

C.L. All right. Mr Bergson and Mr Merlin, we are in New York almost 40 years after the holocaust, the destruction of the Jews of Europe. You had the chance to be in New York during this whole period. I would like first of all that you try to describe, to give an idea for the people of Europe - because it is very difficult to imagine even now - what was the climate in the United States when the first news about the extermination of the Jews of Europe started to be known? What were the reactions here in America among the Jews, among the general people?

BERGSON: For the general people there was no such thing, in a broad sense, as 'starting to be known'. It exploded one day, at least for me, and I presume the average American Jew was not better informed than I was, in the form of a small story in the 'Washington Post' - I was in Washington at the time - on an inside page, about the tenth page, with a headline which nearly knocked me over. It simply said "Rabbi Weiss says 6 million Jews slain". I read it again and again, you know, I didn't believe what I was reading.

C.L. Rabbi ^{Wife} Weiss was the President of the American Jewish Congress.

B. Rabbi ^{Wife} Weiss was president of many things, he was the ^{Poubah?} 'King of the Jews'. It said that walking out of a conference with Assistant Secretary of State Adolf ^{Berle} ~~Berle~~ he made this announcement on the steps of the State Department to reporters, and then he said some 'blah blah', you know,

something very general....

- C. 1. Could you say exactly what he said?
- B. I don't remember. He just said 'It's terrible', some general adjectives, you know. In those days I, together with Sam Merlin and others were working on a committee for a Jewish army of stateless and Palestinian Jews, and we had dealt with and met several times - at least I had - Mr Burley, the Assistant Secretary of State. I ran to the phone and called his secretary and said 'Did you see the paper?' She said, 'Unfortunately, yes.' I said 'Is it true?' She said 'Yes'. I said 'I must see him. I must see the Secretary.' She answered that he was at the White House, so I said I would come over and wait. So I went over, and sat there waiting, and then finally he saw me. He had a few minutes in between appointments. He confirmed - I asked him the same question again, and in fact he said that the State Department had been urging Rabbi ^{Wise} Weiss for a few weeks to make this announcement and he had delayed it. I said 'What are you going to do about it?' and he said 'What can we do about it?' 'Surely you don't say that the Government of the United States is going to do nothing? I am one individual here, a foreigner, and I know that I am going to do something. What good it will do, I don't know, but I know I am going to do it.' Speaking of action, I did not want to start out on the wrong foot by alienating the Assistant Secretary of State, and I thanked him

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for receiving me, went out and called Merlin (who was my right-hand man on the committee in New York) and asked him that evening to call all our active people - our little group of Palestinians, and all the Americans, Jews and non-Jews, who were on the committee. I made a speech that evening which in essence said that from now on we are going to get up in the morning and go through the day and go to bed at night trying to do something to save the Jews of Europe. Unfortunately mine, which I thought would be a universal reaction - ours, I mean our friends had the same reaction - we did not succeed. We discovered to our horror that life went on without much change.

C.L. This was in 1942?

B. This was November 1942. The 18th I believe, but I'm not sure of the day.

C.L. What do you mean when you say that life went on without much change?

B. The first people we went to was the Jewish establishment, the various organisations. We had met with them already because they tried to get us not to do the committee for a Jewish army either. They were not so much against doing it, they were against the fact that we gave a full-page ad in the paper once. We met with Rabbi Weiss...

C.L. You did?

B. Before then. We had met before, so it was easy to go now. We

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said 'We have to do things', and so forth, but we couldn't connect. We wasted a few weeks running around, trying to get the Jewish organisations to do something, and then we decided to start working on our own. We started running ads: 'Save the Jews of Europe', signed 'Committee for a Jewish Army', simply because that was the only instrument we had. We knew it wasn't effective.

C.L. How do you explain this passivity of organised American Jewry, because I don't see what can...

B. Fear. Petrified fear.

C.L. Petrified fear?

B. Totally unjustified, in my opinion, then and now, some 35 years later. Petrified fear. If you want a dramatisation of it there is a document lying around here, a memorandum of the State Department files that came out, of an interview with Goldman. A 3 or 4-page memorandum, and in it - by the way, all the time ... (?) ... the State Department not to talk about saving Jews but to talk about us - to get me deported, to get me drafted, not to cooperate with the committee. Rabbi Wise is quoted there by Goldman as having said later on, in 1941 to the War Refugee Board - to John Pehle, who was director of the War Refugee Board, which (as you know) came about as a result of our activities - when he couldn't convince Pehle that they should stop cooperating with the Emergency

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Committee and ~~Pelee~~ said "How can I; if it weren't for them maybe I wouldn't be sitting here and there would be no War Refugee Board"... ~~Wise~~ said "Bergson is worse than Hitler, because Hitler brought anti-semitism to Europe and Bergson is bringing it to America."

C.L. You?

B. Yes. Obviously, if I was worse than Hitler because I was screaming 'Save the Jews!' you can imagine how petrified they were. What else did I do? What concern was the Emergency Committee? The name of our organisation was 'The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe'. There was a *baggage* not only in the tremendous literature that has developed after the fact, there are still people repeating the nonsense that the United States Government was afraid to do something to save the Jews in order that it shouldn't be said that this was a Jewish war. This argument came up then, and we said "Who will say it's a Jewish war? The Germans? Who cares what the Germans say? We are at war with the Germans! The Russians, who have been invaded? They don't know why they are fighting? The British don't know why they are fighting? The French don't know they were occupied? Who will say it's a Jewish war? The Jews will say it's a Jewish war!" And this fear was an inside Jewish fear that petrified them.

C.L. You are sure of what you say?

B. Unfortunately. You cannot explain the passivity by the way

we went in the middle of this most gruesome subject, I believe, in human history, which affects the lives of all of us - Jews and non-Jews alike, whether we live in the United States, or in Israel as I do, or in China for that matter. I believe that the lack of reaction during the war is still functioning, because there is still time to react after the fact. There was no reaction while the murder went on, and there is no reaction afterwards. I think that it has affected, and will affect, the future of humanity all over until the process of fighting against this dehumanisation, which went over and is going over unnoticed - in this respect maybe something has moved in Germany last week, when there was a beginning for the first time by the German Government to have a little bit of recognition, some action in connection with this 40th anniversary of what they call the 'Crystal Night'. We cannot resurrect the dead. The Jews of Europe are dead, 85% or 90% of those whom Hitler wanted to kill were killed, and what we can do - what we must do, and I think the Jews have a bigger duty, (not a bigger self-interest, just a bigger duty to humanity) - is to re-examine ourselves...

Boîte n° 227

NEW YORK - BERGSON 1/19

3. I want to finish the idea that we have to re-examine our

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attitude, I mean we Jews. I re-examine myself, and I worked 15 or 20 hours a day during that period, and yet I re-examine to make sure "Can I really accuse others?" The Jews who hardly did anything, especially the Jewish leadership, which did not change its agenda, neither in private life nor in public life, neither in ideals, neither in Zionism, neither in political purpose - has to come out with a 'mea culpa' in order to be able to come to the rest of the world and accuse them of the inaction and the silence. As long as we don't do this, I think our yelling against the fact that the Jews were murdered is of no purpose. In fact, maybe it hurts.

C.L. Yes, but the real point is the following, according to me:

How do you explain this lack of reaction? This inaction? You say it was a petrified fear. Do you think this was enough?

MERLIN: May I say something?

B. Go ahead, please.

M. Of course fear was an important ingredient that made up the attitude of the Jews in this country during the holocaust, but fear in itself is not always a negative reaction. Often there are justifications to be frightened. The reaction of the Jews in America was a result not only of fear - the fear itself was a result of prior psychological and mental attitudes - it was a result of a certain way of thinking, a certain traditional concept. The Jews in America believed that first of all they had to be concerned with their own welfare, their own status.

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They were extremely satisfied and happy in this country, they were not frightened people, they were happy people because the majority of them came from Eastern Europe and they felt here, for the first time, as people who are not being persecuted because of race, that they were being treated with dignity, with equality. When we came to this country as representatives of the Irgun we were motivated and driven by a sense of urgency, a sense of emergency that we brought from Palestine and from Europe which was completely lacking in this community. On the contrary they continued the traditional Jewish attitude of eternity, that time is for the Jews, that God saved and protected the Jews for 4 000 years, that there were persecutions in every generation and we always prevailed.

C.L. What about the feeling that every day which passed doomed the Jews of Europe?

M. They were educated, in as much as they were educated, that Jews will prevail, because the Jews are an eternal people. One has to take into consideration that now all kinds of books appear, probably a dozen or twenty, that lay the stress that the Jews were afraid. If you say that the Jews were afraid, (the American Jews), then to a certain extent you exonerate their behaviour. What is important - and again there is another problem here - is that the books writing about this period say that the Jews of America were divided, and because of the internal bickerings they couldn't be effective

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in action in order to save the Jews. But the truth of the matter is that the Jews were not divided, they were united in a certain indifference. There were not many organisations in the United States: the dominant organisation was the Zionist organisation, and all the others, like the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress and later the American Jewish Conference, were all front organisations of the Zionists. So one cannot say there were many organisations. Of course, among the leaders there were certain squabbles, personal rivalries, but from the point of view of ideology and politics they were united. Then there was a small group, the American Jewish Committee, of plutocrats, rich Jews. They had some contacts and influence with the Government but they were not a mass organisation. Then there were the religious people; they were an exception. The religious, orthodox people really cared, they were emotionally involved and they cooperated with us to the full extent.

Who were the people for whom it was the first priority to save the Jews of Europe, or at least to try to save the Jews of Europe, at any price?

M. Only we.

BERGSON: We did it from a political point of view, and the religious people did it from the narrow point of view of saving lives. It's not that I am trying to knock them down, I think their reaction was much healthier, as Merlin pointed out; but in my opinion, if you want to dig into it what you come to is a

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question of identity. The Jewish unity that is so spoken about couldn't cope. It could cope with philosophy, ideology, abstractions, but it couldn't cope with a cataclysmic event such as the extermination of the Jews because, in reality, the Germans were killing Jews in Europe and not in America - not a single American Jew in America was killed - and therefore the talk of *Mi qiden?* 'we Jews', united and one people, didn't make any sense (and it never made sense before, in a political sense). Our great innovation was that we realised this was a war of extinction; it was a matter of principle, a political action. The Germans decided that their war aim included the extermination of the Jews, and therefore there was only one answer: to convince the United States Government (and the other Allied Governments, but since we were here we concentrated on the Americans) that it had to become their war aim to save the Jews. This the Jewish organisations, the Jewish leaders couldn't even understand; to this very day they don't understand what we were talking about. And they couldn't break the American Government: when we introduced (our friends in Congress) a resolution that there should be an Agency made by the President - a Presidential Agency - to save the remnants of the Jewish people of Europe, eventually we won, and we lost. We won because the President formed such a Commission called the War Refugee Board. Why? Because the Jews were afraid to say 'Jew Refugee Board', so as not to

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say it was a Jewish war. What did they do the next day? When we, in cooperation with the staff, had already 65 million dollars of presidential funds earmarked, all the Jewish organisations came and brought cheques to the War Refugee Board and gave contributions - to the American Government, you see so/it shouldn't be said that the American Government spent money on Jews.

C.L. The word 'Jew' was not even uttered?

B. As much as they could help it, they avoided it. We really have to go back to dig into this thing, because Hitler... everybody thinks, if you take a young guy today he thinks 'Hitler came to power and started killing all the Jews'. Well, Hitler came to power in 1933 and the killing of the Jews started in 1942.

C.L. '41

B. '41. This is not '33. There was a period, and in order to understand, Claude, what happened when the massacre was known, after Rabbi Wise's press conference...

Bobine n° 228

NEW YORK 50 - BERGSON/MERLIN

C.L. I think your accusations against organised American Jewry and the Zionist establishment are very sharp. In spite of everything you have said, in spite of the fear and the fact that

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(C.L.) they felt very well in America and didn't want to have anything to do, in one way, with their own past in Poland, it is very difficult to imagine what the average Jew in this country - I mean the Jew in the street - what were his feelings. I would like to understand this, because there are two things: there is the common Jew and there are the leaders. I would like you to elaborate more on this. What were the Jews of Orchard Street thinking, for instance? What did they know, that you passed to the leadership afterwards?

B. The Jews, then especially, were very disciplined people. They always were disciplined people, they followed their leaders, certainly on such an issue, and I think there was a marked distinction: the masses, the average Jew, reacted properly and would have reacted differently if he was given a chance. In the beginning we organized a pageant in Madison Square Garden called 'They shall never die', which Ben Hecht (?) wrote - a big pageant, a theatrical sort of memorial thing. We were petrified; people made me sign so that if we got broke - bankrupt, and unable to pay the expenses I was the official producer. In the marquee there were big names, but I signed the things, and I said "Why?" He said he didn't want to pay the money if it went broke. We didn't know we would fill the hall, they were afraid. We sold out. We had to pay for our tickets, even though everybody was a volunteer, but still, a thing like that cost a lot of money. Two weeks

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(B) before the evening every single one of 22 000 tickets was sold and we decided to chance it. We felt there was a surge of interest, and we issued an announcement that the thing would be an hour earlier, and we made another one at 10.30 in the evening. The police wouldn't give us a permit, they said there have never been so many people there on a non-sporting event. Of course we overcame them and they gave it to us. We filled Madison Square Garden twice in the same night. This was early '43, January or February. And who were we? Unknown people. We used big names, but it was not the names that pulled them. Masses of Jews streamed. I say that if Rabbi Wise and the other Jewish leaders had called a march on Washington they could have mobilised half a million Jews.

MERLIN: You will never escape and nor will Mr Lanzmann escape, this question, because these people were not vicious people. They were not wicked people. There are deeper reasons, fundamental reasons, but one is afraid to touch them because they are of a controversial character. But I believe they have a much less controversial character than just indicating this particular Jew or another particular Jew is guilty or was an accomplice in the murder of millions of Jews.

A.B. I would like to say there is a kind of metaphysical question here. What is the meaning of Treblinka or Auschwitz seen from New York or from Washington? In spite of the fact that people knew, what is the meaning of knowing? I would like to ask you yourself even, what did you have in mind? What did you imagine?

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What did you see? What did you think, when you were talking about the destruction of European Jewry?

B. I speak for myself: as far as I remember that period I was driven by an instinct, and the instinct was to save as many people as possible. I knew there was one way to save people, and this was to make it hard for the Germans. The big question is: could the Jews have been saved? Of course the Jews could not have been saved because by the time I heard about it, for instance, there were already 2 million dead, supposedly. I say 'Jews' could have been saved, a lot of Jews were saved. The fact is that not every single Jew in Europe was killed. There were Jews left, even in the camps, even next to the crematoria. There were hundreds of thousands of Jews saved, and by a few steps, which I hope we will have the chance to discuss, there could have been 2 or 3 million Jews saved. This is what makes this so gruesome. Coming back to the subject, if you go back prior to the extermination, between '33 and '41, the Jews - and this is what became clear to me; I ceased being a Zionist in 1943 when I realised what was going on, and I didn't get into any arguments or fights, but inside to me, (to stop being a Zionist is like the Pope being converted to Judaism.

To me it was a traumatic experience because I was born a Zionist. And I ceased being a Zionist, and I have very bitter feelings towards Zionism, because Zionism with its confusion of identity as a political movement failed because it did

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not clarify the national identity of those Jews who needed
 Palestine as against those Jews who don't need it. That was
 the whole issue, and they went to the Evian conference in
 '38; they were concerned with the internal affairs of Germany,
 they were concerned that the German Jew is a German because
 an American Jew is an American first and foremost, as Rabbi
~~Wise~~ says, and rightly so. It is this lack of clear identity,
 of ~~definition~~. Hitler was not killing American Jews, Hitler was
 killing European Jews who had a different characteristic and
 a different political existence. This was basically a political
 issue which was handled... If you ask me how to summarise it
 I will say the tragedy was that a political war of extermination-
 the greatest, and the only one for the time being, of its
 magnitude in history, so of a different character because it
 was a war of total annihilation for no purpose - this political
 act par excellence committed by an entire war machine was
 treated as an emotional, metaphysical issue, by the confusion
 of so-called 'Jewish unity' - that we are one people, ~~we~~
 are one', as they say today, we came to try and give them a
 definition, and called them Hebrews. Today they are called
 Israelis, because when it comes to practical things they had to
 change the name. And today they are fuzzing the issue again.
 There was a period - and maybe it will dramatize - what happened
 when the war was over? It's a pity we don't have the documents;
 we lost them. We have correspondence - the Hebrew Committee
of National Liberation - with a Russian General who occupied

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Rumania (or liberated Rumania; rather) because UNRA[?], which already existed and functioned, had a rule that they are not supposed to help enemy aliens - so the Jew in Rumania who was hiding somewhere in a cellar so he would not be caught by the Rumanians and the Nazis to be deported and killed, the next day when the Russians came in, he became an enemy alien. He became a Rumanian. It took us nearly a year to have the charter of Unra[?] amended to enable them to include these people as beneficiaries. This is the inner confusion of the whole subject, in my opinion.

C.I. But you were talking about the beginnings prior to the extermination and about the Evian conference. I think this is completely true, but in the Evian conference I don't see this question of identity as relevant.

B. I say this because it was there, but not known. At the Evian conference everything was nice and smooth, everything was polite, and then when the extermination came, not being organised to really counter it they continued as if everything was the same. They were afraid to do things which did not fit the concept of the leaders of American Jews as to what Jews... American Jews should behave as Americans. Here, I said, they were afraid. They were afraid, and unjustly so.

C.I. You mean they didn't give a political answer to a political question?

B. Right. Because they had to pressure the American Government, which would have yielded, in my opinion, I don't think there is any question about it. If the proper pressure had come up,

Roosevelt and the American administration - despite the British, who exerted very strong counter-pressure because of Palestine - I think Roosevelt would have taken the necessary steps, just as he finally took the step of the War Refugee Board, which wasn't 'the' answer, but was something. A lot more could have been done.

C.L. Yes, but this was extremely late, the creation of the War Refugee Board.

B. I know, because, horrible as it sounds, a Resolution introduced in both Houses of Congress urging the President to establish an agency to save the remnants of the Jewish people of Europe was pigeonholed by the Jewish chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, at the request of Jewish leaders.

Rabbi Weiss testified at hearings, which was a tactic to delay it, and he said - he didn't say it shouldn't be done - he said 'It's not enough, because the big issue is opening the gates of Palestine'.

Bobine n° 51 (?)

C.L. You said that in the dialogue (?) adequate pressure would have been exerted, on Roosevelt for example, and that things would have changed.

B. Correct.

In Europe there were 6 million Jews in the hands of the Nazis, and a lot of them had already been exterminated. In America let's say there were about the same number of Jews, which could be considered as a pressure group, but it's not so true.

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(C.L.) I wonder if what you say is true. I have to ask you what could have been done, how this could have been done.

B. Many things could have been done if the principle... our main proposal was that the President should establish a commission to rescue the remnants of the Jewish people of Europe. It was to be accepted as a task, as a war aim... (inintelligible)

I'll tell you a couple of his ideas - other people had some ideas, the famous idea of bombing Auschwitz. It wouldn't have saved so many Jews, but it would have had a psychological effect and saved some Jews, the idea of putting a monkey wrench into the extermination machine. We advised a much more radical idea which would have stopped the extermination from scratch.

C.L. How was that?

B. It was a practical thing. Here is a document which you can see is a letter of mine to the Committee, (2) which was considered at a special meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They decided, and rightly so in my opinion, that this was a political issue. We did this when we were still pressuring the State Department and Roosevelt and the War Refugee Board to adopt it. The Allies warned the Germans not to use poison gas against any of the peoples within their occupation, or they would retaliate by using poison gas against Germany. As you can see from these documents there was a plan of using poison gas if necessary. They said to us they had examined it in the light of this plan. We immediately cabled Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, but especially started pressuring the White House, and

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this was in '44, it was late but there were still a lot of Jews alive, that it was a known fact that the Germans were using gas on Jews, and therefore by ignoring it, as we said, to the criminal Nazi mind this is an encouragement in the murderous affairs. We demanded that Germany be given an official warning to stop using the gas against the Jews, and if they didn't stop, that poison gas be used against Germany. This was a very shocking proposition...

C.1. The bombing of German cities...

B. ...with gas, of course! Why did they say they would do it if they did it to Greeks, or to Poles? Are Jews less human beings than Greeks or Poles? The same thing is the story of the 'Jewish war'. Who were the Americans fighting? Weren't they fighting for other people, for Scotsmen, for Englishmen, for Frenchmen? Why are the Jews any worse than any of these? (...) America was fighting for itself, it really didn't make any difference what kind of name you give to the war. But on the poison gas is the whole tragedy of the issue, because there they were on record threatening to use gas, and it worked because the Germans did not use poison gas on anybody except on the Jews. And they refused - here is where Roosevelt acted criminally - they refused to include the Jews in the warning. They joined the dehumanisation of the Jews, because the Jews are not 'worthy' of retaliation. If you kill Jews with gas, then the Germans are safer in Berlin. And when I included in the

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first speech I made as Chairman of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, in a public meeting in New York which was broadcast on the radio station of the New York Times, - when I included this as a concrete proposal, everybody was aghast. They thought it was a lot of 'Chutzbah', and to me this was a minimal thing, that a Jew thinks he is also a human being and cannot separate the two. I am not first a Jew and then a human being, or vice-versa. To me it is the same thing. I normally advocate such an idea. Now, the threat of the use of poison gas would have reduced the extermination to a trickle. They would have continued killing Jews with machine guns, but it takes a lot longer to kill a person with a machine gun than it does with poison gas.

C.L. What were the other proposals?

B. We had proposals before that (which you see in one of those (files) - acts) to establish in Turkey a 25 square-mile refuge, 25 square miles where the Allies would guarantee to feed the people there if they managed to get there on their own or to be brought there, and guarantee the Turks would take them out without mentioning Palestine again. The key issue was to separate this from the political issue of Palestine, which got the British so adamant.

C.L. Why?

B. Because the British were concerned - I am not trying to defend

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them, I think their attitude was completely criminal - they were concerned that if there would be Jews, where would they put them? The pressure of the surviving Jews then would be towards Palestine, and they were concerned with keeping their imperial position in Palestine. But the Americans did not have this consideration.

C.L. Yes, but it was the ideology of the Zionists...

B. Well that's the whole tragedy, that's what we tried to break away from. I told you before, as a result of this bankruptcy of Zionism - because if you don't want to save Jews because of Zionism ...

C.L. Explain this more, please.

B. The whole purpose, you see... they became victims of mythical ideology, of Zionist redemption between an emotional spiritual yearning, whereas first of all there should have been the physical salvation of the human beings, the Jews of Eastern Europe. The minute the life of that human being was threatened, everything else became irrelevant, - to us it was a foregone conclusion. And we were accused of being traitors to Zionism. I said 'If this is Zionism I am not a Zionist'.

C.L. (?)

B. Well obviously. I remember at one meeting telling Rabbi Wise ... he said we had to say 'Open the gates of Palestine' and I said that was like saying if there was a fire in this building and I managed to run outside for you, would you want me to scream 'Rabbi Wise is burning inside, save him!' or scream 'Rabbi Wise is burning, ... (?)...' I said 'What has it got to

See him to the ...

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with where you save him from! The thing to scream is 'Save them!' and separate it, but they wouldn't.

C.L. And put them wherever possible?

B. Not even mention it, or mention other places, but not mention it. Separate the idea, to put the British in an impossible position and to pressure the American government, which really was not that concerned with Palestine. But when the pressure from here was weaker than the pressure from the British, there was inaction.

C.L. And what were your other proposals? I think you had several.

B. All sorts of proposals. We also repeated this proposal of bombing Auschwitz. It was not carried out because even though the Allies later on were bombing about 5 or 10 miles away from Auschwitz, they didn't do it because the basic thesis that it is a task of the Allies to save the Jews was not accepted. When this was not accepted it was clear that the General Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would reject the gas idea, because they said it was a political idea - each item became a political idea, because the overall policy was that the only thing we can do is win the general war. This was a cynical escape, which unfortunately many of the Jewish leaders wanted. They said 'After all there is a war, and the only thing we can do is win the war.' And we said 'If you are not going to fight this war and the extermination separately, there will be no Jews to save when the war is over,' which is more or less what happened. There were a few hundred thousand left.

Karski

C.L. Do you think that even if the Jews had exerted adequate pressure the Allied powers would have been able or willing to launch a separate, specific war to save specifically the Jews?

B. In my opinion, Claude, and it may be tragic - maybe I would be a happier human being if I didn't feel so convinced - you are overlooking a major thing: the non-Jews. The Emergency Committee to save the Jewish people of Europe attracted hundreds of the most prominent people in the United States, who were immediately

C.L. In your committee?

B. In our committee, but imagine if the other Jews did it they would have got more non-Jews. You speak as if only the Jews would have acted. If the Jews had laid the action of the American people demanding from their Government, it is the American people who would have forced them. It isn't the Jews who today, in this post-holocaust era, have mobilised the support of the administration behind Israel, it is because the Jews went ahead and forged the support of the American people. If they lose the support of the American people, the Jews alone can't do it. I never suggested - you misunderstood me fundamentally if you thought that I thought the Jews alone could have dictated the policy of the Roosevelt administration. The traditional way was that Jewish matters are separate, the Jews keep it apart, and many non-Jews thought that they didn't want them to interfere in the internal affairs of Jews. Many

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people quit...

C.L. You have said that the Jews alone would have been unable to achieve something, but that they could have enlisted a big part of American non-Jewish leading personalities, and that this would have helped to create the proper pressure on the people of the State Department and on Roosevelt.

B. Correct.

C.L. But I ask you this: why was it so difficult? Today there is a very powerful Jewish lobby in what regards Israel. Why at the time was it so difficult? Was there a Jewish lobby at the time?

B. Of course, we organized one. If I have to say it myself, there is a pro-Israeli lobby now, it was just as easy to organize it in 1942-43, and I am not surmising here, because the proof is that we organized such a lobby. We had close to 200 Congressmen - 160, 170 or so on our committee, the Emergency Committee to save the Jews of Europe, we had 40 senators...

C.L. I stop you immediately because you said at the beginning of this interview that the Jewish leaders were petrified by fear. Today the Jews of the Jewish lobby are not at all petrified - there is no fear, Ok? So I want to understand, was it possible at the time...

B. From the point of view of the Jews, or of the non-Jews?

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C.L. I am thinking about the Jews.

B. The Jews didn't do it - the fact is that they didn't. Not only that they didn't, but they hampered us. What I was trying to bring out is the power. You ask how I am sure they could have got the American Government to adopt a policy which would say that saving the lives of the Jews of Europe is an American aim. You could do it only if you could mobilise a sufficient segment of the American people.

C.L. Yes.

B. You could mobilise in my opinion the American people - we found it easier to mobilise prominent non-Jews than prominent Jews! The Secretary of the Interior of Roosevelt, a very prominent, independent man called Harold ^{Alexis?} (?), was honorary Chairman of the Emergency Committee to save the Jews of Europe in Washington. So Rabbi Weiss wrote him a letter threatening him that he should resign.

C.L. Why?

B. It's hard to send you to ask Rabbi Weiss, but I can't answer this. We handled this before, but it's a fact. I am telling you facts. We nevertheless had very prominent members of the non-Jewish community staying with us. Many probably didn't join that we don't know about because it was known that we are a radical group - that the Jewish establishment is against us. And who were we? We were an emergency committee... At the beginning we managed to get the most important people in the United States - Henry Wallace organised the march of Rabbis

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on Washington. The Vice-President of the United States, by arrangement with us, presided over the Senate, stopped the session of the Senate, asked all the Senators to come out to the steps of the Capitol to see the delegation of Rabbis and made a little speech to them. (There are some pictures here, you can see...)

C.I. All right, all right.

B. Later on, we got to the White House with the same Rabbis, - we had asked for weeks for an appointment with Roosevelt but we didn't get an answer, we didn't know till the last minute, and then it comes out that we were not to see Roosevelt. I went in with the Rabbis as part of the delegation, 5 Rabbis and me, (they were orthodox Rabbis), and we came in and were received by one of Roosevelt's secretaries, a man called MacIntyre, who later published memoirs describing the whole story of our pressure, and the counter-pressure, to have Roosevelt receive us, and the final line is that somebody told Roosevelt 'These are not the kind of Jews you should associate with'. They took Roosevelt out of the White House, told us he was out of town, and the next day we read in the paper that he was in an airforce base dedicating a bomber to Tito.

C.I. Yes, but why did they act afraid? I mean the other Jews, the Jewish leadership. They were afraid to appear to lobby precisely

B. They were afraid to lobby, they were afraid of the charge that this was a Jewish war, they were afraid to assert themselves. This was a different period.

C.I. Do you think this is the real difference between your action and their action, or inaction?

B. 100 percent.

C.I. And would you say that you were a radical group?

B. They said, I didn't say we were a radical group. I think we were a very modest group. If we were radical we would have thrown bombs. God knows, if there was ever a justification to throw bombs, these were the years; we didn't even think about it. Because we were not radical, we were humanists. We were human beings reacting in a humanist way, in a most elementary form, with a great deal of energy, but there was no radical question. What did we do? We ran ads in the paper, we made a very peaceful march in Washington. One of the leading American newspapermen, William Allen White, who was an institution in this country, from the Midwest, the pick of Kansas, he met me in Washington then and introduced me to Wallace; he said 'I don't understand the Jews. There shouldn't be one window unbroken in any British office in this country. If they did this to us Irish, we would have broken all the British office windows in the United States.'

C.I. This was radicalism.

B. In those days this was radicalism. We were not radical; I think we were very humanist.

C.I. Who got the first wind of the idea of the *ads*

B. This we started with the Committee for a Jewish army, at first it was before the extermination. We had an ad, the first one in late '41, early '42, - 'Jews fight for the right to fight' was the headline - advocating a Jewish army of stateless and

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...Palestinian Jews. Then we started doing everything, everything we could.

C.L. It didn't happen before in the American press?

B. No. The Zionists started copying this 10 or 15 years later.

Now they do it all the time. We organised a pageant, I mentioned it before, in Madison Square Garden, where the Jews came twice in one evening, 45 000 people, and then we took it to Washington for a select audience where there were 4 supreme court Justices, Mrs Roosevelt and all the ambassadors under the chairmanship of the Ambassadors of occupied Europe - the whole diplomatic corps except the British, 2 or 3 members of the Cabinet. Imagine that this was done by a small group of people, the driving force...

C.L. What was the impact of the advertisements? Did it seem to be very strong?

B. I think they had an impact. We spoke before... We lost and won.

We lost because we did not succeed in putting across the fundamental theme of a governmental duty of a war purpose to save the Jewish people of Europe. We advocated a War Rescue Board to Save the Jews, and they made a War Refugee Board, which was a different proposition, but yet - (a) this was better than nothing, and (b) we don't know, but the fact is that when the war was over several hundred thousand Jews had survived. I hope that our work had something to do with it. The important thing is to realise that from these facts one can surmise that

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if there had been real pressure, there could have been many, many more Jews saved. I don't think they could have saved all the Jews because it was too late. But most could have been saved.

C.L. As a matter of fact the whole year of '43 was completely lost.

B. Because we were also busy fighting the sabotage in Congress.
MERLIN: It depends when you count that the struggle between us and the Zionists began, because, as I said, we were animated and driven by a feeling that time was running out. But this was before the war, this was in 1936 - 1937,

C.L. You were already driven at this time...

M. At that time we were under the impact of ^{2nd Yablonsky} ~~Yablonsky~~, who said that 'if you Jews will not liquidate the Diaspora, the Diaspora will liquidate you'. He didn't refer to the holocaust because he didn't foresee it, but he knew that the objective conditions of the Jews in Eastern Europe, of the masses, were such that only by evacuation could they save themselves. The Zionists were not only against the concept of evacuation, they thought that by proclaiming that the Jews had to save themselves by evacuation would mean giving up in advance their rights in the various countries, especially in Poland. Therefore ^{Yablonsky} was considered a traitor, and there was a lynch atmosphere ...

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Merlin: Yes

C.L.: You were talking about the feeling of urgency.

M.: There was a basic and fundamental difference between ^{Talbot} ~~Zelig~~ and later between the Irgun and the established Zionist organization. The Zionist leadership, through their ideology and propaganda and dialectics, gave the impression that Zionism aims to liberate the Jewish masses and to rescue them in time from a cataclysm. But in reality this was not the case at all: Zionism aimed to transform, through education and vocational schooling, a small minority of young people who should be prepared to go to Palestine and live a life which is not plagued and degraded by the life of the Jews in Europe. They wanted a new generation - productive, proud, physically strong, and socially just. They were not interested in the danger or they were not aware of the danger to the masses of the Jewish people. And this, to my opinion, was the root cause of why the Zionists were unable psychologically and emotionally to identify themselves with the Jews trapped in Hitler's Europe.

C.L.: With the fate of these Jews?

M.: With the fate of the Jews trapped in Hitler's Europe. As a result of this basic difference we started rescuing, not in 1941, not in '42, not in '43, but we started rescue in 1935

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illegal
through / immigration, we decided that in the framework and
in the confines of the legal certificates that the British all-
located to the Jewish agency to distribute among a few thousand
Jews a year, this would not rescue the Jewish masses from
their impending doom. The Zionists were against the illegal
immigration for all kinds of reasons - mainly, for two reasons:
first, because illegal immigration was not selective qualitatively
and morally as they wanted it. The Jewish agency became a
monopoly of limited Jewish immigration. Here there was the
danger that this monopoly would be broken. So these were the
two reasons: first, they were against illegal immigration
because it was not selective, second that it was outside their
monopoly that they received from the British Government. We
came to this country - when I say 'we', I mean delegates of the
Irgun, of the Irgun's (?) in Palestine - as early as 1939, and
we came with the specific, very clear aim of mobilizing funds
in order to finance, with an ever-larger scope, the illegal
immigration from Eastern Europe.

C.L. A mass emigration?

M. A mass immigration. We felt the stampede coming. The stampede
came in 1940, 1941.

C.L. And afterwards you wanted to transform the mass immigration
into a mass rescue?

M. When we came here we found a world that was to us, to Hebrews -
us
Palestinian Jews, members of the Irgun, some of/disciples or
former disciples of *Yehonatan*, - things which were foreign;

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exactly as we were foreign to the Jews here, we found things foreign to us. First we noticed that the Jews don't take themselves seriously; we found such strange phenomena that regardless how important the Jewish story from abroad, from Europe or from Palestine is, the New York Times gave its leader on the Obituary page because somehow, by association of ideas, Jews had to do with death; or it was hidden in the religious rubric in the sense that Jews have to do with the synagogue.

C.L. What do you mean? I don't understand.

M. Jewish news stories were printed in the New York Times and other newspapers, but mainly the New York Times, either on the obituary page...

C.L. You mean news of the extermination?

M. No, not about the extermination - regardless of what kind of important news it was. In 1938, 1939, for instance, that the Jews should participate in the war against Hitler, or whatever new measures Hitler took against the Jews, it was relegated always to an item either on the Obituary page that deals with the dying, or on the religious page that deals with religion. We asked ourselves Why? Why shouldn't such an important, central problem that was declared by Hitler as one of his main war aims not be front page. We decided that we would remove it from the obituary page, from the synagogue page on to the front page. And we did it because we felt that Jews and their condition and their sufferings and their hopes and their aspirations are an important and central issue in the world.

Second: all the activities were downtown, south of 14th Street.

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14th Street was the limit of all the activities.

C.L. Of what? Of the Jews?

M. Of the Jews. The lower East Side. All the three Jewish-Yiddish newspapers were concentrated there, all the famous Jewish restaurants were there, a café where the Jewish intelligentsia and bohemia - the writers and painters - congregated, the Cafe Royal, was on Second Avenue. The furthest that Jews ever dared to come out from the lower East Side was Manhattan centre, on 34th Street. But this was an exception.

C.L. They never went further?

M. Never. And we decided that it doesn't make sense.

C.L. There were no Jews in Elizabeth...

M. There were, but the organisational activities, the Jewish activities were in the ghetto. Individually they lived on Park Avenue, on Central Park West and Central Park South or wherever it was, but when it came to activities of political action, we decided that it had to be brought into the centre of the city, in the centre of the country because it was an important thing. We tried to understand why it was that the Jews were so reticent about... and we found out that they were, as Peter explained, afraid to bring out the Jewish problem into the open, that terrible things might have happened. We decided to undertake a revolutionary...

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Merlin: One can say all kinds of things about the Zionists, in the sense of what opposed them to us, or why we opposed them, but there were two things they considered crucial, and objectively speaking this is what determined eventually the fate of the Jews of Europe: one was that they were not emotionally identified with the masses of the Jews in Poland, in *Walefki?* and other concentrations of Jews which they always treated with pejorative names and connotations; they themselves did not admire the Jews, they were not shocked to the innermost when terrible things happened to them. If you permit me, it is very tempting to tell you a couple of examples of the state of mind, the philosophy and the ideology of the Zionist leaders. Weismann was the greatest Zionist leader - at any rate considered so by the Zionists - he was the most celebrated Jew in the world. At the last Zionist congress before the war, on August 4th 1937, he repeated himself, quoted what he said to the British Field Commission that investigated Palestine in 1936, one year earlier. He said "Millions of Jews cannot be saved, because (he is)..." (and I quote) "acquainted with the laws of physics and chemistry..."

(?) I don't understand..

...and I know the force of material factors. In our generation, only a minority, the young ones, should be thought of to be

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"saved. The old ones will pass, they will bear their fate or they will not. They are dust, economic and moral dust, in a cruel world." And he claimed to speak not only for himself, but to speak in the spirit of the prophets of old. He said (and I quote), "Thousands of years ago we heard the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and my words are but a weak echo of what was said by our Judges, our singers and prophets. 'Only a remnant shall survive. We have to accept it.'"

It is extremely interesting and indicative that because of Dr. Weizmann's speech the Congress rose and sang the Jewish national anthem, the Song of Hope.

C.J. Do you mean that the Zionists were not shaken by the holocaust, the destruction of European Jewry, because deeply in their hearts they were against this type of Jew?

M. They despised the Jewish masses, and their aim was not to rescue their lives, their aim was to create a transformation of Jews in a new social and ethical framework.

Bergson: I think there is a danger here of misunderstanding which I, at least, cannot be passive to. I know that Merlin didn't mean it because the way it comes out it would seem that some might understand that the Zionist leadership accepted the massacre of the Jews and did not move to save them simply because they fundamentally didn't care. I would not share this view, and I must reject it. I don't think human emotions - and there were many deep human emotions involved here - are that simplistic.

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M. Human emotions are complex; and we can judge only by documents...

C.L. Ok, if you have some documents please read them.

M. Here are protocols written at the time of the Rescue Committee - it had all kinds of names, but it settled in 1943 under the name of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency - and there was a 'Doktorat', a Phd printed in Palestine...

C.L. Ok, Ok, but begin the quotation please.

M. The Chairman said...

C.L. Who is the Chairman?

M. Itzfa ^{Greenbaum?} Grimbart (?) He said time and again that it was no use protesting or engaging in any noisy activities, no use in pressuring the governments because nothing can be done and the vast majority of the Jews have to be considered doomed, that the British and Americans were right, that only a military victory may save them. Goldmann said, after he came from a meeting with the State Department, he wrote to the committee saying "I am afraid we have to take it for granted that the extermination of the Jews of Europe will be completed and only remnants will remain: in Britain and in Russia." More than that, when somebody asked if this was the case, that nothing is to be done because nothing can be done, why do we need a Rescue Committee? They explained, 'We need a Rescue Committee in order to prove to the Jews at issue and the Jews in America that we are doing something'. It's exactly on the line of Eden and Roosevelt, what they had done as far as Evian and Bermuda were concerned: that's do something in order to show that we are doing something,

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but actually we don't believe that something can be done, or we don't want to do something. I don't say that the Zionists didn't want to do anything. I only said that their emotional identification was very weak because they were not prepared for it.

Bergson: I still feel that this does injustice to people who maybe don't deserve much justice, but deserve a lot more pity. I think they didn't act because they were petrified. I think they didn't act because they are apolitical people, they are petrified Jews who accept Jewish destiny as being passive. The Jewish existence for 2000 years was to be passive. You needed political action, and they were incapable of grasping...

C.L. I don't think you are right. It is not the case of these people of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency, it is not the case with these people like Greenbaum.

B. You think they have political understanding? Zero!

C.L. No, maybe they have no political understanding... they did have a real political understanding, as a matter of fact: they wanted to create a state of Israel at the end, this was their main aim.

B. He is condemning them too much, and you are giving them too much credit.

Merlin: How do you explain... In 1940, late 1940, we were engaged in rescuing 2400 people who were trapped at the Danube. It was December, and they were trapped in barges, and we needed to

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rescue them to a ship called the Sychariah. At long last we did
it, and the Sychariah arrived in Palestine. Apart from 4 people
who died, everybody survived. It was a proposition that needed
200 000 dollars. The people of Europe, - I mean our own emissa-
ries, Hebrew emissaries, the Irgun and the refugees themselves
assembled all the money except the last 12 500 dollars.
Jabotinsky
~~Jabotinsky~~, who was the head of this operation, cabled here...

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C.L. All right, Peter. What did you do actually?

Bergson: Let me try and explain what the task was, as we saw it. The
task was to save as many Jews as possible. The Germans were
killing them, it was a war aim. We didn't control armies, neither
we nor the Jews. We felt that the most important thing was to
get action on the part of the American Government, that is to
say the President. The only way we could do it was to mobilise
the American people, so everything we did had one paramount
objective: to get as many influential Americans, as many masses
of Americans, to create an atmosphere where a pressure would
build up so that the administration would feel that this is
much more important to them than the British pressure not to do

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anything; because the British pressure not to do anything was because of Palestine. The Zionists, to go back before this horrible thing became known, were engaged in a campaign to open the gates of Palestine against the White Paper policy, and we felt that the most important thing was to disengage - not to say this is nothing to do with Palestine, but to ignore Palestine and create a tidal wave of human reaction that would pressure Washington into action. Whatever we did was aimed at mobilising public opinion; you see here some of the ads, which was a propaganda technique on enormous scale: there were over ninety individual ads placed in various papers in the country.

C.D. In all the biggest newspapers?

B. In about ten of the largest newspapers. In towns, sometimes a bunch of people would organise and print an ad in a little, small town. Signed here with a quote by about 40 senators, governors and Congressman on the side on the overall objective - not the ads, because it was impossible to submit each ad because they were coming out fast. Here are some of the headlines. This was after Bermuda; 'Five million Jews in Nazi trap killed; Bermuda was a cruel mockery' - this was a quote from the Manchester Guardian, by the way. 'Action, not Pity' was the overall slogan. Here is an ad which suggests a complete proposal to establish a 25 square-mile camp in Turkey so that the Jews shouldn't be locked in and locked out, they would have a place to go with the Allies guaranteeing the Turks...

C.D. For the Jews of the Balkans?

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B. The Jews of the Balkan areas and of Hungary - many could have come there, - except the Jews were trapped, they couldn't get out and nobody would let them in. If it became known in Europe that there was a place where Jews could go there would have been a whole underground movement of people going there. The Allies, according to what it says here, would guarantee the Turks to take them out after the war - not saying where to, just take them out.

C.L. What is the other one?

B. This one was a specific ad on the story which we reprinted here from the New York Times about Rumania having offered, for a certain sum of money to take out 70 000 Jews from *Thessalonika* to let them go out instead of shipping them to concentration camps.

C.L. Why were they prepared to do this?

B. I beg your pardon? Rumania offered; there was a story in the 'Times' which is here, this is the story, and we took this in a very laconic copy that Ben Hecht brought here and signed: to the (*four freedoms*) care United Nation Leaders the ignoble state of mind. I really am ashamed as a Jew to say that this obvious propaganda to get the American people... the Zionists said, because the headline was 'For Sale 70 000 Jews, guaranteed human beings at 50 dollars apiece'. If you divided it among the money that the Rumanians asked - they said we were selling Jews. They actually did; they accused us, saying 'You are traitors, you are selling Jewish lives. People understand this as if 'Give you 50 dollars, you save a Jew'. This was

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a tragedy, in Madison Square Garden, as I mentioned before, the picture didn't come out. On this we nearly got the Jews to act, this 'ballad of the doomed Jews of Europe', which Ben Hecht wrote. It ends - it says 'the world is busy with other news all the time, be quiet Jews' and so forth, then it says 'oh world be patient, it will take some time before the murder crews are done. By Christmas you can make your peace on earth without the Jews'.

While we were waiting for an allocation of paper - this was during the war - the President of the American Jewish Congress, a Mr. Schulmann (?), and the President of the American Jewish Committee, this influential outfit, Justice ^{Proskauer} ~~Proskow~~ (?) invited me for an urgent conference. The whole purpose of the urgent conference, the first time I met with these two gentlemen in Justice ^{Proskauer} ~~Proskow~~ home, was to stop this ad because they were afraid it would arouse antisemitism, because we were mentioning Christmas. The minute they started talking, I said 'If you are referring to this ad, forget it, we won't publish it'. They said 'Are you willing not to publish it?' I said 'Of course not. I mean, we have no illusions that that one ad will save the Jews. You are very influential people, you have a lot of power and we are doing this to arouse public opinion. If you think it may do some damage, forget it! Let's talk about what we can do to save the Jews. Let's organise a joint Committee. Let's pool forces. You organise a committee, and we'll disband.' ^{Proskauer} ~~Proskow~~ started crying, and I thought 'My God, I've really broken through a little bit,' and sure enough, after ten days

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we had one meeting with a bunch of Jewish leaders, ^{but} and when they saw that we withdrew the ad, they never answered our phone calls afterwards. The ad was supposed to appear at Christmas, and we finally published it in September.

C.L. Why did ~~Proskauer~~ cry?

B. Because I was talking about Jews dying every day while we were talking there, and I tried to convey the sense of urgency. The whole task was to break the routine of daily life. When you have a horror happening like this, people want to run away from it.

C.L. And the bureaucratic routine of the organisations?

B. Correct. Also in America there was a war, and this argument that 'All you are doing to win the war is the most important thing' was a very potent and powerful argument, except that we said 'There is a war within a war and we have to take this front.'

C.L. The war against the Jews was a war within a war?

B. Within a war. Precisely. And this war has to be handled because it is part of the greater war.

C.L. And to be handled with specific means.

B. We have an ad here that says ' (?) and a call to action' saying 'we failed to persuade governments to take measures to save the Jewish people of Europe, now we must turn to mass action'. That was trying to call people to launch a petition. We did many other things, we did pageants, we had endless meetings thousands of them, small large...

C.L. And the march of the Rabbis?

B. Then we organised ...

C.L. Try to explain this in detail.

B. The march?

C.L. Yes.

B. We organised a march, we thought it would be a very effective thing to mobilise Rabbis to go to Washington on a march, a peaceful demonstration. In those days one wouldn't think of violence - I wonder why, but we didn't - and after we had announced it, to our horror we couldn't find any Rabbis to march. We thought if we asked them they would say no, but if you do it, how could they not march? It says 'You shall not stand idly by with the blood of your brother'. A sacred commandment, you know. They didn't march. And then about 2 weeks before the march, the late Rabbi Silver, not the Zionist leader, the President of ' ? Israel', a non-Zionist organisation, issued an order to the orthodox Rabbis (he was President of the organisation of orthodox Rabbis), and he himself came on the march, at the head. Then about 400 or 500 Rabbis showed up; they organised a special train.

C.L. Very religious Rabbis?

B. Orthodox Rabbis, yes. There are some very powerful pictures, like this. And as I said, the culmination of this was supposed to be a meeting with Roosevelt, and we worked very hard to pressure, and used all the senators we could mobilise, to pressure the White House, and it nearly worked. Finally, under the Jewish pressure inside, they overcame and took the President out of the White House in order to be able

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to tell the Rabbis that he was out of town. Technically it wasn't a lie because he went out of town in order to be able to say he was out of town. The important thing he was engaged in was to witness the take off of a bomber which flew to Tito, supposedly. That was in the Times' the next day.

- C.I. It was more important?
- B. It was more important that he should honour it there, you know. The bomber could have been sent - I don't say the bomber wasn't important, but we didn't need Roosevelt's technical aid to send the bomber. But his presence there was more important than receiving the Rabbis to deal with this question. They were trying to take off public opinion pressure, and we were trying to build up the pressure. In the final analysis, all this.
- C.I. You should say who is.
- B. The administration. You see, by that time the Zionists really felt that we were hurting the cause of Palestine, of Zionism. They thought we were too far out in stressing the humanitarian aspects and ignoring (because we didn't mention it, you couldn't find the word 'Palestine' in any of these ads, not one word)... We were trying to create a separate raison, a separate purpose, which was the humanitarian salvation, and ignoring the fact of the political argument with the British over Palestine; separating the two. Finally, whatever good the War Refugee...

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- C.I. It must have been quite something, the arrival of this group of 500 Rabbis in the morning in Washington. All of them came on the train?
- B. They came from various parts of the country. You see, it was part of an overall... we were talking before about the ads, and in this effort to mobilise general public opinion, to overcome the passivity of the Jewish establishment and the Zionist establishment, we thought of dramatising the cause. We had a lot of people, we did a pageant and a play, and one of the ideas that came up was to organise a march of Rabbis. It was one of the most effective propaganda steps that was done. Particularly important was that the Vice-President of the United States was so moved by the whole situation that he agreed to stop the session of the Senate. There are very rare occasions when the session of the Senate is stopped specifically in order to go outside...
- C.I. What did the Rabbis do?
- B. They marched from the station, which is not too far from the Capitol, and when they arrived somebody went to get the right people to alert the Senate. Then the Senate stopped its session, the Vice-President invited all the Senators to come out. Then there was a group of Senators, led by the Vice-President of the U.S., who came out to the steps and they stood there. Then these 400 or 500 Rabbis came up, and their leaders, headed by Rabbi

(B.) Silver, had a petition ready. Then they said a prayer, and many of them cried very emotionally.

MERLIN: The words of the petition were: 'In the name of God, creator of the Universe, blessed be he who (inaudible) ... thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour. I am the Lord'.

C.L. It started like this?

B. And then the Vice-President answered in a few very general, but very fine, emotional words. He did not make any specific political statement, and then they read the petition, the one of which Mr Merlin gave the beginning. Then we all marched to the White House; I am not a Rabbi, but I was there. The march to the White House required the stopping of the traffic all the way. The same march as in the presidential inauguration, except it goes the other way, from the White House to Congress; it is a distance of 2 or 3 miles, and took a good hour and a half. We walked very slowly and all the traffic in the heart of Washington stopped.

C.L. They were old people?

B. They were people of various ages, also old people, Rabbis of all ages. I think it was a very dramatic thing, and even the opponents, I mean the establishment, couldn't attack this. Even though they poked fun at it - in one of those articles we saw before, they were saying they were led by a little kid, with a quote from the Bible but the effect was there. I believe, to summarise, the pressure of the constant horror, and the realisation every day of so many people killed, was just too much

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to comprehend. I am not trying to justify people, I just feel that whatever the motivations, it is important today - and this is the one thing I cannot understand: why thirty years later the Jewish leaders who are still alive don't recant and say 'mea culpa'. This is important, but I really feel that at the time they were just too overwhelmed and petrified. That's what I started with, I think - fear is a very deadly feeling, and I think they were just afraid. When fear is not justified, it becomes anxiety, and this is even more deadly than it could be.

(fin BERGSON/MERLIN)

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