

## II. CENTRAL AND WESTERN EUROPE

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ALLIED landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, started a series of swift, powerful strokes which demolished the Nazi "Fortress Europe" and finally brought the German army to unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945. To the remaining Jews in Western Europe, the victorious Allied forces were their only hope for liberation and survival. The fate of these Jews was tragically uniform in all the territories dominated by the Nazis—expropriation, slave labor, deportation, and extermination. Comparatively few escaped this fate, although their number varied in each country. The following is a description of conditions of the surviving Jews in Central and Western Europe, including Italy and the Scandinavian countries, from the beginning of July 1944 to the end of June 1945.\*\*

### 1. Germany

Anti-Jewish agitation never ceased in Germany, and was even intensified as the Nazis saw their Third Reich crumbling before the might of the Allied armies. Both in order to bolster the home front and for foreign consumption, the German propaganda machine exploited the so-called "Jewish menace." Jews in British and United States uniforms, *Front und Heimat* wrote on October 12, 1944, have come to take revenge on the German people. In a later issue this paper, which served the German armed forces, bemoaned the fact that the Germans were starving while the Jews were celebrating the Sabbath on German soil. The German News Agency, DNB, and the "Werewolf" radio station threatened the Jews in Germany with complete extermination, if Jewish

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\*\*The review of France, usually found in this section, appears elsewhere in this volume as a special article, "French Jewry under the Occupation," by Acting Grand Rabbi Jacob Kaplan.

officers were placed in charge of occupied territory. In January 1945, the Berlin correspondent of the *Stockholms-Tidningen* quoted Propaganda Minister Goebbels to the effect that the "world revolution against the Jewish race [will not end] until its objective has been attained." The correspondent further reported an intensified drive in Germany against half- and quarter-Jews and against Germans married to Jewish women.

How many Jews were still in Germany during the last year before the surrender is a matter of conjecture. Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler announced in February 1945 that 700,000 were still in German hands, and again in March, he claimed that over 500,000 Jews were in his clutches. In February, it was further reported that some 25,000 Jews had been transferred from Theresienstadt (Terezin), Czechoslovakia, to slave labor camps in Germany. At that time, a Swedish traveler thought there were 1,000 to 2,000 Jews in Berlin. In March, a Swiss official reported that an attempt had been made by Professor Carl Burckhard, president of the International Red Cross, to negotiate with Hitler and Himmler for the release of some Jews to whom Switzerland was willing to give temporary asylum. Earlier in January of this year, some 75 in Bergen-Belsen, who held Latin-American passports, were exchanged together with other internees for German internees in American countries. An earlier exchange took place in July 1944 via Turkey: 282 Jews for 111 Germans residing in the Middle East. It was further reported in March 1945 by the International Red Cross that the German Government had permitted Jews deported to Germany to receive food packages and clothing and to send and receive letters.

With the exception of a few (mostly half-Jews) who were hiding with private families, the Jews in Germany were herded in concentration and slave labor camps, where their numbers daily diminished through starvation, torture, and killing. Very few emerged in Cologne, Frankfurt-am-Main, Hanover, and other cities as they were occupied by the Allied forces. It was only after the big concentration camps in the interior of the country were overrun by the United Nations armies that the remnants of the Jewish survivors in Germany were saved from annihilation. It was rumored

the Nazis had planned to exterminate them all by the summer of 1946.

What was found in these camps after liberation defies description. Giving eyewitness accounts of Buchenwald, Belsen, Nordhauser, Sturhof, Limburg, Ohrduf and Dachau, one American correspondent after another stated: "If I had not seen it, I could not have believed it." Beside the mass graves, dead bodies were piled up in heaps, exposed to the elements, and the living were hardly distinguishable from the dead. In these gruesome extermination factories, hundreds of thousands of human beings of many nationalities: Jews, anti-Vichy Frenchmen, Poles, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Russians, Dutchmen, Belgians, Austrians, Italians, Czechs, Germans, and anti-Franco Spaniards met their tragic fate.

The surviving Jews in Germany, estimated at 275,000 or more, are in their vast majority deportees from other European countries. Only 8,000 German Jews are believed to have remained in the country, which had some 224,000 in May 1939, and 525,000 before 1933. In addition there are several thousand half-Jews living in the larger cities. It is reported that 6,000 Jews, half-Jews, and those married to non-Jews, reside in Berlin, some 400 in Munich, 200 in Cologne, 87 in Frankfurt, and smaller numbers in several other cities. Some 265,000 German Jews emigrated before and during the first two years of the war to all parts of the globe.

Repatriation of Jewish citizens of Belgium and the Netherlands found in Germany was expedited by the Governments of these countries. Several thousand former French residents and refugees found their way into France. The lot of the Jews from East European countries, who constitute the great majority of survivors, remained extremely precarious. It appeared that some of the non-Jewish nationals of these countries who had shared torture and persecution in the same camps with the Jews, tried to make life for the Jewish survivors more miserable than it had been, and warned them against returning to their former homes. Most of these Jews were not removed from the camps, nor did they receive, except in a few cases, the necessary food and medical care. German Jews who were released from camps were turned over for care to the German civil authorities, on the

ground that these Jews were German nationals. Conditions began to improve late in June 1945, when the J.D.C. was granted permission to extend relief in the American-, British-, and French-occupied zones. Jewish as well as non-Jewish members of the Allied armed forces were very helpful in alleviating the sufferings of the surviving victims of Nazi persecution.

The Allied Military Government (AMG), and later the military authorities in each zone of occupation, did their best to cope with a most difficult situation. As early as September 18, 1944, a spokesman for Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) broadcast to the people of Western and Southwestern Germany the decrees issued by General Dwight D. Eisenhower concerning the military government of occupied territory. One of these decrees ordered the immediate dissolution of the Nazi organization and the abrogation of German laws involving discrimination on the ground of race, religion, or political opinion. Another decree ordered the abrogation of the Nuremberg laws for "protection of German blood and honor," and of the Reich citizenship law of 1935 denying citizenship to those not of German blood. Later in December 1944, other proclamations were broadcast by General Eisenhower, one of which proclaimed the establishment of racial and religious freedom. A ruling issued by SHAEF in May 1945, declared that German refugees displaced because of their race, religion, or political opinion would be treated by AMG on the same basis as nationals of the United Nations. Those who had escaped Germany would not be forced to return.

Actual aid, however, was very slow in forthcoming. The problem of the stateless and East European Jewish survivors in Germany is yet to be solved. It is reported that the prevailing sentiment among them is not to return to their former places of residence or citizenship, but to emigrate, primarily to Palestine.

In this generally dismal picture some bright spots were uncovered here and there. Religious services and celebrations of holidays were held by Jewish refugees on German soil in the early stages of Allied occupation. Some Jews were appointed by the military authorities to official positions in German towns. Thus an East European Jew became

mayor of Breslau, a German Jew mayor of Weimar, and a half-Jew mayor of Hamburg. The first Jewish broadcast from German soil to the United States took place on October 31, 1944. Many of the Jewish art treasures and historical records that had been stolen by the Nazis were found in caches in the interior of Germany. The historical and religious relics of the famous 900 year-old Worms synagogue were saved by the curator of the Worms museum in a sub-cellar of the City Hall. In the vaults of the Regensburg Reichsbank was discovered a great quantity of personal jewelry and church and synagogue ornaments. As a symbol of their regained freedom, the 2,539 Jewish survivors in Dachau saw the Zionist flag fly among the Allied colors from the camp's watch-tower.

## 2. Austria

Following the complete occupation of Hungary in March 1944 by the Nazis and the subsequent deportation of Jews from that country, Austria became the transit station for hundreds of thousands of Jewish victims on their way to an "unknown destination." Many of them were thrown into Austrian concentration camps for hard labor. Several of the trainloads filled with Hungarian Jews were attacked by the Austrian underground. Thus in October 1944, it was reported that some 600 Jews were freed by partisans from a train on the way to Vienna. Another 880 Jewish deportees were liberated by workers in Vienna, who forced open a sealed train. The Jews were fed and taken to the suburbs for concealment. It was also reported in June 1944, that about 10,000 Jews, mostly refugees from Berlin, were hiding in Vienna in Christian homes. It was then estimated that of the 82,000 Austrian Jewish population in May 1939, only 3,500, of whom 1,500 were married to non-Jews, had remained in the country.

After Vienna was liberated by the Red Army in April 1945, 17,000 Jews were reported found in the city, as of June 1945. However, most of them were Hungarian Jews and other deportees. Original Austrian Jews were thought to number no more than 2,000. In 1938, when Austria was "incorporated in the Greater Reich," there were about

178,000 Jews in the country. Some 90,000 of them succeeded in escaping abroad. Of the remainder very few have survived in the concentration and death camps.

The new Austrian Government, a coalition headed by a Socialist, Karl Renner, and created with the approval of the Soviet Union, was said (May 18, 1945) to have taken "strict measures" against the Nazis who were responsible for the extermination of Jews, as well as against those who were commissioners of Jewish businesses. The civilian population was requested to furnish lists of articles looted from Jewish homes. Soviet military authorities, it was also reported (April 20, 1945) permitted the establishment of committees of national minorities in Austria. The Jewish Committee opened its headquarters in the building formerly occupied by the Vienna Jewish Community Council. Its first task was to start repatriating the Jewish survivors in the city.

### 3. Belgium

In the last weeks prior to liberation in September 1944, Jews who had been forced into slave labor were being deported by the Germans to concentration camps in Theresienstadt and further East. At the time of liberation, out of a pre-war Jewish population of about 90,000, only some 19,000 to 21,000 were found in Belgium, of whom 6,000 were German and Austrian refugees and 8,000 Polish. The Jewish Defense Committee of the Belgian underground succeeded, with the help of the Christian population, in saving some 10,500 Jews by providing false identification documents or hiding places. The majority of the survivors were in Brussels (12,000), some 2,000 in Antwerp, and the rest in smaller localities. Reporting on their condition, Chief Rabbi Dr. Ullman of Belgium stated on October 13, 1944, that 90% of them "do not possess anything." Immediate relief was organized by the Jewish Defense Committee in Brussels and Antwerp. Soup kitchens were established and loans were granted to enable some to resume their trades.

Particularly difficult was the position of the non-Belgian and stateless Jews, comprising about two-thirds of the survivors. While Jewish residents there before January 1943 were

invited by the Government to return to Belgium, those who had entered the country after that date were expected to leave. German and Austrian Jews, although deprived of their citizenship, were registered as "German nationals" and were deprived of working permits. Their possessions, such as they were, were confiscated as "German property." These restrictions were later lifted, and the Belgian authorities indicated that they would not compel these Jews to return to their former countries.

As early as January 10, 1942, the then Belgian Government-in-exile declared that anti-Jewish legislation introduced during the German occupation was illegal because it contradicted "the principles of the Belgian Constitution of equality without distinction of creed, race or language." Soon after the Germans were driven from the country, all anti-Jewish measures were abrogated. In February 1945, the Belgian Cabinet decided to repatriate all Belgian refugees (estimated at 280,000) wherever they may be. These include some 26,000 Jews, of whom 3,000 are in England. All deportees who lived in Belgium before May 10, 1940, are to be repatriated. The return of Jews has already begun, although in small numbers.

The process of rehabilitation has been progressing at a slow pace, although the municipal authorities have been very helpful. A large number of Jews are still without living quarters and are dependent on relief, which is being supplied in part by the Joint Distribution Committee in cooperation with the Central British Fund for Jewish and Rehabilitation Relief and the Jewish Defense Committee. Particularly difficult is the situation of some 3,200 orphaned children, half of whom had been placed in Christian homes and monasteries to escape deportation. Some of their foster-parents want to adopt them, or claim the right to obtain their voluntary conversion when they come of age. More recently, however, some of these children have already been returned under Jewish care.

The general population in Belgium, as in all other countries of former Nazi occupation, has not been immune from infection with the anti-Semitic virus, which is now showing its effect even after liberation. It should be said to the credit of the governing authorities that everything possible is being

done to abolish anti-Semitism from the country. As an example of prompt action, a Lieut.-Col. Vanden Banheden, presiding judge of a local military court, who had made some anti-Semitic remarks, was suspended for "mental instability."

The question of restoring Jewish property has occupied the attention of the Belgian Government since liberation. Deputy Prime Minister De Schryver stated in October 1944: "The Government has repeatedly made it known that expropriated property will be restored, and the first steps in this direction are already being taken." However, many complicated problems in this connection still remain to be solved.

Jewish communal life in Belgium began to revive almost immediately after the country was freed, the focal point being the Jewish Defense Committee of the underground. This Committee later changed its name to "Association for Aiding Jewish War Victims," and as such it conducts all Jewish relief work in the country. All the Zionist groups joined in a "Zionist Federation of Belgium," and the religious elements formed an "Organization for the Reconstruction of Jewish Religious Life." There is also intensive cultural work being done among Jewish youth groups.

#### 4. The Netherlands

After the Allied armies broke through in Normandy and made a clean sweep toward Paris, reports from the Netherlands indicated that the Germans were intent on emptying all Dutch concentration camps and political prisons. Thousands of Jews who had been kept, apparently for forced labor, in Vught and Westerbork camps were then deported to Germany and Theresienstadt. At the time of liberation, which occurred toward the end of the Allied campaign, there were in the Netherlands an estimated 25,000 Jews, including some 5,000 foreign refugees. These were the remnants of some 180,000 Jews who lived in the country before May 10, 1940.

Even before the country was completely freed in May 1945, the Dutch Government started to prepare for the repatriation of its citizens. In September 1944, the Dutch



Government signed an agreement with the Polish Provisional Government to facilitate mutual repatriation of internees, deportees, and refugees. A similar agreement was signed on January 3, 1945, with the Belgian Government, and a joint commission was established for that purpose. Negotiations were begun in March 1945 with the Soviet Government to repatriate some 200,000 Hollanders who were believed to have been liberated by the Russian armies in Soviet territory and in Eastern Poland.

All anti-Jewish measures enacted during the German occupation of the Netherlands were declared null and void by an Order-in-Council of September 17, 1944. Anti-Jewish feeling, however, inculcated among the Dutch by Nazi propaganda, did not vanish with the country's liberation. For the first time in the history of the Netherlands, open attacks against Jews appeared in the press, indicating that anti-Semitism had become prevalent among some sections of the population. On the other hand, the traditional good neighborly relations between Dutch Christians and Jews withstood the test of time. The people helped the Jews who returned to the country to rebuild their synagogues and reorganize their communal life, and generally gave material and moral support to those emerging from their hiding places. At the first synagogue service held in Amsterdam after liberation, in May 1945, four-fifths of the congregants consisted of non-Jews who came to express sympathy with their Jewish neighbors. The guests of honor were three policemen who had risked their lives to warn the Jews of impending deportations. Many Dutch Christians who had acquired Jewish homes and businesses voluntarily restored them to their original owners. The Government, too, made every effort to eradicate anti-Semitism.

A Provisional Committee for the Rehabilitation of Jews in the Netherlands published on November 16, 1944 an "Appeal to all Israelites in liberated Holland," which declared in part: "We shall try to set up a fund to alleviate the great distress and to obtain contact as soon as possible with the organizations which are temporarily established abroad. . . . Israelites in Holland, help to build up once more our ancient Jewish communities and their institutions!"

Relief for the destitute Jewish survivors came from governmental and communal sources as well as from Jewish relief agencies abroad. In May 1945, the Amsterdam Kehillah opened three kosher communal kitchens. The Amsterdam Municipality granted the Kehillah a weekly subsidy of 5,000 *gulden* (about \$1,900) for welfare purposes. Jewish children who had been placed in Christian homes were gradually being returned to the custody of Jewish organizations, particularly the "Committee for Assisting Jewish Minors." Other active communal organizations were the "Central Registration Bureau for Jews" and the "Coordinating Committee to Safeguard Jewish Interests." A Dutch Jewish paper, *Le-Ezrath Ha-Am* (To the Rescue of the People), has begun bi-weekly publication in Eindhoven.

### 5. Luxembourg

Of the 2,900 Jews in Luxembourg at the time of invasion, May 10, 1940, only 400 have been found in the country since its liberation in September 1944. Some 830 had been deported, while the remainder fled to other countries. In a statement issued September 13, 1944, by the Foreign Minister, Joseph Bech, the Jews of Luxembourg were invited to return along with all others who had fled during the occupation. As early as October 1944, only a month after liberation, it was reported that confiscated Jewish property had been returned to many Jews in the country. This was in keeping with a previous edict issued on August 22, 1941 by the Luxembourg Government concerning the transfer of such property in good faith or otherwise.

### 6. Norway

In 1940, prior to German occupation, Norway had some 1,800 Jews. Within two years, Major Vidkun Quisling and his Nazi overlords had disposed of many of them through killings and deportations. Others, however, succeeded in escaping the country. No Jews were believed to have remained in the country under German domination. Since Norway's liberation in May 1945, the survivors, estimated

at 800, have been gradually returning home. Of the 700-800 deportees, only 12 are believed to have survived. In May 1945, it was reported that the Norwegian Government had financed the return of 200 Norwegian Jews who had escaped to Sweden. The municipalities of Bergen, Oslo, and Trondheim made available funds from confiscated Nazi bank accounts in Norway to help repair damaged synagogues in these cities. The Government, other reports in June 1945 indicated, created a department to investigate collaborationists who had acquired Jewish property. Where there are no individual claimants, the property will revert to the Jewish community.

### 7. Denmark

The majority of the Danish Jews were saved through a miraculous escape to Sweden. Out of 6,000 in May 1940, some 5,000 have survived and are gradually returning to their home country. Professor Modens Fog, Danish Minister of Special Affairs, issued in May 1945 a call to all Danish Jewish refugees to return to Denmark and to help in the economic reconstruction of the country. At the same time, in Copenhagen, the capital, the Mayor requested all those who occupied Jewish homes or businesses that were confiscated under the Nazi regime to furnish within forty-eight hours itemized lists of such property, which is to be restored to the Jewish owners. The Danish people and their monarch, King Christian X, have behaved admirably toward the returning Jews of Denmark.

### 8. Sweden

The noble efforts of Sweden's King Gustav V, his Government, and the Swedish people to help save the trapped Jews of Hungary and Germany continued throughout the year under review. Sweden harbored 6,000 to 7,000 Jewish refugees who escaped the Nazi clutches in many parts of Europe. After liberation from concentration camps in Germany, 3,000 Jews were given shelter in Sweden in May 1945. In the same month, another 423 Danish and Norwegian Jews

arrived from Theresienstadt for temporary asylum. Repatriation of many refugees now in Sweden has already begun, especially to Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Sweden's efforts on behalf of the Jews of Europe during World War II have been exemplary.

## 9. Switzerland

Some 20,000 Jewish refugees from all parts of Europe found a temporary haven in Switzerland during the war years. In the past year, however, comparatively few succeeded in escaping from the still Nazi-occupied territories. A HIAS-ICA report of August 29, 1944 disclosed that 1,000 Jewish refugees from Italy and France had been admitted to Switzerland during the preceding few weeks, in addition to 320 from Hungary. In December 1944, the Swiss Government had agreed, upon the intercession of Jewish organizations and the International Red Cross, to admit 14,200 Jews from Hungary and to assign 810,000 Swiss francs (about \$186,000) for their care. However, due to Nazi vigilance at the borders of their occupied territories, the plan did not materialize.

In the period under review, as in preceding years, the refugees were cared for by the Swiss Jewish Community with the cooperation of American and British Jewish organizations and the Jewish Agency for Palestine. The Swiss Government was most generous with help, permitting refugees to work and allowing them many other privileges. In October 1944, the Government established a commission for vocational training of refugees. In this connection, two refugee shelters were transformed by the Government into ORT vocational training centers. In February 1945, it was reported that the Swiss Federal Government had approved a credit of 1,418,000 Swiss francs (about \$326,000) to provide quarantine camps and personal equipment for 14,000 Jews who were expected to arrive in the country on a transit basis from German concentration camps.

The problem of finding a permanent home for most of the Jewish refugees now in Switzerland remains unsolved. The Swiss authorities are anxious to have all refugees re-

patriated as speedily as possible. Already in March 1945, the refugees were advised to look for new homes. And on April 12, the Swiss Government warned that unless Palestine immigration certificates were provided for 1,620 Jews from German concentration camps then in Switzerland, the entire group would be asked to leave for a refugee camp in Algiers. UNRRA had proposed to transfer Jewish refugees to such a camp in North Africa. But the Jews refused to go, many of them having crossed or tried to cross the border into France to escape transfer. So far only 400 were reported to have left for Palestine.

Another major problem is that of reintegrating the Jewish children who had been placed in Christian homes: As in other countries, some of the Christian parents are reluctant to part with their protégés. It was planned to establish orphanages for these children under the auspices of Jewish organizations.

### 10. Italy

After the liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944, some 8,000 Jews returned to the city from their mountain hideouts. As the Allied armies pushed northward, Jewish survivors were found in the larger liberated cities. By the end of 1944, 22,000 Jews, including 5,000 foreign refugees, were reported in the liberated parts of Italy. Another 1,519 Italian Jews who had escaped to Switzerland now returned to their country.

In Northern Italy, where Mussolini had set up his Republican Fascist Government, persecution and deportation of Jews continued almost to the time of the German surrender in May 1945. They were dragged out of Catholic churches and seminaries where they had sought asylum; and they were picked up during raids in their homes and on the streets. By the end of April 1945, after the whole of Italy had been liberated, a J.D.C. representative who toured the northern areas estimated that there were 1,180 survivors out of a total pre-war Jewish population of 12,400 in Bologna, Modena, Ferrara, Parma, and Milan. It was believed that some 2,000 Jews of Milan had escaped to Switzerland. More

Jews are expected to come out of their hiding places as conditions become stabilized. The total number of Jews in Italy, as of June 1945, is estimated at 30,000 to 35,000, including 5,000 in the northern region. The pre-war Jewish population in that country was 59,000.

A series of decrees, from December 28, 1943 to October 1944, was issued by the Badoglio and, later, the Bonomi Governments, on the restoration of rights to Jews. Those of August to October 1944 provided for the abolition of the so-called racial laws, restoration of Italian Jews to judicial service, readmission to employment, restoration of family rights to Italian and foreign Jews, and restitution of their civil and political rights. The right to join the Italian armed forces has also been restored.

In Milan, the mayor issued a decree on May 11, 1945, nullifying the anti-Jewish measures introduced in that city in 1938. Even prior to the abrogation of these measures, the Committee of National Liberation in Milan, Genoa, and Turin invited Jewish teachers and former government officials and employees who had been expelled from their jobs under the Fascist regime, to resume their positions.

Legislation on the restoration of Jewish property was slow in developing. It was reported that when the Italian Government was still in the South, King Victor Emmanuel had signed a decree to that effect, which was never promulgated because of unforeseen circumstances. A regional ordinance was issued on July 13, 1944 by Colonel Charles Poletti, Commissioner of the Allied Military Government for the Rome region, creating a commission to investigate and settle disputes regarding restitution of personal and real property. However, the authority of the Commissioner in this matter was questioned and the commission never functioned. A special commission was later established by the Italian Ministry of Justice with the advice of the American Government to prepare detailed laws on all aspects of this highly complicated problem. On October 5, 1944, a decree was issued providing for the immediate implementation of an earlier decree on the restoration of property. Later reports (January 1945) indicated that the Government had begun to fulfill its promises to return confiscated Jewish property. Where there were no individual claimants, the property

was transferred to the Jewish community which used it for orphanages and assistance to widows of Nazi victims.

Anti-Semitism has not taken root among the Italian people. The anti-Jewish excesses of the remaining Fascist groups in the first weeks after liberation, were promptly dealt with by the Government. Twelve students of Rome University who participated in anti-Jewish demonstrations, were arrested and 60 others expelled for one year. Seven hundred Fascists were arrested following the discovery of an organization that was kidnapping Jewish children. It was reported in May 1945, that the Italian Government was making preparations for mass trials of Fascists in Northern Italy for their crimes against Jews. Relief was extended to the Jews in Italy by the Joint Distribution Committee almost immediately following the liberation of each area. For the current year (1945), the J.D.C. has allocated \$390,000. The Jews of Rome were able to raise \$25,000, which was matched by an equal amount from the J.D.C. to reopen the community's philanthropic and educational institutions. The Jewish communities of Florence and other cities also raised funds for their relief needs.

There is a tendency among the younger generation to turn to agricultural occupations. Dr. Ferraro Sonnino, head of the Jewish Youth Center, and the Zionist organizations obtained tracts of land outside Rome and Bari, where Jewish youths are learning the rudiments of farm work. Many of them are preparing to go to Palestine.

Community organization was re-established in most cities soon after liberation. The Jewish Community in Rome, after settling a long-standing factional dispute, finally elected its council, with Vitale Milano as president (March 26, 1945). The Jewish Community Councils in Milan and Turin resumed their functions. The J. D. C., with the cooperation of Palestinian Jewish soldiers, has been aiding the Councils in their efforts to deal with the personal, social, and economic problems of the Jews in Italy. The Zionist organizations also resumed their activities and held a conference in January 1945.

Organized self-help among the refugees reached a high degree of development in the establishment of the so-called "Refugee Parliament," in which are represented some 2,500

persons living in camps at Bari, Ferramonte and Santa Maria di Bagni. Their contributions for relief purposes average 25,000 to 35,000 *lire* (\$1,250 to \$1,450) a month.

In October 1944, the Italian Government offered citizenship to stateless refugees in Italy. Sir Clifford Heathcote-Smith, representative for Italy of the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees, urged them at a meeting in Rome to accept this offer. However, only 10 of the 150 present at that meeting accepted it. Their spokesman, Abraham Spearman, expressed the gratitude of the group to the Italian Government for its offer, but explained that future conditions were too uncertain for them to remain in Italy. They preferred to emigrate.

The voice of Italian Jewry rose in thanksgiving at a service held after liberation on July 23, 1944, in Rome's famous synagogue. The service was broadcast to the United States.

### 11. Spain and Portugal

These two countries served primarily as bases of operations for Jewish organizations engaged in rescue work. In the year under review, only a few hundred Jewish refugees remained in the Iberian peninsula at one time, most of the arrivals having been transferred to Palestine or to refugee camps in North Africa.



### III. EASTERN EUROPE

by RAPHAEL MAHLER\*

#### 1. Poland

THE liberation of Poland was accomplished by two great offensives of the Red Army, one starting in the summer of 1944 and the other in January 1945. After the enemy was ousted from the entire country, the last hopes for the survival of a considerable part of the Polish Jewish community were finally dispelled. It has become certain beyond a doubt that Polish Jewry, the largest Jewish community on the European continent before World War II, has experienced the cruelest fate of all the Jewish communities under the bloody Nazi heel. As a rule the German pattern of extermination was carried out more thoroughly in Eastern Europe than in regard to Western European Jews; and unlike their brothers in Soviet territory, few Polish Jews succeeded in escaping the German hangmen by fleeing into the fastnesses of Soviet Russia. Thus even if we add to the few Jewish survivors in Poland many more Polish Jewish refugees throughout the vast Soviet Union, the net result is utter decimation of a Jewish community once three and a half million strong.

#### The Agony in the Last Months of Nazi Occupation

At the end of May 1944, on the eve of the summer offensive of the Red Army, the total number of Jews in Poland was estimated by leaders of the Jewish underground organizations in Warsaw at about 200,000 at the most. According to the reports from the same source two years earlier, before the mass deportations in the summer of 1942, two million Jews were living in the whole country. Thus within barely two years, some 1,800,000 Polish Jews had been murdered by the Nazis in death camps or died of torture and starvation. The surviving 200,000 Jews were distributed as follows: about 25,000–30,000 Jews were living in hiding in cities all over

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the country, particularly in Warsaw; about 10,000–15,000 were secretly scattered in villages or had joined the partisans in the woods; around 160,000 were existing “legally,” about 80,000 of them (mostly Jews deported from Western European countries) in the ghetto of Lodz, and the other 80,000 in concentration camps and labor camps. The ghetto of Lodz, the only ghetto and mass center of Jews in the country, was made up almost exclusively of Jewish skilled workers in the textile and clothing industry. The ghetto was provided with its own railway station for transporting goods, its own street car lines, and special zinc coins bearing on one side a Star of David with the word “ghetto” stamped at the base, on the other the inscription “Der Aelteste der Juden in Litzmannstadt.” This “ghetto-autonomy” was a vicious mockery of the agony of the Jewish slave-workers. The menace of deportation to death camps hung constantly over their heads, while their number decreased steadily because of overwork, malnutrition, cold, tuberculosis, and savage beatings. The ranks of Jewish workers, regularly thinned by deportations and death, were filled by Jewish deportees from other European countries, so that in the summer, and according to one report, even as late as the autumn of 1944, the population of the ghetto in Lodz was still maintained at about 80,000.

Of the concentration and labor camps which were grouped mainly in Southern and Central Poland, the largest was in Plaszow, near Cracow, with 12,000 persons. In the same Cracow district there were several small camps in Mielec, Wieliczka, Stalowa Wola, Pustkow, each containing several thousand Jews. The second largest camp was in Skarzysko (district of Radom), with about 10,000 Jews working in the munitions factory.

Several thousand Polish Jews, as well as thousands of Jews deported from other European countries, were employed in the mines, factories, and public works in Polish Silesia, which had been incorporated into the Reich. They were confined in prison camps near the cities of Krolewska Huta, Myslowice, Katowice, Trzebinia and Wadowice. While in all the camps the number of Jews decreased daily in consequence of tortures, starvation, and selection of the weak for execution and deportation, the most rapid mortality was

recorded in the camps in Silesia: there the excruciating hard labor (fifteen hours a day) at starvation food rations was so unbearable that inmates of entire barracks committed mass suicide.

No more enviable than the lot of the "legal" Jews in the camps were conditions of life of "illegal" Jews hiding in the cities. Many of them lived for years in cellars or dugouts beneath cellars, all of them thrown upon the mercy of their neighbors and haunted by constant fear of detection by spies or Gestapo patrols. In Warsaw, where about twenty thousand Jews lived in hiding, raids on streets and cordons around entire city sections under the slogan: "Look for Jews, bandits and arms!" were the order of the day. Scores of Jews who were caught in each of these manhunts were sadistically tortured and then shot.

Yet even this unspeakable suffering, misery, and mortal danger did not break the will to live of the remaining martyrs of Polish Jewry. Their spirit of mutual help did not flag, and they heroically fought the Nazi murderers to their last breath. The leading organizations of the Jewish underground movement in Poland were the Jewish National Committee, the Relief Council for Jews, and the Jewish Fighting Organization, all centered in Warsaw. In order to cooperate with the Jewish Labor Party of the Bund, a Jewish Coordinating Committee was set up.

The main activity of the Jewish National Committee in cooperation with the Bund consisted of distributing relief through underground channels to Jews hidden in Warsaw and in other cities as well as to Jews languishing in the camps all over the country. It also provided illegal Jews with living quarters and "Aryan" passports; and for this purpose it maintained local branches in various cities, including Lwow in Eastern Galicia. Unfortunately the costs of maintenance were staggeringly high (about 1,000 *zlotys* a month per person) and the help of American and British organizations through underground channels arrived too irregularly, so that the Jewish National Committee and the Relief Council for Jews were able to cover only about one-fourth of the actual needs.

The underground Jewish National Committee also compiled secret Jewish Archives, which had been founded in

the Warsaw ghetto by Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, a noted young historian and one of the leaders of the left Poale-Zion movement, under the innocent name of the society "Oneg Shabbath." After the battle of the Warsaw ghetto, in which he played one of the leading roles, Dr. Ringelblum continued to carry on the work of compiling the Archives, where all materials and documents relating to the martyrdom of Polish Jewry were gathered. From this source came most of the underground reports which reached Jews all over the world concerning the appalling tragedy of Polish Jewry, as well as accurate detailed accounts of the heroic uprisings in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, and in the death camps. Dr. Ringelblum was also responsible for compiling a list of over 300 Jewish intellectuals murdered in Poland, who had been outstanding in the fields of literature, science, fine arts, education, social work, and religious life.

The most stirring report was the one on cultural activities in the ghettos, sent out by underground channels from Warsaw and dated March 1, 1944, which reached this country in August of the same year. This moving document of human dignity amid superhuman agony, signed by Dr. Ringelblum and another leader of the left Poale Zion Party, Dr. Abraham Berman, opens with this eloquent sentence: "We write to you at a moment when 95% of the Polish Jews have already perished through horrible tortures in the gas-chambers of the extermination dens in Treblinka, Sobibor, Chelmno, and Oswiecim or were murdered during the innumerable "liquidation actions" in the ghettos and camps." Declaring that the slogan of the socially active Jewish elements was "live with dignity and die with dignity!" the report depicts the widely ramified cultural work which was developed in the ghettos and camps in an inferno of terror and suffering. These activities included underground elementary schools, newspapers in Polish and Yiddish, lecture groups, and literary and artistic ventures. The report ends on a deeply tragic yet inspiring note: "We doubt whether it will be given to us to live to see you. Our warmest greetings to all workers in the field of Jewish culture, writers, journalists, musicians, artists, and all the builders of modern Jewish culture and fighters for national liberation and the liberation of mankind."

To this rare document of Jewish heroism and idealism, which has since been read at various meetings and conferences all over the United States, the following post-script was added: "This letter was written on March 1. A week afterwards, on March 7, the dugout in the Aryan section where Dr. E. Ringelblum was hiding, was discovered by the Gestapo. Dr. Ringelblum with his wife, his son, and thirty-five other persons, mostly intellectuals, were unspeakably tortured by the Germans and then shot in the ruins of the ghetto. The excellent historian, inspired social leader, and enthusiastic lover of modern Jewish culture died the death of a martyr."

In the abortive Warsaw uprising under the command of General Bor-Komorowski in August and September 1944, thousands of illegal Warsaw Jews participated together with the entire population of the city. During the first week of the battle, on August 7, 1944, the Jewish Fighting Organization issued an ardent appeal to the Jews of Warsaw and other cities to join the uprising against the enemy. Separate Jewish units were formed, one of them named "Berek Joselewicz" after the famous Jewish hero of the Kosciuszko insurrection in 1794. This unit played an important role in the siege and conquest of the main post-office building in Napoleon Square. The number of Jews killed in the uprising was estimated at 500 at least, and several Jews were decorated for bravery. Prior to his capitulation, General Bor paid tribute to the gallantry of the Jewish fighters in a report to the Polish Government-in-exile in London. The contribution of the Jews to the fight for Poland's freedom was also lauded in an address by delegates of the Polish Government-in-Exile in Occupied Poland to the underground Jewish Coordinating Committee. One of the last appeals of the Polish underground radio warned Polish traitors against handing over Jews to the Gestapo. This appeal was unfortunately well-founded, since members of the anti-Semitic Polish NARA organization had cooperated with the Gestapo in exterminating Jews during the entire period of Nazi occupation.

With the defeat of the third battle of Warsaw and the subsequent total destruction of the city itself, the fate of the illegal remnants of Warsaw Jewry was sealed. Some of

the Jewish survivors of the tragic struggle succeeded in scattering to neighboring towns and villages or in the woods; others crossed the Vistula under fire to find refuge in the suburb of Praga, already liberated by the Red Army. According to recent reports, some of the Jews who were taken prisoner by the Germans were dragged, together with other Polish prisoners, to concentration camps in Germany.

In August 1944, when the battle of Warsaw was at its peak, the Germans started mass deportations from the Lodz ghetto to the death camps in Oswiecim and Birkenau (Brzezinka). In the autumn, when the ghetto was again filled with deportees from other countries, the final deportations involving some 70,000 Jews were carried out. Only a small number was saved from death by evacuation from Oswiecim to German Silesia and the interior of Germany. Immediately before the arrival of the Red Army, the last several thousand Jews of Lodz were massacred on the spot. In the middle of January 1945, when the Red Army had already fought to the outskirts of the city, the last group of Jews was machine-gunned in the Jewish cemetery. When the Red Army entered Lodz, no more than 850 Jews came out of their hiding-places, almost exclusively men.

During the summer of 1944, when the Red Army conquered the eastern part of Poland up to the Vistula River, the Germans also accelerated their liquidation of the Jewish labor camps all over the country. In one of these camps, in Czenstochowa, Jews revolted against their hangmen in an armed battle and some of them held out until rescued by the Red Army. As the Red Army drew near, the notorious death camp in Oswiecim was also evacuated. Many thousands of inmates, among them a considerable number of Polish Jews, were evacuated to the interior of Germany, to die of hunger and exposure on the long marches, or to suffer new tortures in Buchenwald, Dachau, and other concentration camps.

### **Death Factories**

After the liberation of Poland, the curtain which for nearly six years had been spread over both the indescribable tragedy of Polish Jewry and the horrible crimes of the Nazi murderers was further lifted. Eyewitness accounts of those

few people who had succeeded in escaping from the death camps, and official investigations made on the spot revealed a hell on earth. The inside story of Treblinka was told by the Jewish artisan, Yankel Wiernik, who participated in the revolt of the surviving Jewish workers of that camp in August 1943. An account of the Dantean scenes in Belzec was given by the Pole, Jan Karski, in his book, "The Secret State." At the end of November 1944, the War Refugee Board made public in the United States accounts by three persons of the mass atrocities in the death camps of Oswiecim and nearby Birkenau.

Although all the death factories in Poland, except those in Oswiecim, had been liquidated by the Germans in the fall of 1943 because of the victorious offensive of the Red Army, the vestiges of the installations in some camps, and the testimony of the few survivors and Nazi guards in others, were sufficient for the Soviet and Polish investigating commissions to determine both the methods of extermination and the approximate number of victims. It became evident that Poland had been used by the Germans as the central slaughterhouse not only of more than three million Polish Jews, but also of hundreds of thousands of Jews of all occupied European countries as well as many Soviet war prisoners and non-Jewish civilians of various countries. While Jews of various European countries were slain in all the death camps, it appears that Polish Jews were for the most part deported to camps in their respective districts. Thus Jews of Lwow and Eastern Galicia were directed to Belzec and Sobibor, Jews of the region of Bialystok to Sobibor and Treblinka, which were also the execution centers of most of the Warsaw Jews; Maidanek was the death station of Jews of central Poland, Oswiecim for those of southwest Poland, while Chelmno was the asphyxiation center of most Jews of the districts of Lodz and Kalisz. After the liquidation of these camps at the end of 1943, the camp of Oswiecim, which had been built as early as 1940, devoured most of the remaining Polish Jews in its gas chambers and crematories.

All the death camps were able, within one or two years, to gas and burn two thousand persons a day. Monstrous methods of mass killing were standardized in accordance with a single pattern, even to the extent of using packs of

hungry dogs to drive dazed victims into the gas chambers. In all the death camps warehouses were built, in which the clothing and other belongings of the dead were sorted before being shipped to Germany. In Maidanek near Lublin where, according to estimates of the Russo-Polish investigation commission, some one and a half million persons were murdered, a pile of about 90,000 pairs of shoes was still left by the Germans. Raymond A. Davies, one of the American correspondents who visited the Maidanek camp, brought some of the tragic relics to this country in November 1944, and they were reproduced in many newspapers and magazines. According to results of an inquiry published by the Polish authorities in Warsaw in June 1945, the total number of European Jews gassed in Chelmno (near Kolo, district of Lodz) was about 1,350,000. While the death camp of Sobibor, falsely represented to the deportees as a "button factory," seems to have been built on a smaller scale, the camp of Treblinka, almost all traces of which were erased by the Germans (it was entirely covered by harmless-looking vegetable garden beds as was also partly the case in Maidanek), probably witnessed twice as many executions as the camps in Maidanek or Chelmno. By far the greatest number of victims died in the largest extermination camps at Oswiecim and Birkenau. However, of the hundreds of thousands of European Jews who were burned to ashes in the four crematories there, the number of Polish Jews seems to have been proportionately the smallest, since their annihilation began earliest and, but for small remnants, was complete by the end of 1943.

### **In Liberated Poland**

In the middle of July 1944, when the Red Army penetrated into Poland west of the Curzon line, the secret radio station of the united organization of the Jewish partisan detachments somewhere in the forests of the Lublin region, issued a call to the Jews in the concentration and labor camps and those hiding in the cities to escape to the woods and join the partisans until liberation by the Soviet armies. In the same secret broadcast, the peasants were called upon to assist stray Jews with food, shelter, and guidance. Apart



from the Jewish partisans operating behind the retreating Germans, many Polish Jews fought in the front line for the liberation of Poland, in the Polish Army units which had been formed in the Soviet Union under the command of General Rola Zymierski.

At the end of the summer of 1944, when about a half of Poland up to the Vistula river in the west was freed of the Germans, the number of Jewish survivors in that area was estimated at about 20,000. After the liberation of the rest of Poland in mid-winter 1945, the estimate of Jews rescued in the entire country west of the Curzon line did not go beyond 30,000. The tragedy was rendered even more horrible when it was learned that the number of children among the survivors was infinitesimal. In Lublin and vicinity no more than seven Jewish children were found, including six at the death camp in Maidanek. Within the next few months the picture became slightly less grim. Many Jews came out of hiding in the cities and villages; hundreds were rescued in the captured concentration camps on the border of Poland, in Silesia, and East Prussia, among them some groups consisting exclusively of women. Even the number of children grew by the hundreds, after many who had been sheltered in churches, monasteries, and in the homes of Polish peasants, were turned over to the Jewish communities.

At the end of May 1945, several estimates placed the number of Jews in Poland at about 50,000. Two months later, the number was authoritatively given (by Dr. Emil Sommerstein) as 80,000. The latest reports indicate that this figure is not final but will be augmented by many more thousands. Many Jews who hid in cities and villages have not yet had an opportunity to register with the Jewish organizations. Among the scores of thousands of Jews liberated from concentration camps in Germany and Austria, a large proportion consists of Polish Jews who are already being repatriated from that part of Germany occupied by the Soviet army. The largest potential reserve for the future Jewish community in Poland is still in the Soviet Union. The number of Jewish refugees from Poland in Soviet territories is assumed to be 200,000-250,000.

At present, most of the surviving Jews of Poland are concentrated in several cities: Warsaw, Lublin, Lodz,

Bialystok, Czenstochowa, Piotrkow, Radom, Przemysl, Krasnik, Minsk, Mazowiecki, and Chelm. While some of these cities, such as Warsaw, Lublin, Cracow, and Bialystok had, by the beginning of 1945, Jewish communities of about 3,000 each, there are other cities and towns, like Kielce, where, after the retreat of the Germans, not a single Jew survived. The largest Jewish community, in Lodz, grew to 11,000 by this summer.

The Polish authorities in the liberated country have from the outset manifested sincerity and a firm resolution to help the destitute Jews both in economic and cultural rehabilitation, and in restoring in practice their full rights. The Polish Committee of National Liberation, formed on July 21, 1944 by a decree of the Polish National Council as the administrative authority of the liberated territory of Poland and headed by the present Prime Minister Edward Osobka-Morawski, included among its members the Zionist leader and former deputy of the Polish Parliament, Dr. Emil Sommerstein, responsible for war supplies, and Dr. Boleslaw Drobner, once leader of the Polish Independent Socialist Party, in charge of press affairs. In its manifesto issued on July 22, 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation pledged "democratic freedom and equality to all citizens, regardless of race, creed and national origin." With regard to the Jews, the manifesto declared: "The Jews whom the invaders have spared from brutal extermination, will be assured normal conditions of existence as well as full legal and actual equality."

The authorities at once established a Jewish Department headed by Dr. Shloima Herszenhorn, who was also chairman of the Jewish Committee formed in Lublin. But the leading spirit of the Jewish Committee was Dr. Emil Sommerstein, who was also instrumental in establishing contact between the surviving Polish Jews and Jews abroad, particularly those in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Palestine. Dr. Sommerstein sent urgent telegrams in the fall of 1944, in which he asked immediate aid for the remnants of Polish Jewry, whom he described as "living human corpses clad in rags." In November 1944, the first meeting of representatives of Jewish communities in liberated Poland took place in Lublin, at which a new committee of Polish

Jews was elected, with Dr. Sommerstein as its head. Shortly afterward, at the beginning of December, upon a motion of Dr. Sommerstein, a resolution granting 16,000,000 *zlotys* (over \$1,250,000) to finance relief activities among Jewish survivors in Poland was adopted by the Polish Committee of National Liberation. The money was to be used to establish public kitchens, hospitals, orphanages, nurseries, and Jewish schools as well as to meet the religious needs of Polish Jewry. The Lublin Government realized, however, that its help was far short of the immense needs of the destitute Jewish population, and its head, Osubka-Morawski, appealed to American Jewish relief organizations for relief, especially clothing. The Committee of Polish Jews also stressed in its appeals for help the deplorable housing conditions of the Jews, whose former homes had been completely demolished.

On the eve of New Year 1945, the Polish Committee of National Liberation was reorganized as the Provisional Government of Poland. The newly established Government included two Jews, Hilary Minc as Minister of Industry and chairman of the economic council of the Council of Ministers, and the former Warsaw journalist, Jacob Berman, as Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs. Both men were awarded the Grunwald Cross, which commemorates the historic victory of the Poles over the Germans in 1410. Dr. Sommerstein who, as director of the office for German indemnities, was given the rank of Vice-Minister, received the order of Polonia Restituta. Soon afterward, at the end of January, the Jewish Committee in Lublin was reorganized under the name of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, a coalition body of all Jewish political parties — the Zionists, Bundists, Democrats, and Workers Party, in equal numbers. The Zionists included the Mizrachi, Zionist State Party (headed by Dr. Feldszuh), General Zionists (headed by Dr. Sommerstein), Hashomer Hatzair, Right Poale Zion, and Left Poale Zion.

After the liberation of Warsaw, the surviving leaders of the Zionist underground movement, Dr. Adolf Berman, leader of the Left Poale Zion, and Isaac Cukierman and Cywia Lubetkin of the Hehalutz movement were enthusiastically welcomed by the Central Committee of Polish Jews in Lublin. On February 2, the Central Jewish Committee,

headed by Dr. Sommerstein, issued a special declaration to the surviving Jewish population, which declared in part: "We have great duties in regard to the Polish State as citizens. The first democratic government of Poland is now building a new, just and people's Poland, assuring full actual and formal equality for us." All of the Jewish parties individually appealed at their conferences to the Jewish population to unite around the Polish Provisional Government.

The veterans of the Jewish underground fight organized an Association of Jewish Partisans. The Minister of National Defense, General Michal Rola-Zymierski, sent greetings to the newly formed Association, in which he said in part: "Jewish partisans groups, as well as the heroic defenders of the Warsaw and Bialystok ghettos, have contributed greatly to the idea of humanity, battling for freedom. The Jewish nation can be proud of these partisans. There will be no place in the revived democratic Poland for anti-Semitism. . . The manifesto of the Committee of National Liberation guaranteed equal rights for all citizens of the Polish Republic. The Polish Army guards these rights with its arms."

In March 1945, the Central Committee of Polish Jews moved from Lublin to Warsaw, after the Polish Provisional Government had established itself there. It organized local branches in various cities as well as district conferences of Jews such as the one held in Bialystok at the end of December 1944, which was greeted by the governor of the district, and that of the Warsaw region, held in the middle of June 1945. The immediate concern of the Central Committee has been the physical rehabilitation of the surviving Jews. Thus the Central Committee, with the financial assistance of the Government, opened four homes for Jewish children in Lublin, Bialystok, Przemysl, and Otwock (near Warsaw), the last named orphanage harboring about 80 children. It has organized relief, medical aid, and public dining rooms in many communities. Although concerned with tasks of immediate relief, the Committee has not lost sight of the fundamental problem of economic reconstruction, which became particularly urgent because of the mass unemployment of the surviving Jewish population. This reconstruction has been mainly directed toward the field of handicrafts and industry both on practical grounds and as a matter of

principle. On the one hand, the opportunities for Jews to engage in commerce have been greatly reduced, because of the "aryanization" of enterprises during the Nazi occupation and because of the trend toward cooperative organization of trade in the liberated nation. On the other hand, the backbone of the Jewish survivors, the physically healthiest elements, consists of skilled workers and partisans who are most fit for industrial work. Consequently, the Central Jewish Committee has opened several industrial cooperatives and workshops with the financial assistance of the Government, and Dr. Sommerstein has urgently appealed to the Joint Distribution Committee for help in tools and machinery. There is every indication that those Polish Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union who return to their homeland will also turn mainly to industrial occupations: during their stay in the Soviet Union, most of them have become skilled workers in various branches of industry, including metallurgy and engineering. At one of the mass meetings at the Peretz-house in Lublin, many speakers also stressed the value of industrial training for those Polish Jews who plan to emigrate.

In the field of cultural reconstruction, too, the rudimentary community of Jews in Poland has displayed amazing initiative and energy. A number of Jewish communal buildings have been returned, through the efforts of the Central Jewish Committee, to local Jewish communities, as in Lublin where the renovated Peretz-house has become the center of communal life. Jewish writers, journalists and artists have organized an Association with headquarters in Lodz, which has become the cultural center of Jews in Poland. In April, this Association began to issue a weekly in Yiddish, *Dos Naie Lebn*, with Dr. Sommerstein, Dr. Adolf Berman, Lt. Mirski, Saja, G. Jaszunski, and Jonas Turkow as editors. In the newly opened Jewish library in Lodz, lectures on literature and art have been held, among them a commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the death of J. L. Peretz. The historical commission of the Writers Association, headed by Dr. Philip Friedman, with local branches in Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, Bialystok, and a score of other cities, has already gathered large collections of Jewish community-archives, official German documents, eye-

witness accounts, manuscripts of Jewish writers, pictures, and even folk-songs and proverbs created in the ghettos, labor camps and among partisan groups. All this material has been deposited in the recently established Jewish Archives and Museum in Lodz. The radio station in Lublin has been broadcasting regular programs in Yiddish, by which many survivors have made contact with their relatives in the United States and Palestine. The revival of Jewish religious life has also begun. There have been reports about the opening of a synagogue in Lublin; and the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army ordered at the beginning of 1945 the creation of a Jewish chaplains-corps, with Rabbi David Kahane as head chaplain.

Close cooperation between the Jewish population and the Government has not been limited to the efforts of the Central Jewish Committee. Jews have also been represented on the National Council, which acts as a provisional Parliament, and they have been included in the commissions to investigate the Nazi crimes in Maidanek and Oswiecim. Among Jews occupying high government posts, Dr. Boleslaw Drobner has assumed the office of mayor of the city of Wroclaw (Breslau), the capital of Silesia. The spirit of sincere friendship of official circles in Poland toward the Jews was also recently expressed at mass meetings commemorating the second anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, which were held throughout Poland. At the meeting in Warsaw, the Minister of Education, Dr. Stanislaw Skrzyszewski declared: "I state that democratic Poland will mercilessly combat every manifestation of anti-Semitism." Dr. Adolf Berman, who represents the left Poale-Zion Party in the National Council, stated at that meeting on behalf of the Central Jewish Committee: "The Jewish people and the Polish people are linked together by bloodshed in the common struggle against the common enemy." On the same occasion of the second anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto battle, the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, Marshal Rola-Zymierski, awarded posthumous orders to 50 heroes, men and women who had fought in uprisings in the ghettos (Warsaw, Bialystok, Czenstochowa,

Bendzin, etc.), in the camps (Treblinka, Sobibor, Trawniki, etc.), and with the partisans. The highest order, the Grunwald Cross, was bestowed upon seven persons, with Mordecai Anilewicz, 24 year-old member of the Hashomer Hatzair, commander of the Warsaw ghetto battle, heading the list.

Nevertheless, despite energetic efforts by the Polish Provisional Government, anti-Semitic activities have not yet been eradicated. Moreover, Poland has been the only country in which Jews have been murdered after liberation from the Germans. This sorry state of affairs is a result of the fact that the internal political struggle in Poland has not yet come to an end. The same elements of the right wing of the anti-Semitic Endek party which, under the name of N. Sz, helped the Germans to exterminate the Jews, have continued their anti-Jewish attacks in liberated Poland. On April 16, 1945, the Polish Embassy in Moscow accused the Polish Home Guard of having killed within the past four weeks about 150 Jews. The murders occurred in Lublin, Siedlice, Sokolow, Jaroslaw and several towns in the Warsaw and Lublin districts. This charge was substantiated by a public protest of Dr. Sommerstein, and similar accusations of collaboration with the Nazis were corroborated by the Association of Jewish Partisans in Poland in a Yiddish broadcast from Lublin. At the end of June 1945, the Lublin radio reported a new wave of anti-Jewish terror unleashed by the underground fascist movement throughout Poland. Near Lenczna in the district of Lublin, two Jewish soldiers, Rozenblum of Lodz and Pachler of Rowno, were murdered by terrorists after their ten Polish colleagues had been released. In an armed attack on Jewish patients in a Lublin hospital, two Jews were shot by members of the same terrorist movement. In Przedborz near Lodz, nine Jews were kidnapped by a terrorist group and shot in the nearby forest. The Polish Hitlerites did not even shrink from killing a mother with her two children in Wierzbnik near Kielce, who only recently had returned from the death camp in Oswiecim. In Rzeszow, a mob incited by terrorists through insinuations of the ritual murder of a Polish girl, fiercely attacked Jews until it was calmed by Polish democratic elements.

The fascist character of these pogroms in post-war Poland is beyond doubt. These are the same terrorist groups which in previous months have been reported waylaying and killing Soviet military men and officials. The Polish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Rola-Zymierski, officials of the Polish Provisional Government, and Soviet authorities have all repeatedly stated that these terrorist groups are units of the Polish Home Army, which took orders from, or was affiliated with, the Polish Government-in-exile in London. On previous occasions, when Polish underground units were similarly accused of handing over Jews to the Nazis and attacking Soviet soldiers, the Polish Government-in-Exile, headed by Tomasz Arciszewski, replied that those units were not affiliated with it but were acting independently of the Polish Home Army. Later in 1945, the Arciszewski Government in London referred also to its order of February 7 dissolving the Polish Home Army in connection with the ousting of the German invaders from Poland by the Red Army. More pertinent, however, than the question of the formal affiliation of the terrorist underground movement in liberated Poland with the Government-in-exile — a question on which the trial in June 1945 of 16 arrested Poles in Moscow threw much light — is the fact that the exiled Government included in its cabinet two members whose program with regard to the Jewish problem is akin to that of the pogrom bands in Poland. In the cabinet of Tomasz Arciszewski, which was formed at the end of November 1944 after the resignation of Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, two ministerial posts were occupied by Zygmunt Berezowski (Minister of the Interior) and Wladyslaw Folkierski, both members of the extreme anti-Semitic and outspoken fascist wing of the Endek party, the O. N. R. A. It is this wing of the Endek party which in pre-war Poland was most instrumental in organizing bloody attacks on Jewish students at universities and cruel pogroms in Przytyk, Minsk, Mazowiecki, Brzesc, and Czenstochowa, in addition to spreading poisonous anti-Jewish propaganda, which was supported by the Endek party as a whole.

Hopes are high that the present consolidation of the



Warsaw Government, which has been recognized by the United Nations as the only legal authority in the liberated country, will also strengthen its hands in completely liquidating fascist and anti-Semitic elements. Most auspicious for the future of the Jews in Poland are the socio-economic foundations of the new Polish democracy. The thoroughgoing agrarian reform which has been carried out in Poland since the liberation of Lublin has paved the way, both directly and indirectly, for the eradication of anti-Semitism. The main roots of political reaction will, it is hoped, be undermined by the creation of a prosperous class of farmers, which in turn will make possible an industrialization of the entire country and a sharp rise in the economic and cultural standard of its population.

Whatever the future may hold with regard to Jewish integration in Poland, there is at the present time a strong desire among a great part of the destitute Jewish survivors to emigrate. This state of mind is not only a psychological reaction to the latest outbreaks of anti-Semitic activity by underground fascist groups, nor is it exclusively a product of the utter misery of the surviving Jews in the devastated country. Most of them, having lost every other member in their family, feel desolate and are anxious to flee places which are associated in their minds with the most horrible memories. This is even more true of those Jews who live in cities and villages in such small groups that they feel abandoned and isolated from any social life.

Finally in Poland, as in most countries where Jews lived through the horrors of Nazi occupation, the desire for a national home in Palestine has been greatly strengthened among all elements of surviving Jewry. Speaking on behalf of the Central Jewish Committee, Dr. Sommerstein has repeatedly given expression to the decided stand of Polish Jewry in favor of a Jewish national home in Palestine, most recently in his statement to the World Conference of Polish Jews held in New York at the end of May 1945. This address, signed also by six other members of the presidium of the Committee, said in part: "We Jews in Poland are inseparably

bound together with the Jewish nation . . . The Jewish nation demands for itself a status in the post-war world which would be equal to the status of other peoples. In solidarity with other Jewish organizations your conference should also go on record for the realization of this demand." While this point of view does not deny the possibility or necessity of rebuilding Jewish life in Poland, some Jewish groups, such as the small community of 200 Jewish survivors in Przemysl, according to a letter to the Jewish Agency in Palestine made public at the end of June 1945, feel so desperate that they see no other solution for themselves but immediate emigration to Palestine. As for the attitude of the Polish Government on this question, Premier Osobka-Morawski was reported to have declared in January 1945 that Jewish emigration would not be hindered.

The future numerical strength of the Jews in Poland will depend mainly upon the solution of the problem of nearly one-quarter of a million Polish Jews residing as refugees in the Soviet Union. First reports on the prospects of their repatriation were confusing and even contradictory. Finally, on June 20, 1945, there came a reassuring report from Moscow, given by Berl Mark in the name of the organizing committee of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union, and according to which Premier Osobka-Morawski solemnly declared in a message to the conference of that Committee that in the repatriation of refugees from the Soviet Union there would be no distinction made between Poles and non-Poles. Repatriated Jews, the same as non-Jews, will be settled in those localities where they will have the best opportunities for rehabilitation." Similarly, the energetic efforts toward rehabilitating the Jews in Poland, which have been conducted by the organizing Committee of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union under the direct sponsorship of the Union of Polish Patriots in the U. S. S. R. as well as with the assistance of Soviet officials and Soviet Jewry, seem to indicate that the outlook for repatriation to Poland of those Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union who are willing to return is favorable. Such voluntary repatriation is by no means incompatible with the facilitation of emigration to Palestine or other countries for those who wish neither to return to Poland nor to settle in their present country of refuge.

## 2. U. S. S. R.

### Nazi Terror and Annihilation of Jews

The liberation of the last Nazi-occupied Soviet territories: western White Russia, western Ukraine, and the Baltic countries was almost complete by the end of the summer of 1944. It was soon revealed that the Germans there had been as thoroughgoing in annihilating the Jews as they had been with regard to the Jews of the Ukraine proper and eastern White Russia. Throughout the newly liberated territories, scarcely "one of the town" survived, as if to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah. The Jews of the largest cities did not fare much better. In Pinsk, the Red Army found in August 1944 only 15 surviving Jews, including six who were hidden by their White Russian neighbors in the cellar. In Vilna, no more than 40 survivors came out of their foxholes. In Tallinn, capital of Esthonia, only 20 Jews were reported to have escaped extermination. In the Bessarabian city of Kishineff, only 12 Jews lived to welcome the Red Army. Such cities as Minsk or Kaunas (Kovno), in each of which some 1,000 Jews succeeded in escaping death, or even Grodno, where the number of survivors was a scant 200, were exceptions.

In eastern Galicia (now part of the western Ukraine), out of about 400,000 Jews who had lived there in 1941 only some 9,000 are reported to have survived. They are mostly concentrated in the cities of Lwow (nearly 2,000), Drohobycz, Stanislawow, Stryj and Czortkow. According to a Moscow report of February 1945, a first census taken in the liberated territories revealed that the Germans had exterminated 99% of all the Jews who had not escaped to the interior of the Soviet Union. The 1%, or according to other reports 1½%, of survivors consisted almost exclusively of people who were hidden by non-Jewish neighbors and of partisans who lived in the woods, since those in the slave labor camps had been massacred virtually to the last man. The only consolation in this mass tragedy is the fact that a large part of the Jewish population of the Nazi occupied territories had been evacuated by the Soviet authorities in the first months of the Nazi invasion. However, the proportion of those evacuated

differed greatly in various provinces. While in Eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and some regions of eastern White Russia and Bessarabia at least a half of the Jewish population succeeded in leaving, in the western provinces the proportion was much lower. Thus in Kaunas (Kovno), out of 40,000 Jews no more than 9,000 are reported to have escaped with the retreating Red Army. In Lwow, out of over 130,000 Jews only some 10 percent are estimated to have left with the Red Army before the seizure of the city by the Nazis.

The pattern the Nazis followed to annihilate the Jews on Soviet territories differed from that applied in Poland mainly in that it was speedier and more efficient. In Soviet territories, mass massacres of Jews started about a year earlier than in Poland; in fact, they became common in the summer months of 1941 and in the subsequent autumn. Killings were reported from Riga, Vilna, Kaunas, Pinsk, Lwow, Minsk, Dvinsk, Kishineff, and many other cities and towns all over occupied Soviet territory. In Riga, as early as December 1941, no more than 4,500 able-bodied men, 300 women, and 15 children were left of the 40,000 Jews who had lived in the city in July of that same year. Acting according to a preconceived plan, the German invaders crowded almost the entire Jewish rural and urban population into narrow city ghettos. The process of starving out the Jewish population, extorting a maximum of forced labor from those still able to work, and then killing off the last survivors, was everywhere the same.

### **Jewish Armed Resistance in the Ghettos and Partisan Warfare**

The macabre story of the torture and destruction of Jews in Nazi-occupied Soviet territories is set in relief by episodes of heroism and self-sacrifice, as inspiring as the heroic battles of Polish Jewry in the ghettos of Warsaw and Bialystok. From all regions of the liberated Soviet Union reports have now come about armed resistance of Jews in the ghettos under almost unbelievable conditions and about stirring deeds of Jewish partisans.

In the province of Volhynia, Jews in Luck in December 1942 resisted the liquidation of the ghetto in a pitched battle

lasting for four days in which several hundred Germans were killed. A similar battle was also waged by the Jews of Vladimir Volynski and a resistance group was organized by the Jews in Kovel.

In Lwow, armed resistance groups were active both in the ghetto and in the concentration camp on Janowska Street, working hand in hand with the Volhynia partisans. Procuring some weapons from Jewish workers in German war factories and buying some from Italian soldiers, they dispatched a number of Jewish boys and girls to the forests of Brody, where they joined the partisans. They also issued an underground newspaper. On May 8, 1943, before the ghetto was razed, their plot was discovered. Among some 17 persons who fell in a skirmish with the SS men, was the poet, Jacob Schudrich. The next day a German battalion closed in on the Brody forest, and after a three day battle only a handful of the partisans survived to join partisan units in the Lublin forest.

In many towns of Transnistria in the region of Kamenetz Podolsk, such as Husiatin, Staraya Ushitsa, and Dunayevtsy, several groups of Jewish partisans harassed the Germans and even engaged in battles. In Husiatin, a Jewish guerilla band led by Leva Goldhaber, now a captain in the Red Army, killed the German sentries guarding an ammunition dump and used the tommy-guns to free a group of Jewish deportees.

The most efficient and numerous Jewish partisan organizations were those in the woods of White Russia and Lithuania. One of the Jewish partisan camps in the region of Minsk under the leadership of Shimon Zorin consisted of nearly 600 persons, men, women, and children. With the help of children, it maintained contact with the Jews in the Minsk ghetto and helped them escape to the woods. This camp had its own tailor and shoemaker's workshop, a bakery, a hospital, and a four-grade school. A similar story has been reported about a forest community of 1,000 Jewish partisans in the district of Baranowicze. Three Jewish partisan groups operated in the vicinity of Vilna one of which, significantly named "The Avengers," was connected with the epic of Vilna, as related by Abraham Sutzkever, a highly talented young Yiddish poet, who led in the revolt of the Vilna ghetto

and later forced his way to the Red Army. It was in Vilna, moreover, that the Jews in the underground engaged in admirable cultural activities, including the establishment of a symphony orchestra and the publication of a newspaper.

While the dark history of Soviet territories under Nazi occupation contains many reprehensible examples of cooperation of some Western Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Esthonians with the German hangmen, it is also replete with inspiring stories of assistance given by these peoples, in many cases at the risk of their lives. White Russian and Ukrainian peasants, Lithuanian Catholic priests and Latvian city dwellers furnished many examples of such aid. Particularly friendly was the collaboration of non-Jewish and Jewish partisans in all the occupied regions, though some exceptions have also recently come to light.

### **Jews in the Soviet Armed Forces and War Industry**

Together with the entire population of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Jews, in the final year of the European war, expended all their energies toward winning a quick victory. The number of Jews in the Red Army decorated for bravery doubled in 1944, rising from 32,000 to 63,000. While the proportion of Jews to the total population was, in 1939 1.8%, the number of Jews who received awards was 2.5% of all officers and men so honored. The number of Jews named Heroes of the Soviet Union also doubled during 1944. Among those awarded this title were Jewish officers who distinguished themselves in the liberation of European capitals, such as Colonel-General Leon Kotlyar who participated in the fight for Vilna, Budapest, and Belgrade, or the brothers, Major-General Matviey and Colonel Yevsey Weinrub, who participated in the conquest of Warsaw, Lodz, Kutno, Gniezno and Bydgoszcz. In orders of the day in the summer of 1944, Marshal Joseph Stalin cited, among others, Colonel Joseph Spiller, in connection with the capture of Viborg (Finland); Major Samuel Krivoshein; Major-General Michael Cherniavsky (erroneously confused with the fallen hero Ivan D. Cherniakovsky, who was not a Jew), Major-General Rubinovitch, and Major-General Aaron Katz, all commanders of tank troops. One of Stalin's latest orders of the

day, announcing the capitulation of Berlin and the seizure of Rostock, mentioned Lieutenant-General Kazankin, Major-General Bukstynovitch, Major-General Moiseyevsky, Major-General Folkenstein, Major-General Shapiro, General Cherniavsky, and many other Jewish officers.

On the home front Jews also took a prominent part among the engineers and workers in war industry. In a huge airplane building plant, the location of which is a military secret, several thousand Jews constituted a large proportion among the workers; in addition, outstanding work was done by engineers Solomonovich and Gershanow (both awarded orders), Yephrem Yudin, Katz, Tsheriak, Yidlson, Marazliansky, and other distinguished Jewish technicians. In the hydro-electrical station of the middle Ural region, "Sugre," a large number of evacuated Jews were employed as workers, and among the prominent engineers were the chief engineer Aronson, engineer Wechsler, and chief organizer Godl Graniek. In the same Ural district, the director of an artillery-gun factory, Lev Honor, a member of the Jewish anti-fascist Committee in Moscow, was awarded seven orders of distinction for his work. The Stalin prize, highest in the Soviet Union, was given to Simon Lavochkin, constructor of the "Lav. 1-7" planes, thousands of which flew in the last year of the war. He is also holder of the Order of Lenin and a Hero of Socialist Labor. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the project of electrification of the Soviet Union, which had been planned by Lenin and Stalin, the Jewish engineer, Naum Alexandrowitch Rogovin was honorably mentioned. Other Jewish scientists, who distinguished themselves during the past year in connection with war industry, include the electrochemist, Alexander Frumkin, and the mathematician and machine builder, Lieutenant-General Boris Grigorevich Galerkin, both prominent members of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

Among the builders of Soviet industry, the names of Jewish women are also prominent. Rivka Kirshenbaum of Astrakhan was recently named chief engineer of the fishing trust in Dagestan. In connection with the Soviet Woman's Day celebration in March 1945, it was recalled that, according to the census of 1939, women constituted 45% among all Jewish workers as well as among Jewish white-collar workers.

Of the Jewish women on the battlefield, Nata Gerber, a sanitarian instructor, Veronica Factor, a sniper at the battle of Stalingrad, and Lieutenant Sonia Shrage, a battery commander, won wide renown throughout the Soviet Union.

### **Cultural Development and Communal Life**

The Jewish community of Moscow, repatriated over a year ago, has become the focus of the cultural activities of Soviet Jewry, by virtue of the concentration in the capital of the leading creative forces of the liberated territories. An obvious sign of the ever increasing tempo of reconstruction of Jewish cultural life in the capital is the Yiddish organ of the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee, "Ainigkeit," which in 1945 began to appear three times instead of once a week. Literary evenings, devoted as a rule to the analysis of the works of one writer or poet, brought together weekly in the Club of Jewish Workers the cream of the Jewish intellectuals in the city. The Jewish Anti-fascist Committee also organized public meetings in its own headquarters, on behalf of Jews in the liberated areas and in commemoration of outstanding events and anniversaries. Jewish painters and sculptors, such as L. Soyfertis, I. Tcheikov, and Meir Axelrod exhibited their works on war themes as well as landscapes of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; while others like M. Gorshman and A. Labas, are still working in those republics. The studio of the Yiddish State Theater in Moscow, directed by Professor Solomon Mikhoels, celebrated its 15th anniversary. During this period, 112 actors and stage managers graduated from it, and the ensemble of the Yiddish Theater in Biro-Bidjan was organized.

Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union, which lost twenty of some sixty of its representatives on the battle front — among them, the novelist S. Godiner; the outstanding literary historian, M. Wiener; the poets S. Rossin and Chashtshevatsky — mirrored during the year under review as during the entire war, the heroic fight against the German invaders. With only a few exceptions (such as B. Gutiansky's satiric poems and fables), even the titles of the books indicate that the war was the dominant theme. Lieutenant Polanker wrote "Your Sacred Duty" at the front; H. Dobin,



a partisan of the "Avengers" unit, wrote short stories on partisan life; Noah Lurie was the author of a play "Resistance"; I. Rabin's book of short stories was entitled "Woe to the German"; David Hofstein wrote two volumes of poems, "I Believe" and "Liberation"; The works of the novelists Abraham Kahan, Itzig Kipnis, H. Blustein, Hannah Levin, and A. Holdes similarly reflected the war as did two recently published collective books: "Heimland," the product of 32 writers and poets, and "Tsum Zig" (Toward Victory), with 43 contributors.

The Yiddish theaters in Moscow and other cities included in their repertoires, in addition to the works of classic Yiddish playwrights, new plays on war themes, such as Bergelson's "I will live," I. Dobrushin's "A Wonderful Story," M. Pinchevski's "I am living," and S. Halkin's historic dramas, "Bar-Kochba" and "Sulamith."

Indications of the mutual rapprochement between Yiddish and Russian literature in the past year was the publication in Russian translation of the third edition of the Yiddish poems for children, "As a Guest" by Leib Kwitko; the preparation of selected poems by Peretz Markish, Itzik Fefer, and S. Halkin in Russian translation; and the announced publication of selected poems of Lermontov in Yiddish translation. The same trend was manifested in the commemoration, in the autumn of 1944, of a hundred years since the death of the Russian fabulist, I. A. Korolenko, by the Jewish Writers Association in Moscow.

The composer on Jewish themes, R. Glière, celebrated his 70th birthday. New musical compositions were published by S. Steinberg (Central Asiatic music), L. Yampolski, Moses Weinberg (music for works of I. L. Peretz and S. Halkin), and Samuel Polanski (folk songs). The noted Jewish composer, Alexander Goldenweiser, was honored on his 70th birthday in Moscow.

Fertile cultural activity was also reported from all those areas in European Russia and Soviet Asia, to which most of the Soviet Jews had been evacuated: Kurga and Magnitogorsk in the Ural region, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkestan, Dagestan, and Siberia. Most of the 14 Yiddish State Theaters resumed their work in those regions, the Kiev Theater in Kokand (Uzbekistan), that of Odessa

and Kharkov in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), of Lwow and Bialystok in Frunze (Kirghizia), and the Minsk Theater in Novosibirsk. Almost all of these theaters toured neighboring provinces. The Jewish community in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) has been most active, thanks to the considerable number of Jewish poets and writers from Nazi occupied territories who have found refuge there (among them N. Bomze and S. Berlinski).

In the field of religious life, it was reported that the Choral Synagogue in Moscow was crowded with worshippers at services on Rosh-Hashonah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, as well as on May 2, 1945, to celebrate the fall of Berlin. On March 14, the Jewish religious community of Moscow joined religious Jews the world over in observing the day as a Fast Day in memory of millions of massacred Jews.

The Jewish Anti-fascist Committee in Moscow further strengthened its ties with Jews of other countries by preparing documents for the *Black Book*, to be published jointly with the World Jewish Congress, the Vaad Leumi in Palestine, and the American Committee of Jewish Writers. It also exchanged greetings with Jewish organizations in the United States, Great Britain, and Palestine on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution, as well as felicitations on the victorious end of the European war.

In addition to Ambassador Constantine Oumansky, who died in an airplane crash in Mexico City at the end of January 1945, the Soviet Union also lost another prominent Jew in the death of the famous ophthalmologist Professor Mikhail Averbach in July 1944.

### **Biro-Bidjan**

Biro-Bidjan, which in 1944 celebrated the tenth anniversary of its elevation from an autonomous district to an Autonomous Region, made notable economic and cultural progress during the year under review. An annual budget of 30 million rubles was adopted for 1945. Seven million rubles were allotted for building a textile mill employing 500 workers at the start. In the 1944 Socialist contest for production in the Khabarovsk Territory, the Autonomous

Region of Biro-Bidjan won first prize. During the last ten years, the number of collective farms in Biro-Bidjan has risen from 8 to 58, apart from 5 newly established Sovkhozes (State farms). All farms, industrial enterprises, including metallurgical works, and gold mines exceeded their quotas of production during the year. The technical school for railway engineers had 550 graduates since the outbreak of the war. The medical school graduated 41 in the last year alone. A sanitarium for 700 children was opened last autumn, as was a regional museum. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Yiddish Theater, two million rubles were allotted for a new building. Although neither the number nor the proportion of Jews in the region has been revealed, it is significant that recently Yiddish was made an obligatory subject in the curriculum of non-Jewish schools.

### **Repatriation and Reconstruction in the Liberated Areas**

The reconstruction of Jewish communities in the liberated areas started early in 1944 in the Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. With the exception of Transnistria, where some Jews survived the German and Rumanian atrocities, the pioneers of reconstituted Jewish settlements consist exclusively of refugees repatriated from the interior of Soviet Russia and from Central Asia. As early as August 1944, the poet, Itzik Fefer, was able to report to the Anti-Fascist Committee that 30,000 Jews had resettled in Kiev. At the same time, many Jewish families were reported to have returned to their colonies in the Larindorf and Fraidorf autonomous districts in the Crimea. Early in 1945, reports were published of the repatriation of Jews in various regions of the Ukraine, such as the autonomous district of Nev-Zlatopole, Fastov (35 farmer families) in the district of Zhitomir and Czernikhow (several thousand Jewish farmers).

In the liberated areas to the west, including the Baltic countries, the rebuilding of Jewish life began as early as the end of 1944, thanks to the thousands of partisans who had returned from the woods. Early in 1945, these partisans were joined by a number of repatriated refugees. As a result, Vilna numbered about 4,000 Jews and Riga several thousand. A report dated September 1944 by the head of the Jewish

religious community in Moscow, Samuel Chobrutzky, stressed the dire need of the communities engaged in reconstruction, particularly for clothing, soap, and medical supplies. Similar reports have come about the refugees still left in the interior of the Soviet Union, most of whom left their former homes at a moment's notice, abandoning all their belongings.

Most encouraging is the cultural revival in the communities being rebuilt. The bureau of Jewish culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Science, which was repatriated to Kiev, is preparing a collection of studies on J. L. Peretz, whose 30th anniversary was commemorated throughout the Soviet Union. The White Russian Academy of Science in Minsk has begun to organize a department for Jewish culture. The White Russian Yiddish State Theater in exile in Novosibirsk, has been ordered to return to Minsk. Because of the destruction of its own building in Kiev, the local Yiddish theater repatriated from Central Asia has found a temporary residence in Czernowitz, where two Yiddish high schools with nearly 1,100 students have been opened. A Yiddish high school has also been organized in Kaunas (Kovno). In Czernowitz, a division for Jewish folklore has also been founded at the regional Folklore Institute and it is cooperating with a scientific expedition of the Jewish Cabinet in Kiev. In Kharkov, the Jewish division of the Korolenko Library with some 50,000 volumes, which were miraculously rescued, has begun functioning again. In Leningrad, the Jewish division of the famous Saltykov-Shtshedrin People's Library has been reopened to the public. In Riga, several returned Jewish painters, sculptors and musicians are working on a project depicting the martyrdom of the local ghetto. In Vilna, an elementary school has been opened and the Government plans to organize a Yiddish high school. The newly opened Jewish Museum in Vilna has among its collections some of the archives of the *Judenrat* as well as valuable documents of the Yiddish Scientific Institute, the Strashun Library, and other libraries, which were rescued from destruction by the poet-partisan Abraham Sutzkever and his colleagues at the risk of their lives. In Vilna also, two synagogues on Niemietska and Zawalna Streets have been restored.

Moving appeals for books have come from all the restored communities, because all Jewish books in the once occupied territories were burnt by the Nazis. In response to these appeals, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow, the "Emes" publishing house, the Jewish division of the Lenin Library in Moscow, the Jewish Community in Biro-Bidjan, and other organizations have launched a campaign to collect books.

### 3. Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was the last Eastern European country to be liberated from the German yoke. While Carpatho-Ukraine (Ruthenia) as well as a larger part of Slovakia were freed by the Red Army during the second half of 1944, the western part of Slovakia and Bohemia-Moravia did not gain their freedom until the collapse and surrender of Germany at the beginning of May 1945. Consequently, during most of the year under review the Germans and their henchmen in Slovakia still continued to annihilate the remnants of Czechoslovakian Jewry which in 1930 numbered nearly 360,000 souls. At first, in view of the advance of the Red Army, the Nazi puppet government in Slovakia slowed down somewhat the rate of destruction of the surviving Jewish population; and at the beginning of August 1944, the Vice-premier, Sano Mach, was reported to have declared that Bratislava Jews would no longer be deported but would be held in concentration camps. However, at the end of that month, German forces marched into Slovakia, and mass arrests and deportations of Jews all over the country, including Bratislava, reached a new peak. In one case, the roundup of the Jews in Nitra, the arrests were declared by the Slovakian Government to be reprisal for participation of Jews in the partisans' struggle. At the same time, surviving groups of Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were either deported directly to the gas chambers in Oswiecim or were temporarily concentrated in the camp-ghetto of Terezin (Theresienstadt) in Moravia. It has been recently estimated that from its establishment at the end of 1941, about 150,000 Jews passed through this town, which was converted into a

hermetically sealed ghetto. The town was purchased by the Germans with money robbed from Czechoslovakian Jews. Up to 1945, the Terezin ghetto served mainly as a concentration camp for Czechoslovakian, German, and Austrian Jews, as well as smaller transports of Jews deported from Western Europe. Later Polish and Hungarian Jews evacuated from other camps were also brought in. A large proportion of the inmates died of starvation, others were regularly transported to Oswiecim, Dachau, and other death camps until the imminent approach of the Red Army. At the moment of liberation, about 30,000 survivors were found in Terezin, among them several thousand Czech Jews.

In liberated Czechoslovakia, according to several official estimates, no more than 15,000 Jews are alive. Of this total, some 12,000 (out of 110,000 in 1930) are believed to be scattered all over Bohemia and Moravia, thus leaving for Slovakia only 3,000 survivors out of about 150,000 Jews who lived there before the war. As for the 115,000 pre-war Jewish population of the Carpatho-Ukraine, recently ceded by Czechoslovakia to the Soviet-Ukraine, the reports at first varied from an estimate of 10,000 survivors to extremely pessimistic assertions that the whole community was virtually destroyed by the Germans. However, in a dispatch from Bucharest dated August 11, some 15,000 Carpatho-Russian Jews were reported by a representative of the Red Cross to have been repatriated from Nazi labor camps. In all three provinces of the Czechoslovakian State: Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, the largest Jewish communities at the present time are in the capitals: Prague, Brno, and Bratislava. In Slovakia, in addition to some 1,500 Jews in Bratislava, another considerable Jewish community of about 500 is reported in Kosice. It is assumed, however, that apart from several thousand Czechoslovak Jews still not repatriated from Germany, France, and the Soviet Union, many have not yet left their hiding places in the mountains of Slovakia. In all, the fully reconstructed Jewish community in Czechoslovakia may total 25,000 persons.

True to its democratic traditions and in accordance with repeated declarations by the Government while in exile, the reborn Czechoslovakian State has treated the remaining Jews

as equal citizens of the country. At the beginning of 1945, while the Government was temporarily located in Kosice, Dr. Imrich Rosenberg, formerly vice-chairman of the National Council of Czechoslovakian Jews in London, was named director of the newly established department of Jewish affairs. At present Dr. Rosenberg is active as deputy chief of the government's repatriation department. At the end of May, the announcement of Vaclav Majer, Minister of Food that Germans would receive the same food rations they had allowed Jews, met with great approval both in the country and abroad. In Bohemia, returning Jews, like returning political prisoners, have been quartered in the apartments of Nazis or collaborators. The decree of President Eduard Benes, at the beginning of June 1945, invalidating all business deals which were made after September 27, 1938, under pressure of occupation, or political, racial, or national persecutions, provides a legal basis for the return of property to the Jews. At the same time Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk declared, in a speech at San Francisco, that he favored using a large share of the property of murdered Jews for reconstructing Jewish communities.

Notwithstanding the friendly attitude of the Government, Jews in the entire State and particularly in Slovakia have thus far encountered difficulties in being reinstated in their jobs. This is particularly true of Slovakia, where vestiges of Nazism and native fascism have not yet been entirely wiped out by the democratic Government. In Slovakia also the process of returning property to Jews has been markedly slower than in Bohemia-Moravia; unlike the situation in the western provinces, Jewish property in Slovakia was not confiscated by Germans but by Slovaks, who are now reluctant to part with their ill-gotten real estate and movable property. As for large factories, the leaders of the Slovak autonomous State plan to nationalize them, including establishments which were formerly owned by Jews.

Considering the fundamentally democratic character of the restored Czechoslovakian Republic, there is every prospect that the anti-Semitic heritage of the German occupation will soon be a thing of the past. It is also anticipated that business competition as a force engendering anti-Semitism, will no longer be of undue importance. As Dr. Eric

Kolar, secretary of the committee to abolish the Nuremberg Laws, recently declared, many Jews will remain in government and military service, which they entered in exile during the war; while many others will remain in manual labor into which they were forced during the occupation. This turn to factory work is significant and is analogous with recent tendencies among Jewish survivors in Poland.

Some concern has been aroused by recent declarations of Czech statesmen concerning the future status of Jews as a minority group. As early as March 1945, Deputy Foreign Minister Hubert Ripka announced that Czechoslovakia would abolish all special nationality rights for minorities. While at that time his stand was interpreted as directed against the Germans and Hungarians, particularly since the minister gave assurances that neither religious nor cultural interests of Jews would be affected, in the middle of June, Dr. Eric Kolar bluntly stated in connection with a declaration of sympathy for Zionism: "The Jewish population must at the same time realize that there are only two alternatives—either Jewish nationality within an independent Jewish State, or complete and full assimilation. Half-measures are illogical and would only prolong solution of the problem." Less unequivocal but still in line with the statements of Ripka and Kolar is the declaration of President Benes of July 2, 1945, in which, after expressing his desire to help those Czech Jews to emigrate to Palestine who so desire, he indicated that those Jews who remain in Czechoslovakia would not be treated as a national minority, but as full fledged citizens. In a later interview with a correspondent of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, President Benes declared that complete assimilation was the only solution for all European Jews who did not wish to settle in Palestine. No less significant are reports that the sentiments of the Jewish population do not seem to run counter to the attitude of the Government. Among one group an ardent desire to emigrate to Palestine is evident; while there is a noticeable trend among most of the others toward full assimilation. Some of the second group have even gone so far as to change their names and religion, as recent news dispatches from Prague and Bratislava indicate.



#### IV. SOUTHERN EUROPE

By EUGENE HEVESI\*

##### 1. Hungary

As indicated in our Review of the Year 1944-1945, the occupation of Hungary by the German army on March 19, 1944, brought about a drastic change in the fortunes of the Jewish population of Hungary.

By July, almost half of Greater Hungary's nearly 800,000 Jews were deported, most of them to extermination areas in Western Poland and Austria. The others, stripped of their property and personal belongings, their homes and occupations, and their human dignity, were crowded into ghettos and concentration camps in Hungary, at the mercy of their German and Hungarian Nazi jailers. The menace of deportation hung constantly over their heads.

In July, too, the indignation of civilized world opinion at the crime committed against Hungarian Jewry, began to influence the new Nazi-controlled régime of Hungary. On July 18, an offer was made by Regent Nicholas Horthy to the International Committee of the Red Cross to permit the emigration of those Jewish children and adults for whom foreign visas or Palestine certificates could be secured. The Red Cross was also officially informed that further deportations of Jews would be suspended. At the same time, the Red Cross was invited to furnish relief "to interned or otherwise confined Israelites."

Undoubtedly, the offer was made with a view to buttressing the position of the already compromised Sztojay and Lakatos Governments by saving at least the remaining half of the Jewish population from deportation. In this situation, it became vitally necessary not only that the United Nations accept the Horthy offer, but also that visas be actually available to as many Hungarian Jews as possible. The issuance of a substantial number of visas would not only have saved the individuals in question, it would also have furnished the uneasy Hungarian régime with a valid argu-

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ment against the German pressure for further mass deportations of Jews.

At this point, Hitler's Reich intervened. In July, it was disclosed that the Nazis themselves had expressed their willingness to halt the extermination of Hungarian Jews, and even to permit the emigration of a certain number of them, on condition, however, that in exchange the Allies supply Germany with substantial quantities of war equipment. Nazis thus resorted to a typical device of blackmail.

At this juncture, a fight to save the remnants of Hungarian Jewry began, the full story of which cannot yet be told in detail. On the whole, in terms of actual rescue it failed, although it resorted to all sorts of devices and expedients, short of supplying war equipment to the enemy. The President's War Refugee Board stood in the center of the fight, and all American Jewish organizations engaged in defense work abroad united in an effort to find a solution to a tragic deadlock.

On July 31, at the initiative of the American Jewish Conference, a mass meeting was held in New York City urging the United Nations to rescue the Jews of Hungary. On behalf of the American Jewish Committee, Judge Joseph M. Proskauer, its president, addressed the meeting.

Soon thereafter, the American Jewish Committee resolved to join with the American Jewish Conference for the purpose of coordinated action in connection with the situation in Hungary. The joint *ad hoc* Actions Committee formed for this purpose held a number of meetings with the directors of the War Refugee Board and with various Government departments, and submitted a series of proposals to the Government. The writer of this review represented the Overseas Department of the American Jewish Committee on the Actions Committee.

On August 17, the State Department announced that the Governments of the United States and of the United Kingdom "have accepted the offer of the Hungarian Government for the release of Jews, and will make arrangements for the care of such Jews leaving Hungary who reach neutral or United Nations territory, and also that they will find temporary havens of refuge where such people may live in safety."

Representatives of the Actions Committee offered a number of urgent recommendations in order to implement the agreement with Hungary. It soon became clear, however, that the Nazis were exploiting the agreement solely for the purpose of blackmail; at the same time, barring all avenues of rescue and escape for the Jews of Hungary.

With the exception of small groups of Hungarian Jews released from the camp at Belsen to Switzerland, no rescue efforts succeeded. Notwithstanding this fact, the Horthy offer and its acceptance did not prove entirely useless. Together with intercessions by our Government, the Vatican, the King of Sweden, Swiss Protestant organizations, and the International Red Cross, the agreement definitely delayed further mass deportations from Hungary for a crucial period of time.

The American Jewish Committee concerned itself from the very outset with efforts to bring about these intercessions. As soon as the news of mass deportations from Hungary became known, the Committee made representations to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, to the British Ambassador, Lord Halifax, and to the Soviet Ambassador, Andrei A. Gromyko, urging that warnings of retribution be issued jointly by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Marshal Stalin. Somewhat later, the Soviet Ambassador was waited upon by members of the Committee, who submitted to him a memorial recapitulating the tragic Jewish situation in Hungary, and appealing to Premier Stalin to intercede.

The Hon. Myron C. Taylor, President Roosevelt's personal envoy at the Vatican, volunteered his assistance with regard to the Hungarian Jews. Through Mr. Taylor, the Committee appealed to Pope Pius XII, asking that he encourage Hungarian Catholics to follow the example of their co-religionists in Belgium, France, and Italy, in aiding Jews to escape persecution and deportation. In response, the Committee was informed by Archbishop Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate in Washington, that the Holy See had done and was doing everything possible to aid the Jews of Hungary.

The combined effect of the Horthy offer and of foreign intercessions made itself felt in three main directions. First of all, the International Red Cross actually organized relief

work among interned Jews in Hungary. Red Cross representatives frequently visited ghettos, concentration camps, and hospitals in Hungary, and arranged for assistance for the Jews. To a large extent, the expenses of this vast undertaking were borne by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The cooperation between the Red Cross and the JDC saved countless Jewish lives in Hungary.

Another important result was the issuance of a considerable number of so-called "protective passports" by the Governments of Sweden and of Switzerland. Some 15,000 Hungarian Jews were reported to have received such passports, the majority of them issued by Sweden. Until the removal of Admiral Horthy from the regency, on October 15, 1944, these passports were considered valid by the Hungarian authorities, and their bearers were permitted to live in separate buildings in Budapest, designated as "Swedish houses." Raoul Wallenberg, counsellor of the Swedish legation, labored fearlessly and untiringly to save these and other groups of Budapest Jewry.

Finally, it is now possible to reveal that the tempo of deportations from Hungary slowed down considerably after the Horthy offer was made. From August 1944 until liberation in January 1945, alarming news was spread about renewed large-scale deportations. In fact, deportations continued and frequent trainloads of Hungarian Jews arrived at the Polish death camps, but the scale of these later deportations never reached that of the first massive waves. At that time there were reports from usually well-informed sources that all Jews had already been deported from provincial towns, and that large-scale deportations had also started from Budapest, the capital. In reality, only one large-scale removal from Budapest occurred after the inauguration, with the backing of the Reich, of the fanatical Szalassy régime, a group of Nazi-minded criminals who formed a Quisling régime at a time when Hitler's Reich was already doomed. According to these reports, some 100,000 Budapest Jews were driven on foot by the retreating Germans and Hungarian Arrow Cross bands to the Austrian border; and a large number of them perished or were massacred en route. Later it became known that no more than 10,000-15,000 Jews had been forced to take part in this

death march from Budapest. While there can be no doubt that both Hitler and his Hungarian hirelings were determined to wipe out the Jews of Hungary, two factors prevented them from accomplishing their set purpose. One was increasing opposition on the part of the Hungarian people to the Nazi policy of extermination, an opposition which made it hazardous even for fanatics of the Szalassy type to indulge in mass killing, on Hungarian soil, of hundreds of thousands of innocent people; the other was the fact that by November 1944, the onslaught of the Russian armies made it impossible to organize large-scale transportation toward the extermination areas in Poland or to Germany.

All during the Szalassy régime, numerous reports were received of arrests of non-Jews charged with hiding Jews, assisting them to escape, supplying them with false identification papers, and concealing their property. Among those arrested were several high municipal officials in various localities who sabotaged anti-Jewish measures; while many other officials were attacked in the Nazi press for "leniency" toward the Jews. Open mass demonstrations against the deportation of Jews were reported from several towns. Numerous Catholic and Protestant clergymen tried to save Jews, often by issuing false certificates of baptism.

Nevertheless, the removal of Horthy and the formation, by the Germans, of the Szalassy Government, was fraught with extreme danger for the remaining Jews. The Minister of the Interior of the new puppet government declared at once that the solution of "the Jewish question" would be "a merciless one . . . deserved by the Jews . . ." All distinctions between professing Jews and those of Jewish descent were abolished, "protective passports" were invalidated, and exemptions from the requirement to wear yellow badges were cancelled. The change of régime, precipitated by Admiral Horthy's request for an armistice with the Allies, was accompanied by pogroms in Budapest and in many provincial towns. The bloody events began on October 15 and lasted several days. Massacres occurred also in a number of localities as the Nazis retreated before the Russians, and during the long and destructive siege of Budapest. Details of these events are not yet sufficiently known to permit estimates of the presumably large loss of life. Hun-

garian press reports estimate the total at some 18,000 in Budapest alone. Undoubtedly, the impetuous onrush of the Russian armies and the fear of immediate retribution were vital factors in preventing the wholesale last-minute slaughter of the remaining Jewish population.

Throughout this last and grimmest phase of the terror, the belief prevailed that a few months under direct Nazi rule would achieve in Hungary the same dire results that had, in the course of years, brought Jewish life to an end in Poland. Jewish opinion throughout the world lost hope in Jewish survival in Hungary.

It was weeks after Hungary's liberation before the curtain of silence was lifted. Initial reports indicated that in spite of everything, the number of Jews surviving in Hungary surpassed all expectations.

This statement, however, calls for very definite qualifications. There are marked differences between the lot of the Jews in the various parts of Greater Hungary. The temporary territorial expansion of Hungary (brought about by the Munich agreement of 1938 and the so-called Vienna arbitration by Hitler) increased the Jewish population of the country from 450,000 to almost 800,000 (including baptized Jews and those of mixed parentage). Since the liberation of Hungary by the Soviet armies, these territorial changes have been rescinded, subject to final approval in peace treaties framed by the United Nations. Of the 800,000, about 450,000-500,000 are believed to have been deported. But of this figure, only some 160,000-170,000 came from Hungary proper. In this smaller area, about 280,000 Jews were reported to have been found after liberation: about 150,000 in Budapest, the capital, and some 130,000 in the provinces. The latter figure is still subject to verification. Thus while only some 35% of the Jewish population of this smaller area was deported or otherwise removed, nearly 90-95% of the Jewish population was deported from the disputed provinces of Southern Slovakia, Carpatho-Ruthenia, Northern Transylvania, and the Banat-Backa region of Northern Yugoslavia. Furthermore, even with the reduced area of Hungary proper, there is a substantial difference between the fate of the Jews in the capital and in the provinces, the latter having been much harder hit by deportation.

In the outlying regions, the extent of annihilation is now on a par with that reached in Poland. In Budapest, "only" some 25-28% of the original Jewish population is missing, including losses caused by deportation, forced labor, massacres, and other causes. Similarly, Jews displaced from Budapest seem to have had a better chance of survival, because they were among the last to be removed from Hungarian soil. The exact number of surviving displaced Hungarian Jews cannot be established at the present time.

Some explanation of these important differences in treatment may be found in the higher degree of solidarity between Jews and the general population in areas permanently under Hungarian sovereignty. Moreover, those shifted and re-shifted from one rule to another in the peripheral areas had been for a longer period subjected to the rigors of direct German military rule, without much interference on the part of Hungarian authorities.

The present situation of some 280,000 Jews in Hungary (a number which is likely to be augmented by returning deportees) is extremely difficult.

True, the armistice agreement concluded with Hungary sets forth certain important obligations in favor of the victims of Nazism, which other similar agreements do not contain. Thus the Hungarian agreement obligates the Government of Hungary to provide, at its own expense, all internees, displaced persons, and refugees with adequate food, clothing, medical services, and transportation to their homes; it also contains the stipulation that all displaced persons and refugees within the limits of Hungary, "including Jews and stateless persons," be accorded at least the same measure of protection and security as Hungarian nationals.

It is also true that, although the armistice agreements do not provide for the restitution of lost Jewish property or for the economic rehabilitation of victims of Nazism, the Provisional Hungarian Government, in its first measures affecting Jews, gave evidence of a sincere awareness of its obligation toward the Jews. A series of decrees it issued went considerably beyond the measures adopted by any other liberated country in both Eastern and Western Europe.

The decrees provide for the immediate restitution, except in certain specific cases, of all looted or confiscated Jewish property. Persons in possession of Jewish property have been ordered to register, under severe penalty for non-compliance. A number of persons have already been tried for failing to abide by the order. In certain complicated cases, the decree prescribes gradual compensation, contingent upon the country's economic condition. The property of war criminals and collaborators is to be confiscated and used for the support of victims of Nazism. Each dispossessed victim of Nazism is to receive a dole from the State until restitution and compensation can be provided. Jews are to share equally with other claimants in the distribution of landed property, which is already under way. Jewish war orphans, war widows, victims and dependents of victims of Nazi deportation and slaughter are to be given priority rights in the distribution of land. They will also receive favorable consideration in the distribution of trade and occupational licenses. The Government has also resolved to assist financially in the rebuilding of Jewish communal institutions, synagogues, schools, hospitals, etc.

All this is true. In practice, however, the present situation of the Hungarian Jews is indeed gloomy. Their misery is rooted in the precarious economic condition of Hungary itself, which is incomparably worse off than any neighboring country, not only because the whole land, including the capital city, was devastated by the war but also because it was systematically looted by the Germans. Today Hungarian agriculture has no implements and seeds; industry has lost most of its equipment; and there is almost no rolling stock and engines in the country. There is no fuel, no production, no merchandise, and no opportunity for the individual to start anew to earn his livelihood. The situation may be graphically illustrated by the fact that in March 1945, the Chamber of Commerce formulated a plan to send a large caravan of horse-drawn carriages to Rumania, in order to buy at least some merchandise in that neighboring land, which has emerged much less scarred by the ravages of war.

Starvation and disease are still rampant among the Jews of Hungary, once the most prosperous Jewish group econom-



ically in Eastern and Southern Europe. Both in the provinces and in the ruined capital the need for speedy relief is overwhelming. Today Budapest harbors by far the largest Jewish community in Europe, a community which is helpless without outside assistance. While the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration is, on principle, authorized to care for displaced persons in ex-enemy areas, actual UNRRA aid is likely to be considerably delayed. Even if UNRRA starts its activities in Hungary earlier than seems probable under prevailing circumstances, large sectors of the Jewish population will remain excluded from its benefits. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has for years aided and is now aiding the Jews of Hungary with substantial relief supplies, but until the J.D.C. is permitted to organize and conduct systematic relief services in Hungary, hopes for an improvement in the situation of Hungarian Jewry can hardly be expected to materialize.

## 2. Rumania

On the same day the Western Allies liberated Paris from the Nazis, Hitler also lost an ally in the East. Tottering under the hammer blows of the victorious Red Army, Rumania proved the first of Germany's Balkan satellites to desert the sinking Nazi ship. On August 23, 1944, a royal proclamation by King Michael suddenly dismissed the pro-Axis Antonescu régime, announced the acceptance by Rumania of United Nations armistice terms, ceased hostilities against the United Nations, and proclaimed the formation of a Government of National Union.

Even before this final liquidation of the pro-Nazi Antonescu dictatorship, official circles in Rumania had made certain attempts to lessen future retribution by adopting measures alleviating, to some extent, the plight of the Rumanian Jews. Transports of Jewish emigrants to Palestine were permitted to depart for Turkish ports. (On August 9, 1944, one of these vessels carrying 292 Jews to Palestine, sank, and all but five of the passengers perished.) A number of dismissed Jewish workers, particularly engineers and

technicians, and also some employees of public institutions, were reinstated in their jobs.

During the last weeks of the doomed régime, asylum was given to a number of Hungarian Jews fleeing their country after its occupation by the Germans in March 1944, and to a number who had escaped from German occupied Poland. A Swedish offer to transport 40,000 Jews on Swedish ships from Rumania to Turkey was reported to have been considered by the Rumanian Government, but rejected by their German overlords. A press dispatch of August 15, 1944 asserted that official anti-Jewish propaganda had ceased — a week before Rumania's capitulation.

But anti-Semitism remained fundamentally operative as long as German domination prevailed. Jew-baiting ran parallel with the new policy of preparing alibis for the inevitable day of reckoning. A number of Jews were sentenced to death for evading forced labor. A decree issued on May 30, less than three months before the overthrow, ordered the death penalty for Jews entering the country illegally. At the same time, Jews in Moldavia were again ordered to wear yellow badges because of alleged collaboration between Jews and Russians in areas near the front.

American newspapermen with the Red Army in the liberated eastern provinces of Rumania reported in July 1944 that, in pursuance of a policy of non-intervention into the internal life of Rumania, Soviet occupation authorities left local laws, including all anti-Jewish provisions, unchanged, pending later changes by the Rumanian people themselves. Although legally correct, this attitude served to prolong Jewish suffering. Jews, for instance, were permitted to return to their original homes only if the latter were unoccupied.

On September 4, King Michael issued a decree restoring the Constitution abolished in 1938 by his father, former King Carol II. This decree implicitly promised the indirect abolition of racial legislation passed during Rumania's partnership in the Axis. On September 12, Marshal Malinovsky, authorized by the Governments of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, signed an armistice agreement with Rumania obligating the Government of Rumania to "liberate at once all persons, irre-

spective of their civil status and nationality, who are kept under arrest owing to their activity to the advantage of the United Nations or for their sympathy with the cause of the United Nations, or owing to their racial origin, and to abolish all discriminatory legislation and restrictions resulting therefrom." An appendix to the agreement provided that German and Hungarian Jews found on Rumanian territory were to be exempted from internment stipulated for other German and Hungarian citizens in Rumania.

The agreement provided also for the detention and trial of persons accused of war crimes, and for the dissolution of all "pro-Hitlerite organizations of the Fascist type." Arrests of collaborators began. Antonescu himself, with a number of his accomplices, was arrested by the Soviet authorities.

By autumn it had become clear that while formally all anti-Jewish laws had been abolished, Jewish property and positions had not in practice been restored, leaving the bulk of the Jewish population in a state of extreme destitution and starvation. Jews had been freed from concentration camps, but no provision had been made for the restoration of their homes, businesses, or jobs, which remained occupied by "Aryans." On October 25, the Foreign Minister of the new Government of National Union of General Sanatescu declared that Jews enjoyed full political and economic rights, but admitted that specific implementation of these rights was needed. He said that legislation to establish machinery for the restoration of Jewish property and positions was being drafted. Government departments had been instructed to reinstate Jewish employees, and professional organizations ordered to re-admit Jewish members. The following week, the Ministry of Justice announced that all Jewish lawyers who were members of the bar on September 15, 1936, would be reinstated, provided they had practiced three years.

Realizing that unless the United Nations Governments took some action to ensure the restoration to Rumanian Jews not only of their rights but also of their property and occupational opportunities, their continued existence would remain precarious, the American Jewish Committee resolved to intercede on behalf of the suffering Jews of Rumania. On October 27, 1944, in letters to Acting Secretary of State

Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., to Lord Halifax, Ambassador of Great Britain, and to Andrei A. Gromyko, Ambassador of the Soviet Union, the President of the American Jewish Committee pointed out that "developments since the conclusion of the armistice . . . give cause for great anxiety. Recent information from Rumania reveals a state of affairs incompatible with the demands of humanity and commitments to and by the United Nations." The Committee urged the Allied Governments "to make representations to the Rumanian authorities and to instruct their representatives on the Allied Control Commission to do everything in their power towards removing discriminations still existing against Jews and restoring to them the rights and possessions of which they were stripped by a Nazi regime." In his reply, Mr. Stettinius expressed his agreement "on the necessity for vigilance, and efficient operation of the organs established for the implementation of the armistice," and his confidence "that the questions which may arise in our relations with Rumania can be handled in the most practicable way." Lord Halifax gave the assurance that "the interests of these unfortunate people are . . . being actively borne in mind by the British, Soviet and American Governments."

It took four months for the Rumanian Government to issue, on December 14, the first decree restoring rights and properties to Jews. The decree proved unsatisfactory. Reinstatement of Jews to their jobs was subjected to a lengthy and bureaucratic procedure. The projected payment of salaries for periods of forced unemployment was omitted from the final decree. The return to Jews of homes occupied by "Aryan" successors was repeatedly postponed. On December 22, Dr. William Filderman, President of the Union of Rumanian Jewish Communities, declared that the decree, as prepared by Lucretiu Patrascanu, Minister of Justice and leader of the Communist Party, granted ". . . not rights but a favor which is subjected to legal procedure, fees, and to long terms of hearing . . . Instead of abolishing racial legislation, the decree maintains such legislation in force." As regards compensation for Jewish property confiscated by the State, Mr. Patrascanu declared that the Rumanian State would be in no position to undertake compensation before the end of the war. In the same statement, the

Minister warned the Jews against insisting on a "law of retaliation," and expressed his hope that with the support of the Jewish masses, he would be able to crush "reactionary Jews" who attempted to provoke trouble and confusion.

Instead of returning to the Jews their homes, the Government announced in January 1945 that 500 Jewish-owned buildings would be expropriated for use by the state administration. The discriminatory nature of this move was widely recognized and criticized; and under the pressure of Jewish and liberal protests, the plan was abandoned.

While conditions created by war and internal upheaval undeniably contributed to the difficulties of large-scale measures for Jewish rehabilitation and indemnification, considerations of political expediency also played a strong part in the Government's reluctance to do full justice to Jewish needs and rightful claims. The fact remains that up to the end of June 1945, no satisfactory over-all attempt had been made to remedy Jewish disabilities in Rumania. The decree of December 12, 1944, postponed the payment of indemnities to Jewish real estate owners until after the war. Actually, it retains Rumanian successors of ousted Jews in their posts in private employment, and gives employers the choice to re-admit, or reject former Jewish employees. According to the *London Jewish Chronicle* (January 12, 1945), the Rumanian Government secretly instructed the various ministries to fill government posts with non-Jews whenever possible.

Government circles are inclined to justify this policy by the desire of the authorities to prevent the re-emergence of widespread anti-Semitism. There are, in fact, numerous unmistakable indications, such as student riots in universities and hoodlumism in Jewish quarters, of the continued prevalence of anti-Semitism chiefly among the urban population. Participation of Jewish individuals in the leftist political movements is reported as having been seized upon by reactionary agitators as an argument both against the Jews and the Government.

On November, 20, 1944, the Government announced that Jews would no longer be considered a national minority but Rumanians of Jewish faith. A number of Jewish organiza-

tions are opposed to this change of status. On January 18, 1945, the draft of a law on the conditions of restoration of Rumanian citizenship to Jews was announced.

On January 23, King Michael approved a decree for punishment of war criminals including those guilty of persecution of Jews. Specified as constituting war crimes were, among others: participation in inflicting cruelty on Jews, deportations, establishment of concentration camps and ghettos, hard labor, and mass extermination. A considerable number of Rumanian Nazis and Iron Guardists are under arrest for trial as war criminals, and the first sentences have been passed, chiefly on Rumanian army officers guilty of massacres of Jews. A decree of March 18, 1945 considers those responsible for the establishment of ghettos or for the deportation of Jews, not as war criminals but only as "persons responsible for the disaster of the country," who will receive less severe punishment than war criminals.

It has now become possible to strike an approximate balance in human terms of the results of the greatest tragedy in the history of Rumanian Jewry.

Of the original Jewish population in Greater Rumania of about 850,000, some 280,000 to 300,000 have been accounted for as living today within the confines of present-day Rumania, from which Bessarabia and Bukovina have been detached but to which Northern Transylvania has been reattached. The number of voluntary Jewish refugees from Rumania during the critical years of Nazism is put at some 100,000. The majority of them escaped to Soviet Russia, while about 10,000 found a haven in Palestine. By August 1943, between 185,000 and 200,000 Jews, mostly from Bessarabia and Bukovina, had been deported to Transnistria, the then Rumanian-occupied part of Southern Ukraine. Between May and December 1944, about 120,000-130,000 Jews were deported to Poland from Northern Transylvania, then under temporary Hungarian sovereignty. Of those deported to Transnistria, about 40,000 were reported to have returned to Rumania early last year, while the remaining 10,000 deported Jews were repatriated by the Soviet military authorities during March 1945. Only a few thousand of those deported from Transylvania managed to return to their homes from Poland, and of the large original

Jewish population of Transylvania only some 6,000-7,000 now remain. The number of those surviving in Bessarabia and Bukovina, the two provinces incorporated into the Soviet Ukraine, has not yet been established but cannot exceed 40,000-50,000. These data account for only some 780,000 Jews, lost or surviving, of the total of 850,000. No satisfactory account can be given for the discrepancy, at least not until the toll of the victims of slaughter, famine, disease, and exposure on Rumanian soil itself is more accurately determined.

The future of a considerable part of the surviving Jewish population is dark. In February 1945, Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz, chairman of the European Executive Council of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, said that some 216,000 Rumanian Jews require immediate assistance. Rumania is a land of plenty, and there is no reason to believe that starvation will long persist, even among the Jewish population. But for large numbers of them the prospects of economic and occupational rehabilitation to a self-sustaining status are dismal; and at best, this involves a long drawn-out and painful process. The splendid efforts of the J.D.C. may provide for the immediate biological needs of these unfortunates but cannot substantially influence the process of their economic reintegration. Jewish community life is also gradually being revived; the Union of Rumanian Jewish Communities is functioning; and the HIAS-ICA (HICEM), OSE, and local Zionist organizations have recommenced their activities. But all these efforts are unable to cope adequately with problems of economic rehabilitation. For a relatively long time to come, emigration is likely to be considered the most desirable solution by a considerable segment of the socially uprooted and destitute Jewish population. Neither enforced mass emigration, nor the artificial stifling of the trend toward emigration can answer the needs of Jewish populations like those of Hungary and Rumania, two countries which together harbor almost one half of Europe's surviving Jewry, outside the Soviet Union.

### 3. Yugoslavia

At the end of June 1945, a delegation of the Belgrade Jewish Community, headed by David A. Alkalay, arrived in Bucharest, Rumania, to secure relief for the surviving Jews in Yugoslavia through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, whose Eastern and Southeastern European work is now centered in Bucharest. The delegation reported that the Germans and their local henchmen had killed 64,000 Yugoslav Jews, and that of those deported, about 9,000 had returned from various concentration camps in Yugoslavia and abroad, to their home towns. Reports received at the end of 1944 estimated the number of Jews found in liberated parts of Yugoslavia at only 1,600; some 5,000 Yugoslav Jews fled to Italy during the occupation, some 2,500 of whom returned to their homeland. As of the end of June 1945, there may, therefore, be a maximum of 12,000 Jews in Yugoslavia, out of a pre-war 1939 total of about 80,000. On January 19, 1945, the free Yugoslav radio disclosed that the majority of a last transport of 4,000 Jewish slave laborers taken along by the Germans on their retreat from the country had been murdered. Many of the Jews who escaped had joined Tito's partisans in the fight against the Nazis.

Immediately after the liberation of Belgrade, the capital, all anti-Jewish laws were abrogated by order of Marshal Tito. The Government restored to the surviving 1,000 Jews of Belgrade their homes and some of their belongings confiscated by the Nazis and their Yugoslav collaborators. Earlier, on June 12, 1942, the Government-in-exile had invalidated all transfers of property belonging to public corporations. The decree, however, considered transfers of individual property invalid only if invalidation was claimed and the charge of duress was proved by the original owner. With these serious limitations, the decree provided for the restitution of retrievable property but failed to provide for indemnification for losses otherwise incurred. The interests of deported Jews are not taken care of by the decree. True, Marshal Tito is known to have issued a warning to the population: "Return Jewish property looted under the



Germans, or your own property will be confiscated," but the existing legal instrumentalities do not seem to measure up to these intentions.

Almost every single Jewish survivor in Yugoslavia today has passed through the ordeal of deportation or confinement in concentration camps. The Jews have returned hungry, destitute, and often in failing health, without clothes, shoes, money, a place to turn to, or a tool to use.

In Belgrade and in some of the other localities, the Jewish communities have opened shelters for Jews, a majority of whom are homeless. They are being fed at a subsistence minimum or even below, but everything is being done to save the lives of the children. A large share of the expenses involved is being carried by the Joint Distribution Committee. The Government itself contributed the amount of 500,000 new *dinars* to Jewish relief, corresponding to about 10,000,000 old *dinars* (or \$250,000). The OSE has also started its health services. But for the time being, all this is far from adequate to mitigate appreciably the sufferings of the Jewish population. The Union of Jewish Communities, as well as the Belgrade Jewish Community, are urgently seeking contributions from abroad to assist the survivors in their efforts to rehabilitate themselves.

Although the number of Jews in Yugoslavia is small, their economic rehabilitation constitutes, amid the almost complete ruin of the country, a formidable task requiring a maximum of aid from the country itself, the Western Jewish communities, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).

Speaking for his Government, General Vladimir Velebit, head of the Yugoslav Military Mission to London, said in January 1945: "The leaders of the National Liberation Army feel deep gratitude for the magnificent contribution of the Jews in its ranks . . . Yugoslavia is a country without any racial or religious prejudice . . . We are anxious to restore the rights of the Jews in all liberated territories and hope that Jewish refugees will soon return."

#### 4. Bulgaria

Although one of the first among the countries of South-eastern Europe to be liberated from Nazism, Bulgaria had failed, up to the end of the year under review, to solve the burning problems of its Jewish population of some 35,000–40,000 who survived four years of Nazi persecution. The pre-war Jewish population of Bulgaria proper was about 50,000. Another 12,000 Jews lived originally in the temporarily annexed Greek and Yugoslav territories. These were deported to Poland and exterminated.

The original Bulgarian Jewish population escaped deportation and physical annihilation, but its segregation, social and economic isolation, and economic ruin were virtually complete. All but 200 of the 29,000 Jews of Sofia, the capital, had been deported to the most backward and unhealthy areas of the country, while their property and positions, together with those of the rest of the Jewish population, had been confiscated or "Aryanized." Even furniture and personal effects had to be left behind by the Jews who were threatened with deportation to Poland.

As a result, at the moment of liberation on September 9, 1944, Bulgarian Jewry presented a picture of abject destitution. At night, the Jews slept on the floors of synagogues and schools; during the day they formed ragged and bare-footed queues in the streets in front of public kitchens to receive a daily spoonful of hot water or potatoes. Almost all the residents of Sofia returned to the ruined capital, in the hope of being permitted to take possession of at least some of their stolen property and to start a new life on the ruins of the old. A painful period of waiting and hoping began, a period of longing for a chance to earn a living. For most Bulgarian Jews, these hopes have as yet remained unfulfilled.

For some time they were given promises which, however, soon turned into excuses and subterfuges. On September 22, 1944, the new National Liberation Front Government declared that full equality of rights had been restored to Jews who now "live under the same conditions and freedom as do other Bulgarian nationals."

In reality, the Jews of Bulgaria may be free, but their conditions of life are not the same as those of other Bulgarians. A *New York Times* dispatch dated January 17, 1945, reported that while freedom and equal rights are assured the Jews, "the only thing they are able to do with their freedom is to starve and freeze."

On January 8, the Cabinet approved a decree providing for the return of certain limited categories of Jewish property seized by the Nazi-dominated régime, such as farms if actually cultivated by Jews, pharmacies, and confiscated property sold directly by the Government itself to third parties. However, on January 22, a Government spokesman informed the Jewish community that although the Government realized the "righteousness" of Jewish claims for restoration of property, the economic situation made immediate restoration difficult. According to confidential reports emanating from Bulgaria, the Government at the same time made it clear that it did not intend to make any Bulgarian suffer from the satisfaction of Jewish demands for restoration and indemnification. In February, David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency, declared after a visit to Bulgaria, that Jewish Communists were opposing the return of Jewish property on the ground that restitution and compensation might lead to the rebirth of anti-Semitism.

Finally, a law published on March 5, 1945, provided that all land confiscated from Jews would be returned to the owners, with the exception "of the land upon which peasants have settled." For the latter category, the law provided monetary compensation to be assessed at 1942 land prices which, in terms of the present value of the currency, would yield only a small fraction of the real value of the properties involved. Rents collected by the Government from tenants of confiscated Jewish real property would also be returned to the rightful owners. The law provided for the return of confiscated goods and stocks and bonds, as well as identifiable personal property. There was also a provision for payment by the State for destroyed Jewish property.

These provisions seem far from satisfactory. Most of the Jewish-owned land is today in the hands of peasants, and

thus only a small part of Jewish landed property is going to be restored. Moreover, the total amount repayable for land taken over by peasants is limited to a total of 30 million *leva*. The 20% property tax levied on the Jews netted the treasury many times this amount, and the total loss of Bulgarian Jewry is estimated at 2-3 billion *leva*. Furthermore, only Jews residing in Bulgaria will be paid without delay even on this precarious basis, while those abroad will have to wait. Finally, the total amount of cash "compensation" for any individual is limited to 50,000 *leva* (about \$65,000); the "balance" will be paid in government bonds redeemable within six years.

It will be difficult, therefore, even for the claimants of substantial sums to establish themselves anew with the help of the compensation they may actually receive by virtue of this legislation. It may represent a measure of temporary relief, but cannot be a factor of rehabilitation even in the face of the comparatively low pre-war economic standards of the average Bulgarian Jew.

In the course of March and April 1945, a larger number of leading collaborators, among them officials of the Nazi "Jewish Commissariat," anti-Semitic writers, overseers of concentration camps in Bulgaria, and those responsible for Jewish deportations to Poland, were tried by a special panel of a People's Court; some of them were sentenced to death.

Some time after the return of Jews to the capital, wretched sanitary conditions caused an outbreak of epidemics in the Jewish quarters of Sofia, enhancing the feeling of many Jews that it would be hopeless for them to remain in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Government is, however, placing obstacles in the way of emigration. Jews equipped with Palestine certificates have been refused exit permits, and even transit visas for Jews desiring to reach Palestine have been denied by the Bulgarian authorities. At the same time, Bulgarian Jews themselves are not united on the issues of emigration and Zionism.

## 5. Greece

The situation of the small surviving fraction of Greek Jewry is still confused and very precarious from every point of view. According to latest estimates, only about 18,000 Jews have been found alive in Greece, out of a pre-1939 minimum total of 85,000. In October 1944, International Red Cross officials estimated that 70,000 Jews had been deported, for the most part to Poland, during the Nazi occupation. Greek Jewish sources, among them Elia Barzilai, chief rabbi of Athens, claim that the original number of Jews in Greece exceeded 95,000. This would indicate an even higher total loss. Before the war, some 50,000 Jews lived in Salonika alone; this number has been reduced to 543. Only very few of the deported Greek Jews have been found alive by Allied forces of liberation.

In practice, restoration of confiscated Jewish property and positions is lagging far behind both legitimate claims and repeated official promises. By a decree of October 22, 1941, the Government-in-exile invalidated acquisitions of property by the enemy and by persons acting under his orders. This, however, does not seem at all to affect beneficiaries who are Greek nationals. Problems of multiple transfers of property are not even touched upon, and compensation for unidentifiable property is hardly mentioned. In effect, the entire issue of restitution and compensation seems to be still at the stage of promises. On March 8, 1945, the Minister of Social Welfare again pledged restitution and indemnification. On April 29, the Minister of Finance declared, however, that decisive steps would be taken at the end of the war in Europe, when an autonomous board would be appointed to administer property of deported Jews. As of the end of June 1945, in terms of actual restitution, the only actions recorded have been partial restitutive decrees in the re-annexed province of Macedonia and the return of properties confiscated by the municipality of Salonika.

At present, some 12,000 Jews are believed to be living in Athens, and about 3,000 in Salonika. The rest, some 3,000, are scattered throughout the country. They live in most miserable circumstances; most of them are completely

destitute and many do not even possess a piece of decent clothing. Starvation and disease are permanent features of their lives. Government assistance to the Jewish victims of Nazism is inadequate, while UNRRA and J.D.C. help has been delayed by hostilities between political factions in Greece. In a devastated country so poorly endowed by nature as is Greece, the process of rehabilitation is in general slower and more painful than elsewhere, and this is doubly true in the rehabilitation of the ruined Jewish element. Consequently, a considerable part of the Jewish population pin their hopes on emigration, preferably to Palestine.

The factional strife in Greece has also affected the Jews in a political sense. In the rescue of the surviving Jewish population, the leftist EAM-ELAS forces had a definite part, notably in connection with spirited away most Jews from Athens, the capital, to safety. Many of the younger, able-bodied Jews immediately joined the fighting ranks of their liberators. The explosive showdown between Right and Left found a number of these Jews in the leftist camp. As a result, many of them shared the lot of the defeated leftist groups. Usually reliable sources reported that considerable numbers of Jews who escaped and fought the Nazis, were being hunted down and, in some cases, deported to Africa. Included among them were younger Jews who had belonged to mountain units of ELAS and could not, therefore, have taken part in the civil hostilities in Athens, as well as older members of the Jewish community of Athens. Former collaborationists, in an attempt to hold on to their illegal acquisitions of Jewish property, seized upon the opportunity to engage in an anti-Jewish campaign in which they condemned all Jews as subversive "conspirators."

A Government decree published on October 23, 1944, restored full civil rights to Jews, and provided for the establishment of temporary Jewish communal councils for Athens and Salonika.