

The Impact of Jewish Overseas Relief on American Jewish and Non-Jewish Philanthropy, 1914-1927

Z O S A S Z A J K O W S K I

I

At the outbreak of World War I in August, 1914, there was no American Jewish organization for overseas relief. The National Committee for Relief of Sufferers by Russian Massacres, founded after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, and the Committee for Relief of Jewish Sufferers by War and Massacre in Turkey and the Balkans, founded during the Balkan wars, had ceased to operate. The existing Jewish services were unprepared for and also unconcerned with problems of overseas relief.¹ Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were interested in overseas relief work, but American Jewish charity was then in the hands of Jews of German birth or origin. According to one source, American Jews of predominantly German background had donated \$100,000,000 for Jewish educa-

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The following abbreviations of sources are used in the notes: AJAr = American Jewish Archives; AJHS = American Jewish Historical Society; Lehman Papers = Herbert H. Lehman Papers, Columbia University Library; Magnes Papers = Judah L. Magnes Papers, Historical General Archives, Jerusalem; NCJSS = Proceedings of the National Conference of Jewish Social Service at annual sessions.

¹ "Special committees were organized for the purpose of raising funds. In this particular instance the organizations directly concerned with Jewish charitable efforts in their country did not initiate this particular movement": Boris D. Bogen, *Jewish Philanthropy* (New York, 1917), p. 57; "[The local American Jewish social service,] as a whole, has not been seriously concerned with the problem": Report by Louis M. Cahn, Washington, May 13-16, 1923, in *NCJSS* (New York, 1924), p. 6; "While the [Welfare] Federations in most cities at this time were not the direct instruments for overseas fund raising": Harry L. Lourie, *A Heritage Affirmed* (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 93.

tional and relief purposes between 1880 and 1910.² Before 1914, there were only isolated cases of collaboration between Jews of German origin and Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in charitable agencies. In most cases, the "Russian" newcomers' charitable initiative was barely tolerated by their "German" coreligionists.

In 1925, the social worker Samuel A. Goldsmith put it this way: "Have we not neglected . . . the groups of the Eastern European Jews until they have almost become millionaires, until they have been able to build, without our guidance or help, million dollar structures, been able to finance their own systems of education, their own hospitals?"³ But there was also a profound gap between the administrators and the recipients of Jewish relief administered by the "German" Jews, an "unfortunate relation of benefactor and beneficiary, which was made still more difficult by unsympathetic treatment on the part of untrained and ill-paid charity clerks and even ignorant volunteer workers."⁴

After the outbreak of World War I, three American Jewish Agencies were created for the purpose of collecting funds for overseas relief: the Central Relief Committee [CRC], organized by the Orthodox early in October, 1914; the American Jewish Relief Committee [AJRC], created on October 25, 1914, under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee and looking for support mainly to the rich Reform Jews; and the People's Relief Committee [PRC], founded on August 8, 1915, by labor and liberal organizations. On November 27, 1914, even before the PRC came into being, the CRC and the AJRC had joined forces to establish the Joint Distribution Committee [JDC], in order to centralize the distribution of relief in war-stricken countries.

² Address by Max Senior, Cincinnati, June 1, 1938 (Senior Papers, AJAr).

³ NCJSS [Denver, June 7-10, 1925] (New York, 1926), p. 228. See also H. Silver, "The Russian Jew and Charity," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, IV, No. 2 (1927), 129-44; Lourie, pp. 50-56.

⁴ Morris D. Waldman, *The Organization Problem of Jewish Community Life in America* [Address delivered at the National Conference of Jewish Charities, Indianapolis, May 9, 1916] (n. p., n. d.), pp. 4-5.

WHO WILL LOOK AFTER THESE PEOPLE?

At first some of the AJRC supporters opposed a separate campaign for Jews in the war-stricken countries. Two days after the AJRC was created, Felix M. Warburg, who became its treasurer, wrote to Louis Marshall that, by establishing a separate Jewish committee, "we give the American Red Cross and their relief committees an excuse for excluding the Jewish sufferers from help from them."⁵ *The Jewish Exponent* of Philadelphia commented on November 13, 1914: "A Christian gentleman who takes an intelligent interest in Jewish affairs expressed surprise at the movement to organize a separate relief fund for the Jews in the war zone in Europe." It was, replied the editor, because of the peculiar position of the persecuted Jews that "a distinctive Jewish fund is needed, and not for any consideration of a separatist nature." That same day, in Cincinnati, the well-known Reform rabbi, Dr. David Philipson, also wrote Louis Marshall to express his opposition to a separate Jewish campaign. Marshall's answer is worth quoting *in extenso*:

The raising of a special fund for Jews, either at home or abroad, is nothing new. Unfortunately we have been compelled to help one another for centuries, because nobody else has been willing to help us. It is all very fine to speak about the brotherhood of man and to cast down all barriers, but the fact remains that conditions are such that they must be dealt with practically, and not from the standpoint of the millennium.

The present war affects the Jews to a greater extent than has any calamity in our history. The actual fighting is in progress, within the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia, in the district in which the Jews live in Galicia, and in Eastern Prussia. More than six million of our co-religionists are directly affected. Their homes are over-run by the warring armies. Their property is being dissipated. They are subjected to all of the sufferings incident to the passage and repassage of hostile armies. It is calculated that over three hundred thousand are now in the Russian army. There are at least one hundred thousand in the Austrian army, and probably as many in the German army. Before the war ends, there will be many widows and orphans; many young and vigorous men crippled for life; disease and famine, and destitution, almost beyond the power of imagination.

⁵ Warburg to Marshall, Oct. 27, 1914 (Marshall Papers, AJAr).

Who will look after these people? Will the Russians or the Poles, or the Austrians do it? What earnest have we in the history of the past decade, that anything may be expected from them? Even now the Polish boycott against the Jews is in full blast, and within the past few days the Poles have been engaged in conducting pogroms against the Jews.

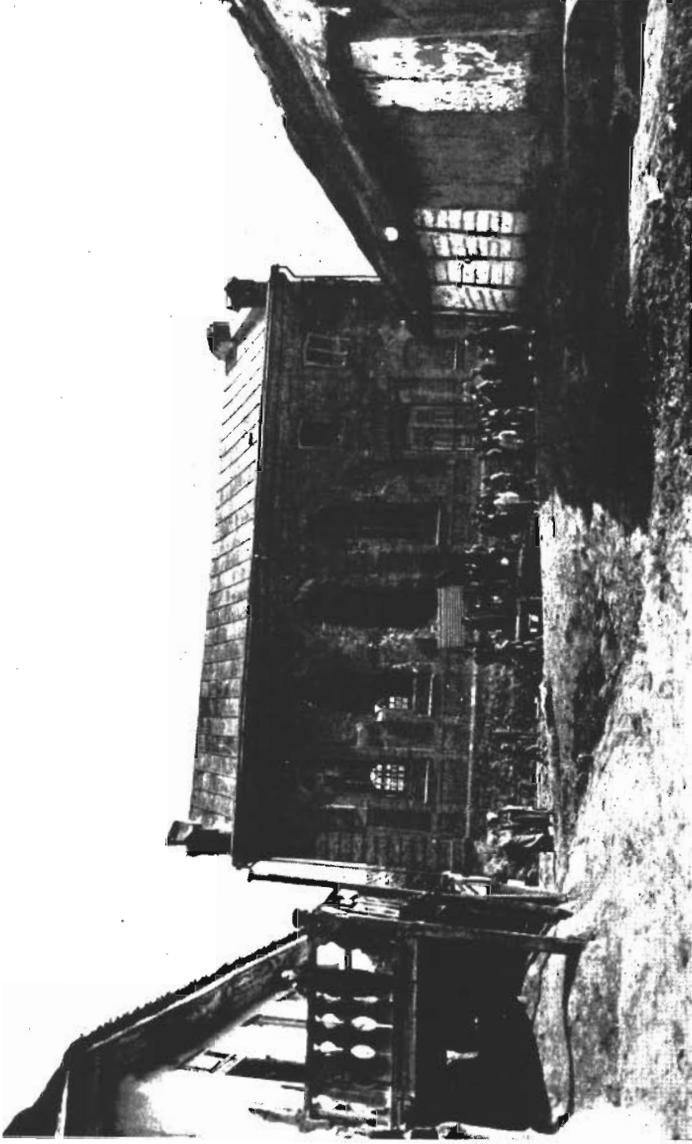
The general funds that are being raised will not help the Jews to any appreciable extent. The Red Cross Society is not organized for the alleviation of such suffering as that which we have in mind. The fund for the Belgians is intended for the alleviation of destitution. But why shall we deceive ourselves into believing that the Jews of Eastern Europe will meet with anything but rebuffs?

When was it that this new idea, that it may be dangerous for Jews to help one another, came into existence? It was not recognized at the time of the Kishineff affair, or during the Balkan war, or at the time of the Morocco episode. It has not been recognized by our philanthropists, who have built up a remarkable chain of institutions intended solely to relieve Jews, although it occasionally happens, from a spirit of hypocrisy and self-deception, that they are described as non-sectarian.

I am afraid that I am behind the times when I assert that the duty of a Jew helping Jews in distress was never greater than it is today. That is probably the result of the training which I received from my earliest childhood, at my mother's knee. But apparently we are getting beyond such narrow-mindedness, with the consequence that a great many of us are helping neither Jew nor non-Jew. So altruistic have some of our people become, so fearful lest they be considered as possessing the spirit of religion, that they are devoting their sole attention to settlement work, and to all kinds of ridiculous fads which begin and end in newspaper notoriety.

So far as the Jews of Eastern Europe are concerned, I can assure you that they may with safety execute today a general release with respect to participation in any general relief fund, first, because it is not at all likely that one will be collected, and secondly, if it is, it will be so administered that the Jews will receive the same consideration which they are constantly enjoying from their stepfather-lands. As to the first of these propositions, we know that, as yet, no general fund has been collected, except for the Belgians; as to the second, we require no statistical information.

As an offset to the criticism made by some of our own people, I desire to call your attention to a letter which I received a day or so ago, which touched me greatly. It was anonymous, and enclosed a dime. The writer said that he was a Gentile, whose earnings amounted to three dollars weekly in excess of his living expenses, that he was very much impressed by the needs of the Jewish sufferers of the war, and that he pledged himself to send ten cents weekly until the war was over to help them, hoping that thereby some poor unfortunate might receive at least temporary relief.



Samuel Schmidt Collection, American Jewish Archives

A bombed-out synagogue in the Ukraine
around 1920



Samuel Schmidt Collection, American Jewish Archives

“We have a Belgium of our own” —
the JDC relieves Jews in Eastern Europe during World War I

I wish that some of our millionaires would act on this really broad theory.⁶

Marshall received other complaints. According to Henry H. Rosenfelt, an early historian of American Jewish overseas relief, one Jew declared that "outbursts of religious persecution as a secondary result of the war" would justify American Jewish Committee aid to "the Jews in the war areas," but that "to undertake to help certain nationals of the belligerent countries simply because of our community of faith is not the province of the American Jewish committee."⁷ Even Julius Rosenwald, who later donated large sums for Jewish overseas relief, had been at first "entirely opposed" to a separate Jewish fund, and A. G. Becker felt much the same.⁸

A BELGIUM OF OUR OWN

Perhaps the attitude of those who advocated a separate Jewish relief campaign was best expressed by the AJRC's Baltimore branch:

There are as many Jews in the war zone in Russia and Galicia as there are inhabitants in Belgium. Have you ever stopped to think that while the world is helping that unfortunate country, no one has raised a finger to help the stricken Jews. . . . We have a Belgium of our own.⁹

Later, after American entry into the war, Marshall wrote to Simon Wolf, who had criticized a separate Jewish campaign:

There is no justification for the criticism upon the collection of moneys for Jewish war sufferers to which you have adverted. There has been collection

⁶ Marshall to Philipson, Nov. 18, 1914 (*ibid.*).

⁷ Henry H. Rosenfelt, *This Thing of Giving* (New York, 1924), pp. 23-24.

⁸ Judge Julian W. Mack to Becker, Nov. 16, 1914, and to Louis D. Brandeis, Nov. 19, 1914 (Brandeis Papers, University of Louisville; microfilm copy, Zionist Archives and Library, New York City).

⁹ *Jewish Charities* (Baltimore), V, No. 5 (Dec., 1914), 97. See also the American Jewish Relief Committee's *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 12 (Jan., 1916), p. 7: "We have heard the story of Belgium recited over and over, and appeals for help for Belgians have been continuous and insistent. Yet the horrid cruelties inflicted by order of the Russian Government and the Russian military commanders upon the poor Jews in Poland and other provinces have been a hundred-fold worse than even the most exaggerated tales of Belgian suffering — and have hardly attracted attention in America."

of money for Belgians, Serbians, Armenians, Poles, for French orphans and English barristers, for Italians and Greeks, and every nationality under the sun, and nobody has made any criticism. Although the Jews have suffered in common with all other people in their countries, they have had sufferings of which others had not known. Thus in Russia, Poland, and Galicia they have been driven from their homes, they have been subjected to religious persecution, as well as to the vicissitudes of war. Nobody has sought to help them except the Jews. In Poland they have not been permitted to participate in the distribution made there of moneys collected through other agencies. Even in the midst of the war they have been the victims of an economic boycott waged against them. To say, therefore, that we should not help them is to my mind unjust. As an indication that the average man is not concerned in their fate, I point to the fact that although we have thus far collected over \$10,000,000, the total amount of money received from non-Jews would not aggregate \$100,000. We shall therefore proceed as heretofore.²⁰

At the end of World War I, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker indicated to Jacob Billikopf his disapproval of a separate Jewish relief campaign. The Jews, he felt, should work through the American Red Cross. Billikopf was then active in the AJRC and communicated Baker's opinion to Marshall, who replied to him on December 5, 1918:

In the first place, as you [Billikopf] have shown, the Red Cross is not equipped to distribute the relief funds which we are collecting among the Jewish war sufferers. It has no adequate organization in Russia, Poland, Galicia, and in other lands where the Jews require immediate assistance. It is unfamiliar with their special needs, particularly those arising from their institutional life. Nor is its personnel of such a character as to understand and appreciate the unique status of the Jews amid the other racial and religious groups which surround them. There is no Jew connected with the Red Cross in any position of authority. There may be some Jews who work in a subordinate capacity, but they are not likely to be familiar with the exceptional conditions to which the Jews whom we are seeking to help have been subjected. For a long time the Red Cross, in selecting its personnel, laid down rules which made it practically impossible for any Jew to be accepted in its service. It was necessary for me to present a series of arguments to that body before it admitted into its service any persons whose ancestors three or four generations back were born in Germany. This placed a large proportion of the Jews who might have entered the service of the Red Cross on the blacklist.

²⁰ Marshall to Simon Wolf, Nov. 20, 1917 (AJAr).

The Red Cross does not understand that, in the distribution of funds for the Jewish war sufferers in Poland and Roumania for instance, it would be utterly impossible for any help to reach the Jews unless the money were distributed under Jewish auspices. In Poland the economic boycott initiated by Mr. [Roman] Dmowski, the president of the Polish National Committee, has been in active operation ever since 1912, and is today more virulent than ever. Neither he nor Mr. [Ignace Jan] Paderewski, although urged to do so, has consented to call off the boycott. The Jews constitute thirty-eight percent of the population of Warsaw and are the poorest of the poor, and yet they have received practically nothing during the war from any funds distributed through the Municipal Council of that city to its destitute population.

In view of this circumstance it is idle to say that the Red Cross, which necessarily must act through local organizations, could help the Jews to any extent. Secretary Baker forgets that the Jews in these countries are treated as outcasts by the general public, that communication except through Jewish organizations is practically impossible, and that any representatives that the Red Cross might send from this country, however well intentioned, would be unable to cope with the problem.

Furthermore it should be remembered that, so far as the distribution of food is concerned, it would be entirely futile unless it conformed with the Jewish dietary laws and ritual requirements, and that many a pious Jew would rather starve than to accept food which does not conform to these requirements. The Red Cross could not deal with this phase of the problem.

It should also be remembered that, with great difficulty, we have organized distribution committees which are well calculated to accomplish the best results with the least possible expense and friction. The Red Cross would not be able to duplicate them.

Finally, we understand the magnitude of the problem as it affects the Jews. It is our desire to assist in putting the survivors on their feet so as to enable them to earn a livelihood. We are quite confident that, taking into account the demands made on the Red Cross throughout Europe, however large the amounts that might be collected by that organization for its philanthropic work, the proportion that could be appropriated for the Jews would be but a small fraction of the amount that they require and which the Jews of this country are collecting and intend to collect for their relief.

I repeat that Jewish relief is complicated by the fact that the Jews of Eastern Europe are the victims of prejudice and persecution, that they are practically without civil and political rights, and that only Jews are thoroughly capable of comprehending their needs and the methods by which effective relief can be granted. The Red Cross would be just as likely as not to select as its agents in Poland the men who for six years past have

tried to annihilate and exterminate the Jews by depriving them of the means of earning a livelihood.

I may add that I have contributed largely to every campaign of the Red Cross and have been a member of that organization for many years and that I appreciate all that it has done, but I have no hesitation in saying that it is not qualified to deal with the problems affecting Jewish war sufferers.¹¹

AN UNUSUAL CASE OF NEED

Billikopf sent a copy of Marshall's letter to Baker, who answered that he appreciated "the gravity of the problem presented by the Jews in the several countries where they have been . . . singled out for persecution and, therefore, present an unusual case of need for relief, assistance and protection. . . ." He feared, however, that American relief would "be enfeebled by multiplied appeals and scattered agencies." It seemed to him "far better to have some great central vehicle to carry American good will to oppressed people everywhere. . . ." He would "broaden the work of the Red Cross rather than set up an independent agency." Baker then went on to say:

I am writing you this personal explanation not that I have thought out all the difficulties of the problem and feel myself safe from error in the matter, but chiefly because I find myself grieved at having any difference of feeling from Mr. Marshall, and the very distinguished company associated with him in the prosecution of this particular appeal. Needless to say I shall not seek to oppose my judgment to theirs, or in any way permit my feeling to be an obstacle in the work which their judgment approves as necessary, and my judgment approves as worthy and high spirited.¹²

In 1919, a manual for AJRC campaign workers stated that the American Red Cross was not equipped to distribute the relief funds; it had no adequate organization in Russia, Poland, and other places where the Jews required immediate assistance. Moreover, the Red Cross was "unfamiliar with the special needs of the Jewish population, particularly those, arising out of their institutional life. . . .

¹¹ Marshall to Billikopf, Dec. 5, 1918 (AJAr).

¹² Baker to Billikopf, Dec. 8, 1918 (Jacob H. Schiff Papers, AJAr).

Only Jews are capable of comprehending their needs and methods by which effective relief can be granted."¹³

II

In the summer of 1914, at the very beginning of the overseas relief effort, some "leaders were fearful of crippling our local institutions, without at the same time being of material assistance to the Jews abroad. . . . Time proved that they were thoroughly mistaken. Institutions did not suffer, but on the contrary they were tremendously benefited through the development of a new and higher standard of giving."¹⁴ As early as September, 1915, the influential *Christian Science Monitor* editorialized that American Jewish overseas relief work would have a great impact upon domestic Jewish relief, that the overseas effort would help to consolidate, centralize, and democratize it. In the post-war period, the *Monitor* predicted, American Jewry would "probably be ready to deal with some of its distinctly domestic and American issues with less separatism than in the past." The cooperative overseas relief effort they had launched would "tend to consolidate Jewish public opinion in the United States against growth of any militaristic policy" and "cause such influence as Jews may have to be cast increasingly on the side of internationalism when the United States hereafter may be tempted to be chauvinistic or jingoistic. . . ." The *Monitor* thought "most encouraging" the American Jewish disposition

shown to federate societies and institutions which serve the same ends, and to build up a more efficient and non-competitive organization on a national scale. The method by which this shall be brought to pass is being vigorously debated now, with intensity of feeling and great candor of utterance. Oligarchic and democratic tendencies are pictured as standing over against each other, striving for mastery of the new organization when formed; and refusal to cooperate in the enterprise is being based on its alleged exclusive and non-representative character. Fortunately the struggle is in the open now, and any defects of the project are likely to be seen and

¹³ *Campaign Workers Manual. Questions and Answers* (Distributed by AJRC, 1919), pp. 4-5 (American Jewish Committee Archives).

¹⁴ Rosenfelt, p. 24.

changed in the light of full debate. Jewish ecclesiastical polity has traditions of independency that will, it would seem, defeat any autocratic trends; but they ought not to stand in the way of federated action if it be democratically defined and controlled. So that, if not this year then in the not distant future, there will probably be a national federation with unifying aims and enterprises.¹⁵

Such a democratizing influence did not come at once, however. It took some time before the influence of the joint effort by the Reform AJRC, the Orthodox CRC, and the radical PRC penetrated the domestic Jewish charitable institutions. On December 21, 1916, the New York Yiddish *Day* asked in an editorial on the newly created Federation of Jewish Charities:

Will all factions of New York Jewry be able to collaborate? Will it not become a bureaucratic institution, where donors will look with disgust upon the takers? Will the antagonistic spirit between the [uptown Americanized] "Yahudim" and the "simple" [East European immigrant] Jews of the East Side manifest itself there? Will the representatives of the democratic Jewish faction who will donate not thousands of dollars, but only their three dollars, have at the Federation equal rights in the meeting rooms or will they have to wait in the corridors?

WE HAVE DROPPED THE WALLS

Jacob Billikopf, Boris D. Bogen, and others frequently drew attention to what they called the by-products of overseas relief work. By giving more dollars for such drives, American Jews became more sympathetic in their attitude toward local and national needs for social service. While some complained that the drives for overseas relief made by the Orthodox middle-class or working-class group had a disrupting influence on old-fashioned donations in many communities, a group of social workers contended that even those who had made donations on a class basis gradually improved themselves economically and in time were absorbed into the established general, non-class-oriented, social-work efforts of their communities, with a resultant democratizing influence on those efforts. Thus, more funds were now expended for Jewish education than had been the

¹⁵ Editorial, *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Sept. 30, 1915.

case before the Jews of East European immigrant stock joined the established charitable agencies. As Bogen saw it, "We are more interested in our brethren of Eastern Europe today than ever before. This enlarged interest necessarily affects the scope and content of our local charities." Overseas relief work, then, did not interfere with domestic charitable Jewish activities. The campaign for the New York Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropies had to be postponed in 1917 because of the overseas relief campaign, but when it was finally launched, it enjoyed greater success than ever.¹⁶

Some of the leading professional Jewish social workers became actively engaged in the work of collecting and distributing overseas relief. Among them were Boris D. Bogen, Jacob Billikopf, David M. Bressler, Lee K. Frankel, and Morris D. Waldman; many of them were of East European birth. After World War I, several returned to domestic relief work and tried to introduce a measure of democratization in that sphere. Their accomplishments need to be further investigated, but in 1919 Felix M. Warburg could say that Jewish social workers had "wiped out class feelings in groups where such a thing seemed to be impossible. . . . We have dropped not only the walls between Orthodoxy and Reform, and Reform and Socialism, that all can go together within the city of New York, but we have dropped them all over the United States."¹⁷

¹⁶ Jacob Billikopf, "The Ten Million Dollar Campaign," *Jewish Charities*, IX, No. 11 (March, 1919); Boris D. Bogen, "Unifying and Disrupting Forces in Jewish Community Life," *NCJSS* [Denver, June 7-10, 1925] (New York, 1926), pp. 219-22. In 1923, for example, "about as much money was spent in constructive relief work in Europe and Palestine as was spent in the local charities here [in the United States]": Samuel A. Goldsmith, in *NCJSS* [Toronto, June 22-25, 1924] (New York, 1925), p. 346.

¹⁷ Felix M. Warburg, in *Tenth Biennial Session [of] the National Conference of Jewish Charities in the United States* [Kansas City, May 12-15, 1919] (New York, 1919), pp. 10-11.

In general, the role of Jews of East European origin who attained wealth during and after World War I — the degree to which they effected quick and lasting changes in American Jewish social work — remains to be investigated. The same is true of their role in other aspects of American Jewish life: for example, the Zionist movement in the United States. While, in 1921, the entire East European faction in American Zionism stood solidly behind the "nationalist" Louis Lipsky against the "anti-democratic" and "anti-nationalist" Brandeis group, the wealthy East European Jews, in later years,

In 1923, in a lecture given at the Solomon T. H. Hurwitz Memorial Lecture Foundation, Cyrus Adler proposed the creation of a national Jewish body in the United States, not "a superorganization" like the American Jewish Congress, which he opposed, but something in the nature of a benevolent organization.¹⁸ The JDC was seeking then to liquidate its relief work in Europe, and Jacob Billikopf urged that the JDC be maintained as a central body for local and national religious, educational, and eleemosynary purposes in the United States.¹⁹ Such a project did not lack opposition, since ideologically the AJRC and the JDC remained closely tied to the aspirations of the American Jewish Committee. *The Sentinel* of Cleveland, for instance, wrote that American Jewry would never accept the authority of any national body constituted along the lines of the JDC, or the AJRC — or the American Jewish Committee. "What the Jewry of the United States needs is a national body which should be truly American; that is to say, democratic in spirit and composition." Billikopf, however, thought that the Yiddish dailies would not oppose "a perpetuation of the AJRC," because they believed that overseas relief needs had not yet come to an end.²⁰

demanded the return of the Brandeis group to the leadership of the American Zionist organization. Despite all their traditions and aspirations, these middle-class Jews dreamed of being accepted in the company of Louis Marshall, Felix M. Warburg, and other American Jewish leaders of German origin; they looked to them for prestige and were happy to participate in campaigns under their leadership. It was easier to obtain a higher social status through partnership with Marshall, Warburg, and their friends than through an organized opposition to the established leadership of the "philanthropists," the Jews of German origin who controlled the American Jewish Committee and the JDC; or through a partnership with "anti-nationalist" Zionists like Brandeis and his friends than with Lipsky. In 1928, the *Yiddish Day* recognized Marshall and his friends as the leading force in American Jewry.

See, for example, Bernard Shelvin, in *The Jewish Morning Journal*, June 23, 1927; Samuel Margoshes, in *The Day*, May 5, 1928; Editorial, *The Day*, May 26, 1928; Abraham Coralnik, in *The Day*, Jan. 8, 1930; Chaim Arlozoroff, *Ktavim* (Tel Aviv, 1935), V, 154.

¹⁸ "Who Will Lead," *Jewish Daily News*, June 22, 1923.

¹⁹ Jacob Billikopf, *Shall the Great Foreign Relief Machine Be Scrapped?* [Reprinted from *The Jewish Exponent*] (Philadelphia, 1923); *Jewish Chronicle* (Kansas City), May 4, 1923; also in other periodicals.

²⁰ *The Sentinel*, May 25, 1923.

On the other hand, Cyrus Adler was enthusiastic about Billikopf's JDC proposal. On May 8, 1923, Adler wrote to Billikopf:

Were it not for the human difficulties that might be involved, the most workable outcome of your suggestion would in my opinion be a re-integration of the American Jewish Relief Committee and the American Jewish Committee out of which the former actually grew. . . . We would thus be creating in America an organization which would exercise the same function as the Alliance Israélite Universelle de France but not have the disadvantage of attempting to play the role of an international society which I think is somewhat injurious to the Alliance.²¹

NOBODY'S BUSINESS TO KNOW

The Billikopf proposal was discussed at the Conference of Jewish Social Service, held on May 13-16, 1923, in Washington, D. C. Louis M. Cahn, in his report to the Conference, suggested that the AJRC

be asked to continue in existence for the purpose of raising the budget not only of the national organizations included in this study [HIAS, Desertion Bureau, etc.], but other national Jewish organizations ministering to the cultural and Jewish educational life of American Jewry. . . . a number of influential Jewish citizens. . . suggested that the Conference ask the American Jewish Committee, which originally organized the [American Jewish] War Relief Committee to call another conference for the purpose of organizing a committee that would, if the Conference so decided, help to raise the money and to budget and distribute the monies necessary for the support of approved national organizations.²²

This proposal had the approval also of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research,²³ but some of the delegates to the Conference opposed such a move to put the direction of Jewish social work in America in the hands of a conservative organization. Isidore Hershfield, representative of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), asked Cahn why he had omitted the labor-oriented

²¹ Adler Papers, American Jewish Committee Archives.

²² NCJSS [Washington, D. C., May 13-16, 1923] (New York, 1923), pp. 19-20.

²³ Bureau of Jewish Social Research, *Study of Budgeting of National Organizations* (New York, 1922).

PRC and the Orthodox-oriented CRC. "Nobody here knows, and it is nobody's business to know, whether I line up as a Reform Jew with the American Jewish Relief Committee or as an Orthodox Jew with the Central Relief Committee or whether I am a horny-handed son of toil and line up with the People's Relief Committee." Hershfield pointed out that HIAS' income came largely from those who supported the CRC and PRC. His organization, he said, could not agree or submit to a recommendation for a national organization which excluded the Orthodox and labor elements.²⁴ Not surprisingly, then, the plan advanced by Billikopf and Cahn was not to be realized, nor would the JDC find that it could give up its relief work in Europe.

III

According to some Jewish relief leaders, the general, nonsectarian relief agencies profited from the experience gained by Jews in overseas relief efforts. There were many cases of non-Jewish contribution to Jewish overseas relief.²⁵ When the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, a closer contact between Jewish and nonsectarian relief agencies was unavoidable. In 1917, Jacob H. Schiff accepted the chairmanship of the overseas relief campaign on condition that part of the money would go to the Jewish Welfare Board for Jewish religious needs in the United States armed forces.²⁶ The Jewish Welfare Board participated in the nonsectarian fund-raising drive of the United War Work Campaign, which was created in September, 1918, under the auspices of seven major organizations. It was agreed that the Jewish Welfare Board would get 2.05 percent of the funds raised; by September 30, 1921, it had received \$3,804,750 from the collected total of \$189,645,158.²⁷ Billikopf convinced the American Red Cross to launch a campaign, not for

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁵ Rosenfelt, pp. 70-89, 276-87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 293-96; JDC Minutes, Oct. 11, 1917 (Magnes Papers, F3-L82, p. 60).

²⁷ *Report of the United War Work Campaign. September 30, 1921* (n. p., 1921).

\$5,000,000, but for \$50,000,000 — and the goal was later raised again to \$100,000,000. If poor Jews were able to raise large sums from minimal donations, Billikopf told the Red Cross, then the American people as a whole could follow their example.²⁸

A “welfare assimilation” — to use the expression of one social worker²⁹ — was being realized as a result of America’s entry into the war. Rosenfelt related a curious incident which occurred in a small community. A wealthy Jew came to a Jewish war relief meeting and pledged a large sum. Everyone was amazed, for this man had always given small sums. The next day, however, the man said that he had not intended “to subscribe anything to the Jewish relief fund” — he had thought the meeting a Liberty Bond rally! “But he offered a compromise, which was promptly accepted.”³⁰ On November 3, 1918, Louis Marshall stated at a meeting in New York City that, in the past, interfaith cooperation “for the accomplishment of a united purpose” had been rare. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews had “gone their several ways,” but “now together we are appealing to all Americans to supply the funds with which to further the welfare of soldiers and sailors.”³¹ A leader of War Chest campaigns felt that nonsectarian fund drives had made “possible the democratization of giving,” and that “a tremendously larger percentage” did “contribute under this [war chest] plan.” He reported that “Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, black and white, all work together for the common good, without regard whether the funds they give or solicit from others are to go to the particular cause in which they are interested.”³²

²⁸ Jacob Billikopf, in *The Jewish Daily Courier* (Chicago), Oct. 29, 1918.

²⁹ Robert Morris and Michael Freund, eds., *Trends and Issues in Jewish Social Welfare in the United States, 1899–1952* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 163.

³⁰ Rosenfelt, p. 62.

³¹ *One Nation — One Cause* [Report of the Meeting in Madison Square Garden, New York, November 3, 1918: A Gathering of the Clergy and Laity of the Three Great Religious Groups, Protestants, Catholics, Jews] (New York, 1918), pp. 10–13.

³² Horatio G. Lloyd, “The War Chest Plan,” in *American Academy of Political and Social Science Annals*, LXXIX (1918), 291–92.

A STONE FROM OUR BUILDING

The opinion of Jewish relief leaders was divided. When the War Chests were first organized, a conference was held between representatives of the radical PRC and the Orthodox CRC at the latter's New York City office. A resolution was adopted in which "voice was given to the dangers to our committees," and the delegates of these two constituent agencies of the JDC were asked to discuss the question at a meeting of that body.³³ The JDC decided that participation or nonparticipation in War Chests was a matter of local initiative over which neither the Joint Distribution Committee nor the executive committee of its three constituent agencies had any control.³⁴ On the local level, the attitude to the War Chests followed mostly the class line of the three constituent agencies of the JDC. The rich Jews of the AJRC branches favored Jewish participation in War Chest campaigns; the middle-class Orthodox Jews of the CRC were often undecided; the working-class relief workers of the PRC opposed joint campaigns.

At its convention in Cleveland, held from May 30 until June 2, 1918, the PRC made its position clear. Baruch Zuckerman, general manager of the PRC, stated then that the War Chest endangered the Jewish character of relief work. The War Chest leadership could not, for example, understand that Jews held it a legitimate part of relief work to extend help to Jewish public schools in Eastern Europe. Also, the Jewish members of the War Chest committees, he was sure, would most commonly be rich Jews and not representatives of the masses.³⁵ On October 23, 1918, Nathan Sand, of the Milwaukee Ezra Batzor Society, notified the PRC that "the rich Jews desired to participate" in the local War Chest campaign with a contribution of \$100,000. On October 28, 1918, Zuckerman replied in Yiddish: "Every time a city is dragged into a War Chest

³³ Baruch Zuckerman to the editor of *The (Philadelphia) Jewish World*, Feb. 11, 1919 (PRC Archives, AJHS).

³⁴ Minutes of the JDC Sub-Committee of War Chests, June 11, 1918, and of the Executive Committee, June 19, 1918 (Magnes Papers, F 14=L 165, pp. 46, 59).

³⁵ *People's Relief Convention. Report of the Administration Committee. May 30, 31; June 1, 2, 1918. At the Temple, Cleveland, Ohio* (New York, 1918), pp. 11-12, 43-44.

plan, I have the feeling that a stone has been taken away from our building. The practical results of such collaboration are known to me from the mere fact that the German *yahudim* are always in favor of such plans." Even so, he advised Sand to participate in the War Chest campaign, to get from it as much as he could for Jewish overseas relief, and to go on in the meantime with smaller separate Jewish campaigns. In Cleveland, a large sum was credited to the PRC from a joint campaign with the War Chest in May, 1918. Though all the activities of the local PRC branch ceased, they were renewed a year later at the time of a separate Jewish campaign.³⁶

The attitude of the Zionists was similar to the one held by the PRC. On August 21, 1918, Judge Julian W. Mack addressed Dr. Harry Friedenwald on joint campaigns with non-Jewish relief agencies:

Jacob de Haas and I are of the opinion that it is a matter to be settled on the basis of the situation in each specific community, always bearing in mind that it is tremendously important to us to identify men and their donations — an impossibility under the War Chest scheme. The Chief [Louis D. Brandeis] feels very strongly this way.³⁷

In March, 1919, the Detroit PRC branch was publicly criticized for refusing to participate in a joint campaign of the local Patriotic Fund. The Detroit *Jewish Chronicle* called the PRC "an irresponsible group of our co-religionists of the class who are characteristically unable or unwilling to co-operate with others."³⁸ The PRC Conference, held in May, 1919, at Cleveland, was not impressed, for it adopted a resolution against joint campaigns with the War Chests:

The greatest danger involved is that it will undermine the existence of special Jewish relief activities. Without special Jewish relief activities the American Jews will never be in a position to meet the special Jewish needs of the Jewish war sufferers. Least of all will they be in a position to meet those problems which will arise when the war will be over.³⁹

³⁶ AJHS.

³⁷ Jacob de Haas Archives, 4 (Zionist Archives and Library, New York City).

³⁸ *Jewish Chronicle* (Detroit), March 21, 1919.

³⁹ AJHS.

OUR VERY PRIDE

A particularly sharp conflict broke out at Philadelphia in 1918-1919. There, Cyrus Adler of the AJRC had been very active in gaining Jewish support for a joint War Chest campaign. The Orthodox CRC was willing to follow Dr. Adler's lead, and Leon Kamaiky declared that such a campaign would win over Jews who usually refused to donate to separate Jewish funds. The PRC, however, insisted on a separate Jewish campaign and was sharply criticized by the local Yiddish newspaper, *The Jewish World*. The PRC defended itself by claiming that it sought only to avoid the complete liquidation of Jewish relief work. On February 11, 1919, Zuckerman wrote to the editor of *The Jewish World*:

In every city where the War Chest was organized, our Committee, as well as other Jewish relief organizations, have entirely been wiped out of existence. . . . I know that some may give the argument that there were some prosperous [Jews] in Philadelphia, who have singly contributed more money than our Committee has succeeded in raising from their several thousands of people. That may be true. But our very pride is that we collected our money in the form of nickels, dimes, and dollars, instead of thousands or millions, which others may succeed in receiving from any other individual. New York City has recently closed its relief campaign for five million dollars, which was successfully conducted under the leadership of our Mr. [Felix M.] Warburg, who is chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee. No less than two months have been spent on that. Hundreds of people, rich and poor, have devoted days and nights to meet individuals to solicit their pledges. There is a probability that if some "right minded man" could have approached five or ten prosperous Jews of the city of New York, he could have raised the five million dollars, without spending so much time of so many volunteers and paid men such as we employed in the New York campaign. Would you or the readers of your paper discourage campaigns among the masses of Jews in behalf of their own brethren? The argument that may be advanced by some, that more money is being given to the Jewish relief by the War Chest than has been raised previously by the Jews alone, and for that reason justify the War Chest, is both wrong and dangerous. If we were the beneficiaries of more money through the War Chest during the year of 1918, we will lose more in the year of 1919, when our relief committees went out of existence, because so much more time and energy and money will be wastefully spent to reorganize our Jewish relief committees now that the War Chests are no more in existence.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Zuckerman to the Philadelphia PRC, Feb. 2, 1919, and to the editor of *The Jewish*

There is no reliable estimate of Jewish contributions to the Chests. According to various sources, the War Chests contributed between five and ten million dollars for Jewish overseas relief,⁴¹ but such estimates are exaggerated. For example, from its creation on August 8, 1915, until its liquidation on June 30, 1924, the PRC had a global income of \$7,588,125, including \$784,561 (10.34 percent) from War Chest collections. Of the \$3,901,688 contributed by the AJRC to the JDC from January 1, 1918, until February 15, 1919, a sum of \$1,052,881 (27 percent) came from the War Chests. Of the \$1,006,807 contributed by the CRC during that period, \$323,963 (32.18 percent) was derived from War Chest sources, and of the \$765,842 contributed by the PRC, \$242,972 (31.73 percent) came from the War Chest.⁴²

IV

In 1919, Felix M. Warburg believed that the overseas relief work effort would "have as great an effect on American life as upon Jewish life."⁴³ After World War I, the "assimilation" of Jewish relief work consisted in Jewish cooperation with the community chests which had replaced the War Chests and similar emergency drives.⁴⁴ Some social workers have even ascribed the origin of community chests to Jewish welfare federations and their pioneering role in centralized campaigns.⁴⁵ Most Jewish social workers favored

World, Feb. 11, 1919 (AJHS); *The Jewish World*, Dec. 10, 1918, Jan. 30, 1919; *The People's Relief of America. Facts and Documents. 1915-1924* (n. p., n. d.), pp. 615-19.

⁴¹ *The Jewish World*, April 23, 1924; Rosenfelt, p. 322.

⁴² *The People's Relief*, pp. v-xxxvii, 344; *Bulletin of the Joint Distribution Committee* [Supplement to June, 1919, issue]. It should be noted that the Jewish radicals of the PRC were not alone in opposing the War Chest. Some Orthodox CRC leaders were also in opposition, and a variety of reasons led some leaders of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Knights of Columbus, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, among others, to an anti-War Chest stand. See Zuckerman, in *Yidisher Kemfer*, May 31, 1918. Much material on this problem can be found in the PRC Papers at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁴³ Rosenfelt, p. 310.

⁴⁴ Lourie, pp. 94-98, 104-5, 236-37, 345-48.

⁴⁵ Frank Dekker Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States* (New York, 1922), p. 428; Morris D. Waldman, *Nor by Power* (New York, 1953), p. 420.

Jewish participation in the community chests, but they also warned against completely giving up separate Jewish drives for purposes which were not covered by nonsectarian community chests — purposes like Jewish education and overseas relief.

At the Conference of Jewish Social Service held in Denver on June 7–10, 1925, Dr. Bogen conceded that the community chest movement might prove “of very great significance in uniting the various factors in the community. The Jews undoubtedly share in the beneficial influences, but it does not follow that the Community Chest movement will strengthen the Jewish communal interest.” While the community at large might be benefited by the tendency to absorb private relief efforts into state and municipal relief, specific group interests might be adversely affected. The individual and volunteer interest of the Hull House days in communal life, Bogen noted, had largely disappeared by the time Jewish participation in War Chests was discussed. The professional, paid social worker had taken the place of the volunteer, and the danger that these efforts would lose their Jewish dimension was great. Thus, separate Jewish relief campaigns were important, campaigns on behalf of Jewish education, for example. Separate Jewish philanthropic endeavor remained, moreover, the most important attempt to unify and strengthen the American Jewish community. It bridged the gap between Jewry’s common experience of persecution and an Americanization which was often only chimerical and full of self-complacency.⁴⁶

A DISRUPTING FACTOR

At the same conference, Morris D. Waldman defined his attitude to nonsectarian charitable work in these terms:

The development of community chests has complicated the problem of Jewish community organization. For the so-called liberal Jew who is averse to the distinctly Jewish activities, the Community Fund offers a comfortable escape. The one who genuinely believes that such affiliation promotes greater co-operation suffers from a confusion of ideas. Co-operation and central [nonsectarian] fund raising are not necessarily identical . . . there

⁴⁶ Bogen, “Unifying and Disrupting Forces,” *NCJSS* (New York, 1926).

is no doubt that the Community Fund, by virtue of its control of the finances, ultimately controls the destiny of all its beneficiary institutions. Under such conditions, the growth and development of the Jewish activities affiliated with the Community Chest depends upon the sympathy, understanding, vision and fund raising capacity of the community chest. . . . Jewish education and foreign relief, for which the community chest cannot legitimately provide funds, suffer from inadequate support because many hide behind the Community Fund. . . . To some extent, therefore, the Community Chest may be considered a disrupting factor in the development of Jewish community life.⁴⁷

Joseph Hyman, of Baltimore, feared that Jewish entrance into the community chests "weakens Jewish unity and often tends to lower the standards of Jewish giving." Also, "foreign relief and Jewish education remain outside the Chest — and the Jewish Community must devise means of financing these important appeals." William J. Schroder contended that contributions to the chests should supplement Jewish communal needs, but not serve as an excuse for contributing less to the Jewish community. Louis M. Cahn stated that the chest did "not eliminate the group question."⁴⁸

Two years later, in 1927, Waldman, then executive director of the Detroit Welfare Federation, reiterated his view that Jewish agencies were better off financially through their association with community chests. Still, he agreed that this association had "complicated, perhaps retarded, at any rate made more difficult though not impossible, the development of a comprehensive and effective Jewish community organization."⁴⁹ As Samuel C. Blumenthal saw it, "to some extent the community chest may be considered a disrupting factor in the development of Jewish community life."⁵⁰

Similar, nonconclusive statements were made in later years: Jewish community organization in chest-affiliated cities was "limited to local philanthropic interests." Auxiliary Jewish organizations "had to be set up for the support of local and non-local Jewish

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–22 (reprinted in Waldman, pp. 405–8).

⁴⁸ *NCJSS* (New York, 1926), pp. 42–57, 225.

⁴⁹ *NCJSS* (New York, 1927), p. 149.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

interests (education, foreign relief, etc.).” Those who concerned themselves with questions of individual adjustment “generally identify themselves with the Community Chests. Interests of a distinctly cultural survival character tend to find expression most frequently in the [Jewish] Welfare Fund.”⁵¹ During World War II, the old arguments which had been used during World War I by the partisans and adversaries of the War Chests were again used, and the same questions were asked: how much should Jews donate to nonsectarian drives, and should they also continue their own drives for specific Jewish relief work which could not be supported by nonsectarian campaigns?⁵²

⁵¹ Michael Freund, “The Community Chest and Influence on the Jewish Community,” *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, VII (June, 1931), 27-32. See also Lourie, p. 104: “After several years of experience with community chests, the Jewish federations learned that the chests could not solve two basic problems facing the Jewish community: 1) they made no provision for raising capital funds for plant renewal and expansion, and 2) they did not undertake any financial obligation for national and overseas causes and for local services of a religious character.”

All the information available on the ratio of Jewish contributions to community chests and withdrawals from Jewish agencies is always based on sample studies and is thus too fragmentary for conclusions.

See, for example, Freund, “Community Chest and Influence,” *Analysis of Expenditures of Federations and Welfare Funds and Budgeting* [Studies of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research].

⁵² S. D. Weinberg, *The 1943 War Chest* (Detroit, 1943) [Yiddish].

In a way, these discussions about Jewish versus nonsectarian relief, both domestic and overseas, were part of a much broader post-World War I discussion on Jewish and non-Jewish financing of certain social activities. The following is but one example: on March 25, 1926, Edward Lawrence Hunt, director of America's Good Will Association, wrote to Joseph Lande on the difficulties of raising funds for the Association:

The Jew says that the chief support must come from the Christians. . . . The Christian says: The Jews ought to back you up for they are the ones who suffer from the growing anti-Semitism. . . . I have always preached that the hater is more hurt by the hating than is the hated. Therefore the Christian should get the Christian to quit the intolerance which destroys all that is best in man. But a serious condition, not a theory, confronts us. And the horrible fact is that there are fewer Christians than Jews who are likely to do what you asked to do (Lehman Papers).

On April 1, 1926, Herbert H. Lehman wrote to Lande that, for the Association to be funded preponderantly by a Jew or a group of Jews “would certainly lead to no good purpose and might be actually harmful” (Lehman Papers).