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The Abandonment of the Jews

Between June 1941 and May 1945, five to six million Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. Germany's control over most of Europe meant that even a determined Allied rescue campaign probably could not have saved as many as a third of those who died. But a substantial commitment to rescue almost certainly could have saved several hundred thousand of them, and done so without compromising the war effort. The record clearly shows, though, that such a campaign would have taken place only if the United States had seized the initiative for it. But America did not act at all until late in the war, and even then, though it had some success, the effort was a very limited one. . . . Why did America fail to carry out the kind of rescue effort that it could have?

In summary form, these are the findings that I regard as most significant:

1. The American State Department and the British Foreign Office had no intention of rescuing large numbers of European Jews. On the contrary, they continually feared that Germany or other Axis nations might release tens of thousands of Jews into Allied hands. Any such exodus would have placed intense pressure on Britain to open Palestine and on the United States to take in more Jewish refugees, a situation the two great powers did not want to face. Consequently, their policies aimed at obstructing rescue possibilities and dampening public pressures for government action.
2. Authenticated information that the Nazis were systematically exterminating European Jewry was made public in the United States in November 1942. President Roosevelt did nothing about the mass murder for fourteen months, then moved only because he was confronted with political pressures he could not avoid and

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because his administration stood on the brink of a nasty scandal over its rescue policies.

3. The War Refugee Board, which the President then established to save Jews and other victims of the Nazis, received little power, almost no cooperation from Roosevelt or his administration, and grossly inadequate government funding. (Contributions from Jewish organizations, which were necessarily limited, covered 90 percent of the WRB's costs.) Through dedicated work by a relatively small number of people, the WRB managed to help save approximately 200,000 Jews and at least 20,000 non-Jews.
4. Because of State Department administrative policies, only 21,000 refugees were allowed to enter the United States during the three and one-half years the nation was at war with Germany. That amounted to 10 percent of the number who could have been legally admitted under the immigration quotas during that period.
5. Strong popular pressure for action would have brought a much fuller government commitment to rescue and would have produced it sooner. Several factors hampered the growth of public pressure. Among them were anti-Semitism and anti-immigration attitudes, both widespread in American society in that era and both entrenched in Congress; the mass media's failure to publicize Holocaust news, even though the wire services and other news sources made most of the information available to them; the near silence of the Christian churches and almost all of their leadership; the indifference of most of the nation's political and intellectual leaders; and the President's failure to speak out on the issue.
6. American Jewish leaders worked to publicize the European Jewish situation and pressed for government rescue steps. But their effectiveness was importantly diminished by their inability to mount a sustained or unified drive for government action, by diversion of energies into fighting among the several organizations, and by failure to assign top priority to the rescue issue.
7. In 1944 the United States War Department rejected several appeals to bomb the Auschwitz gas chambers and the railroads leading to Auschwitz, claiming that such actions would divert essential air-power from decisive operations elsewhere. Yet in the very months that it was turning down the pleas, numerous massive American bombing raids were taking place within fifty miles of Auschwitz. Twice during that time large fleets of American heavy bombers

struck industrial targets in the Auschwitz complex itself, not five miles from the gas chambers.

8. Analysis of the main rescue proposals put forward at the time, but brushed aside by government officials, yields convincing evidence that much more could have been done to rescue Jews, if a real effort had been made. The record also reveals that the reasons repeatedly invoked by government officials for not being able to rescue Jews could be put aside when it came to other Europeans who needed help.
9. Franklin Roosevelt's indifference to so momentous an historical event as the systematic annihilation of European Jewry emerges as the worst failure of his presidency.
10. Poor though it was, the American rescue record was better than that of Great Britain, Russia, or the other Allied nations. This was the case because of the work of the War Refugee Board, the fact that American Jewish organizations were willing to provide most of the WRB's funding, and the overseas rescue operations of several Jewish organizations. . . .

What could the American government have achieved if it had really committed itself to rescue? The possibilities were narrowed by the Nazis' determination to wipe out the Jews. War conditions themselves also made rescue difficult. And by mid-1942, when clear news of the systematic murder reached the West, two million Jews had already been massacred and the killing was going forward at a rapid rate. Most likely, it would not have been possible to rescue millions. But without impeding the war effort, additional tens of thousands — probably hundreds of thousands — could have been saved. What follows is a selection of twelve programs that could have been tried. All of them, and others, were proposed during the Holocaust.

1. Most important, the War Refugee Board should have been established in 1942. And it should have received adequate government funding and much broader powers.
2. The U.S. government, working through neutral governments or the Vatican, could have pressed Germany to release the Jews. If nothing else, this would have demonstrated to the Nazis — and to the world — that America was committed to saving the European Jews. It is worth recalling that until late summer 1944, when the Germans blocked the Horthy offer, it was far from clear to the

Allies that Germany would not let the Jews out. On the contrary, until then the State Department and the British Foreign Office feared that Hitler might confront the Allies with an exodus of Jews, a possibility that they assiduously sought to avoid.

In a related area, ransom overtures might have been much more thoroughly investigated. The use of blocked funds for this purpose would not have compromised the war effort. Nor, by early 1944, would payments of limited amounts of currency have hurt the progress of the war. . . .

3. The United States could have applied constant pressure on Axis satellites to release their Jews. By spring 1943, the State Department knew that some satellites, convinced that the war was lost, were seeking favorable peace terms. Stern threats of punishment for mistreating Jews or allowing their deportation, coupled with indications that permitting them to leave for safety would earn Allied goodwill, could have opened the way to the rescue of large numbers from Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and perhaps Slovakia. Before the Germans took control of Italy, in September 1943, similar pressures might have persuaded the Italian government to allow its Jews to flee, as well as those in Italian-occupied areas of Greece, Yugoslavia, and France.
4. Success in setting off an exodus of Jews would have posed the problem of where they could go. Strong pressure needed to be applied to neutral countries near the Axis (Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Switzerland, and Sweden) to take Jews in. To bypass time-consuming immigration procedures, these nations could have been urged to set up reception camps near the borders. In return, the Allies should have offered to fund the operations, supply food, and guarantee removal of the refugees. At the same time, havens of refuge outside Europe were essential to accommodate a steady movement of Jews out of the neutral countries. Thus the routes would have remained open and a continuing flow of fugitives could have left Axis territory.
5. Locating enough outside havens, places beyond continental Europe where refugees could safely await postwar resettlement, would have presented difficulties. The problems encountered in finding havens for the limited numbers of Jews who did get out during the war pointed up the callousness of the Western world. But an American government deeply concerned about the Jews and

willing to share the burden could have used its prestige and power to open doors. If a camp existence was all that was offered, that was still far preferable to deportation and death.

Ample room for camps was available in North Africa. In the United States, the immigration quotas were almost untouched; in addition, a government committed to rescue would have provided several camps besides Fort Ontario. A generous response by the United States would have put strong pressure on the Latin American nations, Canada, the British dominions, and Palestine. Instead, other countries used American stinginess as an excuse for not accepting Jews. For instance, in Jerusalem on his 1942 trip around the world, Wendell Willkie confronted the British leadership with the need to admit large numbers of Jews into Palestine. The British high commissioner replied that since the United States was not taking Jews in even up to the quota limits, Americans were hardly in a position to criticize.

6. Shipping was needed to transfer Jews from neutral countries to outside havens. Abundant evidence (summarized later in this chapter) proves that it could have been provided without interfering with the war effort.

The preceding steps, vigorously pursued, might have saved scores or even hundreds of thousands. Instead, important opportunities were lost by default. Early in 1943, the United States turned its back on the Rumanian proposal to release 70,000 Jews. It was a pivotal failure; seizure of that chance might have led to other overtures by Axis satellites.

At the same time, Switzerland was willing to accept thousands of children from France if it had assurance of their postwar removal. After refusing for more than a year, the State Department furnished the guarantee. But by then the main opportunity had passed. During the summer of 1943, the way opened for evacuating 500 children from the Balkans. But a boat had to be obtained within a month. The State Department responded with bureaucratic delays. Allied actions, instead of encouraging neutral countries to welcome fleeing Jews, influenced them to do the opposite. For instance, it took more than a year to move a few hundred refugees out of Spain to the long-promised camp in North Africa. With a determined American effort, these failures, and others, could have been successes.

7. A campaign to stimulate and assist escapes would have led to a sizable outflow of Jews. Once the neutral nations had agreed to open their borders, that information could have been publicized throughout Europe by radio, airdropped leaflets, and underground communications channels. Local currencies could have been purchased in occupied countries, often with blocked foreign accounts. These funds could have financed escape systems, false documentation, and bribery of lower-level officials. Underground movements were willing to cooperate. (The WRB, in fact, carried out such operations on a small scale.) Even without help, and despite closed borders, tens of thousands of Jews attempted to escape to Switzerland, Spain, Palestine, and other places. Thousands succeeded. With assistance, and assurance of acceptance into neutral nations, those thousands could have been scores of thousands.
8. Much larger sums of money should have been transferred to Europe. After the WRB was formed, the earlier, tiny trickle of funds from the United States was increased. But the amounts were still inadequate. Besides facilitating escapes, money would have helped in hiding Jews, supplying food and other essentials, strengthening Jewish undergrounds, and gaining the assistance of non-Jewish forces.
9. Much more effort should have gone into finding ways to send in food and medical supplies. The American government should have approached the problem far sooner than it did. And it should have put heavy pressure on the International Red Cross and British blockade authorities on this issue.
10. Drawing on its great prestige and influence, the United States could have applied much more pressure than it did on neutral governments, the Vatican, and the International Red Cross to induce them to take earlier and more vigorous action. By expanding their diplomatic missions in Axis countries, they would have increased the numbers of outside observers on the scene and perhaps inhibited actions against Jews. More important, the measures taken by Raoul Wallenberg¹ in Budapest should have been implemented by all neutral diplomatic missions and repeated in city after city

¹A Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews by furnishing them with Swedish protection papers. — Ed.

throughout Axis Europe. And they should have begun long before the summer of 1944.

The United States could also have pressed its two great allies to help. The Soviet Union turned away all requests for cooperation, including those from the WRB. An American government that was serious about rescue might have extracted some assistance from the Russians.

Britain, though more responsive, still compiled an abysmal record. Until 1944, Roosevelt and the State Department let the British lead in setting policy regarding European Jews. Even when the United States finally took the initiative, Roosevelt did not press for British cooperation. British officials resented the WRB, dismissed it as an election-year tactic, and tried to obstruct its work. The situation did not have to develop that way. An American president strongly committed to rescue could have insisted on a more helpful British response.

11. Some military assistance was possible. The Air Force could have eliminated the Auschwitz killing installations. Some bombing of deportation railroads was feasible. The military could have aided in other ways without impeding the war effort. It was, in fact, legally required to do so by the executive order that established the WRB.
12. Much more publicity about the extermination of the Jews should have been disseminated through Europe. Allied radio could have beamed the information for weeks at a time, on all possible wavelengths, as the Germans did regarding the alleged Russian massacre of Polish officers at the Katyn forest. This might have influenced three groups: the Christian populations, the Nazis, and the Jews. Western leaders and, especially, the Pope could have appealed to Christians not to cooperate in any way with the anti-Jewish programs, and to hide and to aid Jews whenever possible.

Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Pope might have made clear to the Nazis their full awareness of the mass-murder program and their severe condemnation of it. If, in addition, Roosevelt and Churchill had threatened punishment for these crimes and offered asylum to the Jews, the Nazis at least would have ceased to believe that the West did not care what they were doing to the Jews. That might possibly have slowed the killing. And it might have hastened the decision of the SS, ultimately taken in late 1944, to end the

extermination. Even if top Nazis had brushed the threats aside, their subordinates might have been given pause.

The European Jews themselves should have been repeatedly warned of what was happening and told what the deportation trains really meant. (With good reason, the Nazis employed numerous precautions and ruses to keep this information from their victims.) Decades later, Rudolf Vrba, one of the escapees who exposed Auschwitz to the outside world, remained angry that the Jews had not been alerted. "Would anybody get me alive to Auschwitz if I had this information?" he demanded. "Would thousands and thousands of able-bodied Jewish men send their children, wives, mothers to Auschwitz from all over Europe, if they knew?" Roosevelt, Churchill, other Western leaders, and major Jewish spokesmen should have warned Jews over and over against the steps that led to deportation and urged them to try to hide or flee or resist. To help implement these actions, the Allies could have smuggled in cadres of specially trained Jewish agents.

None of these proposals guaranteed results. But all deserved serious consideration, and those that offered any chance of success should have been tried. There was a moral imperative to attempt everything possible that would not hurt the war effort. If that had been done, even if few or no lives had been saved, the moral obligation would have been fulfilled. But the outcome would not have been anything like that barren. The War Refugee Board, a very tardy, inadequately supported, partial commitment, saved several tens of thousands. A timely American rescue effort that had the wholehearted support of the government would have achieved much more.

A commitment of that caliber did not materialize. Instead, the Roosevelt administration turned aside most rescue proposals. In the process, government officials developed four main rationalizations for inaction. The most frequent excuse, the unavailability of shipping, was a fraud. When the Allies wanted to find ships for nonmilitary projects, they located them. In 1943, American naval vessels carried 1,400 non-Jewish Polish refugees from India to the American West Coast. The State and War departments arranged to move 2,000 Spanish Loyalist refugees to Mexico using military shipping. In March 1944, blaming the shipping shortage, the British backed out of an agreement to transport 630 Jewish refugees from Spain to the Fedala camp, near

Casablanca. Yet at the same time, they were providing troopships to move non-Jewish refugees by the thousands from Yugoslavia to southern Italy and on to camps in Egypt.

When it was a matter of transporting Jews, ships could almost never be found. This was not because shipping was unavailable but because the Allies were unwilling to take the Jews in. In November 1943, Breckinridge Long told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that lack of transportation was the reason the State Department was issuing so few visas. "In December 1941," he explained, "most neutral shipping disappeared from the seas. . . . There just is not any transportation." In reality, ample shipping existed. Neutral vessels crossed the Atlantic throughout the war. Three Portuguese liners, with a combined capacity of 2,000 passengers, sailed regularly between Lisbon and U.S. ports. Each ship made the trip about every six weeks. Most of the time, because of the tight American visa policy, they carried only small fractions of their potential loads. Two dozen other Portuguese and Spanish passenger ships crossed the Atlantic less frequently but were available for fuller service. In addition, several score neutral cargo vessels could have been obtained and refitted to transport refugees.

American troopships and lend-lease and other cargo vessels could also have carried thousands of refugees across the Atlantic, clearing neutral European countries of fugitives and opening the way for a continuing exodus from Axis territory. War and State department correspondence shows that returning military transports could have performed this mission without hampering the war effort. In fact, U.S. Army authorities in North Africa offered in 1943 to take refugees to the United States on returning military ships. But the State and War departments blocked the plan.

In spring 1944, Roosevelt himself informed Pehle that the Navy could bring refugees to the United States on returning troopships. The War Shipping Administration believed that Liberty ships could also have transported refugees effectively. While the State Department was claiming that transportation for refugees was unavailable, Liberty ships were having difficulty finding ballast for the return trips from North Africa.

The United States and Britain leased Swedish ships to carry food from the Western Hemisphere to Greece. Sweden readily furnished replacements and additions to this fleet. Despite repeated pleas, how-

ever, the two great Allies never managed to provide a single boat to ferry Jews from the Balkans to Turkey or to shuttle Jews across the Mediterranean to safety. Yet the War Department admitted to the War Refugee Board in spring 1944 that it had "ample shipping" available for evacuating refugees; the problem, it agreed, was to find places where they could go.

Another stock excuse for inaction was the claim that Axis governments planted agents among the refugees. Although this possibility needed to be watched carefully, the problem was vastly overemphasized and could have been handled through reasonable security screening. It was significant that Army intelligence found not one suspicious person when it checked the 982 refugees who arrived at Fort Ontario. Nevertheless, potential subversion was continually used as a reason for keeping immigration to the United States very tightly restricted. Turkey, Latin American nations, Britain, and other countries used the same exaggerated argument. It played an important part in blocking the channels of rescue.

A third rationalization for failing to aid European Jews took the high ground of nondiscrimination. It asserted that helping Jews would improperly single out one group for assistance when many peoples were suffering under Nazi brutality. Equating the genocide of the Jews with the oppression imposed on other Europeans was, in the words of one of the world's foremost churchmen, Willem Visser 't Hooft, "a dangerous half-truth which could only serve to distract attention from the fact that no other race was faced with the situation of having every one of its members . . . threatened by death in the gas chambers."

The Roosevelt administration, the British government, and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees regularly refused to acknowledge that the Jews faced a special situation. One reason for this was to avoid responsibility for taking special steps to save them. Such steps, if successful, would have confronted the Allies with the difficult problem of finding places to put the rescued Jews.

Another reason was the fear that special action for the Jews would stir up anti-Semitism. Some asserted that such action would even invite charges that the war was being fought for the Jews. Emanuel Celler declared years later that Roosevelt did nearly nothing for rescue because he was afraid of the label "Jew Deal"; he feared the political effects of the accusation that he was pro-Jewish. The Jews, according to artist

Arthur Szyk, were a skeleton in the democracies' political closet, a matter they would rather not mention. "They treat us as a pornographical subject," he wrote, "you cannot discuss it in polite society."²

The fourth well-worn excuse for rejecting rescue proposals was the claim that they would detract from the military effort and thus prolong the war. This argument, entirely valid with regard to projects that actually would have hurt the war effort, was used almost automatically to justify inaction. Virtually none of the rescue proposals involved enough infringement on the war effort to lengthen the conflict at all or to increase the number of casualties, military or civilian.

Actually, the war effort was bent from time to time to meet pressing humanitarian needs. In most of these instances, it was non-Jews who were helped. During 1942, 1943, and 1944, the Allies evacuated large numbers of non-Jewish Yugoslavs, Poles, and Greeks to safety in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Difficulties that constantly ruled out the rescue of Jews dissolved. Transportation somehow materialized to move 100,000 people to dozens of refugee camps that sprang into existence. The British furnished transport, supplies, much of the camp staffing, and many of the campsites. The United States contributed lend-lease materials and covered the bulk of the funding through UNRRA. Most of these refugees had been in desperate straits. None, though, were the objects of systematic annihilation.

Between November 1943 and September 1944, 36,000 Yugoslavs escaped to southern Italy. Most crossed the Adriatic by boat, thousands on British naval craft. Some even came out in American troop planes. The aircraft, sent mainly to evacuate wounded partisans, in many cases returned with civilians, including hundreds of orphaned babies. Using troopships, the British moved most of the Yugoslavs from Italy to camps in Egypt.

About 120,000 Poles, mostly men of military age and their dependents, came out of Russia during 1942 and passed into British-controlled camps in Iran. They were part of the remnant of a million and a half Poles the Soviets had deported to Siberia after the seizure of eastern Poland in September 1939. The Soviets released these thousands to join the British armed forces. Two-thirds of them did; the other 40,000 became refugees. Iran did not want them, supplying them

²The White House even avoided mentioning Jews in a brief presidential message commemorating the first anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

was difficult, and conditions at the camps were bad. Most were moved out, mainly on British troopships, between August 1942 and August 1943. Ultimately, about 35,000 went to camps in Africa, India, Mexico, and the Middle East. The greatest numbers were placed in British colonies in East Africa, where camps were made available by shifting thousands of prisoners of war to the United States.

Despite the demands of war, the United States, with British support, extended significant help to the Greek people. Food for Greece moved freely through the blockade, and ships to carry it were located without trouble. American lend-lease funds paid for the project.

The Allies also helped thousands of Greeks to flee Nazi control and provided sanctuary for them in the Middle East and Africa. By 1944, 25,000 Greeks had been evacuated. The largest numbers, reported at between 9,000 and 12,000, were taken to Palestine — most to a former army installation at Nuseirat, near Gaza. Palestine also sheltered 1,800 of the non-Jewish Polish refugees. While the British, intent on keeping the small White Paper quota from being filled, turned back endangered Jews, they generously welcomed these other victims of the storm.

In all, Britain and the United States rescued 100,000 Yugoslav, Polish, and Greek refugees from disastrous conditions. Most of them traveled by military transport to camps where the Allies maintained them at considerable cost in funds, supplies, and even military staff. In contrast, the United States (with minimal cooperation from the British) evacuated fewer than 2,000 Jews to the three camps open to them. . . .

It was not a lack of workable plans that stood in the way of saving many thousands more European Jews. Nor was it insufficient shipping, the threat of infiltration by subversive agents, or the possibility that rescue projects would hamper the war effort. The real obstacle was the absence of a strong desire to rescue Jews. A month before the Bermuda Conference, the Committee for a Jewish Army declared:

We, on our part, refuse to resign ourselves to the idea that our brains are powerless to find any solution. . . . In order to visualize the possibility of such a solution, imagine that the British people and the American nation had millions of residents in Europe. . . . Let us imagine that Hitler would start a process of annihilation and would slaughter not two million Englishmen or Americans, not hundreds of thousands, but, let us say, only tens of thousands. . . . It is clear that the governments

of Great Britain [and] the United States would certainly find ways and means to act instantly and to act effectively.

But the European Jews were not Americans and they were not English. It was their particular misfortune not only to be foreigners but also to be Jews.

Yehuda Bauer

Negotiating for Jewish Lives

Prior to the outbreak of war, the . . . Nazis were pursuing two parallel policies: forced emigration, which became shortly thereafter planned expulsion, and emigration by ransom, which is what the Rublee-Schacht agreement, in effect, amounted to. In 1939-41 emigration was still permitted in most of the Nazi domain. Between the beginning of planned mass murder in June 1941, in the conquered Soviet areas, and the cessation of legal Jewish emigration in October 1941, the two policies were pursued simultaneously: murder in the East, emigration (though partial) elsewhere.

Slovakia

In 1940, some 90,000 Jews lived in Slovakia, where a puppet fascist government, led by a Catholic priest, Father Jozef Tiso, fulfilled all Nazi wishes. Deportations to Poland began in March 1942 with the arrest and transport of 16-year-old girls to Auschwitz. The Tiso government eagerly adopted this atrocity, which was organized by Dieter Wisliceny, the Gestapo expert on Jewish affairs attached to the German embassy at Bratislava. For each Jew deported to Poland, the Tiso government paid the Nazis 500 RM.

A Judenrat imposed on the Jewish community was led by Arpad

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Sebestyen, who was loathed for his sheer inefficiency and abject slavishness toward authority. However, an illegal leadership group, called the "working group," was formed; it was led by a young, orthodox, anti-Zionist, religious fanatic, Rabbi Michael Dov-Ber Weissmandel, and his relative, a Zionist-secularist woman, Gizi Fleischmann, who was active in philanthropic causes and a leader of the local JDC¹ group.

Although they did not know that deportation[s] meant death, Weissmandel and Fleischmann desperately tried to stop them. They approached Wisliceny with an offer of money through the intermediary of a Jewish traitor who collaborated with the Nazis, Karl Hochberg. Weissmandel told Hochberg in June 1942 that he represented a world association of rabbis and could therefore pay in foreign currency. Wisliceny rose to the bait: If half the bribe of \$50,000 was paid within two weeks, the deportations would cease for seven weeks; if the other half was then paid, deportations would cease completely. The Slovaks would have to be bribed separately. The "working group" collected \$25,000 locally from Jewish businessmen who had held on to prewar dollars. The deportations stopped. But the second half of the bribe could not be collected — the JDC was not able to transfer cash from Switzerland, and Hungary's Jews refused to help. In September three Slovakian transports were sent to Poland. Finally, orthodox circles in Hungary collected the remaining sum. A fourth transport was sent to Poland after the second \$25,000 was paid but after that no more deportations took place for two years.

Although Weissmandel and Fleischmann assumed that the deportations ceased because the bribe had been paid, historians later explained the situation by various other factors, such as the Nazi preoccupation at that time with their Russian offensive and the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto, which took place between July 22 and September 12. On June 26, Wisliceny and the German ambassador, Hans Ludin, met with the Slovak prime minister. In a report on that meeting and in a separate report to his Foreign Office, Ludin said that the deportations were stopped because of church pressure and the corruption of Slovak officials who had exempted 35,000 Jews for economic reasons.

Ludin's statements, however, were untruthful. Nothing like

¹Joint Distribution Committee, an American Jewish aid agency. — Ed.

35,000 Jews had been exempted. By June, nearly 50,000 Jews had been deported, and another 8,000 went in the September transports; of the remaining 40,000, only a few thousand at most were lucky enough to receive Slovak exemptions for economic reasons. The church intervened in March. The request by Slovak officials in May 1942 to see the paradise the Germans were building for the exiled Jews in Poland, caused perhaps by some stirrings of conscience, was denied in the usual Nazi style.

It seems that Ludin's reasons for stopping the deportations were a cover-up, that Weissmandel and Fleischmann were right after all. After the war Wisliceny said that he gave the money to Eichmann, who must have reported to Himmler. The bait was obviously not the paltry sum of money but the prospect of contacts with Weissmandel's "world association of rabbis" and their vast influence on America. After the war, Weissmandel put it this way: "Apart from the money, they wanted in this way to get in touch with Jews in the U.S., for some political reason that was more important to them than the extermination of Jews." What was that political reason?

In November 1942 Weissmandel wrote a letter on prewar Swiss paper using an old Underwood typewriter. He signed the letter "Ferdinand Roth," representative of World Jewry. In the letter, he asked the price the Nazis had set for stopping all deportations throughout Europe. When Wisliceny took the letter to Berlin, the Nazis again appeared to rise to the bait. After protracted negotiations, Wisliceny offered, in the name of his SS chiefs, to stop deportations from Western Europe and the Balkans for \$2 million. Further negotiations on Poland and the actual Reich area might follow. By getting the money from abroad, the Nazis thus hoped to establish contact with "World Jewry." However, most Jewish aid organizations in the free world — the JDC, the World Jewish Congress, and others — rejected the Europa Plan, as it came to be called, as a blatant Nazi attempt to extort money; they did not believe deportations would cease. The Allies, of course, would not permit ransom monies to be transferred legally, and no such sums could be smuggled out of Switzerland — the only possible venue — illegally. Only the Jewish Agency and the Histadruth, the workers' trade-union organization in Palestine, managed, somewhat belatedly, to send £50,000 (\$200,000) semi-legally to Palestinian Jewish emissaries in Istanbul. More time would pass until ways were found to smuggle such sums into Slovakia from Turkey. In the meantime, in August

1943, Wisliceny told Fleischmann that the negotiations were in abeyance, but that the Nazis might well renew them.

Hungary

The Zionist Va'adah in Budapest was aware of the Europa Plan negotiations in Slovakia. Komoly and Kasztner, the heads of the Va'adah,² also decided to negotiate — Komoly would try to reach the Hungarian government and the underground; Kasztner would try to continue where the Europa Plan had left off; Brand would establish escape routes to Slovakia and Rumania. An orthodox group and the Zionist youth movements, led by Rafi Benschalom (Friedl), engineered the flight of a few thousand people to both countries. Komoly's negotiations were fruitless. Kasztner met with Wisliceny and offered the equivalent of \$2 million (as in the Europa Plan negotiations) for the ransom of Hungarian Jewry. Although the Nazis accepted the offer and promised that deportations would not occur, they actually viewed the \$2 million as an "installment" on the road to "real" negotiations.

However, preliminary contacts ended abruptly on April 25, 1944, when Eichmann himself ordered Brand to appear before him. He offered to release one million Jews (i.e., not only the Jews of Hungary) in return for war materiel and other goods. In subsequent meetings the ransom became more specific: 10,000 trucks and quantities of tea, coffee, sugar, and soap. The trucks would not be used against the West but against the Soviets — a clumsy Nazi attempt to split the Allies. To negotiate via the Jewish Agency for Palestine with the Western Allies to get the goods, Brand would be sent to wherever he chose — he chose Istanbul. He would have a limited, though undefined, amount of time to get results. If the goods did not arrive, the Jews would be killed. When the Allies agreed to the plan, the first group of Jews would be released. On May 19 Brand arrived in Istanbul.

The Va'adah was unhappy with the choice of Brand for the mission. Why was Brand chosen, and not Kasztner? Joel Brand had been educated in Germany, had been a communist opponent of the Nazis, was arrested by them in 1933 and released in 1934, when he went to Budapest and joined the Zionist movement. Resourceful, brave and

²Zionist Aid and Rescue Committee in Hungary. — Ed.

intelligent, Brand was also a heavy drinker and an adventurer with contacts in the Hungarian secret service.

However, a second figure was involved in the mission: Andor (Bandi) Grosz. Grosz, a convert, was a smuggler and a cheat. He had joined the German military secret service (the *Abwehr*), which was directed by the conservative anti-Hitlerite Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, to escape punishment in Hungarian courts of law. In 1943 Grosz managed to be sent to Istanbul, where he worked for the Hungarian counter-espionage unit as well as the American OSS and the British Intelligence Service. The Va'adah also contacted Grosz, and he became a courier, transmitting letters to and from Istanbul and Hungary. In February 1944 when Himmler's SD finally managed to dissolve the *Abwehr*, the SD itself became Germany's espionage and counterespionage agency. But the fight between the *Abwehr* and the SS (the parent body of the SD) had so disorganized the German services that by 1944 the only effective German contact with Western intelligence agencies was the quadruple agent, Bandi Grosz.

The leader of the SD, Walter Schellenberg, and his boss, Heinrich Himmler, were in early 1944 looking for a way to contact the Western Allies. The war was lost unless Germany could be saved by a separate peace with the Anglo-Americans. Himmler also knew that a strong, conservative opposition was bent on trying to eliminate Hitler. If they succeeded, Himmler's SS, rather than the disunited and inefficient rightists, would gain control of Germany. In the meantime, *Abwehr* contacts could be used to establish a dialogue with the West. But Brand was not the best choice for establishing contacts. It was Grosz who was entrusted with the offer to the Americans of a meeting with German military intelligence officers in a neutral country to discuss the possibility of a separate peace. On May 19 Grosz accompanied Brand to Istanbul — or, perhaps, Brand accompanied him.

Grosz contacted Allied intelligence. Brand, who had only a vague notion of Grosz's assignment, impressed on the Jewish Agency that the lives of a million people hung in the balance. He knew that the Hungarian deportations had started on May 14. The director of the Jewish Agency's political department, Moshe Sharett (who later became Israel's foreign minister and second prime minister), was refused permission by the Turks to come to Istanbul to meet with Brand. The Turks wanted Brand to leave Turkey, but Brand desperately tried to avoid returning to Hungary where he would be killed unless he had some-

thing to show for his efforts. After at first refusing to accept him, the British finally agreed to receive him, and he left Istanbul for British-held territory on June 6. Grosz had already done so on June 1.

In Cairo, Brand and Grosz were interrogated, and the purpose of their missions became clear. The Allies of course rejected any idea of separate peace negotiations with the SS. The British refused to negotiate via Brand, although they saw him as an honorable representative of the Jews and released him after a few months. The Americans, mainly the WRB, viewed the offer of the emissaries as a tool to be used to gain time. The Russians refused to permit any effort to be made to save the lives of people under Nazi rule.

It appears that the SS offer was serious. Because the Nazis believed the Jews controlled the West, they could be used as hostages. Their ransom might bring not only valuable war materials to a besieged Germany (this was the story Himmler "sold" to Hitler; Himmler's Nazi competitors knew nothing about Grosz) but might well move the Allies toward negotiating with the SS. . . .

The failure of the Brand mission did not dissuade the Nazis from using the Jews as a pawn to entice the Allies into negotiations. The Nazis contacted Jewish individuals and groups in Istanbul and Lisbon with offers to negotiate. Although the British refused, the WRB agreed to negotiate, intending to drag on discussions in the hope of saving lives until victory came. The person chosen to handle the negotiations was a Swiss citizen, Saly Mayer, the JDC representative in Switzerland. The instructions from Washington, which were transmitted by Roswell D. McClelland at Berne on August 21, 1944, stated that the United States "cannot enter into or authorize ransom transactions of the nature indicated by German authorities. If it was felt that a meeting between Saly Mayer and the German authorities would result in gaining time, the War Refugee Board has no objections to such a meeting." Mayer could not offer goods or money, nor could he speak in the name of the JDC.

Colonel Kurt Becher, a confidant of Himmler's in Hungary, was assigned to negotiate by the SS. The Jews of Budapest, whose deportation had been "postponed," were the first subjects of negotiation. In addition, a transport of 1,684 Jews organized by Kasztner in June 1944, which included not only his family and friends but representatives of all levels of Hungarian Jewry, was part of the bargaining package. After

agreeing to send these people to a neutral country in exchange for a high ransom, the Nazis sent them instead to Bergen-Belsen, where people who might be exchanged for Germans abroad were imprisoned. The release of some members of that group was a precondition of the first Mayer-Becher meeting, which took place on the border bridge at St. Margarethen, between Switzerland and Germany, on August 21. On that day 318 Hungarian Jews arrived in Switzerland from Bergen-Belsen.

The Mayer-Becher negotiations continued until February 1945. Mayer managed to shift the discussion from goods and trucks to ransom money. He far exceeded the terms of his brief. A conservative, deeply religious, eccentric Jewish industrialist and philanthropist with a rather misanthropic bend, Mayer talked money to the Nazis, though he was expressly forbidden to do so. He ignored the Swiss government's warning on August 8 that Jews who escaped as a result of a ransom deal would be refused entry into Switzerland. And he actually bought Swiss tractors and shipped them to Germany to give the Nazis a reason to continue the negotiations.

On August 25 Himmler ordered that the deportations from Budapest be stopped — a “goodwill” token to keep the negotiations going. In December the other members of the Kasztner transport from Bergen-Belsen arrived. In the meantime, Mayer was trying to persuade the Nazis to permit the Red Cross to take over all “civilian” internment camps, Jewish and non-Jewish (i.e., slave labor, concentration, and death camps). The Red Cross would be using Allied monies and this would, in effect, constitute payment to the Nazis. But the Nazis wanted to contact the American government, an intention of which Mayer was well aware. On November 5 Mayer pulled off a major coup: He arranged a meeting between the Nazi Becher and the American diplomat McClelland in Zurich, at which he demanded that the Nazis stop all killings, release the orphans, and agree to the intervention of the Red Cross. Though the SS accepted Mayer's Red Cross idea only in part, and kept harping on the subject of ransom, Mayer did succeed in saving some lives. To have the clout that would allow the talks to continue, Mayer persuaded the Americans to transfer \$5 million of JDC money to Switzerland to show the Nazis that he could deliver the goods (the money was so tied up, however, that he could not have used it).

In an effort to reach the Americans, the Nazis tried other approaches. Himmler met with a formerly pro-Nazi Swiss politician,

Jean-Marie Musy, and sent emissaries who then contacted the W representative in Sweden, Iver Olsen. To Musy, Himmler released 1,200 Jewish inmates from Theresienstadt.

On January 15, 1945, a desperate Himmler asked his aide: “Who is it that the American government is really in contact with. Is it a Rabbi-Jew or is it the Joint [sic]?” (The JDC was known in Europe as the Joint.) . . .

During the last weeks of the Reich, Himmler continued to negotiate. . . . Contrary to the wishes of the extreme SS faction — Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the security services, Eichmann, and others — Himmler wanted to keep some Jews alive to serve as hostages. Occasionally, his associates intervened to prevent the mass murders that the extreme faction demanded. In that sense, the negotiations pursued since 1942 served until the end — Ravensbruck, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and other camps were abandoned to the Allies without fighting.

Was Rescue by Negotiation Possible?

Throughout their rule, the Nazis advocated two alternative solutions, sometimes one to the exclusion of the other, sometimes both simultaneously: expulsion or sale of Jews, and mass murder. Because the Nazis saw the Jews as non-human, they could be sold — in exchange for peace with the West, for instance, to save the tottering Nazi empire. That seems to be the thread running through the story starting with Weissmandel's deal with Wisliceny in Slovakia in June, 1942, and ending with the Mayer-Becher talks in early 1945. In other words, although the possibility of murder was inherent in Nazi ideology, there were, apparently, alternatives. To realize these alternatives, the West needed different priorities: The preservation of human lives required a higher priority than military considerations. By negotiation, by bombing, and other means, some Jews — and others — could have been saved.