The Historical Journal, 41, 3 (1998), pp. 825–851. Printed in the United Kingdom

FEEDING THE CAMPS: ALLIED BLOCKADE POLICY AND THE RELIEF OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN GERMANY, 1944–1945*

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ABSTRACT. *In the twelve months preceding the end of the Second World War, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various voluntary organizations acting with the Red Cross, were able to dispatch food parcels to increasingly large numbers of concentration camp inmates in Germany and German-controlled territory. As Allied pressure on Germany increased during the last months of the war, the possibilities of sending large-scale relief into the camps prior to their liberation expanded dramatically. However, Allied blockade policy was so deeply entrenched that it was almost impossible for these possibilities to be fully exploited. Official relief agencies failed to convince Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) that improving the rations of the camp inmates would not strengthen the German working force but would alleviate the problems that SHAEF itself would confront when it liberated the camps shortly thereafter.*

I

The literature on the Allied response to the Holocaust is extensive, and continues to attract serious scholarly attention. Historians have focused on the broad question of Allied ambivalence to the overall fate of European Jewry, to the ineffectiveness of rescue and ransom schemes, to their response to the murder of Hungarian Jewry during the spring of 1944, and the inconclusive discussions on the possible bombing of Auschwitz.[1] This focus on the question of obstructing the Nazi policy of genocide has deflected attention from the parallel, but different, question of relief. If the conduct of war prevented large-scale rescue programmes, what steps could be and were taken by the Allies to alleviate the circumstances of internees (Jews and non-Jews) in the extensive concentration camp system until the final defeat of the Third Reich? This article will discuss Allied relief efforts and how they related to post-hostilities planning for the eventual liberation of the camps.

* The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of his colleagues Bernard Wasserstein and Raya Cohen, who commented on an earlier version of the work presented here, and to the research assistance of Ronald A. Hügin (Lausanne) and Steven Yaari (Tel Aviv).

[1] See: Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: a history of the Joint Distribution Committee* (Detroit, 1982), and *Jews for sale? Nazi–Jewish negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, 1994); Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American refugee policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington, 1987); Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 1981); Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* (Oxford, 1979); David Wyman, *The abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York, 1984).

The nature of the German concentration camp system, the size and circumstances of the internee population, and the willingness of the German authorities to allow outside access to the camps, changed in the course of the war. The most dramatic changes came following operation Overlord, and in the last months of the war, as the British and Americans prepared for the invasion and occupation of Germany. On the Allied side, the certain approach of victory, and the growing awareness of the scope of the Jewish tragedy in Europe, brought significant changes in British and American attitudes to the question of relief supplies for the camp inmates. The creation of the war refugee board in January 1944 and the limited revision of the economic blockade against Germany in June 1944 were milestones in Allied policy. Various projects to send food and clothing into the camp system were proposed in 1944 and early 1945, at the same time as the Allies were planning the occupation of Germany and the future liberation of the camps. However, as will be shown below, military planning and the efforts of the different relief agencies were inevitably in conflict.

Concentration camps were an integral part of the Nazi system of government in Germany after Hitler's rise to power at the beginning of 1933. But the purpose of the camps changed dramatically between 1933 and 1945. At the outbreak of war in 1939 the camp population was estimated at 25,000. This figure grew as 'defeatists' and 'slackers' and other German opponents of the war were imprisoned, together with non-German political opponents of the Nazis in the countries they had occupied. By March 1942, the camp population reached 100,000, when the concentration camp system was taken over by the SS economic and administrative section, and the internees were exploited as a source of forced labour. By August 1943, the camp population had grown to 224,000, by August 1944 to 524,000, and it reached its peak of 700,000 by January 1945 (after which accurate records could no longer be maintained).[2] Although the separation was never total, the extermination centres were a separate camp system from the concentration camps.[3] A third category of camp was that for prisoners of war (POWs).

While each camp system served a different function and was very different in nature, all attempts to bring relief to those in German detention shared certain conceptual similarities, and in the last weeks of the war Allied military concern for the fate of the POWs increasingly merged with the concern of Allied civilian (official and unofficial) bodies for the fate of the concentration camp internees. The opportunities to send relief parcels (food, medicines, clothing) into the concentration camps varied according to the nature of the camp, the category of prisoner, and the state of German policy at any particular moment. Family members and voluntary organizations within occupied Europe were frequently able to send parcels to internees, unless the

[2] Martin Borszat, 'The concentration camps, 1933–1945', in H. Krausnick, H. Buchheim, M. Broszat, and H.-A. Jacobsen, *The anatomy of the S.S. state* (London, 1968), pp. 502–4.

[3] The major exceptions were Auschwitz and Majdanek, which functioned both as centres for forced labour and mass murder.

intended beneficiary was incarcerated as a 'Nacht und Nebel' prisoner (i.e., had officially vanished – a category designed to heighten the intimidating effect of imprisonment), was charged with crimes considered particularly serious by the Nazi state ('Schutzhäftlinge' – people taken into 'protective custody' by the Gestapo), or was Jewish.

Aid from outside occupied Europe faced the additional barrier of the Allied blockade. The British and Americans, in the joint policing of the economic war against Germany, allowed relief parcels only to prisoners protected by the 1929 Geneva convention on the status of POWs, or to those civilian internees whose status the Germans had agreed to consider as 'assimilated' to the Geneva convention. (Following the outbreak of war, the belligerents agreed informally to treat civilian internees of enemy nationality with some of the same rights accorded to POWs. No such agreement was reached between Germany and the Soviet Union or any of the governments-in-exile, and as a result their nationals were 'unassimilated' to the 1929 convention. As the Germans did not recognize any of the governments-in-exile, and the latter did not have any German nationals under their control, there was little reason to anticipate that Germany would agree to accord any privileges to their nationals.)

The convention gave the Red Cross visiting rights to POW camps; compelled the imprisoning authority to provide lists naming the individuals interned; and prevented the internees from being forced to work in war industries. Consequently, the Allies considered that the status of 'assimilated to the Geneva convention' provided sufficient guarantees to prevent relief aid being used to feed the German population or sustain workers in the German armaments factories. Accordingly, aid to 'assimilated' detainees did not contravene the purposes of the blockade. However, as the Germans refused to recognize any form of legal protection for the Jewish prisoners (as well as for many non-Jews), the Allied precautions prevented the sending of any aid to the most endangered and persecuted of all the camp internees – the Jews.

By late 1943, as the extent and nature of Nazi persecution of the Jews became more widely known among Allied public opinion, and in official circles, it became increasingly difficult for the British and Americans to maintain their refusal to allow any breaches of the blockade.[4] This coincided with increasing public criticism of the effects of the Allied blockade on the civilian populations of Nazi-occupied Europe. During 1944 and in the first months of 1945 the western Allies were more willing to allow small and measured quantities of food and medicine to reach the concentration camps under German control.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was the main conduit (although not the only one) of relief supplies for the camp internees. By international agreement, the Red Cross was the channel through which parcels

[4] For a discussion of blockade policy and the response of Allied opinion to the consequences of blockade, see Joan Beaumont, 'Starving for democracy: Britain's blockade of and relief for occupied Europe, 1939–1945', *War and Society*, 8 (1990), pp. 57–82. Tony Kushner discusses the effect of public opinion on Allied policy toward the fate of European Jewry in 'The rules of the game: Britain, America and the Holocaust in 1944', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 5 (1990), pp. 381–402.

and mail were sent to the POWs of all sides. The organization was also active in arranging relief for civilian populations affected by the war, and for the 'assimilated' (to the Geneva convention) internees inside the concentration camp system. As such, the Red Cross had various 'client' populations that were dependent on its continued ability to function in the territory of each belligerent, and the organization was very aware of its need to function within the law of both sides.[5] As the international committee was based in Geneva, and had special links to the Swiss government, it was also constrained by an additional consideration. The Allied blockade against Germany dominated Swiss economic life during the war years. Some raw materials for Swiss industry had to pass through British and American lines, while Swiss exports (on which Swiss employment levels depended) were largely sent to Germany. It was a complicated situation for all the parties, and any relief aid which the international committee would be able to organize for the camps in Germany not only infringed the blockade but also brought pressure on the delicate web of agreements between Switzerland and the Allies designed to regulate Swiss trade with Nazi Germany.

There was a labour shortage in Germany estimated at 1 million workers in 1939, even before the war began. As the military industries expanded and mobilization drained more Germans out of the workforce and into the army, the shortage became more critical. Immediately after the beginning of hostilities in 1939, the German authorities deployed 210,000 Polish POWs as forced labourers. The numbers increased in the months that followed. Subsequently labour conscription was imposed on the Polish civilian population, and by the summer of 1940 over 300,000 Polish civilians and additional POWs, a total of 700,000 Poles, were working inside the Reich.[6]

In order to separate the forced Polish labourers from the German population (to prevent 'race pollution'), and to set an example in the relations between Germans and Slavs, the foreign labourers were subject to draconian police regulation. Capital punishment was frequent, and living conditions were harsh. From the very beginning of the war, Nazi racial policies and police-state techniques were employed in relieving major labour shortages.

The expansion of Germany to the west, and the more benign German policies to France, Holland, and Belgium (and to French POWs), allowed the Germans to recruit voluntary labour from these countries as well as in Italy and Yugoslavia. By 1941 there were 2.1 million civilian labourers and 1.2 million

[5] The most exhaustive scholarly account of the international committee during the war is Jean-Claude Favez, *Une mission impossible? Le CICR, les déportations et les camps de concentration nazis* (Lausanne, 1988). The author had access to the records of the ICRC, and presents an authoritative account of Red Cross activities during the war, and of its contacts with the Nazi regime on behalf of the internees. It does not discuss the parcel programme and blockade questions of 1944. Meir Dworzecki, 'The International Red Cross and its policy vis-à-vis the Jews in the ghettos and concentration camps on Nazi-occupied Europe', in Y. Gutman, and E. Zuroff, eds., *Rescue attempts during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 71–110, is an early account based largely on published sources.

[6] Ulrich Herbert, *A history of foreign labor in Germany, 1880–1980* (Ann Arbor, 1990), pp. 130, 132.

conscripted POWs working in the Reich – a total of 9 per cent of the entire workforce. In October and November 1941, Russian POWs were employed, and subsequently 40,000 Russian civilians per week were press-ganged into the German labour force. By the end of 1942, foreign labour employed in Germany approached 5 million workers. The conditions of employment ranged from forced, slave labour for Polish and Russian POWs to contract labour for civilian west Europeans. But as the war in the east continued, the demands of the German economy could only be met by the dual policy of enforcing greater productivity from those workers already in Germany by increasingly harsh conditions, and by the ever more brutal recruitment of civilian labour throughout Europe. Eventually, 7 million foreign labourers were working in Germany, 20 per cent of the German workforce. The overwhelming majority were working there against their will.[7]

The expansion of this foreign labour pool, and its intensive exploitation in deteriorating circumstances, blurred the distinctions between categories of voluntary foreign and forced labour, and between the latter and the concentration camp inmates. The apparatus of the police state was an integral part of the labour system, and the demands of the labour economy had become an integral part of the apparatus of terror. Concentration camp inmates were increasingly employed in construction projects, SS economic enterprises, and private firms. Only a small proportion of them were employed in the armaments industry before 1944. But in that year, as Allied bombardments of German industry increased, the Nazi leadership decided to move armaments production underground, and to build massive bunkers. This was dangerous work, for which only the slave labour of the camp system was considered suitable. However, even the 600,000 camp inmates (500,000 of whom were considered fit for labour) were not enough for the new demands on the supply of forced labour, and it was decided to divert over 100,000 Jews from the gas chambers to the camps in Germany. This was a reversal of Himmler's October 1942 order that all Jewish detainees held in camps in Reich territory be sent to Auschwitz or Majdanek, with the intention of making Germany 'Judenfrei',[8] and was considered a temporary diversion from the process of genocide. During 1944, the percentage of Jews in the concentration camp system grew rapidly.[9] In the last year of the war, most of the Jews sent to the concentration camps, instead of the extermination camps, were Hungarian.[10] All accounts of the conditions in the concentration camps in Germany confirm that the Jewish internees were treated more cruelly, and lived in harsher conditions than the

[7] Edward L. Homze, *Foreign labor in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, 1967), p. 308.; Herbert, *Foreign labor in Germany*, pp. 138–9, 152–3.

[8] Falk Pingel, 'Resistance and resignation in Nazi concentration and extermination camps', in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The policies of genocide: Jews and Soviet prisoners of war in Nazi Germany* (London, 1986), pp. 37–8.

[9] See Peter Black, 'Forced labour in the concentration camps, 1942–1944', in M. Berenbaum, ed., *A mosaic of victims: Non-Jews persecuted and murdered by the Nazis* (London, 1990), p. 56.

[10] 'Of the 458,000 Jews deported to Auschwitz, some 350,000 were gassed and 108,000 shipped out to be deployed as forced laborers' (Herbert, *Foreign labor in Germany*, p. 176).

other camp inmates.[11] Their sojourn in the camps was considered temporary, and as an adjunct of the policy of their total elimination.[12]

From the outside, observed from neutral Switzerland and Sweden, the realities of the concentration camps were difficult to comprehend. The camp system transformed itself in accordance with the needs of the German war economy; distress was universal; the prisoners (even if against their will) were engaged in labour directly benefiting Germany's ability to wage war;[13] and the distinction between forced slave labour and voluntary foreign labour was not always clearly drawn.

II

In June 1943, the ICRC began trial shipments of relief parcels to several concentration camps in Germany. Parcels were sent to named inmates, but as the Germans refused to submit lists of the 'unassimilated' internees to the Red Cross, parcels could only be sent to those prisoners whose names and whereabouts could be established by other means.[14] The first parcels were sent to 150 prisoners, mainly Norwegians, whose names and addresses were known to the Red Cross offices in Geneva.[15] In weeks the ICRC received signed receipts from many of the recipients. News of the relief programme spread, and the Red Cross offices in Geneva were soon receiving names and addresses from internees of many other nationalities, which allowed an expansion of the programme. The ICRC was able to obtain large quantities of supplies within the blockade area from Rumania, Slovakia, and Hungary, and, according to the official ICRC account of the scheme, as many as 9,000 parcels were dispatched daily. Between November 1943 and May 1945, 1,112,000 parcels of food, clothing, and medicine were sent to known internees.[16]

Although this relief programme benefited certain categories of internees, the Red Cross was initially unable to extend any assistance to the most harshly treated categories – Jews and other 'unassimilated' prisoners. At first, the Germans refused to allow any aid for Jews, while the Allies refused to allow any food or funds to purchase food for the benefit of Jews and other unassimilated

[11] See, for example, the account of the Austrian Communist, Hermann Langbein, *Against all hope: resistance in the Nazi concentration camps, 1938–1945* (London, 1994): 'Jews were in an incomparably worse position in the concentration camps' (p. 325). See also Pingel, 'Resistance and resignation', passim.

[12] For a discussion of the conflict between ideological racism and the economic demands of the war effort, cf. Falk Pingel, *Häftlinge unter SS.-Herrschaft. Widerstand, Selbsbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager* (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 139–44.

[13] In 1944, concentration camp labour represented almost 5 per cent of the German workforce (Falk Pingel, 'The concentration camps as part of the National-Socialist system of domination', in Y. Gutman and A. Saf, eds., *The Nazi concentration camps* (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 17).

[14] See *Documents relating to the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the benefit of civilian detainees in German concentration camps between 1939 and 1945* (Geneva, 1972), and *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its activities during the Second World War* (3 vols., Geneva, 1948), III, passim.

[15] United States National Archives (NA), RG 220, Hyde Park, War Refugee Board, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, 1944, Note remise à James, and Livingston, 24 Aug. 1943, 'Dispatch of standard food parcels to concentration camps and prisons'.

[16] *Report of the International Committee*, III, pp. 80, 335–6.

to penetrate the blockade. In September 1943, the ICRC tested Allied policy by requesting permission to send fifty parcels purchased from the American Red Cross to individuals in different camps in Germany, but were refused.[17] Nevertheless, parcels were obtained from other sources and eventually the Red Cross was able to produce thirty-one signed receipts for the fifty parcels sent. Using the success of these early shipments, the ICRC began to pressure the Allied blockade authorities to liberalize the restrictions, to waive the requirement of Red Cross visits to the camps and the provision of detailed prisoner lists in advance, and to accept signed receipts instead.

At this stage, the ICRC had hoped to mobilize the American Red Cross in bringing pressure to bear on the blockade authorities in London, but the American organization was not willing to co-operate:

> The persons involved do not enjoy the protection of the prisoners of war convention, and consequently they are regarded by the blockading authorities in the same light as the civilian populations of enemy controlled territory. The fact that the ICRC is able to obtain receipts from persons in question would not, we are sure, be construed as a circumstance changing this basic position … . The American Red Cross has followed the practice of not endeavouring to influence the decisions of the blockading authorities and we are not, therefore prepared to urge them to agree to the suggestion of the ICRC.[18]

This attitude reflected a broader problem that the ICRC, and other relief agencies, faced in their general endeavours to aid the victims of Nazi persecution, in particular the Jews. Although the committee was continually lobbied by Jewish organizations to do more for the Jews under German control, it had no *locus standi* on the question of 'unassimilated' civilian internees with either warring side, a fact which inhibited the committee's belief in its own effectiveness.[19] During 1943 it reported a worsening of German attitudes concerning Red Cross access precisely because of the increasingly vocal international concern at the internee's fate, which had caused a 'definite tightening-up in the attitude of the occupying powers', while at the same time the committee had been unable to bring about any liberalization of the blockade: 'Any decision to institute relief measures in favour of the European Jews is thus more likely to be taken in the United States or in England rather than in Geneva.'[20]

The creation of the United States War Refugee Board (WRB) in January 1944 provided the necessary focus in an Allied capital to challenge the restrictions of accepted policy from within. The WRB was a temporary executive agency consisting of the secretaries of state, defence, and treasury, with the specific task of facilitating the relief and rescue of the victims of Nazi

[17] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, James to Mitchell, 1 Sept. 1943.

[18] Ibid., James (American Red Cross, Geneva) to ICRC, 7 Feb. 1944.

[19] Bundesarchiv, Berne (BB), political department, E2001 (D) 1968/74 carton 13 dossier B.55.45.25, Schwarzenberg, ICRC to de Haller, political department, Swiss government, 17 May 1945.

[20] Yad Vashem Archives, Duker papers, Office of Strategic Services copy of USA censorship report: Red Cross correspondence – Jean Suchard to Marc Peter, ICRC delegate, Washington, 24 June 1943.

persecution. The board identified the existing ICRC parcel programme as the one sphere of relief activity that could be expanded immediately, and shortly after it began operations, the board contacted the committee with an offer of assistance 'to provide food and medicines to Jews and other persecuted groups in German occupied areas who are denied the facilities available to the rest of the population .... We are prepared to see that funds are made available at once for necessary operations.'[21]

This approach by the WRB was the first sign of an official Allied body pursuing an activist policy on relief. But it also suggested a way to circumvent two of the most difficult problems inherent in any Allied response to Nazi racial policies. The board had offered funds – a reflection of its origins in US treasury circles that controlled the licensing of money transfers. It was unable to overcome the difficulties in obtaining material supplies that the blockade created for relief projects, but it did offer relief for the lesser problem of financing.[22] More significantly, by defining its jurisdiction as relief for persecuted groups who were 'denied the facilities available to the rest of the population', the board had provided an elegant solution to the difficulty of addressing the fact that was obvious to all: that the Jews were the most harshly treated of all groups, and were in the direst need. This problem, discussed below, constrained the Allied response to the Holocaust throughout the war, and was to complicate their response to the possibilities for relief and rescue as they emerged in the last year of the war as well. The board's formula stipulated that aid would be sent to all the persecuted groups, and parties involved in the relief programme continually strove to prove that the aid provided would not discriminate in favour of Jews as a group. This was necessary, it was reasoned, both to avoid antagonizing the Germans and a negative response of domestic Allied opinion.

In December 1943 the ICRC had approached the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) in London with a request for 300,000 Swiss Francs to pay for a relief scheme for concentration camps in Croatia, Slovakia, Rumania, and Hungary, as well as Theresienstadt.[23] It was this project that the WRB now wished to finance with a contribution of $100,000 (Swiss francs 429,000). As the source of the funds which the board was able to make available to the ICRC was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the ICRC was urged to co-ordinate its activities with the JDC's representative in Switzerland, Saly Mayer. The board authorized the committee to purchase supplies in Hungary, Rumania, and neutral countries for dispatch to the individual camps listed.[24]

[21] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, WRB (Washington) to Berne, for ICRC, 279, 27 Jan. 1944.

[22] In fact, the ICRC was not short of funding for Jewish relief projects. Jewish communities in neutral countries, and in some of the Balkan states, had been able previously to finance the purchase of relief supplies for a few of the endangered Jewish communities.

[23] Pressure to do so came originally from the World Jewish Congress.

[24] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 64, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, state department to US legation, Berne (for minister from WRB), no. 437, 9 Feb. 1944.

By the end of February 1944 the ICRC submitted for Allied approval the outline of the relief programme covered by the JDC's contribution channelled through the WRB. The funds were divided between Bessarabia and Transnistria (under Rumanian control), Theresienstadt, and a Jewish relief organization in Cracow,[25] while a reserve was set aside for camps in Holland and Upper Silesia. The committee tried to avoid spending any of the dollars in Germany itself, and sought supplies available in other axis countries.

The creation of the WRB and the sudden willingness of the Americans to transfer funds for civilian (i.e., non-POW) relief campaigns, encouraged the ICRC to confront directly the existing blockade policy and to suggest a far broader relief effort. It was difficult to find adequate sources of food and clothing, and the committee continually reminded the American legation in Berne (representing the WRB) that the task of getting supplies into the camps would have been easier if the Allies had agreed to provide the parcels rather than money.[26] The committee pressed for a stockpile of goods to be established in Geneva, which would allow sudden opportunities of sending aid to be exploited as soon as they appeared: 'The peculiar position of Jews in the axis countries is not a crystallized one, and the possibilities of extending relief to them which exist at any given moment may suddenly disappear.'[27] In order to overcome problems of shipping, the ICRC offered to convey the parcels on the same ships that carried supplies for Allied POWs from the United States and Canada to Lisbon, and from Lisbon to Marseilles (from whence they were transferred to Geneva).

The ICRC was concerned that any new relief programme that would benefit Jews be kept as discreet as possible – both to avoid provoking the German authorities into withdrawing their agreement and raising 'new difficulties', and, paradoxically, to prevent the infighting of the different Jewish organizations involved in relief: 'It is not in the interest of the aim in view to reveal to one Jewish organization what is done by another.'[28] In order to deflect attention from the fact that the new relief campaign had been financed by Jewish organizations and was the harbinger of a broader international relief effort for the Jews under German control, the committee therefore suggested

[25] The 'JUS' – Judische Unterstützungsstelle für das Generalgouvernement Krakau', under the leadership of Dr Weichert. (On Weichert's relations with the German authorities, see Bauer, *American Jewry*, pp. 320–2.)

[26] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, Schwarzenberg (ICRC, POW dept), to Daniel Reagan, commercial attaché, US legation, Berne, 29 Feb. 1944. Schwarzenberg added that 'All the Jews in Switzerland seem to have heard about money being suddenly available and they all come to us with personal claims. I am almost out of my wits and do not know how to stop this continual flow of visitors.'

[27] Ibid., C. J. Burckhardt, ICRC, to US legation, Berne, 29 Feb. 1944.

[28] Four main Jewish organizations were active on relief and rescue matters in Switzerland: the JDC (through its unofficial representative, Saly Mayer); the World Jewish Congress; Hehalutz/Jewish Agency; and the Va'adat Hatzalah. Cf. Raya Cohen, 'Solidariut Yehudit Be'Mivchan: Pe'ilut Ha'Irgunim Ha'Yehudi'im Ha'Olami'im be-Genevah, 1939–1942' (Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv, 1994); Bauer, *American Jewry*; and Monty Penkower, *The Jews were expendable: free world diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana, 1983), passim.

that the scheme be expanded to include other war victims, 'irrespective of race and religion'.[29] The committee specifically mentioned Norwegian, Dutch, Polish, Belgian, Greek, Czech, and 'other deportees' in Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, Ravensbruck, and elsewhere; 80,000 refugee Serb children that had escaped from Croatia; and 100,000 Slovenian children in areas annexed to Italy. The presence of a WRB representative in Berne would allow the Allies to supervise the expanded relief programme and ensure that the food and clothing would be distributed to the victims and would therefore not benefit the German war effort or infringe the intentions of the blockade.

As a result of this response, there were now two separate questions for consideration in Washington: approval of the specific proposals for the expenditure of the $100,000, and a decision of principle whether to allow the ICRC to expand its relief effort to include other war victims and establish stockpiles of supplies in Geneva for that purpose. Up till then, Allied discussion of relief possibilities had focused on aid for Jews who had escaped from Nazi-occupied territory to neutral countries on the fringes of Europe. The new proposal focused attention on events within Europe itself. Blockade policy had always been controversial, and significant pressure groups in the United States had lobbied for a more liberal policy that would alleviate the suffering of all civilian populations under Axis control.[30] While the British had consistently favoured a strict enforcement of the blockade and had some support in Washington (especially from the foreign economic administration), the state department was becoming increasingly sceptical whether the political costs of depriving the civilian populations of Allied governments in Europe did not outweigh the dubious strategic advantage of a blockade policy. In January 1944 Cordell Hull wrote to Roosevelt suggesting that 'the need [of children in Belgium, France, and Norway] was so great that the blockade policy should be amended'. Hull pointed out that the current policy was only alienating the populations in the areas of forthcoming military operations (i.e., Overlord) and was therefore counterproductive.[31] However, during February the United States joint chiefs of staff reiterated their support of the British attitude, and said they would oppose the sending of any relief to industrialized areas under German control.[32]

The heightened public interest in America on the effect of the blockade in Europe, and the approach of Overlord, placed the question firmly on the

[29] Emphasis in the original (NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, C. J. Burckhardt, ICRC, to US legation, Berne, 29 Feb. 1944).

[30] Resolutions calling for trans-blockade shipments to the 'starving peoples of Europe' were passed by the US senate on 15 Feb. 1944 and the house of representatives on 17 Apr. 1944 (Congressional record, vol. 90 pt 2 p. 1652 and pt 3, p. 3497).

[31] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1944, I, p. 252, Hull to Roosevelt, memo, 26 Jan. 1944.

[32] Greece was an exception because it was primarily agricultural (NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS*, 1944, I, 254–5, Admiral William Leahy to secretary of state, 28 Feb. 1944.) See also Beaumont, 'Starving for democracy', pp. 66–7.

agenda of inter-Allied relations. In March, the state department probed London's response to a possible liberalization of current policy, and quickly learnt that while public opinion in the United States was alarmed at the deprivation in Europe, public opinion in Britain, under the impact of German missile attack, would not accept any relief which might strengthen the production levels of industry under German control.[33] The WRB's determination to license funds for a number of rescue and relief projects[34] was discussed by the British cabinet 'Committee on the Reception and Accommodation of Refugees' in March. The board's action had galvanized the committee, and in its first meeting since August 1943, six months previously, the effect of possible relief programmes on Allied blockade policy was debated. Foreign secretary Anthony Eden explained the dilemma now facing His Majesty's government:

> If we object [to the transfer of funds] we risk being held up by the War Refugee Board, which is engaged in a publicity campaign, as obstacles to a humanitarian measure which would probably save many Jewish lives. If we merely acquiesce, we allow the U.S. government to get the credit for a piece of rescue work which critics will say should have been attempted long ago, while if we, too, agree to remit money to the ICRC we may be committed to a relaxation of our financial bloackade which may prove of real advantage to the enemy.[35]

In April, Churchill wrote to the president with a decisive argument against any large-scale relief programme – the logistics of supplies to Europe (safe passage to ships, and protected inland routes of distribution) would make it hard to keep Overlord a secret. 'Any relief action now undertaken would therefore inevitably hamper impending military operations.'[36] In mid-April, Lord Selborne, the British minister for economic warfare, sent a formal response to Washington's queries, stating clearly that His Majesty's government was convinced 'that it is not possible to devise conditions for the satisfactory working of a scheme which involves supplementing the diet available under a German controlled ration system'.[37]

The administration in Washington was now forced to make a difficult choice. On the one hand, the British had made a convincing defence of Allied blockade policy, while on the other the WRB was taking definite steps toward the relief of Jews. As the secretary of state pointed out, aid to the Jews was 'highlighting to the government's embarrassment its failure to take any steps

[33] The anti-blockade famine relief committee was not able to sway parliamentary or public opinion decisively against government policy (Beaumont, 'Starving for democracy', p. 75).

[34] Within six weeks of its creation, the board arranged for licences allowing the JDC and the World Jewish Congress to send $700,000 to neutral countries in order to finance different rescue and relief projects.

[35] Public Record Office (PRO), Cab 95/15, note by secretary of state for foreign affairs, JR (44)4, 10 Mar. 1944; discussed at meeting on 14 Mar. 1944, ibid., JR(44)1st meeting.

[36] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, Churchill to Roosevelt, 8 Apr. 1944, cited in *FRUS*, 1944, I, pp. 257–8.

[37] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, Lord Selborne to Winflied Riefler, FEA, and special assistant to the US ambassador to the UK, 10 Apr. 1944, cited in *FRUS*, 1944, I, pp. 259–60.

toward the relief of other victims of Nazi oppression'.[38] The question of relief had not only joined the agenda of inter-Allied relations, but was becoming an increasingly public issue.

The proposal on 29 February by the ICRC (to broaden the relief scheme which began with the transfer of the $100,000) reached the state department one week later, in the midst of debates on general blockade policy.[39] Until a response was forthcoming, the US legation in Berne authorized the ICRC to begin the specific relief campaign that had originally been proposed (and to named camps in Transnistria). The original plan was based on the ability to purchase goods inside Axis countries, especially Hungary, for relief elsewhere behind German lines. But before the purchases could be made, the German army occupied Hungary (19/20 March) and supplies were no longer available from that source. There were rumours that the other possible sources of supplies, Slovakia and Rumania, would be occupied as well. In searching for alternative sources from neutral countries, the ICRC proposed purchasing food in Portugal and transporting it by ship to Marseilles. This could only be done if the blockade authorities issued *navicerts* (documentation allowing passage of commercial goods) so that the relief parcels to Jews and others could be transported in the same Red Cross ships that were used to transport parcels for Allied POWs.[40] A few days later, the director of the special affairs department of the ICRC, Dr Jean de Schwarzenberg, raised yet again the idea of stockpiling supplies in Geneva in order to exploit future relief possibilities:

> the last possibilities of securing foodstuffs in noteworthy quantities within Europe seem to be dwindling away … . The latest events have shown once more that what would have still been feasible a few months ago has now been rendered impossible because action has come too late. The International Committee of the Red Cross has experienced this over and over again during this war, and that is the reason why we so strongly urge the necessity of accepting our suggestion to send us as rapidly as possible a considerable stock of parcels of food and underwear.[41]

By late April, having received no reply to the idea of stockpiling relief supplies, the ICRC suggested a new source of supply – purchasing a small quantity of goods in Switzerland itself.[42] This suggestion was yet another infringement of the principles of economic warfare, as all Swiss exports to German-controlled territory were strictly regulated by agreements which the Allies imposed on the Swiss government. Any changes to these agreements could only be made as a result of lengthy negotiations, and neither the state department in Washington nor the Foreign Office in London replied to the

[38] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS*, 1944, I, pp. 260–1, Hull to Winant, 21 Apr. 1944.

[39] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, US legation, Berne, to state dept 1366, 6 Mar. 1944.

[40] Ibid., Schwarzenberg to Reagan, 23 Mar. 1944

[41] Ibid., Schwarzenberg to Reagan, 27 Mar. 1944. The US legation informed the state dept that it 'strongly recommended' accepting the ICRC's request (Harrison to state dept, No. 2031, 1 Apr. 1944).

[42] The goods in question were 60 cases of apple jam and 100 cases of green peas (ibid., W. J. Sullivan (commercial attaché, British legation), to Reagan, 22 Apr. 1944).

urgent telegrams of their embassies in Berne requesting permission to authorize the purchases.[43] Following the German occupation of Hungary, the whole relief programme to the concentration camps was unravelling because of the small quantities of apple jam and canned green peas which the ICRC hoped to 'export' from Switzerland. Permission to go ahead with the purchases finally came in May, as an exception to the rules of blockade policy.[44] More significantly, the Allies also scheduled high level talks to reconsider the restrictions on the provision of supplies so that an effective relief effort for the camp internees could be undertaken.

III

Following the United States declaration of war against Germany in December 1941, America became an active partner in the British-led policy of blockade, although there were significant differences of approach between the two Allies on the question of civilian relief. In April 1943, attempts were made to formulate a shared policy on relief supplies, but they were quashed by the British government. Roosevelt and Churchill discussed the general relief question during the latter's visit to Washington in May 1943, and subsequently the Americans recognized that the British would have primary responsibility on formulating Allied policy on blockade matters. The Greek relief campaign of 1942 remained the one substantial exception to the Allied argument that a belligerent power must accept responsibility for the well-being of the people it has conquered.[45]

Any discussion of Allied objections to a large-scale relief programme originating in Switzerland must be seen in the context of the broader wrangling over that country's economic relations with Germany during the blockade. With hindsight, it is difficult to understand the Allies' concern with the transfer of the small amounts of money that the (Jewish) non-governmental organizations wished to use for purposes of relief and rescue, in the light of the huge amounts of commercial credit (almost 1 billion Swiss francs of credit, above and beyond the sums paid for Swiss imports from Germany) that Switzerland made available to Germany during the war as part of its trade agreements with that country.[46]

At the same time, in the spring of 1943, Swiss exports to Germany began to play an increasingly large role in German supplies – as much as 7 per cent of certain classes of goods – and the Allies began lengthy negotiations with the Swiss authorities to prevent any further expansion of these exports to Germany. The military success of the Allies against Germany facilitated the talks, and in December 1943 a new agreement was reached whereby the Swiss agreed to

[43] Ibid., Harrison to state dept, no. 2726, 29 Apr. 1944; and US embassy, London, to state dept, no. 97, 29 Apr. 1944.

[44] Ibid., Foreign Office (FO) to British legation (MEW for Sullivan), no. 1634, 5 May 1944.

[45] W. N. Medlicott, *The economic blockade*, *general series*, *history of the Second World War*, *UK civil series* (2 vols., London, 1952), I, pp. 223 and 226; II, pp. 280–1; and Beaumont, 'Starving for democracy', p. 73.

[46] Medlicott, *Economic blockade*, II, pp. 517, 520

additional restrictions on exports, and to cut some food exports to a minimum. The agreement included a Swiss commitment 'not to authorize exports by the International Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations except with the prior consent' of the Allies.[47] As the defeat of Germany approached, Swiss compliance with Allied blockade policy increased. In October 1944 the export of war material was suspended, and in March 1945 all Swiss trade with Germany was cut.

As the blockade became more effective, and Allied military successes continued, public pressure for relief shipments re-emerged. As the British official historian of the blockade policy noted, 'it was increasingly easy to believe that a few ship loads of this or that would have no bearing on the final result of the war', but the ministry of economic warfare in London remained opposed to any weakening of existing policies:

> The practical difficulty of making arrangements with the German authorities, the conviction that the *existence of genuine distress had in no wise been proved*, and the impossibility in any case of moving ship loads of food into western European waters on the eve of invasion, convinced the ministry in the winter of 1943–44 that no change in its opposition to further relief measures was yet practicable; but the pressure grew.[48]

Six months later, the pressure of public opinion was such that the British government was forced to agree to a joint Allied re-evaluation of possible relief programmes, with specific reference to the parcel scheme for concentration camps. Dingle Foot, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for the ministry of economic warfare, visited Washington in June 1944. In a series of talks with the state department, the FEA and the WRB, a three-month programme to supply 100,000 parcels (550 tons) per month, obtained from within the blockade area, to unassimilated civilian internees was agreed upon.[49] A stringent series of conditions was imposed on the new scheme: it was limited to concentration camps; parcels would have to be distributed to individual internees by ICRC delegates; and the ICRC would have to make subsequent visits to the camps to ensure proper use of the supplies distributed.[50] Nevertheless, the agreement removed the last Allied obstacle to the $100,000 project, and promised greatly expanded relief efforts in the future. Roswell McClelland, the newly appointed representative of the WRB in Switzerland, was informed of the terms of the new Anglo-American policy at the end of June, and the search began for sources of supply for the greatly expanded relief project now envisioned.

Although the June 1944 talks in Washington resulted in a joint Allied agreement to a limited relief programme for concentration camp internees, Foot had not been empowered to agree to any changes of principle in the

[47] Ibid., pp. 510–15.

[48] Ibid., p. 612 (emphasis added).

[49] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS*, 1944, I, pp. 263–4: memo of Dingle Foot–Stettinius meeting on blockade and relief, 8 June 1944; and ibid., pp. 268–70, Dingle Foot to assistant secretary of state Berle, 13 June 1944.

[50] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, 1944, state dept to legation, no. 2198 (for McClelland from WRB, no. 54), 28 June 1944.

blockade regime. In view of the heightened public interest in the relief of the camps, both the WRB and the state department now decided to challenge some of the basic principles that underlay existing policy concerning contacts with the Germans on questions of relief. Already in March, Saly Mayer had suggested to the ICRC that it adopt a more active policy, and that it use some of the $100,000 fund for purposes of rescue and not only for relief. The committee immediately rejected the notion: 'the Red cross could not contemplate the possibility of partaking in certain actions with the object of getting Jews out of axis countries, such actions necessitating methods which are not considered legal by the detaining authorities'.[51]

The World Jewish Congress had frequently asked the international committee to request that the German government extend the status of 'assimilated' internees to Jews, but the committee consistently refused to do so.[52] In April 1944, shortly after its representative, McClelland, began his work in Geneva, the WRB asked the same thing of the committee (on behalf of all internees), and it, too, was refused.[53] The refusal, drafted by Professor Max Huber, the president of the committee, was a lengthy explanation of the problems such an approach would create for the humanitarian work of the organization. Huber pointed out that Red Cross activities for POWs and assimilated civilian internees rested on fragile international agreements, and any attempt formally to gain the consent of the German authorities to expand the scope of these agreements would almost certainly fail. This, in turn, would jeopardize all of the committee's work. Furthermore, any such approach to the German authorities might compromise the committee's neutrality, as Berlin might consider that it was 'dictated by [domestic American] political rather than by humanitiarian motives'. Instead of attempting to change the legal status of the unassimilated internees in Berlin, the committee preferred to expand its informal parcel programme to the camps wherever possible.[54]

The British concession on the parcel scheme for the camp internees was intended to contain the American domestic pressure for a general review of the blockade policy that would include a feeding programme for all civilian women and children in occupied Europe. But the state department remained concerned that the American public would not understand why it was only possible to feed political prisoners and Jews in the camps. Prior to the Foot talks, Washington had considered approaching the Swedish government to act as intermediaries with the Germans in negotiating a broad scheme of civilian

[51] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, Schwarzenberg to Reagan, US legation, 13 Mar. 1944.

[52] For a discussion of World Jewish Congress–ICRC relations during the war, see Penkower, *The Jews were expendable*, ch. 8; Favez, *Une mission impossible?*, pp. 206–11.

[53] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS* 1944, I, pp. 1039–40, state dept to Harrison (Berne), 29 Apr. 1944.

[54] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, Max Huber to Harrison, 12 May 1944, sent to Washington in legation dispatch no. 8203, 17 May 1944. Significantly, Huber also forwarded copies of this correspondence to the Swiss government, with a request for Swiss support for the committee's position (BB, political dept, E2001 (D) 1968/74 carton 13 dossier B.55.45.25).

relief.[55] Once it became clear that Foot did not have the authority to negotiate an agreement that changed the basic principles of the blockade, the state department decided to raise the Swedish proposal again, more forcefully this time, with the British government. As they pointed out, it would be 'inconsistent' to allow the Red Cross to distribute food in the camps but not to trust it to distribute relief to children and nursing and expectant mothers among the civilian population in general. Washington felt that the Allies should at least attempt to negotiate a broader relief plan – 'American public opinion will not be satisfied otherwise'.[56]

Just as the Foreign Office had feared, the parcel programme for the camps was turning into the thin edge of a wedge that threatened to undermine Allied blockade strategy as a whole in the last months of the war. Rather than assuaging public opinion by alleviating the conditions of a defined population interned in concentration camps, the parcel scheme threatened to have the opposite effect. Official opinion in Washington (and elsewhere) was uncomfortable with the claim that the camp internees, increasingly large proportions of whom were Jews, were entitled to favourable treatment. The Red Cross was also uncomfortable with the restrictions that recent Allied concessions had placed on the relief programme. If it was possible to allow 'unassimilated' Jews to receive parcels, why not extend it to all internees? Schwarzenberg raised this question in a personal letter to the Swiss member of the IGCR, Dr. G. Kullmann:

> Si toutefois les autorités Alliées admettent maintenant des envois de secours à travers le blocus (fonds) à destination des Juifs qui, eux, ne jouissent pas non plus de la protection de la Convention et ne sont même pas détenus dans des camps, pourquoi exclure de cette mesure de faveur les déportés civils des pays occupés qui se trouvent dans des camps dans lesquels nous pouvons exercer un certain contrôle sur la distribution? Il est difficile au Comité International de la Croix-Rouge de participer à une action aussi unilatérale et c'est par esprit d'équité qu'il doit insister sur l'extension aux déportés de toute action en faveur de 'refugees'.[57]

This was a recurring theme in all deliberations on relief campaigns – not to be seen to discriminate in favour of the Jews. The Red Cross was concerned both about the question of principle (favourable discrimination) and that the Nazis would be less tolerant of a humanitarian project that benefited Jews (either exclusively or mainly). Consistently pressing for the expansion of the project to 'all persecuted and endangered groups' the committee pointed out

[55] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS* 1944, I, pp. 261–3, Hull to Winant, 27 May 1944.

[56] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, cited in *FRUS* 1944, I, pp. 272–7, Hull to Winant, 1 July 1944. The FO agreed to establish a joint Allied committee to consider the American proposal, and the discussion continued into 1945. The rapid advance of the Allied forces and the liberation of occupied territory in western Europe removed the urgency of this question, and it quickly merged with the discussions on United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration relief activities in liberated areas.

[57] BB, political dept, E2001 (D) 1968/74 carton 13 dossier B.55.45.25, Schwarzenberg to Kullmann, 17 Apr. 1944. (A copy of this letter was sent to the Swiss political dept (the ministry of foreign affairs), where its circulation was strictly limited.)

that various Allied governments-in-exile in London, and the French National Committee of Liberation (in Algiers) would be willing to contribute to a broader scheme, which would require 'several hundred thousand parcels more per month' than that envisaged in the agreement reached by Foot in Washington.[58]

Although there was no possibility of such a dramatic expansion of the relief programme, in the weeks that followed, the policies that the ICRC had been advocating for the past months were now accepted by the WRB and the state department. Relief parcels would be equitably distributed among all nationalities interned in the camps. Furthermore, there would be no attempt to obtain official German approval for the programme. From its previous experience, the ICRC had learnt that it was far more effective to rely on the graft of individual camp commanders in some of the bigger camps (Dachau, Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, Buchenwald, Ravensbruck, and Natzweiler in Germany; and Jasenovac, Stara Gradisca, and Gredjani Salas in Croatia) who would allow Red Cross delegates to enter the camps and distribute parcels, in exchange for bribes of cigarettes. Berlin's approval was therefore not necessary, and there was no point in risking its active opposition. Accordingly, McClelland requested that the shipments of food parcels also include a 'few hundred cases' of cigarettes as well. The committee also requested that the blockade authorities abandon the requirement that parcels be individually distributed and that the recipients sign for their receipt.[59] As the state department informed the ministry of economic warfare in London, 'the amount of food which might fall into enemy hands could not affect the outcome of the war nor prolong it'.[60] The British authorities approved the amended plan in early August, and the second large effort (after the $100,000 scheme) could now get underway.[61]

In order to overcome difficulties in shipping the parcels from the United States, goods were first salvaged from a POW ship (the SS *Christina*) that had beached near Sète, France. Originally intended for French and Belgian POWs, the salvaged French portion of the cargo was made available to the Red Cross. During September and October 1944, 2.5 kilo food parcels were distributed in

[58] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, 1944, McClelland to state dept, no. 3877 (for WRB), 17 June 1944.

[59] Ibid. In the final accounting of the goods sent to the camps on account of the earlier $100,000 scheme, which had been designed to benefit primarily Jewish internees, most of the foods purchased could not have been intended for the use of the starved internees. The shipments included large quantities of, inter alia, foie gras, paté Hongraise, paté de lièvre. Presumably these too were designed to facilitate the agreement of camp commanders to any parcel distribution. (NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, Boehringer (ICRC) to McClelland, 26 Sept. 1944, final summary report of the use made of the $100,000 'en faveur de réfugiés et déportés juifs'). One eye-witness of the liberation of Buchenwald recorded: 'It was amusing to see how hastily the camp officers cleared their rooms of empty Red Cross boxes as the front approaches, so the Americans would not come to the obvious conclusions when they saw them' (David Hackett, ed., *The Buchenwald report* (Boulder, 1995), p. 96).

[60] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, Stettinius to US embassy, London (no. 2663 to Berne), 3 Aug. 1944.

[61] Ibid., Livingston (British consul general, Geneva) to Elting (US consulate, Geneva), 9 Aug. 1944.

the German camps listed above, as well as in Neuengamme, Schliessfach, Mauthhausen, and Bergen-Belsen (and one other unidentified camp, 'Feldpost 07702'). An estimated 25,600 internees of all nationalities received parcels.[62] Additional supplies were also made available via Göteborg, Sweden, as a result of the opening of new supplies routes for POW shipments. 300,000 parcels were especially packed by the American Red Cross and made available to the ICRC for trans-shipment into Germany via Lübeck.

The first cargo of 15,000 parcels reached Sweden in September; however their distribution was delayed for over two months when the German authorities refused to allow any civilian transport from north to south, in order not to disrupt military traffic on the east–west axis during the fighting in Belgium. A further instalment of 224,000 parcels reached Göteborg on 1 December, and the remaining 61,000 were sent to Toulon, France, on 19 December for distribution to camps in southern Germany via Geneva. As a result of pressure from different Jewish groups, it was also decided to distribute test shipments of 250 parcels each to a number of camps in Poland (including Auschwitz) 'within 120 to 245 kilometers of the eastern fighting front'.[63]

As the relief programme gained momentum, and possibly also because the board had conceded to McClelland's request to include shipments to camps in Poland, WRB officials in Washington began to express concern that the food parcels were not distributed 'impartially'. The board was aware of the original $100,000 contribution by the JDC, and of subsequent shipments of kosher food parcels organized by the World Jewish Congress in Sweden (40,000 parcels). McClelland and the ICRC decided that the Christina goods, and the first 15,000 of the American parcels would be directed to non-Jews in the camps. The balance of the 224,000 destined for Sweden would be divided between 39,000 kosher parcels and 185,000 'primarily to non-Jewish detainees'.[64] The officials of the board were uneasy at the fact that a portion of the relief supplies had been earmarked especially for Jews, and informed McClelland that they 'regretted' that shipments were not distributed 'on an equitable basis motivated solely by need and accessibility'.[65] Two weeks later, officials of the board's Washington office met privately with delegates of the ICRC in the American capital and called them to task at the use made of the first $100,000 (donated by the Jewish JDC): 'They were under the impression that nearly all the relief bought with this money went to Jewish victims.' The only reply that the ICRC could make was that 'we had to use the addresses we had and they happened to be mostly [of] Jewish victims'.[66]

[62] Ibid., Schwarzenberg to McClelland, 21 Aug. 1944; and McClelland to WRB, nos. 7365–6, 6 Nov. 1944. Approximately 50 per cent of the parcels were distributed to named prisoners, and the rest were delivered in bulk.

[63] Ibid., US legation, Berne to state dept, no. 8169, (McClelland to WRB), 16 Dec. 1944.

[64] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – 1944, McClelland to state dept, no. 8044 (for WRB no. 280), 9 Dec. 1944; and no. 8169, 6 Dec. 1944.

[65] Ibid., state dept to US legation, Berne, no. 4314 (to McClelland, no. 302), 22 Dec. 1944.

[66] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross – Jewish relief, report of meeting, 8 Jan. 1945.

McClelland was at a loss to understand the concern of the board's headquarters.[67] The Red Cross distributed goods where and whenever possible, to whichever camps were accessible. The Jewish internees were the most disadvantaged of all the camp residents, and anyone who was aware of the realities of the camps (as McClelland was) would never suggest that the Jews were benefiting unfairly from an 'impartial' allocation based on national or religious identity. Nevertheless, the board was simply expressing a widespread concern in Allied official circles that Jewish persecutees, qua Jews, should not be singled out for any special concern or distinct treatment.

This question had been directly debated in official circles concerned with relief and rescue during September and October 1944. Jewish organizations had become alarmed by growing indications from Germany that the Nazis would murder all the Jews in the camp system before Germany's final defeat. Hitler had stated as much in a broadcast to the German people, and there were other indications as well. As the Allied armies advanced across Europe, different Jewish organizations appealed to the board and to the state department that Eisenhower issue a warning that any German implementing orders for a last-minute massacre would be held personally responsible for his crimes. The board drafted a statement calling for the protection of the camp inmates 'whether they are Jewish or otherwise'. However, Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), in keeping with the Allied concern for impartiality, modified the wording to 'without regard to their nationality or religious faith'.[68] The modification was endorsed by the joint chiefs of staff and the warning was made public in early November.[69]

There were many reasons for the official unease in identifying the distress of Jewish internees as in any way different from that of other concentration camp prisoners. Concern at playing into the hands of German propaganda, or of domestic anti-Semitism, or of engaging in atrocity propaganda, have all been correctly identified as factors in determining Allied responses to the Holocaust. However, to these general considerations must be added other, overriding considerations when considering the development and implementation of practical relief plans: the WRB was a marginal entity in the American administration; the initiative in formulating policy toward civilian populations in Germany had moved almost entirely to SHAEF; and neither SHAEF nor any other official body had valid or even current information about the realities of the camp system.

IV

In the course of planning the military occupation of Germany, the existence of a large population of foreign labourers, and of forced labour in detention, presented many complex problems for the Allied planners. It was considered both in the context of long-term post-hostilities planning and as an immediate

[67] See his marginal comment on no. 4314 (n. 66)
[68] See documents in NA, RG 107, papers of John McCloy: general correspondence.
[69] NA, RG 218, joint chiefs of staff, box 357, CCS 383.7, CCS 713/1, 2 Nov. 1944.

concern of the ground forces that would inevitably uncover and liberate these camps. Accordingly, in the last ten months of the war, SHAEF prepared a series of briefing papers on the concentration camp system. The research and analysis branch of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) also prepared reports on the same subject. Both SHAEF and the OSS updated and modified these papers a number of times as the Allied armies prepared to cross the Rhine. Although based on different sources, the different reports gave similar and totally erroneous impressions of the camps and the physical condition of the inmates.

SHAEF's report, 'Axis concentration camps and detention centers reported as such in Europe' (150 pages long), was prepared by G-2, Military Intelligence. It provided an exhaustive listing of camps and satellite camps (600 separate sites in Germany and Austria), based on information that was valid eighteen months previously. The one-page introduction to the document (and probably the only thing read by the recipients) strongly suggested that conditions in the camps were improving as the war came to an end – the opposite of what was in fact happening:

> recent political and military developments in Europe are said to have established new trends in German concentration camp policy, but these reports have not been adequately confirmed. Greater leniency towards inmates of concentration camps has been reported. A former inmate of Oranienburg said that the beating of inmates there has been forbidden and in Sachsenhausen the guards are said to have been informed that the inmates should be treated as 'property of the Fuhrer'. Hitler is said to have intervened on behalf of the inmates at Dachau. As a result, a brothel is said to have been opened for the inmates, and permission was granted for the clearing of a soccer field … One report expressed the belief that, at the present time, the hatred of the SS men towards their commissioned officers is greater than that for the inmates.

This hopeful picture of camp life was circulated shortly after the extermination and labour camp at Majdanek had been liberated by the Russians (July 1944), and the evidence of large-scale extermination and slave labour operations there had been exposed in *Pravda* (8–9 August) and in the British and American press (August and September). It was also published after the Free French had liberated Natzweiller, in Alsace, with its small gas chamber and crematorium. An endless stream of captured German POW interrogations, and reports from liberated Allied personnel, provided much additional information on the brutal regime in the camps and the conditions of the surviving inmates. None of this material, however, made its way into the report of G-2.

An even more deceptive impression of the camp system was presented in the OSS research and analysis report no. 1844, 'Concentration camps in Germany'. Two separate editions of this report were printed in July and in October 1944. Based entirely on information gathered before 1941 (and parts of it from 1937), the report allocated only a few lines to the Jews in the camp system – one third of its coverage to Jehovah's Witnesses as prisoners. It presented a mild account of life in the camps, and made the following

categorical comment in the summary to the report: 'recent reports … indicate that few Jews remain in the German concentration camps, having for the most part been either executed or sent to Polish camps'.[70]

There were other, more realistic, estimates of the composition of the camp population.[71] Nevertheless, the reports cited above were widely distributed in official circles. They also conformed with the general principle underlying all Allied planning in 1944 concerning displaced persons and refugees – only citizens of Allied nations were entitled to relief. Camp inmates (including Jews) of German, Austrian, or Hungarian origins were to receive the same treatment as other 'ex-enemy nationals'.[72] The sensitivity of the WRB in Washington to any distribution of relief parcels that favoured Jewish camp inmates can only be understood in the light of SHAEF's intentions in dealing with the internees after their liberation, on the prevailing desire to be 'impartial', to avoid highlighting the Jewish component of the general distress, and the intelligence on which these policies were based.

During January 1945 the German transportation system began to break down under the pressure of German military demands and Allied bombing. The relief supplies that had been transferred from Sweden to Lübeck had not yet reached the major camps, despite an increased willingness of individual camp commanders to act independently of Berlin and to allow ICRC access. Furthermore, as the Allied victory drew closer, there were a growing number of contacts between the Berlin delegation of the ICRC and senior Nazi officials responsible for the central administration of the camp system. The latter promised greater access to the camps and to allow the distribution of food parcels to Dutch, Belgian, French, Danish, and Greek Schutzhäftlinge.[73] By February 1945 McClelland was discussing with the committee in Geneva the possibility of sending Red Cross representatives to concentration camps in order to ensure, by their presence, that the SS would not attempt a last minute massacre of the inmates. Similar requests were made to the Swiss and Swedish governments for the dispatch of diplomatic representatives for the same purpose.[74]

By early February 1945 it appeared that the only obstacle to a large-scale relief programme, in advance of the liberation of the camps, was the collapse of the German transportation system. McClelland informed Washington that an

[70] Duker papers (July edition); and NA, RG 260, OMGUS, CAD, POW, and DP branch, box 156 (Oct. edition).

[71] See Handbook for military government (prior to defeat or surrender), 20 Dec. 1944: 'The majority of internees are German political offenders and Jews, but there are also a number of ordinary criminals, military delinquents, and non-Germans' (Eisenhower Library, Bedell Smith collection, box 36).

[72] NA, RG 331, SHAEF, adjutant general's division, executive section, decimal 383.7–1, box 97, SHAEF administrative memo no. 39: displaced persons and refugees, 18 Nov. 1944.

[73] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, Jan.–Mar. 1945, McClelland to state dept, no. 1056, 16 Feb. 1945.

[74] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, Stettinius to US legation, Berne, no. 127 (from WRB, no. 356), 9 Jan. 1945. The legation was instructed to 'urge that continued efforts be made from now on to keep the surviving victims of Nazi persecution alive during the coming stages of hostilities in Europe'.

adequate supply of trucks would allow a far more effective continuation of the halted Allied relief effort,[75] and the British legation in Berne conveyed to London a request of the ICRC for 'some hundreds of lorries … with petrol and other accessories' and SHAEF agreement for 'protection against air attack on [a] secondary railway route'.[76]

The collapse of the German transportation system and the increasing willingness of the authorities to allow access to the camps were only two aspects of the rapidly changing situation. As Washington, London, and the SHAEF offices in Paris now learned, the Germans were also evacuating all camps on the eastern front, and Allied POWs as well as civilian internees were being force-marched westward in conditions of severe cold without food. There were huge stockpiles of supplies available both to the ICRC and to the different national Red Cross societies (for the POWs) but no means of distributing them. The ICRC attempted unsuccessfully to convince the Swiss authorities to provide trucks from their local sources. The Swiss army had 1,500 trucks at its disposal but due to the blockade 357 trucks were without tyres, and they had no sources of tyres, spare parts, or fuel. They were unable to provide trucks even to transport Swiss goods across France, and refused to make any trucks available for relief work in Germany.[77]

The only possible source of adequate transportation were the Allied forces preparing to launch the attack across the Rhine. SHAEF had 466,400 2.5 ton trucks at its disposal, but believed this was 63,000 short of its needs for military units, and was not willing to make any trucks available for civilian relief.[78] On 20 February, the newly appointed head of the WRB in Washington, William O'Dwyer,[79] convened the secretary of state, secretary of war, and secretary of treasury – the full membership of the board – for their first meeting since the previous April, in order to agree on policy to exploit the new possibilities of relief. After explaining that the expansion in the relief programme would be financed from private funds ('particularly the [Jewish] JDC'), O'Dwyer managed to obtain approval for large-scale purchasing of food supplies in Switzerland, and the agreement of the war department to ask Eisenhower to provide fuel and tyres for trucks which would be purchased there as well.[80]

[75] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, Jan.–Mar. 1945, McClelland to state dept, no. 455, 22 Jan. 1945.

[76] PRO, WO 106/4286, 17 Feb. 1945, Norton (British legation, Berne) to FO, no. 292.

[77] McClelland was informed of the Swiss–ICRC talks by Schwarzenberg on 27 Feb. 1945 (see his marginal comment on NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, McClelland to state dept, 1217, 27 Feb. 1945).

[78] NA, RG 331, SHAEF, office of chief of staff, sect, general staff, decimal 383.6/13, box 88, memo on trucks for hauling Red Cross supplies from Switzerland into Germany, 24 Feb. 1945.

[79] John Pehle resigned as executive director of the board on 28 Jan. Brigadier-general O'Dwyer, on leave from the US Army, was the district attorney for King's County, New York, before replacing Pehle.

[80] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, minutes of the 5th meeting of the WRB, 20 Feb. 1945. Secretary of treasury Henry Morgenthau chaired the meeting which was attended by secretary of war Henry Stimson, assistant secretary of war John McCloy, acting secretary of state J. C. Grew, assistant secretary of state James Dunn, and George Warren (state dept adviser on refugees and displaced persons).

Consistent with its policy of deferring all civilian relief until after the liberation of Germany, SHAEF was reluctant to become involved in any major relief efforts during the hostilities. However, as these events were unfolding, the ICRC dramatically changed the terms of the debate. In a telegram to all Allied governments and Red Cross delegations on 22 February, the committee announced that in view of the transportation situation it was no longer able to distribute food parcels to the POW camps (i.e., in addition to its inability to distribute them to concentration camps.). Furthermore, it pointed out, the forced marches of POWs from east to west was creating severe hardship and overcrowding in those camps within Germany to which the POWs were sent. The committee called for the pooling of all national Red Cross stockpiles, fuel, and tyres for existing ICRC trucks, and extra trucks. The telegram concluded with the dire warning: 'Immediate dispatch food parcels to camps situated in areas not directly menaced imperative if more than one million men are to be saved.'[81]

The increasing chaos in Germany, and the imminent Allied invasion of the heartland of the Third Reich, transformed the situation in the camps, and also the possibilities of relief. In particular, German policy changed as members of the Nazi leadership attempted to use the concentration camp internees, and especially the Jews among them, as pawns in negotiations with the Allies. The Swedish Red Cross was allowed to conduct its own relief programme in northern Germany which eventually led to the evacuation to safety of 21,000 Scandinavian and other internees.[82] There were also a number of well-documented negotiations among Himmler, Schellenberg, and other high-ranking Nazi officials, and the president of the ICRC, Carl Burckhardt, the Swiss politician Jean Musy, a representative of the World Jewish Congress in Stockholm (who was flown to Berlin for the meeting), and between SS officers in Budapest and the representative of the JDC in Switzerland, Saly Mayer.[83] These talks were designed to avoid the threatened last-minute massacre of the Jews in the camps, and to allow the evacuation of some internees from the camps to Sweden or Switzerland. They all took place at a diplomatic level that had little to do with the increasingly chaotic realities on the ground, and the various programmes for direct relief into the camps.

The heightened activity of all the agencies involved in relief during February and March 1945 marked a new phase in Allied responses to the fate of the camp internees. Blockade policy, and the unwillingness to focus on the harsher fate of the Jews in the camps, was now replaced by an urgent concern to do what was possible to avoid the death by starvation and disease of all internees within reach. It now appeared that the only obstacle was SHAEF's control of the means of transportation. In the weeks that followed the ICRC's telegram

[81] PRO, FO 1049/26, ICRC Geneva to ICRC delegations and Allied governments, no. SH520, 22 Feb. 1945.

[82] See Amitzur Ilan, *Bernadotte in Palestine, 1948* (London, 1989), pp. 25–47.

[83] These negotiations are recounted in the sources cited in n. 1 above.

threatening to suspend its supplies to POWs, SHAEF made available 468 trucks and 525 railway freight cars for shipments from Switzerland to Germany for the POW programme.[84] Although no guarantee was given that the relief convoys for the POWs would not be bombed, the ICRC was assured that Allied pilots were instructed to 'do their best' to avoid attacking the specially marked trucks.[85] Once they had delivered their supplies to the POW camps, the trucks were authorized to carry civilian internees (small numbers of whom had been released as a result of negotiations with Himmler) back to Switzerland. However, SHAEF did not agree to provide any trucks for the transport of relief supplies to civilian internees.

Throughout late February and early March, McClelland and the ICRC tried every strategy to obtain trucks. A few were rented in Switzerland (once SHAEF agreed to make tyres available), the YMCA handed over a dozen trucks it controlled in Germany, and fifty trucks were purchased in Sweden. Convoys were dispatched whenever transportation became available. But the large stockpiles of food parcels for the ICRC–WRB relief programme that had accumulated in Göteborg, in Geneva, and in French ports, were barely used. At the same time, reports from ICRC representatives in Germany, and of the drivers of those few trucks available, all concurred that the forced marches of the detainees were flooding the larger camps with tens of thousands of prisoners in desperate physical condition. None of the reports during March recounted any difficulties in gaining access to the camps to distribute the few truckloads of supplies that arrived. Indeed, as a result of Burckhardt's negotiations with Himmler's officials in mid-March, the Germans now agreed that ICRC representatives be permanently stationed in the major concentration camps to supervise the distribution of relief goods.[86] But all attempts to find adequate transport were unsuccessful.

At the end of March, two weeks before the Allied field units liberated the first camps in German territory, McClelland, together with James Mann, the representative of the American Red Cross in Geneva, appealed for Washington's intervention with Eisenhower's headquarters to force SHAEF to make trucks available. In their jointly drafted telegram they warned that as the fighting pushed deeper into Germany the situation in the camps was deteriorating daily:

> According to latest report, civil internees in German and German occupied areas are in a very precarious situation. As a result of military developments it is most likely that the Germans will withdraw all feeding from internees who are not useful in their war effort. Mortality is increasing. Camp populations are being shifted from one area to another, on foot and over long distances. Thousands are unable to endure the rigors of these

[84] NA, RG 220, box 60, International Red Cross, SHAEF G-2 memo: transport of POW supplies inside Germany, 5 Apr. 1945.

[85] NA, RG 331, SHAEF, office of chief of staff, sect., general staff, decimal 383.6/13, box 88, air ministry, Whitehall, UK to air staff, no. AX339, 6 Mar. 1945.

[86] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, McClelland to state dept, no. 1722, 22 Mar. 1945.

forced marches and are succumbing. Unless transportation for food packages is secured and these people are fed, they may not receive even minimum food to sustain life.[87]

During the second week of April the ICRC was able to send five truckloads of food (ten tons) in the direction of the camps at Oranienberg, Ravensbrueck and Hamburg-Neuengamme, and a convoy of similar size toward Dachau, Lansberg, Flossenburg, and Mauthhausen. The food was intended for distribution at these camps and to prisoners on forced marches along the way. Separate convoys were sent to Theresienstadt and the Vienna area. It is difficult to state with certainty the actual amounts of food sent. McClelland was forced to revise his estimates almost daily as trucks broke down, fuel or tyres failed to materialize, or routes were closed.

By late April, most of the larger camps had been liberated by the Allied forces, and the continued fighting in Germany made it almost impossible to continue the relief programme. The last convoys were held up outside Munich, unable to reach their destination, and on 23 April the ICRC decided to discontinue all shipments of food parcels from Switzerland to Germany.[88] Occasional small convoys managed to reach their destinations, including also some supplies from Göteborg via Lübeck. But the last, frantic effort to send relief into the concentration camp system had come to an end.

In the final two weeks of hostilities, McClelland attempted to integrate the WRB–ICRC's wealth of experience, and the huge unused stockpiles which the board had acquired over the last twelve months, with the fledgling relief efforts of the Allied armies. At the very least, he asked for authority to resume shipping food into the camps once the fighting ended, until these stockpiles (240,000 parcels in Geneva, and another 140,000 in Sweden – 950 tons of food) were exhausted.[89] But SHAEF was determined to prevent any civilian interference in its own relief programmes, preferring instead to rely on the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which it had recently (and belatedly) mobilized for that purpose. Immediately at the end of the fighting in Europe, McClelland was instructed to end all attempts to distribute the stockpile of food, and to cease all relief activities.[90]

V

The story of the food relief programme has largely been ignored in favour of the more dramatic diplomatic contacts with the Germans in the last months of the war. Nevertheless, the food parcels provided by the American government, by national Red Cross societies, and by Jewish organizations had greater potential for saving lives than the chimerical hopes of any negotiated last-minute reprieve by the Nazi authorities for the concentration camp internees.

[87] NA, RG 59, 840.48 refugees, Mann and McClelland to O'Dwyer (in Paris), no. 1519, 29 Mar. 1945.

[88] Ibid., Katzki and McClelland to state dept (for O'Dwyer), no. 2421, 25 Apr. 1945.

[89] Ibid., McClelland to state dept (for O'Dwyer), no. 2550, 1 May 1945.

[90] NA, RG 220, McClelland papers, box 60, International Red Cross, Apr.–June 1945, state dept to McClelland (from WRB), no. 1763, 10 May 1945.

The obstacles to be overcome in organizing food relief characterized all rescue and relief projects. Despite the small quantities of food, clothing, medicines, and money involved, the blockade policy of the Allies inhibited any attempts to send aid. The policy was liberalized when public opinion in the United States became increasingly critical of the blockade's effect on civilian populations in the occupied countries. In mid-1944 the British government was willing to agree to the limited food relief programme for camp internees negotiated by Dingle Foot in Washington in order to save the Anglo-American consensus on the blockade as a whole. Apart from the WRB, no Allied government agency was directly concerned with the welfare of the concentration camp internees.

It is not possible to know with any certainty how much food was dispatched into the camp system as part of official and unofficial relief efforts during the last phase of the Second World War. Almost all this aid was channelled through the ICRC. In 1948 the committee published a detailed account of its activities during the war. However, the publication was designed as a defence against the widespread criticism of the Red Cross for its refusal to take a determined stand against German persecution of the Jews, and its accounting blurs the fact that a very significant proportion of the parcels distributed by the ICRC (some 4,500 tons) were sent to 'assimilated' internees from 1943, and to all the surviving internees after the German surrender.[91] The actual numbers of parcels reaching unassimilated and Jewish internees during the war was only a fraction of this amount. Nevertheless, as recounted above, during the last twelve months of the war the obstacles to Red Cross activity in this field were external to that organization.

The question of the food parcels to the concentration camps was only one of many difficult and contentious issues created by the Allied policy of blockade as a whole. During the period under discussion here, the British and American governments confronted the effect of blockade on the population of western Holland that remained under German control. Despite the fact that up to 3 million people in that area were in direct danger of starvation, the blockade was only gradually and partially lifted.[92] The belief in the efficacy of blockade, the priority accorded to military action in the field, and the tardy release of food supplies for urgent humanitarian purposes, characterized potential relief programmes in all areas equally.

The physical conditions in the camps deteriorated in the last months of the war. Starvation and fatally harsh conditions had once been the result of intentional German policy, but as the war drew to a close and the Allied forces approached, there was a significant change of attitude (or perhaps just indifference) on the part of camp commanders and their superiors in Berlin. This change was barely exploited.

[91] *Report of the international committee*, III, pp. 335–40.

[92] See Bob Moore, 'The western Allies and food relief to the occupied Netherlands, 1944–1945', *War and Society*, 10 (1992), pp. 97–118.

With the creation of the WRB in January 1944, and Roswell McClelland's arrival (representing the board) in Geneva in April, relief and rescue activities benefited from his activism and determination. However, McClelland's experience and the contacts he had cultivated could not overcome SHAEF's determination to prevent outside bodies from meddling in its administration of occupied Germany. The disbanding of the WRB at the crucial phase between war and peace was disastrous for the prisoners in the camps. The 950 tons of food parcels that the ICRC and the board were unable to transport into the camps in the last month of the war would have helped to alleviate the terrible condition of most of the inmates that so shocked the world when the camps were liberated. Ultimately, SHAEF's policies seriously compounded the problems that the occupying Allied armies had to solve themselves a few weeks later.