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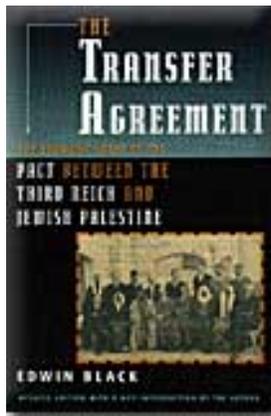
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*By Edwin Black  
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# THE TRANSFER AGREEMENT

*The Dramatic Story of the Pact Between  
the Third Reich & Jewish Palestine*

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## CHAPTER 1

### The Powers That Were

SHOCK WAVES rumbled through the world on January 30, 1933. The leader of a band of political hooligans had suddenly become chief of a European state. Before January 30, 1933, the repressive ideology of the National Socialist German Workers Party-NSDAP-had been resisted by the German government. That would all change now.

Hitler had become chancellor of Germany-a shock, but no surprise. The November 1932 general elections were held amid public hysteria over Germany's economic depression. Despite expensive emergency make-work programs, more than 5 million people were still unemployed on election eve. In some areas the jobless rate was 75 percent. More than 17 million persons-about a third of the entire population-were dependent upon a welfare stipend equivalent to a few dollars per family per month. Such families knew hungry nights once or twice weekly. Destitute people slept in the streets. The memory of closed or defaulted banks was fresh. The Nazis blamed the Jews and sought voter support through street violence against Jewish members of Germany's urban middle class.

But the November 1932 election was indecisive. Hitler's party received only a third of the vote, about 12 million ballots. Then a coalition government was blocked by Hitler's refusal to share power with the Socialists, who controlled 20 percent of the vote, and the Communists, who controlled 17 percent. Finally, in exasperation, on January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg exercised his emergency powers, appointing Herr Adolf Hitler interim chancellor.

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The Nazis had promised that upon assuming power they would rebuild Germany's economy, dismantle its democracy, destroy German Jewry, and establish Aryans as the master race-in that order. Yet many Western leaders saw only the economic value of Nazism. Hitler seemed the only alternative to a Communist state, a man who might rebuild the German economy and pay Germany's debts. That would be good for all Western economies. As for the threat to Germany's Jews, that was domestic German affair. (1)

Therefore, if the world's governments would not act, it would fall to the influential Jews of America to save their brethren in Germany. With the ability to be heard, the Jews of America, especially in New York, could mobilize economic and political pressure against Germany that would make war against the Jews a campaign of national suicide.

American Jewish muscle was not a sudden imagined power. For nearly a century, American Jews had been using economic pressure and protest to beat back anti-Semitic outrages throughout the world. But this time the American Jewish community would fail. That failure was tied to the so-called Big Three defense groups: the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, and the American Jewish Congress.

Both the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith were founded by well-to-do German Jews with a special outlook. Like other European Jews, the Germans immigrated en masse following the political upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century. But unlike their East European counterparts, the Germans clung to their original national identity, and were economically more established. Moreover, many German Jews believed they were so called Hofjuden, or courtly Jews, and that coreligionists from Poland and Russia were "uncivilized" and embarrassing. The bias was best summarized in a June 1894 German-American Jewish newspaper, the Hebrew Standard, which declared that the totally acclimated American Jew is closer to "Christian sentiment around him than to the Judaism of these miserable darkened Hebrews". (2)

Having achieved a secure standing in America, the German Jews organized essentially to protect their position from any "Jewish problems" that might appear. In 1843, in a small cafe on New York's Lower East Side, twelve German Jewish leaders founded B'nai B'rith as a benevolent fraternal organization. By aiding the Jewish poor, they hoped to remove any Jewish welfare burden that could arouse Christian anti-Semitism. In the 1880s, after hordes of impoverished East European Jews flooded America, B'nai B'rith accepted these newcomers as lodge members, but largely to

"manage" the East European Jewish presence in the United States.  
(3)

In 1906, as Czar Nicholas continued his anti-Semitic pogroms, men like Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, and Cyrus Adler went beyond philanthropy and constituted the American Jewish Committee. These powerful men would now function as a special lobby concerned with political problems important to Jews. The Committee initially limited its membership to roughly sixty prominent men, led by about a dozen central personalities from the realms of publishing, finance, diplomacy, and the law. (4) As individuals, they had already proven themselves combating hotels and other institutions that discriminated against Jews. Once united as the American Jewish Committee, they waged effective private economic war against the Russian monarchy. Their motives were not based on concern for East European Jews, but rather on a solid opposition to organized Jew hatred anywhere in the world.

But in 1933 things would be different. Quick as they were to oppose anti-Semitism in foreign lands, Germany held a special place in the hearts of Committee leaders. A foreshadowing of just how emotionally paralyzed the Committee would become in a crisis involving their ancestral home was amply displayed during the early years of World War I. Committee stalwarts were torn between their loyalties to the German Fatherland and America's popular allegiance to France and Britain. In 1915, Committee cofounder Jacob Schiff articulated his conflict in a note to German banker Max Warburg: "I still cherish the feeling of filial devotion for the country in which my fathers and forefathers lived, and in which my own cradle stood-a devotion which imbues me with the hope that Germany shall not be defeated in this fearful struggle." (5) Committee members' open support for Germany against Russia did not alter until the United States actually entered the war.

Popular Jewish disenchantment over Committee policies and the known Hofjuden prejudice against the Jewish multitudes had long alienated America's East European Jewish community. Increasingly, the Jewish majority saw the gentlemen of the American Jewish Committee as benevolent despots, not entitled to speak for them. (6) In response a number of national and regional Jewish organizations gathered in Philadelphia in June 1917 and affiliated into the American Jewish Congress. Proving their democratic character, 335,000 Jewish ballots from across the nation were cast. Three hundred delegates were elected and an additional one hundred appointed, representing thirty national Jewish organizations. (7)

After the war, the question of who would represent Jewish interests at the Peace Conference was bitterly contested. A delegation cutting across Committee and Congress lines finally did assemble at Versailles. But the Committee split off from other American Jewish groups negotiating Jewish rights when-in the Committee view-the proposed rights went "too far." Specifically, when Versailles mapmakers were redrawing boundaries based on religious, linguistic, and other ethnic affinities, popular Jewish sentiment demanded to be counted among the minority groups targeted for self- determination. That meant a Jewish homeland in Palestine-Zionism.(8)

Committee leaders were repulsed by Zionism. In their view, a refuge in Palestine would promote Jewish expulsions from countries where Jews lived and enjoyed roots. Anti-Semitic regimes could point to Palestine and claim, "You belong there in your own nation."(9) However, majority Jewish sentiments won out at Versailles, assuring a Jewish homeland in Palestine, with stipulations preserving Jewish rights in other countries.

American Jewish Congress leaders returned from Versailles in triumph. They had helped create a Jewish homeland, as well as secure international guarantees for minorities in Europe. In the early 1920s, the Congress solidified its popular Jewish support, thereby becoming the third of the so-called Big Three.

By 1933, the Congress stood as the most representative and outspoken Jewish defense organization. In contrast, B'nai B'rith functioned as little more than a fraternal order (except for its autonomous Anti-Defamation League). And the Committee, in 1933, basically represented the interests of about three hundred and fifty prominent Jewish members. Nonetheless, the Committee and B'nai B'rith-which often acted as a binary lobby-were respected, influential, and adequately financed, with access to the most powerful circles of American government and business. By comparison, the Congress, despite its vast membership, constantly struggled for funds and for recognition. While the Committee and B'nai B'rith generally chose quiet, behind-the-scenes methods, Congress people-predominantly East Europeans-were accustomed to attention-getting protests.(10)

Yet, all were Jews, drawn from a common heritage. And as of January 30, 1933, there arose a clear need to unify to combat the greatest single anti-Jewish threat ever posed. Hitler promised not only to rid Germany of its Jews, but to cleanse the world as well. Action by America's Jews was required-fast action.

As Adolf Hitler's Nazi party was taking over Germany, as the German Jews of New York were dominating the American Jewish political scene, so too, would Germans and Germany now determine the realities in a small undeveloped stretch of desert by the sea known as Palestine. For hundreds of years, the area had been the kingdom of the Jews. After the Israelites' dispersion in the second century A.D., the Romans changed the region's name to Syria Palaestina to wipe away the Jewish nation forever. Small groups of Jews had remained through the centuries in what became known simply as Palestine, but not until the late nineteenth century, following waves of European anti-Semitism, did large numbers of Jews begin an experimental return to their ancestral home. Agricultural settlements repeatedly failed in Palestine as Jewish idealists and dreamers tried to force the sandy and swampy wasteland to bloom. But with the steady help of European and American Jewish philanthropists, the Jewish agricultural revival finally began to triumph over the neglected Palestinian terrain. (11)

By the time airplanes were flying over the Mideast, the future of Jews in Palestine could be seen as green patches against a bleached beige backdrop. The green patches marked orange groves, the economic basis for Jewish survival in the Holy Land. When the young workers came from Russia, Poland, and even the United States, they were frequently settled on groves to grow oranges and other citrus for export. (12) Orange crates became the building blocks of Zionism.

Promising as those orange groves were, Jewish Palestine in 1933 was still little more than a collection of unconnected enclaves between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The nearly 200,000 Jews living in Palestine accounted for only 19 percent of the population. If the enclaves were to grow into an actual homeland and fulfill the promise of God, Abraham, and Balfour, the orange groves would have to prosper. For that, more hands and more lands were needed.

But in 1933, Jewish prosperity in Palestine was in danger of shutting down. In a tense world, the British were once again making strategic plans for the Middle East. These plans were dependent upon the Arab potentates England had been stringing along for a decade with conflicting promises of Arab nationalism in Palestine. So Palestinian immigration regulations had been pointedly revised a few years earlier. Severe quotas now applied to all Jewish immigrant categories, except the so-called capitalist settler with proof of £1,000 (about \$5,000) in hand. (13)

Few Palestine-bound Jews possessed that much money. Most were

poor European workers. Moreover, the "worker immigrant" quota itself was limited by "absorptive capacity" or the ability of the Palestinian economy to expand and provide new jobs. In this way existing Arab jobs theoretically would no longer be threatened by new Jewish arrivals. The British didn't really expect the Palestinian economy to grow, because quotas restricted immigration for all but the wealthier Jews, and the great majority of wealthy Jews were uninterested in emigrating to Palestine. With little or no new capital, the Jewish economy in Palestine would stagnate.

At the same time, the message to the world was clear. What began as a private campaign of violence against Jews was now, under Hitler, the unofficial policy of the day. Jews were murdered in their homes, daughters were raped before parents' eyes, rabbis were humiliated in the street, prominent leaders were found floating in the canals and rivers. As early as the first days after Hitler's surprise appointment as interim chancellor, the message was indeed clear to those who would pay attention: The Jews of Germany were facing an hourglass, and time was slipping away.

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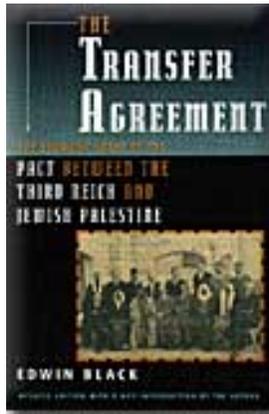
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# THE TRANSFER AGREEMENT

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## CHAPTER 2

### The Ideological Struggle

REACTIONS to Nazi anti-Semitism were immediate, especially in America, reflecting the cross-sectional anger of ordinary people. Naturally, Jewish Americans were at the vanguard. That was a problem for many in Jewish leadership who considered Jewish protest their private province.

On February 22, 1933, B'nai B'rith president Alfred Cohen convened a special conference of fifteen Jewish leaders, five from each of the Big Three. Meeting in New York, the leaders reviewed the situation.(1) Thus far, Hitler was nothing more than an interim chancellor appointed until the next general elections scheduled for March 5. By March 5, Hitler might be gone. But if the election increased Hitler's voter support from a minority 33 percent to an actual majority, he would control the entire German government.

The conference was divided. Two of the American Jewish Congress representatives had discussed a series of public protests, here and abroad, to show the German people that the world was indeed watching and that Brownshirt violence against Jews must stop. The men of B'nai B'rith didn't want to endanger its 13,000-member German organization or its 103 fraternal lodges in Germany by publicly antagonizing Hitler and the Nazis. The Committee leadership had close friends and relatives in Germany who had advised that public protest would surely provoke a far stronger Nazi counteraction. Finally, the leaders agreed to establish a "Joint Conference Committee" merely to "watch developments in Germany very carefully" and hope for the best.(2)

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But as the gathering broke up with an apparent trilateral agreement to keep mum, the Congress people planned otherwise. They hadn't told the B'nai B'rith or the Committee representatives, but two weeks earlier the Congress had secretly decided to pursue the path of protest. (3)

On February 27, 1933, the Hitler takeover began. Hitler himself was attending a party at Propaganda Minister Paul Joseph Goebbels' Berlin apartment. A frantic telephone call to Goebbels relayed the news: "The Reichstag is burning!" The Nazis snapped into action. During that night Hitler and Goebbels prepared a propaganda campaign. By the next morning, the German public was convinced that the fire-which Hitler's own people probably ignited-was in fact the beginning of a Jewish-backed Communist uprising. Hitler demanded and received temporary powers suspending all constitutional liberties.

The Nazis were riding a wave of anti-Jewish, anti-Communist hysteria. In the name of defending the nation from a Communist revolution, Hitler's private militia-the storm Troopers, or SA, together with rank-and-file party Brownshirts-destroyed editorial offices, brutalized political opponents, and increased atrocities against Jews. Through it all, Nazi-dominated local police forces looked the other way. The apparatus of law and order in Germany had been suddenly switched off.

One week before the Reichstag fire, Hitler had met with over a dozen leading industrialists to assure them that nothing was as important to the Nazis as rebuilding the German economy. This was to be the foundation of a strong, rearmed Germany, which, under Hitler, would prepare for war and racial domination. All Hitler wanted from the gathered industrialists was their financial support in the days preceding the March 5 general election. Before the meeting was over roughly \$1 million was pledged to establish an unparalleled propaganda war chest, all to be spent over the next two weeks. With that prodigious sum, the Nazis were able to saturate every newspaper and radio station, dispatch pamphleteers to every city, and flood the streets of Germany with sound trucks blaring election propaganda. Under Hitler's emergency powers, only Nazis were permitted to rally voter support.

Yet when the March 5 votes were counted, the Nazis were still unable to muster a majority. Despite the biggest campaign blitz in history, Hitler polled only 43.9 percent of the vote. Only after sealing alliances with other right-wing parties did Hitler achieve a slim majority. Nevertheless, he called it a "mandate" and promised to quickly eradicate the enemies of Germany: Communism,

democracy, and the Jews.

As the polls were opening March 5, the largest Jewish organization in Germany, the Central Verein in Berlin, issued a statement: "In meetings and certain newspapers, violence against Jews is propagated... The spirit of hatred now directed against the Jews will not halt there. It will spread and poison the soul of the German people." When local Nazi party activists learned of the statement, Storm Troopers vandalized the Central Verein office. Worried about the impact of such news among anti-Nazi circles in New York, Nazi leader Hermann Goering summoned Central Verein leaders to his office for a formal apology and assurances that the incident would be the last. (4)

But within days, Germany's dark future became clear. On March 8 and 9, Hitler's Storm Troopers smashed into the provinces and towns. Within forty-eight hours, provincial authority was virtually disassembled and replaced with Hitler's hand-chosen people. At the same time, the Nazis began attaching party observers or kommissars to all major newspapers, companies, and organizations. Carefully orchestrated anti-Jewish actions in Essen, Magdeburg, and Berlin accompanied the takeover. In some cases, Nazi flags were merely raised over Jewish store entrances and owners "voluntarily" closed. In other cases, windows were shattered, stench bombs rolled in, customers escorted out, and proprietors manhandled. (5)

The Nazis now controlled not only the federal government, but state and local governments as well. Virtually every institution was now subject to Nazi party dicta and brought into readiness for the achievement of Nazi social, political, and economic aspirations--including the elimination of German Jewry. On March 9, Central Verein leaders returned to Goering's Berlin office. He again used reassuring words to downplay the anti-Jewish incidents. (6) And the Central Verein wanted to believe.

In New York City, however, the Jews were more realistic. On March 12, the American Jewish Congress leadership convened a three-hour session and voted to commence a national program of highly visible protests, parades, and demonstrations. The centerpiece of the protest would be a giant anti-Nazi rally March 27, at Madison Square Garden. An emergency meeting of regional and national Jewish organizations was set for March 19 to work out the details. (7)

Before the group adjourned, Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, a Congress vice-president, spoke a few words of warning to Germany for the

newsmen present. Threatening a bitter boycott, Tenenbaum said, "Germany is not a speck on Mars. It is a civilized country, located in the heart of Europe, relying on friendly cooperation and commercial intercourse with the nations of the world.... A bellum judaicum-war against the Jews-means boycott, ruin, disaster, the end of German resources, and the end of all hope for the rehabilitation of Germany, whose friends we have not ceased to be." Measuring his final words carefully, Tenenbaum spoke sternly, "May God save Germany from such a national calamity." (8) The protest would begin-American Jewish Committee or no American Jewish Committee.

The next day, March 13, American Jewish Committee leaders were startled to learn of the Congress' protest decision. The Committee called an urgent meeting of the Big Three for the following day under the aegis of the "Joint Conference Committee." The top leadership of the Congress attended, led by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the Congress' founder, currently serving as its honorary president. The hierarchy of the Committee and B'nai B'rith were at the meeting as well. The Committee's intent was to abort any Congress protest and forestall Congress attempts to contact "Washington circles." (9)

As the conference began, the Congress people defended their decision to rally at Madison Square Garden. They saw Hitler's bold provincial takeover and the accompanying violence against Jews as a threat that could no longer be ignored. Nazi rhetoric was turning into action at a frightening rate. And the Congress' national affiliates were demanding an immediate response, including a comprehensive boycott of all German goods and services. (10)

Wise added that he had been in touch with Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, a leading American Zionist and one of Wise's close personal friends. The advice was to delay a direct appeal to newly sworn-in President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was preoccupied with America's Depression and a calamitous banking crisis. But Brandeis did feel that ultimately the matter should be brought to the ear of FDR personally. (11)

Those Congress leaders most favoring the path of protest and even boycott pleaded that only economic retaliation frightened the Nazis. Even Nazi party leaders had admitted Hitler's strength rested on the German public's expectation of economic improvement. (12)

Committee leader David Bressler scorned all protest ideas, insisting that any such moves would only instigate more harm than help for the German Jews. The committee's reluctance was based upon urgent communications from prominent Jewish families to kill any

anti-German protest or boycott. German Jewish leaders were convinced that the German public would abandon the Nazis once the economy improved. And even if Hitler remained in power, German Jewish leaders felt some compromise would be struck to provide Jewish cooperation for economic convalescence. Hitler might then quietly modify, or set aside, his anti-Semitic campaign. (13)

Wise was also reluctant to move on a boycott, but insisted that a joint protest statement be issued and efforts commence with the new administration in Washington. There could be no more delay. Bressler rejected this and castigated the Congress for even releasing its March 12 protest decision to the press. A Conservative Congress leader, Nathan Perlman, tried to assure the Committee people that the protest policy would be overruled or delayed at a meeting of the Congress' Administrative Committee later that night. But Wise advised against second-guessing the Administrative Committee, suggesting instead that for now, the three major organizations agree on a joint statement and a Washington plan. American Jewish Committee Secretary Morris Waldman interrupted and declared that any trilateral action would hinge on the Congress's protest decision. Wise accepted that proviso. (14)

The Committee delegates were cautiously reassured. Immediately following the meeting they dispatched a telegram to B'nai B'rith president Alfred Cohen, in Cincinnati: "CONFERENCE THREE ORGANIZATIONS GERMAN SITUATION...DISCOURAGING INDEPENDENT ACTION JEWISH GROUPS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY." (15)

But within hours, the Committee learned that its efforts had failed. The Congress' Administrative Committee had rejected the conservative position and by a vast majority opted for visible, vocal protest highlighted by the March 27 Madison Square Garden rally. The next morning, March 15, American Jewish Committee secretary Morris Waldman telephoned Congress vice-president W. W. Cohen to inform him that the Committee-B'nai B'rith binary would disassociate itself from the Congress-indeed from any anti-Nazi protest. Waldman then sent a telegram to Alfred Cohen in Cincinnati telling him to fly to New York to help plan countermoves to any organized Jewish protest against Hitler. (16) In that moment, the "Joint Conference Committee" was dissolved.

While the Big Three were arguing over whether to protest Hitlerism, smaller Jewish organizations were already committed to action. For these smaller organizations, closer to the Jewish masses, the debate was whether or not the Jews should unleash a

comprehensive boycott against Germany as the best means of protest. In pursuit of that answer, the militant Jewish War veterans held a fiery session in New York the evening of March 18.(17)

Shouts for and against a boycott bounced back and forth as the delegates debated how far the protest against Hitler should actually go. Speeches, interruptions, calls to order, and sporadic applause stretched the meeting well past midnight with no decision. Unable to make their deadlines, the press went home. Finally, to break the deadlock, Benjamin Sperling of Brooklyn, formally moved that the Jewish War Veterans organize a vigorous national boycott of all German goods, services, and shipping lines. The yells in favor were abundant, but the presiding officer insisted on a formal vote, and with a flurry of excitement the boycott was unanimously adopted. (18) It was done so in accordance with the JWV's charter: "To combat the sources of bigotry and darkness; wherever originating and whatever their target; to uphold the fair name of the Jew and fight his battle wherever unjustly assailed."

History thus records that in an era distinguished by appeasement, the Jewish War Veterans were the very first, anywhere in the world, to declare openly their organized resistance to the Nazi regime. They had fought Germany once and would fight again. This small association of ex-warriors, mostly men of little finesse and even less pretense, would no longer be bound by the Jewish hierarchy.

The gentlemen of the JWV felt especially obligated to persevere that night. They wanted to present their boycott movement as a "fact" that would inspire the other 1,500 representatives of Jewish organizations meeting the following day to consider the dimensions of the American Jewish Congress call to protest. Indeed, a JWV protest march was already planned, as was a boycott office, a publicity campaign, and a fund-raising effort.(19) The Veterans wanted to be sure that when the March 19 emergency conference convened, the word boycott would be an established term in the language of confrontation with the Nazis.

But that same day, Nazi, Jewish and Zionist interests were anxious to stillbirth the protest movement before it could breathe life. A Paris conference, called by a group of European Jewish organizations analogous to the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith, tried to stifle the growing protest movement on the Continent inspired by the American Jewish Congress. The Committee was unable to attend the sudden conference, but did telephone their concerns to the meeting. The Parisian conference unanimously decided that public protest by Jews was "not only premature but likely to be useless and even harmful.(20) Committee people in New York

could now tell the Congress that Jewish organizations closest to the trouble in Europe agreed that there should be no public agitation against Hitler.

March 19, 1933 was also the day that the swastika was unfurled over German consulates in Jerusalem and Jaffa. Germany maintained the two consulates in Palestine as part of its normal diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Angry Tel Aviv Jews prepared to storm the consulates and burn the new German flag. But Zionist leaders were afraid to provoke the Nazis, lest Berlin suddenly clamp down on Zionist organizing and fund-raising activities in Germany. In Jerusalem, Jewish Agency Executive Committee member Dr. Werner Senator dispatched a letter about the flag-raising to the Zionist Organization in London. Senator explained that Zionist leaders were working with the British Mandatory authorities to defuse the problem "to avoid hostile encounters, which would cause unpleasant repercussions for our people in Germany."[\(21\)](#)

In Berlin, the Hitler regime was clearly worried. Atrocity reports covered the front pages of newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. Der Forverts correspondent Jacob Leschinsky's report from Berlin was typical: "One can find no words to describe the fear and despair, the tragedy that envelops the German Jews. They are being beaten, terrorized, murdered and...compelled to keep quiet. The Hitler regime flames up with anger because it has been forced through fear of foreign public opinion to forego a mass slaughter.... It threatens, however, to execute big pogroms if Jews in other countries make too much fuss about the pogroms it has hitherto indulged in." The dispatch was carried by The New York Times and many other newspapers. Leschinsky, immediately after the dispatch, was arrested and expelled.[\(22\)](#)

Atrocity scandals were complicating almost every attempt at the German economic and diplomatic recovery Hitler desperately needed to stay in power. The Jews of New York would have to be stopped. Within a few days, the reconvened Reichstag was scheduled to approve sweeping dictatorial powers enabling Hitler to circumvent the legislature and rule by decree. But this talk of an international Jewish-led boycott was frightening Germany's legislators. Such a boycott could disable German export industries, affecting every German family. Goebbels expressed the Nazi fear in his diary: "The horrors propagandized abroad gives us much trouble. The many Jews who have left Germany have set all foreign countries against us.... We are defenselessly exposed to the attacks of our adversaries." But as Nazi newspapers castigated German Jewry for the protests of their landsmen overseas, German Jews themselves responded with letters, transatlantic calls, and cables to

stifle American Jewish objections to Hitler.

When the Congress' emergency protest planning conference convened on March 19 at New York's Astor Hotel, Committee representatives arrived with a prepared statement. It read: "It is only natural for decent and liberal-minded men and women to feel outraged at these occurrences and...to give public expression to their indignation and abhorrence, (but) the American Jewish Committee and the B'nai B'rith are convinced that the wisest and the most effective policy for the Jews of America to pursue is to exercise the same fine patience, fortitude and exemplary conduct that have already overwrought feelings, but to act wisely, judiciously and deliberately.(24)

These words of caution were emphatically rejected by the delegates who well knew that the Committee had become a megaphone-via friends and family relations-for Nazi pressure on the American anti-German protest movement. Bernard S. Deutsch, Congress president, set the meeting's defiant tone: "The offices of the American Jewish Congress are being flooded with messages from all over the country demanding protest... We are met here to translate this popular mandate into responsible, vigorous, orderly and effective action," Cries of approval bellowed from the crowd. The protest motion was formally introduced: "This tragic hour in Jewish history calls imperatively for the solidarity of the Jewish people. And we American Jews are resolved to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brother Jews in Germany in defense of their rights, which are being grievously violated, and of their lives, which are imperiled.(25)

The audience cheered. But from among the cheering delegates stood up J. George Fredman, commander in chief of the Jewish Was Veterans, who proudly announced his organization had already-on its own initiative-commenced the national anti-Nazi boycott. He urged fellow Jewish organizations to join and formally called for a boycott amendment to the protest resolution.(26)

Judge Joseph M. Proskauer, the American Jewish Committee's representative at the rally, became livid. He stood up and insisted that marches and meetings were improper and unproductive. He advised quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy-as the Committee had always done. The crowd booed and hissed. Undaunted, Proskauer turned toward Fredman and condemned his boycott amendment as "causing more trouble for the Jews in Germany by unintelligent action." Over waving hands and hostile jeering, he insisted on placing into the record a message from another Committee stalwart, Judge Irving Lehman, the brother of the governor of New York. In a

voice struggling to be heard, Proskauer read Lehman's letter: "I feel that the [Madison Square Garden protest] meeting may add to the dangers of the Jews in Germany.... I implore you in the name of humanity, don't let anger pass a resolution which will kill Jews in Germany." At this the crowd stormed their disapproval in English, Yiddish, and Russian. The hotel meeting room became so unruly that police had to be called to restore order.(27)

Stephen Wise stepped in to avoid total humiliation for the Committee, which he still hoped would use its influence in Washington. He offered to redraft the protest resolution, but the final wording was virtually the same and still anathema to the Committee. The date March 27 was approved, and Madison Square Garden was ratified as the epicenter of a day of global anti-German protest that would signal the beginning of mass Jewish resistance to Hitler. But through Wise's counsel, the Congress did not declare a boycott. He felt the big inter-organizational boycott the Congress could mount would be indeed the final nonviolent weapon. The time had not yet come.(28)

But official Congress hesitation did not rule out outspoken unofficial support for the Boycott movement. The very next day, March 20, Congress vice president W. W. Cohen became inspired while lunching at a fine German restaurant. When the waiter came by and offered Cohen an imported Bavarian beer, Cohen suddenly became enraged, and shouted "No!" The entire restaurant turned to Cohen, who then pointedly asked for the check.(29)

Cohen left the restaurant and went directly to a Jewish War Veterans' boycott rally, where he proclaimed to an excited crowd, "Any Jew buying one penny's worth of merchandise made in Germany is a traitor to his people. I doubt that the American government can officially take any notice of what the German government is doing to its own citizens. So our only line of resistance is to touch German pocketbooks."(30)

As W. W. Cohen was exhorting his fellow Americans to fight back economically, the Jews of Vilna, Poland were proposing the identical tactic. Poland contained Europe's most concentrated Jewish population, nearly 3.5 million, mainly residing in closely-knit urban communities. They were economically and politically cohesive, often militant. Bordering Hitler's Germany, Polish Jewry could organize an anti-Nazi boycott that would not only be financially irritating to the Reich, but highly visible in central Europe. The Jews of Vilna held a boycott rally on March 20, 1933. To recruit added interpolitical and interfaith support, they incorporated their boycott movement into the larger national furor over the Polish

Corridor. Hitler, in his first days as chancellor, had hinted strongly that Germany might occupy the Corridor to ensure the Reich's access to the free city of Danzig. German access via a corridor traversing Poland and controlled by Poland was part of the Versailles Treaty. Poland, unwilling to relinquish its Versailles territorial rights, reacted defensively, and rumors of a preemptive Polish invasion of Germany were rampant.(31)

By identifying their anti-Nazi boycott as national rather than sectarian retaliation, the Vilna Jews sought to construct the model for other worried Europeans. Vilna's March 20 mass anti-Hitler rally urged all Polish patriots and Jews throughout the world to battle for Polish territorial defense by not buying or selling German goods. The Jewish War veterans were no longer alone.(32)

As the former governor of New York, President Roosevelt was attuned to the pulse of the Jewish constituency. The legends of FDR's strong friendship with Stephen Wise of the American Jewish Congress were feared in Berlin. In truth, however, the Wise-Roosevelt relationship by 1933 was strained. Two years earlier, in his last face-to-face meeting with FDR, Rabbi Wise had presented Governor Roosevelt with written charges against then New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker. Roosevelt objected to Wise's pejorative manner that day and then lectured the rabbi about an earlier protest on an unrelated issue. That was to be their last private conversation for five years. Wise openly broke with Roosevelt in 1932 by backing Democratic primary loser Alfred E. Smith for the presidential nomination.(33) Berlin did not know it, but in March 1933, Wise was reluctant to test his access to the White House.

Roosevelt himself had shown little official concern for the plight of Germany's Jews. Shortly before the inauguration in the first week of March, one of Wise's friends, Lewis Strauss, tried to convince outgoing President Hoover and President-elect Roosevelt to send a joint message of alarm to the German government. Although Hoover sent word of his concern through the American ambassador in Berlin, FDR refused to get involved.(34)

Yet Nazi atrocities intensified, as bannered each day in the press: Midnight home invasions by Brownshirts forcing Jewish landlords and employers at gunpoint to sign papers relenting in tenant or employee disputes. Leading Jewish physicians kidnapped from their hospitals, driven to the outskirts of town and threatened with death if they did not resign and leave Germany. Dignified Jewish businessmen dragged from their favorite cafes, savagely beaten and sometimes forced to wash the streets.

Wise felt he could wait no longer and on March 21, 1933, he led a delegation of American Jewish Congress leaders to Washington. To set the tone of his Washington efforts, Rabbi Wise released a statement that effectively burned the last thread of hoped-for cooperation with the Committee-B'nai B'rith binary. "The time for caution and prudence is past," Wise said. "We must speak up like men. How can we ask our Christian friends to lift their voices in protest against the wrongs suffered by Jews if we keep silent?" (35)

Seeking an audience with the president, Rabbi Wise telephoned the White House and spoke with FDR's executive assistant, Col. Louis Howe. Howe remembered Wise unfavorably from the 1932 primary campaign, but was nonetheless cordial. Wise mentioned that he had delayed his visit for several weeks on the advice of Supreme Court Justice Brandeis, whom he had checked with again that very day. Howe answered that with Roosevelt preoccupied with the nation's catastrophic banking crisis, the time still wasn't right. Howe did promise, however, to have the president telephone the U.S. delegate to the Geneva Disarmament Conference, who would raise the subject with the Germans there. (36)

Wise and his group also testified before the House Immigration Committee, urging a halt to restrictive procedures at U.S. visa offices in Germany. German relatives of American Jews might then be granted refuge in the United States. Obstructing that succor was a so-called Executive Order issued by Herbert Hoover in 1930 at the height of Depression woes. Actually, the order itself was only a press release circulated to consular officials. Quite reasonably, the presidential memo directed visa sections to stringently enforce a paragraph of the 1924 Immigration Act barring indigent immigrants who might become "public charges." The paragraph was intended to be waived for political refugees. However, consular officials, some of them openly anti-Semitic, used the Hoover order to deny visas to those legitimately entitled. In the past, the wrong enforcement of the order had been of no grave consequence because Germany's immigration quota had been grossly underfilled. (37) But now the need was urgent, especially for German Jewish leaders targeted by Nazi activists. For them, procuring a visa was in fact a matter of life or death.

Chairing the House Immigration Committee was New York Representative Samuel Dickstein, a close friend of Rabbi Wise. Dickstein responded to Wise's testimony by introducing a House resolution to nullify Hoover's Executive Order. Dickstein also set about the longer process of introducing a Congressional bill revising immigration procedures in view of the new emergency. (38)

Rabbi Wise also met with Undersecretary of State William Phillips. Wise and the Congress people vividly described the brutalities suffered by German Jews-many of them relatives of American citizens, some of them actual U.S. citizens residing in Germany. Wise made it clear that the Congress was leading a national anti-Nazi movement to be launched by a countrywide day of protest, March 27, focusing on a mass rally at Madison Square Garden. But then Wise assured the State Department that he would not demand American diplomatic countermeasures until the department could verify the atrocity reports. Phillips felt this was reasonable. In his press announcement, Phillips said, "Following the visit of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the Department has informed the American Embassy at Berlin of the press report of mistreatment of Jews in Germany...[and] the deep concern these reports are causing in this country. The Department has instructed the Embassy to make....a complete report of the situation." (39)

Rabbi Wise's maneuver won him a triple achievement: First, he appeared reasonable to the State Department; second, he instigated an on-the-spot State Department investigation putting the Reich on notice that the American government was studying her anti-Semitic campaign; third, the State Department's investigation would provide independent, official confirmation that could not be ignored. This would obligate the U.S. government to follow up diplomatically. The U.S. Government was now involved in a conflict it had sought to avoid.

Across the Atlantic, the Reich took notice of Wise's visit to Washington. Goebbels and other party leaders were convinced that Rabbi Wise was the archetypal powerbrokering Jew who could manipulate the U.S. Congress, the State Department, and even the president. (40) Even as Wise was finishing his round of Washington meetings, the Reich Foreign Office in Berlin dispatched a cable to its consulate in New York denying "exaggerated (press) reports" about "brutal mistreatments." The cable denounced "opponents of the present nation government" who are hoping that "well-organized atrocity propaganda may undermine the reputation and authority of the national government." The statement added Hitler's personal assurance that future violence would be averted by tough new police efforts. (41)

By 11:30 A.M. the next day, March 22, German Ambassador Friedrich von Prittwitz called on the State Department. Offering a Goering press statement as evidence, von Prittwitz declared that there would be law and order in Hitler's Germany, that Jews would be protected, and that crimes would be punished. (42) The State Department was becoming aware of the escalating Nazi-Jewish

conflict. Within twenty-four hours of the German ambassador's visit, an American Jewish Committee-B'nai B'rith delegation called on Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The Committee knew that Hull deplored public protests such as the American Jewish Congress was organizing. Even more importantly, they knew he would oppose any boycott of the Reich. Hull's expressed view was that "the friendly and willing cooperation of Germany is necessary to the program of world [economic] recovery." (43)

Hull received the Committee-B'nai B'rith representatives cordially in his office. The delegation did their best to impugn the methods and the organization of Rabbi Stephen Wise. They wanted no misunderstanding. Their anxiety over the German situation was just as great as that of the Congress but their tactics differed. The Committee-B'nai B'rith group made clear to Hull that they favored quiet, behind-the-scenes action. (44)

Their argument to the secretary probably added little to the joint Committee-B'nai B'rith communiqué issued after the Congress' March 19 emergency protest organizing meeting. To salve the angry demands of rank and file B'nai B'rith members, and to show quotable concern in the light of the Congress' public rallying, that joint communiqué declared: "The American Jewish Committee and the B'nai B'rith express their horror at anti-Jewish action in Germany, which is denying to German Jews the fundamental rights of every human being. The events of the past few weeks in Germany have filled with indignation not only American Jews but also Americans of every other faith... We shall take every possible measure to discharge the solemn responsibility which rests on our organization to marshal the forces of public opinion among Americans of every faith to right the wrongs against the Jews of Germany and for the vindication of the fundamental principles of human liberty." (45)

From Hull's point of view, listening to a distinguished Committee and B'nai B'rith delegation was an obligation to fulfill, not an inspiration to action. The March 23 visit therefore did not accomplish any amelioration for the Jews in Germany. Worse, the visit confused the State Department. One Jewish group was bent on loud and vigorous protest. Another was calling for quiet, discreet diplomacy. But the Committee-B'nai B'rith people were the influential and prominent leaders of the Jewish community. So Hull concluded that their voice was representative of Jewish sentiment. (46)

In one sense, then, the Committee's "methods" had worked. Despite a tiny constituency that numbered about 300, the

Committee's pronouncements were still more potent than those of the half-million-strong American Jewish Congress. The delegation had effectively discredited the Congress as naïve rabble-rousers.

Shortly after the Committee-B'nai B'rith mission left Washington, Hull dispatched a cable to George A. Gordon, America's charge d'affaires in Germany: "Public opinion in this country continues alarmed at the persistent press reports of mistreatment of Jews in Germany.... I am of the opinion that outside intercession has rarely produced the results desired and has frequently aggravated the situation. Nevertheless, if you perceive any way in which this government could usefully be of assistance, I should appreciate your frank and confidential advice. On Monday next [March 27] there is to be held in New York a monster mass meeting. If prior to that date an amelioration in the situation has taken place, which you could report [for]... release to the press, together with public assurances by Hitler and other leaders, it would have a calming effect.(48) In essence, Hull was asking for an encouraging report-justified or not-to soothe angry Jewish groups. Thus, he could cooperate with the Committee request as well.

Within twenty-four hours, Gordon composed a response to Hull: "I entirely agree with your view...[of] the present situation of outside intercession.... There is...one suggestion I venture to make in case you have already not thought of it.... [T]he general tenor of communications between foreigners and the government here has necessarily been one of complaint and protest, and it is possible that if confidence [were expressed] in Hitler's determination to restore peaceful and normal conditions, emphasizing what a great place he will achieve in the estimation of the world if he is able to bring it about, it might have a helpful effect.... Hitler now represents the element of moderation in the Nazi Party and I believe that if in any way you can strengthen his hand, even indirectly, he would welcome it."(49)

Gordon then held meetings with several of his counterparts in the Berlin diplomatic community, obtaining a consensus against any efforts in their countries to use diplomatic channels as a medium of protest against Adolf Hitler. He wired news of his achievements to Hull.(50)

An unwitting alliance of groups now saw their mission as obstructing anti-Nazi protest in America and Europe, especially an economic boycott. The members of this alliance included B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Committee, and even the Jewish Agency for Palestine, each preoccupied with its own vested interests, each driven by its own ideological imperatives, and each wishing that

conditions for German Jews would improve in the quieter climate they hoped to establish.

A fourth member of this alliance was now the United States government, which was pursuing what it thought was America's vital interests. As for the fate of German's Jews? Officially, the U.S. government simply wasn't concerned.

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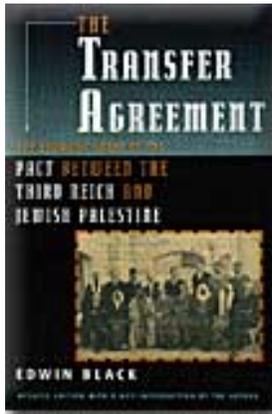
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# THE TRANSFER AGREEMENT

*The Dramatic Story of the Pact Between the Third Reich & Jewish Palestine*

**By Edwin Black  
from  
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## CHAPTER 3

### The Weapon Hitler Feared

CORDELL HULL and the American Jewish Committee soon learned that their efforts to contain the anti-Nazi movement would be seriously challenged. Page-one headlines of the March 23, 1933, New York Times portrayed the new public mood.

"PROTEST ON HITLER GOWING IN NATION. Christian and Non-Sectarian Groups Voice Indignation Over Anti-Jewish Drive. URGE WASHINGTON TO ACT."<sup>(1)</sup>

"BOYCOTT MOVE SPREADS. Merchants Canceling Orders for German Goods."<sup>(2)</sup>

The movement was spreading spontaneously, along interreligious lines. Spurred on by the Jewish War Veterans, the nation's emotions were mobilized. Boycott was finally a word lifted out of the whispers and into the headlines. Under the direction of Col. Morris J. Mendelsohn, chairman of the JWV's Boycott Committee, a veterans' protest march was organized. In solidarity, W. W. Cohen, vice-president of the American Jewish Congress, accepted the position of parade marshal. He participated at his own initiative, since Stephen Wise was still reluctant to commit the Congress to a boycott per se, and Congress leaders didn't want to detract from their own upcoming Madison Square Garden protest.<sup>(3)</sup> Cohen's visibility nevertheless associated the powerful Congress with the JWV's banners and placards declaring economic war on Germany.

Without the active support of the Congress, Mendelsohn was uncertain how many marchers would participate and how many

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Edwin Black Home

prominent figures would actually show up to endorse the boycott. The day before the parade, Mendelsohn tried to cheer up JWV leader J. George Fredman by telling him, "George, if we have nobody else, you and I will march the full line of the parade and call on the mayor." But in truth Mendelsohn doubted whether even Mayor John O'Brien would attend, since he was known to be saving his first anti-Nazi appearance for the Congress rally.(4)

Everyone was surprised, therefore, when the Jewish War veterans' boycott parade received an enthusiastic reception. Many thousands of cheering sympathetic watchers encouraged the thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish vets as the parade moved through the East Side to City Hall where Mayor O'Brien was waiting on the reviewing stand. With much fanfare and applause, resolutions were presented demanding diplomatic measures and an economic protest against the Reich. Dovetailing with the JWV protest parade was a variety of sympathetic conferences, petitions, and resolutions by interfaith and nonsectarian groups, including the American Federation of Labor, which pledged its 3 million members to fighting Nazism here and in Germany.(5)

March 23 was a success for the Jewish War Veterans. Their boycott kickoff generated maximum publicity. One radio station covered the day with updates every fifteen minutes. Extensive support was offered by those in prominence and power-as well as by the anonymous faces in the crowd, outraged and merely waiting for a raised hand to lead the protest against Adolf Hitler.

German legations around the United States reported the anti-Nazi developments to the fifty-one-day-old Reich. Jewish protest was not merely a nuisance, it preyed upon the minds of the Nazis as they braced for their first big fight against their avowed enemies, the Jews.(6) How effective any anti-German boycott and protest movement would be was the question. Could mere popular protest in Europe and America influence the Third Reich? Could a boycott-an economic war-topple the Hitler regime or force Germany to abandon its anti-Jewish program? At the time, some Jewish leaders either doubted the power of the anti-Nazi movement or were unwilling to participate. This failure to participate worked to Hitler's advantage, because the Jewish-led worldwide anti Nazi boycott was indeed the one weapon Hitler feared.

To understand why, one must examine Germany's economic precariousness in 1933, the Nazi mentality, and the historic power of Jewish-led boycotts. To do so requires a dual perspective: statistical and perceptual. Of equal weight in history is reality and the perception of reality, because the two ignite each other in a

continual chain reaction that ultimately shapes events and destinies among men and nations.

The deterioration of the once powerful German economy really began in World War 1, when German military and political leaders simply did not calculate the economic effects of prolonged war. The Allied blockade cut off Germany's harbors and most of her land trade routes. Trade was decimated. Industry couldn't export. War materiel and civilian necessities, including food, could not be imported.

Before the blockade was lifted, 800,000 malnourished German civilians perished. Actually the blockade created less of a food shortage for Germany, which was 80 percent food self-sufficient before the war, than did the short-sighted policy of pulling Germans off the farms to fight without compensating for reduced food production. But the popular perception among Germans was that they had been starved into submission, defeated not on the battlefield but by political and economic warfare and connivance, by what became known as the "stab in the back."

The Treaty of Versailles' nonnegotiable terms demanded the forfeiture of German colonies as well as a number of conquered or traditionally German lands: the dismemberment of the German military machine; the arrest of hundreds of German militarists and leaders as war criminals, including the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II; the granting of most-favored, nonreciprocal foreign commercial rights in Germany; and a certain amount of interim foreign occupation. The German leadership was to sign a hated statement of total war guilt. Additionally, Germany was to pay war reparations over the next two years of 5 billion gold marks and approximately 15 billion marks' worth in cattle, timber and other barterable items. The Allies allowed no negotiation of Versailles' oppressive terms and refused to lift the economic and material blockade until German leaders accepted what later German generations would call the Diktat.

Two years later, the Allied Reparations Commission levied additional reparations of 132 billion gold marks. Such a monumental sum, payable in cash and goods, would be a garnishment for generations, a commercial enslavement that would hold Germany captive for fifty to a hundred years.

Germany's population, and indeed world leaders and historians, would later brand the Versailles Treaty as merciless and intolerable. But the Allies were following in the tradition of previous German victories, which vanquished losers. For example, in February 1918,

when Russia, beset by revolution, tried to disengage from the war, German generals issued an ultimatum to surrender within five days or suffer unlimited destruction. At the same time, a renewed German offensive began. Lenin was forced to submit his new nation to the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Its terms defrocked Russia of a third of her farmland, 56 million people-or a third of her population-a third of her railroads, more than 5,000 factories comprising half her industrial capability, almost 90 percent of her coal, and beyond that a cash indemnity of 6 billion gold marks. The treaty was nullified after the Allied victory.

So Germany in 1919 was forced to recover from war under conditions similar to those she had previously imposed on her own enemies. However, the German people did not blame the precedents they themselves had established, but rather the political and economic weapons wielded against them at the Peace Conference. They blamed the blockade and their own civilian leaders for acceding to Allied demands and forfeiting German glory.

And, some Germans, such as the Nazis, blamed a Jewish conspiracy. In their minds it was Jewish bankers who would prosper from Germany's economic tragedy, since massive loans would be necessary both to recover from the war and to pay war indemnity. In Nazi minds, it was Jewish Bolshevism that would gain by undermining the German Empire and replacing it with Weimar Republic where Marxism could flourish. In their minds it was Jews who at the Treaty of Versailles gained rights of minority citizenship throughout war-reconstructed Europe. (7)

Hitler's own words expressed the scapegoat rationale. Preaching to frantic, impoverished Germans, the Nazi leader cried: "Not so long ago, Germany was prosperous, strong, and respected by all. It is not your fault Germany was defeated in the war and has suffered so much since. You were betrayed in 1918 by Marxists, international Jewish bankers, and corrupt politicians. (8)

Hitler attributed the stories of Germany's wartime atrocities to an international Jewish conspiracy, using newspapers Jews secretly controlled. And so the Nazis held a special fear of what they called Greuelpropaganda, that distorted German valor into Hun-like savagery. Greuelpropaganda was a mighty weapon the Jews knew how to use to harness the German nation into bondage.

The lasting economic agonies of Versailles were soon apparent. Inflation wracked postwar Germany, as the Weimar Republic struggled to keep pace with Allied reparation demands and domestic recovery. German currency was printed-so fast that it was

inked on one side only. In 1919, the value of the mark was around 9 to a U.S. dollar; in 1921, 75 marks to a dollar; in 1922, 400 to a dollar; and in early January 1923 7,000 marks equaled a dollar.

For reparations, France of course preferred commodities, such as timber and coal, to valueless German currency. But German production was unable and unwilling to satisfy the payment schedule. When the Weimar Republic defaulted on the delivery of 100,000 telephone poles, France exercised her treaty option and in mid-January 1923 invaded German's industrial heartland, the Ruhr. Thousands of French troops took charge of mines, mills and manufacturing plants. Germans were outraged that so petty an infraction could warrant a full-fledged French occupation. Workers throughout the Ruhr went on general strike with the full backing of the Weimar government. To support the strikers, the government cranked out millions upon millions of worthless marks as special welfare assistance. By late January 1923, the mark had jumped to 18,000 to the dollar and began inflating astronomically, until by 1924, it was about 5 trillion to the dollar.

In 1924, German currency could be used for virtually nothing except lighting stoves. People's savings were wiped away, their livelihood ruined. An international commission intervened and Dawes Plan emerged whereby France would withdraw from the Ruhr and scheduled reparation-mostly in goods-would be resumed. The goods would be manufactured after a national retooling financed by large foreign loans, mostly from America.

Within a few years, billions of U.S. dollars and other foreign currencies flowed into Germany, reequipping and overindustrializing that nation on an unparalleled basis in order to produce merchandise and other barterable items to repay the Dawes loans and war reparations. By the late 1920s, America owned and controlled billions of dollars of German industry. And the entire German economy-which was becoming somewhat stable and prosperous-was now also dependent upon export. Millions of jobs were wholly tied to the foreign market. Export was the oxygen, the bread, and the salt of the German work force. Without it, there would be economic death. (9)

Just before the decade closed, on October 24, 1929, Wall Street crashed. America's economy toppled and foreign economies fell with it. For Germany, intricately tied to all the economies of the Allied powers, the fall was brutal. Thousands of businesses failed. Millions were left jobless. Violence over food was commonplace. Germany was taught the painful lesson that economic survival was tied to international trading partners and exports.

During each economic crisis the Nazis scored electoral triumphs among the disadvantaged. In the boom-like year 1928, the Nazis could poll no more than 810,000 votes nationally. But two years later, well into the Depression, the Nazis' support leaped to about 6.5 million. In July of 1932, at the height of the crisis, oppressed by 6 million unemployed, the nation delivered 13.5 million votes for Hitler, most of it from the young, unemployed middle class.(10)

Shortly after the July 1932 election, the economy improved somewhat, due more to psychological than true financial factors. A bumper wheat and potato harvest made Germany temporarily independent of imported grain and starch related foodstuffs. Public make-work gave short-term relief to the most severely hardshipped in big cities. More than 74,000 gardens and 26,000 settlement houses were erected to help feed and shelter the jobless in small towns. Seasonal unemployment came a bit later and less severely that autumn than in previous years. Total acknowledged unemployment was under these circumstances down to just more than 5 million. In certain segments of German society, confidence began to take hold.(11)

As the bankrupt Nazis approached the November 1932 contest, they were unable to pay for a last-minute voter drive. In the aura of stability and with reduced Nazi campaigning, the electorate backed away from the radical program of National socialism, casting 2 million fewer votes for the NSDAP. But after the November election, with the Nazis nevertheless assured of a leading role in the government, the brief improvement in the economy vanished.(12) The moderate moment had been lost.

Commercial recovery was Adolf Hitler's prime mission when he came to power in January 1933. But Hitler and his circle's conception of their problem and the twisted explanations they ascribed to real and perceived trends became the new determining economic factors. The greatest obstacles to recovery now were, in fact, political instability and bizarre economic policies, including import restrictions that provoked retaliatory bans on German exports.

Economic policies and the worldwide economic depression combined to deprive Germany of her place among the world's trading nations. Without exports, Germany was denied foreign currency-the essential ingredient to her survival. Without foreign exchange, she could not pay for the imported raw materials she needed to continue manufacturing nor for imported foodstuffs to compensate for recurring shortages. Worse, Germany couldn't even borrow money to pay for raw materials and food because without

foreign exchange to pay her war reparations and other foreign obligations, her credit was once again unreliable.(13)

In late 1932, the president of the Reichsbank warned the cabinet that further deterioration in foreign exchange would force Germany into another fiscal default. What's more, if there was a sudden run on Germany's banks, it would trigger another total crash of the economy.(14)

But when Hitler and his circle saw Germany deadlocked in depression, they did not blame the world depression and the failures of German economic policy. They blamed Bolshevik, Communist, and Marxist conspiracies, all entangled somehow in the awesome imaginary international Jewish conspiracy. The Jews were not just a handy scapegoat. The paranoid Nazis believed in the legendary, almost supernatural economic power of the Jews. When they promulgated the motto "The Jews are out bad luck," they meant it.(15)

Complicating the Reich's response to economic developments was Hitler's impatience for economic details. A British embassy report compiled in early 1933 explained: "Hitler is a pure visionary who probably does not understand the practical problems he is up against." In fact, Hitler saw only the superficial aspects of any economic problem. He was well known for exhorting his followers: "If economic experts say this or that is impossible, then to hell with economics....if our will is strong enough we can do anything!"(16) Therefore, when problems persisted, the Nazi response was to scream "conspiracy" and make snap decisions to plug holes rather than rebuild the dike.

In the Nazi mind, the Jewish-led anti-Nazi boycott would reduce exports and foreign currency below the viable threshold. By Nazi thinking, a second prong of the Jewish offensive would be publicizing German atrocities to undermine confidence in the new regime and turn the non-Jewish world against Germany. In this instance, Nazi fears approximated the reality. As an overindustrialized nation dependent upon exports, Germany was especially prone to boycott. Therefore, as the American Jewish War Veterans escalated their ant-Reich agitation in late March 1933, a primary order of Nazi business would now be to end the atrocity claims and stop the boycott.(17)

Nazi preoccupation with the anti-German boycott was not merely fear of Jewish power. The Nazis dogmatically believed in the power of boycotts in general. Boycott had long been a prime tactic of the German anti-Semitic movement. When in 1873 an economic

depression followed a stock market fall, the German Conservative party falsely blamed Jewish speculators and organized anti-Semitic campaigns, including boycotts. A few years later, the Catholic party joined the movement, coining the motto "Don't buy from Jews." By 1880, Berlin women's organizations had formed housewife boycott committees. (18)

During the years prior to 1933, Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, and other Nazi leaders regularly struggled to attract public support by advocating the anti-Jewish boycott. Brownshirt pickets around a store with signs reading DON'T BUY FROM JEWS served to remind Germans of the Jew's secure economic status and warn Jews of what was in store should National Socialism come to power. The Nazis were convinced that an official countrywide boycott would totally destroy the commercial viability of the Jews in Germany. (19)

But during the first years of the Nazi party, German anti-Semites also became painfully aware of the Jewish power of boycott and backlash. The lesson came in a confrontation waged not in Germany but in the United States, pitting the Jewish community against the American anti-Semite most revered by the Nazis: Henry Ford.

The richest man in America, whose name was stamped on every Model T, quickly catapulted to the forefront of political anti-Semitism after he became convinced of the Jewish conspiracy cliché. Henry Ford's nineteenth-century rural mentality didn't adapt well to the complexities of the twentieth-century world. He did things in his own peculiar way, regardless of the cost. Shortly after the Great War began in Europe, Ford claimed he had discovered "proof" that Jews were behind the world's troubles. In 1918, Ford purchased the weekly Dearborn Independent and soon thereafter changed its editorial thrust to virulent anti-Semitism. (20)

Ford also employed agents to seek out more anti-Jewish "evidence." One such agent acquired a typescript entitled The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the fabricated secret minutes of an imaginary Jewish conspiracy to topple governments, dominate economies, pervert morals and defeat noble bloodlines by intermarriage. The fake Protocols were laughed off by many. But a few, including Henry Ford, took them to be a veracious revelation of the most sinister plot of modern times. In May 1920, a series of Dearborn Independent articles and editorials publicized the Protocols and a host of slanders and accusations under the general heading "The International Jew" Ford's articles accused American Jewish leaders such as Louis Marshall and Louis Brandeis of using

Presidents Taft and Wilson as their puppets. Other prominent Jews were accused of perpetrating World War I for the benefit of Jewish bankers and fomenting the Russian Revolution for racial imperialism. The defamations continued weekly as Ford's paper denounced the Jewish conspiracy for corruption on Wall Street, in labor, and on the ball field-Jews were even behind the Black Sox baseball gambling scandal. Jews were also allegedly responsible for Benedict Arnold, the Civil War, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. What Jews could not achieve by money, media or manipulation, they would achieve by pandering to the sexual perversions of the powerful and prominent.(21)

These accusations were not just the ramblings of The Dearborn Independent. They were in fact a product of the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford listed his name at the top of every page. Ford motorcar dealers were compelled to buy and sell subscriptions. Dealers who filled their subscription quotas received Ford cars as prizes. Those falling short were assured that The Dearborn Independent was "just as much of a Ford product as the car or tractor." Many reluctant dealers received threatening legalistic letters insisting they sell the tabloid. Reprints were bound into booklets and distributed to libraries and YMCAs throughout the nation.(22)

Devoting the national sales force and the assets of Ford Motor Company to spreading Jew hatred made Henry Ford the first to organize anti-Semitism in America. Indeed, he was the hero of anti-Semites the world over. In Germany, thousands of copies of Ford's teachings were published under the title The Eternal Jew, By Heinrich Ford.(23)

Ford's book quickly became the bible of the German anti-Semites, including Adolf Hitler-this at least two years before Mein Kampf was written. Hitler was so entranced with Ford's struggle against Jewish economic power that he hung a large portrait of Ford beside his desk and spoke of him incessantly. When Hitler was interviewed by a Chicago Tribune reporter in 1923 about Ford's chances of winning the U.S. presidency, der Fuhrer enthusiastically declared, "I wish that I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the elections. We look on Heinrich Ford as the leader of the growing Fascist Party in America."(24)

A year later, in 1924, Hitler wrote his own anti-Jewish epistle, Mein Kampf, his blueprint for the destruction of the Jewish people. Many of the ramblings in Mein Kampf were identical to passages in "The International Jew." Hitler lionized Ford even after the Nazis became a leading factor on the German political scene. Just before

Christmas 1931, der Fuhrer admitted to a Detroit News reporter, "I regard Henry Ford as my inspiration." Once the Third Reich came to power, millions of Ford's books were circulated to every school and party office in the nation, many featuring the names Hitler and Ford side by side on the cover.(25)

American Jewish reaction to the Henry Ford threat was swift. Within a few months of the Dearborn Independent's inaugural anti-Semitic issue, a spontaneous Jewish boycott movement erupted. Libel suits were launched against Ford personally. A Jewish-lead campaign to legally ban the sale or distribution of the publication began in Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, and other cities. Where legislated bans were overturned by court action, angry mobs often greeted Dearborn Independent street vendors.(26)

The backlash campaign started hurting Ford in late 1920, when Jews began refusing en masse to purchase any vehicle bearing a Ford emblem. Typical was a Connecticut Jewish community's 400-car parade in early 1921 honoring Albert Einstein and Chaim Weizmann- parade rules included the proviso "Positively no Ford machines permitted in line." Ford himself couldn't even give one away to his Jewish neighbor, Rabbi Leo M. Franklin of Detroit. Each year Ford gave the rabbi a custom-built car as a gift. But the rabbi emphatically refused Ford's gift after the Dearborn Independent's articles began.(27)

Even the American Jewish Committee encouraged the boycott. The Committee opposed proclaiming an "official" boycott, reluctant to openly answer Ford's charges of an economic conspiracy with a coordinated economic weapon. But Committee leader Louis Marshall felt a "silent boycott" would be equally effective, maintaining that any self-respecting Jew would know what to do without being told when purchasing an automobile.

Ford's steepest sales declines first appeared in the Northeast, where Jews comprised a substantial segment of the car-buying market. Within five years, a leading dealer in the Southwest was painfully aware that wealthy Jews in Texas and neighboring states hadn't purchased a Lincoln in years. And company inquiries about low sales in Missouri revealed that Jews wouldn't take a Ford if it was handed to them free.(29)

In reality, the Jewish boycott of Ford products was probably not statistically effective. While Ford's sales in urban centers did decrease significantly, equally important sales in small towns and rural areas either remained constant or increased. And the recorded urban sales slumps were only partially due to the Jewish-led

boycott. General economic conditions and the declining popularity of the Model T were equally potent factors. But in the early and mid-1920s, Ford people were convinced that the Jewish-led boycott was in large part responsible.(30)

The precise figures were guaranteed by Ford's corporate sales hierarchy, even as dealers and regional sales managers continually pleaded for Ford's campaign to cease. For example, New York sales manager Gaston Flaintiff, a personal friend of Ford, wrote numerous letters bemoaning the boycott. Ford would typically reply, "If they want our product they'll buy it."(31)

In 1927, the advent of a competitive Chevrolet made the Jewish boycott an unacceptable liability for Ford Motor company. Any lost product loyalty and the company's future was precariously stacked on a new Model A. At the same time, Ford desperately sought to avoid humiliating public trials with libeled Jews who had sued.(32)

In the summer of 1927, Ford's representatives approached Nathan Perlman, a vice-president of the American Jewish Congress, seeking a truce. Stephen Wise was in Europe, so Perlman referred Ford's people to the Committee. Louis Marshall prepared an embarrassing retraction cum apology for Ford to sign and publish. Close advisers cautioned the car maker that the humiliating apology might be too much for Ford's pride. But the global leader of anti-Semites had endured boycotts, legal actions, and political abrasions long enough.(33) It was time to make money, secure the future, and fight Chevrolet.

On July 7, 1927, in the last year of the outmoded Model T, as Ford acknowledged a decline of about a half million fewer cars sold, and as he prepared for a major financial effort to introduce his new Model A, the proud gladiators of anti-Semites released to the press his contrite plea for forgiveness for wronging the Jews and misleading mankind.(34)

I have given consideration to the series of articles concerning Jews which have since 1920 appeared in The Dearborn Independent... and in pamphlet form under the title "The International Jew"... Too my great regret I have learned that Jews generally, and particularly those of this country, not only resent these publications as promoting anti-Semitism, but regard me as their enemy... I am deeply mortified... I deem it to be my duty as an honorable man to make amends for the wrongs done to the Jews as fellowmen and brothers, by asking their forgiveness for the harm I have unintentionally committed, by retracting as far as lies within my power the offensive charges laid at their door by these publications,

and by giving them the unqualified assurance that hence forth they may look to me for friendship and goodwill. (35)

Within weeks the retraction appeared in The Dearborn Independent itself. Shortly thereafter, Ford's advertising agencies were instructed to spend about 12 percent of the Model A's \$1.3 million introductory advertisement in Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish newspaper-the only minority press included in the campaign. Ford also directed that five truckloads of "The International Jew" be burned, and ordered overseas publishers to cease publication as well. (36)

Ford's capitulation was taken hardest in Germany among Nazi circles. Nazi boycotter Theodore Fritsch wrote to Ford lamenting the loss of both book sales and "the inestimable mental goods" Ford had bestowed upon civilization. "The publication of this book remains the most important action of your life." Yet now, as Fritsch put it, Ford was capitulating to the financial might of the Jews. (37)

Adolph Hitler, when informed of the retraction, tried to avoid comment. Henry Ford was the man the Nazi party and der Fuhrer had himself lionized as the quintessential fighter of the so-called Jewish economic conspiracy. Hitler had once told reporters in Germany that "the struggles of international Jewish finance against Ford... has only strengthened [Nazi] sympathies... for Ford." In Mein Kampf, Hitler had declared that "only a single great man, Ford," was able to stand up to Jewish economic power. (38)

Ford's unexpected surrender was so powerful a loss to Hitler's movement that the Nazi's preferred to ignore the retraction as a mere expediency. Fritsch continued printing "The International Jew." Nonetheless, the tribute to Ford in Mein Kampf was changed in its second edition. The words "only a single great man, Ford," was replaced with the phrase "only a very few." (39)

A lesson had been learned by Hitler and the Nazis. Jewish boycotts and economic influence, in the Nazi view, held the power not only to subvert governments, but silence the most indomitable challengers.

Presidential candidate Norman Thomas declared, "Ford's backdown was good evidence of what a consumers' boycott and a lawyer's million dollar libel suit can do in the way of educating a man who has heretofore been impervious to history." The New York Telegram editorialized, "If one of the richest men in the world cannot get away with an anti-Semitic movement in this country, nobody else will have the nerve to try it, and of that we can all be thankful, gentiles as well as Jews." But perhaps the most poignant summing up was uttered by Will Rogers: "Ford used to have it in for

Jewish people -until he saw them in Chevrolets."(40)

Jews also believed in the power of Jewish boycotts. It mattered little whether the real might of the boycott was statistical business harm or simply the perception of it. Boycott was a weapon the Jews were ready and willing to use in emergencies to dissuade the forces of anti-Semitism.

The anti Ford boycott was but a commercial skirmish compared to the international financial war waged against Russian Czar Nicholas II by Jewish banker Jacob Schiff and the American Jewish Committee. The war began when Jews were blamed for Russia's social and economic chaos in the 1880s. The classic scapegoat scenario developed. Quotas for Jews were decreed in academia and commerce. Jews were physically restricted to the smallest hamlets. Bloody pogroms followed as mounted Cossacks swept through the hamlets pillaging and ravaging defenseless Jews.(41)

Although America's German Jews detested the unkempt Russian Jews, they were nevertheless infuriated by the barbarism of the czar's persecution. Among the Hofjuden who considered themselves the custodians of Jewish defense, Jacob Schiff stood out as a central figure. A major factor in international finance, Schiff's greatest weapon was money: giving it, denying it. After the notorious Kishinev pogrom of Passover 1903, Schiff decided to personally lead a crusade to force Czar Nicholas to abandon his anti-Semitic campaign.(42)

Schiff used his influence with friends and family in Europe to commit major Jewish and even non-Jewish financial houses to a banking boycott of Russia.(43) And before long, Russia's loan requests were in fact systematically denied in most French, English, and U.S. money markets. In 1904, after war broke out between Russia and Japan, Schiff lobbied tirelessly among commercial adversaries and cohorts alike to grant high-risk war loans to the Japanese. About \$100 million, suddenly infused, quickly armed the under equipped Japanese, allowing them to score a series of humiliating victories. Schiff's loans were officially recognized as the pivotal factor in Japan's victory, and the Jewish leader was commemorated in Japanese newspapers and history books as a new national hero. (45)

The banking boycott and the financing of Japan's victory were only the first rounds. In 1906, Schiff and other influential Hofjuden formed the American Jewish Committee. Their first major objective was abrogation of the Russo-American commercial treaty, the legal basis of all friendly relations with Russia. The Committee asserted

that the czar's denial of Russian visas to Jewish American citizens was an affront not just to America's Jewish citizens but to the United States itself. (46)

Although William Taft had issued a presidential campaign promise of abrogation, he refused to honor his pledge once elected. During a February 1911 White House luncheon for Committee leaders, when Taft rendered his final refusal to abrogate, Schiff warned, "We had hoped you would see that justice be done us. You have decided otherwise. We shall now go to the American people." Schiff then stalked from the room, refusing to even shake the president's hand. On the way out, Schiff whispered to fellow Committee leaders, "This means war!" (47)

Calling upon all friends and resources, the Committee began a widespread public appeal to have Congress force the president to end commercial relations with Russia. Within weeks, House and Senate abrogation resolutions-each personally approved by the Committee-were prepared. On December 13, 1911, after the House voted 300 to 1 to abrogate, Taft capitulated, and two days later issued instructions to terminate the treaty. (48)

Despite abrogation, the czar would not yield. Massacres continued, and the Jewish death toll rose. So the banking boycott was tightened. Its effects became most destructive, however, during World War I, when the czar needed multimillion-dollar military loans. Committee members were widely criticized for the stubborn continuation of their boycott even as it threatened the Allied war effort. But the boycott remained in effect until the monarchy was toppled in 1917. (49)

Throughout the nearly fifteen years of the anti-czar boycott and backlash, threats of retaliation against Russian Jewry never deterred the men of the Committee. And in fact, during the anti-czar crusade, thousands of Russian lives were lost and hundreds of thousands more were devastated in pogroms. But the Committee held that the anti-Semitic outrages of one regime could speed infectiously if not quarantined.

Jacob Schiff addressed the issue in a 1905 cable to Russian premier Count Sergei Witte: "No doubt... your local authorities, seeing the coming of the end of the old regime,... have in their rage... instigated the populace against the Jews.... Jewry in general will have at least this consolation; that the present awful sufferings of their co-religionists will not have been for naught, nor their blood spilled in vain." A year later, President Theodore Roosevelt warned Schiff that the U.S. protests against pogroms might only provoke

more harm from an indignant czar. Schiff ignored the warning, determined that such genocidal actions could not go unprotected. (50)

And in early 1911, Schiff acknowledged in a letter to Taft that as a result of "action on our part, pogroms and massacres of Russian Jews, such as shocked the world in 1905, might be repeated." But he assured the president that the world Jewish community and even the Russian Jews themselves knew the risks were unavoidable. The responsibility for bloody reprisals would be taken "upon our own shoulders," said Schiff. He added, "it was recognized by our co-religionists that in such a situation, as in war, each and every man, wherever placed, must be ready to suffer, and if need be to sacrifice his life." (51)

The art of economic and political confrontation-public and private-was thus a tested and endorsed tradition of the American Jewish Committee. In 1929, Committee president Cyrus Adler wrote an authorized biography of the great economic warrior of the Jews, entitled Jacob H Schiff, His Life and Letters. The book detailed Schiff's and the Committee's tradition of unrelenting economic and political retaliation-regardless of the short-term risks- against those who would threaten Jewish rights. The book's foreword hoped its accounts of staunch Jewish defense would "prove of some value in guiding and inspiring others." (52)

For the three and a half decades before Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the Jews of America were actively engaged in international and domestic boycotts to fight anti-Semitism. They used the backlash weapon to fill newspapers and congressional hearing rooms with the gruesome truths of Jewish oppression. The Jews of America could lead public opinion and marshal government action. They had this power and they used it continuously.

Wielding this power inspired the conspiracy stories. And so Jewish leaders were often reluctant. But what choices did they have? After its expulsion from Israel in the second century, Judaism became a religion without a state and thus without an army.

Papal legions could crush rebellions. Crusaders could invade lands. Islamic armies could conquer and convert. To survive, Jews could only use what they had. And what they had was what they were allowed to have. For centuries, denied lands, denied access to the professions, denied military rank, Jews were forced to deal with money, with trade, with middlemanship, with bargains, with influence, with the portable professions. And so Jews fought fire not with fire but with money, with the media, with access to high

position, not in some imaginary conspiracy to dominate the world but in an ongoing effort to stay one step ahead of the blade, the noose, and the burning stake.

Yet the Jewish leaders most skilled in wielding the boycott and backlash weapon would in 1933 refuse, in part because the enemy was now Germany, Fatherland of the Committee. It was now German Jewish blood that would be spilled-not Russian Jewish. It was now their own uncles and lifetime friends whose lives would be subject to reprisal in any war for Jewish rights.

Those skilled in using Jewish weapons would also refuse because a wholly new tactic would now be used to shape Jewish destiny. Palestine would be the new solution. Hence, the question was now whether to use or not to use the one weapon Jews had, the one weapon they knew how to use: boycott and protest.

Yet the one weapon Jews had was the one weapon Hitler feared.

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## NOTES

1. "Protest on Hitler Growing in Nation," NYT, Mar. 23, 1933. [BACK TO TOP](#)
2. Ibid. [BACK TO TOP](#)
3. "Boycott Advocated to Curb Hitlerism," NYT, Mar. 21, 1933; see Morris Frommer, "The American Jewish Congress: A History, 1914-1950" (unpub. Ph.D. diss., history, Ohio State, 1978), 315-16, also see 314, n. 29.
4. Interview with Morris Mendelsohn by Moshe Gottlieb, July 20, 1965, author's transcript. [BACK TO TOP](#)
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