

American Jewish Leaders and the Emerging Nazi Threat (1928–January, 1933)*

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I

Did the National Socialist Party's global anti-Jewish thrust and the onset of its persecution of the Jews in Germany after 1933 really come as a surprise to leaders of the American Jewish community and of the major Jewish organizations in other parts of the world? Overall, the answer must be no. In fact, these individuals and groups—as this study will seek to demonstrate—had been in constant touch with German Jewish groups, and had frequently visited Berlin and other European capitals. Thus they were rather well informed about the all-pervasive Nazi hate-campaign and the party's anti-Jewish policies, and were conscious of their implications for the entire world Jewish community. They watched Hitler's program with growing apprehension, and discussed the problem at closed meetings and in their mutual correspondence. The deteriorating situation in Germany was also reported extensively in the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press, though interpretations varied. Yet all the reliable information, the intellectual analysis, and the recognition of the danger by at least some of the more far-sighted community leaders still did not guide them into any forceful preventive political and philanthropic action. And while the record of a few low-keyed activities is certainly not one of which the commu-

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nity can be proud, the question still remains: What kind of meaningful action was possible fifty years ago, taking into account the domestic and international atmosphere in the late twenties and early thirties, and the position of the Jews in America at that time.¹

American Jewish leaders had been alerted to the danger that the anti-Semitic extreme right-wing presented to the German Jews as early as 1922–1923. In November, 1923, a great number of Jewish stores were robbed in Berlin, Jews beaten up in the streets, and, in Bavaria, the expulsion of foreign Jews launched by the provincial authorities a few days before Hitler's ill-fated coup d'état in Munich. The American Jewish Committee, representing the affluent, acculturated part of the community, contributed \$5,000 in 1922 to counteract the agitation. While Louis Marshall, the Committee's president, did not believe the accuracy of the alarming reports, he brought the Nazi threats against the Jewish community to the attention of Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes. Similarly, the State Department was approached by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, president of the reestablished American Jewish Congress which reflected the ethnocentrism and the national consciousness of newer Jewish groups, mainly of Eastern European origin. The German Embassy in Washington was also contacted. Wise subsequently dispatched Judge Aaron J. Levy, one of the Congress' vice-presidents, to Berlin in order to explain to the German government how disastrous the reaction of the American public would be to Germany if such excesses continued.²

¹ The most important primary sources for this subject are the Cyrus Adler Papers, as well as the minutes of the executive committee of the American Jewish Committee and other relevant files at the American Jewish Committee Archives, New York, N.Y.; the archives of the American Jewish Congress and the Stephen S. Wise Papers at the American Jewish Historical Society Archives, Waltham, Mass.; and the Felix M. Warburg Papers at the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, which contain a great number of American Jewish Committee documents.

² Adler Papers: chronological folders, October–November 1923, and minutes of the executive committee, quoted in Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906–1966* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), p. 147; Wise to Ismar Elbogen, Berlin, November 13, 1923; E.W. Lewin-Epstein, Warsaw, to Wise, November 18, 1923; American Jewish Congress, Confidential Bulletin #2, November 30, 1923; Wise Papers, Box 82.

Similarly, the Joint Foreign Committee (J.F.C.) of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association in London had been in touch with the British Foreign Office and suggested the consul in Munich inform the Bavarian authorities of the British government's

In a response that would often be repeated in the future, Secretary Hughes drew a clear line between the rights and interests of American citizens, which would be defended forcefully, and persons who were not U.S. citizens and for whom the American government was not entitled to intervene. He assured Wise that this distinction did not mean "that we are oblivious to the demands of humanity" and that American diplomats would "express in an informal and appropriate manner the humanitarian sentiment of our people." Yet the real significance of that and similar statements was clear: the disillusioned isolationist administration would not follow earlier, humanitarian precedents. The German ambassador, on his part, told the American Jewish Congress that he had warned his government that the publication of such reports would cause damage to Germany's image, especially "in view of the great charitable work done by Jewish communities . . . for the suffering population of Germany." He had been reassured that the police were ordered to protect the Jews from the rowdies. Because of the changing political climate, his successor in the early thirties would follow a more cautious line in contacts with the representatives of American Jewry.³

The twenties, as Naomi Cohen has remarked in her history of the American Jewish Committee, were not a good time for American Jews, despite the economic progress achieved by many of them: "As Americans they shared the frustrations of a society whose ideals had soured; as not-quite-acceptable Americans their feeling of security in that society was shaken." In those years of the revived Ku Klux Klan, anti-alien restrictions, and heightened

disapproval of the expulsion of the foreign Jews. Lucien Wolf, the J.F.C.'s secretary general, offered to defray expenses for any telegraphing (!) which the urgent action might require. The J.F.C. also contacted the ambassadors of Poland and Czechoslovakia. In principle, Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon's answer was identical with that of Secretary Hughes. Still, the effect of the British consul's unofficial representation was believed to have been salutary. But the J.F.C. preferred not to publicize these activities because of its traditional approach of "backstage diplomacy" and because German Jews were afraid that the anti-Semites would exploit the fact that foreign intervention had been brought about due to international Jewish action.

Lucien Wolf to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, November 14, 1923, and Wolf to Bernard G. Richards, n.d.; Miles W. Lampson, F.O., to Wolf, November 26, 1923; Wise Papers, Box 82.

³ American Jewish Congress Confidential Bulletin, November 30, 1923, *ibid*.

racial tensions, anti-Semitism, for the first time, began to assume significant social dimensions.⁴ Yet social anti-Semitism in the U.S. could in no way be compared with the virulent Nazi anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic, plagued as it was by economic, social, and national grievances. Whereas during the Wilhelmine Empire the Jews were regarded by the majority of the German population as outsiders in spite of their emancipation, in the Weimar Republic they became, in the eyes of the *voelkisch* groups, "the enemy." Anti-Semitism, which successively spread among all strata of German society, was a major subject at thousands of Nazi gatherings, even at a time when they did not obtain more than 2.7 percent of the vote in national elections (1928). There were instances of actual violence against Jews in that year. Jewish-looking persons were assaulted by Nazi hooligans in Berlin; in Hanover the police succeeded in quelling a riot before it reached a violent stage; and Nazi gangs broke up meetings called by the *Centralverein* (C.V.), the liberal political organization of "German citizens of the Jewish faith," to counter anti-Semitic propaganda. In a number of universities, student assemblies, swayed by Nazis and other extreme nationalists, demanded the introduction of a restrictive *numerus clausus* for "students of alien blood." Whereas it was hard for many American Jewish leaders to grasp immediately the full implications of the irrational Nazi campaign, they were certainly aware of these events as well as other anti-Semitic outbursts throughout Europe. Many of them were reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) and appeared in the Jewish press. They were also recorded in the American Jewish Committee's annual report and published in the *American Jewish Year Book*.⁵

In 1928 the *Centralverein*, which at that time represented approximately 60,000 members and was the most influential of the German Jewish organizations, asked the American Jewish Committee for a grant for its publicity campaign. Earlier the C.V. had

⁴ Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁵ Review of the Year 5689 and 22nd annual report of the American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* (AJYB), XXXI, pp. 43-47, 362-63. On the demographic and economic structure of the German Jews see Esra Bennathan, "Die demographische und wirtschaftliche Struktur der Juden," in Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker, eds., *Entscheidungsjahr 1932: Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tuebingen: Mohr, 1966), pp. 83-131.

presented the Committee with a report concerning international anti-Semitic activities which, if unchallenged, could also affect the United States. The C.V.'s request was renewed in 1929 when one of its leaders visited New York.⁶ Marshall, the distinguished corporation lawyer, doubted the efficacy of the C.V.'s methods in fighting Nazi anti-Semitism and regarded them as "dull and theoretical." He would have preferred, he wrote, ridiculing the Nazis in the way he had been fighting the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Henry Ford, and the Ku Klux Klan. As to the requests for financial aid, he thought the 500,000 Jews in Germany, many of whom were very rich, could collect the necessary funds themselves. Indeed, this great American Jewish leader, who had distinguished himself for many years in fighting anti-Semitism and discrimination, showed less understanding of the Nazi threat than a number of his colleagues. Morris D. Waldman, the Hungarian-born executive secretary of the Committee who had spent several weeks in Germany in 1928 and was better informed about the situation of the Jews in Europe, shared some of his president's misgivings about the C.V.'s tactics. Yet he, as well as the scholarly Cyrus Adler, who was soon to succeed Marshall as president, did not underestimate the gravity of the anti-Jewish challenge. Waldman regarded it as incomparable with the anti-Semitic campaign in the U.S.:

The murder of men like [Walther] Rathenau, threatened assassination of men like Max Warburg, was inconceivable in this country, even at the very hey-day of superpatriotic agitation, a few years ago.

Moreover, I believe there is a difference between the temper of the American people and the Germans. The cosmopolitan character of America, due to the diversified racial elements combined with the English sense of fair play which our culture here has inherited from our English mother culture, is much more impervious to anti-race propaganda than the less sportsmanlike temper of the German people.

Waldman emphasized that the increased economic burdens of the Germans and their chagrin over their defeat in the war offered a more fertile soil to race hostilities than the American scene.⁷ At

⁶ Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 156; Max Eisenkraemer (C.V.) to Morris D. Waldman, June 27, 1929, Warburg Papers, Box 251; minutes of the executive committee, November 9, 1929, American Jewish Committee Archives.

⁷ Louis Marshall to Waldman, July 10, 1929; Waldman to Marshall, July 11, 1929,



Cyrus Adler (1863–1940)
American Jewish communal leader, academic, and a founder
and president of the American Jewish Committee

his suggestion, Marshall discussed the situation in Germany with Max Warburg and others during the first meeting of the Jewish Agency in Zurich, a short time before he was struck by a fatal illness.⁸ While Marshall's death was a major blow to the American Jewish Committee and deprived it of its most forceful leader on the eve of the critical thirties, the contacts with the C.V. were to continue. At the beginning of 1930, the Committee transmitted to the German organization \$7,500, a modest sum in comparison with the C.V.'s original request for \$175,000.⁹

II

The Growing Menace

The Nazi Party's major success in the Reichstag elections of September 14, 1930, which accorded it 107 out of the 577 seats (6.4 million votes) and made it the second largest parliamentary group, brought Hitler to national and international prominence. The results should not have come as a total surprise to close observers of the German political scene. Nazi agitation had increased in the preceding months due to the economic crisis, the growing unemployment, and the campaign against the Young plan dealing with reparation settlements. Wilhelm Frick, a leading Nazi official, was already serving as minister of the interior and education in the Thuringian provincial government and gaining publicity due to his racial and anti-Semitic policies. In many universities the elections to the student councils in 1929 had provided the National Socialists with more than 25-30 percent of the representatives.

In the summer of 1930, Cyrus Adler, who divided his time between the presidency of the American Jewish Committee, Phila-

Warburg Papers, Box 251; Waldman to Marshall, July 18, 1929, Morris D. Waldman Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, Box 640; Werner Senator to Waldman, December 11, 1929, *ibid.*; Marshall-Waldman letters also quoted in Morris D. Waldman, *Nor by Power* (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), pp. 40-41. For a sympathetic appraisal of the C.V. defense activities see Arnold Paucker, *Der juedische Abwehrkampf gegen Antisemitismus und Nationalsozialismus in den letzten Jahren der Weimarer Republik* (Hamburg: Leibniz-Verlag, 1968).

⁸ Waldman, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁹ Minutes of the executive committee, December 8, 1929, American Jewish Committee Archives. See also Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

delphia's Dropsie College, and the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, spent a month in Germany and met with a number of German Jewish leaders as did Morris Waldman. Banker Max Warburg, the brother of Felix M. Warburg, chairman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) and one of the American Jewish Committee's most influential members, appeared to him somewhat more optimistic than the husband of Walther Rathenau's niece, though Warburg too regarded the situation as very serious.¹⁰ One could also read in-depth analyses of the growing danger to German Jewry in such important Jewish publications as the London *Jewish Chronicle*. The German Jews—the weekly noted—were

profoundly alarmed and gravely concerned about the growth of the organized militant anti-Semitism which . . . has lately become a powerful force in the political, municipal, and social life of the country. . . . The Jews are now faced with a movement based on a definite theory—cool, deliberate, and determined—aiming at the destruction of Jewry in Germany as a collective body.

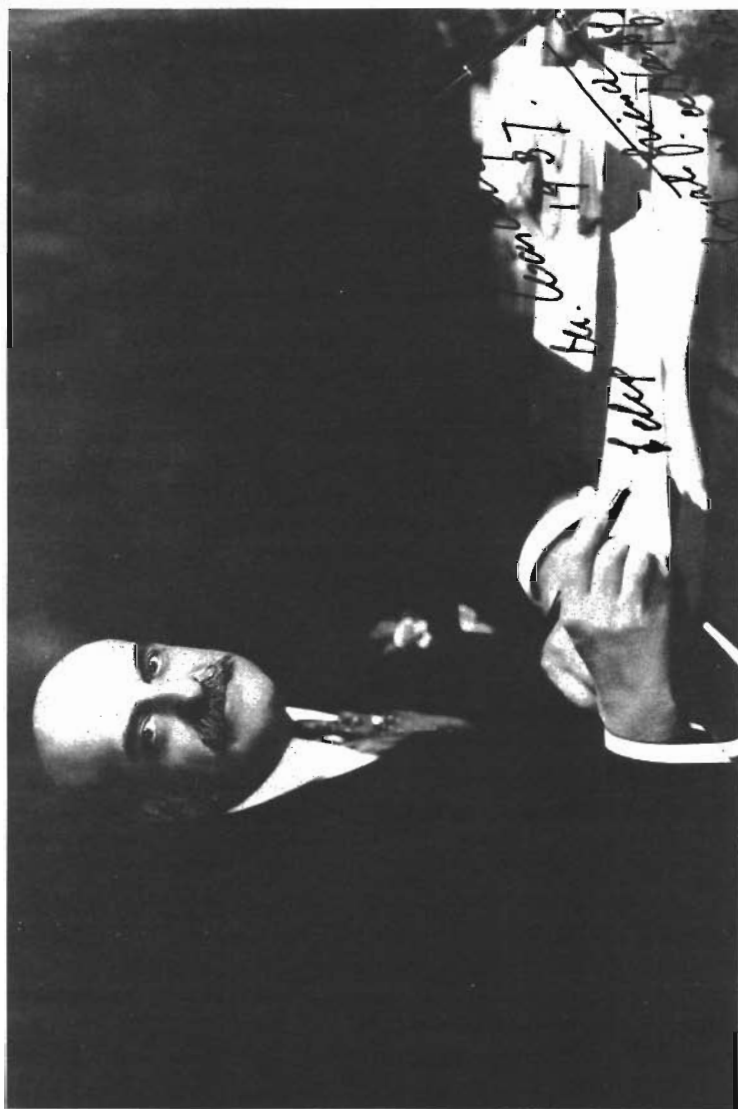
The *Chronicle's* analyst recalled that “the National Socialists [had] created a most efficient machine for the carrying out of these aims. A staff of intellectuals, professors, scientists, artists, writers, and journalists is at their disposal.” At the same time, he extolled the defense activities of the C.V. and its representatives all over Germany who were exposing the Nazi party's chauvinistic views and anti-democratic, anti-republican character.¹¹

German officials had tried to calm foreign fears concerning the outcome of the Reichstag elections. But even a cautious diplomat such as the American ambassador to Berlin, Frederic M. Sackett, intimated that “on the whole, the outlook for the future democratic political development in Germany is not favorable.” After the elections, the U.S. chargé d'affaires called the vote “another overpowering example of Germany's lack of political education and wisdom and a body-blow to the republican form of government.”¹² This pessimistic conclusion did not at all affect the

¹⁰ Adler to Mortimer Schiff, November 3, 1930, Adler Papers.

¹¹ “The Anti-Semitic Movement in Germany,” condensed from articles in the *Jewish Chronicle*, April and May 1930, Warburg Papers, Box 269.

¹² Sackett to Stimson, July 22, 1930, U.S. Department of State, Decimal Files, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (D.S.) 862.032/17; Gordon to Stimson, September 17, 1930, D.S. 862.00/2518.



Felix M. Warburg (1871-1937)
Leading American Jewish philanthropist and long-time chairman
of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

administration's attitude towards Jewish calls for intercession. The official argument was the same as in 1923. When a Jewish citizen from Massachusetts appealed to President Herbert C. Hoover for "the protection of property, liberty, and lives of people of Jewish faith" in Germany, Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson assured him that the Department of State would take care of the rights of American citizens, but that the government was not in a position to intercede on behalf of other persons.¹³

When the newly elected Reichstag opened on October 13, windows of Jewish shops in Berlin's Leipzigerstrasse were broken and some Jews molested. The anti-Semitic outburst caused grave concern among some Jewish groups in Germany, and a number of Jews left the country; the exodus from Bavaria was the greatest. Whereas the Zionist minority, acting in the community through the *Juedische Volkspartei* [Jewish People's Party], called for consolidation of all forces and a strengthening of ranks by the creation of a representative Jewish community organization, the *Centralverein*, representing the liberal non-Zionist majority, did not budge from its integrationist doctrine. It stressed the link of the German Jews to the German people, and its leaders warned against panic and hysteria.¹⁴ Professor Albert Einstein, the world-renowned physicist, endorsed calls for Jewish solidarity, but he too regarded any special measures as a result of the election as unnecessary. Einstein contended that the huge increase in the Nazi vote did not indicate a corresponding growth of anti-Semitism but was rather a symptom of despair in the face of depression and unemployment.¹⁵

The events in Germany were anxiously watched by many Jewish communities. Dr. Joseph Wirth, the leftist Catholic minister of the

¹³ B. Ammerman to Hoover, October 14, 1930, D.S. 862.4016/26, and Stimson to Ammerman, October 16, 1930, D.S. 862.00/2546.

¹⁴ Review of the year 5691, also 24th annual report of the American Jewish Committee, *AJYB*, XXXIII, pp. 75-78, 363-68; 25th annual report of the American Jewish Committee, *AJYB*, XXXIV, pp. 304-306; *C. V. Zeitung*, September 26, 1930, and *Juedische Rundschau*, October 1, 1930, quoted in Margaret T. Edelman-Muehsam, "Die Haltung der juedischen Presse," in Robert Weltsch, ed., *Deutsches Judentum: Aufstieg und Krise* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1963), pp. 358-61.

¹⁵ Philipp W. Fabry, *Mutmassungen ueber Hitler: Urteile von Zeitgenossen* (Duesseldorf: Droste-Verlag, 1969), p. 130. In contrast to Paucker, Fabry is critical of the C.V.'s record, pp. 128-29.

interior in Chancellor Heinrich Bruening's cabinet, who later, as an anti-Nazi refugee in the U.S., was employed by the American Jewish Committee, tried to reassure Jacob Landau, J.T.A.'s managing director, that the government would not "be driven along with the anti-Semitic flow." He repeated the argument that not all the millions of Nazi voters could be regarded as "enemies of the Jews."¹⁶ Bernard G. Richards, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, rebuked Henry Luce's *Time* magazine for speaking in slurring terms of Jews leaving Germany and of alleged offers of Jewish money to appease the wrath of the Hitlerites.¹⁷ Stephen Wise, who would soon play an active role in the efforts to combat the Nazi policies, expressly distinguished between Germany "at its best and highest" and Nazi rowdyism, which "by its conduct dishonors Germany as truly as it dishonors Germany's loyal citizens." The *American Hebrew*, a magazine for American Jews which generally reflected an integrationist, anti-nationalist attitude, cautioned against panic and shared the views of the liberal Jews of the C.V. in Germany that

the successes of the anti-Semitic parties in Germany possess no quality of permanence. They cannot endure. We know the courage and spiritual stamina of our German brethren. They will be neither frightened nor dismayed.

Despite the ideological gap between that magazine and Cleveland's Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, he too believed, as he told his congregants at The Temple, that

German Jewry will know how to meet the present situation with patience, courage, and dignity. They will continue to identify themselves with every movement which makes for liberalism and against every movement which makes for reaction. Their destiny is bound up with the destiny of liberal thought.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, September 30, 1930. On the American Jewish Committee's cooperation with Dr. Wirth see Waldman, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-100.

¹⁷ American Jewish Congress, Press Release, October 6, 1930, and Henry R. Luce to Richards, October 7, 1930, American Jewish Congress Papers, Box 2.

¹⁸ *The American Hebrew*, October 24, 1930 (includes also the quote from Stephen Wise's statement to the American Jewish Congress convention in Washington); Abstract of the address "The Jewish World Scene Today" by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, October 19, 1930, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio, Sermon 331.

American Jewish Committee leaders, most of whom were descended from German-Jewish families, discussed the situation in Germany at meetings of their executive committee and at a special *in camera* session which was convened during the Committee's annual meeting in November, 1930. At Waldman's suggestion, a number of influential Jews who were not actively associated with Jewish communal life were invited to attend the session. He hoped that a more broadly-based group of leaders would help to secure moral and financial support on a much larger scale; but the response was disappointing. Among other factors, growing business depression made it increasingly difficult to arouse interest in the problems of overseas Jews. In an incisive analysis presented at the meeting, Waldman, who had spent some time in Germany during the summer, stated:

What is now transpiring in Germany is of greater significance than any pogroms committed in Eastern Europe. Hitler's party is determined to destroy what the Jew has gained through emancipation—his equal status as a citizen. Should the Jewish position in Germany break down, automatically the Jewish position throughout Eastern Europe will suffer the same fate. This is likely adversely to affect the Jewish position throughout the world. It is this fact that makes the developments in Germany particularly disturbing for the Jews everywhere.

Waldman warned the American Jewish public of the dangerous repercussions on the American scene:

If anti-Semitism gains strength in Europe, if the anti-Semites succeed in putting through anti-Jewish laws, if the outlawing of the Jew by the *numerus clausus* and other measures becomes a permanent feature . . . it will have a suggestive influence on public opinion in the United States and adversely affect the position of the American Jew.

The future nonsectarian strategy of the American Jewish Committee, which often clashed with the plea of the American Jewish Congress for a special Jewish response, was implied in Waldman's call for combatting the forces of Fascism and international reaction on a broad front; a Fascist takeover of Germany would threaten the peace of the whole world. The fight against Fascism was proclaimed to be "the duty of all Jews and non-Jews alike

who wish to safeguard the principles of liberalism and tolerance."¹⁹

As Waldman recalled in his memoirs, those dire warnings, while taken seriously by some of the attendants, among them future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Cardozo, did not convince the whole audience. Many regarded the report as an exaggerated alarmist appraisal. Ludwig Vogelstein, the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, for instance, again voiced his belief that "Germany was the most civilized country on the European continent . . . and the German people too progressive and too humane to countenance the gangster conduct of Adolf Hitler and his colleagues." Only one person, the rabbi of a German-speaking congregation, demanded organized action.²⁰

Subsequently, the issue was again taken up at a leadership meeting that was summoned to hear a report by Dr. Bernhard Kahn, the Joint's European director, on the latest developments in Germany. The Swedish-born former secretary general of the German Jewish *Hilfsverein*, a son of Lithuanian Jewish parents, was regarded as one of the most astute observers of the Jewish situation in Europe. Kahn, while stressing the essential differences between anti-Jewish outbursts in earlier times and the much more dangerous Nazi anti-Semitism, feared that Nazi accession to power would first of all affect the 100,000 foreign Jews; neither did he think that German Jews would be disfranchised in such an event. Yet German anti-Semitism could not be confined within the frontiers of the Reich; it was overflowing into other countries. When asked what could American Jews do to help in this situation, Kahn did not exclude protests by American Jewish organiza-

¹⁹ Waldman's confidential memorandum on his trip to Europe, June-September, 1930, Warburg Papers, Box 269; minutes of the executive committee, November 8, 1930; American Jewish Committee Archives. Report by Morris Waldman submitted at a special executive session of the American Jewish Committee's annual meeting, November 9, 1930, quoted in Waldman, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-47. As Waldman later recalled, to face the emergency he hoped to obtain the active help—"brains, money, and influence"—of such people as Bernard M. Baruch, Walter Lippmann, Felix Frankfurter, Albert Lasker, Benjamin N. Cardozo, Louis Brandeis, the Schiffs, the Speyers, the Seligmans, George Blumenthal, the Strauses, the Guggenheims, and Adolph S. Ochs.

²⁰ Waldman, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48; Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.

tions, though he preferred arousing public opinion outside Germany. Kahn conceded that, under certain conditions, if any repressive measures were actually attempted, mass meetings such as those which took place after the Russian pogroms of 1881 and 1882 might have a positive effect.²¹

Following an exchange of letters with the C.V., Ernst Wallach, one of that organization's vice-presidents, discussed different measures for combatting anti-Semitism with Waldman during a visit to New York. Wallach advised arousing American public opinion by sponsoring a League for Human Rights and fighting Nazi propaganda in the U.S. He thought an additional fund of \$250,000 would help reduce the Hitler movement to a "negligible quantity." But such an amount was not forthcoming. After the 1929 crash, contributions had fallen off drastically, and in the early thirties the yearly budget of the American Jewish Committee did not exceed \$30,000, whereas the C.V. itself was collecting \$300,000 annually. Waldman argued that the Committee should refrain from any contribution unless it was able to raise a considerable sum. The British Joint Foreign Committee, which was also approached by the C.V., told the German organization that the affluent German Jewish community was quite capable of taking care of the anti-Semitic propaganda by itself. There was no great enthusiasm in the American Jewish Committee's ranks for the C.V.'s proposal to sponsor a scientific investigation into the question of race in order to refute Nazi theories. Some members, such as Max Kohler, called for a more militant policy regarding the German crisis. Kohler also stressed the importance of involving the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the fight against anti-Semitism. Herbert H. Lehman suggested that

emphasizing the anti-Semitic phase of the National Socialist movement would not be as effective as making known to the American public the possible unfav-

²¹ Minutes of the executive committee, December 14, 1930; American Jewish Committee Archives; abstract of Kahn's statement at that meeting, Warburg Papers, Box 269. The meeting took place at the home of James N. Rosenberg. Bernhard Kahn, Miscellaneous file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. For a very positive appraisal of Kahn's person see Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929-1939* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), pp. 21-22, 252.

orable effects of Hitlerism upon American international relations and the antagonism of the National Socialists towards the U.S.²²

With the help of the Committee, a number of German Jewish organizations and clubs in New York initiated a new group to be known as the American Friends of German Jews for the purpose of influencing public opinion in the U.S. against the anti-Jewish agitation in Germany. A concise bulletin by Mildred S. Wertheimer on the Nazi program, the party and its scheme of organization was published in January, 1931, by the Foreign Policy Association headed by James S. McDonald, who was to serve as High Commissioner on Refugees in 1933-1935 and later, in 1948, as first American ambassador to Israel. Prominent Jewish members such as Felix Warburg and Frank Altschul ranked high among the contributors to that international-minded liberal organization.²³

Morris Waldman, for his part, started assembling material on anti-Semitism in Germany and elsewhere. The Committee also established a special department which dealt with German-sponsored anti-Semitic propaganda in the United States. This department was replaced after two years by attorney Wolfgang Schwabacher's Information and Service Associates and later on by the Survey Committee, which in the late thirties overshadowed the Committee itself.²⁴

III

A Number of Opinions

In the twenties, Jacob Landau, the managing director of the J.T.A., had undertaken surveys of anti-Semitism in Germany, Poland, and other countries, and had often visited various European capitals.²⁵ In 1931 he was preparing for an enlarged J.T.A.

²² Minutes of the executive committee, December 14, 1930; January 11, 1931; February 15, 1931; March 22, 1931; American Jewish Committee Archives.

²³ Minutes of the executive committee, *id.*, *ibid.*; "Recent Books on Hitlerism," paper read before "The Judeans," New York, December 18, 1932, by Morris D. Waldman, Waldman Papers, Box 664.

²⁴ Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-97.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

coverage of the events in Germany. In May he revisited Berlin and met with representatives of the various Jewish groups and of the government in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the situation and views of all parties concerned.

As Landau recorded in his memorandum to the American Jewish Committee,²⁶ the leaders of the C.V. told him that

any intervention of foreign committees in the German Jewish situation was undesirable. It would add fuel to the contention of the Hitlerites that the Jews in Germany are a foreign element and that their allegiance to the German nation and country was not undivided and would strengthen the belief that the Jews are an international entity.

The C.V. representatives claimed that Jewish protests abroad would make it much easier for the Nazis, should they ever come to power, "to take drastic measures against the Jews, by arousing the belief . . . that the Jews are the enemies of Germany."

The most outspoken among the C.V. leadership group was Dr. Bruno Weil. In his view, financial assistance from abroad was advisable only if a large sum, such as a million dollars, were to be offered. In general, "the Jews in Germany . . . should fight their own battles themselves." Germany should in no way

be compared to Poland, Roumania and other countries where Jewish committees, among them German Jewish committees, had intervened from time to time. These countries are semi-colonial states and Germany could not be placed on one plane with them.

Weil also doubted whether Jews in other countries were a "sufficiently important factor to bring about effective intervention." The Jews of Germany, he feared, might thus suffer all the disadvantages of such an interference without obtaining any benefits. American Jews should learn from the experience of German Jews, and American Jewry's fight against Nazism in the U.S. would have desirable repercussions in Germany. The C.V. leaders renewed

²⁶ Antisemitism in Germany, Memorandum by Jacob Landau, 1931, American Jewish Committee Archives. Also Landau (Berlin) to American Jewish Committee, May 19, 1931. Landau met with Dr. Julius Brodnitz, Dr. Alfred Wiener, Dr. Bruno Weil, and Ernst Wallach of the C.V.; Dr. Mark Wischnitzer of the Hilfsverein; Rabbi Leo Baeck of B'nai B'rith; Dr. Heinrich Stern of the Association of Liberal Jews; and Kurt Blumenfeld of the Zionist Federation.

their proposal for the creation of a scientific institute against anti-Semitism. If possible, an American institution such as the Carnegie Foundation should be induced to establish a department dealing with that subject though it might be financed by Jews. And while Landau's visit took place during a temporary lull in the crisis, C.V. leaders definitely opposed any public demonstrations abroad in case of an emergency. Forecasting their position after Hitler's accession to power early in 1933, they predicted that should such meetings occur they might be forced to protest against them.

According to Landau, not all the leaders of the C.V. and of other groups shared these anti-interventionist views, and it seems that he himself was sympathetic to this minority. There were those who believed that German Jews, if they shared Weil's views, would merely isolate themselves and weaken the chances of effectively countering the anti-Semitic peril. In a confrontation with an international anti-Semitic front, Jews should not hesitate to come out openly in favor of internationalism and oppose narrow nationalistic tendencies. Dr. Heinrich Stern, chairman of the Association of Liberal Jews, expressed his regret that, while there existed an international Jewish body like the Jewish Agency concentrating on Palestine, there was no agency dealing with the Jewish situation as a whole, particularly with the catastrophic conditions in Eastern and Central Europe. Similar opinions were voiced by Georg Bernhard, the former editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*, and by Leo Simon, a prominent industrialist. They felt that European Jews were suffering all the disadvantages because they were considered to be bound by international solidarity, yet they were "deprived of all the advantages which the existence of such an international Jewish body would offer." The Jews, it was felt should follow the example of the Catholics who met at international conventions and did not hesitate to take the most definite interest in Catholic problems wherever they arose. Dr. Stern and Simon even endorsed the summoning of an international Jewish conference in which all organizations and leaders would participate.

The Zionists, of course, were diametrically opposed to the *Centralverein*, which they did not recognize as representative of German Jewry. Landau quoted an editorial in the *Juedische Rund-*

schau, the Zionists' official organ, which bluntly warned the German government that the Jews in New York "would come out in hundreds of thousands on the streets in order to protest against the occurrences in Germany." Unfortunately, these numbers were never reached, not even at the peak of the persecution in the Holocaust years.

Officials of the German Foreign Ministry whom Landau met in Berlin, such as Dr. Hans Heinrich Dieckhoff (later Hitler's ambassador to Washington), Egon Zechlin, and Dr. Moritz Sobernheim, the ministry's Jewish adviser on Jewish affairs, were anxious to minimize the importance of the National Socialist movement and particularly the extent to which anti-Semitism played a role in it. Even if the Nazis would rise to power, they "would hardly make an attempt to carry out their threats of placing the Jew in an inferior status of citizenship," these officials assured Landau. They stressed their interest in retaining Jewish goodwill, especially in the U.S., because of the political and financial influence of Jews abroad and the cultural ties between them and the German people. As a result of Landau's talk with Dieckhoff, the minister of the interior issued a statement against the desecration of Jewish cemeteries but, in keeping with the political climate in Germany, the J.T.A. was asked not to publicize that statement. Chancellor Bruening, who headed a coalition of conservative nationalists and members of the Catholic Center party, also did not find it advisable to grant an interview to the J.T.A. on the Jewish situation. In the same way, he rebuffed repeated requests of the Zionist Federation as well as of the C.V. to include a paragraph concerning the Jews and the anti-Semitic riots in one of his political addresses, or at least to make such a statement to a Jewish delegation. Members of the C.V. were finally received by General Wilhelm Groener, who had replaced Wirth as minister of the interior. But that meeting was not equal, in its political impact, to an interview with the chancellor.²⁷

In contrast to the assurances of the government officials, Landau was warned of the growing dangers of Nazi anti-Semitism by others that he met in Berlin. Dr. von Prittwitz und Gaffron, brother of the German ambassador to Washington, drew Lan-

²⁷ Paucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-33.

dau's attention to the expanding support for the Nazis within the Protestant church in Germany. From others he heard about the increase of the anti-Jewish sentiment among the *Auslandsdeutsche* (Germans living abroad). Hitler's burgeoning movement was also watched with concern by many of the American correspondents in Berlin, all of whom, except one, were non-Jews. A leading official of the Association of German Science who represented the Rockefeller Foundation in Germany told the visitor that a large part of the German intelligentsia was imbued with strong anti-Semitic sentiments.

Landau's conclusions, the wording of which was reminiscent of Waldman's pessimistic report to the American Jewish Committee half a year earlier, were no less alarmistic: "The Jews in Germany are on the brink of an abyss." Referring to the American Jewish public, which was hardly aware of the situation, Landau stated:

The effective combatting of anti-Semitism in Germany is a problem which concerns the American Jews no less than the European Jews. *Tua res agitur*. . . .
 . . . If by aloofness and neglect the American Jew proves himself indifferent to this danger, the Jew in Germany is bound to lose this struggle against a menace which threatens all of Jewry.

But Landau's proposal with regard to the creation of a "Committee for the Protection of Human Rights" was in no way enough to contain the Nazi peril.²⁸

Although the Nazis failed in their efforts to bring about a change of government in 1931, rampant anti-Semitism persisted and anti-Jewish sentiment continued to pervade the German masses. On Saturday, September 12, the first day of Rosh Hashanah, scores of Jews returning from worship in the Berlin synagogues were assaulted in the Kurfuerstendamm neighborhood by hundreds of Nazi storm-troopers commanded by the head of the S.A. in Berlin, Count Helldorf. Only a miscalculation in the timing prevented a greater number of victims. Major English newspapers such as the London *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* termed these events the most anti-Semitic excesses in modern German history. The American public learned about the riot through the J.T.A., whose report was broadcast by the Associated Press. The C.V., in an open appeal, urged German Jews to coun-

²⁸ Landau memorandum, *ibid.*

teract the growing Nazi threat and protested the incitement to an anti-Jewish boycott. But the increased defense efforts by that organization were of no avail. Nazi influence in the winter of 1931/32 was on the rise, and Nazi students would soon launch a major attack on Jewish fellow students at Berlin University, where they had gained control of the student organization.²⁹

Upon his return from another sojourn in Europe in July-September, 1931, Waldman fully reaffirmed the findings of Jacob Landau, who had been considered by leading members of the Committee as too "gloomy a prophet."³⁰ The leadership of the AJJDC was told by its executive director, J.C. Hyman, of the deteriorating economic situation of the Jewish community in Berlin and its request for a loan of \$50,000 for constructive assistance to Jews in Germany.³¹ Yet no such funds were available. One should not forget that in 1931-1932 the contributions to the Joint had declined drastically. Suggestions had even been made of closing it down and maintaining only a skeleton office in New York.³² In the Committee, Waldman tried to revive his inconclusive efforts to involve a small number of rich and influential Jews in the fight against anti-Semitism. While objecting to the American Jewish Congress' campaign for a World Jewish Congress, he criticized the "laissez faire attitude" that characterized all the Jewish organizations engaged in protecting Jewish rights, including the American Jewish Committee. Landau expounded the importance of influencing the American press because of Germany's continuing great interest in U.S. financial and political assistance.³³ Moreover, at that time, American-German relations, which had reached their peak during Gustav Stresemann's stewardship of the Reich's foreign policy, displayed renewed strains.³⁴

²⁹ Memorandum of the subcommittee on Germany, meeting of October 8, 1931, Warburg Papers, Box 287; *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, September 15, 1931; December 13, 1931; December 27, 1931; *Juedische Rundschau*, September 15, 1931.

³⁰ Waldman, memorandum on visit to Europe, June 27-September 20, 1931, Warburg Papers, Box 287.

³¹ Memorandum by J.C. Hyman to the officers of the AJJDC, August 21, 1931, *ibid.*

³² Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³³ Memorandum of the subcommittee on Germany, October 8, 1931, *ibid.*

³⁴ Arnold A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 2-9.

Dr. Herbert Feis, the State Department official later to become a prominent historian,

IV

Preparations for the Worst

In the winter of 1931-1932 Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who took an active part in the preparations for the World Jewish Congress, visited the United States, and, after talks with him and others, Stephen Wise proposed that the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee hold a conference on the situation in Germany. In addition, he suggested that prominent Americans should be asked to help in arousing public opinion against the Nazi agitation.³⁵ The representatives of both organizations met on January 28, 1932, in New York and decided to approach leading German Jews, whose names were to be agreed upon by the Congress and the Committee, with regard "to the best and most effective manner in which assistance might be rendered to them" by American Jewry.³⁶

Because of the long-standing differences of attitude and mentality between the ethnocentric activist Congress (favoring public action) and the cautious, elitist Committee (attuned to quiet backstage diplomacy), the drawing up of the communication to the German Jewish leadership encountered great difficulties. Some leading members of the Congress were unhappy with the time-consuming process after the initiative had been delayed so long and insisted upon immediate action. One of them called for the establishment of a committee "to feed the starving Jews in Germany"; only such a gimmick would arouse the American Jewish public and make it rally to the aid of German Jewry. Baruch Zuckerman of the Labor Zionists advised using influence and organizing mass meetings and protest parades before Hitler came to power, and urged the Congress not to be afraid of the charge of "international

predicted the Nazi takeover as early as December, 1931. Memo for Stimson, December 8, 1931, D.S. 862.00/2645A. Feis was at that time one of the very few Jews in the department. The German ambassador, Friedrich Wilhelm von Prittwitz und Saffron, tried to calm U.S. fears in a talk with Under Secretary of State William R. Castle. February 18, 1932, D.S. 862/2685.

³⁵ American Jewish Congress, minutes of the administrative committee, January 5, 1932, American Jewish Congress Papers, Box 2.

³⁶ Minutes of the executive committee, February 14, 1932, American Jewish Committee Archives.

Jewry." Only Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum counseled "infinite patience" in order to provide common action. In 1933 and later, he was to clash with the Committee because of his leading role in the anti-Nazi boycott movement.³⁷

The Committee leadership, on its part, demanded modification of the draft. Adler, though pessimistic with regard to the political situation in Germany, objected to any agitation by Jewish organizations and stressed the importance of fighting the Nazi propaganda in the U.S. He also opposed sending a delegation to Berlin. Adler did not want to leave the decision with regard to calling a conference of American and German Jews in the hands of the German representation, and upon his request the letter was rephrased. Others totally disapproved of sending a letter because they feared publicity. Felix Warburg, whose views carried much weight because of his central role in Jewish philanthropy, did not dismiss the impact abroad of American protests and utterances of senators but was convinced that a conference in Berlin or elsewhere in Germany could only cause harm. He warned against leading German Jews "to expect more from us in the way of cooperation than we are ready and able to give them." Despite the "inflamed brains" of millions of Hitler's supporters, he still believed that "if the Hitlerites should get into power . . . they will sober down, just as much as the Communists have in Russia and the Laborites have in England." Judge Horace Stern of Philadelphia inquired whether Mussolini could perhaps use his influence. Warburg was doubtful but suggested that Adler, through his contacts, should explore the Italian possibilities.³⁸ The more activist James N. Rosenberg already thought of threatening, in case of an emergency, a boycott of the North German Lloyd and the Hamburg-America line by Jewish passengers, who accounted for 40 percent of the customers of these lines.³⁹

³⁷ American Jewish Congress, minutes of the administrative committee, January 5, 1932, and February 16, 1932, *ibid.* Memorandum of conference of January 28, 1932, Adler Papers.

³⁸ Minutes of the executive committee, February 14, 1932, *ibid.* Adler to Sylvain Levi, February 18, 1932; Felix Warburg to Adler, February 18, 1932; Adler to Felix Warburg, February 19, 1932, Adler Papers; Adler to Warburg, February 18, 1932; Adler to Judge Julian W. Mack, February 25, 1932, Warburg Papers, Box 295.

³⁹ Jacob N. Rosenberg to Ludwig Vogelstein, February 24, 1932, Warburg Papers, Box 295.

The final draft of the communication approved by the Committee and by the Congress stressed that the undersigned did "under no circumstances think of taking sides with respect to an internal political problem in Germany or in any other country than our own." Even though the Bruening cabinet was still in power, it was assumed that mail addressed to Jews in responsible positions was being opened. Therefore the letter addressed to Dr. Ludwig Hollaender, the C.V.'s executive director, was dispatched through Louis Oungre of the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.) in Paris. Hollaender was asked to consult leading members of all parts of the community regarding the action of American Jewry. The recipients acknowledged the arrival of the message and promised to bear the offer of assistance in mind if the situation should require action.⁴⁰

Early in 1932, the administrative committee of the American Jewish Congress called upon its leaders to approach prominent American public figures with regard to the Nazi anti-Jewish threat in Germany. Albert Einstein, who was visiting the U.S., told James Waterman Wise, Rabbi Wise's son and editor of *Opinion*, that statements by President Hoover, Secretary of State Henry Stimson or Senator William E. Borah, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, maintaining that Germans were not "capable of medievalism" might be helpful in preventing Hitler's accession to power. Einstein added that, at the same time, Germany should be flattered as having been "the country of human liberation," advice that was soon followed by Stephen Wise and other Jewish leaders even after Hitler had become chancellor in January, 1933.⁴¹

Although Wise did not like Borah's recent statements about

Calls for an economic boycott of Germany by Jews in America and elsewhere, in case of a Nazi takeover, were voiced during the year in the Jewish press, for instance by the *Chicago Daily Jewish Courier*, edited by Dr. S. Melamed. See *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 4, 1932.

⁴⁰ Harry Schneiderman to Abraham H. Cohen, February 25, 1932, Adler Papers; Adler to Schneiderman, February 18, 1932, Warburg Papers, Box 295; Brodnitz, Hollaender, Baeck (C.V.) to American Jewish Congress and American Jewish Committee, May 6, 1932, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Memorandum from letter of James Waterman Wise to Stephen Wise, Wise Papers, Box 108.

developments in Germany, he met the senator in Washington in March, 1932, and asked him to issue a statement against Hitler's anti-Semitic program. The influential Republican was not at all excited about it and told Wise it might be much more effective if the President himself could be persuaded to make such a statement; he was ready to accompany Wise and Cyrus Adler to the White House. Adler objected and felt President Hoover should not be put in the embarrassing position of being obliged to refuse the request. Adolph S. Ochs of the *New York Times* also did not want to get involved, nor did another suggestion to take up the matter informally at the Geneva Disarmament Conference materialize. A leak by Scripps Howard's foreign editor concerning Adler's part in the solicitation of Borah caused an immediate crisis between the competing American Jewish Congress and the Committee. Jealous Congress leaders were upset that the president of the American Jewish Committee had gained publicity in the general press. Only an unequivocal denial by Adler prevented the collapse of their cooperation.⁴²

Whereas most of the Jewish leaders in Berlin opposed protests by Jewish organizations, they did not object to gentile expressions of support. Confidentially, they favored an appeal to the American administration and to senators in Washington.⁴³ Similarly, German Jewish leaders told representatives of British Jewry that the Bruening government attached great importance especially to Conservative public opinion:

... If a hint could be dropped in certain quarters that any outrages against Jews, or any violent anti-Jewish propaganda, would be regarded by English Conservatives with grave dismay, and would discredit the Hitler party in the eyes of leading British statesmen, such a hint would not be without its effect.

⁴² Minutes of the executive committee, March 13, 1932, American Jewish Committee Archives; American Jewish Congress, minutes of the administrative committee, March 29, 1932, American Jewish Congress Papers, Box 2.

⁴³ According to the minutes of the American Jewish Committee's executive committee, the J.T.A. received via London a confidential telegram requesting the Committee and the American Jewish Congress to approach President Hoover, Senator Borah and others. But it seems this was a reply to a question put to Ludwig Hollaender of the C.V. by J.T.A. correspondent Boris Smolar. Minutes of the executive committee, March 13, 1932; Auswaertiges Amt, Nachlass Sobernheim, 203/8, L 350087-91; quoted in Paucker, *op. cit.*, note 6, p. 282.

Chaim Weizmann, who visited Germany several times in the early thirties, was very much worried about the Jewish situation there. Before proceeding again to Germany, he contacted Robert Boothby, an anti-Nazi Conservative M.P. sympathetic to Weizmann. He soon concluded that emigration was the only hope for the survival of German Jews.⁴⁴ But most of the British Conservatives were more afraid of the—often exaggerated—Communist danger in Germany than of the Nazis. And although a few experienced American diplomats such as George Strausser Messersmith, the consul general in Berlin, watched Hitler's movement with growing concern despite assurances by Hermann Goering that the Nazis would not hurt U.S. business interests and warned German bankers and industrialists "that in bringing Hitler in they were destroying themselves,"⁴⁵ there was no hope of involving the isolationist administration, in the grip of a grave economic depression, in a problem which was regarded as a domestic German issue. This position was reinforced by the even more isolationist public opinion which was opposed to becoming embroiled in European affairs and by restrictionist fears of a flow of unwanted immigrants. Thus, despite the growing Nazi threat to the Jews in Germany, the chances for meaningful intercession on their behalf were indeed minimal, and the chances for any planned emergency emigration were not much better.

In February, 1932, Professor Sylvain Levi, president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, suggested a meeting of the American Jewish Committee, the British Joint Foreign Committee, and the Alliance for "considering possible steps for the protection of alien Jews in Germany, in the event of the coming into power of the Hitlerites." His British counterpart, while calling for preparations for an urgent emigration of 100,000 Jews from Germany, preferred postponing the conference until summer. The Committee was represented at the Paris deliberations by Roger W. Straus. Again the importance of engaging Protestant spokesmen to condemn

⁴⁴ Chaim Weizmann to O.E. d'Avigdor Goldsmid, January 15, 1932, Chaim Weizmann Papers, Rehovot, Israel.

⁴⁵ Messersmith to Frankfurter, May 31, 1940, Felix Frankfurter Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 27; Sackett to Stimson on Alexander K. Wiley's talk with Goering, December 11, 1931, D.S. 862.00/2656.

“the intrinsic antireligious and anticultural nature of the Nazi attitude toward Jews” was stressed, as well as influencing statesmen and public opinion in the Western democracies.⁴⁶

When the possibility of convening a Jewish conference dealing with an emergency had been brought up earlier in the year in a meeting with Dr. Bernhard Kahn, the European director of the Joint who until 1933 directed its activities from Berlin, he did not regard it as helpful:

It is not considered advisable and proper that Jewish organizations should now come together to discuss the fate of the German Jews. It cannot be assumed that such conferences will remain secret and the dangers that would ensue to the Jews in Germany from the fact that outside Jewry is now meddling in the German internal affairs will be greater than any possible help that those conferences may momentarily bring.

Like many others, Kahn emphasized the importance of calling attention to the Nazi danger—not only to Jews but to the entire European cultural heritage—by the international press and prominent non-Jews. On the Jewish aid scene he preferred a small meeting of influential people from the U.S., Britain, and France, in case money was needed for a large emergency and an international action was to be initiated. Yet despite his pessimism with regard to the stateless and foreign Jews and his forecast that a great many German Jews might also flee due to Nazi repression and pogrom-like excesses, he asserted that no meaningful preparation for the rescue of Jews from Germany could be made because it would only incite passion and encourage the Nazis. It was impossible to approach neighboring countries with regard to asylum. If persecution started, they would not be able to push the refugees back, but no states would guarantee in advance the right of asylum.⁴⁷

The differing views of American Jewish leaders with reference to the approaching German Jewish crisis were voiced in Anglo-

⁴⁶ Minutes of the executive committee, March 13, 1932, American Jewish Committee Archives; D'Avigdor Goldsmid to Adler, February 29, 1932; Adler to Paul Baerwald, March 14, 1932; Adler to d'Avigdor Goldsmid, April 14, 1932; Adler Papers. Paris Conference of Allied Associations, June 27, 1932, Joint Foreign Committee Papers, Board of Deputies Archives, Woburn House, London.

⁴⁷ Bernhard Kahn's memorandum on the situation in Germany, February 2, 1933, Warburg Papers, Box 289. English version in Waldman Papers, Box 639 (A-L).

Jewish and Yiddish newspapers, in sermons to congregations, and in public meetings. In March, 1932, *Opinion* published a symposium on that subject. Bernard S. Deutsch, who in 1932–1933 served as president of the American Jewish Congress, called upon enlightened public opinion to mobilize against Hitlerism, warning that “any impairment of the legal status of the Jews in Germany would sadly affect the struggle for equality and justice in other European lands.” Israel N. Thurman and Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum joined the call for action and expressed their belief that the Jewish organizations would rise to the occasion. Rabbi Louis I. Newman decried the hush-hush and “pianissimo tactics.” On the other hand, Roger Straus advised relying on the American Jewish Committee, William W. Cohen recommended following the counsel of German Jewish leaders, and Estelle M. Sternberger suggested the drafting of a bill of human rights. Louis L. Mann mentioned the importance of challenging “the mob psychology of Hitlerite hysteria.” Samuel Dickstein, the Democratic congressman from New York who in 1934–1935 was to conduct the anti-Nazi hearings in the House committee headed by Representative John McCormack, sided with the activists and argued that American Jews must take a definite stand. Editorially, *Opinion* urged “vigorous and fearless execution” of preventive action.⁴⁸ In the months before Germany’s presidential election, the growing menace of Hitlerism caused much concern even to the anti-interventionist and integrationist *American Hebrew*. Yet after Hindenburg’s Pyrrhic victory, it again recovered its faith in the “stability and practicality of the German people.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The symposium appeared on March 7, 1932. Editorial on “American Jews and the German Crisis,” February 22, 1932. See also Stephen Wise, “German Jewry at the Crossroads,” *Opinion*, February 8, 1932.

Abba Hillel Silver told his congregants at The Temple that he was sure Hitler would disenfranchise the Jews and deny them their legitimate political and economic opportunities, because in his eyes the Jews were responsible for the revolution and the establishment of the Republic. The Cleveland rabbi, who at that point did not play any major role on the national Jewish scene, called Hitler a menace to the peace and stability of the world and predicted his power would increase if the present situation in Germany was to continue, yet his party would “go to pieces as soon as Germany assumes her normal life.”

Abstract of the address “Haman-Hitler,” March 20, 1932, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, Sermon 379.

⁴⁹ “The Growing Menace of Hitlerism,” *The American Hebrew*, November 20, 1931; “The German Elections,” *ibid.*, March 18, 1932.

A major bone of contention between the Committee and the Congress remained the latter's insistence on convening a World Jewish Conference in Geneva as a preparatory step for a World Jewish Congress. The gap dividing both organizations on that issue also made cooperation on the German issue much more difficult. The Committee repeatedly warned the Congress leadership that "any action on the part of international Jewry, or of Jews outside of Germany, would singularly rebound to the advantage of Hitler." But Wise and his colleagues were resolved to proceed in their endeavor. In contrast to the acculturated and socially more prominent group close to the Committee who were afraid of ethnocentric emphasis and of the charge of dual loyalties, the American Jewish Congress supported the creation of a World Jewish Congress to bridge the gap between assimilated Jews in the West and the nationally conscious ones in the East, in the same way as it urged unification of the community at home.⁵⁰

In addition to the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Conference was sponsored by the Comité des Délégations Juives headed by Leo Motzkin. It was supported by the Zionist organizations; though important Zionist leaders such as Chaim Weizmann, Abba Hillel Silver, and Kurt Blumenfeld had some doubts about the idea and preferred to concentrate all efforts on Palestine.⁵¹ Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum had voiced alarm with regard to the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Germany and all over Europe at the preceding annual session of the American Jewish Congress in Washington:

An avalanche of disaster and dismay has swept over the Jewish settlements. Anti-Semitism has become an almost universal creed, the purgatory of all sins

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the exchange of letters between Felix M. Warburg and Abraham H. Cohen. Warburg to Cohen, July 29, 1932, and Cohen to Warburg, August 2, 1932, Warburg Papers, Box 295. As a matter of fact, Dr. Nahum Goldmann had recommended from the beginning that only organizations and personalities with a clear national program and no assimilationists should be invited. American Jewish Congress, minutes of a meeting of the Committee on Problems in Foreign Lands, May 31, 1932, Wise Papers, Box 87.

⁵¹ American Jewish Congress, minutes of a meeting of the Committee on Problems in Foreign Lands, *ibid.*; Blumenfeld to Weizmann, January 5, 1932; Weizmann to N. Torczyner, August 1, 1932; Weizmann Papers.

While Weizmann thought the idea of a World Jewish Congress might "assume a real importance in view of the present situation in world Jewry," he had "no confidence at all in any enterprise managed by Wise," and in the manner this particular affair had been managed.

and the panaceas for all ills of the world—a true mass psychosis. . . . Germany will be Nazi-ruled . . . the stage is gradually set for the greatest spectacle since Nero set fire to Rome—the fire test of Jewish endurance under the Nazi regime scheduled to come into power.

Unlike Stephen Wise, the farsighted Tenenbaum strongly opposed international disarmament:

The United States, which has a vital interest in the recovery of the world, must lend its powerful influence for the suppression of international crime and racial war.⁵²

At the conference in Geneva, representatives of German Jewry tried to dissuade Dr. Tenenbaum from delivering a similar paper on the Nazi menace. The conference opened two weeks after the Nazis had scored their biggest success and emerged as the largest party of the collapsing republic (230 out of 608 seats, and 13.7 million votes) and was attended by delegates of the German Zionists and related groups, but not by the C.V. Leo Motzkin described the position of the German Jews as much worse and more alarming than they had portrayed it. Stephen Wise's opening address was the target of vicious attacks by the *Voelkischer Beobachter* and other Nazi papers.⁵³

In 1932, the last year before Hitler's accession to power in Germany, American Jewish organizations intensified their efforts to engage Christian support in the fight against Nazism and anti-Semitism. At a goodwill seminar in Washington sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, a direct condemnation of Hitlerism as suggested by James Waterman Wise was not adopted. Instead a statement by Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, the secretary general of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, was passed and sent to the Lutheran Church in Germany. A similar statement was made by Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, one of the most eminent clergymen in America. The Washington

⁵² American Jewish Congress, press release, annual session, June 25-27, 1932, Washington, D.C., Board of Deputies Archives, Woburn House, London, Box 142.

⁵³ Moshe Gottlieb, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1967), pp. 4-5; A. Leon Kubowitzki, *Unity in Dispersion* (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1948), p. 32; *Juedische Rundschau*, July 26, 1932; August 16, 1932; August 19, 1932; Warburg to Abraham Cohen, September 9, 1932, Warburg Papers, Box 295.

seminar was also attended by Michael Williams, the editor of the liberal Catholic *Commonweal*, who in 1933 was to call for the immediate emigration of 200–300 thousand Jews from Germany. The American Jewish Committee tried to expand the activities of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, co-chaired by Newton D. Baker, President Wilson's Secretary of War, and by Catholic historian Carlton J.H. Hayes and Roger Straus. Dr. Everett R. Clinchy, the Conference's executive director, had been stirred by assaults on Jewish students at Berlin University. There were, of course, many Protestant churchmen who hesitated to identify with the Jewish cause. Rev. Dr. Henry Smith Leiper, of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, for instance, was impressed by the overwhelming German quest for national unity and regarded the Jewish fight for liberalism, rationalism, and internationalism as "ridiculing the things most sacred to the Lutheran and the evangelical."⁵⁴

Both because of their immediate concern and because of the possible impact on Nazism in Germany, American Jewish organizations and individuals paid more attention to Nazi activities in the U.S. itself. Most of the Nazi members and supporters came from the half million post-war immigrants from Germany, many of whom had fought in the Kaiser's army and never made peace with the Weimar Republic. Teutonia, one of the first National Socialist organizations in the United States, had been set up in Detroit as early as 1924; branches soon sprang up in Chicago, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and New York. In 1931 the Teutonia federation was superseded by the New York *Gau* of the Nazi party, and the Nazis increased their activities especially in the New York and New Jersey area where more than two million Jews lived. The J.T.A. and some of the Jewish newspapers exposed Nazi activities; they also were denounced by the Congress and Committee. Most of the general American press regarded the German immigrant Nazi groups as unimportant and took a tolerant attitude towards them. Occa-

⁵⁴ Minutes of the executive committee, March 13, 1932, American Jewish Committee Archives; Wise to Martin Rosenbaum, May 12, 1932; Wise to Michael Williams, March 16, 1932, Wise Papers, Box 82; Clinchy to Roger Straus, July 1, 1932, Adler Papers; Henry Smith Leiper, "Antisemitism in Germany," *The American Hebrew*, December 23, 1932. Williams' appeal on mass emigration quoted in Luther to Foreign Ministry, June 23, 1933, German Embassy Records, AHA I, 19/679-85, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

sionally they were condemned as an un-American growth by the New York *World Telegram* and even by Victor Ridder's *New Yorker Staatszeitung*, one of the main newspapers of German-America.⁵⁵

In December, 1931, the Jewish newspaperman Julius Klein of Chicago—promoted in World War II to the rank of a U.S. general and later in the fifties the chief lobbyist for the West German Adenauer government in Washington—complained to the Department of Justice about the actions of the Hitlerites “who besides being against the present German government [of Chancellor Bruening] are conducting a vicious campaign against the Jewish race.” At that point, a number of Jews of German origin still participated in German American societies and contributed to their foundations. Members of the American Jewish Committee kept in touch with the Carl Schurz Foundation, headed by Jacob G. Schurman, the former ambassador to Berlin, and efforts were also being made to induce the Steuben Society, dedicated to the Americanization of German immigrants, to cooperate in getting American public opinion to express itself against Hitler.⁵⁶

V

A Response Too Little and Too Late

The last Reichstag elections before Hitler's accession to power, in which his party lost 34 seats and two million votes, at first were regarded as inconclusive. Several weeks before the vote of November 6, Sidney Matz conducted another inquiry among Berlin's leading Jews on behalf of the American Jewish Congress and was again told that Hitler would not take over the government and that any intervention was unwarranted.⁵⁷ Early in January,

⁵⁵ Minutes of the American Jewish Committee's executive committee and the American Jewish Congress' administrative committee, *passim*; 26th annual report of the American Jewish Committee, *AJYB*, XXXV, pp. 257-300. For the Nazi movement in the U.S. before 1933 see Sander A. Diamond, “The Years of Waiting: N.S. in the U.S., 1922-1933,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LIX (March, 1970), pp. 256-71.

⁵⁶ Julius Klein to Department of Justice, December 8, 1931, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 5-1-9; minutes of the executive committee, February 14, 1932, American Jewish Committee Archives.

⁵⁷ Stephen S. Wise, *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1949), pp. 234-35.

1933, Dr. Alfred Hirschberg of the C.V. stated that Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher's program indicated a more hopeful outlook for German Jewry:

A government program that seeks to moderate the political conflicts, and to alleviate the economic distress, must result in lessening the load that is pressing down heavily on the spirit of our people, and easing the sense of gloom and bitterness that is fertile soil for the agitators of prejudice and boycott.⁵⁸

Yet these forecasts proved wrong, and the intrigues of the dismissed Chancellor Franz von Papen together with President Hindenburg's camarilla against Schleicher's short-lived cabinet prepared the way for Hitler's appointment as chancellor on January 30.

A more important election took place on November 8 in the United States where, in the midst of the great depression, the incumbent Republican president was voted out of office and a new era began in American and American Jewish history with the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. From the beginning, Roosevelt appealed to a broad cross-section of the American Jewish community; the Jewish support for him was destined to increase from year to year, from election to election. The New Deal administration was soon to help the Jewish masses which, like many other Americans, had been severely hit by the depression and to open up new vistas for many individuals. But as regards the German Jewish crisis and, subsequently, the Jewish catastrophe in Europe, the administration would definitely disappoint them, in the same way that it refrained from satisfying Jewish demands for the full implementation of the national home in Palestine. President Hoover's public charge order of September, 1930, which had drastically reduced immigration, even in the framework of the quota system, would remain valid for a number of years. Roosevelt himself had endorsed restrictionist policies favored by the American Federation of Labor. He had not taken issue with Hoover's cynical conclusion (in October, 1932!) that

with the growth of democracy in foreign countries, political persecution has largely ceased. There is no longer a necessity for the U.S. to provide an asylum for those persecuted because of conscience.

⁵⁸ *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, January 10, 1933.

Nor did he wish to change his position after his victory at the polls.⁵⁹ Moreover, because of the priority of the big domestic issues, he would refrain from antagonizing the new German government in spite of his hatred for Hitler and the Nazis. Thus there was not much room for American governmental intercession except the protection of the rights, life, and property of American citizens.⁶⁰

When, in January, 1933, Adler discussed with Judge Irving Lehman, a vice-president of the American Jewish Committee and a brother of the newly elected Governor Herbert H. Lehman, the possibility of requesting a meeting with the President-elect and with Cordell Hull, the Secretary-of-State-designate, Lehman, a friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, reminded his colleague of the "limitations which all nations must accept in regard even to humanitarian diplomacy." He conceded that the definition of American interests had become narrower since the World War and expressed doubts whether

... the State Department can make any representations to foreign governments on behalf of any group of oppressed subjects of such governments unless American interests, however widely defined, are directly or indirectly infringed by such oppression or the foreign government has been guilty of conduct so outrageous that if continued the foreign nation may properly be regarded as removed from the community of civilized states.

Lehman warned that if the Committee would ask for a more resolute approach it would not meet with a sympathetic reception and suggested postponement of the high-level conference till May or June.⁶¹ Adler and other leaders of the Committee were still discussing at that late date the difficulties American Jewish students were having in being admitted to German universities. Early in February, they received another request from Max Warburg and the

⁵⁹ Hoover quoted in Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed: Official U.S. Policy toward European Jewish Refugees* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), p. 22; Willard Range, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's World Order* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1959), pp. 190-91.

⁶⁰ Herbert Feis, *1933: Characters in Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1966), pp. 159-60.

⁶¹ Irving Lehman to Adler, January 20, 1933 (in response to Adler's letter of January 12, 1933), Adler Papers.

C.V. for financial aid for wider distribution of defense literature against the anti-Jewish agitation.⁶²

Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis, Roosevelt's "old Isaiah," talked in the same terms as would Irving Lehman, six weeks after Hitler had become chancellor: an immediate appeal, in the midst of his overwhelming responsibilities, would make a bad impression on Roosevelt.⁶³ When Stephen Wise, who had not supported Roosevelt in the election campaign, regarding him as "utterly untrustworthy," changed his mind about Roosevelt after the Nazi anti-Jewish boycott, he was rebuffed; no acknowledgment came from the White House.⁶⁴ Abba Hillel Silver, Wise's future rival for the American Zionist leadership, tried in vain to obtain an interview concerning the Jewish situation with Dr. Ernst ("Putzi") Hanfstaengl, the Harvard-educated chief of the Nazi party's foreign press section. The evening of the *Machtergreifung* [seizure of power], the Cleveland Reform rabbi was in Berlin and attended a program sponsored by the *Juedisch-Liberale Zeitung* at which the Jewish place in both German and general liberalism was hailed.⁶⁵

During these first days, even Wise questioned for a moment "whether things are going to be as bad as we dreaded." The only thing he feared was that if Hitler could not "do the things he promised his people to do in other directions, he may finally decide that he must yield to his fellow Nazis in the matter of anti-Semitism."⁶⁶ And whereas Congress activists openly advocated that American Jews employ all means in the face of the emergency, the editorialist of the *American Hebrew* thought that the con-

⁶² Minutes of the executive committee, February 12, 1933, American Jewish Committee Archives; "Jewish Students from America Have Difficulty in Germany," translation from *Forverts*, January 13, 1933, *ibid.*

⁶³ Wise to Mack, March 8, 1933, Wise Papers, Box 115.

⁶⁴ Wise to Frankfurter, September 8, 1932, *ibid.*, Box 108. Wise to his wife, May, 1933; *The Personal Letters of Stephen Wise*, eds. Justine Wise Polier and James Waterman Wise (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956), p. 221; Wise to Roosevelt, May 2, 1933, D.S. 862.4016/1001; McIntyre to Hull, May 19, 1933, and memo of the State Department's West European Division, May 31, 1933, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Silver to Hanfstaengl, February 1, 1933, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, Correspondence, Sabbatical; program of the meeting sponsored by the *Juedisch-liberale Zeitung*, January 30, 1933, *ibid.*, 12-3-6.

⁶⁶ Wise to Kohnstamm, February 1, 1933, Wise Papers, Box 82.

servatives Hindenburg and Papen had taken "a leaf out of the book of Abraham Lincoln, brought their enemies into the camp where they can watch them, possibly bend them into the twig that shall make the newer German tree." He endorsed the C.V.'s short-sighted and false slogan: "We calmly wait," and pleaded that there be no mass meetings, no protest, no irresponsible speech-making.⁶⁷

To sum up, Hitler's momentous rise to power on January 30, 1933, found American Jewish leaders—as well as other Jewish leaders of communities in the Western democracies—divided and unprepared to deal with the major challenge to Jewish existence in Germany and on a global scale. There was neither hope for meaningful diplomatic intercessions and for rapid mobilization of world public opinion, nor for any practical plans for emigration and rescue. A number of American Jewish leaders were well informed about the threatening nature of the National Socialist movement and Hitler's anti-Semitic doctrine, as were leaders of the German Jewish community. They became involved in the American-German-Jewish triangle from the very beginning, long before Hitler's appointment as chancellor. But despite the somber warnings and dire forebodings, many still cherished the hope that the worst would not come true, that the Nazis perhaps would "sober down," and that their policies would not be implemented.

American Jews in general, people from different walks of life, were affected by the economic crisis and not very aware of the full dimensions of the Nazi threat. Their organizational disunity, the decline in philanthropy after the crash of the stock market, made any response in case of an emergency more difficult, and the hostility towards Jews and other immigrants of "inferior races" caused a further strengthening of restrictionist practices. But in the circumstances of the late twenties and early thirties even a more united and better organized American Jewish community enlisting more Jewish talent, money and influence would have encountered insurmountable difficulties in securing preventive steps to protect German Jews from a dangerous enemy not yet in power. Much of the support America had extended to defending human dignity in

⁶⁷ "Jews Calmly Await Hitler's Policies," *The American Hebrew*, February 3, 1933. See also "German Jews Must Not Surrender," *ibid.*, March 3, 1933.

earlier times had been weakened due to the post-Versailles disillusionment, and the interpretation of U.S. interests had become narrower. Indeed, the deepening depression, affecting millions of Americans, only added more hurdles to immigration under the quota system, and news from abroad made little impact on American consciousness.

Despite Roosevelt's Wilsonian origins, the Democratic victory at the polls in November, 1932, did not change this basic condition. Though American-German relations had become less friendly after the death of Stresemann, the revolutionary and terrorist character of the Nazi party and the full implications of its anti-Jewish campaign were not understood except by a few diplomats, churchmen, intellectuals, and journalists. Even after Hitler's accession to power, Washington's concern with the Nazi racial policies was marginal, though the doctrine and its practices were condemned by American officials informally and were viewed with disgust by a major part of liberal public opinion. The isolationist conservatism and the conflicting views and interests of different social and ethnic groups were to inhibit Jewish efforts to arouse a broad spectrum of the public to the Nazi danger. After 1937, direct American diplomatic engagement on behalf of the refugees fitted the general trend of a more active anti-Nazi foreign policy. But despite the mounting terror in Germany, the initiatives of the Roosevelt administration in aiding persecuted Jews were very disappointing, and no realistic proposals for a mass rescue were made.

This is not to excuse the shortcomings of the Jewish communal response in the thirties. One hopes, however, that today's ethnic groups have learned that the success of their influence on the shaping of American foreign policy must be dependent on the cooperation and support of the entire range of organizations within that group. Furthermore, the appeal must be taken successfully to the broader American community, and must appear to complement American national interests. It is unfortunate that American Jewry, today so successful in applying these lessons of history to a number of situations, has had to learn them at the expense of millions of Jewish lives.