

Introduction. The Jews in Russia

THE CONDITIONS of Jews in Tsarist Russia were strongly conditioned by the existence of the Pale of Settlement, which practically represented a sort of open-air prison for the majority of Russian Jews, who were concentrated in some “special” areas next to the western frontiers (almost the entire Ukraine including Bessarabia, Russian Poland and the Lithuanian and White-Russian provinces).

The overwhelming majority of these approximately six million Jews lived in the cities, where Jewish middle-class (traders, professionals, merchants, manpower) gradually moved during the last decades of the 19th century, but also in the village, the *Shtetl* (from the German words *Städtel/Städtle*, that is to say “little town”), which was not a physical but a cultural space, representing the special Yiddish character of a good part of Eastern European Jewry.¹

This atmosphere staged the play of an incredible *coup de theatre* which would have tremendous consequences for their future in Europe: the Tsarist secret police commissioned a fraudulent pamphlet, the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which was published in 1903. This forged text was proposed as the proof of a Jewish conspiracy to conquer global power through finance, economy and politics, masonry, disorder, destruction of religion.

In the same years, another dramatic episode of anti-Jewish violence occurred at Kishinev, during the 1903 Passover, where a brutal pogrom took place. It was soon followed by another wave of pogroms (Odessa, Bialystok, Melitopol, Feodosiya) during the first weeks after the publication of the October Manifesto following the 1905 revolution. As Robert Weinberg underlined, immediately after the Tsar’s granting of fundamental civil rights and political liberties, pogroms, directed mainly at Jews, broke out in hundreds of cities, towns, and villages, resulting in deaths and injuries to thousands of people. In Odessa alone, the police reported that at least 400 Jews and 100 non-Jews were killed and approximately 300 people, mostly Jews, were injured, with some 1,632 Jewish houses, apartments, and stores incurring damage.²

1. On the history of Jews in Russia and Poland, see Semyon M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russian and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, vol. I (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), 408. See also, Evgenii Petrovich Semenov, *The Russian Government and the Massacres: A Page of the Russian Counter-Revolution* (London: Murray, 1907); Lucien Wolf ed., *Legal sufferings of the Jews in Russia* (London, 1912); *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, (London: Wertheimer, 1920); Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
2. 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*, Vol. 45, No. 4, (1955): 519.

Many authors, such as Cyrus Adler (one of the most energetic “activists” in the first decades of the 20th century), Samuel Joseph and Jonathan Frankel exhaustively pointed out how this turn of events had great consequences, not only in Russia, where the Jewish young generations increasingly adhered to radical movements, but also abroad.³ Discriminations and violence had the primary effect of increasing the emigration from the Tsar’s dominions, especially to the United States, where an important group of Jewish communities had established active organizations of charity and assistance.

Only a part of Jewish emigrants believed in Zionism and in the idea of creating their own state in Palestine, as proposed by Moses Montefiore and Theodor Herzl’s World Zionist Organisation (WZO).⁴ The emigration to the United States, on the contrary, increased during the period 1881-1910 and about the 90% of this flow came from Eastern Europe and especially from the Russian Pale of Settlement. In the Polish part of the latter, the feeling of anti-Semitism reached its most intense stage after 1912 when a split between the Polish National Democratic Party and the socialist Jews generated a harsh controversy and regarding Warsaw representative in the Russian Duma.

When the First World War broke out the problems of Russian Jews were aggravated by the dramatic coincidence of the Pale with the front where German, Habsburg and Russian troops started to fight. These problems were confirmed by the first information reporting about hundreds of Jews from Poland rushing to Lithuania in order to flee the frontier. Furthermore, the conditions of war troubled oversea emigration and caused a great mass of refugees in search of help and shelter in East-Central Europe or through Siberia and Japan. Unfortunately, the troubles were not generated only by battles and conflicts, but also by the reinforcement of the traditional hostility and by the rapid acceleration of the political crisis that had been affected Russia since the previous century.

3. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1864-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1981).
4. The Zionist movement was started by T. Herzl, 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); A. Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (New York, 1959); 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).

The Great War and Russian Jews

THE GREAT War represented an occasion for those Jews who hoped to reform Tsarist misrule and improve Jewish conditions. In many of the synagogues prayers were offered up for the success of the German army and it was not surprising, therefore, that many Jews viewed the Great War as the perfect occasion to change the situation of Russian Jews and, most of all, of the Tsarist Empire. Russian government was persecuting the Jews, suppressing and expelling them, seeking to separate the Jews from the Russians and crowding the former “into what has been styled the Pale of Settlement”: four million persons were compelled to live within these quarters, and this constriction was just a sign of a deep-rooted “cesspool of ignorance and superstition”, an “epidemic of nation-wide persecution and popular anti-Jewish hatred”.⁵

The enemies of Russia, Germany in particular, were fully aware of this state of things and tried to exploit the situation and re-address the hostility of Jewish people against Russian troops. In 1914 the German command inaugurated its strategy for conquering the sympathies of these Jews and received the help of the Zionist leaders Max Isidor Bodenheimer and Nahum Sokolow, and of associations such as the *Komitee für den Osten* and the *Mannesmann-Comité*. The German Committee for the Freeing of Russian Jews (*Deutsches Komitee zur Befreiung der russischen Juden*) was created in August 1914 while many leaflets were distributed by the German and Austro-Hungarian armies in the occupied zones of Poland together with a propaganda bulletin in Yiddish and Hebrew entitled *Der Emes*, reminding to the Jews (*An die Juden in Polen!*) of the constant anti-Jewish persecution in Russia.

Naturally, the Tsar tried to annul this potential menace and during the first months of the war issued a proclamation to his “dear Jews” and even decorated some of them, such as the Rabbi of Kovel (Volhynia), Bruk, in August 1914. On his part, the Jewish deputy of the Duma from the province of Kaunas, Naphtali Friedman, in the historic “war session” of the Russian Duma (August 8, 1914), assured the authorities and his colleagues that the Russian Jews would have gone to “the field of battle shoulder to shoulder with the other nationalities of the Empire”.

But Friedman’s words did not produce the right effect and resulted quite useless in fighting the secular “tradition” of diffidence and suspicions regarding the Jews as potential spies. As a matter of fact, the legal disabilities remained untouched and, albeit the generous promises of the Tsar, the first military measures of the army confirmed that hostility was still prevailing in the institutions.

The Eastern Front showed many particular features: it changed much more rapidly than the Western one and these continuous movements troubled the relief and aid of the victims. This emergence has been underlined by many historiographic works (Altshuler, Ansky, Bianchi, Gatrell, Goldin, Levene, Lohr, Prusin). Eric Lohr,

5. “War Items of Special Jewish Interests”; “Russia and the Jew”, *The Sentinel*, August 14, 1914.

in particular, reviewed the different dispositions that the Russian army adopted during the war and underlined how the latter were inspired by the vision of Jews as an unreliable element: spies or deserters who were to be removed from the zones of major strategic importance.⁶ As a consequence, military commands used the War Statute of 1914, and the unlimited powers that this act bestowed upon them, to “cleanse” certain areas from Jews, Germans and foreigners (who were all considered as potential spies) and to consequently adopt a gamut of different measures targeted at these particular groups. Lohr distinguished between four different phases of this policy beginning with the deportations or forced expulsions in July 1914-January 1915. During the second phase, this system was better organized with a circular (January 25, 1915) in which the commander in chief of the Army, Nikolaj Januskevic, instructed all the commanders to expel all Jews and suspect individuals from the entire region of military activity. In April-May 1915, the third phase commenced with larger scale mass deportations: in this case the deportees were assigned destinations in advance and the travels were better organized with the use of trains and the help of civilians. These measures, anyway, were not fully implemented owing to technical problems and to the lack of space where to deport the Jews: 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. In addition to this lack of space, some civil and political authorities complained that this policy was impoverishing local economy, as removing the Jews in many cases meant a paralysis of certain economic sectors.

In this context, another practice was also used, the hostage-taking, which marked the passage to a new phase. As transferring whole populations generated many inconveniences, the commands ordered that deportation was to be replaced with hostage-taking, allowing the communities of deportees to return back home under the condition that hostages were to be taken from each group.

Deportations and hostage-taking declined in scale by the end of 1915, but the army commanders still retained the power of deciding forced expulsions and taking hostages, and many kept on using this prerogative also in the following years.

This whole of discriminatory measures created a legitimized framework for anti-Jewish violence which punctually broke out during the conflict. A large wave of pogroms began in 1915 and was “caused” by the Russian retreat and by the aggressiveness of some Cossack units, who often instigated to violence encouraging popular participation in looting and violence.

6. Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). 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); Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Samuel Goldin, “Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command 1914 – 1915”, *Jews in Eastern Europe*, (Spring, 2000): 40-73.

In May 1915, the Russian-Jewish Relief Committee (Ekopo) that was established in Petrograd as the central institution of relief, issued a report according to which in Poland there were at least 200 towns and about 9,000 townlets and villages that had suffered from the war, producing a big damage in terms of agricultural and industrial production. This document estimated that about two million Jews had been directly affected by the war: many of them had been forcibly expelled from their residence while others decided to flee but also to come back. In 1915, the Jewish deputy of 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: "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".⁷ 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.⁸

A special conference for the Organization of War Refugees was summoned by Jewish organizations in cooperation with the government and also this institution recorded a rapid increase of refugees. The account of March 1, 1916, for example, registered a total number of 185,596 refugees (on November 1, 1915, there were only 160,000) and in some places the situation was undoubtedly more serious. In few months, Vilnius (Wilna) passed from 1,135 to 3,166, Poltava from 5,366 to 10,842 refugees. The provinces of North-Western front-line (Vilnius, Vitebsk, Livonia, Minsk, Moghilev) hosted 53,534 refugees; those of the South-Western frontline were even more "crowded" (41,146 refugees in Ekaterinoslav, Poltava, Taurida, Kharkoff; 16,836 refugees in Bessarabia, Volhynia, Kieff, Podolia and Tehernigoff); the provinces of the interior or of the rear numbered 74,078 refugees.

In April 1916, the report of Ekopo took into consideration the number of 400,000 refugees. In March 1917, Dr. Otto Schiff, the Secretary of the Fund for the Relief of the Jewish Victims of the War in Russia based in London, wrote to the JDC estimating that one and a half million Jews lost their homes, at least according to the inquiries of the Russian Jewish Statistical society: 31% was settled in the war zone, 31% in South Russia, 16% in Central Russia, 16% in Volga provinces, 6% in Urals, Siberia and Central Asia.

Most of these wanderers found their way into larger cities such as Warsaw or Lodz where they increased the large number of unemployed and impoverished people. Other cities of the interior of Russia began to feel the forced invasion of

7. "Victory cheers Germany. Big Capture of Russians looked from Following Vilna's Fall", *New York Times*, September 22, 1915.

8. Michael C. Hickey, "Revolution on the Jewish Street: Smolensk, 1917", *Journal of Social History*, 31 (4), 1998: 826.

these homeless people and the respective governors often asked for a forced return of these refugees to their native places.

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 – especially from Galicia – hoped to find better living conditions. According to a report of the *Israelitische Allianz zu Wienn* (November 17, 1916), Bohemia hosted 75,135 refugees; Mahrend 31,344; East Silesia 7,000; Steiermark 4,000; Northern Austria 10,000; Vienna and Southern Austria 50,000; Western Austria 200,000. But these numbers were not destined to decrease, even if the policy of forced expulsions was partially abandoned, at least at the level of government policies. In fact, the conflict exacerbated the hostility between Poles and Jews and 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 succeeded in driving their opponents back. Severe punishments were inflicted upon the Jews of the war zone who were charged for high treason according to the Polish accusations but were many times proved innocent by the witnesses. The Russian military authorities preferred to seek a scapegoat for their failures and to give Polish accusations wide circulation such as in the case reported by a military paper, “*Naš Vestnik*”, on May 5 (18) 1915 regarding Kuzhi. This village was attacked by Germans on the night of April 28, 1915: the local Jews were accused of helping the German invaders but the investigation of some deputies of the Duma discovered that in the entire village of Kuzhi there were only six Jewish families and that their houses were not so huge to host German soldiers as the previous accusations had underlined. Furthermore, these Jews had escaped before the arrival of the Germans and were residing in a near village during the attack.

But the history of Russian Jews during the war is full of atrocities, devastations and episodes of violence. Many of them are mentioned by the Šlojme-Zanvl Rappoport, who is better known as the Semën Akimovič An-skij, in the well-known *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I* ☒

The Jewish journalist, for example, described the Russian invasion of Brody, where a real “army of poor, ragged, famished kids” (Christians and Jews) walked through the ruins of the market begging for a *kopek*. Almost half of the town had been burned down, including several hundred Jewish houses and the old market place, which looked impoverished and dejected. Many stores, especially the bigger and richer ones, were locked or boarded up.⁹

9. Ansky stressed that every street received a new fancy name after Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, and Turgenev. Naming these horribly deformed streets after the luminaries of Russian culture was quite ironic and this irony had escaped the victors, who were not able to realize how offen-

Ansky also 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 in a sack on his shoulders a German man and 2,500 silver thalers at a blockade of Russian troops.¹⁰

Another complete first-hand description of the conflict within the former Pale of Settlement (it was abolished in spring 1917) was drafted in 1918 by Albert Van Raalte, who left The Hague, in February 1918, went to Berlin and spent 75 days visiting the different localities and contacting the different Jewish communities in the German-occupied zone (the cities of Warsaw, Kaunas, Vienna, Vilnius).

“At Kowno I visited the Ludendorf kitchen with Mr.Struch. When leaving this place we passed two girls of about 16 and 12 years old. The youngest girl was carrying a pan of soup which she had fetched from the kitchen. The elder, we thought, had eaten her soup in the kitchen, and so we asked her whether she had enjoyed her meal, her answer was “I did not eat today, I had no money”.

In the home for the old people at Grodno I saw a woman, who six weeks previously had been taken up almost starved. Notwithstanding the careful treatment the poor woman was not yet recovered, hunger had undermined too much of her strength.

I shall give you the description of her outward appearance. In the Marx asylum at Wilna I saw a nice little boy. He was called “Friedrica”, whether the child’s parents were still living, they did not know, they did not even know his name. And this is the case with so many.

In a children-kitchen at Wilna I met a beautiful girl of 11 years old. I asked her why she did not go to school. Well, she said, because I must look after my four little brothers and sisters.¹¹

sive it was to the memory of those great Russian authors. Semyon Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2002): 68 ff.

10. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 19.

11. 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, 27. JDC Archives, 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”, *The First World War: Analysis and Interpretation*, vol.2, ed. A.Biagini - G. Motta, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

The Action of Relief. The Joint Distribution Committee

THE SITUATION of Russian Jews created a tragic “humanitarian emergency” and was followed by the initiative of many national and international societies. First of all, the Russian Jewish communities prompted a set of relief measures and at Petrograd the Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (Ekopo) was set up. It was structured into a coordinated whole of local committees and branches all over Russia and other existing societies such as the Society for the Advancement of Education among the Jews (OPE, created in 1863), the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population (OZE, founded in 1912) and others.

But this intricate whole of societies, committees and organizations had to deal with many difficulties, first of all with a general lack of funds which was only partially covered by funds such as the Princess Tatiana Relief Fund and by the sums that the government provided only since 1915. The conditions of Russia were alarming and the widespread information regarding this catastrophe caused a quick race for charity and solidarity, for example in the United States, where a substantial community of Jewish immigrants from Russia had settled, in Great Britain and in other states such as France and Germany.

The American organizations immediately reacted to the tragedy of WW1 and the 1914 meetings of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) organized the structure of the funds and their destination focusing on Palestine and, at the same time, explaining that:

“our duty is not, however, confined to come to the assistance of the unfortunate Jews of Turkey, but the great body of Jews of Russia, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, and of other affected lands where for weeks past has occurred the most destructive warfare known to history, stand in grievous need, and must of necessity look to us for assistance” (Eighth Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee, November 1914).

Numerous appeals were arriving from Antwerp and from many European societies such as the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, the Anglo-Jewish Association, the *Israelitische Allianz* of Vienna, and to meet these needs the Committee reserved a sum of the emergency fund and issued a call for the establishment of a general relief fund.

In 1914, the US Ambassador to Istanbul, Mr. Henry Morgenthau, travelled to Palestine and, alarmed by the misery of the region, solicited an economic help from the United States. In a telegram, he talked about a “terrible crisis” and the menace of “serious destruction” which derived from the fact that the Turkish authorities compelled many Jews to join the army and many families remained

without any “breadwinner”, many of them moving to Constantinople. In August 1914, Morgenthau’s solicitations reached the leaders of the AJC, through the secretary of State W.J. Brian, and Jacob H. Schiff and Louis Marshall immediately got involved in order to respond to such an alarm. In a letter dated September 4, 1914, Morgenthau reminded L. Marshall of the Jewish conditions in Palestine:

“Most of them have always depended for their support on charitable institutions and benevolent men in other countries, and now that the inflow of money has absolutely ceased, most of the societies will have to be abandoned, and it is almost too horrible to think of what will become of the poor men that will be stranded high and dry”.

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. 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). In August 1915, the People’s Relief committee (with a socialist orientation) was organized as the third member-organization of the JDC.¹²

But the JDC did not have the staff or the structures to get directly involved in this work of relief and had to rely on the existing societies and on the different committees that had already started their activities in the war zone. The work in Europe was carried out thanks to the US institutions such as the Departments of State and of War, which channelled the funds and organized a central committee – Max Senior and Doris Bogen were involved in this complex work of organization – in order to distribute and administer this money in Europe establishing the headquarters in the USA diplomatic mission in Amsterdam.

As a consequence, the first actions of the JDC consisted primarily in financing different associations in order to establish solid contacts within them. Financing was possible thanks to the funds that the American institutions and some special banks such as Kuhn, Loeb & Co. The financial support of the JDC continued in the following years and by the end of 1917, the JDC had transferred \$2,532,000 to Russia, \$3,000,000 to German-occupied Poland and Lithuania, \$1,532,300 to Galicia, and \$76,000 to Romania. These amounts proved that the first aids were soon implemented and represented just the beginning of a complex work of relief consisting not only in providing for immediate material aids, but also in creating the basis for the future reconstruction. Under this perspec-

12. 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).

tive, the purpose of the JDC was briefly described by one of its agent, Mr. Zuckerman, “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”.

The tasks of the JDC were particularly directed to the development and renewal of Jewish spirit and morale; to help build up cultural, benevolent, and technical institutions; to help integrate the various divergent groups and societies to a common purpose. In this context, the reconstruction could not be simply intended as the restoration of the devastated areas, but it included the aim to enable the victims of war to resume their life anew and to apply their own efforts for their rehabilitation.

At the same time, the relief should also strengthen the Jewish political field and “encourage” those communal activities that would tend to correct the old evils and abuses that had weighted down the life of Russian Jews, for example helping the Jewish welfare work in interlocking with non-Jewish welfare work. Only in this way it was thought that in the long run the morale and economic support of American Jews might prove to be even more valuable than their material support.

The American aids were particularly important in two sectors: the medico-sanitary organization, which lacked skilled Jewish physicians and surgeons as many of them had been sent to the front during the war, killed or incapacitated; 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, and marked the passage from a policy of assistance to one of the first examples of what we call today “development aid”.

In the same period, analogous initiatives were flowering also in other countries, for example in England, where the troubles of Jews were associated to the debates concerning their patriotism, on the one side, and the alliance with Tsarist Russia, on the other.¹³ Here, a London Relief Fund was established, and soon the Anglo-Jewish Association prompted a whole set of measures not only to col-

13. Such correspondence was representative for a controversy that rumbled in the columns of the *Chronicle* and the *World* from late 1914. The JC, for instance, noted with evident disgust that in its annual report the AJA had unusually failed to make a single reference to the conditions faced by the Jews in Russia and Poland. By the end of October 1915, the Anglo-Jewish establishment had made relief in Eastern Europe its priority. It issued an urgent appeal for its newly formed Fund for the Relief of Jewish Victims of the War in Russia (its title mirrored its Russian partner). Leopold de Rothschild and Lord Swaythling (formerly Louis Montagu) were respectively named president and treasurer. Sam Johnson, “Breaking or Making the Silence? British Jews and East European Jewish Relief, 1914–1917”, *Modern Judaism* 30, 1 (2010): 95-119.

lect money for the relief of Eastern European Jews, but also to denounce the Russian ally and its treatment of Jews.

Other actions were taken by other associations such as the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Paris or the *Israelitische Allianz* in Vienna, which pursued the same targets and contributed to alleviate, directly or through other committees, the conditions of the Eastern European Jewry. In the United States, an important contribution was rendered also by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), which served not only for the reception of the last large influx of migrants, but also for securing permission from German and Austrian commands for residents of the military zones to write short messages to their families in the US.¹⁴ This assistance had an important moral value, as it resulted to be essential for those who had not received any word from husbands and relatives since the outbreak of the war.¹⁵ Furthermore, HIAS established a branch in Seattle, a port of arrival for Russian refugees, and up to December 1915 helped more than 13,000 Jewish refugees.¹⁶

The JDC played a crucial role in sustaining Jewish lives throughout the war zones, but it primarily focused attention on Palestine and those Eastern European countries with the largest populations of Jews at risk: Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Latvia. At first, the JSC transferred funds and supplies to Jewish communities in need with the help of foreign consuls and relief organizations that were operating in those regions. The JDC shipped food, clothing, medicine, and money; supported soup kitchens and other meal programs for starving people; and enabled individual American Jews to send help to their loved ones abroad. These actions could be taken only thanks to the support of the American government, for example by approaching the American Secretary of the Navy, whose consent was necessary in order to infringe the blockade, and in March 1915, the JDC dispatched some \$1.5 million in relief, along with 900 tons of food and medicine, to Palestine on the ship *Vulcan*.

Furthermore, the JDC received permission from the US State Department to establish a transmission department (on January 1, 1915, under the supervision of Harriett Lowenstein) to deliver personal remittances to those areas where normal transmission agencies were not able to function because of the war, and to create a committee of Dutch representatives to administer relief funds to the European Jews in enemy-occupied countries. The support of the US government was evident when, at the urging of friends of the Jewish people in the United States Senate, after a resolution introduced by Senator Martine of New Jersey,

14. Lawrence J. Epstein, *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side, 1880-1920* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2001).

15. "Jews in Russia seek their friends here", *New York Times*, December 16, 1917.

16. "Report Great Work for Jewish Relief", *New York Times*, January 4, 1916.

President Wilson made January 27, 1916 the Jewish Sufferers Relief Day. On that day more than \$1 million was collected.¹⁷

This public support was absolutely necessary owing to the rigid conditions the conflict imposed on commerce, communications and transport of persons and goods. American agents in Europe had the fundamental role of carrying out this intense activity of relief: the American Ambassador to Petrograd, David R. Francis, was used by chairman Felix Warburg as a “middleman” for the communications with the Jewish Colonization Association in Russia, which received the first remittances, and the same role was played by other American consuls, for example in Stockholm.¹⁸ Naturally, the same strategy was adopted in the relations with the Russian consuls in the US, for instance with Hon. C.J. Medzakhovsky, the commercial attaché in New York, who was approached in order to obtain permission and fiscal exemptions for the passage of food and clothing in the port of Archangel.¹⁹

Also the support of the Federal Reserve was particularly important in order to direct the American money to Europe, and this attention was proved by many letters in which Ambassador Francis appears extremely involved in the distribution of funds and in its management, for example by approaching the leaders of local Jewish communities, providing for the budgets of the different Russian committees, rerouting the sums, or obtaining detailed information about the sanitary conditions in the Russian camps for prisoners of war.²⁰

The contributions had been collected since the beginning of the war and, it was estimated by Albert Lucas, they reached a per capita sum of more than \$6 each (considering a general Jewish population of 3 million people): naturally some contributors had significant means (Julius Rosenwald of Chicago donated \$1,000,000), but the great mass of collections was represented by moderate contributions from “those who had little if anything to spare above their own needs.”²¹

The money collected in the US was sent through the Kuhn & Loeb bank to Europe, where it was managed by the Dutch committee. Then the funds were dis-

17. On February 17, Wilson received the representatives of the Central Relief committee and of the Women's Proclamation Committee, who expressed him their most sincere gratitude. On January 27, during the Jewish Relief Day, the collections reached about \$2,000,000.

18. Letter of F. Warburg to D.M. Bressler, July 6, 1915. The remittances were arriving from the relatives all over the world, for example from Argentina. JDC Archives: Organization, 6709.

19. Document of January 16, 1916. JDC Archives: Russia, General 1916, 10047.

20. On May 15, 1916 Francis wrote to Paul Warburg (Felix's brother), a member of the Federal reserve board in Washington, thanking him because the federal reserve had greatly contributed to the mission in Russia and to his movements. On August 22, 1916, he explained to Felix Warburg how the American funds were distributed through the Jewish Colonization Association to committees in Petrograd and Moscow. JDC A, Russia, General 1916: items 10053, 10054.

21. Albert Lucas, “American Jewish Relief in the World War”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 79, (1918).

tributed to local committees, such as the Russian Ekopo, which received money from the JDC to look after the refugees from the war areas, especially the ones who came from enemy (Austrian) territory, who were forbidden by the Tsarist government to receive help from Russian Jewish institutions.

In German-occupied Poland, the JDC could count on the help of the German Jewish aid society for Jews with the funds that were distributed through Hamburg and the bank of Max Warburg, Felix Warburg's brother.²² Having received the JDC's funds from Felix Warburg, Max Warburg then typically turned over a portion of the funds to the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden*, an established relief organization of well-to-do German Jews, and credited some of the monies to an account in Vienna via Maximilian Paul-Schiff, the committee's representative who, in his turn, re-directed them to the East Galicia committee in Lemberg which covered about 90 cities.

The money was distributed according to the needs of the different associations, called *landsmanshaften*, which solicited donations from their members in the United States. To receive this relief the different local organizations had to fill in a "Landsmanschaften questionnaire" indicating the name and the data concerning the organization, the legal representatives and other details. These documents were collected directly by the JDC agents in the second part of 1915 and distributed among the applicants.

The sums could be substantial (for example, \$200,000 were sent to Russia and \$200,000 to German-occupied Poland and Lithuania on October 10, 1916) or minimal in some residual cases when the help was directed towards little sporadic groups (the Jewish refugees in Alexandria received \$1,500 on July 14, 1916 for 4 months).²³ Furthermore, while this set of actions was referred to as "general relief", the transmission department established in 1915 to deliver personal remittances, provided for "individual relief" to those areas in Europe and Palestine where normal transmission agencies were unable to function under war conditions. In this way, the relatives from the West had to deposit small amounts of money (typically \$5 or \$10, up to \$100) for the JDC to remit to their relatives overseas.²⁴

In 1916, the relationships with Europe were more frequent and well-organized and the JDC sent some representatives directly to Europe: on July 26, Magnes sailed for Russia on the steamer *Frederic VIII* via Christiania and Stockholm,

22. These are the sums given to Germany in the first phase; up to December 31, 1915, 304,009.25 marks; January 1- July 25 1916, 3,758,769.89 mk; July 25-September 30, 1916, 2,417,641.84; totally 6,480,510.98 marks.

23. Financial Report of the Central Jewish Committee for Aiding War Victims (from the commencement of its activities to July 1916). JDC A., Russia general 1916, item 147.

24. The total number reported by A. Lucas in September 1918 included 24658 remittances reaching an amount of \$607,808.32. Lucas, "American Jewish Relief in the World War", 227.

returning on November 1. This kind of travel intensified during the following months and especially in 1917, after the Declaration of War against Germany on April 2.

Once America entered the war, the usual methods of distribution were cut off. The JDC sent its representatives (Boris D. Bogen and Max Senior) to neutral Holland to organize and oversee a branch office in The Hague obtaining the consent of the State Department on June 10. In this phase the most spectacular of the campaigns was undertaken in New York City, where an intensive campaign was led by Jacob Schiff and Jacob Billikopf reaching approximately \$5,000,000 and this initiative was the climax of the campaign to raise \$10,000,000 in 1917.

The American military intervention meant further obstacles in the relief work. After America's entry into the war the major problem was how to transfer money to areas under enemy control. Many authorizations to transmit funds to Europe were subsequently nullified by the Trading with the Enemy Act of November 2, and new permissions were required to send money to the regions under German occupation such as Poland and Romania. In this phase, the War Trade Board had to "license" every single remittance.²⁵

In accordance with the War Trade Board, the JDC sent more than five million dollars abroad in 1918, following more or less these steps: from the headquarters in New York to the State Department in Washington; from Washington to the US Ambassador to the Netherlands; then to the Dutch Foreign Ministry, to a committee of Dutch Jews, to Max Warburg, and then on to Poland and Austria as before. By the end of 1918, the JDC had managed to collect over \$16.5 million by perfecting fund-raising techniques, largely through the work of Jacob Billikopf, of the Kansas City Federation of Jewish Charities. The money was very carefully distributed in Austria and, after 1917, to those parts of Romania that could be reached and to the other areas of greatest suffering.²⁶ As for Russia, the situation was still more complicated for the 1917 revolutions made it increasingly difficult to transfer money to Petrograd. In September 1917, before the October Revolution, the JDC was able to successfully transfer money to Russia for the last time, but afterwards crucial messages of the JDC could reach Ekopo only with great delays. As a consequence, Ekopo had to borrow money through other channels, relying on the promise of JDC funds once the war and the revolutionary

25. For example, the authorization of August 24, 1917, to transmit funds was nullified on October 16, 1917. Item 150, 1918 Chronology. "Special arrangements announced by Albert Lucas to send remittances to Germany and countries occupied by Germany", *New York Times*, March 7, 1917.

26. The sum of 16.5 was mentioned by Y. Bauer, while another source referred to about 13.75 million dollars across Europe and the Near East during the war, Jaclyn Granick, "Waging relief: the politics and logistics of American Jewish war relief in Europe and the Near East (1914–1918)", *First World War Studies*, 51 (2014): 57.

tumult would pass. The relief funds sent since the outbreak of the war until July 31, 1918 were directed in particular towards Russia (\$2,812,300.00), Poland (\$5,376,662.98), Austria-Hungary (\$1,583,700.00) and Palestine (\$1,571,485.86) while only \$616,004.30 reached Turkey and \$135,900 Romania.²⁷

But the collection of funds continued even after the end of war, as it was clear that the consequences of the conflict were to be felt for many years. The initiatives were reiterated and, if possible, increased and, while the United War Work Campaign of New York sent to Europe \$700,000 in the first half of November 1918, in December it aimed to reach \$1,000,000.²⁸

Conclusions

AN OUTSTANDING, and at the same time paradoxical consequence of the conflict, was that the discriminations during the war produced the first virtual abolition of the Pale of Settlement, as in 1915, as a natural consequence of the war decrees, the Council of ministers permitted for the first time the Jews to move to the interior of Russia. This abolition, anyway, was considered by Jews just a temporary expedient, as it was dictated mainly by military necessity. In fact, the Jews could not be settled “satisfactorily” – without generating the protest of local non-Jewish communities and of the governors in the districts of destination – within the territories of the Pale and it was necessary to move them elsewhere.

This assertion was proved by a book published by the American Jewish Committee, which quoted the minutes of the Council of Ministers (August 4-17, 1915) clearly stressing that the necessity to such a measure was due to the growing flow of Jewish refugees and the unrest provoked by the latter.

A certain “sympathy” towards the Jewish situation increased only with the rise of liberals inside the Duma, especially in 1917, but before the Revolutions the government carried out no radical changes in the legal and material conditions of the Jews who were destined to live in a territory constantly subjected to the menaces of an invading army and to the destruction caused by war.

Naturally, the chaos which was increasingly affecting Russia did not contribute to helping the Jewish interests and also the recognition of Jews’ equal rights by the provisional government following February Revolution (legislation passed on March 21, 1917) did not meet a significant improvement 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

27. Lucas, “American Jewish Relief in the World War”, 228.

28. “To seek \$5,000,000 for Starving Jews”, *The New York Times*, November 25, 1918.

who were seen by the military units as Bolsheviks who were threatening the existence of Russia helping the Germans. The gravest phase of violence, as a matter of fact, commenced during the second part of the war, when the legally forced expulsions theoretically ceased but were replaced by new attacks and violence. As Dubnow pointed out concluding his 3 volumes about the history of Jews in Russia and Poland, the 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”.²⁹ This phase produced a whole of serious consequences that continued to affect Jewish life also in the following years. As a matter of fact, while the opponents were signing armistices and peace treaties, the Jews of Eastern Europe did not experience any truce and “assisted” to the Russian Civil War and the Russo-Polish War, being affected by continuous violence and increasing misery. This turn of events produced a great wave of refugees who moved Westwards and represented a first “demanding job” for the new international institutions (the League of Nations established a High commission for refugees in 1921).

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 the White and the Red Armies, by Petljura’s Ukrainian “patriots”, by the Polish army in the occupied Eastern territories. The conflict, thus, had a special meaning for the Jews of Eastern Europe. On the one side, it interrupted a secular history of “forced residence” and oppression creating for them a complicated storm of different perspectives, which ranged from Zionism or emigration to Bolshevism. On the other hand, the war opened a phase of humanitarian emergency that recalled the attention of foreign organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee. The relief was extraordinary and maybe for the first time it was not only directed towards the concession of material aids, but it also aimed to create the basis for a future reconstruction. Unfortunately, this reconstruction too met new serious hurdles and for many Eastern European Jews it was not followed by a substantial improvement. The experience of the JDC during WW1, anyway, would be extremely helpful also three decades later and became one of the most outstanding of solidarity and relief in favour of the victims of war.

29. S. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, vol. 3, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920).

