

PROBLEMS IN EUROPEAN
CIVILIZATION SERIES

The Holocaust

Problems and
Perspectives
of Interpretation

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people lives [*Am Israel Chai*]." This experience was so ingrained in the Jewish consciousness as to achieve the force of law. The Jewish people could not be annihilated.

Only in 1942, 1943, and 1944 did the Jewish leadership realize that, unlike the pogroms of past centuries, the modern machinelike destruction process would engulf European Jewry. But the realization came too late. A 2,000-year-old lesson could not be unlearned; the Jews could not make the switch. They were helpless.

Hannah Arendt

The Failure of Jewish Leadership

As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution. He did encounter one exception, however, which he mentioned several times, and which must have made a deep impression on him. This happened in Hungary when he was negotiating with Dr. Kastner over Himmler's offer to release one million Jews in exchange for ten thousand trucks. Kastner,¹ apparently emboldened by the new turn of affairs, had asked Eichmann to stop "the death mills at Auschwitz," and Eichmann had answered that he would do it "with the greatest pleasure" (*herzlich gern*) but that, alas, it was outside his competence and outside the competence of his superiors — as indeed it was. Of course, he did not expect the Jews to share the general enthusiasm over their destruction, but he did expect more than compliance, he expected — and received, to a truly extraordinary degree — their cooperation. This was "of course the very cornerstone" of everything he did, as it had been the very cornerstone of his activities in Vienna. Without Jewish help in administrative and police

From *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt. Copyright © 1963, 1964, by Hannah Arendt. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.

¹Rudolf Kastner (Reszoe Kasztner), a Zionist leader in Hungary. See Part V. — Ed.

work — the final rounding up of Jews in Berlin was, as I have mentioned, done entirely by Jewish police — there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German manpower. ("There can be no doubt that, without the cooperation of the victims, it would hardly have been possible for a few thousand people, most of whom, moreover, worked in offices, to liquidate many hundreds of thousands of other people. . . . Over the whole way to their deaths the Polish Jews got to see hardly more than a handful of Germans." Thus R. Pendorf . . . To an even greater extent this applies to those Jews who were transported to Poland to find their deaths there.) Hence, the establishing of Quisling governments in occupied territories was always accompanied by the organization of a central Jewish office, and, as we shall see later, where the Nazis did not succeed in setting up a puppet government, they also failed to enlist the cooperation of the Jews. But whereas the members of the Quisling governments were usually taken from the opposition parties, the members of the Jewish Councils were as a rule the locally recognized Jewish leaders, to whom the Nazis gave enormous powers — until they, too, were deported, to Theresienstadt or Bergen-Belsen, if they happened to be from Central or Western Europe, to Auschwitz if they were from an Eastern European community.

To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story. It had been known about before, but it has now been exposed for the first time in all its pathetic and sordid detail by Raul Hilberg [in his] standard work *The Destruction of the European Jews*. . . . In the matter of cooperation, there was no distinction between the highly assimilated Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe and the Yiddish-speaking masses of the East. In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation. They distributed the Yellow Star badges, and sometimes, as in Warsaw, "the sale of the armbands became a regular business; there were ordinary armbands of cloth and fancy plastic armbands which were washable." In the Nazi-inspired, but not Nazi-dictated, manifestoes they

issued, we still can sense how they enjoyed their new power — “The Central Jewish Council has been granted the right of absolute disposal over all Jewish spiritual and material wealth and over all Jewish manpower,” as the first announcement of the Budapest Council phrased it. We know how the Jewish officials felt when they became instruments of murder — like captains “whose ships were about to sink and who succeeded in bringing them safe to port by casting overboard a great part of their precious cargo”; like saviors who “with a hundred victims save a thousand people, with a thousand ten thousand.” The truth was even more gruesome. Dr. Kastner, in Hungary, for instance, saved exactly 1,684 people with approximately 476,000 victims. In order not to leave the selection to “blind fate,” “truly holy principles” were needed “as the guiding force of the weak human hand which puts down on paper the name of the unknown person and with this decides his life or death.” And whom did these “holy principles” single out for salvation? Those “who had worked all their lives for the *zibur* [community]” — i.e., the functionaries — and the “most prominent Jews,” as Kastner says in his report.

No one bothered to swear the Jewish officials to secrecy; they were voluntary “bearers of secrets,” either in order to assure quiet and prevent panic, as in Dr. Kastner’s case, or out of “humane” considerations, such as that “living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder,” as in the case of Dr. Leo Baeck, former Chief Rabbi of Berlin. During the Eichmann trial, one witness pointed out the unfortunate consequences of this kind of “humanity” — people volunteered for deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and denounced those who tried to tell them the truth as being “not sane.” We know the physiognomies of the Jewish leaders during the Nazi period very well; they ranged all the way from Chaim Rumkowski, Eldest of the Jews in Łódź, called Chaim I, who issued currency notes bearing his signature and postage stamps engraved with his portrait, and who rode around in a broken-down horse-drawn carriage; through Leo Baeck, scholarly, mild-mannered, highly educated, who believed Jewish policemen would be “more gentle and helpful” and would “make the ordeal easier” (whereas in fact they were, of course, more brutal and less corruptible, since so much more was at stake for them); to, finally, a few who committed suicide — like Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council, who was not a rabbi but an unbeliever,

a Polish-speaking Jewish engineer, but who must still have remembered the rabbinical saying: “Let them kill you, but don’t cross the line.”

That the prosecution in Jerusalem, so careful not to embarrass the Adenauer² administration, should have avoided, with even greater and more obvious justification, bringing this chapter of the story into the open was almost a matter of course. . . . The chapter must be included here, however, because it accounts for certain otherwise inexplicable lacunae in the documentation of a generally over-documented case. The judges mentioned one such instance, the absence of H. G. Adler’s book *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* (1955), which the prosecution, in some embarrassment, admitted to be “authentic, based on irrefutable sources.” The reason for the omission was clear. The book describes in detail how the feared “transport lists” were put together by the Jewish Council of Theresienstadt after the S.S. had given some general directives, stipulating how many should be sent away, and of what age, sex, profession, and country of origin. The prosecution’s case would have been weakened if it had been forced to admit that the naming of individuals who were sent to their doom had been, with few exceptions, the job of the Jewish administration. And the Deputy State Attorney, Mr. Ya’akov Baror, who handled the intervention from the bench, in a way indicated this when he said: “I am trying to bring out those things which somehow refer to the accused without damaging the picture in its entirety.” The picture would indeed have been greatly damaged by the inclusion of Adler’s book, since it would have contradicted testimony given by the chief witness on Theresienstadt, who claimed that Eichmann himself had made these individual selections. Even more important, the prosecution’s general picture of a clear-cut division between persecutors and victims would have suffered greatly. To make available evidence that does not support the case for the prosecution is usually the job of the defense, and the question why Dr. Servatius, who perceived some minor inconsistencies in the testimony, did not avail himself of such easily obtainable and widely known documentation is difficult to answer. He could have pointed to the fact that Eichmann, immediately upon being transformed from an expert in emigration into an expert in “evacuation,” appointed his old Jewish

²Konrad Adenauer, West German chancellor in 1961. — Ed.

clear from the tenor and drift of Mrs. Zuckerman's testimony. However, these "political" intentions misfired, for the witnesses were truthful and told the court that all Jewish organizations and parties had played their role in the resistance, so the true distinction was not between Zionists and non-Zionists but between organized and unorganized people, and, even more important, between the young and the middle-aged. To be sure, those who resisted were a minority, a tiny minority, but under the circumstances "the miracle was," as one of them pointed out, "that this minority existed."

Legal considerations aside, the appearance in the witness box of the former Jewish resistance fighters was welcome enough. It dissipated the haunting specter of universal cooperation, the stifling, poisoned atmosphere which had surrounded the Final Solution. The well-known fact that the actual work of killing in the extermination centers was usually in the hands of Jewish commandos had been fairly and squarely established by witnesses for the prosecution — how they had worked in the gas chambers and the crematories, how they had pulled the gold teeth and cut the hair of the corpses, how they had dug the graves and, later, dug them up again to extinguish the traces of mass murder; how Jewish technicians had built gas chambers in Theresienstadt, where the Jewish "autonomy" had been carried so far that even the hangman was a Jew. But this was only horrible, it was no moral problem. The selection and classification of workers in the camps was made by the S.S., who had a marked predilection for the criminal elements; and, anyhow, it could only have been the selection of the worst. (This was especially true in Poland, where the Nazis had exterminated a large proportion of the Jewish intelligentsia at the same time that they killed Polish intellectuals and members of the professions — in marked contrast, incidentally, to their policy in Western Europe, where they tended to save prominent Jews in order to exchange them for German civilian internees or prisoners of war; Bergen-Belsen was originally a camp for "exchange Jews.") The moral problem lay in the amount of truth there was in Eichmann's description of Jewish cooperation, even under the conditions of the Final Solution: "The formation of the Jewish Council [at Theresienstadt] and the distribution of business was left to the discretion of the Council, except for the appointment of the president, who the president was to be, which depended upon us, of course. However, this appointment was not in the form of a dictatorial decision. The

functionaries with whom we were in constant contact — well, they had to be treated with kid gloves. They were not ordered around, for the simple reason that if the chief officials had been told what to do in the form of: you must, you have to, that would not have helped matters any. If the person in question does not like what he is doing, the whole works will suffer. . . . We did our best to make everything somehow palatable." No doubt they did; the problem is how it was possible for them to succeed.

Thus, the gravest omission from the "general picture" was that of a witness to testify to the cooperation between the Nazi rulers and the Jewish authorities, and hence of an opportunity to raise the question: "Why did you cooperate in the destruction of your own people and, eventually, in your own ruin?" The only witness who had been a prominent member of a *Judenrat* was Pinchas Freudiger, the former Baron Philip von Freudiger, of Budapest, and during his testimony the only serious incidents in the audience took place; people screamed at the witness in Hungarian and in Yiddish, and the court had to interrupt the session. Freudiger, an Orthodox Jew of considerable dignity, was shaken: "There are people here who say they were not told to escape. But fifty per cent of the people who escaped were captured and killed" — as compared with ninety-nine per cent, for those who did not escape. "Where could they have gone to? Where could they have fled?" — but he himself fled, to Rumania. . . . "What could we have done? What could we have done?" And the only response to this came from the presiding judge: "I do not think this is an answer to the question" — a question raised by the gallery but not by the court.

The matter of cooperation was twice mentioned by the judges; Judge Yitzak Raveh elicited from one of the resistance witnesses an admission that the "ghetto police" were an "instrument in the hands of murderers" and an acknowledgment of "the *Judenrat's* policy of cooperating with the Nazis"; and Judge Halevi found out from Eichmann in cross-examination that the Nazis had regarded this cooperation as the very cornerstone of their Jewish policy. But the question the prosecutor regularly addressed to each witness except the resistance fighters which sounded so very natural to those who knew nothing of the factual background of the trial, the question "Why did you not rebel?" actually served as a smoke screen for the question that was not asked. And thus it came to pass that all answers to the unanswerable

question Mr. Hausner put to his witnesses were considerably less than "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." True it was that the Jewish people as a whole had not been organized, that they had possessed no territory, no government, and no army, that, in the hour of their greatest need, they had no government-in-exile to represent them among the Allies (the Jewish Agency for Palestine, under Dr. Weizmann's presidency, was at best a miserable substitute), no caches of weapons, no youth with military training. But the whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations and Jewish party and welfare organizations on both the local and the international level[s]. Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people. (According to Freudiger's calculations about half of them could have saved themselves if they had not followed the instructions of the Jewish Councils. This is of course a mere estimate, which, however, oddly jibes with the rather reliable figures we have from Holland and which I owe to Dr. L. de Jong, the head of the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation. In Holland, where the *Joodsche Raad* like all the Dutch authorities very quickly became an "instrument of the Nazis," 103,000 Jews were deported to the death camps and some five thousand to Theresienstadt in the usual way, i.e., with the cooperation of the Jewish Council. Only five hundred and nineteen Jews returned from the death camps. In contrast to this figure, ten thousand of those twenty to twenty-five thousand Jews who escaped the Nazis — and that meant also the Jewish Council — and went underground survived; again forty to fifty per cent. Most of the Jews sent to Theresienstadt returned to Holland.)

Yehuda Bauer

Forms of Jewish Resistance

We have already seen that the basic situation of Jews during the Hitler period was one of political powerlessness. Negotiations to save them, if conducted at all, would have to have been supported by one or more of the major powers; without that there would be little chance of success. Jews could appeal to the powers, they could try to impress public opinion in the Western democracies, but in the end they were perilously dependent upon the mercy of others. In the free world, Jews could appeal or beg for help; behind the barbed wire of Hitler's hell they could cry out in the hope that muted echoes would reach the outside. Was there anything more that the trapped Jews of Europe could do? If so, did they do it? What was the reaction of the victims to the most terrible terror any regime had yet exercised?

Jewish reaction to Nazi rule is of tremendous importance to Jews and non-Jews alike. The Jew wants to know the tradition to which he is heir. How did that tradition, that whole range of historically developed values, stand up to the supreme test of Hitler's death sentence on the Jewish people? Did Jewish civilization, demoralized under the blows of the brutal enemy, surrounded in the East by largely indifferent or hostile populations, simply collapse?

These questions are equally significant for non-Jews. Nothing like the Holocaust had happened before, but there are no guarantees against its recurrence. Jews are not the only possible victims of genocide. It is urgent to know how people react in such extreme circumstances; to find out how people, who were Jews, reacted when it happened to them.

What do we mean by resistance? What, more specifically, do we mean by that term in the context of World War II? What, when we apply it to Jews? Henri Michel, perhaps the most important contemporary historian of anti-Nazi resistance, defines the term negatively: resistance was the maintenance of self-respect. He writes that "acceptance of defeat whilst still capable of fighting, was to lose one's self-respect;

self-respect dictated that one should not yield to the blandishments of collaboration." But it is practically useless to analyse Jewish resistance with such categories — the Nazis certainly did not use the blandishments of collaboration on the Jews.

Professor Raul Hilberg, on the other hand, seems to regard armed resistance as the only, or nearly only, legitimate form of real resistance. In his monumental book, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961), he stated categorically and, to my mind, mistakenly, that the lack of Jewish armed resistance to the Holocaust was a consequence of the fact that Jews during their long diaspora had not had occasion to learn the art of self-defence.

Let me start off with a definition of my own and we shall then subject it to the test of known facts. I would define Jewish resistance during the Holocaust as any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters. I cannot accept Michel's definition because there were in fact very few Jews who consciously collaborated with the Germans, or who were willing to help Germany achieve victory in the hope that they would help themselves or the Jewish people. There were, of course, paid Jewish Gestapo agents and others who helped the Germans having been promised their lives — quite a number of these. But I know of only one clear and one marginal case of collaboration as defined here: I am referring to the group known as the 13 (*Dos Dreizentl*) of Avraham Gancwajch, in Warsaw, and to Moshe Mietek Merin's Judenrat in Zagłębie.

I cannot accept Hilberg's definition or description for two reasons. In the first place, I do not think he is being historically accurate. Jews did defend themselves throughout the ages by force of arms when this was feasible or when they had no other choice — in Polish towns against Chmielnicki's hordes in 1648; in Palestine against the Crusaders; in medieval York. One could cite many such instances. In pre-1939 Poland, moreover, the socialist Bund party had special defence groups that fought street battles with antisemitic hooligans. Early in this century, Jewish students in Prague, Vienna, and Berlin established fraternities that fought duels against antisemites, and so on.

The second and more important point is surely that armed resistance during the Holocaust was possible only under conditions that most Jews did not enjoy. You either have arms or you do not; for the

most part, the Jews did not. Still, the nature of Jewish armed resistance was much more complicated than one might expect.

In the Generalgouvernement (the central area of Poland ruled by the Nazis) there were, according to exhaustive historical accounts, about 5,000 Jewish fighters. Of these about 1,000 fought in the Warsaw ghetto rebellion, 1,000 in the Warsaw Polish uprising in 1944, and the rest as partisans in forests and in a number of ghetto and camp uprisings. There were some 1.5 million Jews in the area in 1939, so one gets a ratio of resisters of 0.33 per cent — not a very high figure — and concludes that Jewish armed resistance was marginal at best. In eastern Poland, where there were about one million Jews before the war, 15,000 armed Jews came out of the forests at liberation — a ratio of 1.5 per cent — which will still not cause one to change the verdict. But during the time Jews were organizing to fight, that is in 1942 and 1943, they accounted for one half of all the partisans in the Polish forests. The other half, about 2,500, were Poles. There were more than 20 million Poles in the Generalgouvernement, so one arrives at a resistance ratio of 0.0125 per cent. The same game can be played regarding other nations in Nazi Europe. One begins to appreciate Mark Twain's adage that there are lies, damned lies, and statistics.

Let us then disregard such futile exercises and examine the real facts concerning Jewish armed resistance in Poland and, subsequently, elsewhere. It is generally accepted that large-scale operations were mainly dependent on two ingredients: the availability of weapons, and the support of a civilian population capable of aiding underground fighters. Neither of these preconditions existed for the Jews. Jews did not have access to the arms buried by the collapsing Polish army in 1939. There were very few Jewish officers in that army, fewer of them holding high ranks (e.g., one general), and the secrets of the buried arms were kept by right-wing officers who went into hiding.

The Polish government underground, the Armia Krajowa (AK), did not buy any arms from deserting German soldiers until very late in the war. No partisan detachments of any importance were established by it before 1943, and, anyway, not only were Jews not accepted in AK ranks, but a number of AK detachments were actively engaged in hunting down and murdering them. Thus when the Jews realized that they were being threatened with mass murder in 1942, there were no AK detachments for them to join. When these did come into existence,

most Jews had already been murdered, and the detachments, in any case, would still not accept the survivors.

The Communist *Gwardia Ludowa*, later the *Armia Ludowa* (AL), was founded in the spring of 1942. It was then very weak, had very few arms, and about half its partisan forces were in fact the Jewish detachments in the forests of the Lublin area and elsewhere. By the time the AL grew stronger (in 1943) large numbers of Jews were no longer alive, but survivors did join the AL. Its weapons were bought or captured from peasants or, in most cases, parachuted by Soviet aircraft.

Jews locked in ghettos generally had no way to procure arms. The AK would not provide them; the Communists still did not have them. Controls at the gates were so strict that it was virtually impossible to bring any arms that could be obtained into the ghetto. The best known exception to the rule was in Vilna where Jews worked in German armouries. There, despite very stringent security measures, arms were smuggled into the ghetto from the city. The same general conditions applied in *Czestochowa*, which explains why the underground there had secured arms despite the obstacles.

Let us now turn to the three basic scenes of armed resistance in the east — the ghettos, the forests, and the camps. In the ghettos, the Jewish population was starved and decimated by disease and forced labour. They were, moreover, surrounded by a gentile population whose reaction to Jewish suffering varied between indifference, mostly hostile, and open enmity toward the victims. As applied to the ghettos Hilberg's thesis seems correct, that so long as the Jews thought they would survive the Nazi rule and the war they could see an incentive to re-enact the modes of passive conduct that in the past had tended to ensure the survival of the community, and they were accordingly reluctant to engage in armed resistance.

Resistance would have met with the disapproval, not only of the Polish population, but even of the Polish underground, the AK. Stefan Rowecki, commander in chief of the AK, issued an order (No. 71) as late as 10 November 1942 which bluntly stated that "the time of our uprising has not come." He mentioned the fact that the "occupant is exterminating the Jews," and warned his people not to be drawn into a "premature" (1) action against the Germans.

An examination of ghetto armed underground organizations shows

quite clearly that, indeed, the Jews entered into the phase of practical preparations for armed action only *after* the first so-called *Aktion*, i.e., mass murder operation by the Nazis. Ghetto rebellions never took place when a hope of survival could be entertained — only when the realization finally struck that all Jews were going to be killed anyway. All other armed rebellions during World War II were predicated on the assumption that there was some chance of success. In the ghettos, no such success could be contemplated; the only result of ghetto rebellion would be the annihilation of all Jewish residents and the subsequent plundering of the empty Jewish houses by the surrounding population — that is, when the Germans did not plunder the houses themselves. This plunder, by the way, ensured the cooperation of the local population in the murder of the Jews and also prevented the escape of survivors: the local population had a strong incentive to ensure that no witnesses survived.

By the time of the first major waves of Nazi murder in 1942, only a small remnant (some 15 to 20 per cent) of the Jewish population still lived in the ghettos. This remnant then had to form an organization which might either be opposed by the *Judenrat* or, if the *Judenrat* supported a rebellion, would have to coordinate its plans with the latter in some way, and would have to secure arms in the face of supreme difficulties. In the western and central part of Poland, moreover, there were no forests where partisans could hide, so that escape was impossible. During the summer of 1942 the Warsaw underground did send Jewish groups into forests some distance from the capital, but the hostility of the Poles, the murderous actions of the AK, and German patrols quickly put an end to these attempts.

The situation was different in the eastern parts of Poland, western Byelorussia, and the eastern parts of Lithuania. Here the forests were thick, but in 1942 and early 1943 very few Soviet partisan groups were operating. In Minsk, where there was a ghetto of 84,000 Jews, the *Judenrat* led by Eliahu Mishkin was part of an underground movement which tried to smuggle Jews out to the forests. Some arms were obtained, luckily, for the few Soviet partisans in the area would not accept Jews without them. But only a small number of persons could be suitably equipped from among the many who were sent out. In the city itself no effective non-Jewish underground was organized for a long

time and no help was obtained from the Byelorussians; on the contrary, the ghetto had to hide anti-Nazis who could not hold out in the city. We do not yet know how many Jews were smuggled out to the forests from Minsk; we are working on a list, and it will take a long time yet before the job is finished. But I would guess the number to be between 6,000 and 10,000. About 5,000 survived the war in the forests — which shielded only those bent on escape and capable of bearing arms.

I should now like to address another problem: collective responsibility. The Nazis murdered a great many persons in retribution for the rebellious acts or suspected sedition of the few. In Dolhynov, near Vilna, for instance, two young men who were about to leave the ghetto for the forest were caught, but managed to escape and hide. The Germans told the Judenrat that if these men did not return and surrender, the ghetto would be annihilated immediately. The two men refused to return, knowing that they were endangering the lives of hundreds of others. On the morrow the inhabitants of the ghetto were shot. What would we have done in the place of the youngsters?

Yet the main internal problem for the Jews was not that of the collective responsibility imposed upon them by Nazi reprisals so much as the more fundamental problem of family responsibility. To belong to a resistance group one had to abandon one's family to death — not just leave it at some risk, as with the non-Jewish resister. The young Jewish man had to make the clear-cut decision to leave his parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, and sweethearts, and watch them being transported to death while he stood helpless, albeit wearing the mantle of the resistance fighter. Abba Kovner, the great Israeli poet and former head of the FPO (*Farainikte Partisaner Organizacje*), the resistance movement in the Vilna ghetto, has told how he gave the order to his people to assemble at an appointed hour: they were to leave the ghetto through the sewers in order to continue the battle in the forests. When the time came, and he stood at the entrance to the sewer, his old mother appeared and asked him for guidance. He had to answer her that he did not know. And, said Kovner, from that time on he did not know whether he deserved the prestige of a partisan fighting the Nazis or the stigma of a faithless son.

Let us then recount, in the face of these facts, what the armed resistance of Jews in the East amounted to. In the Generalgouvernement there were three armed rebellions, at Warsaw, Czestochowa,

and Tarnów; four attempted rebellions, at Kielce, Opatów, Pilica, and Tomaszów Lubelski; and seventeen places from which armed groups left for the forests, Chmielnik, Cracow, Iwanska, Józefów, Kalwaria, Markuszew, Miedzyrzec Podlaski, Opoczno, Radom, Radzyn, Rzeszów, Sokolów Podlaski, Sosnowiec, Tomaszów Lubelski, Tarnów, Włodawa, and Zelechów.

There were moreover rebellions in six concentration and death camps — Kruszyna, Krychów, Minsk Mazowiecki ('Kopernik'), Sobibor, and Treblinka, together with the famous Jewish rebellion in the gas chambers at Auschwitz in late 1944. These were the only rebellions that ever did take place in any Nazi camps, except for that of Soviet prisoners of war at Ebensee at the end of the war. There were armed international undergrounds, in Buchenwald and Auschwitz for instance, but they never acted. (In Buchenwald they took over the camp after the SS withdrew.)

We know also of 30 Jewish partisan detachments in the Generalgouvernement, and a further list of 21 detachments where Jews formed over 30 per cent of the partisans. These latter groups were all part of the AL, because, as I have explained, the AK wouldn't accept them. Individual Jews fulfilled important functions in the AK, but they had to hide their Jewishness and appear under assumed names. A further 1,000 Jews participated in the Polish Warsaw uprising of August 1944. The total number of these fighters was about 5,000, of whom over 4,000 were killed.

The situation in Lithuania, eastern Poland, and Byelorussia is much more complicated, and I cannot render a complete picture. At least sixty ghettos had armed rebellions (such as those in Tuczyn, Lachwa, and Mir), attempted rebellions (as in Vilna), or armed underground movements which sent people to the forests (as in Kovno, Zett, and so on). In some ghettos resistance took more than one form, as in Nieswiez, where an armed rebellion was followed by an escape to the forests. An estimate of Jewish partisans in this area is most difficult to make, though, again, we are currently working on a list. We know that there were some 15,000 Jewish partisans in the area towards the end of the war, and many more must have died before that. Some 2,000 Jewish partisans in the Tatra mountains of Slovakia must be added to any account dealing with eastern Europe.

Two further points. First, the problem of defining a "Jewish parti-

san" is no simple matter. Do we include in that category only Jews who fought in Jewish groups? Or may we include Jews who fought as individuals in non-Jewish groups, such as Soviet partisan units? Moreover, what about Jews who denied their Jewishness and fought as Poles, or Russians? There were, after all, a number of communists (such as Yurgis-Zimanas, the commander of the Lithuanian partisans) who emphatically defined themselves as Soviet or Polish citizens, specifically denying their Jewish backgrounds. This is also true of a few Jews in the AK, and of some of the central figures in the AL command. But these cases were generally few and far between, for Jews were required to identify as such, irrespective of their particular political ideology. Indeed, the attitude toward Jews who refused to identify as anything but Poles or Soviets was often negative in character, so that one is left to wonder whether there is any justification for excluding even communist leaders and assimilationists from an analysis of Jewish resistance. Were not their individual idiosyncrasies overwhelmed by the intruding fate of the Jewish community to which they perceived themselves to belong only by birth?

Second, we cannot ignore antisemitism even in the Soviet partisan detachments, especially those in which Ukrainian partisans had great influence. A large number of such cases have been documented, as have the fatal consequences for a number of Jewish fighters. This hatred was directed not only against Jewish units — which the Soviet partisan command disbanded — but also against individual Jews in general units. Where there were large numbers of Jews in some unit[s], a struggle against antisemitism was likely; but in smaller detachments with relatively few Jews, defiance was much more difficult.

Let us also deal, albeit summarily, with western Europe. Here the story is less dramatic, first, because the total number of Jews in France, Belgium, and Holland was less than one-sixth of the Jewish population of prewar Poland and, second, because armed resistance movements of a serious kind did not become active until well into 1943. By that time there were not many Jews left to fight. In the west, of course, the same hostility towards the Jews did not exist as in the east, but there were notable exceptions. In France, for instance, the French police effected most of the anti-Jewish measures.

There were Jewish armed groups in the OJC (*Organisation juive de combat*) and the MOI (a communist group) in France, two groups in Belgium, and two communist groups of Jews in Germany. By and

large, however, Jews participated as individuals in non-Jewish organizations because no ghettos were set up in western Europe. Should we consider them as Jewish resisters, or as Belgian and French resisters?

I think the answer depends on the way these Jews acted. Was their behaviour more likely the result of specifically Jewish concerns or not? The answer is important because it would help us to measure the depths of Jewish identification among western Jews. It would also help to reveal the extent of integration among Jews and non-Jews. We are still in the middle of these researches, but I would venture the general conclusion that these Jews were usually fighting for "Jewish" reasons.

How many Jews fought? In France there were thousands rather than hundreds and there were probably close to a thousand in Belgium. Moreover, the Jews were usually the first to act — for example, the first urban guerrillas fighting against the Nazis in Paris during the spring of 1942 were members of a Jewish unit of the pro-communist MOI. The Gutfreund group in Belgium took up arms as early as September 1941, killing a Jewish Gestapo agent, robbing a factory producing for the Germans, and later burning a card index of Jews at the Judenrat offices in Brussels. Finally, thousands of Jews fought in northern Italy in 1943–4, and thousands more fought with Tito's army in Yugoslavia.

Let me summarize: Jewish armed resistance was considerably more widespread than has been subsequently assumed. In eastern Europe, a high proportion of those who survived the first wave of murders participated in armed activities. Jewish rebellions in Warsaw and elsewhere were the first urban struggles against the Germans anywhere in Europe, and the Jewish rebellions in the camps were the only ones of their kind. Michel's conclusion that Jewish armed resistance was proportionately higher than that of other people, with few exceptions, is probably true. This is remarkable in light of the greater difficulties Jews encountered and of their lack of modern military tradition. Surely the radical nature of the Nazi threat to Jewish communities is pertinent here. But persecution does not explain resistance, especially when the former is attended by elaborate forms of control and coercion. At any rate, it seems easier to explore the ways Jews in Palestine and then Israel met their military challenges in the light of the above analysis than to believe, with Hilberg, that there was little struggle in Europe and then a sudden inexplicable upsurge of martial skills that enabled the Jews of Israel to fight for their existence.

I have dealt with armed resistance first because unarmed active

Final Solution. But the basic idea of Oneg Shabbat was that knowledge and documentation were forms of defiance of Nazi intent. In this the group succeeded. Despite the fact that only two-thirds of the Oneg Shabbat archives were found after the war, they are our main source of knowledge regarding Jewish life in Poland during the Holocaust.

Of all active unarmed resistance, most intriguing, I believe, were the activities of the "Joint" (the Joint Distribution Committee), the American-based social welfare agency. The Joint was actually just an office which, in Poland, distributed American funds to local Jewish agencies such as TOZ, a health agency, Centos, a society for the care of orphans, Cekabe, a network of free-loan banks, and Toporol, a society for agricultural vocational training. On the face of it, nothing more tame could be devised. But when war came the Joint offices in Warsaw happened to be headed by a group of men with leftist political convictions, among whom Dr Ringelblum is perhaps the best known today. They very early on realized that it would be their job to fight against Nazi-imposed starvation, humiliation, and gratuitous cruelty.

Until the end of 1941, certain sums still arrived from America through a complicated transfer system; although no dollars were actually sent to Nazi-controlled territory, German marks left behind by Jewish emigrants were sent to Warsaw from Berlin and Vienna. This stopped in December 1941, and the Joint became an illegal institution. But even before this, additional funds were being obtained by illegal means. In 1941, the Joint fed 260,000 Jews in the Generalgouvernement, including some 42,000 children. Centos and TOZ, which had themselves been declared illegal, still maintained their operations under the cover of an official welfare organization. Kitchens and children's homes became the centres of illegal political activities, including party meetings, clandestine presses, and illegal schooling. All this was consciously activated by the Joint.

Parallel to this was Joint support for so-called house committees, of which over 1,000 existed in the ghetto of Warsaw. Residences in eastern Europe were usually built around a courtyard, so that in each instance the "house" included four apartment buildings, about 200 or 300 families. These groups of people organized spontaneously, outside any Judenrat groupings, to institute mutual aid, schooling for children, cultural activities, and so on. (Unfortunately these groups included Warsaw Jews only; the refugees, crammed in their shelters, were dependent on the woefully insufficient feeding of Joint soup kitchens which

were meant to provide only supplementary nourishment.) The house committees sprang up from below, but the Joint quickly realized their potential and Ringelblum set up a roof organization called Zetos. This body tried to create a central fund through which more affluent house committees would help the poorer ones, and encouraged activity essentially opposed to the Judenrat. The steering committee of Zetos became the political base for the resistance movement. The Joint was also behind the preparations for the Warsaw ghetto rebellion, and financed the uprising to a large degree. Giterman, the Joint's chief director, also helped to finance resistance movements in Bialystok and elsewhere by sending them money explicitly for this purpose.

The Joint's was a mass activity which embraced hundreds of thousands of Jews. Still, it obviously could not stand up to the forces of mass murder. Giterman was killed on 19 January 1943 in Warsaw, and Ringelblum was murdered in March 1944 when the Germans finally found his hiding place. They shared the fate of the millions whom they had tried to feed, encourage, and lead. But we cannot be concerned here with their ultimate fate; we are concerned rather with their behaviour prior to their murder. We want to know how widespread was unarmed active opposition to Nazi rule among the Jews; and we discover that owing to the work of men like Ringelblum and Giterman the range of such resistance was considerable.

Let us now very briefly touch upon the question of the Judenraete, the Jewish Councils nominated or approved by the Germans. It must be stated at the outset that their behaviour cannot be subsumed under any generalization. Minsk, which I have mentioned, was not the sole example of Judenrat defiance. Other councils tried to stand up to the Germans and their members were murdered as a result. Still others tried to find a way round German regulations, and managed to survive for a time: the Judenraete of Kovno, Siauliai, Siedlce, Kosow, Piotrkow, Tribunaliski, France, Slovakia, and other locations belong to this category. Some Judenraete obeyed German commands, but within that framework tried to help their communities. A typical example of this was the Warsaw Judenrat under Adam Czerniakow, who in the end committed suicide rather than be responsible for handing Jews over to the Germans for killing.

A final group consisted, I would submit, of those who saw no alternative but complete submission to the Germans, including the handing over of Jews to the Nazis for deportation, even after there were

no illusions about the consequences. Such were the Judenraete of Lodz or Vilna or Lublin. But in the case of Lodz and Vilna submission resulted from the conviction that the only way for a *part* of a community to survive was by doing the Germans' bidding and performing slave labour for them. In the case of Lublin, no policy at all was followed — only terror and frightened submission. There was in fact no Judenrat whose policies, attitudes, and actions quite equalled those of another. However, we find resisters among Judenraete as groups and among Judenrat members as individuals in a fairly large variety of cases.

I have dealt with eastern Europe; but it would be wrong to disregard the 500,000 Jews of western Europe, or indeed the Jews of Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. The Joint, Zetos, and various cultural institutions could be classified as self-governing institutions interposed between the Judenrat and the Jewish masses. Similar groups and organizations existed in western and central Europe as well.

Take for example the OSE. This was a general Jewish health organization which had a rather modest branch in prewar France. During the Holocaust, OSE became the main child-care organization in the Jewish sector. In France, of course, the gentile population had a much more positive attitude toward Jews than that which prevailed in Poland. German rule was comparatively less oppressive; Nazi police and SS were less numerous, while German Army interests, which did not always parallel those of the SS, were more important. In this climate OSE and some other groups managed to hide about 7,000 Jewish children, some in Catholic and Protestant institutions but mostly among peasants, and we do not know of one single case where children were betrayed by those undertaking to hide them. OSE, the Jewish Scout movement, and some other groups managed to smuggle some 2,000 people into Switzerland and a smaller number into Spain. In Belgium, the Comité de défense des juifs, headed by a Jewish member of the Belgian underground, hid thousands of Jews as well.

Let us now turn, very briefly, to what is probably the most important, but also the most diffuse, form of resistance: that of popular, mass reaction. Here we are on uncertain ground, because this form barely comes within our own definition. Can one speak of an unorganized, spontaneous action of Jews as expressing true resistance to Nazi enactments?

Well, up to a point it seems one can. Let us cite a few examples. In Holland, which had a Judenrat of the Lodz type, the Jewish proletar-

iat of Amsterdam reacted forcefully in February 1941 to provocations by Dutch Nazis. A Dutch Nazi died in the scuffle, and Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants of the Jewish quarter chased the Nazis out. This was the immediate cause for the famous strike of Dutch workers in support of the Jews. It failed, largely because of the intervention of the Jewish leaders who were told by the Nazis that, if the strike did not stop, large numbers of Jews would be taken to concentration camps and killed. The Dutch desisted, and the same Jewish leaders became the nucleus of the Dutch Judenrat. But what should concern us here is the popular Jewish reaction, especially since the story of the anti-Nazi acts in Amsterdam had further instalments.

Nazi documents record that after the first deportations from Holland in July 1942, the Jews ceased to appear at the appointed time and place when called. From the summer of 1942 on the Nazi and the Dutch police had to ferret the Jews out. This was popular unarmed resistance. We know, of course, that this tactic did not succeed; but the measure of resistance is not its success but its incidence. Was the moral backbone of the Dutch-Jewish population broken? It appears, rather, that their desire to live as free human beings was maintained.

Turning to the east, let us inspect another example. The so-called Slovak National Uprising broke out in the hills of Slovakia in August 1944. The Jews from some Slovak towns and camps fled there in large numbers. Those who could, fought; those who could not tried to hide. As the German troops advanced into the Slovak mountains suppressing the uprising, the Jews refused to obey Nazi orders and certainly avoided concentrating in places where they could be picked up by the Germans. This was typical unarmed resistance.

Some of the popular mood of this kind of resistance is captured in diaries which have survived: the young boy who believes that his father is being taken away and will not come back but writes that he believes his own place is with his father; the young man who jumps out the window of the deportation train only when he is already separated from his mother, whom he had not dreamed of leaving to face her fate alone; Chaim A. Kaplan, in Warsaw, who is sorry he will not see the Nazis' downfall which he is sure will come. Such acts and sentiments are beyond our definition of resistance, to be sure; but they form the background to those acts of unarmed circumspect defiance which I have tried to relate.

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?

Shmuel Krakowski

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

The First Day of the Uprising — April 19, 1943

The German attack that began at 6 A.M. was successfully warded off by the rebels. This success was made possible by the dense concentration of the German forces and their failure to locate the defense positions of the Jewish combat groups. The grenades and Molotov cocktails used by the rebels were highly effective in a short-range battle against the enemy, who were marching in compact columns.

After their realignment, the German units did not come near the rebels' positions, but shot at them with submachine guns, heavy guns, and perhaps even planes. Under these circumstances, the arms held by the rebels — grenades, Molotov cocktails, and a relatively substantial number of pistols — were not effective. The rebels, who were armed with a very small quantity of submachine guns and with little ammunition, were forced to retreat from the positions they had captured after a battle that had lasted a few hours.

The passive resistance of the residents of the ghetto that day was also effective. It explains the small number of Jews captured for "evacuation" (according to Stroop,¹ a total of 580 people). . . .

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¹SS and police leader in Warsaw. — Ed.