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ZIONIST-NAZI COLLABORATION AND THE HOLOCAUST: A HISTORICAL ABERRATION? LENNI BRENNER REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

Over thirty years ago Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* awakened the ghosts of Nazi-Zionist collaboration. This collaboration was an extension of Zionism's historical attitude to anti-Semitism in Europe, which saw anti-Semitism as the natural reaction of non-Jews to the abnormal presence of Jews. The Zionist movement was outraged by these public revelations of collaboration and sought to censor them. Brenner brought together some of the most damning evidence of Zionism's collaboration with the Nazis and their obstruction of the rescue of European Jews to anywhere but Palestine. This essay critiques Brenner's thesis, especially its failure to analyse the Holocaust in depth. Brenner rightly denounced this collaboration, but, as in the case of the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Museum Yad Vashem, he produced no analysis of this official Israeli memorial project. This essay furthermore explores the implications of Zionist collaboration as in the case of Argentina under the Junta and for a future resurgence of anti-Semitism.

Zionist Indifference to the Holocaust as it was happening

In retrospect the major shortcomings of Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* can be summed up as follows:

- A failure to mention Rudolph Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, who escaped from Auschwitz on 10 April 1944, or the Auschwitz Protocols.
- Treating Yad Vashem as a dispassionate, neutral academic institution dedicated to Holocaust research, rather than a propaganda institute.

- A failure to understand that the *Judenräte* (singular *Judenrat*; German for 'Jewish council'), were an integral part of the extermination process.
- A belief that Europe's Jews could be saved through bribery, Weissmandel's Europa Plan in particular. Brenner uncritically adopted the politics of the Jewish Orthodoxy.
- Uncritically accepted the argument that Adolf Eichmann's 'Blood for Trucks' offer could have saved Hungarian Jewry.
- Personally blaming Rudolf Kasztner, the leader of Hungarian Zionism and the Jewish Agency's 'Rescue Committee' (*Va'ada*) in Budapest, for the rapid extermination of Hungarian Jewry whilst ignoring the role of the Jewish Agency.
- A failure to ask what the implications for the future were of Zionist collaboration with the Nazis. With particular reference to Argentina. The Zionist movement argues that the Holocaust was a product of having no state and Jewish weakness but the Israeli state's attitude to anti-Semitism is no different from Zionism historically.

The Zionist leadership delayed publicising the Holocaust until 23 November 1942. Stephen Wise, a leading American Zionist, wrote to US President Franklin Roosevelt that 'I have had cables and underground advices for some months, telling of these things. I succeed, together with the heads of other Jewish organisations, in keeping them out of the press' (Brenner 1983: 231). On 23 March 1943 *Davar*, paper of the Labour Zionist Histadrut, was reprimanded by Yosef Gravitzy of the Jewish Agency's Palcor news agency, for copying a report from a Nazi paper, *Ostland*, that two million Jews remained in Poland. 'It appeared that reports concerning the final solution required confirmation by the Third Reich' (Beit-Zvi 1991: 51).

In 1933 David Ben-Gurion, later Israel's first Prime Minister, told Mapai's¹ Council that 'Zionism... is not primarily engaged in saving individuals ... in the event of a conflict of interest between saving individual Jews and the good of the Zionist enterprise, ... the enterprise comes first' (Teveth 1987: 855). David Ben-Gurion wrote in 1938 that: 'I am still more worried about the elections of the (Mapai) branch in Tel Aviv' (Segev 1994: 105). Even Shabtai Teveth, Ben-Gurion's official biographer, concluded that 'If there was a line in Ben Gurion's mind between the beneficial disaster and an all-destroying catastrophe, it must have been a very fine one' (Teveth 1987: 851).

1 Later the Israeli Labour Party.

The Role of Yad Vashem in the Creation of a State Narrative of the Holocaust

The first proposal to establish Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, was made in September 1942 by Mordechai Shenhavi at a board meeting of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), when most of those who would die were still alive.² The Holocaust had begun less than one year previously. At the same time that the Zionist movement was denying knowledge of the Holocaust, the memorial plan proceeded as if Europe's Jews were already dead. Shenhavi argued that: 'It was the very last opportunity to score any financial success' (Segev 1994: 430). Only the worst anti-Semites would accuse the Jews of being interested in the Holocaust for financial reasons.

In the event Yad Vashem was established by Israeli state law in 1953. Among its collective memory objectives was to create a foundational Israeli heroic myth surrounding the Holocaust. Yad Vashem tried to reconcile Jewish resistance to the Nazis (which the Zionists grossly magnified) with a defence of the Nazi appointed *Judenräte*, administrative bodies during the Second World War which the Nazi required Jews to form in the German occupied territories and which became part of the process of extermination (Bauer 1979: 393, 401, 404). John Conway described how 'professional historians of the new state', such as Yehuda Bauer, created 'the founding heroic myth of Zionist resistance and rescue from their Nazi persecutors' (Conway 2005).

Despite the *Judenräte* helping to round up Jews for deportation, Yisrael Gutman and Robert Rozett argued that 'The Judenrat reinforced the Jews' power of endurance' (Linn (2004: 77, citing *The Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*: 762). To a hostile Yad Vashem audience, historian Raul Hilberg explained in 'The Judenrat-Conscious or Unconscious Tool' that it was necessary to understand why the Holocaust occurred in order to prevent a repetition. 'How do you do that if you do not study what transpired?' (Hilberg 1979: 31–44). Yad Vashem's Josef Melkman had written to Hilberg (24 August 1958) refusing to publish *The Destruction of European Jews* (1961, 2002). Yad Vashem disagreed with Hilberg's 'appraisal of the Jewish resistance' and his reliance on German documents (Hilberg 1996: 110–111). The linkage of heroism and resistance to the Holocaust resulted in a distorted history of the Holocaust and a preference for research devoted to resistance and revolt. The attempt to create a state-authorised version of the Holocaust prevented Yad Vashem from producing a general work similar to that by Reitlinger and Hilberg. Later Yehuda Bauer described Hilberg's work as an 'unsurpassed landmark' (Bauer 2002: 96).

2 Avishai Erlich (2009) at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yad_Vashem, accessed on 25 April 2014.

Yad Vashem has a special wall devoted to the Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, a minor war criminal. Its purpose is to suggest that 'there is much in common between the Nazis' plan to destroy the Jews' (Segev 2000: 425) and the Palestinian enmity to Israel (Achcar 2010: 159–160). Yad Vashem could have devoted a wall to Walter Rauff (1906–1984), a senior SS officer and head of the SS Technical Department who was responsible for the project of extermination using mobile gas trucks. Rauff was responsible for the murder of at least 100,000 Jews. But Rauff was subsequently employed by West Germany's intelligence service and the Mossad, the Israeli secret service. The Mossad paid him, protected him and helped him escape to South America.³

Argentina, Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Disappeared

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military junta. It was world's first post-war neo-Nazi government. 30,000 people 'disappeared', of whom 12 percent were Jewish (Mualem 2004: 51–79).⁴ In 1978 the United States decided to restrict arms sales to the Junta on human rights grounds (SIPRI 1979: 204–5). Israel stepped into the breach, becoming Argentina's major arms supplier, accounting for 25 percent of Israel's total sales (Howard 1983: 24). Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion believed that 'in our relations (with foreign countries) we should be guided by one criteria... and that is whether it is good for the Jews...' What Ben-Gurion meant was being good for the Israeli state, since 'the state constitutes the highest goal of Zionism and the Jewish people' (Mualem 2004: 51–79). The individual was unimportant; the state was everything. By 1981 Argentina was buying 17 percent of its arms from Israel (Bahbah 1986: 123). Israel is believed to have armed Argentina during the Falklands/Malvinas war.⁵ The Latin American Weekly Report argued that 'The Jewish state's concern for the disappeared was subordinated to political and commercial considerations' (Bahbah 1984). Senkman and Barromi described how: 'At the same time that the ambassador was acting on behalf of the detainees, Israeli agents were waiting outside, bearing proposals for sales of the means of warfare. Thus, the arms sales were only detrimental to the cause' (Senkman 1999: 101–104; Barromi 1979: 104–5).

3 Shraga Elam and Dennis Whitehead, 'In the service of the Jewish state', *Haaretz*, 29 March 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/in-the-service-of-the-jewish-state-1.216923>.

4 Uki Go-i, 'Jews targeted in Argentina's dirty war', *The Guardian*, 4 March 1999, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1999/mar/24/guardianweekly.guardianweekly1>

5 *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 April 1982, *The Guardian*, 30 July 1982.

The Argentinean military Junta sponsored a wave of anti-Semitic attacks. Bombs exploded in Argentine synagogues and Jewish schools.⁶ The Israeli state had a choice: between selling arms to the military Junta or defending Argentina's Jews. Israel chose the former. Jacobob Timerman (1923–1999), the founder and editor of the liberal *La Opinión*, was arrested in April 1977 and savagely tortured. As an example of his torturer's anti-Semitism, the following is a good example:

a hysterical voice began shouting Jew, Jew, Jew! The others join in and form a chorus . . . Now they're really amused and burst into laughter. Someone tries a variation, while still clapping hands: 'Clipped prick. clipped prick. It seems they are no longer angry, merely having a good time. I keep bouncing in the chair and moaning as the electric shocks penetrate my clothes. (Timerman 1981: 60–61)

Timerman's high profile forced Israel to make diplomatic representations 'but it did not make public demands as it did on behalf of Jews in the Soviet Union' (Rein and Davidi 2010: 9–11). It is claimed it 'secretly pressured Argentina to free Timerman' (Kleiman 1982: 80). Israeli Ambassador Ram Nirgad asked Timerman to sign a letter saying that he was well treated and had no problems with the government. Timerman refused (Rein and Davidi 2010: 16).

Timerman was attacked in the United States by right-wing Zionists who believed he 'asked for what he got'.⁷ The Neoconservatives argued that Israel was 'an important supplier of arms and military equipment to Argentina' and therefore the Junta could not be considered anti-Semitic (Lobe 2013). Dr Marcos, whose son Mauricio held Israeli citizenship and was murdered by the Junta, was a founder of *Asociacion de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judios*. He described how he and other Jewish families knocked again and again on the door of the Embassy, and were always sent away.⁸

One of the main justifications for a 'Jewish state' is that in the event of a resurgence of anti-Semitism, Israel will provide a safe haven. Marcel Zohar, who was the *Yediot Aharonot* correspondent in Argentina between 1978 and 1982, described how Israel's government refrained from processing immigration applications from Jews with a left-wing background (Zohar 1990: 31). As I argued elsewhere, 'an anti-Semitic regime will also be . . . semi-fascist and a creature of US imperialism. In short, one which the Israeli state is only too willing to do business with...' (Greenstein 1989: 1). Zohar recounts the struggle between Danny Recanati, of the Jewish Agency and the Israeli ambassador,

6 Hugh O'Shaughnessy in *The Observer*, 30 January 1980.

7 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 31 June 1981.

8 Aryeh Dayan, 'A disappearing act', *Haaretz*, 3 January 2003 at <http://www.haaretz.com/a-disappearing-act-1.23290>.

Ron Nergad. Recanati tried to help persecuted Jews escape from the country, while Nergad cautioned that people defined as *persona non grata* should not be rescued' (Zohar 1990: 19–24). There was a fear that those who were released and went to Israel would work with Palestinian resistance groups.

A quarter of century later, the Israeli Knesset called for the extradition of the Argentine military officers. MK Yossi Sarid described how 'the government of Israel never once lifted a finger and co-operated with the Argentine murderers because of their interest in arms deals. . . . In Argentina, Israel sold even the Jews for the price of its immediate interests' (Mualem 2004).

Timerman attacked the Zionist leaders in Argentina as a *Judenrat*. 'I would forget my torturers, I declared, but never the Jewish leaders who acquiesced calmly in the torturing of Jews' (Timerman 1980: 70–71, 78). *La Opinión* had protested against all acts of anti-Semitism, but the President of the Jewish community, Nehemias Berznitsky, disagreed because 'that would create a confrontation with highly powerful sectors of the army'. Under no circumstances would the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (Daia) and the Argentina Jewish Mutual Aid Association (AMIA) campaign openly and publicly against the Junta's anti-Semitism.

In a 1979 visit to Argentina, Geoffrey Paul, editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* 'was urged not to make an issue of the disappeared (by the Zionist communal organisations). . . while the mothers of the Jewish disappeared pleaded for publicity to bring the atrocities before the public's attention'.⁹ In October 1983 a meeting organised by the Argentine Jewish Movement for Human Rights to protest against anti-Semitic attacks (bombing of synagogues etc.) attracted 7,000 people – a meeting which Daia had boycotted.¹⁰ In 1984 at the 90th anniversary Congress of AMIA, a group of women whose children disappeared. . . shouted 'Nazi, Nazi' at those attending the Congress'. Their purpose was to prevent the entrance of Yitzhak Navon, formerly (Labour) President of Israel, to Argentina.¹¹

Hector Timerman, Jacobo Timerman's son, became Argentine's Foreign Minister. When Israel raised the 1994 bombing of a Jewish centre and Argentine's joint investigation with Iran, Timerman told the Israeli ambassador it was none of Israel's business. 'Israel has no right to ask for explanations. . . . Israel does not speak for the Jewish people. . . Jews who. . . live in Argentina are Argentinian citizens. The attack was against

9 Geoffrey D Paul, 'A White Book', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 25 May 1984.

10 'Argentine Protest', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 28 October 1983.

11 'Bitter Protest by Grieving Mothers', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 23 March 1984.

Argentina, and Israel's desire to be involved in the matter only gives ammunition to anti-Semites who accuse Jews of dual loyalty'.¹²

The Nazi appointed *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils)

In *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*, Lenni Brenner failed to analyse the role of the *Judenräte* within the process of the extermination of the Jews. Instead he focussed on the character of their individual members. 'Some scholars have shown that not all leaders or members of the Jewish Councils collaborated' (Brenner 1983: 205). This is true but irrelevant. What was important was not the subjective intentions of *Judenräte* members. No one has claimed that *all* members of the *Judenräte* were collaborators, although over two-thirds of the members of the *Judenräte* (67.1 percent) consisted of Zionist supporters (Trunk 1972: 32). Hannah Arendt argued that:

Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, co-operated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis... if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless... the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people'. (Arendt 1963: 125)

Hilberg described how the *Judenräte* became 'a German tool as a consequence of their origin, condition and strategy... from the beginning virtually all of the Councils were placed into an irreversible position, regardless of the thoughts or perceptions of their leaders'. It was Wisliceny, the butcher of Slovakian, Greek and Hungarian Jewry, who best summed up the role of the *Judenräte*, when he told Joel Brand that 'Our system is to exterminate the Jews through the Jews. We concentrate the Jews in the ghettos—through the Jews; we deport the Jews—by the Jews; and we gas the Jews—by the Jews' (Ben Hecht 1961: 261).

The *Judenräte* were responsible for marking, concentrating, expropriating and providing the lists of Jews to be rounded up for deportation. In some ghettos the *Judenrat* and the Jewish Police conducted searches to find anyone hiding from deportation (Trunk 1972: 484). The *Judenräte* 'could not serve the Jewish people while simultaneously enforcing the German will' (Hilberg, (2002: 242)). One cannot explain how the Nazis had managed to achieve their objects with such efficiency without taking the role of the *Judenräte* into account (Hilberg 1979: 62). What Trunk calls the strategy and tactics of the councils was their futile attempt to resolve this contradiction (Trunk 1972: 388–450).

12 Gabe Fisher, 'Israeli ambassador upbraided in Argentina', *The Times of Israel*, 6 January 2013, at: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-ambassador-upbraided-in-argentina/>.

The *Judenräte* were lethal precisely because they sprang from the existing Jewish leadership. The *Judenräte* represented the class interests of the Jewish leadership within the ghettos. In Warsaw the Bread Tax was an exaction from the poor to keep alive the destitute' (Hilberg 2002: 240). The *Judenräte* became an instrument of oppression who conscripted the weaker classes for forced labour for the Nazis. 'The Germans are killing us, and the Community (the *Judenräte*) is torturing us' (Kermiz 1979: 80–82, citing the Bund paper, *Unzer Veg*, December 1941).

In Warsaw the Jewish Police carried out manhunts during the first *Aktion* and forced the Jews to go to the collection point. On 29 September 1942 ZOB, the Jewish Fighting Organisation, assassinated Jacob Lejkin, vice-commander of the Jewish Police and a month later Israel Furst, the *Judenrat* representative on the deportation staff (Kermisz 1979: 87). Even Yehuda Bauer admits that as long as the *Judenrat* continued to operate, then there was no possibility of resistance (Bauer (1979: 395).

In a few cases, mainly the smaller ghettos and those which were near to the forests and Soviet-organised partisans, the *Judenräte* supported the Resistance, and in Rohatyn and Pilica they armed the Resistance (1979: Trunk 465, 517, 523, citing Kehillat Rohatyn Vehasviva p.294, Levin 1979: 137). In Szarkowszczyzna the head of the *Judenrat*, Hirsh Berkan, warned the community of the impending deportations and many Jews escaped to the forests. In Zhetl, the head of the *Judenrat*, Alter Dvoretzki, created an armed underground and on 8 June 1942 800 Jews escaped to the Lipiczanka forests. Many survived the war (Levin 1979: 136, 137, 142, 144). In Minsk 'the *Judenrat* began to function as the executive arm of the underground' for which Moshkin, the head of the *Judenrat*, was hanged in March 1942' (Cholowsky 1979: 119–123). But these were the exception. The Lodz *Judenrat*, under Chaim Rumkowski, was the object of 'rage and contempt... universal loathing' (Beit-Zvi (1991:331). In the summer of 1940 there were 'stormy street demonstrations' against the *Judenrat*. The same was true in Lublin, Czestochowa and other ghettos (Trunk 1979: 28).

With their welfare activities 'The Councils served the Nazis with their "good" qualities as well as the "bad"' (Hilberg (1979: 32). What Michman termed the Trunk position emphasised the positive aspect of the *Judenrat* (Linn 2004: 92). When Isaiah Trunk exonerated the *Judenrat*, Brenner describes him as a 'careful scholar', ignoring his wider political purpose (Brenner 1983: 205). In the Netherlands the Amsterdam *Judenrat*, the *Joodse Raad*, was headed by two Zionists, Abraham Ascher and David Cohen, which compiled registers of Dutch Jewry and 'let itself be used for the liquidation of Dutch Jewry' (Presser 2010: 264).

In France Danneker, a member of Eichman's staff, attempted to form a *Judenrat* in Paris. He was met with a flat refusal by the Jews. It was

because of this that 75 percent of French Jews survived (Yahil 1979: 320). In Belgium the Nazis set up a *Judenrat*, the *Association des Juifs en Belgique*, which began compiling lists of the Jewish population in March–April 1942, which were then handed over to the Gestapo. Thousands of Belgian Jews refused to have anything to do with the *Judenrat* and went into hiding. On 29 August 1942, the Jewish Communists executed Holcinger, the head of the *Judenrat* (Steinberg 1979: 367). In another case involving members of the *Judenrat* of Bedzin, Poland, Chief Justice Olshan declared on 22 May 1964 that ‘no matter how the *Judenrat* acted, it served the Nazis... Even those who served the interests of the Jewish communities assisted the Nazis’ (Braham 1979: 283–84).

Rabbi Weissmandel and the Slovakian *Judenrat*: The Europa Plan

Rabbi Chaim Michael Weissmandel (1903–1957) was in the tradition of *shtadlanut*, who interceded with the powerful on behalf of the Jewish community.¹³ Although he was a religious opponent of Zionism, he worked with the Zionist leader Gizi Fleischmann as members of the Slovakian Working Group (WG) which bribed German and Slovakian officials and paid negotiated ransom to the Germans. The only problem was that the Nazis were not susceptible to bribes. They would take the money and continue along the same path. Brenner adopts Weissmandel’s analysis about the role of the Slovakian *Judenrat*. In 1939 the Nazis granted Slovakia its ‘independence’. Slovakia was the first country to deport its Jews. From 26 March to 20 October 1942 57,000 Jews were deported to the extermination camps. Hungary became a refuge for about 7,000 Slovakian Jews (Hilberg 2002:769; Bauer 1994: 73–74). As the Nazis occupied Hungary the WG concentrated on saving members of the Zionist youth groups (Rothkirchen 1979: 219–27).

From 1942 onwards, Slovakia’s *Judenrat*, the Jewish Centre or *Ustredna Zidov* (UZ), a Jewish institution established by the Slovak government in 1940 to run Jewish affairs, was drawn into the deportation process’ (Hilberg (2002:779; Conway 1995: 270). Headed by Arpad Sebestyen and Gestapo agent Karel Hochberg, the *Ustredna Zidov* issued ID cards, supplied lists of Jews to the Gestapo and helped to round up the Jews (Hilberg 1992: 779). Gizi Fleischmann was responsible for its emigration department. From January to September 1944 it was headed by Oskar Neumann, former head of the Zionist Organisation of Slovakia. Although the WG was ostensibly a resistance organisation, in practice it was an extension of the collaborative *Ustredna Zidov* (Rothkirchen 1979: 219, 221).

13 ‘Shtadlan’ at: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0018_0_18412.html.

Conway and Vrba argue that from 1942 onwards the WG collaborated with the Nazis (Conway 1995: 269). 'In September 1944 the last period of the WG 'casts a dark shadow over all of them, and on Gizi as their leader. They could have no illusions by then but they acted just like many of the Jewish Councils in Poland. They could have warned the Jews, but they didn't, they could have refused the demands of the Nazis... but they didn't' (Linn 2004). In 2001 a group of historians at Yad Vashem, including Bauer, stung by the accusation that the Slovakian and Hungarian *Judenrat* had kept Auschwitz and the gas chambers secret from the Jewish population, compiled 'Leadership under Duress: The Working Group in Slovakia, 1942–1944' which was mainly an *ad hominem* attack on Vrba.

Weissmandel and Fleischmann were fooled into believing that Wisliceny was corrupt and open to bribes (Lob 2008: 229). According to Conway, it was pressure from the Apostolic Nuncio Monsignor Burzio that led the Pope to issue a strong message concerning the deportation of Slovakia's Jews. The Apostolic special delegate, Monsignor Martilotti, pressurised Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest, into ending the deportations (Beit Zvi 1991: 69). Tiso was unwilling to defy the papal authorities. Pope Pius XII had personally intervened because a Catholic priest, President of a Nazi satellite state, was permitting the deportations.

Two notes were handed to the Prime Minister, Tuka, from the Vatican which explained that the Jews weren't being sent to Poland for labour service; 'the truth was that they were being annihilated there' (2002 Hilberg 786–7). In April 1943 Burzio informed Tuka that the Jews deported in 1942 were no longer alive (Hilberg 2002: 786–8). It was a coincidence that the deportations were halted soon after the paying of a bribe.

Brenner adopts Weissmandel's criticism of the Zionists for not paying further bribes even though bribery could not possibly have prevented the extermination of the Jews. Extermination was integral to Nazi Party ideology and policies. Weissmandel, in fact, was arguing for the traditional Jewish policy of *Shtadlanut*. In breach of the moratorium on deportations, agreed between Wisliceny and the Working Group, a transport of Jews left on September 18th and a second transport left on September 21st. The next day \$20,000 arrived in Slovakia, donated by Gyula Link, a Hungarian Orthodox Jewish philanthropist of Slovakian origin. There was another deportation on 20th October 1942 of physically and mentally handicapped Jews (Fatlan 1994: 171). Yehuda Bauer writes of Wisliceny that 'What is amazing is that the highly intelligent Slovak Jewish leaders believed him and trusted him, none more so than Weissmandel' (Bauer 1994: 100).

When the Nazis invaded Hungary, Wisliceny brought with him a letter from Weissmandel to Chief Rabbi Freudiger saying that Wisliceny could be trusted (Braham 1981: 427; Vrba 1997: 378). The letter was

addressed to the 'trustworthy' people' who had 'enough guts and devotion to negotiate with the SS as the Slovak group had done ...' (Bauer 1994: 154). The conclusion drawn by Freudiger, was that he should establish relationships with Wisliceny (Arendt 1997: 196; Beit Zvi 2006: 311, 314; Porat 1997). The difference in Hungary was that Eichmann was personally in charge. Wisliceny was sent to the provinces to organise ghettos. It was Hermann Krumei who was Eichman's deputy, responsible for organising the Hungarian Holocaust. Randolph Braham described Weissmandel's letter as the 'fatal advice of the Slovak Jewish leaders' (Braham 2004: 188). Krumei himself was one of those for whom Kasztner testified for at Nuremberg.

On the basis of a coincidence, Weissmandel and Fleischman then focused almost entirely on the Europa plan which envisaged stopping the final solution in Europe in return for two million US dollars (Beit Zvi 1991: 292). Vrba described it as 'truly hair-brained'. John Conway described it as 'far fetched and illusionary'. In June 1944 Vrba met with Weissmandel at his Yeshiva, operating openly in the midst of Bratislava under the protection of the authorities. Vrba described it as 'a circus with Rabbi Weissmandel as its main, albeit tragicomic, clown' (Vrba and Bestic 1997: 370–371).

Brenner described Weissmandel's post-war *Min HaMaitzer* ('From the Depths') as 'one of the most powerful indictments of Zionism and the Jewish establishment'. It was nothing of the sort. *Min HaMaitzer* is undoubtedly a passionate reflection of the politics of Jewish Orthodoxy, but it is not an ideological critique of Zionism (Brenner 1983: 236–8; Weissmandel 1960: 13). Because of his Orthodox religious beliefs Weissmandel was incapable of a socio-economic or political analysis of the Holocaust. *Min HaMaitzer* is also unreliable and disingenuous. Weissmandel described how he visited Monsignor Giuseppe Burzio and 'this wicked man' said 'All Jewish blood is guilty and they must die'. This is highly unlikely since it was Burzio whose was responsible for the Vatican pressure which had been decisive in ending the deportations in Slovakia in 1942 (Hilberg 1992: 786–7).

This is equally true of the *Holocaust Victims Accuse* (Reb Moshe Shonfeld 1977) which substantiates and provide depth for *Min HaMaitzer*. Whilst containing interesting documents and quotes, for example a letter to The Times from the late Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld, the Chairman of the Chief Rabbis Rescue Committee in Britain, which detailed the obstructive tactics of the Zionists, it is also wildly inaccurate and at times simply dishonest. It mentions Gizi Fleischman whilst 'forgetting' to mention her close working relationship with Weissmandel in the Working Group. It attacks Jewish Communists in Russia, omitting to mention that up to 1.5 million Jews escaped to the Soviet Union (Hilberg 2002: 295).

It quotes from Rudolph Vrba, the Auschwitz escapee, who was a stringent critic of Weissmandel, who he called 'a clown'. Shonfeld attacks the 'cruel' enemy of the Catholic Church, seemingly oblivious to representatives such as the Apostolic Nuncio in Istanbul Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, who in 1958 became Pope John XXIII and willingness to lobby Pope Pius XII was very well known. Vatican Legate Archbishop Monsignore Martilotti of the Nuncio's office in Bern or the Apostolic Nuncio in Bratislava, Monsignor Giuseppe Burzio, who first sent a copy of the Auschwitz Protocols to the Vatican. Martilotti interviewed the Auschwitz escapees, Rudolf Vrba and Czeslaw Mordowicz (who escaped from Auschwitz shortly after Vrba) for six hours, on 20 June. Before he left for Switzerland, he promised to do everything in his power to stop the killings in Auschwitz. Martilotti supplied the Auschwitz Protocols to Pope Pius XII, who had already received them at the end of April (Braham 1981: 1067, 1127). Erich Kulka believes that the decisive factor in the Pope's telegram to Horthy was Mario Martilotti. Horthy was 'bombarded with telegrams from all sides, from the Vatican and the King of Sweden, from Switzerland and the Red Cross'. The Pope was sending telegrams and the Apostolic Nuncio in Budapest Angelo Rotta was calling "several times" a day. The Turkish, Spanish and Swiss governments had also intervened. The government was now frightened especially when Szotjay read three decoded telegrams from the US and British missions in Bern with a 'detailed description' of the fate of the deported Jews and the threat of bombings of Hungarian and German agencies, including exact addresses. An exception to the willingness to apply pressure was Hungary's Cardinal Sered who was bluntly asked by Angelo Rotta why he was remaining silent (Braham 1981: 1034).

Shonfeld employs a scattergun approach attacking Reform Jewry on account of Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann. He states that Hitler only embarked on the extermination of European Jewry when Stephen Wise declared war on Nazi Germany (it was in fact Chaim Weizmann 'not Wise who declared war', states that Brand left Germany in order to get the Allies to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz, whereas his sole concern was to bring end the final solution through the Blood for Trucks proposal that Eichmann was forced to endorse. Shonfeld recounts the time when Schwalb sent Weissmandel a letter stating that all nations must make sacrifices, as the Jews who are being exterminated are making. Shonfeld tells the story of how the Zionists' Boycott Committee', having destroyed the boycott of Nazi Germany, now started picketing Agudas Yisrael's preparation and distribution of food parcels for ghetto inhabitants.

Shonfeld agreed that the bribing of Wisliceny had halted the deportations, and argued that, for a whole month in 1943, deportations to Auschwitz stopped. If indeed they stopped it was in order to maintain

the extermination equipment. The cynical behaviour of the Zionists' approach to rescuing Jews was the selection of the few from the many (selectivity).¹⁴ Shonfeld also states that 'just as the bribed Nazis had been true to their agreement in Slovakia, so they kept their promise as to this new pact, from which emanated the Europa plan'. Shonfeld seems to have forgotten that the final solution never stopped, at any point (Shonfeld 1977 22, 40, 60, 66, 14, 18, 117, 43, 65, 45–49, 85–87, 87–9).

Nathan Schwalb, head of the Zionist World Hehalutz Bureau in Geneva, sought to protect Kasztner's negotiations with Eichmann from anything likely to destroy them, such as the Auschwitz Protocols, wrote to Weissmandel a letter which expressed the Zionist view that the dead of the Holocaust would be the Zionists' main card at the negotiating table for a Jewish state. When this letter was quoted in Jim Allen's play *Perdition* (1987) Schwalb sued for libel, but he was forced to withdraw the action when he refused to open his archive, as he knew it wouldn't stand scrutiny (Allen 1987) even though both Lenni Brenner (Brenner 1983: 237–8) and Moshe Shonfeld had already cited the letter and attributed it to Nathan Schwalb (Shonfeld 1977: 26–28).¹⁵ The Zionist leaders, including Saly Meyer of the Joint Distribution Committee in Switzerland, refused to countenance handing over \$2m for the Europa plan.

Rudolf Kasztner and the Nazis

Rudolf Kasztner was the leader of Hungarian Zionism and the Jewish Agency's Rescue Committee (*Va'ada*) in Budapest during the Nazi occupation. In return for his silence and co-operation during the deportations, the Zionists were allowed to organise a train of the Prominents which left Hungary on the night of 30 June 1944 with 1,684 of the Zionist and Jewish elite including 388 from Kasztner's home town of Kolosvar, who were taken to Budapest by the SS (Braham 1981 972–3). Most of the *Judenräte* joined the train. Rudolf Vrba, the Auschwitz escapee wrote (Linn 2004: 45):

I accuse certain Jewish leaders of one of the most ghastly deeds of the war. This small group of quislings knew what was happening to their brethren in Hitler's gas chambers and bought their own lives with the price of silence. Among them was Dr Kasztner.

... I was able to give Hungarian Zionist leaders three weeks notice that [Adolf] Eichmann planned to send a million of their Jews to his gas

14 As Kasztner's representative in the defamation case against Malchiel Greenwald, Attorney-General Chaim Cohen explained: 'If in Kasztner's opinion, rightly or wrongly, he believed that one million Jews were hopelessly doomed, he was allowed not to inform them of their fate; and to concentrate on the saving of the few'.

15 At: http://www.weissmandl.org/Book_Text/Uri_Davis/CrossingTheBorder_pt1.htm. http://www.weissmandl.org/Book_Text/Uri_Davis/CrossingTheBorder_pt2.htm. http://www.weissmandl.org/Book_Text/Uri_Davis/Crossing_footnotes.htm.

chambers. . . Kasztner went to Eichmann and told him, 'I know of your plans; spare some Jews of my choice and I shall keep quiet. (Hecht 1961: note 68, 261–2)¹⁶

When he was accused of collaboration with the Nazis, Rudolf Kasztner was forced by the Israeli state into initiating a libel trial (1953–8) in the Jerusalem District Court. Instead he effectively became the defendant and Judge Benyamin Halevi ruled that he had 'sold his soul to the German Satan' (Hecht 1961: 180). The Supreme Court accepted Halevi's findings of fact. Kasztner was cleared on a legal technicality. If you are sued for defamation you have to prove all your allegations. One allegation, of becoming rich with the money from members of the Prominents train was not upheld by Judge Halevi. Therefore the whole libel action succeeded. The Supreme Court later found, on a split decision on legal grounds, that Kasztner had proved libel, though by then he had been assassinated. This procedure is appropriate for run-of-the-mill actions but when it comes to a trial involving the death of nearly half-a-million Hungarian Jews and the collaboration of the leader of Hungarian Zionism in the Nazi murders, one would expect the Supreme Court to rise to the occasion and devise a different procedure. Clearly they were not capable of this, Judge Silberg excepted. However all five Judges were in agreement in upholding Judge Halevi's decision that Kasztner, 'in a perjurious and criminal way', saved Kurt Becher, a major German war criminal, from the punishment awaiting him in Nuremberg. Judge Silberg summed up the Supreme Court finding on this point: "Greenwald has proven beyond any reasonable doubt this grave charge'. The Judges voted 3–2 in agreement. But Greenwald was still found guilty by 3–2 of accusing Kasztner of collaboration.¹⁷ It is little wonder that even today, people cannot agree whether the Judges voted by 4–1 or 3–2 that Kasztner's libel action succeeded.

Yad Vashem has long been eager to vindicate Kasztner and the documents on the Internet used to justify this are politically self serving and strewn with errors. One example is the claim 'the Israeli Supreme Court cleared Kasztner of all wrongdoing. It did no such thing.

Kasztner claimed responsibility for saving 70,000 Jews in the Jewish ghetto (Lob 2008: 209) and numerous other Jews with SS Col. Becher, a representative of Heinrich Himmler, the second most powerful man in Nazi Germany and the person most directly responsible for the Holocaust.

16 *The Daily Herald*, February 1961.

17 At: http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206428.pdf. http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/pressroom/pressreleases/pr_details.asp?cid=235. Yad Vashem archive of Hungarian Jew accused of collaborating with Nazis-Israel Kasztner shot dead in 1957 after Israeli court said he had 'sold his soul to the German Satan' during World War Two, *Haaretz*. 22 July 2007, at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/yad-vashem-given-archive-of-hungarian-jew-accused-of-collaborating-with-nazis-1.226020>.

Yet Becher had to be reminded by Kasztner at Nuremberg that he had saved Budapest's Ghetto (he was in Berlin at the time). If anyone was responsible for saving the ghetto Jews it was the *Nyilas* liaison with the Budapest Police, Pal Szalai (Braham 2004: 40), a fact recognised by the post-war Peoples' Tribunals (Braham 1981: 986). Another example of Kasztner's false claims concerned the 18,000 Jews who were 'put on ice' at Strasshoff, the Vienna concentration camp. They were in fact transferred to Vienna at the specific request of SS Brigade Fuhrer Blaschke, to dig tank trenches. On 30 June 1944 Ernst Kaltenbrunner wrote to Blaschke agreeing to his request. The Judges in the Eichmann trial ruled that Kasztner had fallen for a 'simulated concession' and paid \$1,000 for each of the 18,000 persons in the transports (Steinberg 1968:329–330; Braham 1981 650, 954; Lob 2008: 93–95). 12,000 Jews survived.

Rudolf Kasztner's Testimony at Nuremberg on Behalf of Nazis

Brenner puts the blame for the swift implementation of the Hungarian Holocaust on Kasztner as an individual, whereas the evidence suggests that the Jewish Agency was responsible for Kasztner's role in Hungary, including his testifying at Nuremberg, on behalf of a number of Nazi war criminals, including Hermann Krumey, Eichmann's deputy in Hungary, and Dieter Wisliceny, butcher of Slovakian and Greek Jewry.¹⁸ The Kasztner trial in Jerusalem was unaware of this testimony. Kasztner's testimony on behalf of Becher was the basis upon which Shmuel Tamir built his case for the defendant Malchiel Greenwald.¹⁹ As a result, Krumey spent his post-war years in Germany as a free man (Barri 1997:145). Eventually, after Vrba testified, he was condemned to five years hard labour' (Linn 2004: 47).

In September 1945 Kasztner made two statements before the American Committee for the Investigation of War Crimes. The first mentioned Krumey as the SS officer responsible for the Holocaust in Hungary and Austria. The second statement described Becher and Wisliceny as war criminals whose only reason for benevolent activity during the final months of the war had been to provide themselves with alibis (Barri 1997: 142).

In Rudolf Kasztner's 1946 Report to the Jewish Agency, Krumey, Wisliceny and Becher were described as actors in the Nazi killing machine. Yet on 4 August 1947 Kasztner testified at Nuremberg that Becher helped prevent the destruction of the survivors in the concentration camps (Barri 1997: 144). There is no evidence for this. In May 1948, Kasztner gave

18 At: http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206524.pdf.

19 Barri Kasztner's cable of 12 May 1945, Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Jerusalem, S26/1569.

a statement to Benno H. Selettet (Office of Chief Counsel for War Crimes Nuremberg 5 May 1948), stating that Krumei 'performed his tasks displaying remarkable good will towards those whose life or death depended to a great extent upon the way' (Barri 1997: 144).²⁰

A memorandum of July 1947 indicates that Kasztner attempted to save Wisliceny from execution by transferring him from Slovak to American custody. In February 1948, Gideon Raphael (Ruffer), who subsequently became an Israeli diplomat, wrote to Murray Gurfein, assistant to Prosecutor Robert Jackson, asking if it was possible to accept Wisliceny's offer to provide information regarding Eichman's whereabouts (Barri 1997: 155). American prosecutors Rapp and Kempner claimed that Kasztner was eager to make many statements on behalf of Nazi war criminals.²¹ Despite the denial of Eliyahu Dobkin head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department during the war, the Jewish Agency clearly did know of the testimony as it is contained in a letter from Kasztner to Eliezer Kaplan of the Jewish Agency Executive, of 26 July 1948. Kasztner's statement is appended to the report on the destruction of the Jews of Hungary of 4 August 1947, Prosecution Exhibit 73, Trial Boxes 515) throughout the entire period 1945 and 1948, covering Kasztner's testimony on behalf of the Nazi war criminals, his travel and expenses were funded primarily by Zionist organizations, albeit not continuously.

Rudolf Kasztner claimed during his libel trial in Jerusalem that he testified solely in favour of Becher and that he had been permitted to testify by Dobkin, of the Jewish Agency and Chaim Barlas of Mossad. However Dobkin denied ever having heard Becher's name, which Ruffer contradicted (Barri 1997: 151). Kasztner felt that the Jewish Agency were making him a scapegoat. Dobkin was familiar with all the reports on rescue activities, including Kasztner's. Kasztner claimed that it was impossible that Dobkin should not be familiar with Becher's name. Barri believes that Kasztner's claim 'sounds plausible' (Barri 1997: 144, 149, 150–155, 163).

Ruffer claimed that he had turned down an offer by Wisliceny to help locate Adolf Eichmann.²² Kasztner informed Dobkin and Ruffer that he had given sworn statements for Herbert Kettlitz.²³ The Jewish Agency's primary concern after the war was the 'Becher deposit' which was alleged to consist of large amounts of the wealth of Hungarian Jewry (Barri 1997: 156–8).

20 Statements by Kasztner and Dr Nikolaus (Moshe) Schweiger, 20 January 1946, Eliezer Kaplan's files CZA (Jerusalem).

21 Statement by Walter Rapp given in Tel Aviv before attorney Zvi Kalmantinsky, 6 February 1957, Israel State Archives (Jerusalem).

22 Barri (1997: 154); Orit Galili, 'Interview with Gideon Raphael', *Haaretz*, 2 December 1994.

23 Hamburg, 3 June 1948 and Wilhelm Eggen, Nuremberg, 17 August 1948, in Barri (1997: 159).

Barlas instructed the Jewish Agency's Rescue Committee (*Va'ada*) to make the Nazi war criminals aware that 'we offer them not only money' (Barri 1997: 162). The alibi that the Jewish Agency could provide was a desired commodity in the final stages of the war. It was also the only thing they had to offer at the time' (Barri 1997: 162) Did Rudolf Kasztner receive the prior authorisation of the Jewish Agency? Kasztner certainly considered himself authorised to testify in the Jewish Agency's name (Barri 1946: 164). The matter was never in fact fully investigated. The Jewish Agency in the aftermath of the war could not admit that it had approved testimony on behalf of Nazi war criminals. Yet that is what it had almost certainly done. Shoshana Barri, who is the only person to have investigated the sources concludes that 'Certainly the Jewish Agency knew of some of them, while with regard to the others the picture is less clear. Yet archival sources suggest the probability that the Jewish Agency was aware of them all' (Barri 1997: 145).

The Auschwitz Protocols: The Holocaust in Hungary

On 10 April 1944 Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, who worked in the Canada section of Birkenau, escaped from Auschwitz. They had escaped in order to warn the world that the last major concentration of Jews in Europe was about to be exterminated. Two weeks later, on 24 April, Vrba and Wetzler reached Slovakia and told their story to the Slovakian *Judenrat* (Ustredna Zidov). They sat down, in separate rooms, to write what they knew about Auschwitz. Both reports coincided with each other. The Auschwitz Protocols were transcribed into both Hungarian and German on April 26th 1944. The Protocols detailed the layout of its gas chambers and crematoria as well as the procedures of mass murder and were filed as documents, NG-206Int, at the Nuremberg trials (Linn 2004: 13).

The Auschwitz Protocols revealed that Auschwitz/Birkenau was the Nazis' main extermination camp. They played a crucial role in warning and saving the remainder of Hungary's Jews yet Brenner does not mention them. Vrba and Wetzler insisted that the Auschwitz Protocols should be revealed at once.²⁴ They were assured by the Slovakian leaders that the report would be in the hands of the Hungarian Jewish leaders 'first thing tomorrow'.²⁵ The following day Vrba was told that Kasztner, leader of Hungarian Zionism, was examining the report at that very minute' (Baron 2000: 15). Kasztner did not though inform Hungary's Jews of

24 Vierteljahreshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte, Vol.53, No.3 (2005): 461–472, Escaping Auschwitz: Sixty years later, John S Conway, University of British Columbia Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

25 Vierteljahreshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 53, no. 3, 2005, pp. 461–472, Escaping Auschwitz: Sixty years later, John S Conway, University of British Columbia Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

the fate that awaited them. The circulation of the report threatened to undermine his negotiations with the Nazis. Eichmann referred to a 'gentlemen's agreement' with Kasztner, who 'agreed to help keep the Jews from resisting deportation' in exchange for the opportunity to rescue the Zionist and Jewish elite. 'To sum it all up, I regret nothing'.²⁶

When and to whom were the Auschwitz Protocols distributed?

The answer to this question has been obscured by the fog that Kasztner and the Zionist movement has created. Vrba was explicit that '... the leaders of Hungarian Jewry were in full possession of these facts by the end of April 1944 at the latest'. The Auschwitz Protocols were handed to Kasztner on 25 or 28 April 1944 (Linn 2004: 27; Braham 1968–9: 712; Vrba and Bestic 1977: 248). Another version believed that the Protocols were sent to Budapest, Nathan Schwalb in Geneva and the Zionist liaison committee in Istanbul. However 'Schwalb's primary interest... was to prevent the Vrba-Wetzler report from being published so as not to disrupt Kasztner's negotiation with Eichmann' (Linn 2004:28; Baron 2000:171–208). Instead Yehuda Bauer credits Saly Meyer with saving the Jews of Budapest, a claim which Randolph Braham described as 'highly unlikely' (Braham 1981: 967).

Pope Pius XII received a copy from Burzio at the end of April and also Monsignor Martilotti in late June (Braham 1981:1067; Baron 2000:14). On 20 June 1944 Martilotti came to Slovakia to interview Vrba and Mordowicz (Baron 2000: 22–3). On 15 May 1944, when the deportations started, the Pope submitted the first official protest against the deportation of the Jews (Braham 1981: 1068). On 25 June the Pope appealed 'in an open telegram' to Horthy, calling on him to 'spare so many unfortunate people further sufferings', without explicitly mentioning the Jews (Linn 2004: 28). On 6 July the Pope 'gave vent to his outrage' to Sztojay (Braham 1981: 1072).

One of the copies of the Auschwitz Protocols was given to Dr Géza Soos, a dissident official of the Hungarian Foreign Office and a member of the Hungarian Independence Movement, a small resistance group. Soos gave his copy for translation and duplication to Rev. Jozsef Elias during the first few days of May, who distributed them to the leaders of the Christian churches and the Hungarian state shortly before the start of the mass deportations (Linn 2004: 31–33; Braham 1981:754, 1120). Among those who received a copy were Horthy's daughter-in-law, Catholic cardinals, Lutheran bishops and Erno Peto, a prominent *Judenrat* member. Professor Thomas Sakmyster claims that Horthy's decision to halt the deportation

²⁶ Eichmann in *Life Magazine*, 5 December 1960, in Brenner (2002: 280).

of the Budapest Jews was a direct result of his reading of the Vrba-Wetzler Report (Kulka 1964). A copy of the Auschwitz Protocols was also brought to Switzerland around the 10 June 1944 by a courier of the Czech underground.²⁷ The Protocols were given to Dr Jaromir Kopecky of the Czech government-in-exile who immediately contacted Gerhard Riegner of the World Jewish Council. When Alan Dulles read the entire report he wired it to the USA on 23 June 1944. The veil of secrecy had been lifted. In the following days no less than 383 articles about the Auschwitz death camp appeared in the Swiss press (Baron 2000: 22).

Yehuda Bauer's claim that 'the Vrba-Wetzler report had received widespread, albeit unofficial, publicity within Jewish Hungary is problematic' (Linn 2004: 45; Bauer (1997:297–307). Yet Bauer accepts that one and a half months later, 'the details of the Vrba-Wetzler report were still generally unknown' (Linn 2004: 46; Bauer 2001:196; Kulka 1964). However those on the train of the 'prominents' were given specific information about Auschwitz (Linn 2004: 46). Bauer now concedes that 'the so-called' Protocols... must have arrived in Budapest, perhaps through Kasztner' at the end of April and been handed over to the leading members of the *Judenrat*' (Bauer 1994: 156–7). Gutman too accepted that 'Kasztner had been given a copy of the report on April 29 1944 but... he had already made a decision, together with other Jewish leaders, choosing not to disseminate the report in order not to harm the negotiations with the Nazis'.²⁸ Non-Israeli historians such as Conway are criticised for accepting Vrba's testimony or for being misled by him yet it was Yad Vashem's establishment historians who, kicking and screaming, finally accepted the truth of what happened (Linn 2004: 67; Fatran 1995: 164–201).

On 16 May 1944 Weissmandel sent 'extraordinarily precise' details of Auschwitz, including accurate maps, to Swiss Orthodox Jewish leaders and on May 31 to the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in New York, who passed them onto the War Refugee Board. He begged that the Allies bomb Auschwitz and the rail lines leading up to it. This information was based on the Auschwitz Protocols (Friedlander 2005: 405–6). Freudiger testified at Eichman's trial that the Auschwitz Protocols were translated into English and on 19 June 1944 they were sent out of Hungary by Moshe Krausz (Erez 1997: 123–134). He emphasised how relevant this information had been as prior to this date 'no one had any idea about

27 *Haaretz*, 7 April 2013, at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerzy_Tabeau, This day in Jewish history - Escape from Auschwitz takes shape <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/this-day-in-jewish-history/this-day-in-jewish-history-escape-from-auschwitz-takes-shape.premium-1.514020>.

28 Linn (2004: 46, 72), citing Gutman's *Shoah Vezikaron*.

Auschwitz' In Hungary Cohen writes how 'It is beyond question that the Auschwitz Protocols reached the Jewish Council and Zionist activists including the Hehalutz underground, yet they did not transmit this information to the Jewish public when the deportation began'. Hehalutz concentrated primarily on saving their own Zionist comrades, including smuggling several hundred across the border to Romania and Slovakia (Cohen 1996: 381). Yehuda Bauer admits that 'the protocols were an important factor in stopping the deportations' (Linn 2004:113, citing Bauer 2002: 238). Bauer, in a last desperate attempt to minimise the importance of the Auschwitz Protocols and Vrba's role, suggested they had not included details of the proposed Hungarian Holocaust in them. This is Bauer's and the Yad Vashem historical methodology, speculation designed to undermine those they oppose. Only on 3 July 1944 did information from the Vrba-Wetzler report receive attention in the *New York Times*. Only at a very late stage, after a period of more than four months, did the WRB make reports about Auschwitz public.

The Erasing and Discrediting of Rudolph Vrba and Alfred Wetzler

In 1998, thirty-five years after its original publication in virtually every language, the Auschwitz Protocols were published in Hebrew. Their very publication was an affront to the Zionist historical establishment. Anita Shapira, the 'Princess of Zionism', held that the Nazi Holocaust could only be understood on Jewish national soil. Hannah Arendt rejected Zionism's reduction of Jewish history to the desire to 'return' to Palestine. 'She was incapable of sensing the Jewish experience because she was from 'there', as if 'there' was not where the Holocaust had occurred. . . ' (Piterberg 2008: 149).

Yehuda Bauer held that disclosing the Auschwitz Protocols to Hungary's Jews would have served no purpose. Bauer launched a furious *ad hominem* attack on Vrba as '(a) bitter Auschwitz survivor', 'embittered and furious', and '(his) despair and bitterness are overdone' (Linn 2004: 114 citing Bauer (2001: 230, 235, 237). Like all state-sponsored historians, Bauer, who is in the business of creating an acceptable (Zionist) history, was incapable of dealing with criticism. It was not until 1997 that Bauer accepted that Vrba was a reliable eyewitness (Linn 2004: 66 citing Bauer 1997:297). In the 1990 edition of the Israeli *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, the escapees are referred to by name but in the 2001 edition they are referred to as 'two Jewish prisoners'.

As a result of Linn's efforts, Yad Vashem's historians, in particular Yisrael Gutman, reluctantly accepted that Kasztner was given a copy of the Auschwitz Protocols on 29 April 1944 but chose not to disseminate

them in order not to harm negotiations with the Nazis (Linn 2004: 72). It was not until 1999 that Vrba and Wexler's escape was finally published in Gutman's Hebrew writings for school students. Yehuda Bauer eventually accepted that the Protocols were responsible for three major breakthroughs: changing the Allied belief that Auschwitz was a huge labour camp for Poles, it was the first detailed and reliable report of the gas chambers and thirdly 'it jolted the Swiss into undertaking wide publication' of the exterminations at Auschwitz' (Linn 2004: 30; Bauer 1979: 209).

The actual experiences of the Holocaust survivors were marginalised (Conway 2005: 270–271). In 1994, at a conference at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, Vrba argued that the survivors' experience was superior to that of the Zionist historical establishment (Linn 2004: 108). He asked: 'Who is the better historian – those of us who saw the Nazis in action in Auschwitz' or 'those who did not have direct experience with the Nazis'? Linn 2004: 108). When questioned at the 1968 Yad Vashem conference on Jewish resistance as to why Vrba and Wexler's part in informing the Ustredna Zidov about Auschwitz was missing from her presentation, Livia Rothkirchen answered, 'I was speaking of the organised escapes. The escapes from Auschwitz were acts of individual heroism'. Non-Zionist resistance to the Nazis was disregarded *a priori* (Linn 2004: 85–86, citing Garlinski 1975). As a non-Zionist, Vrba could never be considered credible (Linn 2004: 88–9). He had no right to accuse the Working Group of collaboration with the Nazis (Fatran 1992).

Vrba was first given academic legitimacy by the German periodical *Vierteljahrsheft fuer Zeitgeschichte*, published by the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich. Yehuda Bauer now agreed that Hungary's Jews were ignorant of their impending fate but credits Rudolf Kasztner with playing a pivotal role in rescuing the Jews of Budapest. Randolph Braham accused Yehuda Bauer of using 'questionable psychological arguments' when he argues that the Hungarian Jewish community was informed about the realities of the Final Solution but had not 'internalised' the information, failing to turn it into 'knowledge'. Bauer cites 'selectively the recollections of survivors, including some young Zionist couriers and local community leaders' (Braham 2004: 21–57).

The memoirs of the survivors of Kolosvar attest that the Jews were not only kept ignorant about Auschwitz, but were misinformed. But in a Yad Vashem historical consensus, Gila Fatran argued that even if the Auschwitz Protocols had not been suppressed, Hungary's Jews knew that deportation meant death. Knowledge of the Auschwitz Protocols could not have changed anything, though Zionist activists, including Freudiger,

used this knowledge as a means of escape (Fatran 1995, Response to John Conway). Tivador Soros disagreed. Someone had succeeded in getting out of the death camp at Auschwitz and had told the whole story. . . . We talked a lot about how we might escape'. George Soros confirmed this (Linn 2004: 101). The Jewish deportees were told they were being relocated to Kenyermezö, a fictitious area in western Hungary. If only one per cent of Hungary's Jewish victims had known about the Protocols and had not boarded the trains to Auschwitz, almost three times the numbers on the train of the Prominents would have survived. According to Prof. George Klein 'It was this report that prompted me to escape' (Linn 2004: 47–48).

Randolph Braham asked why, if the Jewish leadership was so sure that deportation to Kenyermezo in Hungary was genuine they did not remain with the masses? (Braham 2004: 51 fn.53). Braham remarked that 'It is a pity that Bauer fails to refer to this, let alone cite the views of many survivors (Braham 2004: note 28, 39). Elie Wiesel confirmed that 'We were taken just 2 weeks before D-Day, and we did not know that Auschwitz existed . . . everyone knew except the victims' (Baron 1994: 10). Braham was highly critical of Yehuda Bauer and his selective accounts, accusing him of fabricating the claim that Oszef Meir, of Hashomer Hatzair, had been involved in 'sabotage and derailing of trains' (Bauer 1994:235). 'No corroboration for this claim has been found to date' (Braham 1994: 39 note 28). Bauer concludes that it was the Zionists who made the 'Blood for Trucks' offer to the SS (Bauer 1994:163–4). The evidence that it came from Adolf Eichmann is overwhelming.

Eichmann, on Heinrich Himmler's orders, offered the Allies one million Jews for 10,000 trucks to be used on the Eastern front. On 17 May 1944, two days after the deportations began, Brand and a German double agent, Bandi Grosz, were sent to Istanbul. The Brand mission was a cover for the real mission, that of Grosz, an attempt to secure a diplomatic opening with the West (Porter 2008:186, 200, 340, 421). The Zionists took it seriously, even though it had no possibility of succeeding. Brenner too was deceived by Brand's criticisms at Kasztner's trial that the Zionists had sabotaged it. Shortly before his death though, in 1964, Brand confessed that he had made a terrible mistake (Braham 2004: 1015, fn. 80; *The New York Times*, 21 May 1964).

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