

THE JEWISH PRESS

and the

HOLOCAUST

1939-1945

*Palestine, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union*

YOSEF GORNY

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## The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939–1945

This book presents the results of comprehensive research into the world's Jewish press during World War II and explores its stance in the face of annihilation of the Jewish people by the Nazi regime in Europe. The research is based on the major Jewish newspapers that were published in four countries – Palestine, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – and in three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. The Jewish press frequently described the situation of the Jewish people in occupied countries. It urged the Jewish leaders and institutions to act in rescue of their brethren. It protested vigorously against the refusal of the democratic leadership to recognize that the Jewish plight was unique because of the Nazi intention to annihilate Jews as a people. Yosef Gorny argues that the Jewish press was the persistent open national voice fighting on behalf of the Jewish people suffering and perishing under Nazi occupation.

Yosef Gorny is professor emeritus of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University, where he served since 1970. His main fields of interest and research are the history of Zionism; the building of the Jewish national entity in Eretz-Israel (Palestine); the Jewish–Arab conflict; the relations between the State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora in the United States and in Europe; the Zionist labor movement in Palestine and the anti-Zionist labor movement in Eastern Europe. His books include *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882–1948: A Study of Ideology*; *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought: The Quest for Collective Identity*; *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897–1985*; and *Between Auschwitz and Jerusalem*. He has been a visiting professor at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York University, Illinois State University at Urbana, and the University of Chicago.



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*Translated by* NAFTALI GREENWOOD



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*To Geulah – my partner in life and work*



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
Introduction: The Transnational Community	i
PART I FROM CONCERN TO OUTCRY – 1939–1942	21
1. The Hebrew-Language Press in Palestine	23
2. The American Jewish Press	80
PART II THE ILLUSION DASHED – 1942–1945	103
3. The Hebrew-Language Press in Palestine	105
4. The American Jewish Press, 1942–1945	143
5. The British Jewish Press, 1939–1945	176
6. The Brief Days of Jewish National Unity: <i>Aynikayt</i> , 1942–1945	185
PART III THE INDIVIDUAL CONFRONTS THE HORROR	203
7. Yitzhak Gruenbaum – “The Main Culprit”	205
8. The Intellectuals’ Delusional Optimism	220
9. Between Lidice and Majdanek	231
10. Remarks on the Continuing Jewish Angst	251
Conclusion: The Cry of the Helpless	267
<i>Bibliography</i>	275
<i>Index</i>	279





## Preface

This study concerns itself with the way the Jewish press in the free world reported and understood the plight of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe.

As I wound up my research, it occurred to me that my investigation began not in libraries in Israel, New York, and London, but much earlier: when the Soviet authorities exiled my family – to its good fortune – to the fringes of Siberia, whence we migrated to Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia.

In the place where we lived in Kyrgyzstan, there was a large sugar factory where most of the refugees who had gathered there worked. On the bulletin board affixed to the factory gate, the official state newspaper, *Izvestia*, was posted every day. Almost every day on my way home from school, I passed this location to read the headlines that described how the war was progressing. Thus, I became something of a commentator on military affairs, interpreting the battles on the various fronts for my Russian, Polish, and Jewish classmates. As I did my research for this book, I found a similarity between the Russian press from my childhood and the Jewish one that I investigated. It had to do with the blaring headlines that these newspapers regularly devoted to the demarches of the war on the Soviet front: The headlines were almost the same in form. In contrast, the main American and British newspapers that I perused for comparison purposes – *The New York Times*, *The Times of London*, and so forth – invested such emphasis only in special developments on the war front.

The memory of it gave me a “split personality.” I became, on the one hand, a scholar who examines the matter anachronistically and in a broad global context, and on the other hand, a person who had been there, in real time, as a boy who had an adult and very mordant social awareness that surmounted his years.

Thus, the sense of personal involvement in this study stayed with me from beginning to end. For example, I found an item in *The Jewish Chronicle* from a Polish underground newspaper that reported the impressions of a traveler who, on his way from his hometown to Warsaw, passed through my place of birth, Wyszaków, and saw thousands of Jews being led along by German

soldiers. Today we know that they were being marched to their death. My parents and I might have been among them had it not been for a stroke of good luck: A firebomb thrown from a German aircraft passing over our town burned our home to the ground. As a result, we were forced to flee to Warsaw, and after that city was occupied, as stated, we made our way to Lwów, which was controlled by a Communist regime. From Lwów, fortunately, the Soviet authorities banished us to the edge of Siberia – thanks to which we survived.

Thus I, the researcher, was one of those whom the Jewish press recounted, although a luckier one than most of the others. It was my lot to be different from colleagues who researched that period, whether they had experienced it personally as young people or children or whether they had had no personal experiential connection with it because they were too young at the time. What made me special was where I stood relative to the inferno: concurrently inside and out.

I must admit that as I immersed myself in the research and progressed toward its conclusion, I was repeatedly perturbed by the question of whether my subjective memories were not interfering with my efforts as a researcher to assess the past as objectively as possible by observing the arena of events from afar. This question, however, also confronted me from another perspective: Do my personal recollections not give me an *ab initio* advantage that allows me to understand better what people felt in those years? Here I refer in particular to the main concept in this study: the awareness of the Jewish collective powerlessness, influenced by the personal powerlessness of a child who had stumbled into a foreign environment that, I admit, did not persecute him but mistreated him anyway because it did not want him around.

Here I cannot refrain from sharing a personal memory that occasionally accompanies me to this day. Back then I had a friend, a Russian boy. One day, after I read the newspaper headlines, I encountered him and cried joyfully: “Our army liberated that city!” He stared at me in amazement. “Yours?” he blurted. “It’s not yours, it’s ours!”

And I fell silent, knowing that he was right.

There is no doubt that my personal powerlessness also influenced my perception of the collective powerlessness of *klal Yisrael*. Furthermore, I think I would not overstate the case by adding the personal memory to the Jewish national fate. I hope that readers who take an interest in the topic will agree with me.

Writing a study is not a solo act; the researcher cannot but avail him/herself of others. Accordingly, I am indebted to everyone who helped me complete this book. The first to thank are the staff of the Palestine Hebrew Press Microfilm Department at Tel Aviv University, the YIVO (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut) Archives in New York, the New York Public Library – Dorot Jewish Division, the Jewish Theological Seminary library, and the British Library in London. I am also thankful to Yitzhak Gershon, then the manager of Yad Tabenkin, the research and documentation center of the kibbutz movement, for his support.

## Introduction

### *The Transnational Community*

*Mir zaynen nit kayn stade eynzame geshlogene yekhidim,  
Mir zaynen a kibuts, a folk.*

[We're not a herd of isolated and battered individuals – we're a collective, we're a people.]

*Idisher Kemfer*, June 24, 1942

Scholars who undertake to describe and analyze the Jewish Holocaust using historical methodology have been doing so – to this day – on the basis of a diverse spectrum of sources: copious state and institutional archives; personal memoirs of victims and their executioners; literary works; and the daily press, foremost the international one.

This study discusses how the Jews' plight in the Nazi-occupied countries during World War II (1939–1945) was reflected in the Jewish press in Palestine, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. What I mean by “reflect” is the information that these newspapers presented in its various forms and the awareness that the information generated. It was this awareness that shaped the stances that this press took on what was happening in continental Europe as the Jewish society there was being destroyed. This awareness also influenced the way overt Jewish public action for the rescue of European Jewry was assessed in state diplomatic echelons and at the grassroots political level – for example, in protest demonstrations and rallies – and at the level of public morality, especially when it came to direct assistance for those interned in ghettos in Eastern Europe and refugees who had managed to escape from the occupied countries.

As for the term “transnational community,” see: Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg, “Debating Transnationalism”; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “New Transnational Communities and Networks: Globalization Changes in Civilizational Frameworks,” in *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis)order*, edited by Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 1–25, 29–45.

This study, the first on the topic, uses a comparative method to investigate concurrently the stance of the relevant newspapers in these four countries. This method distinguishes it from other studies on the Jewish press during that era, which focused separately on each of the countries in question: Palestine, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in contrast to previous research efforts, we concern ourselves with the Jewish press in these four countries, written in three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. The most important trove from our standpoint is the American and British Yiddish-language press, which has not yet been researched thoroughly and systematically as a source for understanding the trends of thought in Jewish society during the relevant years.

Additionally and chiefly, our study discusses the comprehensive Jewish public discourse during the years of disaster that changed Jewish history. Among the Jews, far-flung across the free world, this discourse unleashed communal transnational ethnic feelings and collective existential angst. This concern was expressed in the four Jewish communities that we examine, thousands of kilometers from each other and set in different cultural surroundings and political conditions: British Jewry, firmly rooted in British culture; the large Jewish immigrant society in the United States, still linked to the culture of East European Jewry; the Yishuv (the Hebrew and Zionist Jewish community in Palestine), and Soviet Jewry, transformed by the war. Several factors explain this phenomenon. The first is linguistic. Yiddish and Hebrew were unique to this collective and played a premier role in shaping the modern Jewish national consciousness as a community in accordance with three worldviews: Zionist, Bundist, and Yiddishist. The second is the close causal relationship between the upsurge of Jewish distress in Europe and the reinforcement of the shared national awareness of the unity of fate of *klal Yisrael*, the “Jewish commonwealth,” a relationship that transcended the spiritual and ideological disagreements and rifts that existed among members of this *klal*. The third factor was the sense of shared fate among people who were not totally accepted in their countries of residence. I refer here to the antisemitic trends of thought in the United States and the United Kingdom during the war years,<sup>2</sup> the political hostility of the British Mandate regime toward the Yishuv,

<sup>1</sup> See Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933–1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 278; Robert W. Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 259; Laurel Leff, “When the Facts Didn’t Speak for Themselves: The Holocaust in the *New York Times*, 1939–1945,” in Robert Moses Shapiro (ed.), *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism during the Holocaust* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2003), 51–77; Max Frenkel, “Turning Away from the Holocaust,” *ibid.*; Marvin Kalb, “Journalism and the Holocaust,” *ibid.*; Colin Shindler, “The ‘Thunderer’ and the Coming of the Shoah, 1933–1942,” *ibid.*; Dina Porat and Mordechai Naor (eds.), *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit be-Eretz Yisrael nokhab ha-sho’ah 1939–1945*, [The Jewish Press in Eretz Israel and the Holocaust, 1939–1945] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002, in Hebrew). Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 10 in this volume.

and the Soviet Union's nonrecognition of Jewry as an equally entitled national minority among the diverse national movements in the USSR. Fourth, one must not forget that many correspondents and editors of these newspapers in the four countries that had such papers were personally acquainted with each other during their years of public activism in Jewish society.

My proposition about the existence of the "transnational community" leads to the quest for commonalities in the portrait of this multilingual and multicultural press.

The first commonality we find is that this press was foremost a vehicle for the dissemination of ideologies; its political expression, typical of western newspapers in democracies, was of secondary importance. Examining this premise country by country, one may say that in Palestine, *Ha'aretz*, with a daily circulation of around 11,000, expressed a liberal general Zionist approach; *Davar* (circulation 15,000) carried the message of Socialist Zionism; *Haboqer* (circulation 5,000) belonged to the right wing of the General Zionists stream; *Hatzofe* spread the messages of National Religious Zionism; and *Hamashqif* represented the thinking of the Revisionist Movement. In all, their circulation came to around 40,000.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, we find five national-circulation newspapers in Yiddish. The first, the largest and oldest, was the well-known *Forverts*, which adhered closely to the Jewish trade-union line. Its circulation was 121,000 on weekdays and 147,000 on weekends. The second, *Der Tog*, exhibited a liberal general Zionist persuasion and was circulated in 55,000–57,000 copies. The third, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal*, belonged to the Religious-Zionist Mizrahi Movement; its circulation was 54,000–56,000.<sup>4</sup> The fourth, *Morgn-Frayhayt*, organ of the Jewish section of the American Communist Party, was circulated in around 12,000 copies.<sup>5</sup> By including two weekly journals of the Po'alei Tziyon party – the Yiddish-language *Idisher Kemfer* and the English-language *Jewish Frontier* – we bring the total circulation to around 300,000. The English-language weeklies that were published by various Jewish institutions and the local press in major Jewish centers, such as Chicago, should also be added.

In Great Britain, the principal English-language Jewish newspaper was the explicitly Zionist *Jewish Chronicle*. The Revisionist Movement had its own English-language journal, *The Jewish Standard*. In Yiddish, two papers appeared: *Di Tsayt*, Zionist and associated with the Zionist Labor Movement, and the Orthodox Agudath Israel weekly, *Di Vokhntsaytung*.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the diverse ideological complexion of these newspapers, when it came to defending the Jews' civil political status in these countries and cultivating and developing the Jewish national culture in both of its

<sup>3</sup> Source of data: Mordechai Naor and Dina Porat (eds.), *The Jewish Press in Eretz Israel and the Holocaust, 1939–1945*, in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> According to official data of an independent office, published in *Forverts* on October 21, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Figure reported by the Jewish section of the Party.

<sup>6</sup> Data on the circulation of these publications are not available.

languages – Yiddish and Hebrew – they were united. In the political field, the critical civic stance of *The Jewish Chronicle* toward the policies of the Palestine Mandatory Government, particularly during the war years, when Britain was embroiled in an existential struggle against Nazi Germany, was especially noteworthy.

The American Jewish press expressed a vigorous political stance that it accompanied with a patriotic tenor of appreciation and gratitude for the civil equality that the American Jewish immigrants enjoyed. In Palestine, in turn, the Hebrew-language press fought for the political rights that the country's Jewish inhabitants were owed under the League of Nations mandate to Britain. Importantly, there was nothing novel about insisting on Jews' civil rights in the interwar period; the Jewish press in Poland championed this cause during those years. However, the situation was different in the case at hand: The two large democracies, Britain and the United States, had gone to war against the Nazis, a circumstance pregnant with implications for limiting criticism of a democratic regime that was fighting for its life. The press' main cause in this respect was uninterrupted and vigorous protest against antisemitic manifestations in both countries, especially in the United States, where a diversely complexed antisemitic movement developed precisely during the war years.<sup>7</sup> In Great Britain, the press spiritedly censured the antisemitic manifestations that came to light in the Polish army units that were stationed on British soil under British Army auspices. Superseding all of these was the main allegation against the democracies concerning the absence of a worthy effort to rescue Jews. We return to this matter later in the book.

The second commonality, a very important one from the standpoint of the existence of a "transnational community," was the Jewish press' self-awareness of its national mission in the cultural and emotional senses. It was a conceptual state of mind in which, consciously and inadvertently, Dubnowism and Zionism blended into a single national sentiment. The best evidence of this way of expressing national togetherness surfaced in the Communist journal *Morgn-Frayhayt*, which demonstrated its Jewish national identity consistently and vigorously from the time Nazi Germany invaded the USSR. It was argued at the time – and may still be argued – that this was done in the service of Soviet interests and at Soviet behest. This is only partly correct. I discuss this matter later in the book on the basis of the vacillations of the paper's editors on the Jewish national question even before the war, when Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany concluded their treaty, and the excitement that they evinced when they beheld the Red Army's heroic war against Hitler's armies. Both of these are highly significant for our understanding of the emotional charge that underlies the transnational-community concept.

The same holds true at the opposite extreme, the Zionist Hebrew-language press. These publications ostensibly toed a "Palestinocentric" ideological line, which would seem to clash with the pan-national principle of *klal Yisrael*. This

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 10 in this volume.

press, however, although written in a language understood by only a minority of the Jews, had the goal – from its own perspective – of shaping the future of the entire Jewish people. From this standpoint, “Palestinocentrism” should be the foundation of *klal Yisrael*. Concurrently, the American and British Jewish press, especially in its Yiddish-language opuses, also embraced the Yishuv as the place where the Jews could fulfill their national aspirations by their own strength, given the utter inability of the Jews in the free countries to prevail on their governments to take energetic rescue action.

These traits were also important among the non-Hebrew newspapers. In 1945, before the war ended, the American Jewish press marked in symbolic ways the seventy-fifth anniversary of the debut of the first Yiddish-language newspaper in the United States.<sup>8</sup> *Forverts* devoted a special editorial to the occasion, written in the spirit of the historical editor, Abraham Cahan, if not by him personally. Relating to the Yiddish-language press, the product of the great society of East European Jewish immigrants, the editorialist stressed the contribution of the press to the modernization process that this society had undergone, easing the immigrants’ adjustment to the new society. The press helped spread progressive ideas in Jewish society; its Socialist and Anarchist organs played an important role in the establishment of the Jewish trade unions; and it was the first to disseminate Yiddish-language Jewish literature. Here lay its singularity relative to the general press, which set aside no room for works of literature.

Having addressed the social and ethno-cultural contribution of this press, the editorialist went on to discuss its national role. This role was manifested primarily in its contribution to the transformation of an inchoate mass of immigrants, a cluster of “human dust” (*tsushtoybter idisher emigrantn mase*), into a public imbued with national political consciousness from which the Jewish national movement (*der entwicklung fun der idisher natsyonaler bavegung*) – in its American ethnic form, of course – evolved. Furthermore, the editorial continued, this press had helped strengthen relations between American Jews and their counterparts elsewhere, foremost in Europe. In this capacity it even earned recognition from leaders of the American Jewish elite that did not trace its roots to Eastern Europe and Yiddish culture, such as Louis Marshall.

The editorial ended by expressing hope, accompanied by doubt, that this press would continue to serve the Jewish public and nurture its culture for many years to come, although there was no guarantee that its existence would be assured forever.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, fifty years later, doubt triumphed over hope; the circulation of the last of the historical Yiddish-language papers, *Forverts*, plummeted to one-tenth of what it had been at the jubilee. Meanwhile, however, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* expressed the same spirit of satisfaction and hope at the time.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The debut took place in 1870; in its aftermath, several additional papers made their first appearance in the same decade. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v., “Press.”

<sup>9</sup> *Forverts*, March 4, 1945.

<sup>10</sup> *Der Morgen Dzhurnal*, April 4, 1945.



Importantly, the emphasis that this press placed on its contribution to the consolidation of the American Jewish national cultural consciousness corresponded to the teachings of the liberal philosopher Horace Kallen (1882–1974), who advocated a multicultural society as opposed to the melting-pot theory. In the opinion of the liberal Zionist newspaper *Der Tog*, the American Jewish press had done much to transform the melting pot from a *shmalts top* to a *simfonye Amerikanizm* (an American symphony), in which each instrument spoke in its singular timbre but contributed collectively to the fine American orchestra.<sup>11</sup> The American Communist newspaper, which beyond the political goals of the Soviet Union spoke the language of Jewish national sentiment, also wrote in this vein.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Kallen and the Jewish press preceded today's dominant multicultural-society ethos by fifty years.

Let us pause to consider the overarching question of the relationship between the “human dust” and “American symphony” concepts and the transnational-community framework that I constructed earlier. I would not be wrong, it seems, if I said that according to the outlook of the Yiddishist press, the “American symphony” and “human dust” concepts are mutually exclusive because “symphony” symbolizes the integration of the Jewish collective into American society. Within this seeming dichotomy, the “human dust” concept became a critical component of the transnational-community sentiment at what I define as the level of psychology and idea. The various movements used the pejorative essence of this concept to create a positive alternative to it. Thus, the American Yiddishists embraced the “American symphony,” the East European Bundists adhered (until the Holocaust) to the idea of the fighting Jewish proletarian class, and the Zionist Labor Movement cultivated the “working nation” ethos. All shared the ethos of “negating the Diaspora”<sup>13</sup> – of which “human dust” was one of the preeminent manifestations – whether they preached the abandonment of the Diaspora or elected to stay there.

This press gave the “psycho-ideaic” fundamental of the transnational community emphatic expression in its admiring regard for manifestations of heroism among Jewish soldiers in the Allied armies that fought the Nazis. *The Jewish Chronicle* of the United Kingdom, which was usually even-handed and restrained in tenor, outdid all the other papers in this respect. From almost the very beginning of the war, the *Chronicle* ran weekly reports about the outstanding qualities of Jewish soldiers in all Allied armies, accompanied with inductees' photos. The paper recounted the valor of Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army; a Jewish officer who crossed the German frontier at the head of a French unit; a Jewish soldier who pulled out of the English Channel a German airman whose plane had been downed; a Jewish family that had sent six sons

<sup>11</sup> *Der Tog*, Feb. 15, 1942 (article marking the 10,000th edition of the paper).

<sup>12</sup> *Morgn-Frayhayt*, April 2, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> In this matter, see the concluding chapter of my book, *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897–1985* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006).

to the British Army; thousands of Jewish soldiers in the British expeditionary force in France, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

The main American Jewish dailies outdid themselves on this topic. In 1942–1944, they editorialized repeatedly on the heroism of Jewish soldiers in the American Army. The hero of 1942 was the Jewish airman Meyer Levin, who had been downed in a dogfight with the Japanese over the Pacific Ocean. The Communist newspaper *Morgn-Frayhayt* defined what happened to Levin as the Jewish answer to Pearl Harbor, no less, likening it to the Japanese Air Force' surprise attack that destroyed most of the American fleet<sup>15</sup> and regarding Meyer Levin as a successor to the patriotic tradition of Hayim Salomon, who played a crucial role in the American War of Independence. The Zionist newspaper *Der Tog* stood out in particular, proposing in two editorials that a monument be erected to keep the hero's memory alive.<sup>16</sup>

*Forverts* not only joined this bandwagon, publishing a rhymed paean to Jewish heroism, but also added to the cause by lauding another Jewish hero, one Maurice Levy, of Chicago, stressing that New York and Chicago now had Jewish heroes of their own. The main thing from *Forverts*' standpoint, however, was not parochial pride but the special condition of the Jewish people. According to *Forverts*, every people is proud of its heroes, but pride among the Jews is special for a profound psychological reason: The Jews are a people of martyrs (*a martirer-folk*), subject to the derision and contempt of generations of antisemites of various ilk, who disparage its contribution to the society in which it lives. Now, however, given the actions of these two men, even the greatest of antisemites would not dare belittle the Jews' heroism.<sup>17</sup>

About a year later, *Forverts* ran a general article about "the heroism of Jewish soldiers in the American Army,"<sup>18</sup> proposing to draw up a list of Jewish soldiers who had been decorated for heroism. The idea was to preempt the antisemitic propaganda that would surely erupt powerfully after the war in an attempt to reinflate the canard-balloon about Jews' being cowards ("*az di idn zenen shrekediker*") who eschew personal heroism on the battlefield.

It is important to stress that this national patriotic style was no different from the rhetoric in the Soviet Jewish weekly *Aynikayt* ("Unity"), which made its debut in 1942 under the auspices of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. *Aynikayt*, like the others, ran weekly heroism stories about Jewish soldiers in the Red Army. It published an article by the author Ilya Ehrenburg, "This Is How Jews Fight" (*Ot azoy shlogenzikh idn*),<sup>19</sup> and also, as a case in point, an article about Jewish generals in the Soviet armored corps (*Idn generalin fun tankn militer*).<sup>20</sup> It even saluted the valor of Jewish soldiers in the U.S. Army

<sup>14</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle*, Sept. 8, 1939; March 15, 1940; May 5, 1940; Sept. 27, 1940.

<sup>15</sup> "Der Idisher Entfer oyf Poyrl Harbor," *Morgn-Frayhayt*, Dec. 12, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> *Der Tog*, Feb. 19 and April 20, 1943.

<sup>17</sup> *Forverts*, Oct. 2, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19, 1943.

<sup>19</sup> *Aynikayt*, Nov. 7, 1942.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, June 22, 1944.

in a comprehensive article.<sup>21</sup> These pieces, written in a special passionate style, gave evidence of a phenomenon that transcended the interests of Soviet propaganda: the resurrection of the Jewish national pride that the Communist regime had quashed.

A prodigious player in this context was the poet Nathan Alterman in the newspaper *Davar*. As the war wound down in 1945, the Soviet press cited the Jewish general Khasid, the Artillery Corps commander who had led his soldiers from the Don to the Berlin front. In his poem “General Khasid,” Alterman portrayed the officer as a mystic revelation of sorts, a scion of his pious [Hebrew: *hasid*] forebears who congratulate him from Heaven. “[...] From the wastelands of the Don // his artillery rolled, // and the High Command cited him for praise // down there // and up there too.”

Given these manifestations of admiration for Jewish heroism in the anti-Nazi Allied armies, one would expect to find especially prominent and unequivocal coverage of the eruption of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. The actual coverage, however, was varied and ranged in tone from restrained to exuberant.

First, it is noteworthy that no Jewish newspaper devoted full-width front-page headlines to the uprising, even though they invested such headlines in bitter and – especially – good tidings from the war fronts as well as tragic reports about mass murder of Jews in the occupied countries. Second, some newspapers did not see fit to give the uprising an immediate response in their editorials, fearing that the report was a false rumor that the Germans had circulated to justify their acts of extermination to the world.<sup>22</sup>

This restraint stood out particularly in the UK Jewish press. The mainstream Jewish paper in Britain, the *Chronicle*, contented itself with two front-page articles headlined “Warsaw Ghetto Battle: Jews Went Down Fighting” and “Warsaw: Last Heroic Stand,”<sup>23</sup> and wrote no editorial on the topic. The Revisionist newspaper did not present a comprehensive article about the uprising until it discovered, three years later, the role the Beitar youth movement had played in it. The Yiddish-language Zionist newspaper also responded at a lag. About a year after the events, the editor of the paper, Morris Myer, an intellectual of fame and stature in Jewish public circles, wrote an appreciation of the uprising. Most of it was devoted to recounting the feat, including the factors that led to the uprising and how it unfolded. At the end of the article, the editor concluded that the ghetto uprising had not been of some people who had been interned there but rather of all members of the surviving rump population within the ghetto walls, who had embarked on their final struggle on behalf of their personal and national dignity.<sup>24</sup> Exceptionally, the *Agudath Israel* newspaper responded to the uprising with a lead article titled “Don’t

<sup>21</sup> Y.A. Rontch, “Heldishkayt fun amerikaner idishe soldatn,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, April 23 and May 24, 1943.

<sup>22</sup> *Forverts*, April 20, 1944. See also *Forverts*, April 19, 1944, and *Morgn-Frayhayt*, April 23 and May 24, 1941.

<sup>23</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 7 and May 28, 1943.

<sup>24</sup> Morris Myer, “Geto oyfshtand,” *Di Tsayt*, April 19, 1944.

Be Silent” (*Nisht shvaygn*). Even though it was faith and not force that would lead the Jews to deliverance, the writer said, there are moments in history when struggle and warfare must not be avoided.<sup>25</sup> Nor was this merely a reaction to the moment at hand. Back at the beginning of the war, this paper ran an editorial urging the Jews not to evade military induction for reason of conscience. Even if some of the British declared such a stance, the Jews, the paper warned, have a moral duty to mobilize for war against their greatest nemesis, the enemy who was bent on annihilating the Jewish people.<sup>26</sup>

In any case, if we wish to emphasize the subdued nature of the response of the Jewish press in Britain, we need only note that the *Struma* disaster, the sinking of a clandestine-immigrants’ vessel en route to Palestine in which 750 people perished, and the suicide of the Bund delegate to the Polish Government-in-Exile, Szmul (Artur) Zygielbojm, in London, received more space and more prominent space than the Warsaw ghetto uprising. The reason may lie in the tragic immediacy of these two events, especially Zygielbojm’s suicide, which the press in the United States and Palestine also covered prominently – possibly because Zygielbojm’s action was the most anguished protest to date against the free world’s silence and inaction amid the ongoing murder of the Jewish people. The entire Jewish press shared this feeling, although it did not express it publicly. This is another issue that I take up at greater length below.

The U.S. Jewish press was less restrained in expressing emotions than its British counterpart. The Communist newspaper led the cry of anguish in the Soviet Yiddishist style – “It’s our blood that’s crying out” (*Es ruft unzer blut*), “It’s our people that’s calling out” (*Es ruft unzer folk*) – and made a point of noting that its urgings on this topic, namely demanding that the Allies open a second front in Europe to expedite the salvation of the free world and the Jews, were also in the American interest.<sup>27</sup> *Der Tog*, the Zionist newspaper, announced proudly that the Jews of Warsaw had engaged their murderers in combat.<sup>28</sup> Concurrently, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* spoke of the death of martyrs.<sup>29</sup> *Forverts* was more subdued in terms of its headline but stressed that the fate of the Jews of Warsaw was emblematic of the Jewish people’s isolation in its most tragic hour ever.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the plea for rescue that the headlines of all the editorials voiced implicitly, the writings stressed repeatedly that the rebels of Warsaw had fallen in sanctification of the Jewish people’s dignity and the moral value of all humankind. Therefore, the fallen were depicted both as holy martyrs and as war heroes. An editorial in *Forverts* marking the first anniversary of the beginning of the uprising, titled “The Jewish Heroes and Martyrs in Poland,”

<sup>25</sup> *Di Vokhntsaytung*, May 7, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> “Ratevets unz,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, April 23, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> *Der Tog*, April 24, 1943.

<sup>29</sup> *Morgen Dzhurnal*, April 23 and May 24, 1943.

<sup>30</sup> *Forverts*, May 13, 1943.

represented this trend of thought. This memorial occasion, the editorialist stated, should be not only a day of mourning over the heroes' demise but also a day of national exaltation (*natsionaler derhoybung*) in response to the ghetto fighters' display of heroism.<sup>31</sup>

The soothing discourse of bereavement was culminated by an editorial in the Po'alei Tziyon weekly *Der Idisher Kemfer*, evidently written by the editor, Chaim Greenberg, one of American Jewry's important intellectuals.

We do not know how our brothers and sisters fell in the streets of Warsaw. We do not know about the last days of this large Jewish collective. We do not know the last thoughts and words of the ghetto defenders in their final hours. But we know that in comparison with this heroism of the despairing besieged, and in comparison with the lives and suffering of the weak and the defenseless, all the wars, all the victories, and all the goals and hopes with and for which we live, are paled and dwarfed.<sup>32</sup>

The Palestine press responded to the uprising in three discernible ways. The first may be defined as pronouncedly Palestinocentric; it was expressed, contrarily enough, by *Ha'aretz*, the least activist of the Hebrew-language papers. Its editorial on the topic carried a headline that speaks for itself, rooted in the Second 'Aliya Jewish self-defense organization Hashomer, the spirit of which pulsed in the halutzic (Zionist pioneering) youth movements and in Beitar: "Blood and Fire – Remarks on the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto."<sup>33</sup>

Here is what it said: "The ghetto is being destroyed [...]. We have to provide assistance to what remains of European Jewry, to mobilize the world, and to train ourselves so that the [Jewish] people's future may be built not in new ghettos but in the homeland. This is the role that history has imposed on us."

The National Religious *Hatzofe* responded as the liberal *Ha'aretz* did. As for the Mizrahi and Ha-po'el ha-Mizrahi parties, however, there was a difference between the public stance of the party leaders and the editors of *Hatzofe*, who lauded the rebels' valiant act,<sup>34</sup> and things that were not stated publicly because they implied disapproval of the uprising as a transgression of traditional Jewish religious values.<sup>35</sup>

*Davar* mirrored the attitude of *Hatzofe* and *Ha'aretz* toward the uprising, of course, but in a less Palestinocentric tone. In an editorial that was certainly written by Berl Katznelson himself and definitely reflected his spirit, *Davar*

<sup>31</sup> *Forverts*, April 19 and April 20, 1944.

<sup>32</sup> "Likhter vern Oysgeloshtn," *Der Idisher Kemfer*, June 11, 1943.

<sup>33</sup> *Ha'aretz*, May 4, 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Mordechai Lipson (the paper's editor), "Kol anot halushah mi-tokh anot gevurah" [Heroic Response Engenders Weak Voice of Response], *Hatzofe*, May 25, 1943; "Shin" (Shabtai Don Yihye), editorial, "haganat ha-shem" [Defending God], *ibid.*, May 25, 1943; Moshe Krone, "In Days of Strife and Contention," *ibid.*, June 15, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> See Hava Eshkoli-Wagman, *Bein hatsalah li-geulah: ha-tziyonut ha-datit be-Eretz Yisrael le-nokhah ha-sho'ah* [Between Rescue and Redemption: Religious Zionism in Eretz Israel Confronts the Holocaust] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004, in Hebrew), Ch. 4.

expressed not only agony over the loss of Polish Jewry but also much appreciation for it. The final “battle” of the Warsaw ghetto marked “the end of the struggle of generations of Jews in Poland to integrate and blend the magnificence of Jewish originality into the pride of human uprising.” These characteristics found expression “in the obstinacy of the Jewish masses in Warsaw, which did not renounce their traditional way of life even when it was subjected to derision and scorn in the eyes of the surrounding Gentiles.” Along with the commendable obstinacy of those who preserved the tradition, there appeared “the rebellion and the uprising that lives in the alleys [of Warsaw] and posts freedom fighters to all campaigns worldwide.” The writer must have been referring to the many Polish Jewish Communists who had volunteered to fight on the Republicans’ side in the Spanish Civil War. However, of course, the ghetto uprising had been nourished “by the spirit of the great loyalty and the great national creative endeavor that hovered over the great city, abounding with poverty and magnificence; the aura of freedom that enveloped its labor movement; the lusts for life that kindled in the hearts of its young and its *halutzim* (pioneers, sing. *halutz*) – it is from all of these *together* that the sanctity of the ghetto fighters sprouted. Their death did not *shame* their lives and their isolation did not trample their spirit” [emphasis added].

But there is more: “The world will surely be even more surprised if it realizes that the heroism of Warsaw is not the last link in the chain of *Jewish defense and martyrdom*; if it understands that *generations of Jews* trained themselves to take this stand until the generation that was put to the historical test – and passed it – came along. The world now knows that the defenders of the ghettos left behind a great testament and that fulfillers of this testament will be found wherever Jews respond” [emphasis added].<sup>36</sup>

This depiction of the uprising as a symbol of the heroism of the exiled Jewish people in all its dimensions – the traditional, the revolutionary, and the halutzic – is an expression of the *klal Yisrael* outlook as a national whole notwithstanding its internal contrasts. Moreover, its purpose was not only to glorify the heroism of the annihilated Jews of the ghettos but also to mitigate the tendencies that had surfaced in Yishuv public opinion, especially among the youth, to fault the murdered Jews for not having defended themselves and for having gone to their death “like lambs to the slaughter.” Yitzhak Tabenkin, head of the Hakibbutz Hameuhad movement, expressed this trend of thought in a positive way, arguing that “The spirit of the uprising in Warsaw is the strength of the Hebrew vanguard, the spirit of halutzic resilience.”<sup>37</sup> However, even though Tabenkin credited the spirit of the uprising to halutzic forces only, one should not construe this as total negation of the Diaspora. After all, even according to his narrow approach, the halutzic forces that instigated the

<sup>36</sup> *Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” May 28, 1943.

<sup>37</sup> In this matter, see my book, *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897–1985* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 200–201.

uprising, those he lauds so passionately, were the outgrowths of the very same Diaspora, as were the halutzim who had emigrated to Palestine and established the kibbutz movements. Tabenkin himself was aware of this dialectic relationship between the Diaspora and the Yishuv. Therefore, several months after the Warsaw ghetto uprising, he spoke about the duty of this halutzic elite toward the murdered Jews and cited approvingly the names of Zionists and *Bundists* who had sacrificed themselves.<sup>38</sup> Concurrently, when the newspapers recited the “national *kaddish*” over the loss of the Warsaw ghetto and the destruction of the Jewish national entity, a *kaddish* for the individual was also audible.

In mid-May 1943, the Bund’s delegate to the Polish government-in-exile, Artur Zygielbojm, committed suicide in London in anguished protest over the silence of the free world in the face of the Jewish genocide. Most Jewish newspapers carried the report of Zygielbojm’s death in a prominent location; some accompanied it with editorials – including the Zionist newspapers, which gave the incident more conspicuous coverage than they did the Warsaw ghetto uprising.<sup>39</sup> All the newspapers considered Zygielbojm’s act an acute expression of the Jews’ national helplessness. It was *Forverts*, more than the others, that turned the suicide into an emblem of the Jewish tragedy that found expression not only in the withholding of international aid to the Jews as they were being murdered – after all, no one believed in the possibility of mass rescue – but also in the *indifference* (*glaykhhgiltigkayt*) of the leaders of the free world. Zygielbojm, in the opinion of *Forverts*, had felt in his own flesh the tragic contradiction between his august position, representing the Bund vis-à-vis the Polish National Council in London, and his political helplessness (*hilflozikayt*) and that of the Jewish collective in the free countries. Therefore, he asked himself the tragic question – what should I do?! – and answered it: “I can no longer hold my silence.”<sup>40</sup>

About a year later, at a memorial occasion for Zygielbojm, *Forverts* wrote that the deceased had fought a battle that had been doomed from the outset, together with the millions of Polish Jews whose plea for rescue had gone unrequited. Therefore, the only thing left to say about Zygielbojm’s action was that it showed general and Jewish society the value of human heroism and national and social loyalty (*getrayshaft*).<sup>41</sup>

The two Zionist papers, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* and *Der Tog*, went farther than *Forverts* in emphasizing the Jews’ isolation. They stressed that European Jewry, and especially Polish Jewry, had fallen victim not only to the indifference of the leaders of the free world and the shapers of public opinion but also, and mainly, to the silence of the Jewish public leaders, who did not dare to raise their voices and encourage the Jewish masses to turn out in spirited

<sup>38</sup> *Davar*, June 23, 1943.

<sup>39</sup> *Di Tsayt*, May 14 and May 24, 1943.

<sup>40</sup> “Zygielbojm’s letster veh geshrey,” *Di Tsayt*, June 3, 1943.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, May 2, 1944.

public protest against the silence, apathy, and disinterest of leaders who could have offered assistance, however scanty. However, the most significant eulogy for Zygielbojm in the sense of expressing the transnational community was the one that appeared in the most prominent location on the front page of *Davar*. The piece appeared in a black frame: “S. Zygielbojm – Artur,” and carried the initials H.B., evidently denoting Herzl Berger, a member of the *Davar* editorial board who had known Zygielbojm back in Warsaw. The article describes Zygielbojm, on the basis of personal acquaintance and experience in political disputes, as a second-rate politician, a Bund apparatchik, and a rigid fanatic who was totally loyal to his party and had obtained his exalted status in London by mere coincidence. After delivering this unsympathetic personal appraisal, H.B. related critically to the suicide itself, which clashed in principle with the nation’s attempt to resurrect itself in its homeland. This view, deeply rooted in the Zionist Labor Movement, determined the movement’s ideological and psychological aversion to acts of “sanctification of God’s name” – in other words, martyrdom. Now that Zygielbojm had taken this action, however, even a political rival could not ignore in equanimity the national symbolism of martyrdom in the lengthy history of the Jewish people. Addressing himself to this point, H.B. stated, “Among those who sanctify the name of Israel [...] the memory of those among the activists in Jewish Warsaw who opted for suicide will be preserved: Adam Czerniaków, chairman of the Judenrat, who did not flee from the ghetto and took his life in an attempt to cry out for rescue from within the ghetto walls, and Artur Zygielbojm, who went to faraway London to plead for the lives of his brethren and to entreaty an estranged world to rescue them; there he pounded his head against an impermeable wall and could not break through.” Thus both personalities, Czerniaków and Zygielbojm, although far from the writer’s national outlook, “are paired and glued together in the inferno that has come upon the Jews, and in [the Jews’] future liberation they will go down in the nation’s history as sanctifiers of its name, avengers of its indignity, and augurers of its resurrection.”<sup>42</sup>

These words must have been written with the knowledge of the editor of *Davar*, Berl Katznelson. Explicit evidence of this surfaced about a year later. In 1944, shortly before his death, Katznelson delivered a speech to a seminar of young members of the Mapai Party and said the following in this context, which we consider worthy of reporting verbatim: “By committing suicide, Szmul Zygielbojm [...] proved to be a symbol of Jewish suffering, the most vigorous manifestation of the Jewish anguish, which no Zionist in the same situation expressed as he did. In one moment, Szmul Zygielbojm appeared neither as a party man nor as a Bundist nor as a limited socialist [...] but as a national hero on whose shoulders all the suffering and existence of being Jewish had been foisted, as it were.”<sup>43</sup> Katznelson did emphasize Zygielbojm’s

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., May 21, 1943.

<sup>43</sup> B. Katznelson, *Ketavim* [Writings] (Tel Aviv: 1953), Vol. 11, p. 64 (in Hebrew).



fanatical anti-Zionism, but in his remarks he noted that he found no contradiction between this and Jewish national loyalty unto death.

*Hatzofe* viewed Zygielbojm's action in the same light,<sup>44</sup> even though there was a debate in the National Religious camp about the extent to which the Warsaw ghetto uprising conformed with rabbinical law – some affirming the uprising and sanctifying its heroes and others taking exception to it on grounds of the imperative of life.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, *Hatzofe* took the matter even farther than *Davar* by determining that the last letter written by Zygielbojm, the antireligious zealot and the extreme anti-Zionist, was “a testament to his generation and the generations to come, to the [Gentile] nations and to the Jews; it adds honor to his name and memory.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus two public functionaries, the non-Zionist Adam Czerniaków and the anti-Zionist Artur Zygielbojm, became symbols that carried the ethos of the transnational Jewish community in statements by Zionist leaders and publicists. The combination of the two – the Judenrat chairman and the lonely warrior in London – shows that even during the war there was no opinion that unequivocally negated the role of the Judenrat in the ghettos.

The question still remains, however: Why was Zygielbojm's suicide reported more conspicuously than Czerniaków's? The explanation, I would say, lies mainly in the domain of ideas and psychology. Czerniaków had come from an assimilated family, returned to the Jews, and chose the social advancement of the artisan class as his main field of activity. In no way, however, did he associate himself with the Jewish national movement as a Zionist, a non-Zionist, or an anti-Zionist. Zygielbojm, in contrast, was an active member of, and a leading personality in, a Jewish national party. It is true that, as a member of the left flank of the Bund before the war, he did not recognize the universal existence of a Jewish people. In the middle of the war, however, he changed his mind after acknowledging the failure of all of his attempts to persuade the Polish government-in-exile in London, and the British government, to act in concert for the rescue of Polish Jewry.<sup>47</sup>

The indifference of the others – the Poles and the British – did not dampen his national political resolve, and he acted in common cause with the Zionist delegate to the Polish National Council for the rescue of Polish Jewry. This, in the aftermath of his tragic death, surely entitled him to the national status of a martyr who had “repented.”

In addition to its shared national ideological portrait during the relevant years, this press also exhibited near-uniformity in the way it presented reality

<sup>44</sup> “Shin,” “Haganat ha-shem” [Defending God], *Hatzofe*, May 28, 1943.

<sup>45</sup> In this matter, see discussion in Hava Eshkoli-Wagman, *Bein batsalah li-geulah: ha-tziyonut ba-datit be-Eretz Yisrael le-nokhah ha-sho'ah* [Between Rescue and Redemption: Religious Zionism in Eretz Israel Confronts the Holocaust], (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), Ch. 10, pp. 273–295.

<sup>46</sup> *Hatzofe*, June 4, 1943.

<sup>47</sup> See Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Jewish Labour Bund in Poland 1939–1949* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), pp. 145–150.

to its readers. This was reflected mainly in the primacy that it assigned to reportage from the war fronts. Most of its bold-faced headlines across the front pages recounted victories and setbacks in the course of the fighting. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the eastern front grabbed top priority in these headlines. Furthermore, it would be no overstatement to say that the Jewish press usually reported news from the fronts more prominently than the mainstream American and British newspapers did.

The plight of European Jewry, in contrast, usually received secondary positioning on the front pages until the end of 1942. The sole exception, of course, pertained to reports about distress on a magnitude that transcended the “accepted routine” and attained the dimensions of a national catastrophe. Thus, until 1942, the main bold-faced headlines reported pogroms against Romanian Jews, and, of course, the disaster that would become known as the Holocaust succeeded pogroms as the leading topic of headlines later that year – but without crowding out the demarches of the war.

This pattern of page layout attested to the general realization that the fate of the world and, in particular, of the Jewish people would be determined on the battlefield. Therefore, from the standpoint of the press, World War II was foremost a war of the Jews, countering the Nazis’ slogan of its being a war against the Jews. For the same reason, even though the press persisted in criticizing the anti-Nazi governments for not doing enough to rescue Jews, it essentially accepted their stance – that only upon the defeat of Fascism would the Jews find their deliverance – to the greatest possible extent. This crucial point, which pertains not only to the possibilities of rescue during the war but also to the Jews’ status in the free world at the time, is examined in the chapters of this study.

The second characteristic – an adjunct and in fact an outgrowth of the first one – was the warning these diverse newspapers issued against the dissemination of panic-mongering rumors about the number of Jews being murdered – rumors that quickly proved exaggerated and inaccurate. The warning was sounded in view of the double-edged damage that such rumors caused: dealing the public a false shock and undermining the credibility of accurate reports in the eyes of Jews and non-Jews alike.

The third characteristic was that this press, even as it mirrored the state of emergency created by the war and its backdrop of oppression and extermination, continually reflected the mundane realities of daily life. Thus, all the newspapers, in all three democratic countries that had them, carried reportage on community life, internal politics, and education issues, as well as commercial advertising, fashion columns, and the like. In these senses, the Jewish press was no different from the general newspapers in the relevant countries. Thus, emergency events and mundane doings marched in tandem throughout the war years. From the moral standpoint, however, the general press and the Jewish press differed in the way they treated normality. Unlike the Jewish newspapers, American and British newspapers did not have to face a nation that was being doomed to extermination. The Jewish papers reported

on the matter two or three times each week, uninterrupted, from sources such as the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and the Polish and Soviet press, and in articles based on disclosures by diplomats from neutral countries who had visited the occupied lands. All the papers reported the ghettoization of the Jews of Poland, with prime attention devoted to life in the ghettos of Warsaw and Łódź; the plan to concentrate the Jews in the Lublin area; the pogroms against the Jews of Romania; the deportation of the Jews from the *shtetlekh*; starvation and disease; mortality rates in the ghettos; slave labor; expropriation and deportations from Vienna and Berlin; the internment of thousands of Jews in Paris; and the onset of mass-murder operations in the Ukraine and Belarus, which had become Nazi-occupied territories. All of that even before the magnitude of the Holocaust in its full tragic sense was known. Therefore, the moral collision between presenting the state of emergency and describing routine daily life was demonstrated saliently in the Jewish press. I address myself to this problem in a discussion that follows.

The fourth commonality among the Jewish newspapers was their critical stance toward both external and internal players. Externally, they criticized western governments for their inaction on the rescue question. The British government attracted especially pointed criticism for its policy on Jewish refugees who sought asylum in Palestine but found the country's gates closed, precipitating the *Struma* and *Patria* disasters that cost hundreds of refugees their lives. As noted earlier, this criticism of the British government, as well as of the U.S. government, was voiced steadily even as these countries waged an existential war against the Nazis.

Internally, pungent criticism was aimed at the leaders of Jewish organizations for not doing enough to arouse the Jewish masses, and at the Jews themselves for not initiating mass demonstrations on behalf of their beleaguered brethren. All of this in addition to pained criticism of fellow Jews who engaged in war profiteering in three of the four countries (United States, United Kingdom, and Palestine).

The criticism in all of its shades and hues was harsh and furious, especially in the Yishuv. There it was addressed directly to the focal point of national self-rule, the Jewish Agency Executive, which, unlike American and British Jewry, constituted an obvious moral and political address that I discuss in a separate chapter.

In 1941, alarmed by the critical posture of the Jewish press in Palestine, David Ben-Gurion appeared before a conference of newspaper editors to lecture the editors on the duties of a critical press and how far the criticism should go. His remarks were prompted by the tragic sinking of *Patria* in Haifa port by Haganah sappers in November 1940 to prevent the deportation of the vessel's passengers – refugees who had aspired to immigrate to Palestine clandestinely – to detention camps in Africa, costing 260 of the 1,771 passengers their lives.

This tragic event gave Ben-Gurion an opportunity to discuss the attitude of the Hebrew-language press since the beginning of the war toward various

phenomena that had come to light in Yishuv society – for example, evasion of compulsory mobilization for national service, the growing proliferation of acts of profiteering, avoidance of philanthropic responsibilities related to funding the Zionist national institutions, and, of course, criticism of the Zionist leadership and even of the British government.<sup>48</sup>

Ben-Gurion demanded that the Hebrew-language press display, given the state of emergency, a larger measure of “national” responsibility in its treatment of negative social and political phenomena, although he did not suggest that the press renounce the very principle of criticism. I relate to his remarks at length in my discussion of the newspaper *Davar*, which, not by chance, published an abstract of his lecture.<sup>49</sup>

His “national” outlook, which at the time meant reinforcing the Jewish public’s social discipline and voluntarism for the common good, was shared by all Jewish and Hebrew newspapers in the three countries that had them. Therefore, all urged the various Jewish institutions to take vigorous and united political action. However, there was a difference between the situation in Palestine and that in the Anglo-Saxon Diaspora: In Palestine, the Jews had a national leadership that wielded ruling power in Yishuv and Zionist affairs, whereas American and British Jewry operated via loose confederations of Jewish organizations. Accordingly, criticism from the Yishuv press was sent to one central address, whereas elsewhere it had many addresses. Moreover, this “address” in Palestine, due to its central national status, held itself responsible for Jewish public unity, which, it strongly feared, might be undermined by excessive criticism. This reasoning had an understandable political motive, which was implicit in the very state of national emergency. No Jewish leadership in the Diaspora could claim to possess such a comprehensive responsibility. However, the very demand for total unity in public action was another indicator of the transnational community.

The methodological approach that I use in this study, which postulates the existence of the transnational community, determines the historical structure that follows, specifically the two main subperiods: 1939–1942 and 1942–1945.

In each cluster of newspapers, I define one leading paper, the one that had the largest circulation and the greatest influence, as central in the geographical and linguistic division of the study. Each leading newspaper of this kind – *Davar* in Palestine, *Forverts* in the United States, and *The Jewish Chronicle* in the United Kingdom – was an “axis” of sorts, around which the others revolved. The comparative analysis between the “axial” paper and the others takes place diachronically and synchronically at the same time and is tailored to the nature of the press in each of the three countries examined. Thus,

<sup>48</sup> “Hovat ha-itonay ba-yishuv be-sha’ah zo” [The Duty of the Journalist in the Yishuv at This Time] (Ben-Gurion to journalists about their role at this time),” recorded by Y.B., *Davar*, April 21, 1941.

<sup>49</sup> See further in Chapter 1, subchapter on *Davar*.

given that the Hebrew-language press was largely party-affiliated, **Part I** of the study explains the differences in the papers' political attitudes toward the assessment of the Jews' situation in the occupied countries. Consequently, each Hebrew-language newspaper merits a separate chapter in this part of the book. In **Part II**, even though the veracity of the reports about the plight of Jewry in occupied Europe was no longer doubted, the differences among the parties' approaches did not disappear; in fact, they gathered strength when it came to the possibilities of rescue and were reflected in the Yishuv newspapers. Accordingly, in **Part II**, each newspaper is again discussed separately and is repeatedly compared with other papers, especially the leading one, *Davar*. In contrast, the Jewish press in the United States and its British counterpart – which, while political, were not party-affiliated – are integrated side by side synchronically, with their diachronic development treated as a given. As a result of this research method, two methods appear in the internal structure of the chapters: one fully synchronic and diachronic in respect of the press in the United States and the United Kingdom, and another one only partly so in respect of the press in Palestine. The Soviet Jewish paper *Aynikayt* constitutes a special category and is dealt with separately.

The two-level periodization – September 1939–October 1942 and November 1942–May 1945 – obviously reflects general and external developments: the beginning of the war, the official announcement of the Jewish genocide, and the end of the war in Europe. However, the periodization also has internal significance at the emotional and cognitive levels, which the newspapers expressed conspicuously. In this sense, one may define the first period as an uncertain “in-between” span of time between an era of concern and one of dread. The second period allows but one definition: the “time of horror,” in which, in addition to the acknowledgment of national helplessness that was typical of the first period, there came the outcry, which much of democratic public opinion left unrequited.

In addition to the periodized sections of the study, **Part III** cites topical articles, some previously published, that expand on the theme of the study in ways that surpass the stance of the press. Examples are the attitudes of mainstream non-Jewish newspapers in the United States and Britain toward what was being done to European Jewry; the childhood memoirs of the American author Philip Roth about the war era and the fear of antisemitism that he has carried with him ever since; and Yitzhak Gruenbaum's very complex attitude toward the disaster that befell European Jewry.

Thus the entire study, in all three of its sections, is at once an account of how the press reported information about the Holocaust to the public, an expression of acknowledgment of the Jews' national helplessness, and a testimony to the existence of the transnational community that at times defied the grasp of the imagination and obviated all understanding of their future significance – until the facts that sealed the Jews' human and national fate transformed the inability to understand into explicit acknowledgment. The

commonality among them is the trilingual national discourse in which faith and despair, delusion and dashing of delusion, and the anger and the acquiescence of a nation that could not act within its historical situation dwelled. Therefore, to sense and understand these feelings by means of language, we devote lavish attention to the rhetoric of the discourse and its words and images, the national implements of the war that it fought.



PART I

FROM CONCERN TO OUTCRY – 1939–1942





# I

## The Hebrew-Language Press in Palestine

### INTRODUCTION

The first three years of World War II, between September 1939 and November 1942 – the “in-between” period in our typology – were significant in two respects. The first is general: how the war was being waged on the various fronts. The second is national: the condition of the Jews in the occupied countries.

In the general war arena, the outcome of the global struggle was by no means clear until late 1942, when the British victory at El Alamein and the Soviet triumph at Stalingrad tipped the scales. This was so even though the United States’ entry into the war against Japan and Germany in late 1941 filled the sails of the anti-Fascist camp with hopes of victory.

The uncertainty about how the war would end was paralleled by uncertainty about the fate of the Jews. This period of time through the lens of the Jewish press – as one may judge by the information that it published and the awareness generated as a result – may be divided into three subperiods.

**Subperiod 1** – from the beginning of the war to the eve of the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941. During this time, the gravity of the Jews’ predicament and the realization that it was unparalleled in Jewish history were dominant, but the realization that an irreparable national catastrophe was under way had not yet matured.

**Subperiod 2** – from Operation Barbarossa (the German invasion of the USSR) to June–July 1942. During this time, first rumors about massacres of Jews in Ukraine and Belarus, as well as reports about mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews in these areas, began to arrive. Even so, the press was still dominated by a cautious approach toward the reliability of the information, undoubtedly influenced by vestiges of cautious optimism among the newspapers’ editors.

**Subperiod 3** – from June–July 1942 to November 1942. The proliferation of reports about systematic extermination of Jews triggered large public protests in the United States and Palestine. The final realization that an act of genocide

was under way, however, had not worked its way into the public mind and the press did not express it as it should have.

#### DAVAR

*Davar*, the Mapai-affiliated organ of the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Labor in Palestine), was the most politically important and the most widely circulated newspaper in the Yishuv during World War II. It acquired this status by being identified with the political leadership of the Yishuv and by belonging to the Yishuv's strongest political organization, the Histadrut. This also affected its circulation, of course, which came to 15,000 copies – about one-third of the total circulation of Hebrew-language newspapers in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense of political status, *Davar* was unlike the Jewish press in Great Britain and the United States and the social-democratic press in Europe. Although main Jewish newspapers such as the veteran *The Jewish Chronicle* and the Yiddishist *Forverts* boasted similar circulation rates to those of *Davar* in their Jewish communities, they had no connection with any hegemonic political establishment. The European social-democratic press, in turn, had never attained the public stature of *Davar* even before World War II, in the 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

The ideological image and public political character of *Davar* was shaped and consolidated by one man above all: Berl Katznelson, the intellectual mentor of Mapai and the legendary founder and editor of this newspaper.<sup>3</sup>

The Gordian knot between the political leadership and *Davar* definitely influenced the way that the latter presented the disaster that befell European Jewry and the way its editors and correspondents perceived or interpreted it as parts of a political framework that assigned itself the task of demonstrating national responsibility to the public.

One may gauge the political importance of the Hebrew press for the national leadership at this time by reflecting on remarks by David Ben-Gurion at an emergency gathering of newspaper editors that Ben-Gurion initiated in April 1941 in his capacity as Chairman of the Zionist Executive and the Jewish Agency. The immediate and most urgent reason for convening the editors was the acute criticism that the Hebrew press had leveled against the British government after the sinking of the clandestine immigrants' vessel *Patria*, blown up by the Haganah in Haifa port to thwart the deportation of 3,600 clandestine immigrants to Mauritius.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the detonation, which was

<sup>1</sup> See Dina Porat and Mordechai Naor (eds.), *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit be-Eretz Yisrael nokhah ha-sho'ah 1939–1945* [The Jewish Press in Palestine facing the Holocaust].

<sup>2</sup> See Shlomo Shafir's article in *Kesher* 35.

<sup>3</sup> On Katznelson as the editor of *Davar*, see Anita Shapira, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Mordechai Naor, *Sefer ha-'aliyot* [Book of the waves of Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Massada and MOD publishing house, 1991), p. 106.

supposed to have been controlled, 267 would-be immigrants drowned in the Haifa Bay.

In the wake of the disaster, the entire Hebrew press, as well as the British and American Jewish press, pummeled His Majesty's government witheringly. The Yishuv leadership found this troubling in the context of its relations with the Mandatory Government in particular, and, by implication, the policies of the Zionist Executive and the behavior of Yishuv society at the beginning of the war. Ben-Gurion directed his remarks at what he termed a campaign of incessant criticism of manifestations of speculation in food commodities and fuel, the growing incidence of evasion of compulsory public service, and the public's indifference to exhortations from the Zionist National Institutions to enlist in the various security forces.

Ben-Gurion addressed himself to the attitude of the press because in wartime, he explained – when the public cannot express its views via the electoral system – the press is perceived as the “daily criterion” of the public's opinion. He did acknowledge unequivocally that “the press has a threefold function: to reflect reality, to criticize it, and to guide public opinion.” This, however, assumes that the press knows how to evaluate and judge reality in a balanced and multifaceted way. “This matter has come up recently in certain newspapers,” he stated.

The question of paramount concern to Ben-Gurion was the psychological strength of the Yishuv and its public steadfastness under emergency conditions. Hence, he focused his grievances against the press on what he considered its exaggerated criticism of the Yishuv's ways of life. “Yes, the Yishuv isn't meeting the nation's needs adequately,” he admitted. “The scale of our disaster is too great.” For this very reason, however, one should beware of an optical illusion that may “falsify the image of the Yishuv.” What Ben-Gurion meant was that corruption and evasion were commonplace in other societies that faced emergencies, for example, Great Britain, where the population was withstanding the ordeal of the war with supreme valor, especially in the unrelenting bombardments of London, which he had personally experienced while visiting that city not long ago. The source of British society's heroism, he stated, was its tradition of “étatist” discipline. As for the Yishuv, in contrast – “our main flaw,” he said, is not that people indulge in corruption and evasion but that “we have no étatist tradition. It's been centuries since we lived lives of statehood. We have no framework of state, we have no government.”<sup>5</sup>

Ben-Gurion, of course, had been the Yishuv's main exponent of étatisme since having been named Secretary of the Histadrut in the early 1920s. There is no doubt, however, that the editorial board of *Davar* also invoked it in its assessment of the situation of European Jewry. The newspaper's approach may be defined as a combination of pessimistic and critical emotional rhetoric in

<sup>5</sup> Y.B., “Hovat ha-itonay ba-yishuv be-sha'ah zo” [The Duty of Journalism in the Yishuv at the Present Time], *Davar*, April 21, 1941. In the 1950s, Ben-Gurion expressed the same views in appearances before journalists.

regard to domestic and foreign affairs and balanced intellectual rhetoric that strove to stay close to the facts, in some of which the paper even found glimmers of hope. This approach, however, neither concealed nor overlooked the tragic plight of European Jewry in overt references to the political helplessness of the Jewish organizations in the three countries, which found it beyond their ability to rescue the Jewish communities in the Nazi-occupied countries.

This subchapter concerns itself with the attitude of *Davar* between September 1939, when the war began, and December 1942, when the policy of systematically exterminating millions of Jews, applied by the Nazis and their accomplices in the occupied lands, became known beyond all doubt. Once this tragic certainty took shape, the dual, although not ambivalent, approach that *Davar* had accepted in its attention to the Jewish national disaster came to an end.

This split-level approach during these years was manifested in two ways: how the paper presented the information and the general consciousness that flowed from it. The information was published abundantly and in various ways: front-page reportage, lengthier articles on inside pages, opinion pieces, and editorials – some 900 published items in all. Thus, in the forty months between September 1939 and December 1942, *Davar* made only twenty-five mentions per month of what was happening in Europe and devoted only seventeen main headlines “above the fold” to the plight of the Jews there. The demarches of the war were given 800 front-page headlines, and the plight of the Jews was addressed in some 200 lengthy articles and editorials. Thus, although the Jews’ situation was indeed perceived as grave, it was not considered catastrophic and the state of the war fronts was given primacy. This mirrored the axiomatic proposition that the results of the war would also have a definitive effect on the fate of the Jews.

As for the information itself, *Davar* painted a clear portrait of the situation of the Jews in all Nazi-occupied countries and in Nazi allies such as Romania and Hungary. Naturally, the fate of Polish Jewry was given central attention. The reportage recounted deportations of German and Austrian Jews, the looting of their property, and murders committed in Poland. Reports and articles focused on the “Lublin plan,” the Nazis’ scheme to concentrate the Austrian and German Jews in the district of that name. Later on, reports about the establishment of ghettos in Łódź and Warsaw came in.

Perceiving the Jews’ suffering as less than catastrophic, *Davar* expressed its immediate response in the first two weeks of the war in two ways. On the one hand, given the constructive “Palestinocentrism” of the Zionist Labor Movement, it emphasized the efforts of Yishuv society to organize for the emergency that the war had brought about.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there was already talk of the destruction of Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jewry, the enslavement of tens of thousands of Jews, and of “the terror of the consuming sword in Łódź and Warsaw and Kraków and Lwów.” These two situations – the

<sup>6</sup> *Davar*, *Devar ha-Yom*, Sept. 5, 1939.

Yishuv having to organize and the Diaspora going up in flames – were linked by the Jewish fate and the Zionist solution, so that “we should not remain human dust in the world.”<sup>7</sup> The practical meaning of this ideological wish not to be “human dust” in the comprehensive Jewish organizational sense, which did not necessarily apply only to the Diaspora, resided in the demand to strengthen relations between the Yishuv and European Jewry “as far as the hand extends” – an addendum that attests to the extent of sober caution that guided the newspaper’s editors.

Within a few days, however, the level of concern climbed and became a sense of dread. The next editorial described the state of Polish Jewry as a *sho’ah*. Its use of this concept, however, was emotional as opposed to intellectual; after all, as would be realized later, no one grasped the human essence and national significance of the event in the first years of the war. Even then, however, the anguished rhetoric expressed the fear about what might happen. While noting that “The *sho’ah* in Poland has not yet been revealed to us in all of its horrors,” the editorialist already found the fragmented rumors arriving from that country “frightening, and even if some of the details are inaccurate and even if some reports are exaggerated, this in no way alleviates the terrifying realization that an appalling *sho’ah* has descended on millions of Polish Jews, one that exceeds in its scale and horrors all the ordeals that we have experienced in recent years.” Furthermore, the editorial states explicitly that “millions of Jews are doomed to extermination” and speaks of about tens of thousands of starved children and women whom the Nazis intend “to put [to] grueling labor, torture, and extermination in judicial and extrajudicial ways.”

The sense of impending disaster, albeit “only” in the coin of mass mortality, underscores the paper’s awareness of the Jews’ isolation and impotence due to the response of Poland’s neighbors “to the *sho’ah* in the one way that was put to use in the disastrous days of the twentieth century: by locking the gates.” Here the editorialist is referring to the governments of Romania, Latvia, and Belarus, which slammed their borders shut in the Jewish refugees’ faces. In this wretched state of affairs, the only remaining recourse is an appeal to the hearts of Jews in the free countries and to the conscience of the countries at war with the Nazis. They should be entreated to do whatever they could to save those who could be saved. “[Even if] it’s impossible to save the population permanently – it should be possible to save them temporarily. If it’s impossible to save adults – it may be possible to save children.”<sup>8</sup>

Parts of E. Loewenstein’s article, “First Duties,”<sup>9</sup> takes up the cause of the rescue of children in the very first week of the war. The article, speaking of children in Germany and Poland, states that while children throughout the occupied areas face a grim fate, “there is no doubt whatsoever that the fate

<sup>7</sup> *Davar*, Sept. 13, 1939.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, *Devar ha-Yom*, “Ba-malkodet” [In the Trap], Sept. 17, 1939.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Eliezer Loewenstein, “Tafqidim rishonim” [First Duties], Sept. 10, 1939.

of the Jewish children will be many times grimmer.” American Jewry should fund the entire project, the writer suggests, and the children rescued should be received in Palestine. Loewenstein is sure that the Yishuv will assume this burden happily.

Beyond seeking mercy for the unfortunates, the article addresses a demand to the democracies: They must consider the Jewish population part of the anti-Nazi combat array and protect this population according to the international rules. All of this is said in view of the awareness that “The international situation is getting more and more complicated. No one knows what the morrow will bring.”<sup>10</sup>

The doubt about the future that nestled in the hearts of the editors of *Davar* included the present. While repeatedly admitting that they fail to grasp the immensity of the catastrophe that has befallen Polish Jewry, they warn about “the Job-like tidings that arrive every day, some true and others fictive,” and even criticize those who rush to publish reports plucked from thin air as “first-hand news.” One article presents a list of examples of individual and mass-murder reports that soon proved to be incorrect. Things like this, the writer notes, cause unnecessary panic among the public, which has had its fill of disasters and is heartbroken to begin with. Therefore, “Writers and editors are duty-bound in these times to apply redoubled caution and even more redoubled responsibility” because “*the sho’ah is fomenting panic and defeatism*” (emphasis added). These states of mind are posing obstacles to the rescue efforts that are needed, which depend mainly on Poland’s neighbors, especially the Soviet Union, which has occupied the eastern part of that country. Nevertheless, the article clings, like a drowning man who grasps at any straw, to the hope of abolishing the restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine that the Mandate Government has imposed: “Might even this *sho’ah* – which came about in a country that is associated with the Mandate Government by a political alliance and has exposed hundreds of thousands of Jews to lethal danger – have the merit of bringing about such a miracle? Maybe.”<sup>11</sup>

Those who hope for a “political miracle” express their firm doubts about it on the very same line. In such a situation, only two “complementary” goals remain. First, “the Jewish Yishuv must *maintain its existence, defend its land, and assure the continuation of its enterprise*” (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> Second, the Jewish organizations in the free world, especially in the United States, must help the Jews of Europe and are not doing enough; the writer defines their behavior as “horrific” and “criminal” in its complacency. Accordingly, he states with emphasis that only the organized Yishuv can change this behavior by taking political action that will rouse world Jewry from its lassitude, this being its duty “to the Jews of Poland, to the entire nation, to itself.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., *Devar ha-Yom*, Sept. 18, 1939; see also *Devar ha-Yom*, Oct. 29, 1939.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., *Devar ha-Yom*, Oct. 3, 1939.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Sept. 18, 1939.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Oct. 10, 1939; see also *ibid.*, Nov. 15, 1939.

These pronouncements, which sound like so much baseless florid pretense in view of the situation as it was, and especially as it would be, were unrealistic but by no means fake. They flowed from the conviction that Zionism and, specifically, the Yishuv in Palestine were responsible for the fate of the entire Jewish people. In the meantime, reports came in about the Nazis' intention of establishing a Jewish zone in the Lublin district, intended primarily for Jews being deported from Germany and Austria. This report, originating in official German sources, led *Davar* to the conclusion that the Nazis had embarked on "a war of extermination against the Jewish people in Central Europe." Even this vehement statement, however, was accompanied by doubts: "The reports arriving from Germany and, especially, from the German occupation territory in Poland, *should be treated cautiously* [emphasis added] [because] their level of reliability is low and their disseminators' intentions are sometimes illegitimate." Therefore, the reports often contradict each other and quickly prove false. Accordingly, reports about "the establishment of a 'state of the Jews' in Lublin should be treated with caution." However, the article continues, with all due caution and despite the doubts, "Through the mist of ignorance and inaccurate and basically false reports, the program of oppression, the new mission of extermination, stands out in its full horror." The Nazi scheme outdoes itself in inhuman hypocrisy, because "that scoundrel [Hitler] speaks of 'solving the Jewish problem' *but he is [really] bent on annihilating them*" (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup> Two weeks later, however, *Davar* published a letter from one Ephraim Braude of London under the heading, "State of the Jews or Lepers' Colony."<sup>15</sup> The letter, despite the grim account of events that it presents, offers a different assessment of the Nazis' intentions: not the onset of extermination but, contrarily, keeping the internees alive under harsh and humiliating conditions so that American Jewry will mobilize to help them, thereby enriching the Nazis' treasury with badly needed foreign exchange. In other words, the plan now is to make the suffering of the Jews concentrated in Lublin into a device that will help the Nazis. Monetary extortion aside, Braude believed that the Germans also intended to foment tension between the Polish population in that area and the Jews, who would be brought there to be settled on land expropriated from the Polish inhabitants. This divide-and-conquer policy would give the Nazi regime further utility, allowing them to profit doubly from these Jews' existence.

Behind these false hopes lurked true hope. The partitioning of Poland between Germany and Soviet Russia had spared approximately two million Jews from Nazi rule for the time being. *Davar* came out vigorously against accusations in the Polish press in London to the effect that the Jews had welcomed the Soviet occupation. *Davar*, while acknowledging that the Soviet regime was hostile to the Jewish faith, Zionism, and any other manifestation of Jewish nationhood, noted that it had granted the Jews "equality not only on

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Nov. 13, 1939.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Nov. 29, 1939.



paper but also in life,” that is, “absolute civil equality in theory and in practice, which [the Jews] had not known even in independent Poland.”<sup>16</sup> Notably, this view approximated that of the Jewish Communists in the United States but clashed with the outlook of the Jewish newspapers in that country, which expressed concern about the fate of Jewish culture under a Soviet regime that was hostile to it. The editors of *Davar* entertained similar fears but managed to differentiate correctly between murderers of Jews and destroyers of Jewish culture.

By late 1939, *Davar* had come around to a two-edged and “balanced” assessment of the state of Polish Jewry. A lead article notes that the fortunate ones who had managed to leave Poland and reach Palestine “deny several reports about the destruction of localities and of massacres.” The same article, however, adds that “The sadistic powers of invention of the SS men have discovered slow killing methods that are ghastlier than outright extermination.”<sup>17</sup>

One doubts whether the writer, with his ornate style, fathomed the meaning of “outright extermination” at the time. One also doubts that anyone at *Davar* believed this was indeed the fate of Polish Jewry. We say this because the flow of incoming reports slowed in 1940, as did the frequency of articles about the condition of the Jews in the occupied countries. There were roughly as many articles in the twelve months of that year as in the four months of the preceding year. Much the same happened at the other Hebrew newspapers and in the American Jewish press.

The impression that one gets from most of the lead articles and surveys is that the minds and hearts had attained a stabilization of sorts when it came to assessing the Jews’ tragedy. One may infer this from an editorial that carried the hopeful headline, “Glimmers.”<sup>18</sup> The piece begins with a message of cautious consolation, so to speak, as new reports from the occupied countries relate that “faith has not expired and glimmers of a war of hope have been ignited amid this deadly darkness.” The text does describe the demise of Austrian and German Jewry and a change in attitude toward the Jews on the part of the Soviet authorities in eastern Poland, manifested in the repression of the Jewish culture and persecution of the Zionist movement; and in Nazi-ruled western Poland, brutal oppression is continuing in full force. In both locations, however, there are “glimmers”: the underground operations of the Zionist pioneering youth movements. It is in them that hope resides because “even in the night of our struggle here, their luminescence will illuminate from afar.” These lofty rhetorical devices – they must have been produced by Shneur Zalman Rubashov (Shazar) – are meant, contrarily, to encourage the Yishuv. It is, after all, with the Yishuv that the article begins: “In these days of great struggle, with the Yishuv in the throes of a desperate war for its life and the fate of its people, every piece of news from the lands of

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1939, Nov. 23, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1939.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, April 12, 1940.

the *sho'ah* – describing the Jews' steadfastness against the disaster that has come upon them – “is treasured many times over”. When speaking about the Yishuv's desperate war for life, the writer must have been referring to the 1939 White Paper and its outcome, the “land transfer regulation” in early 1940 that limited the possibility of legal purchase of land by Jews to 5 percent of the territory of Palestine. There could have been no other reason for the use of this terminology because in the first half of 1940, when the situation on the war fronts had ground to a halt, the Yishuv in Palestine faced no danger from any quarter. Accordingly, these remarks expressed the psychological aspiration of striking a balance of sorts between the condition of the Yishuv and that of the Diaspora. Both are in danger, both are waging a desperate war for their collective existence, and both derive encouragement from each other's national struggle. Thus, the Polish Diaspora, teetering on the brink of extermination, is offered as an example and a paragon for the national collective in Palestine.

An editorial published five weeks later confirms our conjecture about its predecessor. This piece states explicitly, with no excessive rhetorical flourish, that “The *sho'ah* of the world and the *sho'ah* of the [Jewish] people darken the horizon and sow despair among many who had not known despair thus far. The awful dangers that we did not breed and that we lack the strength to repel may now bring about an additional danger for which we alone are responsible: the danger of paralysis of the will to act, the lack of initiative to recover.” This call for recovery and action is addressed mainly to the Yishuv, because “the Yishuv is not lacking in power even in our times. And if days of trial are in store for us, let us greet them as a vigorous, organized Yishuv that is in control of its forces, thinks clearly, abounds in initiative, and is quick to act.”<sup>19</sup>

These remarks flow from the Zionist national premise that “Only great redemptive action in Palestine can fortify the Yishuv and encourage great redemptive actions in the Diaspora.”<sup>20</sup> This specific message is needed because the current year has exposed, more than ever, “our weakness and our disaster: our not being of people that dwells on and controls its soil. Therefore, we are alone among the nations even amid a disaster that has gripped the [entire] world.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, according to the writers' Zionist national consciousness, an organized Jewish entity exists in only one location on earth, Palestine, and this entity enjoys some extent of national sovereignty even though it lacks political rule. Therefore, only it can animate the Jewish people in its distribution across the free countries. This consciousness, although undoubtedly logical from the national standpoint, proved to be a vain hope in the historical reality. The Yishuv and the Zionist Movement did not manage to mobilize Diaspora Jewry for organized national action on behalf of rescue, let alone for action that might have changed the fate of those suffering under Nazi occupation. All that could be done at that time was to publish in a newspaper, under

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., May 23, 1940.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Aug. 27, 1940.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Aug. 30, 1940.

a banner headline on page 1, the proclamation of the first year of the war – 1940 – as the year of the disaster of Polish Jewry, for the additional purpose of expressing the hope that “We will yet be privileged to see you in freedom,”<sup>22</sup> in Palestine, of course.

These remarks of encouragement, advertised by the United Committee for Assistance to Polish Jewry, also reflected the outlook of *Davar*. The paper articulated its view in two comprehensive articles: one by Maksymilian Apolinary Hartglas, the political right-hand man of Yitzhak Gruenbaum in the Polish Senate, who to his good fortune had managed to escape from Poland at the very outbreak of the war; and one by Shneur Zalman Rubashov (Shazar), a member of the *Davar* editorial board who would succeed Berl Katznelson as editor of the paper upon Katznelson’s death in 1944.

Hartglas’ article carried a headline that would eventually become a historical idiom – “War of the Jews *or war against the Jews*” (emphasis added). Published in five installments,<sup>23</sup> the article reviews the anti-Jewish policies of Central and East European countries in the 1930s and then takes up the attitude of the Nazi regime in occupied Poland toward the Jews. Relating to the situation in the present, Hartglas explains that, admittedly, “This war is being called the new world war and it is directed against Britain and France, but for the time being its casualties are not them but mainly the Jews, foremost the Jews of Poland.” Hartglas penned these words several weeks before the Germans invaded France and occupied Belgium and the Netherlands. Hartglas believes that “Britain and France will [eventually] win” no matter what. This, however, leads to a question that troubled many: “Will Polish Jewry win along with them?” The affirmative answer to this question depends, in his opinion, primarily on the Jews in the free countries, who must mobilize to help Polish Jewry by fighting “the indifferent silence of the countries of Europe”; it also depends, of course, on the United States, which is giving Germany free rein to carry out its policy of humiliating and brutally oppressing the Jews of Poland. Despite these descriptions, Hartglas, like many members of the Zionist leadership in Poland including Gruenbaum, continues to believe that the only correct solution to the national problem in Europe after the defeat of Nazism harkens to the principles that had been worked out in the Versailles treaties after World War I, which awarded the various national minorities in the new countries of Central and Eastern Europe the right to self-determination. Accordingly, “We demand, justly, that we be given full civil rights in the new Poland, with no further eliminationist intentions and not only on paper but also in practice. And because we are a special *national-cultural bloc*, we should be assured national-cultural autonomy with government support and assistance” (emphasis added). This demand originated in the universal political principle of the protection of national minorities and the accepted Zionist premise that the Jews’ future national existence must be predicated on autonomous cultural

<sup>22</sup> See *Davar*, *Devar ha-Yom*, Sept. 1, 1940, and *ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1940.

<sup>23</sup> *Davar*, Omer department, Jan. 4, March 8, April 5, May 17, and May 19, 1940.

organization in the Diaspora and the building of an autonomous national Yishuv, eventually to become an independent Jewish state, in Palestine. It all rested on the clear realization, as Hartglas admits, that “Jewish Palestine is the only answer to the Jewish question, but much time will pass until the masses and the millions manage to settle in Palestine.” Even then, too, the Jewish national problem will continue to fester because millions of Jews will remain in the Diaspora. Therefore, thought should be invested in solving the Jewish question at both levels: the territorial level in Palestine and the civic and cultural level in the lands of the Diaspora.

Hartglas’ thoughts, published in *Davar* against the drumbeat of information about the dire distress of Polish Jewry, are the most pronounced manifestation of restrained optimism about these Jews’ postwar future. This mindset must have influenced the editorial board’s decision to publish an abstract of a lecture in which the well-known historian Salo Baron unfurled several optimistic scenarios of the condition of European Jewry after the war, during it, and even under German rule.<sup>24</sup>

Several months farther into 1940, S. Z. Rubashov published a far-reaching survey on the state of European Jewry under the headline “The *Sho’ah* of 1940 in the Jewish Diaspora.”<sup>25</sup> He began by expanding the concept of *sho’ah* to apply to the condition of the entire free world. By doing this, he offered an approach that furnished a semiconsolation, so to speak. As he puts it, from 1933, when the Nazis came to power, to the beginning of the war, the Nazi regime persecuted one group only: the Jews. Now that the entire democratic world is fighting against him, the Jewish people is no longer alone in its distress. Then, in the spirit of cautious optimism, Rubashov divides the Jews into three categories, each with its own situation. The first category, embracing Jews under Soviet rule including those in eastern Poland, are not in mortal danger but their Jewish culture is at risk of being trampled by the Communist regime. The second category comprises American Jews, who, while enjoying the status of free and equal citizens, are deterred from publicly identifying with the national distress of their people. Their plight traces to current American antisemitic trends of thought that accuse the Jews of intending to draw the United States into the war against the Nazis. Rubashov was right about the antisemitic trends: That year, overt antisemitic propaganda was being waged in the United States, the famous pro-Nazi airman Charles Lindbergh its foremost exponent – all of which against the background of the broad-based “America First” movement, which opposed entering the war.<sup>26</sup> The third category comprises Jews under Nazi rule. Rubashov has nothing new to say about their desolate situation beyond what has been set over the past year. Therefore, unlike Hartglas, who is optimistic about the future of the Jews after the war, Rubashov is skeptical about what might happen in

<sup>24</sup> Y.P., “Atidah shel yahadut Eiropah” [The Future of European Jewry], *ibid.*, Jan. 3, 1941.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1940.

<sup>26</sup> In this matter, see Chapter 10, “Remarks on the Continuing Jewish Angst.”

the future, as the conclusion of his article shows: “*The sho’ah of the present* is placing the nation, in all its segments, before a decision for which no segment [of the nation] has prepared itself” (emphasis added). He did not know how telling and tragic his words would soon become. Along with Hartglas’s sober political optimism and Rubashov’s hesitant existential skepticism about the fate of Polish Jewry, *Davar* published emotional articles and writings that predicted the annihilation of the Jews, albeit without terming it a *sho’ah*.

Anselm Reiss, a leader of the World Alliance of Po’alei Tziyon and a member of the Committee for the Rescue of European Jewry, issued an anguished outcry in an article headlined “Why Are We Silent?”<sup>27</sup> He wrote on behalf of “the blood of our brothers and sisters that cries out to us from the Nazi inferno” while the Jewish public in the free countries, with its plethora of organizations, was not doing enough to help on its own and to influence Gentile public opinion and the democracies’ governments.

Later that month, *Davar* ran an article by an anonymous author under the headline, “The Nazi Inferno in Poland,” retelling the testimonies of refugees who had managed to escape from that country. The testimonies, the writer states, show that “The Gestapo brutes have transformed [Poland] into a vale of killing where our fellow Jews are being murdered, killed, and tortured day after day.”<sup>28</sup> Even the sociologist Jacob Leshchinsky – while maintaining skepticism about the reliability of the information arriving from Poland and admiring the steadfastness of the Jews there, who were being persecuted on a daily basis – came out against the prevailing view that “this is the worst it can get.”<sup>29</sup>

The most agonized writings were published by an eyewitness named J. M. Neimann in a letter from Vilna that was posted in February 1940.<sup>30</sup> Neimann, who claimed personally to have experienced the torture of life under Nazi rule in Poland, likened the fate of Polish Jewry to the destruction of “the Aztec civilization, of which hardly a vestige remains.” At the root of this tragic and prophetic comparison, he said, was the idea that “the destruction of Polish Jewry is so enormous that no one can grasp it in its full breadth and depth. It is almost unprecedented in human history,” rendering the suffering public and also that outside the killing vale, for example, Lithuania, “powerless and helpless.” In his despair, the only thing left for him to express was one request of his compatriots outside the perimeter of the menace: “If it proves impossible to offer full assistance, please display at least some degree of sincere commiseration, of Jewish and human warmth. The hands may slacken but the hearts – as long as they continue to beat – may be a source of boldness and heroism.” He also thought it important to assert publicly that the

<sup>27</sup> *Davar*, Feb. 8, 1940.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1940.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 29, 1940.

<sup>30</sup> J. M. Neimann, “Za’aqat yehudei Polin” [The Outcry of Polish Jewry], *Davar (Omer)*, March 6, 1940.

oppressed and persecuted had not lost their Jewish and human pride even on the brink of extinction.

Furthermore, as a man who personally had experienced the full measure of agonies and tortures, he urged his readers to vow “to know and understand that the demise of Polish Jewry *has an element of tragic heroism* [emphasis in the original]. Apart from indescribable evil and agony, surprising powers of endurance and amazing faith and confidence exist here. *Many generations will still be astonished by this episode of agony and valor*” (emphasis added). Indeed, historical research and the public ethos, with its various symbols, prove how right this man was sixty years after the events. Even at the time, however, the editor of *Davar*, who boldfaced the words “tragic heroism,” understood the essence of this human reality.

A year after Neimann’s outcry, his request for empathy with those being murdered was answered in a way by Haim Shorer, a member of the *Davar* editorial board who became the paper’s editor ten years later, in the early 1950s.

Shorer, like Neimann, appealed to the Jews but not to all of them, focusing instead on those in Palestine. His remarks were published in response to press reports about the holding of Purim parties in various locations. Shorer’s message was simple: “I want to cry [...], I want us to be allowed to cry so that we shouldn’t be so ‘strong,’ so ‘strong as a rock.’ What has this custom of the wealthy got to do with us?” On the contrary: “We are Jews, simple, poor, and destitute, the wretched of the wretched, and the thing that suits us best is lamentation, simple weeping that shocks He who breaks hearts.”<sup>31</sup>

In the first half of 1941, until the Nazi forces invaded the Soviet Union, reports and assessments about the situation of European Jewry succeeded one another in their lachrymose and worrisome routine. They continued to describe life in the ghettos as reported by neutral countries’ diplomats, they underscored the shaky situation of the Jews in the Balkan states (now under German and Italian military occupation), and the fate of the Jews under the Fascist Vichy regime. Even at the outset of the historic Operation Barbarossa, the tenor of “troubles as usual,” originating in a mindset of objective helplessness that breeds a passive response, did not change.

The tenor changed two months after the war against the USSR began, expressing a terrifying conclusion about the fate of the Jews in that country even before the magnitude of the extermination actions there were known and confirmed: “The *sho’ah* now being unleashed against Soviet Jewry is unparalleled in all these years of atrocities [...]. Everything that has happened in Europe thus far pales in comparison with the disaster that has befallen the Jews of Russia.” This was written pursuant to an appeal by Jewish intellectuals in Russia to their counterparts in the free world, especially the United States, to help the Red Army, which was spilling its blood to fight the Nazis. *Davar* considered the very fact of an appeal from Soviet Jewish intellectuals,

<sup>31</sup> Haim Shorer, “La-yehudim” [To the Jews], *Davar*, March 4, 1940.

of course presented with the Soviet authorities' consent, as a ray of consolation in this time of distress. It was, in the newspaper's opinion, an expression of national partnership of fate that made one hope that "The day will come when we and Russian Jewry will be united in more than common resistance to our people's rash and cruel enemy." This hope inherently offered some consolation for the future in view of the Jewish national powerlessness at the present time – in regard not only to Soviet Jewry but to the plight of Polish Jewry, which has been oppressed and mortally endangered for two years now. In the latter context, *Davar* admitted, "Today we cannot offer large-scale and real assistance to our tortured brethren in the Polish Diaspora,"<sup>32</sup> not even by persuading general public opinion to launch a public protest over their suffering. The situation is so depressing that even the disaster of the Armenians in World War I received more reverberations and protests than that of the Jews in the present time, although the latter is graver. The basis of the tragedy, however, lies not in the world's silence but in the Jews' own acquiescence in "the [inability of the] democratic world [to] force the rulers of Nazi Germany to cease their criminal actions in the countries under their control." All that could be done was to believe that the Nazi criminals would soon be brought to international justice.<sup>33</sup>

Despite this acknowledgment of general impotence, *Davar* continued to describe the Jews' plight in two tones of voice: pessimism and cautious optimism. On the one hand, it protested the neutral countries' sealing of their borders to Jewish refugees; on the other hand, it presented as a paragon of assistance the Soviet authorities' granting of right-of-way to Jewish refugees from Ukraine during the evacuation from the oncoming German forces.

*Davar* ran a lecture by Dr. Majewski, an activist in the Polish resistance who had managed to escape, under the banner headline, "How Are Jews 'Living' and Dying in the Ghettos of Łódź and Warsaw?"<sup>34</sup> Majewski's remarks abound with heartrending descriptions of the suffering of the Jews in the ghettos and provide horrifying statistics about the rates of mortality among them. The paper also published a public lecture by Dr. L. Berger at a press conference sponsored by the Polish Democratic Club, thereby showing its interest in disseminating the lecture among the public at large. In the lecture, titled "How Are the Jews Living in the Ghetto?"<sup>35</sup> Berger wished to prove that there was some hope for some Jews in the ghettos who had been integrated into the process of manufacturing for the German army. What is more, he said, the inhabitants of the ghetto are not only working productively but also sustaining lively cultural life.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Aug. 26, 1941. (The Soviet Jewish intellectuals' appeal to world Jewry was published in August 1941; the appeal to mobilize for relief was repeated in the Soviet Yiddish weekly *Aynikayt* in June 1942.)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Nov. 10, 1941.

<sup>34</sup> *Davar*, Dec. 17, 1941.

<sup>35</sup> *Davar*, Jan. 21, 1942.

Reiss and Moshe Prager published additional similar accounts in the middle of 1942.<sup>36</sup> Haim Barlas, the newspaper's correspondent in Constantinople, added details from a point of observation outside the ghetto in his article, "Reverberations of the Destruction of European Jewry."<sup>37</sup> While recounting the destruction of the Jewish communities of Bukovina and Bessarabia, he also noted the assistance that Switzerland was giving to Jewish refugees.

Paradoxically, in September 1942, two months before the reports about the mass murder of Jews in Poland and Russia were confirmed, S. Z. Rubashov published his second annual survey of events in Europe. This time, however, he did not title it "The *Sho'ah* of European Jewry," as he had a year earlier; instead, he gave it the headline "The Jewish Diaspora in 1941/42."<sup>38</sup> The survey says nothing that has not already been said about ghetto life – the distress and its outcome, mass mortality, but also the daily struggle for existence. Rubashov places special emphasis on cultural activity and, in particular, the brazen spirit being shown by the pioneering youth movements, which are staying in touch with Palestine as best they can. Rubashov also offers words of consolation: Now that the United States has joined the war, the entire Jewish people – from the Soviet Union via occupied Europe to Great Britain, Palestine, and the United States – is on the front lines of the war against Hitler. Unfortunately, however, he says, the leaders of these nations have not yet recognized the Jewish people's role in this war – namely, they have not allowed the Jews to establish a combat brigade under the Jewish national flag.

Notably, articles exuding a cautiously optimistic tone of voice continued to appear in *Davar* even after the paper, on June 28, 1942, ran a report from the British *Daily Mail* about the murder of 700,000 Jews in Poland and after in its editorial the newspaper defined the public mood as one of "impotent rage,"<sup>39</sup> which could, admittedly, "be manifested in actions" – that, however, had of course not been taken. Here the paper seemed eager to derive encouragement from what was being done in the ghettos. Evidence of this was its publishing of N. Kantarowicz's article, "Vigor and Courage in the Ghetto."<sup>40</sup>

It was surely this cautious and misinformed optimism that delayed by a month a response of *Davar* to the release of information about the mass murders in Eastern Europe. This kind of thinking recurred in an editorial summing up the third anniversary of the war, which explained matters in terms of the democratic coalition against Nazism and an increase in the Yishuv's

<sup>36</sup> *Davar*, A. Reiss, "Ha-teror ha-germani be-Polin" [German Terror in Poland], June 5, 1942; M. Prager, "Ha-ze'aqah ha-ilemet shel yehudei Eiropah" [The Mute Outcry of European Jewry], June 10, 1942.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1942.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1942.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, July 30, 1942. See also Yosef Krük, "Ha-retzihot be-Polin" [The Murders in Poland], Aug. 18, 1942.

<sup>40</sup> N. Kantarowicz, "Meretz ve-ometz ba-geto" [Vigor and Courage in the Ghetto], *ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1942, and Moshe Prager, "Ha-shanah ha-shelishit le-hayei ha-geto" [The Third Year of Ghetto Life], *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1942.



participation in the war effort – without relating to the horrifying reports about the mass murders that were being perpetrated in Poland and Russia.<sup>41</sup>

Two weeks later, the editors evidently felt that they had been wrong not to emphasize the disaster of their fellow Jews in their summation of three years of war. To explain their “oversight,” they first address a general argument to the public: “Our attitude toward the trampled and dying Diaspora is evolving into one of sighing and heartbreak only,” which will do nothing whatsoever to help those being oppressed and murdered. However, they hurriedly emphasize and warn that “One should not stir up exaggerated hope; it must be recognized clearly that the possibilities of offering aid are very narrow,” adding that the public’s responses are so sluggish because it knows so little. The proposal, then, is to give the public more information and point it in the direction of practical and realistic ways and means that it may invoke to help the dying Jews, even if only a little.<sup>42</sup>

As for the nature of those few possible ways, it is unlikely that the editors of *Davar*, with the possible exception of Berl Katznelson, knew about them. Therefore, they allocated a great deal of space to speeches by the Yishuv leaders Moshe Shertok, Berl Katznelson, and David Ben-Gurion, which related to the strategy of national salvation.

Shertok’s speech was delivered to the Assembly of Representatives of Knesset Yisrael and published under the headline “The War and Us” in March 1942, about three months before the reports about the mass killings came in. The subthemes of the address were the *Struma* affair (relating to the ship that had sunk with 760 refugees aboard), Jewish mobilization for protest against the Mandate Government policy that was thwarting rescue immigration, the Yishuv’s war effort, and policy problems. Shertok defined these as “*the only [areas of] effort worthy of the name of our national war effort, the only effort that strives by its very essence to fighting back against Hitler, that aims by its very essence to create a new political base for us, to assist in the creation of a new political base – this is what we are mobilizing for*”<sup>43</sup> (emphasis in the original). The clarity of the words leaves no need for interpretation.

About half a year later – three or four months after the mass killings of Jews in Poland and Russia had become a known fact – Berl Katznelson spoke at a conference in honor of the Jewish National Fund, called “The Voice of the Land,” on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem on September 23, 1942. Katznelson, like Shertok, spoke only about the national goal of the Yishuv at this fateful time for the Jewish people. His remarks, mirroring the crux of the organized Yishuv’s stance, deserve to be quoted at length due to their contents and also due to the way they found expression. Winding up his speech, Katznelson said, “Will this Yishuv, which is better off than all the other tribes of Israel, not feel responsible for what will happen after the war? Will it not assume

<sup>41</sup> *Davar*, Sept. 4, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1942.

<sup>43</sup> *Davar*, March 1, 1942.

responsibility – will it not pledge all its abilities – *for the rescue of the Jewish survivors*? Do we not share the Jews’ suffering? We may manifest this sharing in two ways: by giving our people to the war and by giving our wealth to establish a home for those who will return from the war, the surviving remnants of the sword and the plagues, the orphans of Israel who will have no other home anywhere on earth save ours.” Admittedly, “This home may be unsatisfactory in many respects, *but just the same it is a home and there is none other*” (emphasis added). This home, Katznelson continued, is being built by *klal Yisrael* (the Jewish commonwealth, the Jewish people at large); “Everything we have merited here is due solely to the merit of the Jewish people,” he stated with emphasis. Therefore, “The time has now come for this Yishuv to pay back some of its debt to the Jewish people.”<sup>44</sup>

These remarks seem to cover some distance toward explaining Katznelson’s mysterious attitude toward the disaster that had befallen European Jewry. His biographer, Anita Shapira, found no answer for his failure to “get up and do something, as he knew how to do.”<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, Katznelson “knew how to do.” In late 1943, when Ben-Gurion’s “periodic crisis” with Chaim Weizmann flared up, Katznelson dismissed Ben-Gurion’s stance vehemently and imposed on Mapai a resolution contrary to Ben-Gurion’s views.<sup>46</sup> In the case discussed here, however – the greatest tragedy that the Jews had experienced in their history – “Berl imposed silence on himself and did not allow us to peer into the recesses of his psyche,” says Shapira. The riddle, however, belongs not only to Katznelson’s personality but also to his stature as editor of the most important newspaper in the Yishuv. The question, then, is: Did Katznelson really dodge the problem both as editor of *Davar* and as the spiritual leader of the Zionist Labor Movement? The answer appears to be no. As editor of *Davar*, he expressed his views indirectly and, by means of editorials, directly. Although most of the paper’s editorials were not written personally by him, it is hard to imagine that they clashed with his outlooks and that he had not vetted them before they were published. It is also hard to believe that S. Z. Rubashov, who evidently wrote most of the editorials, did not consult with him. And these writings presented the ghastly truth for all to see: It was impossible to save the masses and the rescue efforts were named only for the few. Furthermore, Tuvia Friling, in his painstaking study titled *Arrow in the Dark*, stresses that Katznelson took part in many discussions of the “troika” that administered the secret rescue activities. Relating to this “inside” participation in the rescue action, Friling says that the coopting of Berl Katznelson in the decisions should not be examined in quantitative terms only, that is, by counting the number of times that he was asked for his

<sup>44</sup> Berl Katznelson, “La-haradah ha-tziyonit” [About the Zionist Angst], *Davar*, Oct. 2, 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist, Berl Katznelson, 1887–1944*, translated by Haya Galai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 323.

<sup>46</sup> Yosef Gorny, *Shutafut u-ma’avaq* [Partnership and Struggle], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1976), pp. 152–159.

views. The moral and political backing that Katznelson gave Ben-Gurion and the troika until his death in August 1944 was also very important.<sup>47</sup> This may explain the opening sentence in Katznelson's letter to Ben-Gurion in August 1942, which was devoted entirely to matters involving the Am Oved publishing house: "David, you may laugh at me for what I'm writing to you these days (you may also infer from it what remains for me in our public life)."<sup>48</sup> From his sense of impotence in the present, Katznelson, like R. Yohanan b. Zakkai in his time, sought to salvage the Hebrew culture as a material part of the Jewish National Home, as he defined it at the assembly in honor of the Jewish National Fund – a home intended "for those who will come back from the war, *the surviving remnants of the sword and the plagues*" (emphasis added), in other words, for the survivors only, it already being impossible to save the majority. Therefore, at this very time, with the public not privy to his views on the rescue of European Jewry, Katznelson fought for the integrity of the National Home policy. This explains his belligerent stance on the crisis between Ben-Gurion and Weizmann, as noted earlier, and his unshakable belief in the redemptive national significance of Zionist action – settling the country and mobilizing for the war effort – at this time.

Nevertheless, one question still remains: Why did the man who had written those stirring verses in memory of the eight Zionist warriors who had fallen at Tel Hai in 1920<sup>49</sup> fail to find the strength, twenty-two years later, to say a "Yizkor" (in memoriam) for the millions who had already been murdered? The reason was not only the lack of psychological fortitude but also, and perhaps mainly, concern about giving official and final confirmation of the disaster that had befallen his nation. If he did this, he would establish a symbol of impotence that would amplify panic and despair in the Yishuv, causing the public to attenuate its exertions instead of striving to bolster what was known at the time as the national project. Therefore, instead of aligning himself publicly with the mourners, Katznelson chose to station himself at the forefront of the doers. Furthermore, "doing" is the only path to rescue – admittedly not of the millions but of the nation, of *klal Yisrael*, from which Katznelson had never intended to secede. Indeed, he was never among the radical negators of the Diaspora.<sup>50</sup> For this purpose, the ethos of a new R. Yohanan b. Zakkai is needed: to leave behind the besieged Diaspora, doomed to devastation, in order to build a national home as a center of political strength and cultural vitality, where the modern Hebrew *Yavne* and the fighting Jewish *Massada* would prevail. Only by means of this sad rhetorical ethos may the public, powerless to rescue its compatriots, be consoled.

<sup>47</sup> Tuvia Friling, *Hetz ba-arafel: Ben-Gurion, hanhagat ha-yishuv ve-nisyonot hatzalah ba-sho'ah* [Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust], translated by Ora Cummings (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), Vol. B, pp. 204–205.

<sup>48</sup> *Berl*, p. 323.

<sup>49</sup> Berl Katznelson, "Yizkor," *Ketavim A* [Writings A] (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Mapai Publishing House, 1950), p. 202.

<sup>50</sup> In this matter, see Berl Katznelson, "Mi-shut bi-t'futzot ha-golah" [A Voyage in the Diaspora], *ibid.*, pp. 369–382.

Ben-Gurion hoisted the combination of powerlessness, isolation, and the call for mobilization to the pinnacle of public rhetoric in his speech before the Assembly of Representatives after the magnitude of the national disaster had become known. It was one of the most brazen and moving speeches ever delivered by this leader, whose remarks were usually typified by topical dryness that appealed mainly to logic. At this occasion, Ben-Gurion orated in a torrent of passion. He spoke about the Jews “as the only people being abandoned as a people” to the Nazi murderers who were brutalizing them above and beyond anything they were doing to other occupied peoples. This, he said, is because the Jews are a people whose blood has been abandoned by the entire world, including the nations at war with the Nazis. Therefore, babies, women, and elderly, together with men, are doomed to die solely on account of the sin of being Jewish – “because only the Jews lack a *fighting advocate*” (emphasis added); in other words, the Jews’ national powerlessness also traces to the free world’s nonrecognition of the Jews as a people.

Therefore, the representatives of the Jewish people gathered to demand that the leaders of the democratic world “stand in the breach to the best of their ability, lest they consign to annihilation a shackled, imprisoned people lacking defense and weapons – its sons and daughters, men and women, elderly and children.” When it came to possible methods of rescue, however, he had no new proposals and ideas to offer beyond those already expressed, for example, persuading the neutral countries to open their borders, threatening the murderers, the collaborators, and the bystanders with punishment, and, of course, opening the gates of Palestine to the refugees. The focus of his speech was elsewhere: on the Jews’ national powerlessness. Here, the targets of his criticism were the leaders of the democratic powers. Ben-Gurion admitted that the Jewish people appreciated their war efforts and were confident in their eventual victory over Nazi Germany. However, he continued, “We summon you to justice for our profaned *Jewish dignity*. [emphasis added] It is not Hitler who profaned it. The Nazis cannot diminish our dignity as human beings. They can oppress, kill, apply yellow badges.” However, “We are being persecuted, hated, abhorred, slaughtered, and trampled as Jews. We want as Jews to fight the cruel enemy and the threat to our people.” Further on, his anguished rhetoric rose to its climax with the outcry: “We demand for the Jew the right that every American, every Englishman, and every Russian has. We are few. We are helpless” as against the large and mighty nations. “We are a small and poor people, scattered and fragmented. But we are people like you. Our hearts are like yours. Our emotion is like yours, our insult is like yours, and if we are abused as Jews, we want to fight back as a people, as would any people against the murderers who have risen to annihilate them.”

Ben-Gurion’s remarks echoed the famous peroration of Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? – fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us,

do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?<sup>51</sup>

With the Jewish tragedy already in plain sight, one cannot avoid the melancholy reflection that Ben-Gurion's impassioned and sincere rhetoric was offered as a psychological and spiritual counterweight of sorts to the Jews' state of national powerlessness, which he acknowledged thoroughly and without illusions. For further inductive evidence of this, one may recall that under nonpublic circumstances as well – for example, in closed meetings and in personal correspondence – Ben-Gurion raised no proposals and made no demands that were different from those that he expressed publicly, such as rescuing children to the extent possible and pressuring governments in countries such as Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria – which, although allies of Nazi Germany, had not yet been directly occupied by it – not to persecute the Jews there. He expressed this clearly at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on December 6, 1942, several days after his speech before the Assembly of Representatives. In this discussion, Ben-Gurion ruled in his characteristically blunt way, “The rescue of the Jews doesn't depend on us”<sup>52</sup> but rather, of course, on the democratic powers and, above all, on victory over the Nazis. Ben-Gurion voiced a similar approach in his letter to Arthur Lurie, Secretary of the Zionist Executive mission from Britain, which he wrote with the intention that Lurie should forward it to Felix Frankfurter, the American federal judge. In the letter, Ben-Gurion reiterated, apart from proposals for partial rescue, his vehement demand for the establishment of a Jewish army, its being the Jewish people's right to fight the Nazis under its national flag.<sup>53</sup>

After the magnitude of the national disaster became known, the editorials in *Davar* spoke in a different tone of voice from Ben-Gurion's belligerent one. A week before Ben-Gurion's fighting words were published, the newspaper expressed itself in a melancholy way: “Bereft of words and at a loss for counsel, we are buckling under the burden of the frightening reports that are arriving in succession from the core of the inferno in Nazi Poland. *Helpless, the nation and all its families weep*” (emphasis added).

<sup>51</sup> The connection between these two speeches occurred to me due to the polemic that broke out between Ben-Gurion and Nahum Goldmann at the first world intellectual conference in Jerusalem in 1957. At that occasion, Ben-Gurion passionately criticized Goldmann's pro-“exilic” outlook, and in the midst of the polemic Goldmann cited Shylock and expressed his attitude toward the stage character as a proud and courageous Jew in the foreign exilic environment that Ben-Gurion totally negated.

<sup>52</sup> See *Bein Magen David li-t'lai tzabov: ha-yishuv ha-yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael ve-sho'at yehudei Eirovah 1939–194: qovetz te'udot* [Between the Star of David and the Yellow Patch: the Jewish Community in Palestine and the Holocaust of European Jewry 1939–1945, Collection of Documents], Dina Porat and Yechiam Weitz, eds. (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002), p. 202.

<sup>53</sup> Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, Vol. A, pp. 68–69.

This acknowledgment of national powerlessness was accompanied by the acknowledgment of a human transgression: the self-restraint that *Davar* had applied in the past, due to excessive caution, in publishing information about the magnitude of the ongoing extermination. For this reason, a set of painful questions appeared: “Is it possible that we did not cry out enough? Might we, too, be at fault for the failure of the voice to penetrate far and wide? for not having added the sound of our weeping to the choked wailing of the masses of victims?” Then, however, the national impotence shouted out from the historical question in its full measure of tragedy: “To whom should we cry out? Where is the ear that will hear it? or the hand that will offer aid?”<sup>54</sup> The only thing left, then, was to persuade the leaders of the free world, by virtue of their common war against the barbaric murderers, to do at least what could be done to rescue some of the children, there being no further possibility of rescue for the adults. Therefore, all that remained was to cry “Save them!” Indeed, between November 24 and December 30 of that year, *Davar* published thirteen editorials that expressed, in various wordings, the same anguished call for rescue actions.<sup>55</sup>

Naturally, these editorials started out by expressing the hope that the democratic governments would take political action to save whomever could be saved. A short time later, however, the turn of bitter disappointment came. Even if the editorialist stated with emphasis, belaboring the obvious, that “the possibilities of salvaging souls from the European inferno are very restricted and very limited,”<sup>56</sup> the free world proved unwilling to do even the little that could be done, for example, to make an effort to rescue children and to offer assistance. Therefore, there was no avoiding the grim conclusion that “[t]he terrible *sho'ah* that has come upon the Jewish people has made us *a source of divisiveness and discord to all nations on earth*” (emphasis added). And this because “we are demanding rescue, must demand it, and will demand it even when the demand seems troublesome, even when it is addressed to allies who are standing together with us in this war.”<sup>57</sup>

Added to this *cri de coeur* was the newspaper’s disappointment with the Yishuv due to its manner of behavior at the time, specifically in regard to the “stain” of evading compulsory national service. To stress the public disgrace of such conduct, *Davar* stated with emphasis that the call for mobilization in the Yishuv applied to those aged eighteen to nineteen, whereas other anti-Nazi countries were drafting older people as well. Therefore, “The Yishuv must cleanse itself of this stain.” This was a gravely critical charge to bring against Yishuv society; very few accusations of its severity were voiced then and even later. Given that it was expressed by a pronouncedly “establishment” newspaper that represented the ethos of the new Hebrew Jewish society, defining

<sup>54</sup> *Davar*, *Devar ha-Yom*, Nov. 24, 1942.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 26, 27, and 29, and Dec. 4, 7, 8, 16, 21, 24, and 30, 1942.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1942.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1942.

evasion as a “stain” on this society’s collective forehead was no exaggeration in the minds of the editors of *Davar*. This criticism, however, was addressed to Yishuv society and not to the national leadership, of which *Davar* was a part.

This brings us to the matter with which we began the discussion: the status of *Davar* as the organ of the largest and leading political movement in the Yishuv. It is in accordance with this status that we should evaluate the newspaper’s positions on the disaster that had struck European Jewry. In regard to these positions, one may discover caution and self-restraint toward official reportage of the unfolding events under the Nazi occupation, together with free rein to the emotional expressions that predicted the Holocaust, as indeed came to light at the end of the period discussed here, November–December 1942. This dual attitude found especial expression in the contrast between the “even-handed” tenor of the editorials and the articles that appeared on the inside pages, which presented firsthand eyewitness accounts of life in Poland, especially in the Warsaw ghetto. The descriptions in these articles, cited earlier, are almost identical to the stories of daily life in the Warsaw ghetto that we cull from the diaries of Adam Czerniaków, chairman of the Judenrat in the ghetto years, and of Emanuel Ringelblum, the ghetto historian, until after the ghetto uprising in April 1943.<sup>58</sup> The fact that this is so gives us evidence not of disregard of the disaster that had befallen the ghetto inmates and the persecuted Jews in the occupied countries at large, but rather of the same cautious optimism that we observe throughout the period described – that is, the assumption that most of the nation would survive despite the grim reports from the relevant areas. Accordingly, the editors of *Davar* grasped at any straw that might awaken flickers of hope, such as indications of steadfastness amid the ghastly distress; the existence of an education system, however rudimentary; the activity of the youth movements, community relief organizations that distributed food to the destitute, and so on – reports that two aforementioned diaries support to some extent. Although these were encouraging signs, they did not affect the general admission of the national powerlessness of the entire Jewish people, not only those who were suffering and being murdered but also the Jews in the free countries, including the Yishuv, who had no practical ability to deliver salvation even by influencing the leaders of the powers that were at war with the Nazis. After all, these powers’ abilities were also severely limited according to the same admission and despite the criticism that *Davar* leveled at the Jewish organizations and the democratic governments for their inefficacy. In this state of affairs, it became clear incrementally, until it became a certainty that defied ambiguity, that the strident pessimists were “more right” than the cautious optimists. What remained was to struggle for

<sup>58</sup> Adam Czerniaków, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniaków: Prelude to Doom*, Stanislaw Staron and staff of Yad Vashem, eds. (New York: Stein and Day, 1979); Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, Jacob Sloan, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1958).

the national dignity of the Jewish people as an equal partner in its war against the Nazi enemy, with everything that this implied in the Zionist sense for the Jews' status in the postwar international arena.

#### HATZOFE

*Hatzofe*, the organ of the Religious Zionist movement (comprised of the World Mizrahi Organization and the Palestine-based Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrahi party), was the closest to *Davar* in its views on the fate of European Jewry. This proximity of stances came about due to the political partnership between the Zionist Labor Movement and the National Religious movement in the Zionist Executive, but not for this reason only.

Religious Zionism, from the time of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever of Hibbat Tsiyyon, via Rabbi Yitzchak Reines of the Zionist Organization, to Rabbi Judah Leib Fishman of the Zionist Executive, had displayed the ability to separate statecraft, which entails political compromises, from the Religious Zionist vision whenever present and future Jewish national interests were at stake. This segregation of the vision of redemption from daily action recurred in the views expressed in *Hatzofe* about the fate of European Jewry.

This dual approach – optimistic messianism on the one hand and political action on the other – was manifested in the persona of Rabbi Meir Berlin (subsequently Bar-Ilan), president of the Mizrahi World Center and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper, *Hatzofe*.

On the eve of Passover 1942, by which time the public was aware of the mass murders being perpetrated by the Nazis pursuant to the resolutions taken at the infamous Wannsee conference, Rabbi Berlin published an article titled, "Let Us Await the Redemption!" In the piece, he stated, "Our generation will have sinned if it turns its attention from the redemption and despairs of it." There is no justification for allowing such a diversion of focus, "even in a generation that considers the redemption *a certainty that will arrive tomorrow*" (emphasis in the original). Accordingly, following long-standing tradition, "Let us await the redemption, which may be far off or may arrive tomorrow or the day after."<sup>59</sup>

These remarks, aimed at a readership of believers for which this newspaper was its medium, expressed faith in the eventual redemption and also acknowledged the limits of the Jews' ability to engage in far-reaching rescue at the present time.

Rabbi Berlin had been expressing this acknowledgment since the beginning of the war. Two months after the Nazi armies occupied Poland, he warned about the looming menace to Jewish society and its culture in the occupied countries. Within the overall threat, in his opinion, "The plight of the giants of the Torah, the yeshiva rabbis and their students, who have managed to flee from the conquering oppressor to the towns of eastern Poland and are now

<sup>59</sup> *Hatzofe*, April 1, 1942.



seated in Vilna, is especially dire.” It was true that these yeshivas, with their teachers and students, have managed to keep themselves intact for the time being, but there was no assurance that this situation would prevail for long – as indeed happened when the Red Army occupied Lithuania. Therefore, Rabbi Berlin demanded an all-out effort to arrange asylum for the Torah scholars and their teachers in Palestine as “the only solution” in view of the clouded future.<sup>60</sup>

In Rabbi Berlin’s opinion, the mandate to rescue the Torah scholars belongs, first and foremost, to the religious institutions in Palestine and the United States. That the American Mizrahi organ *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* supported this demand comes as no surprise. Interestingly, however, secular Jewish newspapers in the United States, such as *Forverts* and *Der Tog*, did the same. Their stance evinced a combination of optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, a way to effect rescue from the looming menace to Jewish culture seemed to have been found: relocate the yeshivas to Palestine. On the other hand, it amounted to an admission that nothing else could be done under the existing conditions. Furthermore, the action to be taken would be on behalf of Polish *Jewry* and not the endangered Polish *Jews*. Even though this distinction was not expressed in so many words by those who demanded the rescue of the leading rabbinical teachers above all, it was implied by the very proposal, which, under the circumstances of the time, made it clear that the masses could not be saved.

In this sense, there were no material differences between *Hatzofe* and *Davar* in terms of reportage and assessments. Reports about the plight of the Polish Jews did refer to their suffering and express dread for their fate, but the possibility of mass annihilation was not mentioned at all until the middle of 1942.<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, *Hatzofe* invested space in articles asserting that the condition of Polish Jewry would change for the better at the end of the war, once the suffering and loss of life would run their course. Indeed, Azriel Carlebach, reviewing the progression of the war in his capacity as the newspaper’s foreign-affairs editor, was not sure

whether you and I, or even the surviving remnants in Europe, will be privileged to be alive on that day. There is no assurance that we will witness the day of our vindication. [However,] in this war, the nations of the world have been summoned to the throne of justice. The day of judgment is at hand. On that day, the nations will be told that we, the Jewish people, are one of their number as well. And although it is true that we will be handed a severe sentence – [...] the very spectacle of the existence of justice and of He who administers justice is a festival for us, a great day for us [...].<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Rabbi Meir Berlin, “Qol deme’i aheinu” [The Voice of Our Brethren’s Blood], *ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1939.

<sup>61</sup> *Hatzofe*, Sept., 1939, Sept. 17, Sept. 20, Sept. 22, 1939; Oct. 2, 1939; Nov. 17, 1939; March 24, April 9, Oct. 25, 1940.

<sup>62</sup> Dr. Ezriel (Azriel) Carlebach, “Al hurvotayikh, Polin” [On Your Ruins, Poland], *ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1939.

No one at the time knew how right he was, in both senses. Whereas Carlebach wavered between gloom about the present and hope for the future, the researcher A. I. Brawer expected the status of Polish Jewry to emerge favorably due to the community's joint struggle against the German occupier on behalf of the slogan of the Polish patriots who were struggling to liberate their country, along with other national-liberation movements in Europe: "For your freedom and ours."<sup>63</sup> S. Gottlieb, an expert on Polish Jewry who also wrote for *Ha'aretz*, also described the daily hardships in the ghettos but did not inflate the matter into an existential issue, especially when he compared the situation of the Jews with that of the Poles in Warsaw and proved that the difference between them was not great and, in certain respects related to food supply, the Jews were actually better off.<sup>64</sup>

A "balanced" approach in describing and assessing the situation was also manifested in reference to the behavior of the Yishuv in states of emergency. E.[A] Carlebach quoted in *Hatzofe* the remarks of several Polish-Jewish leaders who had managed to escape from Poland and reach Palestine. They grumbled about how life in the Yishuv was continuing as if nothing had happened, as if the tragic change in the existence, if not the lot, of Polish Jewry had not taken place. The Hebrew press, too, "has lost the ability to project its voice outside its narrow bailiwick – it's all business as usual."<sup>65</sup>

Carlebach himself entertained no illusions; he knew that "we cannot be of much assistance. The forces acting against us are too strong." Even the little that could be done, however – expressing emotional and moral empathy with the suffering Jews and providing whatever assistance, however scanty, that could really be offered – was not in evidence, he said, either among the leaders or in public opinion. In the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, he said, life was going on as though nothing whatsoever was happening to the Jewish people. A year later, as noted earlier, Haim Shorer expressed the same anguished protest in *Davar*.

The *Hatzofe* editorial board responded to Carlebach's remarks and the disgruntlement evinced by refugees from Poland who had managed to reach Palestine. We quote the editors' remarks at length and verbatim here because they reflect the feelings of the Yishuv leadership and most of the newspapers. The article states with emphasis that

Amid the refugees' outcry one also hears repressed resentment of the Yishuv for not having been horrified when it heard about the great *sho'ah* that befell Polish Jewry in one stroke [...]. They hold the Yishuv accountable for indifference and coldness and subject it to the trite rebuke of being the "complacent in Zion."

<sup>63</sup> Dr. A. I. Brawer, "Ha-teragediah shel Polin" [The Tragedy of Poland], *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1939.

<sup>64</sup> S. Gottlieb, "Yehudei Varshah meqadmim et penei ha-ra'ah" [The Jews of Warsaw Preempt the Evil], *ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1940.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. A. Carlebach, "Im setimat ha-golel al Varshah" [On the Sealing of Warsaw's Fate], *ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1939.

In the writer's opinion, the refugees, still pursued by nightmares from the suffering that they had undergone, should not be faulted. This, however, does not mean that one should refrain from asking, "To what extent is this charge against the Yishuv an exaggeration? This Yishuv has just endured three years of bloodshed [the Arab rebellion in 1936–1939] that claimed hundreds of victims – the finest of its sons and daughters – and is still in political and economic distress." Therefore – in a tone of insult and rebuff – he replied, "to accuse *this tortured Yishuv* of the sin of complacency is little more than a mocking of the wretched" (emphasis added).

The very fact that the writer implicitly likens the suffering of the Yishuv, fighting against the Arabs, to that of the Jews of Poland under Nazi oppression demands attention. Admittedly, nearly 400 Jews – 1 percent of the entire Yishuv – lost their lives in the three years of the "Arab rebellion" – 1936–1939 – mirroring the fatality rate in Israel's War of Independence between November 1947 and January 1949. In both cases, it was a dramatic bloodletting indeed. However, the very comparison of the two situations – the erstwhile one in Palestine and the present one in Poland – shows that the writer cannot grasp the latter situation and, by the same token, acknowledges the Yishuv's inability to offer real assistance to the suffering Jews in Europe. After all, the tragic question that the public asks itself is: In what way can the Yishuv be helpful – "in protest rallies? These days of madness are not the time for rallies. Even if the Yishuv turns out en masse and demonstrates against the bloody regimes that are oppressing Polish Jewry, their voice will not be heard and their pleas will not rise." Then, as if to prove the impotence of public protest, the writer states that even American Jewry, with its numbers and influence, "is neither protesting nor demonstrating."<sup>66</sup> After all, such protests have no effect on the Nazi authorities. The only thing left to do, then, is to prepare a detailed and practical plan of assistance for the Jews of Poland. The obligation to take this initiative resides foremost with the functionaries and leaders of Polish Jewry who have made their way to Palestine; they should approach the Yishuv institutions with such a plan in hand.

This understanding of the vicissitudes of the Yishuv, which had just emerged bruised and battered from three years of struggle with the Palestinian Arabs, turned into genuine fear a year later when the Wehrmacht occupied the Balkan region and approached the borders of Palestine. In view of this menace, *Hatzofe*, which had doubted the validity of demonstrations in support of the suffering Jews in the Nazi-occupied countries, now demanded that the Zionist leadership demonstrate Churchillian characteristics at this time of emergency and deliver encouraging and morale-boosting words to the worried and frightened Yishuv. After all,

[t]he war front is steadily moving in. The Yishuv is facing danger and has been abandoned to its devices and its fate at this grim hour. [Nevertheless,]

<sup>66</sup> "Hovatenu le-yahadut Polin" [Our Obligation to Polish Jewry], *ibid.*, April 9, 1940.

the leaders of the Yishuv do not consider it their personal obligation to appear before the public at this time and speak to it, bolster its morale, and strengthen its hands. The Yishuv's eyes are trained on its leaders and their remarks. It wants to hear encouraging, edifying, counseling words from them. Instead, [the leaders] are treating [the Yishuv] with disregard.<sup>67</sup>

The expressed sentiment was that the gravitas of the moment demanded a different response. The Yishuv did in fact face an existential threat between March 1941 and October 1942, when the British victory in El Alamein reversed the tide of the war.

Therefore, it was correct to claim that the Yishuv needed a dose of Churchillian moral encouragement. Such encouragement should have been expressed by the leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement, such as Chaim Weizmann. One might regard this as a public demonstration of sorts, the value of which had been dismissed the previous year when it concerned empathy with the Polish Jews, who were suffering and on the verge of extermination. At first glance, of course, this reflects the question of whose ox is being gored; it sounds as though concern for bolstering the Yishuv's plummeting spirits takes precedence over the screaming isolation of those interned in the concentration camps and the ghettos. After all, if the Yishuv empathized with the suffering trapped Jews of Europe, these Jews would surely have found out about it in various ways. Thus, the Yishuv could have raised their morale even if it could not have provided any real deliverance. It was exactly this – encouragement for the worried public – that the article now demanded of the Zionist leaders. On second thought, however, there seems to be a basic difference between the two situations and it may have determined the editors' stance. Moral support for the victims of Nazi persecution was effectively useless; what the Jews of Europe needed at the time was clandestine, practical organized assistance. In the free and organized Yishuv, in contrast, psychological encouragement might give the public a very meaningful “shot of adrenaline” with which it could withstand the menace. The reference to Churchill's speeches merely proves the point. Even so, those who spent every day in the presence of death needed public empathy, and indeed, the United States and Palestine offered it in June–July 1942. This demonstration, however, was preceded by several months of doubts about the credibility of the rumors concerning the extent of the killings in Poland and Russia. As reports came in from various places, *Hatzofe*, like *Davar*, saw fit to question their veracity:

We have already noted the problem in this [column]: the reports repeat themselves and the number of those killed and slaughtered rises with each successive report until it adds up to tens of thousands and millions. The result is the opposite impression of the one intended, both inwardly and outwardly.

Inwardly, in respect to the Yishuv, the reports are depressing, numbing the senses and consciousness. Outwardly, “these reports accustom [others] to

<sup>67</sup> “*Devar ha-dabarim*” [The leaders must speak out], *ibid.*, May 1, 1941.

viewing the Jews as totally abandoned and their blood free to shed, if they have blood at all.” The tendency to publish exaggerated reports originates, according to *Hatzofe*, in competition among news agencies:

Each agency seems to compete with its counterparts for the greatest number of persons killed and slaughtered that it can report. Some do argue that “It is our duty to place on the record each and every Jew who has been killed [...] so that we will be able to claim compensation and reparations on the day of peace and payback. Since this is how the world works, the enslaved people should do it, too. This, however, is a desirable course of action only if the reportage is as credible and accurate as possible. Otherwise, as they say, when you multiply a multiple, you merely subtract.”<sup>68</sup>

Even by the end of June, when a protest demonstration was held in New York against the mass murders and in empathy with the victims, *Hatzofe* expressed the demand for strict responsibility in reporting the magnitude of the murders being committed. As the paper expressed it, if these reports were tendered “accurately, reflecting the responsibility of the writer and the informer, they might make the whole world tremble.” To provide evidence for this argument, *Hatzofe* compared the way the free world responded to the murder of hundreds of inhabitants of the Czech village Lidice with its response to the extermination of tens of thousands of Jews. “The slaughter in a little town in Czechoslovakia,” *Hatzofe* stated, “shook the whole world and triggered fierce protests [whereas] the great and ghastly massacres and slaughters in Poland and Lithuania are making no impression.” Then came an important clarification: This happens “not because these slaughters are carried out against Jews but because the reports about them are given over improperly, deficient both in factual truth and in the responsibility of those who speak and write truth.” As I show later in the book, the Yiddish-language Jewish press in Britain shared this view. The tragedy, of course, was that the disseminators of the scare rumors were telling the truth and the more sober-minded among them were wrong. Indeed, a day later, despite taking mild exception to the full reliability of the reports, *Hatzofe* confirmed that mass-murder actions were indeed taking place.<sup>69</sup>

From then until November, when the mass-murder actions were officially confirmed, the reports about extermination operations became more and more frequent.<sup>70</sup> When the official statements were made public and all newspapers echoed the public’s dismay, the editors of *Hatzofe* plunged into a round of soul searching that included a confession to God for their “silence” theretofore. The remarks in *Hatzofe* were more candid than those in *Davar*. Y. Bernstein, head of the Ha-Po’el ha-Mizrahi party and a member of the *Hatzofe* editorial board, wrote frankly, “Justly and unjustly, we are eating our hearts out, first

<sup>68</sup> “Ve-shuv be-oto inyan” [Back to the Same Topic], *ibid.*, April 9, 1942.

<sup>69</sup> “Damim be-damim” [Silent in the Face of Bloodshed], *ibid.*, June 30, 1942, “qol ha-dam” [The Voice of Blood], July 1, 1942.

<sup>70</sup> *Hatzofe*, June 18, July 24, July 27, Sept. 21, Oct. 31, Nov. 3, 1942.

of all blaming ourselves profusely for having distracted ourselves all those years from the fate of our brethren behind the iron ramparts, for holding our silence, and for our neglect.”

This admission was followed by apologetic reasoning: It was due neither to indifference nor to distraction but to “powerlessness” and the fear of making things worse instead of better that prompted “*acquiescence under duress*” in “the bitter and demoralizing thought that it can’t be helped, that there is no remedy for those who have fallen into the enemy’s hands until the enemy is defeated” (emphasis added). This meant that “The Jews themselves acquiesced and the entire world acquiesced and who and what would stop them?”<sup>71</sup> Then came the tragic admission that the silence had freed the Germans from all inhibitions, allowing them to continue their murderous actions undisturbed.

The most candid and agonized remarks were penned by E.[A] Carlebach, who, unlike Bernstein, a political personality, was a “professional” journalist and, as stated, a policy-affairs editor who had been invited to join *Hatzofe*. Thus absolved of political-movement responsibility, he could allow himself to be frank in public. Hence he began his confession: “This writer begs his readers’ forgiveness” for having, as required by “my profession,” attempted just last night to do his duty and monitor the foreign news as is his daily wont.” In view of the terrifying reports that reached the editorial board and were spreading through the public, however, “The words did not come together to form sentences, the sounds did not come together to form words, and *his mind did not grasp what was being reported*” (emphasis added). He then confessed to the crime of sinning to God, not only at the individual level but also as a public,

[by having] distracted ourselves. It was easy, the tumult was so great, dramas much more fascinating were taking place, events much more diverse were rising to the surface. It was more convenient to share the concerns of Churchill and Stalin, whose labors were not ours to perform either way, than to share the daily concerns of the Jews, which we alone may address.

Indeed, the main daily headlines in the Palestine Hebrew press and the Yiddish press in the United States and Britain related to the demarches of the war. This is not to imply, however, as Carlebach wrote in a paroxysm of emotion, that he and the public had simply been distracted. It was, as we have stressed several times previously, a response flowing from a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, one should not accept the personal and collective guilt that Carlebach imposed on himself and the public by stating flatly, “*The writer of these columns, too, helped the transgressors*” (emphasis in the original) – that is, the public leaders, and by feeling for this reason that “he will be summoned to justice for each and every line that may have distracted the Jews’ thinking from the cause that matters”<sup>72</sup> – the murder of their compatriots.

<sup>71</sup> Y. Bernstein, “Ba-asonenu u-vi-gonenu” [In Our Disaster and Our Melancholy], *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1942.

<sup>72</sup> A. Carlebach, “Miqtzat viduy” [A Little Confession], *ibid.*, Nov. 23, 1942.

Yeshayahu Bernstein's aforementioned article, published four days after Carlebach's "confession," was probably a response of sorts to the latter's public self-flagellation. Bernstein, too, did not totally cleanse the national leadership of the "sin" of inaction for rescue but did not believe that the masses could be saved. For lack of choice, then, he repeated the same trite ideas such as rescuing children, inducing neutral countries to open their borders, appealing to church leaders, and so on. He also accepted, personally and on behalf of the public, guilt for having neglected such rescue efforts, however small in scale, as might have been made. Citing the Jewish national powerlessness, however, he categorically rejected comprehensive blame for abandoning the suffering Jews. Just the same, he upheld the sense of moral guilt, arguing, "It is a good virtue that exists within us and should be retained." The purpose of this guilt is neither to purge a bad conscience nor to dispel moral malaise but "to attain correction, to take positive actions." Then, as if seeking dialectic solace, he added, "If one should hesitate to accept self-blame when it comes to something that we have lost irretrievably, then [this acceptance] is immensely valuable when it comes to rescuing the endangered remnants." This is because "[t]he more we blame ourselves for the past, the more it energizes us to act in the present. It is here that our confession-exhortation – we are guilty! – has its most positive effect."<sup>73</sup>

For Bernstein, the act of breast-beating for having held silence was not meant as a substitute for urging the democracies to take all possible action to rescue the Jewish masses who were being murdered. This, he said, was in contrast with those among the public who argued that a proud nation in distress does not address pitiful requests to others to help it but rather fights for its existence with all its strength, as Britain did in the evacuation at Dunkirk and during the Luftwaffe's bombardments of its cities. Other nations, Bernstein asserted, also ask for help when stricken by national disaster, especially the kind that has befallen the Jewish people.<sup>74</sup>

Unlike Bernstein, who lashed out at the Yishuv, Mordechai Lipson, editor of *Hatzofe*, took the murdered Jews to task by stating that he sought points of light in the gloom of the national disaster and that he found them: those who refused to march to their death "like lambs to the slaughter."<sup>75</sup> By implication, the blame for the national disaster resides not only with those who "held their silence" for the reasons that Bernstein noted but also with those who fail to rebel against their fate.

The two views are different in essence: a request for aid to save lives in the former case, a demand for struggle on behalf of the honor of the dead in the latter. Both, however, had a common origin: the Jews' national powerlessness.

<sup>73</sup> Y. Bernstein, "Be-yom tzom ,ta'anitenu" [On the Day of Our Fast, *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1942.

<sup>74</sup> Y. Bernstein, "Ke-Angliya bi-mei Donkerk" [Like Britain at the Time of Dunkirk], *ibid.*, Dec. 11, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> M. Lipson, "Tipot nihumim be-khos yegonim" [Drops of Solace in a Cup of Agonies, *ibid.*, Dec. 7, 1942.

## HA'ARETZ

Although known as a nonpartisan newspaper, *Ha'aretz* expressed political views on various aspects of Yishuv and Diaspora public life. Economically independent because it was owned by the wealthy Schocken family, it was exempt from the utilitarian political considerations that every party organ faces. From this standpoint, if one may so state, *Ha'aretz* expressed an “unexpurgated” Zionist attitude that lay somewhere between *Davar* and *Hatzofe*, organs of the Zionist Executive, and *Haboqer* and *Hamashqif*, its political critics. This independent in-between status makes *Ha'aretz* an especially important object of study in assessing the views and trends of thought in the Yishuv during the war, as the fate of millions of European Jews was being sealed. Paradoxically, *Ha'aretz*'s independent perspective did not diminish the importance of the views of the party-related newspapers; contrarily, it usually strengthened them whenever *Ha'aretz* agreed with all or some of the newspapers on any particular issue. In this sense, *Ha'aretz* is a reliable witness to the Yishuv's general state of mind during the time of concern to us.

When the war began, *Ha'aretz*, like the other newspapers, proclaimed the onset of a time of emergency and woe for the Jews. In fact, it outdid its rivals by stating – only a week after the Nazis invaded Poland – that “The Germans are punishing the Jews of Poland.”<sup>76</sup> The writer drew this conclusion because, in his opinion, even though it was clear that the Jews would suffer immensely due to the occupation of Poland, “[t]he reality far exceeds even the cruelty that we have come to expect from the Nazis.” The rumor that led the writer to this conclusion concerned the execution by the Germans of several Jewish public figures in Kovno as a punishment for their having urged their communities to mobilize for struggle against the Nazis.

The sense of emergency grew in intensity when reports came in about the closure of the borders of neutral countries, such as Romania, to Jewish refugees who were attempting to leave Poland.<sup>77</sup> This led *Ha'aretz* to the conclusion, on the eve of Yom Kippur, that Jews were worse off than other peoples under Nazi occupation because they had neither refuge nor shelter. The writer probably had no idea how on-target he was in assessing the fate of Polish Jewry two years later.

A month later, *Ha'aretz* published a report about the Nazis' intention of establishing a “Jewish precinct” in Lublin District, which it defined as “a quarantine camp on an immense scale, the likes of which the world has never seen.”<sup>78</sup>

*Ha'aretz* responded to the reports in two ways: the routine way that all the newspapers invoked and its own way. In the correct routine way, *Ha'aretz* called for the mobilization of resources in the Diaspora and Palestine, from the budgets of public institutions and from private donations, to aid refugees from Poland who had escaped to Romania, Hungary, and Lithuania. It also urged

<sup>76</sup> “She'elot ha-sha'ah” [Current Affairs], *Ha'aretz*, Sept. 11, 1939.

<sup>77</sup> “Beyom ha-din” [On the Day of Judgment], *ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1939.

<sup>78</sup> “Medinat ha-yehudim” [The State of the Jews], *ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1939.



the Zionist National Institutions to intercede with the Mandate authorities in all possible ways to allow the immediate repatriation of Palestine citizens.

The second type of response was an appeal to the Yishuv's social conscience. The Yishuv, according to this response, should correct its social faults and make sure that "the hungry be given bread, the naked be given clothing [...] and the oppression of the weak be ended." This exhortation originated not in the worldview of the Zionist Labor Movement but in the spirit of Jewish tradition, with Yom Kippur at the gates. Indeed, "Jews in Palestine and elsewhere have faced daunting and malevolent decrees [in the past] and *tzedaqah* [philanthropy] is one of the things that 'set aside the vileness of the decree.' Thus, the nation will find its redemption through *tzedaqah*."<sup>79</sup>

Beyond the moralistic tenor of these remarks, which were expressed in a traditional spirit and style, this marked a significant expansion of the Palestinocentric outlook in the national sense. The recommended philanthropy is meant, after all, to enhance the social resilience of the Yishuv, which is sovereign to act on its own behalf and on that of the Jewish nation, within the given political framework and in accordance with its scanty resources, whereas Diaspora Jewry "stands *powerless* against the terrifying retribution that has sundered the existential foundations of millions of Jews in Eastern Europe"<sup>80</sup> (emphasis added).

This unequivocal statement about powerlessness related to the condition of Polish Jewry and was contrasted with the possibilities of political action by Jewish organizations in the free countries. In 1940, however, the panic triggered by the invasion of Poland and the initial reports from that country were followed by a cooling-off period of sorts. Articles in *Ha'aretz* provided a gentle gust of optimistic spirit. The accounts from the ghettos, and especially the Warsaw ghetto, retold the hardships and the abuses but also emphasized that life there was continuing to take its daily course. In Polish-Jewish relations, too, even amid the profusion of antisemitic manifestations, a rapprochement was under way.<sup>81</sup> The *Ha'aretz* correspondent in London, Robert Welch, who in 1938 had urged German Jews to wear the yellow star proudly, now called on the Jews of Poland to endure the daily humiliations and persecutions proudly, as the Jews of Germany had only three years earlier.<sup>82</sup>

The human inability to predict the ghastly future that was being prepared for the Jews of Poland and, generally, of occupied Europe is illustrated by a comparison that *Ha'aretz* drew between an earthquake that had struck in Turkey in 1940, claiming tens of thousands of victims, and the plight of Polish Jewry and the Jewish people at large. In the newspaper's opinion, both peoples stood powerless against a phenomenon that they could not prevent – an

<sup>79</sup> Editorial, *ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1939.

<sup>80</sup> "Ma'asim ketanim – mitzvot gedolot" [Little Actions – Great Mitzvot], *ibid.*, March 28, 1940.

<sup>81</sup> S. Yedidya, "Yehudei Polin bein tzipornei ha-Natzim" [The Jews of Poland between the Nazis' Claws], *ibid.*, Jan. 28, 1940.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Welch, "Ha-ketem ha-tzahov" [The Yellow Stain], *ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1940.

earthquake and a murderous regime, respectively. Just the same, *Ha'aretz* proposed that the Jews learn a lesson from the Turkish government, which was doing whatever it could, however little this was, to help the casualties of the temblor.

Given that these remarks were aimed at the full array of Jewish institutions, the article was titled “Little Actions – Great Mitzvot.”<sup>83</sup> Just the same, the comparison of the situations is bizarre. Even if we assume correctly that the future could not have been fully predicted, the Turkish inhabitants had the option of fleeing from the earthquake zone in view of the danger of aftershocks, thereby saving themselves, whereas the Jews in the ghettos, even if able to obtain relief from various institutions that year – 1940 – could not escape the possibility of an additional earthquake and its violent effects. Alternately expressed, the Turkish government could rescue endangered Turks, whereas the Jewish institutions could offer only partial and temporary aid to endangered Jews. Just the same, the newspaper became increasingly aware of the Jews’ impotence against the Nazis’ murderous might. A month after the aforementioned piece, it ran an editorial under the headline “Genocide Being Planned.” The editorial stated explicitly that “This newspaper presents daily reportage on the great horrors that Hitler’s agents are committing in the occupied countries, especially Poland, against the Poles and the Jews. The trend toward the physical annihilation of the Jews and, to some extent, the Poles and the Czechs stands out in these actions.”<sup>84</sup> The methods that the Germans were applying against the Jews were dispossession, exclusion from sources of livelihood, cruel persecution, mass pogroms, and ghettoization. For the Poles and the Czechs, it was a matter – for the time being – of confiscation of land and resettlement of Germans on it.

Details reported in the news section about the Germans’ depredations against the Poles and the Jews in the occupied areas confirmed the contents of the editorial.<sup>85</sup> In response to these reports, *Ha'aretz*, marking the eve of the Ninth of Av 1940 – when traditional-minded Jews lament the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem – urged the Yishuv to mourn the “two destructions” that the House of Israel faced: that of the temples in the Land of Israel and “the third destruction that the House of Israel in exile is experiencing this year.” The Diaspora accounts for both the masses and the infrastructure of world Jewry; American Jewry, although large in numbers, is no substitute and Palestine lacks both numbers and mass relative to it.

Nevertheless, despite the tragic situation, there must also be some consolation: “[...] This is but a temporary destruction, an evil that has not blown over, for how will the nation arise for redemption in the location of its vitality if it is bereft of the very offspring who would do the building?” The writer answers this question firmly: “The defeat of the empire of malevolence will

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., March 28, 1940.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., May 20, 1940.

<sup>85</sup> Shalom Gottlieb, “Shi’abud Polin” [The Enslavement of Poland], *ibid.*, June 18, 1940.

create an opening of hope for us, too, with which the ruins of the exile may be healed and the National Home built.”<sup>86</sup> The headline of the article – “When a Nation Is Destroyed” – was culled from a sentence in Ahad Ha’am’s well-known article, “Truth from the Land of Israel,”<sup>87</sup> in which he describes a congregation of worshipers on the eve of the Ninth of Av 1891. At the sight of the worshipers – wretches, in his view – he pronounced grimly, “When a land is destroyed and its nation remains vital and strong, a Zerubavel, an Ezra and Nehemiah will stand up on its behalf and the nation will follow them, return, and rebuild; but when a nation is destroyed, who will stand up for it and whence will it get its assistance?” Behind the ostensible pessimism of these remarks is the opposite: Ahad Ha’am’s national philosophy and public activity in the Hibbat Tziyon movement reflected his faith that the nation would indeed find its succor in precisely this source.

The piece in *Ha’aretz*, too, the title of which was surely chosen deliberately, exudes an optimistic tenor that reflects the same trust in the Zionist resurrection that Ahad Ha’am placed in Hibbat Tziyon. However, the condition for this resurrection, according to *Ha’aretz*, is victory over the Nazis. Thus, even at this difficult hour in 1940, as Britain faced the Nazis alone and London was being bombarded night after night, *Ha’aretz* trusts that ultimately, by virtue of the British heroism and the Americans’ participation in the war – a future development in which *Ha’aretz* believed – Germany will be trounced, the Jewish Diaspora will climb out of its ruins, and the Jewish National Home in Palestine will rise from the rubble on an immense scale.

Robert Welch’s summary of events in 1940 also offers faint rays of consolation. Welch does define the plight of Polish Jewry as a *sho’ah* – an inferno describable only by a poet of Dante-esque talents – but offers optimistic news as well, for example, the cancellation of the Lublin Jewish precinct scheme.<sup>88</sup> Welch’s survey is no different in contents and spirit from Rubashov’s surveys in *Davar* in 1940–1941, cited earlier.

The ambivalent pessimistic-optimistic state of mind that still prevailed in the first half of 1941 was manifested in two articles by the publicist Shalom Gottlieb. In the first, published at the beginning of that year, Gottlieb describes the regimen in two German detention camps, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald<sup>89</sup>; in the second, he writes about the postwar future of Polish Jewry.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> “Am ki yeherav” [When a Nation Is Destroyed], *ibid.*, Aug. 12, 1940.

<sup>87</sup> “Emet me’Eretz Yisrael” [Truth from the Land of Israel], First Article, *Kol kitvei Ahad ha-am* [The Complete Writings of Ahad Ha’am], 2nd Edition, in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Devir, and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publishing House, 1949), p. 30.

<sup>88</sup> R. Weltch, “Yahadut ha-golah bi-shnat ta”sh” [Diaspora Jewry in 1939/40], *Ha’aretz*, Oct. 2, 1940.

<sup>89</sup> Shalom Gottlieb, “Be-zaksenhoysen u-buhenvald be-yamim eleh” [In Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald at the Present Time], *ibid.*, March 2, 1941.

<sup>90</sup> Shalom Gottlieb, “Atidam shel yehudei Polin aharei ha-milhamah” [The Future of Polish Jewry after the War], *ibid.*, April 15, 1941.

The first article describes the grim lives of some 6,000 German Jews who have been interned in these camps. The second relates to determining the civil status of the three and a half million Jews of Poland after the war, something that will affect favorably the status of most Jews in Europe. Noting the cooperation between Jewish institutions and the Polish government-in-exile in London and its representatives in New York, Gottlieb expresses confidence that the solution to be worked out for Polish Jewry at the end of the war will be based on civil equality in Poland and a national home in Palestine.

These writings were produced in the spirit of Apolinary Hartglas's aforementioned article in *Davar*, which also appeared in *Ha'aretz*. S. Goralnik, making an effort to resist the pessimistic spirit that gripped Yishuv public opinion in view of the Mandate Government's policies, is also optimistic about the postwar future of Polish Jewry, most of which, he thinks, will remain in Europe and some will emigrate to Palestine.<sup>91</sup> Dr. David Lazar, in contrast, demands an exodus from Europe after the war, a radical Zionist stance that is obviously very optimistic in essence, given the conditions under which millions of European Jews are living.<sup>92</sup> Despite the flood of reports about the worsening living conditions of Jews in the ghettos of Poland,<sup>93</sup> Gottlieb remains optimistic about the future and believes that the end of the war will occasion a change of values for the better in the attitude of Poles toward the Jews,<sup>94</sup> so that a large Jewish collective will remain in Poland.

Importantly, the basis for this optimistic state of mind in late 1941 was the paradoxical fact that the Nazi armies had invaded the Soviet Union. While the invasion had drawn additional millions of Jews into the extermination zone, it also reinforced the hope for victory in the war.

Immediately after the war began, *Ha'aretz*, like *Davar*, responded with excited national passion to the appeal of the Jewish writers in the USSR to Jews in the free countries. Mirroring *Davar*, *Ha'aretz* stressed, "We consider the Jewish gathering in Moscow a large and important step but only a first step toward the Jews' involvement in the war with the strengthening of relations with the Land of the Soviets" in terms of military and economic aid, which "by necessity will facilitate and expand the connection with Russian Jewry." Thus Russian Jewry, too, will be able "to participate once again in rising from the ruins of our national life and building its future."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> S. Goralnik, "Hu mavhileni va'ani eini nivhal" [He Frightens Me and I'm Not Frightened], *ibid.*, July 18, 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Dr. David Lazar, "Ke-she-homot ha-geto yiplu" [When the Ghetto Walls Fall], *ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1941.

<sup>93</sup> Shalom Gottlieb, "Ha-lehem u-mezeg ha-avir be-geta'ot Polin" [Bread and the Weather in the Ghettos of Poland], *ibid.*, Feb. 4, 1941.

<sup>94</sup> Shalom Gottlieb, "H-tzorekh[Ha-tzorekh] be-shinuy arakhin" [The Need for a Change in Values], *ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1941.

<sup>95</sup> "Lo amut ki ehveh" [I Shall Not Die but Shall Live], *ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1941; see also S. Goralnik, "Kruz ha-sofrim ve-ha-omanim ha-yehudim" [The Jewish Writers' and Artists' Statement], *ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1941.

The cautiously optimistic spirit that took shape due to the Soviet Union's enlistment in the war encouraged *Ha'aretz* to demand that the Zionist leadership prepare the national demands that the Jewish people would present once the war would wind down.<sup>96</sup> With this in the background, there was also an escalation of demands that Jews in the Yishuv mobilize for the war effort in various ways and by various means.<sup>97</sup> This proved once again the discomfort that permeated the Hebrew press about the Yishuv's response to the current needs, including the attitude toward the refugees who had managed to flee to Palestine.<sup>98</sup>

*Ha'aretz* also expressed the opinion that the reports about the number of Jews being murdered by the Nazis were exaggerated. This is not to say that the paper doubted the nature of the Nazi authorities' conduct; instead, it questioned the belief that the plight of the Jews had taken a major turn for the worse. Shalom Gottlieb, in an article titled "About the Recurrent Horror Stories,"<sup>99</sup> criticizes the news agencies for spreading unverified rumors about mass killings, thereby aggrieving a very large number of people who had families in the occupied countries. Addressing the core issue, he explains:

First of all, we must realize that where the Nazis' murders are concerned, there has been no change whatsoever since the day of the first invasion in this war. The occupation authorities are treating the population cruelly, sometimes more and sometimes less [... However], according to the reports arriving from the neutral countries, based on private sources in Poland itself, it may be stated that the Nazis' war in Russia has by and large brought some relief to the lives of the Jews in the Polish Generalgouvernement. The Nazis' primary interest is the labor productivity of the occupied territories, and for this reason orders for various jobs, given to the ghettos, have multiplied. Although the wages are low and barely suffice for a few basic foods, they do allow life to continue. The German officials in the ghettos have been replaced by Italians. The senior and junior bureaucracy is corrupt and susceptible to bribery. Some Jews even leave the Warsaw ghetto for a respite in communities or ghettos in smaller towns. While it is true that distress and hunger are the general condition, those who have money can keep themselves fed. Overall, the situation is one of mass starvation but not of murder or mass extermination.

Despite this "sober" assessment of the situation of the Jews in the ghettos, the Yishuv public had to face what the newspaper considered a number of moral questions. In late 1941, responding to a testimony given by a woman survivor from Poland, *Ha'aretz* asked, "Would we" – the Jews of Palestine – "have the mental fortitude to endure this ordeal? After all, it is only by chance that we have been spared thus far and are not sharing the fate of our brethren

<sup>96</sup> "Tziyonut" [Zionism], *ibid.*, Sept. 21, 1941.

<sup>97</sup> *Ha'aretz*, "Yom ha-din" [The Day of Judgment], Sept. 1, 1941; "Ba-shevi" [In Captivity], Oct. 20, 1941.

<sup>98</sup> D. Lazar, "Ha'azinu le-qol Varshah" [Heed the Voice of Warsaw!], *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1941.

<sup>99</sup> *Ha'aretz*, Nov. 24, 1941.

in Poland.” Then it asked another question: “Can the dire wounds that the oppressor has inflicted on the souls and bodies of our brethren in Poland be healed? What will be the image of the surviving remnants in Poland that manage to live and reach the day when the Nazi regime is wiped off the face of the earth?” The answer given is that there is no answer: “If we hope in our hearts that humanity will arise from the dunghills and the dust, let us add that the questions still have no answers. We must also realize that all members of our generation share this sense of *helplessness and powerlessness* in view of the destruction, unless they delude themselves in vain” (emphasis added).<sup>100</sup> The main issue addressed here, again, relates not to assessing the villain’s actions but to the future, the day when enlightened society will have to lift the world out of its ruins.

This path to rebuilding the ruins and healing the dispirited nation starts with united political action in which the Jews will present the nations with their own national demands ahead of the peace settlements following the war and the Nazis’ defeat. Here *Ha’aretz* criticizes the Zionist leadership for not stressing the importance of the national Yishuv in Palestine vis-à-vis Jewish public circles and the leaders of the free world. Thus, “a great sin was committed by the small group that now heads our institutions, debasing the political image of the Hebrew public in Palestine and paralyzing not only its political activity but also the sense of shared responsibility for the interests of Jews wherever they be.”<sup>101</sup>

This concern about the share and status of the Jewish people among the nations ahead of the political arrangements that would follow the war and the Nazis’ defeat draws a line of sorts between two periods. In the first half of 1942, until July–August, it was still believed that the Jewish masses were holding on despite the ghastly conditions that the Nazi murderers were imposing on them. From then on, however, reports from authoritative sources in Poland about the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews began to undermine this belief. Although the terrifying numbers were not fully accepted, there was no doubt that something horrific and exceptional was happening in Poland and the occupied Russian territories. Even so, however, one doubts that the editors grasped the full magnitude and significance of what was happening, namely the Holocaust. This period, between July and August and November 1942, is the one that this study defines as the tragic interlude. Before it, signs of hope still protruded amid the awareness of the terrible distress; after it, it was realized that the Holocaust was at hand, in which no hope for large-scale rescue existed. During the interlude, hope and despair continued to mingle.

Immediately after the reports about the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews – 700,000 at first, a million later on – were published, *Ha’aretz* described “the Nazi atrocity in Europe [as] much more than just a mere crime, than

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Dec. 22, 1941.

<sup>101</sup> “U-mah be-inyaneinu?” [And What about Our Interests?] *ibid.*, June 19, 1942.

a mere mass murder. It has clear ‘politics’ [...]. It has a certain intent and program, even more than it expresses the unleashing of the lowliest of urges in a nation that is showing its horrific face this time.” It is the emphasis on *a certain intent and a program* that distinguishes the Holocaust from other mass murders, like that perpetrated by the Turks against the Armenians in World War I and the great slaughters that have taken place in the tribal wars of postcolonial Africa.

Accordingly, under circumstances not of benighted impulses but of a way of thinking that generates a program of benightedness, one cannot speak of “protest,” because this is not what is needed at such a moment, “but rather of a predetermined plan to thwart the evil intent”<sup>102</sup> of a nation that, even if defeated in the war, hopes to be the winner in the act of extermination.

These remarks were written in view of the uncomfortable sense in public opinion that the Yishuv had been dilatory in its public-protest responses to the mass murder, especially after a huge large protest rally had been held in New York. Even after a protest rally took place in Tel Aviv, demanding a halt to the massacres by all means, *Ha’aretz* asked, “In reading this resolution, one main question comes to mind: What are these ‘all means’ that can thwart the murders?” This remark is not meant to imply that the powers really have tried to rescue Jews by all means. Still, the question remains: What means might bring the murders to an end?

This question lent itself to only one answer, a very explicit one: “There is only one way: military victory, the destruction of the military and political machine that Nazi Germany has created in order to enslave all of Europe, all of the world.” Furthermore, total victory over this totalitarian regime can be achieved only by total mobilization to destroy it. As has already been said, “The lowest price we will have to pay for the annihilation of the enemy will be – everything!”<sup>103</sup> Such a mobilization means the mobilization of all strata in the Yishuv for the war effort in all requisite areas of activity – economic, social, and military. The first step toward this is an end to the phenomenon of evasion – what *Ha’aretz* calls “criminal abandon” – that has gripped large segments of the Yishuv.

Into the autumn of 1942, shortly preceding the official reports about mass murders, a three-level assessment of the national condition took shape. First, rescue will be achieved only by obliterating the enemy. Second, nothing is gained and no necessity is served by “repeating the numbers,” because the statistics on the dispossession, the deportations, and the murders are only one aspect of the terrifying picture. The agonies and tortures cannot be described “in [statistical] tables” because they “leave their imprint not only on the nation’s body but also on its soul.”<sup>104</sup> Despite the reports, at this point the process underway was not yet extermination but murder, and even mass murder

<sup>102</sup> “Nokhah ha-zeva’ah” [Facing the Atrocity], *ibid.*, July 30, 1942.

<sup>103</sup> “Keitsad yipasku ha-zeva’ot?” [How Will the Atrocities Stop?], *ibid.*, Aug. 3, 1942.

<sup>104</sup> “Yom yahadut Polin” [Polish Jewry Day], *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1942.

is a far cry from extermination. Therefore, tables and members are unimportant because the suffering, unmatched anywhere else, has long been known.

However, hope for the survival of much of Polish Jewry still flickers. Therefore, the same edition of *Ha'aretz* ran an article by Shalom Gottlieb, the Polish Jewry expert, titled, "Despite the Enslavement, the Threat, and the Hunger ... the Amazing Endurance of the Jewish Public in Occupied Poland – Encouraging Reports." The article is based on a report published in Switzerland in March about the state of Polish Jewry in the preceding twelve months. After surveying the findings of the report about the hardships of life and the human suffering in the ghetto, Gottlieb concludes by stating that "This public remains very resilient and will endure until the day of redemption, may we witness it soon."<sup>105</sup>

This optimistic spirit recurs in an article on "The Zionist Conference and the Diaspora" in early October 1942. The article identifies with remarks made at the conference by Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who offered two complementary assessments of the situation of Polish Jewry. In one, Gruenbaum expressed "the hope that the Jews' civil rights will be fully restored after the war." In the second, he stressed that the restoration of the Jews' civil and national rights would do nothing to solve the situation of the millions of Jews in Poland. After all, given the destruction of the Jews' economic base and the "large oversupply" of Jews in the country even before the war, their plight will only worsen once the war ends. Consequently, there will be no solution for the surviving Jewish masses in Poland save the Zionist solution. By implication, Gruenbaum continued, "The Jews of the Diaspora are awaiting redemption more than they are awaiting the restoration of the prewar status quo." These remarks imply the demand for a change in policy on solving the problem of the Jews of Poland. Therefore, "[t]he Zionist Movement and the Hebrew Yishuv in our country are duty-bound to do what they must so that European Jewry's hopes for redemption – which are also hopes for Zion – not go unrequited."<sup>106</sup>

Three weeks after this upbeat assessment, an article appeared under a headline that said it all, even though it was not based on new information: "The Final Extermination Policy."<sup>107</sup> The article discusses the Vichy Government's intention of deporting to Germany 10,000 Jews who had found refuge in the Vichy zone even though they were not French citizens. The article, published in October 1942, considers this the onset of the implementation of a plan to annihilate European Jewry. Support for this assertion, the writer says, comes from overt German sources. The peoples of occupied Europe, the writer continues, have been divided into "three types: those to be totally annexed to the Reich; those whose affairs will be managed under strict Reich supervision; and those that will be 'colonial' peoples administered by Reich bureaucrats." He also mentions a fourth type – "those unable to adjust to the 'new order,'

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Sept. 1, 1942.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Oct. 1, 1942.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Oct. 23, 1942.



who will be exterminated outright.” This steers the writer to an unequivocal conclusion: “It doesn’t take great powers of imagination to understand the category in which the Nazis have placed the Jewish population of Europe. All their actions, even those not concretely and directly related to murder operations, demonstrate their main underlying intent: the physical extermination of this population.”<sup>108</sup> As evidence, he cites what has been done to the Jews of Poland and Ukraine.

A month after this casual “prophecy of doom” was published, official statements from the democratic governments about the mass extermination of European Jews appeared. The horror engendered by the confirmation of these chilling propositions, and the terrifying fears that were expressed amid hope that they would never fully come to pass, were of course weighty, as manifested in dozens of articles that appeared between late November and the end of December 1942. The trepidation articulated in these pieces, accompanied by doubt that turned into an outcry in response to the no-longer doubtable truth, underscores the tragedy of the Jews’ national powerlessness. It does so because, beyond the outcry itself, the writers raise no demand or proposal that has not been voiced previously – because none exists. Again only military victory will assure rescue.<sup>109</sup> Again they warn the world that satanic German Nazism menaces all of humanity and not only the Jews.<sup>110</sup> The heads of the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church in Britain, the British Parliament, and the main newspapers, especially the *Manchester Guardian*, are thanked for empathizing with the Jews’ tragedy.<sup>111</sup> Again we read the same old demands to step up the rescue operations and to mobilize the Yishuv and American Jewry for this sacred and exalted human mission.

Nevertheless, the remarks now exhibit a new tone that was not audible before – self-flagellation for the sin of public silence in the previous half-year. A week after *Ha’aretz* expressed the hope that, despite everything, world public opinion would produce a few elements that were alert to the suffering of the other, the paper realized, admittedly on the basis of rumor, that even the members of the Zionist Executive had closed their hearts to their compatriots’ agonies in recent months. In an editorial, *Ha’aretz* said, “In our inner explorations of the atrocity, a sorrowful and, at the moment, unnecessary topic has infiltrated in recent days – when did the fact of the mass murders become known? Some wish to prove that it was even known three or four months ago but was hushed up – and hushed up by our institutions, no less. Needless to say, several months of silence by Jewish institutions would greatly diminish the responsibility of non-Jewish entities for their unresponsiveness over a two-week period,” namely from the end of November until the date of the editorial.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> “Hashmada” [Extermination], *ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1942.

<sup>110</sup> “Le-ahar ha-ishurim” [After the Confirmations], *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1942.

<sup>111</sup> “Ha-teguvot ha-rishonot” [First Reactions], *ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1942.

Again, *Ha'aretz* considered the rumor about the cover-up superfluous and even harmful for the reasons noted previously in reference to the responsibility of the leaders of the anti-Nazi powers. But when it was linked to the chairman of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, whose name is not mentioned in the editorial, an authoritative reply became necessary. The assertion is backed, in the opinion of *Ha'aretz*, by “the odd and far-fetched reasoning that the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem knew about the atrocity back in August but held its silence because the situation in El Alamein and Stalingrad was grim, and so on.” Accordingly, “It is astonishing that this comrade has not felt it necessary thus far to deny or correct the puzzling remarks reported in his name.”

I will discuss my opinion of Yitzhak Gruenbaum's attitude toward the destruction of Polish Jewry in a separate section of this study. My concern here is *Ha'aretz*'s explanation of its own stance on the same issue during the two years of the war. According to the editorial, “Insofar as one may judge by the material that eventually reached the Jewish public, the reports that came into its possession concerned neither *regular dates* for the destruction of the Jews nor the establishment of a special committee for this purpose [the reference must have been to the decisions of the famous Wannsee conference in February 1942], but rather the recent rumors. Only those who have just emerged from the German-occupied area knew how to describe the whole picture, and their contents not only confirmed the most horrific rumors, *which we could hardly believe in the past* (we accused the [news] agencies of having reported these rumors with exaggeration and hyperbole) but also augmented them with the most terrible ‘detail’ of all. Now the picture has been filled in and one doubts that there will be further room to add much to it”<sup>112</sup> (emphasis added).

#### HABOQER

*Haboqer*, the organ of the General Zionist party in Palestine, positioned itself to the right of the general liberal Zionist *Ha'aretz*. It devoted even less space than *Ha'aretz* to coverage of what was being done to European Jewry, except for the first three weeks of the war and, of course, November–December 1942. *Haboqer*'s reportage and articles on this topic treated the matter sparingly even by the other newspapers' standards.

This intrinsically puzzling fact defies all explicit explanation unless one grasps at a conjecture and blames it on the pronounced Palestinocentric Zionist outlook of its editor, Peretz Bernstein (1890–1971). Although Bernstein's outlook hardly blinded him to the tragedy of European Jewry, the emphasis that he placed on this topic, manifested in both his editorials and his journalistic pieces, was persistently geared to concern for the fate of the national enterprise in Palestine as the only possible response to the disaster that had befallen

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., *ibid.*

Diaspora Jewry. From this standpoint, Bernstein, the General Zionist and leader of a party that remained in opposition to the Mapai-led Zionist leadership, was of one mind with Berl Katznelson and David Ben-Gurion.

Bernstein set down this constitutive guideline in the very first two weeks of the war. In an editorial ahead of Rosh Hashanah, he offered some very melancholy reflections on the fate awaiting the Jews in occupied Europe and especially those in Poland. However, he also hurriedly noted that “We see one ray of light in this generally bleak picture: that the Jewish people, as such, has an advocate in this war, a real advocate *that represents the Jewish people to the exclusion of anything else*. Our Yishuv exists. This time, there is a Jewish Yishuv in Palestine [...] that has a national consciousness and carries the Zionist idea, *which proposes to reclaim the Jewish people from its dispersion*” (emphasis added). Even though the role of this Yishuv in rescuing the Jewish people is not yet clear, “We are confident that the role will be a Jewish one, pursued on behalf of *the Jewish people*, and indeed, it is a great achievement that has not been our privilege in two millennia” (emphasis added).<sup>113</sup> Bernstein’s remarks, then, emphasize the rescue of the Jewish people and less the rescue of the Jews. This, of course, is not to say that Bernstein is indifferent to the Jews’ fate; rather, his main concern goes to the future of the nation. Therefore, *Haboqer* urges urgent relief action for refugees from Poland who have made their way to Palestine.<sup>114</sup> From Bernstein’s standpoint, however, the emphasis should be on national mobilization for the war effort and preparations for the national political struggle that will follow the war.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, it is evidently no coincidence that alongside the reportage in *Haboqer* about the establishment of a Jewish center in Lublin District and the demand for the formation of a Jewish army, *Haboqer* came out with an editorial preaching public mobilization and public reinforcement of Hebrew as the daily vernacular “specifically among Hebrew speakers.”<sup>116</sup>

This positioning of the national-political cause as a central problem for the Jewish people during the war led Bernstein to a paradoxical conclusion. In the first week of the war, he penned a journalistic piece, headlined “The Great Turnaround,” that compared the political standing of Zionism at the start of World War I with that at the present time. From this comparison he infers that, politically speaking, Zionism is much better off now than it was then. Back then, the Yishuv was minuscule and utterly devoid of political power; now it comprises some half a million Jews and has become an organized national entity and a sought-after regional ally of the British Empire in its war against Nazism. This, in his opinion, is a “great turnabout” in Jewish history. It is at this juncture that “we enter the great struggle, no less than the

<sup>113</sup> P. Bernstein, “Rosh Hashanah,” *Haboqer*, Sept. 13, 1939.

<sup>114</sup> “Le-taqanatan shel yehudei Polin” [To Repair Polish Jewry], *ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1939; see also “Yahadut ‘azuvah” [A Neglected Jewish Community], *ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1939.

<sup>115</sup> P. Bernstein, “Ha-hitgaysut ha-leumit” [The National Mobilization], *ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1939.

<sup>116</sup> P. Bernstein, “Lashon Ivrit u-sevivah Ivrit” [Hebrew language and Hebrew environment], *ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1939.

mighty nations, to assure ourselves the possibility of national freedom. We are referring not only to the Palestinian Yishuv but to the entire Jewish people.” Bernstein is convinced that Nazism will fail to obliterate the greater part of European Jewry. The Jews of Europe, however, will find no redemption in this because the persecution of the Jews, typified by historical cycles, may recur even after the eradication of Nazi Germany. Accordingly, the Jewish people’s goal in this war is “to liberate itself from *any possibility* of persecutions similar to those that victimized our brethren in Germany” (emphasis in the original). Bernstein was unable to take his human imagination to greater lengths for the time being. “We do not want the Jewish fate to depend on this or that regime in this or that country, and for this reason we have been striving for decades to prepare an independent future for our nation in Palestine, based on *its own forces*” (emphasis added).<sup>117</sup>

Three months later, as 1939 wound down amid a growing tide of reports about the distress of Jews whom the Nazis were persecuting in various ways, Bernstein sought to underscore another paradox in Jewish nationhood at this time of emergency. As he had argued before – that, contrarily, Zionism’s political status had gained strength amid the current state of war – now he felt constrained to argue that the outcry about the Jews’ fate and the call for assistance to refugees from the Nazi inferno were inadequate. Even the opposite – settling for these without concurrently demanding change in the Jewish political status – might prove harmful to the nation. After all, they render the Jewish question into a mere humanitarian problem that may be solved through the generous assistance of other nations, especially after the victory over Nazism. This is not the essential Jewish problem. “The Jewish question is *not merely a question of refugees and fugitives* but a question of people who wish to fashion national lives for themselves in their own country. Because they want the right to live and work and be creative by the best of their strengths and in the full extent of their strengths, *not despite being Jews but because they are Jews*” (emphasis added).<sup>118</sup> Admittedly, however, the Jewish national question will not be solved by the Yishuv alone or even by the world Zionist movement. To attain that goal, the great American Jewish community, most of which is not Zionist, must mobilize. The national mission, then, is to persuade American Jewry of the justice of the Zionist cause.<sup>119</sup>

In 1940, *Haboqer*, like the other Hebrew and Jewish newspapers, carried fewer and fewer reports about developments in the occupied countries. Early that year, *Haboqer* did come out with the following headline: “Blood-Curdling Tidings, Reminiscent of Job: How 2 Million of Our Brethren Are Being Exterminated in the Nazi-Occupied Territory.”<sup>120</sup> The reportage that followed, however, was based on testimonies of refugees who had managed to

<sup>117</sup> P. Bernstein, *ibid.*, “Ha-mifneh ha-gadol” [The Great Turnaround], *ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1939.

<sup>118</sup> P. Bernstein, *ibid.*, “Hadashot min ha-tofet” [News from the Inferno], Dec. 1, 1939.

<sup>119</sup> P. Bernstein, *ibid.*, “Tafqid ha-yahadut ha-Ameriqanit” [The Role of American Jewry], Nov. 2, 1939.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 20, 1940.

escape from Poland. Therefore, evidently due to concern about its reliability, the persecutions and killings were not discussed that year with the intensity previously displayed. A month later, for example, a report titled “Nazi Abuse of Polish Jews Knows No Limit” appeared on an inside page.<sup>121</sup>

The emphasis in the main headlines, in contrast, shifted to the domestic Palestinian front. Examples are the implementation of the 1939 White Paper regulations, which restricted the possibilities of Jewish land purchase and were known in the Yishuv as the “land decrees,” and the bombardments of Tel Aviv and Haifa by the Italian Air Force, under the headline “The War at the Gates of Palestine.”<sup>122</sup> At this stage, then, fear for the future of the Yishuv was no less intense than fear for the fate of Jewry in occupied Europe. The editorials in *Haboker* illustrate this. On the one hand, *Haboker* flayed the leaders of American and British Jewish institutions for already elaborating Jewish demands for the convening of a postwar peace conference. As the criticism was written, millions of Jews in Poland were being trampled under the Nazi jackboots and their leaders in the free countries were not raising an outcry about it, let alone trying to offer these *miserables* some assistance.<sup>123</sup>

On the other hand, more than a month later, the same paper issued political demands for the postwar era that were no different from those that it had criticized a short time earlier. The emphasis expressed in these demands, however, was on the establishment of the national home in Palestine because historical experience, in the opinion of *Haboker*, proves that civil rights and even national minority rights do; they had disillusioned the Jews in the past and might do so again.<sup>124</sup>

The two contrasting views reflected the peculiar blend of simultaneously pessimistic assessments and optimistic feelings about the fate of Polish Jewry. The pessimistic assessments dealt with the destruction of Polish Jewry even though its magnitude and horrors were not imagined at the time; the optimistic feelings envisaged the day when “Polish Jewry will regain its glory and its role, in all its spiritual treasures and cultural assets, so that it may continue to leverage the redemption and resurrection of the Jewish people to its bygone state.”<sup>125</sup> This optimism apparently seeks to counterbalance the sense of powerlessness that prevails in all matters related to “the extent of aid that can be offered at this time to all those who are suffering and harmed” – as an earlier editorial expressed it. Accordingly, with no practical counsel to offer, *Haboker* urges the public to identify with the suffering of its fellow Jews symbolically, by means of moments of silence, as do other peoples who memorialize their heroes who fall in national wars. This is meant in particular to meet an internal need of those in the Yishuv, who require “moments of silence amid the flood of events that distract us from the *sho'ah* that is

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18, 1940.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1940.

<sup>123</sup> “Ha-pe’ilut ha-hadashah” [The New Activity], *ibid.*, Jan. 28, 1940.

<sup>124</sup> “Matrot ha-milhamah” [Goals of the War], *ibid.*, March 13, 1940.

<sup>125</sup> “Yom yahadut Polin” [Polish Jewry Day], Sept. 1, 1940.

inundating our brethren in the Polish territories.”<sup>126</sup> The two editorials show that the concepts of “destruction” and “*sho’ah*” are relative terms, their extent depending on how one assesses the existing situation. Otherwise, hope for the comprehensive resurrection of Polish Jewry after the war would not be expressed. This optimistic and ostensibly realistic assessment persisted even a year later, *Haboqer* speaking then about Polish-Jewish relations in the post-Nazi future.<sup>127</sup>

This optimistic outlook gathered strength due to the Soviet Union’s enlistment in the war after being attacked by the Nazis in June 1941. Admittedly, the Nazi invasion did place millions of Jews in Russia in mortal peril, but it also brought closer the end of the war and the defeat of the Nazis. Therefore, *Haboqer* warned against further panic and public outcry; after all, these would not influence the Nazis and “real measures of intervention are not in our possession.” Further on comes the tragic admission of Jewish national powerlessness. Readers must not delude themselves into thinking that “the wide world is impressed by our shouting about the sufferings of the Jews. It has become too accustomed to them.” This is not to say that those in the Yishuv should maintain silence in view of the plight of the Jews in the occupied countries; concurrently, however, they should avoid being caught up in the belief that public protest will help them. This pessimistic conclusion did not prompt the editors of *Haboqer* to surrender and “throw up their hands.” On the contrary: Their cautious optimism led to practical conclusions of the Palestinocentric type: “It has always been our recommendation that we continue handling our internal affairs. We have always disputed the view that one should sit with arms folded in a time of emergency.”<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, public protest may be more than a positive thing per se; it may also have national utility. In other words, even if it has no effect on outside society, it may be nationally useful to the Jews. This is so, however, only if it expresses the remonstrations and dismay of the entire Jewish public, in unison, and not be split among “the haredim” (the Old Yishuv Orthodox) and the Zionists. It must be expressed in addition to the voices of those of liberal persuasion, especially among certain groups of American Jews who harbor the illusion that the restoration of equal rights for European Jews, who will be liberated at the end of the war, will bring about a correct and favorable solution to the Jewish problem. Bernstein, the Palestinocentric Zionist, considers this stance a national menace because “One cannot vehemently demand equal rights for the Jews and nevertheless prove that these rights actually offer no solution whatsoever. *The role of Zionist propaganda is to make this fact widely understood*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> “Zekher yahadut Polin” [Remembering Polish Jewry], May 8, 1940.

<sup>127</sup> See “Bimei ha-ra’ah u-vi-mei ha-tovah” [In Bad Times and in Good Times], *ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1941.

<sup>128</sup> “Anahnu kan” [We Are Here], *ibid.*, June 25, 1941.

<sup>129</sup> “Zekhuyot shavot” [Equal Rights], *ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1941.

Importantly, Bernstein takes great care that his remarks not be construed as the abandonment of Diaspora Jewry to its fate after the war, let alone during it. Accordingly, he hurriedly emphasizes that despite his Zionist outlook, he does not rule out struggle for the civil rights of Jews in the Diaspora. What concern him instead are the national priorities. From this standpoint, the struggle for the establishment of the Jewish state – an elemental historical solution to the Jewish problem, albeit a protracted and difficult process – is the national struggle that should be given the main emphasis, in the specific context of preparing for the postwar peace conference.

The debate over postwar Jewish national policy in Europe proceeded rather placidly, because in 1941, the press received no earth-shattering reports about an extreme change for the worse in the situation of the Jews there. Therefore, the same blend of pessimistic accounts and optimistic assessments, typically evinced by the entire press, continued as well. In September 1941, for example, the journalist S. Ussishkin spoke of the fine future that awaited Polish Jewry after the war.<sup>130</sup> More than a month later, reports about “the brutal massacre of thousands of Jews in Poland” appeared,<sup>131</sup> the paper stressing that they had come from reliable sources. Despite this grim news and additional reportage of similar nature, the cautiously optimistic tenor in writings about the state of Polish Jewry lingered until the middle of 1942. In April of that year, *Haboqer* ran an article, based on a piece copied from an Australian newspaper, about life in the Warsaw ghetto; the story described life there in admiration, if not amazement, despite the economic hardship and the daily persecutions.

The gist of the article was captured by its subhead: “Behind 22 Gates, the Jewish Ghetto Leads a Life of Both Courage and Despair.”<sup>132</sup> The balanced approach – hope here, despair there – continued to appear despite two terrifying reports about murders of Jews that appeared in February and March of that year. The first report told about the gassing to death of 400 persons as an experiment; the second recounted the murder of 250,000 Jews in Ukraine and Belarus. The source was the Soviet Foreign Ministry.<sup>133</sup> Just the same, the editor, Bernstein, devoted his journalistic writings in January to the condition of the Zionist Movement and the Yishuv. In June of that year, a month before the reports about the mass extermination were published, *Haboqer* occupied itself with the question of the possibilities of ‘*aliyah* – emigration to Palestine – from Soviet Russia by Jews who held Polish citizenship.<sup>134</sup> A week before the public outcry about the murder of nearly one million Jews erupted, *Haboqer* published several articles in response to discussions at a Hebrew writers’

<sup>130</sup> S. Ussishkin, “Yahadut Polin le-ahar ha-milhamah” [Polish Jewry after the War], *ibid.*, Sept. 15, 1941.

<sup>131</sup> “Tevach akhzari” [Brutal Massacre], *ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1941.

<sup>132</sup> Leib Speismann, “Ha-ligyon ha-avud shel Varshah” [The Lost Legion of Warsaw], *ibid.*, April 17, 1942.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1942, March 16, 1942.

<sup>134</sup> “Eifo za’aqatenu?” [Where Is Our Outcry?], *ibid.*, June 11, 1942.

conference where fierce criticism had been expressed about the lifestyles and the hedonism of members of the Yishuv at this time of emergency.<sup>135</sup>

Several days later, *Haboqer* came out with a banner headline about a demonstration by Jewish organizations in New York. It also carried reportage about a million murdered Jews in a small font. The same edition, however, reported in boldface that tens of thousands of members of the Yishuv had volunteered for service in the British Army – a fact that spoke volumes about the paper's attitude toward the reliability of the extermination reports on the one hand and the national priorities on the other.

As it did so, *Haboqer* expressed its view about the necessity and influence of the protest rallies. They are useless, the paper claimed: After all, they cannot deter the Nazis from their acts of mass murder and fail even to inspire Western opinion in the free countries to protest to their governments for action in this matter. This proves, according to *Haboqer*, that the free world had relegated the Jews' disaster to the fringes of its consciousness. Most Jewish newspapers in Palestine and the United States had already noted this by comparing the general protest against the murders of hundreds in Lidice, along with killings in France, with silence about the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Therefore, acknowledging the national powerlessness of those who were crying out, the article stated, "We are not fond of protest rallies. We have wearied of protesting. It was truly our hope that we would be allowed to reclaim our nation from the state of exile that had made protest rallies an essential tradition [...]." The writer seems to be alluding to criticism expressed about how the protest rally in New York had preceded that in Palestine. Amid a state of almost total powerlessness, however, there seems to be no other way of voicing national anguish. Therefore, "Once again we must raise our voices in bitter outcry. *The role is unbecoming of our state of mind. But we must discharge it*" (emphasis added).<sup>136</sup>

Bernstein interpreted the state of mind behind this assertion in an opinion piece that he published on the eve of Yom Kippur that year. Due to its importance in understanding not only his outlook but also the feelings of the Yishuv public, which had also become a current issue, I believe it correct to quote it at length.

The opening sentence of the piece states that while "the complaints about Yishuv's complacency have quieted down a bit [...] I do not think that the state of mind in the Yishuv has changed much in the meantime." This is due to "the psychological need to express bitterness – a continual need, deeply embedded in the psyche," related not to a given situation but to the perpetual psychological need to express bitterness.

As for his opinion about the issue proper, Bernstein explains, "Personally, I always considered the displeasure about the Yishuv's complacency badly

<sup>135</sup> In this matter, see P. Bernstein, *ibid.*, July 15, 1942, Y. Hoffman, *ibid.*, July 17, 1942, and S. Ussishkin, *ibid.*, July 20, 1942.

<sup>136</sup> "Meha'ah" [Protest], *ibid.*, July 29, 1942.



overstated.” To his mind, one may perhaps accuse the Yishuv of extreme transitions from tension, originating in dread for its fate in view of the progress of the Nazi armies toward the Egyptian frontier, to total lack of concern after the menace blew over. These extreme transitions in the public state of mind may or may not be normal, but “In any case, there is no denying that the observer may get the impression that the Yishuv accepts the terrible news from the occupied areas about the Jews’ fate ostensibly as news reportage only and that we are not turning our daily lives into continual gloom and bereavement. The observer may also be especially amazed about the appearance of complacency in this regard” – not only from the general national perspective but specifically at the personal level, because indeed, most members of the Yishuv have relatives in the lands where the massacres are taking place.

Bernstein does not deny the phenomenon of outward and overt complacency but attempts to explain it in human psychological terms:

The power of imagination exists within narrow limits, and that’s a good thing. If we could truly attain total emotional empathy with the victims’ sufferings, we could not continue to carry on normally for a moment. To continue one’s work, one needs a certain degree of psychological equilibrium and one cannot maintain it without immunizing the psyche from the onslaught of the imagination, which produces in the mind’s eye a picture of the horrors unfolding in Germany and the occupied areas.

These remarks are written on the eve of Yom Kippur. Therefore, Bernstein stresses that while understanding the public’s “indifference,” he urges the Yishuv on this specific day to achieve total psychological empathy with the human national disaster that has befallen the Jewish people. This would also amount to a demonstration of sorts by the public at large that would somewhat counterbalance its national powerlessness. It would flow from the awareness that “If we, or anyone else, lacks the ability to intervene effectively on behalf of European Jewry, which is wallowing in its blood, [then] we would like this indescribable calamity at least to open the world’s eyes to an understanding of our situation, which is so different from that of other peoples’. In this sense, however, we encounter difficulties that are no less immense.” To wit, the enlightened world and much of world Jewry do not share the Zionist conviction that the Jewish national disaster originates in the nation’s lack of a homeland under Jewish national sovereignty and that cyclical disasters will continue to visit the Jews until this situation is corrected.

This truth, in his opinion, should be explained indefatigably and in various ways to the leaders of the free world and to the Jewish masses – in memorial rallies, protest demonstrations, statements by clerics and intellectuals, and more – “And if they, too, find it hard to understand us, we will gain more this way than by *placing our wounds and tears on continual display*” (emphasis added).<sup>137</sup>

<sup>137</sup> P. Bernstein, “Asonot ha-golah,” [Disasters of the Diaspora], *ibid.*, Sept. 19, 1942.

The attitude of understanding and even relating somewhat positively to the phenomenon of public “indifference” in the Yishuv changed when the official reports about the mass extermination were made public. In response to the ghastly truth, *Haboqer* exhorted the public to protest and demonstrate before a world that was apathetic to the apocalypse that had come over the Jews, even though “We do not yet know what measures should and can be taken.” Above all, the editorial in this matter, surely written by Bernstein himself, implored those in the Yishuv “to address these words to ourselves: We, too, have not fulfilled our obligation; we, too, treated [the disaster] with near-disregard. We have continued our lives here as though there were no ‘Jewish front’ at all, as if only the various war fronts exist and the front of the ghettos in Warsaw and Piotrków, Kielce and Radom, is far away.”<sup>138</sup> By putting it this way, the editor was surely beating his own breast. After all, the headlines in his newspaper, as in all the Hebrew papers and all Jewish newspapers in the United States and Britain, were devoted mainly to the course of the war – a phenomenon to which I return at the conclusion of this study.

Pursuant to these remarks, Bernstein ran a three-article series that summed up his stance in regard to the Jews of occupied Europe in the war years thus far. The headline in all three installments of the series includes the expression “the Extermination Conference” (*Farnichtungs Kommission*), undoubtedly alluding to the decisions of the infamous Wannsee conference, held in January 1942.

In these articles,<sup>139</sup> Bernstein breaks almost no new ground in the positions he takes. He admits that, in fact, it was known even before the arrival of the recent days’ reports that “The Nazis have been carrying out an extermination policy against European Jewry, which is under their thumb.” Nevertheless, “[t]he reports reached us in the form of rumors and no one knew exactly how accurate they were; each of us hoped, against his better judgment, that they were scare stores or at least exaggerations.” Indeed, despite these doubts and in its powerlessness, the Yishuv has turned out for protest demonstrations despite grave skepticism about the likelihood of “really saving Jews by doing this.” Even when the reports precipitate a surge in volunteering by the Yishuv for the British Army, Bernstein terms this “undoubtedly a fine and understandable response *but a symbolic one*” (emphasis added).

There was, however, one novelty in these writings. It relates to a question that pains us to this day as a reflection of the Jewish national weakness in the past and as a condemnation of the very willingness to debate it in the present: “Why, in the entire horrific process of the murders, did we not hear

<sup>138</sup> “Besorot ha-zeva’ah” [The Tidings of Atrocity], *ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1942.

<sup>139</sup> P. Bernstein, “Od bi-d’var va’adat ha-hashmadah” [More about the Extermination Conference], *ibid.*, Nov. 25, 1942, “Ve-od bi-devar va’adat ha-hashmadah” [And more about the Extermination Conference], *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1942; “Va’adat ha-hashmadah poteret et she’elat ha-yehudim” [The Extermination Conference Solves the Jewish Problem], *ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1942.

about signs of uprising among the Jews? How can it be that thousands are led to sure death by a handful of policemen without rising up *en masse*? I don't dare to judge. The ongoing persecutions may have [...] come together to induce demoralization."<sup>140</sup> Notably, the historian of the Warsaw ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum, recorded similar remarks in his diary in June 1942. He, too, asked how the masses of Jews agreed to be led "like lambs to the slaughter" by a small clutch of policemen, some of whom were Jews, without at least trying to escape from their cruel fate. His conclusion was much like Bernstein's: The fatigue and weakness of the persecuted, starving Jews had "defeat[ed] the will to struggle."<sup>141</sup>

One may add to these identical assessments by Bernstein, in Palestine, and Ringelblum, interned in the Warsaw ghetto, an anguished desideratum expressed by Lipson, editor of *Hatzofe*, who prayed to hear that there were indeed Jews who had risen up by force against their fate. Above all, of course, we should add Abba Kovner's famous January 1942 broadsheet, "Let Us Not Go Like Lambs to the Slaughter."<sup>142</sup> The concurrent posing of this demand in different circles – the ghettos of Poland, the forests of Ukraine and Lithuania, and Palestine – gives further evidence of the existence at this time of a transnational Jewish community embracing Bernstein the General Zionist, Lipson of the Mizrahi Movement, Ringelblum of Po'alei Tziyon Left, and Abba Kovner of Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir.

#### HAMASHQIF

*Hamashqif*, the newspaper of the Revisionist party in Palestine in 1939–1949, was the organ of the extraparliamentary Zionist political opposition that had formed in the mid-1930s when the Revisionist Movement, by decision of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, officially seceded from the Zionist Organization, and throughout the war years. Its stance, which represented the outlook of the "secessionists," is especially important in determining whether the opposition read the situation differently or proposed different ways of rescuing European Jews. From this standpoint, paradoxically, the standing of *Hamashqif* resembles that of the Jewish-Communist *Morgn-Frayhayt* in New York, discussed later in this study. Both newspapers subjected the Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish establishment to extreme criticism, one from the Right and the other from the Left. Therefore, their outlooks not only attest to themselves but also illuminate the stances of others who belonged to the Zionists or the Jewish establishment.

One may sense two planks in *Hamashqif*'s oppositionist position. One was historical; it continued to pursue the political dispute between Jabotinsky's

<sup>140</sup> P. Bernstein, *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, in Hebrew (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1993), pp. 382–383.

<sup>142</sup> See Dina Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Studies in Jewish History, 2009), p. 71.

Revisionist movement and the Zionist organization, headed by Chaim Weizmann and the Zionist Labor Movement. Underlying this dispute was a clash between two political methods. One was the practical and flexible doctrine of Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, which strove to avoid frontal political collisions with the Mandate Government as long as the Zionist enterprise was allowed to develop. The other method, the demonstrative Revisionist approach, advocated the use of overt political pressure to attain Zionism's goals. The continued pursuit of this political line influenced the consistently and highly aggressive style of criticism of the stances of the Zionist Executive in terms of everything the Executive did, and especially failed to do, in the newspaper's opinion, for the rescue of European Jews. Accordingly, the question in regard to reportage about what was being done to the Jews in the occupied countries and the proposals for actions to rescue them, is whether the views of *Hamashqif* were essentially different from those expressed in *Davar*, which represented the position of the Zionist establishment.

Systematic tracking of *Hamashqif*'s policy on publishing the news shows no difference between it and the other papers, those of the Zionist "establishment," especially *Davar*. Like them, *Hamashqif* gave leading status, as reflected in its main front-page headlines, to reports about the progression of the war. The numerical count of main reports about events on the front to main reports about European Jewry shows 20:1 ratio in favor of the former. Most headlines relating to the Jews appeared in late 1942, when the magnitude of the Holocaust disaster became official public knowledge. The reason for this is elucidated later in the chapter. In other words, the strategic premise in *Hamashqif*, as in the other papers, was that the rescue of European Jewry depended foremost on the results of the war. The information that reached this paper, too, was no different from that reported by the other papers from their shared sources.

Nevertheless, *Hamashqif* exhibited one tendency typical of it alone: indefatigable optimism. Although *Davar* and the other papers, such as *Ha'aretz*, also dabbled in optimism, they were what I call cautious optimists. *Hamashqif*'s optimism about the fate of the Jews during and at the end of the war went much farther. It traced its origins to the culture and worldview of the Revisionist Movement, which essentially rested on the covert psychological-philosophical assumption that people struggling for their just cause can impose their will on the course of history.

This view was shared by the Zionist Movement and, in particular, the Labor Movement in Palestine. The Revisionist optimism, however, was fundamentally different from that of the Labor Movement in that it consistently refused to acknowledge historical experience, which shows that political struggles usually end in compromise. Thus the Revisionists' ideological optimism encouraged belief in the positive national results of struggle, while the struggle itself filled the optimistic sails of the Revisionist rank-and-file.

This mindset of optimistic activism found expression right away in the first two months of the war, when *Hamashqif* countered the Nazis' satanic plot of

establishing a “Jewish state” in Lublin District by promoting a plan for the evacuation – nay, a great exodus – of European Jews to Palestine at the end of the war.<sup>143</sup> The editor of the paper, Y. Rubin, writing on the eve of Passover 1940, termed this “the Second Exodus.” What he meant, of course, was the resurrection of the idea, first raised in the prewar 1930s, of evacuating a million Jews from Poland. “The mass evacuation of *all of them and of everything*,” Rubin writes, “has ceased to be a question of propaganda, a problem of the talent of persuasion” (emphasis added). The emphasis here rests on the concepts of “all” and “everything,” which the writer invokes to define the envisaged emigration from Poland as something greater than Jabotinsky had originally specified. He does so due to the historical paradox, in its national sense, that the war caused: It created a new reality that, in the editor’s opinion, “will not disappear here from the world with the banishing of the tyrants and the oppressors of our people.”<sup>144</sup> The explanation for this is concurrently social and political. In other words, the assumption is that the millions of Polish Jews will not find a place in Poland after that country regains its political independence. Basically, this is an optimistic premise.

Rubin’s partner in ideology, B. Weinstein, goes even farther, stressing that the objective need for the exodus will, admittedly, clash with the wishes of many Polish Jews to return to that country. In his opinion, however, a bitter disappointment awaits all those who “dream” about returning to Poland, because “that Diaspora – the exile of old Europe – has been obliterated and no sentimental yearnings may change this fact.” Drawing on this unequivocal judgment, Weinstein infers that “From the ruins of the Diaspora, a path leads directly to the palace of rebirth and independence.”<sup>145</sup>

Notably, Apolinary Hartglas, the Polish Zionist leader who penned a series of articles in *Davar*,<sup>146</sup> also expected a large share of Polish Jewry to survive the war. He also believed that they would be able to continue their public lives within the framework of an arrangement governing the rights of national minorities. Weinstein, in contrast, was convinced that the absolute obliteration of Polish Jewry, expressed in the destruction of its culture and its political and economic underpinnings, would lead inexorably to its national resurrection in Palestine. This radical attitude, known as “cruel Zionism,” an accepted doctrine in extremist Revisionist circles, prompted him to conclude his article with an optimistic “Marxist”-style statement from the Revisionist school: “What intelligence hasn’t done, time has done and its labor has not yet ended.”

B. Iyar continued to express this optimistic national-minded trend of thought half a year later, stating unequivocally, “The fate of the [Jewish] people rests

<sup>143</sup> See “Medinah yehudit be-Lublin” [A Jewish State in Lublin], *Hamashqif*, editorial, Nov. 29, 1939.

<sup>144</sup> Y. Rubin, “Nishtanah ha-laylah ha-zeh” [This Night Is Different], *ibid.*, April 22, 1940.

<sup>145</sup> B. Weinstein, “Be-shivtenu al horvot ha-golah” [As We Sit on the Ruins of the Diaspora], *ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1940.

<sup>146</sup> See discussion of *Davar*, above.

in the Yishuv's hands." In an article under this headline, Iyar urges the Jews to transform their self-awareness from "*passive objects* of international events" into "*active subjects* in the international arena" (emphasis in the original). This means, "[t]he Yishuv, with the entire Jewish world looking on, should accept upon itself the crown of complete, redeeming statist Zionism," because "the fate of the entire Jewish people rests today, for the first time, in the hands of this Yishuv."<sup>147</sup> On the basis of this premise, Iyar implores the National Committee to behave like a national government that represents not only the Jews of Palestine but also those under Nazi occupation in Europe.<sup>148</sup>

The demand to make the Yishuv a basis for a nation-state model of leadership for the Jewish people worldwide got a boost after the Soviet Union joined the war against the Nazis. As the German divisions pierced the vastnesses of the Ukraine, *Hamashqif* came out with a passionate editorial about the role of Jewish soldiers in the Red Army. The important thing, in *Hamashqif's* opinion, was that the Soviet propaganda machine had appealed to Jewish patriotism by urging world Jewry to help the USSR in its war. By implication, "Jewish patriotism as a Jewish [phenomenon] has become a political factor in Russia and around the globe."<sup>149</sup> Again, we should compare this statement with *Davar's* response to the Soviet appeal. *Davar* stressed Jewish unity; *Hamashqif*, in contrast, transformed the "imagined" unity into a political factor of the highest order.

The improvement in the Jews' international standing due to the Soviet Union's joining the war, including that of Soviet Jewry, reinvigorated the idea of the Jewish "evacuation" from Europe. This led to the following conclusion:

After the war, Europe will be totally different from the Jewish standpoint from what it was before the war and before 1933. The Jews in Europe, *in their millions*, [emphasis in the original] will not be able to reintegrate organically into the diluted European corpus; they will need, they will be forced, to leave Europe and find themselves a homeland.<sup>150</sup>

Most of this rhetoric, of course, was directed at the fate of the Jews of Poland. There, indeed, a postwar evacuation would occur – the tragic evacuation of the surviving remnant, roughly 10 percent of prewar Polish Jewry.

Three days after this editorial appeared, B. Hacoheh reinforced this argument by explicitly proposing the evacuation of the Polish Jews as a Polish national interest. This idea, as stated, was not new. In the 1930s, Jabotinsky had expressed it publicly in his talks with the Polish political leadership. In late 1941, however, shortly before the Wannsee conference, the idea was

<sup>147</sup> B. Iyar, "Goral ha-am natun bi-yedei ha-yishuv" [The Fate of the People Rests in the Yishuv's Hands], *Hamashqif*, March 7, 1941.

<sup>148</sup> Editorial, "Ha-qayam mosad elyon li-yehudei Eretz Yisrael?" [Does a Supreme Institution for the Jews of Palestine Exist?], *ibid.*, March 24, 1941.

<sup>149</sup> Editorial, "Kelum na'aleh al ha-mapah?" [Will We Not Place Ourselves on the Map?], *ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1941.

<sup>150</sup> Editorial, "Ha-tahalikh ba-golah" [The Process in the Diaspora], *ibid.*, Dec. 23, 1941.

accompanied by a satanic fate that the author never imagined. Otherwise, he would not have concluded his piece by saying, “An evacuation at the Jews’ initiative means the mutual restoration of health, a mutual redemption; the choice is in our hands.”<sup>151</sup> After all, in the Revisionist world, everything depended on Jewish initiative.

Trust in the possibility of restoring the alliance of political interests between Zionism and the Polish people received intellectual intensification in *Hamashqif* at the invention of Abba Ahimeir. Ahimeir expressed the assessment that an alliance of blood between the Jewish soldiers and the Poles had come about in the war. These Jewish soldiers, he said, were fighting “for the White Eagle and the Star of David as one.”

The fighting idealism of members of both peoples rests on an infrastructure of a mutual interest: the mass evacuation of Jews from Poland. This leads Ahimeir to the far-reaching conclusion that “Antisemitism is more comprehensible to us than Western or East European philosemitism is; ‘death by kissing is the hardest death of all’.”<sup>152</sup>

Ahimeir uses these blunt remarks to underscore his normalistic ideological outlook and its political implications. According to this approach, which lay at the core of Revisionist thinking, the Jews should not aspire to normalization – that is, to be a nation like any other, as the leaders of the Zionist movement from Herzl to Weizmann and Ben-Gurion postulated – because they already were a normal nation even though they did not yet have a sovereign state. Consequently, they should behave in accordance with their national interests without letting moral inhibitions get in the way. If so, a political alliance with antisemites is a fit and desirable thing to conclude if it serves the national interest. This national interest, in turn, should be part of a mutual Jewish-Polish national interest based on the principle of “positive Machiavellianism”, if one may so define it, as a normal phenomenon in international political relations.

When the rumors and reports about mass killings of Jews spread in the summer of 1942, this normalistic outlook prompted the editors of *Hamashqif* to try to explain the disaster in “normal” concepts. Tragedy and ludicrousness intermingled in these attempts, as would become clear several months on. It was their assumption, they said, that “many of the Jewish victims were killed undoubtedly in reprisal for the Jewish partisans’ warfare in the enemy’s rear.” To reinforce this notion, they argued that those murdered are “victims of war, Germany’s war against Jewry and the Jewish people in Germany.” As evidence, they cited the way in which the Germans had taken vengeance against the inhabitants of the village of Lidice, Czechoslovakia, for the assassination of Heydrich, chief of the Gestapo.

The Jewish tragedy in this situation was that while they resemble other peoples in suffering and sacrifice, they do not in political status. This is because “it is not Gentile malice that has caused *the terrible silence* that surrounds our

<sup>151</sup> B. Hacohen, “Yehudei Polin” [The Jews of Poland], *ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1941.

<sup>152</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “Rosh Hodesh September 1939” [September 1st, 1939], *ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1941.

heroes and victims in the occupied countries, but rather our *criminal* weakness and pointless fragmentation” (emphasis added).<sup>153</sup> Thus, not only the leaders of the democracies are to blame for the abandonment of the murdered Jews to their fate; so are the “criminal” weakness and “pointless fragmentation” of the Jewish leaders and organizations.

This approach, of the Jews’ being a nation like all nations at war with the Nazis, leads the editors of *Hamashqif* to recommend a public demand to allow the Jews, as a nation, to avenge the Germans for their spilled blood. “Our demand of the Allies is that they allow us to get our revenge for everything that has been done to us.” The revenge they have in mind is terror bombardments against the German population, to be carried out by Jewish pilots, “immediately,” in the hope that “the groaning of the masses of German men and women who will be injured or killed in our revenge bombardments may prompt the chiefs of the Gestapo to stop their murderous campaign.”<sup>154</sup>

The Revisionist *Hamashqif* was not alone in demanding punitive and deterrent air raids against Germany. The Jewish-American press and *Davar* in Palestine stressed similar views. The originality of the demand in this opinion piece, however, lay in the idea of entrusting the act of revenge to Jewish pilots, under their national flag of course, like the Polish and Czechoslovakian pilots who served in the British Air Force. In its novel extremism, this idea even surpassed the “Hebrew army” propaganda that Hillel Kook and his associates were spreading in the United States at the time.<sup>155</sup>

Even as they called for vengeance against the German civilian population for the Nazis’ murders of Jews, the editors of *Hamashqif* were not sure that the reports coming in from occupied Europe were truly reliable. In August 1942, when the reports about mass murders became more frequent and successive, and after protest rallies in New York and Jerusalem, the newspaper ran an editorial under a headline with an exclamation point that spoke for itself: “Let’s Check the Accuracy of the Reports!”<sup>156</sup>

This editorial, concurring with the views of “establishment” newspapers such as *Davar* and *Hatzofe*, states that some of the reports came from “unauthorized sources [...] and one should doubt their accuracy” – not only for reasons of journalistic credibility but also, and mainly, to spare those in the Yishuv who had relatives in the occupied countries from unnecessary consternation and pointless panic. As an example of the disproving of terrifying rumors, *Hamashqif* cites recently published information about events in the Warsaw ghetto. At first, it was reported that the Nazis were planning to deport

<sup>153</sup> “La-tevah bi-yehudei mizrah Eiropah” [On the Slaughter of the East European Jews], *ibid.*, July 2, 1942.

<sup>154</sup> “Ein eitsah, ela neqamah beli dihui” [The Only Counsel: Immediate Revenge], *ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1942.

<sup>155</sup> See Judith Tydor Baumel, *Bein ideologiah le-ta’amulah: mishlahat ha-irgun be-Artzot ha-Berit 1939–1948* [From Ideology to Propaganda: The Irgun Delegation in the USA 1939–1948], in Hebrew (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999).

<sup>156</sup> *Hamashqif*, Aug. 28, 1942.



100,000 Jews from the ghetto, in response to which the heads of the community committed suicide so as not to hand over lists of candidates for deportation. The next day's reportage stated that the Jewish population of the ghetto had grown to 500,000. The tragic truth is that the first report was accurate: In July 1942, the chairman of the Judenrat, Adam Czerniaków, committed suicide because he could no longer obey the Nazis' murderous directives.

Beyond the culture of journalistic reportage, caution not to foment purposeless public fear, and psychological inability to accommodate the information at first, the editorial was also based on the Revisionist optimism, the mindset that believed in the evacuation of millions of Jews from Europe to Palestine at the end of the war.

Even when confirmed reports about the mass extermination became public, the traditional political activism persisted in the editorials, surfacing in the recurrent vigorous demand for the merger of Jewish communities throughout the free world into a united political body that would represent the dispersed Jews as a nation. After all, as the journalist B. Hacoheh explained, "*There is no nation that lacks a general national framework for the expression of its will*" (emphasis added). Especially where the Jews were concerned, for Hacoheh, "[t]here is no possibility of inspiring the nations of the world to believe in a positive solution for the Jewish problem unless the Jewish people unites around this program *as a nation* and unless it produces a single leadership that will negotiate with the powers on behalf of the entire nation" (emphasis in the original). Absent such an act, in Hacoheh's opinion, "[t]here isn't a smidgen of hope that we will take up our place in the assembly of Allied nations and that we will cease to be *a passive object [and become] an active subject in our history*" (emphasis in the original).<sup>157</sup>

This idea did come to pass but only after the war, against the background of the Holocaust, as the Jews of the free world – especially in the United States – aligned themselves with the Zionist demand for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the time the foregoing words were penned, however, they had no toehold in historical reality and among the Jewish public because they overstepped even the demands and propaganda of the Revisionist group headed by Hillel Kook in the United States at the time, namely agitation for the establishment of a Jewish army that would fight alongside the Allies.<sup>158</sup> Hacoheh's exhortation was vigorously supported by an editorial in his newspaper, which went to the trouble of reinforcing it with remarks on the same topic by the *Ha'aretz* correspondent in London.<sup>159</sup>

Four days later, *Hamashqif* repeated this demand in the course of a vigorous attack on the Zionist leadership for not demanding that the European powers award the Jews belligerent status as a nation. Here *Hamashqif* repeated, verbatim, a demand that David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish

<sup>157</sup> B. Hacoheh, "Mah aleinu la'-asot" [What We Must Do], *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1942.

<sup>158</sup> "U-mah akhshav?" [And What Now?], *Hamashqif*, Dec. 3, 1942.

<sup>159</sup> In this matter, see Judith Tydor Baumel, *From Ideology to Propaganda*.

Agency Executive, had expressed a week earlier. *Hamashqif*, like Ben-Gurion, demanded, “Give us national status! Give us immediately the means to fight against our oppressors and for our future! We demand nothing of you save the restoration of our national *dignity*. Transform us from passive victims into active warriors”<sup>160</sup> (emphasis in the original). The paper followed Ben-Gurion’s lead in more than its anguished and passionate wording. Its demand of material aid for the persecuted Jews, at this time, was no different from that of the Jewish establishment in the United States and Palestine – against which *Hamashqif* unleashed a torrent of frothing criticism. True to its activist way, however, *Hamashqif* did not settle for making demands of the Jewish organizations; it also insisted on humanitarian aid “from the United Nations and at its expense.”<sup>161</sup> This desideratum, which of course was not required and may have been altogether impossible, was one of the most conspicuously tragic manifestations of the Jews’ national powerlessness because it was expressed by Zionism’s most optimistic movement. The results of the Bermuda conference, held half a year later (April 1943) and discussed later in this book, will prove it.

<sup>160</sup> “Beineinu le-vein atzmenu” [Among Ourselves], *Hamashqif*, Dec. 7, 1942.

<sup>161</sup> “Ezrah bein-leumit li-yehudei Eiropah” [International Aid for European Jewry], *ibid.*, Nov. 18, 1942.

## The American Jewish Press

### INTRODUCTION

In the first two years of the war, the American Jewish press had a different public and political status than its counterparts in Britain and Palestine. During this time, the United States maintained neutrality in regard to the armed conflict in Europe. Its public opinion was dominated by an isolationist mindset that separated American interests from those of the European democracies that were fighting Fascist Germany. The political slogan “America First” held sway in the public domain. Given this state of affairs, the Jewish presence, which held anti-Fascist views generally and anti-Nazi views particularly, was isolated in American public opinion and often stood accused of urging America to join a war that clashed with its national interests. On top of these woes were pronouncedly antisemitic organizations that accused the Jews of treason; their anti-Jewish propaganda persisted even after the United States declared war on Nazi Germany in December 1941.<sup>1</sup>

It is against the background of this public political climate in “neutral” America that one should assess the position of the Jewish press, which ceaselessly sounded the alarm against the Nazi occupiers’ brutalities in the first two years of the war. When the United States joined the conflict, of course, the status of this press changed. Did the attitude of general public opinion toward the Jews’ fate also change? The discussion in this part of the book will attempt to answer this question.

### THE OPTIMISM THAT NEVER SAID DIE

It was *Forverts*, the oldest and largest of the American Jewish newspapers, that set the tone for all its rivals in informational international and political policy during the war years.

<sup>1</sup> On this matter, see Chapter 10, “Remarks on the Continuing Jewish Angst.”

Immediately after the fighting broke out, the armies of Nazi Germany shattering the Polish army's defense lines, *Forverts* declared in its lead article, "Hitler Has Declared War on the Jewish People."<sup>2</sup> There was nothing new about this announcement in itself. After all, Hitler, ever since rising to power, had been ceaselessly portraying the Jews as Europe's enemies generally and Germany's particularly. Until the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, however, the writer stressed, his *Kampf* had been against the "Jewish Bolshevism"; after the war against Britain and France erupted, there appeared a new enemy: "Jewish democracy" (*idishe demokratiye*).

Paradoxically and ironically, the author of this article views these proclamations of Hitler's as a kind of victory for the Jewish people. By speaking as he did, Hitler had cleansed the Jews of the "stain" of Bolshevism, which *Forverts* had opposed vehemently and consistently, and earned them recognition as a people that carries the democratic idea. Furthermore, in his opinion, Hitler is actually right on this account: Democracy, after all, was, is, and will remain an inseparable part of the Jewish tradition.

This statement by the writer, more than reflecting a historical truth and a cultural essence, attests to the self-evident psychological need of the editors of *Forverts* to fit the Jewish people into the array of democracies that has set out to extirpate the enemy of enlightened humanity. Thus, by Hitler's "virtue," world Jewry has obtained a national "emancipation" of sorts in the international arena, which will lead to a political alliance between it and peoples with which the Jews have endured lengthy historical friction, foremost the Poles.

The journalist H. Lang shared this view of an alliance among the peoples, publishing an article with a headline alluding to this state of mind: "Jewish Cities and Towns in Poland on the Battlefield of the Current War."<sup>3</sup> Lang was right about one thing: Describing the Nazis' acts of vandalism and noting that the Nazis even destroyed Jewish cemeteries, he expressed his confidence that the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw would remain intact whereas the Nazi empire of evil would be destroyed. So it was: For some reason, five years later, this location was unscathed whereas Germany's main cities lay in ruins.

Even those who judged the Nazis' intentions toward the Jews of Poland more severely did not describe them in terms of mass extermination. L. Fogelman warned that Hitler had made it his mission to displace (*oystsuratn*) the Jews from Poland. He was accomplishing this by applying administrative pressure and physical intimidation that were impelling hundreds of thousands of Jews to flee from the western (Nazi-controlled) part of the country to the eastern (Soviet-ruled) sector.<sup>4</sup> In other words, where the tragic fate of Polish Jewry was concerned, as it was in the headline of his piece, the meaning of the events still drew its substance from the Jews' historical experience in Eastern

<sup>2</sup> "Hitler derklert krig dem idishen folk," *Forverts*, Sept. 5, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 10, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1939.

Europe and, especially, from that of World War I and its aftermath – “killing,” “destruction,” “displacement,” “deportation” – insofar as the human imagination could analogize them from the past.

To understand this phenomenon with greater clarity, it is worth dwelling on an editorial that appeared two weeks later, headlined “The Tragic Fate of 8 Million Jews,”<sup>5</sup> which connected the fate of Polish Jewry under Nazi rule with that of Jews under Soviet rule, including those who held Soviet citizenship, and also, the writer opines, the Jews of Hungary and Romania. Together, they add up to eight million. This comparison, inaccurate at the time, was rightly challenged by the Jewish Communist newspaper *Morgn-Frayhayt*. Apart from demonstrating *Forverts*’ zealously anti-Communist line, the editorial gave further evidence of the paper’s inadequate understanding of the situation facing the Jews who had fallen under the Nazi heel. The comparison sounds even odder in view of an article on page 1 of the same edition of *Forverts*, submitted by its correspondent in Europe, which described the life of suffering that the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto were leading: the destruction of formerly Jewish-inhabited areas; mass starvation; slave labor; and so forth.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper could not report, however, about acts such as this, not to mention the damage being inflicted on Jewish religious and cultural institutions, in the Soviet part of Poland.

Several months later, *Forverts* itself took some exception to this far-reaching comparison of the attitude of the two totalitarian regimes toward the Jews. It is hard to believe, the newspaper said, that the Communist regime would encourage an antisemitic campaign – although who knows what to believe and what not these days? After all, who had imagined that Stalin would become Hitler’s ally? In late 1939, the articles in *Forverts* gave evidence of another anguished sensation: that the free world was holding its silence in view of the sufferings of the Jews of Poland despite their “destruction,” even though this situation was still defined in economic and cultural terms only.

An editorial summing up international events in 1939 underscored the special suffering of the Jewish people. The destruction being wrought against the peoples of Europe, the editorialist said, does not resemble the Jews’ ordeal in these countries. In the current situation, with war rampaging across Europe and the Fascist-Communist alliance prevailing for the time being, the suffering Jews’ only hope is assistance from the United States. There, five million Jews inhabit a free democratic society and have been given political power with which they should prevail on the government to answer their request with the generosity of its democracy and the sensitivity of its liberal conscience. Surely America will help the suffering Jewish masses in various ways.<sup>7</sup>

The argument that the Jews’ suffering differs from that of other Nazi-occupied peoples was based on reports from the occupied areas that appeared

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1939.

<sup>6</sup> “Vos es tut zikh itst op in Varshe,” *ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1939.

<sup>7</sup> “A tragisher s’khakl,” *ibid.*, Nov. 30, 1939.

on the pages of *Forverts*. In early January 1940, the plight of the Jews who had been deported to Lublin District, which the Germans cynically called the “Jewish state,” was recounted in an article written by a man who had managed to escape from that location. The subhead speaks of people being buried alive. The writer had spent two weeks among hundreds of ill and starving Jews and hundreds of corpses interred in mass graves. Lublin, he concluded, had become “the biggest Jewish concentration camp in the world.”<sup>8</sup> A week later, *Forverts* ran excerpts from the German press, based on an official German police report, about the killing of hundreds of Jews and the looting of thousands of homes.<sup>9</sup> Another week later, *Forverts*’ correspondent in Palestine recounted the stories of several survivors who, while describing the horrors of the situation, noted that many Poles were participating with the Germans in the abuse of the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

An editorial headlined “The Heartrending Tragedy of Polish Jewry” responded to these reports.<sup>11</sup> It stated unequivocally that the Nazis’ intention was to purge Poland of its Jews physically and spiritually, as they had done in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. No one, however, the writer complains, is talking about this in public. What is more, Jewish public opinion accepts this silence with a sad understanding of sorts, realizing that there is no point in protesting while the free world is occupied with its own calamity and therefore is not at leisure to worry about that of the Jews. For this reason, any protest would be a mere cry in the wilderness as far as the world’s ears are concerned, because the world is no longer capable of being shocked by any new atrocity. Therefore, the proposals to impose a boycott in the United States, which had not yet joined the war, against anything related to the Nazi regime – especially in the economic domain – would probably achieve nothing of substance. All that remains, then, is to hope for the regime’s quick downfall.

In other words, at the very beginning of the war, even before the Nazis adopted their scheme for the total annihilation of European Jewry, the helplessness of the Jewish public in the free countries, especially the democratic United States, rose to the surface. All American Jewry, with its five million citizens, can do is demand that the U.S. government open the country’s gates to the persecuted Jews by preventing the adoption of anti-immigration laws and repealing such statutes as were precluding war refugees from finding asylum there. The American democracy, the editorialist wrote, must not stain itself with the disgrace of treating the refugees malevolently (*di shand fun rishes tsu di heymloze vanderer, di korbones fun di blut-hint in di diktatur-lender*).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it was within the power of the United States to extend a

<sup>8</sup> S. Moldover, “Lublin der shoyderlikher gehenum far idn,” *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> “Hitlers politsei dertseht vegn morden fun poylische idn,” *ibid.*, Jan. 11, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Y. Spigelman, “Zay brengen kayn Palestine shrekleke grusen fun di idn in Poyln,” *ibid.*, Jan. 13, 1940.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 11, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> “Ersht itst muzn di toyeren fun Amerike blaybn ofn!” *ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1940.

fraternal hand to those pleading for assistance, not only as a universal moral act but also as a way to wage war against the enemies of humankind.

As if to reinforce these remarks, the grim tidings came in one after the other. A month later, an editorial appeared under the headline “The Greatest Horror in Human History Is Now Taking Place in Poland.”<sup>13</sup> It recounts not only deportations and mass killings but also the large-scale sterilization of men in the concentration camps for the purpose of fundamental “ethnic cleansing,” in which men of non-German origin are being sterilized while German men are being encouraged to marry in order to have children. Admittedly, as the editorialist notes for the sake of caution, the authorities in Washington have not confirmed these reports officially because the testimonies behind them have not yet been confirmed. Only the Soviet journalists and bureaucrats who enjoy freedom of movement in the German-occupied areas are capable of knowing the truth – but they are the Nazis’ allies.

This marks the first appearance of doubt about the credibility of the reports about the Nazis’ actions, a matter that would become more pointed in subsequent years of the war as reports about mass extermination of Jews in the Soviet Union and Poland began to reach the West. We discuss this problem in Part II of this book.

Despite the heartbreaking descriptions, faith in the possibility of maintaining normal life under the hellish conditions persisted. One may adduce this from *Forverts’* exhortation to American Jews to contribute money for the shipment of matzo to Jews who would be celebrating the Passover Seder in the occupied countries.<sup>14</sup> This had become possible, in *Forverts’* opinion, due to an agreement between the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Nazi authorities in Poland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. The paper even expressed the explicit hope that there would surely be no need to make a special appeal to American Jewry to contribute generously to this Jewish humanitarian cause. This initiative on the part of “the Joint,” however, immediately raised doubts about the Nazis’ intentions. Some argued that the Nazis’ only purpose was to show the United States, by means of a gesture of little value, that their attitude toward the Jews had changed. Therefore, any cooperation with them would confirm, as it were, that they had indeed changed their policy. *Forverts* dismissed this concern: Be the Nazis’ intentions what they may, it said, sending matzo to Jews in Poland would make the recipients’ lives easier at least during the eight days of the festival.<sup>15</sup> This appeal, however, is accompanied by doubts about the public’s willingness to make donations in the sums warranted by the emergency. This doubt is based on experience; after all, under ordinary conditions, only some Jews are willing to sacrifice any of their resources, in money or in public activity, on the public’s behalf. Despite these qualms, *Forverts* calls for an emergency

<sup>13</sup> “Dos shreklekhste in der geshikhte kumt itst for in Poyln,” *ibid.*, Feb. 23, 1940.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, March 23, 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Nokhamol vegn matso far di idn unter natsisher hershaft,” *ibid.*, March 29, 1940.

mobilization, noting that the times have changed and that at these times one must not have to knock on doors; hearts must be willing and helping hands must be outstretched.

Despite their attempts to maintain “normality” amid abnormality by assuring supplies of matzo for the ghettoized Jews, the editors of *Forverts* were not oblivious to the fact that a watershed in Jewish history had indeed been crossed. True, in previous generations, Passover had been the occasion of blood libels against the Jews, but those were highly localized acts of persecution followed by continued ordinary lives of economic, social, and intellectual endeavor. In the spirit of the wording of the Passover Haggadah, this time is different from all other times. Here the editorialist reaches the tragic conclusion: The Jews are powerless. Adding a fifth question to the traditional “four questions” in the Haggada – “Wherefore are these afflictions that are now besetting our people?” – he answers: “We did the world no wrong and do not deserve all the afflictions that have descended upon us. But we are a weak people, helpless in every country, and every tyrant and demagogue makes [us] into scapegoats so that he can more easily control the masses” (*Mir zaynen ober a shvakh folk, in yedm land*).<sup>16</sup> However, in the spirit of the festival of freedom, the editorial concludes with words of solace: Although the Jewish people is being battered at the present time, it will overcome the disaster, outlive Hitler, and take part in a new Exodus. These remarks illustrate what we always said above: It remained impossible that year to understand and feel that the mighty nation that would set out on this Exodus would no longer exist.

Evidence of this “despite it all” optimism was a banner headline – “5 Million Jews in America Must Save 6 Million Jews in Europe!” – that appeared in May 1940 as an appeal to the Jewish trade unions to mobilize for this task.<sup>17</sup> The point emphasized in this appeal is not that such mobilization is a moral thing to do, but rather that it will result in the rescue of masses of Jews. Thus the impression persisted that the existential menace concerned hunger and illness, not extermination.

This attitude toward the distress that had overtaken European Jewry was not new. At the end of World War I, the American Jewish institutions had mobilized to aid the Jews of Poland. The adoption of these traditional measures now, however, attested to a misunderstanding of the new situation that had engulfed European Jewry. The belief that traditional assistance could spare millions of Jews from starvation and mass mortality was based on the strategic political and military premise that Hitler’s regime would soon be trounced by the free world, over which the United States would ultimately take the helm. In this optimistic assessment, however, which persisted even in the first month of the war as the German army marched from victory to

<sup>16</sup> “Vi azoy idn bagegenen dem hayntign peysekh,” *ibid.*, April 22, 1940.

<sup>17</sup> “5 milyon idn in Amerike muzn rateven 6 milyon idn in Eyrope!” May 17, 1940. The front page of the paper also showed a drawing with two large hands, representing American Jews, embracing a group of people, the Jews of Europe.



victory, there were no illusions about the Nazi regime's ultimate intentions toward the Jews.

In the middle of 1940, after Germany's lightning victory over the British forces in Norway, *Forverts* devoted an opinion piece to this question under the ominous deadline, "If Hitler Wins."<sup>18</sup> The article carried an imaginary account of a total Nazi takeover of the peoples of Europe, enslaving them to the needs of the German Empire. The Jews, the article continued, do not need to wonder about their fate at all; they will be exterminated. (*Di idn velen absolut fartiligt veren.*) Thus, we need to distinguish in this context between understanding and imagination. By applying their understanding, they had gotten the foundation of the Nazis' intentions for the Jews. In their imagination, however, they could not grasp what was actually happening according to their understanding, in the tragic magnitudes that European society had never known.

Staying within the framework of these familiar and accepted measures of relief and rescue, *Forverts* repeated, for lack of any other possibility, its modest demand that the United States open its gates just a bit wider for the Jewish refugees in Europe who were pounding on them. (*Efenen a bisele breyter di tirn fun amerike, az es zolen kenen araynkumen mehr imigrantn.*) Its main reasoning here was not the moral imperative of saving some of those otherwise doomed to annihilation, but rather the important contribution of Jewish immigrants to the American economy at all times.<sup>19</sup>

A string of events that follow the publication of this article seemed designed to amplify the request to ease the restrictions on Jewish refugee immigration to the United States. In November 1940, *Forverts* reported the Vichy Government's yellow-star edict. A month later, it reported an intention to deport the Jews of Romania from the cities of that country. In January 1941, it noted the deterioration in the situation of Jews in both parts of Poland, the Fascist-controlled and the Communist-controlled. Later that month, a series of articles described the pogroms being perpetrated against Jews in Romania and also in Poland.<sup>20</sup> The series prompted many readers of *Forverts* to contact the paper, asking "Do you have to tell everything?"<sup>21</sup> This happened because the incessant reports of brutality, surpassing the grasp of inhabitants of modern society, were having the opposite result of the one intended – hardening the hearts instead of opening them. After all, there is a limit to the amount of suffering that one can absorb through one's intelligence and emotions; beyond

<sup>18</sup> "Oyb Hitler vet gevinen," *ibid.*, June 3, 1940.

<sup>19</sup> "Farvos nit mehr imigrantn," *ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1940. On the same topic, see "Di amerikaner regirung un di flikhtlinge," *ibid.*, June 17, 1941. The article discusses the fate of Jewish refugees in Portugal and the American consul's estranged attitude toward them.

<sup>20</sup> See (1) "Di gele late in Frankraykh," *ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1940; (2) "Der geplaneter geyrush Romenye," *ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1940; (3) "Di troyerige barikhtn fun natsisher un sovetisher Poyln," *ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1940; (4) "Shekhites oyf idn in Romenye," *ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1941, and also Jan. 25, 26, 27; (5) "Di blut-bod in Romenye," *ibid.*, Jan. 28, 1941.

<sup>21</sup> "Darf men dertsehlen alts?" *ibid.*, Feb. 3, 1941.

that limit, one can neither understand it nor sympathize with it. The tragic paradox is that the more accounts about the cruel murders of women, elderly, and children there were, the harder people's hearts became. Although the readers identified emotionally with the victims, as human beings they tended to turn their eyes away from the horror. In view of the skewed results of the coverage, the question was why the paper should ceaselessly submit the matter to public opinion at all.

Importantly, the Hebrew press and the British Jewish press also discussed this question and answered it similarly. *Forverts* argued that full reportage is a moral duty that also offers national utility because times have changed. In earlier times, the Jews lamented their victims in prayers and in public and private bereavement, individually and collectively. Now, however, prayers and jeremiads cannot fully express the horrors. The Jews' current sufferings are shared by those of the world that is at war with the Nazis, between the occupied countries and the free countries. Paradoxically, one may say that the Jews' current disaster has transformed them, for the first time since they had gone into exile and dispersion among the nations, into part of the community of nations – not only in their suffering but also in their vehement demand that they be allowed to fight the Nazi murderers and in their trust that the victory over the Nazis will surely come, with the assistance of the United States, of course – the unchallenged fortress of free society.

Perhaps in an attempt to alleviate the anxiety that the atrocity reports induced in some readers, *Forverts* devoted a lengthy editorial to the reportage that an American journalist had submitted on life in the Warsaw ghetto after visiting the ghetto with the Nazi authorities' permission. The editorial expresses suspicion about the reportage, alleging – correctly per se – that the Nazis had shown the correspondent what they wanted him to see. Nevertheless, it feels it correct to present the readers with the correspondent's partial truths, which sound credible in view of what historiography tells us about life in the ghetto that year. The editorial recounts the concentration of 500,000 Jews in the ghetto and notes that the ghetto is encased in a wall with fourteen gates, each guarded by a German soldier, a Polish policeman, and a member of the Jewish ghetto police. It describes housing distress, shortages of food, diseases, and a high mortality rate, but also self-rule in the ghetto. The coverage ends by saying that while the fate of the Jews interned in the ghetto is unknown, for the time being they consider themselves lucky to have been imprisoned by the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto, relative to the lot of the Jews elsewhere in Poland.<sup>22</sup> It is unclear whether this is the impression of the journalist who visited the ghetto or a conclusion drawn by the editorialist. Either way, the editorial was presented as a report of sorts that aimed to describe, at least partly, the situation of the Jews in the ghettos from a slightly optimistic perspective. Otherwise, why publish its contents without offering contradictory evidence? Furthermore, the beginning of the editorial stresses that its

<sup>22</sup> "A grus fun der poylisher geto," *ibid.*, April 4, 1941.

purpose is to present information, however scanty, about the lives of Polish Jews under Nazi occupation. Concurrently, however, an article from a Polish pro-Nazi newspaper was published that gleefully reported the mortality rate in the Warsaw ghetto – six times higher than the birthrate – and expressed the hope that most of the Jews on Polish soil would disappear.<sup>23</sup> To wit: Even though the ghettoized Jews were still managing to hang on, they may as well have perished already as far as their future is concerned.

At this time, however, it was definitely hoped that most of Polish Jewry would survive until the Nazi regime could be destroyed. Evidence of this state of mind is an editorial that appeared three weeks before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, after which the extermination of East European Jewry began. The editorial, concerning relations between the Polish government-in-exile and Polish Jewry, was written on the occasion of the arrival of an official representative of the Polish nation in the United States.<sup>24</sup> The underlying premise of the piece is that Poland has no more room for its Jewish population because it will be economically devastated after the war; accordingly, the Jewish masses will wish or be forced to emigrate. This assessment was not novel. It had been expressed before the war, in the 1930s, and sparked public controversy between the Zionists, headed by Yitzhak Gruenbaum and Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who considered the departure of some Jews from Poland a necessity, and the Bund Party, which negated this assessment categorically, ruling out emigration as a solution to the Jewish problem in Eastern Europe. *Forverts'* position approximated that of the Bund. Convinced that most Polish Jews would remain in Poland after the war, it overtly supported the demands that a Bund mission had presented to representatives of the Polish government-in-exile.

The first of these demands was the lifting of all restrictions that had been imposed on Polish Jews before the war in respect of economic life, education, and the public services. The second demand was an undertaking from the government not to force the Jews to emigrate in the future as a way to solve the Jewish problem in Poland. Third, Jewish refugees should have the same right to return to Poland, with assistance, as non-Jewish citizens will have. The fourth demand was the *ab initio* removal of all restrictions and stringencies that the Nazis had imposed on the Jews.

Much of the Bund leaders' optimism undoubtedly adhered to the editors of *Forverts*, many of whom were much of like mind. It deserves emphasis, however, that these optimistic assessments were shared by some Zionist leaders, foremost Ben-Gurion, who even in 1942 still believed that two million Jews would immigrate to Palestine from Europe. Moshe Sneh, Yitzhak Gruenbaum's right-hand man in the Polish Zionist leadership, was not far from the opinion that much of Polish Jewry would emerge through the war in one piece.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "88 levayes tsu 15 geburtn," *ibid.*, April 17, 1941.

<sup>24</sup> "Di poylishe regirung un di poylishe idn," *ibid.*, June 3, 1941.

<sup>25</sup> See Yosef Gorny and Shlomo Netzer, "Avodat ha-hove ha-murhevet" [The Expanded 'Work in the Present,'] in *Olam yashan, adam hadash: Qehilot Yisrael be-idan ha-modernizatsyah* [Old World, New Man – Jewish Communities in the Era of Modernization], ed. Eli Tzur, in

These optimistic estimations were based in part on JDC data about its activities in the occupied countries in the middle of 1941. An editorial with a headline that spoke for itself – “Hoping for Aid and More Aid” – was devoted to this report.<sup>26</sup> It begins by noting that thousands of Jews are managing to escape from the occupied countries and hundreds of Jewish refugees have made their way to each of a number of free countries such as Switzerland and even Japan. The most important section of the report, in the editorialist’s judgment, is the one concerning the situation of Polish Jewry. In hundreds of towns inhabited by Jews and in dozens of large cities, it says, relief committees for those who are hungry and ill have been set up. The editorial notes in particular that the report speaks not only of material assistance but also of spiritual relief, especially with regard to religious needs – the delivery of Torah scrolls and tefillin to locations where the Nazis had destroyed them. JDC even provided communities with kosher glue for the repair of torn prayer books. This assistance, while kindling hope in distressed localities, must be expanded. Therefore, the Jewish public is urged to step up its donations to the United Jewish Appeal, in whose name JDC operates.

The cautiously optimistic tenor in the pages of *Forverts* was shared by the Zionist newspaper *Der Tog*. It, too, exhorted the Jewish institutions to increase their material aid for the ghettoized Jews in the belief, of course, that this may spare large numbers of Jews from hunger, cold, and disease. *Der Tog* also bases itself on a report to the Vatican by a cardinal of the Catholic Church in Poland, describing the killings that the Nazis were perpetrating against the Jews. This, in *Der Tog*’s opinion, will have a strong (*kolossal*) influence on public opinion in the free world.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, despite the rumors about mass killings of Polish Jews by the Nazis, belief in the future of Jewry in that country never flags. Much like remarks on the pages of the Hebrew-language *Davar* and the Yiddish-language *Forverts*, the Zionist *Der Tog* thinks the problem of Polish Jewry will find a favorable solution after the war. This solution, true to the conventional Zionist outlook, rests on two premises: (1) some of the Jews will relocate to Palestine; (2) others will remain in independent postwar Poland, a democratic and liberal land that eschews antisemitism. On the basis of the latter premise, expressed in the optimistic spirit that was present at the beginning of the war, *Der Tog* states that it is not enough to improve the civil status of the Jews of Poland; instead, “We can and must also demand the establishment of Jewish cultural autonomy in tomorrow’s Poland.” The article was headlined “The Resistance in Poland Has Not Been Broken,”<sup>28</sup> and the resistance at issue was the very fact of ongoing daily public and community life.

Hebrew (Sede Boqer: The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2005), pp. 87–119.

<sup>26</sup> “Hilf hofenung, un mehr hilf,” *Forverts*, Aug. 4, 1941.

<sup>27</sup> *Der Tog*, Jan. 23, 1940.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, May 5, 1940.

Thus, three cautiously optimistic approaches intermingled: a demand for the broadest possible assistance to the Jews in the ghettos; faith in assistance from humane and liberal public opinion in the free world; and belief in a two-pronged settlement of Polish Jewry's status at the end of the war, namely emigration to Palestine and finding a solution for the Jews' safe and honorable civil and national existence in Poland.

Paradoxically, this state of mind drew encouragement from the Jewish historical experience, in which the Jewish people always rebounds from the successive catastrophes that it goes through. Thus, the mourning of the Ninth of Av became a symbol of hope in view of the nation's current ordeal. "One must not," *Der Tog* counseled, "abandon the messianic hope that was born on the day that the Temple [in Jerusalem] was destroyed: faith in the victory of the camp of the just, to which we, too, belong."<sup>29</sup>

This cautiously hopeful tone was evidenced in opinion pieces in *Der Tog* even in late 1940 and early 1941, amid the proliferation of reports about the Nazis' plans to concentrate the Jews of Slovakia, Germany, the Netherlands, and, of course, Poland in "modern" ghettos ahead of their evacuation to various districts in Poland.<sup>30</sup> *Der Tog* interpreted the scheme for the establishment of a Jewish "state" in Lublin District as an intention to subject the Jews to economic exploitation as slave laborers – as *Davar* had explained as well – and not as a preparatory step for an extermination program. As for the Jews of Germany and Poland, the paper hoped that most would yet return to their countries and places of residence.

The same judgment was applied toward the future of Romanian Jewry. Although the country's Fascist government had unleashed a pogrom against them in which some 2,000 men and women were murdered, hope for the Jews' future in this country persisted.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, at least where Romanian Jewry was concerned, part of this cautious optimism did come to pass: About half of the Romanian Jews survived the war despite the suffering that they endured.

The same hopeful-for-lack-of-choice tone of voice was used in an editorial marking the second anniversary of the German invasion of Poland. This piece expresses hope for an improvement in relations between the Jewish and Polish peoples once the war is over. Therefore, *Der Tog* urges its readers to be happy on Rosh Hashanah, precisely because the troubles are many, the anguish profound, and the Germans' bloodthirstiness unprecedented.<sup>32</sup>

The second Zionist newspaper, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal*, closely associated with the Mizrahi movement, behaved like the two previously mentioned papers both in giving over information and in expressing the optimistic hope that most of European Jewry would survive. Even the deportation of the Jews of Germany was no disaster in the opinion of *Der Morgen Dzhurnal*. The

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., "The Ninth of Av," Aug. 18, 1940.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Dec. 10, 1940; Feb. 15, 1941; Feb. 20, 1941.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Jan. 24, Jan. 25, Jan. 27, Jan. 30, and Feb. 2, 1941.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., "Rosh Hashanah," Sept. 21, 1941.

proposition behind this was that these countries would be the first to be liberated from the yoke of Nazi occupation as the war progressed. In other words, the expulsion of the German Jews would become their salvation.<sup>33</sup> The writer was right. Poland and Czechoslovakia, to which most of the German Jews were deported, were liberated before the final downfall of the Nazi regime; however, few Jews there remained alive. Given the reasoning that the Jewish masses did not face the menace of extermination, what remained was immediate concern for the rabbis. Therefore, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* came out a year and a half after the war began with an urgent appeal to the Jewish institutions, foremost JDC, to help rescue the rabbis in Europe, mainly by covering the travel expenses of those who already held American immigration visas.<sup>34</sup>

The weekly journal of the Po'alei Tziyon party in the United States, *Idisher Kemfer*, was less optimistic. In an article titled "The Destruction of European Jewry," the famous sociologist of the Jews, Jacob Leshchinsky, compared the physical destruction of Polish Jewry under Nazi occupation to the spiritual destruction that awaited the Jews who had come under Soviet rule in the eastern part of Poland:

We encourage ourselves [to believe] that not everything is yet lost. I would like to believe it. However, I fear that even in the best case we will be facing such immense spiritual destruction [*gaystikn khurbn*], a spiritual wasteland, that Jewish life there will not be possible.<sup>35</sup>

Notably, even though Leshchinsky stresses the grim living conditions of the Polish Jews under Nazi rule – ghettoization, the yellow-star requirement, concentration camps, dispossession, and hundreds of suicides – he still considers the destruction of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union a great menace. This is because the Soviet authorities' political attitude toward Jewish culture also poses a physical menace [*a fizishe gefar*] to the millions of Jews living under this regime, especially now that the Communist regime and the Nazi regime have concluded a treaty of cooperation. Furthermore, in Leshchinsky's opinion, the danger is greater in the Soviet Union because there the regime has found collaborators for the destruction of Jewish culture, specifically the Jewish Communists. The journalist L. Naiman also likens the two totalitarian regimes to each other in their menace to the Jewish future.<sup>36</sup> The meaning of this is that whereas, according to the writers, the Jews' fate under Nazi occupation still wavers between restrained pessimism and cautious optimism, when it comes to the future of Jewish culture, there is no doubt whatsoever that it is doomed to extinction in the Soviet Union by deliberate policy of the Communist authorities.

<sup>33</sup> *Der Morgen Dzhurnal*, Jan. 20, 1941.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1941.

<sup>35</sup> *Idisher Kemfer*, Aug. 9, 1940.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1940.

In the middle of 1941, however, even this journal expressed more optimistic assessments. Hayim Greenberg, its editor-in-chief and the leading intellectual in American Yiddish-speaking society and culture, took issue somewhat with his two colleagues. In his opinion, given that the state of the Jewish people is so grave and bitter, one should not make things worse by losing faith in the future. True, there is no reason to hope that the plight of European Jewry will improve radically at the end of the war. Even so, one should not drown in the despairing thought that the Jews will have no future on European soil even after the defeat of the Nazis. Greenberg derived this optimistic faith from the courage of a group of professors at the Leiden University in the Netherlands who had called a protest strike over the Nazi authorities' dismissal of a colleague, a well-known scientist of Jewish origin, from this institution. Therefore, Greenberg is confident that the spirit of Leiden will ultimately defeat the satanic spirit of Nuremberg.<sup>37</sup>

Even after the yellow-star requirement was imposed on the Jews of Germany, the editors of *Idisher Kemfer* did not consider it a policy of separating out the Jews as candidates for exile and extermination. What is more, the Jews of Germany should not be insulted by this decree, let alone be driven to suicide by it. The Jews of Poland, for example, kept up their morale amid similar ordeals in the past and have continued to do so in the present. The editors find backing for their thesis in a report that in the streets of Berlin hundreds of Germans greeted Jews wearing the yellow star by shaking their hands as a sign of identification.<sup>38</sup>

These optimistic assessments of the future of Jews in Europe may explain the shock that *Idisher Kemfer* expressed when the sinking of the clandestine-immigrants' vessel *Struma*, with 760 children, women, and men aboard, became known. The horror was twofold: the loss of life among Jews seeking rescue, and the hard-hearted aloofness of the British authorities who refused to give asylum to those pleading for rescue from the very same regime that Britain was fighting so courageously. Morally speaking, this was an even greater manifestation of evil than the Nazis had displayed by requiring the Jews to wear the yellow star. Consequently, Hayim Greenberg defined the disaster as murder (*der mord fun di 750*) and the author David Pinsky composed a *yizkor* (memorial prayer) for the victims.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the deaths of hundreds became more visceral and heartbreaking than the ghastly impending disaster of the millions, which had not yet come into sight.

The stance of *Morgn-Frayhayt*, published by the Jewish section of the American Communist Party, is of special interest in this discussion because this paper is exceptional among the Jewish organs discussed here. First, it was not a "free" newspaper; it took uninterrupted orders from the Communist center in Moscow, with everything that this implies for its attitude toward the

<sup>37</sup> Hayim Greenberg, "Der gayst fun Layden," *ibid.*, May 23, 1941.

<sup>38</sup> "Spektatur – di gele late," *ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1941.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, March 6, 1942.

Jewish national question. Second, when World War II erupted, it was excluded from the Jewish consensus by the rest of the newspapers in a national boycott that lasted de facto until the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union.

However, from the perspective of the transnational community, as explained in the Introduction, this newspaper's vacillations on the Jewish national question deserve special attention. From this standpoint, the history of *Morgn-Frayhayt* had three chapters: from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, the first two years of the war (the duration of the Nazi-Soviet alliance), and from June 1941 to the end of the war and beyond. In each phase, there is perceptible tension between the Communist Party's political directives and the Jewish national passion, pronouncedly manifested in the attitude toward the Yiddish culture and language. To illuminate this phenomenon – a matter of material importance for the ethos of the Jewish transnational community – we need to digress from the path of developments during the war and turn our attention to something that happened ten years before the war. I am referring to the murder of dozens of Jews by Arab marauders in Hebron and elsewhere in Palestine in August 1929, due to the combined religious/political conflict between Jews and Arabs over the status of the Western (“Wailing”) Wall as a Jewish shrine. These tragic events, which claimed as victims mainly people who were innocent of any “Zionist transgression,” were defined in the Zionist argot as “the ‘events’ of *tarpat*,” denoting the Jewish year corresponding to 1929, whereas the Communist newspaper, *Morgn-Frayhayt*, defined them by using the traditional term in Jewish history and Czarist Russia: a “pogrom” (*tsarishe pogromen*).<sup>40</sup> In its editorial, *Morgn-Frayhayt* urged Jewish workers to turn out for a protest rally against this vile act.

The Central Committee of the American Communist Party immediately interpreted the stance of *Morgn-Frayhayt* as a “national deviation.” The editors of the paper were reprimanded and as a result, two days later, *Morgn-Frayhayt* published a “correction” defining the rioters’ actions as an “Arab uprising” (*arabishe oyfshtand*).<sup>41</sup>

Ten years later, in 1938, the leader of the Jewish section, M. Elgin, lent a Jewish national interpretation to an intellectual and political article that he published about the Communist Party’s election platform. Jews in the United States, he says, have a dual political status: They are both part of the American civic nation and a separate people within American society. Accordingly, the Communist Party’s social demands in these elections are universalistic and Jewish-national at once. Therefore, his article repeats the concept of a “Jewish people” and specifically emphasizes this people’s will (*dos idishe folk vil*).<sup>42</sup>

Invoking the concept of a Jewish people was not a deviation from the policy that Moscow had laid down before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, when seemingly unbridgeable tension prevailed between the Fascist

<sup>40</sup> “Iber hundred toyt in shlakhtn in Palestine,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, Aug. 26, 1929.

<sup>41</sup> Editorial, *ibid.*, Aug. 26, 1929.

<sup>42</sup> M. Elgin, “Di komunistishe val platforme un di idn,” *ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1938.



and Communist regimes. Back then, the Jews, as victims of Fascism, became “allies” of sorts with Communism. This, I would say, is how one may understand the reportage in *Morgn Frayhayt* about an assembly held in Moscow upon the eightieth anniversary of the birth of Sholem Aleichem. At this gathering, which took place two months before Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany signed their treaty, the chairman of the Soviet Writers’ Union delivered a lecture that was cited in Elgin’s article. The chairman, like Elgin, spoke about the Jewish people (*dos idische folk*) and the danger posed to it by the Nazi barbarians who were bent on destroying its culture. He also expressed hope that the Jewish people would be free everywhere on earth in the future, just as they were in Soviet Russia.<sup>43</sup>

This Soviet political leaning allowed *Morgn-Frayhayt* to give the Yiddish vernacular free rein and invest the remarks with a pronouncedly national sound. A year or so after the assembly, *Morgn-Frayhayt* reported enthusiastically that the Soviet Writers’ Union had decided to mark the eight-hundredth anniversary of the death of the Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi, who had lived in the West, in Spain, while his soul was wedded to the East, the Land of Israel. The article, however, linked Halevi not to his historical homeland but to Birobidjan, where the Jewish population, the writer said, had been growing in leaps and bounds recently. But what did the one have to do with the other? It was this: In the Soviet state, where national cultures were blossoming in the various republics, there is a place for the cultivation of the Jewish national culture, too, as a joint and parallel development in the growth of the Jewish autonomous zone in Birobidjan. The two events – the burgeoning of Birobidjan and the publication of the works of Yehuda Halevi, including some never published before – attest wonderfully to the building of Soviet society generally and Jewish-national Soviet society specifically (*der natirlekker groyser vunder fun der sovetisher un sovetish idisher natsionaler boyung*).<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, these remarks were made in the service of Soviet propaganda, which was having a hard time explaining and justifying the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact – an accord that had bestirred harsh criticism in left-wing intellectual circles, which were composed in great part of Jews. The furious criticism, accompanied by dropping of party membership, emanated mainly from these circles. Against the critics and, especially, against the entire Jewish press, which fiercely condemned the pact and called for a boycott of the Jewish Communists, *Morgn-Frayhayt* set out to defend the accord on decidedly national grounds: It had, the paper said, saved two million Jews from Nazi oppression and allowed them to lead free lives in the Soviet state.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Editorial, “Das idische folk vet umetum veren fray,” *ibid.*, April 21, 1939.

<sup>44</sup> “Fun Birobidjan biz Yehudah Halevi,” *ibid.*, April 23, 1940.

<sup>45</sup> “A milyon idn geratevet fun Hitlers hent,” *ibid.*, Sept. 18, 1939; “Di tsukunft fun Poyln un fun di poylishe idn,” *ibid.*, Sept. 19, 1939; “Gute naves far poylishe idn,” *ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1939; see also *ibid.*, Dec. 31, 1939; Feb. 27, 1940; “Finf milyon idn in der mishpokhe sovetishe felker,” *ibid.*, May 2, 1940; “Birobidjan un di idn fun gevezenem Poyln,” *ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1939.

It must be acknowledged that, notwithstanding the cynical significance of defending the USSR's political alliance with the Fascist Satan, there was some historical truth in this allegation. Had it not been for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, after all, those two million Jews who had been transferred to the Soviet-controlled zone would have survived. Furthermore, the Jewish Communist leaders who had decried the Fascist regime from the outset and whose support of the accord had been imposed on them by the Party undoubtedly viewed the temporary salvation of two million Polish Jews as the Jews' only consolation amid their dire plight.

When war between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia broke out, the national tendency in *Morgn-Frayhayt*, reflected in the words and expressions of its Yiddish language, gathered strength. In 1941, the paper ran a memorial article about M. Elgin, the party leader who had died in 1939. The author, A. Pomerantz, quotes the Yiddish writer Shmuel Niger, who was not a Communist, describing Elgin as a Communist who did not always accept his party's views. Although he always remained loyal and devoted to the party, Niger stressed, Elgin had another "party" to which he definitely pledged allegiance: the Yiddish language, for the existence and quality of which he fought indefatigably.<sup>46</sup>

I stress this point due to the importance of a Jewish language – Yiddish or Hebrew – in every version of Jewish national renaissance: the Zionist, the Dubnowist, the Bundist, and even the Communist. Lacking conventional definitive elements of nationhood such as territory, population, economy, history, and a common language, the defining element and common denominator of Jewish nationhood was Yiddish and its culture, or Hebrew and its culture.

These manifestations of national culture plainly enjoyed the approval if not the explicit encouragement of the Soviet government, which was interested in American Jewish assistance in its war against the Nazis even before the United States joined the war. The strains of Yiddish in *Morgn-Frayhayt*, however, expressed more than this. Referring to the suicide of Adam Czerniaków, chairman of the Warsaw ghetto Judenrat, the paper sought to distinguish between the valorous and desperate struggle of an individual and a war of the people. In reference to the latter, the editorialist says that a people neither wishes to commit suicide nor can do so. The people – our people, he says – wants to fight and must fight for its existence and liberation to its last breath (*A folk – unzer folk – wil un muz kemfn far zayn eksistents un bafrayung biz zayn letstn otemtsug*).<sup>47</sup> Words of similar spirit and content appeared in *Aynikayt*, the weekly journal of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union, to which we devote a separate chapter later in the book.

In the spirit of these remarks, *Morgn-Frayhayt* also expresses political demands for the unification of Jewish forces in the United States, Britain, and Palestine for the anti-Fascist struggle. Practically speaking, American Jewry

<sup>46</sup> A. Pomerantz, "M. Elgin un dos idishe vort," *ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1941.

<sup>47</sup> "Der zelbsmord in Varshever geto," *ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1942.

is asked to donate funds for the manufacture of thousands of tanks and hundreds of aircraft for the Red Army. The appeal stresses a symbolic Jewish national point by proposing a name for the battle tanks that will be produced by dint of the Jews' donations: "Bar Kokhba."<sup>48</sup>

With the onset of Operation Barbarossa, a famous and fateful event for the Jews and other peoples in Europe, especially the Russians, the cautiously optimistic tenor in the Jewish press began to wane due to incoming reports about the Nazis' especially savage conduct toward Jews and their cultural assets in the towns of Ukraine. *Forverts*, for example, wrote about the torching of a library that contained collections of rare manuscripts and books.<sup>49</sup> Still, the cautiously optimistic spirit of the previous era did not expire altogether. The assumption was that the Red Army would impede the Germans' progress and quickly reverse the course of the war. It would do so in an alliance with Britain and the United States, which, given the German attack on Russia, would assume an active role in stamping out the Nazi enemy.<sup>50</sup> It is true that the writer had no doubt about the enormity of the suffering and sacrifice that the Jews would experience in this new war, but it was an inevitable price that at least carried the hope of impending victory. For this reason, *Forverts* revised its hostile political line toward the Soviet Communist regime, although not its ideological line, especially with respect to the Soviets' attitude toward Jewish culture. Thus, it drew a firm distinction between the Russian people and its army, which were fighting against the Nazis, and Stalin's Bolshevik regime, which even now continued to persecute the Zionists, the Bundists, and the rabbis.

Several months later, *Forverts* reinforced this message by running an article calling for the sending of food parcels to the ghettoized Jews via the Red Cross. Here the paper contradicted its previous strongly worded claims that most food commodities were being looted by the Nazis. The article based itself on letters that had arrived from the Warsaw ghetto, stressing the importance of these parcels in both the physical and psychological senses.

This trend of thought – offering faint hope that, despite the ghastly plight of European Jewry, the majority would endure until the war could end with the Allies' victory – persisted even when the deportation of the Jews of Paris and the resumption of deportations of German and Czechoslovakian Jews became known.<sup>51</sup> When the latter deportations resumed, it was stated that Hitler was again assaulting the Jews. The word "again" (*vider*) signals the prevalent belief that the anti-Jewish policy had been suspended until then. Another turning point in the tone of reportage and opinion pieces occurred in February 1942, immediately after the infamous Wannsee conference.

<sup>48</sup> "Unzer blut! Unzer blut!" *ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1942.

<sup>49</sup> *Forverts*, Aug. 9, 1941.

<sup>50</sup> "Di milkhome in Ukraine un di idn," *ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1941.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 23, 1941.

In March 1942, *Forverts* began to carry reports, which escalated into main headline stories, about the mass murder of Jews in Ukraine.<sup>52</sup> In April of that year, an editorial in this paper defined the actions as the slaughter of Jews in Russia. The reports were based on sources in Moscow and Kuybyshev, whence the Soviet government had been evacuated when the Nazi army had closed in on the suburbs of Moscow, along with information disseminated by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow. These reports already spoke of the murder of hundreds of thousands. The information had reached the authorities in Moscow and thence the Anti-Fascist Committee from the Jewish partisans and Jews in the occupied areas of Ukraine and Belarus; they had also reached the West. *Forverts* treated this information with caution although not with disbelief. In its opinion, the number of Jews murdered by the Nazis was as likely much smaller as it was larger. Accordingly, it said, one should not be overly reliant on random information delivered by messengers, agents, and commanders of partisan groups. For example, *Forverts* said, there is no doubt, according to reliable sources, that mass murders had taken place in cities such as Kiev and Odessa; beyond this fact, however, there were no further details. It is also not clear, the paper added, whether Jews still remained in these towns or whether the entire Jewish populations there had been annihilated or evicted. Accordingly, the information arriving from the arena of the slaughter should be treated cautiously, because the entire picture will become clear only after these areas are liberated from Nazi rule. One should, therefore, hope that the horrific reports about the slaughter of Jews in Russia are exaggerated (*iz ibergetribn*). In the meantime, all that remains is to do the utmost to help the Allied forces in every possible way.<sup>53</sup>

Four months later, *Forverts* reported the mass murder of Jews in Vilna, this time on the basis of sources not in Moscow but in Stockholm, which the newspaper evidently considered more credible. The reports spoke of the systematic murder of some 60,000 Jews over a two-week period and numbered the remnants of the entire Jewish population of Vilna at only 20,000. In view of these reports, the article claimed, one needs nerves of steel to avoid tumbling into pits of despair even though the Jews' suffering surpasses that of other peoples under German occupation. Furthermore, it is no consolation that the atrocities trace to the despair (*fartsveyflung*) that has gripped Hitler in view of the defeats that his army is absorbing on the front. Here *Forverts* reverts to an opinion that established a toehold on its pages: that the Jews are being murdered not as part of a predetermined program of extermination but by deranged murderers in eruptions of rage. This "consolation," however, is hard to accept, *Forverts* cautions, given that in his moment of final despair,

<sup>52</sup> 15,000 Jews murdered in Borislav – March 10, 1942; murder of 60,000 Jews in Vilna – April 16, 1942; murder of 60,000 in Kishinev – June 21, 1941.

<sup>53</sup> "Di natsi shekhites oyf idn in Rusland," April 7, 1942; see also "Di masn-shekhite oyf Berliner idn," June 16, 1942, written in response to a report about the execution of 258 Jews in Berlin.

Hitler may attempt to wipe the Jews off the face of the earth. At precisely this time, however, other peoples are suffering as well. This fact allows one to hope that the Jews' fate will be linked to that of other peoples and that, together with them, the Jewish people will vanquish the Nazi Fascism. Even though it is the Jews' fate to make the greatest sacrifice in the struggle against Fascism at this hour of bloodshed, one must not lose faith that the Jewish people will survive Hitler's atrocities just as it surmounted all persecutions by its rabid enemies and murderers throughout history.<sup>54</sup> One may say, then, that a change of awareness occurred at this point: from consciousness of the Jews' extraordinary distress to the realization that they faced extermination as a result of enraged attacks by the collapsing Nazi regime.

By now, more than one million victims were being spoken of; *Forverts* found it correct to note that reliable American correspondents were reporting identical numbers.<sup>55</sup>

If so, what can one say? *Forverts* asked. No one is so wise as to be able to offer a clear answer, no institution exists that can state that it has a plan, comprised of these or other particulars, to halt the murders. Nevertheless, both the mind and the heart scream that something must be done (*Az epes zol men fort ton*). An example of "something," in the opinion of *Forverts*, is the Jewish trade unions' initiative to sign one million Jews to a petition that will be presented to President Roosevelt. The petition will articulate the Jews' outcry (*dos gantser idisher geveyn*) and urge the president to warn the Nazi murderers that the United States and the entire progressive world would bring them to justice after their defeat on the battlefield. Furthermore, the German people, as well as the other peoples that are collaborating with them, should know that they, too, will have to face the bench of international justice and that the hands that are smashing the Jews' heads will be amputated.

The approach in *Forverts*, which combined the outcry over the Nazis' murderous acts with a bit of consolation over the very fact that life was continuing, was shared by the Zionist *Der Tog*. In an opinion piece headlined "Between Hope and Despair" (*Tsvishn hofnung un fartsveyflung*), this paper indeed sounded an alarm about the mass murders, reports of which it had obtained from Soviet sources. "From the other side [however,] reports are also arriving that stimulate hope and confidence and reinforce faith that the Jewish spirit has not been totally broken despite these murderous acts."<sup>56</sup> The

<sup>54</sup> "Di natsishe masn-shekhite oyf di idn in Vilna," *ibid.*, June 17, 1942.

<sup>55</sup> "Di petitsye fun di idisher arbayter tsum prezident Ruzevelt," *ibid.*, June 6, 1942; below is the list of reports that appeared in *The New York Times*:

1. Vilna Massacre of Jews," June 16, 1942;
2. A report on the slaughter of 700,000 Jews in German-occupied territories, July 2, 1942;
3. 258 Jews reported slain in Berlin, June 14, 1942;
4. Himmler program kills Polish Jews, Nov. 25, 1942;
5. Slain Polish Jews put at a million, Nov. 26, 1942;
6. 50,000 Kiev Jews reported killed (in September 1941), Nov. 29, 1942.

<sup>56</sup> *Der Tog*, Jan. 8, 1942.

source of this solace, it turns out, was a report about the public celebration of “Land of Israel Day” in the Warsaw ghetto and the continued functioning of the ghetto’s variegated education system. The most pronounced indication of this cautious optimism was the special concern that *Der Tog* expressed about the Nazis’ having ordered the closure of the Jewish schools in the ghettos. However, *Der Tog* stresses, the children who have been barred from the schools are continuing to study in groups in private homes. When textbooks are in short supply, the paper reported, they are copied over in handwriting and distributed among the youngsters. To bolster readers’ morale despite the present distress, *Der Tog* cited recent experience: The Communist regime, after all, had pummeled the Jews for twenty years or so but could not break their spirit. Observe, as evidence, the Jews’ national awakening in Russia and the resumption of contacts between them and their compatriots in the free democracies. Accordingly, in occupied Poland, too, where the Jews are fighting for their lives and their spiritual legacy, there is hope that they will outlive (*iberleben*) this cruel test despite the killings and devastation.<sup>57</sup>

Even when it published reports about the murder of 35,000 Jews in Łódź and augmented them by running a report – which would not be believed at that stage – that the Nazis were using poison gas for mass killing purposes, *Der Tog* still sought to maintain its cautiously optimistic composure. Although the editorial was headlined “In the City of Slaughter” (*Di shekhite-shtodt*), it urges the public to respond to these grim reports by “keeping its cool” (*kihl batrakhtn*). The paper’s rationale for this recommendation was one of the most difficult manifestations of the tragedy under way: It found “solace” in the possibility that the use of gas against the Jews was a scientific experiment (*visnshaftlekhe eksperiment-arbayt*) aimed to test the strength of this gas for use at the front.<sup>58</sup>

Three days later, even this “Satan’s solace” vanished as *Der Tog* published the report of the Polish government-in-exile that proved the fact of mass extermination (*masen mord*), with a million victims already counted.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the explicit reports, *Der Tog* wished to apply maximum caution in assessing the disaster. In an opinion piece ahead of Rosh Hashanah, in which it attempted again to dilute the cup of agony with a dash of consolation, the paper told its readers that there is no assurance that the publicly reported toll of murdered Jews is indeed accurate. The only plain fact is that the number is large, in the hundreds of thousands.

The most vehement expression of doubt about the reliability of the terrifying reports appeared in the Po’alei Tziyon organ, *Idisher Kemfer*. The public exponent of this line of argumentation was the sociologist Jacob Leshchinsky, whose remarks combined the feelings of a powerless people, forsaken by democratic society at its moment of disaster, with a critical rational approach that judged the information published to be numerically improbable.

<sup>57</sup> “Idishe maranen in Poyln,” *ibid.*, April 15, 1942.

<sup>58</sup> “Di shekhite-shtodt,” *ibid.*, June 28, 1942.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1, 1942.

Leshchinsky was the first and almost the only one to protest publicly the discrimination that the American public applied to the murder by the Nazis of hundreds of people in the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice in response to the assassination of Gestapo chief Heydrich. It is this, he says, that explains the public's silence in regard to the report, which had been appearing in print for more than a year, about the mass deportation and murder of Jews in the Nazi-occupied areas.<sup>60</sup> The protests about the murders in Lidice, he complains, originate in the American press, foremost *The New York Times*; the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, has also decried it in public. The blood of Jews, in contrast, is cheap (*bilik*); no one protests the murder of tens of thousands in Poland and the ongoing pogroms against the Jews of Romania.

Just the same, Leshchinsky explicitly doubts the reliability of the numbers associated with the mass murder: “Inconsequential as I am, I have the courage to say that I don’t believe, even now [*Ikh gloyb oykh itst nit*], that 700,000 Jews have been murdered.”<sup>61</sup> In his opinion, the figure of 700,000 murdered Jews, not to mention 1,000,000, is a severe exaggeration (*ibergetribn*). However, he adds, even if “only” 20,000 Jews have been murdered, does this change anything from the moral standpoint? In any event, he continues, efforts to obtain reliable information and report it regularly are urgently necessary. Concurrently, Leshchinsky issues a firm warning against hyperbole (*derbay zikh shtark hitn fun ibertraybungn*): Inaccurate information causes immense public damage, sows panic and despondency among the Jews, and plants severe doubts in general public opinion, which, for this reason, is reluctant to respond publicly. For example, he says, it is altogether unimaginable that 35,000 Jews in Lwów were murdered in one day, as rumors appearing in the Jewish press allege. After all, soldiers were not killed in such numbers even on the worst day on the front. Accordingly, one should be very cautious when launching public protests against the mass-murder actions on the basis of unconfirmed reports. Instead, the outcry should be aimed at the Nazis’ attempts to make the Jews into subhumans of the third or even the fourth degree.

In the meantime, reports about the extermination actions were multiplying. They prompted the leaders of the various Jewish organizations to call for a mass protest rally in Madison Square Garden, New York, on July 17, 1942. The newspapers considered the enormous crowd that would turn out, filling not only the arena but also the surrounding streets, the only way to influence American public opinion and also to allow the Americans and other free peoples to express their respect for the Jews. This sentiment was reflected most boldly by *Idisher Kemfer*, which wrote that the huge rally proves that “We are not an assortment of battered individuals – but rather a collective, a people

<sup>60</sup> In this matter, see also Chapter 9, “Between Lidice and Majdanek.”

<sup>61</sup> Jacob Leshchinsky, “Iz unzer blut hefker?” *Idisher Kemfer*, June 26, 1942. *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* offered remarks in the same spirit in its editorial of June 19, 1942: “Natsi shekhites oyf idn.”

[*a kibuts, a folk*] and our people's voice is being heard among the voices of other peoples that are fighting for their freedom and for universal justice."<sup>62</sup>

*Idisher Kemfer*, however, did not conceal the truth – the Jews' national powerlessness – from its readers: "The truth must be told [that] we do not know what can be done right now to stop the mass killings" (*Mir visn nit vos es ken itst geton vern kedey optsushteln di hent fun di merderer*). Just the same, everyone feels deeply that the silence of the Jewish people must come to an end.

In November 1942, by which time the reports about the systematic murders and their extent (estimated at 700,000–1,000,000) had been verified, Chaim [Hayim] Greenberg published in the English section of *Idisher Kemfer* an article headlined "The Plan of Destruction."<sup>63</sup> The article illuminates the psychological and cognitive state of mind of a political intellectual who professed a humanistic national and socialist outlook, a thinker who knew the facts but could not wrap his mind around their horror. Greenberg knew about the suicides of parents and their children, the freight trains in which people were being asphyxiated, the people being shot at the edge of mass graves, the starvation and humiliations, and on and on. However, he writes, for the very reason of the enormity of the horror, one cannot answer the question of what is really happening there in clear and precise terms: We do not know, and no one on earth knows, how to answer these questions, he rules. The information about the disaster, he says, arrived from diverse sources, some unreliable and some inaccurate. Even after filtering the incoming material, one cannot produce an authoritative account of the situation as it really was: what portion of European Jewry had already been exterminated and what portion still lived. All that remains, therefore, is to mobilize public opinion by disseminating the general report about the appalling disaster that had been brought upon the Jews and warn the world that the fate of European Jewry had reached the eleventh hour on the clock of history. At twelve o'clock, the Jews would face "complete physical extermination." At this fateful interval, between the eleventh and the twelfth, hope still exists for the millions who still live.

This hope, Greenberg opines, originates in the realization and the belief that the Nazis have not managed to infect all the peoples of Europe with their murderous hatred of the Jews. Furthermore, among these peoples, even if they are not free of antisemitic sentiments, large portions remain that are not helping the murderers and are even siding with those being murdered. Such is the case in Bulgaria and Fascist Italy, for example, where the churches resisted the governments' actions, and so it is in Denmark, where the king attended a symbolic demonstration on behalf of his country's Jewish citizens. There is no doubt, however, says Greenberg, that the rescue of European Jewry depends foremost on what two powers – the United States and Britain – will do. The Jews' role in this campaign is to awaken public opinion in these countries so

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., "Der Anhoib," July 24, 1942.

<sup>63</sup> Hayim Greenberg, "The Plan of Destruction," *Jewish Frontier*, Nov. 1942.



that it will persuade their governments that the rescue of the Jews must not depend only on defeating the Nazis. Less than a month later, all doubts and hesitations vanished: The clock had struck twelve, and no one had the ability or the desire to turn it back.

*Forverts* commented on the protest rally in a similar vein but drew a different conclusion: “The little that the Jews can do in the present situation is to vow solemnly never to forget this terrible tragedy in our people’s history and to be neither silent nor at rest until the Nazi murderers pay the full price for what they have done.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> “Nekome oder shtrof,” *Forverts*, Aug. 30, 1942.

PART II

THE ILLUSION DASHED – 1942–1945

With the credible and confirmed Job-like reports that we have now received from the vale of killing – the era of expectations and delusions has ended; the period of the kindness of ignorance is over, and the time for the easing of inner anguish by entertaining doubt – who knows, maybe a miracle has happened and the horror described and conjectured didn't happen in full intensity? – has gone.

(*Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” March 10, 1944)

As our children weep in the shadow of the gallows  
we have not heard the world's outrage  
For You chose us from among all nations  
You loved us and desired us.  
For You chose us from among all nations,  
From Norwegians, Czechs, British  
And as our children march to the gallows,  
Jewish children, wise children  
They know that their blood is not valued  
They call only to mother: don't look.

Nathan Alterman, “From among all Nations,” *Ha'aretz*,  
November 27, 1942



## The Hebrew-Language Press in Palestine

### INTRODUCTION

When authoritative reports about the magnitude of the systematic murder of millions of Jews appeared in print, the profound public concern of the Hebrew-language press metamorphosed into an outpouring of Jewish national anguish that had not been heard on its pages to that time – an outcry that reflected the inexhaustible grief of most Jewish inhabitants of Palestine over the loss of family members in Europe; a protest against the fact that the free world was in no rush to offer assistance and denied the Jews the ability to fight their war against the Nazis under their national flag; and self-flagellation due to the lack of a public response even when semiauthoritative reports about the mass murders began to arrive in the summer of 1942. In the last-mentioned manifestation, the press did not accuse the public of deliberately having disregarded its brethren's suffering; instead, it singled out the syndrome of optimistic self-delusion, which had induced paralyzing complacency.

The response was louder in the Hebrew press than in the Diaspora, evidently due to the national role that this press had undertaken. Therefore, as construed by the Hebrew press, the silence had evolved into a *national blunder*. So it was, the Hebrew newspapers ruled, even though this silence contained no element of gagging; indeed, all the grim reports had found their way to the front pages. Rather, they sidestepped a grave interpretation that, half a year later, proved only too true. Did this truth, apart from the personal and public pangs of conscience that its revelation evoked, change the assessment of the Jewish national condition? Did the public entertain new hope for rescue actions as a result of intervention by the democracies, or did the Jewish press respond with de facto acquiescence in the national tragedy due to its sober political realization that rescue was out of the question for many of the doomed? These are the main questions that will occupy us in this part of the study.

DAVAR

The first newspapermen who beat their breasts for having committed the sin of silence were two senior journalists at *Davar*, Yehuda Gotthelf and Dan Pines. Their confessions were so agonizingly candid that they deserve to be quoted verbatim. Any paraphrasing of their remarks would diminish the intensity and meaning that the words possessed when written and the way they may be understood today.

Two weeks after the outpouring of public dismay, Yehuda Gotthelf wrote:

The days of fasting and eulogy, the ten days of repentance, have passed, and our lives appear to be getting back “on track.” We haven’t yet received even one word of consolation, and there is no indication thus far that the slaughter of European Jewry has stopped. Just the same, the law of *amnesia* is having its effect; the force of life is sweeping, dragging the Yishuv onto a course of *tranquility and complacency*, just like before (emphasis added).

Gotthelf speaks of a law of “amnesia” that stems from the flow of life; he does not think of it as a law of “*dis-remembering*” that results from a policy or a public conspiracy – a topic that we will yet discuss later in this book. Still, he does not try to water down his allegations against the public. Accordingly, he gets right to the painful point:

Is it possible that *this time, too* [emphasis in the original] we won’t marshal the strength to counteract the flow [of life] and acquiescence, to spurn consolation, to persist in our outcry and entreaty? It is on this that the fate of many Jews who still palpitate between life and death depends; *it is by this that the moral verdict of the Yishuv in Jewish history will be handed down* [emphasis added]. We were guilty, we dealt treacherously. Now that the darkness of the terrifying reports has descended on us, it seemed as though *this time* Yishuv would do its soul-searching.

However, disappointment soon follows:

*Quickly we found a way to ease our gut feelings by foisting the blame on others* [emphasis added]. The Yishuv didn’t know a thing – it was the fault of this or that institution in London for having hid [it] from us; our telegraphic agencies were at fault for not having reported it [...]. The truth, however, is that these reports *reached Palestine and the newspapers published them* (emphasis in the original).

This leads Gotthelf to a very dire conclusion: “Therefore, something terrible happened: the Yishuv heard [the message] but did not absorb [it] and did not raise such an outcry as would plunge Diaspora Jewry and, by its means, the entire world, into a storm.” This happened, in Gotthelf’s opinion, because “It is the ‘national’ Yishuv, which carries the gist of the nation’s past and future, the concentrated core of Jewish responsibility – that could have and should have given the signal. However, the Yishuv did not respond.” Then Gotthelf

asks a question that plagues the public to this day: “Why? – *many have asked* and will yet ask this bitter question” (emphasis added).

Gotthelf’s answers to this question, although not unequivocal, drive to the heart of the Zionist public conscience. One of them points the finger at personal hedonism – “Maybe it’s too good for us under our country’s fair skies and the goodly and beneficial sun of Palestine.” This is probably an allusion to the Yishuv’s economic prosperity, precipitated by the services the Yishuv has been rendering to the British army in and around Palestine. A second possible reason is even grimmer. Gotthelf suggests that the Yishuv’s sense of national fraternity with Jews abroad may be slipping, foremost among the youth: Is it possible, he asks, that “Due to the sheer abundance and the pampering that the country lavishes on them, they do not feel sad about the sufferings of the Diaspora?” Gotthelf seeks a third reason in the public political domain: “May it have happened because we squandered the enormous deposit that Jewish history has given us, investing most of our public energy *in the past two years in matters of less importance, distracting ourselves from the things that really matter?*” (emphasis added).

In the aftermath of this peroration, Gotthelf inveighs against those who, even now, deem the silent world to be the main field of action and therefore, out of sheer despair, conclude that nothing can be done. Gotthelf attacks them mainly in moral terms, not practical ones. Before we blame the world, he says, we should ask, “Did we ourselves, the survivors of those who have been murdered, wake up so quickly that we should complain about governments and peoples that are farther away in body and soul?”

Gotthelf finds the answer to this question about why the public was silent in an editorial that his newspaper presented some two years later:

With the credible and confirmed Job-like reports that we have now received from the vale of killing – the era of expectations and delusions has ended; the period of the kindness of ignorance is over, and the time for the easing of inner anguish by entertaining doubt – who knows, maybe a miracle has happened and the horror described and conjectured didn’t happen in full intensity? – has gone.<sup>1</sup>

The term “ignorance” is inaccurate, of course. [Part I](#) of this study proves that the reportage left very little out. It was, however, received with “kindness,” that is, with a combination of skepticism and suspicion that, while not totally negating the truth of the reports, did not accept it fully at that time.

Moving past his national-level qualms of conscience, Gotthelf asks those in despair whether they see any way of saving the few who remain alive, apart from continually protesting to the enlightened world and urging it frantically to treat the Jews being murdered by the same standards that it would apply had a similar disaster befallen members of other peoples. Although he admits that this outcry has not yet fallen on attentive ears, he counsels against despair “because this is the test of the sincerity of the democracies’ war for the

<sup>1</sup> *Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” March 10, 1944.

equality of peoples and races.”<sup>2</sup> The editorialist did not know how powerfully this statement, too, would accompany us to this day in view of the persistent questions about whether the Allies really did everything they could to save even a few of the beleaguered Jews, even if this might risk the lives of many of them. Ordering the American and British air forces to bombard the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau was an example of something that could have been done but was not done for various reasons.<sup>3</sup>

Another member of the *Davar* editorial board, Dan Pines, followed Gotthelf’s lead in a piece headlined “The Call for Rescue,” pertaining to “our brothers and sisters who are being smashed and trampled in the den of the ‘lions’ of Europe.” Pines, however, quickly admits with the honesty of self-affliction that the terrifying report, “even when it reached our ears was not forwarded to our nerve centers. *The cold mind chilled the hot heart*” (emphasis added). True to his honesty, however, Pines has to admit that half a year earlier, in July 1942, the American Jewish public turned out for an audacious public protest against the reports about the mass murders, whereas “Hebrew Palestine acted more belatedly than American Jewry in crying out and girding for rescue.” Pines rules out any sort of consolation for the Yishuv’s sin of dilatory protest – “*The response of the great world and the reverberations of its actions were stronger*” (emphasis in the original) – due to the Yishuv’s special status in the Jewish consciousness and world public opinion. In mellifluous rhetoric that attests to the emotional turmoil of a person seeking solace, Pines emphasizes that “[f]rom this standpoint, in the sense of the general consciousness of our presence here, the cream of the national crop in terms of the influence and impression of our entreaty, that of the apple of world Jewry’s eye – something was underscored that should not be belittled.”<sup>4</sup> Pines is referring to the prominent space that the American Jewish press reserved for public manifestations of protest and grief in Palestine and the mentions of these phenomena in the general press in New York and London. One doubts, however, whether in those years the non-Zionist public truly considered the Yishuv the “apple” of the Jewish people’s eye.

Indeed, *Davar* admitted in an editorial that when it came to answering the ghastly rumors that had arrived in July–August 1942, not only had it failed to spearhead the Jewish protest campaigns, but it had been caught up in general public opinion’s skepticism about the reports. “Back then, the world didn’t want to believe. Back then, *the Jews themselves also refused to believe* that this curse was indeed descending on them” (emphasis added). Now, however,

<sup>2</sup> Y. Gotthelf, “Hanahot li-feu’lah u-le-hatmadah” [Guidelines for Action and Perseverance], *Davar*, Dec. 10, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> In this matter, see Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 290–297.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Pines, “Qri’ah le-hatsalah!” [The Call for Rescue!], *Davar*, Dec. 31, 1942; see also H. Shorer, “Al penei tehom” [On the Cusp of the Abyss], *ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1942.

all doubts having disappeared, the response must change: “Now we must not let the world be silent.” Embedded in this cry, which also signaled a commitment to rescue action – was the acknowledgment of self-guilt.

A year later, after the Warsaw ghetto uprising, came the distressing news that the promise not to be silent had failed: “Our hand proved too short” to effect rescue. What remained, then, was to make an additional promise of sorts, after the deaths of the heroic martyrs “whom we did not know how to save while they were alive.” The thing that remains is that “We should at least know not to shame them after their annihilation, because they believed in us.”<sup>5</sup>

The editorialist is speaking, of course, about the members of the Zionist pioneering units who commanded the uprisings in the ghettos of Warsaw, Białystok, Vilna, and elsewhere. In the DP camps, however, among survivors of the Holocaust after the war, the Zionist spirit that infused them with faith in the national Yishuv in Palestine was dominant.<sup>6</sup>

*Davar* expressed this feeling in strongly national terms toward the end of the war by arguing that the Jews’ disaster had happened “because we were few, because custody of the gates of Palestine had not been entrusted to us, and because we had no standing among the nations as we were the weakest of all nations – it is for this reason alone that our brothers and sisters *who could have been saved* were not saved” (emphasis added). In other words, the Zionist national axiom, which was basically correct but unrealistic, did not sweep the editorialist into flights of the imagination. He emphasized that had these minimum conditions of Jewish political sovereignty been met, it would have been possible to redeem only those “who could have been saved.” In reality, few Jews fell into that category, as had been correctly argued in public since the magnitude of the disaster had become known. These remarks, more than meant to lament the erstwhile national situation, were aimed at the future, at the end of the war, when the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state would be demanded to prevent the recurrence of the Jews’ tragic powerlessness. Therefore, the lengthy and gradual process that ended with the Jews’ catastrophe reaching the consciousness of the Gentile nations and the Jews themselves serves as an example: “The obvious, outrageous lethal truth did not become apparent to us and the entire world as such, in the simple and binding sense, in one stroke. The veil was lifted slowly, very slowly, vaguely and uncertainly, and now the whole world knows everything about our disaster.”<sup>7</sup> In a tragically paradoxical way, however, “[The world] does not find the disaster so shocking” precisely because it came to “the knowledge and consciousness” of

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Dec. 14, 1943.

<sup>6</sup> See Hagit Lawski, *Liqrat hayim badashim* [Toward New Life], in Hebrew (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005); Irit Keinan, *Lo nirpah ha-ra’av* [The Hunger Has Not Slackened], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> *Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” March 14, 1945; in the same manner, see *ibid.*, “Devar ha-Yom,” April 22, 1945.



Jews and non-Jews slowly and gradually. Gradually they “got used to” what had happened, and in this sense a “kindness” was bestowed on them. This kindness, however, may seal the fate of additional millions of Jews. The writer is referring to Jewish leaders and non-Jewish statespersons who do not consider the establishment of the Jewish state the correct and essential response to the cataclysm that the Jews are undergoing.

Thus, intentionally or not, the sin of public silence in view of the Jews’ tragedy became a national lesson for the future. This is exactly what happened immediately after the war, as the Yishuv withstood the political and military struggle for the establishment of the Jewish state with decisive political and military aid from the Jewish Diaspora.

When the Nazis’ murderous conduct became widely and undoubtedly known and as guilt feelings for having ignored it surfaced in the public’s consciousness, the concept of *sho’ah*, Holocaust, evolved from a historical metaphor denoting destruction into a visceral phenomenon in the here-and-now. The difference between two concepts of devastation in Jewish history, *hurban* (“destruction,” as in the two temples in Jerusalem) and *sho’ah* (“holocaust,” as in an all-consuming blaze), was not only quantitative but also and mainly material. A *sho’ah*, in its true sense, denotes the annihilation of the Jewish people. From late 1942 onward, the Hebrew press recognized this; thus, *hurban*, destruction, denoting suffering theretofore unparalleled in Jewish history, became a *sho’ah*, which has the extermination of the entire Jewish people as its aim.

One may summarize *Davar*’s response to this state of affairs in two imperatives: the call to “mobilize,” an imperative addressed to the Yishuv and the Jews in the free countries, especially the United States; and the cry of “Save us,” addressed to the powers at war with the Nazis. Both imperatives were doomed to disappointment and despair.

The disappointment was brought on by the inadequate willingness of members of the Yishuv to mobilize for the various rubrics of national service. There was nothing new about this – *Davar* had been decrying it before the *hurban* became a *sho’ah* – but it carried special meaning in the new situation. The disillusionment occasioned by this phenomenon reflected in particular the contrast between what was happening and the great expectations. The expectations found hope in the Yishuv as a lever that would catapult Jewish and general public opinion from the abyss of indifference to the pinnacle of vigorous public involvement that would affect the attitude of the enlightened countries’ leaders toward the Jews. This belief also found rhetorical expression in the writing employed at that time of emergency. *Davar* vehemently demanded that “Against the extermination battalions that the enemy oppressor has mounted against us, may *rescue battalions* also arise!” The upshot of this imperative is that “*It is every Jew’s right and obligation to mobilize*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Nov. 27, 1942; see also *ibid.*, Nov. 26, 1942.

As stated, disappointment in the results of the passionate exhortation came quickly, especially when it followed previous appeals to the Yishuv but with emphasis on the new emergency conditions that had come about. Therefore, by early December 1942, *Davar* already noted that while “Many have responded” to the new order of the day, “there is *mass evasion* and it has to stop and be uprooted” (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> To stress the gravity of this phenomenon even more emphatically, the editorialist notes that the duty of mobilization in the Yishuv applies to those aged eighteen to nineteen – a much younger cohort than the anti-Nazi countries were mobilizing at the time.

It is important to remark at this juncture that the National Institutions’ order to mobilize was not compulsory but voluntary. It could only be so: The Yishuv institutions had no governmental power to enforce their urgings; their powers went no farther than public moral suasion. One should, then, evaluate the extent of the mobilization in view of its voluntary nature. Of course, however, those who regarded the Yishuv as the cream of the Jewish national crop could not but be profoundly disappointed by the phenomenon of evasion and could not help but express their feelings in terms of fierce public censure. They did so without fearing that their action might harm externally, and especially in the Jewish world, the quality of the “cream of the crop.” In fact, they must have done so for this very reason; after all, the comprehensive national mobilization of *klal Yisrael* depended, in *Davar*’s opinion, on the public example that the Yishuv would set.

The exhortation “Mobilize!” was accompanied by the outcry “Save us! ... Don’t let this entreaty fall silent, either for ourselves or for others,” so that it be heard in every Jewish home, every organization, urging the leaders of the democracies to “demand moral responsibility,” raise resources for rescue, bring down the border barriers that are obstructing the war refugees, “summon every young man in Israel to the flag of the army, strengthen the ‘ghetto-destroyer companies,’ [and] strengthen the corps of resurrection and revenge.” All these hopes and expectations were now put to the test of the world’s conscience: “We have allies in the world – this time they will be tested by whether our outcry remains lonely or not.”<sup>10</sup>

It was indeed the most onerous moral quandary that the anti-Nazi free world faced, a question more important for understanding the nature of democratic governance than for determining what measures the Allies could take to rescue at least a small proportion of the Jews. Indeed, as the contemporaries would soon discover, the flaw was fundamentally moral and it was this characteristic that determined the measures of action and inaction.

Indeed, the disappointment was as great as the erstwhile expectations. A week after the outcry “Save us!” appeared in print, the suspicion arose that it was having no effect, even though it was expressed by the free Jewish communities, organizations and all, and more than a few non-Jewish entities. As

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Dec. 7, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Nov. 26, 1942.

a result, “To this very day, no good tidings have been heard about any action whatsoever by those to whom the outcry was addressed.”<sup>11</sup> This loud and demanding rhetoric, however, was accompanied by more modest demands at the practical level.

The editors of *Davar* admitted publicly that “The possibilities of rescuing souls from the European inferno *are very limited, very restricted*” (emphasis added). It is within the choice of the democracies and the neutral countries, however, “to expand or contract these possibilities.” In the editorialist’s opinion, expanding the possibilities means “urgent, large-scale, vigorous action to extricate those condemned to death”<sup>12</sup> from the Nazi-controlled areas. However, the extent of rescue produced by this large-scale and vigorous action was measured in several thousand, according to the example of Switzerland and Sweden, the two countries whose policy toward the Jewish refugees was lauded in all Jewish papers during those years. Spain and Portugal, too, with their Fascist leanings, unenthusiastically granted refuge to several thousand Jewish refugees and were cited approvingly for it.

Even though the free world’s practical response was belated, it did seem that “the conscience of the democratic world” had begun to show its presence. This impression was generated by responses in public opinion: the press, the radio, the churches, and even Parliament in London.

Right away, however, *Davar* stressed that the calamity is too enormous to be requited with sympathy alone; it entails audacious and immediate actions. Such are also being demanded “by many of those in the whole world who have a conscience.”<sup>13</sup>

Two days later, an even more encouraging editorial appeared after the three powers stated that those responsible for the murder of the Jews would be punished after the war. The importance of this statement, however, depended not only on warning the criminals but also, and mainly, on helping those who were being murdered. Here, of course, while the possibilities were indeed “limited,” this axiom should not be allowed “to serve [...] as a reason to restrict the possibilities that exist.”<sup>14</sup>

A week later, in keeping with the almost-daily careening of thought from optimism to pessimism, it was disappointment’s turn. The editorial does note with emphasis that “A wave of protest is sweeping the world”; although it is not comprehensive and merely “not slight,” its moral essence inspires hope. “However, the actions that are awaited by ourselves, and by those doomed to extinction and murder with each passing moment, are nowhere to be seen.” Then, with remarkable candor, the editorialist adds, “The rescue work is surely very difficult, much more difficult than the extermination work. It isn’t

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Dec. 4, 1942; see also A. Reiss, “Ha’im ein hatsalah?” [Is There No Rescue?] *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1942.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., “Devar ha-Yom,” Dec. 8, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Dec. 16, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Dec. 18, 1942, Dec. 21, 1942.

easy to find ways to pry the executioners' hands from their victims. It isn't easy to declaw the Nazi government." Therefore, it is clear beyond doubt that "The rescuers must make supreme efforts in their role as redeemers." The prospects of their success in this role hinge on one main prerequisite: staunch will. For this very reason, doubt surfaces: "Will this will become visible? Will it come?"

The editorial goes on to acknowledge the psychological difficulty that the loudly voiced Jewish demand for rescue is creating in general society and among the leaders of the countries at war with the Nazis. Openly and frankly, it states that "[t]he terrible *sho'ah* that has come upon the Jewish people has made us *a source of contention and discord among all the world's nations* [because] we demand rescue, must demand it, and will continue to demand it even when the demand seems bothersome, even when it is addressed to those who are standing together with us in this war" (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> As an example of the bothersome demands, one may note two ideas that the editorial cites, one concerning the transfer of tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of displaced Jewish refugees from Vichy-ruled northern Africa and Soviet Central Asia – to Palestine, of course. Even though the people are not in mortal danger, they are suffering immensely and are doing nothing useful in their present localities. The issue here is not the saving of lives but liberation from economic and social distress, which, of course, has far-reaching implications in Zionist terms. For this very reason, given the political calculus of the powers, especially Britain, this is a more "bothersome" demand than the insistence that everything possible be done to rescue the few via the neutral countries.

Notably, the contents of this editorial mix large doses of overstatement and sober thought. The overstatement is the editorialist's overestimate of the response in general public opinion, as we show in a separate chapter later in the book. Another piece of hyperbole concerns the notion of solving the woes of masses of displaced Jews who are not in mortal danger in the middle of the war. The sobriety, in contrast, evinces itself in recognition of the totality of difficulties and obstacles that stand in the path of any effort and attempt to rescue even a few Jews. One may understand and explain this contradiction only by noting the distress of those times, in which existential despair, human hope, and practical sober thinking intermingled consciously and unconsciously.

About three weeks after the idea of extricating tens of thousands of refugees from the distress of deprivation in northern Africa and Soviet Russia was dashed in *Davar*, an editorial began by stating that, "The reports reaching Palestine about the pace of the Allied countries' preparations for rescue action *evoke enormous trepidation*" (emphasis added). After the public awakening and shock, and after newspapers had been reporting the contents of the debate that was taking place in the corridors of power, it turns out that "[t]hose in

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Dec. 30, 1942.

the world capitals do not yet understand and feel the price of every day that we endure without action.”<sup>16</sup> The trouble, the editorialist explains, is that each country conditions its assistance, such as opening its borders to the refugees, on another country’s action.

The severe disappointment over the Allies’ inefficacy in rescue was soon augmented by a sense of insult over their discriminatory attitude toward the Jews as against other peoples. This sense was so powerful that *Davar* did not flinch from likening the Allies’ discrimination against the Jews to the Nazis’ anti-Jewish racism. “The Allied countries at war with the Nazis,” the editorialist opines, “have engraved racial equality and non-discrimination among religions and nations on their standard.” Hitler has left no doubt about the seriousness of his intentions; the Allies, in contrast, must still prove the veracity of their declarations. “After all, how will we believe that a bit of the racial doctrine hasn’t affixed itself to them if they have not found a way, thus far, to send a food ship to the children in the ghettos, while direct and indirect ways of sending food and medicine have been found for the children of Greece and France and will soon be found for Norway as well? The accuracy of the item about shipping food to occupied countries is vague. What matters is that it became one of the hallmarks of discrimination between Jews and non-Jews, as the American Jewish newspapers had been stressing.”<sup>17</sup>

*Davar* did not content itself with protesting against discrimination in relief for the needy; it also dwelled on discrimination between Jewish and gentile blood. “To this day,” the editorialist states, “the Allies have not presented credible proof that they consider the murder of Jews as important as the murder of members of ‘Aryan’ nations.” Indeed, the Germans take care to avoid mass extermination actions against members of other nations, with the exception of Communist activists, but they do not conceal their designs against the Jews at all. If so, why not warn the commanders of the Wehrmacht that they will be held personally responsible for actions that they will not be able to explain on the grounds of “carrying out orders?” Sounding such an alarm does carry a risk: The Jewish people’s allies “will certainly say that we are rebellious and tiresome and are annoying the statesmen of the Alliance.” But how can they behave differently? Therefore, the editorialist proclaims, “We will not stop asking. Would the Allied statesmen behave as they are behaving if [the Germans] were killing an ‘Aryan’ nation in this manner?” (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

This grim rhetoric, deliberately published in a personal article that appeared in the editorial column, was obviously produced with the editor’s knowledge. Evidence of this is not only in the positioning of the article but also in the fact

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1943.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 4 on the American Jewish press.

<sup>18</sup> Y. G. (evidently Yehuda Gotthelf), “Hatsalah ve-ezrah” [Rescue and Aid] *Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” June 15, 1943.

that the previous day's "Devar ha-Yom" ran a piece of similar content, although it did not accuse the Allies of racial discrimination against the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Notably, expressing the tragic paradox, *Davar* demanded affirmative-action treatment for Jewish refugees. The paper decried the policy of the U.S.-British intergovernmental commission on refugees, which stated its intention to establish standard criteria for the care of all refugees. The objection targeted a statement by the U.S. Secretary of State, that the Allies could not view the refugee problem as belonging to any particular race or nationality. "We cannot accept this explanation," *Davar* said in response, "which *ostensibly* means a perception of equality in contrast to the Nazi perception." There is no similarity, the paper continued, "between "the *Jews*' conditions of life and death in Hitler's prison and those of other peoples"<sup>20</sup> (emphasis added). Hence the doomed Jews' entitlement to positive discrimination on the Allies' part. To reinforce this demand, *Davar* stated in early 1944, "Despite all the horrific reports that we have been imbibing for a year and more, we do not yet know the details of the atrocities that have inundated our brethren."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, even though British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was right in saying that only victory would engender meaningful rescue of the beleaguered Jews, quite a few possibilities of rescue for some segments of European Jewry still remained.<sup>22</sup>

About a month after these remarks appeared, as if they had fallen on attentive ears, President Roosevelt set up a blue-ribbon government commission to care for the Nazis' victims, foremost the Jews: the War Refugee Board.<sup>23</sup> The formation of this body, its three senior-minister members including the Jewish Henry Morgenthau, obviously sparked hope that vigorous rescue action would be taken this time. Given the disillusionment of the past, however, this emotion was accompanied by doubts and fears. Therefore, the editorial, although expressing relative optimism, concludes fearfully, "We are steeped in experience, and the experience is as bitter as wormwood. Now let us see what the Board will do."<sup>24</sup>

Despite the doubts, however, the editorials began to give off a somewhat optimistic whiff. About three months after the WRB came into being, *Davar* noted, "In recent weeks a different spirit seems to have overtaken the representatives of the countries that hold the key to the rescue of Jews."<sup>25</sup> The paper alluded to manifestations of sensitivity and understanding of the Jews' catastrophe and initial measures indicative of resolve to do something about rescuing them. Nevertheless, this acknowledgment is accompanied by the traditional doubt, targeting this time not the powers' benign and staunch will

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., June 14, 1943.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Dec. 13, 1943.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Jan. 24, 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Aronson, pp. 113, 119, 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Davar*, "Devar ha-Yom," Feb. 7, 1944.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., April 19, 1944; see also *ibid.*, March 16, 1944.

but rather the celerity and magnitude of the rescue efforts. After all, time is pressing and the obstacles are many. The paper's remarks also seem to reflect the impression of the Wehrmacht's occupation of Hungary in March 1944. Indeed, two months later, in mid-June, shortly before the Germans began to send Hungarian Jewry on its death marches, *Davar* stated, "We have come too late to rescue Hungarian Jewry" – this, while nearly 800,000 Hungarian Jews remained alive.<sup>26</sup>

A week later, as initial reports described the onset of the extermination of Hungarian Jewry, *Davar* approached the problem from the opposite direction: "President Roosevelt's rescue committee' has shown strength in advertising thus far but has not yet earned the merit of real achievements [...]. Its initial real achievements [are] very modest relative to the threat of devastation [*sho'ab*]."<sup>27</sup>

Even as it aimed this Sisyphean criticism at the leaders of the democracies, *Davar* faced internal and external criticism of the national leadership's rescue efforts. "Covertly and overtly, one occasionally hears aspersions against our rescue endeavors, the institutions, and the leaders," for having pledged all their political efforts to assuring asylum for Jewish refugees in Palestine, thereby neglecting other possible ways of saving them.

*Davar* did note that the accusations were mainly external in origin, emanating from circles belonging to or closely associated with the authorities, which were attempting in this manner to refute or deflect the charge that they had left the Jews' blood unrequited. The paper, however, was more troubled by criticism from within, that is, originating in the Yishuv and even the Zionist Movement. Such a critic was the public figure Moshe Smilansky, who, *Davar* states, accused the leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement, namely the Zionist Labor Movement, of having sacrificed the lives of masses of Jews who could have found refuge in other countries due to "Palestinocentric" political considerations.

These charges, which persist decades after the Holocaust, were countered in overtones that continue to reverberate in detailed and responsible historical research on the national leadership's rescue efforts.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, I present the response almost unexpurgated. *Davar* begins with a set of quasi-rhetorical questions: "Who deceived these people so horribly that they level such a grave charge against us, of all people? Who presented them with this libel that Zionism hardened its heart and dissociated itself from all forms of rescue? [...] Didn't these accusers ask about and investigate the results of the efforts of non-Zionist Jewish organizations and federations abroad to find countries of

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., June 18, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., June 27, 1944.

<sup>28</sup> See Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Yehuva Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1994); T. Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

entry for our refugees and victims?” As examples, the paper cites the debates in the British Parliament, approaches to the government of Australia, the exertions of South African Jewish organizations, and, last and most important, the ongoing debate in the United States about increasing immigration quotas specifically for Jewish refugees, who accounted for a negligible fraction of the half-million immigrants who had reached the United States since the beginning of the war – a tragic fraction relative to their existential situation. Therefore, *Davar* asks, “Did it truly depend on Zionist leaders or Jewish leaders?!”

Thus far, *Davar* was speaking about Jewish institutions in the various parts of the world. Then, however, as warranted in this particular newspaper, the editorialist turned his spotlight on “the leaders of *Zionism*, since it is *at them* that the barbs are aimed” (emphasis in the original). Here is the paper’s response:

Anyone who has had any opportunity to follow matters closely knows that there aren’t the slightest grounds for the charges that the Zionist leadership opposed the removal of Jews to any country whatsoever in these times of atrocities. In view of our terrible disaster, no fact will document the existence of rescue opportunities outside of Palestine.”

As proof, *Davar* notes “frequent demands and requirements” from the Jewish Agency – part of the Zionist leadership – of all sources, “to open camps for Jewish refugees in neighboring and neutral countries.” This is because, as everyone knows, the restrictions on entering to Palestine under the 1939 White Paper had not been annulled even though the British government knew about the magnitude of the disaster. Therefore:

Those who did something about rescue acted in all directions. [In the future, too,] when the annals of this desperate struggle are written in all its details, we will all realize that, for sure, *we all did little in any way and in any direction*, and we often faltered and squandered opportunities, but no path was off-limits and no pursuit of Zionist gain foiled our success (emphasis added).

The discussion in this book, from the beginning of the war, in the Jewish press in Palestine and elsewhere, substantiates this candid confession of flaws and weaknesses in the initiation of rescue action and the squandering of rescue opportunities. Just the same, the failure to enhance the rescue efforts traced not to the flaws and weaknesses but to the Jews’ national powerlessness.

Accordingly, the concluding sentence of the editorial, which resounds in our ears to this day, carries a large dose of truth:

Why falsify reality? Why rub *unnecessary* salt into our wounds and *libel* ourselves *unjustifiably* and indiscriminately? The reader is put on notice that the critics’ ‘courage’ disserves the truth, to put it mildly; worse still, it absolves the real culprit of the heavy guilt that falls upon him. [Therefore,] history will hand down the true verdict on a basis other than these vain rumors<sup>29</sup> (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> *Davar*, “Devar ha-Yom,” June 22, 1944.



The finale of this editorial does trouble us to this day, even though thorough and even-handed research demonstrates its truth, as previously stated.

These remarks may also be construed as expressing what we may term *Davar*'s regret of the criticism, which it itself had leveled during the war years, of the blunders of Zionist institutions and Jewish organizations wherever rescue was concerned. Accordingly, the paper emphasizes the arenas of pro-rescue activity: negotiations with the Hungarian regent, Miklós Horthy; the demand for relaxation of the American immigration laws; and, of course, the struggle to repeal the White Paper regulations that limited Jewish immigration to Palestine.

The editorial at issue, published in June 1944 – more than a year after the Bermuda conference (April 19–29, 1943) – may also be viewed as a response to the disappointing results of the conference, which had begun with especially lofty hopes for rescue against the background of the Warsaw ghetto uprising that had erupted that very month. The hopes that had been pinned on the conference and the disillusionment that followed are two of the most pronounced indicators of what I call the “Jewish condition” at that time. The conference had been called as the result of pressure that had been brought against President Roosevelt, the American trade-union leaders, and the leaders of American Jewry; it was supposed to discuss the full range of proposals so as to tackle the problem of war refugees generally and the fugitive Jews particularly.

Ahead of the conference, *Davar* stated that those assembling “will have to rule on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Europe. Like it or not, its decision and the way it approaches the problem will have a definitive effect on the Jews’ fate” – not only in the present, under Nazi rule, but also “for a lengthy [future] time, perhaps generations.” Therefore, irrespective of all formal definitions, “The Jewish people has the right to demand representation at this conference”<sup>30</sup> within the framework of the general requirement that the conference allow representation not only of the especially great powers – the United States and Britain – but also of the countries where the Nazi extermination was being perpetrated, such as Poland. It was self-evident that the mortally endangered Jewish masses – the immediate reason for calling the conference – should themselves be represented at the national level and should be coopted into the conference deliberations. This demand was not accepted, of course. On the eve of the conference, *Davar* received rumors to the effect that the initiators of the event, true to their principled approach, refused to grant the Jewish refugee problem any special status; instead, they chose to fit it into the overall framework even though, as *Davar* stresses, members of other European peoples under Nazi occupation, although suffering and even incurring fatalities, did not face annihilation as the Jews did.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, as the conference wound down, *Davar* wrote with bitter derision that its goal had

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, March 30, 1943.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, April 18, 1943.

not been “to rescue Jews” but “to rescue the government from the pressure of public opinion that demanded real acts of rescue,”<sup>32</sup> as the historical studies referenced earlier have demonstrated.

A month later, in view of reports that the government of Bulgaria was planning to deport the Jews of that country at the Germans’ behest (a menace that did not materialize due to pressure from public opinion and parliament on the King of Bulgaria), *Davar* launches a very grave accusation at the heads of the Bermuda conference: “The Bulgarian Jews who will now become casualties are the first victims of the Bermuda conference”<sup>33</sup> because the powers that sponsored the conference did nothing to deter the government of Bulgaria from carrying out this decree despite very early reports in advance about said government’s intentions. Yes, the plot fell through due to internal pressure from the Bulgarian parliament and church on the King. However, the very connection that *Davar* drew between the attitudes and resolutions expressed in Bermuda and the possible cruel fate of Bulgarian Jewry demonstrated the accuracy of the basic charge against the leaders of this conference, namely that the fate of the Jews is radically different from that of other Nazi-occupied peoples.

Despite disappointment in the Bermuda conference and the explicit awareness that the American and British delegates to Bermuda did not display the will to pledge political efforts and financial and logistic resources to the rescue of the Jews – insofar as rescue was possible – hope persisted that they would do this in the near future. This hope originated in the impression that Stephen Wise had formed in his talk with President Roosevelt and that a delegation of British Jewry had formed in its meeting with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Both leaders had assured their respective Jewish interlocutors that when their envoys met again, an effort would be made to invest the Bermuda resolutions with practical meaning.<sup>34</sup>

Less than a year after this hope was expressed, the Wehrmacht invaded Hungary and the extermination of the 800,000 Jews who survived in this country in the summer of 1944 began. Only 100,000 of these Jews found refuge in Budapest, mainly due to the courageous and exalted actions of the renowned Raoul Wallenberg and the Swiss consul Charles Lutz, supported by President Roosevelt’s War Refugee Board and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Zionist pioneering youth movements also played a role in this act of rescue.<sup>35</sup>

There were also negotiations between representatives of the two democracies and Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy at the onset of the extermination operation in August 1944, concerning the possibility of large-scale emigration of Jews from Hungary to neutral countries. These negotiations, however,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., April 25, 1943.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., May 26, 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Aug. 29, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Aronson, pp. 262–270.

failed – not only due to the Germans' opposition and the neutral countries' fears but also due to the tentative policies of Britain and the United States, which did not display genuine will, despite the difficulties that they faced, to honor their undertaking to rescue Jews.<sup>36</sup>

So it was that *Davar*, in its lead article about a week before the German invasion of Hungary (March 19, 1944), remarked correctly: "The era of expectations and delusions has ended; the period of the kindness of ignorance is over."<sup>37</sup>

#### HATZOFE, 1943–1945

Several days after the public outpouring of grief and protest in December 1942, *Hatzofe* warned against the resigned and despairing state of mind that had gripped the public, a "despair-induced apathy" that counsels, as it were, that "It can't be helped [...] no one's listening to our outcry. The ears of the world's nations are sealed to our entreaties. So – there's nothing to do about it." As a result, paradoxically, despair about the abnormal historical reality is inducing a flight to normal daily life: "We are continuing to follow our ordinary path of life," along which "we are getting used to this terrible idea that nothing further can be done about it."<sup>38</sup>

*Hatzofe* inveighed against this atmosphere of despairing resignation. Asserting that the murder campaign has come to a recent temporary halt, it identifies an opportunity at this point to take risky actions by exploiting every "crack" and "fissure" through which Jews, albeit only a few, may be extricated from the Nazis' lethal talons. *Hatzofe* admits that the cry for rescue is a demand for action "*that we cannot carry out but that others who have the strength, the audacity, and the heroism [may carry out]*" (emphasis added).<sup>39</sup> For the time being, however, these others are contenting themselves with promising speeches and prayers of commiseration as the murders continue. Hence the inevitable conclusion: "The Jews will not find deliverance in speeches and prayers." Such a conclusion carries a tone of heresy, even if the speeches and prayers are aimed at the Christian churches in Britain, the only non-Jewish public institutions that stress public protest and sorrow over the atrocity that is unfolding before the eyes of the world. Although appreciative of this manifestation of human sympathy, *Hatzofe* acknowledges the powerlessness of those who believe that man was created in the image of God against those carrying out the mission of Satan.

Accordingly, the only thing that *Hatzofe*, like all the Hebrew newspapers, can do is lurch from "hope for the Bermuda conference" to disillusionment

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>37</sup> *Davar*, "Devar ha-Yom," March 10, 1944.

<sup>38</sup> "Li-tenufat ezrah ve-hatsalah hadashah" [On the New Momentum of Relief and Rescue], *Hatzofe*, Jan. 20, 1943.

<sup>39</sup> "Neumim u-tefilot" [Speeches and Prayers], *ibid.*, March 1, 1943.

with it. Between April and June, *Hatzofe* devoted six editorials to the dashed hope that succor for the beleaguered Jews might come from the direction of the United States and Britain.<sup>40</sup> Things have reached such a state, the paper admitted, that it is necessary to plead publicly with the British authorities to allow an exchange of several hundred Jewish women and children who are citizens of Palestine and found themselves in the occupied countries, for an equal number of German women and children in Allied captivity. According to the editorialist, however, the swap is being held up and “We are still waiting for a response to our petitions. Still we lift our eyes in hope that the attitude of the leaders of the democracies will yet turn in the direction of our cause.”<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, amid its great disappointment, *Hatzofe* admits that where rescue is concerned, “[m]any have already grown sick and tired of the matter. Not only the many who are not Jewish, who are not overly pleased about being ‘harassed’ in this matter,” which they evidently consider trivial relative to their weighty duties in the war, but also “[f]or many Jews and members of the Yishuv in Palestine, talking about it has become *a burden that is not highly desired*.” This avoidance of the disaster is caused “not by malice and rigid alienation, heaven forbid, but by despair and severe disappointment in view of the results” (emphasis added). Thus, the despair that surfaced at the beginning of the year is now augmented by *disappointment* occasioned by the negligible results of the Bermuda conference.

*Hatzofe* has no practical, realistic reasoning to offer against this state of mind except the stoic moral principle that forbids the shirking of responsibility for the collective, even when action is hopeless, because “It is the human quality in the life of each of us; in any case of disaster and danger and any woe that comes about, we feel it our sacred duty to do everything possible and impossible for rescue.”<sup>42</sup> This moral tenet, however, has not become a definitive standard for the behavior of the Yishuv public.

As for the National Institutions’ rescue fundraising drive, *Hatzofe* wrote in late 1943 that the mission had not been fully accomplished. There were several reasons for this, in the paper’s judgment. One is “the cruelty that has overtaken and conquered the human psyche during the war, including much of the Yishuv.” Another is despair over the dearth of rescue action despite recurrent appeals to the conscience of the leaders of the democracies. The paramount reason, however, is the guilt of the national leadership, including the press, for not having managed “to jolt the Yishuv to the depth of its soul so that it will sense the immensity of the disaster that has befallen the entire [Jewish] people.” The failure is even farther-reaching: “We have not managed to terrify all threads of the Yishuv’s psyche so that it will acknowledge and understand that with the extinction of European Jewry, our enterprise also faces extinction, heaven forbid. We have not managed to make the Jewish soul

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., April 6, 1943, May 2, 1943, May 30, 1943, June 13, 1943, Aug. 2, 1943.

<sup>41</sup> “Ad kedei kakh qatsrah ha-yad” [So Short Is Our Reach], *ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1943.

<sup>42</sup> “Shuv va-shuv hatsalah” [Again and Again – Rescue!] *Ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1943.

tremble.”<sup>43</sup> The answer to this disappointing national phenomenon lies, among other things, in the format of traditional Zionism – educational information activity by volunteer members of the intellectual elites, who will devote day and night to this cause.

These dire remarks about the Yishuv’s state of mind make one reflect again about the concept of the transnational community, which I take up again in the Conclusion of this book.

Shifting in the meantime to the domain of action and acknowledging the fact that the gates of Palestine were barred to the survivors, *Hatzofe* pledged its passionate support to an idea broached by the American Zionist leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, to establish provisional havens in the United States for the thousands of refugees until the storm of the war blows over.<sup>44</sup> Here was a way to circumvent the strict American immigration laws, which remained in effect throughout the war even though the immigration quotas established by these laws were never fully taken up during those years. How terrible it is, *Hatzofe* remarked, that the war had rendered unusable hundreds of thousands of potential immigration visas.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it became clear several months later that, according to *Hatzofe*, only 1,000 Jews were allowed to invoke the American asylum provision.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, one may say that this was “strike two” against the Jewish people. “Strike one” was satanic – the crematoria – and strike two was Kafkaesque: the closure of the gates to those pounding on them. Then came strike three: the insult inflicted on the Jews at large when international institutions such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) did not recognize them as entitled to have a mission representing it at the organization’s first world convention, to which representatives of the other Nazi-victimized peoples were invited. *Hatzofe* responded to this smack in the face by stating, “A people that lacks a state and a government has the ‘right’ to be numbered among the most tortured of victims.” Admittedly, its representatives were allowed to submit memoranda and apply for assistance – “but its honor is not united in the community of nations; it is but a mass of people lacking identity [...]. We are outside the law; we are always buffered and separated by a partition of ‘except’ – except for the Jews.”<sup>47</sup>

The application to UNRRA of this antisemitic elocution, which originated in Eastern Europe, Czarist Russia, and Republican Poland, was unfair to this organization because it did not discriminate between Jews and others as individuals. Rather, it was snared, in a painfully insensitive way, in formal definitions – who among the victims were a people and who were not.

<sup>43</sup> “Al na’amod al dam aheinu” [Let Us Not Stand Idly by Our Brethren’s Blood], *ibid.*, Dec. 23, 1943.

<sup>44</sup> “Tokhnit tahanot hatsalah” [The Rescue-Havens Plan], *ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1943.

<sup>45</sup> “She’arim ne’ulim, levavot segurim” [Locked Gates, Closed Hearts], *ibid.*, Aug. 20, 1943.

<sup>46</sup> “Keitsad le-havin zot?” [How Can One Understand This?] *ibid.*, June 15, 1944.

<sup>47</sup> “Ha-delatot seurot” [The Doors Are Closed], *ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1944.

In this state of political impotence and social isolation, all that remained was to cry out. In this context, too, however, *Hatzofe* states self-accusingly, “We have not yet cried out and have not yet made others cry out in the full intensity of the anguish, commensurate with the full horror of the disaster. Nor have we mourned as the mother of a nation mourns her offspring. We have neither expressed nor articulated even a thousandth of the profound shocks of the depth of the atrocity. The veil has not been totally pulled aside and the eyes do not behold.”<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, the eyes were not yet sure in 1944, according to *Hatzofe*. Therefore, as in the initial period preceding November–December 1942, *Hatzofe* warned the news agencies not to disseminate unconfirmed reports about the extent of the murder operation underway. Because these reports arrived from different sources concurrently, they were causing the numbers of those murdered to be multiplied, introducing irresponsibility and foolishness into the discussion of so great a catastrophe. Furthermore, the dissemination of such reports “has the opposite result: it neither makes hearts tremble nor enflames spirits; instead, it blunts the emotions.”<sup>49</sup>

The almost word-for-word reiteration of the previous period’s argumentation, after the official numbers had been public knowledge for more than a year, indicates not only blindness but also vestiges of optimism – the only remaining straws that one might grasp. Several months later, however, reality demolished these vestiges, too: The extermination of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews had begun.<sup>50</sup>

Negotiations between the Hungarian dictator, Miklós Horthy, and representatives of the western governments had fallen through in the meantime. Pursuant to this failure, thanks to the hand of chance – Raoul Wallenberg’s mission to Budapest – 100,000 Jews in this city were saved from death, as discussed earlier. *Hatzofe*, however, in an editorial under the byline of “S” – evidently S. Shragai, a member of the National Committee representing the Ha-Po’el ha-Mizrahi movement – sheds light on the internal vacillations that surrounded the arguments for rescue.

The editorial amounts to an appendix to the remarks that *Davar* published on the same topic. It, too, like its predecessor in *Davar*, opposes the “prosecution” of the national leadership as expressed by Moshe Smilansky and Agudath Israel – that is, the argument that the leadership had diminished the possibilities of rescue by its Palestinocentric adherence to this country as the only place of refuge for the survivors and refugees of the Holocaust.

The editorialist in *Hatzofe*, like his counterpart in *Davar*, insists vehemently that “[All] the institutions incessantly demanded rescue in all ways and by all

<sup>48</sup> “Be-yom za’aqatenu ve-az’aqatenu” [On the Day of Our Outcry and Our Call for the Outcry of Others], *ibid.*, June 5, 1944; see also “Yekholet ve-ratzon” [Ability and Will], *ibid.*, May 31, 1944.

<sup>49</sup> “Zerizim ve-nifsadim” [Quick to Act, Quick to Lose], *ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1944.

<sup>50</sup> “Be-yom zeh” [On This Day], *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1944.

means, with explicit emphasis on obtaining permission to enter neutral countries.” This, in any case, is the way these issues had appeared in all the Hebrew newspapers and their American and British Jewish counterparts. Here, however, the editorialist breaks new ground by raising the opposite argument: Given the other countries’ refusal to admit large numbers of Jewish refugees, the Yishuv leaders and the press may have made a mistake; they should have stated that a place of refuge already exists: Palestine. In the aftermath of this admission, he explains why this was not done:

We didn’t want to mention Palestine specifically. We were afraid that the anti-Zionists abroad – and the antisemites in particular – would dwell on the ‘Zionist angle’ and say that the Zionists are exploiting the demands for rescue for Zionist interests, thereby foiling the rescue efforts. Therefore, time and again we demanded rescue from every location to any location, even Palestine.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the editorial continues emphatically, due to “the fear that we would somehow defeat the rescue actions, *we defined the rescue problem as a refugee problem*” (emphasis added). In other words, they replaced the *particularistic* national concept – the “rescue” of the Jewish individual and collective – with the *universalistic* concept of “refugees.” This semantic maneuver failed, of course: The gates of the countries at war with the Nazis and the neutral states as well remained largely closed to Jewish refugees. Accordingly, the editorialist now demands a return to historical truth in Palestine.

The question here is whether the semantic change was nothing but a Zionist political ruse, as was alleged in anti-Zionist circles such as Agudath Israel and by humanistic intellectuals such as Moshe Smilansky, and as is alleged today by anti-Zionist historians who accuse Zionism of transforming the Holocaust calamity and its survivors’ sufferings into an instrument for the attainment of its political goals.

Then as now, these ideological and political contentions seem to have found no support whatsoever. The editorial in question, like its predecessor in *Davar*, explains frankly the Zionist strategy and tactics in view of the Holocaust. In the strategic sense, Zionism as a national movement continues to adhere to its ultimate goal – the establishment of a national home, a state, for the Jewish people in Palestine – to transform the Jews into a nation that claims equal status and rights in the global community of nations. From the practical standpoint, where the rescue of individuals is concerned, the Zionist leadership, representing *klal Yisrael* (the “Jewish commonwealth”) by its own lights, demands the opening of gates of asylum in any location possible. It does so even though reality proves that no country on earth is willing to open its borders to large numbers of Jewish survivors in the middle of the war or even afterward. All that remains, then, is the one and only solution to the Jewish problem: Palestine.

<sup>51</sup> “Ha-derekh ha-ahat” [The One Way], *ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1944; see also “Hatsalah!” [Rescue!] *ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1944.

The postwar reality in the displaced-persons (DP) camps, where the inmates refused to return to their countries of origin in Eastern Europe while diverse countries, especially the United States, continued to restrict their entry, indeed justified the national assessments and aspirations of Zionism.<sup>52</sup>

#### HA'ARETZ, 1943–1945

After the official reports about the magnitude of the extermination of Jews in occupied Europe were published and confirmed, *Ha'aretz's* response took on a different tone and offered a new and different assessment of what was happening. Its even-handed locutions from the “illusion” period of 1939–1942, as *Davar* defined it, gave way to piercingly realistic wordings in three domains: clear awareness that mass rescue would be impossible; the moral imperative of doing everything possible for the few who could still be saved; and political criticism of the democracies' indifference, and especially the blunders of the Yishuv and its leadership in regard to mobilization for national service and willingness to contribute to the rescue fundraising drive.

There was nothing particularly new about these remarks per se; they had been expressed before. However, the style in which they were articulated changed so radically that *Ha'aretz* did not flinch from accusing the powers and the Yishuv, which were not doing enough for the cause of rescue, of “knowingly or unknowingly” aiding the Nazi murderers.<sup>53</sup> An additional novelty in the pages of *Ha'aretz* was the call for the establishment of a world Jewish national authority that would represent the interests of the persecuted and murdered Jews vis-à-vis the Allied powers.<sup>54</sup> By applying united political pressure, *Ha'aretz* believed, it might be possible to influence the statesmen and bureaucrats “who read every morning horrifying statistics about the number of persons slaughtered – and nevertheless continue to mull and hesitate and consult and search for slick formulas.” Some maintain that no single country can take in large numbers of survivors. Others, in contrast, state that because the possible number of survivors is so small to begin with, there is nothing to gain by investing vast efforts in rescuing them. In the meantime, *Ha'aretz* adds, thousands are dying on the way to solving the Jewish problem.

Thus far, there seems to be nothing truly new about these accusations against the rulers of the free world. Such remarks had appeared in the previous period, although not as fiercely expressed. The novelty is the explicit addition to the charge leveled at external players: “Let us not foist all responsibility on our counterparts. Didn't the Jewish camp itself have, and doesn't it have now, worthy functionaries and ‘leaders’ who didn't do a thing – and

<sup>52</sup> In this matter, see “Beomitat Sedom” [In the Bed of Sodom], *ibid.*, April 12, 1945.

<sup>53</sup> “Met ba-derekh le-fitron ha-be'ayah ha-yehudit” [Died on the Way to Solving the Jewish Problem], *Ha'aretz*, April 5, 1943.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1943, Jan. 17, 1943, Feb. 3, 1943.



also interfered with others' efforts – as thousands died before their eyes, followed by tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, 'on the way to a solution?'" The accusing finger in this matter is pointed mainly at those circles that, in the opinion of *Ha'aretz*, "refused to acknowledge the very existence of the Jewish problem." Now that the Nazis had come to "solve" it, all Jewish national and non-national circles must mobilize for rescue under the slogan that captures the solution to the Jewish problem in the Psalmist's words "I shall not die but I shall live" – as uttered by Jewish writers from Moscow who had exhorted Jews in the free world to help by making donations to the Red Army, which was at war with the Nazis. We discuss this matter later, in a separate chapter.

Four months after this call for the unification of national forces, the turn of bitter disappointment came. It was addressed initially to the Yishuv: "We may sum up the Yishuv's efforts in the war in view of the need to make the Yishuv feel, above all, that it could have done more than it did." This assertion, however, did not nullify what the Yishuv had done for the war effort despite the difficulties that the Mandate authorities had thrown in its path. Furthermore, everything done thus far had been made possible by the spirit of "despite it all" that infused much of the Yishuv, a spirit "that even severe blows could neither silence nor falsify."<sup>55</sup> The paper hurriedly noted in particular that the call for mobilization of the Yishuv had been voluntary and added that the Jewish economy in Palestine was contributing much to the British army in agricultural and also industrial output.

Consequently, in respect of mobilization for the war effort, *Ha'aretz* was milder in its criticism than *Davar*, which vehemently denounced the tendency to evasion and even stressed, in support of its allegation, that the National Institutions' exhortation to enlist in the security forces was addressed to members of a much younger age group than those inducted for military service in Britain and the United States, let alone the Soviet Union.

In contrast, when it debated the question of volunteering for the rescue of Jews in the Diaspora, reflected in the public sense by donating money, *Ha'aretz* took a less forgiving approach. First of all, it demanded that public opinion make a value shift in regard to the essence of the financial aid that the National Institutions were asking the public to contribute. The total sum at issue was around a quarter of a million pounds sterling, an amount that should not have placed a particularly onerous burden on Yishuv society. Accordingly, in the opinion of *Ha'aretz*, the main thing is not the size of the donation but the imperative that Yishuv society "free itself of the feeling that we are being urged merely to offer 'help.'" This refers to a dominant feeling in the Yishuv that, because it had been helped by Diaspora Jewry in the decades preceding the war, it should now repay the debt – something like the reinstatement of *kofer nefesh*, the traditional Jewish method of rescue and relief in which the safe and the strong contribute on behalf of fellow Jews who

<sup>55</sup> "Sikumenu" [Our Tally], *ibid.*, Sept. 3, 1943.

are being persecuted and murdered. This stance, *Ha'aretz* admits, extends a helping hand to those who cry for help. However, it creates a differentiation between “us” and “them,” whereas the real problem is not fundraising for the payment of a ransom but the realization that those facing extermination and those donating to save them have a common fate in the crucial question of the future of the Jewish people during and after the war.<sup>56</sup> What is needed, in other words, is not the ransoming of the weak by the strong, but a national policy geared to rescuing the entire nation.

Indeed, according to reportage in *Ha'aretz* some three months later, the National Institutions' rescue fundraising campaign was a resounding success. Its proceeds were four times greater than the sum initially targeted – a million pounds sterling instead of a quarter of a million. *Ha'aretz* considers this an important achievement even relative to the sums donated by Jews for much the same purpose in other countries, especially the United States. Just the same, the paper urges the public to make a further effort and donate even more money to the campaign.

In contrast to its satisfaction with the public fundraising operation, *Ha'aretz* expressed its disappointment with the deliberations of the Assembly of Representatives, which held a special public session to explore rescue possibilities. To the immense disappointment of the public, the debates did not deal with rescue at all. “This [omission], which need not be defined, disillusioned and angered a large share of the many participants in the session.” Furthermore, the representatives, it turned out, had not intended from the outset to discuss rescue in front of the large audience that had turned out for the special session in order to demonstrate its interest in the topic. *Ha'aretz* accused the leadership of the National Committee and, foremost, its president, Izhak Ben-Zvi, of not intending to hold a public debate *ab initio* in the belief that the matter should be studied and deliberated behind closed doors. Even if this assumption sounded logical, why should they have invited a large audience? A second argument was that the cancellation of the public debate had been engineered to protect the chairman of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, several of whose comments about Diaspora Jewry, discussed earlier and discussed further later in this volume, had exposed him to very harsh public criticism.<sup>57</sup>

It is doubtful, however, that the critics of the emergency session truly favored public debate of the rescue issue. The same editorial asked rhetorically what gain could be achieved by mass assemblies. Five months later, *Ha'aretz* inveighed against the practice of public protest rallies. It did praise the Yishuv, which, by its continuing protests, sounded an alarm about the emergency in

<sup>56</sup> “La-golah” [To the Diaspora], *ibid.*, Sept. 7, 1943.

<sup>57</sup> “Konenut ve-hatsalah – hesegim ve-khishlonot” [Preparedness and Rescue – Achievements and Failures], *ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1944. See also “Le-hitgaysut ve-hatsalah” [For Mobilization and Rescue], *ibid.*, March 15, 1944, and “Al ha-moqed” [At the Focal Point], *ibid.*, March 17, 1944.

a manner that was not being matched with the same urgency by the Jews in the free countries. However, it added immediately, “We would disserve ourselves if we failed to ask whether the proliferation of rallies isn’t causing a loss that more than offsets its gain.” After all, “[w]e know that not all methods of action and all outcomes of action are publicly accountable. Therefore, the main impression that the rallies leave behind is grim and disappointing.” It would be better, *Ha’aretz* believes, to move about in various places of settlement and convene the local inhabitants to explain what was being done and spur them to action.<sup>58</sup>

As these remarks were written, the Jews of Hungary were being mass-murdered by SS and Wehrmacht forces with the help of Hungarian police. It was then, in view of the blaring newspaper headlines, that the expression “our Bermuda” was hurled into the ring. It had been coined by the Revisionist newspaper *Hamashqif* even before the Nazis had begun to annihilate Hungarian Jewry. What it denoted was that the National Institutions, or the “Agency institutions” as *Hamashqif* termed them, had abandoned the Jews to their fate much as the representatives of the great powers had done at the Bermuda conference a year earlier. Various public players aimed these charges at the chairman of the Rescue Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, personally.<sup>59</sup> As I noted in [Part I](#) of this book, *Ha’aretz* took a critical and accusatory stance toward Gruenbaum due to his earlier pronouncements about reports that the Jewish Agency Executive had obtained about the mass-murder actions. Now, in contrast, with Gruenbaum under attack again, the paper sided with him when he said publicly that the Jews could not be saved even if every possible effort to save them were made. He also accused the public of being unwilling to stare the cruel reality in the face because its blindness had trapped it in a dangerous state of self-delusion. Without knowing what this public self-delusion was – Gruenbaum did not spell it out – *Ha’aretz* states,

His opinion seems correct and one can only rue the great delay in making it public [...]. Those who dealt with the cause of “rescue” fostered the very delusions of which Mr. Gruenbaum has now spoken. The very use of the word “rescue” may have played a role in this matter. It created the impression that real rescue, on a scale that would justify the proud title “rescue committee,” is taking place, and thereby it also created the impression that real possibilities of rescue exist.

The editorial went on to explain that in this matter, as in other matters during the generation of Zionist action since the Balfour Declaration, there had been lots of delusions and even Yitzhak Gruenbaum himself continued to cultivate them when he announced about half a year earlier, at an emergency meeting of the National Committee, that many more Jews could be saved if the requisite sums of money were made available for this purpose. Of course, the editorial

<sup>58</sup> “Ha-queri’ah ha-mehudeshet” [The Renewed Call], *ibid.*, June 6, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> “Bermuda shelanu” [Our Bermuda], *ibid.*, June 14, 1944.

stresses, the situation in Hungary was materially different at that time. Even then, however, the hopes contained “a great deal of delusion” (quoting the expression used by the chairman of the Rescue Committee). The upshot of this announcement, according to *Ha'aretz*, is not that one should feel free to abandon the effort. On the contrary: Everything possible must be done to save those among the few survivors of European Jewry who could be saved. Although plainly aware of the Jews' national powerlessness, the editorial concludes with the tragic pronouncement that “the stain of ‘our Bermuda,’ however phrased, will not be erased, and the fact that at this terrible moment we did not have a leadership even slightly worthy of the name will be a very wretched chapter in the book of our people's agonies.”

The next editorial, “Harmful Confusion in Rescue Affairs,” which appeared three weeks later, suggests what *Ha'aretz* had in mind by leveling such a grave accusation against the Zionist leadership – and not only the Yishuv leadership – under Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion.<sup>60</sup> It alludes to the negotiations that Eichmann's proxies were conducting with various representatives of the Jewish Agency through the mediation of Joel Brand concerning a deal – a fiction of unparalleled magnitude, in view of the war in progress – involving the rescue of a million Jews in return for 10,000 trucks that the Allies would deliver to the German army.<sup>61</sup> The editorialist responds skeptically to a published report, attributed to authoritative sources at the National Institutions, that a “comprehensive plan” to save the Jews of Hungary is being negotiated: “We do not know what this ‘comprehensive plan’ is [...] but we must say that given the experience of the past two years, we can only regard these words as a prologue to *a new illusion and a new disappointment*” (emphasis added). This assessment, flowing from profound awareness of the Jews' political powerlessness amid their tragedy, was on target. Therefore, “[i]t is hard to understand why the public should again be encouraged to entertain false hopes about the existence of a plan.” What may be offered, in fact, are measures of relief and no more. Such measures are welcome per se, but their scale and results must not be overestimated because the disillusionment that will follow them can only cause harm.

In the editorialist's opinion, a public statement of this kind, stressing the limited nature of the rescue activities, will give the public confidence by persuading it that the leadership knows what it should be doing and where to guide the public, which is in need of confidence. “It is precisely this confidence, however, that is missing. The directors of the operation bear much responsibility for this feeling” because their numerous statements contain repeated contradictions. It is unacceptable that, as certain circles in the National Institutions spread reports about a “comprehensive rescue plan,” the

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., July 6, 1944.

<sup>61</sup> In this matter, see Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939–1945*, and Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*, pp. 248–261.

chairman of the Rescue Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, publishes an article in the Zionist Organization newspaper stating and arguing boldly that there is no hope for the rescue of Hungarian Jewry – just as there was no hope for the rescue of Polish Jewry – and that the Hungarian Jews are best advised to prepare to defend themselves and their national dignity by force. Relating to this contradiction, produced by the National Institutions, *Ha'aretz* asserts, “One may understand Mr. Gruenbaum’s approach; one may agree that the Jews should resist the extermination actions with the last remnants of their strength. One must not, however, approach the public with such a statement in one hand and the proclamation of ‘comprehensive plans’ for rescue in the other hand.”

Although the prime responsibility for this contradiction in the public announcements belongs to Yitzhak Gruenbaum, the root of the problem lies not in Gruenbaum’s personality as a political leader but in a much more fundamental error: “From the first day of the operation, our institutions should have placed the finest individuals in the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement at its helm. They did not do so, and this factor played its role among the factors that foiled the relief operation.”

According to *Ha'aretz*, rather than having squandered rescue opportunities, the leadership has deluded the public for various reasons that focus on one point: the lack of a courageous national leadership that is psychologically resolved not only to tell the public the truth but also to act against this background and do what could be done for rescue without illusions. As for the situation itself, in the opinion of *Ha'aretz*, one doubts that such a leadership would have managed to rescue more Jews than had been rescued. There is no doubt, however, that such a leadership, free of illusions and psychologically resolved, is essential for the nation ahead of the postwar trials that await it. Therefore, as the war winds down and vestiges of European Jewry still survive, it is necessary to stop discussing with the Gentile nations what could have been done to save Jews and had not been done. After all, “Unilateral portrayal of a very complicated matter does not make the situation clear. But unilateralism also exists in not mentioning the grave failures – *those that trace to our fault and those that trace to others*” (emphasis added). Consequently, given the existence of this “balance of guilt” in regard to behavior in the past, which there is no point in discussing, the proper thing to do is to concentrate on the future. Now there are “urgent and new [national and human needs] that may also present a new and urgent opportunity, i.e., to approach the survivors with a real and practical comprehensive plan that will transform ‘aid’ into real ‘rescue’ and rescue into the creation of new Jewish life, far from the graveyards and death camps of Europe.”<sup>62</sup> As an example of the new rescue policy that *Ha'aretz* stresses, one may cite the paper’s great appreciation of David Ben-Gurion’s visit to the Jews of Bulgaria, who, while having been

<sup>62</sup> “Shalav hadash ba-‘avodat ha-hatsalah” [A New Phase in the Rescue Work,] *ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1944.

spared from the Nazi murderers, are in dire economic and psychological distress. Having said this, *Ha'aretz* lends the concept of rescue a pronouncedly Zionist interpretation: It recommends the opening of political negotiations with the Soviet authorities and the Communist governments in Bulgaria, Hungary, and – for that matter – Poland for the resettlement of the survivors in Palestine.<sup>63</sup> However, it warns against enthusiastic thinking such as Ben-Gurion's formulation of the "catastrophic *'aliyah*" (emigration to Palestine) of more than a million Jews immediately after the war. *Ha'aretz* adopts, in contrast, Chaim Weizmann's view of the immigration of hundreds of thousands "over a fifteen-year period." It is not enough, after all, to describe the dire condition of the survivors. The public must also be made aware that the new rescue enterprise – the immigration to Palestine of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees – is a task the likes of which Zionism has not yet known. Therefore, much caution is needed both in announcing plans, as Ben-Gurion had done, and in formulating practical and realistic plans to solve the problem of the survivors in Europe, who have no place to go other than Palestine, be it due to the objective situation in these countries or due to the national desideratum that unites them.<sup>64</sup>

The cautious and balanced Zionist approach that *Ha'aretz* proposed for the treatment of the survivors in Europe, reflecting the style of the movement leader, Chaim Weizmann, brings us back to the "stain of Bermuda" concept that the paper applied to the Zionist leadership of the Yishuv. What was the essence and purpose of this accusation? It puzzles us, because *Ha'aretz*, which adopted this Revisionist political coinage, represented no political party; if it felt close to any party, it would be the most moderate among them. Furthermore, in its reference to the Bermuda conference, in which skepticism about its intentions at the time it convened evolved into frothing rage over its conclusions once it ended, *Ha'aretz* was no different from *Davar*.<sup>65</sup> It even outdid *Davar* by claiming that the Jews had been abandoned at Bermuda not only for antisemitic reasons but also, and mainly, due to the social and spiritual decline that had spread through western society, as symbolized by the Dreyfus trial in France. Thus, Bermuda "revealed the rot that consumed [western society] from within and ultimately, decades later, occasioned its ghastly defeat."<sup>66</sup>

For what purpose did *Ha'aretz* offer this vision of doom as the West doggedly fought the Nazi regime? It was already clear by now that the democracies were verging on the very victory on which the fate of the "surviving remnants" and Jewry at large depended, as *Ha'aretz* had been noting during the war years. The harsh depictions of the powers' attitude toward the disaster of the Jews were mainly emotional and not intellectual in origin, and their

<sup>63</sup> "Pegishah im ha-golah" [A Meeting with the Diaspora], *ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1944.

<sup>64</sup> "Et La-'asot" [Time for Action], *ibid.*, Jan. 31, 1945.

<sup>65</sup> See "Bermuda," April 21, 1943; "U-mah hale'ah?" [What Now?] April 27, 1943; "Akhzavah marah" [A Bitter Disappointment], May 3, 1943.

<sup>66</sup> "Milyonei Drayfusim" [Millions of Dreyfuses], *ibid.*, May 16, 1943.

purpose was to laud the few exceptions, such as the members of the British Parliament and the editors of the *Manchester Guardian*, who, like the French author Émile Zola in his time, refused “to acquiesce in the silence, in the cheap ‘politicians,’ in acquiescence.”

We now return to the intent of the expression “our Bermuda stain.” *Ha’aretz* surely did not mean it to imply that the Zionist leadership had abandoned the murdered Jews of Europe with malice aforethought, thereby squandering opportunities for large-scale rescue. On the contrary: Throughout those years, *Ha’aretz*, like *Davar*, defined the possibilities of rescue as severely limited. Instead, *Ha’aretz* raged at the leadership for not having done enough to rescue even the few because it did not display the kind of leadership that the national emergency necessitated. Evidence of the powerlessness of this leadership lay in the fact that the Jewish organizations in Palestine and the free world failed to form a common national front for the rescue of their brethren.<sup>67</sup> In this regard, one may say that *Ha’aretz* did not let itself be caught up in the anguish of its nation’s impotence.

#### HABOQER, 1943–1945

Half a year after the reports on the extent of the exterminations appeared, *Haboqer* issued a public confession that explained its editors’ psychological approach toward what was being done to European Jewry. The editor, Peretz Bernstein, wrote frankly:

It was not easy from the outset to receive authoritative reports about the extent of the slaughter. *Hardly anyone believed* the first reports about the systematic extermination. Some thought they were merely the fruit of anti-Nazi “atrocious propaganda” and others imputed the atrocity reports to the well known tendency to avert large disasters by providing highly exaggerated descriptions of things that had happened.

The turning point in public opinion occurred “only when eyewitnesses reached Palestine. [Only then] *did we begin to understand* what we had refused to believe” (emphasis added).<sup>68</sup>

Now the evidence, which had been doubted until then, became living testimonies. Just the same, Bernstein stresses, “Many of the reports continued to contradict each other, especially in regard to numbers.” The problem, he says, was that as early as late 1942 reports spoke of the murder of two million Jews. Later on, the number fell to one million and later on shrank to 700,000 and even 500,000. The same happened to reports about the fate of the ghettoized Jews. For example, rumors that there were no more Jews in the Warsaw ghetto had spread. Now, however, in April, an uprising has broken out there.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., “U-mah hale’ah?” [What Now?] April 27, 1943.

<sup>68</sup> “Shenei milion Yehudim hushmedu” [Two Million Jews Exterminated], *Haboqer*, May 31, 1943.

Despite all the cautions and misgivings, however, Bernstein concludes, “It can no longer be doubted that the Nazis have managed to murder nearly two million Jews thus far” – a fact that attests not only to their intention of isolating the Jews but also to their ability to do so.

This recognition of the Nazis’ ability to murder five million Jews led the editors of *Haboqer* to a conclusion that was paradoxical in the Zionist sense. The context was criticism from non-Zionist but friendly Jewish circles, to the effect that the Zionist leadership’s adamancy about Palestine as the only possible place of refuge for the survivors of the Holocaust was gravely prejudicing the possibilities of rescue. *Haboqer*, with its pronouncedly “Palestinocentric” Zionist approach, responded to these arguments differently than *Davar* and *Hatzofe* did when these papers took up on the same topic. This was not the right time, *Haboqer* proclaimed, to engage in polemics those who held these views:

However, we must observe the fact and be considerate of it. Therefore, it is a fact that the terrible *sho’ah* of the Jews [...], which ostensibly should have displayed and emphasized the Zionist idea before the enlightened world in the entirety of its realistic truth – has contrarily become an impediment to Zionism. [This is because] the catastrophe that has befallen the Jewish people is not attracting our friends to the solution of political Zionism; instead, it is repelling them.

The reason for this, *Haboqer* continued, is because the urgent question concerns the rescue of *Jews* and not a political solution for *the Jewish people*, such as, in the opinion of those in these circles, the Zionist Movement is demanding. To their minds, the Zionist stance not only clashes in principle with the Jews’ needs but also blocks the path to rescue because the powers and the public organizations that are willing to support the rescue enterprise are reluctant, at this time, to support the political demands of the Zionist Movement.

Bernstein, who must have written this editorial, was unable to delegitimize this approach at that particular time. He even defined it as humane and believed that it should be upheld “until the storm blows over” – “because now,” the editorial stressed, “one must not speak of *a solution* but rather of *rescue*” (emphasis added). This statement, no matter how unequivocal, was immediately circumscribed: “Debating the two seemingly contradictory approaches is totally impractical, since amid the reality that exists in view of the difficulties that the rescue effort faces, the matter is rhetorical and no more.”<sup>69</sup>

However, it is worth noting the minute difference between this approach and the remarks in *Davar* and *Hatzofe*. The latter newspapers attempted to blur the difference between the two approaches *ab initio*; the editorial in *Haboqer*, in contrast, stresses the material difference between them while noting its temporary nature. Accordingly, summing up the disappointing – from the Jewish standpoint – resolutions of the Bermuda Conference, Bernstein

<sup>69</sup> Lecture Moshe Shertok, *ibid.*, May 4, 1943.



proposes two avenues of response. The first avenue, the immediate one, is to maintain pressure on the powers by demanding vigorously and publicly that they explain what they intend to do for the rescue of those who can still be rescued. The reference, of course, is to all possible ways and means, permanent or provisional, such as places of asylum for Jewish refugees in the United States, Britain, and neutral countries in Europe, of which much had already been said in the Jewish press. The second avenue, also immediate, is not to relinquish, even at this stage of the war, the vehement and unequivocal demand for a solution to the Jewish problem after the war that centers on Palestine as the Jews' national home.<sup>70</sup>

In view of this stance, the editorial then castigates the American Jewish organizations and the National Institutions in Palestine for not vigorously representing the special Jewish problem before the powers. The surrender agreement that the government of Italy had signed, for example, did not require the Italian army, retreating from the Balkans, Greece, and Yugoslavia, to take along such Jews as survived to keep them out of the Wehrmacht's clutches.<sup>71</sup>

The political failure, in the opinion of *Haboqer* and as also expressed in *Ha'aretz*, stems from the lack of an agreed-on and united Jewish national leadership that would represent the Jewish people's interests vis-à-vis the powers. Instead, one finds a profusion of institutions that act without coordination and in shameful competition and redundancy.

Explicit remarks on this topic followed about a month later. In an editorial discussing the emergency assembly of the National Committee to mobilize the Yishuv for yet another rescue effort, *Haboqer* states openly and emphatically, "It cannot be denied that all the rescue work thus far has been performed as if its goal is more to assuage public opinion than to save Jews." The editorialist, however, stresses the distinction between the criticism and accusations that were hurled during the assembly's debates at those in charge of the rescue operations, which had not delivered any results to speak of, on the one hand and criticism that demanded more effective methods of action on the other. The editorialist objects to the former line of criticism but expresses his support of the latter<sup>72</sup> – evidently to draw a distinction between himself and the views of the Revisionist newspaper *Hamashqif*, which I address later in the chapter.

Three months after the assembly, the Nazi military units invaded Hungary, and the disaster of nearly one million Jews in this country, who had managed to survive the four years of the war under relatively "normal" living conditions by the standards of the antisemitic Fascist regime that had ruled Hungary until then, began to unfold.

From the moment the Germans invaded Hungary, it was feared that this Jewish collective would face the same fate as that of the Jews of Poland.<sup>73</sup> This

<sup>70</sup> "U-mah aharei Bermuda?" [And What about after Bermuda?] *ibid.*, May 19, 1943.

<sup>71</sup> "She'elat lo yehudim" [A Question of Non-Jews], *ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1943.

<sup>72</sup> "Asefat ha-nivharim ve-ha-hatsalah" [The Elected Assembly and Rescue], *ibid.*, Jan. 17, 1944.

<sup>73</sup> "Misrad la-hatsalah" [An Office for Rescue], *ibid.*, March 23, 1944.

was due to distrust in the democracies' willingness to take any meaningful rescue action, given the bitter and wretched experience that had been amassed in the four years of the war. In *Haboqer's* opinion, however, blame for the abandonment of the doomed Jews should not be laid at the feet of the democratic powers exclusively: "The truth is that we, no matter how schooled in experience we were, did not apply all our strength to the necessary extent." It is true that the Jews are a stateless nation; accordingly, due to their political weakness, they cannot apply pressure to those who make the decisions and, for this reason, cannot possibly establish an effective rescue organization. "Nevertheless, it cannot be that in view of the dangers, we will not discover the hidden forces that always appear" at a time of individual and collective danger. At such a time, as the menace of extermination has begun to loom over the Jews of Hungary, the editorialist proposes the creation of a topical and moral separation between the traditional concern for *'aliya* – immigration to Palestine – and the urgent need for rescue. To accomplish this, in his opinion, a special rescue office is needed, "devoted foremost and specifically to rescue affairs only." Such an office would be exempt "from the whole burden that weighs on the Jewish Agency apparatus, in which parties and factions engage in continual and innumerable infighting."<sup>74</sup>

The closer the war came to its end, coinciding with the demise of European Jewry, the more *Haboqer* reverted to this special "Yishuvic" form of national soul-searching. As the trains carrying Hungarian Jews to the death camps rumbled on, the newspaper performed a reckoning of all actions that had been taken for the rescue of European Jewry just as, in its opinion, this cause had almost dropped off the public agenda.

In an opinion piece accusatively headlined, "Puzzling Silence in Rescue Affairs,"<sup>75</sup> *Haboqer* began as follows: "Since we first began to receive authoritative reports about the industrialized and calculated extermination of European Jewry in the extermination camps in Poland, we in the Yishuv have occasionally held days of mourning, demonstration rallies, and public prayers, in order to express in some manner an agony that cannot be expressed in words." The effect of these outcries and protests, however, is almost nil in comparison with the immensity of the disaster that has befallen the Jews, given the powers' conviction that rescue will take place only with victory over Germany. True to form, however, Bernstein does not settle for foisting the guilt on the other; instead, he launches a fierce attack on the conduct of the National Institutions in the Yishuv, which, he says, are concerned with totally different matters than those essential at this time: "They are conducting their inter-party wars, dealing with party rifts, and setting up elections for the Elected Assembly and the Histadrut in order to beat their rivals." The main

<sup>74</sup> In regard to the Jews of Hungary, see "Anahnu heil ha-ezer" [We Are the Auxiliary Force], *ibid.*, June 27, 1944, and "Hatsalat yehudei Hungariah" [Rescuing the Jews of Hungary], *ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1944.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1944.

target of his remarks is the ruling party, Mapai, which since 1942 has been embroiled in an internal political debate that would ultimately split it, with the secession of Hakibbutz Hameuhad and the establishment of Ahdut ha-'Avodah. Bernstein's critical barbs, however, also sink into the flesh of the American Zionist leaders. Even though admitting that he is much less familiar with events in the United States than with those in Palestine, he has no doubt that "[t]hey are almost certainly waiting for some more-or-less high official to agree to receive them for an exchange of words, only to hear afterwards that they're looking into it or that the policy of His Majesty's Government on Palestine cannot be revised at this stage of the war."

These remarks and, above all, their derisive style in reference to the Zionist establishment, and especially that of the Labor Movement, are no different from those expressed by the Revisionist Party in its newspaper *Hamashqif*, which I discuss later. The public measures that Bernstein proposes, however, are not extreme; one may even define them as "establishmentarian." He does demand the awakening of public opinion "on a broad scale, not for the purpose of mourning demonstrations but for the expression of *astonishment and protest* [emphasis added] over the failure to exploit rescue opportunities," chiefly due to the British government's refusal to annul the White Paper fully or at least partly, such as in the sections that limit the entry of Jews to Palestine – all of which, to save the several hundred thousand European Jews who remain alive.

This demand, correct and justified per se, was neither original nor extreme. All Jewish newspapers, party-affiliated and not, from the anti-Zionist Left to the nationalist Right, expressed it. *Haboqer's* stance, however – seconding that of *Ha'aretz* on the same issue – attests to discomfort, to put it mildly, in broad sectors of the Zionist and Yishuv mainstream in regard to the whole matter of rescue actions. This, even though these newspapers, much like their political rival, *Davar*, did not conceal the constraints and difficulties that applied to such actions; indeed, they regularly emphasized them.

Nevertheless, although acknowledging the constraints that pertained to rescue action, *Haboqer* warned the Jewish organizations in late 1944, as the Red Army already stood at the Hungarian border and inside Yugoslavia, that the danger to the remnants of the Jews in these countries themselves had not blown over. *Haboqer* expressed the fear that these organizations are "venturing a bit too much into after-the-war domains," in reference to the discussions that the various institutions had begun to pursue about how much compensation the Jews would be owed at the end of the war for their losses in lives and property. Other peoples being liberated from the yoke of Nazi occupation were emerging intact, even though they had suffered. "We [Jews, in contrast,] are still aboard the lurching vessel that is threatening to break up; our brethren are still drowning and we must voice a bitter outcry, 'Save us!'"

While criticizing the wartime Zionist and Yishuv leadership for its inefficacy in rescue and arguing that this leadership has failed to represent the national interest and, accordingly, should be replaced ahead of coming events – namely

the postwar struggle for the resurrection of the Jewish people in Palestine – *Haboqer* admits that the basis of the Jewish tragedy is the Jews' national powerlessness. In an emotional, soul-searching editorial, it writes:

There is no reconciliation, nor any possibility of reconciliation, *between the ghastly sho'ah and any response to it*. Each and every individual's emotion, the source of any response, cannot attain a magnitude of agony that accords with the magnitude of the numbers [...]. Every demonstration of anguish cannot be equal to the atrocity that animates it [...]. Any response to this unimaginable reality must *appear pallid*, weak, and even slightly artificial (emphasis added).<sup>76</sup>

This statement by the editor of *Haboqer*, an oppositionist vis-à-vis the Zionist leadership under Mapai, may explain the mildness of the criticism that this paper, too, lodged against this leadership's policies. In the summarizing chapter of this book, I rediscuss the methods and contents of the criticism in the entire Jewish press during those years.

#### HAMASHQIF, 1943–1945

During these years, as the cautiously optimistic illusion about the fate of European Jewry, dominant in the previous era (1939–1942), waned, *Hamashqif* underwent a change of heart: Instead of being the main critic of the Zionist leadership, it became a consistent warrior against it. The difference between the two approaches manifested itself not in practical politics but rather, and mainly, in style. It is hard to see where this style, aggressive, if not predatory, in nature, had any political influence on the Zionist Executive's policies. It did, however, make a bold impression on the public because its ultracritical manner of expression offered the public, at the psychological level, compensation of sorts for its powerlessness by assigning the blame to its national leadership. Nevertheless, this style, no matter how radical its arguments were, paradoxically underscored the Jews' national powerlessness. It did so not necessarily because its demands and proposals were materially different from those in *Davar* or *Hatzofe*, but rather because on each topic discussed, *Hamashqif* radicalized its allegations and positions until its editorial columns replaced the politics of the possible with an imaginary utopia that invoked generalization in its criticism and hyperbole in its hope.

Two months after authoritative reports about the magnitude of the Holocaust appeared, *Hamashqif* editorialized in extreme terms about the response of “the Yishuv” to the disaster, charging stridently that “Despite the hair-raising Job-like reports, the Yishuv remains *as quiet as before*. It mourns a bit, sheds a tear, fasts for half a day, takes part in mourning assemblies, and recites Psalms” (emphasis added). The sarcastic tone of voice is followed by a grave accusation: “There exists among the Hebrew public in Palestine, too, a sense of *tsiduaq*

<sup>76</sup> “Aharei yom ha-evel” [After the Day of Mourning], *ibid.*, March 15, 1945.

*ha-din* [a Jewish concept denoting the acceptance of something justified], it can't be helped, and all hope is lost" (emphasis in the original). The editorial uses the Jewish term not in the sense of the Jews' "having it coming," meaning that the Holocaust was justified, but rather in an alternative interpretation, as in a prayer that people might recite when they are separated from those dear to them, accepting the judgment decreed against them lovingly. It was precisely against this interpretation of *tsiduiq ha-din* that *Hamashqif* inveighs: "This *tsiduiq ha-din* state of mind is very dangerous and portends great disasters for the future, *with unforeseeable outcomes*" (emphasis added).<sup>77</sup>

The warning originates in the newspaper's core belief that the redemption and rescue of the Jews must not be separated. The other newspapers also linked the two causes but not in a way that would make them inseparable under any political circumstances. In other words, to their minds, not every rescue action has to lead to national redemption; rescue itself would suffice. *Hamashqif*, in contrast, said, "The concentration of profound grief in the Yishuv must serve as an opportunity for the presentation of our national demand with full vehemence and audacity."<sup>78</sup> Its view mirrored a demand that Ze'ev Jabotinsky had expressed shortly before his death in his book, *The War and the Jew*: the establishment of a Jewish army – so that the Jews would no longer be "bastards' in foreign armies" – and also, ultimately, the establishment of a Jewish state with a Jewish population five million strong.<sup>79</sup>

A condensed expression of this approach was articulated by the journalist B. Hacohen, a member of the *Hamashqif* editorial board. In his article, "The Bermuda Conference and the Yishuv," he accused the Yishuv, due to its flaccid response to the resolutions of the conference, of actually lending it support by way of consent.

This phenomenon, in Hacohen's opinion, is "not only a political failure. It is a *moral* [emphasis added] failure [because] the Yishuv has proved again that its main concern is not the Jewish people but itself. And it has plenty of concerns, thank God." This is an enormous national sin on the part of the Yishuv, which, by contenting itself with protest rallies, is mimicking American and British Jewry. What it should do instead is to approach world public opinion not as a supplicant pleading for assistance but as the emissary of the Jewish people, on which the Jews' national future hinges. The meaning of the Yishuv's acquiescent behavior, in Hacohen's opinion, is that "The Yishuv [...] has joined the cycle of *betrayal* and disintegration [that typifies] the *cowardly and assimilationist* Jewish Diaspora and, like it, has settled for protest rallies" (emphasis added).<sup>80</sup> This tirade, aimed at American Jewry in particular,

<sup>77</sup> "Halakh-ru'ah shel tsiduiq ha-din" [A *Tsiduiq ha-Din* State of Mind], *Hamashqif*, Feb. 18, 1943.

<sup>78</sup> "Kedei she-yihyeh ta'am le-evlo shel ha-yishuv" [To Make the Yishuv's Mourning Worth It], *ibid.*, June 13, 1943.

<sup>79</sup> Z. Jabotinsky, *The War and the Jew* (New York: The Dial Press, 1942).

<sup>80</sup> B. Hacohen, "Ve'idat 'Bermuda' ve-ha-yishuv" [The Bermuda Conference and the Yishuv], *Haboqer*, April 16, 1943.

was precipitated by the failure of the Revisionist initiative to persuade the American Jewish political establishment to support the idea of establishing a “Hebrew army.”<sup>81</sup>

To make sure that his criticism would not be construed as an exercise in sweeping generalization, Hacoheh hurriedly explains, “Obviously, when we say ‘the Yishuv’ we do not mean all of the half-million Jews who live in this country, but rather their organs of expression – the leaders, the institutions, the press.” Due to his very wish to praise the minority, however, he offends the majority: Among the half-million Jews in the Yishuv, “With all the *immigrant* fatigue that marks most of them, there are *statist* elements” (emphasis in the original). The Revisionist distinction between “statism” and “immigrantism” could not but offend the Zionist ethos of the Yishuv. Notably, the Labor Movement in Palestine also differentiated between activist and passive elements in the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement; Laborites, however, inserted the pioneering ethos in the slot that Revisionists reserved for the statist ethos.

Immediately after the repression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, the statist ethos prompted *Hamashqif* to publish a paraphrase of Jeremiah – “And we shall transform grief into rage and our rage shall be a challenge” – as a banner headline. To wit: The Yishuv should not acquiesce in the situation submissively but rather “*create a situation in which ending the slaughter and rescuing the millions will become a vital necessity in the prosecution of the war and in progress toward victory*” (emphasis in the original). The Warsaw ghetto uprising is a case in point: It introduced the Jewish tragedy to the consciousness of the free world. In contrast, “All these appeals to [the Gentiles] for the rescue of our brethren are wailings and beseechings that are unworthy of a mighty ‘power’ such as *the Jewish people*” (emphasis in the original). On the basis of this national self-assessment, which contrasts with the other newspapers’ sense of national powerlessness, the conclusion follows: “As long as we are unwilling to make sacrifices *here*, in a national war that the leaders of the Allied countries should feel keenly, we will be unable to rescue our victims *there*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>82</sup>

This was more than passionate nationalist rhetoric. It manifested itself in the struggle of Lehi – the Sternists – against the British authorities during the war and the revolt that the Irgun Zeva’i Le’umi (IZL) proclaimed against this regime in 1944. Underlying this Jabotinskyite rhetoric was the awareness that a determined minority can, in fact, impose its will on historical developments by applying steady pressure to the course of history in various ways, particularly overt ways, such as the proclamation of political goals, the initiation of political petitions, initiatives for the formation of international alliances, and refusal to flinch from armed struggle.

<sup>81</sup> See Tydor-Baumel, *From Ideology to Propaganda* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> “Ve-hafakhnu evel le-za’am, vi-yehi za’amenu tagar!” [And We Shall Transform Grief into Rage, and Our Rage Shall Be a Challenge], *Hamashqif*, June 15, 1943.

True to these principles, *Hamashqif* demanded the replacement of secret diplomatic efforts for the rescue of Jews with an overt initiative that would come about due to pressure by the Jewish street against the leaders of the Allied powers, the state of war notwithstanding. Such a demarche would succeed “because the fulfillment of Zionism and, with it, the rescue of our brethren in Europe would no longer reside in the hands of official diplomacy but rather in the hands of the masses.”<sup>83</sup> This opinion – voiced by the journalist Hacoheh but surely shared by others – differs from that of the other newspapers, which agree that provisionally, in the current situation that will prevail until the end of the war, the demand for rescue should be uncoupled from the Zionist political demands so as not to impede the rescue efforts.

Hacoheh’s view found official support in an editorial ahead of a special meeting of the National Committee on the topic of rescue operations. The editorial attacked what it called “declarative” Zionism, which, to its mind, does nothing useful with its rhetoric and even its rallies for the rescue of the doomed. Therefore, the editorialist expresses the hope that “We will now find out whether the Elected Assembly will remain our ‘Bermuda’ – a forum for pathetic declarations only – or become the political crucible in which an effective method for the rescue of brethren will be forged so that a regime will arise in the Yishuv that will neither pause nor rest until the last of the Jews in Europe is saved.”<sup>84</sup>

One who reads these words cannot refrain from commenting on the paradoxical fate of expressions that are charged with historical meaning. The concept of a “declarative” policy or a “declarative” Zionism originated in the Labor Movement school, which used it to bash the Revisionist Movement for playing no active role in building the Yishuv and contenting itself with mere political pronouncements. Now, this very concept, in its activist political sense, became a weapon against the Jewish Agency Executive, which was headed by the Labor Movement.

There is no doubt, however, that the concept of a “Bermuda of the Yishuv” touched a raw nerve in the Yishuv. As evidence, we need only recall that a newspaper such as *Ha’aretz*, which was not suspected of Revisionist leanings, adopted it itself. Furthermore, the “Bermuda of the Yishuv” concept reflected an accusation in addition to political criticism: suspicions about the use of rescue donation funds for other – extraneous – political needs.<sup>85</sup> Such was especially the case when the concept was accompanied by the unequivocal assertion that “There’s no shortage of money for rescue” and that, therefore, the thing needed was not only action to finance “administrative needs” for “the rescue of individuals” but also the investment of thought “first and foremost

<sup>83</sup> B. Hacoheh, “Shuv be-inyan ‘ha-hatsalah’” [Again in the Matter of ‘Rescue,’] *ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1944.

<sup>84</sup> “Asefat ha-nivharim o Bermuda yishuvit” [The Elected Assembly or the ‘Bermuda’ of the Yishuv], *ibid.*, Jan. 3, 1944.

<sup>85</sup> See “Teshuvah le-giluy da’at” [Response to Manifesto], *ibid.*, March 12, 1944.

about a *political offensive* to break through the opaque wall” (emphasis in the original)<sup>86</sup> of external and internal indifference.

B. Hacothen supplied historical ideological justification for this “political offensive.” He seized on the opening sentence in an editorial in *Davar* that discusses the occupation of Hungary: “We were late in rescuing the Jews of Hungary.” Hacothen states that he is writing not only in his own name but also on behalf of his comrades and as their emissary. In view of the menace of the impending annihilation of the Jews of Hungary, he engages the Zionist leadership in a historical and political debate. His argument is that when the war broke out and the Germans occupied most of Central and Western Europe, a political opportunity had taken shape to form an alliance between the Jewish people and the small nations that the Germans had subjugated, with the support of the great powers, of course. The purpose of this “alliance of blood,” as he defines it, would be to resist the German hegemony in Europe. Thus, he and his comrades believe, the Jewish cause would be integrated into the general interest of the peoples of Europe.

It is noteworthy that this approach contrasts with the perception of the entire Jewish and Zionist press in the Diaspora and all Jewish political parties there, which repeatedly stressed the uniqueness of the Jewish condition relative to that of the other enslaved peoples.

There is no doubt that this idea is an extension of Jabotinsky’s prewar political initiatives for the creation of an alliance of interests with European states that had large Jewish populations to press Britain to solve the Jewish problem. Both ideas – the original one and its extension – were based on the principle of commonality of interests on an international basis.

The disaster, then – if we pursue the logic of this argument – was that just as the prewar “alliance of interests” never came to pass, so the “alliance of blood” did not come into being during the war. Therefore, “[w]e remained alone and isolated with our disaster and the only ‘achievement’ was Bermuda.” Bermuda, of course, was a result of the failure of the old and unimaginative Zionist Organization leadership to muster the political courage to initiate the formation of the aforementioned “alliance of blood.” Furthermore, the old Zionist leadership’s mistaken approach traces to its belief that “Zionism is the outcome not of ‘catastrophes’ but of slow and comfortable growth in Palestine, helped along by funds and ‘pioneers’ from the Diaspora.”<sup>87</sup>

The Zionist leadership, Hacothen goes on to allege, continued to adhere to this outlook even when the war broke out and as European Jewry teetered

<sup>86</sup> “Ein mahesor” [There’s No Shortage], *ibid.*, May 30, 1944.

<sup>87</sup> In this matter, see Yosef Shechtman, *Ze’ev Jabotinsky: Parashat hayav* [Ze’ev Jabotinsky: a Biography] (Tel-Aviv: Karni, 1959) Vol. C, “Policy and Alliances,” in Hebrew, pp. 125ff. See also Eli Tzur, “Yehasim mesukanim: Ze’ev Jabotinsky u-misrad ha-huts shel Polin” [Dangerous Relations: Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Polish Foreign Ministry], in Avi Bareli and Pinhas Ginosar (eds.), *Ish ba-sa’ar: masot u-mehqarim al Ze’ev Jabotinsky* [A Man in a Tempest: Essays and Studies on Ze’ev Jabotinsky], *Iyyunim bi-tequmat Yisrael* topical series, in Hebrew (Sede Boqer: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2004).



on the brink of the valley of death. Therefore, the leaders did not grasp *ab initio* what Hungarian Jewry would be facing upon the German invasion. Hence, it would not be forgiven for its public admission of having been “late” and, accordingly, should yield its position to a different national leadership, a Palestinian one, which would aspire indefatigably and fearlessly to the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. Otherwise, the Jewish people has no future, because “[a]s a Palestinian sect we are doomed to go the way of all Jewish flesh. As a sovereign nation – we will put an end to the exile, here and everywhere else.”<sup>88</sup>

This stance on the part of *Hamashqif* definitely reflects the inexhaustible political optimism that pervaded all organs of the Revisionist movement. Therefore, even after negotiations for the rescue of most of Hungarian Jewry failed and when only meager vestiges of Polish Jewry remained, *Hamashqif* continued to demand rescue operations and broached ideas that had already been discussed and had failed in the past – for example, the exchange of Jews in extermination camps for German prisoners or yet another appeal to the powers by the Jewish organizations, and especially the leadership of the Yishuv, to display “greater interest and willingness, after the extermination of millions of Jews, to save the lives of thousands and tens of thousands.”<sup>89</sup>

The demands expressed by the “maximalist” Revisionist political school are hard to distinguish from the “minimalist” demands of the Labor Movement in the national or, as *Hamashqif* put it, the “Jewish Agency” national leadership, on which it placed the responsibility for the Zionist political failure from the early 1930s to the very appearance of these remarks in print.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> B. Hacoen, “Ha-yishuv ve-ha-hatsalah” [The Yishuv and the Rescue], *ibid.*, March 24, 1944. On the same topic and in the same vein, see “Gormeï ha-kishalon” [The Reasons for the Failure], *ibid.*, Dec. 14, 1944.

<sup>89</sup> “Ha-shakhahnu et aheinu ha-mit’anim ba-golah?” [Have We Forgotten Our Afflicted Brethren in the Diaspora?] *ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1944.

<sup>90</sup> See “Gormeï ha-kishalon” [The Reasons for the Failure], *ibid.*, Dec. 14, 1944.

## The American Jewish Press, 1942–1945

The approach of the Jewish year 5702 (Summer 1942) was marked by the traditional Ninth of Av, the narrative of which – the destruction of the Temple and the onset of the Jewish exile – was becoming current reality in view of the reports about the annihilation of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland and Russia. Just the same, *Forverts* crowned its editorial that summarized the year just past and looked ahead to the year to come with the hopeful headline, “For a Good Year.”<sup>1</sup> Its choice stemmed neither from public blindness due to distraction nor from disregard due to a quest for oblivion. On the contrary: The editorial spoke about East European cities and towns that had been emptied of their Jews because the Nazis had murdered them, those who remained alive but had become slaves in labor camps, and the tens of thousands who had become starving and persecuted nomads. However, the editorialist stated, although one could state without hesitation that the past year was the worst in the entire history of Jewish suffering, the approximate number of those who had perished, let alone the exact number, remained unknown.

By questioning the reliability of the numbers, *Forverts* still expressed cautious optimism that had typified the Jewish press since the beginning of the war. Therefore, it allowed itself, in the very midst of the Jewish human apocalypse, to disseminate the consolation of deliverance and national rebirth as well. It did so, it said, on the basis of historical experience: After all, the Jewish people had proved its ability to rise up and dust itself off after every blow that it had been dealt in more than 1,800 years of exile, while its oppressors had largely vanished from the stage of history.

The Zionist newspaper *Der Tog* wrote in a similar vein<sup>2</sup>: Like *Forverts*, it stated that yes, one could not estimate when the disaster would end; indeed, the extermination had not yet ended and might continue. It did not know how on-target it was! Just the same, the same optimistic faith persisted: The end

<sup>1</sup> *Forverts*, Sept. 13, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Tog*, Sept. 11, 1942.

of the editorial expressed hope that upon their impending victory over the Nazis, the democracies would compensate the Jewish people as a nation, and the Jews as individuals, for their suffering.

The Religious Zionist *Morgen Dzhurnal*, too, while admitting that the enlightened world lacked the means for mass rescue in the current situation, nevertheless expressed its belief in the possibility of rescuing many.<sup>3</sup>

By November 1942, however – two months later – the calm and cautiously optimistic tenor had disappeared from these papers' editorials, replaced by anguished appeals to the enlightened world to help rescue the Jews from the slaughter underway. It is outcry and alarm, coupled with a demand for real action, that ring out in the editorials. During the month-long period from late November 1942 to early January 1943, thirty-two editorials of this kind appeared (eight in *Forverts*, ten in *Der Tog*, ten in *Morgen Dzhurnal*, and four in *Morgn-Frayhayt*) – one every day.

Given the terrifying reports arriving from Europe, *Forverts* acknowledged the psychological need not to believe them. Otherwise, one could not continue with one's daily life. And if daily life continued despite everything, it was because the human imagination lacked the ability to grasp the reality revealed by facts, the truth of which no one could challenge any longer and the escape from which was no longer possible even when emotion and imagination insisted on denial. The psychologically most daunting necessity, however, was to admit that there was no way of preventing the ghastly act. Even when the Nazis realized that their end was approaching, they would continue to murder the Jews; in fact, they might even step up their assault as an act of vengeance (*Alts groyzamer ... vet vern zeyer nekomeh shtreibung benogeye idn*).<sup>4</sup> The editorialist did not know how real this fear would become less than two years on. Indeed, in the middle of 1944, with the Nazi regime already facing collapse, hundreds of thousands of Jews were sent from Hungary to the extermination camps. Thus the catastrophic emotional reaction, like the one manifested in *Davar*, metamorphosed into a real historical phenomenon. For this reason, given that the irrational had become real – that is, the murder campaign had become unstoppable – only one avenue of rescue remained: rapid victory over the Nazis (*Di eyntsige shtreibung vos darf diktirn unzer taktik, lomir zign vos gikher* (emphasis in the original)).<sup>5</sup> This conclusion, which dovetailed perfectly with the attitude of the American and British leadership and had unchallengeable strategic logic on its side, also stressed the Jews' national powerlessness at the time.

The only consolation against the sense of helplessness came from reports about desperate resistance that Jews had mounted in several of the liquidated ghettos. Although it had not lasted for more than a few hours, it proved that these Jews preferred immediate death to slow demise in the concentration

<sup>3</sup> "Idn velkhe men ken ratevn," *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Sept. 18, 1942.

<sup>4</sup> "Di idishe tragedye in Eyrope," *Forverts*, Sept. 27, 1942.

<sup>5</sup> "Nisht veynen nor kemfn," *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1942.

camps.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, although aware that assent in the Allies' strategy could not be avoided – that the only thing to do for the victims was to defeat the Nazis – *Forverts* stopped short of total acquiescence; therefore, it did not abandon its tactical demand for a quest for various ways to save a few. In the opinion of *Forverts*, the problem that the Allies' leaders faced now was not the number of Jews who would be murdered but how many could be saved and by what means (“*Di frage ... is nit vifil idn es veln oysgemordet vern, nor vifl iden es kenen geratevet vern, un vi azoy zey kenen geratevet vern*”) before the Nazi regime would be obliterated. This, in the editorialist's opinion, is a difficult and complex task but a possible one if the neutral countries would help, as they would if the Allied powers pressured them. This hope, however, was accompanied by doubts fomented by the attitude of the American press toward the Jews' calamity. Therefore, the editorial ended by expressing sorrow about the very “tepid” (*shvakh*) response of this press and of American public opinion generally; consequently, the American public lacked correct information about the full extent of the devastation being brought upon the Jews.<sup>7</sup>

The British press, in contrast, earned the appreciation of the Jewish papers in the United States for siding with the victims and their demands of the Allied governments, which were no different from those bruited by *Forverts*.<sup>8</sup> Their appreciation aside, however, they immediately noted that notwithstanding the sorrow, the various proposals remained, for the time being, mere empty words because there was no possibility of rescue. “This cannot be believed; one cannot lose hope of people's goodwill.”<sup>9</sup> This was now revealed in overt demands by British public figures, including the head of the Anglican Church, to give provisional asylum to any Jewish refugee in any free or neutral country that he or she might manage to reach and to promise that a permanent country of residence for these refugees would be found at the end of the war. Again it was stressed that, regrettably, the main American newspapers had not broached similar proposals.<sup>10</sup>

The two Zionist newspapers, *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal*, implored American Jewry to do whatever it could to rescue its brethren. *Der Tog* urged American Jews to be grateful for their good fortune in being citizens of this country. This status, the paper continued, obliges them to look after their oppressed brethren in Europe, who are being murdered.<sup>11</sup> The imperative of history has summoned the five million Jews in the United States to be “the rescuers of the surviving remnant of our people” (*di reter fun der sheyris-hapleyte fun unzer folk*). Their obligation, then, is not to settle for proclaiming

<sup>6</sup> “Di shekhite oyf di kinder,” *ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1942.

<sup>7</sup> “Nekome shpeter, retung bald,” *ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1942.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 9 in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> “Der opruf fun England oyf der idishe tragedye,” *Der Tog*, Dec. 28, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> “A heym far di geratevete idn,” *ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1942.

<sup>11</sup> “Lomir dankn,” *ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1942.

a day of mourning and fasting but to erupt in protest: to turn out for demonstrations in the streets of important American cities to shock (*oyftsitern*) the public, which remained indifferent to the Jews' disaster, and especially the national press, leading clergy, and trade-union leaders. Especially painful to *Der Tog* is the fact that while American society was stunned to read about the murders in one Gentile town, Lidice, it was indifferent and wholly silent about the murders in hundreds of Jewish Lidices (*eyn Lidice hot oyfgetreyselt a velt; un di hunderter idishe Lidices vern oyfgenumen mit glaykbgilt un shvaygn!*).<sup>12</sup>

Just the same, *Der Tog* counseled, the world's attitude should not drive the Jews to despair (*fartsveyfn*). After all, there are also positive indications of a change of heart. Indeed, for the first time even *The New York Times* devoted an editorial to the Jews' disaster. Neutral countries such as Switzerland and Sweden were granting Jews asylum. Most importantly, President Roosevelt was repeatedly protesting the persecutions and murders of the Jews. Notably, these were but straws that "rescuers" were willing to toss in the direction of drowning people. All that remained for *Der Tog* to do, then, was to explain that deliverance would come about by virtue of the great and staunch might (*makht*) that would destroy the Nazi regime.<sup>13</sup> None of this might, however, not even a little, belonged to the Jews. All they had were political initiatives directed at themselves and at others.

*Der Tog* proposed that the Jewish leadership adopt an action plan that the Zionist labor party Po'alei Tziyon-Tze'irei Tziyon had been promoting. The plan included five planks: mass demonstrations in main American cities; a convention of trade unions in Washington that would approach the U.S. government; appeals to mayors and state governors; placing large advertisements in main newspapers in the hope of reaching the public by their means; and, of course, sending a high-ranking delegation of Jewish public leaders, rabbis, and intellectuals to the president. The idea behind all this was not only to influence the U.S. government but also, and perhaps foremost, to overcome the can't-be-helped state of mind that had gripped some of the Jewish public.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the anguish and doubts about the attitude toward the Jews' suffering, hope flickered that these drowners, "clutching at straws," would also be tossed a life raft – a verbal life raft, to be sure, but one of principled international significance: a statement by thirteen countries at war with the Nazis, led by the three great powers – the United States, the USSR, and the United Kingdom – against the murder of the Jews, coupled with a threat to bring those responsible for it to international justice after the victory.

*Der Tog* construed this declaration as a principled change in the free world's attitude toward the Jews, an expression of the realization that the murders

<sup>12</sup> "Ein tog fun taynis un troyer," *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> "Di briv fun gehenom," *ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> "A program tsu rateven idn fun Nazi-shekhites," *ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1942.

being perpetrated not only targeted persons of Jewish origin but also aimed to annihilate the Jewish people. By extension, the declaration underscored the tragic uniqueness of the Jewish problem relative to the suffering of other Nazi-occupied peoples. Therefore, in the opinion of *Der Tog*, “With this historical declaration [*historishe deklaratsye*], the Allies have blown a breeze of hope and encouragement [*treyst un mut*] in the direction of us Jews; thereby they have also earned the merit [*rehabilitirt*] of reinforcing faith in the ideals of humanism and freedom for which they are fighting.”<sup>15</sup>

The editors of *Der Tog* found the declaration important for another reason: remarks by the head of the provisional Polish government, General Sikorsky, several days earlier. Sikorsky had made an attempt to include the Jewish tragedy in the cruel fate of the Polish nation under Nazi occupation and in that of the other Nazi-oppressed peoples. Therefore, the Allied statement reflected a significant correction in the views of the Polish government, to which the newspaper, for understandable reasons, had been taking very cautious exception.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the encouragement that the Allies’ declaration provided, utter frustration reigned when it came to practical rescue programs. The frustration was so profound that the editors of *Der Tog* grasped at imaginary schemes provided that they contained practical proposals. Thus, it devoted an editorial to a proposal by a leading figure in the Anglican Church that Britain, via a neutral third party, open negotiations with the Nazis for the liberation of Jewish women and children in Europe to transfer them to neutral lands. This fictive and wholly unrealistic scheme attracted the newspaper’s attention because it represented a practical approach, unlike the protests and the expressions of empathy that could not possibly end with anyone’s rescue.<sup>17</sup>

The Religious Zionist newspaper *Morgen Dzhurnal* took a similar approach. Prompted by its public-activist stance, it supported the Po’alei Tziyon-Tze’irei Tziyon program that *Der Tog* disseminated enthusiastically.<sup>18</sup> However, whereas *Der Tog* stressed the need to influence various non-Jewish circles, *Morgen Dzhurnal* turned most of its attention inward, to Jewish society, decrying what it called the Jewish indifference (*di idishe glayhgiltikayt*) in the United States. In its opinion, notwithstanding the public activity of individuals and public entities, some American Jews still believed that they could disengage from the whole world. The editorialist must have been referring to the old Jewish elite, largely the offspring of families that had immigrated to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century and had attained a status of wealth and honor. This elite was epitomized by the Sulzberger family, owners of *The New York Times*.<sup>19</sup> The state of mind at issue, according

<sup>15</sup> “Di felker-deklaratsye kegn di shekhites oyf idn,” *ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> “Oyfn veg fun idisher retung,” *ibid.*, Dec. 14, 1942.

<sup>17</sup> “Vi tsu rateven di idn fun dem Nazi-gehenom,” *ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> “Nokhin taynis vos vayter?” *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Dec. 2, 1942.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 9 in this volume.

to *Morgen Dzhurnal*, expresses the wish to assimilate into general American society and shirk the mutual responsibility that had traditionally embraced all Jews, resulting not only in dissociation from the Jewish people but also disengagement from the moral obligation to Jews who are being persecuted and murdered.

*Morgen Dzhurnal* also expressed withering and derisive criticism of the culture of fundraising for European Jewry that the public institutions were spearheading. This culture, in its opinion, is one of “banquets” that is incompatible with the tragic circumstances. Therefore the time has come to stop “celebrating” (*banketeven*)<sup>20</sup> and find some other way to persuade the public to open its hearts and wallets. Underlying this criticism is the realization that, under existing conditions, the Jews have no power to prevail upon non-Jewish players to do anything significant to help rescue Jews. What the Jews must do, then, is unite not only politically but also culturally.

The response of the Communist newspaper, *Morgn-Frayhayt*, equaled that of the two Zionist newspapers in its national activist style and sometimes even surpassed it. Its political approach, to be sure, had definitely been approved by Moscow, which was interested in mobilizing resources to assist its army, which was bearing the brunt of the effort and paying the highest price of blood in the war against the Nazis. Thus, an absolute identity of interest came about between Jewish nationalism, even in its Zionist version, and that of the Soviet Union. This identity indeed legitimized the national language – Yiddish – but did not determine the passionate style that *Morgn-Frayhayt* invoked. In view of this style, one may infer that the new situation during the war had given the Jewish Communists an opportunity to reveal the national passions that they had been soft-pedaling, if not repressing, for obvious and understandable reasons. I discuss a similar phenomenon in the chapter on the newspaper *Aynikayt*, the organ of the Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union.

One may get an idea of this approach and style from an editorial whose headline speaks for itself: “For the Lives of Millions of Jews in Europe and Palestine.”<sup>21</sup> The editorial attempts to bolster its readers’ morale by reporting encouragingly on Jewish public activity, most importantly a meeting that leaders of Jewish organizations had held with President Roosevelt. Another encouraging sign is an advertisement in *The New York Times*, sponsored by important non-Jewish and Jewish intellectual and social personalities, protesting the murder of the Jewish people. The editorialist, while stressing the gratitude that the Jewish people (*dos idishn folk*) should feel in view of the declaration, takes principled exception to a certain expression in the declaration and responds to it with a principled argument. Due to its importance for understanding Jewish Communist nationalism, I present the argument below in full (free translation):

<sup>20</sup> “Di idishe ‘troyer vokh,’” *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Dec. 16, 1942, Dec. 17, 1942.

<sup>21</sup> “Far di lebens fun di milyonen idn in Eyrope un Palestine,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, December 18, 1942.

One cannot assent in the expression “stateless Jews” [*stetles dzshuz*] that is used in the declaration, i.e., Jews who lack a homeland. There are Jewish refugees, there are Jews who lack civil rights, and there are Jews who are living as outlaws in Nazi-ruled countries. However, one must not submit to the idea that the Jews lack a homeland, “*idn on lender.*” No Jew is uprooted [*oysgevortselt*] from the land where he was born, or from the state in which he lives, and from his right to struggle for his rights in these countries. In this spirit, any demand for the right of Jews to participate in the struggle against the Nazis on all fronts and in all domains where it is taking place deserves support. Further in this spirit, the demand expressed by the Jews of Palestine to be given the possibility of participating fully in the United Nations’ war effort, as an organized national Jewish entity equal to the Arab people in Palestine, also deserves support.

After paying its “dues” to the Internationalist spirit, the editorialist states with emphasis that the main importance of the document that had been published, signed by hundreds of well-known personalities, lies in its “proud and respectful [*shtolts un virdig*] [advocacy] for the existence of the Jewish people for the entire American nation [to see].” It is unlikely that the editors of *Morgn-Frayhayt* were oblivious to the significance of their remark about the existence of a world Jewish people, which clashed with the traditional Communist perspective that did not acknowledge Jewish peoplehood, least of all on a global basis. Now, to save this people, the Jewish Communists were willing to embrace any ideas that might reinforce and organize pan-Jewish activity, especially in the United States, for this purpose. In this field, *Morgn-Frayhayt* added a demand of its own that the other newspapers overlooked: the immediate opening of a second front in Europe. This was, of course, something that the Soviet Government had been imploring the United States and Britain to do to facilitate its conduct of the war and defeat Germany more quickly. This demand, apart from being a justified Soviet strategic interest, was an existential cause for the Jews who were en route to the extermination sites. After all, had it been possible to open a second front only one year before this actually happened, hundreds of thousands of Jews surely would have survived. This, however, was merely an observation meant to indicate the existential identity of Soviet and Jewish interests at the time. *Morgn-Frayhayt* was the loyal and authorized proponent of this identity of interests on behalf of the Soviet Communist Party and government, and on behalf of the editors’ national awareness.<sup>22</sup>

By the beginning of the new year – 1943 – the particularistic catastrophe that had befallen the Jews became an inseparable part of the price that free society was paying in its war against the Nazi enemy. *Forverts’* editorial on January 1, 1943, surveyed the unfolding of the war since it had begun. It expresses the view that given the turnaround on the eastern front and Africa

<sup>22</sup> See “Faraynikte aktsye fun alle idn muz organizirt vern bald,” *ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1942; see also “Idn veln zikh aleyh oysratn,” *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1943.



in late 1942, the outcome of the war is foreknown and the Fascist regime's fate is sealed. Admittedly, one may expect setbacks and failures on the road to victory, and the peoples of occupied Europe, the Jews in particular, are doomed to immense suffering. The threat of a German victory, however, has blown over for good.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that the demand for rescue action had blown over as well. It persisted despite the realization that most European Jews could not be saved under current circumstances. Accordingly, the editorial addresses the demand for rescue action to those countries that still maintain some degree of autonomy vis-à-vis Nazi Germany – Hungary and, especially, Romania.<sup>24</sup>

This demand was accompanied by an intermingling of hope and doubt. Hope stemmed from reports about stirrings in political circles and public opinion in search of ways to ease the Jews' suffering. Doubt traced to the fact that these initiatives remained nothing more than good intentions for the time being, even if accompanied by practical ideas. The trouble, in the newspaper's opinion, is that practical paths to rescue are very hard to discover (*Di tsore iz, vos s'iz zeyer shver tsu gefnen do di noytige praktishe hilf mitlen*).<sup>25</sup>

The editorial does not conceal the hurdles that impede the implementation of the rescue schemes. The first hurdle is to work out an agreement with the Nazis, the second – to find a place of asylum for those saved. According to conventional wisdom, the second problem is easier to surmount than the first. The editorialist still believes that the neutral countries, and especially the powers at war with the Nazis, can be persuaded to open their gates to Jewish refugees. Although this is undoubtedly a difficult task, it does not and must not mean that the rescue efforts should be halted for even a moment for this reason. (*Gevis iz es zeyer a shvere frage, ober di shverikeyt fun der frage tor unz nit opshteln oyf kayn eyn moment fun zukhn alerley miteln vi azoy di frage tsu leyzn.*) For this purpose, a pro-rescue movement should be established. One of its first and most urgent tasks should be to persuade the United States and Britain that the problem of rescuing Jews lies outside the general question of arranging places of asylum for the entire population of European war refugees. The Jewish refugees, after all, are different because they are in immediate mortal danger. Accordingly, one must not wait until the enormous resources for relief for the refugee masses are found; instead, anything that can be done to rescue thousands of Jews must be done at once. Such action would not clash with the two countries' explicit aim of devising a large-scale operation to solve the general refugee problem.<sup>26</sup>

It soon became clear, however – *Forverts* claims – that the two aforementioned external difficulties are not the only ones; there is another one, an internal one. A month or so later, in a response to a large protest rally sponsored by the Jewish organizations in New York, the paper noted that practical

<sup>23</sup> *Forverts*, Jan. 1, 1943.

<sup>24</sup> "Aktive retungs arbayt noytig," *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1943.

<sup>25</sup> "Di bavegung tsu rateven di idn fun di natsishe merder," *ibid.*, Jan. 18, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> "Arum der flikhtling-konferents," *ibid.*, March 5, 1943.

proposals and demands in regard to rescue had been expressed in the speakers' remarks and the resolutions adopted. However, to the tragic misfortune of the Jewish people (*tsum umglik far unzer folk*), neither the Gentile nations nor the Jewish organizations had put together a realistic work plan for rescue action thus far. Distressingly, these organizations were still operating via concepts of the past, as if nothing had changed. They do not act in unison, *Forverts* lamented; the old squabbles continue. Therefore, nothing is being done to rescue thousands of Jewish children in Vichy France, thousands of Jews in Spain are languishing under the threat of deportation to the occupied areas, and so on and so forth. It is therefore a national imperative to abandon the disputes, silence the prickly rhetoric, and pledge devoted efforts to the essential political and organizational rescue work (*politisher und praktisher retungs-arbayt*).<sup>27</sup> If this is indeed done, the organizations can also amplify the political influence of the mass protest rallies and the statements by American intellectuals that recently have been appearing in nationwide newspapers.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, to bolster national morale and spur the Jews to vigorous action, the newspaper presented a lengthy list of relief and rescue actions for Jews in various occupied European countries. The headline of the piece speaks for itself: "We Still Have Friends in the World" (*Mir hobn nokh fraynt oyf der velt*) – many friends, in fact.<sup>29</sup>

At this time, the Jews definitely had many friends who empathized with their suffering as human beings. This, however, did not earn them recognition as a member of the community of nations at war with the Nazis.

In April 1943, when an international conference on the topic of the refugees convened in Bermuda at American and British initiative, the Jewish people, which had a stronger interest than any other people in the outcome of the gathering, had no representative there. *Forverts*, thrashing about for a bit of consolation, noted that one of the American representatives was well acquainted with the problem of the Jewish refugees and viewed the refugees favorably, and that the conference administration had agreed to receive memoranda from various Jewish organizations. The main unanswered question, however, was whether the powers would make efforts for rescue despite the difficulties in doing so, of which government officials and the public at large were aware.<sup>30</sup>

The editorial on this topic was written on April 18, 1943 – the day the Warsaw ghetto uprising broke out, although this information had not yet become public knowledge. A week later, however, *Forverts* drew a connection between the two events in an editorial headlined "The Bloodbath in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Conference in Bermuda."<sup>31</sup> It states that as the last of

<sup>27</sup> "Der miting in Medison Skver Garden," *ibid.*, March 3, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> "Di vikhtigste idische oyfgabe," *ibid.*, March 24, 1943.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 4, 1943.

<sup>30</sup> "Di Bermuda-konferents vegn flikhtlinge," *ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1943.

<sup>31</sup> "Di blut-bad in der varshever geto un di konferents in Bermuda," *ibid.*, Apr. 24, 1943; see also *ibid.*, April 13, 1943 – terrifying reportage on the plight of Polish Jewry.

the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, no more than 35,000 in number, are fighting for their lives, their honor, and the honor of their people, rumors are emerging from the conference in Bermuda that the American and British delegations understood the onerous difficulties associated with any attempt to provide relief for refugees. The editorialist responded to these reports stridently:

We understand the difficulties [...]. We are the most loyal supporters of the British and American governments, which are fighting the Nazis with an effort that entails much sacrifice [...]. But this, after all, is the last outcry of the Jews in Warsaw and of the women and children: Save us! [*Ober dos iz der letstn geshrey fun di letste idn [...] Ratevets unz!*]

These words appeared as part of a direct appeal to the U.S. government to allow significant numbers of persecuted Jews who escape from the Nazi hell to emigrate to the United States. According to *Forverts*, of the quota of 150,000 immigrants per year, only 20 percent of the portion allotted to Europe had actually entered the United States during the three years of the war. Thus, it would be very “easy” to save 75,000 Jews from Europe even without overshooting the immigration quotas.

According to *Forverts*, the “emergency committee for the rescue of the Jews of Europe,” appointed that year by President Roosevelt, concurred with this approach. Accordingly, the Jewish national organizations (*unzer natsionale idische organizatsyes*) should pressure the government incessantly to make a quick decision in this matter, as the U.S. Secretary of State had promised.<sup>32</sup>

A month later, pending a government decision to open the gates of immigration, *Forverts* urged its readers to donate to the “Jewish appeal” that was raising money for “the fund for the rescue of Jewish children.” The British government, the newspaper stated, had promised to issue immigration permits for 30,000 children; the United States would also take in several thousand. Given that the operation would be enormously expensive, readers were urged to donate to this human and Jewish endeavor through the offices of their organizations.<sup>33</sup>

Although this plan initially seemed to have a chance for success, it ultimately fell through, of course. Dina Porat lists the reasons for its failure (in addition to the Germans, of course): disarray in Turkey, a country that the children would have to cross, and Turkish dependency on Britain; the military and political changes in southeastern Europe, especially Romania and Hungary; the lack of ships owned by the Yishuv; and the main thing, in Porat’s judgment: Britain’s refusal to keep its word. Thus, the plan dwindled steadily from 30,000 children to 5,000, 1,000, and finally a few dozen only.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “Der grester farbrekhn in der velt-geshikhte,” *ibid.*, Aug. 8, 1943.

<sup>33</sup> “Fand tsu rateven draysik-toyzent idische flikhtling kinder,” *ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 149–163, 172–173.

The editorialists who urged the readers of *Forverts* to step up their donations for the rescue of children did not know how tragically the affair would end, of course. Their sense of powerlessness, however, was so profound that they grasped at any source of consolation. A case in point is 150 Jewish prisoners whom the American forces released from a detention camp in Italy as they advanced through that country.<sup>35</sup> This solace was put forward as a ray of light in the darkness of the estrangement of the leaders of democratic society, who, in the opinion of the British *Manchester Guardian*, knew how to ease the wretched Jews' plight but did nothing anyway (*un dokh blaybn zey zitsen mit farlegte hent*).<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, one who studies the *Manchester Guardian* in those years finds that this newspaper, pro-Zionist at the time, took the most moral stance among all British and American press vehicles in response to the fate of the Jews. It demanded action not only to rescue Jews by opening the borders of Mandatory Palestine to refugees but also to restore the Jewish people's national dignity as a member of the community of nations by establishing Jewish military units, so that Jews may fight the Nazis under their own flag, as Poles and Czechs did.<sup>37</sup>

Given the realities – silence on the part of the enlightened world and inadequate rescue action on the part of governments and Jewish organizations – all that remained was to find consolation in historical myths and ethos. And what myth/ethos in the Jewish tradition is mightier and more important than the Ninth of Av, symbol of the vicissitudes of the exiled Jewish people in almost every generation? (*zint demolt hobn mir ongehoybn vern a heymlaz folk kimat in yedn dor.*)

Jewish tradition also has it, however, that the Messiah was born on the day the Temple was destroyed. Indeed, history proves that resurrection follows each act of destruction. Now too, judging by how the war was developing, one might entertain hope for all the enslaved peoples and, especially, for Jews who manage to survive, and of course, for the entire Jewish people, which has never exited the stage of history.<sup>38</sup> This was the refuge of history and myth to which the newspapers resorted after all realistic hope of rapid and significant rescue actions were dashed. The Zionist organs – the two dailies (the general-readership *Der Tog* and the religious *Morgen Dzhurnal*) and the *Idisher Kemfer* of Po'alei Tziyon – took a more forceful political line than in the Yiddishist *Forverts* when it came to demands for the rescue of the doomed Jews. All the newspapers did agree that in view of the national powerlessness, a tragic equation had been formed between adamancy in regard to rescue and disappointment in the democracies for their unwillingness to do anything meaningful for its sake. In this regard, the Zionist approach and the non-Zionist

<sup>35</sup> “Di 150 geratevete idn,” *Forverts*, Sept. 25, 1943.

<sup>36</sup> “Dos vikhtige vort in tsayt,” *ibid.*, Sept. 19, 1943.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 9 in this book.

<sup>38</sup> “Tisha be-Av,” *ibid.*, Aug. 10, 1943.

approach differed not in their estimates about how many Jews who could be saved; in this regard everyone agreed that the possibilities were limited and fraught with difficulties. The difference related to the intensity with which the uniqueness of the Jewish national tragedy should be stressed for general public opinion and the leaders of the free countries amid the general distress of the Nazi-occupied peoples of Europe. *Forverts*, as noted earlier, addressed this problem in a minor way, in accordance with its universalistic-liberal and national *Weltanschauung*. The Zionism rhetoric, in contrast, emphasized the special situation of the Jews and, thus inspired, raised far-reaching and even far-fetched proposals about methods of rescue and finding places of asylum for the survivors.

The watershed in regard to the hopeful activism and its demands for action was the Bermuda conference in April 1943. *Der Tog* was under the impression that the conference would center on the Jews' fate. The deliberations at the conference, however, were secret and the Jews were unrepresented in them; even representatives of the press were barred from the discussions. This elicited a series of questions in *Der Tog*: Why all the secrecy? Why the closed doors? Why are the discussants afraid of the Jews? Are the Jews the persecutors and someone else the persecuted who needed rescue? Are the Jews not the victims and the Nazis the persecutors? It is they, the Jews, who needed rescue. If so, why are the Jews not crying out? Had the devastation reached the Jews in the free countries as well? (*Farvos-zeshe shrayen mir nisht? Zaynen mir aleyn shoyrn khorev gevorn?*)<sup>39</sup>

A month later, it became clear that the conference, as presented by the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, had resolved to treat the Jewish refugee problem as part of the overall question of refugees of miscellaneous nationalities. *Der Tog* responded to this by admitting that there was a general problem that entailed the mobilization of relief resources for masses of refugees but argued explicitly that the one has nothing to do with the other: As a matter of human honesty, one cannot place the suffering of the Jewish people and the Nazis' other victims on the same plane. Then, in an apology of sorts, *Der Tog* explained that it spoke this way not because the Jews' sufferings are dearer to it naturally, but because the Jews' ghastly plight is a matter of cruel truth (*groyzamer emes*).

The implication of this distinction, in the mind of *Der Tog*, is that the Jewish question at that time does not fall into the domain of caring for war refugees, who do need a place of asylum; instead, it is a question of life and death for an entire people (*In dem idishn fal geyt es direkt in lebn oder nit lebn*).<sup>40</sup>

Given that the American and British leaders rejected this principle of "affirmative action" in rescue, *Der Tog* could only call for grassroots protest action outside the political establishment to force the establishment to view the

<sup>39</sup> "Fun khurbn Kishenev biz khurbn Eyrope," *Der Tog*, April 26, 1943.

<sup>40</sup> "Di letste gelegenheit," *ibid.*, May 23, 1943.

matter in the way that it had been evading thus far. Politically, of course, this was a very guileless approach to take in the middle of the war, for the very reason of its profound moral and tragic essence. The headline of the editorial, “The Last Chance,” expresses the point very powerfully. *Morgen Dzhurnal* responded to the discussions about the refugees in a style that was no less pungent, if not more so. While admitting that there is something encouraging about the very discussion of the refugee problem, it fears, on the basis of experience, that the treatment of this question is like treating an illness that “drags on and on” (*farshlepte krenk*). Even now, the deliberations and resolutions at the conference are already emitting strange sounds, suggesting that the problem of rescuing Jews does not require special treatment due to its extraordinary severity; it is being debated in the spirit of the 1938 Evian conference, which, of course, took up the question of all refugees in Europe, including Jews. Today’s policy makers, however, forget that the situation now is totally different. At Evian, the discussants talked about finding refuge for suffering refugees, whereas now it is a matter of life and death for European Jewry. This makes the quest for permanent refuge a question of secondary importance where Jewish refugees are concerned. The policy needed now is one of saving lives; the “how” and “where” of the future continuation of these lives counts for less.<sup>41</sup>

One can still sense a ray of hope in these remarks, despite their critical nature, in the very attempt to persuade officialdom of the uniqueness of the current situation for the Jews. Two months later, however, *Morgen Dzhurnal* came out with an editorial titled “The Dashed Jewish Hopes” (*Tshesherte idishe hofenungen*),<sup>42</sup> in which the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy is propounded in even stronger terms. The main argument was the explicit question of whether the plight of the Poles, Czechs, French, Norwegians, and other peoples is at all comparable to that of the Jews. The oppressive measures that the Nazis are applying against the other occupied peoples are not materially novel relative to previous wars and occupations; where the Jews are concerned, in contrast, a totally new situation is at hand. They are being subjected to annihilation, a course of action that blocks all roads to deliverance.

The non-Zionist *Forverts* avoided such clear and unequivocal nationalist language. True to its Jewish and liberal outlook and its universalistic socialist patina, *Forverts* tried to strike a delicate balance between the general need and the Jewish tragedy. The two Zionist newspapers, valuing the national aspect of the matter as their supreme concern, expressed the specific and objective Jewish truth that, unfortunately, could not be denied as an unchallenged historical phenomenon.

This also explains why, when *Forverts* listed the countries that could take in Jewish refugees, it omitted Palestine whereas the two Zionist newspapers always included it, of course. This is not to say that *Forverts* ruled out

<sup>41</sup> “Retung tor men nit opleygn” (editorial), *Morgen Dzhurnal*, March 7, 1943.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, May 15, 1943.

Palestine as a refuge for Jews; practically speaking, however, in view of the British government's White Paper policy, its editors considered Palestine only marginally important, whereas the Zionist newspapers, while not oblivious to the political difficulty associated with Palestine, treated it as a national destination from the standpoints of principle and ideology, as *Forverts* did not at the time.

The most forceful journalistic expression of Zionist activism in the context of rescue was given by Hayim Greenberg, one of the most important American Jewish public personalities and the editor of the *Idisher Kemfer*. Staking his ground as one of the most prominent intellectuals in Jewish politics, Greenberg stated flatly that the silent response of the political constellation and the important nationwide newspapers to the authoritative reports about the systematic mass extermination of Jews gives Hitler, in a certain unintended sense, encouragement to persist in his murderous ways (*umdirekte dermutikung far Hitlern*). With pained sarcasm, he then explains the reason for the silence: Only millions of Jews are being exterminated and not hundreds of Czechs or French, as had been murdered in Lidice (*es handelt zikh bloyz vegn milyonen idn*). This phenomenon, he says, has no pertinent excuse apart from the conclusion that the Allied governments are not emotionally connected with the Jews' disaster, with the sole exception of the Polish government-in-exile, seated in London, which observes with gritted teeth the Allies' impotence to help Poles and Jews alike (*umbaholfnkayt*).

If so, what can Greenberg propose to attempt to rescue the few Jewish survivors? His proposals have nothing new to offer relative to those of other newspapers and relative to his own proposals a month earlier in an English-language article – written, as previously stated, before the official reports on the magnitude of the extermination campaign were made public. Therefore, he reiterates his proposal of stressing to the millions of believers in Germany, by means of the Christian churches, the moral imperative of rescuing Jews. He even reasons that American citizens of German origin might be mobilized to approach their countrymen. Greenberg himself is unsure about how much these measures, if taken, will truly influence and arrest the murderous juggernaut. Then, however, he challenges all the “savants” and skeptics who preach a de facto policy of “sit there and do nothing”: What more does the Jewish people, in its fateful hour, have to lose apart from the incessant attempt to save those who can still be saved? If the Jews balk at making such an attempt, what can they expect even from their friends? If American Jewry rests on its laurels and, heaven forbid, adjusts comfortably to its state of paralysis, who then can be trusted (*oyf vemen zol men hofn*) at this most desolate moment in Jewish history?<sup>43</sup> At this point, it is worth remarking that there was a difference

<sup>43</sup> “In der umglikekhster sho in unzer existents,” *Idisher Kemfer*, Dec. 4, 1942. In the same spirit, see editorial, “Nekomesh shpeter, retung bald,” *ibid.*, Sept. 18, 1942; Jacob Leshchinsky, “Neyn, nit shvaygn!” *ibid.*, Dec. 25, 1942; A. S. Lirik, “vegn shrayen un shvaygn,” *ibid.*, *ibid.*

between the English version and the Yiddish version, which came later in time. The former is more optimistic in hoping that Britain, and particularly the United States, would extend a helping hand to the European Jewry. The latter, in contrast, urges the Jewish people, specifically, to address a proposal to Nazi Germany in which it would transfer Jewish masses to Britain and the United States for the duration of the war. Greenberg subscribed to this fantasy not because he thought it realistic but because it reflected his activist faith (*gloybn*) in both the possibility and the necessity of doing something to effect rescue through the offices of those players, however few, who are convinced that the surviving Jews' fate has not yet been sealed for good. This, he said, contrasts with the faithlessness (*umgloybn*) of most American Jews, who have ceased to believe that large numbers of European Jews can still be saved. The disaster, he continued, is that many Jews in the United States despaired of such action long before the terrifying reports appeared and accepted the thought that all rescue attempts were doomed to fail. Even when certain actions were taken, Greenberg ruled, they were mainly for the historical record (*tsulibn historishn rekord*). Greenberg decried this fatalism persistently, opining that it stifled the Jewish public vigor and plunged very many people into despairing passivity (*pasivitet fun ye'ush*). Indeed, he continued, the Jewish people is powerless in its current situation, more so than ever in its history. Sadly, however, it must be admitted that the Jews themselves are overemphasizing their own powerlessness. By so doing, they conceded *ab initio* the possibility of demanding vehemently that the democratic powers begin taking rescue actions. In contrast, Greenberg lauds enlightened non-Jewish public figures such as the British socialist H. N. Brailsford, who, unlike the Jewish leaders, unveiled a rescue plan that, even if impractical, reflected the belief, or at least the wish to believe, that the democratic governments should be talked into trying to save Jews in every possible way. Here Greenberg referred to measures such as mediation by neutral governments, for example, that of Switzerland, which, he thought, had been successful in some cases, or addressed a general warning to those responsible for the murder operations that they would face punishment at the end of the war. These threats, Greenberg says, do influence the murderers, as evidenced by their public attempts to deny their gruesome acts.<sup>44</sup>

Greenberg's tragedy, that of the activist intellectual, stands out in especially strong relief against the background of the general tragedy because his call for action went unheeded. At the end of that year, he was forced to come out and repeat it to the public, this time in a harangue addressed at the Jewish public leaders who had squandered various opportunities at the international political and interorganizational levels to do something about rescue. One of the measures that Greenberg urged the Jewish institutions to take was to violate the Allied injunction against sending food parcels to Jews in Europe, a corollary of the Allies' economic siege against Nazi Germany. The Allies themselves

<sup>44</sup> "Nokhamol: di retungs-aktsye," *ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1943.



had deviated from the economic siege policy, Greenberg noted, citing the flexibility that they had applied in the case of Vichy France for diplomatic reasons and the very significant aid that they were providing, mainly for humanitarian reasons, to the civilian population of Greece. As for the Jews, Greenberg extolled the independent course of action chosen by Agudath Israel, which fearlessly circumvented all injunctions against the shipment of food parcels to needy Jews in the ghettos. Agudath Israel, he stated, was undaunted by those who accused it of acting on the basis of a Jewish egocentrism (*idishn egotsentrism*) that demanded a special and extraordinary status and treatment for Jews relative to accepted practice toward other peoples. Admittedly, Greenberg was altogether unsure that the Nazis would allow action on behalf of Jews as they were allowing on behalf of Greeks. He accepted all doubts in this matter. The doubts, however, must not thwart various rescue attempts *ab initio*; as long as even a flicker of hope remains, the attempts must be made again and again. Therefore, in a saliently activist step, Greenberg proposed that the Jewish institutions proclaim openly and officially that they intend, temporarily and due to the state of emergency, to disobey the injunction against sending food to starving Jews in the ghettos across Europe. And if critics say that this action, clashing with the war interests, is being taken because of the Jews, the answer should be yes, because of the Jews, because no one else is being threatened with murder in such strangely cruel ways. Greenberg concluded his opinion piece with an anguished outcry: Give us the same sad privilege that you gave the Greeks.<sup>45</sup>

It is not of interest in this discussion to determine how real the precedent of sending humanitarian aid to Greece, with the Germans' consent, was. What matters from my standpoint is to emphasize how elementally utopian Greenberg's political activism was in the existing political reality. Neither the official American Jewish institutions nor, especially, the Zionist Executive could afford to contravene the democracies' policy openly by sending food parcels to the ghettos in Europe. The case of Agudath Israel, which Greenberg praised for its actions, was different; Agudath Israel represented only a sliver of the Jewish public. In this sense, Greenberg's principled activism and Agudath Israel's practical activism were partners in thought but did not represent the Jewish public vis-à-vis the leaders of the great powers.

At this very time, as the newspapers wrote about various possibilities of rescuing Jews and how to go about them, the Communist *Morgn-Frayhayt* continued to be the great and consistent pleader for across-the-board unity (*eynikeyt*), that is, Jewish unity embracing all Jewish cultures, viewpoints, and countries of residence; unity in the efforts of all Jewish organizations; unity of war goals between the free world and the Jewish people; and unity in apportioning the funds that the Jewish fundraising campaigns were generating. None of the components of the "unity" slogan was novel; the other newspapers had been raising the same demands and proposals all this time. However,

<sup>45</sup> "Brekht di blokade!" *ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1943.

by gathering them under the “umbrella” of a single concept that also became a political slogan, the Communist newspaper’s stance acquired a national complexion that was indistinguishable from, and worded almost identically to, that of the Zionists. “We need,” *Morgn-Frayhayt* intoned, “the broadest and deepest Jewish unity [*idisher eynikeyt*] possible, not in order to grieve together, since such grief would be self-evident, but to fight shoulder-to-shoulder as the Jews’ contribution to the victory [*idishn baytrog tsum zig*], in order to make it possible to formulate our demands together so that everyone willing to offer assistance may do so in the best possible way.”<sup>46</sup> The last expression was borrowed from speech by the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, who had announced in Parliament that the Allied countries were seeking the best and most practical modalities of rescue action.

In editorials that it published almost every week, *Morgn-Frayhayt* attempted relentlessly to push Jewish public opinion and the Jewish public leaders toward unity. In this respect, the Communist organ was no different from the other Jewish papers except that, for self-evident reasons, it emphasized the initiatives of Jewish labor organizations in the spearheading of this national demarche. The upshot of these actions transcended the organizing of mass demonstrations, although the intrinsic importance of demonstrations was not belittled; it included the establishment of joint institutions among all political entities that might represent the Jewish cause. To attain this goal, marginal and inconsequential political scores (*klayzl politik*) must not be allowed to obstruct action at this fateful time for the Jewish people. Therefore, all Jewish organizations, irrespective of their political and social outlooks, must unite to engage the conscience of the United States and world public opinion.<sup>47</sup>

The principal way to attain rescue was to defeat the Nazis as quickly as possible. All Jewish newspapers said this, but *Morgn-Frayhayt* expressed the concept in a special way that was, of course, related to its ideological world and to the political interest that accompanied it and influenced it very powerfully: the recurrent demand for the opening of a second front. Admittedly, this demand was expressed in 1943 with as much urgency as in the previous year, when the course of the war turned around, but this time its importance was emphasized not only in hastening the end of the war but also in saving millions of Jews. The Nazis, *Morgn-Frayhayt* ruled, must not be given the latitude to murder millions of – invoking traditional language – holy Jews (*idische kedoyshim*) and no effort to save those who remained should be spared. This is the meaning of the “second front” (*ot dos iz der taytsh fun dem tsvейn front ... in terminen fun idishe lebns*). Thus far this device was not invoked, but now, given the absolute certainty that the Jews are being exterminated, the moment must be seized. The other peoples that the Nazis enslaved, too, are looking forward to a second front. What they have to gain from this, however,

<sup>46</sup> “On eynikeyt tsvishn idn iz shver tsu krign hilf fun droysn,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, Jan. 29, 1943.

<sup>47</sup> “Dos gantse idishe folk – tsu protest un aktsye,” *ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1943.

is largely liberation from grievous suffering; for the Jews it is no less than life.<sup>48</sup> This, of course, was a logical stance but not a practical one. The United States and Britain balked at opening a second front until they felt themselves militarily strong enough to assure a successful landing in Europe. In principle, however, as stated earlier, the Soviet state interests dovetailed perfectly with Jewish national existential imperative.

In the meantime, with no imminent likelihood of opening a second front, *Morgn-Frayhayt* pinned its hopes on the idea that something might emerge from the Bermuda conference. The paper expressed passionate hope for a memorandum that was presented to the conference by a Jewish institution that dealt with European Jewish affairs, containing the revolutionary proposal of granting all Jews under Nazi occupation the status of war prisoners (*krigs-gefangene*). The idea was a good one, of course, but was probably impractical in view of what was known about how the Nazis' treatment of Soviet war prisoners, not to mention the utter implausibility of Jews enjoying the status of American and British POWs. *Morgn-Frayhayt* also lent its support to another fantasy that was proposed in the document: to help the Jews in the ghettos by means of the Red Cross, as was being done for the Greeks, and to allow them to emigrate to Britain, the United States, and Palestine.<sup>49</sup> Hayim Greenberg, too, as we recall, demanded that the Jews be given the treatment that the Greeks were enjoying. He did not, however, entertain such flights of fancy as to seek for them prisoner-of-war status and allow them to emigrate, as *Morgn-Frayhayt* demanded.

Indeed, disillusionment quickly knocked on the door where this delusional hope had settled. A week later, it became clear that the discussions at Bermuda might skip over the main issue because they placed the cause of rescuing Jews at the bottom of their priorities. In the opinion of *Morgn-Frayhayt*, this happened due to the long-held antisemitic views of some of the conference participants and the fear of both the British and the American delegations of antisemitic trends of thought among citizens at home, who would accuse them of discriminating in favor of the Jews over members of other peoples. Such an accusation had not been expressed in other newspapers that criticized the conference resolutions. These papers, as we recall, stressed the fact that the Jews' uniquely tragic plight had not been recognized at the conference. *Morgn-Frayhayt*, in contrast, offered practical criticism that was not adequately stressed in the Zionist papers, not to mention *Forverts*. The criticism pertained to the fact that the conference had not asked Britain to annul the clauses in the White Paper that limited the immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine. Therefore, the gates of Palestine would remain half-closed. (*Di tirn fun Palestine vern blaybn azoy halb-ofn oder oyf a fert-khelek vi itst.*)<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Rateven – un vos shneler!" *ibid.*, Apr. 17, 1943.

<sup>49</sup> "Ratevn di flikhtlingn azoy lang, vi s'iz faran vemen tsu ratevn," *ibid.*, Apr. 20, 1943.

<sup>50</sup> "Vos is fort vegn rateven di flikhtlingen un felker fun Eyrope?" *ibid.*, Apr. 28, 1943; for more on the same topic, see *ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1943.

Late that year, *Morgn-Frayhayt* bruited a “rescue package” that would reflect the unity of the rescue efforts. The elements of the package related to winning the war (at the top), opening the gates of immigration to the United States to Jewish refugees, canceling the White Paper rules, and providing the ghettoized Jews in occupied Europe with medical aid and food.

*Forverts* began 1944 with an editorial that expressed optimism, of course. The war was approaching its hoped-for end; the Red Army was already perched at the Polish border; in the British Isles, an enormous American military force had massed in anticipation of landing in Europe; and heavy American and British aerial bombardments were steadily reducing Germany’s cities to rubble. A new free society would arise on the ruins of the Nazi regime and in it the Jews’ bitter fate should serve as a standard for the safeguarding of freedom. After all, had democratic society embarked on struggle against German Fascism as soon as Nazi Germany had begun to persecute the Jews, at which time its military strength had not been fully developed, the free world would not be going through the ordeal of this arduous and ongoing world war. Furthermore, the Nazis’ impending downfall should teach any other nation of a mind to persecute others that it faced the disaster of self-destruction.<sup>51</sup>

In this optimistic frame of mind, *Forverts* immediately demanded that the U.S. government adopt the already published proposal to declare the Jews of Europe prisoners of war – not only as one of the ways to rescue them but also as compensation for the democratic governments’ failure thus far to give the Jews’ suffering the humanitarian treatment that it deserved.<sup>52</sup>

Notably, this idea – a utopian notion under the conditions at the time – was passionately supported by entities associated with the Jewish labor movement – the editorial board of *Forverts* and the Communist *Morgn-Frayhayt*, as noted earlier, and the American Committee of the Bund.<sup>53</sup>

These ideas were carried aloft by a special optimistic breeze that originated in President Roosevelt’s announcement of the establishment of a special U.S. government board for the rescue of the Jews of Europe. The newspaper interpreted the decision as an official government commitment to take responsibility for the rescue actions, in conjunction with the Jewish institutions that had been active in this field for several years. It judged the decision to be a great historical act (*historishe tat*).<sup>54</sup>

In this optimistic tenor, *Forverts* discussed the question of the immigration of displaced Jews to the United States at the end of the war. In so doing, it said explicitly that this was not the time to go back and criticize the Americans’ current immigration policy, provided that no further additional strictures, which would be especially injurious to Jewish refugees who had managed

<sup>51</sup> “1944 – der yohr vet brengen fridn far der velt un derlozung far idn,” *Forverts*, Jan. 1, 1944.

<sup>52</sup> “Vegn idishe gefangene in Daytshland,” *ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1944.

<sup>53</sup> See Bund document, *ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1944.

<sup>54</sup> “Prezident Ruzevelt’s groyse historishe tat,” *ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1944.

to escape from the Nazis, be imposed.<sup>55</sup> This conciliatory approach was, of course, influenced by the hopes that President Roosevelt's statement about rescue had instigated.

The public change that took place in the United States on the topic of the plight of European Jewry also changed the newspaper's outlook on Palestine as a place of refuge for Jews. As previously noted, *Forverts*, unlike the other papers, had not mentioned Palestine as a possible haven for survivors in 1943. Now, after Roosevelt's speech, it turned its policy around, expressing unequivocal support for rescinding the White Paper restrictions while nevertheless objecting to the demand for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine at the end of the war, as had been spoken of in a resolution of the U.S. Senate on that topic. It explained its opposition to the political demand, which was deeply rooted in its editors' non-Zionist Jewish Socialist tradition, in terms of political prudence flowing from its agreement with the outlook of the U.S. State Department and the heads of the armed forces. Therefore, *Forverts* recommended adamancy about the cancellation of the White Paper, which was supposed to expire in 1944, on the one hand, and postponement of the demand for Jewish statehood to some future time, on the other. *Forverts* stressed that its recommendation pertained to a temporary suspension and not to the repeal of the Senate resolution. This compromise, it hoped, would be accepted in most liberal American circles, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.<sup>56</sup> Pursuant to this policy, *Forverts* enthusiastically congratulated President Roosevelt for stating that the United States had never supported the White Paper. Following this statement, which was released despite political counterpressure on the U.S. government from several Arab countries, *Forverts* crowned Roosevelt the Jewish people's greatest friend. It stuck to its belief that the cancelation of the White Paper should not be linked to the rescue efforts and the U.S. Senate's promise to favor Jewish statehood at the end of the war. Such a linkage, it said, might create political complications and even difficulties in canceling the White Paper,<sup>57</sup> which it judged to be the most urgent goal, the nearest one, and one that accorded with general Jewish interests. Jewish statehood, in contrast, was a distant goal to which not all American Jewish circles assented, not to mention the U.S. government.

It took only two weeks for the hopes pinned on Roosevelt's statement to begin to dissipate. The fifth anniversary of the White Paper – its expiration date – was March 31, 1944. A week ahead of this occasion, *Forverts* warned that there were no evident indications on the horizon that the British government actually intended to revise the White Paper policy even after its official expiration; thus, it continued, there was no chance of rescue for thousands of Jewish refugees who could reach the shores of Palestine but did not hold immigration visas within the White Paper quota that had gone unused during

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18, 1944.

<sup>56</sup> "Amerike un fraye Palestine imigratsye," *ibid.*, March 7, 1944.

<sup>57</sup> "Prezident Ruzevelt's aroystrit gegn dem vaysn papir," *ibid.*, March 11, 1944.

the war thus far. Accordingly, after the paper's initial enthusiasm, it concluded that the British government's stance merely demonstrated once again that the rescue actions were proceeding too slowly given the magnitude and celerity of the extermination operation.<sup>58</sup>

On this basis, *Forverts* assailed His Majesty's government's policy, noting the blatant contradiction between Foreign Secretary Eden's appeal to the peoples of Europe to help persecuted Jews and his adherence to the White Paper rules. The newspaper attempted to justify its stance on the grounds of universal principles. The question, it said, does not concern the most urgent practical measures that should be taken to save those who could be saved in coming weeks. The statement was one of principle, pertaining to Zionists, non-Zionists, and undifferentiated Jews: opposition to laws that limit Jewish migration to certain countries on the grounds of various rationales or fears. What is more, Palestine is the last country that has the moral right to do this in this or any respect. (*Un yedenfals is far unz Palestine dos letste land, vos hot dos moralishe rekht nit arayntsulozn tsu zikh idn!*)<sup>59</sup> This statement in *Forverts* was undoubtedly influenced by the Zionist trend of thought that had captured the American Jewish street in 1943 and that would prevail during the struggle for the establishment and consolidation of the Jewish state in 1945–1950.

Amid the new awakening of hope – the notion that the U.S. government's involvement in the rescue efforts would indeed help the *sheyris-hapleyte* (the Jewish “surviving remnant”) to survive – the Nazi army invaded Hungary, and that country's Jewish population, which until early 1944 had led a “normal” wartime life under the Hungarian antisemitic regime, suddenly faced the specter of extermination. Even so, hope still remained that Hungarian Jewry would not share the fate of its Polish counterpart. This rested on the assumption that the Nazis would not bother to continue exterminating the Jews' lives as they fought for their own lives.<sup>60</sup>

It took less than a month for this hope to expire. The headlines of the editorials that spoke of the tragedy now bearing down on Hungarian Jewry screamed: “Jews of Hungary Are Already Feeling the Nazis' Talons” (April 18, 1944); “The Terrifying [*Shoyderlikher*] Document” about the fate of Hungarian Jewry (May 12, 1944); “Why Are They Not Saving 600,000 Jews in Hungary?”; “The Jewish People Awaits an Answer to the Painful [*payn-lekher*] Question” (August 9, 1944); “Several Hundred Hungarian Citizens in Protest Demonstration in New York against the Murder of the Jews [*di idn-shkhite*]” (July 11, 1944).

Once the extermination became real, the U.S. Congress issued a sharply worded warning. Countering those who doubted the utility of such warnings, *Forverts* argued that one could understand their tragic innocence only against

<sup>58</sup> “Vi halt es mit der idisher retungs-arbayt?” *ibid.*, March 25, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> “Anthony Eden's rede un der ‘Vayserpapier’,” *ibid.*, Apr. 1, 1944.

<sup>60</sup> “Hitler's okupatsye fun Ungarn – di akht hundert toyzent idn,” *ibid.*, March 22, 1944.

the background of the disheartening reality. The very fact that the warning was addressed to the Hungarian people and not to the Hungarian government, the paper said, makes it more likely to have some effect. The Hungarian government, after all, is acting at the Nazis' behest, whereas ordinary Hungarians who are benevolently and helpfully inclined have more latitude to act. Of course, *Forverts* cautioned, no one can be sure how much even this warning will affect some elements of the Hungarian people.<sup>61</sup>

The pointlessness of this hope was rooted in the notion that decent segments of the Hungarian people would support and defend the Jews. (*Di antshendike elementn fun di ungarisher bafelkerung un virkn oyf zey, az zey zoln aynshkeln far di idn un bashitsn zey.*) The innocuousness of this demand is captured in the idea that the population could be asked to side with and defend the Jews and not in the more realistic demand that it abstain from collaborating with the Germans. The demand actually expressed, as had become clear in most countries that had large Jewish population centers, was altogether divorced from reality. Furthermore, one could not expect one large population group to sacrifice itself to rescue another. Indeed, as we know, the Hungarian Jews who survived – about 100,000 in number – were saved not by helpful Hungarians but by protection extended by the Swedish Red Cross envoy in Budapest, Raoul Wallenberg, and the Swiss Consul, Charles Lutz.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, one could not expect the population to match the feats of these diplomats, who acted by force of their human conscience and their diplomatic powers – even if the population had the best intentions toward the Jews, which, to put it mildly, they rarely did. These, however, are mere reflections sixty years after the fact. Consequently, they cannot be construed as criticism of the contemporaries' guilelessness; it was the only lifebuoy they could offer and it quickly became a mere straw at which the drowning Jews might grasp.

Two months later, another lifebuoy, which even seemed to be a life raft of sorts, floated across the waves that threatened to inundate the surviving Jews in Hungary<sup>63</sup>: an offer by Miklós Horthy. The Hungarian dictator, who still wielded governing authority in the capital, Budapest, held in his hands the fate of more than 100,000 Jews who were still alive in that city. For reasons of his own, he offered the American and British governments an arrangement that would allow the Jews to leave the city and emigrate to neutral countries.

Both powers viewed the offer favorably, provided that the Jews leave Budapest of their own volition and not due to coercion by the Fascist authorities. Shlomo Aronson, who describes and analyzes the historical trap that snared the Jewish people during the war years, uses newly discovered archive documents to track the progression of the negotiations painstakingly and explains the reasons for their failure. He lists four reasons: opposition from the Gestapo in Hungary, headed by Eichmann, to any deal concerning the

<sup>61</sup> "A vorenung fun unzer Congress tsu Ungern vegn idn," *ibid.*, June 23, 1944.

<sup>62</sup> See Aronson, pp. 230, 273.

<sup>63</sup> "Der bashlus fun Amerike un England vegn di ungerishe idn," *Forverts*, Aug. 19, 1944.

Jews; the German government's refusal to issue transit visas for Jews to neutral countries such as Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland; the refusal of the governments of Romania and Bulgaria, under pressure from their militaries, to allow Jews to cross their territory; and the hesitancy of the Allies, which dragged out the decision for political reasons of their own, thereby defeating Horthy's offer by their own hands.<sup>64</sup> The failure of these negotiations provides further evidence for Aronson's main argument about the existence of a political trap into which the Jews had been led by the Nazis' extermination policy and the political interests of the Allies, who foiled every meaningful rescue attempt, as in the case of the Jews in Budapest. In this case, as stated, Jews' lives were saved through the intervention of individuals who did not represent American and British political interests. This fact proves each time anew the national powerlessness of the Jews, who could not prevail upon these powers to set aside their "petty" political considerations in favor of the greater humanitarian action that they could have carried out for the salvation of human beings – the Jews.

The hopes aroused by the American and British governments' willingness to negotiate for the Jews of Budapest were not only wishful thinking. Three months earlier, *Forverts* advised its readers that more than 30,000 Jews had already been rescued from Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria and transferred to neutral countries thanks to the actions of President Roosevelt's War Refugee Board. While this paltry number offers no response to the overall problem, the newspaper continued, it does give the Jews a great deal of encouragement by showing the world that they are not abandoned wherever the Allies' grasp extends. It also encouraged the newspaper to demand the immediate opening of America's gates to Jewish refugees.<sup>65</sup>

The urgent call for rescue in view of the collapse of the Nazi war machine seemed to prove the basic premise throughout the Jewish press, that only victory would bring about mass rescue. Now that victory was impending, however, hundreds of thousands of Jews in Hungary were doomed to die precisely because the Nazis faced imminent perdition. This proves that the closer and more visceral the Nazis' defeat becomes, the crueler and ghastlier the Nazis' acts of torture will become even before they get around to mass murder.<sup>66</sup> One doubts whether the editorialist already knew the magnitude of the resources that the Nazis were investing in transporting Jews to extermination and labor camps – resources, especially those related to transport such as trains, that were needed for an army that was fighting on the front with the last of its strength.

Amid the reality of heightened efforts by the dying Nazi regime to murder the Jews, *Forverts* could only repeat its anguished bewilderment about the

<sup>64</sup> See Aronson, pp. 269–270.

<sup>65</sup> "Amerike ratevet idn," *Forverts*, May 6, 1944, "Es muzn glykh geefent vern 'fraye hafens' far flikhtlinge," *ibid.*, May 8, 1944.

<sup>66</sup> "Mit oysmordn di idn banugent zikh Hitler nit," *ibid.*, June 7, 1944.



U.S. government's failure to increase, in view of this very situation, its immigration quotas for Jewish refugees and its settling for expressing empathy with their suffering.<sup>67</sup> *Forverts* responded in the only way it could: by imploring its readers to donate to the rescue fund for Jewish children.<sup>68</sup> As the extermination campaign moved ahead ceaselessly, the only thing left to do, *Forverts* stated, was to appeal again to the murderers' common sense and announce that on the day of their defeat, which was approaching, the Allies would punish them and their accomplices in the gravest manner. It remained the paper's hope that such a warning might influence them just the same. No such thing happened, of course.

Late in 1944, as the Nazis inflicted their last brutal blows on the Jews and the Allies delivered one disappointment after another, doing almost nothing to save the few who remained, one hope persisted: the belief, which *Forverts* had avoided at the beginning of the year but supported passionately by year's end, that the U.S. Senate would confirm its previously stated intention of coming out openly for the establishment of a state for the Jews in Palestine at the end of the war. Despite the understandable difficulties associated with such a resolution, as the U.S. State Department pointed out, *Forverts* believed that the Jews' specific suffering in the war and the need to find a fair and permanent solution for those who survived obliged the enlightened world to support the establishment of the national home as a sovereign Jewish state. The disillusionment that followed was immense because the resolution, although supported by a majority of senators, again failed to "stick" due to State Department opposition.<sup>69</sup>

The "Zionization" of *Forverts*, so strong as to transform Zionism into an interest of Jewry at large, was also undoubtedly influenced by incoming reports about the distress that had engulfed Jews in Romania, Greece, Poland, and even France, even after their liberation from Nazi occupation.<sup>70</sup>

About a month later, both houses of Congress approved the aforementioned resolution in both of its clauses: the immediate cancelation of the White Paper and support for the establishment of a Jewish "commonwealth" in Palestine after the war. The Jews, *Forverts* asserted, should take profound satisfaction in this resolution and be proud of the warm sympathy that members of Congress, from both parties, had expressed for the Jewish national aspiration.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, in view of the destruction of European Jewry, *Forverts* joined the other newspapers in embracing the Zionist solution as its goal, even though it remained moderately non-Zionist in several causes of principle that Zionism championed, such as the "negation of the Diaspora," the superiority of Hebrew

<sup>67</sup> "A sakh reydn un veynik maysim," *ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1944.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 6, 1944.

<sup>69</sup> "Zey hobn alle 'fargesn' vos zey hobn tsugezogt," *ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1944.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1944; Oct. 26, 1944; Oct. 30, 1944; Nov. 16, 1944; Dec. 20, 1944; Jan. 7, 1945; Jan. 13, 1945; Feb. 7, 1945.

<sup>71</sup> "Di palestiner rezolutsye in Congress," *ibid.*, Jan. 29, 1945.

culture over Yiddish culture, and Palestine as the preferred destination among all free countries.

One month on, it became clear beyond doubt that Europe contained very few surviving Jews whose future had to be secured. The editors of *Forverts* expressed this bitter truth in an overt confession that attested, in a certain sense, to their having understood this reality throughout the war years. They admitted that until early 1945, despite the reports about mass killings in Poland and Russia, it remained the belief in the United States that the numbers reported may have been overstated. (*Nokh nit eynige togen tsurik hot men bayunz in Amerike, zikh getreyst, az filaykht zaynen di barikhten vegn di tsol idische korbones in poyln un in andere lender fun Eyrope ibergetribn.*)<sup>72</sup> In Jewish public circles, many optimists had continued to estimate the number of surviving Jews in Poland at far more than the half-million that the semi-official announcements stated. Furthermore, they had believed, most Jews in the Baltic countries had survived by escaping into the Soviet interior and no few Jews who remained in these countries were still alive in the ghettos. Now, however, the truth was out – a ghastlier truth than anything the greatest of pessimists had thought or imagined.

This being the reality, *Forverts* said, American Jewry had become the world's largest Jewish center, the one that from now on would be responsible for the people's fate. This statement quickly proved true. At the end of the war and in view of the Holocaust, the Jewish people vaulted from its wartime powerlessness and became an entity that fought for its national rights, with American Jews at the forefront of the Diaspora's political struggle. *Der Tog* wrote in the very same vein, addressing itself to the optimistic delusion that persisted until the truth became known.<sup>73</sup>

The two Zionist newspapers, *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal*, continued in the last year of the war to feed their readers the same information that *Forverts* disseminated widely. They, too, called for additional united struggle for the rescue of the surviving remnants, especially the Jews of Hungary, whose extermination was set in motion in 1944. They stressed that the failure of the aforementioned negotiations for the exodus of the Jews of Budapest was a manifestation of the Jews' powerlessness – not against the German murder machine, which nothing could stop, but specifically against the Allies, whose political interests played an important role in the demise of the negotiations. *Der Tog* explicitly cited Britain's share of responsibility for the abandonment of the Jews of Budapest to their cruel fate. Basing itself on information that it had obtained, it stated that under an agreement between the Red Cross and Hungarian Premier Horthy, tens of thousands of Jews could leave Hungary. Only two things stood in the way: immigration visas to Palestine and ships to deliver them to the destination. Britain had the ability to provide both. This, however, had to be done quickly and with no unnecessary

<sup>72</sup> "Der idisher khurbn iz fil greser vi men hot gemeynt," *ibid.*, Feb. 20, 1945.

<sup>73</sup> "A tragisher sakh ha-kol," *Der Tog*, Sept. 13, 1945.

political foot dragging or other rationalizations, such as the need to reserve the cargo vessels for military purposes. The rescue operation had to be given top priority. Such, however, was not the view of His Majesty's government, which did nothing to bring the rescue scheme to fruition. Now, the vestiges of Hungarian Jewry stared annihilation in the face, and Britain acknowledged the failure of the negotiations that had been intended to rescue them. Even if this was an expression of regret, a mighty empire such as Britain should not consider it satisfactory. Therefore, *Der Tog* insisted that the least Britain could and should do is announce that any Jew who managed to escape from Hungary or any other occupied country would be entitled to an immediate immigration visa to Palestine. Furthermore, Britain must instruct its diplomatic envoys around the world to help Jewish refugees by all available means, including marine or air transport. Only thus could Britain atone for the moral sin (*moralishe zind*) of having abandoned tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews to their appalling fate.<sup>74</sup>

These real-time remarks about Britain's political conduct match Shlomo Aronson's aforementioned conclusions to the last detail. The correspondence demonstrates the general reliability of the information that found its way to the Jewish press; it also points to the more forcefully critical policy of *Der Tog*, in which *Morgen Dzhurnal* concurred, than that of *Forverts*.<sup>75</sup>

The practical manifestation of this political trend of thought was the demand, expressed by both newspapers, for the establishment of a Jewish brigade within the British army.<sup>76</sup> *Forverts* did not add its voice to this demand for the reasons mentioned above, namely concern about the radicalization of Zionist political demands beyond the rescue of refugees. In addition, the Zionist papers demanded explicitly that the Jews be granted official international status as a nation at the April 1945 conference in San Francisco where the United Nations Organization would be established. This should be done, they said, as a moral obligation on the part of the democratic powers toward those who were murdered and were suffering, and in recognition of the Jews' right to be numbered among the nations of the free world. In *Forverts'* opinion, the Jewish delegation should include not only representatives from Palestine but also of the Jewish people at large, as the result of the struggle being waged for fifty years now by that portion of the Jewish people that possessed national awareness. In *Forverts'* opinion, nonrecognition of the Jews as one of the nations entitled to representation at the conference showed evidence of a Nazi attitude toward them. The Nazis, too, after all, distinguished between Jews and other peoples, dooming the former to death and the latter to mere enslavement.

<sup>74</sup> "England un di idn in Ungarn," *Der Tog*, Nov. 13, 1944.

<sup>75</sup> "Di tragedye fun Ungarishe idn," *ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1944; see also "In der letster sho," *ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1944; "Marsh tsum toyt un ruf tsum lebn," *ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1944.

<sup>76</sup> "Hobin kavod fun di idishe kedoshim," *ibid.*, Jan. 9, 1944; see also "Di idishe brigade," *Morgen Dzhurnal*, March 27, 1945.

*Forverts* admitted candidly that some Jewish organizations did not accept this view and did not seek recognition of the Jews as an equally entitled member of the family of nations. However, the paper did demand fealty to the demand for recognition from the organizations that had joined the American Jewish Conference two years earlier; thus, this body could represent the interests of the Jewish people in the United States. This demonstration of Jewish unity toward the initiators of the San Francisco conference, *Forverts* said, is a vital necessity for the entire Jewish people.<sup>77</sup> Notably, the paper's stance was inconsistent, to put it mildly, with the accusation that *Hamashqif* had leveled at the Zionist leadership for ostensibly having torpedoed the establishment of a joint Jewish mission.

When the founding conference of the UN took place a month later, this demand became another victim of the Jews' political powerlessness. The organizers of the conference, at the initiative of the U.S. government, resolved to annex to the American mission two Jewish representatives with adviser status, one from the American Jewish Conference and one from the American Jewish Committee. The latter had been boycotting the American Jewish Conference together with the Jewish Labor Committee, with which the editors of *Forverts* were associated. The newspaper's main concern was how the two organizations would present the Palestine question to the international conference. On the other issues – the Jewish refugees, cancellation of the White Paper, and so on – there was unanimity, *Forverts* claimed.<sup>78</sup>

At day's end, the national-powerlessness syndrome repeated itself. The American mission refused (*umviling*) to take up the Palestine question. Britain, of course, objected to such a debate vigorously, and the other countries were indifferent. Because the Jews were weak and helpless (*shvakh un hilflos*), all that could be done was to remember the five million who were murdered in order to draw from them the strength to keep up the struggle.<sup>79</sup>

As for the status of the Jewish mission at the conference in San Francisco – whom did it represent, the Jewish people or the Jewish organizations? – *Morgen Dzhurnal's* view was undistinguishable from that of *Der Tog*. It deserves emphasis, however, that *Morgen Dzhurnal* responded more radically to the blow dealt to the Jewish people's status at the conference. It urged American Jews to demonstrate against the vile breeze of nonrecognition of the Jews as a nation that blew at this conference.<sup>80</sup> The most important topic that the Jewish mission should place on the negotiating table in San Francisco, in the newspaper's opinion, is the future of Palestine, so that a state for the Jewish people may be established there.

<sup>77</sup> "A Yidisher reprezentants in San Francisco," *Der Tog*, March 10, 1945.

<sup>78</sup> "Idishe fartretershaft," *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Apr. 11, 1945.

<sup>79</sup> "Zoln idishe farshteyer gedenkn di finf milyonen idisher meysim!" *ibid.*, Apr. 25, 1945.

<sup>80</sup> See "Idn frage in San Francisco," *Morgen Dzhurnal*, March 6, 1945, "Idishe fartretershaft," *ibid.*, Apr. 11, 1945; "Idishe shtim muz gehert vern," *ibid.*, Apr. 27, 1945.

Although *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal* shared this demand equally, the latter adhered to it more consistently. During the debate over the public cause relating to the Jewish people, *Morgen Dzhurnal* took every opportunity to stress adamantly that the question of Jewry as a people lacking its own homeland, of which hundreds of thousands had become refugees, could be answered only in Palestine. In this matter, as in everything pertaining to the chances of rescuing Jews in the Balkan countries and, especially, in Hungary, even after the negotiations with Horthy fell through, *Morgen Dzhurnal's* outlook careened regularly from optimism to pessimism and back – between the sense of vindication that surged when the powers, especially the United States under Roosevelt, appeared to have embarked on vigorous rescue action, and the bitter disappointment that soon followed. In April 1944, *Morgen Dzhurnal* wrote that rescue action was proceeding and doing well. Two months later, in June of that year, it expressed profound disappointment over the small scale of this rescue action.<sup>81</sup> In May, it expressed hope for the rescue of tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews; by August, it proclaimed the tragedy of this Jewish collective.<sup>82</sup>

Summing up the stance of the two Zionist newspapers relative to that of the non-Zionist *Forverts*, I would stress several points. All three papers were of one mind about the possibilities of rescue and the resources needed for this purpose. However, they were differentiated in their national political demands concerning the status of the Jewish people and the solution of its problems after the war. The Zionist papers demanded that the international institutions debate these issues at once but failed to have this done. By expressing their demand vocally, however, they offered American Jewry, in the main, a political goal that, after the Holocaust, gave them a great advantage in presenting it to the community of nations and that led, after a difficult and tortuous struggle, to the establishment of the Jewish state. Thus, at the end of the war, the Jewish national powerlessness during the war led to political strength after it. The Communist newspaper, *Morgn-Frayhayt*, outdid itself in its national rhetoric, which grew in stridency as it became increasingly clear that only vestiges of the Jews remained in Europe, for example, in Budapest.<sup>83</sup>

Cold logic points out that the Jewish masses no longer exist. Furthermore, according to Marxist doctrine, there never was a Jewish “world people.” There is no doubt that, with the encouragement of the world Communist leadership in Moscow, the Jewish Communists reinforced the national demands of the Jewish people at large. As a symbolic example of this state of mind as expressed in *Morgn-Frayhayt*, it is worth noting the headline of an editorial

<sup>81</sup> “Retungs aktsye geht on,” *ibid.*, Apr. 7, 1944; “Retungs aktsye muz ongehn,” *ibid.*, June 11, 1944.

<sup>82</sup> “Hofnung far Ungarishe idn,” May 5, 1944; “Tragedye fun Ungarishe idn,” *ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1944.

<sup>83</sup> Between May and October 1944, this newspaper ran seven editorials about the rescue of Hungarian Jews.

in early 1945: “The Jews as Accusers and Judges.” The editorial recounts that the government of Bulgaria had decided to appoint Jewish lawyers as prosecutors on its behalf in the trials of Fascist criminals who collaborated with the Nazis in murdering or abusing Jews. Basing itself on this precedent, *Morgn-Frayhayt* demanded, as a rule, that it be Jewish judges and prosecutors who should bring to justice the Nazi criminals who had murdered their people. (*Idn aleyn veln zayn di onklager fun di murderer.*) Only this act would carry immense moral importance. (*In dem bloyzn fakt farshteyt zikh a moralishe bafridikung.*)<sup>84</sup> This demand was part of the “Jewish reckoning with Hitler,”<sup>85</sup> as *Morgn-Frayhayt* defined it.

Beyond the symbolic national turns of phrase, *Morgn-Frayhayt* positioned itself at the cutting edge of the internal Jewish political struggle for the establishment of a united body that would represent the Jewish people vis-à-vis the U.S. government and various international institutions. Accordingly, it raged at the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Labor Committee for their refusal to participate in the American Jewish Conference that came together in late 1943, an occasion at which the Zionists recorded a historic achievement when most Jewish organizations in that country lined up behind their demand for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine at the end of the war. Because the Communist Party had been invited to take part in the conference, the Jewish Labor Committee, dominated by a zealous and consistent anti-Communist mindset (abetted by the Bundist tradition of some of its leaders), boycotted it. The American Jewish Committee, in turn, shunned the Conference due to its opposition to the demand for Jewish statehood. *Morgn-Frayhayt*, invoking the venomous polemic style that was accepted in Jewish national circles of whatever persuasion, responded by calling the American Jewish Committee people “assimilationists” and the leaders of the Jewish Labor Committee “quislings.” Obviously, behind this national rhetoric stood the Communist Party’s political interest in joining the coterie of Jewish organizations in order, when necessary, to influence them in the direction that its leaders desired. Where the issue itself was concerned, however, the difference between the Communist political interest and the Jewish national principles had become blurred in the atmosphere of the time.

This confluence of interests – the Soviet and the Jewish – was especially conspicuous in *Morgn-Frayhayt*’s staunch and comprehensive support of the Zionist demands and the compliments that it showered on American Zionist leaders, especially Rabbi Stephen Wise.<sup>86</sup> The paper missed no political opportunity to express its support for the Zionist demands: the repeal of the White Paper; the unrestricted entry of Jewish refugees to Palestine; and the establishment of the Jewish Brigade, which, according to its paradoxical logic, would not only be of importance to the Jewish people but would also infuse with

<sup>84</sup> “Idn aleyn di onklager un di rikhter,” *Morgn-Frayhayt*, Feb. 20, 1945.

<sup>85</sup> “Der idisher kheshbon mit Hitler’n,” *ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1944.

<sup>86</sup> “Vayz’s bazukh bay Ruzevelt’n,” *ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1944.

inspiration the goal of establishing Jewish-Arab unity. The utopian logic that prompted *Morgn-Frayhayt* to express this idea was that the establishment of a Jewish unit or brigade would influence the Arabs in Palestine to demand the formation of a similar entity for war against the Nazis. To the paper's way of thinking, the two peoples that shared Palestine would draw closer to each other by standing together on the front against the Nazi enemy. To make matters clear, it is worth stressing that the editorialist spoke of the establishment of a Jewish national military entity for Palestinian Jews only; the other Jews, some one million in number, were fighting valiantly for the armies of their countries of residence.<sup>87</sup> *Morgn-Frayhayt* also explained its recommendation to vote for Roosevelt's reelection by citing the president's support of the Zionist desiderata.

All the national rationales that *Morgn-Frayhayt* expressed in the first few months of 1944 found distilled expression in its views on the Jewish mission to the international conference in San Francisco.<sup>88</sup> In a three-month period, February–May 1945, *Morgn-Frayhayt* devoted seven opinion pieces to this topic, more than any other American Jewish newspaper. It spoke on behalf of the Jewish unity that was represented in a ten-point document prepared by the heads of the American Jewish Conference ahead of the San Francisco gathering; it came out in favor of the demands of Nahum Goldmann, the Jewish and Zionist leader, for recognition of the Jewish national delegation. In each of its pieces, the paper reemphasized the Zionist interpretation of the Palestine clause in the American Jewish Committee documents. The headlines of its editorials mirrored their Jewish pan-national content: "The Jewish Representatives in San Francisco"; "The Jewish People's Ten Points"; "San Francisco and the Jewish Distress."<sup>89</sup> The editorials, of course, preached Jewish unity and the eradication of the internal disputes among the various organizations in view of the urgent and existential national necessity for unity among all Jewish forces. Thus the slogan of "unity" (*eynikeyt*), by which Jewish intellectuals in Russia reached out to world Jewry to mobilize their support for the Soviet Union in its war against the Nazis, now became a supreme imperative for the Jewish people, struggling for its national existence after the Holocaust. Back then, as the Soviet Union struggled for its existence as a state, and now too, as the Jewish people geared up for political and military struggle on behalf of its independent state, political interests and principled national aspirations merged. This fact created a paradox in the stance of the Jewish press on the national issue. The oldest and most important of the Jewish newspapers, *Forverts*, which represented the Jewish national cause consistently and powerfully in the cultural, civic, and humanitarian senses, refrained from representing it in the international political realm. The Communist paper, in contrast,

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1944, and added text in English. In all, *Morgn-Frayhayt* ran fifteen pro-Zionist opinion pieces between October 1944 and March 1945.

<sup>88</sup> "Ruzevelt's tsuzog vegn Palestine," *ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1944.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1945; March 22, 1945; Apr. 11, 1945; May 1, 1945; May 23, 1945.

marginal in its standing among American Jews, became the champion of this cause no less, and sometimes more, than the Zionist press in terms of its volume and style, which, as stated, was not altogether artificial and was definitely not false.

We conclude this chapter by taking a look at the organ of the American Jewish Congress (AJC) – the *Congress Weekly*, the main English-language political weekly of the principal American Jewish organization, headed by the leaders of American Zionism, Stephen Wise as president and Louis Lipsky as chair of the board of elections. The political line adopted by the AJC leadership in the middle of 1941 was one and self-evident: full cooperation with Britain in fighting the Nazis, even though the United States had not yet joined the war. The special topic in which this approach manifested itself was the debate between the large Jewish organizations and Agudath Israel concerning the sending of food parcels to Jews in the ghettos of Poland. The British government discouraged the sending of such parcels because such action would breach its economic blockade of Germany. The Jewish organizations decided to accede to this request, whereas Agudath Israel refused on the grounds of *piku'ah nefesh* (Jewish lives being at stake) and sparing the Jews from starvation. In an editorial, the AJC leadership accused Agudath Israel of violating the national interest by effectively foiling united Jewish action in conjunction with Britain in order to save a small number of its own members, including those who had privileged status and apparently enjoyed special dispensation from the Nazis to receive this aid. As a compromise, the editorialist proposed the establishment of a joint action committee comprised of all Jewish organizations, which would attempt to deliver the food parcels to all the needy via the Red Cross.<sup>90</sup> Cooperation with Britain and the United States in this field also attracted moral criticism and condemnation in Zionist circles. As we recall, Hayim Greenberg, editor of the *Idisher Kemfer*, inveighed against it with much vehemence.

Two years later, in 1943, the principle of cooperating with the British and American governments suffered a grievous blow with the publication of the resolutions of the Bermuda conference on refugee affairs and the statement in Parliament of the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that there were no special ways to rescue the beleaguered Jews. The *Congress Weekly* responded to this in an editorial arguing ironically that it was precisely this “professed sensitiveness” that evoked the fateful question: Is there really nothing to do for rescue even if negotiating with Germany is out of the question? The root of the problem, according to the editorialist, is that the American and British governments consider the problem of the Jews, manifested in mass murder, part of the general distress that had engulfed tens of millions of people in Europe. If this is the attitude, obviously nothing meaningful can be done to save the Jews from sure death other than, of course, victory in the war.<sup>91</sup> The

<sup>90</sup> *Congress Weekly*, Aug. 28, 1941.

<sup>91</sup> “After Bermuda,” *ibid.*, June 1943.



editorial was accompanied, not coincidentally, by another piece in the same issue of the *Congress Weekly*, speaking of the heroism of Szmul Zygielbojm and the protagonists of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.<sup>92</sup>

In late 1943, it seemed that a ray of hope had broken through the gloom with Roosevelt's announcement of the establishment of the War Refugee Board. The President's statement was defined as a healing poultice for a wound that was long painning American Jewry. A year and a half had passed since late 1942, when the first reports about the mass murders had come in. Since then, American Jewry had been relentlessly pleading and crying out on the victims' behalf. The Bermuda conference had been a total disappointment. Now the Rubicon was finally being crossed, even though the President's announcement spoke about rescuing refugees at large and the White House statement spoke of taking various measures to prevent the annihilation of the Jews and other minorities in Europe.<sup>93</sup>

Three months later, as the vestiges of Hungarian Jewry teetered on the brink of extermination, the *Congress Weekly* warned that the free world might once again stand aloof, as it had when the Jews of Poland were being murdered. The only thing left to do was again to ask the leaders of the great powers – the United States, Britain, and Soviet Russia – to warn the Germans that they would be held fully responsible for their criminal deeds.<sup>94</sup> Within less than two months, however, it became clear that the powers' warning had had no effect on the Nazis, as had happened in the past. Therefore, the demand was revised: The Allies should carry out massive bombardments, using hundreds of aircraft, to destroy the tracks, the trains, and the extermination camps. Was this an outlandish and stupid proposal that might scramble the Allies' plans? – the editorialist asked, and if it were so, he answered with bitter derision, begging forgiveness for being a fool mired in a “realm of fantasy” that endures only for those who believe that the rescue of the doomed may descend from heaven.<sup>95</sup> It was fantasy indeed; heaven-sent salvation in the form of hundreds of Allied bombers did not materialize.

All that remained, then, was to turn out once again for a mass mourning assembly in downtown New York on July 31, 1944, the day after the Ninth of Av. According to the *Congress Weekly*, it was a grassroots demonstration of women and men after a hard day's work in shops and factories, some of them “stooped,” some still “erect,” most having turned white-haired or gray-haired. Nevertheless they stood patiently, not even shuffling their feet, until the last of the speakers finished his remarks. The concluding sentence is worth quoting verbatim because it says a great deal about what the writer felt about the response of American Jewry at large:

<sup>92</sup> “The Last Stand,” *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> “The Task of Rescue,” *ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1943.

<sup>94</sup> “Where Rescue Is Yet Possible” (editorial), *ibid.*, March 31, 1944.

<sup>95</sup> “Saving the Last Million,” *ibid.*, May 19, 1944.

A decade and two will pass, and there will be fewer and fewer of these to whom the woe of their brethren across the sea is their own woe, and who are ready to answer every call to stand up and be counted.<sup>96</sup>

He was wrong. Sixty years after these remarks were published, Holocaust remembrance has become a Jewish national symbol worldwide, not because of sophisticated manipulation by the Jewish establishment, as several historians – of Jewish origin, of course – have been writing in our times, but due to the profound grassroots empathy of the sons and grandsons of the vestiges of those who survived those events. However, under those sorry circumstances of Jewish powerlessness – among those being murdered and among those who could not save them – all the *Congress Weekly* could do was write an editorial headlined “To Die with Dignity,” pursuant to a letter that the young historian Emanuel Ringelblum had written several days before he took his own life, in which he described life in the Warsaw ghetto.

In a different sense, the question may also be asked about the entire Jewish press: Did it stand with dignity with those of its people who went to “death with dignity”? I will answer this question in the Conclusion of this book.

<sup>96</sup> “Their Brother’s Keepers,” *ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1944; for more on the stance of the American Jewish organizations during the war, see Shlomo Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations: the American Jewish Community and Germany since 1945* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), Chapter 1, pp. 21–35.

## The British Jewish Press, 1939–1945

British Jewry in 1939–1945 manned the war front together with the entire British nation. Together with the Gentile British, it bore the burden and the suffering of those years, from the heroic evacuation of the forces in Dunkirk, to the heroic stand in the bombardments of London during the aerial blitz, up to the ballistic missile strikes preceding the end of the war. Such was especially the case in the ordeal that British society underwent during its year of “fighting alone,” from May 1940, after the surrender of France, to June 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. The other two Jewish societies discussed in this book were not put to such a test: The front never closed in on American Jewry or the Yishuv, although Tel Aviv and Haifa were bombarded at the beginning of the war and Rommel approached the Egyptian border in the summer of 1942.

During those calamitous years, the Jewish press in Britain undertook to represent the Jews’ political cause and fight for it in the public domain, even though this cause did not always square with the policy of Britain, which was waging an existential war against the Fascist regime. Although this mismatch of interests led to no political collision, it must serve as a standard in the evaluation that follows of the emphasis that the British Jewish press placed on the special distress of the Jewish people, especially when it was expressed from a pronouncedly Zionist perspective. This press was spearheaded by the *Jewish Chronicle*, a veteran weekly that celebrated its centenary in 1940; the Labor Zionist daily *Di Tsayt*; the pro-Revisionist English-language weekly *The Jewish Standard*; and the main organ of World Agudath Israel, *Di Vokhntsaytung*. All were mouthpieces not only of the Jews but also of the Zionist national cause.<sup>1</sup>

Given their Zionist outlook, these papers adopted a dual-edged critical stance toward the British government. One edge, from 1939 onward, related

<sup>1</sup> In this matter, it is noteworthy that in those years, Agudath Israel supported the idea of establishing a Jewish national home and even a Jewish state in Palestine, provided, of course, that it be administered under *halakhah* (rabbinical law).

to the White Paper and the restrictions that it imposed on Jewish immigration to Palestine; the other, especially from late 1942 onward, concerned the government's paltry efforts to do what might be done to save Jews, albeit only a few, from the Nazi inferno.

This press, like the Jewish press in Palestine and the United States, reported uninterruptedly about the plight of the Jews in occupied Europe from the beginning of the war to its end. Its information sources were Jewish and international news agencies and the press in the neutral countries. In the way it understood the situation, transitioning between cautious optimism and profound pessimism in the manner noted previously, the Jewish press in Britain was no different from its counterparts elsewhere. However, the two main newspapers – the *Chronicle* in English and *Di Tsayt* in Yiddish – placed greater emphasis than the others on the Jews' powerlessness and the estrangement that some Jews displayed toward their own.

When the reports about the systematic murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews spread publicly in July 1942, the editor of *Di Tsayt*, Morris Myer, termed the Jews in occupied Europe and the free countries "helpless in the meantime" (*dervayl hilfloz*), unable under the current circumstances to do anything about rescue apart from appealing to the conscience of the leaders of the free world.<sup>2</sup>

The Zionist Organization representative in Poland, Dr. Ignacy Szwarcbard, now seated in London, said much the same in the same newspaper. He admitted publicly that the only way to rescue a large number of Jews, so that at least part of the Jewish people would survive – was to win the war quickly (*Gevinen der krig – dos iz der hoypt veg*).<sup>3</sup> *Di Tsayt* was not the only or the first paper that drew this conclusion; its counterparts in Palestine and the United States had been expressing similar assessments. None of the others, however, used such vehemence in affirming this view, which, as I show later in the chapter, preceded the official attitude of His Majesty's government five months later, when the mass-murder rumors evolved into authoritative reports.

One of the most important articles that explained the Jews' powerlessness through the prism of their anguished appeals to western public opinion was penned by S. Goldschmidt.<sup>4</sup> His opinion piece, "The Veil Has Been Lifted," followed the reportage in June–July 1942 about the murder of a million Jews in Eastern Europe – reportage that did not profoundly shock American and British public opinion. The importance of Goldschmidt's article is its prescience: Half a year before the official reports about the magnitude of the Holocaust, Goldschmidt had predicted this tepid response and warned the

<sup>2</sup> Morris Myer, "Shiv'ah 'asar be-tammuz 5702," *Di Tsayt*, July 2, 1942. The headline of the editorial refers to the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, observed by observant Jews in commemoration of the breach of the walls of Jerusalem ahead of the destruction of the temple.

<sup>3</sup> I. Szwarcbard, "Gedenkt Varshe," *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Der shleyer is aropgefaln," *ibid.*, July 22, 1942.

Jewish public not to hope that the ghastly information would change the indifference of public opinion about the Jews' disaster. Due to the importance of the article, which transcends the time of its authorship in both the past and the future, I present parts of it in free translation.

Goldschmidt begins with a piercingly realistic pronouncement that leads him to a chilling conclusion: The reports about a million murdered Jews are nothing really new, nothing revolutionary, to those who read them. They know and understand that, all in all, the grim reports that had been arriving from Europe since the beginning of the war were no less terrifying than those arriving today. The reports are like a drug that befuddles and erodes the senses and emotions until they gradually grow numb and almost disappear as public manifestations. Therefore, the terrible tally now being disclosed for the first time has not shocked the Jews in the way that it has influenced the non-Jews. The reason is that since the beginning of the war – nay, several years before the war began – the Jews have been absorbing the tragedy of their people relentlessly until it has overwhelmed them; therefore, when the events reached their terrifying climax, the Jews did not have the strength to respond to them properly.

For non-Jews, in contrast, the lifting of the veil (*shleyer*) from the Jewish tragedy was a revolutionary discovery. For the first time, they peered into Dante's Inferno. In one stroke, they discovered the tragic truth that a million people had been murdered. From their standpoint, the revelation is so depressing and terrifying that they find it hard to grasp and respond to. The proof is the intensive moral response of democratic public opinion to the murders in Lidice. What happened in Lidice fits into the framework of human historical experience; what is happening and may yet happen to the Jews lies beyond their grasp, verging on the unbelievable.

To reinforce his remarks, Goldschmidt offers the example of a friend, a non-Jewish journalist, who took part with him in a press conference where details about the murders were reported. In his notebook, the friend placed a question mark alongside each tally of murdered persons. Consequently, the shock among non-Jews is so profound that it causes them to doubt the veracity of it. Indeed, many of Goldschmidt's non-Jewish friends have asked him whether the reports and the numbers accompanying them are really correct.

The perplexity of these shapers of public opinion in the British press escalates further in view of the source of the reports about the mass murders: the Polish government-in-exile in London.

This leads Goldschmidt to an agonizing question: Might the distress have been alleviated had the general press not concealed the fact that the Jews were suffering *qua* Jews? The answer is evidently no, but the silence on this point did cause pain. The thing that should be clear is that as long as the free world is fighting the Nazi enemy, the question of whether protest would help the murdered people is invalid. There are even some Jews who say that revealing the facts (*farefentlekhn di faktn*) is fundamentally erroneous from the Jewish perspective, because it may assign blame to decent people who appear

unwilling to help. Goldschmidt himself doubts whether the outcry indeed illuminates the enormity of the Jewish tragedy so powerfully as to prevent the free world from turning the page and moving on. In his opinion, the shapers of public opinion – journalists and statesmen – are convinced both politically and psychologically that the Jews’ hardships do not transcend those of other peoples, namely the Greeks, the Czechs, and the Poles.

Paradoxically, then, one may say pursuant to Goldschmidt’s remarks that the war had created a tragic equality of sorts between the Jews and the other peoples. Under these conditions, however, the Jews’ “emancipation” had come about not via the right to be free but via the fate to die. However, the invalid comparison of the Jews’ suffering to that of others did not plunge Goldschmidt into general despair. He finds slight consolation in the fact that the comparison gives those being murdered the “legitimacy” of being victims of the war. It follows, according to Goldschmidt’s Zionist outlook, that the path is clear for struggle on behalf of international legitimacy for the coopting of the Jewish people into the war against the Nazis. By joining the war, the Jews would both contribute to the victory and be numbered afterward among those who will participate in the international tribunal that will judge the Nazi criminals.

Notably, the public trend of thought noted by Goldschmidt, of not distinguishing between different peoples’ suffering, was officially endorsed nearly a year later at the Bermuda conference, convened at the initiative of the United States and Britain. I will return to this matter later. In the meantime, in the summer of 1942, as *Di Tsayt* explicitly noted the Jewish public’s impotence in trying to prevail on general public opinion, *The Jewish Chronicle* aimed barbed criticism of the Jewish public. Its comments appeared half a year later, in December 1942, by which time the terrifying reports that had appeared that summer had been confirmed once and for all. The response of the *Chronicle*, which until then had reported extensively on the plight of European Jewry but did little to evaluate it in its editorials,<sup>5</sup> was special, if not extraordinary, in comparison with the other Jewish newspapers in the three countries. The *Chronicle* pointed an accusing finger first at the Jewish public and only afterward at the governments and public opinion in the free countries. Excerpts from the editorial, headlined “The Slaughter of European Jewry,” deserved to be presented verbatim in view of their importance.<sup>6</sup>

Week after week, during these many sad and weary months, this paper has striven to awaken the public mind to the facts of the Jew-extermination being carried on by the Nazi monsters in Europe. Again and again it has cried aloud that the oft-repeated Nazi threat of Jewish annihilation was seriously intended. Week after week, with what was regarded in some quarters

<sup>5</sup> As against approximately 130 news items and articles that this newspaper published in 1939–1942, it devoted no more than 10 editorials to the topic.

<sup>6</sup> “The Slaughter of European Jewry,” Dec. 11, 1942; see also front-page headline, *ibid.*: “Two Million Jews Slaughtered.”

as sickening iteration, *The Jewish Chronicle* has demonstrated from reliable reports that the gruesome plan had already passed beyond the region of threat and was in process of actual and ruthless execution. Many Jews and most non-Jews, except for the leaders of the Churches, were unconvinced.

These remarks draw a distinction between general public opinion, which finds it hard “to believe the unbelievable” in view of its concepts and experience, and that segment of Jewish public opinion that has no valid moral and cognitive reason to disbelieve the facts that the newspaper has published.

Therefore, after appealing, in the routine way that was accepted at the time, to the powers to do whatever they could to help the victims and save the doomed, the *Chronicle* concluded the editorial by turning again to the Jewish public. First, it urged the public to participate in a public fast that the rabbis had proclaimed and to refrain from pleasures during the week of mourning. Then it issued a threat:

Any Jew, who should next Sunday, without the reasons referred to, ignore the call of our lay and clerical leaders, abstain from fast and prayer, and ply his affairs as though he were unconcerned, will rule himself out from K'lal Yisrael. He will proclaim himself not only mentally and spiritually blind but an enemy of his people. At him will be pointed the finger of contempt and he will have richly earned this opprobrium to the last day of his life.

It was a de facto call for the social ostracism of Jews who refused to empathize with their compatriots' suffering. More than it was meant to have public influence among the Jews at large, it expressed the emotions of the editors, whose voice had not been heard adequately in the Jewish public scene to date.

Remarks as blunt if not as threatening as these, aimed at that segment of the Jewish public that evaded or was indifferent to its national and moral duty, were not seen in any Jewish newspaper in the United States or Palestine, even though there, too, there was no shortage of criticism of the public behavior of individuals and, particularly, of institutions at this time of crisis. The explanation may lie in the editors' pangs of conscience over having failed, for nearly two and a half years since the war began, to cry out adequately in their editorials about the appalling peril that the Jews of occupied Europe were facing. This, despite the historian David Cesarani's accurate remark in his study about the history of this newspaper: The *Chronicle*, he said, reflected the “agony” of British Jewry when it realized the immensity of the terror being perpetrated in Europe without having the political strength to intervene meaningfully.<sup>7</sup> Cesarani, like the *Chronicle*, assigns some of the blame for the political powerlessness of this public to a Jewish complex that some of this public exhibited. The idea in these circles was to pledge all strength to maintaining the status that they had acquired in British civil society, namely to keep the Jewish problem as inconspicuous as possible. As Cesarani put it,

<sup>7</sup> David Cesarani, “The London *Jewish Chronicle* and the Holocaust,” in *Why Didn't the Press Shout*, p. 189.

their silence is the best reproach toward a society that, because it is Jewish, failed innocent people who were doomed to annihilation.<sup>8</sup>

These remarks, meant to reinforce the *Chronicle's* grievance against part of the Jewish public, lead to the next question: What stance did the newspaper take from then on, until the end of the war? Did it demand international assistance for its beleaguered compatriots with a vehemence that it had eschewed until then? The answer is yes, even though it knew that its voice was unlikely to land on attentive ears. By so doing, the *Chronicle* earned encouragement from the mainstream British newspapers and, especially, the unending support of the veteran pro-Zionist *Manchester Guardian*.

Two weeks after “The Slaughter of European Jewry” appeared, the *Chronicle* asked the question that transcended all others: “What now?”<sup>9</sup> This piercing question surfaced in the aftermath of Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden’s speech in Parliament, in which Eden spoke movingly of his empathy with the Jewish victims. The *Chronicle*, however, stressed delicately that many people considered his remarks “vague and hesitant” and were not being said by ingrates who disregarded the difficulties that Eden had placed in the path of rescue efforts made to that time; in fact, he had even thwarted them. The actions taken to date, however welcome, would no longer suffice. The thing needed now is an overt and solemn proclamation that Britain, the mother of democracies, would henceforth be a sanctuary for all victims of tyranny. Given the situation, most of the restrictions that had been imposed on those seeking asylum in Britain and countries under its influence or protection should be lifted. In so doing, state security should not be endangered where possible, but security constraints should not be treated with the same importance as the genocide that is under way before the world’s eyes. Giving security constraints equal emphasis would diminish the appalling significance of the disaster in both of its senses: the mass killing of Jews and the inaction in rescuing the few. Immigration permits should be issued to the 5,000 refugees in Portugal and Spain before Hitler’s accursed hand can reach them, and the president of neutral Ireland should be asked to open the gates of his country to children who had lost their parents, their homes, and even their names. Is there nowhere on earth, the *Chronicle* asked in agitation, for these people?

Notably, even though the editorial establishes the universal principle of rescue for all victims of tyranny, the examples it offers speak only of the Jews. A week later, it is true, these examples became a statement of history: The Jews in occupied Europe, as throughout their history, are indeed a “peculiar people” whose fate is about to be sealed by satanic forces.

Although the editorial reemphasizes the fate of the other peoples, its strident appeal to the governments in the anti-Nazi alliance concerns the Jews. Here, basing itself on the *Manchester Guardian*, the editorialist demands the cancelation of the immigration provisions of the White Paper in regard to

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> “What Now?” *The Jewish Chronicle*, Dec. 22, 1942.



fugitive Jews. Can one imagine an act of greater justice than the opening of the gates of the “national home” to these refugees? the editorial asked. Then came a harsh allegation: Withholding this entitlement from the persecuted Jews clashes with the moral tenets of the war that the Allied powers are prosecuting against Fascism; for the Jews, this “adds humiliation to physical devastation.” The point of this anguished rhetoric is not that there is hope for the rescue of a large number of Jews; on the contrary, the editorialist admits that, unfortunately, “only a fraction of the doomed could hope for deliverance” even if the practical rescue measures proposed from various directions are taken.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this tragic awareness of the Jews’ powerlessness, even the particular and limited efforts to save Jews came under question several months later. The *Chronicle* came out aggressively against a statement by the British Deputy Home Secretary who, on the basis of resolutions by the American and British delegates to the April 1943 Bermuda conference, reached the conclusion that the problem of Jews seeking rescue belongs to the general question of addressing the needs of more than 100 million refugees who were seeking asylum due to the war. Practically speaking, this meant no solution for the Jews other than the rapid conclusion of the war.

What this statement means, according to the *Chronicle*, is that whether or not the Allied powers are at fault for the Jews’ tragic fate, the Jews are helpless in dealing with this fate and powerless to change the situation into which they have been thrust. The democratic powers, too, can do “little or nothing” in this matter. Addressing this conclusion, the *Chronicle* inferred with pained irony that the annihilation campaign would continue until the Nazis are defeated. “This is all the world has to offer a people after its 2,000 years of unparalleled martyrdom,” it rued. In the editorialist’s opinion, this decision to abandon de facto the few Jews who might still be saved is accompanied by a humiliating attitude toward the Jewish people at large, namely by the withholding of the Jews’ right to fight the Nazis under their own flag. This “dishonoring” attitude “fixes upon the Jews the brand of the pariah and proclaims them fit targets for contempt and massacre.”<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the Jews, the nation that has absorbed a full dose of discrimination and humiliation, which experienced the useless deliberations at the 1938 Evian Conference, where the quest for a solution to the Jewish refugee problem was to have been discussed, and the 1943 Bermuda conference, which proclaimed this difficult problem unsolvable, even partly, in the near future – can do nothing after going through these two ordeals but shout “never again” and, of course, take action so that it will indeed never happen again.

This illusion-free awareness of the Jews’ tragic isolation steered the *Chronicle* to Hillel’s famous aphorism: “If I am not for myself, who will be?

<sup>10</sup> “Year of Doom,” *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1943.

<sup>11</sup> “Never Again,” *ibid.*, May 28, 1943.

And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, all it could do for itself is to demonstrate national unity.

It was on this basis that the *Chronicle* continued to criticize the behavior of some Jewish elements in the free countries. In late 1943, it termed it no overstatement to describe the response of the Jewish public as confused, stunned, and accordingly unable to grasp the reality. Furthermore, this subjective phenomenon of a response that is “not merely bewildered but divided” obviously amplifies the objective state of national powerlessness. Here the *Chronicle* was referring to the schism among the Jews between proponents and opponents of the Zionist demand for the establishment of Jewish military units under the national flag as an immediate step and the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine at the end of the war.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in the summer of 1944, after lengthy political negotiations accompanied by pressures from various directions, the Palestine Jewish brigade was established under the Jewish national flag as part of the British army. At that very time, in a satanic reminder of the Jewish national powerlessness, the Nazis embarked on the extermination of Hungarian Jewry. Early in this process, in June 1944, the *Chronicle* noted in alarm that 100,000 Hungarian Jews had been sent to the Auschwitz death camp and that the ostensibly “decent” German army, which controlled Hungary, was not stopping the SS units that, assisted by the Hungarian police, were perpetrating this malicious scheme. Thus, the *Chronicle* noted a phenomenon that scholars confirmed fifty years after the fact – the active participation of Wehrmacht units in the extermination campaign.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond this revelation, the editorial expresses the grim feeling occasioned by the indifference of British public opinion to the horrifying reports from Hungary. Unlike the situation a year and a half ago, in late 1942, only a few indignant voices, the paper said, are audible in this country – “perhaps because the chords of human sympathy have been dulled by sheer overuse” due to the relentless pressure of information about the Nazis’ brutalities.

Given this situation – Wehrmacht participation in the murder operations and free public opinion that had become fatigued with and unresponsive to the atrocities – all that can still be done is to demand that, at the end of the war, responsibility for these actions be imposed not only on those who initiated or perpetrated them but also on the entire German people, which, by dint of its silence, had made itself an accomplice.<sup>15</sup>

This was all *The Jewish Chronicle*, like the other Jewish papers, could demand: collective punishment of the German nation, which had elevated the

<sup>12</sup> Mishnah, Avot 1:14.

<sup>13</sup> “The Fourth Milestone,” *ibid.*, Sept. 3, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> See, in particular, Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*, Parts IV–V, which describe the annihilation of Hungarian Jewry.

<sup>15</sup> “National Responsibility,” *ibid.*, June 3, 1944; see also, “This Concerns You,” *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1944.

Nazi murderers to power and collaborated with them either by supporting them or by not opposing them. It was also the only remaining action that the Allies, which could not rescue large numbers of doomed Jews and did not try hard enough to save small numbers, could take to avenge those who had been murdered. This demand, paradoxically, was yet another manifestation of the Jews' national powerlessness: Its proponents exchanged their hope for rescue for a demand for the punishment of the murderers by the same governments, and the same personalities, that had not done enough for rescue. Things did not play out as the *Chronicle* and the other papers demanded, of course. This fact, however, does not diminish the public courage that was displayed and, especially, that of the *Chronicle*, which managed to represent the Jewish cause valiantly and proudly for internal consumption and outwardly as well, under the emergency conditions of a grim war in which positive outcomes were not always taken for granted.

## The Brief Days of Jewish National Unity

*Aynikayt, 1942–1945*

*Aynikayt* (“Unity”) was the organ of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which was formed in the Soviet Union in 1942 and dismantled in 1948. Born in tragedy and dying in tragedy, the newspaper began as an initiative of the naïve and carried on as an effort of the true believers. Both met their demise at the hands of the murderers whom they had sought to serve. The story began with an initiative by two leading figures in the Polish Bund, Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter, who had fled to the Soviet-ruled zone in Poland after the Wehrmacht occupied Warsaw, and it ended almost a decade later, in 1948, with the trial of the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Committee and their subsequent execution by the Stalinist regime.

The affair was researched with thoroughgoing exactitude by Shimon Redlich, who based himself on findings from Russian archives that were declassified for historians in the past fifteen years. The introduction to this chapter, then, is based on Redlich’s research.<sup>1</sup>

It began with an ideological and political paradox. Erlich and Alter were longtime persistent opponents of Stalinist Communism. Consequently, when they escaped to the Soviet-occupied zone in eastern Poland, the authorities summarily arrested them and, in the summer of 1941, sentenced them to death. Pursuant to the Nazi German invasion, however, they were released from prison at the initiative of the chief of the NKVD, Lavrentiy Beria, to establish an international Jewish anti-Fascist committee that would aid the Soviet Union in its war by propagandizing in the United States and Britain with the help of Jewish public opinion. Notably, this initiative came about nearly half a year before the United States entered the war against the German-Japanese Axis. Therefore, the Soviet government’s principal target was American public opinion and especially its Jewish segment, which, to Moscow’s mind, was able to influence the U.S. government. Erlich and Alter were known for their connections with leading American Jewish unionists and intellectuals, so Beria

<sup>1</sup> Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995).

sought to turn them into instruments in the service of his goal. Their committee would thus join other panels that had been established in the USSR on an ethnic or professional basis for the same purpose.

Beria ordered the two men to prepare a memorandum for Stalin about the essence of the committee idea. The document was duly produced and sent to its addressee in October 1941. Its contents were pronouncedly national: It spoke of an appeal to world Jewry to aid the Soviet Union and even suggested the establishment of Jewish military units in the Red Army.<sup>2</sup> After the memo reached its destination, about two months later, its authors were again thrown into prison, where they subsequently died – Erlich at his own hand in May 1942 and Alter by execution in February 1943. According to Redlich, the reasons for the reimprisonment and murder of the two men remain murky to this day. There is no doubt, however, that at least one reason was their national naïveté, which stood out in the wording of their proposals for relief action on behalf of the Soviet Union. This conjecture is reinforced by Redlich’s description and analysis of the history and demise of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1941–1945. At the head of the Committee, established in August 1941, stood three personalities: foremost Solomon Mikhaïlovich Mikhoels (1890–1948), a stage actor, director, and a public figure, a member of the supreme cultural committee of the Soviet government and a recipient of the country’s highest citation, the Order of Lenin; Shakhne Epstein (1883–1945), a journalist and editor, the editor of *Aynikayt* and the secretary of the Anti-Fascist Committee; and Itsik Fefer (1900–1952), a Yiddish-language Soviet poet and an activist in various spheres of culture. He was one of the spearheads of the Committee, the deputy editor of *Aynikayt*, and secretary of the Committee’s Communist Party cell. These *prominenti* aside, some of the most important writers, poets, and intellectuals in Soviet Jewry were active on the Committee, the best-known being the author and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg.

The Committee operated on the basis of guidelines that Erlich and Alter had established in their memorandum to Stalin, excluding the outlandishly utopian idea – a notion of “Zionist” nature – of establishing a Jewish military unit. They turned to American Jewry and asked it for enough funds to produce 500 warplanes and 1,000 tanks for the Red Army. In a typical manifestation of the national style of the Committee’s propaganda, it proposed that the tank be named for the Jewish historical hero Bar Kokhba!

In pursuit of this goal, Mikhoels and Fefer undertook a lengthy and successful tour of the United States in 1943. From the time it was founded until shortly after the end of the war, the Committee constituted a world Jewish legation, so to speak, in the Soviet Union – as demonstrated by appeals to its leaders from Jews in the various provinces of the USSR. One may also say that, practically and unofficially, the Committee and especially its leaders became the

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed discussion of this document appears in my book, *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897–1985* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 171–173.

representatives of the Jewish ethnic group in the USSR in various respects: the war on antisemitic manifestations in the country's provinces, especially the western ones once they were liberated from Nazi occupation; broaching ideas for a new Jewish settlement project in the Crimea (discussed later in this chapter); and expanding the Jewish cultural autonomy in Birobidjan. The Committee also engaged in fostering relations with Zionist parties and circles in Palestine – as long as the Communist Party allowed it to do so, of course.

The Committee's national mouthpiece, *Aynikayt*, made its debut in June 1942. The paper's circulation came to 5,000–10,000 at various times, all numbers being approximations. Its distribution increased particularly at the end of the war in the western regions of the Soviet Union. The Communist authorities attributed this to a surge in nationalist tendencies among Soviet Jews and it was certainly one of the reasons, if not the most important reason, for the deactivation of the Committee in 1948. The chair of the Committee, Solomon Mikhoels, was evidently murdered at the personal behest of Stalin in 1948. Other activists were imprisoned and tortured during the 1949–1953 period. Three of them, including Itsik Fefer, were put on trial in 1953 and executed. This marked the end of the road for those guileless souls who believed in the possibility of a Jewish national revival in the Soviet Union, or at least had expressed such a thing in the spirit of the time.

This chapter concerns itself with these innocents' national aspirations, which they voiced publicly in Yiddish and paid for with their lives. Notably, as Redlich's research shows, the expression of the Jewish national question in *Aynikayt* was a compromise of sorts between two approaches. One approach favored emphasis on the Jewish national question within the framework of the ideological common denominator that the Communist Party imposed on all of Soviet society's constituent nationalities. The second approach, mirroring the Communist tradition that frowned on recognizing the Jews as equals among the Soviet nationalities, sought to soft-pedal the Jewish cause without forgoing it from the standpoint of principle. However, even in view of this compromise in regard to the Communist Party's tradition of opposing Jewish nationalism – a tradition as old as the Party, even predating the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 – and the Soviet government's policy during the twenty-five years preceding the beginning of the war, makes the national revival expressed in *Aynikayt* highly significant, significant enough to cause its exponents their lives.

In a nutshell, one may say that *Aynikayt* was created as an organizational framework and a journal that featured Jewish national indicators but emphatically Soviet current political content. In the dynamics of the realities of the time, however, content evolved into framework and vice versa – that is, the Jewish national consciousness became the content and the Soviet political interest became the framework. This turnabout, first manifested in 1942 and enduring until 1945–1946, found salient expression in *Aynikayt* as a restrained display, in a manner of speaking, of the national views and mindsets that dominated the Committee's internal debates. As our discussion continues in

this chapter, we will compare the two levels of these debates, the overt and the covert.

The newspaper's name, *Aynikayt* (Unity), was not original. This journal was preceded by another publication of the same name, although spelled somewhat differently in the Yiddish: the American Communist newspaper *Aynikayt*, published in 1927 by the Jewish tailors and furriers in the United States. This proto-*Aynikayt* had been preceded by *Glaykhbeyt* (Equality), edited by Shakhne Epstein, who had migrated to the United States briefly before returning to the USSR.<sup>3</sup> In 1942, as noted earlier, the same Epstein was named editor of *Aynikayt* on behalf of the Anti-Fascist Committee. Thus, the title *Aynikayt* originally denoted equality among the Jewish trade unions in New York and had nothing to do with Jewish national unity. On the contrary: In Marxist thinking, the very concept of Jewish unity is fundamentally illegitimate.

Nevertheless, fifteen years later, the newspaper *Aynikayt* addressed the Jewish people under the baton of the selfsame editor.

In the summer of 1942, the debut edition of *Aynikayt* published two documents that were designed to sketch the national framework of the Anti-Fascist Committee and its organ, *Aynikayt*.<sup>4</sup> The lines were drawn in the paper's appeal to world Jewry to demonstrate unity (*eynikayt*) in the struggle against the Nazis, foremost by furnishing the Red Army with enough material aid to manufacture 1,000 tanks and 500 warplanes.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of class unity, promoted fifteen years earlier, now took on a war interpretation. The anticapitalist struggle, in turn, metamorphosed into a war on Fascism, a life-or-death struggle that the Jews should pursue arm in arm with other peoples against the Nazi enemy. Here, the editorialist added, by virtue of the Jews' mobilization for this struggle in various ways, Soviet Jewry would rapproche with Jews in other countries and become acquainted with each other's lives and struggles (*zi vet bakant makhn di sovetishe idn mitn lebn un kamf fun zeyer blut-eygene in andere lender*). Note that the appeal is addressed to Jews abroad and not to the Jewish people abroad, those whose connection is based on ethnic or even racial origin – "*blut-eygene*." These Jews, dispersed in various countries, are brethren (*brider*) but were not until then defined as a people or as a nation. In reference to the Soviet Jews, too, the Committee did not invoke the concept of peoplehood. Indeed, the document states that together with the Soviet peoples (*felker*), the Jews, singly and collectively (*ale vi eyner*), have risen to defend their homes. It is important to emphasize these nuances because the Communist political culture strictly adhered to them generally and in regard to the Anti-Fascist Committee activists particularly. Notably, at the Committee's founding assembly in the

<sup>3</sup> See Shakhne Epstein, "Fun 'Glaykhbeyt' tsu 'Aynikayt,'" *Aynikayt*, April 1, 1927, and *ibid.*, No. 1, March 25, 1927.

<sup>4</sup> "*Aynikayt* in kamf" (editorial): "Tsu di idn fun gor der velt," *Aynikayt* 1, June 7, 1942.

<sup>5</sup> S. Mikhoels, "1,000 tankn, 500 bombardiern!" *ibid.*

summer of 1941, the keynote speakers – Mikhoels, Peretz Markish, and David Bergelson – spoke of a Jewish people, whereas Ilya Ehrenburg, in his impassioned remarks, delivered to demonstrate his return to the Jewish fold, did not.

Ten days after the appeals to the Jews were published, an editorial in *Aynikayt* invoked the concept of a “Jewish people.” Repeating the demand to speed up preparations for the opening of a second front in Europe and to step up fundraising for the purchase of weapons that the Red Army needed, the editorial emphasized the following fact: For a year now, the multinational Soviet people (*filnatsyonale*) has been waging that carries the significance of saving all of humankind, *including the Jewish people (bemeyle for der retung funem idishn folk)* (emphasis added). It is this contribution, in *Aynikayt*’s opinion, that will show the whole world the identity of interests between the struggle of Soviet Russia and that of the Jews, who are dispersed across the face of the earth.<sup>6</sup> From this point on, *Aynikayt* legitimized the concept of a Jewish people foremost within the framework of Soviet society. Therefore, the paper stated when discussing the status of the Jewish autonomous area in Birobidjan (see later in the chapter) that, together with the peoples that have risen to life (*oyfgerikhhte felker*), the Jewish people (*dos idishe folk*) is also rising to resist the Fascist menace. This equality between the Soviet peoples and the reborn Jewish people is manifested in their inseparability, akin to the inseparability of the front and the rear. Both are fighting at the front and both are contributing to the Soviet war economy by going about their work in their respective autonomous areas. Thus the war is furthering the normalization of the Jewish people’s status in the Soviet Union among the Soviet peoples.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, the war is a struggle not only for the freedom of the Soviet homeland but also for the dignity of the Jewish people (*far der ere fun undzer folk*).<sup>8</sup> Wherever national honor is at stake, as it is in any national movement and Zionism in particular, references to history and its mythic heroes are important. Therefore, the editorialist states, every Jewish commander and soldier in the Red Army must fight like Samson and Bar Kokhba (*yeder idisher shlakhtman un komandir fun der royter armey muz zayn a Shimshn hagiber un a Bar Kokhba*).<sup>9</sup> Driven by their national passion, the editors of *Aynikayt*, marking the first anniversary of the founding of the Anti-Fascist Committee, termed this event a turning point in the history of the Jewish people (*a vegn-punkt in der geshikhhte funem idishn folk*). Accordingly, the Committee addresses its first appeal to world Jewry as representative of the Jewish people (*forshteyer funem idishn folk*) and urges it to fight together against the enemy of both humankind and of the Jews. In this struggle, Soviet Jewry is the leading player, of course, due to the valorous acts of its

<sup>6</sup> “Yeder tog is tayer,” *ibid.*, June 17, 1942.

<sup>7</sup> “Vi in shlakht azoy in arbet,” *ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1942.

<sup>8</sup> “Far der frayhayt fun undzer land,” *ibid.*, July 5, 1942.

<sup>9</sup> “Dos heymland is in gefar,” *ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1942.



soldier-offspring and its willingness to sacrifice for its homeland and its people. Admittedly, the editorialist continues, Jewish history records chapters of sublime heroism in the people's struggle against subjugation and slavery, but no such chapter can match the level of heroism that the Soviet Jewish soldiers have attained. Accordingly, it is world Jewry's sacred duty (*heyliker khoyv*) to contribute to the Red Army and its Jewish soldiers.<sup>10</sup> The concept of "holy" (*heyliker*) may not have been meant in the religious context, but it fit into the national-religious atmosphere that enveloped the fighting Russian nation and was encouraged by the Communist authorities, which also urged the clergy, whom it had been persecuting until then, to enlist in the struggle and open the churches to the believers whose blessing the mobilized masses sought.

This spirit also wafts from Mikhoel's speech, which was broadcast over Soviet radio to American and British Jewry ahead of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Mikhoels spoke of "our grandparents" (*undzere zeydes*) who used these occasions to beseech the Creator of the Universe for redemption and deliverance. Now, however, the Jews had a new prayer to deliver: cursing their enemies, not in a prayer of words but in rather one of actions on the front and in the rear, at work and in creative endeavor. The question posed endlessly to the brethren in the Allied countries was whether they fully grasped the fatefulness of the hour (*un ir undzere brider in oysland tsi hot ir ot dos banumen bizn sof*)<sup>11</sup>; after all, they owed it to their people.

One may, of course, state correctly that this language and its metaphorical baggage were designed for external consumption, for Jews outside the Soviet Union. Even so, however, in the more-than-slightly religious atmosphere in Russia and under a regime that weighed every word via "minders" from official institutions and secret agents, these metaphors, culled from the religious and historical tradition, were significant in the climate of Jewish national awakening. The rhetorical national passion became a political dynamic in late 1942 and in 1943–1944. It peaked with the publication of greetings to a conference of intellectuals in the United States that had been called by an *Aynikayt* committee established at the initiative of the leadership of the Jewish section of the American Communist Party. The greetings that were addressed to this gathering, published in a special April 1943 edition of *Aynikayt*, included, first and foremost, and in a prominent location, best wishes from the president of the Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann, and Dr. Israel Goldstein, two American Zionist leaders and prominent personalities; Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, head of the Mizrahi movement; and the presidents of Hadassah and World Agudath Israel.

The programmatic statement preceding the conference first spoke of the urgent need to establish a world Jewish organization to build Jewish national unity on two pillars: Soviet Jewry and American Jewry. The principal task of the organization at this time is, of course, maximum mobilization of Jewish

<sup>10</sup> "Der heyliker khoyv," *ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1942.

<sup>11</sup> "Der khoyv farn folk," *ibid.*, March 25, 1943.

forces for the war against the Nazis. The historical mission of the united organization, however, must not be limited to that. The organization must outlive the war to participate in reorganization of the free world after the victory over Fascism. For the construction of the new world order, the Jewish people need a setting that will unify it under the leadership of Soviet and American Jewry in order to revitalize Jewish life in the various countries on the basis of full equality of civil rights, and also to build the Jewish national home in the Land of Israel (*oyfboy fun der idisher natsyonaler heym in Erets Yisroel*).<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy that the conference was not supported by all Jewish organizations. The Confederation of Jewish Trade Unions and the unions' close associate, the consistently anti-Communist mainstream newspaper *Forverts*, expressed their opposition to it for fear that it would attest to a Communist plot to take over the American Jewish organizations. In contrast, the Zionist leadership in United States and Palestine, and especially the Jewish press in these countries – in Hebrew and in Yiddish – welcomed the reconnection with Soviet Jewry from its inception in 1941, when the Soviet Jewish intellectuals urged world Jewry to mobilize on behalf of the Soviet Union in its war against the Nazis. The range of congratulations that were sent to this conference, from the Zionists to Agudath Israel – in addition to those from the Anti-Fascist Committee – was published in the New York edition of *Aynikayt*, but not in the Moscow edition. They could not have escaped the watchful eyes of the Party's ideological minders. At this stage of the war, however, the supervision was adapted to the urgent needs of the Red Army; therefore, the end of defeating the Nazis sanctified the means of the world Jewish national passion.

To promote this goal, the chairman of the Committee, Mikhoels, and the third-ranking member of the leadership, the author Itsik Fefer, were sent to the United States in 1943 for a tour of the Jewish scene. They crisscrossed North America – the United States, Canada, and Mexico – for several months and came home with very favorable impressions of their achievements in their appearances before their fellow Jews in these countries, in a report that they submitted to the third conference of the Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow.<sup>13</sup>

Fefer's enthusiastic survey received official confirmation in an editorial headlined "Happy Tidings" (*Freydike grusn*). After describing the mass assembly that had been called in New York in the visitors' honor and the warmth with which they were received everywhere in the United States and the neighboring countries; after emphasizing the useful contacts that the visitors had established with organizations such as JDC and the World Jewish Congress; and after taking the opportunity to criticize derisively the opponents of the visit, the editorialist summed up the matter in the national spirit that had gripped the dispersed Jews everywhere, defining it as the Anti-Fascist

<sup>12</sup> The text appeared in a special edition of *Aynikayt* in New York, April 1943.

<sup>13</sup> See "Idn in oysland in kamf kegn fashizm," remarks by Itsik Fefer at the third Committee conference, *ibid.*, April 20, 1944.

Committee's duty to fulfill the positive impressions that its emissaries to the American continent had brought back. The Committee has proved itself to be a highly important player due to the popularity that it has attained among the Jews, as demonstrated during the visit. Accordingly, it is charged with consolidating the Jewish people's forces to counter Fascism more extensively all over the world (*konsolidirn ale koykbes funem idishn folk in ale velt teyln*).<sup>14</sup> These remarks were accompanied, in a similar spirit and in similar content, by the concluding statement of the third conference of the Anti-Fascist Committee, which defined the delegates as emissaries of the Jewish people (*di forsbteyer funem idishn folk*) who turn to "the Jewish people the world over" (*gor der velt*).<sup>15</sup>

This appeal, like those preceding it during the three years of the war (since 1941), was always reasoned in terms of the Red Army's valorous struggle against the Nazi regime. This exhaustingly repeated message had three facets: historical, political, and national. Historically, it was a fact that the Red Army was carrying the heaviest burden and making the greatest sacrifices of all in the war against the Nazis; such had been known since the first month of Operation Barbarossa. Politically, it was obvious and understood that the Soviet Union wished to strengthen its political standing among the democracies by means of propaganda that positioned the Red Army's war in the center. From the national standpoint, there is no doubt that the share of Soviet Jews in the Red Army on the front, the number of those dying in action, and the proportion of those receiving citations for heroism surpassed immeasurably those of Jews in the American and British armies and volunteers from the Yishuv in Palestine. While stressing these points, however, *Aynikayt* made sure to mark the memory of the Warsaw ghetto rebels each year and to praise the excellence of Jewish soldiers in the U.S. Army.

The two objective phenomena – the Red Army's warfare and Soviet Jews' role in it – sufficed to stir national sentiments among Soviet Jews and nurture worldwide Jewish passion and fraternity as a self-evident spontaneous human phenomenon. The question to ask here, however, is whether the helmsmen of the Anti-Fascist Committee equipped the emotional awakening with an ideological basis. Indeed, they did. A year before he died of a severe illness, Shakhne Epstein – secretary of the Committee, editor of *Aynikayt*, and the Committee's number-two man after Mikhoels – tackled the national ideology that was emerging from the battlefields where Jews were fighting and the Nazi concentration camps where they were being put to death. In early 1943, Epstein published two articles with headlines that speak for themselves: "Leninist Patriotism" and "Lenin's With Us."<sup>16</sup> In the first piece, Epstein lauds the awakening of patriotism in the Soviet Union, which is steadily gathering strength in its war against the Nazi enemy. The Red Army's victories, he said,

<sup>14</sup> "Freydike grusn," *ibid.*, Jan. 13, 1944.

<sup>15</sup> "Tsu di idn fun gor der velt!" *ibid.*, April 30, 1944.

<sup>16</sup> "Leninisher Patriotizm," *ibid.*, Jan. 18, 1943; "Lenin iz mit undz," *ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1943.

are reinforcing unity in the multinational Soviet state. Dialectically speaking, then, the patriotic fervor is paving the way to an international Communist society.

The second article, "Lenin's With Us," offers an unconventional take on the status of Soviet Jews as a national collective and attests to the development that occurred in the thinking of Epstein and his associates. Here Epstein, of course, attributes the change in the Jews' status, from objects of discrimination under Czarist rule to an equally entitled nation that has its own territorial district, to Lenin's doctrine and also, of course, Stalin's. A year later, Epstein ran an article of far-reaching significance, "The Rebirth of a People" (*Dos vidergeburt fun a folk*).<sup>17</sup> The headline already speaks for itself: rebirth! – the one that has proceeded despite the quondam Czarist regime and the liberal bourgeois regimes, which recognized the Jews not as a people but only as a religion and considered them a dangerous collective that should be treated with suspicion if not racist antisemitic hatred. All of Jewish history, however, Epstein claims, belies the malicious fiction that Jews have faced from all directions – from Czarist reactionism to the ostensible liberal progress (*Di gantse geshikhthe funem idishn folk iz eyn durkhoytsike opleykenung fun di nider-trekhtike bilbulim mitsad di fintsterlekhen fun ale zaytn*). This attitude traces to one thing only: The Jews have no national territory of their own, anywhere. How surprising it is to hear Epstein, a Russian Bundist in the past and a Soviet Communist in the present, put forward this pronouncedly Borochovian Zionist premise. Were that not enough, he accompanies this piece of Borochovian ideology with a Dubnowian historical outlook on the existence of a world Jewish people (*folk*). This remark, of course, is but a reflection that leaves room for doubt whether Epstein was aware of the meaning of his ideas.

In contrast, Epstein leaves no doubt whatsoever about the root of the world Jewish problem: antisemitism in its various periods and metamorphoses. The Soviet citizens, he says with firm commitment, have found the right solution in the constitution that Comrade Stalin has bestowed on the soviet peoples, the Jews included.

Epstein, of course, cannot come out and say that the Soviet regime, which has given the Jews full equality in civil rights, has only partially recognized their equality among the other Soviet peoples, in a way that is lacking in decisive importance in regard to the Jewish national problem in the Soviet Union, by establishing a quasi-Jewish cultural autonomous area in Birobidjan. I will return to this topic later on.

Thus, by circumventing the original problem – Communism's essentially negative attitude toward Jewish nationhood – Epstein grasps at the war as the reason for the rebirth of the Jewish people. After all, if the Jews, together with the other Soviet peoples, have displayed such exalted heroism in war against the Nazis, one cannot deny them the collective national right to develop freely

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Oct. 8, 1944.

and equally among the other peoples (*tsuglaykh mit ale andere felker*). Here, as we will see, he is referring not only to the Soviet peoples but to peoples at large.

In Epstein's opinion, the Jewish question during the war and how to solve it after the war evokes much interest in foreign countries (*a sakh khakires*) and has led to various publicly voiced proposals. This led to a surprising statement, three years before the famous speech of the Soviet Foreign Minister at the U.N. General Assembly in favor of partitioning Palestine and establishing a state for the Jewish people, which had suffered so grievously during the war:

Obviously, no rational and freedom-loving thinker [*normal denkiker*] can object to the entitlement of the Jews in Palestine to continue building their homes there, which they created [*geshafn*] with great toil in laying the foundations for independent statehood [*oyf di yesoydes fun eygener melukhish-keyt*]; this is their right as a collective that is united by shared interests and goals [*gemeynzamkeyt fun interesn un tsiln*].

Epstein proceeds very cautiously in his early and surprising identification with the goals of Zionism. He emphasizes that it is the Jews in Palestine, as opposed to the Jewish people abroad, who are entitled to make the country their nation-state. Therefore, he hurriedly stresses that the Jews in Palestine account for only a small portion of Jewry and will continue to do so in the future; accordingly, the emigration of Jewish war refugees to Palestine, even in small numbers, cannot solve the problem of the majority of Jews in their countries of residence.

In Epstein's opinion, the Jews' fate throughout history has always been linked to that of the peoples among which they dwell. Therefore, the faith in a better future for the nations of the world is the Jews' as well.

From that point, Epstein's path to the Communist Jewish national conclusion is free and clear. In the Soviet Union, born under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, the Jews are privileged to be an equal among equals (*a glaykher tsvishn glaykhe*) as individuals and, especially, as a free people that enjoys de jure equality (*a fulbarekhtik, a fray folk*).

To wit, in the national sense – as a member of the family of nations – the Jewish people owes its revival primarily to the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, and this rebirth will be completed in the future when part of Jewry establishes its national home in Palestine. At this point, Epstein's attitude in political ideology, which his comrades share, is absolutely identical to the principled Zionist outlook on the dependency between the Jewish people's national existence and its title to a certain piece of territory. The Anti-Fascist Committee stalwarts indeed searched for such a territory that the Jews of the Soviet Union might use, without dismissing the right of Jews elsewhere to seek their territorial solution in Palestine. Thus, as World War II wound down, two Jewish territorialist national trends gathered strength, one Zionist and one Communist-national. In February 1944, the three leaders

of the Anti-Fascist Committee – Mikhoels, Epstein, and Fefer – turned to Comrade Stalin in this vein, proposing in a direct letter the establishment of a Jewish autonomous republic in the Crimea after the liberation of this area from Nazi occupation.<sup>18</sup>

The writers' proposal rested on the utopian premise that some three million Jews would be living in Soviet territories after the war and that most of them, now scattered across the country, would return to their areas of residence. This collective, in the writers' view, would need not only economic rehabilitation but also the revival of Jewish culture, which would flourish best in a Jewish autonomous area. Overlaying this constructive argument of affirmation lay reasoning by negation. The authors of the letter stress that the population of the liberated areas in the western Soviet Union has been displaying troubling antisemitic manifestations toward Jews returning to their homes. The proposal, then, is the coupling of cultural revival with territorial separation of Jews from their erstwhile neighbors. To accomplish this, they believe, a Jewish Soviet republic should be established in the Crimea, where and within which Jews could pledge their best talents and efforts to the revitalization of the Soviet state at the end of the war. In their opinion, such an attempt was already made in the establishment of the Jewish autonomous district in Birobidjan; what is more, the gambit has rung up some impressive achievements. However, given the distance of this area from Jewish population centers and the absence of an adequate effort by the state to bring the autonomy plan to fruition, Birobidjan has not fulfilled most of the hopes that have been pinned on it. This tone of cautious criticism of the proponents of the Jewish Birobidjan idea and those responsible for implementing it attests to the extent of the writers' confidence in presenting their revolutionary proposal, which bespoke the establishment of a Jewish Soviet republic in the Crimea even before this area was emptied of some of its Tatar population, which, as we know, would be transferred to the interior, to an area along the Volga River. The letter does not note this fact explicitly; it merely alludes to the territorial expanses that are appropriate for Jewish settlement in that part of the country. The authors of the letter also mention the successful experiment that Jews had had in agricultural settlement in the Crimea in the 1930s. Beyond these rationales, the letter stresses that the establishment of a republic would answer the Jewish national question for good in accordance with the principles laid down by Lenin and Stalin, by equalizing their national status with that of the other Soviet peoples at the state level.

Concluding their letter, the writers suggest that the initiative of establishing a Jewish republic would be received enthusiastically by the Soviet citizenry and would attract significant economic assistance from Jews in the free world.

Notably, the writers draw a distinction in their letter between Birobidjan, defined as a Jewish autonomous district, and the Crimea, where a Jewish Soviet *republic* would take shape. The change in these definitions and their explicit

<sup>18</sup> See Redlich, pp. 264–267.

wording in the letter attest to the development in the authors' worldview and their innocent national hopes.

The letter went unanswered, although it did come to the attention of those who were perpetually vigilant about goings-on at the Anti-Fascist Committee. In response, instead of dropping the idea of establishing a Jewish Soviet republic, *Aynikayt* shifted the idea back from the Crimea, part of Ukraine, to the Far East, Birobidjan, where the foundations of national autonomy had already been laid.

Four months after the appeal to Stalin, *Aynikayt* published an open letter to Comrade Stalin in the name of workers in the Jewish autonomous zone.<sup>19</sup> The letter, a whole page long, repeats the traditional formula of praising the Soviet leaders' policy on the national question and then stressing the Jews' immense contribution in the Red Army. It also notes the economic achievements in Birobidjan, which the writers define as the pearl of the Far East (*dos perl funem vaytn mizrekh*). In view of these achievements, the writers propose a series of measures for the development of the area by establishing economic enterprises, encouraging people to move there, and developing cultural institutions, all of which to transform the district into a center of Jewish national culture (*vern der tsender fun der idisher natsyonaler kultur*).

Thus, the grand scheme of establishing a Jewish Soviet republic in Crimea became a gradual project in which the Jewish district in Birobidjan would evolve into a Jewish demographic and cultural center – almost, one may say, on the basis of the “Zionist method” of Hibbat Tziyon, Ahad Ha'am, Chaim Weizmann, and the Zionist Labor Movement in the 1920s. Their principal goal, too, had been the establishment of a Jewish-Hebrew sociocultural center, but in Palestine. Indeed, in the initial postwar years, the Anti-Fascist Committee adhered to its plan of building up the Jewish population in Birobidjan, running several articles that described living conditions in that area and outlining various schemes for its development.

In the second half of 1947, *Aynikayt* reported enthusiastically that thousands of Jewish families were preparing to move from various parts of Ukraine to Birobidjan. The headline of its lead article on this topic congratulated those “who are building *the Soviet Jewish state enterprise (melukheshaft!)*” (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of the concept of a Jewish “state enterprise” was based on a resolution by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, adopted on August 29, 1936, that expressed – according to the article – the aspiration of establishing a Jewish “state homeland” (*tsu shafn an eygn heymland, tsu shafn an eygene natsyionale melukheshaft*) that would correspond with the conditions of Jewish nationhood.

<sup>19</sup> “Fun di arbetendike fun der idisher avtonomer gegent dem khaver Iosif Visarionovitsh Stalin,” *Aynikayt*, June 1, 1944.

<sup>20</sup> “Zayt gegrust, boyer fun der idisher sovetisher melukheshaft!” *ibid.*, June 7, 1947. See also “Unter der fan fun der sovetisher felker frayntshaft,” *ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1947.

At this stage, and in accord with the new anti-Zionist breeze that was blowing in the corridors of the Kremlin, *Aynikayt* termed the plan for the expansion of the Jewish presence in Birobidjan as part and parcel of the Communist struggle against Zionism and the other reactionary forces – in other words, Soviet territorial Jewish nationhood as a counterweight to Zionist territorial Jewish nationhood.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the grand Crimea program turned, amid consent to a small Palestine program, into a small Birobidjan program that negated Zionism. The change in the Soviet regime's political aims aside, one may say that the turnabout made internal sense from the national perspective of the Committee leaders. In other words, as long as the hope of establishing Jewish territorial autonomy in the Soviet Union persisted, the Zionist intentions did not compete with it and, against the background of the Holocaust, even complemented it. However, once the grand scheme was buried and only the small Birobidjan plan remained, and even though Birobidjan was invested with the status of a "state enterprise," Zionism became a material and dangerous rival at the Jewish national level, irrespective of the Soviet government's changing policies. Either way, the national imagination of the heads of the Anti-Fascist Committee and the intellectuals associated with it was dealt a failure, giving further evidence of the Jews' powerlessness during and immediately after the war.

This powerlessness also found expression in direct discussion of the Holocaust and its meaning in the pages of *Aynikayt*. Although *Aynikayt* devoted relatively little space to this topic, for reasons that I explore later, it figured importantly in undisclosed internal discussions between the Committee leadership and the Communist Party. The discussions concerned the idea of publicizing the Nazis' crimes against the Jews in a work to be titled the *Black Book*, a historical and literary monument to the special suffering of the Jewish people. The progenitor of the idea was Albert Einstein, supported by intellectuals who joined the antifascist committee that had been established in the United States in 1942. The task of editing the book was undertaken by the Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow, which had already accumulated much evidence about what the Nazis were doing in the occupied areas. The author Ilya Ehrenburg, a member of the Committee presidium, was named editor of the book. The Committee's initiative traced to Jewish-national and Soviet-civil motives. By publishing the book, the Committee sought to become the leader of world Jewry in memorializing the Jews' suffering; concurrently, it aspired to emphasize pan-Soviet solidarity by underscoring Gentile feats of self-sacrifice in attempts to save Jewish lives.

The Anti-Fascist Committee held several internal discussions about the nature of the book. The Moscow-based *Aynikayt* neither disclosed these discussions nor urged Jews to submit material on the topic. *Aynikayt* of New

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Anti-Fascist Committee leadership to Kaganovich, undated, Redlich, pp. 227–271.



York, in contrast, gave these matters lavish publicity and stated explicitly that beyond gathering evidence about the Nazis' actions, the book should catalyze the reunification of the Jewish people by soliciting funds from Jews worldwide for this enterprise in commemoration of the Nazis' victims, which the paper defined as a "grand national project" (*groysn natsyonaln verk*).<sup>22</sup> The enterprise was meant not only to memorialize the Jews' suffering but also to establish its uniqueness amid the Nazis' persecution of other peoples. This stance found expression on the eve of the establishment of the international antifascist committee in New York in late 1942, when the magnitude of the murders of the Jews became officially known. On this occasion, the committee stated that the Jewish people, and not only Soviet Jewry – which was suffering more than any other people from the Fascist tyranny – must marshal all its forces to help the Red Army in its war (*dos yidische folk, vos laydt mer fun alemen*) and make a supreme effort, by means of all-out mobilization, "to provide the resources, the implements of war, that the Red Army needs."<sup>23</sup>

This outlook, which set the Jews' suffering apart from that of the other Soviet peoples and proposed to symbolize it via the *Black Book*, was rejected *ab initio* by the Communist Party leadership. Accordingly, after some four years of deliberations, the Party decided in 1947 not to publish the book. The mothballing of the symbol of Jewish national suffering – the *Black Book* – joined the failure to solve the national problems of Soviet Jewry by establishing a Jewish Soviet republic in the Crimea or, at least, by expanding the autonomous district in Birobidjan in a major way.

Having seen that the Soviet authorities shot down the manifestations of nationalist tendencies that the Committee and *Aynikayt* expressed, we need to ask how they interpreted these tendencies. The answer is that as far back as 1943, during the "honeymoon" between the Committee and the Soviet Communist Party, the Committee's overstated nationalist leanings and, especially its rapprochement with Zionist ideology, attracted criticism from the Party on the grounds that the Committee had, as it were, become something like a national government of Soviet Jewry. Shakhne Epstein, secretary of the Committee and editor of *Aynikayt*, vehemently rejected these accusations where the Committee leadership was concerned but admitted that a small group of activists at the Committee did aspire to transform the panel into something resembling a ministry of Jewish affairs and a representative of world Jewry. The Committee, however – Epstein assured the Party – had summarily rejected these illegitimate and vain attempts.<sup>24</sup>

The Party leaders' suspicious accusations about the Committee's intentions gained momentum and crested with the dissolution of the Committee in 1947, when the Secretary of the Communist Party, the fanatic Communist dogmatist Mikhail Suslov (1902–1980), thrust himself into the thick of it.

<sup>22</sup> *Aynikayt*, New York, July 1944.

<sup>23</sup> "Der kheshbn fun blut un payn," *Aynikayt*, Dec. 27, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> See Epstein's letter, Nov. 23, 1943, in Redlich, pp. 287–289.

The Party's report about the activity of the Anti-Fascist Committee carries Suslov's signature but represents painstaking staff work that explored all of the Committee's actions and captured most of the Party's charges against it in a centralized way. Therefore, I address them one by one, with remarks attached.

The first allegation was that the Party had never made an official decision to establish the Committee and had not defined its powers. The Committee's powers related mainly to the mobilization of Jews outside the Soviet Union for the war on Fascism and the exercise of influence on the press in those countries; this, however, had been specified orally.

This allegation is true from the formal standpoint but it disregards the fact that the Anti-Fascist Committee had been formed by two leaders of the Bund, Erlich and Alter, with the knowledge and blessings of Beria, who surely could not have taken this initiative without the knowledge and approval of Comrade Stalin.

In Suslov's opinion, the Committee had had some success in mobilizing public opinion during the war; now that the war was over, however, it had done its duty and could only cause political harm by continuing to exist and operate beyond its due period of time. The flaw in the Committee's work at the present time and the source of its illegitimacy, Suslov believed, was its having adopted a radical Zionist nationalist worldview, thereby strengthening bourgeois nationalist forces in foreign countries and even encouraging Zionist tendencies among some segments of Soviet Jewry.

This accusation, irrespective of its severe wording in the notorious Communist style, carries more than a bit of truth. Even though the leaders of the Committee had not intended it, their activities had undeniably touched off a Jewish national revival of Zionist nature. Furthermore, nationalist fundamentals identical to those of Zionism were embedded in the Soviet Jewish ideology that the Committee disseminated in the pages of *Aynikayt*, as I noted earlier and will note again later.

As a result of its "nationalist" ideology, the Committee leadership, through the organ of *Aynikayt*, overstated the importance of the status and influence of the Jewish population in Soviet society. This was especially evident in its description of the importance of the Jewish intelligentsia. Consequently, it created the impression that the Jews were central in Soviet society, in systematic disregard of the importance and weight of other national groups in this society.

In my opinion, based on systematic study of the issues of *Aynikayt*, this argument was totally untrue. Furthermore, it reflects a reverse antisemitic attitude, so to speak: Whereas "ordinary" antisemitism accused the Jews of taking over all of society, Suslov accused them of cultivating the false image of themselves as having such an influence.

The truth is that *Aynikayt's* editorials went out of their way to emphasize, proudly, the Jews' role as part of the total matrix of Soviet nationalities. They lauded the Soviet leadership so repeatedly as to nauseate readers

who subscribed to the democratic culture and tradition; they praised Lenin and Stalin for having given Soviet Jewry equality and freedom and sparing them from antisemitic hate by prohibiting such hate via the Soviet constitution. Suslov's report goes on to claim that the Jews' intellectual condescension prompted some of the Jewish intelligentsia to proclaim repeatedly the supremacy of Jewish culture and, foremost, its historical sources – the Bible and the Talmud – in disregard of the values of non-Jewish society.

The Committee, Suslov continued, is disseminating this opinion about the Jews' contribution to Soviet society abroad. This, he said, adds fuel to the arguments of the reactionary and antisemitic anti-Soviet propaganda that identifies everything Soviet as Jewish *ab initio*. To demonstrate this kind of use of the Committee's propaganda as an anti-Soviet tool, the report noted the cooperation between the Committee and the American newspaper *Forverts*, an anti-Communist publication, and the Yishuv newspaper *Davar*, which took critical anti-Soviet positions. Indeed, this argument was half-true. *Forverts* was consistently anti-Communist and objected categorically to the expansion of the Anti-Fascist Committee to the United States and the free democracies; therefore, there was no cooperation between them. *Davar*, in contrast, like most of the Zionist leadership including the leaders of the Mizrahi and Ha-Po'el Ha-Mizrahi movements, joined the entire Hebrew press in welcoming the Committee's appeal to the Jewish people. This reinforced the Communist Party's charge that the Committee, snared in its Jewish national worldview, had become a captive of the Zionist ideology, as manifested in its emphasis on the Jews' problems as distinct from, if not in contrast to, the Jews' class affiliation and civil status in the various countries.

It must be admitted that this criticism contains a smidgen of truth. The Committee's national stance did repeatedly emphasize the existence of a world Jewish people and Jewish national unity as matters that transcended individual Jews' status as citizens of their countries of residence, the Soviet state above all.

After decrying the Committee's ideological deviations, Suslov's letter segued to political charges. It accused the Committee of having flagrantly subversive intentions because it had attempted, under the pressure of American Jewish organizations, to intervene with the Polish and Hungarian governments in respect of the situation of the Jews in these countries. By so doing, he said, the Committee had named itself the custodian of the Jewish populations of these countries, which were under Soviet control. Beyond this, the Committee, under the leadership of its Secretary, Shakhne Epstein, in his article on the Jewish national revival (discussed at length earlier), had made itself into a political ally of Zionism, a movement that aspired to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Thus, it prejudiced the Soviet Union's political interests in the Middle East insofar as the Arab countries were concerned.

Suslov was right from the political standpoint, although one may doubt the extent of the Arab governments' awareness of the Committee's stance. The historical irony, however, was that a year after he expressed this accusation, the

Soviet government threw its support behind the motion in the U.N. General Assembly to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish state.

The letter concluded by charging that the Committee's attitudes originated not in the ideology of the patriarchs of Bolshevism, Lenin and Stalin, but in the worldview of Zionism and the Bund, which preached separation of the Jews from the other Soviet peoples and reactionary struggle for world Jewish national unity.

The document was circulated among the entire Soviet leadership including its head, Stalin.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, its accusations served as a preamble to and a rationale for the death sentences that were handed down and implemented in 1948–1953 against the leaders and activists of the Committee – from Solomon Mikhoels, murdered in 1948, to Itsik Fefer, executed in 1952.

In conclusion, however, we think it important to note that the two years between Suslov's categorical letter (1946) and the murder of Mikhoels (1948), paradoxically, put to the ultimate test the strength of the national awakening of the heads of the Committee and the editors of *Aynikayt*. It happened, oddly enough, due to disagreements that surfaced within this body on the basic question in their worldview, Jewish national unity. Itsik Fefer identified totally with the main allegation in Suslov's letter about the Zionist complexion of the aspiration to Jewish unity. In two successive opinion pieces,<sup>26</sup> he sought to prove that the Committee and *Aynikayt* had never championed the unity of *klal Yisrael* but rather anti-Fascist unity: "Mir hobn kaynmal *nit geredt vegn klal-Yisroeldiker eynikeyt, nor vegn antifashistisher eynikeyt*" (emphasis in the original). This was, of course, an inaccurate statement, to put it mildly, even in terms of Fefer's own writings in the newspaper.

Fefer's article, undoubtedly written in response to a "hint" from Suslov's bureau, symbolized the end of the intellectual and political dalliance that the Anti-Fascist Committee and its organ, *Aynikayt*, had been pursuing with Jewish nationalism in the Soviet Union and abroad during the war years.

In May 1947, however, when the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko surprised world public opinion by delivering a passionate speech in favor of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, *Aynikayt* received another opportunity to express its political support for the Zionist cause.<sup>27</sup> For the next year, until May 1948, *Aynikayt* accompanied the Yishuv's war of independence sympathetically, regularly emphasizing the anti-imperialist complexion of the struggle. Several members of the Anti-Fascist Committee council greeted the declaration of Israeli statehood enthusiastically. The chair of the Committee, Mikhoels, welcomed it publicly, and several other *prominenti* including Ilya Ehrenburg, the chess player Mikhoel Botvinnik, and well-known writers did

<sup>25</sup> Redlich, pp. 425–433.

<sup>26</sup> "Nokhmal vegn eynikeyt," *ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1946; "Eynikeyt haynt," *ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1946.

<sup>27</sup> See L. Goldberg, "Der historisher bashlus vegn Palestine," *ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1947; "Palestine vider in tog ordenung," *ibid.*, May 17, 1948, K. Seriozshig, "Palestine – az obyekt fun imperyalistisher spekultatsye," *ibid.*

the same without saying so in public. The Anti-Fascist Committee sent a congratulatory cable to Chaim Weizmann, the president-designate of the new state, but *Aynikayt* did not publish it in its monthly edition. Redlich cites many testimonies about the passion that gripped groups of Jews across the Soviet Union. Some of them asked the Committee what they could do to help the fledgling state in its existential struggle; some even sought to volunteer for service in the Jewish army. More than a few sought ways to emigrate to Israel.<sup>28</sup>

This shows that the nationalist seeds that *Aynikayt* had scattered among the Soviet Jews landed on well-ploughed and fertile soil. Therefore, they gave rise to flowers that continued to blossom even after the war but were quickly and rudely trampled by the Soviet Communist establishment and plucked away by the bloodstained hands of the Soviet secret services and judiciary. Although this aspect of the matter falls outside our purview, it is closely, inseparably, and causally related to it because the combination of the Holocaust and the experience of Jewish heroism made it into a national ethos that could not be totally repressed, as became apparent decades after the end of World War II.

In this sense of cultivating the national ethos, *Aynikayt* earns a special place in the Jewish press of the World War II era. The Jewish press in the democracies – Palestine, Britain, and the United States – tried to nurture and sustain a Jewish national or ethnic spirit that already existed; in the Soviet Union, one lonely newspaper sought to revive it. Tragically, the revival of this collective sought its justification in the sacrifices that the Jewish people had made in the extermination camps and in the trenches on the fronts. The historical process, however, is usually burdened with paradoxes that create contrasting, if not destructive, phenomena. Thus, the national revival that was nurtured by the valorous feats of Jewish soldiers in the Red Army became the reason for a brutal campaign of repression by the authorities, at the behest of Stalin, against the Jews in their Soviet homeland.

From this perspective, by contributing to the wartime national awakening among Soviet Jews and thereby furnishing the reason for its repression by the Communist authorities after the war, *Aynikayt* earned a special status that no other Jewish newspaper had, including *Morgn-Frayhayt* of the Jewish section of the American Communist Party, which was strongly influenced by the national spirit that wafted from *Aynikayt*'s pages.

<sup>28</sup> See Redlich, chapter 6, and documents on pp. 373–389.

## PART III

### THE INDIVIDUAL CONFRONTS THE HORROR

This part of the study diverges from its two predecessors. Before we dealt with newspapers that presented information about the European Holocaust to readers in the free countries, hoping to influence them and encourage them to take action for the rescue of their fellow Jews. Here, in contrast, the discussion traces the actions of individual intellectuals who understood or wanted to understand the events in a way that was not always identical to the outlook that the press wished to give to the public. The paths that they took were noted for different trends of thought and assessment, starting from the statesmen and intellectuals Yitzhak Gruenbaum and Nahum Goldmann, via the historians Salo Baron and Cecil Roth, to the political thinker Hannah Arendt – from the middle of the war to its end, and up to our contemporary, Philip Roth, the most significant representative of the Jewish angst that has extended from the Holocaust to our times.



## Yitzhak Gruenbaum – “The Main Culprit”

When we come to recount the horrific suffering and the endless tortures of our brethren in Europe [...] our hearts fill with limitless sorrow and compassion and even helpless rage.

Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *Ha'olam*, Sept. 10, 1941

This man, whom some Yishuv newspapers in 1943–1944 held directly responsible for the Zionist Executive's failure to effect rescue – thereby making him into a symbol of, or a “main culprit” for, this body's tragic failure at the human and national levels – was Yitzhak Gruenbaum (1879–1970). Accordingly, it is proper to devote a special chapter to discussion of his special attitude toward this problem. Gruenbaum was named chair of the Committee for the Jews of Occupied Europe (hereinafter: the Rescue Committee) that had been established in late January 1943, immediately after confirmation of the rumors about the magnitude of the mass murders being committed in the Nazi-occupied areas of Poland and the USSR. The Committee, founded after tortuous political negotiations among the Zionist parties and institutions and those of the Yishuv, comprised twelve members: five from the Jewish Agency Executive, three from the executive board of the National Committee of Keneset Yisrael, two from Agudath Israel, and two from the Revisionist Zionist Organization.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, no senior Zionist personality was worthier and more fitting for this role. Gruenbaum was unparalleled among Zionist leaders in his knowledge of Polish and Russian Jewry. While still in his twenties, he, together with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, was among the authors of the “Work in the Present” program that was adopted at the 1906 Helsingfors Conference – the program that demanded cultural autonomy for the Jews in Imperial Russia together

<sup>1</sup> For more on all aspects of the establishment and modi operandi of the Committee, see Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939–1945*, chap. 3, pp. 64–71, and Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, chap. 3, pp. 125–141.



with the establishment of a national home in Palestine. In the independent Polish Republic established in 1918, Gruenbaum was, until 1933, the great and indefatigable champion of the civil and national rights of Polish Jewry; the most important delegate to the Polish Sejm that this population group spawned; the initiator of the Minorities Bloc, which defended all national minorities in Poland (Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Germans); and one of the most prominent personalities in the Congress of National Minorities in Europe – not to mention one of the most important leaders of the Zionist Organization in the 1920s.

In the late 1920s, Gruenbaum began to slip from the summit of movement leadership due to schisms in the Zionist Organization in Poland, to which his authoritative personality had contributed more than a little. Consequently, he left Poland in 1932, although he did not make a total break with the country. After spending a year in Paris, he immigrated to Palestine in 1933. Once settled there, he was named to the Zionist Executive of the Jewish Agency, headed the Agency's Immigration Department between 1933 and 1935, and headed the Agency's Labor Department from 1935 on. Thus, he took the helm of the Rescue Committee from a quasi-ministerial status but no longer as the leader of a Polish Jewry that was fighting for its life. Did Gruenbaum's stance on rescue issues have something to do with his being the disillusioned and ousted leader of Polish Jewry? This question will accompany us in this chapter from beginning to end.

Due to his role as chair of the Rescue Committee and his imprudent remarks at a Zionist Executive meeting that was devoted to the reports in the Executive's possession about the mass extermination of Jews at the early juncture of June–July 1942, and pursuant to remarks that he published in the press about the fate of Hungarian Jewry (see later in the chapter), he absorbed a torrent of public criticism from *Ha'aretz* and *Haboqer* and, particularly, *Hamashqif*. Because Gruenbaum was the “main culprit,” at least in the minds of an important part of Yishuv public opinion, I think it correct to present his stance, as he had expressed publicly, verbatim (along with his remarks on this topic in closed-door meetings of the Zionist Executive).<sup>2</sup> My purpose in so doing is to arrive at the most comprehensive and accurate appraisal possible of his attitude toward his fellow Jews under the Nazi yoke and his changing assessments of their situation.

Notably, in the first quarter of 1941, a year and a half into the war, Gruenbaum remained optimistic about the fate of Polish Jewry once the guns would fall silent. In an article that he published in early 1941 about the Jewish ghetto, he did describe the place as a “prison” or a “quarantine camp,” the inhabitants of which were “doomed to degeneration and extinction,” but his accounts of quotidian life there were optimistic relative to the actual doings

<sup>2</sup> Gruenbaum's articles appeared in the Zionist Organization journal *Ha'olam*; the internal discussions can be found in Dina Porat and Yechiam Weitz, eds., *Between the Star of David and the Yellow Star*, in Hebrew (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2002).

of the ghettoized Jews. “We read,” he wrote, “about the arrangements in the Warsaw ghetto: the Jewish police subordinate to the Council of Elders; the self-rule, steadily expanding and encompassing all public life in the ghetto; in particular a Jewish court of law that has begun to come together; the social-assistance and mutual-assistance efforts; the cultural endeavors – and we are agape and amazed by the power and the magnitude of spirit that the afflicted and oppressed Jewish public is displaying.” The way Gruenbaum concludes this account shows that his optimistic information originated not in false Nazi propaganda sources but in trustworthy sources; therefore, one could take pride in the vital force that the ghettoized Jews were displaying. This optimism was also reflected in the two extensive accounts of ghetto life that Shazar (Zalman Rubashov) published in *Davar* in 1940–1941, quoted in [Chapter 1](#).

Aside from his views on the oppression of the Jews per se, Gruenbaum, as a Zionist activist, was outraged by their historical condition as a people lacking a homeland and national territory – a people that could not, for this reason, rise up against the oppression as other peoples – for example, the Poles – were doing.

Just the same, he still confidently adhered to the feeling that masses of Jews would outlast the war despite the grim hardships and cruelties of ghetto life. The unanswerable question from his standpoint was whether these Jews could rebuild their lives in their countries of residence after the Nazis had systematically destroyed their economic foundations in these places, where the non-Jewish peoples were also cringing under Nazi occupation. His main concern, then, was whether the Jews could rehabilitate themselves after the war: “These are the questions that increasingly protrude for us, become more and more troubling, in the outcomes of Nazi rule.”<sup>3</sup>

As we recall, he was not alone in this view; leading figures in American Jewish institutions and renowned individuals throughout the Diaspora regarded the matter in this way.<sup>4</sup>

Half a year later, when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union and reports about the mass murder of Jews in Ukraine and pogroms against the Jews of Romania began to reach Palestine, Gruenbaum changed his mind. His trusting optimism was overtaken by an anguished outcry of “limitless sorrow and compassion and even helpless rage,” mirroring the title of his article.<sup>5</sup> The novelty in these remarks lies not in compassion and sorrow – he had already expressed these in his account of life in the Warsaw ghetto – but in his emphasis on the sense of “helplessness,” which he cited to explain the limited nature of the Zionist leadership’s power in view of the existing situation. “For some time now they have been shouting at us and asking in sincere or contrived

<sup>3</sup> Yitzhak Gruenbaum, “Geto ha-olam,” [The Ghetto of the World], *Davar*, April 3, 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Gruenbaum had also written in this vein a year earlier in his article “Al hurban yahadut Polin” [On the Destruction of Polish Jewry], published in the monthly journal *Moznayim*. See Porat and Weitz, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Davar*, Sept. 10, 1941.

bitterness, ‘Why are we silent? Why aren’t we sounding off for all the world to hear? Why aren’t we demanding that the United States intervene in the matter and order the Romanian [dictator] Antonescu, for example, to stop the lethal mistreatment of the Jews?’”

As Gruenbaum averred, the National Institutions were in fact making appeals and intended to step up their demands by bringing special public pressure to bear against the American political leadership. “However,” he asked,

Does anyone believe that these outcries of rage will inspire these forces to respond in the desired way and to influence and stop the acts of murder and extermination, the abuse, and the plunder? Will anyone totally assuage his agitated heart by enraged speeches or even the fiercest protest resolutions? Look, if anyone has the power to penetrate more deeply the abyss of blood in which the Jews of Europe are steadily sinking, especially the Jews of Eastern Europe, he should cover his face and hold his silence – because what word is there, what anguished outcry is there that will blunt the intensity of the pain and the immensity of the atrocity?

From here on, after articulating the human pain that words cannot express, Gruenbaum is swept away by the sense of national insult that this atrocity embodies. He derives this sense of insult from comparison of the behavior of other peoples, such as the Serbs, with that of the Jews. The Serbs, settled in their country, have risen to fight against their oppressors, are defending themselves heroically, and “are not crying ‘stop, thief!’ and are not shouting ‘save us and let us escape.’ [Instead,] they laud their warfare and their heroism.” Then, to underscore the contrast between the two situations, Gruenbaum, the Zionist activist, confesses, “*How jealous we should be* when we read these accounts” (emphasis added). This “jealousy” gripped him with even greater intensity in view of several testimonies that arrived in letters from the killing fields, containing humiliating accounts of hundreds of Jews being led to their death by a few Nazi soldiers and local police, soundlessly and without attempting to rise in defense of their personal and national honor. This feeling was not exclusive to Gruenbaum, writing from his safe perch in Palestine. The historian of the Warsaw ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum, also noted in his diary the disgrace of the tragedy, in which hundreds of people allowed themselves “to be led like lambs to the slaughter.”<sup>6</sup> By June 1942, when Ringelblum penned these words, systematic mass extermination was underway; he explained the phenomenon of nonresponse as the outcome of the physical and spiritual attrition that the Jewish population had suffered after more than three years of terror, torture, and starvation since the war began. Ringelblum’s was a Zionist-humanistic perspective; Gruenbaum, in contrast, gave the same phenomenon a Zionist-political explanation centering on the exilic state of the Jewish people. Peoples that are settled in their homelands, he reasoned, know how to defend their personal and national honor, whereas “masses” outside their homeland merely “keep up their lives and sacrifice everything in order to save them and derive

<sup>6</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, p. 383.

their aspirations and pride from always being innocent of crime. Accordingly, they are both crushed and trampled.” This, Gruenbaum says, is the essence of the Jewish condition: not only being trampled but also being denied the pride of those who fight against their enslavers.

Only one lesson can be learned from this, Gruenbaum says: that of political Zionism. His concluding paragraph drives the point home with rhetorical flourish:

We in this homeland, which is being lifted from its desolation by dint of our milk and our blood, when we come to recount the horrific suffering and interminable tortures that our brethren in Europe are enduring [...] sometimes look for responses of heroism and defense of *honor* and do not find them. Then our hearts fill with *limitless sorrow and compassion and even helpless rage* (emphasis added).

In these remarks, written more than a year before the magnitude of the Holocaust became known, Gruenbaum expresses a number of things rolled into one: acquiescence in the tragedy of the unpreventable killings, Zionist ideological zeal, profound sorrow, and a degree of human insensitivity. Even when his sober historical gaze attributes the lack of armed Jewish resistance to the Jews’ state of exile, where the preservation of human dignity even in a hopeless situation is concerned, one can sense a tone of censure in his remarks. Gruenbaum, both in his profound sorrow and his helpless rage, was not far from this, although, ostensibly, he inveighs against those whose hearts “entertain emotions not of compassion for the victims but of contempt because they did not know how to die in defense of their honor.” Nevertheless, the tenor of his remarks creates the impression that something of this attitude rubbed off on him too.

Gruenbaum’s subsequent remarks confirm this assessment. A year later, at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive that debated the possibility of Jewish armed self-defense in Europe, some members expressed doubt about the very possibility of such defense and its utility as a rescue tactic. Gruenbaum, in contrast, argued that one thing was certain: self-defense would not make the Jews’ plight any worse: “It can’t get worse than it is now.” However – and here is the important point in his stance – “Our honor in the world would be much greater. *The Jews’ trouble in exile is that they prefer the life of a ‘beaten dog’ over an honorable death*” (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

Gruenbaum adhered to his view on this emotional and agonizing topic even after the immensity of the extermination actions became known in early 1943. In a debate in the small Zionist General Council in the very month when he was named chair of the Rescue Committee, he admitted frankly, “I cannot rid myself of the sense of sadness and searing pain [...] over the Jews’ going to the slaughter without any of them aspiring in any way to fight for his life.”<sup>8</sup> He had discovered this, he said, from survivors and from documents that the

<sup>7</sup> Jewish Agency Executive meeting, June 30, 1942, see Porat and Weitz, p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Polish resistance had smuggled out. Thus, his allusion to the matter in the aforementioned article was no different from what he stated explicitly at the closed meeting of the General Council.

Gruenbaum had more to say on this issue. As he himself attested, he told a mission of Polish Jews that had implored him to pull out all stops, relentlessly, for the sake of rescue, that the matter was indeed at the top of the national leadership's agenda, but he was not the only one who needed to attend to it:

In my remarks, I again stressed the “deposit that we hold” and the need to stop being an “exceptional people” and to become a people like all peoples. Two thousand years of exile are enough for us. We should become an equally entitled nation in the family of nations in this world. This is our destiny and we must attain it.<sup>9</sup>

These remarks, quoted in *Haboqer* – no fan of Gruenbaum's – are undoubtedly correct in content even if not accurate as given. The concept of a national “deposit” was key in Gruenbaum's thinking and modus operandi. This end sanctified most means, such as preferring the maintenance of the Yishuv's strength and development over rescue actions, especially when he, like other members of the leadership, assumed *ab initio* that meaningful rescue was altogether unlikely amid the political and military reality at hand.

In September and October of that year, after Rommel's armies were pounded at El Alamein and the USSR seized the upper hand at Stalingrad, Gruenbaum did think that the chances of rescue actions had improved. Just the same, he remained skeptical about the outcomes of such operations. In a report that he submitted to the Zionist General Council board in January 1943, he repeated the assessment that he had offered two years earlier. “I strongly doubt,” he stated candidly, “that the slaughter can be stopped and rescue achieved by our demands and our shouting. If the slaughter stops, it will be thanks to the victories of the Russians, the British, and the Americans.”<sup>10</sup>

By the time Gruenbaum attended this meeting, he had become the “main culprit” in the concealing of information from the public. When he said that the Zionist Executive had known about the mass killings in June–July 1942 but had not publicized the information due to the grim situation of the Allies on the Stalingrad and North African fronts, *Ha'aretz* delicately described what he had said as “puzzling.”<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of his remarks, Gruenbaum made note of something that this study has shown to be a fact: The mass-murder reports had been publicly known since the onset of the Nazi invasion of the USSR. Admittedly, “Perhaps many did not want to believe the reports. Articles, newspapers, and various other writings said that the reports might have been overstated but that something, and something terrifying, has happened in Poland, is steadily happening

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., *Haboqer*, Dec. 7, 1942, Porat and Weitz, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Zionist General Council, Jan. 18, 1943, Porat and Weitz, p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ha'aretz*, Dec. 9, 1942.

there.” Again, he was right. The newspapers did serve up regular reportage about murders in the forests of Ukraine. Gruenbaum, however, was stung by the public criticism leveled against him and answered it in kind. Despite the steady flow of information, he said, “The public didn’t budge.” He discovered this firsthand when, together with the other members of the relief committee for Polish Jews and refugees, “We encountered any number of manifestations of indifference and unwillingness to pay attention to all these horrors.”<sup>12</sup> One may get an impression of how much this phenomenon was not limited to the Yishuv from a shocking article that appeared that very month in *The Jewish Chronicle* in Britain.<sup>13</sup> This situation – a flow of distressing information to the public, which treats it with skepticism doused in indifference – lasted for a full year, he said. Only in the summer of 1942 did semiofficial reports about the mass murders begin to appear. Even then, however, he said, “The Yishuv didn’t move, didn’t budge.” How did this happen? He answered in anguish and personal rage: “When I asked myself then, and I ask myself even today, why such a thing occurred, why the Yishuv didn’t move and didn’t budge back then, the same Yishuv that is voicing *so many harsh accusations now*, [claiming] that the bloody events had been concealed from its view, I have an answer for that” (emphasis added). By offering this answer, Gruenbaum erected a barrier between himself and the Yishuv at large, which turned him into a scapegoat of sorts for the Yishuv’s collective sense of guilt. Aware that he had nowhere to run or hide from what he had done, he admitted, “I realize now, as each and every person in the Yishuv thinks he has to blame the other if the other doesn’t scratch the wounds as fiercely as he would like, that they won’t accept my answer. But in my opinion, there is no other answer.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, his answer was conciliatory: It proposed to explain the public’s indifference as the response to the danger that it faced as Rommel’s Nazi army clattered across the El Alamein desert toward the Egyptian border. As stated, *Ha’aretz* defined this explanation as merely “puzzling” – an indirect attempt to defend the National Institutions and Gruenbaum himself. To *Ha’aretz*’s mind, the exact date on which the authoritative reports reached the National Institutions was absolutely immaterial: the general contours of the picture had been known; the most recent information was only “the most appalling” added detail.

Although *Ha’aretz*’s view offered Gruenbaum a public “life raft” of sorts, he stood his ground and continued to assert that where rescue actions were concerned, “I have no doubt that had the situation on the front not changed for the better”; in other words, were it not for the victories at El Alamein and Stalingrad, “they would not be talking to us about this matter for better or worse. They hushed up the slaughter of the Armenians in the previous war, and to hush up the slaughter of the Jews isn’t such a hard thing to do.” The public, however, unwilling to accept this, launched an offensive against the national

<sup>12</sup> Porat and Weitz, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2 in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Porat and Weitz, p. 122.

leadership. Gruenbaum took a derisive view of this offensive because it originated in the guileless belief, or the impure intent, that “Had we demanded it, they immediately would have done what was necessary for rescue, just to be helpful.” Then he added, revealing his personal sense of insult,

I do not wish to destroy this delusion. It’s good for them, these Jews, because [otherwise] whom would they shout at? They can demand my resignation over everything that’s happened, but can they demand it of Roosevelt, of Churchill? And when they say in some newspaper that I’m an antisemite, they know it’ll hurt me and they may also find some small consolation in doing so, but if they say that Churchill’s an antisemite, I don’t know if it’ll hurt him.<sup>15</sup>

Gruenbaum did publicly reveal his sense of having been offended to his colleagues in the leadership. By so doing, however, he did not abandon his struggle in the domain where the Zionist leadership had sovereign decision-making power – the allocation of funds in its possession, which in historical terms belonged to the building of the Yishuv, for various needs that now included the additional necessity of financing possible rescue activities.

Naturally, the evolution of rumors about the extermination of the Jews into authoritative reports created an emergency atmosphere that led to urgent demands for rescue actions. The demands related to two things at once: political lobbying with the leaders of the great powers and the allocation of budgets for urgent or longer-term rescue actions. What the leadership had in mind was human and logical in view of the state of emergency: to reassign some Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund) money, which was meant for the development of the Yishuv, to the rescue campaign. This idea ostensibly served Gruenbaum’s interest; after all, he headed the Rescue Committee, and the transfer of the money would surely augment his power by allowing him to influence personally the allocation of rescue funds. Gruenbaum, however, true to his Zionist convictions, thought differently. This led him to the staunch Zionist proclamation, reflecting his worldview, for which he has not been forgiven to this day. He recounted to the members of the Executive that when various sides had pressured him in public to reassign Keren Hayesod money to immigration purposes, his answer at all times was, “No, and I’ll say it again – no. I know it amazes them that I find it necessary to say this.”

Then, to answer this question, Gruenbaum offered a personal confession of sorts that sheds much light on his nature as a politician and, especially, as a leader who clings uncompromisingly to his righteousness. “My friends have taught me,” he said, “that even if you are right, you shouldn’t say so in public at such a moment of sorrow and concern. I cannot agree with them. In my opinion, this wave, which relegates Zionist action to second place, has to be resisted.” He was willing, he continued, to pay for this resistance in the coin of being insulted. Indeed, because of his stance, “They called me an

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126–127.

antisemite and said that I'm the one at fault for our not investing up to our necks in rescue actions." He protested the personal isolation that had become his portion in the system because his comrades had abandoned him. However, he was unwilling to defend himself even if he remained alone against the surging wave of defamation that he faced, because "I think it's necessary to state here – Zionism comes before everything."<sup>16</sup> That is, Zionism comes first at any time, even amid the disaster that was befalling the Jewish people right then. Beyond the blow that this would deal to the national enterprise in Palestine, it was necessary, he believed, to strive for rescue in every possible way.

Gruenbaum's responses originated in sober analysis of the reality, as reflected not only in the Nazis' extermination program but also in the democracies' attitude toward it. In the latter, he distinguished between two periods. He defined the first period as that of "silence and silencing"; it began when the war broke out and continued until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Pursuant to his remarks, one may define the second period, starting with Operation Barbarossa, as the time of declarations and protests, or, as he said, "declarations of sympathy, commiseration, and threats about the punishment that will be imposed after victory against those guilty of the slaughter and the abuse." However, "real rescue action is not being taken even at this time." In the United States, it is true, an emergency Rescue Committee had been established by order of the president. However, Gruenbaum remained skeptical<sup>17</sup> and assumed that the establishment of the War Refugee Board did not, per se, signify that the rescue proposals that were presented to the Board "would be carried out with the full resources available to a mighty government." He must have been referring to the idea of bombarding the concentration camps, which he had presented as a demand to the American Consul in Jerusalem on June 11, 1944.<sup>18</sup> This pessimistic feeling about the fate of the Jews, murdered by the Nazis and abandoned by the democracies, led him to the conclusion that only actions within the Jews' own power would be taken. And two things were within their power: to build the national homeland despite Britain's opposition and to defend the Jews' national honor against the Nazi murder machine. Hence the injunction against transferring funds that were earmarked for building to rescue. As for the vestiges of the Jews in the ghettos, they would have to defend themselves.

With this line of argumentation, Gruenbaum's zealotry drove him to an additional bombastic eruption. The first, as stated, was his resolute opposition to the transfer of any Keren Hayesod money, earmarked for the building of the Yishuv, to the rescue fund for survivors of the Holocaust. The second pertained to a point no less dramatic and even more painful. A year after the uprisings in the ghettos of Warsaw and other towns, Gruenbaum came out publicly against the few survivors' efforts and hopes to find shelter or a

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 129. See continued discussion of the issue at the same meeting, *ibid.*, p. 184–186.

<sup>17</sup> "Shetei tequfot" [Two Periods], *Ha'olam*, Feb. 17, 1944.

<sup>18</sup> Porat and Weitz, pp. 255–256.



source of rescue in the bunkers that they had prepared for themselves inside the ghetto confines. In his article, “Bunker and Self-Defense,” he compared the quest for a hideout with self-defense and argued that while neither offered a chance for rescue, the act of self-defense at least had the quality of dignity.

Addressing himself to the “bunker,” he wrote with typical candor, “It’s hard to understand on what the Jews of the ghettos in Poland were hoping for when they prepared bunkers for themselves. Had they imagined that they could hide there until the German executioners forgot about their victims and then go somewhere else?” Gruenbaum knew that the ghetto fighters had also built bunkers as hideouts, but they, of course, considered their bunkers combat bases and not shelters for rescue. Jewish national honor was so important to Gruenbaum that he saw fit to emphasize that even the newspapers of the Polish resistance, not all of which sympathized with the Jews – to put it mildly – “bow their heads in awed respect for the Jewish heroes, who forced the Nazi executioners to bring cannon and light tanks and to torch the buildings of the Warsaw ghetto in order to overcome its defenders.”<sup>19</sup>

These remarks were written and published shortly before the Wehrmacht breached the frontiers of Germany’s Hungarian ally. Now that nearly a million Jews in Hungary faced the menace of extermination after having survived the war in relative safety to that point, the National Institutions cried out for their rescue, and Yitzhak Gruenbaum accompanied the plea with an article headlined “About the Survivors.”<sup>20</sup> The article surveys rescue efforts and political contacts with Allied governments for this purpose in the two years dating from the initial reports about mass extermination. The survey is almost an exact iteration of what Gruenbaum had said a year previously, at the meeting of the small Zionist General Council, with the omission of his personal grievances. The summation of the survey in this article, as in his aforementioned defensive speech, is that all rescue efforts have gotten nowhere because no way has been found to influence the powers to pressure the Nazis to stop the murders, and because the powers have shown no willingness to make a special effort to create conditions for the rescue of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees.

Despite his bitter disappointment, Gruenbaum wrote,

We again turn to the democratic free world with a question and a demand: will they once again turn a deaf ear to our anguished plea for the surviving Jews of Europe, teetering between life and death in Hungary ... awaiting their verdict in Bulgaria ... escaping on small rickety boats from Romania ...? Will the great rescue effort again not be made, leaving the Jews of Hungary to follow the path taken by their brethren in Poland ... in the countries of Western Europe ... to be packed into sealed [railroad] cars in lethal density and be taken by train, the majority to death camps and the minority to slave-labor camps? ... Will the journeys of these death trains again take place without disruption, even though the connecting roads and supply lines of Hitler’s

<sup>19</sup> “Bunqer ve-hitgonenut” [Bunkers and Self-Defense], *Ha’olam*, March 2, 1944.

<sup>20</sup> “Al ha-she’erit” [About the Survivors], *ibid.*, June 8, 1944.

camps are being bombarded every day? ... and will the smoke of the chimneys in Oświęcim, and Treblinka ... and all the places where thousands are being exterminated every day by instruments of mass death not cease to billow?

In view of the situation, unique in human history, a series of pointed questions has amassed and is addressed to those behind the war effort, itself unprecedented in human history, to erase this evil from the face of the world. "Look, the factories that produce the war machines are being bombarded each and every day. The bombers have already reached Western Poland," not far from extermination camps such as Auschwitz. If so, "Won't the bombers find the time and will to destroy the instruments of the mass slaughter? Is it not high time for extraordinary efforts to save the vestiges of European Jewry? Do the triumphant Allied powers lack the strength to stay the Nazi hand as it murders masses of men, women, and children?" These questions, expressing grave if indirect accusations, were followed by others that reflected mordant suspicions of a hidden anti-Jewish plot – not on the part of the Nazis, who were upfront about their intentions, but on the part of the Western powers: "Really," Gruenbaum asked, "will the Nazi propagandists be able to brag about what they've done and say with satanic hauteur that, truth be told, the democracies aren't all that willing to save the Jews since they haven't yet opened their countries' gates to those fleeing from torture and massacre, since nothing effective to save them is being done, *and that the radical solution to the Jewish problem, being fulfilled by the Nazi executioners in their view as well, which they do not dare to reveal, will absolve the whole world of an irreparable nuisance?*" (emphasis added).

These remarks constitute one of the most tragic manifestations of the recognition of Jewish powerlessness. Therefore, all that remained was to appeal to the enlightened powers once again, even though they were closing their eyes and plugging their ears: "At this last moment, we again speak out and plead for rescue – do not, rulers of the democratic world, [forsake] the remnants of European Jewry to slaughter and annihilation! Your power and ability are greater today than before – may your willingness to offer salvation also grow."<sup>21</sup> The aforementioned studies of the historians Shlomo Aronson, Dina Porat, and Tuvia Friling demonstrate the truth of what Gruenbaum wrote in real time and, as it were, with his own blood. Despite the mellifluous nature of his writing, I have no other definition for his remarks but the truth, the wholly unquestionable truth, even though the man had gone through two years of public criticism for having "ignored" the disaster that had visited his brethren.

Three weeks after publishing this appeal to the conscience of the leaders of the democracies, Gruenbaum again came out publicly to lament the uselessness of his previous appeal. In an article titled "And If the Die Is Cast,"<sup>22</sup> he closed the circle of despair and hopelessness that had been opened in 1942. Two years

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., June 29, 1944.

later, as the extermination of the Jews of Hungary moved ahead, he assailed the various optimists and self-deluders, Jewish or otherwise, who grasped any strand of hope, every sliver of information, and any dubious rumor to the effect that a large number of Jews remained alive in the countries of occupied Europe. "How happy these people are," he states, with the faith and innocence that allow them to believe in the power of "telegrams to the mighty of the world, proposals for mass rescue by fantastic means, miraculous acts, the vapor of the mouths and the declarations of the mighty of the world."

His remarks about those who believe in "miraculous acts" must have referred to the scheme of Joel Brand, mediator between the Nazis and the National Institutions – a plan that surpassed all other Jewish utopian fantasies and satanic Nazi deceptions: the exchange of a million Hungarian Jews for thousands of trucks that the Allies would present to the Nazi army, a scheme that the heads of the National Institutions, including Moshe Shertok, pursued to the very end even though they doubted its practicality from the outset.<sup>23</sup> Gruenbaum, in contrast, spoke of "reprisal measures" against the German population, bombardment of the death camps, and Jewish self-defense before deportation. Citing as examples the uprisings that had taken place in several ghettos in Poland in 1943, he stated disappointedly that the Jews of Hungary had not learned the lesson of the fate of Polish Jewry, which had risen too late, after more than half of their number were no longer among the living. They should therefore learn the tragic lesson now and "fight for their lives from day one and not be tempted by enticements and promises that aim merely to gag, to soothe, and to distract attention, energy, and efforts from the cause of self-defense," along with other actions that might hinder the extermination operation in view of the tens of thousands who were being shipped by train to the death camps.

Gruenbaum's tragic conclusion follows: "People seem to learn only from their own experience. The Jews of Hungary, too, are still waiting. We have not yet heard about the acts of heroism and splendid desperation that they are carrying out [...]. They still trust that they will gain from what they're losing; they still trust that they have what to lose." As for "the others" – evidently in reference to the leadership, local and elsewhere – "the consciousness of the responsibility that is theirs stops them from doing anything that might endanger those in the clutches of death without a brief spell of grueling labor before or afterward, this time relating to developments on the front." Thus, it was Gruenbaum's hypothesis that as the front approached the labor camps, the Jews interned in them would be put to death. By saying this, he was predicting, as it were, the death marches of the remnants of Hungarian Jewry. This, Gruenbaum said in conclusion, seems to be "the fate of Hungarian Jewry, from which there is no refuge and no escape in our world."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David*; Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*; Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*; and Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> "Ve'im nigzerah gezerah" [And If the Die Is Cast], *Ha'olam*, *ibid.*

Gruenbaum's remarks attracted criticism from *Ha'aretz*, which actually agreed with their essence but took exception to their timing and manner. *Ha'aretz* reminded Gruenbaum that only five months earlier, at an emergency conference held in Jerusalem for the rescue fundraising drive, he had demanded "money, lots of money," thereby creating the impression that large-scale rescue indeed depended only on large amounts of money. Furthermore, *Ha'aretz* added, rumors about the existence of "a comprehensive plan for the rescue of Hungarian Jewry" had leaked from the Rescue Committee's deliberations.<sup>25</sup> Now, however – *Ha'aretz* intoned heavily – Gruenbaum himself has published an article urging the Jews to rise up for their last battle, not for rescue but for their honor as human beings and Jews. Reacting to this contradiction, *Ha'aretz* said that yes, "One can understand Mr. Gruenbaum's approach, one can agree with the need for Jewish resistance to the acts of extermination with the last of their remaining strength, but one cannot turn to the public with such a statement in one hand and speak of comprehensive rescue in the other."<sup>26</sup>

*Ha'aretz's* perplexity shows that Gruenbaum, too, the realist who entertained no illusions about the state of the Jews in occupied Europe, sometimes fell for the illusions that, like looking the truth in the eye, were an inseparable part of the tragic reality.

As for the merits of *Ha'aretz's* question, one may find an answer in Tuvia Friling's detailed study that demonstrates, on the basis of the Rescue Committee debates, that there was in fact an impression in early 1944 that a "deal" with the Germans might take place. In April of that year, at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, Gruenbaum proposed that the Executive initiate negotiations with German representatives in Istanbul over halting the extermination of the "surviving remnant."<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, his public allusions to possibilities of rescue and his emphasis of the need for large sums of money for this purpose might at least have been based on information that he had received. During the internal discussions of the matter, Gruenbaum vehemently ruled out negotiations with the Nazis as long as deportations to the extermination camps continued<sup>28</sup> and objected to the intention of reporting to the British about such negotiations. His unequivocal positions created tension in the discussions between him and the members of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee and the Executive, and in particular between him and the treasurer, E. Kaplan, and the Chairman of the Executive, David Ben-Gurion.

It was Gruenbaum's personal frustration with the committee's deliberations and, above all, the fate of Hungarian Jewry, moving steadily toward its demise as the entire free world watched it take its final journey to the death

<sup>25</sup> "Bermuda shelanu" [Our Bermuda], *Ha'aretz*, June 16, 1944.

<sup>26</sup> "Ha-bilbul ha-mazik be-inyenei ha-hatsalah" [Harmful Confusion in Rescue Affairs], *ibid.*, July 6, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, Vol. B., pp. 5–6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–28.

camps, that prompted him to urge those still alive to embark on their final battle. His exhortation to the Jews of Hungary to fight for their honor was also his last appeal to his fellow Jews as a national leader. Gruenbaum's political decline was undoubtedly linked to the disaster that overtook the Jews of Poland. The connection between them, however, was more symbolic than political; after all, he had lost his status as a Zionist leader in Poland back in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This also explains why he had left Polish Jewry approximately ten years before the Holocaust.<sup>29</sup>

In Palestine in the 1930s, Gruenbaum's political status steadily lost ground for the additional reason of his tense relations with the Chairman of the Zionist Executive, David Ben-Gurion. Finally, his tenure as head of the Rescue Committee made him the target of public criticism originating in helplessness frustration.

All this notwithstanding, as a fighting personality, Gruenbaum was and remains a symbol of the new Polish Jewry: the collective that waged political struggle for its civil rights; the collective whose Zionist offspring set out to build the national home in Palestine for the Jewish people; whose other sons, the Bundists, spearheaded the struggle against antisemitism in that country; and the remnants of which rose up for their last battle for their own dignity and that of their people.

This symbolism captured Gruenbaum's strengths and weaknesses as a leader who represented the tribulations of European Jewry in general and Polish Jewry in particular. His strength lay in his courage to tell the public the truth after the hopes for rescue had dissipated and to present the matter in its full brutal nakedness. The source of his strength, however, was also the source of his weakness: the compulsive and self-centered nature of a leader who measures those close to him and the masses whom he aspires to lead by the standards of his personality. Thus Gruenbaum failed to comprehend the natural human urge to survive, to escape, or to hide in a bunker – either a real one or as a tragic symbol. Even if he was right that fleeing to imaginary hideouts offered no hope, he did not display enough sensitivity to the escapees' human fears. Instead, he urged them to fight for their dignity, disregarding his own basic premise that a people in exile cannot fight for its existence as settled peoples can.

Furthermore, due to his self-centeredness as a leader, Gruenbaum was insensitive to the fact that his call for the final battle also had a moral aspect. After all, he himself was not in a ghetto; he had settled in the "bunker" of Palestine. It is true that he did not leave Poland immediately after the occupation, as his comrades Moshe Sneh and Apolinary Hartglas did, leaving their flock behind. Just the same, he was not in the killing fields. Roman Frister, Gruenbaum's biographer, insists that "[Gruenbaum] demanded of others what he demanded of himself."<sup>30</sup> Even if we accept this, at this tragic juncture, as

<sup>29</sup> See Roman Frister, *Le-lo pesharah* [Without Compromise], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1987), chap. 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 11, p. 304.

he could not demand of himself to step out of the bunker, it would have been morally more appropriate to refrain from publicly demanding such a response from those being led to their death.

Admittedly, Gruenbaum was not the only one who found it very hard to endure the “disgrace” of those being led to their death like lambs to the slaughter. However, he was neither Abba Kovner in the Vilna ghetto nor the historian Emanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto. They had the personal moral right to remonstrate against the phenomenon; he did not. Importantly, the leader of the Hakibbutz Hameuhad movement, Yitzhak Tabenkin, granted uprising and self-defense the same human and national value that Gruenbaum did at the time. Tabenkin, however, had not urged the Jews in the ghettos to rise up *ex ante* and had not demanded that they leave the bunkers. Only after the uprisings did he elevate them to the pinnacle of personal and national heroism.<sup>31</sup> Gruenbaum also overstated the case when he argued that the Jews did not defend themselves like other peoples because they were mired in exile, citing the Serbs and other Balkan peoples as examples by negation. The resistance movement in the Balkans was hardly typical of most of the peoples of Europe, especially Western Europe. The difference between these peoples and the Jews was existential. Even when they fought the Nazis, they were not menaced with systematic and total annihilation at the hands of the best-equipped military organization in Europe. Furthermore, the Polish uprising in Warsaw in the summer of 1944 took place mainly for political motives and not for self-defense from extermination. Accordingly, he did the Jews an injustice by comparing them with other peoples. Moreover, he himself blamed the Jews’ national disaster on their unending exile, which, according to his Zionist worldview, could be rectified only by the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, or at least in part of it – as he had believed back in the 1930s, before the world war broke out. Therefore, once he shed the optimistic delusion that much of Polish and European Jewry would survive and restore its public life there, he viewed the construction of the society in Palestine as the only way to rescue Jewry as a national collective. This was the source of the radical belief, which subjected him to much criticism then and now, that funds earmarked for the construction of this society, for the many, should not be pledged to rescue – in other words, for the lives of the few. For this purpose, he insisted that other sources of finance be secured. This outlook, which he expressed in public, merged his pessimistic conviction that few possibilities of mass rescue existed with the belief that the path to constructive action for the few was open. By embracing this belief, Gruenbaum in the last phase of his public life symbolized, more than any other Jewish leader, his people’s powerlessness in the war and its resolve to turn the situation on its head thereafter.

<sup>31</sup> See Yitzhak Tabenkin, *Devarim* [Collected Speeches] (Yad Tabenkin: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1985), Vol. 4, p. 18.

## The Intellectuals' Delusional Optimism

In 1939–1942, as newspaper editorial boards in the three countries exhibited a cautiously optimistic frame of mind in regard to the fate of the Jews, various intellectuals expressed much more optimistic assessments and even offered rational solutions for the Jews' postwar future.

The term “intellectual” in this context includes historians, philosophers, writers, publicists, researchers, and also public figures – to the exclusion of newspaper editors, ranking journalists, regular publicists, and politicians whose words appeared in newspapers. The difference between the two is not only institutional but also topical. The men and women of the press focused their discussion on the present; the “intellectuals” pondered the future. While the journalists dealt with the existential politics of the war era, the intellectuals turned their attention to the historical processes that would follow the war. The intellectuals' interest in the future originated in the utopian tendencies that belong to the structure of all critical intellectual thinking irrespective of its purpose: an attempt to correct reality or raze it to the ground. The intellectuals who populated the group of concern to us had no need to advocate the destruction of the existing reality because this reality was steadily being destroyed as they looked on. What remained for them, then, was to cogitate rationally about the rebuilding of Jewish society after the war. The failure of their intellectual optimism resided in the contrast between acknowledgment of the “destructive” reality and faith in the “constructive” future.

From this standpoint, there was no difference between the members of this group in Palestine and those in the United States or Britain, nor among those of left-leaning, right-leaning, or liberal views. All found “dialectic encouragement” in the Jewish historical experience, which proved, to their minds, that generations upon generations of Jews had marshaled, from their internal sources, the mighty power to surmount their national disasters and rebuild Jewish life. In this matter, of course, there was a divergence of views between “catastrophic” Zionists, who ruled out the possibility of rebuilding in Europe after the war, and “gradualist” Zionists, who, believing that the Jews' exodus from Europe should take place gradually, affirmed the need to reconstruct

their lives in their countries of residence. Obviously, too, their views differed from those of “Diasporic” thinkers, who were convinced that Jewish life would carry on in its various Diaspora locations at the end of the war.

By exploring these views, expounded by familiar public personalities who enjoyed a status independent of political entities, we may examine the optimistic outlook – a term that carries relative meaning at different levels – that dominated Jewish public circles at this time even though the brutal truth of the situation was known and had been widely published, if not yet confirmed in all its monstrous manifestations.

In January 1939, nine months before the war began, hundreds of thousands of German Jewish refugees were pounding on the gates of the western countries, which were almost totally sealed. This spectacle prompted Shlomo Zemach, the author, agronomist, and participant in the Second Aliyah, to ask on the pages of *Davar*, “What should we impose on the Diaspora – a sense of frantic escape?” or “Should we reinforce the Jews’ spirit of resistance and defense in their places of residence, wherever they may be?”<sup>1</sup>

In Zemach’s opinion, the problem was not the need to rescue several hundred thousand persecuted Jews whose only hope for shelter was to escape from Germany, but rather the national political question at large: Is the Jewish public willing to accept the status of a nation of refugees?

Zemach opposed this possibility vehemently, convinced that the Nazi regime in Germany would expire quickly because the German people would not put up with it for long. Thus, he warned against the collective impugning of the German people, as the Nazis were doing to the Jews. After all, as enlightened and optimistic people, “We say that not only Jews but also Germans are not corrupted from birth and from the womb by dint of the blood that flows in their arteries.” Apart from the condition of the Jews in Germany, Zemach was also, and mainly, concerned about the fate of the 16 million Jews who were scattered around the world and especially, of course, in Europe. For all of them, in his opinion, only one course of action existed: “The Diaspora has to fight in its countries of residence until the storm passes. Under no circumstances should it regard the persecutions as a dictate of reality, part of the natural order. For the Jewish people, the heinous phenomenon [of Nazism] is temporary and transient.” Until it blows over, Jews have no other option, no other choice, than to hold on wherever they live. There is no place of asylum for 5 million Jews. It is more correct to believe that 80 million Germans will rise up against Hitler’s regime:

The question is how to assess the situation. Have we passed the point of despair and should anyone who can escape do so? Or is there still a shadow of hope that this bleak cloud, overshadowing all intellectual life, will be carried by the wind? Even one who thinks all is lost has nothing to be afraid of if he hopes as I do. And for those who believe that the world will overcome

<sup>1</sup> S. Zemach, “Shemad o qerav aharon ” [Assimilation or Last Battle], *Davar*, Jan. 10, 1939.



its internal destructive forces, this imperative of *hanging on everywhere, in Palestine and in the Diaspora and under all conditions* – is definitely the imperative of the moment (emphasis added).

During the war years, Zemach did not return to *Davar* to publish further reflections or thoughts about the plight of European Jewry. A year later, the poet Leah Goldberg stressed her belief that the main danger posed by the Nazi regime was the destruction of human civilization, which again found itself facing “the spiritual war that has been [fought] from Creation to the present day.”<sup>2</sup>

Two years after Zemach expressed his faith in the Jews’ ability to endure in their places of residence, the publicist and philosopher Yehiel Halperin published a polemic against those who believed that Jewry had a future in Europe between the Communist regime, which partly recognizes Jewish nationhood, as in the Birobidjan scheme, and the liberal democratic Europe that would succeed Hitler, in which Jews would enjoy civil equality. Halperin, like Zemach, was a consistent Zionist. The thing that set them apart, however, was Zemach’s belief in the sustainability of Jewish life in the postwar Diaspora. Halperin saw no such possibility:

Can the notion of continued exilic life, which has been etched into our flesh and our hearts in such a manner and that offers the Jews a future so wretched and insulting, lowly and suffocating – can this notion bring life and passion, transform the beaten dogs and heroes of a very difficult war, an existential war of a people reviled and persecuted by almost the whole world? [...] If we do not leave the exile – may we not face the danger of deteriorating into human dust and the refuse of nations if only the Gestapo’s whip ceases to crackle over our backs?!<sup>3</sup>

These two assessments of the national future of European Jewry after the war, although different in essence, share the underlying belief that most Jews in Europe would remain alive after the eradication of the Fascist regime. In this sense, Halperin was even more optimistic than Zemach. After all, reports about the extermination of large numbers of Jews in the towns of Ukraine and Belarus were proliferating by late 1941, especially after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union.

Abba Ahimeir, one of the most important ideologues of Revisionist Zionism, took an even farther-reaching view of the “exodus” from Poland than Halperin, the Socialist Zionist. As Ahimeir expressed it, the eruption of the war in 1939 had created an alliance of blood between the Polish people and the Jewish people, whose offspring were valiantly resisting the Nazi invaders. The Jewish soldier, Ahimeir noted, “fights for the White Eagle [the Polish national coat of arms] and the Star of David as one.” Abba Ahimeir’s national political and utopian vision, developed on the basis of this program,

<sup>2</sup> Leah Goldberg, “Tarbut hurban” [Culture of Destruction], *Davar*, July 19, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Yehiel Halperin, “Eiropah beli Hitler” [Europe without Hitler], *Davar*, Dec. 24, 1941.

asserted that the cruelty of historical reality also breeds solutions to historical problems. The only way to solve the problem of too many Jews in Poland, for example, is to engineer a mass outflux of Jews from that country by mutual Polish-Jewish consent. This is possible, in his opinion, because “the Polish public, on the one hand, is not permeated with the racial doctrine (its Catholicism precludes this) and, on the other hand, is largely free of the palaver of the legacy of the miserable French Revolution,” namely the delusional belief that the question of Israel among the nations will be solved by way of civil equality. In contrast, Ahimeir continued, “Only the Polish public understands the Jewish problem.” How so? Because in the extreme paradoxical manner typical of Abba Ahimeir, “Polish antisemitism is more comprehensible to us and, in essence, may be more useful to us than Western or Eastern European philosemitism. ‘The kiss of death is the harshest kiss of all.’”<sup>4</sup>

Jacob Leshchinsky, a sociologist and a Zionist Labor Movement stalwart who spent the war in the United States, held a view similar to that of the Revisionist extremist, Ahimeir. Although Leshchinsky’s utopian imagination did not steer him toward an alliance of historical interests between Jews and Poles, it prompted him, too, to advocate a mass exodus of Jews from Poland at the very beginning of the war. Unlike his movement colleague Yehiel Halperin, however, Leshchinsky believed that the large and definitive majority of Polish Jews would emigrate to the United States once the war was over. Thus, American Jewry would become “the national center of Diaspora Jewry, 16 million strong, [and would] assume responsibility for the national fate of all of world Jewry, perhaps including that of Palestine.”<sup>5</sup> As it happened, however, millions of Polish Jews neither emigrated en masse to Palestine nor relocated to the United States; instead, they were transported to their death on Polish soil.

Utopian optimism about the fate of European Jewry was also shared by Jacob Robinson, who was born in Lithuania and emigrated to the United States, where he headed the Institute for Jewish Affairs, and by Nahum Goldmann, already a well-known Zionist functionary and the Zionist Organization’s delegate to the World Jewish Congress. Both men pictured the postwar solution to the Jewish question within the framework of international arrangements. Despite the Nazis’ murderous ways, Robinson stressed, “millions of Jews will survive this war”; consequently, the question of their fate will surface at once. The answer, he said, lies in the need for an urgent comprehensive search for places around the globe where they may settle in large numbers. Palestine is only one such place and not even the most preferable of them.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “Rosh hodesh September 1939” [September 1, 1939], *Hamashqif*, Sept. 5, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> J. Leshchinsky, “Ha-hagirah be-hayeinu” [Migration in Our Lives], *Davar*, Dec. 14, 1939. See also J. Leshchinsky, “Der Khurbn fun Eyropeishn Identum,” *Idisher Kemfer*, Aug. 9, 1940. The term *khurbn* refers here to the destruction of Jewish culture, as distinct from physical extermination.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Robinson, “Preparing for Peace,” *Congress Weekly*, Feb. 2, 1941.

Nahum Goldmann, the politician-intellectual and a central figure in the World Jewish Congress in the late 1930s, shared Robinson's belief that despite the tragic plight of European Jewry, which from the political standpoint could not be modified or even slightly alleviated, most European Jews would survive. Therefore, he said, once the war reaches its end, we will confront a situation in which six to seven million homeless and destitute Jews would remain in Europe. The only solution for them is not just to improve their material situation and restore their status quo ante on the basis of civil equality, but also to ordain far-reaching political change in Europe. The change would lead to the establishment of a European federation of states, including the national minorities of these states. The international constitution that would underlie this federation, Goldmann believed, would replace the Versailles treaties that had been signed at the end of World War I and that had failed to withstand the various peoples' national interests and cravings. In this utopian vision, Goldmann assigned the Jewish people the "noble task" of serving as the "vanguard" of a movement that would engineer the most important political and national progress in human history – the establishment of a federative international world authority wielding power and political clout.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Nahum Goldmann was a realist who entertained no illusions about the condition of the Jews in the near present, as well as an optimist about their future, Salo Baron, the noted Jewish national historian, proved to be a consummate optimist in his view of the condition of the Jews in the present and the future alike.

In May 1940, as German armored divisions and paratroop battalions were defeating the French and British forces on the Western front, Baron delivered a lecture at a conference of Jewish organizations that dealt with relief for refugee and ghettoized Jews, held in Pittsburgh. When the lecture was published three months later, an editorial note was attached stating that Baron had been asked if he wished to revise any of the contents but had insisted that the lecture appear verbatim.<sup>8</sup>

Baron began by criticizing the "state of panic, verging on catastrophic despair," that had gripped the American public and, in particular, the American Jews. The intensity of the despair, he said, had impelled many of his friends to decide to stop making relief donations for Jews in occupied Europe and Palestine, which the Italian armies were steadily approaching. After all, they had become convinced that these efforts would no longer help the intended beneficiaries. Baron, in contrast – an optimistic historian who refused to view Jewish history as solely a "lacrimal" narrative, and juxtaposed favorable and constructive phenomena in the generations of Jewish life over the persecutions, discrimination, and catastrophes – made an effort this time, too, to prove that the towel should not yet be thrown in. In this case, however,

<sup>7</sup> Nahum Goldmann, "Post War Problems," *Congress Weekly*, Nov. 28, 1941.

<sup>8</sup> Salo W. Baron, "Reflections on the Future of Jews in Europe," *Contemporary Jewish Record*, July–August 1940.

Baron discussed not the past but the future – a domain in which a historian is probably unqualified unless he or she believes in the cyclicity of historical processes.

Baron's optimistic outlook was constructed of three distinctly different scenarios. The first and the most optimistic was that the enlistment of the United States and the Soviet Union in the war would doom Germany to defeat. Importantly, Baron said this a year before the Germans invaded the USSR and a year and a half before the Japanese attacked the United States. In his second scenario, also optimistic, Baron noted with emphasis that some two-thirds of the Jews, who lived in the United States and the Soviet Union after the latter country's annexation of Polish territories and their Jewish population of two million or so, were outside the danger zone controlled by the Nazis. Insofar as this optimistic assessment related to Soviet Jewry, Baron shared the view that the American Jewish Communists were disseminating to justify the German-Soviet alliance. Baron's hope was that the vastnesses of the USSR would be made available to the Jews not only to save them in the present but also to organize their national life, even though Baron realized that the Communist regime was applying a policy, for the time being, that was destroying Jewish culture.

Baron then moved on to the third scenario, which was more original than the first two in its bizarre optimism, even at a time when no one yet imagined the possibility of the mass extermination of European Jewry. Basing himself on the optimistic nature of the dialectic historical outlook, Baron maintained that the German occupation of much of Europe might alleviate the Jews' plight and might even improve their situation. In his opinion, the German occupation and domination of other peoples would lead, at the end of the historical process, to the creation of a multinational empire of sorts, over which Nazi Germany would ultimately lose its political hegemony. This situation, Baron believed, "might cool [Germany's] anti-Semitic zest."<sup>9</sup> He must have had in mind the historical example of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire of the pre-World War I era. Baron's unshakable optimism also led him to the notion that the Germans might reestablish the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Indeed, the reports about the Germans' intention of settling masses of Jews in the vicinity of Lublin meant that the Jews would be able to continue leading organized lives despite the immense suffering that might prove to be their fate. Furthermore, he assumed that according to the well-known imperialist technique of "divide and rule," the Germans might use the Jews as auxiliaries in their policy toward the other population group that was under their thumb. Admittedly, Baron stressed, this is not a desirable vision but a possibility that should not be overlooked.

A similar development, in his opinion, might take place in Palestine if the Italian Fascist authorities were to occupy that country. There, the local population – that is, the Arabs – might rise up against the Italian oppression.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

Consequently, the occupying power would have to ask the Jews “to help him stem the tide of the local nationalist rebellion.”<sup>10</sup>

What it all goes to show is that even a historian can get swept up in Machiavellian assessments when he attempts to discuss present or future political developments. Baron augmented this with another utopian political possibility: a situation in which the Fascist powers, Germany and Italy, would decide to grant the Middle East a quasi-autonomous political status. Such a development, in Baron’s opinion, might expedite an agreement between the two leaderships in Palestine, the Arab and the Jewish, on the granting of autonomy to the Yishuv, thereby allowing limited Jewish immigration from Europe to Palestine.

Baron made it clear to his listeners/readers, of course, that his ideas were merely musings about various possibilities that the Jewish people might envisage; their purpose was to encourage the heads of the various organizations to ponder the situation cautiously and judiciously and not to sink into the kind of despair that would induce a lethargy that would menace the Jewish people’s very existence. Even with this disclaimer, however, it took enormous self-confidence on Baron’s part to present the agitated and anxious public with such an intellectual brew of “utopian” ideas. Indeed, his message must have startled the audience; the aforementioned editorial note indicates as much. Even the contemporaneous reader is perplexed by the remarks of a historian of Baron’s importance and stature. The key to the riddle definitely lies in Baron’s optimistic historical outlook, which, paradoxically in view of the threatening present, led him to erroneously utopian predictions. When he took a longer-term view of the progression and results of the war, in contrast, Baron, the “optimist,” was above all a far-seeing realist when it came to the Soviet and American enlistment as Britain’s partners in the war against Fascist Germany, and in the longer term in respect to the political structure of post-war Europe.

Baron proposed the possible development of three alternative political models. The first was an absolute British hegemony in Europe after the disarmament, if not the political dismemberment, of Germany – something that indeed happened when the country was partitioned into East and West for some fifty years. The second was the establishment of a British- and Soviet-led European federation. The third was the creation of a European federation without British and Soviet participation; such a thing is taking shape at the present writing, with Britain but without no-longer-Soviet Russia. Importantly, Baron, the realist, warned that, absent Britain and Russia, Germany would wield ascending power and eventually become dominant due to its economic might – which goes to show that even historians who investigate the past are sometimes graced with prophecy about the future, and that “utopians” can also be “realists.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

As for the fate of the Jews of Europe, Baron the optimist, like the other intellectuals, assumed that most would outlast the war. Once the confederation of European peoples came into being, he predicted, the best solution for the Jews of Europe would also be found.<sup>11</sup> Without explaining exactly how, he stated that in view of historical experience, the Jews would be better off within a multinational political structure than in a structure of separate nation-states. As for the national project of repatriating some of Jewry to Palestine, he cited the idea – an accepted one in most Zionist circles – of a population exchange between the Palestinian Arabs, who would find a place in the neighboring Arab countries, and the Jews who would immigrate to Palestine. Concurrently, he foresaw international arrangements that would allow large numbers of European Jews to emigrate to other countries.<sup>12</sup>

In sum and in retrospect, there is no doubt that where Baron the “optimistic” historian was wrong, Baron the utopian-realist futurist was right. While not having imagined the nearly total annihilation of European Jewry, he foresaw the federal process that began in Europe after the war and culminated with the establishment of the confederative European Communities more than fifty years later. Let us admit that this process had no effect on the civil equality of such Jews as remained in Europe after the war; they obtained this status in their respective countries of residence. The European confederation, however, would definitely influence the Jews’ self-organization within an ethno-cultural, extraterritorial framework even though they lacked a common language such as that of the Jews of the United States. Baron was also right about the postwar growth of the Jewish national center in Palestine. Thus, paradoxically, the source of his error – his inexhaustible optimism about the fate of European Jewry in the near term – was the source of his correctness in respect to the longer term, following the war and the victory over the Nazis.

The optimistic debate over the fate of the Jews after the defeat of Nazism was terminated in 1944 by Hannah Arendt, who was then at the beginning of a career that would elevate her to centrality as a conservative-liberal thinker in western academia.

During the war years and for several years thereafter, Arendt held views approximating those of Zionism and identified in particular with the Jewish national perspective of Simon Dubnow.<sup>13</sup> In August 1944, she published – in the same journal that had carried Salo Baron’s lecture four years previously – an article proposing a comprehensive settlement for the situation of the national minorities in Europe upon the end of the Nazi occupation of the continent.<sup>14</sup> In her historical analysis of the problem of the national minorities in interwar Europe, Arendt underscored the status and *problematique* of the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>13</sup> See my book, *Between Auschwitz and Jerusalem* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2003), pp. 35–45.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Concerning Minorities,” *Contemporary Jewish Record*, August 1944.

Jewish people, which she defined as a “minority par excellence” in Europe. Given her positive attitude toward national minorities’ right to cultural self-determination, she believed that the future citizen-state would evolve into an economic federation of nations in a common state territory, and that this federation would become the home of all its citizens and would be managed concurrently and cooperatively by omnibus institutions at the federal level and separate autonomous institutions of each national group separately.

Arendt, publishing her article in the same quarterly that printed Baron’s lecture four years earlier, went on to weave his utopian federal ideas into her own. Baron’s idea, she said, had once been suitable for the condition of the Jews as the quintessential national minority among the peoples of Europe. By now, however, she continued, the Jews, tragically, had ceased to be a national minority because the overwhelming majority of them had been put to death. Instead, she evidently believed – but did not state explicitly – that the vestiges of the Jews had a hopeful future in a Europe that would be based on states composed of national autonomies. She even toyed with the idea of the resurrection of Jewish autonomous national life not only in Europe but even in Germany.<sup>15</sup>

Although these hopes were somewhat exaggerated – she herself doubted them – a degree of Jewish community life has resumed today in the new Germany. In 1943–1944, however, it took a heavy dose of “intellectual selfishness” even to hint at the restoration of Jewish life in Europe.

In contrast to Baron’s and Arendt’s optimistic political view of the future of European Jewry, the British Jewish historian Cecil Roth took a different if not aberrant take on the matter. In late 1940, a year after the war broke out, Roth published an article under the troubling title of “The End of a Century,”<sup>16</sup> in which he expressed profound fear for the continuation of Jewish existence in Europe. His trepidation flowed from a long-term historical perspective that noted three watershed events in European Jewish history: the Crusaders’ decrees against the Jews in 1096; the woes of 1648, brought about by the rebellious Cossacks against the Jews of Eastern Europe; and 1940, when the Nazis’ campaign of oppression and destruction against the Jews in the occupied countries got under way. Posterity, Roth predicted, would probably recall these events, like their predecessors, as “*gezeroth Tash*” (i.e., the persecutions of 5700, i.e., 1939–1940). In Roth’s opinion, the earlier bouts of distress were etched into the traditional national memory not necessarily due to their quotient of terror but because they were watersheds in European Jewish history. Thus, the 1096 troubles marked the end of an “age of tranquility” in West European Jewish life and the beginning of migration to the eastern part of the continent. The events of 1648 symbolized the end of the era of efflorescence in East European Jewry. And the reign of anti-Jewish terror in occupied Europe

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Cecil Roth, “The End of a Century: A Year of Terror and Trial,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, Sept. 27, 1940.

starting in 1940, in Roth's opinion, might signify the end of the century of emancipation: "The clock of Jewish emancipation has been turned back with the clock of human progress," he intoned. In other words, unlike Baron and Arendt, who believed that the Jews, like the others, would again participate in the march of progress at the end of the war, Roth was altogether unsure. While stressing that he was not overly pessimistic, he proposed weighing the Jewish future as a people in concepts different from those in effect in the previous hundred years.

From here on, Roth believed, the condition of the Jews as individuals and as people would change for the worse. As long as the war continues, he said, even if it is not aimed against them alone but at democratic and liberal society at large, the Jews will be its principal victims.

At this stage, Roth did not think in terms of a *sho'ah* in the genocidal sense of the term; rather, he was distressed by the certainty that the Nazis would destroy Jewish culture in Europe. This culture could be saved only in the British Isles, in the United States across the Atlantic, and in Palestine. In both western countries, however, a generation of young Jews more assimilated than Jewish was being raised. ("We are bringing up a generation, not of Jews, but of de-Judaized non-Aryans.") Although not totally despairing of the chances of a Jewish spiritual revival in these countries, Roth pinned his main and most confident hope on the Yishuv in Palestine:

Today, for the first time in merely two thousand years, there is, thanks to the self-sacrificing efforts of the past quarter-century, a solid Jewish nucleus in Eretz Israel. Grievous trials may be in store for them as well. But so long as their head is unbowed, we can look forward to the Jewish future with confidence.

The editor of *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, Yitzhak Lufban, had written in the same vein a year earlier. "Zionism," Lufban said, "was indeed dealt a severe political blow on the eve of the war, but even so it remains the only fulcrum on which one may rest the lever for the rescue of the Israelite nation from extinction."<sup>17</sup>

As for Roth, this was undoubtedly a pronouncedly Jewish-Zionist statement that exuded an optimism much different from that of Baron's and Arendt's. The paradox of Roth's conviction, however, is that today, seventy years after his words were written, the Jewish contents of the State of Israel have become the topic of a public debate in Israel itself.

In sum, the inability of the various intellectuals to grasp the true meaning of the situation in 1939–1942 attests not only to them but also to the entire public and, especially, the Jewish press, which was supposed to explain to this public what was happening and what was coming. The intellectuals, more than the journalists, however, demonstrated the human inability to fathom a totally new situation, unprecedented in historical experience. This was due not

<sup>17</sup> Y. Lufban, "Ha-tziyonut ve-ha-yishuv be-mivhan ha-tequfah" [Zionism and the Yishuv in the Test of the Era], *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, Oct. 24, 1939.



only to their professional skill and their experience in judging social and cultural phenomena by the standard of rationality, but also to an approach that was free of the political considerations that informed the writings of newspaper editors and journalists. Indeed, all the intellectuals discussed in this chapter possessed a national worldview but not the same one. The class of thinkers quoted here included “spiritual Zionists” such as the poet Leah Goldberg and the historian Cecil Roth; Socialist Zionists such as Jacob Leshchinsky and Yehiel Halperin; the Revisionist Abba Ahimeir; the Liberal-Zionists Nahum Goldmann and the researcher Jacob Robinson; and non-Zionists such as the historian Salo Baron and the political thinker Hannah Arendt. This diversity, which was not only ideological but also linguistic and cultural, provides the best possible evidence of the existence of the transnational community of Jewish intellectuals who, due to their rational outlooks, could not conceive of the inconceivable thing that was unfolding at the time.

## Between Lidice and Majdanek

This chapter probes the response of the American and British Jewish press to the attitude of the general press in these countries toward the Holocaust as the tragedy unfolded.

The discussion begins on the “seam” between two periods – the middle of 1942 – and ends in 1944, when non-Jewish American journalists became eyewitnesses to the mass-murder actions. Thus, it mulls the tragic events in “real time,” much unlike the critical studies that American historians, most of them Jewish, have produced in the past twenty years about the general press’ treatment of the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup>

By comparing two critical approaches to one phenomenon at different times, we illuminate a cultural and existential difference between them. Journalistic criticism is at once publicistic and sensitive; basic academic research transcends real time. The Jewish journalists discussed in this chapter were intellectuals of East European origin, whose language of culture was Yiddish; the historians are American- or British-born, and their language is English. The Jewish papers printed the remarks of former-immigrant intellectuals who were flush with gratitude to their democratic countries of residence, which had given them the civil status of free men and women; the historians are natives of these countries, who take their equal status for granted and not as a generous gift from a host society.

<sup>1</sup> Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: the American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 278; Robert W. Ross, *So It Was True: the American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 289; Laurel Leff, “When the Facts Didn’t Speak for Themselves: the Holocaust in the *New York Times* 1939–1945,” in Robert Moses Shapiro, ed., *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism during the Holocaust* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2003); Max Frenkel, “Turning Away from the Holocaust,” *ibid.*; Marvin Kalb, “Journalism and the Holocaust,” *ibid.*; Colin Shindler, “The ‘Thunderer’ and the Coming of the Shoah: 1933–1942,” *ibid.*; Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

It is also worth bearing in mind that during the war years – especially the first two years, 1939–1941, before the United States joined the anti-Nazi struggle – manifestations of organized political antisemitism had appeared in the United States and indications of social antisemitism were not lacking in Britain.<sup>2</sup> The journalists wrote against the background of a state of war that had engulfed the democracies, as Britain even fought for its existence. The contemporaneous academic criticism, in contrast, is produced in the placid environment of a democratic, liberal, and tolerant society, in which this type of research is predominant.

The discussion in this chapter takes up three interrelated topics: the Jews' real-time response; comparison of the attitude of the American general press with that of its British counterpart; and the distinction between the real-time criticism expressed in the Jewish press and the academic criticism of contemporaneous scholars of Jewish origin.

In terms of sequence, the chapter is divided into three parts: the middle of 1942, typified by the tragedy in Lidice; late 1942, centering on the confirmed reports about the mass killings of European Jews; and the middle of 1944, concerning the response to the discovery of the mass graves at the Majdanek extermination camp near Lublin. A comparative approach is used throughout, weighing the press' response to the brutal murder of hundreds against its response to the extermination of millions.

To focus attention on the response of the Jewish press, I begin the story at its end, that is, with the response of the widest-circulation Jewish newspaper in the United States, *Forverts*, to the reportage and commentary in main American newspapers, especially *The New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, about the mass murders at Majdanek when these were discovered in 1944.

*Forverts'* response was given in an editorial titled "Lublin and the American Press,"<sup>3</sup> and due to its importance I present it here in an expanded abstract. The editorial begins by stating the by-now-unchallengeable fact that a million and a half innocent people, including some one million Jews, were put to death at the Majdanek extermination camp. This enormous act of murder, perpetrated by the Nazis in cold blood, without batting an eye, and in a horrifyingly systematic way, as though it were a matter-of-fact job, is the greatest and ghastliest tragedy in human history. Naturally, then, anyone who is shocked by this tragedy, several years in duration – and Jews in particular – should monitor the world's reaction with bated breath.

*Forverts* addresses its demand for an appropriate response first to the segment of the press that reflects and shapes the consciousness of society. This rules out the Jewish press, which has done everything possible to call general society's attention and conscience to the demand to do justice for the Jewish victims, even though the Jewish publications were often gripped with the justified fear that this outcry fell on deaf ears.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 10 in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> "Lublin and the American Press," *Forverts*, Sept. 1, 1944.

Therefore, the Jewish public, and especially the newspapers that speak for them, are curious to know how the general American press will respond to the appalling tragedy unearthed at the mass graves of Majdanek. Although the reports about this camp were not new, the editors of the general newspapers doubted their reliability because they had originated in secondary sources. Now the situation has changed: A Soviet-Polish committee of investigation, looking into the Nazis' murder operations, has invited dozens of American correspondents to witness the outcome of the Lublin inferno with their own eyes. These journalists have personally seen the gas chambers where people were asphyxiated; they have seen the crematorium chambers; they have seen the mass graves.

The American journalists affirm unanimously: They are totally convinced, beyond even the slightest doubt, that the Nazis murdered hundreds of thousands of people in this institute of murder. What more did it take? The American correspondents saw dozens of German military people taken prisoner who had served in this extermination camp, and they told them about the mass murder, carried out in the manner of daily work, and even admitted that children and babies had also been taken to the crematoria.

Thus it is no longer doubted that Lublin represents the greatest tragedy human civilization has ever experienced. *The New York Times* even stressed in an editorial that its correspondent, who submitted the report, is a senior and experienced newspaperman; accordingly, one can trust his testimony unquestioningly.

If so, one might expect the American press to stir up a storm in this matter. To the credit of *The New York Times*, it must be said that it ran the tragic story on page one. And to the credit of the journalist, W. H. Lawrence, his account was moving and every line of it attested to the depth of his agitation, which did not always find the right words to express. Therefore, *The New York Times* should have given the tragedy a larger-font headline and a more prominent place on page one; after all, a big headline attracts more reader attention. In contrast, the second New York newspaper, the *Herald Tribune*, buried the information on one of its inside pages, in addition to the account of its correspondent who had visited the camp. Unfortunately, one has no choice but to add that New York's other newspapers paid less attention to the tragedy of Lublin than was warranted.

Apart from the very fact of publishing the report, the Jewish papers examined their Gentile counterparts' editorial treatment of the revelation. In *Forverts'* opinion, the *Times* ran a rather good editorial but placed it third in its series of editorials and not first, as such an appalling tragedy obviously deserved. The *Times'* editorial, however, at least expressed no doubt about what its correspondent in Lublin had submitted.

The *Herald Tribune*, in contrast, devoted a very short editorial to the topic and regrettably, said *Forverts*, expressed doubt about the contents in the very first paragraph, reasoning that one should wait for further testimonies. To the editorialist's credit, it should be noted that he had drawn the correct conclusion from the affair: He strongly emphasized that the perpetrator of these acts

of blood-curdling murder, the Nazi regime, should be punished as mercilessly as it had treated its victims, and that the nation that had abetted these actions is unfit to share the company of civilized peoples.

If so, however, *Forverts* asked, how had the press thus far not given expression to the magnitude of the tragedy that had befallen European Jewry? Its answer was neither unequivocal nor even accusatory. The editorialist, finding the phenomenon hard to explain, preferred to answer the question with another question: Has society grown accustomed to mass killing and, for this reason, become so benumbed that it no longer grasped the essence of the atrocity? These, however, were mere “rhetorical” conjectures, meant to stress the immense pain evoked by the discrimination that this press practiced when weighing Jews’ suffering as against that of non-Jews.

Then the editorialist mentioned the murder of approximately 300 Czechoslovakian civilians in the village of Lidice, following the assassination of the Nazi arch-executioner Reinhard Heydrich. The American press had paid more attention to this act, *Forverts* alleged – so much more that the lead article in the *Herald Tribune* on the mass murders in Majdanek spoke of Lidice as a great tragedy and of Lublin as more of the same, so to speak. The *Forverts* editorialist hurriedly emphasized that no one intends to downplay the magnitude of the crime committed in Lidice, but that Lidice and Majdanek defy comparison. The former involved the murder of hundreds and the latter the systematic extermination of a million and a half people. In Lidice, the murderers had an “excuse” – avenging their leader’s death – whereas in Lublin-Majdanek, enormous numbers of people, including a million Jews, were murdered methodically and by design for the sole “sin” of having existed.

The editorial provides emphatic evidence of the powerlessness of Jewish public opinion, as expressed in the writer’s restrained and anguished wording. It also exudes a whiff of sarcasm, describing the Jewish public’s tense anticipation of the general press’ response to the revelation of the unquestioned facts about the mass murders, and in “thanking” New York’s two main newspapers for seeing fit to highlight the Jews’ tragedy on their front pages at long last.

The intensity of *Forverts*’ helpless agony is evidenced not only in its sarcasm but also in a morally charged argument that differentiates between the murders in Lidice, behind which a reason existed, and the senseless acts of annihilation at Majdanek. Although there is no real moral distinction to be made – one cannot measure the murder of innocents in quantitative terms – the material difference in the murderers’ intent deserves emphasis. In Lidice, people were murdered to deter the anti-Nazi resistance; in Lublin-Majdanek and other concentration camps, millions of Jews were put to death to exterminate an entire people. In this sense, the crime in Majdanek also differs from the killing of millions of Poles, Russians, and members of other nationalities that the Nazi wished to enslave but not to annihilate.

We should then digress to the origin of the matter. In the summer of 1942, members of the Czechoslovakian underground assassinated the chief of the Gestapo, Reinhard Heydrich, near the village of Lidice. As a result, the Nazi

authorities carried out the collective punishment of executing all male villagers and sending the women and children into exile. To publicize the deterrent effect, they outdid themselves by advertising the atrocity that they had committed in the official state media. *The New York Times* reported the affair on its cover page, along with a general list of the Nazis' victims, itemized by countries. The Jews did not appear on this list as a separate category.<sup>4</sup> The next day, it ran a lead article under the charged headline "Lidice the Immortal."<sup>5</sup> The shock with which the mass murder was greeted prompted the editors to ask whether the victims were entitled to draw up the rules for a just settlement with Germany after its defeat in the war, and their answer was yes! Given that the emotional outburst that followed was atypical of the usually restrained style of the *Times*, it follows verbatim:

It is they who will rise when the great Nazi retreat begins, from behind every tree and every ruined wall, they who will say that the beaten broken Nazi thugs shall have no water, no food, and no truce, they who will insist that no mountain, no valley, no depth of the sea, no island shall save the guilty for retribution; they will avenge Lidice.

The moral outrage led the editorialist to sanction revenge against the murderers by their victims and prohibit the denial of this revenge by those who had the good fortune to have avoided the occupied peoples' suffering. Therefore, "Let them first be satisfied in grief and they have earned the right. After that, we can help write the peace."

Apart from justifying revenge against the murderers' nation, Lidice became a moral symbol for the prevention of future villainy on behalf of all of humankind:

The name of Lidice extinguished? The name goes around the world. It is written in blood in every free man's atlas. It blazes in undying fire on every map of Europe. What happened there will never be forgiven, never forgotten. If there was in any honest mind a rag, a shred of compromise, there in that martyred glorious town – where all the men died because none could be found to denounce the "guilty" – it burned to ashes.

*The New York Times* never wrote that way about the extermination of millions of Jews.

The lead article in the *Herald Tribune* spoke more moderately but no less forcefully in condemnation of the murderous deed after the Nazis' official announcement convinced the editors that it had actually happened. The opinion piece likened the Nazis to the king of the Huns, who derived his glory from viewing mounds of corpses. According to the editorialist, the atrocity resides not only in the act itself but also in the German government's official

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times*, June 11, 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *The New York Times*, June 12, 1942.

announcement of it as an overt manifestation of a policy of mass-murdering the innocent. Therefore:

It is useless to talk about vengeance; one cannot take revenge for a depravity of such depth. But the words of that announcement are imperishably engraved now upon millions of minds, and one thing is certain – that those individuals who convict themselves of such crime must be put forever beyond the power to harm.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, in the newspaper's opinion, in contrast to that of its rival, *The New York Times*, the German people should not be targeted for vengeance – such a move would be pointless – but should face enough restrictions and put up enough assurances to make sure that such a regime will never resurface. By implication, the *Times* was more horrified and drew more extreme conclusions than the *Tribune*; I will have more to say about this later in the chapter.

It is also noteworthy that the Lidice story, carried by the American media, elicited responses of protest and moral shock in American public opinion. Matters went so far that various localities that had German names were asked to change their names and several small towns actually offered to rename themselves Lidice. The awakening was so broad that it merited being mentioned in a *New York Times* editorial.<sup>7</sup>

The British press – the *London Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* – responded to the murders in Lidice in a totally different way, severely restrained and informative only. The Nazis' act of murderous revenge was soft-pedaled within the few laconic lines that these papers devoted to the factor that brought on Heydrich's assassination, the lethal techniques that he had introduced in Czechoslovakia. Only the *Manchester Guardian* took a slightly different approach, not necessarily by covering the revenge killings prominently but contrarily, by demanding that personal acts of vengeance against Nazi criminals be avoided because they cause brutal Nazi reprisals against the innocent population. Therefore, members of the resistance in the occupied countries should display "courage and self control."<sup>8</sup>

The murder *aktion* in Lidice and the responses to it took place in the summer of 1942, by which time reports about the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland and Russia were proliferating. As we know, the latter information was not privileged with the same response that Lidice had attracted. Hence the next question in our inquiry is how the Jewish press reacted to the media differentiation between murder and extermination.

The first to relate to this moral discrimination in an editorial, using restrained and balanced language, was the American Communist Party

<sup>6</sup> *Herald Tribune*, June 12, 1942.

<sup>7</sup> "Lidice, USA," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1942.

<sup>8</sup> "Attack on Heydrich," *London Times*, May 28, 1942; "New Czech Terror after Attack on Heydrich," *The Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 22, 1942; "The Attack on Heydrich," *Manchester Guardian*, May 29, 1942.

newspaper, *Morgn-Frayhayt*.<sup>9</sup> It stressed its total identification with the general protest over the murders in Lidice but hurriedly added, with emphasis, that “hundreds of Lidices” (*hunderter liditses*) were taking place concurrently against the Jews in occupied Europe, and that the number of victims of these operations had already climbed to one million. The editorialist had two things in mind by noting this: to focus attention on the Jewish suffering, which had been marginalized in the public consciousness; and to repeat the Soviet Union’s political demand to open a second front against the Nazis to defeat them more quickly and, thereby, to save the millions of candidates for extermination.

The publicist A. Ginzburg, writing in *Forverts*, preceded *Morgn-Frayhayt* on this account. With pained sarcasm he commented on the difference between the murder of hundreds in Lidice and the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Jews. The reason for the difference, he said, was the one Lidice counted as more important in the anti-Fascist democracies’ war propaganda than dozens of cities such as Vilna – to name only one – where tens of thousands of Jews had already been murdered. Why? Because the murder of Jews did not anger public opinion. The public’s attitude toward the Jews’ tragedy remains indifferent and bland, as it was since the war broke out. Now the public is not protesting against the murders, and back then it had not demanded the opening of the country’s gates to Jewish refugees who wished to immigrate.<sup>10</sup> Several months later, in December 1942, by which time the murder of the Jews in occupied Europe was an unquestioned fact, *Forverts* demanded a discussion of American public opinion’s attitude toward this development.<sup>11</sup>

The editorialist pointed out that Jewish public opinion was the first in the United States to warn about the impending danger that the ascendancy of Germany’s Nazi Fascist regime posed to the free world. In contrast, the American political establishment, unlike the British, disregarded this menace even after Hitler rose to power. The editorial then dredged up some uncomplimentary facts that had been forgotten: Before the war, the American press had indeed practiced much self-restraint in criticizing the Nazi regime. It had spoken with “half a mouth” (*halbn moyl*) about the German army’s persecution of Jews in the occupied countries. To be sure, one cannot accuse the American people of indifference toward the thing that was being done to the Jews of Europe. On the contrary: Empathy with their suffering has been expressed in many ways, especially among the clergy. This, however, is not enough:

Therefore, we must now intervene to bring the entire truth about the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews to American public opinion as quickly as possible. Concurrently we need to reinforce our demand of the U.S. government to step up its actions for the rescue of the Jews who are facing mass extermination.

<sup>9</sup> “Lidice, di idn un a tsveyte front,” *Morgn Frayhayt*, Oct. 25, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> A. Ginzburg, “Favos farshvaygtmen unzere korbonos” *Forward*, Aug. 15, 1942, quoted from J. Leshchinsky, *Idisher Kemfer*, Aug. 28, 1942.

<sup>11</sup> “Amerike un di natsi-shkhites oyf idn in Eyrope,” *Forverts*, Dec. 8, 1942.



If so, both Jewish newspapers express negation by way of affirmation. Each of them, in its own way, stresses that the Jews are being forgotten as they are being murdered. However, both avoid direct criticism of the general press.

The harshest and most vehement remarks about the free world's attitude toward the slaughter of European Jewry were penned by the Jewish sociologist Jacob Leshchinsky. He decries the "universalization" of the Jewish tragedy, which fails to distinguish between the Jews' particularistic disaster and the suffering of the other peoples under the oppressive yoke of Nazi rule. It is this attitude, in Leshchinsky's judgment, that explains why the leaders of the democracies were not warning Hitler and were not demanding, backing their rhetoric with threats, that he stop the annihilation.

In Leshchinsky's opinion, this attitude toward the Jewish tragedy in public opinion is manifested in the public's reaction to Lidice. *The New York Times* had written two editorials about these criminal murders, and the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, had published a protest in one of the American newspapers. Leshchinsky responded to this by stating that although the response of American public opinion is commendable, "I am not embarrassed to say that I am jealous: Why is no one coming to the defense of our blood?" (*Farvoz unzer blut iz hefker?*) The Jews, he continued, share the blame for this, "because we feel so wretched, so neglected, that we don't demand anything" – even though every Jewish family of European extraction is bereaved – "and we are silent" (*un mir shvaygn*).<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the criticism and sense of grievance that were voiced in regard to the general press, *The Advocate*, one of the two Zionist newspapers in Chicago, launched a direct and blunt attack on *The New York Times*. When the doomed Jews in the Warsaw ghetto began their last desperate struggle against their murderers not as martyrs but as almost unarmed fighters, the *Times* reported it as though the tragic struggle was not being waged by Jews. The *Times* was unwilling to give these Jews the honor of being identified as persons sacrificing themselves in a struggle of desperate valor. And this, in a newspaper that was established and is run by Jews and that festoons its banner with the slogan, "All the news that's fit to print!" Indeed, the pride of the Jews in their struggle as Jews against the Nazis is not fit to emphasize, or at least to print in boldface, in *The New York Times*.<sup>13</sup>

The two mainstream Zionist newspapers in New York, *Der Morgen Dzhurnal* and *Der Tog*, spoke in the same spirit.<sup>14</sup>

The Zionist newspaper in London, *Di Tsayt*, sounded the alarm about the silence of the British press in early 1942, before the reports about the mass murders of Jews began to appear. Its editor, Morris Myer, asked why

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Leshchinsky, "Iz unzer blut hefker?" *Idisher Kemfer*, June 26, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> *The Advocate*, Dec. 31, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> "Soyne-tsién hoybn oyf kep," *MJ*, Jan. 23, 1942; "Di anti-idishe aroystretung fun der New Yorker 'Times'," *Der Tog*, Aug. 16, 1943; William Cohen, "The Strange Case of the N.Y.T.," *Jewish Frontier*, February 1942.

the general press maintained silence in view of reports about the murder of 240,000 Jews by the Nazis in Ukraine. The British press, he said, allowed this dreadful information to pass by with stony silence that is hard to comprehend. Do they not realize that silence is sometimes construed as consent? Do they not realize that their silence is encouraging the murderers to do what they are doing? He did not expect them to answer. His own answer to these painful questions is that the Jews, lacking statehood, have no government-in-exile in London as the Norwegians and the Poles do. The British press reckons with these governments-in-exile and therefore protests brutalities against these nations' innocent civilians. In his opinion, the blame resides not only with the editors of the newspapers but also with the heads of the Jewish organizations, which do not adequately warn the politicians and editors about the Nazis' atrocities, not only those against the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

Three months later, as the media reported the murder of some one million Jews, the publicist S. Goldschmidt addressed himself to the matter. The silence of the press reflects a paradox, he explained: The reports have shocked liberal public opinion so badly that it does not believe what the newspapers and the radio are saying. Public opinion can grasp the murder of hundreds of people, as had happened in Lidice, but not the extermination of millions. Goldschmidt then told about a friend of his, a noted British journalist, who had sat with him at a press conference where the details of the magnitude of the extermination were released. The man wrote down the information in his notebook and placed a question mark next to each number. Goldschmidt's conclusion: Psychologically and politically, democratic society at war with Fascism will not reserve a special place for the suffering of the Jews because in all the Nazi-occupied countries, the Jews are suffering together with members of other peoples. From this standpoint – from the perspective of general public opinion – the Jews are no longer “exceptional.”<sup>16</sup> Goldschmidt must have been thinking of the years leading up to the war, when the Jews of Germany were being persecuted by the Nazis.

The situation described by the Jewish publicists changed temporarily in late 1942, as authoritative reports about the mass murder of Jews in Poland and Russia appeared in November–December of that year. *The New York Times* came out with a lead article headlined, “The First to Suffer,” which alluded to some change in the paper's policy in regard to the plight of the Jews. This article, without abandoning the *Times*' universalistic approach to the victims of the Nazi regime, nevertheless stresses the singularity of the Jews in that they had been marked as the first to suffer. The explanation lies in the Jews' particularistic weakness. The Nazis searched for a scapegoat and found one in the Jews because they were a small minority among the nations, the most scattered and the most powerless of all. The writer's conclusion in this matter

<sup>15</sup> “Fun redaktor: Di shoyderlikhe natsi merderayen oyf idn un andere – farvos farshvaygtmen dos fargosene idish blut?” *Di Tsayt*, March 20, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> S. Goldschmidt, “Der shlayer is aropefaln,” *Di Tsayt*, July 16, 1942.

is paradoxical given the anti-Jewish-national worldview of the owners of the paper, the Sulzberger family: It states, after all, that the key to the Jews' suffering and martyrdom lies in their being a minority.<sup>17</sup>

The paradox in this definition of the Jewish problem is its pronouncedly Zionist nature: It is Zionism that regards the Jewish problem as mainly a question of a far-flung minority that does not constitute a national majority anywhere on earth. This is why all Zionist currents, from left to right, aspired to the attainment of a Jewish majority in Palestine; even Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir, which in the 1930s championed the idea of a binational state, did not abandon the principle of a Jewish national majority in Palestine.<sup>18</sup> Again, *The New York Times* did not abandon its universalistic outlook and went out of its way in this article, too, to emphasize the suffering of other peoples (the Poles and the Czechs), the memory of Lidice, and the French and the Norwegians. Just the same, by defining the Jews as "the first to suffer," the writer falls into the "trap" of Zionist theoreticians such as Moses Hess, Pinsker, Herzl, and their successors.

The *London Times* actually reinforced the argument about the uniqueness of the Jewish problem. It describes the problem as one of historical fate and defines the murders as a "pogrom." Although pogroms have occurred before, never have they attained such a magnitude, and the murderous, cruel, planned, and perfected nature of the Nazi actions is unprecedented. Just the same, the *London Times*, like *The New York Times*, continues to cling to the universalistic "horns" of the mass-murder altar; it, too, lists alongside the Jews the other peoples that are suffering in occupied Europe<sup>19</sup> and states emphatically that the Jews' fate relative to that of the other peoples is the worst "only in scope" but "not in nature." It offers this comparison even though it explicitly defines the Jews as a "helpless nation" that is like no other nation, because the others continue to resist Nazism as nations and therefore cannot be considered helpless.

The two other mainstream British newspapers, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Manchester Guardian*, address the matter in similar language. The *Telegraph* dismisses the argument, put forward in *The New York Times* and the *London Times*, that the rescue of the Jews depends on rapid victory in the war; instead, it urges the Allies to adopt special rescue measures, such as lifting all restrictions on the transfer of Jews to the United States and Britain and encouraging neutral countries to open their gates to such refugees as manage to elude the Nazis' clutches.<sup>20</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, traditionally pro-Zionist since the Balfour Declaration, went farther than any other paper in speaking this way. It demanded all possible action in piercing rhetoric that illuminated the

<sup>17</sup> "The First to Suffer," *The New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> See Yosef Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920–1990* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> "The New Barbarism," *The Times*, Dec. 12, 1942; "The Tyranny in Europe," *ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1943; "A Pledge to the Jews," *ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1943.

<sup>20</sup> "Mass Murder," *The Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 18, 1942.

real and humanistic tragedy. Is there nothing that can be done? the newspaper asked. Yes, it answered, there is no doubt that only military victory over the Nazis will have a significant effect. When the victory comes, few Jews will remain alive in the Nazi-occupied countries. "But nothing that might save even few should be left undone."<sup>21</sup>

The *Guardian* continued to demand this of the Allies on moral grounds: Under no circumstances, it said, should it become standard thinking that only the fastest possible military victory will save such Jews as will survive. Indeed, in the paper's opinion, rescue should be one of the reasons to step up the war effort to achieve victory faster. The question facing the leaders of the free world at the present time, however, is not how many Jews will be murdered but how many will be rescued before Hitler's regime meets its demise.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of contenting itself with a general demand, the *Guardian* proposed ways and means of rescue that surpassed those of the *Daily Telegraph*, such as exchanging German civilians in custody for Jews and lifting the restrictions on immigration to Palestine that had been established in the 1939 White Paper. It also alluded to additional ways of rescue that could not be discussed publicly.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the *Manchester Guardian* was exceptional among important British and American newspapers in its consistent demand for rescue as a moral act. This stance undoubtedly originated in its historical support for Zionism. This support, irrespective of the paper's attitudes toward Zionism's political demands, was an exemplary moral position, reflected not only in the call for allowing escaping Jewish refugees to immigrate to Palestine, but also in urging the establishment of a Jewish military unit under the Jewish national colors. After all, the paper reasoned, the Poles, the Greeks, and other Nazi-occupied peoples were being allowed to fight the Nazis under their own flags; why not the Jews? Practical considerations aside, this was, as stated, a moral stance of the highest order. By adopting it, the *Manchester Guardian* gave full and pointed expression to the Jews' particular plight. The other papers, in contrast, erected a tent of general human suffering over it, thereby obscuring the Nazis' goal – the annihilation of the Jews, which was different in its historical essence from the killing and murdering of masses of other peoples, even though both forms of murder were equally reprehensible from the moral standpoint. In this sense, S. Goldschmidt, quoted earlier, was right when he claimed that one cannot expect the democratic press to draw a clear and material distinction between the Jews' suffering and that of the other occupied peoples.

Indeed, after the eruption of protests in the press in late 1942, the journalistic reportage and attitudes reverted to their earlier norm. Again the headlines overlooked the cause of the murdered Jews. No newspaper gave prominent attention to the Warsaw ghetto uprising in late April and early May 1943.

<sup>21</sup> "The Extermination Policy," *Manchester Guardian*, Dec. 12, 1942.

<sup>22</sup> "What Can Be Done?" *ibid.*, Dec. 11, 1942.

<sup>23</sup> "Protest and Action," *ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1942.

When reports about the extermination of Jews began to appear in the middle of 1942, only the *Daily Telegraph* gave them prominent coverage; even the *Guardian* numbered these victims among the millions who were being murdered in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth noting for comparison, however, that the Polish uprising in Warsaw in the summer of 1944 also merited no special emphasis in the British press, even though Poland had a government-in-exile in London and Polish battalions were fighting alongside British units on the Italian front. One might infer from this that the press was not totally at peace with the uprising. The *Guardian* even said in so many words that although the rebels deserve support, one can only “regret” the “obvious mistiming” of their rebellion.<sup>25</sup>

The feeling of the Jewish press, noticing the boundary between doubt about the information that it presented and undoubted certainty about the extent of the extermination of the Jews, was manifested in an editorial in *The Jewish Chronicle*, “The Slaughter of European Jewry,” of which excerpts follow:

Week after week, during these many sad and weary months, this paper has striven to awaken the public mind to the facts of the Jew-extermination. Again and again it has cried aloud that the oft-repeated Nazi threat of Jewish annihilation was seriously intended.

Although these warnings had been based on credible sources, “Many Jews and most non-Jews, except for the leaders of the Churches, were unconvinced.”<sup>26</sup>

Jewish journalists reported these events as unbelievable atrocities. Even when reliable newspapers began to carry the dreadful reports, some groups of Jews did not believe them and even demanded that synagogue rabbis not repeat them in their sermons.

These poignant and grim remarks must have represented the views of the American Jewish newspapers’ editors and correspondents as well – those who also sounded an outcry that did not elicit the hoped-for response.<sup>27</sup>

*The Jewish Chronicle*’s tormented remarks, as stated previously, related to the years that we define as the period of uncertainty, 1939–1942. Even after the fate of European Jewry was no longer in doubt, however, public opinion in the free countries still had no real picture of the atrocities taking place. This situation changed in the summer of 1944. In August of that year, the Polish provisional government – with Soviet consent, of course – invited western correspondents to Lublin, a short distance from the Majdanek extermination camp.

<sup>24</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 30, 1942; *Daily Telegraph*, July 9, 1942; quoted from Shindler, pp. 162–163.

<sup>25</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 9, 1944.

<sup>26</sup> “The Slaughter of European Jewry,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, Dec. 11, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> In regard to the outcry of *The Jewish Chronicle*, see also (1) “Two Years of War,” Aug. 29, 1941; (2) “Massacre,” July 3, 1942; (3) “Answers to the Mass Murders,” Dec. 18, 1942; (4) “What Now?” Dec. 25, 1942; “Years of Doom,” Jan. 1, 1943; (5) “Never Again,” May 28, 1943; (6) “The Fourth Milestone,” Sept. 3, 1943; (7) “National Responsibility,” June 3, 1944; and (8) “This Concerns You,” Sept. 1, 1944.

The correspondents of the two leading New York newspapers, the *Times* and the *Herald Tribune*, reported what they saw and their employers hurriedly printed their submissions, this time on the cover page, accompanied by editorials.

On August 30, 1944, *The New York Times* ran a submission by its correspondent on the eastern front, W. H. Lawrence, on page one but not under a banner headline. The item stated explicitly, without disclaimers prompted by excessive caution, that a million and a half human beings had been murdered in the gas chambers of Majdanek and reduced to ashes in the crematoria of the camp. Lawrence described in exacting detail what he had seen and even quoted testimonies of the camp commanders and Nazi soldiers whom the Red Army had taken prisoner.

Lawrence, a veteran correspondent who had accompanied the Soviet army in combat, confessed that he had not believed the Soviet press reportage on the Nazis' murder actions until then. "After inspection of Maidanek [however], I am now prepared to believe any story of German atrocities, no matter how savage, cruel, and depraved."<sup>28</sup>

This personal remark, expressed as an aside, sheds light on his paper's policy on reports about the extermination of Jews that had reached it from secondary sources.

The next day, August 31, 1944, the *Times* ran an editorial under the headline "The Maidanek Horror." Strangely, although surely not fortuitously, the editorial began by describing a spat between the Polish provisional government and the Soviet leadership concerning the Red Army's failure to help the Polish resistance that had launched an armed uprising against the Wehrmacht in the capital, Warsaw.

The editorial then discussed what the *Times'* correspondent had seen at the Majdanek extermination camp, stressing that the discovery of these atrocities made any political dispute seem "childish and excusable."

The editorialist added nothing to the description as such. However, he did express a twofold political conclusion: (1) one cannot conceive of any just settlement of the "Polish question" unless the European peoples at war with the Nazis agree on it unanimously; and (2) the perpetrators of these crimes must be punished and no power capable of such actions should ever arise again. Against this background, in the *Times'* opinion, contested issues between the Polish government and the Soviet authorities on borders and the complexion of governance pale in comparison. A question hovers over the graves of the victims: Can a human civilization be reborn that will accommodate all segments and groups in the free countries?<sup>29</sup>

One may surely point at this editorial as a salient example of *The New York Times'* avoidance of taking a stance on the Jewish issue, even when its correspondent made it clear – although without saying so explicitly – that

<sup>28</sup> W. H. Lawrence, "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp," *The New York Times*, Aug. 31, 1944.

<sup>29</sup> "The Maidanek Horror," *The New York Times*, Aug. 31, 1944.

most of the murder victims were Jews. Furthermore, it seems no exaggeration to say that the political envelope in which the editorial rests from beginning to end – the context of the Polish-Soviet conflict – is meant only to soft-pedal the Jewish tragedy by placing it in an international political context.

This hypothesis is reinforced by the contents of an article by the journalist Maurice Hindus in the *New York Herald Tribune* on August 30, 1944,<sup>30</sup> the day before the *Times*' editorial. Hindus's descriptions are identical to Lawrence's, but unlike his colleague, he emphasizes the Jewish identity of the prime victims in a special paragraph ("Jews first on list"). Then he adds a reckoning of the state of Polish Jewry at large: According to accurate estimates, he reports, three million Polish Jews have been murdered and only 60,000 remain alive in various parts of Poland that are still under Nazi rule. Thus, the editors of *The New York Times* knew that Polish Jewry had been destroyed but remained unwilling to admit that the Jews' disaster surpassed that of the other Nazi-occupied peoples. However, despite its different attitude toward identifying the victims' nationality, the *Herald Tribune* still entertained doubts about the veracity of the report. The paper's editorial the next day, "Horror at Lublin," said as much. Do not rush to conclusions, the editors counseled; even if all the testimony about the Nazis' cruelties are true, it is hard to imagine that a million and a half people were murdered and incinerated in one concentration camp. Just the same, the correspondents' eyewitness testimony cannot be ignored. Therefore, despite the doubts, the correspondents' descriptions speak for themselves and their remarks, based on eyewitness testimony, should not be questioned. Moreover, if the accounts are correct, then the regime that was capable of planning a crime of such magnitude, and with such appalling cruelty, "deserves annihilation on the same scale," and those who had supported this regime cannot hope to be treated mercifully after their nation surrenders to the triumphant Allied forces. Then comes a sentence that ties a Gordian knot between Lidice and Lublin:

Add Lublin to Lidice and both to the indiscriminate slaughter of the robot bomb offensive, and all propaganda for soft peace becomes an insult to justice.<sup>31</sup>

It bears emphasis that the very comparison of the murder of innocents in Lidice with the mass extermination at Majdanek, which had been perpetrated as part of a genocide, and the addition of the guided-missile bombardment of London shows that despite the discovery of the mass graves, largely containing Jews, the line connecting Lidice and Majdanek had not been erased and, in fact, was drawn more emphatically than ever. I will have more to say about this at the end of the chapter.

Notably, the British press did not give the revelation of the Majdanek atrocity the same dramatic coverage as the New York papers did. Only at the very

<sup>30</sup> Maurice Hindus, "Lublin Inquiry Lays 1,500,000 Deaths to Nazis," *New York Herald Tribune*, Aug. 30, 1944.

<sup>31</sup> "Horror at Lublin," *ibid.*, Aug. 31, 1944.

end of the war, several days before the surrender of the Wehrmacht, did a British newspaper perform a modest public accounting of the public's attitude toward the wartime victims: An editorial in *The Times of London*, "The Victims,"<sup>32</sup> cited Majdanek as a place that symbolizes the Nazi regime's inhuman cruelty. Against this background, the editors noted that during the war, many had doubted the reports from the inferno. The doubts, they explained, originate in the doubters' faith in the "honour of human nature." For this reason, they questioned the veracity of the horrifying reports from the scene and suspected that they traced to the victims' own "hallucinations." The discovery of the extermination camps, *The Times of London* stressed, did away with all previous doubts. It is now the victorious Allies' duty to punish the criminals and attempt to reeducate the German masses that had been drawn into their wake.

There is surely some truth in these remarks, which explain the restraint of the British press – and its American counterpart – in reporting the events in Europe. Statements made almost three years previously, in late 1942, in *The Jewish Chronicle* editorial cited earlier, reinforced this conclusion by noting emphatically that even many Jews dismissed these reports in utter disbelief. Nevertheless, there was an important difference between the two newspapers' attitudes: Whereas the *Chronicle* protested the phenomenon in an accusatory tone of voice, *The Times of London* considered an apologetic explanation sufficient.

We now come to the last of the tasks listed at the beginning of the chapter: comparing the Jewish journalistic criticism that was expressed during the period investigated with the academic criticism, also Jewish, that came later. First we consult the historians. Deborah Lipstadt, a pioneer in studying the American press' attitude toward European Jewry in World War II, came to a grave conclusion after comprehensive and painstaking research: She accused this press of equanimity and callousness toward the Jewish tragedy even though it had been fully informed about it. In a radical turn of phrase, Lipstadt termed "both the final solution and the bystanders' equanimity [...] beyond belief."<sup>33</sup>

Robert Ross, who researched the Protestant press in the Allied countries, reached a similar conclusion although he expressed it in less radical terms. This press, he said, had known what was being done to the Jews of Europe, reported it, but totally refrained from urging anyone to help the victims.<sup>34</sup>

Colin Shindler, a British citizen who probed the attitude of *The Times of London* toward this problem, was more balanced in his conclusions. In his opinion, the *Times* devoted little space to the cause of the murdered Jews for several reasons: the total priority of reportage from the war fronts; doubts about the mass-murder reports that were flowing in; and a selective equanimity that derived its moral justification from the awareness that the murder of

<sup>32</sup> "The Victims," *The Times of London*, April 20, 1945.

<sup>33</sup> Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, p. 278.

<sup>34</sup> Ross, *So It Was True*, pp. 258–259.



the Jews could not be stopped as long as the war continued.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Shindler, too, could not refrain from moral judgment of this phenomenon. The Jews, he said, had been abandoned to their fate by the press as a result of “professional deafness.” His conclusion was much the same as Lipstadt’s; it quoted a line from a poem by the Polish bard Czesław Miłosz: “There is no such thing as an innocent bystander. If you are a bystander you are not innocent.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus far we have presented critiques of the stance of the general press. Now we move on to a painful point from the Jewish perspective: *The New York Times*’ treatment of the Holocaust. In this chapter, we refer to the *Times* not as the newspaper of record in the United States and the free world at the time, a status that imposed on it extra public and moral responsibility, but as a paper with a “Jewish problem” that its owners and editors remained stuck with even when they ignored it. This phenomenon also has a family background. The founder of the *Times*, Cyrus L. Sulzberger, entertained pro-Zionist sympathies and in the early twentieth century served as vice-president of the American Federation of Zionists. In contrast, his son, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, a central personality in both American and Jewish public life, was known for overt and pronounced anti-Zionism of the American Council for Judaism style, which negated Jewish nationhood totally and emphasized Judaism’s solely religious complexion. It is true that Sulzberger’s position on the political aspirations of Zionism changed somewhat after the discovery of the horrors of the Holocaust at the end of the war. For our purposes and at the time discussed here, however, his fundamental anti-Zionist views were important in their effect on how the *Times* defined the world-scattered Jews as a people. Therefore, according to Max Frenkel, a correspondent for the *Times* in the period at issue and subsequently its editor, Sulzberger made every effort to dissociate from anything that might identify his newspaper with Jewish interests.<sup>37</sup>

A worthy answer to this question is provided by the researcher Laurel Leff, who investigated the *Times*’ stance on this matter with spectacular thoroughness and published her findings and conclusions in an article that preceded her comprehensive book on the topic. Because her study is, for the time being, the last one that discusses the American press during the Holocaust from the perspective of Jewish researchers, its accusatory moral and emotional tenor captures the views of the scholars who preceded her.<sup>38</sup> Leff produces a year-by-year list of tragic events – the eviction, the ghettoization, and finally the mass extermination of Jews – that found room only on the inside pages of *The New York Times* and not on the cover page.

Because this newspaper undoubtedly abandoned the slaughtered Jews not because of their religion but due to their Jewish national affiliation, the

<sup>35</sup> “The Thunderer,” in *Why Didn’t the Press Shout?* p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Frenkel, *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> Leff, “When Facts Didn’t Speak,” *ibid.*, p. 70.

*Times* – and especially its editors – revealed a saliently Jewish characteristic typical of the kind of Jew who spares no effort to distance himself from the Jewish people even when willing to help Jews from a human perspective, as the Sulzbergers did for Jewish immigrants to the United States.

Indeed, Sulzberger was consistent in his policy of masking the especially tragic plight of European Jewry by shunting information about it to marginal places in the newspaper.

The argument against Sulzberger's anti-Jewish stance in the national sense, as distinct from his recognition of Judaism as a religion, is meaningful in a way that transcends itself and its time. I refer to the principled collision between universalism and national or ethnic particularism, following the conventional definition of groups that share common cultural and religious origins in western countries. The stance of *The New York Times* and the other American and British newspapers, with the exception of the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom, was strongly universalistic at its root. In these papers' opinion, the Jews' situation, however dire, was fundamentally no different from that of the other enslaved peoples. Accordingly, Hitler's and Nazism's war targets enlightened humankind above all and not necessarily the Jews. Hence the unending likening of the Jews' suffering with that of other peoples. This ideological posture was accompanied by a moral premise as well: the equivalence of the murder of hundreds, as had happened in Lidice, to the murder of millions in Majdanek. Given this universalistic human stance, the difference between an act of human revenge – the execution of hundreds of innocents – and the very real intent of annihilating an entire innocent people was totally obscured.

The universalistic approach is countered by a liberal and democratic ethnic approach that emphasizes, increasingly with each generation that passes from the real-time publicists to today's historians, the particularistic nature of the Jewish tragedy against the background of the universalistic disaster. This approach stems from the overt national consciousness of Jewish publicists of East European origin, bearers of Yiddishist culture, who belonged to a broad spectrum of political currents from Communism via liberalism to Zionism. When today's historians, too, assert the Jewish collective singularity of the Holocaust, they stress an ethnic approach that is not far from that of their publicist predecessors. In this respect, both of them, knowingly or not, express pronouncedly Zionist or Dubnowian views. This is so because these views, more than those of any modern Jewish movement, affirm the particularism of Jewish existence among the nations. The Reform and Conservative movements underscore religious particularism; the Bund struggled for Jewish national particularism of Socialist complexion. Only Simon Dubnow and his disciples, and especially the Zionist Movement, however, spoke in the name of *klal Yisrael*, the "Jewish commonwealth," as a world people.

Embedded in this ideological concept and psychological sense is a similarity between the Yiddishist intellectuals of yesteryear and the researchers of the present, the products of Anglo-Saxon culture. Here, too, is where the criticism

of the silence of the general press originates: for having relegated the reports about Jews' plight from the headlines to the inside pages; and for immediately likening the Jews' disaster to other peoples' distress even on the rare occasions when it emphasized the former. Topping this trend was fierce criticism of the editors of *The New York Times* and its owner, Arthur Sulzberger. At that time, this criticism was national in spirit or outlook; today it stems, if one may so define it, from a proud ethnicity that belongs to the liberal-democratic and multicultural trend of thought that currently holds sway, especially in western intellectual circles. It is in this culture that the comprehensive academic "critical ethos" toward most, if not all, areas of society, especially those belonging to hegemonic political or economic establishments, was created.

In this spirit, I take the "liberty" of venturing a critical thought about the steamroller offensive being waged against *The New York Times*. There is no doubt that the anti-*Times* arguments of yesterday's Jewish press and the criticism of the paper by today's historians are factually correct when they take up the *Times*' policy on printing reports about the plight of European Jewry; they are also materially important in dissecting the anti-Jewish motives, in the national sense, of the paper's owner and editors, who stood behind them. These matters, however, should be set in their comparative context, and once we do this, we find that the American and British daily press had adopted the same policy toward the Jews' calamity. The other newspapers did not give the matter prominent coverage on their front pages and did not treat it as a unique phenomenon amid the general suffering of the occupied peoples. This being the case, could *The New York Times*, with its "Jewish nose," be an outlier? I strongly doubt it.

Laurel Leff does argue correctly that the *Times*, as the paper with the greatest influence on public opinion and, in particular, on national policy makers and public personalities, had extra responsibility in revealing prominently and uninterruptedly the information that it had been receiving; had it discharged this duty, it might have influenced the policy decisions, however slightly.<sup>39</sup> However, one can lodge the same grievance against *The Times of London*, which commanded a similar status in Britain with only one major difference: It was not a "Jewish paper." Nor can one dismiss concern about this image at a time when antisemitic circles were vocally active, as they were throughout the war years.<sup>40</sup>

Another point that cannot be ignored is Leff's quantitative findings about the number of mentions and descriptions of the matter of European Jewry in *The New York Times*. According to Leff's painstaking tally, the *Times* printed some 1,200 reports and articles about the Jews' fate during the war.<sup>41</sup> Although only forty-two of them received front-page prominence of any kind, the number of items far surpassed that in London's two major newspapers, the

<sup>39</sup> Leff, *Buried by The Times*, pp. 357–358.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 10 in this book.

<sup>41</sup> L. Leff, in *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*

*Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, as well as in the *Manchester Guardian*. One should add two anguished articles to the count: a 1943 piece by the Yiddish writer Sholem Asch, “In the Valley of Death,” and “The Nightmare That Is a Reality,” by Arthur Koestler, in 1944.<sup>42</sup> Even though they, too, failed to induce change in the newspaper’s policy on what to print – until the mass graves at the Majdanek extermination camp were discovered in the summer of 1944 – the *Times* did find their outcry fit to print.

Paradoxically, the case of *The New York Times* sheds even more powerful light on the Jews’ state of objective national powerlessness during the war. The only consolation it offers is the attitude of the liberal pro-Zionist publications, the *Manchester Guardian* in Britain and the *New Republic* and *The Nation* in the United States, which adopted a moral approach to the Jews’ particularistic disaster.<sup>43</sup> However, as stated, they had no “Jewish problem” as *The New York Times* had.

It deserves emphasis that pro-Zionist sympathies also reflected a moral stance at that time – a stance that one could demand of the democratic press at the time, and one that did not happen.

Having said this and having acknowledged the veracity of the findings that the historians Lipstadt, Shindler, and Leff present – notwithstanding their accusatory nature and the documentation behind them – I find it difficult to acquiesce in the definition of “bystanders” that they use to describe the position of this press – especially when the first two mentioned, Lipstadt and Shindler, portray this as the press’ attitude toward the Final Solution. Here, in my opinion, lies a methodological error and a mistaken moral approach.

The concept of “bystander” was coined by the noted Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg in his book *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*.<sup>44</sup> It is first of all a “technical” concept, that is, Hilberg stretched it to accommodate a broad and strange spectrum of bystander types: members of the occupied peoples including those who helped Jews, those who profited from the disaster by looting Jews’ property, and those who merely looked on. The bystander class also included emissaries from the occupied countries to the anti-Nazi powers, who delivered the news of the disaster; the Jewish institutions and their leaders who attempted to take rescue action; the Allied leaders; the governments of the neutral countries; and the Catholic and Protestant churches – everyone who had not instigated the extermination campaign even though some of them participated in it, and those who had tried to help but made very little headway.

This expansive generalization is fundamentally erroneous due to the unbridgeable contrasts among its elements – those who could have rescued

<sup>42</sup> Sholem Asch, “In the Valley of Death,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 7, 1943; Arthur Koestler, “The Nightmare That Is a Reality,” *ibid.*, Jan. 9, 1944.

<sup>43</sup> In regard to the American periodicals, see Leff, *Buried by The Times*, p. 349.

<sup>44</sup> Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: the Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial Library, 1992).

Jews and did not, as against those who could not have offered assistance; those who gained by looting Jews' property as against the emissaries who presented the free world with the horrifying news from the ghettos and concentration camps; and the helpless Jewish organizations as against Allied leaders who could have saved a few of the doomed and did not do so.

This approach inadvertently renders formal definitions into moral formulations by giving all "bystanders," irrespective of their intentions, the common denominator of bystander-ness. To prove my point, I note that the historians listed earlier construed it this way by attaching the moral sin of the "silence" to the American and British press during the Final Solution. By doing this, they broadened Hilberg's concept of "bystander" even more and compounded the methodological error with a moral one. In an existential struggle, one has to draw a clear moral distinction between the forces of darkness and the forces of light, even when some of the latter's actions and considerations were not moral. It is into this category that the press in the free world falls!

Finally, it is worth asking whether the Lidice-Majdanek affair carries a significance that transcends itself and its own time in respect to our understanding of the Holocaust today. I believe it does; it lies in the "universalistic" interpretation that the wartime general press lent to the Nazis' actions, generalizing the Nazis' attitude toward all the occupied peoples to include the Jews. By so doing, the press almost totally ignored Nazism's eliminationist intentions toward the Jewish people, a factor that was absent in respect to the other enslaved and suffering peoples.

The universalistic approach toward understanding the Holocaust has undergone development in recent times, manifested in the shifting of emphasis from the tragedy of the collective to the suffering of the individual. This trend, originating in universalistic moral and human motives, is desirable and important per se but is dangerous in a fundamental way: It raises the possibility that the "privatization" of the Holocaust memory will crowd out the specific historical meaning of the Holocaust by blurring the difference between the death of millions as the result of the war and the intent of exterminating an entire people by dint of a racist ideology. This, in addition to the deliberate obfuscation by this universalistic moralist trend, prompted by humanitarian motives, of the difference between lethal means of war – for example, the use of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the systematic destruction of the cities of Germany from the air – and Auschwitz and Majdanek; between the death of children by starvation and disease and the dispatch of children to the crematoria. The distinction between the two has more than historical significance; it also carries universalistic significance for the future of humankind.

## Remarks on the Continuing Jewish Angst

This chapter conducts a comparative discussion of the phenomenon of anti-semitism in the United States during World War II (1941–1945) from two points of view: the childhood memories of the American-Jewish author Philip Roth, as articulated in his book *The Plot Against America*, and the attitude of the Yiddish- and English-language Jewish press toward this phenomenon in the same years.

Both perspectives are subjective. The former embodies childhood memories as reconstructed and worked through by a renowned author, which, according to the critics of his widely influential book, are very much on-target. The second subjective point of view belongs to the American-Jewish press, especially that in Yiddish, which at the time still represented the culture of much of American Jewry as evidenced by its daily circulation. Published mainly in New York, the Yiddish-language press was distributed in more than 400,000 copies per day. I define the Jewish press' response as subjective because, concurrently, it sustained the East European cultural tradition in its national outlook and its responses to antisemitism and strongly underscored the new and changing status of the Jews in the democratic United States and its tolerant and liberal society.<sup>1</sup>

American antisemitism during World War II was surely a special phenomenon in respect to the history of European antisemitism, the memory of which was carried to the United States by Jewish immigrants. It was unique in that it erupted powerfully during the war years, precisely as the United States fought the Nazi Fascist regime, and even gathered strength toward the end of the war, when the downfall of this murderous regime was no longer in doubt.

To gauge the uniqueness of the American antisemitic model, we need to compare it with at least two contemporary European models: Nazi antisemitism, a strategic doctrine geared to ousting the Jews from general society, leading incrementally to the Final Solution; and Polish antisemitism, a hybrid

<sup>1</sup> In this matter, see Ben Halpern, *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis* (New York: Herzl Foundation, 1956), chapter 1, pp. 11–35

creature of discriminatory politics in various fields, government-led but resting on broad public support, deriving its ideological justification from nationalist intellectual circles.<sup>2</sup>

The American brand of antisemitism differed from its predecessors in several respects. First, although anti-Jewish prejudice existed in the United States and its constituent states ever since the United States constituted itself as an independent political federation, antisemitism as an organized political movement had never surfaced there. Given this historical tradition, the advent of antisemitism in the United States during the war, of all times, signals its uniqueness and therefore deserves to be defined, for the sake of emphasis, as “American antisemitism.” American antisemitism was fueled primarily by a right-wing conservative and religious worldview that took extreme exception to the democratic liberal governance engineered by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, unlike the European Fascist models that supported and collaborated with their respective regimes. American antisemitism also had a fundamentalist complexion, either Catholic or, especially, Protestant. Much of American antisemitism championed political isolationism and sought a political settlement with Nazi Germany before and in the initial years of the world war, until the United States declared war on Germany. To identify the specificity of American antisemitism even more emphatically, it is worth noting that the opposition to the U.S. liberal regime during those years recalls the conservative reaction to nineteenth-century European revolutionary liberalism, a doctrine that was, among other things, antisemitic in its essence – *mutatis mutandis* in respect to place and time, of course.

Would it be justified to define this anti-Jewish awakening in the 1930s and 1940s as an antisemitic movement?

According to David Wyman,<sup>3</sup> the United States boasted more than 100 active antisemitic organizations during that decade. The most important of them was Charles E. Coughlin’s so-called Social Justice Movement. Coughlin, ordained as a Catholic priest in 1916, emerged in the 1930s as a propagandist against bankers, trade unions, and Communists. In 1934, he established the National Union for Social Justice. From that time on, he was a radical critic of Roosevelt and the latter’s social policy, the New Deal, and an advocate of the nationalization of American banks and national resources. Coughlin, publisher of a monthly journal called *Social Justice*, was a Nazi sympathizer and a leading personality among the propagators of American antisemitism. In 1942, his publications were banned by the U.S. government and his propaganda was silenced by the heads of the Catholic Church, although he was

<sup>2</sup> See Shlomo Netzer, *Ma’avaq yehudei Polin al zekhuyoteihem ha-ezrahlot ve-ha-leumiyot (1918–1922)* [The Struggle of Polish Jewry for Its Civil and National Rights (1918–1922)], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1980); Emanuel Meltzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935–1939* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). See also Gulie Ne’eman Arad, *America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), part 4, pp. 187–224.

not defrocked. His importance for the purpose of this discussion is that the Jewish press emphasized the danger that his influence posed to the Jews. His landscape was also populated by antisemitic groups such as the Silver Shirts, the German-American Bund, and a Protestant fundamentalist entity called Defenders of the Christian Faith.

Although these organizations were dissolved by government order immediately after the war against Germany and Japan broke out, they kept going in the guise of variously named organizations. Examples are the International Catholic Truth Society and, in particular, the American First Committee, a purveyor of political isolationism established by the fundamentalist preacher Gerald Smith, a political opponent of Roosevelt's New Deal and an antisemitic ideologue.

In addition to these organizations' antisemitic propaganda, violent attacks on Jews took place in New York and Boston in 1941–1944<sup>4</sup>; even if they were not related to the antisemitic ideology, they abetted the atmosphere of tension among Jews.

This capsule description of the American network of anti-Jewish organizations suffices to justify defining it as an ideological movement of political intent, irrespective of its weight and public importance in terms of political clout. I define these organizations as a movement despite their pluralistic nature due to their underlying commonalities: Catholic or Protestant religious radicalism, social conservatism, sympathy for Fascist regimes, and an antisemitic view of Jews. This movement also had a common territorial base, mainly in the Midwest, amid a society of farmers who had suffered from the Great Depression, some associated with immigrant families of German origin.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Lindbergh, the "hero" of Philip Roth's book, was drawn into this variegated movement and became the emblem of American antisemitism on the eve of the U.S. enlistment into the war against Nazi Germany. Charles Augustus Lindbergh (1902–1974) was an American national hero, the first man to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a solo flight from New York to Paris in 1927. In 1938, he visited Nazi Germany, was impressed by the Luftwaffe, and became an aficionado of the Fascist regime. Returning to the United States, he propagandized for America First political circles, which advocated an isolationist American policy in contrast to that led by Roosevelt. When the war broke out, Lindbergh joined the U.S. Air Force.

In its struggle against American antisemitism, the Jewish press assumed the role of crier and soother at the same time. The two tasks, although ostensibly contradictory, had a common origin: immense admiration for and strong faith in American society. Two concurrent messages emerged from this feeling: alarm about the dire risk of Fascism, in its American garb, to American democracy, and a soothing message, inspiring readers to believe that American

<sup>4</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, pp. 10–12.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 250–251.



democracy had enough strength to eradicate the menace once it marshaled the will to do so. Accordingly, this press undertook not only to alert the Jews to the danger that they faced, but also to encourage them to influence their elected representatives, by applying political pressure, to wage war against the antisemitic hate.

The press' struggle may be divided into two periods: 1939–1941, from the beginning of the war to the American enlistment against Japan and Germany at the end of the latter year; and the rest of the war era. The paragons of anti-semitism in the first period were the airman Lindbergh and Father Coughlin, leading personalities in the isolationist America First movement. During the second period, the problem was the upsurge in antisemitic hate that corresponded, perversely, with American society's war on Nazi Fascism. At this time, antisemitism ceased to be a social and cultural phenomenon and became a political problem at the American national level due to the similarities in identity between it and the ideology of the Nazi regime against which the United States was fighting.

The war on antisemitism was spearheaded by *Forverts*, not only because it was American Jewry's largest-circulation newspaper, but also, and mainly, because it was the Jewish paper most strongly identified with the American democratic and liberal ethos. It had never suffered from the "dual-loyalty syndrome" that afflicted the two Zionist papers, *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal*. From its standpoint, then, the great menace lay in Charles Lindbergh's antisemitic propaganda, because Lindbergh was still the revered hero of the America of which *Forverts* considered itself an integral part.

Not long before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh shocked the American-Jewish public by delivering an antisemitic hate speech that accused the Jews of pressuring America to join the war against Germany. *Forverts'* first response to this outburst (April 21, 1941) was alarm. In an editorial headlined in a manner that said it all – "The Dark Shadow over America" – it termed Lindbergh the prophet of Nazi destruction because he had come forth to warn the United States, and especially the inhabitants of New York, that if their country went to war with Germany, their fate would resemble that of London, which was then under bombardment. The editorial acknowledges, for lack of choice, that in American democratic society, one cannot limit freedom of speech on this inflammatory matter. Therefore, it pins its hopes on American society, which should dissociate itself from Lindbergh because his shameful proposals would have America betray its national essence, its history, and its honor.<sup>6</sup> It quickly transpired, however, that the warning stirred public concern among the Jews; therefore, four months later, in an article headlined "America's Response to Lindbergh's Antisemitic Attack," *Forverts* also tried to assuage its readers and dispel their fear that Lindbergh's slander attested to feelings that were rippling through the American public at large. This fear, the writer said, is fundamentally erroneous; most Americans

<sup>6</sup> "Der fintsterer shatn iber Amerike," *Forverts*, April 21, 1941.

should be absolved of such suspicion. “No, a thousand times no!” (*Neyn, toyznt mol neyn!*)<sup>7</sup>

The headline of this piece, “The American Response to Lindbergh’s Antisemitic Attack,” attests to its main intent, as noted earlier: to alarm and to soothe. Here the latter purpose was the main thing, giving even stronger evidence of the concerns that were spreading with growing intensity through the Jewish public.

*Forverts* based its confidence in American society, which it punctuated with exclamation points, on the premise that Lindbergh’s luster as an American hero was fading steadily because his pro-Nazi and antisemitic views were unacceptable to the public mind. As evidence, the paper noted that no public personality had come out in his support; on the contrary, many important public figures condemned his rhetoric and stressed their backing of Roosevelt’s policies. Accordingly, with paradoxical irony, the editorial noted that even newspapers that advocated an isolationist U.S. policy decried Lindbergh’s antisemitic utterances; even the staunchly conservative American Legion did so. Thus, the editorial wound up with an explicit conclusion: “American Jews need not be worried about Lindbergh’s antisemitic attack. The United States has responded in a way that is worthy of it and its dignity, and American Jews are proud of this response.”

The Jews continued to fret anyway. A week after these soothing words appeared, their angst surfaced again when the leaders of America First, a large isolationist organization, came out with pro-Lindbergh statements. It is true that even though they openly supported Lindbergh’s political positions, they had not seconded the accusations that he had leveled against the Jews as inciters of war against Germany. To *Forverts’* mind, however, their very support of Lindbergh was an antisemitic manifestation. Pro-Nazi propaganda, the paper warned, has been escalating in recent months and antisemitism has been spreading far and wide, thus menacing not only Jews but also all of American democratic society. This makes it the matter for the appropriate state authorities to investigate.<sup>8</sup>

The Zionist newspaper *Der Tog* addressed American antisemitism but with less concern. In an editorial summing up world and Jewish events in 1940, it opined that the more anti-Fascist the American policy – “neutral” for the time being – became, the more the antisemitic propaganda in the country would ebb.<sup>9</sup>

Several months later, in late 1941, the United States joined the war against the Fascist countries. Did antisemitism wane as a result of this, as *Der Tog* believed? It did not, as noted previously; instead, it actually increased and so did the Jews’ sensitivity about it. This is illustrated by two editorials in *Forverts* in 1942, discussing the Jews’ image in view of the sizable representation of

<sup>7</sup> “Amerike’s entfer oyf Lindbergh antisemitisher atake,” *Forverts*, Sept. 20, 1941.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, “Di antisemitische farshverung muz untermukht vern,” Sept. 28, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, “Idn in 1940,” Jan. 7, 1941.

Jews among persons accused of black-market commerce in ration coupons and games of chance.

In an antiprofitteer editorial headlined “A Sickening Offense,”<sup>10</sup> *Forverts* reworked the phenomenon into a matter for examination at the Jewish collective level. Its remarks arose against the background of the upturn in anti-semitic argumentation that the Jews had dragged the United States into the war because it was their war; the Aryan peoples, in contrast – the argument went – have no grounds for conflict with America. Here *Forverts* admits that indeed, things are different where the Jews are concerned, “because for the Jews it is a *war of life or death*, whereas for the other peoples it is a question of *enslavement or liberty*” (emphasis added).

The tragic truth of this existential distinction would become clear by the middle of 1942, when the Jewish and general press carried reports about the mass-extinction campaign. Accordingly, *Forverts* condemned profiteering with exceptional vehemence as an act that impaired the war effort against the Jewish people’s greatest enemy. These actions, the paper said, are unforgivable because

One can forgive a thief, one can understand a murderer, one can understand a forger with repugnance, but it is the duty of every Jew individually, and of the Jewish people severally, to decry the profiteers’ crime with total and unforgiving severity. These people are not ordinary criminals but *traitors to their people*, traitors to humanity, and Hitler’s agents. The Jewish community must impose a general ban on these people as a punitive Jewish national act [*Un di shtrof darf gegebn vern ... fun dem idishn folk gufe.*] (emphasis in the original).

The national and pan-Jewish significance of this manner of expression hardly needs further comment. Additional evidence of sensitivity toward the phenomenon of profiteering by Jews is furnished by *Morgen Dzhurnal*’s response to what the London newspaper *The New Statesman* wrote about similar occurrences in Britain. *Morgen Dzhurnal* warned against profiteering in whatever form. The Jews as a collective are especially vulnerable at this time, it noted, and such actions are tantamount to playing with fire in front of the Jews’ enemies, who lay in wait for them behind every corner.<sup>11</sup>

As the war approached its end and the Allies’ victory over Fascism was no longer in question, the paradoxical phenomenon of American antisemitism gained strength in inverse proportion. Paradox aside, this phenomenon also embodied human indifference and public insensitivity, because the Nazis’ ongoing extermination of European Jewry was known beyond all doubt by then (1943–1944). Even the American press, which was careful not to emphasize the rumors of mass annihilation, printed the confirmed reports

<sup>10</sup> “An ekelhafter farbrekhn,” *Forverts*, May 14, 1942; see also, “Unzere shande” (Our scandal), *ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1942.

<sup>11</sup> *Morgen Dzhurnal*, March 22, 1943.

about extermination camps in areas that the Red Army had liberated, such as Majdanek. Therefore, as the tide of antisemitic propaganda in the United States rose, the Jewish public became increasingly concerned about pro-Nazi groups that were peddling their hate propaganda in the guise of patriotic slogans. An editorial in *Forverts* in late 1943,<sup>12</sup> headlined “Escalation of Antisemitic Propaganda in This Country,” evidences this by opining bluntly that there is no reason whatsoever for the government, at this time of wartime emergency, not to forbid such actions. The democratic freedom that exists in peacetime, the paper counseled, should not be granted now. Those in Washington ruling circles, however, have not yet freed themselves of the idea that in a democracy, freedom of expression exists under all conditions and must not be abridged even in wartime and even toward those who exploit democratic freedom to undermine democratic rule:

This *faux* liberal outlook is politically responsible for the destruction of democratic rule in several European countries. It is this menace that prompted the Government of supernally democratic Switzerland to pass emergency laws against anti-democratic and antisemitic propaganda. The Government of Sweden recently adopted similar measures, whereas here in the United States, where the menace of antisemitism is much greater than in Sweden or Switzerland, the U.S. Senate was presented with a bill that would ban antisemitic and racist propaganda but it was “mothballed” in committee.

If so, *Forverts* states with emphasis, it is high time to mobilize all progressive forces in the United States for the defense of democratic rule. The paper’s demand for federal legislation against antisemitic propaganda was joined by other newspapers – one example is an editorial in *Der Tog* headlined “The Struggle against Antisemitism in America.”<sup>13</sup>

That year, bands of youths carried out a number of violent attacks against Jews in Boston and New York. The Jewish press responded in two ways. Some papers warned about the menace that this phenomenon posed to the unity of a nation at war; others dismissed the phenomenon as marginal and unimportant. In *Forverts*’ opinion, expressed in an editorial headlined “Antisemitic Hate in New York,” both extreme approaches are wrong. In a city such as New York, with a population that comes from dozens of countries, practices different cultures, and speaks many languages, interethnic frictions are inevitable. Not all immigrants become American right away. Each ethnicity brings its national cultural tradition, including habits and prejudices. Therefore, the traditional hatreds among national groups and religious faiths, of European origin, reach the new society in the United States together with the immigrants and are preserved in the ethnic ghettos of the New World. It would be silly to believe that they will disappear immediately upon the transition from

<sup>12</sup> “Di farshtarkte antisemitische propaganda in land,” *Forverts*, Nov. 14, 1943.

<sup>13</sup> “Der kampf kegn antisemitizm in Amerike,” *Der Tog*, Nov. 14, 1943; and an editorial against racist incitement in general: “In Amerike tor es nit geshehn,” *Morgen Dzhurnal*, June 23, 1943.

Europe to the United States. It will take much time, perhaps generations, until the offspring of the European peoples become a new nation in the "American melting pot." Even the American-raised children cannot free themselves of the traditions that their parents brought with them and are sustaining among their families. Therefore, much time will pass until their psychology becomes American (*Amerikanizirt*), in the most exalted spiritual sense of the concept. Just the same, it would be wrong to treat this phenomenon as a philosophical issue only and disregard the dangerous symptoms that find expression in the antisemitic attacks on Jews and also in racist discrimination against the blacks. The phenomenon is confined to gangs of youths for now, but the children's actions are the outcomes of the adults' words, especially those of their parents at home. The question, then, is not only one of educating the young but also of educating the adults in the American spirit of freedom and equality and democratic, religious, and national tolerance. Surely it will be impossible to vanquish the Fascist enemy in Europe if the antisemitic manifestations in the United States are overlooked, and it is foremost the duty of the city and police of New York not to overlook them.

The nexus of antisemitism and American society's multicultural traditions also found expression in pro-Fascist and antisemitic tendencies in various American locations where larger numbers of persons of German extraction dwelled, especially Pennsylvania. *Forverts* stressed this phenomenon in an editorial headline, "Antisemitic Hate in New York,"<sup>14</sup> on the basis of a series of articles that Gerard Sager, a senior journalist and Social Democrat, had printed in a German-language newspaper in New York. In the editorialist's opinion, the danger is that antisemitism has not only spread among the grass-roots but has also penetrated middle-class intellectual circles.<sup>15</sup>

Given the spread of antisemitism, *Forverts* stepped up its demand for federal legislation that would not only ban antisemitic propaganda but also declare it an act of *treason*. Such a law, the paper said, would protect not only the Jews from their enemies but also, and mainly, democracy from its enemies. Admittedly, true to its alarm-and-soothe methods, the editorial stressed that the issue pertains only to a minority of Americans, but in a state of emergency, even a minority can be very dangerous to the majority. Given that this demand stood no chance of being accepted as stated, the newspaper found small consolation in a paradoxical way. In the trial of a Fascist group that had been accused of treason, the defendants claimed that they had betrayed not America but only the Jewish opponents. Thus, *Forverts* reasoned, antisemitism was paired with treason by the antisemites themselves, who had done the Jews' work for them. So *Forverts* argued in this editorial and in another series of

<sup>14</sup> "Antisemitische hetse in New York," *Forverts*, Dec. 3, 1943.

<sup>15</sup> "Dos vaks fun antisemitizm in land," *ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1944.

<sup>16</sup> "Indyatments kegn antisemitische un natsishe hetser," *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1944; "Kemf kegn antisemitizm," *ibid.*, April 10, 1944; "Farrat un antisemitizm," *ibid.*, May 11, 1944.

articles that carried self-explanatory headlines – “The War on Antisemitism” and “Treason and Antisemitism.”<sup>16</sup>

Whereas *Forverts*, essentially an American-Jewish newspaper, stressed the need for federal legislation against antisemitic propaganda, the two Zionist papers, *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal*, in addition to supporting this demand and its rationale, emphasized the importance of organized Jewish political pressure on the institutions of the administration in Washington.

In early 1944, the American-Jewish Congress called a national conference in New York to debate the phenomenon of antisemitism. *Morgen Dzhurnal* noted with regret that not all Jewish organizations took part in the gathering, some on the grounds of opposing overt political struggle against the phenomenon. The paper criticized this stance fiercely<sup>17</sup>: It constituted a reversion to the political state of mind of seeing no evil amid the escalation of verbal and physical attacks on the Jews. These organizations, in the editorialist’s opinion, were returning to the Jewish outlook of silencing those who would respond – *sha-sha politik* (hush-hush politics), in the parlance of the time. In the paper’s opinion, the disagreement about how the public should tackle the surging antisemitism traces to a schism that divides the Jewish public into two main camps in other matters as well: assimilationists (*asimilatorishn tsugang*) and their opponents who take a Jewish-national approach (*idish-natsyonaln tsugang*). It corresponds to the approach of the coward and the flincher (*fun der pakhden un oysbahalter*) against that of those who struggle mightily and proudly (*dreystn un shtoltsn kemfer*) for their self-value (*zelbstvirde*) and their lawful rights.

The current antisemitism, the editorial goes on to stress, is different from that of previous years in the United States. Antisemitism there used to be social and economic, admittedly significant in the sense of civil discrimination but not dangerous. Today it is an essentially political antisemitism (*politish in karakter*) and is dangerous because it derives its ideas from traditional European antisemitism; instead of being an end in itself, it is but a means to a much farther-reaching end relating to the Jews’ status and security, much like the one being implemented by the Nazis in Europe against Jewish existence. In the writer’s opinion, the situation in the United States resembles that in Germany when the Nazi Party took its first steps toward rule. American Jewry, however, still has time to gear up for political struggle against this menace – provided that it unify its forces, forswear its traditional *sha-sha* politics, and launch an overt public struggle not only on its own behalf but also in the defense of liberal democracy in the United States. From here on, vocal protests against antisemitic manifestations will no longer do; instead, a systematic and broad-based struggle against the phenomenon must be organized. The editorial ends by expressing hope that the conference will engender programs that will unite all, or at least most, Jewish organizations for a resolute and relentless war on antisemitism, the

<sup>17</sup> “Antisemitizm in Amerike,” *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Feb. 13, 1944.

outcome of which will depend largely on the unification of forces of the various Jewish organizations.

It took only about a year after the conference for the Zionist *Morgen Dzhurnal* to speak disappointingly about how the war on antisemitism was being waged. In an editorial titled “The Struggle against Antisemitism,”<sup>18</sup> the paper still expressed much public satisfaction with the broad positive reverberations of the conference in Jewish and non-Jewish circles. However, “the war on antisemitism can no longer content itself with a policy of shouting ‘Let’s go to Palestine’ and leveling accusations against the Gentiles. What’s needed now is a national pan-Jewish conference that will show public opinion in the free world the full gravity of the menace that antisemitism presents it as well.”

The second Zionist newspaper, *Der Tog*, adopted a similar Jewish-national political stance<sup>19</sup> and added another reason for the need to establish pan-Jewish unity for this struggle. The many antisemitic organizations, the paper said, despite the differences among them, are not only unified in their hatred of Jews, but also work together, thereby creating an unbroken anti-Jewish front. This, he says, entails the creation of a united counterfront. Such an organizational initiative may succeed, because antisemitism and Americanism are fundamentally opposed and if one of them must disappear, it should be antisemitism – viva America! (*Lebn zol Amerike!*)

The English-language Zionist paper – *The Advocate* in Chicago – wrote about the conference in the same vein. In fact, it said, the national conference for war on antisemitism symbolizes an epoch and a departure: an epoch of the proud and courageous way in which the problem was tackled, and a departure from the “timid” and “bashful” methods of the past.<sup>20</sup>

The stance of the Zionist press against “forbearance” in the Jewish public’s attitude toward antisemitic manifestations received support from the young historian and thinker Ben Halpern, who, in a collection of articles by Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals titled *Jews in a Gentile World*, vehemently attacked those who adopted the hush-hush approach to Jewish-Gentile relations.<sup>21</sup>

I now move on to Philip Roth’s childhood memories in order to compare history with memory. Roth’s novel is composed of two intersecting circles: one realistic – his childhood recollections from 1940–1942, when he was aged seven-to-nine, and one fictional, retelling, as it were, the ascendancy of the Nazis to power in the United States under Charles Lindbergh, the ballyhooped airman who was elected president of the United States as the candidate of the Republican Party.

<sup>18</sup> “Kemf kegn antisemitizmus,” *Morgen Dzhurnal*, Dec. 28, 1943.

<sup>19</sup> *Der Tog*, Feb. 12, 1944.

<sup>20</sup> “Conference to Combat Anti-Semitism,” *The Advocate*, Feb. 25, 1944.

<sup>21</sup> *Jewish Frontier*, July 1942, “Anti-Semitism and the Experts”; see also Isacque Graeber, ed., *Jews in a Gentile World: The Problem of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1942).

What interests us in this context is not the famous writer's imagined memories related to the phenomenon of American antisemitism at the time, which he retains even sixty years after the events. My purpose in comparing the Jewish press with Philip Roth is twofold: to ask whether Roth's childhood memories correspond in spirit to the editorials, and to examine how strongly the aged author's mind is gripped today with the same angst that seized American Jews back then, during the war, as reflected in the press.

First, it must be said that this is one of the most heartwarming American-Jewish ethnic novels ever written, ironically by an author who has always been considered the harshest, if not the most venomous, of that country's Jewish society. Lovingly and understandingly, Roth describes not only his parents and family but also his old neighborhood in New Jersey, not far from New York – a neighborhood of working-class Jews who are not religious but respectful of tradition, who attend synagogue services only on festivals but studiously avoid nonkosher meat and light Sabbath candles at home, who maintain warm and caring neighborly relations and are involved in American folk culture, who read the popular press and – except for a few of them – do not bother with *Forverts*. The connection with faraway, mysterious Palestine is manifested in slipping coins into the Jewish National Fund collection box that a weird old man comes around to empty once a year; children are ordered by their mothers to make these contributions without understanding the whys and wherefores of it. After all, America is their beloved homeland and it is its patriotic anthems that they sing passionately on its festival days.<sup>22</sup>

The author posits his ethnic ideology behind these heartwarming accounts, expressing it in roughly this manner: They were Jews who did not have to show much proof, who did not have to proclaim their faith, and who did not have to display fanatic religious piety to be Jews. They did not need a different language in addition to their native tongue, with the local style and special idioms that they use when playing cards in the market or negotiating with other parts of the population. For them, Jewish existence was neither a misfortune or a disaster nor an achievement of which they should be proud. Their Jewishness flowed from their selfness, as did their Americanness. It was as it was – a natural thing, like the arteries and the capillaries in the human body. They never expressed even the slightest desire to change or deny their identity, be the results of that what they may.<sup>23</sup>

To reinforce the impression that something in Roth's attitude toward his ethnic origin changed direction, I cite something that he said at the outset of his literary career, by which time he had already made large public waves after publishing his *Portnoy's Complaint*. In a dialogue between Israeli and

<sup>22</sup> Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> See "Second Dialog in Israel," *Congress bi-Weekly*, cited in Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought: The Quest for Collective Identity* (London/New York: Macmillan & New York University Press, 1994), p. 99.



American-Jewish intellectuals in Israel in 1963, Roth claimed that the existence of Jews in the United States means nothing in the Jewish spiritual sense except for the Jews' feeling – which offends him – that “the Jews are better.”<sup>24</sup> The change in Roth's emotional attitude toward his fellow Jews indicates that he was influenced by the zeitgeist of the 1960s. In that decade, which preceded the arrival of ethnic ideology in the United States, many Jewish intellectuals demonstratively distanced themselves from their ethnic identity, and especially from any connection with the State of Israel. In the present, in contrast, ethnocultural identity having legitimized itself in western society – a fact manifested in the efflorescence of literature on ethnic themes – Roth is back in tune with the times.

This “ethno-existentialist” statement was unacceptable to the Jewish press until then. The non-Zionist *Forverts*, the Zionist *Der Tog* and *Morgen Dzhurnal*, and even the Communist *Morgn-Frayhayt* prophesied in a national spirit, each in its own way. In other words, they spoke in terms of the existence of a world Jewish people of which American Jewry is part, not necessarily due to its religion but due to its nationhood – in Dubnowistic historical terms, as opposed to the religious Orthodox or Reform sense. In retrospect, Roth dismissed both as unimportant; in this zeitgeist, it is the ethnic culture in its American-Jewish folk version that counts and that serves as the object of the nostalgia in his novel. If so, the difference between Roth and the editors of the newspapers is that the former is a *Jewish American* whereas the latter, his predecessors, were *American Jews*. Despite the principled difference between them, they continue to share two Jewish “characteristics”: abundant love for the United States, the land of democracy, and worry about what this liberal and tolerant regime might be succeeded by – a conservative, jingoistic, religious, and also antisemitic one. This explains the Jewish press' repeated warnings during the war that antisemitism is not only a menace to the Jews, but also the foe of American society. Its aim, after all, is to destroy the democratic and liberal foundations on which this society rests. Hence the title of Roth's novel: *The Plot against America*.

It is indisputable that in both cases, past and present, the intent was and is to warn against the antisemitic Fascist menace. The newspaper editors did this in their editorials, the readership of which was limited to Yiddish speakers, whereas Philip Roth addresses millions of Anglophones. This difference illuminates the intervening change in the social and cultural standing of American Jewry. It also stresses, however, that despite the Jews' underlying historical attitude toward their surroundings, their perennial concern, alternating with profound anxiety, has not changed. Was this feeling justified in the first period of World War II, the one that ended when the United States joined the conflict on the side of Britain and the Soviet Union? The answer, I would say, is yes. The isolationist political forces within the Republican Party and the various grassroots movements such as America First, which opposed entering the war, did hold much sway in public opinion; President Roosevelt spent more than

two years struggling mightily to overcome them. In this sense, he played a role in Jewish history, irrespective of his attitude toward the Jews' suffering and his inconsistent political attitude toward the singularity of the Jewish problem. At this time, the Jewish press, speaking in its ethnic language, stood up courageously to the antisemitic propaganda, which accused the Jews of dragging the United States into the war due to their parochial interest as Jews. Indeed, this press, as I have shown, did not flinch from stating with emphasis that apart from the general menace to democratic society through the intent of depriving it of its freedom, Nazi Fascism threatened the Jewish people with the dispossession of its life. How objectively correct the Jewish papers were in judging the strength and seriousness of the American quasi-Fascist isolationist and antisemitic movement is not our concern here. In the context of our theme, what matters is the subjective sense; it is this that brings us back to the present day – that is, to Philip Roth's novel.

The reader of the novel finds it hard to gain release from the creeping fear that envelopes him or her in the wake of the gradual, nonaggressive, but nevertheless inexorable Fascist takeover of American society. The American incarnation of pre-Kristallnacht Germany is the product of Roth's anxious imagination. It still lacks "racial laws" but is armed with "pragmatic discriminatory measures" in the style of the American political culture. Roth's description of the Jews who identify with Lindbergh's Fascist regime need not seem bizarre and devoid of logic. After all, in Mussolini's Italy, before the Duce had concluded his unholy alliance with Hitler in 1938, many Jews had belonged to the Fascist party not because they had been forced to join or had some interest in affiliating with it, but in awareness of and identification with this ideology.<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon, culled from the historical reality of which Roth was surely aware, aggravates his anxiety all the more.

Here the critical question arises: What is Roth afraid of at the beginning of the new millennium? American Jewry has attained an honorable and meaningful status in important social domains, beyond all precedents in their history in Diaspora, even during the Golden Age in medieval Spain and in pre-Nazi Germany. If so, whence Roth's "Jewish angst" originates? It seems to be associated with the growing strength of ideological and political conservatism in the United States, surging in recent years with the electoral victory of the Republican Party – aided by fundamentalist religious circles – that vaulted George W. Bush into the White House. Roth's novel was written before the second Bush campaign – that of 2004 – which, if my assessment is accurate, would have made him even more fearful. Another explanation may be sought in the prominence of large numbers of Jewish "neoconserv-

<sup>25</sup> See Mikele Sarfatti, "Ha-yehudim ha-fashistim ve-ha-fashizm be-Italiah (1922–1938)" [Fascist Jews and Fascism in Italy (1922–1938)], in Raya Cohen, ed., *Yehudim Eirovim ve-Eirovim yehudim bein shetei milhamot ha-olam* [European Jews and Jewish Europeans between the World Wars], in Hebrew (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2004).

atives” among the intellectuals and political and administrative factotums in the Republican ruling court. In Roth’s book, the Reform Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, the Fascist president Lindbergh’s highly influential court Jew, is emblematic of the claue of Jews who surround President Bush. From this standpoint, the ultraliberal Roth views them as part and parcel of the present-day “plot against America.”

Here, then, is the connection between the “Jewish angst” that the Yiddish press evoked in reference to the real historical Lindbergh and Philip Roth’s fictional Lindbergh. Angst aside, the Yiddish press and Roth share another characteristic: vigorous objection to the Jewish “Diaspora politics” paradigm of avoiding public response to discriminatory treatment – the aforementioned *sha-sha politik*. Perusal of the Jewish press shows that it distinguished among three kinds of responses: (1) assimilationist Jews who fled from the battle; (2) “forbearance” on the part of Jewish leaders who thought the nastiness would eventually blow over, making it unwise to stir the pot further by means of public protests; and (3) the proud Jews who struggled openly and courageously for their national honor and the defense of their collective identity.

Roth’s family as he remembers it reveals all three types of responses to the antisemitic jingoistic American conservatism: that of the assimilationists, of the acquiescent, and of the fighters. Those representing the fictional first-mentioned include his aunt and his eldest brother, who enthusiastically join Lindbergh’s movement. His noble, devoted mother, the main soothing figure in the family, represents the traditional response of proud *sha-sha*. When the boy, Philip, devoted to his stamp collection, asks whether a Jewish personality will ever appear on a postage stamp, she replies: maybe someday, I hope so. From that time, Roth adds, twenty-six years passed until Einstein’s likeness appeared on an American stamp.<sup>26</sup> His mother draws the conclusion, for lack of choice, that “Lindbergh is teaching us how to be Jews whether we like it or not.” Then she adds, “We just think we’re Americans.”<sup>27</sup> In her folk consciousness, then, she is an American Jewess who entertains deep-seated distrust of the Christians.<sup>28</sup>

Roth’s father, in contrast, represents the Jewish-American type who fully believes he is an integral part of this society. Therefore, he reacts heatedly to his wife’s remarks: “No! [...] it’s not debatable [...] or negotiable at all.” He considers his Americanness natural and self-evident. Therefore, wherever he encounters antisemitic manifestations or anti-Jewish discrimination, he protests angrily in the name of the values of equality that the American founding fathers have laid down. His belligerence on this point even leads to police intervention when his family is refused a hotel room because they are

<sup>26</sup> Roth, *The Plot against America*, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Jews.<sup>29</sup> From his perspective, Lindbergh represents the “plot against America” whereas he, the father, defends his country with the unmitigated fervor of the uncompromising believer in the American ethos of liberty. Even Roth’s mother, mild-mannered and acquiescent in the Jews’ foreignness in American society, agrees with him on this point.

To stress the historical authenticity of his childhood memories, Roth presents Lindbergh’s famous speech, delivered in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11, 1941, as an appendix to his novel. In the speech, the famous aviator accused three groups of “pressing this country toward war: the British, the Jewish and the Roosevelt Administration.” Then, with the well-known hypocrisy of Fascist propaganda, he claimed:

I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both the British and the Jewish races, for reasons which are as understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war.<sup>30</sup>

These remarks, as demonstrated earlier, reverberated powerfully in the Jewish press, which responded in the spirit of the anti-Fascist protest of Roth *père* back then. Moreover, they grip Roth *fils* no less powerfully in the present, for reasons that he does not reveal until he is gripped by the chilling specter of the creeping Fascist takeover of American governance and culture.

Although Roth’s book is worthy of psychosocial research as evidence of the turnabout in his views about his Jewishness, my concern in this chapter is the confrontation between the public response and the personal one, between a political position and a childhood memory. My conclusion, which I consider proven beyond doubt, is that the memory, albeit of the child aged seven-to-nine, corresponds to the historical public feeling that was expressed in the Jewish press. Therefore, one may term both responses authentic and, by and large, identical. This is because the American-Jewish press seventy years ago and the contemporaneous Jewish American, Philip Roth, are linked by the angst-charged historical term: Jew!

Because this concept is historical, however, it has metamorphosed simply due to the passage of time. Here lies the difference between the historian’s approach and that of the author. At the time the Jewish press conducted its war on antisemitism – the era to which Philip Roth returns in his memoirs – the Jews’ public struggle was unquestionably a helpless one. American democracy, governing institutions and all, did not launch the comprehensive and vigorous campaign against antisemitism that the Jewish press demanded; the protests of Roth’s courageous father fell on deaf ears. Importantly, too, the struggle related not to prodigious and complex efforts, probably unworkable, to save some of European Jewry at the time, but rather to a quest for federal

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

legislation that would correspond to the state of emergency that had engulfed the American nation at this time.

Thus far, we have addressed the past. As for the future – about which, it seems, Roth wishes to sound an alarm – it cannot be imagined unless one understands the condition of the Jews today. It is a different condition in terms of their status in Israel, the United States, and other democracies, where almost all Jews dwell at the present writing. Therefore, one doubts whether Roth's "creeping angst" has political substance. In its public sense in the past and its personal sense in the present, however, Roth's creeping angst suffices to dangle an additional question mark over the possibility of the total normalization of world Jewish existence.

## Conclusion

### *The Cry of the Helpless*

The nation, family by family, weeps helplessly today.

*Davar*, Nov. 24, 1942

The global Jewish press during World War II gave public expression to the national existence of the Jewish transnational community and attested to this community's political powerlessness. Ostensibly, it sounds like an oxymoron. The first term conveys a sense of power flowing from Jewish national unity despite geographic dispersion and cultural diversity. The second term highlights the opposite – political weakness. In fact, there is no contradiction because both terms originate in the Jewish state of dispersion and lack of sovereign national territory. The “transnational community” symbolizes the cohesion that sustained the Jews during their dispersion – the characteristic of persevering “despite it all” – and also the helplessness that reflected their inability to transform this cohesion into a meaningful political tool that could rescue the doomed. During the war, this state of affairs turned the Jews' transnational community into an imagined community in the eyes of leaders and public opinion in the free world. It happened not because they disregarded the Jews' human suffering but because they refused to grant Jewry the collective status that they awarded to the other Nazi-occupied peoples. Therefore, they refused to acknowledge that the Jews as a people, unlike other Nazi-occupied peoples, had been condemned to outright extermination. Here lies the tragic and paradoxical meaning of the concept of “powerlessness” or “helplessness” as presented in this book. I use these concepts not to stress the Jews' weakness against the Nazis' murderous war machine – which toppled whole nations and armies – but to emphasize their weakness vis-à-vis the anti-Nazi democracies. It is for this reason that the Jews' leaders and organizations were unable to persuade the leaders of these powers to take meaningful rescue action, even for the few. Powerlessness bred unresponsiveness.

The Jewish leadership in all of its public and political organizations acknowledged the reality of this situation. However, for reasons of political prudence in wartime and the objective political weakness that made them almost totally dependent on the western powers, these leaders could not express the matter

publicly except in assemblies for public outcry and protest once the magnitude of the Holocaust became known. The Jewish press did not have these political constraints. Waving the banner of protest, it persistently raised its voice in anguish, for internal and external consumption alike, by vehemently demanding humanitarian aid to those interned in ghettos while this remained possible, and by pressing for firm political intervention after doubts about the perpetration of an ongoing extermination campaign vanished.

In this sense, the Jewish press expressed the emotions of the Jewish masses more than it did those of their political leadership, which, as stated, stood between the hammer of objective and subjective political constraints and the anvil of the democratic powers' leaders and public opinion.

This is not to say that the Jewish press spoke for the entire Jewish public, as it attested in its harsh and unrelenting criticism of manifestations of indifference toward fraternal suffering that spread among the Jewish public in Palestine, Britain, and the United States. No less harsh, in the moral sense, was its public criticism of the role of Jews in black-market commerce in the United States and Britain, and of the shameful phenomenon of shirking volunteer national service on the part of young Jews in Palestine, even though the age groups that were urged to volunteer were younger than those subjected to compulsory induction in the countries at war with Nazi Germany.

No less than this, and even more insulting, was the Jewish press' charge that the general press deliberately overlooked the Jews' tragedy as opposed to that of other peoples, manifested symbolically in the general press' enraged response to the murder of innocents in the Czech village of Lidice and its disregard for "hundreds of Lidices," as the expression had it, of Jews.

Most of the Jewish press did not mouth the views of the Jewish political establishment. The most important newspapers, such as *Forverts* in the United States, *The Jewish Chronicle* in Britain, and *Ha'aretz* in Palestine, were totally independent. Even papers associated with political parties served, in part, as mouthpieces for the opposition to the Zionist leadership, such as the General Zionists, the Revisionists, and Agudath Israel. Each paper took critical stances. However, it is only right to note that, for the most part and in the journalistic political culture of the time, public criticism did not target individuals, with the sole exception of Yitzhak Gruenbaum after this personality's imprudent utterances.

This is not to say that the barbs of criticism were not aimed directly or indirectly at personalities such as David Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive; Nahum Goldmann and Stephen Wise, leaders of the World Jewish Congress; and others. Publicly, however, these individuals were not attacked personally.

One may wonder whether the leadership's self-imposed wartime constraints in its treatment of western leaders also influenced the press, which effectively restrained itself when relating to those who, in its view, held the Jewish people's fate in their hands. However, the press gave itself license that the political leadership did not give itself. Thus, it persistently inveighed against

the British government for continuing to enforce the 1939 White Paper rules despite the tragedy of thousands of Jewish refugees who were pounding at the gates of Palestine, culminating with the foundering and sinking of the clandestine immigrant vessels *Patria* and *Struma*. This criticism relentlessly accused the British and American governments of abandoning the Jews to their fate in accordance with the recommendations formulated at the 1943 Bermuda conference. The second line of criticism concerned the Allies' refusal to allow the Jews to fight the Nazis under their national colors, a right enjoyed by other peoples whose national territory had been occupied. This criticism, precisely due to its ferocity, emphasized the political weakness of the Jewish press, which had no influence whatsoever on its intended listeners.

Importantly, these newspapers, in all three countries, thought it insufficient to criticize the behavior of the leaders of the democratic powers and the heads of the Jewish organizations; they also turned the spotlight on themselves. This was especially the case after the first three years of the war, up to the end of 1942, as the flow of reports about the worsening plight of the Jews intensified until the fact of the extermination campaign was proven beyond doubt – and the papers had not sounded the alarm about it. Even the oppositionist newspaper *Hamashqif* had warned about being sucked into unreliable rumors about the magnitude of the Germans' murder operations.

Once the authoritative reports about the immensity of the national disaster became public, these newspapers flagellated themselves for having been silent. They explained it, without justifying it, as the product of their inability to believe these reports, which lay totally outside their cultural concepts and all Jewish historical experience, which had no shortage of national disasters. However, even amid the self-indictment, the editors of these papers clung to the cautiously optimistic hope that some Jews would nevertheless survive and that the nation would surmount this catastrophe as it had others in the historical past. The editors said this not only because they had decided consciously not to leave the readership totally dispirited, but also due to the optimistic element, intrinsic to their *a priori* faith, that *klal Yisrael*, the “Jewish commonwealth,” was a natural and cultural whole whose very existence assures the nation's ability to surmount disaster.

This psychological historiography, predicated on an optimistic delusion, did not affect the release of information about what was happening in the occupied countries. This information, as I have said, was reported uninterruptedly and usually on the front pages. Accordingly, the absence of an outcry from the Jewish press for more than three years, from the outbreak of the war in September 1939 until late 1942, traces to the gap between the contents of the information reported and the press' ability to understand and interpret it. The press, as stated, reported what was being done to the Jews in the occupied countries almost each and every day: lootings and murders, ghettoization, starvation of the ghetto populations, mortality rates, massacres in the Nazi-occupied western reaches of the Soviet Union, and the Germans' intention of making Europe *Judenrein*. Concurrently, however, motivated by a spirit that,



while cautious, was nevertheless optimistic and rather strong, the press pinned its hopes on encouraging phenomena in the lives of the ghettoized Jews: the continued existence of the education system, public relief for the needy – especially the starving – by the various ghetto organizations, the activities of youth movements there, and so forth. Prompted by this delusional optimism, however cautious it was, Jewish intellectuals made assumptions and concocted programs for the regularization of European Jewry's status after the war – and the newspapers published them.

Once the enormity of the Holocaust became known, this cautiously optimistic faith gave way to a different kind of cautious optimism, a practical one, reflected in the insistence that much could be done to rescue the few despite the difficulties, through the vigorous intervention of the democratic powers, of course. Even this slender hope was misplaced, however. The spirit that powered the engine of national hope in the Jewish press found its public expression in language. Given their political helplessness, this was the only weapon that any Jewish newspaper had in its struggle for the rescue and national dignity of members of the Jewish people.

It must be acknowledged, however, that these newspapers, apart from discussing the fate of those doomed to annihilation, dealt uninterruptedly and extensively with routine Jewish public life in their communities and national organizations. This phenomenon of normal life amid a state of emergency was interpreted negatively and positively at once. Criticism of normalcy was expressed by those who considered it evidence of the public's indifference to its compatriots' agonies. Acquiescence in normalcy, in turn, was stressed by those who believed that relentless wallowing in grief, apart from being politically useless, also fomented a brand of despair that would inspire the public to give up. And there were some, especially in the American and British press, who warned the Jews that their recurrent complaining would trigger a counterreaction in general public opinion: The Gentiles would "get used to" the complaints and replace their empathy for the suffering Jews with indifference. Some even worried that the emphasis on the Jews' suffering was making them "lepers" in the family of nations, beyond all redemption and rescue. Not to mention the thought that the Jews actually "had it coming."

What influence did the positions of the Jewish press have on the public during those years? Did the number of participants in protest demonstrations increase? Did the donations to the rescue funds increase or not? Did fewer Jews dabble in the black market? Did more Jews in Palestine volunteer for security service? Were those who turned their backs on the public's grief frightened by the threat of social ostracism that the *Chronicle* in Britain prescribed against them? All in all, did the normal peacetime ways of life change? According to the newspapers' reportage, the answer seems to be no. Does this show that the press had no influence, or does it demonstrate the power of quotidian life that endures even in a state of emergency, for better or worse?

These questions are important for understanding the public influence of the press on Jewish society in these countries. It is difficult, however, to answer

them unequivocally due to the lack of ways and means of monitoring and measuring such influence at the time. One may say, however, on the basis of Ben-Gurion's remarks at the gathering of newspaper editors that was called at his initiative, that the press' criticism of the policies of the British government and the public's behavior in various domains had an effect. Otherwise, the man who headed the Yishuv's national leadership would not have summoned the editors to this encounter.

Whereas doubt or vagueness exists in regard to the Jewish press' influence on the public, its supremely important role in sharing information with the public is undoubted. The press recounted, sometimes day by day and always week by week, the story of the incremental murder of European Jewry. By so doing, it engaged most or at least much of the Jewish public, consciously, emotionally, and also practically, in their fellow Jews' fate. By so doing, it contributed unrelentingly to the unity of *klal Yisrael* in its despondency, grief, and anger – in Palestine, United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, as this study has shown.

Here is the place to note that, by conservative estimate, the Jewish press printed nearly 2,500 references to the plight of European Jewry during the fifty-five months of the war (September 1939–May 1945) in editorials, articles, and reports from various sources. This information was divided among the major newspapers in each of the three countries (Palestine, United States, and the United Kingdom) in the following way: ten times per month in *Davar*, eight times per month in *Forverts*, and three times per month in the *Chronicle*, a weekly journal. These are averages, of course; the actual number of items depended on reports about European Jewry that came in from international agencies and neutral countries. Be this as it may, the steady flow of information that the press shared with the Jewish public gives further evidence of the existence of the transnational community.

From this standpoint, the Jewish press played a role that the public leaders usually had to avoid, for reasons of political prudence or for personal motives, in their discourse with the leaders and public opinion of the western world. By so doing, with the leaders' encouragement or tacit consent (especially in Palestine), this press carried out the mission of the national leadership with its various branches. Furthermore, one may learn, especially from newspapers that spoke for the dominant political establishment – such as *Davar*, *Hatzofe*, and also the Zionist newspapers in United States and Britain – about the states of mind and assessments that existed among these leaders. Thus, this press has become a supplemental source, on top of sources in political and public archives, for research on Jewish public policy during the period at issue.

As we conclude this study, more than sixty years after the Holocaust and in view of a totally different national-political reality, it is proper to ask whether the Jewish press passed its professional and national test in those years. This question is not exempt, of course, from the inevitable tendency to compare the wartime Jewish press with today's critical and increasingly politically involved press – not only to assess the difference in the media culture between that

period and ours, but also to understand how the press at issue connected with its era. Therefore, we need to ask three questions in the journalistic and national domain. First, did this press pass the professional journalistic test as a medium for the dissemination of information in real time? Second, did it pass the political test as an institution critical of government and society? And third, did it speak on behalf of a singular national interest or of divergent interests?

In the first respect – the sharing of information – the Jewish press did its job first of all by monitoring the course of the war every day. It stressed this matter by giving it as much, and sometimes more, front-page coverage than the main newspapers in the free world, *The New York Times* and *The Times of London*. As for the plight of occupied European Jewry, it reported on this regularly on the front pages, although not much in the main headlines due to doubt about the credibility of the information that it received from news agencies in the initial period (1939–1942).

As for the newspapers' attitude toward reports about the progress of the war and the distress of European Jewry, and especially the salience of their coverage of these matters, there is no doubt that the situation on the fronts regularly got the main headlines and the Jews' situation did not. This indicates that the Jewish press, of all persuasions, considered defeating the Nazis the main way to rescue their fellow Jews. Thus, without saying it in so many words, it agreed with western leaders who were fighting the Nazis. Either way, the Jewish press passed the test of sharing information, although not always in the sense of interpreting it correctly.

As for the second domain – political criticism – a disclaimer is necessary: It was wartime. The general press at this time construed its role as the purveyor of political and military commentary without critical involvement, as opposed to internal social issues associated with the hardships of the war and its demands in each of the countries that were prosecuting it. Although the Jewish press was part of this culture, it was driven by the tragic plight of European Jewry to take an openly critical stance on the attitude of the American and British leaders toward action for the rescue of those condemned to suffering and extermination. The Jewish press in all three countries, despite the state of war, adopted an aggressively critical policy toward the leaders of the democratic powers. In this sense, it spoke on behalf of the Jewish leaders who, for political reasons, could not express their feelings and thoughts aloud. Here I speak of the “foreign policy” of the Jewish press. In its “home policy,” things were different. The Hebrew-language press in particular, especially that in Palestine, did not spare the national leadership from severe criticism of what it considered political ineptitude in all matters related to the rescue of Jews.

Nevertheless, no segment of the Jewish press flinched from presenting its readers, courageously and painfully, with the tragic truth that large-scale rescue was totally out of the question and that only a few could be rescued in the best case. Thus, it played an important role in democratic society, valid

not only for that time. It did this in view of its illusion-free awareness that its ability to influence public opinion in the direction of rescuing at least the few was negligible. All it could do, then, was protest about the ability of Lidice, the village in Czechoslovakia, to engage the emotions of millions while the “hundreds of Jewish Lidices” met with evasive silence.

This leads me to the third question: Did this press, in its three cultural and political dimensions – the “Palestinocentric” Zionist, the Anglo-Saxon-Jewish in the United States and Britain, and the Soviet-Jewish in the USSR – speak the same national-political language? Yes, it did, notwithstanding the underlying ideological differences that these newspapers represented: Zionist versus non-Zionist and even anti-Zionist; liberal democracy versus totalitarian Communism; freedom of conscience and religious faith; zealous promotion of the Hebrew language and adherence to Yiddish. The ties that bound these ideological and political contrasts and diversities and forged their carriers into a transnational community transcended grief over the disaster that had befallen the Jews; they also included the aspiration to change the Jews’ national standing among the nations – a change effected by recognition of the Jews as a people that has a single destiny and needs and deserves recognition and that has the right to cultural self-determination in the western democracies, autonomous self-determination in the Soviet Union, and political self-determination in Palestine. The wartime Jewish press, crying out in its powerlessness and encountering unresponsiveness, created, by expressing these demands, a goal for the Jewish people after the war – a goal for which it indeed mobilized in each of the countries where it was publicized, and which it fulfilled.



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# Index

- Advocate, The*, 238, 260  
Africa, 16  
Agudath Israel, 3, 8, 123–124, 158, 173,  
190–191, 205, 268  
Ahad Ha'am, 56, 196  
Ahimeir, Abba, 76, 222–223, 230  
Alter, Wiktor, 185–186, 199  
Alterman, Nathan, 8, 103  
America First, 33, 80, 253–255, 262  
American Jewish Committee (AJC), 169,  
171–173  
American Jewish Conference, 169, 171–172  
American Jewish Congress, 173, 259  
American Jewish Labor Committee, 169, 171  
American Jewry, 17, 28, 33, 55, 62, 65,  
83–85, 93, 95, 108, 118, 138, 145,  
147, 156–157, 162–163, 167, 169–170,  
173–174, 176, 186, 190–191, 223–224,  
251, 254–255, 259, 261–263  
American Legion, 255  
Antisemitism, 232, 251–252, 255  
Antisemitism, American, 33, 80,  
251–260, 262–263, 265  
Antonescu, Ion V., 208  
Arendt, Hannah, 203, 227–230  
Armenian disaster, 36, 60  
Armenians, 211  
Aronson, Shlomo, 164–165, 168, 215  
Asch, Sholme, 249  
Assembly of Representatives of Knesset  
Yisrael (Asefat Ha-Nivharim), 38, 41–42,  
127, 140  
Auschwitz, 183, 215, 250  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, 108  
Australia, 117  
Austria, 29, 83–84  
Austrian Jewry, 26, 30  
*Aynikayt*, 7, 18, 95, 148, 185–192,  
196–199, 201–202  
*Aynikayt, New York*, 198  
Balfour Declaration, 128  
Balkans, 35, 48, 134, 170, 219  
Baltic countries, 167  
Bar Kokhba, tank, 96  
Barlas, Haim, 37  
Baron, Salo W., 203, 224–230  
Beitar, youth movement, 8, 10  
Belarus, 16, 23, 27, 68, 97, 222  
Belgium, 32  
Ben-Gurion, David, 16–17, 24–25, 38–42, 64,  
73, 76, 78–79, 88, 129–131, 217–218,  
268, 271  
Ben-Zvi, Izhak, 127  
Bergelson, David, 189  
Berger, Herzl, 13  
Berger, L., Dr., 36  
Beria, Lavrentiy, 185–186, 199  
Berlin, 16, 92  
Berlin, Meir, Rabbi, 45–46  
Bermuda conference, 79, 118–121, 128–129,  
131–133, 138, 140–141, 151–152, 154,  
160, 173–174, 179, 182, 269  
Bernstein, Peretz, 63–65, 67–72, 132–136  
Bernstein, Yeshayahu, 50–52  
Bessarabia, 37  
Białystok ghetto uprising, 109  
Birobidjan, 94, 187, 189, 193, 195–198, 222  
Boston, 253, 257  
Botvinnik, Mikhoel, 201  
Brailsford, H.N., 157  
Brand, Joel, 129, 216  
Braude, Ephraim, 29  
Brawer, A.I., 47

- Britain, 1, 2, 3-4, 14, 16-17, 18, 24-25, 32, 37, 52, 56, 62, 64, 71, 77, 80-81, 92, 95, 96, 101, 113, 117-118, 120-121, 126, 134, 136, 146, 147, 149-150, 152, 157, 160, 167-169, 173-174, 176, 179, 181, 185, 213, 220, 226, 229, 232, 240, 256, 262, 268, 269, 271
- Britain, British Government, 141, 152, 156, 160, 162-163, 168, 173, 176-177
- British Jewry, 2, 17, 119, 176, 180
- British Mandate for Palestine, 4, 25, 28, 38, 54, 57, 73, 126, 139, 153
- Buchenwald, 56
- Budapest, 119, 123, 164-165, 167, 170
- Bukovina, 37
- Bulgaria, 42, 101, 119, 131, 165, 171, 214
- Bulgarian Jewry, 119, 130
- Bulgarian Jews, 119
- Bund, Bundists, 2, 6, 9, 12-13, 88, 171, 185, 193, 199, 201, 218, 247
- Cahan, Abraham, 5
- Carlebach, Azriel (Ezriel), 46-47, 51-52
- Cesarani, David, 180
- Chicago, 3, 7
- Churchill, Winston, 49, 51, 115, 119, 212
- Congress Weekly*, 173-175
- Constantinople, 37
- Coughlin, Charles E., 252, 254
- Crimea, The, 187, 195-198
- Czechoslovakia, 50, 83-84, 91, 236
- Czechoslovakian Jewry, 26, 96
- Czerniaków, Adam, 13-14, 44, 78, 95
- Czesław Miłosz, 246
- Daily Mail*, 37
- Daily Telegraph*, *The*, 236, 240-242, 249
- Davar*, 3, 8, 10-11, 13-14, 17-18, 24-26, 28-30, 32-39, 42-47, 49-50, 53, 56-57, 73-75, 77, 89-90, 103, 106, 108-120, 123-126, 131-133, 136-137, 141, 144, 200, 207, 221-222, 267, 271
- Denmark, 101
- Der Idisher Kemfer*, 10
- Der Morgen Dzhurnal*, 3, 5, 9, 12, 46, 90-91, 155, 168-170, 238, 254, 256, 259-260, 262
- Der Tog*, 3, 6-7, 9, 12, 46, 89-90, 98-99, 143-147, 153-154, 167-170, 238, 254-255, 257, 259-260, 262
- Di Tsayt*, 3, 176-177, 179, 238
- Di Vokhntsaytung*, 3, 176
- Dubnow, Dubnowism, 4
- Dubnow, Shimon, 227, 247, 262
- Dunkirk, 52
- Eden, Anthony, 154, 159, 163, 173, 180-181
- Ehrenburg, Ilya, 7, 186, 189, 197, 201
- Eichmann, Adolf, 129, 164
- Einstein, Albert, 197
- El Alamein, 23, 49, 63, 210-211
- Elgin, M., 93-95
- Epstein, Shakhne, 186, 188, 192-195, 198, 200
- Eretz Israel, 191
- Erlich, Henryk, 185-186, 199
- Evian Conference, 136, 155, 182
- Fefer, Itsik, 186-187, 191, 195, 201
- Fishman, Judah Leib, Rabbi, 45
- Fogelman, L., 81
- Forverts*, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 17, 24, 46, 80-89, 96-98, 102, 143-145, 149-156, 160-170, 172, 191, 200, 232-234, 237, 254-259, 262, 268, 271
- France, 32, 69, 81, 114, 166, 176
- Frankfurter, Felix, 42
- Frenkel, Max, 246
- Friling, Tuvia, 39, 215, 217
- Frister, Roman, 218
- General Zionists, The, 3, 63-64, 72, 268
- German Jewry, 30, 54, 57, 90-92, 96, 221, 239
- Germany, 4, 15, 23, 27, 29, 32-33, 36, 41-42, 56, 60-61, 65, 70, 76-77, 80-81, 83, 86, 90, 94-95, 135, 149-150, 156-157, 161, 165, 173, 176, 221, 225-226, 228, 235, 237, 252-255, 259, 263, 268
- ghettos, 1, 11, 14, 16, 35-37, 44, 47, 54-55, 57-58, 72, 87-88, 90, 96, 114, 132, 158, 160-161, 173, 213-214, 216, 219, 246, 270
- Ginzburg, A., 237
- Glaykhhbeyt*, 188
- Goldberg, Leah, 222, 230
- Goldmann, Nahum, 172, 203, 223-224, 230, 268
- Goldschmidt, S., 177-179, 239, 241
- Goldstein, Israel, 190
- Goralnik, S., 57
- Gotthelf, Yehuda, 106-108
- Gottlieb, Shalom, 47, 56-58, 61
- Greece, 114, 134, 158, 160, 166
- Greenberg, Hayim, 10, 92, 101, 156-158, 160, 173

- Gromyko, Andrei, 201
- Gruenbaum, Yitzhak, 18, 32, 61, 63, 88, 127-128, 130, 203, 205-219, 268
- Ha'aretz*, 3, 10, 47, 53-63, 73, 78, 103, 125-132, 134, 136, 140, 206, 210-211, 217, 268
- Ha'olam*, 205
- Haboqer*, 3, 53, 63-69, 71, 80, 132-137, 206, 210
- Hacohen, B., 75, 78, 138-141
- Hadassah, 190
- Haganah, 16, 24
- Haifa, 16, 24-25, 47, 66, 176
- Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 11, 219
- Halperin, Yehiel, 222-223, 230
- Halpern, Ben, 260
- Hamashqif*, 3, 53, 72-73, 75-79, 128, 134, 136-140, 142, 169, 206, 269
- Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrahi, 10, 45, 50, 123, 200
- Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, 229
- Hartglas, Apolinary, 32-34, 57, 74, 218
- Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir, 72, 240
- Hatzofe*, 3, 10, 14, 45-53, 72, 77, 120-123, 133, 137, 271
- Herzl, Binyamin Ze'ev (Theodor), 76
- Heydrich, Reinhard, 76, 100, 234, 236
- Hilberg, Raul, 249-250
- Hindus, Maurice, 244
- Hitler, Adolf, 37, 41, 55, 81-82, 85-86, 96-98, 114-115, 156, 171, 181, 215, 221-222, 237-238, 247, 263
- Horthy, Miklós, 118-119, 123, 164-165, 167, 170
- Hungarian Jewry, 116, 123, 128-130, 134-135, 141-142, 144, 163-165, 167-168, 170, 174, 183, 206, 214, 216-218
- Hungary, 42, 53, 116, 119-120, 129, 131, 134, 136, 141, 150, 152, 163-165, 167-168, 170, 183, 214
- International Anti-Fascist Committee, New York, 198
- Istanbul, 217
- Italy, 66, 101, 134, 225-226
- Iyar, B., 74-75
- IZL (Irgun Zevai Le'umi), 139
- Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, 72, 74-75, 88, 138, 141, 205
- Japan, 23, 89, 225, 253-254
- JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee), 84, 89, 91, 191
- Jerusalem, 38, 47, 63, 77, 217
- Jewish Agency Executive, 16, 42, 79, 128, 140, 205, 209, 212, 217-218, 268
- Jewish Agency Rescue Committee (Va'ad ha-Hatsala), 34, 63, 127-130, 205-206, 209, 212, 217-218
- Jewish Agency, The, 24, 63, 129, 135, 142
- Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, 7, 95, 97, 148, 185-189, 191-192, 194-202
- Jewish Brigade, 168, 171, 183
- Jewish Chronicle, The*, 3-4, 6, 8, 17, 24, 176-177, 179-184, 211, 242, 245, 268, 270-271
- Jewish Frontier*, 3
- Jewish Standard, The*, 3, 176
- Judenrat, 13-14, 44, 78, 95
- Kallen, Horace, 6
- Kantarowicz, N, 37
- Kaplan, Eliezer, 217
- Katznelson, Berl, 10, 13, 24, 32, 38-40, 64
- Kemfer, Idisher*, 1, 3, 91-92, 99-101, 153, 156, 173
- Khasid, General, 8
- Kielce ghetto, 71
- Kiev, 97
- klal Yisrael*, 2, 4-5, 11, 39-40, 111, 124, 180, 201, 247, 269, 271
- Koestler, Arthur, 249
- Kook, Hillel, 77-78
- Kovner, Abba, 72, 219
- Kovno, 53
- Kraków, 26
- Kuybyshev, 97
- Lang, H., 81
- Latvia, 27
- Lawrence, W.H., 233, 243-244
- Lazar, David, 57
- League of Nations, 4
- Leff, Laurel, 246, 248-249
- Lehi (Lohamei Heirut Yisrael), 139
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich, 192-195, 200-201
- Leshchinsky, Jacob, 34, 91, 99-100, 223, 230, 238
- Levin, Meyer, 7
- Levy, Maurice, 7
- Lidice, 50, 69, 76, 100, 146, 156, 178, 232, 234-240, 244, 247, 250, 268, 273
- Lindbergh, Charles A., 33, 253-255, 260, 263-265

- Lipsky, Louis, 173  
 Lipson, Mordechai, 52, 72  
 Lipstadt, Deborah, 245-246, 249  
 Lithuania, 34, 46, 50, 53, 72  
 Łódź, 16, 26, 99  
 Łódź ghetto, 36  
 Loewenstein, E., 27-28  
 London, 9, 12-14, 25, 29, 54, 56-57, 78, 108,  
 112, 156, 176-177, 242, 244, 254  
 Lookstein, Joseph, 190  
 Lublin, 16, 26, 29, 53, 64, 74, 83, 90, 225,  
 232-234, 242, 244  
 Lufban, Yitzhak, 229  
 Lurie, Arthur, 42  
 Lutz, Charles, 119, 164  
 Lwów, 26, 100
- Madison Square Garden, 100  
 Majdanek, 232-234, 242-245, 247,  
 249-250, 257  
 Majewski, Dr., 36  
*Manchester Guardian, The*, 62, 132, 153,  
 181, 236, 240-242, 247, 249  
 Mapai Party, 13, 24, 39, 64, 136-137  
 Markish, Peretz, 189  
 Marshall, Louis, 5  
 Mauritius, 24  
 Myer, Morris, 8, 177, 238  
 Mikhoels, Solomon Mikhaïlovich, 186-187,  
 189-192, 195, 201  
 Mizrahi, 3, 10, 45-46, 72, 90, 190, 200  
 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, 81, 93-94  
*Morgen Dzhurnal*, 144-145, 147-148, 153, 167  
 Morgenthau, Henry, 115  
*Morgn-Frayhayt*, 3-4, 7, 72, 82, 92-95,  
 144, 148-149, 158-161, 170-172,  
 202, 237, 262  
 Moscow, 57, 92-94, 97, 126, 148, 170, 185,  
 191, 197  
 Mussolini, Benito, 263
- Nation, The*, 249  
 National Committee of Keneset Yisrael  
 (Ha-Va'ad Ha-Le'umi Shel Keneset  
 Yisrael), 75, 123, 127-128, 134, 140, 205  
 Neiman, L., 91  
 Neimann, J.M., 34-35  
 Netherlands, 32, 90, 92  
*New Republic*, 249  
*New Statesman, The*, 256  
 New York, 7, 50, 57, 60, 69, 77, 100, 108,  
 150, 163, 188, 191, 253-254, 257-259  
*New York Herald Tribune, The*, 232-236,  
 243-244
- New York Times, The*, 100, 146-148,  
 232-233, 235-236, 238-240, 243-244,  
 246-249, 272  
 Niger, Shmuel, 95  
 Northern Africa, 113  
 Norway, 86, 114
- Odessa, 97  
 Operation Barbarossa, 23, 35, 96, 192, 213
- Palestine, 1-2, 4, 9-10, 12, 16-17, 23, 28-33,  
 35, 37, 41, 46-49, 54-59, 63-66, 68-69,  
 72, 74, 78, 80, 83, 88-90, 95, 105,  
 107-109, 113, 117-118, 121-122, 124,  
 126, 131-137, 141-142, 149, 155-156,  
 160, 162-163, 166-172, 177, 180, 183,  
 191-192, 194, 196-197, 200-201,  
 207-208, 213, 218-220, 223, 225-227,  
 229, 240-241, 260, 268-269, 271-273
- Paris, 16, 96  
*Patria*, 16, 24, 269  
 Pines, Dan, 106, 108  
 Pinsky, David, 92  
 Piotrków ghetto, 71  
 Pittsburgh, 224  
 Po'alei Tziyon, 3, 10, 34, 91, 99, 146-147  
 Po'alei Tziyon Left, 72  
 Poland, 4, 27-30, 32-34, 37-38, 44-45,  
 47-50, 53-55, 57, 59, 61, 64, 66, 74,  
 81-84, 86, 88-91, 99-100, 118, 131, 135,  
 166-167, 173, 177, 205-206, 222, 225,  
 242, 244  
 Polish Government in Exile, 14, 57, 88, 99,  
 156, 178, 242  
 Polish Jewry, 11-12, 14, 16, 27-28, 30,  
 32-34, 36, 46-49, 53-54, 56-58, 61-62,  
 66-68, 74-76, 81-84, 87-92, 95, 130,  
 134, 142-143, 167, 174, 206, 210, 216,  
 218, 223, 244  
 Polish National Council in London, 12, 14  
 Polish uprising in Warsaw, 219, 242-243  
 Pomerantz, A., 95  
 Porat, Dina, 152, 215  
 Portugal, 112, 165, 181  
 Prager, Moshe, 37
- Radom ghetto, 71  
 Red Army, *The*, 4, 7, 35, 46, 75, 96, 126,  
 136, 161, 186, 188-192, 196, 198, 202,  
 243, 257  
 Red Cross, *The*, 96, 119, 160, 164, 167,  
 173  
 Redlich, Shimon, 185-187, 202  
 Reiss, Anshel, 34

- Ringelblum, Emanuel, 44, 72, 175, 208, 219  
 Robinson, Jacob, 223–224, 230  
 Romania, 27, 42, 53, 150, 152, 165–166, 207, 214  
 Romanian Jewry, 15–16, 86, 90, 100  
 Rommel, Erwin, 176, 210–211  
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 100, 238  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 98, 115–116, 118–119, 146, 148, 152, 161–162, 165, 170, 172, 174, 212, 252–253, 255, 262, 265  
 Ross, Robert, 245  
 Roth, Cecil, 203, 228–230  
 Roth, Philip, 18, 251, 253, 260–266  
 Rubashov, Shneur Zalman (Shazar), 30, 32–34, 37, 39, 56, 207  
 Rubin, Ya'akov, 74  
 Russian Jewry, 57, 97, 143
- Sachsenhausen, 56  
 Salomon, Hayim, 7  
 San Francisco Conference, 136, 168, 169, 172  
 Schocken, Gershom, 53  
 Serbia, Serbs, 208, 219  
 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 41  
 Shapira, Anita, 39  
 Shertok (Sharett), Moshe, 38, 216  
 Shindler, Colin, 245–246, 249  
*Sho'ah*, 27–28, 30–31, 33–35, 37, 43, 47, 56, 66–67, 110, 113, 116, 133, 137, 229  
 Shorer, Haim, 35, 47  
 Sikorsky, Wladislaw, General, 147  
 Slovakia, 90  
 Smilansky, Moshe, 116, 123–124  
 Smith, Gerald, 253  
 Sneh, Moshe, 88, 218  
 South Africa, 117  
 Soviet Central Asia, 113  
 Soviet Jewry, 2, 35–36, 67, 75, 84, 186, 188–192, 194, 198–200, 202, 225  
 Soviet Union, USSR, 1, 3–4, 6, 15, 23, 28–30, 33, 35–38, 49, 57–58, 67, 68, 75, 88, 91, 93–97, 99, 113, 126, 131, 146, 148–149, 167, 172, 174, 176, 185–195, 197–202, 205, 207, 210, 213, 222, 225–226, 237, 262, 269, 271, 273  
 Spain, 112, 151, 165, 181  
 Stalin, Yosif V., 51, 82, 96, 186–187, 193–196, 199–202  
 Stalingrad, 23, 63, 210–211  
 Stockholm, 97  
*Struma*, 9, 16, 38, 92, 269  
 Sulzberger, Arthur Hays, 246–248  
 Sulzberger, Cyrus L., 246
- Sulzberger, family, 147, 240  
 Suslov, Mikhail, 198–201  
 Sweden, 112, 146, 165, 257  
 Switzerland, 37, 61, 89, 112, 146, 157, 165, 257  
 Szwarcbard, Ignacy, 177
- Tabenkin, Yitzhak, 11–12, 219  
 Tel-Aviv, 47, 60, 66, 176  
*Times of London, The*, 236, 240, 245, 248–249, 272  
 Transnational Community, 3–4, 6, 13–14, 17–18, 72, 93, 122, 230, 267, 271, 273  
 Treblinka, 215  
 Turkey, 54–55, 152
- Ukraine, 16, 23, 36, 62, 68, 72, 75, 96–97, 196, 207, 211, 222, 239  
 United Jewish Appeal (UJA), 89  
 United Nations, 169  
 United Nations Organization, 168  
 United States, 1–5, 9, 16, 18, 23, 28, 32–33, 35, 37, 46, 49, 69, 71, 77–78, 80, 82–88, 95–96, 98, 101, 110, 117–118, 120–122, 125–127, 134, 136, 146–147, 149–150, 152, 157, 160–163, 165–167, 169–171, 173–174, 177, 179–180, 185–186, 188, 190–191, 197, 200, 208, 213, 220, 223, 225–227, 229, 232, 237, 240, 247, 251–260, 262–263, 268, 271
- UNRRA (the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), 122  
 Ussishkin, S., 68
- Vatican, 89  
 Versailles Treaties, 32  
 Vichy, 35, 61, 86, 113, 151, 158  
 Vienna, 16  
 Vilna, 34, 46, 96–97, 237  
 Vilna ghetto, 219  
 Vilna ghetto uprising, 109
- Wallenberg, Raoul, 119, 123, 164  
 Wannsee conference, 45, 63, 71, 75, 96  
 Warsaw, 9–11, 16, 26, 47, 81, 185  
 Warsaw ghetto, 13, 36, 54, 58, 68, 71–72, 77–78, 82, 87–88, 95–96, 99, 132, 175, 207–208  
 Warsaw ghetto uprising, 8–12, 14, 44, 109, 118, 139, 151–152, 174, 192, 213–214, 238, 241  
 Wehrmacht, 48, 114, 116, 119, 128, 134, 183, 185, 214, 243, 245  
 Weinstein, B., 74

- Weizmann, Chaim, 39-40, 49, 73, 76, 129,  
131, 190, 196, 202
- Weltsch, Robert, 54, 56
- White Paper on Palestine, 31, 66, 117-118,  
136, 156, 160-163, 166, 169, 171, 177,  
181,  
241, 269
- Wise, Stephen, 119, 122, 171, 173, 268
- World Jewish Congress, 191, 223-224, 268
- WRB (War Refugee Board), 115, 119, 161,  
165, 174, 213
- Wyman, David, 252
- Yugoslavia, 134, 136
- Zemach, Shlomo, 221-222
- Zionist Labor Movement, 13, 26, 39,  
45, 54, 73, 116, 136, 139-140,  
142, 196
- Zionist Religious Movement, 45
- Zionist Revisionist Movement, 3, 72-74,  
76, 78, 139-140, 142, 205, 222,  
268
- Zygielbojm, Szmul (Artur), 9,  
12-14, 174