

In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys

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Unbelievable!, Hillel Kook thought, his eyes riveted on a headline in the *Washington Post* for November 25, 1942: "2 Million Jews Slain, Rabbi Wise Reports." The Associated Press dispatch went on to explain that Stephen Wise, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, had just received State Department confirmation that half of the estimated four million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been murdered in an "extermination campaign." Wise's own sources disclosed that the German *Führer* had ordered an end to the remainder by New Year's Day 1943, and that half of Warsaw's Jewish population of 800,000 had already died.¹

If the shocking facts were true, reasoned Kook, why confine them to two brief paragraphs on page six? Surely the report merited the front page alongside the *Post's* two-column account of a suicide. Yet major New York newspapers, while including Wise's assertion that Hitler "is even exhuming the dead for the value of the corpses," which were to be "processed into such war-vital commodities as soap, fats and fertilizer," also relegated the AP item to secondary status that morning. Grabbing a telephone, the individual then in charge of an effort to raise a Jewish Army against the Third Reich called Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle for an immediate appointment.²

Within an hour the 32-year-old Palestinian had his worst fears corroborated. Apologizing for his urgent tone, Kook asked his regular contact at State for details. "Yes," admitted Berle, "we've already discussed the matter with Rabbi Wise." "What are you going to do about it?" pressed his visitor. "What can we do?" the Assistant Secretary candidly replied. The two spoke for a few minutes more, and Kook took his leave.³

Without the "faintest idea" of what to do, but knowing that he would do something, Kook contacted Samuel Merlin, his chief lieutenant, and summoned the Committee for a Jewish Army's executive board. All agreed that the imperative of rescue should now assume first priority. A program for immediate action was drafted: President Franklin D. Roosevelt should clearly announce the coun-

1 Hillel Kook talk at the Hebrew University (notes in author's possession), June 1, 1972; *Washington Post*, Nov. 25, 1942.

2 Kook talk, June 1, 1972; *New York Herald Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1942; *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1942.

3 Kook talk, June 1, 1972.

try's determination to find ways and means of stopping the mass slaughter, and appoint a full-time committee of military and political figures for the task. In addition, those "disinherited and stateless" Jews free of Hitler's clutches should be granted the right to form a Jewish Army in league with the Allied forces.⁴

It would be a formidable task to shake the "helpless passivity" of Americans in the face of history's most monstrous crime. The highest United States government circles maintained a conspiracy of silence, and the rest of the country followed their example. A divided Jewish leadership also failed to grasp or convey the significance of the disaster facing their people across the Atlantic. But at this late hour, as Kook pointed out to news broadcaster Raymond Swing, "no Four Freedoms or Atlantic Charter or Democracy for the Common Man should be preached" before a democracy's collective conscience regarding Hitler's first victims was touched to the quick. Only thus could the murder of a people be shifted from the press's back pages and be interrupted by rescue action.⁵

The story of these Palestinian visitors to the United States had begun early in 1939, when a small delegation of the Irgun Tsvei Leumi arrived in New York. With letters of introduction from Revisionist New Zionist Organization (NZO) president Vladimir Jabotinsky, their ideological mentor, and others, Robert Brisco, Chaim Lubinski, and Col. John Patterson first sought financial support for the organization's transfer of thousands of "illegal" Jewish immigrants from Europe to the Promised Land. They immediately found a receptive audience in William Ziff, author of the anti-British *The Rape of Palestine*, and Rabbi Louis Newman of New York's Reform Congregation Rodeph Sholom. Mrs. John Gunther and Wall Street banker Harvey Schwamm opened up various doors, aided by the nephew of Lincoln's Secretary of War and some lay leaders in the Orthodox Young Israel organization. Publication of Britain's May White Paper in turn spurred the creation a month later of The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, which began publicly to champion unauthorized immigration and a Jewish military force against the Mandatory power.⁶

4 Kook interview with the author, June 22, 1972; Ben Ami interview with the author, March 28, 1972.

5 Merlin interview with the author, March 27, 1972; Bergson to Swing, Nov. 29, 1942, Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe Mss., Box 66-89, Metsudat Ze'ev, Tel-Aviv.

6 David Niv, *Ma'arkhot Ha-Irgun Ha-Tsva'i Ha-Leumi*, vol. II (Tel-Aviv: 1963), p. 196; Lubinski to Ziff, May 20, 1939, and June 30, 1939, Box 1/1, Palestine Statehood Committee Papers (hereafter PSC), Sterling Library, Yale University.

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Yitzchak Ben Ami, sent by the Irgun's commander-in-chief to take charge of activities when the first three emissaries left the United States on the eve of World War II, expanded the new, non-sectarian organization to embrace Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago. When the United Jewish Appeal refused to finance the NZO's shipment to Palestine of 2,000 Central European refugees, stranded in small barges on the frozen Danube, the American Friends obtained the necessary funds in January, 1940 by releasing the facts to the press. On February 13, the *Sakariya* landed its cargo of 2,175 escapees from Hitler in Haifa, the British retaliating with the arrest of Eri Jabotinsky, its organizer and the son of the NZO president. With that voyage, the Revisionist-Irgun program of unauthorized immigration came to an end.⁷

Vladimir Jabotinsky's arrival in the United States the following month signaled an upsurge of activity. Jabotinsky's first appearance at New York's Manhattan Center drew an impressive crowd and coverage in the metropolitan newspapers. The subsequent fall of France to the *Wehrmacht* lent extra force to his public call on June 19 for a Jewish Army of 100,000, including American volunteers, following the example of World War I's Jewish Legion. Last efforts to secure unity with the World Zionist Organization having failed, the ten-member NZO delegation headed by Jabotinsky looked forward to expanding the Jewish Army campaign that fall. The unexpected death of the Revisionists' president in August threw the NZO into turmoil, however, and the movement floundered for a year while seeking its bearings.⁸

Some in the Irgun had already taken issue with Jabotinsky and his tactics. Hillel Kook, while working in Europe under Abraham Stern during 1938–1939 on arms purchases and illegal immigration to Palestine, accepted his commander's judgment that the Irgun existed as a combined military-political entity free of Revisionist Party control. The NZO chief executive's faith in diplomatic negotiation and international conscience he found naïve; so did Samuel Merlin, secretary general of the NZO World Executive, after Shlomo Ben Yosef went to the Palestine gallows a martyr in the

7 Ben Ami interview with author, March 28, 1972; Schwamm *et al.* memo, Jan 27, 1940, Box 4/2, PSC; William Perl, *The Four-Front War: From the Holocaust to the Promised Land* (New York: 1979), Ch. 6.

8 Joseph B. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet: The Last Years* (New York: 1961), Ch. 20; Jabotinsky to Lothian, June 21, 1940, and FO to Lothian, June 14, 1940, Foreign Office files (hereafter FO) 371/24566, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Kew, England; Benjamin Akzin interview with the author, Aug. 19, 1976.

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Irgun's armed campaign against Arab terror. Alexander Rafaeli (alias Hadani), active on the continent in public relations and finance for the underground organization, took a similar position.⁹

Only an independent political arm, the Irgun leadership decided, could arouse the world's conscience to the justice of their military struggle. Creation of the American Friends and a public manifesto from headquarters in Jerusalem against the White Paper represented first steps in this direction. Kook, Lubinski, and Rafaeli traveled to Geneva in August, 1939 to brief delegates and foreign journalists at the World Zionist Congress about the Irgun's fight against the British. Jabotinsky, apprised by the trio of their task just prior to the Congress, had no choice but to accept the *fait accompli*. He did not forgive the separatists, and shortly before his death warned Rafaeli against continuing American Friends' activity in Chicago and points West.¹⁰

With Jabotinsky's passing, the Irgunists' break with the NZO in America became inevitable, and they went their own way. Not long after reaching New York in July, 1940, Kook, the Irgun's supreme commander-in-exile, attracted Ben Ami, Merlin, Rafaeli, Jeremiah Halperin, and Aryeh Ben Eliezer to his standard. Using the alias Peter H. Bergson, chosen previously so as not to embarrass his uncle, the late Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Kook turned his charm and English accent on New York's literati over cocktails with the dramatic vision of a large Jewish Army as most effectively identifying the Jewish tragedy and Jewish rights. His interest in a high pressure campaign also interested Eri Jabotinsky (released by the British after his father's death) and Ben Zion Netanyahu, the one member of the NZO delegation from Palestine who resigned in protest against his older colleagues' orthodox methods and wrote in *Bitzaron* of the Jews' need to "fight for their right to fight." Undaunted by attacks from America's established Zionist bodies, the small band of emissaries led a frugal existence, lunch often being a nickel bag of peanuts and dinner the welcome largesse of parlor gatherings.¹¹

The breakthrough Kook and company so desperately needed came in the person of Ben Hecht. Intrigued by that author's biting attack in an April *PM* column against influential Jews who hid

9 Niv, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 139, 164, 192; Kook oral history interview, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University; Rafaeli interview with the author, Aug. 15, 1976.

10 Schechtman, *op. cit.*, pp. 481-482; Rafaeli interview, Aug. 15, 1976.

11 Kook interview, June 22, 1972; Netanyahu interview with the author, June 2, 1974.

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behind their pride in being neutral Americans rather than speak out against Hitler, Kook invited Hecht to lead their cause. The highly paid Hollywood script writer of such films as *Wuthering Heights* and *Scarface*, and author of the popular play *The Front Page* (with Charles MacArthur) and the self-flagellating *A Jew in Love*, Hecht had been far removed from ethnic roots and from all contact with Palestine. But the Nazi purge of his people and the silence of the democracies regarding that persecution brought his Jewishness to the surface. The author's *A Book of Miracles*, appearing on the eve of World War II, had prophesied a "great International Pogrom" against the Jews, whom he lovingly portrayed as the Lord's "little candle" in a world of cruelty and darkness. He subsequently wrote propaganda speeches and pageants for Herbert Agar's Fight for Freedom group, which sought to bring the United States into that global conflict. Kook's appeal therefore struck a warm chord. Hecht agreed to join the campaign to mobilize the press and Congress for a separate army which could, as he later reminisced, "bring respect back to the name Jew."¹²

After months of planning, the Irgun emissaries launched the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews on December 4, 1941. Beneath the grouped flags of all the Allied nations, the conference of more than 150 representatives from across the land called for a force of 200,000 to be based in Palestine to "combat the Satanic zeal" of Hitler and to fight under the British in the "evangelic hills of Galilee." Foreign correspondent and author Pierre Van Paassen, as national chairman, stressed the army's invaluable strategic importance to the free world. Samuel Harden Church, president of Carnegie Institute and honorary chairman of the new committee, went further in calling for an end to the White Paper and in forecasting the army's return to Jerusalem, where a Jewish government should be re-established in Palestine with freedom for all peoples. Senators Claude Pepper and Styles Bridges sent greetings, and, in a real coup, Secretary of War Henry Stimson called in his best wishes for the committee's future.¹³

America's entry into the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor three days later appeared providential for the committee's success, and Kook exploited the sudden turn of events with a master stroke. A while earlier, he had Hecht solicit prominent citizens (drawn from *Who's Who in America*) to join the future

¹² Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York: 1954), p. 536; Ben Hecht, *A Book of Miracles*, (New York: 1939), pp. 23-53, 112-201.

¹³ *Washington Times Herald*, Dec. 5, 1941; Pierre Van Paassen, "World Destiny Pivots on Palestine," *New Palestine*, Dec. 12, 1941.

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committee, with supporters in turn recommending others. On January 5, 1942, Kook placed the names of some of these politicians, professors, and authors in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*. "JEWS FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO FIGHT" ran the headline on page thirteen, which went on to demand that the Jewish people take its rightful place in "the ranks of the free peoples of the earth" by joining the Allied cause in a 200,000 strong army.¹⁴

The \$2,000 publicity gamble shattered the prevailing American consensus regarding Jewish affairs. The Committee's forthright demand for a Jewish Army carried tremendous emotional power, appealing to non-Jews as well as to many Jews who had heretofore not identified with Zionist concerns. The very means of communication, bringing the message via newspaper and radio to the nation's breakfast tables, in turn generated further coverage. As Kook had estimated, the public found the substantial scheme, dramatically portrayed in non-partisan terms, more attractive than the Jewish Agency's limited request that HMG create a Jewish force of some 30,000 in Palestine.¹⁵

The American Zionist organizations proved unable to counter this broad appeal. Upstaged by the young Palestinian mavericks, the umbrella-type Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (ECZA) sought to co-opt the committee's leadership. The attempt failed, while Jewish Agency executive chairman David Ben-Gurion ordered an end to all negotiations with the dissidents. With the aid of advertising tycoon Alfred Strelsin and Maryland rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz, Kook invaded the nation's capital and proceeded to breach the barriers of officialdom. Congressman Andrew Somers, a fighting Irishman from Brooklyn with no love for the British, introduced a resolution in the House on behalf of the committee. Senators Edwin Johnson and Elbert Thomas spoke out forcefully in its favor, while many others joined as members; Adlai Stevenson helped obtain the public support of his superior, Navy Secretary Frank Knox. A committee delegation almost reached London to lay its case before the Foreign Office, but Whitehall, fearing that even a private reception would increase the committee's prestige, turned the scheme down. (The Committee's propaganda in London, directed by Jeremiah Halperin and Lord Strabolgi, had also been winning public acclaim.) Ultimately, HMG fell back on its an-

14 Kook interview, June 22, 1972; *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1942.

15 "I Bring a Sword," Jan. 1947 report, Box 6, Eri Jabotinsky Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev.

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nounced position that Jews could most effectively contribute against the Axis by serving in the armed forces of the countries to which they owed allegiance, and "stateless" Jews could volunteer for service. By the end of 1942, the committee's objective was still far from being reached.¹⁶

Such was the record of Kook and his comrades when the State Department first confirmed the dimensions of the Holocaust. The group's campaign for a Jewish Army had been far bolder in conception and implementation than that of the country's Zionist organizations, who had no active Palestinian emissaries in their councils, and had alerted Americans to a most worthy cause. Had such a force been created, Kook reasoned, the Nazis would have considerably reduced the scale of their annihilation of the Jews out of fear of the army's retaliation against German prisoners of war.¹⁷ Events across the Atlantic had overtaken even the energetic committee leadership, however. The voices of the doomed Jews of Europe called for the opening of a new front – a campaign against massacre. The hour was very late, Kook understood, and from a determined enemy the vanquished Jews could expect no quarter.

The Irgun delegation's war for the rescue of European Jewry began with a demand for action, not pity. Across a full-page in the *New York Times* on December 7, 1942, Van Paassen's "Proclamation on the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews" called on America, "the moral and military arsenal of World Democracy," to support the Jewish Army. Only with this military force, as suggested by Arthur Szyk's accompanying portrait of a Jewish soldier eager to revenge his martyred family, could the Jewish survivors, "caught between the blows of Hitler's hammer and the anvil of our own passive sympathy," return to their rightful place among the free peoples of the earth. An end could then be put to "the scandal of history, of a great and ancient people compelled to haunt the corridors of Time as ghosts and beggars and waifs of every storm that rages."¹⁸

But something with greater impact than a ringing proclamation in a newspaper was necessary to blast the spiritual lethargy of the world toward the Holocaust. Hecht's shrill full-page advertisement

16 Ben-Gurion to Locker, Jan. 4 and 26, 1942, S 25/41, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA); Kook interview, June 22, 1972; Rabinowitz to Merlin, June 1, 1942, Box 54-59, Committee for a Jewish Army Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. IV, pp. 544-547; FO to Halifax, Oct. 21, 1942, FO 371/31379, PRO.

17 Bergson to Swing, Nov. 29, 1941, Box 66-89, Emergency Committee Mss.

18 *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1942.

on February 16, 1943, announcing a Rumanian offer of 70,000 Jews in Transnistria's concentration camps "AT \$50 APIECE GUARANTEED HUMAN BEINGS" immediately drew fire from Wise and respectable Jewish organizations as unjustified in the absence of official confirmation. That same month, Hecht conveyed the faint cry of Europe's Jews, based on underground reports received from Hayim Greenberg of the *Jewish Frontier*, in the *American Mercury* and (abridged) in the *Readers' Digest*. An American audience of millions now confronted the dire truth that only this people, "reduced from a minority to a phantom," would not be represented in the judgment hall when peace dawned. Yet the country's leading writers of Jewish origin, whom Hecht convened in the expectation of receiving help in dramatizing the nightmare to the United States and the world, refused to contribute their talents to the committee's crusade.¹⁹

One February afternoon Hecht came up with an idea. He quickly interested three Jewish friends in "a memorial dedicated to the 2 million Jewish dead of Europe." His script would have an original Kurt Weill score, with Moss Hart directing and Billy Rose producing the pageant in Madison Square Garden. When a meeting in his Algonquin suite of all New York's Jewish organizations failed to produce a united front, as Kook and Merlin had predicted, Hecht agreed to have the Committee for a Jewish Army coordinate the spectacle.²⁰

"We Will Never Die" dramatically indicted the American nation on March 9, 1943, for its silence, and therefore its collaboration, in Hitler's massacre of the Jews. Coming a week after the New York arena had witnessed a massive rally led by Stephen Wise to rescue Jewry without delay, the Garden now had to open its doors twice in one evening for the overflow crowds. With the Ten Commandments on two 40-foot tablets under a Star of David dominating the stage, the haunting call of a Shofar summoning Jews to prayer ushered in the production. For two hours, as in a vast synagogue for an extraordinary Day of Atonement, those present looked into the grave of Jewry and discovered that people's singular contributions to civilization. The pageant, the city's papers agreed the next morning, had most effectively reminded the free world that the

19 Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New York: 1961), pp. 191-192; Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: 1970), pp. 175-182; Ben Hecht, "Remember Us!", *Readers' Digest*, Feb., 1943, 107-110; Hecht, *A Child*, pp. 551-553.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 553 ff.

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four million Jews still alive in Europe were "helplessly waiting for death or deliverance."²¹

The success of the unique processional strengthened the "Bergson boys," as Kook's group began to be called, to increased activity. Americans flocked to see the memorial in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. Coverage of the event prompted the first daily press reports of Jewry's desperate plight. On April 12, Mrs. Roosevelt headed as distinguished a gathering as ever attended an unofficial function in the nation's capital, with seven Supreme Court justices, two cabinet members, thirty-eight Senators and hundreds of Congressmen, and the representatives of forty nations present at the bier of the massacred. When Van Paassen resigned as chairman of the Committee due to ill-health and writing commitments, Edwin Johnson assumed his position. This influential member of the Senate Military Affairs Committee announced a three-fold program of rescue: the immediate appointment of an intergovernmental commission of military experts to determine a "realistic and stern" policy to stop the wholesale slaughter; a Jewish Army, complete with commando teams and Eagle Squadrons, for retaliatory bombing of Germany; and the initiation of possible transfers of Jews from *Festung Europa* into Palestine and elsewhere. In April, the magazine *The Answer* appeared, expressing its faith that the people of America and Great Britain (including the Jewish masses), once aroused, would demand action to stop Hitler.²²

When the closed Anglo-American Bermuda Conference on Refugees adjourned at the end of April without indicating its willingness to adopt an effective rescue program, the committee leadership openly broke with the State Department. Entreaties from B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee not to publish Hecht's "Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe" had already proven fruitless. That advertisement carried the refrain that the Christian world (including the U.S. Department of State) "is busy with other news" than the killing of Jews, and concluded that by Christmas all Christians would enjoy their "peace on earth" without the Jews (who would be killed by then). The committee also instigated the sending of thousands of letters and cables against the White Paper to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during his White

21 Ben Hecht, "We Will Never Die," Box 23-25, Emergency Committee Mss.; *New York Post*, *New York Times*, and *New York Journal American*, all March 10, 1943.

22 *The Answer*, April and May, 1943.

House visit. Not surprisingly, the militant group now disregarded the Jewish Joint Emergency Council's advice, and inserted another full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on May 4 attacking the Bermuda proceedings as a "cruel mockery" of 5 million Jews caught in the "Nazi death trap." Senator Harry S. Truman resigned from the committee because of this, but Senators Langer and Murray reaffirmed their support of its objectives, and Johnson stayed on as national chairman.²³ The committee's propaganda war continued to win converts everywhere.

The real danger that with the advance of the Allied armies the Nazis would speed up their annihilation of the Jews, as Goebbels currently threatened, did not permit those in Kook's entourage to rest on their laurels. Convinced that governments would act only when public opinion compelled action, the sponsors of Van Paassen's Proclamation, in cooperation with the Committee for a Jewish Army, decided to call an "Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe." Meeting between July 20–25, 1943 at New York's Hotel Commodore, outstanding experts, after examining questions of international relations, military affairs, transportation and relief, placed the tragedy in its proper place as a specific Allied problem capable of solution. The conferees urged the United States government to create an official agency charged with rescuing this one people marked for death, the other "United Nations" free to participate if they so wished. The International Red Cross, neutral governments, and the Vatican, for their part, should oversee better treatment of Jews in the satellite governments, and press for their emigration from Axis-held territory. Ample food and shipping was available for limited feeding of the persecuted. In four months, 600,000 Jews from the satellite nations could be evacuated to Palestine, with an additional 150,000 brought to other temporary locations in neutral countries. Punitive raids and the threat of postwar reprisals would follow if Germany's satellites refused to let the Jews leave.²⁴

The conference elicited wide coverage, and pressured the nation's foremost political leaders to take a stand. Responding to a telegram from Max Lerner, chief political writer for *PM* and chairman of the Emergency Conference's resolutions committee, President Roosevelt seconded Secretary of State Cordell Hull's assurance that the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and

²³ Feingold, *op. cit.*, Ch. 7; Hecht, *A Child*, pp 564–565.

²⁴ "Memorandum on the Findings of the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe, July 20th to 25th," copy in Box 66–89, Emergency Committee Mss.

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other Anglo-American efforts represented this government's "repeated endeavors" to rescue European Jewry. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Mrs. Roosevelt sent more personal messages of concern, as did Wendell Willkie, Herbert Hoover, and the chief rabbis of Palestine and England.²⁵

Accompanied by American Labor Party leader Dean Alfange and the sculptor Jo Davidson, Kook met with Secretary Hull and Under Secretary Breckenridge Long on August 12. The delegation suggested sending three three-man teams to investigate rescue possibilities, including temporary rescue havens, in Spain and Turkey, and to ask the Palestine High Commissioner about temporary visas and the possibility of releasing the last 29,000 certificates under the White Paper. Similar camps at Jewish expense, they added, could be set up in Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, and Morocco. The Secretary replied at the time that he viewed favorably the dispatch of such delegations, and would take their suggestion for camps into consideration.²⁶

Still, finely expressed intentions did not result in concrete action. At the end of August, the State Department announced the formation of a special United States Commission to save European art, but the new Emergency Committee's request for a specific agency to rescue Jews went unheeded. The Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and the Bermuda Conference championed by Roosevelt and Hull, by ignoring the unique Jewish tragedy, had proven inadequate to meet the crisis. The Dept. of State and Downing Street, as Lerner tellingly put it in a column addressed to the President, continued to "insist on giving the Jews in their death the civil national status that Hitler denies them in life." In September Van Paassen submitted a full-page "open letter" to Roosevelt and Churchill, appealing for the immediate establishment of a joint rescue agency so that humanity could say, in the language of the Bible, "our hands have not shed this blood." He received no reply. The mission of Representative Will Rogers, Jr., sent by the Emergency Committee to London, also failed to achieve positive results.²⁷

25 New York City newspapers for July 20-25, 1943; Lerner to Roosevelt, July 14, 1943, OF-76C, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter FDRL); *The Answer*, August, 1943; and Sept. 7, 1943.

26 *The Answer*, Nov. 1, 1943, p. 5, and Sept. 7, 1943, p. 21; Bergson statement, Nov. 19, 1943, *Hearings, House Resolutions 350 and 352, 78th Congress, 1st Session* (hereafter *Rescue Hearings*), reprinted in *Problems of World War II and its Aftermath*, vol. II (Wash., D.C.: 1976), pp. 60-61.

27 *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, p. 5; *Rescue Hearings*, p. 61; Hull to Lerner, Sept. 1, 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4435, State Department records, RG 59, National Ar-

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Confronted by bureaucratic shuffle and silence, the Bergson boys increased the public pressure on Washington. To coincide with the ten Days of Penance preceding Yom Kippur, 400 Orthodox rabbis marched on the Capitol on October 6. After presenting a petition to Vice President Wallace on the steps of the Senate which called for rescue without further delay, the bearded, black-coated assembly heard one of their number chant Hebrew prayers at the Lincoln Memorial for Hitler's victims and (to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner) for the United States government. From there the patriarchal-looking group silently proceeded to the White House for an expected interview with Roosevelt, only to be told that the President was away on "other business."²⁸

The foremost leaders of 6,000 churches in America followed by proclaiming October 10 a Day of Intercession, requesting their followers to pray for "your Jewish brethren" in Europe and to aid the Emergency Committee. As "the last-ditch stand to prevent inaction from countenancing the slaughter of European Jewry," the committee then initiated a drive for ten million signatures to the President and Congress favoring the establishment of a separate intergovernmental rescue agency. It also staged the first rally honoring Sweden's heroic action to save Danish Jewry, at which 6,000 heard Office of Price Administration director Leon Henderson castigate the Allies' "moral cowardice" and challenge Roosevelt and Churchill to right their countries' dismal rescue record. When the Moscow Conference's Declaration on Atrocities still pointedly excluded the Nazis' prime target, Hecht penned an advertisement entitled "My Uncle Abraham Reports," an elegy which concluded bitterly with small hope of hearing anything worthwhile about Jews from Roosevelt.²⁹

The tragedy of Jewry abroad and the success of the Emergency Committee's enlightenment campaign inspired the Bergsonites to try their last card – resolutions in both the House and Senate to move the Administration. Representatives Rogers of California and Baldwin of New York and Senator Guy Gillette of Iowa introduced identical resolutions on November 9, 1943, urging Roosevelt

chives (hereafter SD); *PM*, July 22, 1943; *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, pp. 5, 23, and Oct. 15, 1943, pp. 5–6. Concurrently, Van Paassen's *The Forgotten Ally* (New York: 1943) broke the British censorship about the *Yishuv's* substantial efforts on behalf of the Allied military cause.

28 Merlin interview with the author, Jan. 18, 1978; Washington, D.C., newspapers for Oct. 7, 1943.

29 *The Answer*, Oct. 15, 1943 and Dec. 5, 1943, pp. 20–21; Hecht, *A Child*, pp. 579–580.

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to create a rescue commission "designed to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany." For Breckenridge Long, State's chief officer on refugee matters, the demand appeared "an unwarranted duplication of effort" of the Intergovernmental Committee revived during the Bermuda Conference. Only after protracted delays and Treasury Department intervention had he recently agreed to Kook's request that Ira Hirschmann, Vice President of Bloomingdale's, be sent as the Emergency Committee's representative to Turkey on rescue matters. Seeking to blunt the attack on State's handling of the Jewish refugee question, Long released the Bermuda final report the following day. Its lack of substance, however, merely strengthened the resolve of his opposition.³⁰

While the Senate Foreign Relations Committee took the resolution under its wing, Sol Bloom, chairman of its House counterpart, decided to hold hearings on the matter. The elderly Jewish Congressman from New York, having been pilloried by the Bergson boys for serving at the Bermuda fiasco as a stalking horse for State's position, now saw the chance to rehabilitate his image. Witnesses Dean Alfange, Representative Baldwin, William Ziff, Kook, Frances Gunther and New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, however, unsparingly accused the American government and the Allies of sabotaging all effective rescue of European Jewry, and thereby encouraging the Nazis to continue their annihilation campaign with unremitting fury.³¹

The mounting pressure of cables demanding action, speared by the Emergency Committee's advertisement "HOW WELL ARE YOU SLEEPING?," convinced Bloom to have Long himself testify in State's defense. For four hours in executive session on November 26, the star witness described the Department's rescue steps and dwelt on his reviving the Intergovernmental Committee at Bermuda. His confidential assertions that the Allied body had the authority to negotiate with the Axis through neutral governments and that 580,000 refugees had been admitted since 1933 to these shores contributed to a very favorable reception; even Rogers, co-sponsor of the rescue commission proposal, hailed his "fine and brilliant exposition."³²

The appearance of Rabbi Wise before Bloom's committee six

30 Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 223; Bergson-Hirschmann-Long talk, Sept. 1, 1943, Box 202, Breckenridge Long Mss., Library of Congress.

31 *Rescue Hearings*, pp. 15-160.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 161-210.

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days later further weakened the resolution's chances of success. The American Zionist spokesman, keen opponent of Jabotinsky in the past, had opposed the Irgun group's independent methods from the start as unrepresentative of the American Jewish community at large. A few months earlier Wise had persuaded the United States delegate to the Intergovernmental Committee not to attend the Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe. He had also rejected a suggestion from Samuel Rosenman, Roosevelt's chief speech writer and advisor, that Kook be invited with the most prestigious Jewish organization leadership to a conference for unity; he and Rosenman (both Reform) had advised Roosevelt in October not to receive the Orthodox rabbis. The executive of the established ECZA worried about Rosenman's periodic warnings that the tactics of the Bergson clique alienated the "sympathetic" President, and no Jewish leader venerated the occupant of the White House more than Stephen Wise.³³

Speaking as a co-chairman of the recently established American Jewish Conference, Wise lost no time in throwing a damper on the resolution. He first smeared those "rashly written and rashly published advertisements" (of Kook's group) which always asked for help and funds not accounted for, and casually dismissed the Emergency Committee as representing "no one but a handful, a very small number of Jews and a number of Christians." The Zionist official then deemed the resolution at hand "inadequate" for its lack of a specific program, especially for not mentioning open entry into Palestine, the Jewish National Home promised in Britain's Balfour Declaration. In their own counsels, Kook, Merlin, and the others entertained no doubt that the governmental commission they championed would quickly realize that country's central value. But in assigning rescue first priority, the Irgunists and their Congressional supporters had purposely avoided this knotty political issue out of fear that it might jeopardize the resolution. For Wise and other leading Zionists, however, rescue and Palestine were inseparable in the redemption of their beleaguered people.

33 Monty N. Penkower, "The 1943 Joint Anglo-American Statement on Palestine," *Herzl Yearbook*, VIII (1978), 229 and n. 37; Goldmann-Rosenman talk, Nov. 3, 1943, Z5/358, CZA; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978. According to a report which Rosenman passed on to the established Zionists, Roosevelt had been "much displeased" at the rabbis' march instigated by Kook, wondering at breakfast that morning: "can nothing be done to liquidate [sic!] Bergson? He was, after all, a British Palestinian subject." Goldmann reported Rosenman's words to the British Embassy. Hayter minute, Nov. 11, 1943, FO371/35041, PRO.

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Having carried the banner of a Jewish state in Palestine for many lonely years, and having now captured most of the country's major Jewish organizations for that cause at the American Jewish Conference, they were not prepared to tolerate any compromise on principle.³⁴

The Zionist establishment's sincere but myopic perspective soon brought its antagonism towards the Bergson boys into the public eye. Rumors regarding fiscal irregularities were now heard and the American Jewish Conference released a memorandum charging that the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe was one of many "fronts" designed to undermine the recognized national Jewish agencies. Branding the committee an "irresponsible" group which "had not done a thing which may result in the saving of a single Jew," Wise even asked Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes (in an undated letter) to withdraw as honorary chairman of the committee's Washington division. He refused. With the Bergson boys having resolved early not to expose these Jewish rifts during the Holocaust, it was left to the committee's Christian co-chairmen to reply that no "property rights" existed in an issue of moral concern to all decent human beings.³⁵

Despite these setbacks, the mounting pressure initiated by the Emergency Committee exposed State's position. Convinced that Long's "extensive report" obviated the need for a separate rescue commission running counter to the policy fixed at Bermuda, Bloom asked for and received Long's approval to make the Assistant Secretary's testimony public. The vacuity of the Bermuda Conference now became common knowledge, especially after the Jewish Telegraphic Agency printed a statement it had obtained from the director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees that that much lauded body had no authority whatsoever to negotiate with the Axis. State's duplicity also appeared blatant when Jewish organizations calculated the numbers of all refugees actually admitted to the United States at no more than a third of Long's figure, the Assistant Secretary having erroneously given the number of visas issued. Just before the Christmas recess, the House Foreign Relations Committee shelved the resolution, as Long had wished, but Gillette and the Senate Committee stood firm.

34 *Rescue Hearings*, pp. 217-243; Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

35 American Jewish Conference statement, Dec. 29, 1943, MRD-1, 7/1, United Jewish Appeal Mss., New York; Wise to Ickes, n.d., in Harold Ickes Diary, Jan. 1, 1944, Library of Congress; Merlin interview, March 27, 1972; *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944, p. 24.

Gillette's resolution, which drew the unprecedented co-sponsorship of twelve colleagues from both parties, was adopted unanimously on December 20, 1943.³⁶ What would Congress do, observers asked, when it reconvened in three weeks?

The breakthrough occurred on January 16, 1944, when Secretary Morgenthau presented a report on State's record of sabotage to the President. Six months earlier, the Emergency Committee had evoked the Jewish Secretary's first public statement on the Final Solution, and his diary on Jewish refugees began with numerous clippings about the conference. Kook's appeal impressed people like Josiah DuBois, Jr. and John Pehle of Morgenthau's staff, who had exposed State's opposition to rescuing Europe's Jews and then convinced their superior that only Roosevelt could right the sorry situation. Long's published testimony and the fate of the rescue resolutions corroborated Treasury's views. Although Morgenthau wished the argument settled on its merits, he realized that his "strongest out" in pressing Roosevelt lay in the imminence of Congressional action. The President could be told, the Secretary remarked to his subordinates just before the appointment, "This is a boiling pot on the Hill. You can't hold it; it is going to pop, and you have either got to move very fast, or the Congress of the United States will do it for you."³⁷

Morgenthau's intervention and the public pressure built up by the Emergency Committee forced Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board (WRB) on January 22 by Executive Order. Some time later, the Secretary informed Pehle, the new board's director, that the President had intervened because of Congressional pressure: "I had something to do with it, but the tide was running with me." The President could not escape responsibility any longer for the government's inaction, particularly in an election year. The Emergency Committee had been very effective. Roosevelt's abrupt step, which took rescue out of State's hands, drew 850,000 letters of support to the White House. Gillette removed his resolution from the Senate floor, noting that the President's action "attained the goal we were seeking." Unaware of the Secretary's personal involvement, newspapers like the *Washington Post*, the *Christian*

36 *The Answer*, Jan., 1944; Bloom-Goldmann-Shulman talk, Dec. 8, 1943, Z5/665, CZA; Feingold, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-236.

37 Monty N. Penkower, "Jewish Organizations and the Creation of the U.S. War Refugee Board," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, July, 1980, 129-132; vol. 688-I and January 15, 1944, vol. 694, Morgenthau Diaries, (hereafter MD), FDRL.

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Science Monitor, and the *New York Post* credited the Emergency Committee's "industrious spadework" with the outcome.³⁸

American apathy had at last been replaced with a first step to action. The Bergson boys had contributed greatly to a moral victory. Yet an additional two million had perished at the hands of the Nazis since Kook first read of the slaughter of two million Jews. The "battle against massacre" just begun would need far more than a will to rescue if the War Refugee Board were to check the German zeal to complete its mission.³⁹

The Emergency Committee immediately moved to aid the WRB. On January 25, Kook emphasized to Pehle during a private talk the need for official measures to have the "Jewish problem" recognized abroad. Short-wave broadcasts and air drops of leaflets could begin to impress the enemy with the United States government's interest in rescuing European Jewry. If several hundred thousand Jews were also saved, he added, Germany's satellites would fall into line. A memorandum from the committee several days later specifically explained that reception centers should be set up in Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden, who would announce that every Jew reaching their borders would be admitted without difficulty. The Board, while covering expenses, would give temporary passports and assurances to satisfy the reluctant neutrals that these refugees would move on after the war.⁴⁰

Palestine, the Emergency Committee maintained, should command particular attention. Because of its geographical proximity to the satellites, its internationally mandated status, and its center of 600,000 Jews eager to help their kin, the country could offer immediate haven to large numbers of refugees. The discriminatory laws of the 1939 White Paper, remnant of "Munich and appeasement politics," should be abrogated in the face of Jewry's catastrophe. At the same time, Kook cabled Aryeh Ben Eliezer, sent by the Bergson boys in September, 1943 to Palestine to reorganize the splintered Irgun high command, to undertake a bold rescue plan immediately: evacuate 500 Bulgarian Jews overland to

38 Penkower, "Jewish Organizations," 132-134; March 8, 1944, vol. 707, Morgenthau Diaries, FDRL; Feingold, *op. cit.*, p. 238; *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944.

39 *The Answer*, Feb. 12, 1944, p. 9. Kook had also played an important role in interesting the new Under Secretary of State in the plan. For his memorandum on the subject, see Bergson to Stettinius, Nov. 17, 1943, 840.48 Refugees/4383, SD.

40 Jan. 25, 1944 meeting, Box 6, War Refugee Board files (hereafter WRB), FDRL; memo to Pehle, Feb. 7, 1944, *ibid.*

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a camp in Turkey financed by the Emergency Committee (and thence to Palestine) and charter a ship for Rumania, preferably to bring Jews from concentration camps in Transnistria either to Turkey or direct to Palestine. "One quick successful operation," Kook concluded, would prove the possibility of rescue and set the pattern for further efforts on a large scale.⁴¹

These ideas found a sympathetic audience at WRB headquarters. At Rogers' request, Pehle cleared the way for Eri Jabotinsky to proceed to Turkey as the committee's delegate, Kook hoping that his colleague's past experience in unsanctioned immigration to Palestine would prove helpful even now. As for temporary havens, Pehle and his staff agreed with the Emergency Committee that such refugee centers seemed "indispensable" to the success of any effort to stop the mass murder of Jews. In the director's view, the American government should set the first example, and thus avoid a charge of hypocrisy. The country had, after all, a legal precedent in its housing of thousands of German prisoners of war during the present hostilities. And while the WRB decided not to take a position regarding a Jewish state in Palestine, it hoped that the British would announce a willingness to admit unlimited numbers of refugees to Palestine on a temporary basis and so contribute materially to the rescue effort.⁴²

The Emergency Committee helped Pehle muster public support for this idea, again to the consternation of the American Zionist organizations. While Morgenthau intervened with Roosevelt to back at least one haven in the United States, DuBois asked a private gathering of the Washington Emergency Committee in mid-April to campaign for the larger scheme. The committee placed full-page advertisements headlined "25 SQUARE MILES OR 2 MILLION LIVES, WHICH SHALL IT BE?," asserting that use of this "political penicillin" in Palestine, Turkey, North Africa, some abandoned United States military training camps, and in British territories could accomplish the desired miracle. On behalf of the committee, Senator Gillette introduced a resolution calling for "reception centers" in this country to receive "Jews and other special victims of Nazi hatred" until the war's end. After Roosevelt

41 *New York Post*, Feb. 10, 1944; *The Answer*, March 10, 1944, p. 4; Bergson to Klarman (for Ben Eliezer), Feb. 11, 1944, Box 6, WRB, FDRL. Ben Eliezer proved instrumental in bringing order to the divided Irgun forces and in having Menachem Begin chosen as their military commander. Begin interview with the author, Nov. 29, 1976.

42 Pehle to Stettinius, April 1, 1944, vol. 720, MD, FDRL; March 8, 1944 meeting, vol. 707, MD; Pehle draft, vol. 716, pp. 171-74, MD, FDRL.

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set up one camp for 918 Jews and 64 other refugees at Ft. Oswego by Executive Order, the Emergency Committee followed up with resolutions from Representative Somers and Senator Thomas for a temporary center in Palestine. Again the Zionists were opposed, insisting that no refuge in the Jewish National Home should be other than permanent.⁴³

At that juncture, the Irgun delegation took its boldest step to secure the deliverance of their people – the creation of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. On May 18, 1944, the foreign visitors cast off their anonymity and publicly declared themselves “the servants and spokesmen for the Hebrew Nation, until such time as our nation shall be free to elect its own spokesmen and representatives in democratic form.” The group went on to proclaim “that the dry and tormented bones of the Jews in European lands have now been united; that the blood of our three million dead has done more than fertilize the earth of the people who have murdered them. It has molded the survivors into a single living entity. It has brought forth a renascent Hebrew Nation. The Jews who live today in the hell of Europe together with the Jews of Palestine constitute the Hebrew Nation.” For the first time since Roman legions crushed Bar Kochba’s struggle for independence in the year 135, a unified band of Palestinians had launched, in exile, a revolt for self-determination and sovereignty.⁴⁴

The ideological underpinnings of this radical move had their genesis not in Palestine, but in the group’s perception of the unique American condition. Before the Irgunists had landed in the United States, they had accepted Vladimir Jabotinsky’s dual emphasis on Palestine as a Jewish state and on European Jewry, retaining an independent national-ethnic identity, being granted minority rights. Once in America, however, the Bergsonites came to realize that many of the country’s five million Jews had become fully integrated into the United States as citizens. Accepting the American separation of state and religion, most American Jews maintained in varying degrees their religious heritage but were completely indifferent to their former national origins. Prominent Jews especially would do nothing which might raise the charge of dual loyalty. The failure of the Zionist efforts to win over the Jewish community

43 Pehle memo, June 1, 1944, vol. 738, MD; meetings of the Washington (D.C.) Emergency Committee division, April 13 and May 1, 1944, Box 34-48, Emergency Committee Mss; Pehle report, May 16, 1944, vol. 732, MD.

44 Aaron Berman, “The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the Rescue of the European Jews,” April, 1975, Hampshire College honors paper, pp. 51-52; Kook interview, June 22, 1972; *The Answer*, June 15, 1944.

over the years were the best proof of this historical development. American statesmen themselves asked Kook and Merlin how they could interfere on behalf of "enemy nationals."⁴⁵

The Palestinian emissaries arrived at a solution to this dilemma during the latter half of 1943. Merlin, influenced by the thought of Adolf Gurevitch, presented his colleagues with a tentative draft in April outlining the distinction between "Hebrews" – the *Yishuv* and Europe's stateless Jews – and Americans of Jewish descent. Four months later, Ben Ami suggested the formation of a Free Palestine League, whose major objective was the creation of a "Hebrew Republic" in Palestine. Merlin first articulated the new philosophy in *The Answer*. The Free Palestine Committee, officially organized at the end of November, kept out of public view until Kook addressed the Emergency Committee's "Show of Shows" in Madison Square Garden on March 18, 1944, to celebrate the WRB's creation. At an executive meeting of the Free Palestine Committee in early April, he recommended that its name be changed to the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. The group purchased the former Iranian embassy at 2315 Massachusetts Ave., hoisted outside the blue and white banner of Zion, and took up residence on "Hebrew soil."⁴⁶

As might be expected, the Zionist organizations reacted strongly. Officials in America and Palestine charged that the new Hebrew Committee sought to splinter the American Jewish community and to overthrow the legitimate Va'ad Leumi and especially the Jewish Agency, the only internationally recognized body representing the Jewish people in all matters affecting Palestine. Ben Zion Netanyahu, who had returned to the NZO in August, 1941 as editor of *Zionews* after Kook decided to eschew a political attack on HMG regarding Palestine, joined in the cry. The World Jewish Congress's Nahum Goldmann contacted various ambassadors and warned Secretary Morgenthau that the Hebrew Committee's intention to float a ten-year million dollar bond issue was a "swindle" for which it should be prosecuted. Goldmann also supported inquiries by the Department of Justice into the group's status as a foreign agent and the Selective Service's check into Kook's draft status.⁴⁷

45 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 55ff; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978; Kook interview, June 22, 1972.

46 Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 38; *The Answer*, Sept. 20, 1943, pp. 12-15; and Aug. 29, 1944, pp. 23, 32.

47 Feuer statement, May 18, 1944, Emergency Committee file, ZA; *Zionews*, July, 1944, 12-16; memo of May 19, 1944, 867N.01/2347, SD; May 20, 1944 talk, vol. 734, MD; talk of May 24, 1944, vol. 735, MD; Parker-Wilson talk, May 20, 1944, 867N.01/6-2344, SD.

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Despite Kook's estimate that this violent attack helped publicize the new Hebrew Committee, the opposition's united front hurt the cause. A number of American labor leaders, upon receiving a Histadrut cable condemning the committee, left the American League's ranks. Some in the Emergency Committee's executive board departed as well. Fearing that the new organization would undermine the Anglo-Committee for a Jewish Army, and not having been consulted in advance, Jeremiah Halperin resigned membership in the Hebrew Committee. The WRB, impressed that the American Jewish organizations had united on this issue, decided to maintain a neutral position on the matter. The State Department refused to recognize the committee's claims, much to the delight of anxious officials in Whitehall.⁴⁸

Undeterred, Kook refused to capitulate in a Town Hall address on July 19 to commemorate the "Birth of a Nation Rally." The self-styled "nuisance diplomat" demanded recognition of the so-called Hebrew Nation as vital for rescue if Europe's surviving Jews were not to lose their identity by being classed either as nationals of a particular government or as "stateless refugees." Only those who swore allegiance to the new nation, Kook argued, could request representation in United Nations councils, a Hebrew Army, gas warfare in retaliation against Germany's use of poison gas on the co-belligerent Hebrew people, and a free Palestine with the Arabs as equal partners in a non-theocratic democracy.⁴⁹

The catastrophe facing Hungarian Jewry provided the Bergson boys with their major test as the alleged spokesmen for the "Hebrews" of Europe. Immediately after the Nazis occupied Hungary at the end of March, the Emergency Committee had held a large-scale conference of Hungarian Jewish leaders at New York's Hotel Astor; placed large advertisements for immediate rescue, particularly urging the opening of Palestine's doors to Jews; sent a delegation of Hungarian Jews to confer with Congressmen and the WRB; and cabled Josef Stalin to exchange 50,000 Jewish refugees from the Western Ukraine for Soviet-held Hungarian prisoners of war. Emergency Committee representatives met with the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, who transmitted to the Vatican American Jewry's prayer that Pope Pius XII intervene for Europe's last substantial Jewish community, and requested the International Red Cross to protest to the Hungarian government over the murder of

48 Bergson to Halperin, May 20, 1944, Colonial Office papers 733/461/75872/14A/II, PRO; talk of May 24, 1944, vol. 735, MD; Hull memo, May 29, 1944, 867N.01/2366, SD; Halifax to FO, May 26, 1944, FO 371/38544, PRO.

49 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-44. See also *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944.

Jewish Allied nationals. Following past practice, at a conference on June 17 the committee rallied the support of Christian Hungarian-Americans, whose messages against the atrocities were beamed to Europe by the Office of War Information and the BBC. The Office of War Information also broadcast a Service of Intercession, sponsored by the Emergency Committee, at the First Magyar Reformed Church of New York on July 9, during which worshippers donned the yellow armband Jews had to wear in union with "those who scream to us from the windows of rumbling death-trains."⁵⁰

Through contacts with the International Red Cross, the Bergsonites learned in mid-July of Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy's offer to release thousands of Jewish children and even adults, and they acted in decisive fashion. Hoping that wide-spread publicity would force the British and American governments to respond favorably, they released the news to the press. The Emergency Committee also cabled various governments requesting the issuance of Nansen-type passports to Jews in Hungary; the creation of temporary emergency shelters capable of admitting some 100,000 refugees; and representation to Great Britain to issue Palestinian certificates immediately for those Hungarian Jews in need. Kook cabled Churchill with a plea for Palestine refugee shelters, noting that the Hebrew Committee would postpone political controversies over Palestine until the end of hostilities. The Hearst chain and the *New York Post*, particularly, supported the Palestine "free ports" scheme. Resolutions to this effect were introduced in both houses of Congress a month later, supported by a mammoth petition and the backing of House Majority Leader John McCormack. The British, who stalled concerning Horthy's readiness to send Jews to Palestine, did not budge.⁵¹

HMG's intransigence against opening the most obvious haven, even to the remnants of European Jewry, brought a final change in tactics. The Irgunists' past appeal to Great Britain on humanitarian, rather than political, grounds had proven a failure. HMG's unwillingness to create an agency parallel to the WRB; Ben Eliezer's detention by the Palestine Administration in April as he was about to depart for rescue work in Turkey; the lack of official response from London to their different appeals; and Britain's

⁵⁰ *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944, 20-22, and July 15, 1944, 17-18, 27.

⁵¹ Smertenko to Roosevelt, July 24, 1944, and Aug. 4, 1944, Box 1/12, PSC Mss.; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 86; Bergson to Halifax, June 15, 1944, Box 1/11, PSC Mss.; Isaac Zaar, *Rescue and Liberation, America's Part in the Birth of Israel* (New York: 1954), p. 97.

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refusal to rescind the White Paper or even accede to temporary havens on Palestinian soil – all intensified anti-British sentiment in the ranks of the Hebrew Committee. Always acting independently of the Irgun command in Palestine and publicly deploring terrorism, the group had helped obtain the reprieve of a Stern member from the gallows. But this victory in July was the sole British concession to public pressure. Even HMG's creation of a Jewish Brigade that September rankled. While the Anglo-American Committee for a Jewish Army had generated much needed support for a Jewish fighting force, the British confined the small unit's enlistment to Jews in the United Kingdom, Palestine, and Mauritius.⁵²

The response of the Hebrew Committee and the American League for a Free Palestine to Churchill's comment on the assassination of Lord Moyne by two Sternists in November reflected this more militant shift. Churchill's reaction in Commons that the "shameful crime" of Moyne's murder "has shocked the world," and that he and others would have to reconsider their pro-Zionist position if that movement were to end producing "a new set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany," appeared callous and hypocritical. Why, the chairman of the Hebrew Committee wrote the Prime Minister, had Germany's use of poison gas, death factories, and the extermination camps of Treblinka and Majdanek never moved Churchill to tell the House of Commons that these crimes have "shocked the world"? The two Sternists, like other revolutionaries in the British Empire, acted independently, yet the entire *Yishuv*, in "the most tragic hour of our history," had been held culpable. If anything, Britain's "cold-blooded refusal" to let the Hebrews flee death by proceeding to the home promised them in the Balfour Declaration and the Bible bore "much more similarity to the systematic extermination of one people by the Nazis" than the act of Moyne's killers.⁵³

Difficulties in the United States compounded the Irgunists' sense of frustration. In October, the *Washington Post* carried a series of articles critical of Kook and the group's financial transactions. Although the influential newspaper printed a rejoinder by Merlin and retreated somewhat in an editorial, it refused to publish an extensive rebuttal by Kook or to take steps against the American Zionist Emergency Council's reprints of the newspaper's first articles. The Hebrew Committee distributed a lengthy booklet to

⁵² *The Answer*, Aug. 29, 1944, pp. 4, 26; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Bergson to Strabolgi, Sept. 21, 1944, FO 371/40132, PRO.

⁵³ *The Answer*, Nov., 1944, pp. 16–17.

state its case fully, but damage had been done. An Internal Revenue Service investigation, which in time found no irregularities, further drained the Hebrew Committee's strength. The non-Zionist American Jewish Committee and the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, the Hebrew Committee's most likely allies in terms of its Hebrew-Jew distinction, maintained a safe distance. American Jewish organizations at the second UNRRA conference also made certain to discredit the committee and its wish that separate Allied rehabilitation be granted the Hebrew Nation.⁵⁴

With the first publication of the near complete annihilation of European Jewry, the Hebrew Committee's bitterness mounted. The War Refugee Board's release on November 26 of eye-witness reports about the ghastly truth of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the subsequent failure of the UN War Crimes Commission to consider any crimes committed against the "stateless" and against persons of Axis nationality, shocked the group and strengthened its demand for representation on that body. The forced resignation from the international commission of its two major British and American delegates for pressing to bring to trial and punish all Axis war criminals, including those guilty of atrocities against Jews, further convinced the committee of the correctness of its position. The group, in addition, began to insist that the entire German population be indicted morally and politically "for the holocaustal sufferings of men in our generation." *The Answer* particularly heralded *A Guide for the Bedevilled*, Ben Hecht's mordant counterattack against anti-Semitism and his depiction of the Germans as a sub-human "race of killers" damned forever.⁵⁵

The Bergson boys increasingly levelled their fire on HMG. Kook's public request of Roosevelt at the end of November to mediate a conference between the British, the Hebrew Committee, and those Palestinians in the Jewish Agency meant little, for Roosevelt had already indicated an unwillingness to challenge his ally's Palestine policy. Full-page advertisements followed, sharply criticizing Britain's "ruthless occupation" of martial law against Jews and seconding the late Lord Wedgwood's exhortation that America assume the Mandate, mirrored the Hebrew Committee's

54 Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Harper to Meyer, Oct. 6, 1944, Box 1/12, PSC Mss.; Campbell to FO, Aug. 1, 1944, FO 371/40144, PRO; Zaar, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-28, 112; *The Answer*, Nov., 1944, pp. 20, 22. As a mark of solidarity with the Allied cause, Rafaeli and Ben Ami left the Hebrew Committee to serve in the American armed forces.

55 *The Answer*, Jan., 1945 and Nov., 1944; Ben Hecht, *A Guide for the Bedevilled* (New York: 1945).

true convictions. At the end of January, 1945, it called on the peoples and governments of the United Nations to help bring the "500,000 Hebrews clamoring for an opportunity to go to Palestine immediately" to their destination, the White Paper notwithstanding. The British responded by having Eri Jabotinsky deported from Turkey to Palestine and then arrested as a suspect in Moyne's assassination. The Hebrew Committee's representative had actually been engaged in hiring a boat to carry 2,500 "illegals" per week on a Constanza-Haifa route; the British foiled the plan, and only pressure from the committee obtained his release. Yet Kook remained pessimistic as long as the Mandatory authorities could detain Ben Eliezer and 278 other Irgunists and Sternists in a camp in Eritrea and then the Sudan.⁵⁶

The Hebrew Committee's plans could not be realized without clearing the opposition of Jewish organizations, and so Kook made his last effort with a lengthy letter to Chaim Weizmann on April 2, 1945. The decimation of European Jewry and the presence of still-rampant anti-Semitism in the world required a new political program if the Jewish people were to recuperate from their severe wounds. Repatriation of one-and-a-half million to Palestine in the next eighteen months could stem this national disaster. The major world leaders had not responded to that catastrophe during the war "primarily because of the confusion and the ambiguity of our present existence in the world." A free Palestine state, "the national territory of the Hebrew nation," including the Arabs already there, would allow those of Jewish descent everywhere (particularly in the United States) to exist as purely religious communities. Weizmann, as the Jewish Agency's president, should initiate the reconstitution of his organization into a Hebrew Agency (composed of Hebrew nationals), which would endeavor to secure official or de facto representation in the United Nations and various international bodies. Continuation of the status quo would be "disastrous" for Hebrews and "most harmful and potentially explosive for Jews everywhere."⁵⁷

Kook's blueprint for Hebrew freedom never received an acknowledgment, let alone a response, from the recognized leader of world Zionism. Representatives Somers and Bennett of New

56 *The Answer*, Feb., 1945, p. 17, and Jan., 1945, p. 23; Bergson to Roosevelt, Nov. 29, 1944, Box 1/15, PSC Mss; Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Yaakov Meridor, *Arukh Ha-Derekh Le'Heirut* (Tel Aviv: 1975).

57 Bergson to Weizmann, April 2, 1945, Weizmann Archives, Rehovot, Israel. Meyer Weisgal, Weizmann's closest associate, published a reply in a letter to the *New York Times*, May 12, 1945.

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York jointly introduced a House resolution a month later, initiated by the Bergsonites, demanding recognition of the Hebrew nation and an intergovernmental agency to repatriate the surviving "Hebrews" of Europe to Palestine. At the last minute, however, Senator Murray decided against being a co-sponsor with Senator Ferguson, stating that he had just heard that a number of Jewish organizations were not united on the proposal.⁵⁸ Little had changed since Stephen Wise had intervened in November, 1943 against the Emergency Committee's resolution on rescue. World War II ended, as it had begun, with this internecine conflict still raging.

The Bergson boys came to America, unheralded, to awaken its citizens to the Jewish tragedy. Without friends, supporters, or money, they gradually succeeded in piercing the silence surrounding the Holocaust. The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, never exceeding more than 2,000 active workers though it had several times that many contributors, publicized the Irgun's illegal immigration program against the British. With the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, which numbered almost 50,000 individual contributors and several active chapters of hundreds of members in the most major cities, the delegation's cause took on the proportions of a mass movement. The over-125,000 supporters and active members of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the first broadly based organization calling for rescue action, influenced in some measure the establishment of the War Refugee Board. The American League for a Free Palestine, with a membership of over 40,000, supported the ideology of the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation and its revolutionary proclamation of a separate government-in-exile. These various organizations, each created for a definite but distinct purpose, collectively dramatized to such a degree the unique plight of European Jewry that people across the nation joined to demand action, not pity, as a response to Germany's most monstrous crime.⁵⁹

The fundamental creed which underlay the Irgunists' methods possessed considerable force. Believing that public opinion ruled in a democracy, they developed new mass media techniques which consciously evoked the country's noblest liberal and religious traditions. When challenged, particularly by recognized Jewish organizations, for having no authorization to speak in the name of

58 *The Answer*, July, 1945, pp. 9, 17; Smertenko to Bridges, May 15, 1945, Hebrew Committee for National Liberation Mss., Metsudat Ze'ev.

59 Smertenko to Sulzberger, May 29, 1945, *ibid.*; Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978.

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an established constituency, the Bergson boys relied on what Samuel Merlin termed "the mandate of conscience."⁶⁰ Americans responded to their non-sectarian, non-partisan approach, much like that of the Committee to Help the Allies and the Fight for Freedom Committee, or the individual armies and governments-in-exile set up by different national liberation movements in the course of the war. Many came to understand that the Jewish disaster in Europe was also their own problem and especially a Christian responsibility. Once Hungarian Jewry vanished in the crematoria of Auschwitz, the group's increasingly militant attack on HMG's maintenance of the White Paper carried additional immediacy for a nation born of revolution against England.

The separatists wrought their greatest transformation on the American Jewish community. Until their arrival, the outbreak of World War II checked the protest movements in which Jews had been engaged during the 1930's, such as the anti-Nazi boycott or demonstrations against Britain's Palestine policy. Assimilated Jews feared taking any steps which might raise the question of dual loyalty and strengthen anti-Semitism. The Jewish establishment, relying on the good will of Roosevelt and Churchill, was also restrained and the Zionist leadership in particular did what it could to check the Bergsonites' growth. But American Jewry at large could not but be aroused by the independent, aggressive effort of the young Palestinians. Their guiding principle of directly attacking the criminal, rather than defending the victim, attracted estranged souls like Ben Hecht or non-aligned intellectuals such as Max Lerner, who insisted that Jews should "no longer be the anvil of history but its hammer." Their unwavering focus on rescue after November, 1942 also found support amongst the leaders of Orthodox Jewry, who heretofore had eschewed confrontation politics and alliances with other Jewish groups. The Irgunists' response also prodded organized Jews to adopt increasingly outspoken positions on a Jewish fighting force, immediate rescue, and the destiny of Palestine. Thus the delegates demanded that the American Jewish Conference create a committee on rescue although the agenda had initially focused on post-war Jewish rights, Palestine, and unity in American Jewry's ranks.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *The Answer*, July 12, 1944, p. 20.

⁶¹ Max Lerner interview with the author, May 7, 1979; Ben Halpern, *Midstream*, 12 (May, 1966), 76; Chaim Greenberg, "Bankrupt," *Yiddishe Kempfer*, Feb. 12, 1943; *American Jewish Conference, Organization and Proceedings, First Session, 1943* (New York: 1944), pp. 333, 77-85, 115-130. Judd Teller's brief recollections are perceptive, as is Feingold's analysis, but Melvin Urofsky's link-

But the Bergson boys' attempt to remove the "biggest obstacle" impeding rescue in Europe and restoration in Palestine failed.⁶² Their distinction between Hebrew and Jew, which was meant to free American Jewry particularly from charges of double loyalty and to promote large-scale United Nations rescue for a separate ethnic co-belligerent, created more confusion. Even non- and anti-Zionists refused to accept the novel hypothesis, and many erstwhile supporters dropped away.

When Merlin, hoping to win additional rescue support, had first advanced the Hebrew vs. Jew concept in April, 1943, Aryeh Ben Eliezer had wisely cautioned that it would only bewilder the public. Most American Jews (and certainly their Gentile neighbors) lacked a firm enough grounding in Zionist ideology and Jewish philosophy to grasp the notion behind the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation. The Irgunists wished to solve the longstanding "Jewish problem" along the lines of the American separation of church and state, and to concentrate on the "human boundaries," rather than the mere physical borders, of a future state in the Holy Land. The majority in America and Palestine, however, continued to view Jews and their history as *sui generis*, sharing both religious and nationalist identities.⁶³

The Bergson boys' meager success in the face of the Holocaust reflected the limits of their power. They spoke for masses of Jews, summoned forth the most generous impulses of the Gentile majority, and even forced Roosevelt to leave Washington for the dedication of some Liberator bombers for the Free Yugoslav forces, rather than face the call to conscience of a few Orthodox rabbis seeking immediate rescue. Once, however, the Irgun mission's imaginative enlightenment campaign succeeded in dramatizing ideas and in winning over a compassionate public, implementation had

ing the group with the divisive American Council for Judaism overlooks the Palestinian's positive influence. Samuel Halperin avoids the Bergson "boys" entirely. Judd Teller, *Strangers and Natives: The Evolution of the American Jew From 1921 to the Present* (New York: 1968), pp. 202-207; Feingold, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8; Melvin I. Urofsky, *We Are One!, American Jewry and Israel* (New York: 1978), pp. 75-81; Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit: 1961).

62 Bergson to Weizmann, April 2, 1945, Weizmann Archives.

63 Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 109; London *Jewish Chronicle*, April 27, 1945; Kook interview, June 22, 1972. Kook's continuing adherence to the Hebrew Committee's original *raison d'être* can be found in an interview, *Ha-Aretz*, Nov. 26, 1977. For a somewhat related group, the Canaanites, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5, col. 101-102.

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to be left to other hands. Action lay beyond the Bergsonites' capabilities.

Fundamental decisions still rested with Washington and London, and the two Western powers at the Bermuda Conference opposed the creation of a Jewish Army and major rescue. The British authorities stymied the Bergson boys' two representatives abroad, Aryeh Ben Eliezer and Eri Jabotinsky and kept Palestine firmly closed, even refusing to establish temporary "free ports." The Anglo-American governments would not retaliate in kind against Germany for her slaughter of the Jews, and the Allied War Crimes Commission failed to consider the specific murder of a people. In such circumstances, it is doubtful that Jewish unity would have significantly altered the outcome of the Holocaust.

In the end, the Bergson boys placed too much hope in the democracies. Public opinion, no matter how effectively summoned, does not ultimately decide. Will Rogers, Jr. emphasized at the Emergency Conference of July, 1943 that the problem had to be "taken out of the dossiers of the diplomats and placed in the hearts of humanity," but officialdom had no intention of relinquishing control over major policy. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill took up Hitler's challenge and made the rescue of Jewry one of their war aims. Even the Irgun never took Roosevelt to task – Kook even listing him in April, 1945 among "our staunchest friends" – and expected until mid-1944 that the British government would respond to its non-political appeal.⁶⁴ Propaganda and dissent proved to be limited in their ultimate effect. During Jewry's most anguished years, the leaders of the free world who could have translated that humanitarian call into action had other priorities. Accordingly, in one of history's most bitter ironies, the Jews of Europe who fervently dreamed the dream of Zion did not live to see its realization.⁶⁵ The Allies denied the existence of such a community, on whose behalf Kook and his associates had undertaken their mission. Adolf Hitler did not, and the community with its dreams went up in ashes.

64 *The Answer*, Oct. 15, 1943, pp. 5–6, and April 1945. Ben Hecht realized earlier than most the limitations of Roosevelt's sympathies toward the plight of Jewry during World War II. *A Child*, p. 581. (The reference is to Walter Kirschner, a personal friend of the Roosevelt family. Merlin interview, Jan. 18, 1978.).

65 Merlin remarks, Dec. 5, 1974, at The Holocaust Seminar, Touro College, New York (notes taken by the author, in his possession).