

PROBLEMS IN EUROPEAN
CIVILIZATION SERIES

The Holocaust

Problems and
Perspectives
of Interpretation

Third Edition

Edited by

Donald L. Niewyk

Southern Methodist University

Houghton Mifflin Company Boston New York

Let us not exaggerate. There were communities that collapsed. One cannot even find the dignity of quiet defiance in some Jewish responses. In Copenhagen, for example, the whole Jewish community was saved without its lifting a finger to help itself; in Vienna, but for a few hundred people in hiding, nothing but abject submission was the rule. Unfortunately it is impossible to explore here the reasons behind this apparent lethargy.

The range of Jewish resistance was broad, as I have shown: armed, unarmed but organized, semi-organized or semi-spontaneous. Let me conclude with a form of resistance which I have saved to the last because it is the most poignant. My example is from Auschwitz, and I am relating it on the authority of the late Yossel Rosensaft, head of the Bergen-Belsen Survivors' Association. Yossel was also a "graduate" of Auschwitz, and he testified that in December 1944 he and a group of inmates calculated when Hanukka would occur. They went out of their block and found a piece of wood lying in the snow. With their spoons, they carved out eight holes and put pieces of carton in them. Then they lit these and sang the Hanukka song, "Ma Oz Tsur Yeshuati."

None of the people who did this were religious. But on the threshold of death, and in the hell of Auschwitz, they demonstrated. They asserted several principles: that contrary to Nazi lore, they were human; that Jewish tradition, history, and values had a meaning for them in the face of Auschwitz; and that they wanted to assert their humanity in a Jewish way. We find a large number of such instances in concentration and death camps. Of course, there were uncounted instances of dehumanization in a stark fight for survival: bread was stolen from starving inmates by their comrades, violent struggles broke out over soup, over blankets, over work details — struggles which only too often ended with death. In the conditions of the camps, incidents of this kind are not surprising or unusual, but examples such as the one mentioned are. The few Jews who did survive could not have done so without the companionship and cooperation of friends. And friendship under such conditions is itself a remarkable achievement.

I think the story of Kosów is also appropriate. It exemplifies most vividly the refusal of so many Jewish victims to yield their humanity in the face of impending murder. Kosów is a small town in eastern Galicia, and it had a Judenrat which was not very different from others. On Passover 1942, the Gestapo announced it would come into the ghetto.

The Judenrat believed that this was the signal for the liquidation of the ghetto, and told all the Jews to hide or flee. Of the twenty-four Judenrat members, four decided to meet the Germans and offer themselves as sacrificial victims — to deflect the wrath of the enemy. With the ghetto empty and silent, the four men sat and waited for their executioners. While they were waiting one of them faltered. The others told him to go and hide. The three men of Kosów prepared to meet the Nazis on Passover of 1942. Was their act less than firing a gun?

Isaiah Trunk

Why the Jewish Councils Cooperated

Utter lawlessness and virtual anarchy prevailed in the territories under German occupation during World War II. With respect to the civil population in general and the Jews in particular, the German authorities applied no legal norms such as are commonly understood and practiced in the relations between governments and governed or in human relations in the civilized world. The Jews were just plain outlawed as soon as the Germans caught up with them in any given town, township, or hamlet that came under their rule. Unheard-of acts of terror against the Jews by the German army and police bear witness to a bloody wave of degradation, spoliation, and murder. . . .

We shall now endeavor to analyze . . . "rescue-through-work" as a fundamental element in the strategy of the Councils vis-à-vis the Germans before "resettlements" and even after "resettlements" were partially completed. The practical implementation of this strategy stemmed from the assumption that the work of Jews within and outside the ghetto for the benefit of German war industry could serve as a basis for survival,

Reprinted and edited with the permission of Scribner, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., from *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* by Isaiah Trunk. Copyright © 1972 by Isaiah Trunk.

or at least for a reprieve from extermination. One finds these theoretical considerations in the preserved speeches of prominent leaders in a few larger ghettos.

The most outspoken propagator of the idea that the lives of ghetto inmates could be preserved only by work was the Elder of the Łódź ghetto, Rumkowski. On innumerable occasions, in all his public utterances both before and during the "resettlements," he untiringly repeated that the physical existence of the ghetto depended solely on labor useful to the Germans and that under no circumstances, even the most tragic ones, should the ghetto give up this justification for its continuation. In an address delivered to deportees from Central Europe on November 1, 1941, barely one month before preparations for deportations from Łódź had begun, he said, *inter alia*:

When I moved into the ghetto on April 6, 1940, I told the mayor that I was moving in the belief that this was a gold mine. When he, astonished, asked for an explanation, I told him: "I have forty thousand hands for work in the ghetto and this is my gold mine." As I began successfully to organize work, the authorities gradually began to deal with me and to count on me more and more. . . . Today there are 52 factories in the ghetto testifying to my success in creating places of employment. These factories have been visited by the highest representatives of the authorities on many occasions, and they have been amazed. They repeatedly have told me that up to now they had known of only one type of Jew — the merchant or middleman — and had never realized that Jews were capable of productive work. I shall never forget the reaction of one of the dignitaries from Berlin. Noticing a patrol of the ghetto police in the factory, he was sure that their duty was to chase people to work. I informed this gentleman that the duty of the policemen was rather to chase away the many people constantly searching for some kind of work. . . . Work provides the best publicity for the ghetto and enhances confidence in it. . . .

Despite the fact that the ghettos had been sealed off, the assumption that employment might make rescue possible spread from ghetto to ghetto through escapees, special emissaries, and other channels. . . .

When people in the town of Łuków (Lublin district) complained that the Jewish Council had done nothing to prevent imminent disaster, they received the answer that "it is necessary to work. . . . it is possible that the Germans will not bother workers at employment premises, and

that they will live." A frantic search for the places to work ensued. People tried by giving bribes and gifts to find better, more secure German employment places. It is alleged that Hendler, the chairman of the Jewish Council at Brzesko (Cracow district), advised the Jewish population on the second day of the "resettlement" to clench their teeth and continue working, since labor was the only rescue possibility available. . . .

The policy of employment as a rescue strategy was probably encouraged by the attitude of certain circles of the occupation authorities, notably the military, who had sometimes expressed their opposition to the rapid and total physical extermination of the Jews. Though on the whole the *Wehrmacht* and the *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied territories of Soviet Russia cooperated in the Final Solution, this cooperation was not always smooth. The intra-office correspondence of some occupation authorities in areas invaded by the Germans after June 1941 (when mass murder of the Jews began to take place concurrently with the victorious advance of the German army) indicates that the contradiction between the economic interests of the *Wehrmacht* and the political exigencies of carrying out the Final Solution appeared very early. When the Germans occupied the Ukraine and Ostland they found that Jewish artisans and skilled workers were predominant. In a number of small towns the only artisans and skilled workers were Jews. . . .

Skepticism regarding the advisability of the mass physical extermination of the Jews, including skilled labor (which, incidentally, cost the Germans next to nothing) was also expressed by the Nazi bureaucratic and military machines in the occupied territories of Poland, both in the Government General and the Wartheland. It was particularly evident in the middle of 1942, when the German war economy began to feel a pinching scarcity of reserves. The net result of the sudden mass elimination of Jewish laborers was a drastic decrease in production, which caused uneasiness among the economic and administrative authorities responsible for production output. . . .

German firms working for the army were reluctant to let their Jewish workers go and tried to intercede with the SS and police in order to exempt them from "resettlements." In their secret reports, various German labor offices sounded the alarm, warned against drastic reduction of the labor crews, and requested new workers to replace "resettled" ones. Interventions followed on the part of the economic agencies of the

German army directly affected by negative results of the "resettlements" for war production potential. . . .

We know now that the Jewish Councils made a great mistake in believing that Nazi policy with respect to the Jews had been motivated by rational or utilitarian considerations of any kind. Now we know for sure that the difference of opinion between the *Wehrmacht* and the SS had been *only about slowing down* the tempo of the Final Solution and *not about stopping* the total physical destruction of the Jews. The army was interested solely in the exploitation of Jewish slave labor for the benefit of the German war machine until the time when replacement of Jews with non-Jewish workers from the native population would become feasible. . . .

Admittedly, however, in those times of unprecedented calamity the Jewish Councils, groping toward means to cope with the "resettlements," had no choice but to try the mass employment strategy. It should be added that wide circles of the working segments of the population shared this strategy, though perhaps under the influence of the Councils. In retrospect we find that those who remained in the ghettos perished almost to a man, having been deported to extermination camps or killed on the spot. On the other hand, a certain percentage survived from among those who, before or during the liquidation of the ghettos, were shipped to various labor or concentration camps. There is no doubt that the decisive factor in extending the lives of some of the ghettos was the measure of their contribution to the German war economy. Thus the final liquidation of the Łódź Ghetto took place as late as the end of August 1944 (except for Theresienstadt, Łódź was the last ghetto in occupied Europe to be liquidated). Among the relatively long-lived ghettos, important for the German war economy, were those of Białystok and Vilna, which were liquidated in August and September 1943 respectively. The ghettos of Kaunas and Šiauliai, which were converted into concentration camps, were liquidated in July 1944. These few ghettos were almost the last remaining ones in occupied Eastern Europe at the time. Each of them was what the Germans called an *Arbeitsghetto* ("labor ghetto").

Had the war ended earlier, a sizable number of the labor elements might have survived. Let us take the case of the Łódź Ghetto. In August 1944, when the Soviet armies had already reached the environs of Warsaw, approximately 70,000 Jews still lived in Łódź (at a distance of some 75 miles). Had the Soviet army not stopped its advance till January 1945,

a large number of these 70,000 people would certainly have escaped the gas chambers of Auschwitz. . . .

What were the tactics used by the Jewish Councils vis-à-vis the ghetto population during the "resettlement actions"? What answers could they give to placate frightened people inquiring in a state of terror about the alarming news from neighboring ghettos of disaster descending upon them?

At first the Councils had no hint whatsoever what the intentions of the Germans were. At most they may have guessed intuitively that this was not a simple matter and that the "resettled" people were in danger. It simply was humanly impossible to perceive that "resettlement" meant physical destruction of the entire Jewish population, particularly since the police and the officials of the civil administration used elaborate tricks before and during the course of the "actions" to keep the Jews in the dark about their monstrous intentions. A few examples will suffice to illustrate German fraud and deceit.

On July 20, 1942, barely two days before the Gestapo men came to the office of the Jewish Council in Warsaw to dictate the order for mass "resettlement" to Adam Czerniakow,¹ he noted in his diary:

[I visited] the Gestapo at 7:30 in the morning. I inquired of Mende [in charge of Jewish affairs] how much truth there was in the rumors [about pending resettlement]. He answered that he knew nothing about it. To my question whether this was at all possible, he again answered that he knew nothing about it. I left unconvinced. I then asked his chief, Kommissar Boehm, who answered that this was not within his competence, that Höhnemann [a leading Gestapo man] might be in a position to give some information. I stressed that, according to rumors, the "resettlement" was to start today at 19:30 [7:30 P.M.] [He] answered that he would certainly have had some information if this were so. Having no recourse, I approached Scherer, the deputy chief of Department III [of the Gestapo]. He showed surprise and said that he too knew nothing. I then asked whether I might inform the [Jewish] population that there was no foundation for the alarm. [He] answered that I could do so. Everything that has been rumored is unsubstantiated gossip and groundless talk. I have [therefore] instructed [Jacob] Łejkin [commandant of the ghetto police] to inform the population accordingly through the area committees.

¹Chairman of the Jewish Council in Warsaw. — Ed.

Czerniakow supplemented the entry by stating that when First, the chief of the economic department of the Jewish Council, inquired of two other Security Police officials, they got very angry because of the rumors and said that an investigation would be ordered about the whole thing. A mere two days later the "resettlement" began and Czerniakow committed suicide. . . .

All this intentional fraudulence and cheating in cold blood during the Final Solution process was used by the Germans in order to soothe the panic-stricken Jews, reduce their alertness, and entirely disorient them so that to the very last minute they had no inkling of what "resettlement" really meant. The instinct of self-preservation, which prompts people to resist the thought of imminent destruction and to cling to even a spark of hope, here played into the hands of the executioners. A vast number of ghettos fell prey to this combination of circumstances. To a large degree the age-old Jewish optimism that a miracle might yet occur even at the very last moment itself contributed to the fatalistic attitudes of Council members and of the ghetto population as well, particularly since no other solution to their tragic situation was in sight. . . .

The Jewish Councils faced a particularly grave dilemma when the fateful time of the "resettlements" came. It was perhaps the most excruciating moral predicament encountered by a representative body in history.

The German authorities forced the Councils to make all the preliminary preparations for "resettlements" on their behalf: deliver data on the demography and employment of the ghetto population; prepare, in accordance with their strict guidelines, lists of suggested candidates for deportation; order the Jews to report at the places designated for "selection"; search for deportation candidates who tried to conceal themselves and deliver them in person, or order the ghetto police to find them according to lists prepared by the Councils or given to them by the authorities.

During these most awful times, the Councils realized that it was impossible to save the entire ghetto community. Though they may have reasoned that, thanks to their "rescue-through-work" strategy, the working segment of the ghetto population, the young men and women, would have a better chance of survival, they understood at the same time that people on welfare or otherwise not working had no chance at all — people like the elderly and the feeble, who faced death or illness

anyway, and large families with small children as well as the children themselves. Beset by the impending ordeal, a sizable number of Councils fearfully came to the fateful conclusion that since not all Jews could be saved, it was better to deliver to the Nazi Moloch those ghetto dwellers with little or no chance of survival in order to save others. This desperate reasoning, that in the calamity that had befallen them it was necessary as a kind of rescue strategy to sacrifice some to save others, emerged within many ghettos. . . .

A vivid description of the crushing moral dilemma that overpowered the Jewish Councils during the "resettlements" comes from the Kaunas Ghetto. On October 26, 1941, there arrived in the ghetto its newly appointed boss, the Gestapo man Rauke, who ordered the entire Jewish population, without exception, to assemble at the Democratic Square two days later. All were to bring their working papers. A check would be made, and those unable to work would be transported elsewhere. Whoever was found at home after 6 A.M. on the day of the assembly would be shot. Only the ill were exempt; however, they had to produce a certificate from a doctor. The vice chairman of the Council thus describes the anguish that tortured its members.

The Council faced problems of conscience and responsibility at the same time. . . . [There were two alternatives:] . . . either to comply, announce the Gestapo order to the ghetto inhabitants, and issue proper instructions to the Ghetto police; or openly to sabotage the order by disregarding it. The Council felt that if it followed the first alternative, part, or perhaps the majority, of the ghetto might yet be rescued at least for a time. Should however, the other alternative be chosen, heavy measures of persecution would follow against the entire ghetto, and possibly its immediate liquidation [might result].

Aware of the situation and of this burden of responsibility for the lives of thousands whom it might yet be possible to save, the Council at the same time felt the traditional Jewish optimism that, perhaps, a miracle might yet mercifully come at the last minute. These considerations influenced the Council once more not to choose the path of open sabotage against the Germans. A resolution to this effect was adopted in Kaunas after an agonizing moral struggle during a long meeting and following a night of consultation with the old Kaunas rabbi, the late Abraham Duber Shapiro. The rabbi fainted when he heard what the Council members told him. When he came to, he asked for a few hours to search the holy

books for advice on how one is to act in times of such a calamity, according to Jewish ethics. In the morning, he gave the following opinion to the Jewish Council: "If a Jewish community (may God help it) has been condemned to physical destruction, and there are means of rescuing part of it, the leaders of the community should have courage and assume the responsibility to act and rescue what is possible." Of the 26,400 Jews remaining in Kaunas after three previous "actions" (on August 18, September 26, and October 4, 1941), some 9,000 persons were taken away during this "selection" on the next day. . . . and killed. . . .

Considering their tasks, cooperation with the authorities was unavoidable for the Councils. The very rationale for their existence would have vanished without it.

The Councils had to maintain daily contacts with the Germans in such matters as food, delivery of forced laborers, collection of imposed material *Leistungen* [contributions], filling production orders for ghetto industry, permission for import of raw materials, carrying out of some welfare activities — medical or sanitary services, education of children, etc.

It was stated in official German pronouncements that the Councils represented the interests of the Jews. . . . Thus the Councils were made to believe that they would really be able to protect Jewish interests.

For purposes of comparison, it should be remembered that cooperation between the indigent non-Jewish population and the authorities took place throughout the occupied territories. Hundreds of thousands of officials and workers from among the local population (in the Government General alone their number reached 260,000 persons . . .) served in the German administrative, economic, judicial, and even police apparatuses. Without their assistance it would have been impossible for the Germans to administer and dominate the occupied lands. No accusations of collaboration were advanced against these people after the war, except in some individual cases of overt criminal acts committed against the population in the occupied territories.

There were however, basic differences between non-Jewish collaboration and Jewish cooperation.

1. Collaboration of non-Jews was on a *voluntary* basis, either because of sharing the National Socialist ideology, or because of opportunity for personal gain (career, authority, etc.) or in order to let off pent-up hatred toward the Jews, or because of a lust to rob and kill. This category includes Jewish Gestapo agents and the demoralized members of the

Councils and the ghetto police who served the German authorities in order to gain privileges and material goods for themselves and their families. In contrast, the cooperation of the Councils with the Germans was forced upon the Jews and was maintained in an atmosphere of ever-present merciless terror.

2. Diametrically different were German aims with regard to non-Jewish collaborations, as compared to Jewish ones. Toward the former their aims were political and tactical: to infect with propaganda and morally disarm the local population in order to neutralize the anti-Nazi movement. But with respect to the Jews, the imposed cooperation was aimed at accomplishing the special tasks of an instrument for carrying out all anti-Jewish persecution measures, including self-destruction, with the Council members and the Jewish Police themselves as the final victims.

3. The non-Jewish collaborationists greatly profited from the fruits of their cooperation, sharing the material privileges of the German authority apparatus. They were considered allies in the future "New Europe," while the Councils, as a rule, acted under conditions of constant physical and spiritual degradation, always on the brink of the abyss, with the threat of being thrown into it hanging over them all the time. They were treated as enemies by the Nazis, as were all Jews.

However, cooperation with the Germans was a threat to spineless Council members. They were in danger of going to the extreme in cooperating with the Nazis, not so much in the illusory belief of interceding for the common good of the Jews as for their own benefit. In an atmosphere of moral nihilism, corruption of Nazi officialdom, and inhuman terror, it was not easy for such Council members to be on guard against crossing the fine demarcation line between cooperation and collaboration. Compelled to adjust themselves to the mentality of their German bosses, some of the Council members were disposed to adopt their methods. They were often forced to do so. There were also Councilmen with a compulsive urge to rule, and participation in the Councils provided them with the opportunity of relieving their lust for authority and honor; for this they felt obligated to the Germans.

Here we come to yet another aspect characteristic of the cooperation of the Jewish Councils with the Germans: the seeming "authority." The Jewish Councils got from the Nazis functions which had not been carried out for ages by Jewish community representatives. Since the Middle Ages, no other Jewish body had exercised so much economic, administrative, judicial, and police authority. This alleged "authority"

could corrupt many Council members or chairmen. For the price of continuing in office (and this could happen only at the mercy of the Nazis) they entered into open or covert collaboration. . . .

Two periods can be discerned in the history of the Jewish Councils, with the "resettlement actions" as a borderline. During the initial period, when the authorities requested cooperation in the seizure of Jewish property and delivery of Jewish laborers to places of work or to labor camps, the moral responsibility that weighed on the Councils was still bearable. They could justify their cooperation by reasoning that in carrying out German demands they helped prolong the life of the ghetto, making it useful to the authorities as a source of material gain, and of slave labor for the Nazi war economy, almost free of charge. The situation became morally unbearable when, during the mass "resettlement actions," the Germans forced the Councils and the Jewish police to carry out the preparatory work and to participate in the initial stages of the actual deportation. The latter task was forced mainly upon the Jewish police. The Councils then faced a tragic dilemma never before experienced by a community representative organ. Cooperation then reached the morally dangerous borderline of collaboration. The Councils were called upon to make fateful decisions on the life and death of certain segments of their coreligionists. There were Council chairmen in the large ghettos who even then found justification for cooperating with the authorities. However, there were numerous instances where Council members, including chairmen, resisted this delusive temptation, committing suicide or going to execution in the gas chambers together with their families. Others took the perilous path of resistance. . . .

It is clear from available sources that the majority of the Councils were against the idea of organized resistance. There were Councils that actively opposed underground groups and denounced them to the Germans. They were afraid that open resistance might spoil their strategy of making the ghetto inmates useful to the Germans. Collective reprisals against the ghettos after Jews had been caught with arms or waging other forms of resistance confirmed these Councils in their negative attitudes. To give only one instance of many: On July 22, 1943, members of a group of the Jewish United Partisan Organization in the Vilna Ghetto left for the Narotch Forest. Fourteen people joined them on the way. During an encounter with the Germans, some of the fighters fell.

Two were taken prisoners and perished in Ponary. In retribution, the Gestapo chief, Neugebauer, ordered that the families of the escapees be delivered to him. He also ordered that the brigadiers of the labor unit where the escapees had been employed be delivered together with their families. Thirty-two persons were taken from their homes in the night and brought to the prison and, later, to Ponary. Neugebauer issued an order of collective responsibility: the entire family of each escapee was to be seized. In case an escapee had no family, all the persons living with him in the same room were to be seized. If these persons were not found, all the tenants of his building were to be shot. All Jews leaving the ghetto for work were to be separated into groups of 10; if one was missing on return from work, all of his group were to be shot. After this tragic event in which 32 persons were murdered, there appeared in the *Geto-yedies* the following item under the headline "Wrath and Grief" (*Tsar un tsorn*):

The responsibility for these deaths falls onto those who betrayed our ghetto community and all its serious tasks in the full knowledge that they were endangering the existence of our entire ghetto and the lives of their loved ones in the first place. They are responsible for the spilt blood. . . .

There were Councils that adopted a positive attitude to resistance and rescue endeavors by all those able to escape from the ghetto, dangerous consequences notwithstanding. There were individual Council members and entire Councils involved in underground activities against the Germans even before the "resettlement actions." . . .

Positive attitudes to resistance took various shapes: some Councils granted young people financial assistance, some encouraged them to organize groups for resistance when the time came to join the partisans. The highest degree of cooperation was achieved when chairmen or other leading Council members themselves actively participated in preparing and executing acts of resistance, particularly in the course of liquidations of ghettos. Here are a few examples.

Jacob Łazebnik, a member of the Lenin Jewish Council (near Pińsk), called upon the youth to organize themselves. In Radomsko the Council chairman Gutgesztalt in January 1943 warned members of the Zionist Youth Organizations Hechalutz and Hashomer Hatzair not to trust German assurances that there was a possibility of their going to Palestine as part of a special exchange program. He labeled this another Gestapo trick and advised them to flee the ghetto. He himself escaped into the forest.

One of the most prominent members of the Warsaw Jewish Council, Abraham Gepner, adopted a positive attitude toward the resistance movement and contributed money to buy arms.

When the Sasów Jewish Council (Distrikt Galizien) got an order to deliver people for "resettlement," it warned the inmates to escape and itself escaped to the forest. When the Gestapo arrived, they found the Jewish homes empty.

Jewish Councils or their individual members suspected of cooperating with the underground were mercilessly persecuted. According to a witness, Shmuel Zalczman, second chairman of the Chmielnik Jewish Council, maintained contact with the underground circles, advising them on how to organize the underground in the ghetto. Zalczman was arrested because of an informer. Fastened to a horse-drawn cart, he was dragged all over town and died a horrible death. . . .

The sources mention instances of Council members actively taking part in acts of armed resistance against the Germans and physically resisting the "actions." One of these was Bert Łopatyn, chairman of the Council at Łachwa Ghetto (Pińsk area). Based on facts contained in four eyewitness accounts collected independently, this is what took place. On September 3, 1942, the ghetto was unexpectedly shut off by the Byelorussian militia. Next day, the SD men began chasing inmates through the ghetto gate to prepared graves nearby. The SD men entered the Council building, demanding that Dubski, a Council member, give them the list of Jews in the ghetto (probably in order to carry out a "selection"). When Dubski refused, he was shot on the spot. Before the "action" began, Łopatyn unsuccessfully tried to pay off the *Kommandant* of the SD unit. In company with a member of the underground group, he then went from house to house telling ghetto inmates that when he sees that the end had come he would set fire to the Council building as a signal for all inmates to do the same [to their homes]. It seems that on his advice many people armed themselves with knives and axes. A large number of armed ghetto inmates waited at the assembly place for the signal. When the Council building began to burn, people put their own homes to flame. In the turmoil that broke out one of the inmates, Yitzhak Rechstein, split the head of a gendarme with his hatchet. As if on signal the crowd surged forward, trying to reach the ghetto gate. Łopatyn snatched an automatic gun from a German but did not know how to use it and began shooting at random. The German wounded him in the arm.

A former soldier of the Polish army, Hajfec, snatched a gun from another German and began shooting in the direction of the German cordon, which opened fire on the Jews. The crowd, armed with knives and bottles of lye, attacked the ghetto sentries. Some escaped, taking along some arms from the watchmen. Many others escaped from the burning ghetto, but the majority perished. One eyewitness, Leon Slutski, related that of 2,000 ghetto inmates some 600 escaped, of whom only 100 or 120 remained alive and met in the forest. Łopatyn was among these, and later on he fought in the Stalin squad of the Kirow Brigade (operational area: Lida-Nowogródek). Hit by a mine, he perished on April 1, 1944. . . .

The material cited is sufficient to illustrate how complicated the problem of objective evaluation is, both with respect to the behavior of individual members of Councils and of Councils as a whole. The researcher faces grave psychological problems grappling with the analysis, particularly so because it is not easy to perceive now the specific climate of those "times with no precedent" and the spirit of people who lived and acted under unimaginable conditions of stress, on the brink of an abyss that constantly threatened to swallow them up. Considering the behavior and deeds of the Councilmen one has always to bear in mind that they were under the pressure of cynical, merciless terror by the Nazis at all times, that the prospect of being killed sooner or later was a concrete eventuality, and that every step they took was liable to postpone or hasten it. . . . Only in the context of this extraordinary situation with its relentless psychological stress is it possible to grasp at all or explain the activities and behavior of the Councils and their members. . . .

[Trunk's associate and collaborator, Jacob Robinson, wrote the introduction to the book in which he commented on the significance of Trunk's findings. Here are Robinson's final thoughts. — Ed.]

Was the Jewish Council a positive or a negative factor in the final outcome of the Holocaust? The problem refers to the broad outcome of the Holocaust, not to the isolated individual cases of casualties charged — rightly or wrongly — to the Councils or the individual cases of rescue attributed — rightly or wrongly — to them. Did their participation or nonparticipation influence the dreadful statistics? The following facts should help in formulating an enlightened answer:

1. In large areas of Eastern Europe at least two million victims were murdered without any participation at all on the part of Jews. This

refers particularly to victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* in both the initial phase of the war and during the later stages.

2. In the larger ghettos in Poland and in the Baltic states where there was Jewish participation it was of importance in the initial, not in the final, stages of deportations; the later deportations, as has been indicated above, were carried out by German forces, while the Jewish police played only a secondary role.

3. With few exceptions the process of extermination was finished by early 1943, a year and a half prior to Himmler's autumn 1944 "stop extermination" order. Whatever survivors of the fatal year (spring 1942–spring 1943) remained or could have remained alive were destroyed (one may even say at a leisurely pace) during the following months.

4. Above all, the German will to destroy the Jewish people (*Vernichtungswille*) was directed with particular fury against Eastern European Jewry. The Nazi official statements are full of warnings of the dangers to Germany of East European Jewry, which is represented as the greatest source of Jewish power, a mighty stream from which Jews spread out to all corners of the world, as the reservoir for the existence and constant renewal of world Jewry. The Nazis claimed that without the addition of fresh East European Jewish blood, Jewry in the West would long ago have disappeared. It is difficult to believe that with this determination the Nazis would not have used every day and every device to implement the Final Solution to the letter.

It would appear, then, that when all factors are considered, Jewish participation or nonparticipation in the deportations had no substantial influence — one way or the other — on the final outcome of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.