

THE JUDENRAT IN SHOAH HISTORY.

A RECONSIDERATION BASED ON HISTORY.

By Wolf Marmelstein.

The contributor offers a reconsideration, based only on historical facts, of the "Judenrat Question" pointing out how those tragic figure had been overburdened by events and circumstances clearly out of their control and did their best in order to savage what possible. After explaining who the Judenrat had been, some meaningful rabbinical responses are quoted in order to rebuke theories worked out by persons who never had to face a Nazi official. The contributor recalls how the Nazis obtained legally the power first in Germany and, later, by overrunning other countries. The Judenrat had to cope with many problems in their attempt to help fellow inmates and to face under heavy duress the lower ranking Nazi officials who hold little power and, themselves, were spied upon. Being between hammer and anvil the Judenrat certainly could not care about their future, after war, image in various essays. Only very few of those tragic figures survived and had to face heavy accusations due to hysteria, persecution complexes, interest in discrediting witnesses of wrong doing and political reasons. The still lasting accusations to have been informed about the Gas Chambers and not having called fellow inmates to revolts turn out as not consistent.

In Appendix short profiles of persons quoted show their dramas.

Il relatore propone un riesame, basato solo su fatti storici, della questione degli Judenrat mettendo in rilievo come questi tragici personaggi fossero stati sommersi da eventi e circostanze fuori dal loro controllo quando si impegnarono di fare del loro meglio per salvare il salvabile. Dopo aver chiarito chi erano gli Judenrat e accennato ad alcuni significativi responsi rabbini si confutano teorie formulate da personaggi che mai avevano dovuto affrontare un funzionario nazista. Viene poi ricordato come in Germania i nazisti ottennero il potere legalmente e poi invasero altri stati. I Judenrat dovettero affrontare molteplici problemi e comparire di fronte a funzionari nazisti non di alto rango, aventi ristretti margini di potere e spiati loro stessi, Stando fra l'incudine e il martello i Judenrat non potevano curarsi della loro, futura, immagine in vari saggi del dopo guerra. Solo pochi di questi tragici personaggi sopravvissero e dovettero affrontare accuse dettate da mania di persecuzione, isteria, interesse di screditare i testimoni di varie malefatte e da ragioni di politica. Si dimostra come le perduranti accuse di aver saputo e di non aver chiamato alla rivolta siano del tutto prive di fondamento.

Nell'Appendice si presentano brevi profili delle persone citate anche per illustrare le loro situazioni drammatiche.

WHO WERE THE JUDENRAT.

The generic term

Judenrat requires a distinction among various figures:

1. The term "ELDERS" mean the Council Members; in German "Judenrat" or "Aeltestenrat"; Council of Elders.
2. The terms "ELDEST", "DEAN OF JEWS" or "PRINCIPAL" mean the Council Head; in German the "Judenaeltester", responsible for the Jewish Community or Ghetto and having to face the Nazis and receive their orders; the most discussed and blamed figures.
3. The Staff Members managed offices and services the Judenrat had to run.
4. In Germany from 1933 to 1939 the "REICHSVERTRETUNG DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND" (Jewish Central Agency in Germany) with elected officials had been in charge and then replaced by the "REICHSVEREINIGUNG" (Union of German Jews) with officials appointed by the Gestapo.
5. In Austria (1938) and Bohemia-Moravia (1939) the Nazis, at their arrival, appointed the Head of the established communities; later replaced by an "Aeltestenrat" (Council of Elders) and a Judenaeltester (Eldest).
6. In Poland – from the beginning in 1939 – and then in other countries overrun by the Nazis, the Judenrat (Council and Council Head) had been set up
7. In other countries – vassal states – Jewish leaders had been called Presidents or Directors.

In following the generic term Judenrat will be stated.

The Judenrat had been selected among former Community Officials as Board members, modern rabbis, high ranking clerks, persons involved in charity organizations, etc. The experience of Zionist leaders in matter of emigration had been requested. Later, mainly in the Ghettos, persons with little or no community affiliation, but experienced in running technical services or utilities, had been appointed. The knowledge of German was, of course, a must. Beards had to be cut and the traditional Jewish dressing was out of question; observing Shabbat or Holidays became impossible. A Judenrat had to be bond to Jewish faith in order to cope with Jewish fate as he had to be clever, courageous, authoritative, distinguished, highly moral and of strong character in order to resist to the increasing stress involved in facing the Nazis, so civilian officials as SS officers who spoke the language of judges and executioners, not that of poets and thinkers; only few Judenrat had had experience in talking with anti-Semite young men.

In 1933 in Germany Baeck had been elected, at a gathering of leaders of Jewish organizations, President of the "REICHSVERTRETUNG". In 1938 at Vienna, Loewenhertz (Community Manager and Zionist leader), after some weeks of imprisonment, had been appointed by the SS Head of the Jewish Community with the clear order to set up and fasten the emigration having Goering forecasted a two year time frame for Vienna without Jews. In 1939, at Prague, Weidmann, the only qualified Community clerk the Nazis met in office at their arrival, had been appointed; President, Vice-president and other prominent figures stood already safe abroad.

In Poland, in 1939, at Warsaw Czerniakow had been asked by the Polish Mayor to head the Jewish Community and then ordered by the Nazis to set up the Judenrat. At Lodz Rumkowski had been appointed, it seems, by case, being the oldest among a group of men a Nazi met in Community Office. In 1940, at Amsterdam, Cohen, already having a long record in matter of assistance to refugees, had to set up the "Joodsche Rat" following the Prague model. In 1942, at Riga, to head the various Ghetto sections, officials of the Communities of origin had been chosen. In December 1942, at Salonika, Koretz had been appointed mainly for his knowledge of German. Important for following is that in 1941, in Lithuania in some communities the Judenrat had been selected by drawn as the Vilna School rabbis ruled that taking the burden was mandatory.

TAKE THE BURDEN OR NON PARTICIPATION ATTITUDE.

Persons, leftwing radical chic intellectuals, who in those years stood safe in New York, Jerusalem, Geneva or London and never had to face a Nazi official, worked out the theory that, by taking the burden, the Judenrat made the deportations easier and that a non participation attitude should have been followed. This theory, expressed mainly by Hanna Arendt – close friend and disciple of the Nazi philosopher Heidegger – does not consider the real conditions of Shoah time.

The rabbis who stood with their communities in face of the cruel enemy could consider the real conditions and the very few choices possible under that duress. Secular, and even non believing Judenrat asked the rabbis for advises. Some of the few recorded responses shall be mentioned:

1. According the Vilna School rabbis the burden had to be taken by accepting the appointment as Judenrat.
2. Someone who endangers his own life – by trying to talk with Nazi-Fascist officers – in order to savages his fellows proves his great Faith.
3. In the event the enemy had decided to exterminate a community, but in one way or another, it is possible to put salvage a part of the community members, then the leaders have to call upon all their spiritual forces and make every possible effort accordingly.
4. In 1941, as selections for transport lists had to be started, at Berlin Baeck expressed the opinion that only the Judenrat could perform this task in a human way. But Murrelstein observed the Lod Response "... but when the enemy asks for a certain person by name, otherwise the whole community... so you should hand him out" and at Vienna the lists had been worked out by the SS. The above two opinions of learned rabbis reflect different local conditions and both deserve respect; at Buchenwald the "Lageraelster office" used similar selections to transfer inmates in danger for having been "noted" by an SS.
5. The law of kingdom is law even when it is a bad one; meaning that the Judenrat could not help but obey Nazi orders.

Indeed, from January 20, 1933 until May 8, 1945 the THIRD REICH was a state, and the Nazi governments hold power, according law and international treaties. In 1932 the Nazi Party had become the strongest fraction so in the Reichstag as in many regional assemblies and Hitler had

been appointed Chancellor at January 30, 1933 by President Hindenburg respecting formally the Weimar Constitution procedures. The Holy See and other governments had regular diplomatic relationships and negotiated treaties with the Nazi regime; the racial laws had been considered internal affairs and not subject to any objection. In 1938 there had not been any meaningful opposition to the annexation of Austria while that of the Sudenteland resulted from the Munich Treaty. As Bohemia-Moravia, in 1939, became a Protectorate Prime Minister Chamberlin expressed only his deepest feelings of sympathy.

In August 1939 the partition of Poland, and so the start of World War II° and the final cruel phases of the Shoah, had been agreed in the Treaty between the Third Reich and URSS. So, until the Nazi attack, June 1941, against URSS the communist parties around the world were, at least, bystanders. Furthermore, in the thirties, in Great Britain and France socialist parties opposed any increase of military budgets in order to enable armies to resist possible German attacks. In September 1939 France avoided any valid military action on the Rhine in order to help Poland.

The Jewish leaders – Baeck (Berlin), Eppstein (Berlin/Terezin), Loewenhertz (Vienna), Murrelstein (Vienna/Terezin), Edelstein (Prague/Terezin), Czerniakow (Warsaw), Rumkowski (Lodz), Gens (Vilna), Cohen (Amsterdam), Koretz (Salonika) and others – could not be stronger as the many “statesmen” whose political bankruptcies led to the Nazi-Fascist rule in Europe. Nor could they resist better than military commanders of the countries overrun by the Wehrmacht

The Jewish leaders had to cope with the real conditions of power, so under direct Nazi rule as in the vassal states, and savage what possible. Indeed, the few visas for emigration had been granted by the various consular officials on the passports issued by the Nazi police after a cruel “red tape”. Even in March 1945, International Red Cross Committee had to deal with the Geneva Nazi Consul in order to obtain access to the last Concentration Camps and Terezin Ghetto in order to help the last survivors.

PROBLEMS THE JUDENRAT HAD TO COPE WITH.

The first problem Jewish leadership in Germany had to face was that the new government did not even answer documents submitted. For educated, well mannered, gentlemen, used to speak the language of poets and thinkers it was hard to face rude individuals who already spoke like judges and executors.

With the racist laws, and actions, economic and social conditions of German Jews continuously got worse; the need for social and educational services to grant was increasing while the necessary means were diminishing. Until 1938 people willing to emigrate needed only to be advised about opportunities and procedures.

In 1938 specific, properly managed emigration departments had to be set up, first at Vienna, then at Berlin and, in 1939, at Prague. Until the stop in 1941, difficulties were continuously increasing as visas were difficult to obtain, travel facilities had to be procured, groups of emigrants had to be formed, etc. As soon as the procedure had been completed the Jew had only few days to leave, as otherwise he would put on arrest and sent to a Concentration Camp. Therefore an emigration department could not use tour operator courtesies.

The managers of Jewish emigration – Edelstein of Prague, Eppstein of Berlin and Murrelstein of Vienna – while helping fellow Jews to go abroad lost any opportunity to get safe themselves and

met then at Terezin where they followed each other as “Judenaeltester” (Eldest of Jews). Only Murrelstein survived, target of heavy accusations and defamations even after death.

In October 1939, Eichmann, as new supervisor of Jewish emigration, pretended to set up a Jewish Homeland in Poland, in the Lublin District, between the Bug and Sun rivers. As the first group of Jews, led by Edelstein and Murrelstein, reached Nisko, presented as the center of that “homeland”, in a speech Eichmann explained the need to perform various works because “otherwise it would mean to die”.

Indeed, in the overcrowded Ghettoes, the Judenrat had to grant distribution of food and various town and health services and keep order. The recruitment of men for work in German Army facilities and factories seemed at that time a good way for survival as no one could foresee the later developments of things.

Strict secrecy had to be kept about meaning and details of actions aimed to help people to survive as, unfortunately, the Nazis could watch careless talks and many useless discussions, arguments and rivalries through many, often unintentional, informers. Staff members had to be controlled in order to possibly prevent them from dangerous contacts with Nazi – civilian or SS – officials. In such conditions a Judenrat could not care too much about his own, after war, image in journalistic or academic essays or follow the many discussions at New York, Jerusalem, London or Geneva.

It seems that in summer 1942 the Nazi secret service SD had reports on discussions, at New York, about how many Jews could join armed resistance in Poland. In July 1942 Czerniakow believed that Warsaw Ghetto factories had reached a satisfactory level of efficiency and so a chance for survival. But at same time Himmler ordered to deport great groups of Jewish workers to the Death Camps, even those employed in Army facilities. The Warsaw military commander, who had moved objections referring to the skill of Jewish workers, had been overruled and replaced.

Essays published in 1942 when the Wehrmacht was still advancing, on how rule after the War the defeated Germany and Austria certainly did not help those who stood in the hell at Berlin and Vienna.

The Nazi secret services knew from the beginning the foolish action to let parachute, in 1944, a group a young Zionists who had been watched from their departure until arrival in Hungary and Slovakia where they had been captured; only one survived. So, the SS suspected the last groups of Jewish workers at Lodz and Terezin; their deportation to Auschwitz followed. The efforts of Rumkowski and Eppstein for survival by work failed and both are Martyrs; nevertheless they were heavily blamed after the war.

A Judenrat was aware to stay between the hammer of the harsh orders of the SS and the anvil of the many non realistic expectations of fellow inmates. A Judenrat could not think to stay also between the hammer of the suspects of the Nazis and the anvil of the ignorance of things and careless talks at the foreign based organizations. Those tragic figures are now, more than sixty years later, between the hammer of senseless essays and discussions and the anvil of their tragic martyrdom!

A JUDENRAT IN FACE OF THE NAZIS.

The Judenrat, so in Germany as in the countries overrun, could meet only lower-ranking officials, SS or civilian, who had only strict margins of power and were themselves spied upon and never a real decision maker. In vassal states some time it was possible to meet or contact high ranking personalities.

The encounters were between those who had been trained to hatred and suspects and were sitting comfortable in their armchair and those who, hated and suspected, had to stand for hours receiving rude and cruel orders without any possibility to move objections. Questions had to be answered at once and a single careless word could raise suspects. Any request for allowances, for exemption from deportation transports, etc, had to be submitted in a way a Nazi could understand and find reasonable. When, for reasons matter of conjectures, an allowance or exemptions had not been granted, the Judenrat is still blamed as not enough capable.

The stress – physical and psychological - of such encounters under duress should be considered. Indeed, any encounter a Judenrat had with the SS commander could be the last one. Gens of Vilna had been shot in the mouth when he was entering the Commando Head Quarter while Eppstein of Terezin had been shot in a nearby prison suddenly after having been put under arrest, etc.

In Bulgaria it had been possible to salvage almost the entire community and in Romania a large part. In Slovakia high ranking officials, even a lady in close relationship with the President Mons. Tiso, had been bribed and deportations had been stopped for more than a year; a part of the community could survive.

THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE JUDENRAT.

The first to blame the Judenrat had been persons who stood safe and comfortable in New York, London, Jerusalem or Geneva and were unable to start any useful action those who stood in the hell. Such persons certainly welcomed the accusations raised by former inmates against the Judenrat, almost all Martyrs.

Reliable evidences about the deeds of the Judenrat are rare. Very few survivors had been in positions enabling them to see, hear and rightly understand events and talks.

Documents of that time had been written in the language of judges and executors, today difficult to understand, following strict rules:

- a. The Judenrat had to be very cautious when writing reports, request or petitions in order to avoid suspicions.
- b. The Nazi wanted to show how strong he had been in obtaining obedience and cooperation; such statements are often pure falsehoods.

Historians should be very cautious, and avoid slanders, in evaluating documents which almost never meet the criteria of juridical proofs.

The few diaries found after war are precious for personal feeling and deed reported. Many stories published after the Shoah hardly meet any test of consistency with facts made certain in other way; authors often stated absurdities hoping that slandered persons would not have any mean, or anyone, to defend their good name. There had been many hear-say, gossip or false testimonies, sometime obtained by various pressures or threats.

The accusation rose from:

1. Hysteria and persecution complexes.
2. Interest in discrediting any witness of own wrongdoing.
3. Personal or ideological hatred and rivalries.
4. Interest to divert attention from political bankruptcies and shortcomings. Mainly in Poland, but also in other countries, the communists and other leftists spoke about Jewish accomplices and guilt in order to obtain the support of anti-Semite nationalists.

The absurd accusations against the Judenrat turned out to be advantageous for banks, insurance companies, big corporations and persons who had bought Jewish properties at bargain prices. Indeed, the World Jewish Congress started the claim actions without the precious knowledge of the few surviving Judenrat about the details of the seizures of Jewish assets. Furthermore, World Jewish Congress, like other organizations, followed the leftist attitude to blame the Judenrat; reasons to be conjectured.

The heavy discussions about “Jewish (Judenrat) guilt” were useful also for advocating pardon or anticipated release of convicted Nazi criminals. Later revisionist historians and deniers of the Shoah eagerly quoted those discussions.

THE TERRIBLE SECRET – WHO KNEW AND WHEN.

The deportations, called RESSETLEMENT TO EAST, were actions so the German population as foreign press knew about; the details – overcrowding, hunger, forced labor, etc. - had not been discussed. The terrible secret had been the Gas Chambers in the Death Camps and no one in, 1942/43, really wanted to know about it. In 1942 SS Lt Gerstein - dead in strange circumstances in 1945 when already in US Army custody - could inform a Swiss business man about the Gas Chambers. In summer 1942 the World Jewish Congress got that information through its Geneva Delegate and informed the Allied – Great Britain and USA – Governments. The London based Polish and Czechoslovakian Exile Government had their own sources of information. Furthermore, in 1943 Jan Karski – a Polish Resistance fighter who in could see things going on, so in Warsaw Ghetto as in a Death Camp – managed to reach London, and then Washington, reporting about the Mass Slaughter. No meaningful action followed: handing out diplomatic notes to the Holy Seat in autumn 1942 clearly was not a useful one. In 1942 or 1943 a Declaration by Allied Government could had have some effect on vassal state leaders: mainly Vichy France. So, in order to divert attention from anti-Semite attitude of some allied government official, the Judenrat had been blamed for “having had knowledge of things without taking any action to resist”.

As all the “Judenaeltester”/Eldest of Jews of East European Ghettoes are Martyrs, this slander hits Marmelstein (Vienna/Terezin) who dared to survive with a group of fellow inmates at Terezin.

In journalistic reports Baeck had been quoted for having stated in 1948 at a gathering of his followers in USA to have been informed about things but preferred not to share this information in order to avoid panic. Journalists are looking after scoops and often adapt reports to various goals, at least that of political correctness. Historians are supposed to look after facts considering only reliable evidences. Indeed, the supposed Baeck statement does not result from any evidence given in a hearing before an investigating magistrate (or police officer) in Czechoslovakia or, later, in an affidavit released to any state authority.

Furthermore, the supposed statement of Baeck is reported, at least, in two different versions, no one meeting any test of consistency:

1. Baeck should have been informed still in Berlin (autumn 1942) by a non Jewish friend.
 - By that time an "Aryan"/German was forbidden, under threat of Concentration Camp, to have contacts with a Jew without Gestapo authorization.
 - It is hardly thinkable that a friend of Baeck – certainly watched by the Gestapo – could have been among the few who, in 1942, knew about the things going on in the East.
2. Baeck should have been informed in August 1943, at Terezin, by a friend (?) who should have managed to escape from Auschwitz.
 - Baeck arrived at Terezin after the January 1943 transport wave; an Auschwitz inmate could not know about his arrival.
 - For a German Jew (friend/follower of Baeck) should have been almost impossible to cross in hiding Bohemia-Moravia, from Auschwitz to Terezin.

Historians should, instead, consider that People Court in Litomerice (Czechoslovakia) had made certain:

1. The first alarming information reached Terezin only at December 31, 1944, at the arrival of the first group of Slovak Jews.
2. In February 1945 a strange building work appeared very suspect. Murrelstein, at high personal risk, faced the Commander making clear that the increasing concerns could provoke a mass panic. The Commander obviously denied – and did so even in trial at People Court – any reason for concern. But, three days later the Commander turned from Prague with the order – that only SS General K. H. Frank had the power to give – to stop those, suspect, building works.

WHY NO RESISTANCE HAD BEEN OPPOSED.

At the Eichmann Trial Attorney General Hausner, who personally in those years stood safe dared to ask many survivors the shocking question: Why you did not oppose any resistance?

As to the standards set in Jewish history, armed resistance almost never resulted had success.

The Nazis watched carefully, with suspects, the celebration of Purim and Hanukkah but not the celebration of the Fast Day of Av. 9.

1. At Purim we remember how Jews in Persian Empire could survive the Hamman decree for their destruction as they were allowed to defend themselves against assaults. It is almost never studied that Mordechai had obtained the necessary decree and the support of nearby populations by political action.
2. At Hanukkah we light the candles and remember the armed resistance of the Maccabees. It is noteworthy that armed resistance had been followed, as soon as possible, by political action until full independence could be declared.
3. At Fast Day of Av 9 we remember how two Jewish revolts against Roman rule – the Zealots (66/70) and Bar Kochba-Rabbi Aquiba (131/135) – resulted in great disasters.

A community everywhere in minority among hostile or indifferent populations has no possibility to oppose armed resistance.

From the destruction of the First Temple and end of first Jewish statehood until last century, Jewish leaders followed the way of dealing with the ruler and his officials. From Josephus Flavius on, Jewish writers and thinker, thanks to their position at Court or in cultural life confuted hostile – pagan or Christian – literature. Only so Jewish people and Faith, always and all around the world a small minority, could survive.

The Shoah differed from previous persecutions as the enemy aimed not conversion but destruction of Jews. Tasks of Jewish leaders became harder and harder.

At the Warsaw Ghetto, Treblinka and Sobibor revolts few inmates could escape, some of them survived. There had been Jews who joined individually the Resistance but not everywhere they were welcomed; in Greece and Poland nationalist movements had a hostile attitude.

REVOLT OR SURVIVAL.

The contributor can hardly answer in a polite way the hurting question “Why at Terezin people did not start a revolt?”

In November 1944 at Terezin there were few men in working (combat) age; most of the work had to be done by women. There were many aged and sick persons. Murrelstein submitted a report, and obtained its transmission, about a possible new embellishment action to make the Ghetto fit for new foreign visits; in December the embellishment could start. Fortunately, this action of Murrelstein met so that of Jean Marie Musy, Swiss Past President, aimed to obtain from the terrible SS Chief Himmler the release of the last survived Jews and as that of the International Red Cross aimed to obtain access to the Concentration Camps.

At April 6, 1945 the International Red Cross Delegates could visit Terezin and caught the desperate cry for help launched by Murrelstein at high personal risk – “the fate of Terezin is reason of concerns” – and obtained the same day from K .H. Frank, Governor and SS Commander of

Bohemia-Moravia, the assurance that no inmate would be removed. In following weeks the Delegates obtained to put the Ghetto under Red Cross protection; keeping order was important.

So, the farce of a revolt of a revolt broken out in the night of April 17, 1945 could exactly grant Eichmann the pretext for the repression of riots behind combat lines and the killing of all "revolted" inmates. Beside the SS of Terezin and around, a Wehrmacht unit had been placed nearby. Fortunately, Murrelstein had been able to get, in short time, the shouting and singing people back in the quarters. Next morning, at the daily report, Murrelstein heard from Commander: "Fortunately I did not meet crowds around; it is impossible not to fire in such circumstances". And about the leaflet stating that the SS had left and, until the arrival of allied forces, a temporary regulation should be in force "no need to send it to the Prague Office". Clearly, Nazi provokers aimed to nullify the Red Cross help action.

In following weeks the Red Cross Delegate could address to Terezin many groups of Concentration Camp inmates walking helpless around, still guarded by SS, in North Bohemia.

COCNCLUSION.

The present contribution should answer many persons who, at least, never had faced an SS or, more likely, regret our survival. And also persons who could publish stories or essays and often gather professorships on Holocaust Studies without caring to interview one of the last survivors.

The best answer to quote is that of the last Terezin Commander in a hearing before the People Court Investigating Magistrate: "No, things were not going on so. We certainly did not stay under the orders of Murrelstein".

The contributor asks for understanding for his bad English. The still lasting bitch hunt against his Family deprived him of many educational and professional opportunities.

APPENDIX.

TOOK THE BURDEN AND LOST THE OPPORTUNITY TO PUT SAFE THEMSELVES.

SHORT PROFILES OF THE JUDENRAT MENTIONED.

BAECK LEO – (1873/1956), Germany; (Berlin/Terezin). Liberal rabbi and scholar. President of the World Union of Progressive Judaism. Chairman of the “Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland”, Honorary President of the “Reichsvereinigung der Juden”, Member, and then Chairman, of the Terezin Council of Elders, Deputy Eldest at Terezin.

In 1933 he accepted the call to act as Chairman of the new Central Agency of Jews in Germany (“Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland”) losing so the opportunity to go abroad – a call of a foreign university should have been easy to obtain - and putting safe himself. In 1939 he had been named Honorary President of the Union of German Jews “Reichsverein der Juden in Deutschland” which replaced the former organization. In 1943 he had been deported to Terezin where he became member of the Council of Elders and, in December 1944, Chairman of the Council of Elders and Deputy Eldest. In July 1945 he could go to London.

COHEN DAVID – (1882/1967) – Netherland (Amsterdam) – Zionist leader - Professor of Old Age History (Leiden/Amsterdam). Chairman of the “Joodse Rat”.

From 1904 engaged as Zionist activist and from World War I on in Boards for Assistance for Jewish Refugees and in the Ashkenazi Community Council. So, as in 1940 the Netherland had been overrun, he was in the first Co-ordination Board and from 1941 Chairman of the “Joodse Rat” (Jewish Council). His attempts to help and beware from deportations had no success. At September 1943 Cohen, like other Council members, were sent first to Westerbork and then to Terezin where he survived. After his return in 1945 he had to face accusations for collaboration and put on arrest for some months. After having been released from prison, a Jewish Community “Court”, in 1947, banned Cohen, “as collaborator”, from holding “Jewish Offices”. These two procedures prevented Cohen from granting a useful contribution to a better knowledge about the seizure of the large Jewish assets in Netherland (only few prior owners survived and returned) in view of a tougher claim action. Only in 1950 he could return to the Amsterdam University; he retired in 1953.

CZERNIAKOW ADAM – (1880/1942) – Poland (Warsaw) – Engineer – Member of Warsaw City Council and of Polish Senate.

Considered an assimilated Jew - he could not speak Yiddish very well and was not affiliated to any Jewish party - but in 1937 he had been among the few leaders who preferred to remain in office coping with Polish Government decrees aimed to a stronger control of Jewish Communities. As the

Nazis in 1939 invaded Poland, the Warsaw mayor asked Czerniakow to take the place of the Jewish community chairman who had fled the city. In October 1939 he was ordered by the Nazis to

establish the Warsaw Judenrat. In following months, Czerniakow did not catch the opportunity to leave Poland and criticized those Judenrat who fled. In October 1940, as the Ghetto had been established, the Judenrat had to run many town services: distribution of food, health care, utilities and keeping order. So, many assimilated or not affiliated Jews having the necessary experiences had to be appointed to important positions. Czerniakow tried to work within the system and keep the Nazis out of the internal Ghetto affairs, as much as possible, in order to attempt to save lives. He was able to obtain some allowances from the ghetto commissar. At July 22, 1942 Czerniakow had been ordered to round up Jews for "resettlement in the east". The following day Czerniakow took his own life.

EDELSTEIN JACOB. – (1903-1944) – Bohemia-Moravia / Prague-Terezin – Zionist Official – Prague Jewish Community Emigration Manager - Eldest of Terezin Ghetto.

In 1938 had the choice to stay with his community managing emigration or get an appointment at Jewish Agency Jerusalem Head Quarter putting safe himself; he chose to stay and help. In March 1939 he was ordered by the Nazis to fasten emigration and in October he had sent to Nisko but could return and go forward with his efforts. In October 1941 the Prague Community Emigration Department had been renamed Ghetto Department and Edelstein had to work out proposals for the Terezin Ghetto where he had been sent at November and appointed as (first) Eldest. The SS took advantage for their tricky mockeries of his belief to use Terezin as a Jewish youth training centre in view of the future in Israel. Suspected of contacts with Czech Resistance he had been replaced by Eppstein at January 1943, remaining however for some month as First Deputy Elder. At November 10, 1943 he had been put on arrest and, with the December 1943 transport wave, sent to Auschwitz where he had been shot with his family, perhaps in May 1944.

ELKES EICHANAN – (1879.1944) – Physician (Neurologist) – Lithuania – Elder of the Kaunas/Kovno Ghetto.

As physician he had had many prominent patients and so good personal connections which offered him an opportunity to obtain safe conduct to leave Lithuania in June 1941 when the Nazis had launched their attack against URSS; he chose to stay with his community. At July 10, 1941 the Kaunas Jews were ordered move into the Ghetto and the Jewish Committee had been ordered to turn in a Judenrat and choose an Eldest. Elkes followed the call of the rabbis and accepted to serve as "Head of the Jews" in eyes of the Nazis and "Head of the Community" in eyes of the Jews.

Until July 8, 1944, when the Ghetto – renamed in autumn 1943 Concentration Camp Kauen – had been dissolved Elkes tried to do his best to save lives. Elkes was among the 4000 inmates transported to camps in Germany; he died on October 17, 1944 at Landsberg, a sub-camp of Dachau.

EPPSTEIN PAUL. (1902-1944) – Sociologist – Germany(Berlin)/Terezin – Director of the Central Agency of the Jews in Germany/ Union of Jews in Germany – Elder of the Terezin Ghetto.

In 1926 Eppstein became a lecturer at the Mannheim Commercial University and in 1929 Principal of Mannheim Open University. From 1933 on he worked in various capacities in Berlin at the Central Agency of Jews in Germany and then in the Union of German Jews, dealing mainly with emigration. In 1938 he had his last opportunity to leave Germany for an appointment as lecturer for sociology in London but thought it right to stay with his community. In 1940 he had been put on arrest for four months and, after his release, banned from handling the emigration matter. In January 1943 he had been deported to Terezin where he became the Elder, replacing Edelstein. At September 27, 1944 he had been put on arrest and suddenly murdered in the nearby prison.

GENS JACOB. – (1903-1943) – Lithuania (Vilna) – Vilna Ghetto Hospital Director – Police Commander – Eldest.

In June 1941 he had been named director of the Jewish hospital and then, in September, commander of the Ghetto police. Gens tried to help the Jews during the September and December 1941 mass slaughters. In July 1942 the Nazis dissolved the Council and made Gens Eldest, Ghetto administration head. Gens started his “work for life” plan and eventually the most of the inmates were working and for a time the Ghetto was calm. Gens established a medical care system, welfare, cultural institutions. Gens, having a non Jewish Lithuanian wife and daughter outside the Ghetto, had several opportunities to join them going safe but preferred to stay hoping to be able to help. At September 14, 1943 he had been summoned to the Commander Head Quarter and shot in mouth just when entering.

KORETZ ZWI - (1886.1945) – Greece (Salonika) – Chief Rabbi – Eldest.

In 1933 the Salonika Community, of Sephardi/Spanish rite, chose the Ashkenazi Rabbi Koretz – born in Poland and educated in Germany – perhaps in order to avoid political problems bond to the appointment of a rabbi educated at the Italian Rabbinical College. Furthermore, Rabbi Koretz had first to learn the Ladino language spoken by his new community; how he could then communicate with his flock is not stated. This seems at the origin of incomprehension, hostility and clearly inconsistent accusations, however considered even by historians.

After the return of Monarchy in 1935, Koretz had been able to establish a good relationship so with the Royal Family as with Dictator Metaxas. In 1941, at the arrival of the Nazis, Koretz had been put on arrest and kept in prison at Vienna; he could return to Salonika only in January 1942. These dates show the clear inconsistency of the accusation to have handed out the Community Member Card List to the Germans. That material had been “handed out” to (actually confiscated by) the German Military Commando at the end of April 1941 – after the arrest of Koretz - by the community secretary Sabin Saltiel nominated Community Head. Koretz, obviously for his knowledge of German, took part in the negotiations with the Wehrmacht Commando for release

of 10000 men from the forced labor; the deal had been reached at end of October 1942. In December 1942 Koretz had been nominated Head of the Community, the Eldest, a task he was not prepared for. In this capacity he had to face in February/March 1943 SS Officers Wisliceny and Brunner receiving the orders for the Yellow Star, the establishment of the Ghetto and then the

Deportations. Orders Koretz could not help to receive and transmit to his flock. A man of his German education could not realize how able Wisliceny was in telling fibs about the new Homeland in Poland Salonika Jews would find. In a desperate attempt to obtain the halt of the Deportations, he met the Greek puppet Prime Minister Rallis who answered simply that he “could do nothing in that matter”. Some days after that unfortunate meeting Koretz had been put on arrest and, together with a group of other Jews sent to Bergen Belsen. At April 1945 he was among those sent to Terezin but freed on the way by the Red Army. He died on typhus some days later.

LOEWENHERZ JOSEF. – (1884-1960) – Vienna (Austria) - Lawyer – Zionist leader – Community Head – Eldest.

In 1938, at the arrival of the Nazis, Loewenherz was the Jewish Community General Manager and First Secretary. After some weeks of imprisonment he was released, named Community Head and ordered to manage a fast emigration. For this purpose he had been permitted to make several trips to meet foreign Jewish leaders; the last in December 1940 to have talks at Lisbona with the representative of American Joint. In September 1942, at the end of the Deportation waves, the Vienna Jewish Community had been replaced by a Jewish Council (Aeltestenrat) with Loewenherz as Eldest. In 1945, on denunciation, he had been put on arrest by the URSS occupation authorities and kept in prison in Czechoslovakia for some month. Although cleared by an Honor Court in London from all absurd accusations of collaboration, the World Jewish Congress did not secure – appointing him as advisor - his knowledge about the seizure of Jewish assets in Austria. He immigrated to the USA and died in 1960 at New York.

MURMELSTEIN BENJAMIN – (1905-1989) - Rabbi and scholar – Vienna Jewish Emigration Manager and Deputy Eldest - Terezin Ghetto Deputy Eldest and last Eldest – The witness never heard.

In 1938, as the Nazis arrived, he was a lecturer (author of essays and books) at the Vienna Rabbinical College and the youngest among 17 community rabbis. In 1939 he was the only rabbi still with the community having taken the burden – at request of Community Head Loewenherz - set up and run the Community Emigration Department. The Palestine Certificate issued by the Jerusalem Hebrew University had been endorsed to Abimelech Rimaldt who so could go in safety.

At start of managing emigration Murmelstein had to meet the terrible Eichmann in charge of the new ZENTRALLSTELLE FUER JUEDISCHE AUSWANDERUNG – Central Office of Jewish Emigration established by the Nazis first at Vienna (and then at Prague and Berlin). From 1938 until 1941 at Vienna about 120.000 emigrations cases had been handled successfully. At beginning of the Deportations Murmelstein followed the Lod Response; at Vienna the selection lists had been

made by the SS. At January 28, 1943 Murmelstein with family had been deported to Terezin where he had been named Second Deputy Eldest, in charge of Health Care and Technical Services. In this capacity he had to manage, in 1944, the first “Embellishment Action”.

At Kippur 1944 he had to take the full burden of the Ghetto replacing Eppstein and watch the departure of two deportation transports with many men in working (and combat) age. Some days later, having been told to set up lists for new transports, he lost control of nerves and started to

explain the impossibility of new deportations; the Commander shouted “no bargaining here, get out and wait!” The Eichmann aids worked out the lists by themselves and Marmelstein could only submit some request for exemption, mainly for “necessary workers”; the reasons of several refusals can only be conjectured. At the end of the last Deportation wave, Marmelstein realized that only making the Ghetto – where still stood about 300 persons with important connections – fit for new foreign visits was basic for a possible survival. The results of the new embellishment action induced Eichmann to agree to a Red Cross visit. The Red Cross Delegates caught the cry for help launched by Marmelstein and obtained the protection of the Ghetto until liberation at May 5, 1945. Baeck expressed twice, in writing, his feelings of thankfulness for the work performed by Marmelstein in uncommon conditions.

For the Czechoslovakian government – Benes, Gottwald & C. - it was much more important divert attention from the 1938 political bankruptcy than the survival of the Ghetto; a wave of “collaboration trials” started. A trial against a Jew could divert attention also from the withholding of Jewish properties sold at bargain prices in 1939/40 to Nazis and confiscated in 1945 as “German assets”. Marmelstein had been put on arrest in June 1945; a long investigating followed. After 18 months, in December 1946, having State Attorney not even submitted request for trial, the Investigating Magistrate of People Court acquitted Marmelstein because accusations had proven to be fully baseless.

At the trial against the last Commander, March/April 1947, Marmelstein had been considered a “reliable witness”, as fully rehabilitated. But at the Eichmann trial Attorney General Hausner did not call Marmelstein as witness – reasons to be conjectured - and so five points could not be cleared. Wiesenthal never tried to contact Marmelstein. No publisher had shown interest for a German or English version of his book about Terezin. The bitch hunt, started in 1945 with slanderous articles, is still going on.

RUMKOWSKI MORDECHAI CHAIM – (1877-1944) – Poland (Lodz) – Eldest of the Lodz Ghetto.

He is said to have been an unsuccessful business man. At the arrival of the Nazis in 1939 he was the Jewish Orphanage Director. At October 13, 1939 he was appointed as the Eldest of the Lodz Community, perhaps accidentally. In April 1940, as the Lodz Ghetto had been established he became the Ghetto Eldest and set up a rigid organization which granted him control of all aspects of life, even of the cultural programs. Rumkowski believed that creating a productive work force

would help to survive; in about 120 Ghetto factories thousands of Jews were working. As at the end of 1941 the Chelmo Extermination Camp started killings, at Lodz Ghetto deportations began. In first months of 1942 about 55.000 Jews of Lodz had been sent to their deaths at Chelmo; and in September 1942, in a second deportation wave, 20.000 Jews, followed.

As until summer 1944 there were no further deportations from Lodz, Rumkowski had been strengthened in his belief that keeping order and working for the Germans would help to survive. In June/July 1944, in a new deportation wave, about 7000 Jews had been sent to their deaths. In August 1944 the Nazi Ghetto Administrator Biebow found it necessary to address a speech to the

“Ghetto workers” saying that the great factories in Germany needed workers. The Jews of the Lodz Ghetto were sent to Auschwitz and Rumkowski had been kicked in one of the last deportations cars. One of the few survivors years later admitted: “Rumkowski was nearly to save all of us”.

His surname “King Chaim” and his picture on the Ghetto money were clearly Nazi mockeries while the postage stamps (with his picture) never circulated.

WEIDMAN FRANTISEK/FRAZ. (1910-1944) – Czechoslovakia/Prague - Lawyer – Secretary of the Jewish Community – Leading figure of the Czech-Jewish movement - Head of the Jewish Community – Member of the Council of Elders at Terezin.

In March 1939 the only qualified community official the Nazis met in office at their arrival and so appointed as Head of the Community; a task clearly over his forces. The main work – emigration management – had been performed by the Zionist leader Edelstein named Deputy Head of the Community. In January 1943 Weidman with family had been deported to Terezin where he joined the Council of Elders as a representative of the Czech Jewry. He had been sent to Auschwitz in October 1944.