Unknown Fronts

The "Eastern Turn" in First World War History

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Cover image: Austrian troops advancing in the Carpatians [between ca. 1914-1915]. Source: Library of Congress, Washington DC, George Grantham Bain Collection, LC-DIG-ggbain-18943. See also: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ggbain.18943, accessed 1-11-2016.

11 The Great War and the Jewish Refugees in Russia. Research in the documents of the Joint Distribution Committee

Giuseppe Motta

Introduction

The Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement resented the consequences of the Great War from many points of view: measures taken by the Russian military authorities produced a great flow of refugees, the repeated occupations of German and Russian armies impoverished these communities and caused hardships for the Jewish population, especially in Poland and Lithuania. Many organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee (an organisation formed in the United States to relieve the adverse situation of Jews in Palestine, that later extended its sphere of activities to other war-afflicted zone's) intervened to ease the Eastern European Jews' situation, and started the difficult work of assistance, counting on a solid web of associations and committees to ameliorate their circumstances. The documents of the Joint Distribution Committee, therefore, could be very helpful to have a first-hand description of many Eastern European cities and of the reality in which many Jewish communities were living. In particular, this paper focuses on reports concerning refugees, who were obliged to leave their homes and generated a real "humanitarian emergency" that would have important consequences, not only during, but also after the war's end. From this perspective, research based on the documents of the JDC can be extremely relevant analysing of one the most dramatic problems of the contemporary world.

The Conflict and the Jews in Russia

In his three volume history of the Jews of Russia and Poland, Simon Dubnow pointed out that the Great War "opened up before the Jewish people a black abyss of medievalism in the midst of the blazing light of modern civilization, and finally threw it into the flames of the gigantic struggle of nations."[1] At the same time, the Great War represented an occasion for those Jews who hoped to reform and end Tsarist misrule and improve Jewish conditions, "to make Russia a modern state build upon righteousness and justice, may at least have a voice in the framing of the laws of that medieval country." In August 1914, a Jewish journal in the United States openly defined Russia as a "cesspool of ignorance and superstition", emanating "the epidemic of nation-wide persecution and popular anti-Jewish hatred", and, therefore, it was not surprising that in many synagogues prayers were offered for the success of the German army.[2]

1 Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920), 3:169.
2 I.I., "Russia and the Jew," *The Sentinel,* August 14, 1914, p. 2; "War Items of Special Jewish Interests," *The Sentinel*, August 14, 1914, p. 4.

The problems of Russian Jews dated back to the age of Catherine the Great, when the notorious Pale of Settlement was established in the territories of the former Polish Kingdom. After the Polish partitions, the Jews – with few exceptions – were compelled to reside in this "special" area that was formed by the western part of the Russian Empire: almost the entire Ukraine (including Bessarabia), Russian Poland and the Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces (Vilnius, Vitebsk, Grodno, Kaunas, Minsk, Mogilev). This sort of open-air prison hosted the majority of the Jewish population: 724,000 in Belorussia, 697,900 in Lithuania, 1,321,100 in Poland, 1,425,500 in Ukraine and 501,800 in the so called 'New Russia'.[3]

11-1 The "Stab in the back".

The Russian law, anyway, contained many other legal discriminations, such as the forced "admission" of Jewish children into Cantonist schools, professional prohibitions, the laws of May 1882 that were promulgated after Alexander II's death, or the expulsion of Jews from Kiev (1886) and Moscow (1891).[4] This atmosphere staged the play of an incredible *coup de theatre* which would have tremendous consequences for the Jewish future in Europe: the Tsarist secret police commissioned a fraudulent pamphlet, the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,* which was published in 1903 and became the "bible" of antisemite movements that used it as the absolute proof of a Jewish conspiracy to take over power in the world through finance, economy, politics, the freemasonry, disorder, destruction of religion.[5]

Hostility towards the Jews had, traditionally, expressed itself in the form of episodes of collective violence: the infamous pogroms that terrorized Jewish people (for example, the 1903 Kishinev).[6] Other pogroms took place after the 1905

3 According to a 1926 memorandum, 1,400,000 Jews lived in the six provinces of Lithuania and Belarus, 2,600,000 in Ukraine. The Pale of Settlement in the former Russian Empire, Archives of the Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), folder USSR: Agro-Joint, Publicity, 1925-1927, 1921-1932, item 359421.

4 Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russian and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), 1:408. See also Evgenii Petrovich Semenov, *The Russian Government and the Massacres: A Page of the Russian Counter-Revolution* (Murray: London, 1907); Lucien Wolf, *The Legal sufferings of the Jews in Russia. A Survey of their present situation, and a summary of laws* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1912).

5 The falsity of this book was first proved by Lucien Wolf's and Philip Graves' articles on *The Times* and by Herman Bernstein, *The history of a lie. The protocols of the wise men of Zion. A study* (New York: J.S.Ogilvie Publishing Company, 1921).

6 In those years, the movement of the "Black Hundred" was violently attacking the Jews and every form of national self-determination, for example the Ukrainian one. Walter Laquer, *Black Hundred: The Rise Of The Russian Extreme Right* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Don C. Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Simultaneously, many Jews had important roles in the development of the first socialist movements. Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale. The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

revolution, when in many cities (Odessa, Bialystok, Melitopol, Feodosiya) the populace was instigated to attack Jews and defend Russia against these groups of alleged "revolutionaries", "radical agitators" and "traitors."

The effects of this oppression were twofold: on the one hand, many young "secularized" Jews became the most ardent supporters of the first socialist movements such as the Bund and the Social-Democratic Party; on the other, it caused the emigration of many Jews to America. Jewish immigration in the United States increased between 1881-1900 and nearly 90% of this migration wave originated from Eastern Europe. In Palestine other emigrants, following the doctrine of Theodor Herzl's World Zionist Organisation (WZO), established the first Zionist "outposts."[7]

After the schism between Jews and the Polish National Democratic Party in 1912, antisemitism in Russian Poland reached its most intense expression: the Polish National Democratic Party failed to elect an antisemite candidate to represent Warsaw in the Russian Duma, and subsequently launched an anti-Jewish economic boycott in order to avenge this defeat.[8] Some years later, the outbreak of the Great War exacerbated the tensions because the Jews living near the front were considered to be potential spies and traitors, not in the least place because their Yiddish language was close to German.

The German and Austrian commanders were fully aware of the plights of the Jews in Russia and tried to exploit this situation by addressing the Jewish population's hostility towards the Russian troops. The German Committee for the Liberation of the Russian Jews (*Deutsches Komitee zur Befreiung der russischen Juden*) was created in August 1914 and a vast propaganda campaign was launched distributing many leaflets in the occupied zones of Poland. Also a bulletin in Yiddish and Hebrew, reminding the Jews (*An die Juden in Polen!*) of the constant anti-Jewish persecution in Russia, was published.[9]

7 The Zionist movement was started by T. Herzl, Moses Montefiore, Chaim Weizmann and by other activists such as Arkadii Kremer, Chaim Zhitlovsky, Nachman Syrkin, Menahem Ussishkin and Ber Borochov. Theodore Herzl, *A Jewish state: an attempt at a modern solution of the Jewish question* gave birth to the contemporary Zionist movement in 1896. Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 2003); Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (New York: Cohen, 1976); Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East 1792-1923* (Harlow: Longman, 1987).

8 Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910* (New York, 1914), 172; Bernard D. Weinryb, "East European Immigration to the United States," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 45, no. 4 (1955): 519; Lawrence J. Epstein, *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side, 1880-1920* (San Fransico: John Wiley & Sons, 2001); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and The Russian Jews, 1864-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1981).

9 Zosa Szajkowski, "The German appeal to the Jews of Poland, August 1914," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 59, no. 4 (April, 1969): 311-320.

11-2 The Pale of Settlement.

These attempts to capitalize on the adverse conditions of the Jews, however, had only scarce results, at least in the early stages of the war: during the historic "war session" of the Russian Duma on August 8, 1914, the Jewish deputy representing the province of Kaunas, Naphtali Friedman, stated that the Russian Jews were ready to fight as "faithful sons" of their fatherland, "shoulder to shoulder with the other nationalities of the empire." But Friedman's promises proved to be useless: as a matter of fact, the first military measures of the Tsarist army confirmed the secular "tradition" of diffidence and suspicions. This approach had tragic consequences for the Jewish people of the Pale. It anticipated the "stab-in-the-back"-myth, a notion that seriously affected Russian Jews during the conflict, and that unfortunately was not destined to be confined within Russian frontiers.

Many historiographic works have underlined the precarious situation of Russian Jews during the war (Altshuler, Ansky, Bianchi, Gatrell, Goldin, Levene, Lohr, Prusin). Eric Lohr has, in particular, reviewed the different dispositions of the Russian army and underlined how the army was inspired by the vision of Jews as an unreliable element: spies or deserters who had to be removed from the zones of major strategic importance. As a consequence, military commands used the War Statute of 1914, and the unlimited powers that this act gave them, to clean certain areas of Jews, Germans and other foreigners and to consistently adopt different measures targeted at these particular groups. Lohr has distinguished four different

phases of this policy beginning with the first chaotic deportations or forced expulsions in the period between July 1914 and January 1915. During the second phase, this system was better organized by a decree (January 25, 1915) of the Russian General Headquarters' chief of staff, Nikolai Yanushkevich, that instructed all commanders to expel all Jews and other suspect individuals from the entire region in which the military was active. In April-May 1915, the third phase commenced with larger scale mass deportations: in this case the deportees were assigned destinations in advance and their transport was better organized with the use of trains and the help of civilian officials. The measures could not be fully implemented because of technical problems and lack of space to which the Jews could be deported. As a matter of fact, the great majority of the Pale of Settlement was under military control and only few zones remained available to concentrate the Jewish deportees. Civilian and political authorities even expressed some criticism: for example, some governors complained that this policy was harmful for the local economy, because the Jews' removal led to the paralysis of entire sectors of the economy.[10]

Another practice used in this context was the taking of hostages. According to Lohr, this marked the passage into the fourth phase: since deporting entire segments of the population proved to be too cumbersome and led to protests by civil authorities, the commands ordered that deportations were to be replaced by the taking of hostages. Under these new arrangements, the deported communities were allowed to return home under the condition that some hostages were taken from their midst.

The discrimination against Jews during the war, paradoxically, also led to the virtual abolition of the Pale of Settlement: in 1915 the Council of Ministers permitted Jews to move to the interior of Russia for the first time. However, this abolition, was considered to be just a "temporary expedient, dictated mainly by military necessity and partly by the need of a foreign loan. The American Jewish Committee published a book by which it tried to prove this assertion by stating that this measure did not remove any of the limitations to which the Jews were legally subjected. The book cited the minutes of the Council of Ministers (August 4-17, 1915), which underlined that the necessity of this measure was due to the growing flow of Jewish refugees and the unrest provoked by the latter in the territories to which they were deported.[11] Despite the formal interruption of these "preemptive measures" and the downscaling of deportations and hostage-taking by the end of 1915, the army commanders still retained the power to decide on forced expulsions

10 For a detailed analysis of these military measures see Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July, 2001): 404-419; See also Alexander V. Prusin, *Nationalizing a borderland: war, ethnicity, and anti-Jewish violence in east Galicia, 1914-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Samuel Goldin, "Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command 1914 – 1915," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 40-73.

11 A deputy of the Duma, Rostovtzev, even denounced that the Pale had been abolished not by Russia but by Kaiser Wilhelm. *The Jews of the Eastern Front* (New York: The American Jewish Committee), 23.

and to take hostages and many kept on using these prerogatives during the following years.

In fact, the conflict exacerbated the hostility between Poles and Jews. Furthermore, the attacks of Austrian and German troops were interpreted as the result of Jewish connivance: this suspicion consequently produced many problems where the Russian troops managed to drive their opponents back. Severe punishments were inflicted on Jews, who were charged for high treason, but were often proved innocent. The Russian military authorities preferred to seek a scapegoat for their failures and circulated Polish accusations to a wider audience: for instance, a military newspaper, *Nash Vestnik*, reported on the village of Kuzhi in its May 5 (18) issue. This village was attacked by the Germans on the night of April 28, 1915, and the local Jews were accused by the Polish inhabitants of helping the German invaders. The investigation by some deputies of the Duma, later discovered that in the entire village of Kuzhi there were only six Jewish families and that their houses could not accommodate the amount of German soldiers the numerous denunciations claimed. Furthermore, many Jews from Kuzhi had escaped before the arrival of the Germans and resided in another village close by.

The entirety discriminatory measures, suspicions and renewed hostility created a legitimized framework for anti-Jewish violence. Thus, a surge of violence coincided with the conflict. A real and large wave of pogroms began in 1915 and often coincided with the Russian retreat and were sometimes instigated by military units, which encouraged popular participation in looting and violence. Many eye-witnesses reported on these episodes and the general brutality of the Russian troops, especially the Cossacks, against Jews.

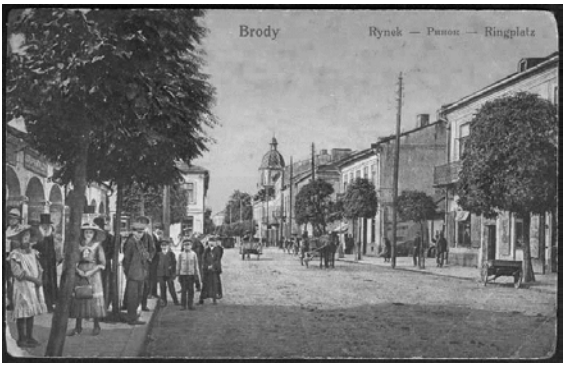
During his long roundabouts in Eastern Europe, before assisting with the *The Ten Days That Shook The World*, John Reed had the opportunity to visit many cities of the Eastern front and to notice the numerous Jews hunch-baked and skinny, the desperate fugitives who used to shrink before policemen, soldiers and priests. Too many traders, cabmen, barbers, tailors were concentrated in a confined world, which was reserved only to Jews and was periodically increased with those who were expelled from the "prohibited areas."[12] At Zaleshchiki the Russians had massacred the Jews and expelled women and children, at Kholm the Jews were compelled to buy images of the Tsar's daughter Tatiana and to celebrate her birthday even twice a week: doors and windows were protected by heavy wooden shutters used as a defence against pogroms. Reed travelled for two hundred miles behind the Russian front, through Bukovina and Galicia as far as Poland, finding examples of the sufferings inflicted upon the Jews everywhere. One village after another of muddy humbugs plastered over with lively colours were sacked and destroyed by the Cossacks and the Russian soldiers: Zaleshchiki was a jumble of

12 Many references to Jews are contained in the book, however, a whole chapter is dedicated to the Jewish question specifically in John Reed, *The War in Eastern Europe* (New York: Scribner's sons, 1916), 234 ff.

ruins; Rovno had witnessed antisemitic troubles; at Kielce, in Poland, a pogrom in the old-fashioned style occurred (in which Cossacks committed mass murder).

To confirm the special attention that Russian authorities reserved to the Jews as potential spies, Reed explained that he was able to travel in the area only because he carried a list of American citizens (provided by the American diplomatic service) who were in the war zone and were mainly Jews. Whenever the Russian authorities read the contents of this list they were usually disgusted and tended to believe that Reed was a spy.[13]

The idea that Jews were allied with Germany and potential spies is confirmed also by the 1915 description of another outstanding author, Šlojme-Zanvl Rappoport, (who is better known as Semyon Akimovich Ansky) in his reportage *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*. The Jewish author, researcher and activist – famous for his 1914 play *The Dybbuk* – reported about the numerous falsehoods that he heard in the various localities, where the same "tales" were re-arranged and enriched time by time, always underlining the treason of Russian Jews: in one of these versions, an old Jew succeeded in transporting on his shoulders a sack containing an German man and 2,500 silver thalers through a Russian military checkpoint.[14]



11-3 The Market square of Brody.

Ansky also described the Russian invasion of Brody, a Galician city that had been a frontier post before the war. The city had been half devoured by a devastating fire, which also affected several hundred Jewish houses. It was said that, after the arrival of the first Cossack division in Brody, a Jewish girl had shot at the commander. This supposed attack – which was retold in many versions in different towns – caused a violent reaction by Russian troops. The whole city looked impoverished and dejected: the stores were locked or boarded up after having been ransacked, while the shops that were still open were enjoying a brisk business.

> *The road to Brody was flanked by burned and desolate cottages. In the distance we saw a broad field covered with ruins. Soon the devastated*

13 John Reed, *The War in Eastern Europe,* 198-199.
14 Semyon Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 16-19.

> *town emerged from the grey mist of an early winter morning. There were blackened chimneys and burned walls as far as we could see, visible beneath a dusting of downy snow. The town looked like the ancient, mossy remnants of Pompeii. I noticed the scorched wall of a synagogue. Above the door, some Hebrew words had survived: "How awesome is this place" [Genesis 28:17]. The verse was fitting for the ruins of the house of worship and for the entire spread of the shattered neighbourhood. Nestled among the wreckage I saw a small cottage almost embedded in the earth. It looked as if it had crouched down during the conflagration, hidden in the ground, and therefore survived.*[15]

At every street corner, shiny metal signs in Russian had been nailed to the walls. The occupiers had given every street a fancy, new name: Pushkin Street, Gogol Street, Lermontov Steet, and Turgenev Street. Ansky thought that naming these horribly deformed streets after the luminaries of Russian culture was quite ironic; this irony had escaped the victors, who were not able to realize how offensive it was to the memory of those great Russian authors. Almost half of the town had been burned down, including several hundred Jewish houses and the old market place, where a real "army of poor, ragged, famished kids" (Christians and Jews) walked through the ruins of the market begging for a kopek. Scenes like this could be witnessed in many Galician towns, also in places that had not been affected by the conflict directly at that moment. As a matter of fact, these localities were equally, though indirectly, conditioned by the disastrous effects of the war. Kobrin, for example, was a small shtetl (the typical Jewish village of Eastern Europe) and became the centre of the retreating military. Evacuees and escapees crowded this centre, cooking food and drying their laundry over campfires or feeding cows and horses:

> *All squares, courtyards, vacant areas, riverbanks, and parks were occupied by the homeless, especially male and female peasants, who could be identified from afar by the loud colors of their clothing… These thousands of people looked like nomads wandering with their herds from place to place.*[16]

The Challenge of Relief

After the outbreak of the war, information about started flowing out of the Pale of Settlement. In reports one could read about hundreds of Jews from Poland rushing to Lithuania (which was expected to be the epicentre of the conflict soon) in order to flee the frontier. These reports were confirmed by the subsequent deportations and the fighting between German and Russian troops, both of which created a tragic "humanitarian emergency" that attracted the attention of many national and international societies. First of all, the Russian Jewish communities prompted a set

15 Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure,* 68-70.
16 Ibid., 196.

of relief measures in order to help their fellow Jews who were affected by conflict. At Petrograd (the new Slavic name was used to strengthen patriotic feelings and create a distance to the old German-sounding Sankt-Peterburg) the Jewish communities organized the Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (*Yevreiskii Komitet Pomoshchi Zhertvam Voiny;* EKOPO), which was formed by the Petrograd central committee and by a whole range of local committees and branches all over Russia. EKOPO cooperated with many existing societies such as the Society for the Advancement of Education among the Jews (*Obshchestva dlya Rasprostraneniya Prosveshcheniya Mezhdu Yevreiami v Rossii;* OPE, founded in 1863), the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population (*Obschestvo zdravookhraneniya yevreev;* OZE, founded in 1912), the Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades (*Obchestvo Remeslenogo Truda,* ORT) and the Jewish Colonisation Association (JCA).[17] The funds were private to a large extent and only a part of these resources was in the form of public aid from the Princess Tatiana Relief Fund and susm of money provided by the government since 1915.

Needless to say, this intricate network of societies, committees and organizations had to deal with many difficulties: first of all with a general lack of funds (which was partially covered by the generous aids coming from America). The American support had already become a sort of "myth" in these Eastern European communities; for example, see the reference to Jacob Schiff in Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Family Moskat*. During the war this connection proved to be essential in order to meet the material needs of many people, starting with the refugees who were crowding the towns of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine.

The American organizations immediately responded to the tragedy of WW I and the meetings of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) during 1914 organized the first collection of funds in favour of "the unfortunate Jews of Turkey", and of the great body of Jews of Russia, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, and of other affected lands where for weeks the most destructive warfare known to history had occurred, creating a "grievous need", and a supreme need of assistance.[18]

According to Yehuda's Bauer history of the Joint Distribution Committee, it all began when in 1914 US Ambassador to Istanbul, Henry Morgenthau, travelled to Palestine and, alarmed by the misery he found in the region, solicited an economic support from the United States.[19] In August 1914, Morgenthau's requests reached the leaders of AJC, through the Secretary of State W.J. Brian, and Jacob H. Schiff

17 Steven J. Zipperstein, "The Politics of Relief: The Transformation of Russian Jewish Communal Life During the First World War," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry. The Jews and the European Crisis, 1914-1921*, ed. J. Frankel (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22 ff.

18 "Eighth Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee in November 1914," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916): 367.

19 On the history of the creation of the Joint Distribution Committee and the action of relief in the US and in England see Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper. A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929-1939* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974); Sam Johnson, "Breaking Or Making the Silence? British Jews and East European Jewish Relief, 1914-1917," *Modern Judaism* 30, no. 1 (2010): 95-119; Albert Lucas, "American Jewish Relief in the World War," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (1918): 221-228.

and Louis Marshall immediately came in to action in order to respond to such an alarm. After Ambassador Morgenthau's telegram, the American Jewish Committee called for a general meeting in New York, on October 25, and established the first committees to coordinate the work of relief and the collection of funds. On November 24, 1914, the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers (JDC) was finally formed joining the American Jewish Relief Committee (expression of the New York elites), and the Central Relief Committee (appealing to the Orthodox element), while the third constituent member, the People's Relief Committee, was organized only in August 1915.

JDC soon decided to increase and enlarge its activities because of the growing misery that was affecting Eastern European Jews and started operating through the local organizations such as the EKOPO in Russia or the Vienna based Israelitische Allianz. As a consequence, the first aid efforts were soon undertaken. These only represented the beginning of a complex relief effort that work of relief aimed not only at an immediate easing of the circumstances, but also at future reconstruction. From this perspective, the purpose of JDC was briefly described by one of its agents, Mr. Zuckerman, as "not merely to give bread, but to give the hope of a better life, to help our brothers over there to live again, to give them the means wherewith to live, and to enable them to live as Jews."[20]

To relieve the needs of this mass of people, the effort was organized and structured in detail, connecting the great international organizations such as the JDC and the little local societies called *landsmanschaften*, which solicited donations from the United States. Owing to these funds, the local committees opened food stores and cooperatives buying and selling products at the same cost, they provided for fuel for the winter, clothes, footwear, opening schools and educational centres for children; they gave loans to professional workers, established medical-sanitary units, a statistical bureau and a legal advice bureau for those Jews not possessing proper passports in cases of oppression on the part of police authorities. These efforts had notable costs that were calculated to 1,800,000 roubles per month to provide for the needs of approximately 350,000 refugees. The average expenses calculated by the central committee of Petrograd in July 1916 was 8 roubles in the front zone and 7 roubles in the rear for every registered refugee.[21]

Consulting a budget of EKOPO, it is evident that the committee did not possess these sums: as a consequence, the expenses devoted to the assistance of refugees were normally inferior, for example 277,328 roubles in January 1916 (while the funds for the committee of the district of Kiev amounted to 82,332) and 348,763 in February.[22]

20 Internal Report of the Committee on Conference to the Joint Distribution Committee (August 10, 1919) for the sole use of members of JDC. Not for Publication. AJDC, JDC Administration, Committees, Standing and Subcommittees, 1919-1921, item 201103.

21 Cablegram of the Jewish colonization (May 17, 1916). AJDC, Russia general 1916, item 10031.

22 Report of Ekopo of March 1916. AJDC, Russia general 1916, item 10010.

The committee also organized loans on a large scale, furnishing credits through banks and credit societies to those refugees who evidently needed only temporary aid to become self-supporting again. About one-third of the registered Jewish refugees benefited from these loans.[23] The question of housing also presented a major question: In many cities the refugees were quartered in synagogues, parks and market places, or in other temporary shelters where they lived in a promiscuous way, with no separation as to age, sex or family relationship. In places like Orenburg the refugees were housed en masse, because only a small number of refugees could be settled in separate lodgings, while the majority was obliged to live in missionary establishments:

> *experience shows that refugees living in separate lodgings settle down to some kind of business or work much quicker. The living of refugees en masse demands, therefore, considerable money, by far exceeding the expense necessary either for the evacuation of refugees, or even for the organization of special lodgings.*[24]

In order to improve these conditions the committee found it necessary to spread the refugees in small groups to the, not yet overcrowded, suburbs. The problem of housing also created medical and sanitary problems, and different diseases could spread more easily in missions, public buildings or overcrowded houses. OZE was charged to organize medical and sanitary relief and to care for the children, organizing the convoys and prompting special crews that accompanied refugees to the places of resettlement and supplyed them with food and arranged special sections in order to provide first-aid stations and hospitals for infectious diseases. Some medical expeditions were organized in zones next to the frontline: they consisted of a flying ambulance administering medical relief to the population and often nourishment. These ambulances were manned by one executive, two physicians, two trained nurses and two dietitians. However, the general lack of means did not permit the development of efficient medical and sanitary measures. For example, at Vitebsk, there were only four ambulances, one hospital and four "homes" for 15,990 refugees.

Another form of help, less urgent, but equally important, was represented by the opening of schools (in cooperation with the Society for the Spread of Education among the Jews of Russia). This effort was present in 88 localities and aided 18,635 children in 115 schools. Also, special agencies to secure work through local committees that were directed by the Society for Manual and Agricultural Labor among Jews played a role. In this way, the ORT became a real Labor Department of a small state: some special manufacturing shops were created for the making of shoes, linen, knitted goods, clothes, while other agencies organized manual training classes for boys and adults capable to work. Some special shops were established

23 Report of Cyrus Adler, January 23, 1919. AJDC, JDC Administration, general 1918, item 143.
24 Draft memorandum on Relief in Eastern Europe, transmitted by M.A. Charosh to Cyrus Adler (January 23, 1919), Russia, Pogroms and Persecutions. 214709.

for seamstresses, in Yekaterinoslav, Simferopol and Nizhny Novgorod, for carpenters in Mariupol, for embroiderers in Lugansk. The department of relief secured work and organized shelters for apprentices between 12 and 17 years old and placed 500 apprentices in 10 different locations through a contract with the proprietor of the shop (there were also afternoon courses with school matters and lessons in drawing and technical drafting).

This brief survey illustrated the general aspects of the relief effort and clearly indicated that, maybe for the first time, a new perspective was used to help the refugees and the victims of war. As a matter of fact, the relief was also intended to strengthen Jewish social field and to "encourage" those communal activities in order to correct the old evils and abuses that had weighed down on the Jews (for example, helping the Jewish welfare work in cooperating with non-Jewish welfare work). It was thought that only this way of providing moral and economic support (by American Jews) could prove to be even more valuable than the direct material support.

The American aid was particularly important in two sectors: the medical and sanitary organization, which lacked skilled Jewish physicians and surgeons, as many of them had been sent to the front during the war and were subsequently killed or incapacitated; and the possible introduction of American industrial methods and machines among the artisans and industrial workers. These steps were considered essential to create the premises for a future peaceful and rapid development. During the years of the conflict marked the passage from a policy of assistance to one of the first examples of what today we call "development aid."

The Conditions of the Jewish Refugees and Population

As aforementioned, an important part of these efforts were naturally addressed towards the mass of refugees that was moving along the Eastern Front or to the interior of Russia or even tried a long and difficult escape through Siberia and China.[25] The territory from which these refugees came was quite considerable in extent. Not only the gubernias that were actually occupied by the "Teutonic" troops (Poland, the Gubernias of Grodno, Vilna, Kovno, Courland, the western part of Minsk, Livonia, and Volhynia), but also those which were merely threatened with invasion, gave their quota of refugees (the gubernia of Podolia, Bessarabia, Vitebsk, Pskov, the southern part of Transcaucasia and parts of the district of Kiev).

25 Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

For example, in April 1915, the entire Jewish population from Kovno (Kaunas), Courland and Grodno gubernias began to move in hordes, driven by Cossacks and pressed into closed railway cars. In some places such as Chelyabinsk the number of children's' deaths annihilated the entire young generation. In one case, a train was dispatched from Kaunas to Poltava, and then returned to Kaunas after a stop in Vilnius and was subsequently redirected to the interior of Russia, travelling for one month before reaching its final destination.[26]

11-4 Jewish World War I refugees from the Kovno district taking shelter in a synagogue near Vilna, May 16, 1915.

As a Russian observer commented in 1916, the story of Russia's war refugees, in its terrors and sacrifices, had no parallel and could be compared only with the slaughter of Armenians in Turkey: in both cases, thousands of peaceful, innocent people were destroyed in the midst of revoltingly cruel armed conflicts.[27] Warfare continued to drive thousands of refugees from Poland, the Baltic provinces and Northwest Russia to the interior of the country. The crowd was composed of many different groups: some were forced by military authorities to leave the territory near the front; others left the towns and villages that were occupied by German and Austrian troops voluntarily. From that time on, two new words were added to the Russian language and became common in the columns of the Russian press: *vyselentsy*, those who were forced to leave, and *bezhentsy*, those who fled voluntarily. The former were often compelled to flee within twenty-four hours on military orders, the latter could prepare their flight better. However, in both cases these terror-stricken unfortunates were compelled to sell all their property, or simply leave it behind, as they rushed to follow every available road that led to the nearest place of safety. Tens of thousands of Jewish families rapidly converted into

26 Report of Oze (February 10, 1918). AJDC, Russia, relations with organizations, item 6712 .
27 "Russia's War Refugees," *The Russian Review* 1 (May 1916): 242.

homeless fugitives living in holes, barracks or lying on pavements far from their houses.

Thousands of women, children and old human beings lost their lives in this flight, which usually proceeded amidst conflagration and deafening cannonade. Parents lost their children, husbands became separated from their wives. In short: the confusion was endless. The rich and the poor formed a crowd of ragged and hungry refugees fighting a daily struggle against suffering and deprivation.[28]

Naturally, the Russian Ministry of the Interior was called to intervene and organized a special department for the removal of refugees, while the Law of August 30, 1915 established a Special Conference, presided over by the Assistant Minister of the Interior, which was called to consider the problem and to take care of the streams of refugees and of their most immediate needs. Notwithstanding the formation of this special council for rehabilitating refugees, the department of Police issued a circular to all governors not to extend any subsidies to Jewish refugees but, instead, to direct all applications to the Petrograd committee. As a consequence, Jews began to receive state money only after the proper enforcement of the law, by the regulations of March 2, 1916, when the situation changed and the funds were given directly to the committees.

The conditions of refugees were tragic and are described in a whole of documents. For example, according to a 1918 Report of the Central Jewish committee for relieving the victims of the war, refugees were compelled to live in temporary shelters without any segregation as to age, sex or family relationship:

> *Families were scattered and separated on the roads in the forests and fields, and left to die of starvation and cold. Most of these wanderers found their way into larger cities" also in cities of the interior of Russia overcrowded trains going from place to place without any particular destination the committee had to take of these trains with medical aid, food and provisions, money and guides.*[29]

This document did not contain an overall estimate of the refugees' number but described only the situation and, as many other acts, explained that it was not possible to state the accurate number of homeless Jews: on November 1, 1916, the committee registered 210,000 refugees, but the numbers obviously indicated only those refugees who applied for help (food rations, lodging, medical aid) and, as a consequence, the real number was in reality much higher.

In May 1915, the Russian-Jewish Relief Committee of Petrograd issued a report according to which, at least 200 towns and approximately 9,000 townlets and villages in Poland had suffered from the war and had experienced a decrease in agricultural and industrial production. This document estimated that about two

28 Ibid.
29 Report of the Central Jewish committee for relieving the victims of the war from August 1914 until June 30, 1917.

million Jews were directly affected by the hostilities: many of them had been forcibly expelled from their place of residence, while others decided to flee, but also to come back. Notwithstanding the difficult process of collecting data, this report calculated that more than 100,000 refugees had left the Polish provinces:

> *Hundreds of factories have been destroyed… while branches of trade have been shattered, burying the welfare of the artisans under their ruins… Commercial life also has been laid waste. The merchants – great and small – are ruined…*[30]

In 1915, a Jewish deputy in the Duma, Friedman, complained that about half a million persons had been doomed to a state of beggary and vagabondage: in the province of Kaunas wealthy persons became beggars in few days, while all the cities and the villages within and outside the Pale began to be crowded by an increasing number of refugees.[31] The city of Smolensk, for example, witnessed the arrival or passage of great masses: 1,500 persons in June 1916, 6,500 in July, 8,600 in August.[32]

The special conference for the Organization of War Refugees recorded the rapid increase of refugees: on November 1, 1915, there were "only" 160,000 refugees. On March 1, 1916, this had increased to 185,596. In some places the situation was undoubtedly more serious. In few months Vilnius (Wilna) saw an increase from 1,135 to 3,166 and Poltava from 5,366 to 10,842 refugees. The provinces of North-Western frontline (Vilnius, Vitebsk, Livonia, Minsk, Moghilev) hosted 53,534 refugees; those of the South-Western frontline were even more overcrowded (41,146 refugees in Yekaterinoslav, Poltava, Taurida, Kharkov; 16,836 refugees in Bessarabia, Volhynia, Kiev, Podolia and Chernigov); 74,078 refugees applied for help in the provinces of the interior or of the rear.[33]

Naturally, the other side of the coin was represented by those centres which people were abandoning. According to A. Pankratov, the correspondent of *Russkoye Slovo,* the Jews from Khirardov, Piaseczno, Grodisk, Pruszkow moved to Warsaw, while those of Lithuania went to Vilnius. As consequence, in places such as Brody, 16,000 ran away and only 6,000 remained.[34]

30 *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone,* 101-102.

31 "Among the refugees I met Jewish women and girls, who had worked together with Russian women, had sewed garments with them and collected contributions with them, and who were now forced to encamp on the railway embankment." Speech of Deputy Friedman in the Duma on August 2, published in *The New York Times* September 23, 1915. See also "Victory cheers Germany. Big Capture of Russians looked from Following Vilna's Fall," *The New York Times,* September 22, 1915.

32 Jews in Smolensk organized a Society for the Aid of Jewish War victims and a refugee labour bureau. Michael C. Hickey, "Revolution on the Jewish Street: Smolensk, 1917," *Journal of Social History* (summer 1998): 826.

33 Report of the special conference for the Organization of War (December 30, 1916). AJDC, Russia, general 1916, item 10081.

34 In November 1914 in Warsaw there were 20,000 Jewish refugees; out of 688 Jewish residents, at Opolia the refugees were 557. Report of Oze of February 10, 1918. AJDC, Russia. Relations with organizations, item 6712.

In the spring of 1916, the report of EKOPO took into consideration the number of 400,000 refugees, while the English Fund for the relief of the Jewish victims of the war in Russia issued more precise statistics concerning the various localities.[35]

11-5 A German soldier with Jewish refugees.

35 Fund for the relief of the Jewish victims of the war in Russia (March 14, 1916) signed by Otto Schiff to Felix Warburg in response to a letter of February. AJDC, Russia, general 1916, item 10014.

Place	Number of refugees requiring help	Place	Number of refugees requiring help
Simferopol	7584	Ananyev	517
Bakhmut	1061	Lugansk	250
Mariupol	2487	Kamenets-Podolski	1500
Poltava	2504	Kremenchuk	1744
Roumy	1584	Kharkov	5800
Kiev	12000	Chernigov	671
Bakhmach	Omission	Syzran	250
Kazan	1250	Chelyabinsk	Omission
Staraya-Roussa	103	Malaya Vishera	30
Riga	Omission	Vitebsk	3700
Rietchetza, Lyntzin, Prely	500	Dwisnk	5000
Nevel	400	Minsk	28506
Pinsk	1600	Homel	5000
Vyatka	170	Orsha, Dubrovno	265
Tolochin	108	Tatarsk, Shamovo, Kadino	127
Petrograd	400	Glubokoe, Dolghinovo	Omission

Naturally these flows were directed not only eastwards but also to the other side of the front, that is to say to those Austrian and German territories where the fugitives from Galicia, after the Russian invasion, hoped to find better conditions of living. According to a report of the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien (November 17, 1916), Bohemia hosted 75,135 refugees; Moravia 31,344; East Silesia 7,000; Steiermark

4,000; Northern Austria 10,000; Vienna and Southern Austria 50,000; Western Austria 200,000. Despite the fact that the policy of forced expulsions was partially abandoned, at least in official government policies, these numbers were not destined to decrease and many refugees were still wandering all over Russia and Eastern Europe when the Bolshevik government signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 .

Generally, the reports about the conditions of refugees could not but underline the impact of these flows of refugees in the major cities bordering the war zone: For example, the cities under German occupation, such as Kaunas, Vilnius and Białystok. These localities were visited by Albert Van Raalte between February and April in 1918 and were consequently described in a long report containing data and different sorts of information.[36]

Van Raalte made a tragic description of the poverty in Vilnius: the hygienic conditions of life were in a dire state and the overall poverty especially affected the Jews of the city. This was proved by an account by Dr. Zemach Schabad (one of the founders of OZE), who claimed that in his medical office (open to people of all religions) between 50-80% of the patients was Jewish.

Some families of refugees obtained a house, some other were not so lucky. There were also families who had been well-off, but in the present situation were demoralised to such an extent that they became ordinary beggars.

Van Raalte visited a great number of shelters, public kitchens, schools, charitable institutions and described the great efforts that the local committees, with the help of American funds, were sustaining in order to alleviate the conditions of the poor and needy. These institutions, such as the Łódźer Israelisische Worltatigjeitsverein, were providing the poor with meals and other support, and in some cases were also landing small amounts of money to impoverished merchants.

In addition to the detailed descriptions of this tragic reality, Van Raalte adopted a more scientific approach and collected budgets, information and all kind of data, for example regarding mortality and diseases. It is possible therefore to recall some of the figures that Van Raalte inserted in his reports in order to get a general and circumstantiated account of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. First of all, Van Raalte underlined the great proportion of people who in need of economic support through meals, clothes, loans etc. In Łódź the needs were getting higher and higher and in March 1918, out of 140,000 Jews, about 30,000 were receiving

36 Starting from JDC European headquarters at The Hague in February 1918, Van Raalte went to Berlin and left the German city for a journey that led him to Warsaw, Kaunas, Vienna, Vilnius, spending 75 days in the occupied territories. Van Raalte's final report was sent to Holland and New York on June 12, 1918. In the previous months Van Raalte had already transmitted some partial accounts of his trip, on March 1, 14 and 27. AJDC, folder Overseas Administration, JDC Committees, Holland Bureau, June-December 1918, items 1051-1052. Giuseppe Motta, "The Jews of Eastern Europe and the Great War in the Documents of the Joint Distribution Committee," in *The First World War: Analysis and Interpretation,* vol. 2, ed., A. Biagini and G. Motta (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

their meals in public soup-kitchens. Higher percentages were recorded in Kaunas (3,000 out of 7,000), in Vilnius (29,430 out of 57,500), Grodno (5,100 out of 15,350) and Białystok (27,600 out of 38,000).

The most complete and exhaustive data reported by Van Raalte are those concerning the city of Vilnius, where he could count on the cooperation of Dr. Schabad, who provided him with the information regarding the passage from the pre-war situation to the reality after 1914. These statistics are particularly meaningful because they were collected by the persons who were directly assisting to the worsening of material, sanitary and psychosocial conditions and represented an unique source of information in those troublesome years. The rate of mortality in Vilnius was very high and the figure below gives a precise account of how the death-rate of the civil population was normal by the standards of the time in 1911-1913, but rapidly increased after the outbreak of the war. In 1916 the numbers show a "relaxation" and reached its peak in 1917, when the casualties doubled those of the previous year.

	1911	**1912**	**1913**	**1914**	**1915**	**1916**	**1917**
January	94	133	98	112	128	173	330
February	111	99	84	98	129	192	360
March	94	83	94	104	130	116	447
April	77	102	98	104	130	116	378
May	101	81	95	79	146	120	424
June	113	103	66	91	154	99	325
July	93	95	79	95	188	95	304
August	111	90	86	130	271	99	274
September	94	105	101	115	330	108	251
October	95	126	106	124	435	121	184
November	88	101	97	105	145	166	182
December	112	93	84	139	163	209	221
TOTAL	1183	1152	1188	1302	2165	1680	3680

Van Raalte underlined the high mortality rates of the children under 5 years of age, which become evident after examining the statistics of 1916 and 1917 and, taking into consideration the lack of proportions between the general death-rate and the infant mortality, showed that this "abnormal" phenomenon could only be explained by the negative economic conditions under which the Jews were living. The situation worsened in 1917, when these rates doubled compared to the

previous year: 166 boys and 126 girls had died in 1916, 148 boys and 120 girls died only in the period between January and May in 1917.

The following figures, give an insight into the causes of death and indicate an evident increase of some diseases. This can only have been the result of poorer material conditions and of the decrease in medical assistance (tuberculosis, kidney diseases and weakness, that could be easily be confused with malnourishment and hunger).

	1915	**1916**	**1917 (January-May)**
Contagious diseases	12.05%	2.8%	3.36%
Tuberculosis	6.05%	12.7%	13%
Diseases of the digestive organs	7.25%	4.55%	4.3%
Diseases of the respiratory organs	19.25%	15.15%	12.2%
Heart and blood-vessel diseases	9.05%	10.05%	9.5%
Diseases of the urinary organs	5.5%	11.9%	14.7%
Nerve and brain diseases	6.6%	5.2%	2.7%
Cancer and the like	4.5%	3.5%	1.5%
Blood diseases	1.1%	1.45%	1.3%
Weakness	17.5%	26.4%	34.4%
Accidents	10.7%	6.3%	3.04%

A further evidence of the constant worsening and impoverishment was procured by the data regarding the number of new-born children and of casualties:

	Births	Deaths	Difference
1911	904	606	+298
1912	908	641	+267
1913	773	568	+205
1914	748	696	+52
1915	667	1164	-457
1916	394	869	-475
1917 (January-May)	112	1052	-941

Also the proportion of Jewish deaths comparing to the general mortality showed that the death rate among the Jews was always slightly higher than that of non-Jews. According to the census of 1916, the Jews represented the 41.5% of the total casualties within the population of Vilnius. The rates of the first months of 1917 always showed a higher percentage of Jewish casualties:

	Total	Jews	Jewish Percentage
January	659	282	42.8%
February	731	325	44.4%
March	875	442	50.5%
April	871	363	41.6%
May	1030	463	45%
June	752	304	40.4%
July	784	354	45.1%
TOTAL	5702	2533	44.4%

The same situation affected also other cities such as Warsaw (where the death-rate doubled from 1916 to 1917, from 7,211 to 14,111 casualties), Łódź or Lublin (here the deaths were 712 in 1913, 842 in 1916 and 949 in 1917).The committee of Lublin in 1917 assisted 402 families of reservists (totally 1,145 persons), 229 families of emigrants (814 persons), 974 families of poor people (3,377 persons) for a total account of 1505 families or 5,336 persons.

But the destiny of these unfortunate people could also follow different paths and a part of these refugees began a long odyssey in the interior of Russia looking for a way of escape to the Far East. The presence of these groups is testified by a report redacted by Samuel Mason, who was selected by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to comply with a mission in Japan, at the beginning of 1918.[37]

Mason had the opportunity to meet some families who had been wandering in Russia for three years. The most fortunate and tenacious of them arrived in Japan via Vladivostok by steamship, or from Manchuria by steamer from Fusan (Korea) and this travel took two months to cover a journey of 1,500 miles. At Harbin, Vladivostok and other cities the refugees commonly slept in the railway stations, only a small percentage received communal aid. Their conditions seemed very tragic, at least reading Mason's comments about refugees at Harbin – "How they manage to live is a mystery." The same is true for his comments on the situation in Vladivostok, where many refugees were left without any help: they were actually scrambling for crumbs of bread wherever they could be found, and they slept in any shed they could find along the railroad tracks. The Russian emigrants arrived at Harbin and were cruelly exploited by organized swindlers, white slaves and opium traffickers. At Vladivostok, men, women and children were kept in dirty cellars, without beds and only to sleep upon. There was no separation of sexes, no protection for women and girls from sailors and soldiers.

Owing to the abnormal conditions in Siberia and Russian Manchuria, it was impossible to obtain accurate figures of the number of Jewish refugees and Mason himself seemed quite confused: once he pondered it was reasonable to think that there were above 20,000 Jewish refugees, all scattered East of the Urals; in another document he stated:

> *there must be at least one million Jewish souls somewhere between Moscow and Vladivostok who either have lost all trace of their relatives in this country, or have no relatives in this country or who are not desirous of coming to this country.*[38]

The emigrants were most of all well-to-do people who often succeeded in travelling in comfortable circumstances, bringing considerable amounts of roubles. But unfortunately, the exchange rate and the inflation did not favour them. Their roubles soon lost their original value and in Yokohama they were sold for the equivalent of six American cents.

Many people were directed to the US and many women, who represented the majority of these "Japanese" refugees, were just trying to reach their husbands.

37 He left New York on November 16, 1917, staying in Yokohama from January 1 until July 7, 1918 and coming back to New York, via Seattle, Vancouver on August 5, 1918. The results of his work were described in a report "Our mission to the Far East", dated August 12, 1918.

38 Confidential supplement to the public report of Samuel Mason (February 28, 1918). AJDC, HIAS 1918, item 5580.

Communication with America was very slow and sometimes a full month was needed to receive a cable. Mason also added that other refugees were starving in Siberia, between Chelyabinsk and Chita. These were not only Jews, but also Catholics, Armenians and Syrians; there were 11,000 refugees in Harbin and 4,000 in Yokohama.

According to a careful estimate, the total number of refugees in Russia (of all nationalities) was approximatively six million. The whole territory of the Tsarist Empire became an enormous hotbed of misery and despair and fed became the feeding ground for the tragic events that would subvert Russian politics and society after 1917. In this chaotic context, the refugees were not only simple victims of the war, but they were deeply affected by a whole of measures that were only indirectly related to the hostilities. They would soon experience the importance of social and geographical boundaries in a world that was changing, in large part as a consequence of the Great War.[39]

Conclusions

When talking about the conditions of European Jewry at the time of the First World War the most common reference is normally dedicated to the well-known Balfour Declaration dated November 2, 1917. This declaration was concerned with the creation of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Besides this outstanding document, many other events contributed to the consolidation of the idea of creating a Jewish state or a "national home." The First World War underlined the necessity to finally intervene and solve the long standing Jewish question and put an end to the historical discrimination against and the difficulties encountered by Jews in Europe since the Middle Ages. The violence that affected Eastern European Jewry during and after the war strengthened the expectations for a new and better Europe under the principle of national self-determination. This principle was to assure all people (or at least a great majority of them) the right to freely cultivate their creeds and identity in a "national state" or by guarantees of their civil and political equality in both law and reality. At the same time, these postwar developments proved that contemporary warfare could "produce" enormous amounts of victims, including not only casualties but also other sorts of sufferers: first and foremost, refugees. The mass movements of substantial groups of refugees generated many outstanding problems that could be resolved not exclusively through immediate relief and material assistance. This emergency had relevant consequences for the future of Eastern European Jewry. This was perfectly understood by the JDC leaders, who always approached the problems with an eye to the reconstruction after the conflict. This was simply intended as the restoration of devastated areas, but was actually aimed to enable the victims of war to resume their life anew and to take their own initiative in building a new life. From this perspective, the tasks of JDC were directed towards the development and renewal

39 Peter Gatrell, "Domestic and International Dimensions of Population Displacement in Russia, 1914-18," in *Russia in the Age of Wars*, ed. Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1998), 38-39.

of Jewish spirit and morale in particular. These efforts were supposed to help build cultural, benevolent, and technical institutions and to help integrate the various divergent groups and societies to a common purpose.

But on the other side, as Gatrell poignantly points out, the salvation of the refugees and their possible integration into the new European settlement was not so easy. Marginalized in their new communities, the refugees were shut out of the scramble for land and power that occurred all over Russia. They probably took little consolation in the fact that the subsequent Russian Civil War turned their hosts into refugees as well and made them turn away from them. On the other side, the presence of these people in many European countries was perceived as a "threat" to their national cohesion. The dilemma between repatriation and emigration, that was central in many reports, was solved over the years by the European political development in favour of the latter. Thus, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Balkans to the Baltic Countries, Jewish and Russian refugees were forced to rebuild their lives in communities that did not usually want them.

Only a part of the Jewish emigrants adhered to Zionism and to the idea of creating their own state in Palestine following the example of more ancient attempts to do so by Joseph Nasi and Sabbatai Zevi, or more recent attempts by Moses Montefiore and Theodor Herzl (who infused Zionism with a new ideology and a sense of practical urgency). The majority of Eastern European Jewry remained in Europe and experienced further troubles and discriminations, first of all in obtaining the citizenship, if they were entitled to possess it according to the laws of the newly created by the treaty of Versailles in order to replace the old multinational empires.[40]

The new Eastern European governments (for example, in Poland and Romania) did not handle the presence of refugees particularly well, and for these refugees the Great War only meant the start of a long odyssey that would end tragically only two decades later. In Russia, on the other hand, the outlook was equally problematic: The only "positive" consequence of the war was the legal abolition of the Pale of Settlement and the recognition of Jews' equal rights by the provisional government following February Revolution (legislation passed on March 21, 1917). But this formal achievement did present a significant improvement in terms of material conditions. On the contrary, the atmosphere even worsened and the liberal proclamations of the provisional government in 1917 were rarely followed by concrete changes. The anarchy that pervaded Russian troops had terrible consequences for the Jews who were seen by military units as Bolsheviks who were threatening the existence of Russia by helping the Germans outside and the

40 On the Jewish conditions in Eastern Europe, see Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Leon Poliakov, *History of Antisemitism. Suicidal Europe, 1870-1933*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977); Carlile Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); Giuseppe Motta, *Less than Nations. Central-Eastern European Minorities after WW1,* 2 vols. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

Bolsheviks in the interior. The gravest phase of violence, as a matter of fact, commenced during the second part of the war, when the legal forced expulsions theoretically ceased but were replaced by attacks and violence.

While the opponents were signing armistices and peace treaties, the Jews of Eastern Europe did not benefit from any truce and "witnessed" the October Revolution, the Russian Civil War and the Russo-Polish War, being affected by continuous violence and increasing misery. This turn of events produced another great wave of refugees who moved Westwards and represented the first "demanding job" for the recently founded League of Nations, which established a High Commission for Refugees in 1921.[41]

The violence of the conflict was repeated endless times and the years after 1918 recorded tragic and bloody pogroms that were carried out by troops of White and Red Armies, by Petliura's Ukrainian "patriots" and by the Polish army in the occupied Eastern territories. The archives of the Joint Distribution Committee contain many interesting reports concerning this post-war context and the subsequent relief effort (which was intensified due to the continuing humanitarian catastrophe). The funds were to be used for social and cultural purposes and to rebuild the basis of a community that had been almost destroyed by the conflict. Seen from this perspective the focal point of development aid became evident in an intricate web of different agencies, including schools, cooperative societies and loan houses that aimed to promote Jewish enterprises.

This work would prove to be very helpful during the following years, when the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe had to rebuilt their lives inside of the new states of Eastern Europe. They experienced many problems in their troublesome search for a decent, stable and safe place in the societies of twentieth century Europe. Ernest Hemmingway has suggested that the conflict was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that had ever taken place on earth. However, the conflict amounted to more than that: on the one hand, World War I interrupted a secular history of "forced residence" and oppression that created a storm of different perspectives ranging from Zionism to Bolshevism, on the other hand, the humanitarian crisis created by the war opened a new phase in Jewish history and compelled Jews to deal with a world of modern nations, leading to a strange combination of old and new problems and of ancient and modern prejudices.

41 The work of the League in this field has been analysed by Carlile MaCartney, *Refugees. The Work of the League* (London: League of Nations Union, 1931); Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Claudene Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1995).

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One hundred years ago Europe unleashed a storm of violence upon the world: The First World War had an enormous impact on the lives of Europeans, European history and culture. To this day, the iconic images of trench warfare in Belgium and France are burned onto our retinas, the names of its major battles, such as The Somme, Verdun and Ypres, are etched in our consciousness, as are the stories of modern warfare's greatest horrors: the usage of poison gas and new technical means such as aerial warfare and the tank.

In recent years it has become clear that this is only a small part of the Great War's history. In many senses there were other fronts: both geographically, as well as thematically the war was fought on fronts that have remained relatively 'unknown' to date. From a geographical perspective there were many other fronts on the European continent alone, there was fighting in the Balkans, in Romania and in the borderlands of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires (an area that is today part of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic States). Outside of Europe there was also warfare in European colonies in Africa and in the Middle East. Seen from a thematic angle, these 'unknown fronts' relate to the life and conduct of civilians and diplomats who lived and worked in the war. Civilians might serve as (para)medical professionals or might have fallen victim to one of the war's many violent episodes. Diplomats might have served the interests of their countries of origin in one of the many belligerents, yet, their documents can also shed light on different aspects of the war. Then there are soldiers themselves, whose voices have not always been heard. Yet another unknown front, is the life and work of intellectuals, who did not partake in violent actions, but often took up the weapon of the pen to wage their war.

Since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, many aspects of the Eastern fronts of the First World War have come to light and new sources have been uncovered. So to speak, there has been an 'Eastern turn' in First World War historiography. The scholars who contributed to this volume, all historians or literary scholars, have researched new sources on those Eastern fronts and have given new valuable insights in several 'unknown fronts' of the Great War, but also had to conclude that there are still many unanswered questions that need further inquiry. A revision of historiographical insights on the First World War is however warranted.

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