also concealed his move from Ben-Gurion. It stands to reason that the request was put forward at an earlier date by Dr. Weizmann, who did not know of the Jewish Agency Executive's decision, or before that decision was adopted.

On July 6, Weizmann and Sharett did not react directly to Eden's mention of the bombing of Auschwitz. They did not retract the request, but did omit it from the list of requested actions spelled out in their memorandum. Following this memorandum *no additional approaches were made to the British on this topic.*

Here we arrive at the document quoted by Hausner and Eban as convincing proof that Weizmann had vigorously demanded the bombing of Auschwitz.¹⁰⁰ The document in question bears the date July 11, 1944, and is marked in the Weizmann Archives as a document of the Executive in London. The editor in *Ha'aretz* titled it "Reasons to Bomb the Death Camps," and noted that it was apparently drawn up by Moshe Sharett as preparation for another talk with the British. Clear signs relating to both its form and content indicate that this document was intended for internal consumption and could not be submitted, in this form, to the British. The *entire* memorandum repays close study.

The section quoted by Hausner and Eban is devoted to reasons in favor of bombing the camps. There are five of these and all are of a psychological-demonstrative character. As for the prospects of rescue, or, at least, a possible slowdown in the pace of extermination as a result of the bombing, the memorandum's author does not conceal his reservations. The section that has not been ardently quoted by historians states that the suggested bombings would "hardly [be] likely to achieve the salvation of the victims to any appreciable extent." The destruction of the extermination facilities "might perhaps delay the extermination of those still in Hungary... but this may not go far enough, as other means of extermination can be quickly improvised." The note did not balk at pointing out that the effect of the bombing could "possibly [be] the hastening of the end of those already doomed"--in other words, the camp inmates. And this was the decisive consideration that motivated the Jewish Agency Executive to oppose the bombing so strongly.

Sharett's memorandum (if he was its author), with its sober appraisals, was not likely to convince the Allies of the justice of bombing Auschwitz. At all events, it was never submitted to the British, neither in whole nor in part, neither orally nor in writing. In a meeting between Sharett and a British Foreign Office official named A.W.G. *Randall*, which took place on July 12, the day after the memorandum was drawn

up, and on which Sharett drafted a highly detailed report, the bombing proposal was not raised. Nor is there anything to indicate that it was raised at a later date--until on September 1 the British replied that "for technical reasons" they refused to bomb Auschwitz.

If, based on the known facts, we try to reconstruct the flow of events as they appear to us, the following picture emerges: On an unknown date, but no later than June 1944, Weizmann suggested to the British government that Auschwitz be bombed (in Sharett's memorandum the proposal is referred to as "the original proposal for

¹⁰⁰ Hausner, p. 243; Eban, p. 426.

carrying out the bombing"). In connection with a similar proposal raised by Gruenbaum in his meeting with the American consul-general in Jerusalem, the Jewish Agency Executive decided as a matter of principle against the bombing of camps containing Jewish prisoners. When Weizmann was apprised of this decision by Sharett in London, it unsettled him and aroused hesitations. His hesitations, and possibly those of Sharett as well, produced their equivocal behavior on July 6, as described above. A few days later Sharett drafted a "working paper" for an internal clarification of the question by the members of the Executive in London. The memorandum spelled out all the propaganda advantages likely to accrue from the bombing, but also pointed out the attendant dangers and spoke of the unlikelihood that anything concrete would be achieved. As a result of the clarification, based on the considerations adduced in the memorandum, the matter was no longer followed up--the proposal was not dropped, but neither was anything done to expedite its implementation. The British government's negative reply of September 1 released the Jewish leaders from this posture of fatalistic ambivalence. The additional idea raised on July 6, to bomb the Budapest-Birkenau railway line, was rendered irrelevant when the Hungarian ruler Horthy yielded to pressure exerted by Roosevelt, which included the bombing of Budapest, and ordered a halt to the deportations.

It is possible that this reconstruction of events is not accurate and that events did not occur as we conjecture. But one thing is certain beyond any doubt: in July 1944 Weizmann did *not* request the bombing of Auschwitz. He did *not* give the British reasons to justify the bombing as these appear in the Sharett memorandum and as Hausner and Eban maintain he did. None of this happened.

Fortunately for the members of the Jewish Agency Executive, their decision against bombing was found to be justified for the Auschwitz of mid-1944. The purposefulness of bombing the death camps depended on a tragic choice between the fate of the prisoners liable to lose their lives

during or in the aftermath of the bombing, and reasonable calculations that other Jews could be saved as a result of delays in the extermination process. The decision had to be made for each individual case on the basis of detailed knowledge of the facts of the situation. The members of the Jewish Agency Executive had little knowledge of the situation in Auschwitz or any other death camp. The discussion on whether or not to bomb was conducted in very general terms, on "the death camps in Poland, Oswiecim, Treblinka, and so forth"--this when the camp at Treblinka had been non-existent for nearly a year. The information provided by Gruenbaum, that Auschwitz contained only service personnel, was incorrect. In 1944 the number of prisoners did not fall below 50-60,000, and in certain periods reached 90,000 and more.¹⁰¹ The bombing of the camp would have brought about tens of thousands of deaths, both from the bombs themselves and from the wholesale slaughter the Nazis might have perpetrated. In summer 1944 the hopes that the destruction of the facilities at Auschwitz would put a stop to the extermination were quite misplaced. The experience of Babi Yar at Kiev, Ponar at Vilna, and the Ninth Fort at Kovno shows that tens of thousands were murdered without any resort to sophisticated machinery, In Treblinka hundreds of thousands were gassed to death without crematoria to burn them. Gas chambers could be improvised in any sealed hut.

Gruenbaum's assurance that the prisoners who managed to break out of the camp could "scatter and be saved" was extremely doubtful. Following the prisoners' revolts at Treblinka and Sobibor, which were planned in advance, very few of those who escaped survived. There was no basis to expect a better fate for those who might escape from Auschwitz following an air raid executed without any advance warning.

The Jewish Agency Executive could not be expected to know any of this--nor did they. So it was a matter of luck that despite their inexperience and ignorance of the situation they made the right decision and prevented pressures in London that were liable to bring about many more Jewish deaths.

Those who lived as the events were happening sometimes had no choice but to act without knowing all the facts. But not those who came on the scene afterward to know, to evaluate and to record. They ought to know full well what happened, and it is their duty to tell the truth. What was a mistake *then* is deception now. At the time, there was lack of knowledge; now--far worse than that. Because often the writing of history carries with it as much responsibility as its making.

¹⁰¹ Reitlinger, p. 452.

Chapter Fifteen

Summations and Lessons

At the opening of a conference of Holocaust researchers, Dr. Meir Dvorjetski urged his colleagues: "Multiply research! Train pupils! Do not describe the Jews in the ghettos and camps as better than they were, do not deal in apologetics, but please do not depict them as inferior to what they were! Reveal the complete, multi-faceted truth! Reveal the historical truth!"¹

Dr. Dvorjetski thus gave expression to the pretension that characterizes many researchers: to give grades of "good" or "bad" to the victims of the Holocaust--a posture devoid of any moral basis. What happened to the Jews of Europe in World War II is summed up in the word *Shoah*, or in English, catastrophe. The human aspect of the event bears close comparison with ancient Greek *tragedy* whose heroes struggle in vain against a foreordained doom. In the confrontation between European Jewry, who stood alone with no outside help, and the violent Nazi juggernaut that assaulted the Jews with its full might, the relation of forces was akin to a single individual in an earthquake.

The fierce and bloody whirlwind of this horrific disaster dislodged many accepted and sacred standards of normal behavior. Some of them proved irrelevant to the nightmarish reality; others conflicted with the pressing needs of the hour. Problems arose that were found to be intractable, and dilemmas emerged which had no "correct" solution--not then and not today, decades later. In the face of this reality it behooves us not to be rash in passing judgment as to what behavior was right and what wrong, what was good and what bad.

A salient example of passing quick judgment on a subject painful to the point of horror was provided by Dr. Dvorjetski on another occasion. While praising the behavior of Jewish prisoners in the camps of Estonia, he notes in particular the inner courage of women who were brought with their children from Vilna to the Vaivara camp. After the women were removed from the train, a "selection" was carried out. Unmarried women and women without children were sent to work, children and their mothers to extermination. "The mothers, to whom it was clear that their children were doomed, and who understood that if they declared themselves to be the mothers of these children they, too, would be sent with them and share the same fate as their children, nevertheless chose the death transport so they could be together for another few hours or days."²

¹ *Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust*, discussions at a conference of Holocaust researchers, 1968, p. 16 (Hebrew).

² Dr. Meir Dvorjetzky, *Camps of the Jews in Estonia 1942-1944*, pp. 244, 252.

Many of the mothers, perhaps the majority, did make this choice. But not all. Some young women, realizing that their dear ones were doomed, succumbed to the instinct to save their own lives by finding an opportunity to separate themselves from them. This was possible during the selection following the arrival of the transports from the ghettos, and in the death camps at the entry to the gas chambers.³ Some of them managed to survive the war and build a new family.

For a mother to voluntarily choose death in order to alleviate the final hours of her children is surely a supreme expression of self-sacrifice. In contrast, for a mother to forsake her children in an hour of distress is not a heartening spectacle. This is precisely why it is unjust to emburden the already bitter memories of women survivors by the condemnation of their behavior that is implicit in commending the behavior of those mothers who chose death. It is unjust because it is far from clear what the "correct" behavior was in this dark and fateful time for both the individual and the community. If these wretched women had been able to turn for counsel to a great rabbinical sage, might he not have answered: "Since you cannot save your children, try, my daughter, to save your own life, that you may live and that the Jewish people will not be annihilated." And if they had heeded this horrible advice, would their heart not have tortured them until their last day? Who, then, can say what was right and what was not right?

The question of self-sacrifice was not limited to the mother-child relationship. The choice was equally harsh in terms of the relation of youngsters to their parents and other family members who were dependent on them. The literature of the Holocaust contains no dearth of accounts of youngsters who, albeit with anguished soul-searching and stricken consciences, nonetheless left their families. Yet many instances are also known in which sons and daughters passed up the possibility of their own rescue in order to accompany their loved ones to the gas chambers or the killing pits. Here, in contrast to the mother-child situation, elderly parents often begged the youngsters to leave them to their fate and save themselves. What, then, was the right course of action?

And what can one say about the "*Aktion* of the children" in Shavli and in Kovno? Or about the *Aktion* of the children and old people in Lodz, or the separation of the children during the liquidation of the Bialystok ghetto? What recipes for behavior can one prescribe for parents who faced these situations?

In the maelstrom of events generated by the *Aktions* of the children, situations were created which forced parents to make decisions

and commit acts that were manifestly beyond the limits of humanity's ability to bear. When some German soldiers permitted mothers to take with *one* of their children who were designated for transport, they had to make the decision quickly, without delay—in the face of their children's pleading eyes choose *who* to save, and then take the child quickly and leave before the German regretted his merciful deed. One or more instances are known in which the mother's response to this offer was to leap on to the cart in order to be sent to death together with her dear ones (this was not always allowed), or, in the madness of despair, to flee without taking a single one of her children. Can one propose a "correct solution" for this situation?

These extreme examples of unresolvable inner distress symbolize the Holocaust as a whole. Attempts to pass moral judgment on the behavior of its victims according to the standards of normal life inevitably result in a gross perversion of justice. It is not by chance that Jewish tradition holds all the victims of such disasters to be *martyrs*, with the exception of those who failed by turning informer (the informers shall have no hope!).

This consideration suffices to reject outright the various censures leveled at Jewish behavior in the Holocaust. Nor is it necessary to cite good deeds that supposedly "compensate" for the failures and transgressions. It is enough to assert that such censoriousness, at a remove of time and place, is unfair and is usually the result of inadequate thought and/or ulterior motives. This is especially so when the intensity of the hatred and the "logic" of the condemnation know no bounds. If a Jew who was made to do forced labor for the Germans can be said to have "sold his soul to the devil," and a worker in the Treblinka sewing-shop can be described as the "henchman of the

³ Israel Gutman, *People and Dust* (Hebrew), p. 245; Bebe Epstein, "The Liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto," *YIVO Bletter*, 1947, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 128 (Yiddish).

executioners,” why shouldn’t a Jewish mother be accused of collaboration for grabbing one of her children from the death cart and, ostensibly, determining which of them would survive and which be taken to death?

This is not to deny that there were no misdeeds in the ghettos. There were many, as there generally are in a crisis-stricken society. And they hampered life more than misdeeds do in a normal society. On the other hand, there were perhaps more instances of acts of grace informed by selfless devotion, mutual help, and the like. Both types of behavior could serve as the subject of a socio-psychological study of human behavior in situations of distress. But too often there is nothing substantive in a *moral* evaluation of negative phenomena in the Holocaust based on criteria of normal life. Certainly a blanket reproof of Holocaust victims is

baseless. We who were not there, and even those among us who were there and lived, possess not one iota of authority to pass judgment on our martyrs. Outsiders--still less.

The rejection of supposedly moral censure does not preclude a thorough and meticulous examination of the events of the Holocaust in order to learn lessons for both the present and the future. On the contrary. The demonological tendency in the relevant historical writing looks for corrupt motivations underlying the behavior of “rival” elements in Holocaust Jewry, which it seeks to reveal and to revile. A break with this tendency could direct research into productive channels of substantive clarification, without either exonerating or condemning the people involved. The pivot of any such clarification must involve a determination of the *vital interests* of the Jewish people which were at stake in these terrible years. Based on this, one can delineate the general lines of Jewish behavior that were consistent with securing those interests.

Actions which were inconsistent with the interests of the Jewish people, or even conflicted with those interests (again, we rule out informing) should not necessarily be regarded as crimes, whether done by individuals or by groups and organizations. The behavior befitting an emergency situation can be determined only by the *guidance* of an experienced and prestigious leadership. It is far from certain that an individual caught in the pressure of a disaster will always be able to subordinate his responses and actions to considerations of the general good, unless he has been properly guided and has absorbed that guidance.

Even appropriate behavior by no means constituted a “solution” to the situation in which the Jews of the Holocaust found themselves: a situation of which the essence was, as we said, tragic. No prescriptions of behavior could have saved the Jews of Europe *without outside help*. Of such situations the Jewish sages said that “a prisoner cannot free himself from prison by himself.” At the same time, as will be seen, a delineation of these lines of behavior is useful for understanding and evaluating the events of the Holocaust.

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The vital interest imposed, in stark clarity, a single paramount task for Holocaust Jewry: to prevent the annihilation of the Jewish people in Europe. This task, which also conformed with the direct interest of each individual, exceeded in importance and thrust aside every other goal. Any action that helped achieve it was useful; anything obstructing it was negative and harmful. To remain alive was the highest imperative of the Jews in the Holocaust.

The Nazis’ juggernaut of total destruction did not allow the Jews to pursue their objective by means of a head-on confrontation of force against force. The Jews had no choice but to act *within* the reality of the destruction process in order to concentrate their efforts to save what was possible. David Ben-Gurion, who did not occupy himself with the problems of the Holocaust and whose concern about its outcome was related to the overriding goal of realizing Zionism, inadvertently defined correctly the desired objective in Europe: to ensure the largest possible *surviving remnant*, or *She’erit Hapletah*.⁴

As was noted above, and will shortly be explained at greater length, the Jews had no objective need to defend their honor. Fighting carried out under this pretext, for the

⁴ David Ben-Gurion, *In the Campaign* (Hebrew), Vol. II, p. 255.

most part by youths and young men and women, were for the most part an outlet for the yearnings of people who had suffered emotionally or who sought revenge for the murder of their loved ones. Insofar as such actions did not conflict with the primary task of saving *She'erit Hapletah*, they were the personal affair of those who carried them out, and had no impact one way or the other. However, when such operations interfered with rescue efforts, they were detrimental to the national interest, notwithstanding the good intentions, readiness for sacrifice, and manifestations of heroism that marked them.

Moreover, the inhabitants of the ghettos and the inmates of the concentration camps (as distinct from the partisans in the forests) were under no moral obligation to take an active part in the war against Hitler, either by fighting or by sabotage. Humanitarian organizations and public figures in the free countries tried unsuccessfully to have them designated prisoners-of-war. In fact their situation was far more serious. Burdened with old people, women and children, exposed to arbitrary death at any moment by their taskmasters, subject to cruel collective responsibility, the Jews had the lowly status of prisoner-hostages. By any standard of justice, and according to the custom of partnership in war, they were exempt from making a personal contribution to the war effort. If, nevertheless, some of them, impelled by emotional or ideological motives, carried out an act of sabotage, its impact on the Nazi war machine was generally miniscule, but its potential for doing harm to the chances of rescuing *She'erit Hapletah* was very considerable.

These basic facts were not lost on the advocates of armed combat. In some cases, when they tried to ignore the facts, reality thrust them to the surface. In Bialystok, *Yitzhak Malmed* threw sulphuric acid into the face of one Nazi and caused the death of another. In reprisal the Germans murdered one hundred Jews on the spot and announced that they would

murder another five thousand unless Malmed, who had managed to escape and go into hiding, was handed over. Finally Malmed gave himself up (according to a Jewish account) or was turned in by an informer (according to a German account), and was tortured and then hanged.⁵ There were no more acts of this kind in Bialystok--until the revolt. In Warsaw, Jewish fighters killed a German officer and wounded another. Immediately the Germans dispatched a special punitive squad that went on the rampage on Mila Street and murdered 120 Jews. On that day the Fighting Jewish Organization instructed all its units to refrain from further attacks--until the day of the revolt.⁶

The collective responsibility that the Germans imposed on the Jews was an issue that preoccupied the young fighters. Their incessant soul-searching and their efforts to reconcile their thirst for action with the disasters their operations could bring on the Jewish population, are attested to by the intense discussions conducted in the circles of the fighting underground. The solution that the youngsters in the Cracow ghetto found was to fight their war "for three lines in the history books" outside the ghetto walls as an anonymous group that concealed its Jewish-ness and thereby sought to exempt the Jews of responsibility for their actions.⁷ Other ghettos saw a bitter debate amongst the fighters as to whether they should operate within the ghetto or join the partisans in the forests. In the Vilna ghetto the disagreements on this question led to the formation of two separate organizations that competed with each other.

Generally speaking, the agonizings over the question of collective responsibility led to a decision by the fighting organization in a ghetto to go into action only in the *final* stage of the ghetto's existence, when the last of the inhabitants were being deported. Since it was presumed that liquidation invariably meant the extermination of all its inhabitants, the fighters believed that armed resistance could do no harm, as all were doomed to immediate murder.

This assumption was not borne out by the facts. Precisely in the three cities which had the strongest resistance organizations--Warsaw, Vilna and Bialystok--the liquidation of the ghetto was not accompanied by the immediate or almost immediate total extermination of the deportees. It was this faulty assumption that underlay the great mistake of the fighting wing of Holocaust Jewry.

5 B. Mark, *The Revolt in the Bialystok Ghetto* (Yiddish), pp. 270-272.

6 Tuvia Buzhikovsky, *Between Tumblin Walls* (Hebrew), p. 25.

7 Gusta Dawidsohn, *Justina's Diary*, p. 131.

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In the campaign to discredit the Judenrats, which has persisted for over thirty years, a major place is occupied by the contention that people fostered illusions that by means of appropriate behavior they could prevent

the total extermination of the Jews in their communities. In contrast, it is said, the fighting undergrounds argued that total extermination was inevitable and that the cardinal thing was to die with honor and not go like sheep to the slaughter. But in the heat of the controversy one fact is lost sight of: that in retrospect, the debate over the failure to prevent total extermination was resolved in favor of the stand taken by the Judenrats. Of the eight million Jews under direct Nazi rule or under the heel of the Nazi satellites, the Nazis succeeded in murdering nearly six million. Two million, or a quarter of those whom the Nazis intended to exterminate, were saved. In Romania over 400,000 were saved--half the total Jewish population. All the Jews in the Hungarian provinces were transported to their deaths, but nearly 200,000 were saved in the capital, Budapest. In Italy two-thirds of the Jewish population survived. All of Bulgarian Jewry survived, although in Thrace and Macedonia, which were annexed to Bulgaria, the Jews were slaughtered almost to the last person.

In each of these countries special circumstances existed which furthered rescue. In all of them, rescue entailed outside forces, as described earlier. But above all, what these countries had in common was that the Nazis' extermination machinery began to deal directly with the Jews in them at a *late* stage of the war. Their energetic agents managed to destroy the Jews of Greece, Thrace and Macedonia, but they lacked the strength to overcome the obstacles to the finalization of their scheme that emerged in the other countries.

The overwhelming majority of the Jews in Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia, the Ukraine and the Baltics who fell into Nazi hands, were exterminated. Four years of continuous preoccupation were enough for them to very nearly exhaust the potential for murder. But here, too, it was the time factor that determined the outcome of the Holocaust. About one hundred thousand persons survived and constituted the hard core of *She'erit Hapletah*. They gathered in "displaced persons" camps in Germany and played a crucial role in determining the course of the Jewish people in the post-war era. Had the war lasted another year, it is possible that not one of them would have survived. By the same token, had the war ended a year earlier, far more would undoubtedly have been saved.

To sum up: the annihilation of European Jewry was one of Hitler's paramount aims. Had he won the war, or had sufficient time at his disposal, he would have accomplished his objective in full. But he was defeated and lacked the time to perpetrate his vast scheme thoroughly in every locale.

The Judenrats could not foresee the final outcome. But their basic behavior was consistent with the main interest of the Jewish people. Since in the absence of outside help it was impossible to *prevent* the destruction process, they directed their efforts toward gaining time by exploiting means and elements that could *delay annihilation*. *Unlike their adversaries in the fighting camp, they did not accept the argument that total extermination was inevitable and that nothing would be lost by accelerating the pace of extermination as reprisal for attacks. In this the Judenrats were right. Thousands and tens of thousands of Jews survived thanks to their delaying tactics.*

The contention that the Judenrats fostered empty illusions among the inhabitants of the ghettos has some basis in fact, if by illusions one means unfulfilled hopes. But it is entirely baseless if by illusions are meant expectations that from the outset were unrealistic. In some ghettos--Vilna, Bialystok, Lodz and others--the heads of the Judenrats often expressed their hope that productive work for the Germans might save the ghetto together with its inhabitants. These hopes proved false. The ghettos were liquidated and most of their occupants were murdered. But it cannot be said that from the outset there was no place for a reasonable optimistic supposition. The Judenrats' rescue efforts were aided by two mutually complementary factors.

First, an influential faction in the Nazi hierarchy argued that the Jewish labor force must be exploited to the hilt for the sake of Germany's war goals. This group, which consisted chiefly of generals and economic experts, waged a persistent struggle

against those seeking to intensify the “Final Solution.” The latter generally had the upper hand, though in a few cases and places the military and the business interests had their way. When they encountered the “productivity” efforts of the ghetto leaders, situations were created which helped put a partial stop to the extermination process.

The second factor was the greed of the Nazis who came into contact with the ghettos. Some of them made a fortune from exploiting the cheap labor of Jewish slaves. Others engaged in the relentless plunder of the ghetto and/or enjoyed the bribes they pocketed from the Judenrat treasury. For both groups the ghetto was a source of profuse enrichment which it would be a pity to forgo.

At the local level, the combination of these two factors created a reality that gave grounds for hope. Ephraim Barasz, head of the Judenrat in the Bialystok ghetto, noted confidently that “the Germans from the area favor the existence of the ghetto. The local authorities appreciate us at our

value.” But he immediately added with implicit sobriety that “we expect no danger as long as there is no *general order from above*.”⁸

The “general order from above” arrived. In (almost) every case it arrived before salvation. *The delaying tactics did not achieve their ultimate goal. They succeeded in postponing the destruction and bringing about a larger *She'erit Hapletah*. But here, unlike the Balkans, the Nazis had a surfeit of time.

The Holocaust researcher Livia Rothkirchen, speaking about the delaying efforts by means of “productivization” undertaken by the first head of the Judenrat in Theresienstadt, Ya’akov Edelstein, pronounces cautiously:

“It may therefore be asserted, that had the war ended in the summer of 1944 or had the attempt on Hitler’s life been successful, most of the youth in the ghetto would have survived and the productivization of Theresienstadt would have been regarded as a successful rescue project.”⁹

Certainly, it may be asserted. Not only as regards Edelstein’s activity, and not necessarily based on the supposition of an earlier end to the war. Thus, for example, if Stalin had not halted the Soviet Army’s thrust forward at the gates of Warsaw in early August 1944, in order to “punish” the Polish insurgents, it’s doubtful whether the Germans would have managed to deport the inhabitants of the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz. And then, perhaps, the head of the ghetto, Chaim Rumkowski, would have gone down in history as having saved 70,000 Jews in five years of toil. And if there had been a Jewish body in the free countries ready and willing to act as a “father” to Holocaust Jewry, it can be asserted that many Judenrat heads would have seen their labors rewarded.

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The refutation of the thesis concerning the inevitability of total extermination, against the background of the imposition of collective responsibility, undercuts the belligerent philosophy of the youngsters’ undergrounds. There was no justification for other Jews to have their chances for survival erased immediately because of resistance operations executed to provide an outlet for fighters’ emotional or ideological needs; especially when the concrete results, in terms of the damage caused to the enemy, was bound to be inconsequential. In the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, several hundred youngsters and youths from the two underground

*It was late in arriving at the Hassag plant in Czestochowa, where 5,200 Jews were saved because the Nazis did not manage to deport them before their liberation by the Soviet Army. See *Lieber Brenner, Resistance and Extinction in the Czestochowa Ghetto* (Yiddish), p. 169.

organizations were able to give vent to their feelings by killing thirteen German soldiers (see Ch. 14): for this, 13,000 Jews paid with their lives on the spot, in addition to 7,000 more sent to annihilation in Treblinka. Of those who died, 5-6,000 perished in the explosions and fires that came as a direct response to the combat operations, while

⁸ Nachman Blumenthal, *Way of a Judenrat* (Hebrew), p. 232.

⁹ Livia Rothkirchen, lecture at the second international historical conference at Yad Vashem, April 8-11, 1974.

a few thousand were put to death on the pretext of taking part in the revolt. It is impossible to know how many of them would have been sent with the other ghetto occupants to the camp at Trawniki or at Poniatow, how many would have escaped from the massacre perpetrated in these two camps half a year later, and how many would have succeeded in remaining alive until the end of the war. But there were people who did survive and were saved. Nor is it beyond the realm of possibility that of those murdered in the revolt some might have been numbered among *She'erit Hapletah*.

To risk killing Germans was justified when it brought about the rescue of Jews. The revolts in the death camps enabled a number of inmates to escape and some of them to be saved. This was also the case in a few towns where the inhabitants tried at the last minute to flee into the surrounding forests. For the most part, Jews' integration into life in the forest necessarily entailed their participation in partisan warfare. These were actions obligated by the situation. Whereas revolt for the sake of revolt, or belligerent protest actions that *accelerated* the extermination process, conflicted with the vital interests of the Jewish people in the war and in the Holocaust.

As Emanuel Ringelblum attests in the article already cited (Ch. 14), the behavior of the Jews being led to death was directed by a "mass instinct" which dictated not lifting a hand against a German in order not to endanger other Jews. This form of passive heroism was consciously agreed to by the members of the general Nazi underground in the German concentration camps. The underground members who were taken to their deaths in the camps evinced no resistance whatsoever to their murderers. Their obedient behavior was dictated by a sense of responsibility to the fate of their comrades and of the entire camp. Manifestations of resistance were liable to be construed as a revolt and bring in their wake brutal reprisals. This issue was a frequent subject of discussion by the inmates of the camps.¹⁰

What turned out to be a temporary measure in the non-Jewish anti-Nazi underground, stemming from the conditions of the Hitlerite terror, was for the Jews a "mass instinct"--a collective life-wisdom whose source lay in the millenia-long experience of a people who lived as a persecuted minority and waged a constant struggle for survival. That all Jews are

responsible for each other is manifest to us in two senses: on the one hand, there is nothing new in the fact that Jew-haters are eager to impose on all Jews responsibility for the acts of individuals. On the other hand, we have often had occasion to discover how much our existence depends on our readiness to help one another selflessly and with self-sacrifice.

It stands to reason that the sense of mutual responsibility played a not inconsiderable role in the Jews' self-restraint. But this was not the sole factor and certainly not the principal one. The primary reason that the Jews did not indulge in violent protests was that such actions served no useful purpose other than providing an emotional outlet for their perpetrators. They fulfilled no objective need, whereas their deleterious effect was certain. The deeply rooted Jewry of Eastern Europe knew how to fend for itself in periods of distress. The way of life in the ghettos of Warsaw, Vilna, Bialystok and others stands as faithful testimony to astonishing vitality of their inhabitants, who in these inhuman conditions fulfilled the precept of Judaism, "In thy blood, live." They fought stubbornly, and not without success, against the siege of famine imposed on the ghettos. Children's houses and soup-kitchens for the needy were established and maintained. The medical service did much to eradicate illness and epidemics under conditions of want and horrendous overcrowding. Indefatigable efforts were invested in maintaining schools, both legal and clandestine. And despite the appalling surroundings, cultural and artistic life was maintained. Everything was directed toward the idea that in the midst of the extermination process--which could not be halted without outside help--body and soul alike must stand fast until redemption would come, if it would.

Just as the ghettos were distinguished by the low rate of individual suicide, collective or group suicide through the Germans--the direct and necessary consequence of armed revolt--was also an alien concept.

The negative attitude toward armed resistance was shared by all the strata of the Jewish population, with the exception of a small group of youths and young men and women who were organized in political youth movements. Rabbis and thinkers, the bearers of the historical experience and national thinking, rejected revolt; so did

¹⁰ Eugen Kogon, The Theory and Practice of Hell, Ch. 23.

parents, old people and young people who feared for the fate of their children and refused to accept the thesis of total destruction as an inevitable end. All the leaders of the Jewish political parties opposed revolt. Yitzhak Zuckerman points out correctly that the Jewish Fighting Organization in Warsaw was established

against the will of the parties. ** Emanuel Ringelblum writes about this in greater detail in a piece devoted to Mordechai Anielewicz, written at some point between the Big *Aktion* and the revolt:

But our friend Mordechai made a second serious mistake that wreaked revenge on the history of Warsaw and Polish Jewry. *Haver* Mordechai and the young *haverim* from Hashomer and from the workers' organizations gave too much consideration to the views of the adult generation--so wise and so settled in their outlook--who sat and thought and pulled out of their sleeve a host of considerations against fighting the occupier. A paradoxical situation was created: the adult generation, which already has half its life behind it, spoke and thought about how to get through the war, dreamed of life. The youth--the best, finest and noblest asset of the Jewish people--spoke and thought about death with honor.¹¹

Shocked by the results of the Big Action, Ringelblum forgot about the mutual responsibility and about the "mass instinct" to which, before that operation, he had recommended submission. Nothing useful would be served at this time by asking on which occasion he was right and on which he was wrong. What is important is his categorical testimony that the "adult generation" rejected the idea of armed resistance to the Germans. It bears noting, too, that when Ringelblum spoke about adults, he was not necessarily referring to the elderly. The Yiddish word *dervaksene* that he uses means mature people after childhood and youth. This explanation reconciles Ringelblum's testimony with the fact that the opponents to armed revolt included young people who were burdened with party or family responsibilities.

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The negative attitude held by the overwhelming majority of ghetto residents toward the idea of conducting warfare in the ghettos is manifested by the events in Bialystok and Vilna. In the former, it will be recalled, on the day of the ghetto's liquidation, the Jews, by refusing to heed the call not to go to the assembly point, caused the abolition of the

** Conference on Jewish steadfastness in the Holocaust, 1968, p. 118. On that occasion Zuckerman told about a thought he had entertained while walking with his small boy, his first-born, in the kibbutz fields: "The ghetto, the *Aktion*, me and my little boy by my side--what would I have done?" Ibid., p. 21.

underground's plan of combat. When the organization launched its desperate actions, the crowd did not follow suit, with the possible exception of a few individuals.

In Vilna the disagreement between the two sides assumed very grave aspects. A fierce conflict erupted on July 16, 1943, regarding *Yitzhak Wittenberg*, the commander of the United Partisans Organization (FPO). One of Wittenberg's Communist Party comrades informed the Gestapo that Wittenberg was active in the party. Wittenberg was arrested in the ghetto by the Gestapo and freed by some of his FPO colleagues. The Germans responded with an ultimatum. They would immediately destroy the ghetto together with its inhabitants unless Wittenberg was handed over. A near "civil war" broke out in the ghetto before Wittenberg decided to surrender.

The incident opened the eyes of the FPO to the polar conflict between their desires and the ghetto inhabitants' wishes and aspirations. "We lost our leader, but also our hope that the ghetto was with us and would follow us when disaster struck."¹² The FPO was increasingly disposed to abandon the idea of fighting in the ghetto and inclined to

¹¹ Emanuel Ringelblum, *Writings from the Ghetto* (Yiddish), Vol. II, pp. 148- 149.

¹² Rozhka Korczak, *Flames in the Dust* (Hebrew), 1965, p. 167.

take to the forests, along the lines of the rival organization (“Yehiel’s Fighting Company”). The two groups began to cooperate, though remaining distinct as regards responsibility for the needs of the whole community on the one hand, and their own needs on the other hand.

The events of September 1, 1943, shed light on this separatist approach. On that day S.S. men and Estonian troops carried out a transport to the camps in Estonia. It was not the first such transport, and it seemed probable that the destination was labor camps and not extermination at Ponar. However, due to certain indications--the severance of contact with the city and perhaps the large number of soldiers--the impression was formed that the liquidation of the ghetto was at hand. The fighting organization therefore went into action, according to plans of operation previously worked out. Leaflets pasted up in the ghetto called on the masses to join the uprising. “Anyone who goes through the ghetto gate is bound solely for Ponar,” it was explained. “We have nothing to lose,” the fighters declared, “for whatever happens, death will overtake us.” The inhabitants were urged “not to conceal yourselves in the hiding places and dugouts” but to go to the street and fight. “Anyone without a weapon will use an ax. And if there is no ax, let him seize an iron rod or a stick.”¹³

Parallel to calling on the ghetto to launch a suicidal battle using iron rods and sticks, the organization drew up a plan of action--more balanced and judicious--for itself. A forward post was set up at 12

Strashun Street to cover the approach to the organization’s main barricade. It was decided in advance that “if the forward position should fall, and it becomes hopeless to continue the fight for the barricade, the ghetto wall will be dynamited at 6 Strashun Street in order to breach a path to the city.”¹⁴

As it turned out, the ghetto wall was not exploded. What did happen was that the forward position at 12 Strashun fell, its commander was shot and killed, and several other inhabitants also perished when the Germans blew up the building in which the position was located. The fighters’ unit had retreated before the blast, and the Germans left the ghetto with the Estonia-bound transport.

Surprisingly, among the transportees were an organized group of about 100 youngsters that included the FPO’s Second Battalion. According to the generally accepted account of how this group was arrested, the fighters did not have time to get arms from the cache and were surprised by a strong German force. The historian of the ghetto, Hermann Krook, introduces a few changes into this account.

According to testimony taken from a squad commander, Moshe Wein, the battalion was seized after it was informed on by the policeman Ruk and the brigadier (work director) Heiman. “The two of them indicated the FPO’s forward position at 6 Spitalana Street and brought the German police there through Heiman’s home... The 150 people in the group were evacuated under guard to the ghetto gate. About 25 of them managed to escape. Each person in the group had in his possession two lightbulbs filled with acid [which served as substitute grenades] and four pistols in the possession of the battalion commander and the company commanders [each commander’s personal weapon, which was not part of the central cache]. At the gate, all of them get rid of their lightbulbs except for Gordon, who wanted to take his with, and succeeded. The pistols are given to a policeman who is a member of the organization, to ensure that they do not go to waste. The group is taken in two trucks to Russi [a Vilna suburb where the ghetto deportees were concentrated].”¹⁵

The battalion turned out not to be entirely lacking in arms. So poorly did the Germans guard them that the fighters were able to leave behind next to the ghetto gate an entire cache of hundreds of “grenades” in addition to the four pistols. Since neither account mentions Jewish or German casualties, it seems likely that the surrender passed without a clash of any kind. Probably, in the light of the near certainty that the transport was destined not for immediate extermination but for labor

camps, the boys saw no point in laying down their lives and bringing about a general massacre in the ghetto.

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¹³ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁵ Ibid., Appendix 4, from the legacy of Hermann Krook, p. 376. The comments in square parentheses are by the author or the book’s annotator.

In *Warsaw*, two factors unique to the city informed the ghetto population's attitude toward the fighting underground. The first factor was the after-shock of the "Big Action." No one disputes that prior to the vast deportation operation of July-September 1942 the idea of armed revolt commanded no significant support in the Warsaw public, including the young population. Ringelblum's article on the "mass instinct" was written a month before the start of the Action. At around the same time Yitzhak Katznelson wrote the "Song of Shlomo Zhelochovski" in which he lauded the man who went willingly to the gallows in order to expiate for his community. This was the perception in Warsaw, as huge numbers of Jews were slaughtered in the cities and towns of Poland.

Toward the end of the Big Action, when the truth became known about Treblinka and about the fate of the 300,000 deportees, a volcano of despair erupted in the ghetto remnant. The shock at the loss of relatives and dear ones was compounded by the bitter feeling that a terrible mistake had been made, that something should have been done but was not. The idea of an armed uprising was one response to the sense of regret and frustration. In this atmosphere Ringelblum underwent a total change of heart, and Yitzhak Katznelson would later praise the insurgents in "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People." They were not alone.

The second factor was the special character of the Warsaw underground organizations. Both of them, the "anti-Fascist" group and the Betar group, were largely products of the shock that followed the Big Action and they developed in conditions of urgency and unremitting pressure, as no more than two or three months separated one Action from the next. Both groups were distinguished by ideological orthodoxy and an absolute belief in the rightness of their course. Against the backdrop of the enfeebled Judenrat following Czerniakow's suicide, and the corrupt Jewish police, unexampled in any other city, the underground found itself in fierce conflict with both bodies from its very inception. In October 1942 the underground announced the execution of deputy police chief Lejkun and stated that "the Judenrat and its presidium are on the guilty list" and that "severe punitive measures will be taken."¹⁶ When, not long before the liquidation *Aktion*, the Judenrat, through the mediation of Yitzhak Shiffer, invited the Fighting Jewish Organization for a consultation, "the command naturally rejected the offer with disgust."¹⁷

In the final months before the liquidation, the fighting organizations became partial rulers of the ghetto. Being armed, organized and purposeful, they were able to successfully eradicate Polish and Jewish gangs of robbers who had terrorized the inhabitants. They acted to eliminate informers and police officers known for their cruelty and treachery. To finance their needs they exacted by force payments from both the well-to-do and the Judenrat. On at least one occasion, they tried by violent means to impose on the population the mode of behavior they espoused.

This was on April 14, 1943, when leaflets containing the following announcement were pasted up in the ghetto: "Ya'akov Hirshfeld was sentenced to death for inducing the Jewish population to leave voluntarily in the direction set by the conqueror, thereby betraying the interests of the Jewish people. Sentence was executed and will serve as a warning to others."¹⁸ Hirshfeld worked as a foreman in the furniture factory of a German, Halmann, that employed about a thousand people (among them Ringelblum) and was one of the first designated for transfer to the Lublin area. His death was explained as due not to his behavior as a foreman, but explicitly as punishment for having persuaded people to accompany the plant, and as a lesson to others.

The killing of Alfred Nossig is further testimony of the organization's swiftness of decision and action. Dr. Alfred Nossig was an internationally known writer, sculptor and thinker. At the age of 75 he was accepted for work on the Judenrat at the order of the Germans, who treated him with pronounced civility, and he was subsequently given a certificate of exemption from deportation. In December 1939 he was appointed director of the Emigration Department,¹⁹ and during several months

¹⁶ Ber Mark, *The Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Yiddish), 1963, p. 188.

¹⁷ Yitzhak Zuckerman, "The Fighting Jewish Organization," according to Melech Neustadt, *Destruction and Revolt of Warsaw Jewry*, p. 111.

¹⁸ B. Mark, p. 224.

¹⁹ Ringelblum, Vol. I, p. 36; Adam Czerniakow, *Warsaw Ghetto* Diary (Hebrew), entry of December 11, 1939.

negotiated with the Gestapo on various emigration plans.²⁰ The head of the Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, looked askance at the aged writer's activities and practices, once even remarking to him that he was "writing unnecessary letters to the authorities."²¹ Nossig was eventually made director of the Judenrat's Department of Culture and Art,²² in which he was not very active, if at all. He was not involved in ghetto life, and after April 1940 his name is not mentioned in the Czerniakow or Ringelblum diaries. Rumor had it that he continued to dispatch letters to the Gestapo, but for three years these did not bother anyone.

In January 1943 the Fighting Jewish Organization decided that the 79-year-old Alfred Nossig was a Gestapo agent and that his letters were actually reports to his employers. As part of the campaign to purge the ghetto of traitors and provocateurs, Nossig was sentenced to death and the

sentence was immediately carried out. In fact, a letter to the Gestapo was found in his pocket which spoke of what he termed the harmful cruelty of those who carried out the *Aktion* of January 18-22. No other proof was found to suggest that he was a Gestapo agent.

In his long life Alfred Nossig served the Jewish people. He was a Zionist leader from the First Congress until 1903, when he left the Zionist Organization over differences with Herzl. Afterward he occupied himself with Jewish problems for decades, to the best of his knowledge and understanding. It seems to us that in fairness to his memory a thorough historical investigation should be conducted to determine whether he really betrayed his people at the end of his life.***

In the light of the impetuous vigor of the fighting organizations, it would be unrealistic to expect free manifestations of opposition to their actions on the part of the ghetto population. But that opposition was spontaneously expressed during the revolt and liquidation. When on the second day of the uprising a group of JEO members entered the bunker at Nalewki 37, the women there started shouting and wailing, and preferred to escape outside in broad daylight rather than remain with the fighters.²³ It need not be supposed that this was a special group of women who had been incited against the revolt: they simply reflected a frame of mind within the ghetto.

An equally shocking incident occurred in the bunker at Mila 5. A group of fighters found themselves in the midst of a large Jewish crowd, some of whom had fled to the site from the building's other wing, which was going up in flames. At a certain moment it was learned that there were Germans outside, and the fighters decided to go out and engage them in battle. "We tried to get out, but the civilians suddenly blocked the way: they insisted on accompanying us, otherwise they would not let us out. Our explanation to them that *we were going to engage the enemy in battle* and they could not possibly help us, and indeed would hamper us, was not accepted. Deep down, they believed that we had secret possibilities to save ourselves. We tried to evade them singly, but we confronted a living wall of men and women." Finally, with the aid of a ruse, the fighters managed to get by the crowd and leave the bunker. Then came the sequel: "In the yard we entrenched ourselves in the wing and opened fire at the

 *** In saying this we reiterate the call issued by *Ha'aretz* on March 22, 1945, in A. Rosenberg's article, "On the Fate of Alfred Nossig." It is not necessary to stress again that, as in similar cases, what is involved is a clarification of the activities of Alfred Nossig, and *not* of those who killed him in the belief that they were doing a loyal service to the Jewish people.

Germans... We had the cover of a wall and he [the enemy] could not overcome us. He therefore hurled fire bombs. This wing was also consumed in flames."²⁴ (Emphasis added.)

The fate of those who remained in the bunker is described in the book of a second memoirist who evidently happened on the scene shortly after the first writer had left.

²⁰ Hillel Zeidman, *Warsaw Ghetto Diary* (Hebrew), pp. 207-208.

²¹ Czerniakow, entry of April 11, 1940, and of December 21 and 31, 1939.

²² *Book of the Ghetto Wars*, p. 737.

²³ Tuvia Buzhikovsky, *Between Tumbling Walls*, p. 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

Haim Frimmer's group reached Mila 5 when it had become a "death trap," and its experience was similar to that just described. *"Following our operation today* the Germans set fire to all the buildings in the area. Everywhere we found people who fled from the burning buildings. People ran back and forth with the terror of death in their eyes." And again:

Those who were not in the organization undoubtedly pinned great hopes on us. They thought we could save them. They could not imagine that our fate, too, was sealed, and that we had a single purpose: to maintain our unity for *the sake of the battle*. Jews surrounded us on all sides and would not let us move from the spot. Our pleas that we were soldiers on duty were of no avail. We fired a few rounds to intimidate them and they left us alone. This was the most terrible picture that remains in my memory from the days of the revolt. People kissed and wept and begged forgiveness from one another before going to their death. My heart cried within me. But there was no choice, and we broke through the fire at the gate into the street. We thought we would encounter the Germans in the street, but it was empty. Only a large number of bodies lay there.²⁵ (Emphasis added.)

Very many bodies. On the streets, in courtyards, in rooms and in cellars. The fighters from both groups emerged safely from that day's dangers. Young, agile and armed, they managed to retreat from house to house and from bunker to bunker until they reached the shelter of Mila 18. The men and women who tried to stop them paid a heavy price for the boys' daring in battle--a thousand Jews died for every German killed.

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The concept of "defending one's honor" merits a separate analysis to elucidate and sum up our views on the subject. The contention that the Jews of the Holocaust were obligated to do something in order to save their honor is a base slander that causes ongoing and repeated character assassination decades after the victims were murdered bodily. It is

intensified to a certain extent by a confusion of meanings stemming from the dual semantic value of the word "honor."

Philosophers teach that one meaning of the concept of honor relates to inner esteem of a person (or group of persons) felt by him (or them). The second meaning refers to esteem for the behavior or standing of a person that emanates from others and is determined according to accepted norms in the society. In normal situations the differences between the two meanings are blurred to the point where they appear to be identical. But in periods of emergency they are revealed to be separate and distinct. When a man is violently attacked or a woman is raped by a thug, they may feel that their self-esteem has been violated. It is inconceivable, however, in an enlightened society that their honor has been debased. Self-esteem deriving from emotion is an individual matter. Society's duty is to provide the individual with means to protect his self-esteem, but it cannot dictate the depth of one's sensitivity in the wake of a blow to that self-esteem.

Moreover, both that sensitivity to such a blow and the protection of honor that society accords the individual, are conditional on the existence of social and moral values shared by the violator on the one hand, and by the person harmed and the accorders of esteem, on the other hand. An insult which can cause severe depression if uttered by a friend or by respected persons in the society, does not arouse a sense of diminished honor if spoken by underworld figures whose observance of moral values is known to be defective. Cruel maltreatment by kidnapers-blackmailers can, while it is in progress, generate a sense of debased self-esteem in the victims, but it certainly cannot detract from the respect society accords people who have had the misfortune to fall into the hands of criminals.

The Nazis who assaulted the Jews of Europe shared no basic moral values either with their victims or with the free world. There are many indications that initially, their actions aroused feelings of shock and insult among Jews who were taken aback in their masses by the magnitude of the Germans' enmity and brutality. Later, after they

²⁵ "From that Fire," the story of Haim Frimer, pp. 223-224.

had first-hand experience of the Nazis' mind-set, things began to fall into their proper place. Their abuse was abuse, their evil, evil--and neither could affect the Jews' self-esteem. In September 1940 the Warsaw teacher Chaim A. Kaplan wrote about one of the decrees that were intended to humiliate the Jews: "But the Jews are not upset: 'May this be only the last of our worries!' A disgrace? 'The disgrace is not yours, but rather your tormentor's.'" 26 To educated Jews and Torah pupils it became ever more clear that whatever was done by the Nazi barbarians, bearers of the

cannibal "culture," they were incapable of debasing the honor of the Jews whom they held captive.

Within a short time matters had slid far beyond feelings of honor or dishonor. Millions of Jews found themselves caught up in the furious storm loosed by the whirlwind of total destruction, all their energies directed toward desperate efforts to save themselves from almost certain death. A study of the feelings and responses of the Jewish masses to situations within the relentless inferno exceeds the bounds of philosophy and falls within the domain of medicine and traumatic psychology.

What the Nazis did not accomplish in their blitzkrieg, the various interpreters of the Holocaust are doing in a protracted and persistent campaign. Violation of the honor due the memory of the Holocaust victims is perpetrated by means of a rhetorical question--"Why didn't you revolt against the Nazis?"--and is aided by a colorful simile: that they went "like sheep to the slaughter." Before returning to sum up the answer to the question, we turn to a discussion of the image.

In the Bible and in Jewish tradition, as was noted previously, the notion of going like sheep to the slaughter symbolizes a *situation* of helplessness in which the defeated find themselves, at the mercy of vicious treatment inflicted by cruel enemies. This is an objective state of affairs, and its distinctiveness lies in its not being dependent on the actions of the vanquished. An attempt to revolt against the situation cannot greatly impact on its development or its outcome. Sheep that revolt do not suddenly acquire jaws.

In reality, the jaws stand for weapons and combat conditions. In ancient times, when weapons were primitive, the victors sought to ensure that the defeated would become "sheep for slaughter" by binding their hands and feet. The invention of more sophisticated arms rendered the binding process superfluous. With a rifle barrel aimed at the head ready to fire and kill immediately, everyone temporarily becomes a "sheep," however courageous and brave he may be. This simple fact is confirmed in the stories describing the behavior of hostages in the many kidnappings perpetrated in our time, and in the thrillers we watch on television or in the cinema. Millions of Soviet soldiers who were captured by the Nazis were turned into "sheep for slaughter" when Hitler decided to deprive them of the rights accruing to prisoners-of-war under international law. Healthy youngsters, and experienced in warfare, they were just as brave as their captors. But because they were unarmed, they went obediently like sheep to the slaughter and were destroyed in huge numbers by all manner of unnatural deaths.

The Jews of Europe, who were unarmed, unorganized militarily, and lacked outside help, were as "sheep for slaughter" in the confrontation with the Nazi rabble who were equipped with the most lethal weapons and imbued with the desire to murder. That the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter reflected an objective situation in which they found themselves and which they had no possibility to change. The attempts of individuals or isolated groups to revolt against the reality did not change that reality. The uprising in Warsaw, which assumed significant proportions, immediately generated a bloodbath that underlined the powerful finality of the events.

Given the above, it seems reasonable that there is no exaggeration in the view expressed by a French writer, Jules Perreault, who wrote that the question of why the Jews did not resist their destruction is "the most inane of this century's questions."²⁷ At all events, the answer to the question can be summed up in two mutually complementary ideas: (1) Active physical resistance conflicted with the prospects for the survival of a Jewish remnant from the Holocaust; and (2) concrete resistance was not possible.

26 Abraham I. Katsh, ed., *The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, New York, 1973, p. 202. The quotation is from "My Sister Ruhama" by Y.L. Gordon.

27 According to K. Shabbetai, *Jews and Non-Jews in the Holocaust* (Hebrew), p. 5.

The depth of the inanity and injustice residing in the question “Why didn’t you revolt?” is well illustrated by an incident that occurred during the Eichmann trial. When one of the witnesses, Dr. Moshe Beisky, a district court judge (now a Supreme Court justice), was suddenly asked this question by the prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, his reaction was one of shocked anguish. Hausner relates that the man was absolutely thunderstruck: “A grimace of pain distorted his intelligent features. The strong, sturdy man, who an hour before had declined the court’s offer to allow him to sit while testifying, now asked for permission to be seated.”²⁸ In a trembling voice, at times falling into an inaudible whisper, the witness replied. His answer was disorganized and halting under the pressure of his emotions. Beisky spelled out for the court the series of circumstances and considerations that he hastily summoned up. It was clear that before taking the witness stand he never contemplated having to answer a question of this nature. He later reproached Hausner: “Why did you not at least warn me beforehand?”²⁹

To round off his answer to the unexpected question, the witness gave a concise and restrained account of a supreme act of consideration for the fate of brothers in distress, an act of which the details are known from another source and whose hero was Beisky himself. When he was a young man of 19, in the Plaszow camp, he was approached by Fridka Mazie, his colleague in the Noar Hatzioni youth movement, who proposed

that he escape from the camp and cross the border with “Aryan” papers. The young man rejected her pleas that the two make their escape at once. Fridka Mazie quotes his answer:

“When someone escapes, everyone in his group, about sixty people, is executed. I cannot endanger them. I am not ready to save my life at that price. True, we are all condemned to death at Plaszow, whether today or tomorrow, But I will not provide them with a pretext to kill. I cannot...”

Mazie begged him to consider the matter, to consult with his friends. She proposed that she return and help him escape. They would be across the border before he was missed. But he turned down every suggestion.³⁰

This story, which sheds light on the moral fibre of the witness, adds substance to his reaction to the question, “Why didn’t you revolt?” A person who, according to Hausner, had “dispassionately unfolded hair-raising scenes of horror”³¹ to the court, suddenly “broke.” Why?

We do not intend to answer this question in reference to any specific witness. Only the witness himself is qualified to do so, if he sees fit to return to the subject. But I believe that we will not be off the mark in offering an interpretation of the incident’s objective and symbolic significance. Dr. Beisky’s agitated reaction to “this century’s most inane question” was a spontaneous protest against the gross injustice done to him and his fellow-witnesses in the trial. People who were called to testify about deeds perpetrated by Eichmann were suddenly placed in a situation of *defendants* called on to offer justification for a “blunder” of non-revolt which serves as a pretext for accusers and vilifiers. Little wonder that an injustice on this scale caused a shock.

This reproving question could be countered with a series of questions directed at the chief prosecutor on behalf of the witnesses who were thus harassed: Why, in fact, Mr. Attorney General, do you find it necessary that we revolt and rebel? From your study of the subject, hasn’t it become clear to you that in our situation at that time, revolt would have conflicted with our chances for survival? If so, why should we have revolted anyway? Just to curry favor with you, begging your pardon?

The Eichmann trial provided a rare opportunity to correct many distortions. While casting his wide net across the Nazis’ kingdom of murder that encompassed Europe’s countries and cities, the prosecutor, had he wished, could have exploited the platform at his disposal, with its broad reverberations, to restore the honor of the murdered after its violation by historians and commentators. In practice, the reverse

occurred. The choice of the witnesses, the manner of their interrogation, and the order of their appearance, only strengthened the conception according to which there were on the one side a few heroes who staged uprisings, and, on the other side, a huge mass who were incapable of defending their honor. The emphasis was placed on revolt,

²⁸ Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem*, pp. 176-177; minutes of the Eichmann trial, testimony of Dr. Moshe Beisky.

²⁹ Hausner, *ibid.*

³⁰ Fridka Mazie, *Friends in the Storm* (Hebrew), p. 153.

³¹ Hausner, *ibid.*

whereas the content of the trial should have led to a searchlight being cast on the issue of rescue. The result: a trial that, where the Nazi criminal was concerned, did justice according to its substance and its procedures, inadvertently compounded the injustice done to the murdered Jewish people.

The prosecutor did not have to make any special effort to behave as he did. It sufficed to follow assiduously the accepted line of the memorialization establishment and do nothing liable to embarrass the heads of the World Zionist Organization. They found it convenient to have more talk about revolt or non-revolt and less, if at all, about rescue and neglect. Better to direct attention to the victims and not to the would-be rescuers.

Therefore three witnesses were asked "why there was no revolt," followed by ten consecutive witnesses from the fighting underground who upheld the precept of revolt to the satisfaction of the attorney general of the State of Israel. The German pastor Dr. Heinrich Grueber, who engaged in the rescue of Jews and met with Eichmann, was questioned in great detail, but among those not summoned to the witness stand were Pinhas ("Pino") Ginzburg, Urbach-Agami and other emissaries of the Zionist movement who engaged in rescue in Berlin and Vienna on the eve of the war and also maintained contact with Eichmann and his cohorts. To conclude the judicial questioning, one witness was questioned about rescue activities *after* the war, but not a single representative of the leaders or activists in the wartime rescue establishment was summoned to testify.

Under the glare of maximum publicity, the prosecutor contributed powerfully to the fulfillment of the wish attributed to Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who remarked to his confidants not long before the 22nd Zionist Congress: "It is essential for us to create a legend of Jewish heroism, to forge a myth of Jewish revolt, Jewish uprising and Jewish resistance, even if the heroism, the revolt and the resistance were non-existent."³²

One transgression leads to another. Efforts to conceal the rescue failure of the 1940s generated a historical and information failure twenty years later. The scope of the failure is reflected in the fact that the Eichmann trial added to the literature of execration a sophisticated and wicked work by Hannah Arendt that "stole the show" from the important aspects of the trial.³³ A large group of writers and thinkers who mobilized

against this virulent attack on Holocaust Jewry, and said things that should have been spoken at the trial, probably failed to expunge the nefarious impression she left.³⁴ It's a pity that the great intellectual effort invested in rebuffing Hannah Arendt's obloquies was not directed at the behavior of those who were on the outside and were obligated to rescue by virtue of being fathers to Jews who were being murdered.

* * * * *

Condemnation of going "like sheep to the slaughter" totally conflicts with accepted norms everywhere regarding honorable behavior by people about to be executed. Nothing could be more praiseworthy or honorable than to be described as a person who met his death quietly and temperately, without frantically running around and without making vain attempts to prevent the inevitable. When this restrained behavior is not confined to an individual or a few individuals but is evinced by vast numbers of people going to certain death, it generates respect among both sympathizers and haters.

This was the attitude toward those killed in the Holocaust that began to emerge in the immediate post-war years. It was based on testimonies of incontrovertible reliability. One of the executioners, a Nazi officer named Walter, who personally took part in the murder of Jews and Gypsies, reports to his superiors with a bit of amazement: "It must be admitted that the Jews are going to their death with great restraint--they stand very quietly, while the Gypsies wail and run about incessantly when they are already at the death site."³⁵ Oberleutnant Walter wrote his report in 1941, when he was still a novice executioner; at that time, he later said, he had

³² K. Shabbetai, p. 13. See also Shabbetai's article in Davar, April 26, 1968. In both places he speaks about a "well-known Zionist leader" without mentioning his name. Mr. K. Shabbetai informed us of the leader's identity and his sources of information in a letter dated December 31, 1975.

³³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963.

³⁴ *Die Konroverse: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann und die Juden* (German), 1964.

³⁵ CZA, File No. S46/656.

managed to put to death “only” a hundred souls--men, women and children. His testimony in itself is therefore of limited value. But it is endorsed by one of the greatest of the murderers, the commandant of Auschwitz. Rudolf Hoess, who oversaw the murder of millions of Jews, wrote of Jews who went to the gas chamber:

I noticed that women who either guessed or knew what awaited them nevertheless found the courage to joke with the children to encourage them, despite the mortal terror visible in their own eyes. One woman approached me as she walked past and, pointing to her four children, who were manfully helping the smallest ones over the rough ground, whispered: “How can you bring yourself to kill such beautiful, darling children? Have you no heart at all?”³⁶

And the German engineer Hermann Graebe, who chanced to be an eye-witness to the massacre of the Jews of Dubno, in the Ukraine, relates:

Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells and waited for a sign from another S.S. man, who stood near the pit, also with a whip in his hand. During the fifteen minutes that I stood near the pit, I heard no complaint or plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight persons, a man and a woman, both about 50, with their children of about 1, 8 and 10, and two grown-up daughters of about 20 to 24. An old woman with snow-white hair was holding the one-year-old child in her arms and singing and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The parents were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about 10 years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed towards the sky, stroked the boy's head, and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment the S.S. man at the pit shouted something to his comrade. The latter counted off about twenty persons and instructed them to go behind the earth mound. The family I have described was among them. I well remember the girl, slim and with black hair, who, as she passed me, pointed to herself and said: “Twenty-three years old.”

I then walked around the mound and found myself confronted by a tremendous grave... The pit was already two-thirds full. I estimated that it held a thousand people... [The people] lay down in front of the dead and wounded. Some caressed the living and spoke to them in a low voice. Then I heard a series of shots.³⁷

Not all the Jews behaved like the Jews in Dubno, but very many did. Thus went to their deaths those who were hanged at Zdunska Wola, whose execution engendered the “Song of Shlomo Zhelochovski.” Thus Janusz Korczak walked to the transport boxcars at the head of two hundred children and eight assistants, as did a large number of headmasters and educators from children's homes in Warsaw.³⁸ This was the behavior of tens of thousands of youngsters, who accompanied their parents and family members on the road to perdition, forsaking any

attempt to save their own lives. This was the behavior of the legendary Holocaust heroine, Gusta (“Justina”) Dawidsohn, who made a pact with her husband, Shimon Draenger, that if one of them were caught by the Gestapo, the other would also turn him/herself in so that both should die together.³⁹ And thus, to add an example from literature, did Ernie Levy, the protagonist of Andre Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*, go to the gas chamber, wishing to die together with his beloved.

It cannot be said that this was the only “right” behavior, nor is any other form of behavior to be discredited (if, as mentioned, it did not involve informing). Looked at from the utilitarian viewpoint, it would have been more “right” if Gusta-Justina had remained alive, and with her hundreds of other youngsters, at least, from among the myriads who went to their deaths with their loved ones. We also came across a demurrer to Korczak's act--that he should have scattered the children every which way in the hope that a few of them, the strong, the agile and the fortunate, might perhaps survive. Emanuel Ringelblum, shocked by the Big *Aktion*, thought that the sacrifice of the educators in the children's houses was “not useful and perhaps not necessary.”

³⁶ Rudolf Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, Pan Books, London, p. 167.

³⁷ IMT, Vol. 19, pp. 456-457.

³⁸ Dr. Y. Kermish, “Not Korczak Alone...,” *Davar*, April 5, 1975.

³⁹ *Justina's Diary*, pp. 165-166.

Nonetheless, he wrote, “we must bow our heads before this sacrifice by the best of our educators.”⁴⁰ And thirty years after the event, Marek Edelman, a former commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, assesses the act of a boy who jumped of his own volition into a boxcar in order to accompany his mother to Treblinka, as a far nobler embodiment of bravery than taking up arms.⁴¹ Whatever purposefulness underlay all these examples, they certainly partake of honor and inner courage.

The description of the murder of Dubno’s Jews was inserted into the speech of the British prosecutor at the Nuremberg trial and made an indelible impression on those present and on world public opinion. The international press and world literature evoked the words time and again. This picture of a mass transcendence of death’s bitter sting might have served as a lofty symbol for the behavior of Holocaust Jewry in the vale of slaughter. But in the campaign to denounce the act of going like sheep to the slaughter, it “emerged” that this was dishonorable behavior. In Israel, the death of the Dubno Jews became something to be ashamed of. The story that marked a moral and emotional peak at Nuremberg was not even mentioned at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem.

* * * * *

As a respite between discussions concerning honor, heroism and responsibility, we will devote a few lines to psychological-circumstantial considerations which we believe are of some relevance to the manner in

which the Jews went to their death in the Holocaust. We have already said that they were not under any obligation to resist; that an uprising, since it conflicted with the prospects of being saved at both the individual and community levels, also ran against the vital interests of the Jewish people. We accepted the premise of Emanuel Ringelblum--that a powerful national instinct directed the Jews not to lift a hand against the Germans, in order not to endanger other Jews. We saw the inner heroism of those whose main concern was to lighten the last hours of their dear ones. All of these are decisive factors both morally and practically.

With the moral nullity of “the century’s most inane question” now clear, and in a situation where no accusing finger is pointed at those who were killed, we are free to adduce further reasons for their passive behavior, without seeming to adopt an attitude of righteousness.

We noted above the situation of helplessness in which an unarmed person finds himself when someone aims a rifle at him with the intent to shoot to kill. The incapacitating effect of this situation is further aggravated when the person under attack is uncertain whether he has anything to lose by resisting. When he harbors some hope that ultimately he may not be killed, he will evince absolute obedience in order not to hasten the end. The Holocaust writer Ka-Tzetnik (Yehiel Dinur) describes in detail the doubts he (or the protagonist of his story) experienced while digging, under threat of rifle barrels, a pit destined, perhaps, to be his grave. How his hands were paralyzed “lest you lift the hoe against the line of rifles pointed at you. Here is life! From the grave it cries out to you:

Live! As long as your hands are digging, you are alive! Dig and live!”⁴²

The chronicles of the Holocaust are full to overflowing with similar situations. Some of the incidents ended with a temporary reprieve for those involved, or for some of them. Ka-Tzetnik, or his protagonist, was not shot at the pit in which fifteen of his fellow diggers were buried. Another writer, Mordechai Striegler, relates that the Germans surrounded a labor camp he was in with the aim of liquidating it. Striegler lit a match with the intention of setting fire to the straw mattresses on which the inmates slept in order to burn down the hut along with its occupants. The match went out. Someone grabbed the box of matches from his hand, and another asked him: “*Do you already know everything with certainty?*”⁴³ (Emphasis in the original.) The mattresses were not torched. Striegler subsequently endured the horrors of Majdanek and survived.

40 Ringelblum, Vol. II, p. 61.

41 Emil Jacobetti, “The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt,” conversation with Marek Edelman, *L’Express*, May 5-11, 1975, trans. in *Yediot Ahronot*, May 15, 1975.

42 Ka-Tzetnik, *The Watch* (Hebrew), pp. 12-20.

43 Mordechai Striegler, *Burnt-Out Candles* (Hebrew), p. 15.

When Elie Wiesel arrived in Auschwitz together with his family and many other Jews, they knew what awaited them. Among the new inmates were a few broad-shouldered youngsters who concealed knives

among their utensils and urged their comrades to attack the Nazis. "But the older ones begged their children not to do anything foolish: 'You must never lose faith, even when the sword hangs over your head.'" The attack was not carried out. The old, the weak, the women and the children were taken to the gas chambers. The strong youngsters were selected temporarily for labor, and a few of them survived the war. So, too, did Elie Wiesel.⁴⁴

These three writers recorded their experiences, but many survived and did not write of what they had endured. Far more were saved once, twice, but finally perished. Uncertainty regarding the finality of the fate of the individual and the group alike, an uncertainty that was assiduously cultivated by the Nazis, was one of the reasons militating against resistance actions or hastening the end by provoking the murderers.

Another factor of the most substantive kind was the perception many Jews held of death as a longed-for escape from the unendurable agonies of body and soul. In the circumstances, this was a realistic perception which did not necessarily stem from a breakdown of one's powers of judgment. It is pointless to view this longing for death as a sure sign of mental degeneration such as afflicted the "Mussulmen" who were starved in the concentration camps to the point where they lost all semblance of humanity. A person can be in full control of his mental and emotional faculties and still believe that death is preferable to the tortures he is undergoing. Everyone understands and commiserates with hospital patients who suffer terrible pain and wish only for death. Even depressed lovers who prefer death to the travails of their love gain understanding, if not agreement. Job was not a Mussulman who begged God to take his life. Nor was the Jew Zigmund Greenberg from the Plaszow camp.

The architect Greenberg was placed at the head of a group of Jewish engineers who constructed buildings at Plaszow. He was beloved and admired by the camp inmates and was beaten incessantly by the commandant. "I do not actually remember this man without bruises, without a bandaged head, and without wounds. Day in and day out he would be set on by dogs or receive a beating, a hundred strokes or twenty-five, or just plain blows with the fist."⁴⁵ As the person responsible for many engineers and workers, he always assumed the blame for their defective work and served as a lightning rod for the tyranny of the camp commandant. Greenberg frequently begged to be shot, but did not take his own life. His wife and daughter, who were in the same camp, demonstratively served the commandant as hostages to guarantee his good behavior.⁴⁶

Zigmund Greenberg, who finally perished in one of the camps in Germany, symbolizes the situation and the feelings of tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Holocaust. Within a sea of anguished bereavement, or with their children dying hopelessly of starvation in front of their very eyes, they pondered their situation sanely and realistically, and with perfect clarity of mind arrived at the perception that it was better to die than to endure such a life. Instinctual and moral inhibitions and other reasons prevented them from taking their own life, but they did not hold on to life tenaciously, either. They were ready to follow in the footsteps of their departed dear ones. They reconciled themselves to death.

There was also another factor that put restraints on the behavior of the condemned, a factor that has eluded many who have wondered about the obedience they displayed. Even in the final stage on the road to death, when everything was clear and known and there were no more doubts or illusions; when their fate was sealed and was imminent and inevitable--even then the victim believed that his behavior could *aggravate* what lay in store for him. At this stage anxieties and apprehensions surface that are distinct from the fear of death itself. These are anxieties about agonies entailed in the manner of being put to death or tortures liable to be deliberately inflicted by the executioners. It is fears of this kind that may drive persons condemned to the gallows to slash their wrist or swallow cyanide. The Nazis made these fears into

⁴⁴ Elie Wiesel, *The Night*, excerpted in Gerd Korman, ed., *Hunter and Hunted*, New York, 1973, p. 253.

⁴⁵ Testimony of Judge Dr. Leon Wells in the Eichmann trial.

⁴⁶ Ya'akov Stendig, *Plaszow* (Hebrew), pp. 46-68.

an obligatory part of a horrific reality and exploited them to their considerable advantage.

In addition to meting out mass collective punishment for the actions of a few, the S.S. were known to be particularly brutal in their reprisals for manifestations of revolt and disobedience. When they had the time, and circumstances permitted, they invented all manner of methods to torture their victims and inflict as painful a death as possible. The chronicles of the ghettos and camps are full of stories about slow deaths perpetrated with spades and clubs, about people being left half-dead for hours in the boiling sun, about people being torn apart by vicious dogs. One of the witnesses in the Eichmann trial who was harassed with the question "Why didn't you revolt?", told about a mother who on the way to the crematorium spat in the face of a Nazi guard. Her child was taken from her and its head smashed against a tree. The woman underwent agonizing tortures and was hanged by the legs in front of everyone as a lesson.⁴⁷

Truly, difficult are the demands that the reproachers place on the memory of our martyrs...

* * * * *

In the fundamental debate conducted between the Judenrat and the militant underground in the ghettos, justice was on the side of the Judenrat. But the history was written by the survivors of the fighters, and they wreaked havoc on the memory of their adversaries, who perished almost to the last person. Tendentious descriptions and hostile interpretation that received the vigorous and unhesitating support of the Holocaust research establishment, transformed the Judenrat into a symbol of degenerate corruption. If the sin of going en masse "like sheep to the slaughter" is sometimes "explained away" and justified, no mercy at all is shown to the leaders. There is not an evil deed or malicious intention that has not been imputed to people whose fate it was to head the community during its worst tragedy. Selfishness, hardness of heart, abuse of their position, alienation from the general distress, and, above all, active help to the Germans in order to save their own skin--these are some of the component elements in the image of the Judenrat that have been inculcated in the public consciousness for thirty years. Speaking at a scientific conference on the study of the Holocaust, a Yad Vashem researcher, Dr. Meir Dvorjetzki, gave voice to the accepted evaluation:

The Judenrats did not constitute the Jewish leadership. The deterioration of many of the Judenrat members should be deplored, both because they were under the vain illusion that they could offer any salvation whatsoever to the suffering masses, and because they acted out of fear for their own skins and for their lives. This condemnation, this dissociation from the course pursued by the Judenrats is a necessity, both for an evaluation of the past and for the prospect of the future. Because in the future, too, we will often have to face the danger of Judenrats in one form or another, in one country or another.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that these grave comments were voiced at the conclusion of a lecture devoted to the need to show magnanimity of understanding and identification with the Jews of the Holocaust.

It suffices to mention the names of the Judenrat heads in some of the better-known ghettos in order to cast doubt on their disqualification as leaders. At the head of the list is Dr. Elchanan Elkes, chairman of the Judenrat ("Aeltestenrat") in Kovno, whose integrity, trustworthiness and boldness of spirit are cited reverentially by all the historians of the ghetto. His name is mentioned with deep affection by people who worked with

him or were witnesses to his actions. In the ghetto Dr. Elkes was much admired and beloved. "It can be said with absolute certainty that the Kovno ghetto was immensely privileged to have Dr. Elkes as its head throughout the period--a person

⁴⁷ Testimony of Dr. Leon Wells in the Eichmann trial.

⁴⁸ Jewish Steadfastness in the Holocaust, p. 149.

with unusual inner qualities.”⁴⁹ His activity is lauded unreservedly by the chroniclers of the Kovno underground. “At that meeting of functionaries Dr. Elchanan Elkes was chosen as head of the Aeltestenrat, and as subsequently emerged, no better choice could have been made.”⁵⁰ It turns out that during the existence of the ghetto itself the members of the underground singled out “several members of the Aeltestenrat, including Dr. Elkes, who demonstrated their integrity and courage while carrying out their duties as ghetto heads.”⁵¹

After Elchanan Elkes, we will note three Judenrat heads whose uprightness was certified by the underground leader Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof: *Ephraim Barasz* from Bialystok, *Adam Czerniakow* from Warsaw, and *Dr. Brawer* from Grodno. “Barasz is an upright man. That is a great compliment for a Judenrat chairman (I knew three like that—upright: the engineer Czerniakow took his own life during the *Aktion* in Warsaw; Dr. Brawer, Grodno, was shot by the Nazis, and B[arasz] was the third. The rest are scoundrels.”⁵²

Levi Shalit (Shalitan), from the Shavli underground, insists that “life in the [Shavli] ghetto and the behavior of the ghetto leaders were of a higher level than in the two [Lithuanian] ghettos, Kovno and Vilna, and the majority of the ghettos in Poland.”⁵³ Both Shalit and the chronicler of the ghetto, Eliezer Hayerushalmi, constantly praise the head of the Judenrat, *Mendel Leibowicz*, and his assistants. Both relate how the Judenrat reacted when it was called on to submit to the Nazis a list of persons who smuggled food into the ghetto, so they could be executed: the list contained the names of the twenty-eight members of the Judenrat and other public officials who volunteered to be included. At that time the conquerors did not yet wish to kill the ghetto leaders, and the murder was replaced by a fine.⁵⁴

Dr. Josef Parnas, who headed the first Judenrat in Lvov, was shot to death for refusing to supply the Germans with the quota of workers they demanded. *Dr. Henryk Landsberg*, the third chairman (the second died of illness) was also murdered a year before the ghetto’s liquidation, and only the fourth chairman, Dr. Ebersson, “a decent but helpless man,” according to those who knew him, died in the final liquidation operation in the ghetto.⁵⁵

Eliahu Myshkin, head of the first Minsk Judenrat, was murdered by the Gestapo after being accused of attempting to bribe a German officer to

release him from detention.⁵⁶ And *Yehoshua (Ovsey) Isaacson*, head of the Judenrat in Branowitz, “a well-known public figure who did not flinch from danger and who was devoted to the Jewish cause,” was murdered by the Nazis during the first *Aktion*, when he refused to hand over 3,000 of the old and sick and women.⁵⁷

The list of large ghettos can be augmented with the names of Judenrat leaders from various cities and towns who by their deeds and the manner of their death demonstrated their faithfulness and dedication. *David Aharon Shapira* from Ratno, *Dr. Meiblum* from Zloczow, *Eliezer Perimutter* from Melawa, *Mordechai Goldstein* from Stanislawow, *Dr. Sharf* from Djalitin, *Hirsch Ciechanowski* from Nowogrodek, and *Dov Lopatyn* from Lachwa.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly many more could be added to the list, but were unmentioned in the survivors’ memoirs.

The truth is that the heads of the Judenrats constituted the real leadership of the Jews in the ghettos, a leadership commensurate with the needs of that horrific hour. Despite the extensive killing perpetrated by the Germans among officials of the communities in the first months of the occupation, groups of people emerged who assumed the mantle of leadership. In the overwhelming majority of the cases known to us, they fulfilled their duty to the best of their ability and conscience.

49 L. Garfunkel, *Jewish Kovno Destroyed* (Hebrew), p. 245.

50 Zvi Brown/Dov Levin, *Chronicles of an Underground* (Hebrew), p.

43.

51 Dov Levin, *Fighters Defending Their Lives* (Hebrew), p. 167.

52 Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof, *Pages from the Conflagration* (Hebrew), 1947, p. 30.

53 Levy Shalit, *Thus We Went to Our Death* (Yiddish), p. 95.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 133-137; Eliezer Yerushalmi, *Shavli Register* (Hebrew), pp. 104-107; Eliezer Yerushalmi, *Ghetto Scenes* (Hebrew), pp. 54-

57.

55 Dr. F. Friedman, “Lvov,” in *The Diaspora Encyclopedia* (Hebrew), pp. 613-614.

56 Ya’akov Greenstein, *Brand from Jubilee Square* (Hebrew), p. 64; David Cohen, “On the Judenrat in Minsk,” *Niv Hakvutza*, April 1969 (Hebrew).

57 *Book of the Jewish Partisans*, Vol. I, p. 601.

58 The list follows Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* (Hebrew), 1965, p. 154.

The diary of Adam Czerniakow, head of the Warsaw Judenrat, indicates that the primary and principal characteristic of leadership in the Holocaust lay in the very readiness to serve the public, without evasiveness and without attempts at escape. Czerniakow, who turned down a proposal to receive an immigration certificate to Palestine,⁵⁹ frequently expresses his contempt for those who left. "H[artglass] and K[erner] say they have received immigration certificates for Eretz-Israel. K.--a self-righteous liar--even saw fit to add an interpretation."⁶⁰ In connection with the protracted disagreement he had with Dr. Yitzhak Shiffer regarding participation and non-participation in the work of the Judenrat, he relates: "At the meeting Dr. Shiffer again lost his temper. After he reproached those present with the 'educators,' I asked, Where are the educators? Should we look for them among those who fled or among those who did not manage to leave the country?"⁶¹ The height of rancor was reached in an exchange with a Zionist functionary who immigrated to Palestine and asked to be exempted from the community tax. "As he left--after I refused--he said: 'I will remember this.' To which I retorted:

Scoundrel, I will remember that you posed as a leader but now you are fleeing and, along with those like you, are leaving the people in a terrible situation."⁶² The diary, which is written in a restrained and civilized style,

contains few sharp outbursts of this kind. To Czerniakow, refusal to become involved in communal needs through fleeing or excuses of one kind and another, represented inexpiable dereliction of duty. Indeed, those who were not derelict bore the crown of thorns of the Holocaust leadership, which no conference of researchers can deprive them of.

The Judenrats in all the ghettos strove for one goal: to gain time until the end of the war. All of them without exception adopted the method of abating the Nazis' murder-lust by working for the Germans and bribing Nazi officers. From this point of view there was no difference between the Judenrats mentioned above and those of Vilna, Lodz and Bandin Sosnowiec, where controversy surrounds the images of their leaders. As fate would have it, two leaders who were completely different in character came closer than others to achieving their goal, at least in part. Chaim Rumkowski, as mentioned, finally lost his struggle when the Russians, for political reasons, ceased their offensive at a distance of about 100 km. from Lodz. Prior to its cessation, that offensive might have brought salvation to the ten thousand remnants of the Kovno ghetto. Following the liberation of Minsk on July 3, 1944, and of nearby Vilna on the 8th,⁶³ Kovno's liberation seemed to be a matter of days. That Jews and Germans alike believed this to be the case is attested to by the bold effort undertaken by Dr. Elkes: he went to the Nazi officer Goecke and proposed to him that he disregard the order to evacuate the ghetto and pledged that the Jews would intercede for him with the Soviet authorities whose arrival was imminent. The Nazi rejected the proposal but did not dare harm the proposer.⁶⁴ Because of the slowdown in the Soviet Army's advance, the Germans were able to evacuate the ghetto from July 12-14, three weeks before Kovno's liberation.

The contention that the Judenrats' opposition was affected by their members' "fear for their skins and lives" is a nasty attack that does no honor to its proponents. On the one hand, it is true that a person thinks primarily of himself and his dear ones, whether consciously or not. This generalization applies to the members of the Judenrat, but in no small measure also to the members of the fighting undergrounds. The Judenrat leaders often saved family members, associates, and various people or groups from deportation. Among the latter a considerable place was occupied by members of underground organizations who were rounded up in manhunts and whose comrades turned for help to the Judenrats when other connections proved unavailing.

Giving preference to preferred persons often entailed cruelty toward others; when the transport involved a fixed quota, the rescue of

some meant that others were taken instead. **** But we did not find a single instance in the Holocaust literature in which a member of the underground castigated himself or was accused by others of rescuing a comrade at the expense of others. In

59 Adam Czerniakow, *Warsaw Ghetto Diary* (Hebrew), entry of December 12, 1939.

60 *Ibid.*, December 18, 1939.

61 *Ibid.*, October 25, 1940.

62 *Ibid.*, February 20, 1940.

63 Reitlinger, *Chronological Table*, p. 528.

64 Garfunkel, p. 195; Brown and Levin, p. 372.

contrast, we know that *Markus Horowitz*, head of the Judenrat in Kolomyja, ruled that he had no moral right to save his wife from deportation because he could not do the same for others.⁶⁵

Horowitz was among the Judenrat heads who took their own lives in a moment of despair.⁶⁶ The most famous leader in this group, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide at the outset of the Big *Aktion* when the Nazis demanded that he supply thousands of candidates for deportation on a daily basis. His death put an end to his denigrators' contentions: "He perpetuated his name by his death more than by his life. His end proves conclusively that he worked and strove for the good of his people; that he wanted its welfare and continuity even though not everything done in his name was praiseworthy."⁶⁷

Czerniakow's suicide might also have served the cause of rescue by signalling the free world about the meaning of what was happening in the ghetto--had there been anyone ready and able to receive and decode the signal. *****Notwithstanding this, we believe it is difficult to assail the conclusion that his voluntary departure from the scene at a disastrous moment for the ghetto was an unfortunate event that aggravated the fate of the inhabitants to a degree difficult to estimate. The experience of other ghettos indicates that in several instances planned and intended liquidations were postponed or reduced considerably in scope thanks to the influence of various persons. On July 24, the day after Czerniakow's suicide, the Department of the Ghetto Directorate in the Lodz Gestapo informed the local electricity company that it would not accept orders for the workshops in the ghetto because the situation of the ghetto was liable

 **** This was particularly pronounced in the actions of the general anti-Nazi underground in the Buchenwald concentration camp, whose members infiltrated key positions in the camp's office and drew up the lists of deportees according to their own considerations. Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, Ch. 20; Rozhka Korczak, "Children in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp," *Yalkut Moreshet*, No. 8, p. 55 (Hebrew).

***** I.M. Neiman, *Davar*, August 21, 1942, asks: What signal is the head of the Warsaw community sending us by his suicide? But he gives no answer.

to be altered fundamentally "as regards the general solution of the Jewish Question."⁶⁸ We do not know what tipped the scales in favor of the postponement of the ghetto's liquidation for two years, but it cannot be ruled out that a contributing factor was the considerations of the local authorities, who were swayed by the multifaceted persuasion efforts of Chaim Rumkowski.

In September 1941 Ephraim Barasz, the head of the Bialystok Judenrat, succeeded in obtaining the annulment of the order to deport all the Jews in the ghetto to the town of Prozhany and getting the number reduced to 4,500.⁶⁹ On another occasion, in February 1942, Barasz's eleventh-hour intervention actually saved 500 Bialystok families who were in Prozhany and were designated for a death transport the next day.⁷⁰

One cannot say whether Czerniakow would have been able to help had he remained alive and tried to counter the decree of slaughter. But the possibility cannot be ruled out. It seems unlikely that he would have been able to secure its total revocation, since senior levels of the Nazi apparatus were involved. But the destruction mechanism had a dynamic of its own, whose elements were affected by factors that came into play at the scene in the course of its implementation. The only person who constantly stood between the Jews and the Germans might have acted as one of those factors; at all events, his disappearance from the scene could not but harm the chances for survival of some of the Jews. The person who served his community

⁶⁵ Shlomo Bickel, *Kolomyja Register* (Hebrew), p. 424.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, p. 384.

⁶⁸ Isaiah Trunk, *The Lodz Ghetto* (Yiddish), pp. 266-267.

⁶⁹ Blumenthal, p. 32.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

with integrity and faithfulness for three full years could not muster up the strength to hold out at the critical moment of his leadership.

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The situation was greatly aggravated by an internal factor in the Warsaw community. The momentary weakness of the Judenrat chairman exposed the community to the effects of a serious failure on his part during his years in the post. In the course of his great labor and preoccupations, a problematic social organism was spawned and evolved after his suicide into a vicious multiheaded monster. This was the Jewish Police of the Warsaw ghetto, a unique Jewish body and one which will bear the mark of eternal ignominy [ignominy] in the annals of the Holocaust.

This police force began its work under the leadership of educated officers who volunteered to serve without pay. Its attitude toward its task-preserving public order in the ghetto--was one of great deference which was carried out considerately and with a touch of shyness. In time, though, a radical change occurred. In the Big *Aktion* the police force showed itself to be a murderous gang of oppressors lacking any human inhibitions. At

one stage of the operation things reached the point where each policeman was given a daily quota of "heads" (*keplech* in their underworld slang) to be brought to the transport station to Treblinka (*Umschlagplatz*)--and the order was carried out with no consideration for anyone.

The story of this horrific metamorphosis awaits the patient researcher who will trace its underlying causes. The researcher will, perhaps, take note of the unique composition of the hierarchy of this police force, which included an inordinate number of assimilated and converted Jews. Nor will the fact escape him that the Judenrat head, Czerniakow, himself a former assimilationist who returned to his people,⁷¹ showed kindness to the converted Jews in the ghetto and underscored his trust in them by appointing them to important posts, to the displeasure of the ghetto rabbis and the Judenrat.⁷² As police chief he appointed Andrzej *Szerynski*, a former *polkovnik* (lieutenant-colonel) in the Polish Police, a convert who was active in the community of Jewish Christians and worshipped in the ghetto's Catholic church, and was known to always have an eye out for bribes.⁷³

Szerynski's appointment elevated him to a lofty standing in the community. He accompanied Czerniakow in his visits to the Gestapo offices, maintained direct contacts with the Nazis, and took orders directly from them and not through the Judenrat chairman. When he was arrested for a certain profit-making deal, his release became a matter of the highest priority for Czerniakow. Between the beginning of May and mid-July 1942, his diary mentions no fewer than seventeen intercessions with the German authorities on Szerynski's behalf. Finally he was released--a few days after Czerniakow's suicide--and headed the terror campaign of the police along with Lejkin, Schmerling and other scoundrels.

A thorough study, then, could well turn up several factors that were at the root of the ghetto police's degeneration. But we will probably not be wrong in viewing as one of the cardinal causes, perhaps the decisive element, Czerniakow's failure of neglect. His implicit confidence in Szerynski and his cohorts prevented Czerniakow from seeing what was going on in the police force and thus from taking the necessary measures to eradicate while there was still time the fatal tendencies that were spreading within the body. Other ghetto police forces also saw cases of individuals who could not resist abusing the power placed in their hands (this was also discernible in some non-ghetto police forces). But only in Warsaw were these proclivities allowed to assume a collective character entailing a loss of human dignity.

When corruption began to spread in the Bialystok ghetto police, the Judenrat head carried out a vigorous and thorough purge. Two leaders of police extortion gangs who terrorized the ghetto inhabitants (such as by informing that the Judenrat had bribed Germans) were actually put to death via the Gestapo, perhaps with the aid of the bribe recipients. A "quintet" of their close aides were expelled from the police, removed

71 Arye Tartakower, "Adam Czerniakow: The Man and His Supreme Sacrifice," *Yad Vashem Studies*, VI, pp. 47-57 (Hebrew).

72 Czerniakow, entries of July 2 and 27, 1941.

73 Ringelblum, Vol. I, p. 314.

from the ghetto, and imprisoned in a nearby labor camp. Eleven other policemen were also expelled from the force. The list of those dismissed and imprisoned was made public,⁷⁴ and Moshe Berman, who was a very popular figure among the inhabitants and was highly praised by ghetto memoirists, was appointed deputy director.⁷⁵ The measures adopted were discussed by the Judenrat plenum, a general meeting of the police, and a mass assembly of ghetto inhabitants. The acts of extortion and informing were described in detail, and it was explained to the police that they were to serve as “hands” to carry out the orders of the Judenrat, and no more. They were assured of support and encouragement in fulfilling their duty, but were also openly warned: “If any of you try to follow these [criminal] ways, we will treat you unmercifully!”⁷⁶

The upshot was that the Bialystok ghetto police subsequently became a faithful instrument of the Judenrat. Among the actions it can take credit for was the public hanging of three informers who in the *Aktion* of February 1943 helped the Germans discover Jewish hiding places (they were hanged under the guise of being thieves).⁷⁷ In addition, with the help of the police another 35 informers were identified and publicly denounced, and most of them were killed by the people.⁷⁸

Not all the ghetto police forces attained the level of the Bialystok police, but neither, to the best of our knowledge, did any of them decline to the level of the Warsaw police. The shame of the Warsaw police is its own shame alone, not that of other police forces, and not even that of the faceless Judenrat that operated in the Warsaw ghetto after Czerniakow's death. Certainly no generalizations can be extrapolated from its behavior regarding all the police forces and Judenrats. Confusingly and bewilderingly, this is often done by the rebukers of the Judenrats, who, flying in the face of the facts and of logic, intermix the despicable behavior of the Warsaw ghetto police with the activity of the Judenrats in all the ghettos and then arrive at conclusions convenient for their own purposes.⁷⁹

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We noted above that all the Judenrats without exception submitted to the Nazi decrees out of an aspiration to gain time and save the largest

possible remnant. Of all the decrees, the most difficult was that which forced the Judenrats to execute operations related to the processes of deportation and extermination. These were forced operations which the reproachers called “collaboration” and whose practitioners were labelled by the most zealous of the accusers “assistants of the hangmen.” A onetime instance of such “collaboration” was described by a witness in the Eichmann trial: in the Budzin concentration camp the Nazi commander decided to have a Jew named *Bieter* murdered—but by the Jews themselves. To that end he took two thousand Jews, gave them sticks, and forced them to hit *Bieter*. “He had to run in a circle and two or three Ukrainians ran behind him to make sure that he was actually being beaten hard by the Jews. *Bieter* died from the blows.”⁸⁰

Jean Francois Steiner asserted that the thousand staff-prisoners at Treblinka were permanent assistants of the executioners (see previous chapter). The operations that the Judenrats were forced to do took place at a distance from the killing site, but were undoubtedly part of the destruction process. At the Nazis' order the Judenrats helped them collect candidates for deportation and in some cases to select them as well. The choice they faced—between submission or disobedience—was the same choice that faced the prisoners in Budzin who were ordered to hit *Bieter* until he died. Among the faithful leaders we named above were some who were murdered because they rejected out of hand the Nazis' demands or committed suicide to avoid having to fulfill them. Their motives were pure and their act received its due appreciation. But there were also leaders whose devotion to their community led them to assume the burden and responsibility of doing the terrible things that were forced on them by their enemies. The principal reason they cited was that by positioning themselves between the Jews

74 Blumenthal, pp. 354-356.

75 Ibid., p. 128, Note 7.

76 Ibid., pp. 186-212.

77 Ibid., p. 514.

78 Ibid., p. 516.

79 For a striking example, see Nachman Blumenthal, “The Warsaw Ghetto and Its Destruction,” *Diaspora Encyclopedia*, Vol. on “Warsaw.”

80 Testimony of Prof. David Vdubinsky in the Eichmann trial.

and their murderers they were saving Jewish blood and enhancing the remnants' chances to survive. Unlike the Warsaw police who, as was seen, became a convenient instrument of destruction in the hands of the Nazis, Jewish police in other ghettos were dispatched to assist the Nazis in the work of deportation with the aim of preventing bloodshed there and reducing as much as possible the scope of the operation.

The affair of Jacob Gens, the head of the Vilna ghetto, is very well-known in this connection. Gens constantly praised his actions and even extended them at his own initiative outside the confines of his ghetto. Following one of the first Actions in which the police took an active role, a delegation of rabbis came to Gens and accused him of violating Jewish religious law. Gens replied that by taking part in the selection and handing

over a small number of Jews, he was saving many other Jews from death. To this the rabbis said that his actions were expressly forbidden by a ruling of Maimonides.⁸¹ The latter had (with pronounced unwillingness) permitted to hand over to a gentile authority Jews who were demanded individually and were accused of rebellion against the kingdom; whereas when it came to handing over Jews because they were Jews, "If the star-worshippers told them: 'Give us one of yours and we will kill him, otherwise we will kill them all'--let them kill all but do not give them a single Jewish soul."⁸²

Gens's response to this Halakhic argument is not known. Reliable testimony suggests that prior to his action at Oszmiana (see below) he assured himself the assent of the local rabbi.⁸³ We will return to Gens and his controversial deeds. In the meantime, we will try to clarify matters by examining the experience of a revered Judenrat head who to this day has received only words of praise.

When Dr. Elkes and his fellow-members of the Kovno Aeltestenrat were ordered to assemble all the ghetto inhabitants for a "general census," they understood that an *Aktion* was afoot. Their choice was as follows: to obey the command and, effectively, help implement the Action, or refuse and take the consequences of that refusal--for them and for the entire ghetto. In great mental distress they turned for moral guidance to the rabbi of Kovno, *Avra ham Dover Shapira*, a distinguished Halakhic authority. So agitated was the elderly rabbi upon hearing the question put to him by the members of the Aeltestenrat, that he fainted. After recovering, he asked for time so that he could examine various books on how to behave in the face of this calamity. The following day he ruled that if the Aeltestenrat hoped that by executing the order even some of the Jews of the ghetto could be saved, they must assume the responsibility for its implementation.⁸⁴

The rabbi's injunction was followed. Announcements called on all the inhabitants, including children, the elderly and the sick, to leave their flats no later than 6 a.m. on October 28, 1941, and assemble by families at a certain square in the ghetto according to the orders of the police. The people were warned that anyone found in his house after 6 a.m. would be summarily shot.⁸⁵

This was the "Big *Aktion* of the Kovno ghetto, in which 9,000 persons were selected for death out of the 26,000 who assembled that morning in the square. The following day Dr. Elkes asked for and received permission from the Germans to remove from the list of candidates for extermination one hundred people according to a list he had prepared. This

meager "clemency" request (which in the event did not come to pass because of a disturbance and an injury sustained by Dr. Elkes) symbolized in cruel fashion the behavior of the Kovno Judenrat from the handing down of the Halakhic ruling by Rabbi Shapira until the ghetto's final liquidation three years later.

Dr. Elkes and his associates were well aware that if they wished to go on fulfilling the task they had undertaken, they had no choice but to obey the Nazis' demands. As they received a moral-Halakhic endorsement for their obedience, their subsequent behavior in this matter was no different from that of other Judenrats. They drew up lists of candidates for deportation and transfer and sent policemen from house to house

81 Dr. Meir Dvorjetski, *Jerusalem of Lithuania in Revolt and Holocaust* (Hebrew), p. 282.

82 Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, Ch. 5, Sec. 5.

83 Zelig Kalmanovich, "Vilna Ghetto Diary," *YIVO Bletter*, Vol. 35, p. 41 (Yiddish).

84 Garfunkel, p. 72; Rabbi Ephraim Asheri, *Destruction of Lithuania* (Yiddish), p. 142.

85 Garfunkel, p. 73.

to bring the people.⁸⁶ The Jewish Police, whose commander was one of the leaders of the underground and who was murdered together with forty officers and policemen for supporting the partisans, obediently carried out the harsh orders of the Judenrat and even carried out the public hanging of Nahum Mak, a Jew who shot a German sergeant. In the same connection, the police handed over to the Gestapo twenty hostages from the ghetto who were chosen arbitrarily.⁸⁷

What applied to the Aeltestenrat in Kovno was equally true of other Judenrats. In this there was no difference between “good” Judenrats and those who were excoriated by their detractors. Obedience to the Nazis’ demands was the *sine qua non* for the existence of every Judenrat. Failure to obey orders led to the murder of the refusers and provided a personal solution to their mental anguish. But such behavior never alleviated the fate of the community; on the contrary, it often resulted in the immediate worsening of the situation.

“Give and take” with the Gestapo over the number of those being deported to death was one of the methods employed in the ghettos where possibilities existed for *Aktionen* whose scope was not decided in advance. The extent of the “concessions” obtained depended on the means of persuasion possessed by the Judenrat. Ephraim Barasz, who succeeded in establishing within the German administration in Bialystok a “ghetto lobby”—a strong group that for various reasons advocated the ghetto’s continued existence⁸⁸--could permit himself to bargain with the Gestapo prior to the Action of February 1943. Instead of the 17,600 victims initially demanded, the final quota for the Action was placed at 6,300, to be rounded up with the help of the Jewish Police according to a list of the unemployed supplied by the Judenrat. The representative of the underground, Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamarof, who was made privy to the secret contacts, endorsed them: “We are making a sacrifice of these 6,300

Jews in order to save the remaining 35,000. The situation on the front is such that a radical turnabout is possible at any time. Secret messages were sent to the members of the underground to leave the Polna quarter in which the Action was to begin.”⁸⁹ We have no doubt that for both of them, Barasz and Tenenbaum, it would have been immeasurably easier to give their lives than to endure the hell of this terrible blood deal.

To define these acts as collaboration with the murderers amounts to *judicial violence*. It smacks of the abuse of technical phenomena and formal concepts while disregarding the basic fact that these things were done under pressure of cruelly vengeful compulsion. The suffering of the people who were forced to act against their brethren aggravates the crimes of the murderers, while the people, as long as they did not inform on others, were guiltless. The reproaches of haters of all types are far outweighed by the judgments handed down by the victims themselves. Nahum Mak, who was executed by Jewish police in Kovno, told them at the last minute that in his eyes they bore no guilt and he held no grudge against them.⁹⁰ The Jew Bieter, from the Budzin camp, even while he was being beaten to death by his fellow-Jews, asserted: “I receive this with love. If I am to expiate for the Jewish people, I receive it with love.”⁹¹

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The actions of the “head of the ghetto” in Vilna, Jacob Gens, constitute a lively source of disputes and conflicting evaluations. His direct adversaries and their colleagues spared no effort and balked at nothing to blacken his reputation, although some of them later had a change of heart. In 1965 Chaike Grossman still stuck to her opinion that Gens was “an enemy, a careerist, a Gestapo man.”⁹² Rozhka Korczak, who once testified that “our conjecture was verified” concerning Gens’s poisoning of Wittenberg,⁹³ in 1965 retracted the verification but not the conjecture itself.⁹⁴ Abba

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 134-135, 149-151, 155.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

⁸⁸ Tenenbaum-Tamarof, pp. 30, 39.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp 67-68.

⁹⁰ Garfunkel, p. 137.

⁹¹ Testimony of Prof. Vdubinsky.

⁹² Chaike Grossman, *People in the Underground* (Hebrew), 1965, p. 141.

⁹³ Reisel Korczak (Rozhka), *Flames in the Dust* (Hebrew), 1946, p. 189.

⁹⁴ Korczak, op. cit., 1967, p. 167; *Book of the Ghetto Wars*, p. 426.

Kovner in 1975 held that “the epithets enemy and Gestapo agent are inapplicable to Gens” but declined to elaborate.⁹⁵ Researchers and memoir writers were from the outset less categorical in their judgments. They pointed to acts constituting, in their view, incriminating evidence against him, but did not disregard facts tilting the scales to the other side.

Although Gens’s emotional declarations in his own behalf are frequently quoted, insufficient attention has been paid to the highly significant support he received from *Zelig Kalmanovich*. It emerges that the Bar-Kossiba (with all due difference) from the Jerusalem of Lithuania had his own Rabbi Akiva who supported him unreservedly and furnished him with moral and ideological rejoinders. The introverted scientist and

author did not hesitate to express publicly his admiration for Jacob Gens. In September 1942 he told him: “May we soon be privileged to tell throughout the Jewish dispersions what you were for the ghetto.”⁹⁶ A month later he came out staunchly behind Gens when the latter sent policemen to the town of Oszmiana to take part in an *Aktion* there. Gens justified his decision by saying that it had saved 600 people from death. Public opinion in the Vilna ghetto supported him,⁹⁷ though there were also objectors and dissenters. When an argument erupted regarding Gens’s demand that similar operations be repeated in other towns with the participation of persons who objected to what was done at Oszmiana, Kalmanovich recorded in his diary considerations based on general principles whose ramifications went beyond the specific issue in dispute:

The old rabbi [from Oszmiana, who ruled in favor of Gens’ s move] may serve as a model: we must save whatever can be saved. This is the situation and we cannot alter it. Of course, a noble soul cannot tolerate such deeds, *but the soul’s protest has only a psychological worth and not a moral one*. All are guilty, or perhaps more truly: all are innocent and holy, and, above all, those who actually carry it through. They must master themselves, brace themselves, and conquer the soul’s sufferings. They exempt others and shield them from sorrow.⁹⁸

These few lines, and particularly in the passage emphasized (in which the “noble soul” is not, surely, meant to be taken sarcastically) contain the moral key to the problems of the Holocaust, as perceived by the person who was called the “prophet of the Vilna ghetto” by those who remember him.⁹⁹ That his opinion was concealed from the Israeli public through the boycott of his diary may well have been a major contributing factor to the distorted judgment of the Judenrats.

Kalmanovich also aligned himself with Gens in the matter of turning in Yitzhak Wittenberg, the Communist who headed the underground FPO organization. Of Wittenberg himself he wrote in words charged with emotion: “Let Kaddish be said for the lad who fell, a victim... May his memory be blessed.” But he spares no condemnation for the behavior of the underground. “A Jewish hand was lifted against Jews. The arms that according to their owners should have been used to defend the lives of others, became takers of life... The boys who ostensibly defended the violated honor of their people, themselves violated the name

of Heaven.”¹⁰⁰

In this connection, a few remarks about “defending honor” and about armed resistance in the ghetto:

Self-defense is a vain act. It is of no point and no value, and certainly of no substance. It cannot be said that those who were put to death died basely even though they went like lambs to the slaughter. The living people of Israel will remember them eternally with honor... ¹⁰¹ The prisoner’s only strength resides in his being, the community demands no action of him, only that he preserve his existence using any means. And if some other emotion is mixed in, one must fear that it is cowardice,

⁹⁵ Author’s recorded conversation with Abba Kovner, July 17, 1975.

⁹⁶ Kalmanovich, p. 36.

⁹⁷ Hermann Krook, *Vilna Ghetto Diary* (Yiddish), p. 381.

⁹⁸ Kalmanovich, excerpted in Lucy Dawidowicz, ed., *A Holocaust Reader*, New York, 1976, pp. 227-228.

⁹⁹ Dvorjetski, p. 242.

¹⁰⁰ Kalmanovich (Yiddish), p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

nullification of the will to live. How can we direct the attention of the youngsters to this fact? To warn them not to be lured by frantic people who have more than once done harm to the people and were liable to thwart its creative output. And are we to forget the slogan, "To break the Workers' Organization," which was proclaimed with a great uproar? 102

And more: "When these people speak of the supposed 'honor' they are defending, they bring shame on all the myriads who have perished. But the truth is that these people executed by the state do not occupy a lower rung than those who take up arms. After all, defense in Eretz-Israel and even during the pogroms in Russia is not comparable to the situation here. Only cowards and the empty-minded can think of bringing arms into the ghetto."103

We need not see Kalmanovich as the final arbiter of behavior in the Holocaust. We can agree or disagree with his views. But we cannot ignore them as though they were nonexistent. The reflections he set down, written in his heart's blood, will eventually burst the circle of the boycott imposed on them for a generation and will wield their influence on a reassessment of the problems of the Holocaust in general and the Judenrat in particular.

The ghettos, and the Judenrats they spawned, were set up by the Nazis as transition stages and as means toward the extermination of the Jews. But the Jews seized on them as means in the struggle to forestall their extinction. In the unequal war between the prodigiously powerful murderers and the murdered, who were left to their own devices by their would-be rescuers, the Judenrats serves as centers of Jewish energy and

sagacity. As in any place of uncontrolled rule, instances of injustice and abuse abounded. Plenty of scoundrels tried to subvert their steadfastness both from within and from without. Nevertheless, and despite everything, the Judenrats generally fulfilled their duty faithfully and devotedly. Not all of them were equal in the justness of their deeds. But many of them recorded splendid pages in Jewish martyrology and can serve as an exemplary model for Jewish leadership in conditions of distress.

There is no need to idealize the Judenrats, but to present them as an abhorrent symbol is a serious transgression against the historical truth, against our past. And a people that sins against its past, sins against its future.

In the *Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir* we came across one exceptional opinion which was expressed in 1943 and was repeated, with a minor modification, in 1956. In a mourning assembly held at Kibbutz Yagur in June 1943, Ya'akov Hazan, one of the leaders of Hashomer Hatza'ir, stated:

It was with trepidation that I followed the constant struggle between the heads of the communities and the members of our movements. No, I do not cast a stone at these wretched community leaders at whose head marched Czerniakow and whose funeral was rounded off by Zygelboim. They spoke, and from their throats resonated the millenia-long pent-up wisdom of sorrows of Jewish tradition: We will hold out a bit longer, we will bow our heads a little more, as long as we can save the remnant and not allow the tyrant to carry out his scheme. Jewish honor? Can these beasts of prey impugn Jewish honor?... No, I cast no stones at these community leaders--not only the ghetto insurgents shall enter the cup of tribulations and expectations of the nation of Israel, but also the poison imbibed by Czerniakow and Zygelboim, and the faithful tear of the Lvov community leaders who marched in their Sabbath clothes at the head of their people to death.104

The very least that must be done immediately, for the sake of historical justice, entails, at least, a shift in the spirit of these words.

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102 Ibid., pp. 75-76. This passage and others, which we did not cite, show that Kalmanovich attributed crucial importance to the role of the Revisionists in organizing the underground. This embarrassing testimony was sufficient to cool any fervor the Holocaust research establishment in Israel may have entertained regarding the diary's quick publication.

103 Ibid., p. 77.

104 Ya'akov Hazan, "A Single Fate," *Book of Hashomer Hatza'ir* (Hebrew), p. 589.

The lessons of the Holocaust for the Zionist movement can be encapsulated under one rubric of which the common theme is: full Zionism vs. narrow Zionism. The blunders of Zionism in the Holocaust

years derived from the constriction of its goals in the wake of the Uganda crisis. The separation of the ongoing concern for the wellbeing of Jews throughout the world from the plan to establish the "safe haven" was artificial from the outset and became a disaster when an *apparent* contradiction arose between the two. Instead of acting like a "father" to the Jewish people in its fateful hour, the Zionist movement behaved like a mere friend, a friend whose own concerns and preoccupations diverted its attention and shifted its perception away from the overriding misfortune. In connection with several events, narrow-mindedness and fear of "territorialism" led the Zionist movement to operate against rescue efforts undertaken by others, Jews and non-Jews. In the course of time the movement's involvement and determination to thwart such efforts increased. If at the Evian Conference the head of the Zionist delegation, Arthur Ruppin, disregarded the stand espoused by Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, the American Zionist hierarchy, which was close to the scene of the events, took part in the activities against the Rublee-Wohlthat Plan. And to thwart the Santo Domingo Plan, the finest organizational and intellectual forces of the movement in America and Europe were mobilized. In fact, obstructions of efforts to rescue Jews that did not directly involve *aliyah* continued until the very end of the war.

The fear of territorialism had no basis in reality. Historical experience shows that the concentration of Jews in any new place in the diaspora neither competes with nor impinges upon Zionism. The only case in which the territorialist approach was liable to harm Zionism was in the Uganda affair--not because of the danger of *settlement* in that country, but because of the serious crisis that afflicted the nascent movement. The new Jewish areas of settlement that have been established since then throughout the world are centers of Zionist support and strength. The largest of them, in the United States, to which Jews streamed despite the displeasure of Zionist functionaries, became a faithful prop for Zionist realization. If the Zionist leaders had thought in terms of full Zionism during the Holocaust years, they would have avoided the terrible mistake of crushing, along with territorialism, possibilities of rescue.

A trenchant expression of estrangement from the needs of rescue can be found in the *information* policy of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. The turning point in this realm came on November 23, 1942, when the Zionist movement for the first time accepted the fact of the Holocaust. The period prior to this was marked by a stubborn disaffirmation of reports that arrived from the killing areas, however reliable and detailed. Particularly noteworthy is the campaign of

suppression in the Yishuv press of the reports that arrived in March 1942 and included, among other information, an account of the slaughter at Babi-Yar. A second shocking instance was the editorial in *Davar* on August 10, 1942, which expressed categorical support for the Nazis' accounts at the height of the Big *Aktion* in Warsaw.

In the Holocaust years the nations of the free world did not do everything in their power to rescue Jews. But this is no reason to rebuke them: very often they demonstrated their willingness to help, in the form of the Evian Conference, the absorption of tens of thousands of refugees in England, France, Portugal and elsewhere, and the creation of the War Refugee Board in America. Even the ill-fated Bermuda Conference had its inception in a welcome initiative propelled by British public opinion, which insisted that urgent operations be undertaken to rescue Jews.

But in the conditions of the war, when nations fought for their existence in the face of the cruel Nazi enemy, their friendly readiness to help was insufficient. For this readiness to be translated into action, what was required was the close cooperation of a *Jewish* body for which rescue was a supreme mission informed by life-and-death urgency. This body would have served as a source of reliable information on events and as an incentive and guide for what could be done, despite everything. What was needed was something like a Judenrat of the Bialystok and Kovno types. We saw how distant the Zionist movement was from serving as such a body. When the "head of the Jews," Chaim Weizmann, met with one of the leaders of the free world, President Roosevelt, for an hour-long talk, the Jew did not find fit to mention the Holocaust or the need for rescue in so much as one word. Moshe Sharett rejected an offer of friends in England to differentiate between problems of rescue and demands for *aliyah*--and he strengthened the hand of Zionism's opponents in the British government to interfere with rescue as

well. And when the Peter Bergson group succeeded in making a distinction between *aliyah* and rescue, the War Refugee Board was created in spite of official Zionism.

The information factor had a crucial impact on the attitude of nations and governments toward the events of the Holocaust. The Nazis worked hard to conceal the destruction of the Jews from the world, and the Zionists believed them with appalling persistence until November 23, 1942. Subsequently the Zionist offices were a source of faulty information which gave the impression of being deliberate propaganda to promote the Zionist cause.

It is not surprising that non-Jews placed no more credence in the reports about extermination than the victimized nation itself.

Consequently, it was only natural that the late shift in the Zionist posture did not generate far-reaching results elsewhere. In fact, the Nazis' successful deception lasted throughout the war. People did not know what to believe and what to think about reports of incomprehensible atrocities. A considerable contributing factor in this regard was the Zionist information failure, what Zalman Shazar bemoaned as "Ignominy Number One."

The writing of Holocaust history compounded the mistake. It completed the physical murder of millions of our brethren by besmirching their name among the Jewish people and the gentiles. Their going "like sheep to the slaughter," which was the unavoidable manifestation of an objective situation, was exploited against them as demeaning and incriminating evidence. A prolonged slander of the Judenrats presented them as the embodiment of evil and corruption, in gross contradiction to truth and justice. The abasement of the Jewish people, in which the Nazis did not succeed, was done consistently and energetically by Jews.

* * * * *

A distorted presentation of the events of the Holocaust obstructed their correct perception and precluded the obligatory lessons from being drawn. The experience of a fateful period in the life of our people was neither learned, ingested, nor made part of the arsenal of our existence. Thirty years after the Holocaust no spiritual stocktaking has been done concerning what occurred and no national/Zionist change of values has been demanded.

Consequently, there was no place for *applying* lessons, even when a pressing need to do so arose. Ever since the "Doctors' Plot" in January 1953, when *Soviet Jewry* found itself on the brink of an abyss, the Jewish people has faced the problem of extricating the Jews from the USSR. The problem took various shapes and forms, but it was not annulled with Stalin's death and Khrushchev's ouster. Fundamentally, it remains a problem of rescue, and its solution resides in a Jewish exodus from the Soviet Union. Fortunately, helpful circumstances have emerged toward a solution: the Soviet regime is currently undergoing a period of relative moderation which is enabling mass emigration. The Jews of Russia are aware of their situation and are relentlessly pushing their aspiration to leave. And in Eretz-Israel a Zionist state was established whose duty it is to rescue Jews.

But the Zionism of the Israeli government has proved insufficient for the great task it is called on to perform. The same routine thinking that marked it in the Holocaust is now driving it to defend narrow Zionism

against the infringement of broad Zionism. David Ben-Gurion, who fought the danger of territorialism until the last day of the Holocaust, was exceedingly careful to ensure that "excess" involvement in the matter of Russian Jewry did not harm the state. For years the World Zionist Organization was headed by Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who openly and publicly opposed the waging of a vigorous war to open the gates of Russia to a Jewish exodus. The successors of Ben-Gurion and Goldmann in the state and the Zionist movement followed their lead. They impeded as much as they could those who advocated concrete action to extricate Soviet Jewry, and they took an extremely reserved approach to the requests of the first *aliyah* activists who succeeded in reaching Israel from Russia. Pressed by Jewish public opinion, and in the circumstances that were formed following the break in relations between Israel and the Soviet Union, they halfheartedly withdrew their opposition, but their assistance to the rescue operation continues to be hesitant and sluggish. In the meantime, it has become quite manifest to anyone with eyes in his head that Israel needs Russia's Jews

as much as they need Israel, and that in the final reckoning of broad Zionism, no contradiction can exist between the interests of the state and efforts to rescue Jews.

As these lines are being written (spring 1977) a slowdown has occurred in the departure of Jews from the Soviet Union. Over 100,000 have already left, the great majority settling in Israel. The situation of the Jews in Russia is now parallel to that in Nazi Germany before the night of riots in November 1938, and their departure from the USSR constitute full-fledged rescue. No one knows how long the relative "liberalism" of the rulers in the Kremlin will continue. This is a propitious hour which must not be missed. Rescue is its own reward, and where Jewish rescue takes place Zionism exists, whether it is rewarded immediately or at a later stage. Let us hope that the lessons of the Holocaust will serve us as a guiding light in this great task.

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**GOLDA MEIR ON THE EVIAN CONFERENCE :
METAMORPHOSES OF A TESTIMONY**

1. Correspondence 1972

S.B. Beit-Zvi

Zahala, Tel Aviv

July 25, 1972

Mrs. Golda Meir
Prime Minister of Israel
Jerusalem

Madam Prime Minister,

Within the framework of my study of the Holocaust, I am currently researching in detail the Evian Conference which took place in July 1938. I have learned from Hans Habe's book The Mission that you appeared there in a press conference on July 14. My perusal of the Hebrew press for this period turned up no mention of this press conference, with the exception of a few words in the weekly *Ha'olam*.

I would be most grateful if you could receive me for a conversation on this topic. It is my wish to clarify the reasons and the circumstances which brought you to Evian and the details of your activity there. I would also like to hear your own assessment of the conference.

If you do grant me an interview, I would like to clarify one additional matter, although I would not take up your time for this alone. On May 6, 1943, at a meeting of Jewish workers in Palestine, you said: "Someone saw to it that the dreadful report did not reach us, for fear that we would be appalled and demand the opening of the gates of Eretz-Israel." What I would like to know is whether you recall the fact (or facts) on which you based this statement, or whether this was a conjecture based on a general appraisal.

Thanking you in advance,

Yours sincerely,

(-)

S.B. Beit-Zvi

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Prime Minister's Bureau

Jerusalem

August 28, 1972

Dear Mr. Beit-Zvi,

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of July 25. Regarding your questions about her participation in the Evian Conference, the Prime Minister does remember participating in the press conference mentioned by Hans Habe. She took part in that event together with the late Arthur Ruppin. She also recalls saying, and I quote: "I pray for the day when there will be no cause to pity us. This I said in view of the remarks by the speakers in the conference: *pity--yes*; acts of rescue--*no*."

The Prime Minister does not recall any other details about the conference, and it is difficult for her now, so many years after the event, to reconstruct impressions and assessments concerning the conference. This being the case, we feel that there is no place for a meeting with her on this matter or on the other subject which you raise at the end of your letter.

Since we took the trouble to locate a report from *Davar* dated May 7, 1943, which reports on the Prime Minister's address at the meeting, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the item.

Wishing you a *Shana Tova*, Eli Mizrahi/Deputy Director, Prime Minister's Bureau

* * * * *

September 28, 1972

Personal

Re: Conversation Regarding the Evian Conference

Madam Prime Minister,

I wish to appeal the decision of your office not to grant me a meeting with you in order to clarify your participation in the Evian Conference. My reasons are as follows:

(1) The quotation from your remarks in the press conference at Evian, as cited in the letter from Mr. Eli Mizrahi, indicates that you have a better recollection of what occurred there than other participants whom I have interviewed to date (Dr. Goldmann, Dr. Tratkower, Prof. Akzin, Mr. Adler-Rodell).

(2) My questions to you are largely of a circumstantial character: why you went to Evian (you had not been a candidate for the delegation);

what you did there in addition to the press conference; whether you were privy to Dr. Weizmann's decision not to attend the conference--and other such matters which you will be able to recollect, at least in part. I hope thereby to fill in some of the "blanks" concerning Evian. The estimated time needed for the meeting (if we forgo my second question, which I am willing to do) is no more than 15-20 minutes.

(3) During the ten years in which I have been engaged in research on the Holocaust, I have met with a number of public figures, among them the late Moshe Sharett (1962), the late Arye Kobuvi (1962), the late Yitzhak Gruenbaum (1968), David Ben-Gurion (when he was prime minister, in 1962), Anshel Reiss (1968), Dr. Ringer (1970), Yitzhak Zuckerman (1970), and the four personages mentioned above. In no case did anyone refuse to see me for any reason. I request that you not become the sole exception on this important subject.

I hope and request that this letter be forwarded for your personal perusal.

Wishing you holiday greetings,

Most sincerely,

(—)

S.B. Beit-Zvi

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Prime Minister's Bureau
Office of the Director-General
Jerusalem
October 15, 1972

Dear Mr. Beit-Zvi,

The Prime Minister has asked me to reply to your letter of September 28.

Mrs. Meir believes that a meeting about the Evian Conference would be pointless as she did not participate in the conference. Mrs. Meir did take part in the press conference, as she happened to be in Europe, visited Evian, and was asked to join the press conference, but she took no part in the actual proceedings.

Sincerely,

Simcha Dinitz, Director-General

This letter from the director-general of the Prime Minister's Bureau put an end to my hopes of obtaining information from Golda Meir about the Evian Conference. It emerged that while Mrs. Meir was not

ignoring my requests and was even assigning officials in her office to deal with them, she was determined not to become personally involved.

Two weeks after I had sent the first letter, a staff member of the Prime Minister's Bureau phoned me. Introducing herself as Devorah, she asked where I had found the quotation from Golda Meir's address at the workers meeting on which I had based my

second question. When I told her (*Davar*, May 7, 1943), she said that the Prime Minister “will want to see you.” In the end, however, the deputy director of the Prime Minister’s Bureau sent me the very same item from *Davar* on which I had based my query.

I was not entirely convinced by Mr. Simcha Dinitz’s assertion. I did not accept the fact that Mrs. Meir “took no part” at all in the conference. I knew she had been at Evian for some four days (July 11-14) and, together with the heads of the two Zionist delegations, had taken part in a press conference of which the avowed goal (and which succeeded in part) was to bring influence to bear on a certain part of the proceedings. As for the perfectly valid claim by Mr. Eli Mizrahi--that the immense passage of time since the conference made it difficult for the Prime Minister to reconstruct details and impressions-- this was a problem which could be overcome. Anyone who collects testimony concerning events in the distant past often has no choice but to help a witness refresh his memory with the aid of facts gleaned from other testimonies and from written records. It was my good fortune that the persons whom I interviewed about the Evian Conference were well-educated and had the intellectual capacity to absorb and integrate the evidence I presented to them and were willing to cooperate in the search for the historical truth.

Together with her vehement refusal to deal with the Evian Conference, the Prime Minister transmitted to me, via the directors of her office, fragments of information which in other circumstances might have been useful. But I soon discovered that because of its inferior quality this information could shed no light on what happened at Evian, nor could it furnish new details concerning Golda Meir’s activity there. The details she provided contradicted solid facts which I had gleaned from reliable documents which came into my possession. I knew for certain that the joint meeting with journalists--together with Arthur Ruppin and Nahum Goldmann--took place on July 11, the day Golda arrived at Evian. Purely chronological factors rule out the possibility that the press conference was held on July 14, as Hans Habe seems to suggest, since it was on that day that a report about the event appeared in the weekly *Ha’olam* in distant Jerusalem.

The confusion led me to the reasonable conclusion that Golda Meir actually took part in *two* separate press conferences at Evian, one on July 11 with Ruppin and Goldmann, and the other, by herself, on July 14. The former dealt with events at the Evian Conference, while the latter was devoted to Golda Meir’s personal reactions, as her view of the results of the conference differed from that of Ruppin and Goldmann. Thus concluded my first “taking of testimony” in 1972.

2. Memoirs 1975

In her autobiography, which was published about three years later, Golda Meir devoted a few lines to the Evian Conference (*My Life*, Futura Books edition, pp. 127-128):

In the summer of 1938 I was sent to the International Conference on Refugees that was called by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Evian-les-Bains. I was there in the ludicrous capacity of “the Jewish observer from Palestine,” not even seated with the delegates but with the audience, although the refugees under discussion were my own people, members of my own family, not just inconvenient numbers to be squeezed into official quotas, if at all possible. Sitting there in that magnificent hall and listening to the delegates of thirty-two countries rise, each in turn, to explain how much they would have liked to take in substantial numbers of refugees and how unfortunate it was that they were unable to do so, was a terrible experience. I don’t think that anyone who didn’t live through it can understand what I felt at Evian--a mixture of sorrow, rage, frustration and horror. I wanted to get up and scream at them all, “Don’t you know that these ‘numbers’ are human beings, people who may spend the rest of their lives in concentration camps, or wandering around the world like lepers, if you don’t let them in?” Of course I didn’t know then that not concentration camps but death camps awaited the refugees whom no one wanted. If I had known that, I couldn’t have gone on sitting there silently hour after hour being disciplined and polite...

Nothing was accomplished at Evian except phraseology, but before I left I held a press conference. At least the journalists wanted to hear what I had to say, and through them we could reach the rest of the world and try again to get its

attention. “There is only one thing I hope to see before I die,” I told the press, “and that is that my people should not need expressions of sympathy any more.”

This was a new story altogether. It was a version of events which differed in nearly every substantive detail from the information which Mrs. Meir had conveyed to me three years earlier through the directors of her office. It now turned out that she had not arrived at Evian by chance but had been sent there on a unique mission. She was furious at being seated with the audience and not with the government representatives taking part in the proceedings. According to her autobiography, she managed to take in the speeches of the representatives of the 32 countries which sent delegations to Evian. She had not been asked to take part in a press conference, as she had told the director-general of her office, but had called one at her own initiative. As for the press conference with Ruppin (and Goldmann)--she fails to recall it here. But she does remember her stinging reprimand to the nations of the world for pitying the Jews and for not doing what should (in her view) be done.

This testimony of Golda Meir's is not exactly bursting with clarity and credibility. One puzzling matter is the imaginary role of the Jewish observer from Palestine which was accorded her by an unknown body or organization. Her claim to have listened to the speeches of 32 delegates sounds like an exaggeration. All the indications are that she arrived in Evian on July 11, the sixth day of the conference. By then, nearly all the public speeches had already been delivered, each delegate having detailed the relevant laws of his country and the clauses which prevented the entry of undesirable aliens. These data had originally been requested by the conference organizers for the *secret* use of a subcommittee as factual material. Because of an organizational hitch, the papers were delivered at public sessions in the first days of the conference, a development which had an adverse effect on the entire proceedings. Reports of the unplanned speeches spread far and wide and gladdened the hearts of the conference's opponents. Golda Meir naturally heard about this and remembered it for the rest of her life. But she did not actually hear the speeches delivered at the conference, certainly not all of them. She was simply not there long enough for that.

Another key element is Golda's foul mood as she sits in the conference hall, what she gloomily describes as "a mixture of sorrow, rage, frustration and horror." In 1975, when her autobiography was first published, she seemed to have grounds for relying on persons who were

more expert than she regarding the history of the conference and who thought, like her, that "Nothing was accomplished at Evian." Their comments indicated that, like her, they were embittered and disappointed. Had she consented to meet with me for 15 or 20 minutes, as I requested, I would have been able to show her the written documents with which I convinced other interviewees, or at least two of them--Nahum Goldmann and Shalom Adler-Rodell--that at the time in Evian they were hardly in a despairing mood at all: to the contrary, they were satisfied and optimistic. I would have reminded her that Dr. Ruppin, thanks to his expertise and his mental qualities, did not become melancholy in the wake of the delegate's speeches; in fact, he cooperated positively with the conference and emerged from it highly optimistic. Perhaps I would have had time to tell her that yet another personality, Schneor Zalman Rubashov (later Zalman Shazar, Israel's third President), who was in Evian on behalf of *Davar*, was enthusiastic and pleased about what he saw, and urged the Zionist movement not to forgo the rescue opportunities which the conference was making available. All of these data, detailed and documented, in preparation and in written form, were to be contained in the chapter on Evian in my book, Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust, concerning which I had requested to meet with Mrs. Meir. In 1975 the book had not yet appeared in print.

Davar's version of a wire-service report from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) which was published in the Hebrew-language press in Palestine on July 17, 1938, contained the following: "The majority of the delegations left Evian in a good frame of mind and with great hopes for the future - (?-Ed.)." (*Ha' aretz* carried the same item, but without the question mark.) It emerges that the group of Zionist leaders and functionaries who were at Evian and who were closely involved in the proceedings, emerged from the conference quite optimistic. However, the *Davar* editor who was responsible for his paper's version of the JTA report was unable to countenance the Evian contingent's frame of mind.

I was able to discover the true source of Golda's unease at Evian from the information I acquired about her participation in the press conference with Ruppin and Goldmann. While I was still awaiting a reply to my request to meet with Mrs. Meir,

I came across a report sent from Evian to Jerusalem on July 12, 1938 (Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, File No. 74/17441). According to the report, a press conference had been held the previous day--July 11, 1938--with the participation of Dr. Ruppin, Dr. Goldmann, and Golda Meir. They had been critical of Lord Winterton, head of the British delegation to the conference, for not having mentioned

in his speech that Palestine was a land of immigrant-absorption, something he was duty-bound to have said as the representative of the Mandatory power in Palestine.

Indeed, it turned out that Golda Meir had come to Evian on an urgent mission of the Zionist leadership. Even before the conference opened, both Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion were highly apprehensive that it would prove detrimental to the Zionist cause. On June 3, 1938, Weizmann expressed his concern that the conference might have public reverberations which would overshadow the importance of Palestine. "We are especially apprehensive that [the conference] will impel Jewish organizations to collect large sums of money in order to aid Jewish refugees, and that these fund-raising drives will interfere with our own campaigns." Speaking at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on June 26, Ben-Gurion said: "Our principal task is to minimize the damage, danger and disaster which we can expect from the Evian Conference. In my opinion, we should play down the character of the conference. To the extent that it depends on us, it is desirable that the conference not make decisions on its own but establish a committee to discuss matters."

The first five days of the conference seemed to confirm Weizmann's and Ben-Gurion's worst fears. Not a single delegate spoke about Palestine; Lord Winterton said in his opening speech that the British government had settlement plans for its East African colonies, but failed to mention Palestine. The Ruppin-Goldmann-Meir press conference was a bold last-minute attempt to get Palestine on the agenda through a public appeal to Lord Winterton.

The ploy succeeded. In his concluding address Lord Winterton devoted considerable time to Palestine and spoke in terms which calmed the Zionist contingent at Evian. Zalman Rubashov delightedly informed his readers in *Davar* that "it was a Zionist speech." Dr. Goldmann personally expressed to Lord Winterton his satisfaction with the speech. And Arthur Ruppin pressed ahead with his efforts to rescue German Jewry.

But not Golda Meir. She was neither placated nor pleased. Winterton's "good" speech did not mitigate her fears concerning the "damage, danger and disaster" which the conference had caused Zionism. Seeking to rectify the situation, she held her own press conference in addition to the joint press conference with the heads of the Zionist delegation. This, apparently, engendered the saying that became a key item in the inventory of her memory: her hope that the day would come

when "my people should not need expressions of sympathy [pity] any more." This at a time when for the Jews of Europe every drop of sympathy and pity was a fateful necessity.

From the version of events in the autobiography I learned three things:

(1) That my conjecture concerning *two* Golda Meir press conferences had been correct.

(2) That the version of events Golda had given me through the director-general of her office had been almost accurate: she had been (whether by chance or not) in Europe, had visited (whether by chance or not) Evian, and had been asked to take part in a press conference. Nor had she (besides that) taken part in the actual proceedings.

(3) The fact that in 1975 she was unable to recall her joint press conference with Ruppin and Goldmann shows that already in 1972 the comments of the deputy director of her office about her weak memory were no exaggeration.

Not many years later, learned historians, among those appointed to oversee the memory of the Holocaust in Israel, raised Golda Meir to the level of the one and only witness for determining what did and did not happen at Evian.

3. Chief Testimony

Golda Meir's final testimony concerning the Evian Conference appeared in Chapter 9 of *Pillar of Fire*, a series which was twice screened on Israel TV (the first time in winter-spring 1981) and in 1982 appeared as a book in album format edited by Yigal Lossin, the director of the television series. Two half-pages of the book are devoted to the

Evian Conference, and they contain one single testimony: that of Golda Meir. The testimony affirms and illustrates the book's statement that "At the Evian Conference the secret was revealed. One after another the representatives of the 33 countries which participated in the conference made it clear that salvation for the refugees would not come from them." This is Golda Meir's testimony according to Pillar of Fire:

All the speeches were very moving, about the terrible character of the Nazi regime, about pity for the Jews. But every one of the speeches had the same chorus: my country cannot accept refugees.

The Australian went even farther and explained why not--because there was no antisemitism in Australia. If Jews were

allowed in, antisemitism would be created in Australia. In any event, the summary was: plenty of pity, plenty of condemnation of the Nazi regime, no rescue for the Jews. *I remember that after the conference there was a press conference, Ruppin was there, to this day it is not clear to me why I was also there--but we went together.* I remember saying that I want to live and to see the day when no one would have to pity the Jews, because I felt then that the maximum the Jewish people could get when it was in trouble, was pity. (Emphasis added.)

This is Golda Meir's third version of events--in addition to what she relates in her autobiography, and the information the directors of her office conveyed to me in 1972. As compared with the autobiography, the new testimony excels in the brevity of its description, one which is tailor-made for the simple thesis of the authors of Pillar of Fire. Its main point is expressed through the anecdote concerning the "wicked" Australian who, like all the delegates at Evian, refused to help the distressed refugees. This central idea is seasoned with Golda's favorite remark, about the unhelpful pity for the Jews.

That remark, which appears in all three versions, made a lasting impression on Golda Meir's heart and memory alike. She remembers well saying this at a press conference, but she is not certain at which one: that with Ruppin (and Goldmann) or that which she held at her own initiative following the conference. She remembers each one alternately, but seems unable to recall them both simultaneously. In 1972 she was able to relate that she had been asked to take part in the press conference with the leaders of the Zionist delegation, but the highly-charged issue which was at the center of that press conference, and its surprising results, had been totally erased from her memory.

Fortunately for history, the Pillar of Fire staff did not delete one of Mrs. Meir's comments concerning the press conference with Ruppin. For the sake of convenience, I emphasized this sentence, and I want to return to it now. Given her memory, there is nothing remarkable about the fact that Golda Meir "moved" the press conference from July 11, when it was actually held, to the day after the conference. However, the other details in this sentence generate useful questions, which give rise to interesting solutions.

What is unclear to Mrs. Meir about her having participated in the press conference together with Arthur Ruppin? Why does she find it so

amazing that they "went together"? Why does she make such a great, albeit unsuccessful, effort to find an answer to this "puzzling" fact? Were both of them not part of the leadership of the Zionist movement which was defending a common interest at Evian? Or did they perhaps represent two separate sides, two camps which sought different things at Evian?

I proposed an initial reply to these questions by citing the JTA report about the conference which appeared with a question mark in *Davar*. This contained a reasonable description which resolved the contradictions between the contents of the report and the doubts of the *Davar* editor, between the demonstrative optimism of Ruppin, Goldmann and Shazar on the one hand, and the gloom of Golda Meir and the angry press conference she called upon the conclusion of the proceedings, on the other hand. The words that Golda let slip out in her confusion, and which the editors of Pillar of Fire then made public without giving the matter any thought, constitute unequivocal evidence of the sharp disagreement which emerged between her and Ruppin and his colleagues at the end of July 1938. Based on what we know about the

personalities of the two rivals, we can risk an attempt to pinpoint the roots of the dispute.

At the press conference which she joined in order to help the Zionist delegation fight for recognition of Palestine as a land of absorption, Golda Meir heard Dr. Ruppin say that Palestine had the capacity to absorb ten thousand Jewish refugees every year from Germany and Austria. The conditions then prevailing in Palestine made this estimate something of an exaggeration. However, in the light of the goal for which the Evian Conference had been called--to find a haven for the half-million Jews of these two countries--Ruppin's statement was tantamount to a forced admission which the reporters had managed to extract from him. Naturally, this admission weakened the arguments of the Zionists, and Golda Meir could only view it as an unjustified concession to the "territorialists" who were scheming to send Jews to countries other than Palestine. Very soon she discovered that a group of important Zionist functionaries, who were representing the Zionist movement at Evian, identified with Ruppin's tolerant attitude towards territorialist deviations from orthodox Zionism. This frame of mind was only natural at Evian, where those gathered were primarily and above all concerned about the fate of the Jews who were facing hardships.

But Golda, who had come on a mission to deliver Zionism from the deleterious consequences feared by Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, viewed the behavior of the delegation members as harmful and dangerous. In her autobiography she relates how she tried to rectify the situation by

holding her own press conference. The astonishing comments quoted in Pillar of Fire show just how fierce the dispute was between her militant Zionism and the non-orthodox Zionism of Arthur Ruppin. That she dared take a stand against a person of authority and achievement in building the country attests to her courage and force of character. The depth of the experience she underwent is shown by the permanent traces it left in her mind.

4. The Witness and the Establishment

How did it happen that such shaky and unreliable testimony was chosen to serve as the (exclusive!) source of information about an important historical event?

In the album's introduction, the editor, Yigal Lossin, explains that five well-known professors of history acted as scientific consultants for Pillar of Fire. They "critiqued the drafts of the scripts" and "saved us from many pitfalls." Yet these advisers failed to prevent the use of a truly vitiated piece of testimony. Had they taken the trouble to make a careful comparison of the testimony being proposed for Pillar of Fire and the parallel version in Golda Meir's autobiography, would they not have treated them as unusable draft-scripts? It stands to reason that the resulting misgivings and doubts would have led them to the written documents stored in archives and libraries: reports of members of the Zionist delegation, letters, articles, and so forth. Had they read, in the minutes of the Evian Conference (Central Zionist Archives, File No. S7/693), the speech of the Australian delegate, they would have found that Golda's account was based on a faulty quotation and a malicious interpretation.

This quite uncomplicated examination would have enabled an unequivocal evaluation of Golda Meir's testimony, and might have offered a starting point for a reasonable appraisal of the Evian Conference. All the indications are that no such effort was made.

When Pillar of Fire was being produced, there was no dearth of living witnesses concerning the Evian Conference. Each of the four persons whom I mentioned in my 1972 letter to Mrs. Meir took an active part in the conference and all of them were available to give testimony. On the face of it, the most suitable of the four in this regard was Dr. Nahum Goldmann.

Goldmann was a member of the Zionist delegation at Evian and headed the World Jewish Congress contingent. Together with Arthur Ruppin, he represented the Zionist movement at the conference. Under Ruppin's strong influence, he supported the work of the conference while

it was in progress. Upon its conclusion, on July 15, Goldmann issued, on behalf of the WJC, a declaration of satisfaction and identification with the conference, adding the WJC's readiness to cooperate with the intergovernmental commission which was set up to implement the conference resolutions.

Years later Goldmann expressed a different view, one which conformed with that of his colleagues in the leadership of the Zionist movement. In a program entitled "Friends Tell About Arthur Ruppin," broadcast on the Israeli Army radio station in January 1972, Goldmann pronounced that the Evian Conference had been "a shame and a scandal for the entire progressive world." In his memoirs, which were published that same year in Hebrew translation (from the German), he relates how his "blood boiled at the sight of prodigiously powerful governments which were ready to abandon Europe's Jews."

In a recorded conversation with this writer, on May 14, 1972, he confirmed several of the things I had gleaned from the written documents, partially retracted his comment about the "shame and scandal for the progressive world," and tried to explain why he had changed his original assessment of the Evian Conference. It is perhaps no accident that I was able to obtain a copy of the positive statement he made in 1938 not from him, but in the private archives of Adler-Rodell.

Pillar of Fire availed itself abundantly of Goldmann's testimony. A perusal of the album shows that he is quoted no fewer than five times on various subjects, most of them of paramount historical importance. Both sides seem to have been eager to cooperate. It seemed improbable that they simply forgot about Evian and that possible testimony by Goldmann about the conference did not come up for discussion. But the fact is that instead of an account by the person who knew more about the Evian Conference than any person still alive when the series was produced, a person was used whose involvement in the conference was partial at best and whose reliability as a witness on this subject is doubtful.

Thanks to the generous assistance of Mr. Lossin, I was able to learn something of the circumstances which led to the choice of Mrs. Meir as the witness for the Evian Conference. It emerged that the original choice was in fact Dr. Goldmann. He was interviewed on the subject in late 1977. In that interview he offered a negative assessment, noting in particular that Jewish organizations had dispatched "too many" delegations espousing divergent outlooks and advocating different proposals, with each contingent demanding to be heard and have its program implemented.

Just over a year later, in 1979, a few months before her death, Golda Meir was interviewed on the same subject, and it was her testimony that was selected for screening.

Besides these facts and approximate dates, I was unable to obtain *definite* information concerning the reasons and considerations which tipped the scales in favor of Golda Meir's version. I do not know what defects the producers found in Goldmann's testimony, or what made Golda Meir's remarks superior in their eyes. The truth is that the difference between the two versions is not great. Neither of them told the truth about what happened at Evian and both of them disavowed the stand of the Zionist delegation headed by Arthur Ruppin. In retrospect, however, Golda's testimony held out the possibility of historical profit and gain, this thanks to the "foulup" of the five professors who were entrusted with the task of preserving the scientific quality of the material due for publication. They failed to notice that in this, one of the last interviews Golda Meir granted, the great woman inadvertently revealed a secret which had been well hidden by the Holocaust historical establishment: that in 1938 at Evian she was in the opposition to the Zionist delegation, and in dispute with the members of the movement hierarchy who attended the conference.

If these pages are published and if they succeed in breaching the armored shell of the establishment, the chances of a thorough examination of the Evian episode will be vastly improved. I would like to think that a symbolic herald of this possibility is to be found in the recent election as head of the Zionist movement of the person who at the time conveyed to me, in Golda Meir's name, reasonable information concerning her nonparticipation in the Evian Conference.

* * * * *

The Great Erasure

The Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem was pleased when the Evian Conference concluded, on July 14, 1938, “with no substantial results.” When the head of the Zionist delegation to the conference, Arthur Ruppin, returned to Jerusalem and asked to report to the Executive on the delegation’s activity in Evian, he was permitted to do so in order to preserve internal peace.

The Jewish Agency Executive convened and heard him out. His proposals were listened to and recorded in the minutes. The participants made no response to his remarks, and no discussion was held. Thus ended Ruppin’s activity and the delegation’s. His and Nahum Goldmann’s reports on the conference were consigned to the archives, and the articles of Shneur Zalman Rubashov (Shazar), to *Davar*. The Evian Conference, insofar as it was reflected in the activity of these persons, was expunged from historical memory. David Ben-Gurion, who just two months earlier had named Ruppin to head the Zionist delegation, was able to bring the matter to a masterful conclusion.

This was the first erasure regarding the Evian affair. A relatively small erasure, easily enough executed. The related developments took no more time than the ten days of the conference itself. Only a few individuals were involved. The expunged material was quite limited in scope. Two organizational snags that marred the course of events at the conference subsequently enabled the description of events to be arbitrarily doctored.

The first foulup occurred when conference delegates, who had been requested to provide prior information on the laws and regulations prevailing in their countries on the admittance (or rejection) of foreigners in a special *closed* session, instead did so in *public* speeches. In some cases they accompanied their presentations with a pledge to open the gates to refugees. The relatively low standing of the delegates in their government hierarchies led several of them to word these pledges in a non-binding manner. As a result, some speeches created a (mistaken) impression of hypocrisy and of an uncaring attitude toward the plight of German Jewry.

A further hitch was caused by the decision of the conference organizers to allot a very brief time (a few minutes) for the submission of petitions by non-governmental delegations, most of them Jewish, who had come to Evian. This wrongheaded decision generated a feeling of unease and disappointment in these “private” delegations.

Combined, the two snags fully account for the complaints directed at the time against the Evian Conference. They were a pretext for criticism by the conference’s opponents, and remain so to this day. They did not bother Arthur Ruppin and Shneur Zalman Rubashov, or Nahum Goldmann, for that matter, while he attended the conference at Ruppin’s side. (For details and documentation, see my book, Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust, Hebrew, pp. 166-175.)

The historical establishment which assumed the task of memorializing the Holocaust adopted the version of the Zionist institutions and added criteria that readied it for academic usage. Firstly, the activity of the Zionist delegation at Evian was removed from the realm of research, as, ostensibly, being irrelevant to the issue. Here help was forthcoming from delegation member Nahum Goldmann, who at Evian worked closely with Ruppin but afterward disavowed everything he said and wrote at the time of the conference.

The establishment historians could not rest content with the “small erasure” carried out by Ben-Gurion and his colleagues. To support the conclusion that the Evian Conference ended “without results,” scholars in the universities and in research institutes are forced to delete from history, in addition to the ten days of the conference, an entire chapter: a period that lasted for over half a year and left abundant and well-documented traces. Attempts to doctor the events of that period were insufficient. Reliable signs indicate that establishment scholars reached the conclusion that some of the facts from this period must be discarded, at whatever cost. This conclusion then seems to have become a fixed norm.

A salient example of a Holocaust study marked by a thorough erasure of facts and events surrounding the Evian Conference and its aftermath is a book published some ten years ago which has since become a basic handbook, known and accepted by Holocaust researchers. I refer to a documentary collection entitled Documents on the

Holocaust, edited by three scholars, Professors Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman and Avraham Margalioth.

The editors write in the foreword: "The selected documents that follow are intended for students in university and in the upper grades of high school, and for all who have recourse to primary sources in order to study and understand the events and meaning of the Holocaust period."

A perusal of the volume shows that in general the editors collected documents generously, and provide the reader with much useful material. Against this background one flagrant and recalcitrant exception stands out. The chapter devoted to Germany and Austria comes to a virtual end with

Document No. 53--a passage from the speech delivered by Hitler on January 30, 1939. Between this date and the outbreak of World War II on September 1 of that year, only one event is deemed noteworthy: the establishment of the Federation of Jews in Germany on July 4. Beyond this, the editors had nothing with which to enlighten their readers.

In his preface to this chapter, its editor, Prof. Margalioth, writes: "The failure of the Evian Conference testified to the indifference of the world's nations to the fate of the Jews, and signaled Germany that it had nothing to fear from international pressure on behalf of the Jews." This statement is true only in part. And like many half-truths, it contains another half which is the opposite of the truth. In this case we can pinpoint the places that form the dividing line between truth and untruth.

As to whether Evian was a failure or a success, it will be recalled that on this issue Ben-Gurion and his aides differed with Ruppin and his associates. As is known, the historical establishment in Israel accepted Ben-Gurion's verdict and disregarded Ruppin's opinion. As for the claim about how the Germans interpreted the conference, the truth here extends only as far as December 1938. For six months the Nazis saw the conference results as confirming their belief that Jewish blood was expendable. And when the pretext arose, they staged on November 10 the huge pogrom known as *Kristallnacht* as the intended prelude to the swift and violent removal of the Jews from the Third Reich.

However, the vigorous reaction of the free world convinced the Germans unequivocally that their assessment was misplaced. The shock and fury that gripped broad sectors of the population in Europe and America, including pro-German and commercial circles, proved very damaging to German diplomacy, and particularly to the German economy. The Nazis were not long in reaching their conclusions. On November 12, two days after *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi leader Herman Goering chaired a consultation of ministers and officials devoted to the "accomplishments" of the pogrom. Yet just one month later, on December 15, the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht, acting on behalf of Goering, submitted to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees set up by the Evian Conference, a proposal for the orderly exodus of Jews from Germany and Austria.

Goering's first proposal via Schacht, dubbed by historians the "Schacht Plan," was rejected by Jewish organizations and their supporters because of the ultra-extortionist terms laid down by its author. Following Schacht's dismissal as Reichsbank president (not necessarily because of his stand on the Jewish Question), Goering invited the director of the

Intergovernmental Committee, *George Rublee*, to his house, and in an hour-long talk proposed that he continue the negotiations with a senior German official named Helmut Wohlthat. In this talk Goering expressed the wish that the discussions be expedited as much as possible until an agreement could be reached.

In practice, this is exactly what happened. Goering met with Rublee on January 21, 1939. Rublee made a brief trip to consult with staff of the Intergovernmental Committee, and returned to Berlin. His talks with Wohlthat began on January 25 and within a week produced a full accord. A few more days were needed to draft the document and to examine scrupulously the German and English versions. On February 7 Rublee submitted the text of the agreement to the Intergovernmental Committee, which approved it on the 12th.

This agreement--or "Rublee Plan," as it was known during the Holocaust period--set in motion a period of intercourse, albeit, of a constrained nature, between the German government and the Intergovernmental Committee (the "Evian Committee"). The response of the free countries to the events of *Kristallnacht* forced the Nazi

hierarchy to retreat from the violent road of removing the Jews. For their part, the Intergovernmental Committee and the governments that stood behind it assented to the Rublee Plan because they saw it as less baneful than the fate the Germans had in mind for German and Austrian Jewry.

There were two schools of thought in the Nazi Party concerning the "Jewish Problem," and each sought to win Hitler around to its view. Thus, in contrast to Ribbentrop, who was a proponent of the Nazis' usual brutal approach, Goering, whose responsibilities included economic affairs, concluded, pragmatically, that Berlin should find a way of compromise (perhaps temporarily...) with the Evian Committee. The signing of the agreement to implement the Rublee Plan demonstrates that Goering's view prevailed. The testimony of Robert Pell, Rublee's assistant and successor, shows that at least until the end of April, Hitler abided by his assent to the plan and cooperated with Goering in its implementation. No evidence exists that he retracted his agreement prior to the outbreak of the war in September 1939.

Most of the documentation concerning the Rublee Plan is incorporated in the reports drawn up by Rublee and Pell, and may be found in the U.S. State Department's series, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1939, Vol. II. By ignoring these documents, the editors of The Holocaust in Documentation lent a hand to the erasure of an important chapter in the history of the Holocaust. But they were not alone and not

the first. While they were contributing their share to the big erasure, other scholars were assiduously defending the small erasure. A group of professors who supervised the historical veracity of the television series Pillar of Fire came out with a "document" on the Evian Conference of which any similarity to history lies in the name alone. The logical consequences of the fact that the Holocaust memorialization establishment stuck to Ben-Gurion's version of the Evian Conference are plain to see. The small erasure brought in its wake an immense void in the historiography of the Israeli scholars.

Sensitive Matters

In September 1975, Yad Vashem held a conference devoted to the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. Senior researchers of the institution took part, and their lectures were subsequently published in a special collection (The Hungarian Jewish Leadership in the Crucible of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem, 1976). Summing up the conference, Prof. Yehuda Bauer stated:

"However, we did not dare address the issue of the Aid and Rescue Committee. These are still such sensitive matters that somehow, by unwritten and unspoken agreement, we refrained from dealing with them. Yet this is misguided. Because this issue is one of the most central and most serious problems. For it involves not only the Aid and Rescue Committee or Otto Komoly or Israel Kastner, not only the famous mission of Joel Brand--it has to do with what some of the speakers characterized as the main thrust... The trees are important, and they are still unrevealed; the forest is obscure, its general contours are still not known, not yet clear" (pp. 153, 154).

The explanation adduced for this surprising phenomenon is as significant as the phenomenon itself. It emerges that the inability of Yad Vashem researchers to present a paper on the Aid and Rescue Committee is a general characteristic of everyone affiliated with the institution. Because the matter remains so sensitive and so delicate, not a single researcher "dared" to deal with it. Yet the affair has been discussed in various forums, both in Israel and abroad, for years. It has been the subject of judicial deliberations in two major trials, one of which (Greenwald vs. Kastner) was devoted exclusively to this subject, and was concluded in 1957. The second case (the Eichmann trial) was concluded in 1962. But 15 years later it turns out that "the trees" (the details) have yet to be revealed, while "the forest" (the subject in general) is still extremely obscure. Both arenas of activity of the Aid and Rescue Committee--the Kastner affair and the Brand mission--continue to be "taboo" at Yad Vashem. This in the winter of 1976.

Two years later, an effort was made to break the taboo in the less sensitive arena--the Brand mission--in isolation from the other sphere, when Prof. Yehuda Bauer

published an extensive article in Yalkut Moreshet (November 1978, pp. 23-60) entitled "The Mission of Joel Brand." The article was detailed and abundantly documented. The discussion was balanced and substantive. Prof. Bauer raised a number of important points and suggests interesting interpretations for several facts (biographical details about Joel Brand, his personality traits, his relations with the Gestapo and with German counter-intelligence personnel, his

credibility or non-credibility on various topics, the idea to bomb Auschwitz, and others). One salient innovation was his account of the relationship and connection between the missions on which the Nazis sent Joel Brand, and the professional smuggler Bandi Grosz.

Prof. Bauer concluded, on the basis of Grosz's testimony in Cairo and in the Greenwald-Kastner trial, that contrary to the generally accepted view, it was Grosz and not Brand who had the leading role in their joint mission. Bauer maintains that the S.S. was primarily interested in the Grosz mission: to propose to the Western Allies, England and the U.S., a separate peace directed against the Soviet Union, "The two were sent by the S.S., at Himmler's order, to prepare the ground for negotiations on a separate peace." Moreover, "Brand's proposal was the opening gambit for such negotiations, and served also as a cover for the true intentions" (p. 55). This is the author's *first conclusion* of the three conclusions with which he ends his article. It is also the only conclusion based directly on arguments and evidence contained in the article itself.

Prof. Bauer's account is actually a *conjecture* which has yet to be proved, and it cannot pretend to be anything more. The Nazis left behind few traces that constitute unequivocal evidence concerning their plans and intentions. In some cases a Holocaust researcher (like a researcher in any other field) has no choice but to collect fragmentary data in the field, classify them according to their probability and relevance, and construct from them a reasonable account. If he has managed not to overlook important relevant facts, and to interpret and assemble his data correctly, he has a good chance of coming up with a "working hypothesis" which will explain all the known facts with certainty and provide answers to all the relevant questions. In such cases the researcher is successful and his field of expertise is enriched.

We will now examine whether and to what degree Prof. Bauer's conjecture fits the requirements of a "working hypothesis." For the sake of convenience, we will first summarize the article's two other conclusions.

The second conclusion is that the Allies, England and the U.S., did not conduct themselves fittingly. True, the author does not believe that there it was feasible that they would accept the proposal as formulated by Brand. "This was out of the question. But this was not the main thing. The Allies were under no obligation to supply the Nazis with war materiel... Certainly they were not obligated to conduct genuine negotiations on a separate peace. All they were requested to do by Brand and Sharett was *to conduct negotiations*. A negotiating process of this kind, which would produce no substantial results, might *save human lives*. Indeed, this was

precisely the course followed by *Saly Mayer* in the negotiations he conducted from August 1944-February 1945. It is impossible to say how many lives, *if any*, could have been saved in this manner. But the Allies had a moral imperative to try, even if only one life could be saved. The fact that no such attempt was made during the Brand mission, conflicted with the free world's declared war goals."

The third conclusion follows from the second: "The true conclusion is not that Brand failed, or that his mission failed--it was *the democracies* that failed" (pp. 55-56; all emphases added).

Let us return to Conclusion No. 1. The first thing that stands out in Prof. Bauer's account is that this was a *scheme of one mind, the mind of Himmler*. Throughout the article, the author identifies the S.S. with Himmler, as though the organization and its leader were interchangeable. When he speaks about "traits of the S.S. or "S.S. intentions," he is really referring to traits and intentions of Himmler. He perceives the S.S. commander as sole initiator, judge and decider, with all the others merely endeavoring to do his will.

This view would have been acceptable in normal times. Himmler, the all-powerful ruler of Nazi Germany, was accountable only to the great *Fuehrer* Adolf Hitler. The organizations and institutions under Himmler's command were loyal to him and were subjected to iron discipline, in them his word was law, and no one dared

contradict him. But all this applied in normal times, before cracks appeared in the edifice of Nazi rule. One of the first visible cracks in that edifice took the form of a confrontation between Himmler and one of his subordinates, Adolf Eichmann.

The Holocaust historian Gerald Reitlinger says that in the final months of the war the fate of the Jews incarcerated in the ghettos and concentration camps depended on the will of three people: Hitler, who desired their death, his own death and the deaths of many of his own people, the Germans; Himmler, who wanted to sell them alive to the Allies in return for receiving personal immunity; and Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who deluded himself into thinking that it would be to his advantage to frustrate Himmler's stratagem.¹ It is safe to say that *a year earlier, in April-May 1944*, when the Brand mission was planned and executed, Hitler was not yet contemplating suicide or considering German deaths on a mass scale. The passive opposition of devout S.S. personnel to their commander's innovativeness had not yet attained the dimensions it would reach a few months later. But even then a clear conflict of loyalties and intentions was discernible. The Nazi Krumei addressed himself trenchantly to this conflict, according to Brand's testimony in his book, Mission of the

Condemned: "Shortly before liftoff [to Istanbul] Krumei took me aside and asked me not to forget him during the negotiations in Turkey. I was to make it known there that not everyone in the S.S. was like Eichmann, but that there were also decent officers like himself and Wisliceny. For his part, he would do everything he could to rescue Jews. In his words I could sense his fear of the catastrophe looming for the Nazi regime" (pp. 103-104).

Krumei may really have said this as insurance in the event of a Nazi defeat. But implicit in his words was something more, which Brand, unfortunately, failed to register or grasp. Besides imparting information about differences within the Nazi leadership, Krumei sounded a hint and a warning: *Do not believe Eichmann*. Someone other than Joel Brand, someone more perceptive, might have been able to glean more from this important message.

Krumei's tacit warning was borne out a thousand-fold. Eichmann, the faithful assistant to Kaltenbrunner and Mueller, went to Budapest not to compromise with the Jews but to exterminate them. This was the devout and bloodthirsty Nazi who just days before the collapse of the Third Reich boasted to his colleague, Wisliceny, that he would leap happily into his grave because the feeling that he had five million people on his conscience was for him a source of extraordinary satisfaction. A better documented incident attests to his stubborn determination to carry out his task. About a week after the Regent Horthy prohibited deportations from Hungary, Eichmann's officers transported 1,500 Jews from the *Kistarcsa* camp near Budapest. When Horthy learned of this, he ordered the train stopped while it was still in Hungary and returned to *Kistarcsa*. But Eichmann managed to outmaneuver both him and the Jews, and a few days later the deportation was effected once more, this time successfully.

In order to bypass obstacles and facilitate his work in difficult geographical and political conditions, Eichmann made use of far-reaching stratagems and was even ready for "sacrifices" in the form of *temporarily* forgoing the murder of a few hundred or a few thousand Jews. Thus, he agreed to release 1,700 Jews from the "train of the privileged," but instead of sending them to Spain, as he had promised, he had them taken to Bergen-Belsen, where they remained for another six months before he was forced to release them. In another case, he sent 17,000 Jews to work at the Stutthoff industrial works in Austria--this at Kaltenbrunner's order--and described the transport as a gesture of mercy toward the Jews, since he was keeping them "on ice" instead of dispatching them directly to Auschwitz. Were it not for the drastic changes that occurred in the military

situation in both the East and the West, it's doubtful whether the privileged on the train or the detainees at Stutthoff would have emerged alive and free, and the same applies to the Jewish officials who handled their cases.

Eichmann, who prepared the Hungarian operation with precise planning and a detailed timetable, was determined to execute the operation in its full scope and in the shortest possible time. The country was divided into five zones (with the city of Budapest forming a sixth zone). A daily quota of deportees was set: four trains of 45

¹ Gerald Reitlinger, The Final Solution, Perpetua Books, 1961, p. 461.

cars each, 70 people in each car (standing)--all told, 12,000 (twelve thousand) men, women and children.²

The precision of the plan is apparent from the operational data. In the period from May 15, 1944, when the deportations began, until June 7, 1944--a period in which deportations were carried out in areas of dense Jewish population in Carpatho-Russia and Transylvania--the daily average stood at 12,000 persons, according to Nazi records, and a total of 289,357 Jews were deported. In three other zones, excluding Budapest, where conditions were less favorable to the Nazis, the pace was slowed and "only" 143,045 Jews were deported within one month. Hungarian and German records show that Eichmann managed to send more than 430,000 Jews to Auschwitz before he was forced, for reasons beyond his control, to stop the deportations.³

In each locale the Jews were very briefly herded into ghettos before the deportations. Prior to the deportation from Budapest, an interim plan was drawn up, with the active participation of the German Foreign Office, for the transfer of all the city's Jews to a certain island in the Danube. An intensive one-day operation was planned, involving Eichmann's *Sonderkommando*, the Hungarian Gendarmerie from the capital and the provinces, as well as the postmen and chimney sweeps of Budapest. In early July, the Gendarmerie began arriving in Budapest, on the pretext of attending a festival, but at the last moment Horthy ordered their removal from the capital.

These are all ironclad facts, documented at the time they occurred. Their import, which is in no doubt, is that Eichmann carried out the annihilation with all the cruelty and efficiency he could muster, and showed no disposition to slacken the operation even for a moment, not even for the week or two during which Joel Brand said he had been assured that no Jews would be sent to Auschwitz. The facts also indicate that where the fate of Jews was concerned, Eichmann had a free hand, at least until the final deportation from Kistarcsa (July 19, 1944),

independent of whatever Himmler had planned or not planned. A clear knowledge of these solid facts, which do not appear in Prof. Bauer's essay, leads to a series of conclusions which cannot be squared with his and show them in an unflattering light.

It turns out that the opposite side to the potential rescuers of Hungarian Jewry was in fact not the hesitating and vacillating Himmler, but the crafty and energetic Eichmann who strove with all his might to continue the destruction of the Jews, no matter what. We do not know what Himmler thought about Eichmann's intentions and how he thought to integrate the mission of Joel Brand and Bandi Grosz. In retrospect, it is clear that this was of no importance, since Himmler's plans did not determine Eichmann's actions. By the same token, no importance should be attached to Prof. Bauer's description of the priority given to the Bandi Grosz mission, as spelled out in Conclusion No. 1. By ignoring the two basic germane facts--Eichmann's deeds and his partial independence of Himmler--Bauer forfeited any chance of formulating a "working hypothesis" for his study.

Prof. Bauer's failure at the academic level to interpret an affair from the past parallels the failure--but one which bore very concrete ramifications--of Jewish functionaries in Jerusalem and Budapest in 1944 to decipher Eichmann's ploy. They, too, needed a "working hypothesis" which was based on facts and could provide a key enabling a reasonable prognosis to be made of additional facts which still lay in the future. Yet there was one person among them who almost from the very outset of Brand's mission grasped what was afoot, suggested a "working hypothesis" which explained everything, and even tried, in his own way, to prevent what he foresaw would occur. The tragic predicament in which this man, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, found himself in the case of Hungarian Jewry, deserves special mention and a more detailed study.

Prof. Bauer's two "practical" conclusions are no better grounded than his principal conclusion. His second argument, that "a negotiating process of this kind, which would produce no substantial results, might save human lives," doesn't have a leg to stand on. Generally, it is a recommended and accepted measure to try to gain time by negotiating with criminals in order to rescue people they are holding (kidnap victims, hostages, prisoners, and so forth). But what is the proper course of action when it is not clear or certain whether by negotiating one may perhaps be *losing time*

² Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, *From the Depths*, p. 103.

³ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, U.S. ed., 1967, pp. 535-547; Livia Rotkirchen, in the collection *Hungarian Jewry in the Crucible of the Holocaust*, p. 48.

instead of gaining time, and that the other side is using the negotiations to mislead and as a cover to carry out his designs. In that case it is necessary, often at the last minute, to take urgent and drastic action

in order to prevent a total disaster and to save what can still be saved. This is exactly what happened in the case of Joel Brand's mission, except that the drastic and urgent measures were not taken at the initiative of the Jewish representatives.⁴

It is perhaps because these facts were known to Prof. Bauer that the case he presents is singularly unconvincing. He is aware of the fact that there was no prospect of the Allies accepting the Nazis' proposals. However, he insists, "this was not the main thing." The main thing was to negotiate with the Nazis and thereby to save lives. Then it emerges that he is not certain that tangible results could have been achieved in this manner. He postulates that it is impossible to say how many people might have been saved, if any. But even this is not the main thing; the main thing, he believes, is that the free world's moral imperative and its declared war aims should have enjoined the Allies to try to hold talks with the Nazis, as the Jewish representatives asked. Maybe it wouldn't have helped, but it wouldn't have hurt to try.

But would it really not have hurt?

To get a proper perspective, we will recapitulate briefly the circumstances of the time and the events. The time is late June and early July, 1944. Moshe Sharett is in London together with Chaim Weizmann in order to urge forcefully that negotiations be undertaken with the Nazis on the Eichmann-Brand proposal. In Hungary, Eichmann proceeds with the deportations efficiently, according to plan. He is able to transport 400,000 Jews to Auschwitz, emptying virtually the whole country of Jews with the exception of the capital. Under his direction plans are being concluded for a lightning one-day operation to remove the entire Jewish population of Budapest to a temporary ghetto on an island in the Danube, from where they will be dispatched to Auschwitz in short order. The operation to annihilate Hungarian Jewry is nearly completed. If the present pace can be maintained, it is only a matter of weeks before Hungary will be *Judenrein*.

In the midst of all this, official Jewish representatives seem to be in a daze. In London and New York they continue to plead with the Allies to do nothing that might thwart the great plan of deliverance. In Budapest, where the final stage of the operation is about to begin, the wily Eichmann conjures up for the mesmerized Jewish officials a delusory vision of the train of the privileged, ostensibly "on its way to freedom" (but which actually ends up at Bergen-Belsen). And in Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion tells the Jewish Agency Executive, partly in his name and partly in the name of a Hungarian official, that "heading the anti-Jewish action in Hungary is now an S.S. leader who is a 'decent' man, in his view."⁵

And all this is occurring at the edge of the abyss.

During the Holocaust it sometimes happened that at the entrance to the gas chambers the victims would be welcomed by a relatively courteous Nazi who distributed bars of soap and told the Jews how good they would feel after going through the "wash" and travelling to their new destination. He might be assisted by prisoners working in the gas chambers, who backed up his lie. Reassured, the Jews entered the hall of death. And then everything changed in a twinkling. The show was over, cruel reality reasserted itself.

Eichmann staged his macabre spectacle across whole countries and continents. When the concluding operation was imminent, he found voluntary lobbyists who did not cease importuning others to remain faithful to the dialogue with him. Had these helpers succeeded, had the free world followed through on the Brand mission, as the Jewish representatives urged in 1944, and as Prof. Bauer, citing the moral imperative, definitely wishes they had 30 years later, it is probable that by July or August, Eichmann would have completed his mission and that not a trace would have remained of Hungarian Jewry. There is no reason to think that under those circumstances the successful Nazi would have missed the opportunity "to settle accounts" with the 1,700 "privileged" from the Kastner train awaiting their fate at Bergen-Belsen, and for that matter with Kastner himself and his aides, for whom Eichmann would no longer have had any use.

⁴ For additional details, see the author's *Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust*, pp. 358-374.

⁵ Minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, July 2, 1944.

Fortunately for the Jews of Budapest, the would-be rescuers did not heed the pleading of the functionaries, who very nearly brought a quick and bitter end to their ostensible dispatchers. Eichmann's plot was thwarted at the last minute by the intervention of the War Refugee Board established several months earlier in the United States expressly to rescue Jews. In the second half of June, the WRB was able to enlist the aid of international forces to extricate the vestiges of Hungarian Jewry still remaining in Budapest. The U.S. and Swedish governments, the International Red Cross and the Vatican appealed to Horthy in the strongest terms to stop the deportations to Auschwitz. On July 2, Budapest was bombed by 600 American aircraft, and a few days later Horthy ordered a halt to the transports.⁶ Eichmann's plan for July was not carried out, and the immediate threat of annihilation hanging over Budapest's Jews was removed for three months, until October 15, when Horthy was ousted by the Germans and by Hungarian Fascists.

None of these events are mentioned in Prof. Bauer's article, as though they were immaterial. After eulogizing the Brand mission and

reprimanding the democracies, he loses interest in whether or not Budapest's Jews were rescued. He may return to the subject if one day he decides to deal with the other arena of the crisis of Hungarian Jewry--the Israel Kastner (and Moshe Kraus) affair. In the meantime, it is clear that any attempt to separate and detach one arena from the other is doomed to failure. The two are interwoven and intertwined, and both represent "sensitive matters" which the staff of Yad Vashem, as Prof. Bauer notes, do not "dare address." His contribution is that by conspicuously disregarding the rescue activity of the War Refugee Board, he shows plainly that this affair too belongs to that category of subjects which are "taboo" in the establishment Israeli institute for Holocaust research.

⁶ Testimony of Pinhas Freidiger in the Eichmann trial, p. 759; testimony of Moshe Kraus in the Greenwald-Kastner trial as related by Shalom Rosenberg in File 124, p. 166; Menachem Bader, Melancholy Missions, p. 108.