Poverty and Persecution: The Reichsvereinigung, the Jewish Population, and Anti-Jewish Policy in the Nazi State, 1939-1945

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This job can no longer provide any satisfaction. It now has very little in common with what we used to understand as welfare work. And when it’s people that are involved, not property, liquidation is particularly rough. Yet just because we’re dealing with human beings, you have those occasional moments when there seems to be some real meaning in still being here.

Hannah Karminski (1897-1942), July 1942

These lines, which bespeak a sense of both profound resignation and social obligation, are from a letter by Hannah Karminski only a few months before she was deported to her death. Karminski, a former managing director of the Jewish Women’s League, was active from 1939 on as a senior staff member in the welfare department of the National Association of Jews in Germany (Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, RV). Her description brings into sharp relief the traumatic dependency of the officials and personnel in Jewish welfare offices on their persecutors, as well as their Sisyphean daily labors in trying to struggle with poverty on a mass and previously unknown scale within the Jewish population in Germany after years of persecution.

This article does not attempt to describe welfare work as a response by Jewish institutions to poverty either as a temporally limited social phenomenon precipitated by crisis or war or as a permanent feature of a specific social stratum. Rather, it focuses on analyzing the ways in which Jewish institutions sought to grapple with the consequences of a process of

1 This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at an international conference on “Jews and Poverty” organized by the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture at the University of Leipzig in September 1997; the original German will be published in the conference proceedings, forthcoming.

2 Letter to Dr. Schäffer, July 24, 1942, reprinted in Leo Baeck Institute Year Book [LBIYB], 2 (1957), p. 312.
structural pauperization as driven by deliberate policy. That process was initiated by the Nazi state in 1933, through a diverse array of persecutory measures, in order to expel German Jewry from the Reich. In the wake of the November 1938 pogrom, as prospects for the success of previous policy seemed to fade, the process was pushed forward with relentless rigor. The Jews’ material bases for survival as a collectivity defined by National-Socialist racial policy were attacked, undermined, and destroyed. Even state welfare benefits for this population were later specifically revoked. A newly devised organization, the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, was ordered by the Nazi state to shoulder responsibility for social care and welfare.

Background Conditions and the Establishment of the RV

Already under the impact of the Great Depression, penury and want were on the rise in the Jewish population. But it was the policies of persecution introduced by the Nazi state, beginning in 1933, that set into motion a structural process of pauperization and immiseration. Rapidly, it resulted in a disproportionately large percentage of Jews among the jobless and destitute in the German Reich, in marked contrast with the general upward trend in the economy. Despite mass emigration, the ranks of unemployed Jews swelled to over 60,000 by the summer of 1938, almost twice the number when the Nazis had seized power. Longer and longer lines of needy Jewish Germans were applying for public welfare assistance.


Local welfare offices reacted to this surge in new applications by introducing ever-more stringent practices. As early as 1936, the Jewish poor in a number of towns were being singled out: in some, supplementary benefits were cancelled; in others, welfare payments were reduced; in still other localities, all welfare recipients were conscripted for compulsory labor in segregated work squads. In the German Council of Municipalities (Deutscher Gemeindetag), municipal officials and mayors were already busy batting about more extensive steps designed to oust Jews from the state network of social welfare. Finally, in the summer of 1938, the Interior Ministry drafted an expedient decree.5

The planned move to exclude all needy Jews in Germany from social welfare was to have grave consequences, and the autonomous incorporated Jewish Communities (Gemeinden) and institutions were confronted with grave problems that virtually defied solution. For one thing, Jewish social welfare-like welfare aid from other religious organizations-had previously operated on the basis of "charity," providing assistance supplementary to state welfare benefits. Moreover, from 1933 on, Jewish welfare offices found themselves up against ever-more pressing financial problems as municipal subsidies for care in Jewish institutional homes were cancelled, along with a rapid drop in the level of funds available for welfare as many former contributors had emigrated.6 Between 1933 and 1938, Jewish organizations abroad had

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already recognized the need to lend a greater hand and boosted their financial assistance to Jewish institutions in Germany.\(^7\)

At the same time, the massive pauperization had an early recoil effect on the central policies of state persecution pursued by the Nazi leadership. By 1936, in ministry-level discussions, officials were emphasizing that poverty constituted an obstacle to expulsion. In 1938, that conflict of interest came to a rapid head. The step-up in anti-Jewish measures was fueling increased poverty, yet the few potential countries of immigration were wary to welcome the destitute.\(^8\) Consequently, after the Anschluss of Austria, the Nazi leadership shifted gears, opting for a policy of force over the shorter term in order to coerce Jews into leaving. On the heels of a mass deportation of Polish Jews in late October 1938, therefore, came the infamous Kristallnacht pogrom.

Yet the pogrom failed to accelerate the exodus of the German Jews to the levels the Nazi leaders desired. As a result of all subsequent new measures, such as forced Aryanization, special taxes, and a ban on commercial activity, the German Jews were now doomed to unemployment, and the indigent

\(^7\) Funding from organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or the Central Jewish Fund accounted for more than half of the outlay for the Central Committee for Aid and Rehabilitation in the Reichsvertretung during the period 1933-1938; Vollnhals, "Jüdische Selbshilfe," p. 317. For a thorough treatment of the Joint, see Yehuda Bauer, My Brother's Keeper. A History of the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee 1929-1939 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974).

\(^8\) See Gruner, "Die öffentliche Fürsorge," p. 598.
among them to dependence on welfare. Many no longer had sufficient funds to emigrate. For that reason, within the span of a few brief but fateful weeks, the Nazi top echelon began to revamp its approach, adopting a new two-pronged strategy: to impel Jews able to leave to emigrate, while forging ahead with the social separation of those remaining behind. Since it was now no longer "merely" a policy of social exclusion, but of erecting separate structures for the Jews in Germany, this new approach was more than a simple radicalization of previous practices. It spelled a fundamental new direction in persecution policy. This policy was pressed forward by the flurry of decrees from the end of 1938 on, ordering the segregation of Jews in education, culture and social welfare, housing and the labor market. The aim of the Nazi state was to systematically isolate some 300,000 individuals within the strictures of a Zwangsgemeinschaft, a compulsory community inside the state, an undertaking historically unprecedented in scope and intent.

One building block in this new orientation was the creation of a compulsory inclusive organization. A recently discovered fact is that only days after the pogrom, on November 15, 1938, Heydrich invited officials to an inter-ministerial meeting to prepare the groundwork for setting up a "Reich Association for the Care of Jewish Emigrants and Needy Jews." The idea

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9 The oft-cited figure of 16 percent of Jews employed in the labor market, based on the May 1939 census, does not refer to the number remaining of those formerly in gainful employment, but indicates the extent of new, supervised job categories. Along with the small number of "medical practitioners" and "legal consultants" (so-called Krankenbehandler and Konsulten, which were new Nazi terms for still-practicing physicians and lawyers), the figure included a few skilled manual workers, white-collar employees in Jewish institutions, and, in particular, conscripted laborers, whose ranks had swollen by then into the thousands; Wolf Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938 bis 1943 (Berlin: Metropol, 1997), p. 92.

10 If a person still had any assets, they were frozen in blocked accounts; "Arbeitsbericht der Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland für das Jahr 1938" ["Arbeitsbericht Rvtr. 1938"], ms. (Berlin, 1939), Jerusalem, Leo Baeck Institute, pp. 15-16.

11 For a more extensive, initial exploration of this concept of persecution, see Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, pp. 58-62, 334-335.

12 "Reichsvereinigung für die Betreuung jüdischer Auswanderer und fürsorgebedürftiger Juden"; see letter, "Werner Best (CdS) an Auswärtiges
had been cleared with Göring, who had given his approval. On December 1, representatives of the ministries and the Security Police decided that this "Reich Association" should also be given the task of setting up a separate school system.\(^\text{13}\) By February 1939, the organization of the bureaucratic apparatus was apparently complete.\(^\text{14}\) It was to make partial use of the personnel and infrastructure of the National Representation of Jews in Germany (Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland), which had been created in the autumn of 1933 as an umbrella organization of the local Jewish Gemeinden and the Jewish state and regional associations.\(^\text{15}\)

Yet contrary to what some historians contend, the utilization of an existing infrastructure is certainly no proof that the Reichsvereinigung was launched with no outside influence from the Nazi authorities.\(^\text{16}\) Even if, since the spring

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\(^{13}\) The holdings of the Federal Archives, formerly housed in different locations, have now been brought together and are mostly deposited in Berlin. "Vermerk über die Besprechung betr. Neuerteilung des Schulunterrichts an Juden am 1.12.1938" (n.d.), Federal Archives Berlin (Bundesarchiv; BA), 49.01 RMWiss, No. 11787, fols. 100-103; see also "Anwesenheitsliste und Niederschrift ü. die Besprechung betr. Neuerteilung des Schulunterrichts an Juden am 1.12.\(^{1}\)\), December 1, 1938, ibid., fols. 106-109RS.


\(^{15}\) On the history of the Reichsvertretung, see Kulka, *Deutsches Judentum*.

of 1938, and under the impact of state persecution on Jewish institutions, representatives in the Reichsvertretung had themselves been bandying about the idea of forming a more strongly centralized body,17 these ministerial discussions and other new documentation suggest a different picture. Thus, on February 5, 1939, the head of the Security Police informed all state police offices in the Reich about a scheme to consolidate the "means lying scattered in diverse Jewish organizations into a single body": the National Representation of Jews in Germany,

...[has been] ordered to form a so-called National Association of Jews. At the same time, it must take steps to assure that all existing Jewish organizations disappear. Their entire facilities are to be placed at the disposal of the National Association.

The local Gestapo was to monitor but not disrupt this process, because the "necessary control and surveillance functions" would be handled centrally from Berlin.18

While the planned organizational structures were set up quickly, their "legal approval" was dragged out. Initially, the plan called for the Reich Association to be launched subsequent to a police decree. Yet in early March, the Nazi leadership suddenly switched to the idea of issuing a new "Decree on the Reich Citizenship Law."19 However, the inter-ministerial agreement this required was held up. That was the main reason the Reich Association was not officially established until July 4, 1939.20

17 Cf. the relevant documents in Kulka, Deutsches Judentum, pp. 410-430.
19 "Schreiben Stuckarts (RMdI)," March 7, 1939, BA, R 18 RMdI, no. 5519, fol. 378. A draft of that same date was virtually identical with the later decree regarding the Reich Citizenship Law; see Kulka, Deutsches Judentum, p. 442, n. 5.
20 Reichsgesetzblatt (1939) I, p. 1097.
The Tenth Decree on the Reich Citizenship Law vested the new Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland with responsibility for a separate welfare and school system; its main purpose was to “promote emigration.” According to the bylaws of July 7, 1939, given the stamp of approval by the Security Police (Heinrich Müller) for the Interior Ministry, the new compulsory organization also had “to fulfil all additional tasks ... assigned it by the Reich Minister of Interior.”21 The RV bylaws could be altered only with the approval of the so-called control agency (or Aufsichtsbehörde, as the Gestapo was euphemistically called).22

The aims and structure of the organization were fundamentally different from those of the old Reich Representation, where the local Gemeinden, State Associations, and regional welfare societies had functioned as constituent members of the umbrella organization. Moreover, they also differed from internal Jewish plans, in the summer of 1938, for a proposed Reich Federation (Reichsverband).

The specified purpose of that Reich Federation was to encompass all Jews in the German Reich and to "promote their religious, cultural, social and other needs"-not emigration. All persons of the Jewish faith who belonged to a Jewish community were regarded as potential voluntary members. By contrast, all “Jews” so defined by the Nuremberg Laws and resident in the territory of the Reich were required to belong to the new compulsory Reich Association. Instead of a confederation of all communities or independent Jewish organizations represented on the council of the envisaged Reich Federation, the Reichsvereinigung consisted solely of branches dependent on directives handed down by the appointed executive board, the larger communities and a total of eighteen district offices that encompassed the smaller Gemeinden under their jurisdiction. Only in one sphere, namely

22 “Bericht der Dt. Treuhand- und Revisionsanstalt (Stand vom 30.6.1940),” BA, 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fol. 7.” I am grateful to Thomas Jersch (Berlin) for calling this document to my attention.
religious functions, did the Jewish communities still enjoy a modicum of autonomy.23

The Altered Situation in Jewish Welfare in 1939

Although the RV bylaws specified that one of its three principal tasks was the creation of a separate welfare system, strangely enough-in contrast with educational matters, for example-no single individual on the executive board was vested with responsibility for this area. Dr. Conrad Cohn was appointed director of the welfare department, Hannah Karminski was made head of the "General Welfare" section, and Dr. Walter Lustig took over as chief of medical welfare.24 Just as in organizational structure, there was only a superficial similarity between the tasks of the Reich Association and its predecessor, the Reich Representation. Welfare now no longer consisted of Jewish self-help to supplement state benefits. Rather, it was an institution for social welfare for the entire Jewish population that had been imposed from above by force, separately organized and centrally controlled by the Gestapo.

For the Jewish side, the starting conditions were negative in the extreme. During the November pogrom, many community centers, clothing distribution points and public kitchens had been demolished; goods, foodstuffs and money had been confiscated and personnel had been arrested.25 From that

24 Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt (July 21, 1939). Only after Cohn had joined the executive board "via a by-election with approval by the control agency" subsequent to Heinrich Stahl's resignation in February 1940, was the area of welfare now represented in persona, even though Cohn was nominally in charge of the department that dealt with preparations for emigration; "Bericht der Dt. Treuhand- und Revisionsanstalt (Stand vom 30.6.1940)," BA, 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fols. 6-7; likewise, ibid., "Vermerk über RV-Vorstandsitzung," February 19, 1940, 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fol. 190.
point on, the fate of the Jewish communities was overseen and sometimes even governed by the local Gestapo. This new constellation spawned unanticipated conflicts of interest with various authorities, since within the framework of the new concept of Zwangsgemeinschaft, the Security Police were now concerned to guarantee (and at times even augment) the ability of Jewish social institutions to function. In most localities, it was evidently the Gestapo that supervised Jewish welfare. Only in Frankfurt am Main was there a special municipal officer appointed for this purpose, and in some towns the local welfare authorities were charged with keeping tabs on Jewish welfare. Even if after a time confiscations were reversed or facilities repaired in a makeshift way, the capacity and financial means of the Jewish offices were often far too limited to provide the necessary relief for the rising tide of those in need. On November 19, 1938, a new decree excluded Jews from the public-welfare system, shifting the state obligation to provide welfare literally overnight to the shoulders of the Jewish communities.

Neither in terms of structure nor budget were the hard-strapped Gemeinden prepared to provide basic social welfare for tens of thousands of impoverished Jews. Moreover, most municipalities and their welfare offices were eager to eliminate the Jewish poor from their public rolls, quickly and


26 In Hamburg, the Gestapo dissolved the Council of Representatives, abrogated the community constitution and appointed Dr. Max Plaut as director of a newly created Jewish Religious Association (Jüdischer Religionsverband) and head of all Jewish organizations in Hamburg; see “Bericht über Arbeit der Religionsgemeinde Ende 1938 bis Ende 1940” (c. May 1940), State Archives Hamburg, 522-1 Jüdische Gemeinden, no. 991 a, fol. 33.

27 In 1939, he acted initially on instructions from the municipality, from 1940 on as ordered by the Gestapo; see Lutz Becht, “Der Beauftragte der Geheimen Staatspolizei bei der jüdischen Wohlfahrtspflege in Frankfurt am Main,” in Frankfurt am Main, Lindenstrasse. Gestapozentrale und Widerstand (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 1996), pp. 87-99.

28 “Dr. Conrad Cohn (RV) an IKG München,” August 26, 1940, BA, 75 c RE 1, no. 761, fol. 94.

totally. In a number of localities that initiative failed, because the Gestapo intervened on the side of the Jewish agencies. In Berlin, for example, there was a special audit of the books of the Jüdische Gemeinde, and the conclusion was that the community lacked the requisite funds to provide for all the needy. Thus, the municipal welfare authority had to continue to give assistance to Jews in need. For such reasons, there were initially quite diverse schemes, based on local circumstances, when it came to compulsory involvement on the part of Jewish agencies in the financing of public welfare.  

Even if public-welfare benefits continued to flow, these were only a minimum aid package, varying from locality to locality. This increased the need for supplementary aid from the Jewish Winter Relief (Jüdische Winterhilfe). The scope of that program also points up just how dramatically the general social situation had deteriorated, because, in addition to Jews on welfare, the Winter Relief was also assisting pensioners, white-collar employees, and factory workers with small incomes. At the end of 1938, there were 70,682 recipients, i.e., one in every four Jews in Germany. The previous winter, the numbers had been one in every five.

Along with the concrete destruction wrought by the pogrom, the general progressive erosion of Jewish institutional infrastructure since 1933 posed a formidable problem for the creation of a separate welfare system inside the Reichsvereinigung. Driven by persecution, pauperization, and emigration, the

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31 Privileged groups, such as small pensioners, disabled veterans or war widows, and war orphans, no longer received any special benefits. Only severely disabled Jewish veterans were left in a somewhat better position; "Arbeitsbericht Rvtr. 1938," p. 17. On the whole, there were diverse welfare practices in different cities; Munich, for example, introduced a reduced "payment schedule for Jews" (Judenrichtsatz); Gruner, "Die öffentliche Fürsorge," p. 609.

number of Gemeinden had shrunk from 1,610 in January 1933, to only 1,480 at the official birth of the Reich Association in early July 1939; of the original thirty-four state and regional associations, only eleven were still in existence.\textsuperscript{33} Associations had been forcibly closed down by the police, or had disbanded due to difficulties in staffing or financing. In 1933, there had been nearly 3,700 Jewish institutions; only a third of these had survived. (In Berlin, the number of Jewish organizations had plummeted from 990 to 221.) Out of 586 welfare organizations, 302 were still operating; only eighty chevrot kadishah (burial societies) were left from an original 582. Of forty-three kindergartens, six remained, and not a single of the 113 lodges had survived.\textsuperscript{34} These still extant institutions were now either slated to be eliminated or incorporated into the RV,\textsuperscript{35} like the Central Welfare Agency for German Jews Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland).\textsuperscript{36}

Due to the expansion of a separate welfare net, Jewish welfare institutions (hospitals, homes for children and the elderly, asylums for the insane and the

\textsuperscript{33} "Bericht der Abwicklungsstelle für Organisationen bei der Reichsvereinigung über die Entwicklung des Vereinswesens 1933-1941," November 7, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 31, fol. 235.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. In Frankfurt an der Oder, for example, there were forty-two associations in 1937; that number had plummeted to just eighteen by the end of 1938; "SD-OA Ost Bericht," January 13, 1939, YVA, 051/OSOBI, no. 47, no fol.

\textsuperscript{35} Some of the central institutions were formally incorporated in October 1939 into the RV; among the social institutions were the Jewish Employment Aid Office (Jüdische Arbeitshilfe) and the National Committee of Jewish Youth Associations. This was also the case with the remaining professional associations and political organizations, most of which had been forced to shut down their operations in November 1938; "Bericht der Abwicklungsstelle für Organisationen bei der Reichsvereinigung," November 7, 1941, BA 75 C Re 1, no. 31, fols. 235-237.

\textsuperscript{36} As a leading welfare organization, the Central Welfare Agency for German Jews had belonged, since 1924, to the German League of Independent Welfare Services. On its history until 1933, see Giora Lotan, "The Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle," \textit{LBIYB} 4 (1959), pp. 185-207. After 1933 it lost its top-level status and had to withdraw from the League, which a short time later was restructured as the Reich Association of Independent Welfare Services (Reichsgemeinschaft der freien Wohlfahrtspflege); on this, see Christoph Sachsse and Florian Tennstedt, \textit{Der Wohlfahrtsstaat im Nationalsozialismus. Geschichte der Armenfürsorge in Deutschland}, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), pp. 132-136.
blind) were initially exempted from compulsory "Aryanization." For example, the Jewish Benevolent Society in Leipzig operated a canteen, a day-nursery, and a home for the elderly. The urgency of the social situation is evident in a letter from the society to the state police headquarters in Leipzig requesting more staff: "The extent of privation among the elderly and indigent Jews we must care for and accommodate has necessitated expanding the staff at the old people's home from 14 to approximately 30 personnel." 38

Thus, the creation of the Reichsvereinigung was no mere attempt to breathe new life into diverse Jewish institutions for self-help; rather, it involved the carefully monitored construction of a separate edifice of welfare in the framework of this new compulsory organization. The purpose of that system of welfare was to come to effective grips with the social problem of mass pauperization within the Jewish population as driven by the policy of discrimination. In the eyes of the rulers, the mass penury constituted a major hindrance to expulsion.

The New Poverty and Jewish Welfare, 1939-1940

The formal creation of the RV in July 1939 had accelerated the shifting of welfare burdens from state agencies to the Jewish institutions. More and more towns and villages now categorically rejected any support for needy Jews. The last such decision was in Hamburg, effective December 1, 1939. 39


39 The social-welfare office in Hamburg had reserved for itself the right to oversee payments. Officials in the Jewish community anticipated that welfare expenditures would rise from RM 643,000 in 1938 to almost RM 1.5 million in 1940. This also meant that there was no longer a positive balance between outlay and revenue as in times past, and the budget was now overdrawn. An initial deficit of RM 500,000 for 1939 doubled the following year, due in the main precisely to the spurt in welfare costs; "Sitzung des Vorstandes am 23.10.1939," State Archives Hamburg, 522-1, no. 985 c, fol. 1; "Sitzung Ende November 1939," ibid., fol. 4; see also "Bericht über Arbeit der
Beginning in November 1939, the RV had to take over funding throughout Germany both for institutional care (so-called Geschlossene Fürsorge), i.e., the accommodation of the handicapped or mentally ill in nursing homes and mental institutions and, from 1940 on (except in Berlin), also for non-institutional care (Offene Fürsorge), i.e., regular ongoing assistance for the needy living on their own.40

At the end of 1939, almost one in every three Jewish residents was on the Jewish welfare rolls, a total of more than 52,000.41 That led to staggering financial problems. Once established, the RV was authorized to collect dues officially from its compulsory membership. It used these revenues to finance its main programs and balance out the budgetary burden between the local communities. Help also arrived from abroad in the form of increasing contributions from organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.42 From the spring of 1939 on, income from the newly introduced "emigration tax" levied on every Jewish emigrant was also employed to finance various activities, including welfare.43

In Hamburg, the Gestapo had already jumped ahead of the rest of the Reich, imposing just such a "levy" in December 1938. According to the local ordinance, it applied to all Jewish emigrants regardless of whether or not they were community members. The local Gemeinde later commented in retrospect:

With the introduction of the emigration tax, the Community was walking in the footsteps of our ancestors. In the 18th century, every Jewish Community

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40 From November 1, 1939, the RV had to take over all costs for institutional welfare; Gruner, "Die öffentliche Fürsorge," p. 610. For the RV this meant that instead of participating with a partial payment of RM 15 per individual, it had to assume the full expenses (RM 90 per person) for some 1,000 mentally ill in public nursing homes; see "Arbeitsbericht der Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland für das Jahr 1939" ["Arbeitsbericht RV 1939"], ms. (Berlin, 1940), p. 38.

41 "Arbeitsbericht RV 1939," p. 32.

42 Funding for Germany just from the Joint jumped from $686,000 in 1938 to $978,102 in 1939; see Bauer, My Brother's Keeper, p. 258.

43 The so-called Auswandererabgabe; "Arbeitsbericht RV 1939," p. 8.
member who moved out of Hamburg was required to pay a high tax assessed on the value of their assets.\footnote{Revenue from this “tax” was initially utilized to cover the budget deficit in Hamburg and, after March 1939, was passed on to the RV; “Bericht über Arbeit der Religionsgemeinde Ende 1938 bis Ende 1940” (c. May 1941), State Archives Hamburg, 522-1, no. 991 a, fols. 38-39.}

This is a striking example that points up the way in which the RV or Gemeinde representatives often sought to weave official orders from the authorities into the woof of their own history — probably in order to preserve some modicum of self-respect and forestall a serious loss of face in the eyes of the broader Jewish population.

Many articles in the \textit{Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt}, the official RV paper, specially invoked Jewish tradition as part of a reaction to the new situation in which the RV had been saddled with sole responsibility for welfare for the poor. At the same time, such references to tradition were intended as an appeal to galvanize internal solidarity within German Jewry in the face of mounting persecution. Yet precisely in this context of galloping privation, a problem arose: some Jewish communities were apparently paying out higher benefits to the needy than the levels permitted in public welfare for Jewish recipients. The RSHA decided to clamp down, taking steps at the end of 1939 to curb this practice. It ordered the RV to introduce a system of “self-surveillance.” On principle, it was necessary that the Jewish poor receive less than their Aryan counterparts; at the same time, the RV budget should not be overburdened “unnecessarily.”\footnote{The welfare department of the RV had to caution people to adhere to the guidelines; "Rundschriften Nr. 1017,” December 14, 1939, CAHJP Jerusalem, JCR/S no. 7, fol. 199; see "Dr. Conrad Cohn (RV) an IKG München (Dr. Neumeyer),” August 26, 1940, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 761, fol. 94.}

Thus, only on rare occasions could the Jewish poor be given special ancillary aid over and above the regular welfare payments. In many towns Jewish institutions also set up welfare soup-kitchens and clothing-distribution shops.\footnote{"Arbeitsbericht RV 1939,” p. 35.}

Though the provision of shoes or clothing remained one of the traditional services of relief offices, that function went through two rapid fundamental transformations. First, when, in the aftermath of the November 1938 pogrom,
the newly founded RV and its district offices were saddled with the task of welfare provision, they found themselves confronted with a daunting task: how to erect a social network on a new scale in order to provide for the needs of tens of thousands of impoverished Jews—a network it was only partially possible to build up on the foundations of existing institutions. Due to the sharp rise in the number of the needy, the RV thus found itself forced over the short term to rely completely on clothing donations from the Jewish population.47

Second, the problem was compounded once the war had broken out and the Nazi state had made another fateful decision: German Jews now had to maintain themselves by so-called Sonderversorgung, a special segregated system for providing basic necessities. From the beginning of 1940, Jews had been prohibited from purchasing new clothing and shoes, so the circuit of clothing distribution shops had to be expanded once again to cope with the new and urgent demands.48

In a parallel development, the JWH, on orders from the Reich Ministry of Interior, suddenly broke with its longstanding principle of distributing nothing but material goods to the needy: indigent Jews were now permitted to receive only financial aid. The reason behind this move was that the Nazi authorities wished to prevent any new articles from ending up in Jewish hands via donations channeled through the Winter Relief. Poverty-stricken Jews now had to depend on the meager "free market," itself further restricted by the regulations of Sonderversorgung, in order to purchase food, used clothing, or fuel.49

Along with the efforts by welfare services and the Jewish Winter Relief to stem the tide of structural poverty, the RV also provided care for the elderly, medical welfare, and aid for the war-disabled. In particular, care for the aged

47 See the call issued by the RV district office in Baden at the beginning of 1939 to hand in all "dispensable articles," such as shoes and underwear, for the clothing distribution shops. The synagogue councils were now organizing collections four times a year; see Josef Werner, Hakenkreuz und Judenstern. Das Schicksal der Karlsruher Juden im Dritten Reich, 2nd rev. ed. (Karlsruhe: Badenia, 1990), p. 296.
48 "Bericht über Arbeit der Religionsgemeinde 1938 bis 1940," (c. May 1941), State Archives Hamburg, 522-1, no. 991 a, fol. 35.
expanded into an ever-larger component of RV activity. The Reichsvereinigung now had to guarantee the provision of such care, replacing services previously furnished largely by private foundations or aid societies. Large numbers of young people had opted for emigration, leaving many elderly or sick relatives behind alone, often without any family maintenance. These developments led to a drop in the number of private families taking in persons requiring special care. That decline was further compounded by the effects of the anti-Jewish Rent Law of April 1939, because "uncertainty over whether the occupants would not themselves soon lose their apartment" often discouraged people from taking in such boarders. By the summer of 1939, in Berlin alone, there were already some 3,000 applications for places in homes for the elderly. Although it was difficult to find space for rent, purchase of property was forbidden, and no funds were available for new construction, RV officials managed to make do: by 1940, they had almost doubled the number of such homes. Facilities were now located in former synagogues or schools, and even in apartments that had been combined to accommodate several Jewish families.

The medical welfare program of the RV concentrated in particular on expectant mothers, medical services in schools and institutional homes, health cures at spas, rest cures and health care for emigrants. The principal obstacle here was the state licensing of physicians. For example, there were only two "medical practitioners" licensed to practice in the whole area of Pomerania, East Prussia, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg, and no Jewish specialists. This welfare district had been particularly ravaged by the destruction wrought to its infrastructure. Of the ninety rest and recuperation

50 "Notiz für Dr. Eppstein," July 7, 1939, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fol. 96.
51 At the end of 1938, there were sixty-seven homes; this had risen to ninety by the end of 1939, and to 122 with 7,000 places in 1940; Adler-Rudel, Jüdische Selbsthilfe, p. 170; "RV-Statistik über Zahl der Heime 1940," BA 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fol. 175.
53 Adler-Rudel, Jüdische Selbsthilfe, p. 171.
homes in Germany in 1932, what remained in the wake of Kristallnacht were nothing but two homes for adults and one for children.54 In addition, the RV welfare department also had to become involved in the two other compulsory main task areas of the organization, namely emigration promotion and schooling. Both had been hard hit by the structural pauperization of the Jewish population. Thus, many indigent Jews were provided the cost of passage, clothing, or tools and equipment in order to assist them to flee from Germany, as long as flight was still possible.55 Indirectly, they also helped potential emigrants by covering the costs of occupational retraining, since the skilled had better prospects abroad: in 1939, 80 percent of all agricultural trainees and 70 percent in the manual trades were being supported, a total of more than 2,000 persons.56

In addition, previously unknown categories of aid to the needy emerged in the aftermath of the pogrom. As part of new directions in anti-Jewish policy, the labor offices began, in early January 1939, to conscript jobless Jews for heavy manual labor in road construction or at garbage-disposal sites. They received the minimal wages for unskilled laborers. Many Jewish officials initially hoped that forced-labor deployment in segregated work brigades (so-called Geschlossener Arbeitseinsatz) would at least guarantee minimum maintenance levels for a group that had already swelled to some 20,000 Jewish workers and their families by the summer of 1939. Such expectations soon soured to bitter disappointment.57 Commenting at the end of 1939, the RV noted:

55 Between January and September 1939, there was a huge wave of some 62,000 emigrants, many of whom received aid from Jewish relief agencies. Of the approximately 5,000 who emigrated from the outbreak of the war to the end of 1939, some two-thirds received funds from the RV; see "Arbeitsbericht RV 1939," pp. 12-14.
56 Ibid., p. 29. These expenses had been divided between the communities and the RV. After the small communities were disbanded, the RV took on the total burden. In July 1939, there were a total of 3,425 training places (1,500 in the skilled manual trades; 1,555 in agriculture); see Adler-Rudel, Jüdische Selbsthilfe, p. 157 and appendix, p. 204.
57 On this entire complex, see Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, pp. 55-119.
These individuals were recruited almost exclusively for unskilled manual labor. Many are housed together in labor camps and separated from their families. Since their earnings are often insufficient to provide for their dependents, the Jewish welfare services were frequently obliged to step in. On top of that, in many instances they also had to make funds available to cover the cost of work clothes for conscripted laborers.58

Huge social problems were also generated in many localities by the strictures of the anti-Jewish Rent Law. Since countless German Jews had lost their apartments by spontaneous eviction notices from individual landlords or by systematic "evictions" at the hands of the municipal authorities, the Gemeinden had to move quickly to set up shelters for the homeless and to enlarge existing facilities for the elderly.59 People were often forced to vacate their apartment at short notice several times over even a few short months. For the victims, this meant not just the loss of their accustomed surroundings and comforts; they also usually had to give up any right to privacy, because in the so-called Judenhäuser ("Jews' houses") set up in many cities, a family as a rule was allotted only a single room. As a result, people had to get rid of their furnishings and belongings, resulting in a further decline in their daily living standards, quite apart from whatever capital they might still possess. The privation generated and driven by the policy of persecution now struck almost all groups in the Jewish population. Malnutrition plagued the aged, the sick, children, and forced laborers in the wake of the policy of Sonderversorgung imposed after the outbreak of war in 1939 and the concomitant reduction in rations.60 Since there was little butter or kosher meat,

58 Cited in ibid., pp. 118-119; see Adler-Rudel, Jüdische Selbsthilfe, pp. 160-161.
59 See "Entwurf Eingabe RV (Dr. Arthur Lilienthal/Berthold Auerbach) an Reichsarbeitsministerium," July 17, 1939, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fols. 90-106. In Leipzig, a shelter for the homeless was set up in a former private synagogue, see Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten (October 31, 1939). On Munich, see "IKG München an OB/Gewerbeamt," April 21, 1939, YVA, M1DN, no. 114, fols. 159-161.
60 On aid for forced laborers, see Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, pp. 118, 132. In Bavaria, the RV welfare department, working together with the section for schools in the RV district office saw to it that Jewish children
rabbis were forced to be extremely flexible in how they interpreted traditional
dietary laws when it came to margarine and meat so as to assure the basic
provision of kosher food for Jewish canteens or institutional homes. Alongside such latent problems, numerous emergency relief operations were
undertaken, such as the swift response sparked by the first deportations from
Pomerania in February 1940: on short notice, Jewish offices rushed to the aid
of individual victims, providing them with money and food, and arranging
shelter for those who later returned.

Poverty and the Budget of the Reichsvereinigung in 1940

At the beginning of 1940, the RV anticipated that another 45,000 Jews would
soon join the ranks of the indigent, necessitating additional annual
expenditures in excess of RM 20 million. Thus, they projected a total budget
of RM 125 million required for the following three fiscal years. Of this, it was
likely that not even half the cost could be met by contributions, liquidations of
assets, or funds from Jewish organizations abroad, such as the Joint. In light
of a potential deficit of RM 71 million, the newly erected compulsory edifice of
the RV appeared to be tottering on the financial brink.

Yet the budget for the first six months of 1940 had initially been drawn up
without taking these projections into account. In any event, the largest single
item in the total budget of over RM 22 million was the figure of RM 11.3 million

also received vitamin tablet supplements, as was common practice in the
public schools; "RV/Bezirksstelle Bayern an IKG Aschaffenburg," December 31, 1940, CAHJP Jerusalem, Inv. No. 346, no fol. 61

In order to make sure there was enough food, the standard generic brand of
margarine was declared kosher parve, even though it contained animal fat.
Since kosher meat was no longer available, other permitted types of meat
were used in the canteens and prepared in strict accordance with religious
dietary laws; "Sitzung des Vorstandes Ende November 1939," State Archives
Hamburg, 522-1, no. 985 c, fol. 4; "Sitzung des Vorstandes November 1940," ibid., fol. 22.

For example, the RV provided aid for deportees from Schneidemühl, those
who remained behind, and a certain number who later returned destitute from
Poland to Germany; "RV-Schreiben an Hauptamt Sipo, Anlage," April 9, 1940,
BA 75 C Re 1, no. 483, fols. 214-215; "Rücksprache im Gestapa am 1.4.1940," ibid., fols. 218-220.

for welfare, made up at this point of the general welfare, support for institutional homes (for the aged, children, the handicapped and rest homes), medical care (clinics and hospitals), and welfare aid for war victims.

Since late April and early May of 1940, RV representatives had been hoping they might economize on welfare expenditures because the Labor Administration Authority had extended the nets of forced-labor deployment to all Jews fit and able to work. Previously, official policy was that "only" those being supported by state welfare were to be conscripted. In order to potentially relieve the strain on the RV welfare budget by means of the wages (however paltry) paid to forced workers, the district offices were now also supposed to order the indigent on Jewish welfare to register with their local labor office. However, Jewish officials believed there was a certain limit to this strategy, since the working conditions for conscripted laborers were becoming ever harsher.

The actual RV expenditures for the first half of the year ran to RM 22.5 million; the outlay for welfare, RM 9.5 million, was somewhat less than projected. Membership dues provided only RM 5 million; and more than half of total expenditures, RM 11.7 million, were covered by "assets." Of the latter, one million came from "genuine" assets, 10.6 million from emigration tax revenues. For the second half of 1940, the RV had a projected budget of RM

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64 The second largest item in the budget was preparation for emigration, RM 4.2 million, though it also contained hidden welfare expenditures; third largest was vocational training, amounting to RM 1.9 million. "Bericht der Dt. Treuhand- und Revisionsanstalt (Stand vom 30.6.1940)," BA, 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fols. 10-13; see also "RV-Haushaltsplan für das 1. Halbjahr 1940," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fols. 40-58; "RV-Voranschlag für das 2. Halbjahr 1940," BA, fol. 146.

65 "Anlage Organisation der RV (Stand vom 30.6.1940)," BA, 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fol. 30.

66 "RV-Voronschlag für das 2. Halbjahr 1940," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 1, fol. 146.

67 Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, pp. 133-150.

68 "Rundschreiben der RV-BSt. Baden vom 1.7.1940." CAHJP Jerusalem, JCR/S 7, no fol.

69 Thus, they tried concomitantly to integrate unemployed Jews into certain aid agencies or training programs, see Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, p. 119.

70 "Bericht der Dt. Treuhand- und Revisionsanstalt (Stand vom 30.6.1940)," BA, 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fols. 10-13.
10.4 million for welfare and had pared down the total budget to just under RM 20 million.\footnote{71} Against the backdrop of new budget planning and in the afterglow of the \textit{blitzkrieg}\ victory over France, the Security Police informed the RV on June 25, that "a fundamental solution" for the Jews from Europe was now envisaged following the anticipated victorious end of the war in the autumn; namely, the "readying of a colonial reservation." The structures and finances of the RV were to be mobilized logistically to this end, and its officials were thus instructed to "begin examining this problem carefully in advance so that potential plans can be put on the table when demanded."\footnote{72}

Although labor offices across the Reich inducted Jews for industrial labor deployment in a second massive wave of conscription in the autumn of 1940, contrary to what many had hoped, the social decline in the Jewish population had not been halted. By the eve of the new year, the number of male and female forced laborers had already soared to some 40,000.\footnote{73} Bearing in mind the effects of the deportations at the end of October from western Germany, the RV noted:

> Outlay will be reduced due to the discontinuance of welfare payments for the Jews in Baden and the Palatinate and, to a limited extent, because of labor deployment as well. On the other hand, effective January 1, 1941, previous expenditures will be augmented by assumption of total welfare costs for the Jews in Berlin.\footnote{74}

With this takeover of all welfare costs in Berlin, the forced transfer of state welfare to the RV inside the \textit{Altreich} was largely complete. The upshot was

that new economy measures notwithstanding, the RV had to increase its budget once more for the first half of 1941 to RM 22.5 million. Half of the projected expenditures were reserved for welfare. Since anticipated income revenue was less than RM 13 million, due to pervasive poverty, the plan was to increase the 1941 membership dues assessed on the basis of declared wealth, and, in particular, to utilize the emigration tax and Gemeinde assets to help cover the deficit. Consequently, plans were drafted in the community institutions to slash personnel and operating costs.

In the midst of these deliberations on how to cut costs, Jewish officials received the next bit of bad news: effective January 1, 1941, a new special 15-percent surtax was to be introduced on all Jewish income, the so-called Sozialausgleichsabgabe. One consequence of this "social compensation tax" was that many forced laborers and employees in Jewish institutions were now at risk to join the ranks of the needy.

Attempts by the RV to Exploit Conflicts of Interest

Although the RV representatives had no possibility whatsoever of altering the basic thrust of the persecution policy, the occasional contradictions, based on conflicts of interest, between the diverse agencies in the Third Reich involved in policy planning could sometimes be exploited for the benefit of the Jewish population as a whole or individuals directly affected. Occasionally, they were even successful.

Thus, in 1939-1941, the Reichsvereinigung was able to induce the RSHA to intervene and block a number of initiatives by other agencies that went

76 "Voranschlag für RV-Etat des 1. Halbjahres 1941," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 64, fol. 63. The maximum daily maintenance allowance for persons in institutional homes was reduced to only RM 0.90, and residents had to take care of all housework. Laundry had to be done in the homes themselves, and vegetable gardens had to be planted on institution grounds. In addition, they wished to set maximum levels for the salaries of community and RV staff; "RV/Abt. Fürsorge-Rundschreiben," January 5, 1941, BA, no. 484, fol. 154-156; "Vorstandssitzung des Jüdischen Religionsverbandes," December 15, 1940, State Archives Hamburg, 522-1, no. 985 c, fol. 27.
77 "Protokoll der RV-Vorstandssitzung," December 20, 1940, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 2, fol. 72; "Protokoll," January 6, 1941, ibid., fol. 69.
beyond the RSHA's own general aims in the persecution policy. Those initiatives included, for example, local hassles in the supply of food\textsuperscript{78} or early plans by some municipalities for barracks camps.\textsuperscript{79} As we have already described, regional welfare authorities and municipal welfare offices were interested in just how fast they could cut off the Jewish poor from social-welfare benefits. The RSHA restrained more radical demands for the RV to assume welfare costs for non-members as well, such as foreign Jews and those in "mixed marriages." Against the selfish concerns of the municipalities to reduce the number of poor on their welfare rolls, the RSHA was interested in making sure that the Gemeinden and RV would not be weighed down by too heavy a financial burden over the medium term so as to guarantee continued functioning of the separate school and welfare systems.\textsuperscript{80}

Diverse conflicts were also generated as a result of the autonomous labor deployment program organized in the Reich by the labor offices. The RV was able to exploit the interest of the SD and Security Police in expanding the schemes of vocational retraining as preparation for emigration in order to shield Jews from the grasp of the labor offices and conscripted labor. However, their venturous attempt in 1940, to have Jewish prisoners released from the concentration camps for work as forced laborers under the Labor Administration Authority ended in failure.

The RV also managed to avert a number of planned local operations against the Jewish population with a "helping hand" from the RSHA. In 1939-1940, the labor offices in Baden and Silesia refused to grant Jews unemployment benefits, arguing that Jewish welfare could also take them under its wing. In this instance, the RSHA, fearing that Jewish welfare offices might be

\textsuperscript{78} Jewish disabled veterans received benefits in accordance with existing legislation just like their "Aryan" counterparts. This was standard procedure for war victims in Hildesheim, Braunschweig, and Bielefeld; by contrast, in towns such as Minden and Wolfenbüttel, in actual practice full maintenance was not provided; "RV/Abt. Fürsorge-Kriegsopfer an RV Berlin," August 25, 1941, ibid., no. 752, fol. 177+RS.

\textsuperscript{79} The RSHA thwarted attempts in Aachen, Brandenburg, and Munich to set up special camps for the Jewish inhabitants; "Aktennotiz 30/41 ü. Vorladung ins RSHA," March 21, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 45, fol. 13; "Aktennotiz 19/41 ü. Vorladung ins RSHA," March 8, 1941, ibid., fol. 47.

\textsuperscript{80} Gruner, "Die öffentliche Fürsorge," pp. 610-613.
swamped by requests for aid and unable to cope, backed Jewish officials in
their petition to the Labor Ministry.

In another case, the RV defended its position by a contrary tactic, this time
with backing from the Labor Administration Authority. When, in October 1940,
the RSHA suddenly demanded that 10,000 male laborers be made available
for work on autobahn construction, the Jewish authorities responded by
pointing out that almost all workers were already busy on the job: they had
long since been integrated into the forced-deployment scheme run by the
labor offices. This special recruitment operation was subsequently
abandoned. In 1941 to press ahead with deportations to the
East.

The Dismantling of the RV in the Course of Deportations

In mid-March 1941, some six months before the beginning of deportations
from the Altreich, the RSHA commented to Jewish officials that "a projected
emigration by all Jews capable of being resettled would necessitate
substantial funds." In preparation, drastic economy measures were ordered,
involving a radical paring of the organizational structures just set up. The
number of communities in the RV as yet not included within district offices had
to be pruned from eighty-two to seventeen: these were only in the larger cities
and were now termed Kultusgemeinden. District offices had to be reduced
from eighteen to thirteen, and now encompassed more and more
communities. The number of members on the RV executive board was cut
back, the number of departments was limited to those dealing with education

81 Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, pp. 121, 165-167.
82 “Notiz Nr. 27 über Vorladung,” March 17, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 45, fol.
26.
83 “RV-Organisationsplan (Stand vom 1.9.1941),” ibid., 75 C Re 1, no. 31, fol.
139. On the situation in 1940, see "Bericht der Dt. Treuhand- und
Revisionsanstalt (Stand vom 30.6.1940),” ibid., 80 Re 1, no. 5019, fols. 7-9.
and retraining, social services, finance/administration, and emigration. The RV was ordered to slash expenditures for personnel and education. The RV and communities had to sack thousands of employees; to avoid new welfare burdens, they were registered in the labor offices for conscripted labor deployment. The RV district offices received similar directives: all expenditures for welfare were to be reviewed in order to channel every fit and able individual on the welfare rolls into conscripted labor. With this "aid" from the RSHA, the labor offices managed once again to recruit more than 10,000 men and women by the summer of 1941. With between 51,000 and 53,000 deployed forced laborers, there were virtually no potential Jewish workers left in the Altreich to conscript. Due to the strenuous, monotonous, and often poisonous working conditions in industry, the grind of shift work, the long distances to and from the job, inadequate diet, and a lack of rest and recreation, Jewish officials expected that the health of nearly all such conscripted laborers would suffer. In Berlin, the city that still retained the most favorable social and economic conditions in the teeth of persecution, there were now some 30,000 persons living on forced labor and 11,000 on welfare, amounting to two-thirds of the Jewish population there.

In connection with these economy measures, the RV had instructed its district offices in late February that, in future, cash welfare payments would have to be replaced by material aid; clothing distribution points and canteens would

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84 Heavy cuts in numbers and personnel in the RV district offices were pushed through, which particularly affected emigration departments and their advisory positions; Prochnik, "Bericht," pp. 11-12.
85 For budgetary reasons, schools had to merge or downsize their teaching staffs; "RV-Vorstandssitzung," February 17, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 2, fol. 64; "Sitzung RV-Vorstand," February 23, 1941, ibid., fol. 62.
86 Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, p. 182.
87 "Aktennotiz 7/41 ü. Vorladung im RSHA," February 20, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 45, fol. 77+RS.
88 If one adds the small number in independent professions or training schemes and the more than 6,000 working in RV administration, welfare and district offices, the estimated 59,000 fit and able to work were all employed; Gruner, Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz, p. 280.
89 Der Aufbau (August 1, 1941).
have to be expanded.\textsuperscript{91} Under the press of persecution, the public kitchens in Jewish institutions had long since cast off their original character as canteens for the needy. They now resembled communal dining halls, their operation geared to the rhythms of forced labor. Welfare work for the young took on a similar thrust, now concentrated in the main on care for the children of forced laborers. The emergency welfare services operated four homes in cities for persons who had relocated from rural areas, transients, the homeless, and those who had been bombed out in air raids. Social welfare was also provided for prisoners.\textsuperscript{92}

In numerous cities, the RV had to contend with the social consequences of forced resettlement into \textit{Judenhäuser}. On top of this, in the summer of 1941, the Gestapo ordered the RV to finance the construction of at least thirty-eight labor and residential camps at closed mines, in evacuated monasteries, or in military barracks. Camp facilities such as Milbertshofen in Munich and Kapellenstrasse in Bonn were now set up in order to intern the Jewish population of entire towns or rural districts prior to deportation.\textsuperscript{93}

Some 167,000 Jews still remained in the \textit{Altreich}; almost 60 percent were female, and the percentage of the elderly was extremely high.\textsuperscript{94} Mass privation was the product of an eight-year-long process of systematic persecution. Half of all RV expenditures, now some RM 3 million a month, went for welfare. In Berlin, the proportion spent on welfare was even greater, hovering at about 70 percent. Only a scant 5 percent of the budget in Berlin was allocated to education and culture, 15 percent was set aside for administrative costs, and 10 percent for other communal activities.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{91} "Rundschreiben," February 27, 1941, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 4, fols. 14-15. The welfare department was forced to reduce the daily amount for maintenance in institutional homes, slashing it to RM 0.75 per person; "RV-Vorstandssitzung," February 17, 1941, BA, 75 Re 1, no. 2, fol. 64; "RV-Vorstandssitzung," February 23, 1941, ibid., fol. 62.

\textsuperscript{92} Prochnik, "Bericht," pp. 23-27.

\textsuperscript{93} Gruner, \textit{Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz}, pp. 249-262.

\textsuperscript{94} Prochnik, "Bericht," pp. 1-4.

\textsuperscript{95} Twenty percent went for non-institutional welfare (cash benefits, foster homes, on-institutional medical care). Forty-five percent was allocated for institutional welfare (benefits for wards/foster children, residents in RV-operated and other homes for the elderly, nursing homes for the infirm, youth
Since the revamping carried out in the spring of 1941, there was a master budget for the whole organization, replacing the former system of independent, separate budgets for the individual communities. On orders from the RSHA, the only revenue sources that could be used to finance the RV budget were dues paid in by its compulsory members, monies from the JWH and from the new *Jüdische Pflicht* scheme, which had been initiated that same spring. It was now strictly forbidden to utilize any other funds, such as capital from property liquidations, etc., because remaining RV assets were earmarked to serve one exclusive and paramount purpose: the financing of the now imminent deportations.\(^96\)

In mid-September 1941, after the introduction of the compulsory yellow badge, the RV district office in Brandenburg, East Prussia, received a letter from Selma Ebert. Together with her three children, she had been left by her "Aryan" husband and had been resident since April 1939 in the Ladeburg poorhouse after having been evicted from her apartment. Frau Ebert wrote:

> Please send me two badges. One for myself and one for my son Gerhard. ... I dread the winter, I don't have any coal or overcoat. If I could buy some coal, but I don't have the money. What's going to become of me? Nobody can stand any more of this suffering and pain. My dear Mrs. Löwenthal, couldn't you possibly see your way to granting me a few marks to buy some coal? Because there's no gas here and I'm totally dependent on coal. Maybe I could get some as an advance from the Winter Relief, 'cause when the two truckloads of coal that the dealer's got have run out, I won't get any till January. Since that's when he'll receive new supplies. My heartfelt thanks in advance, Selma Ebert.\(^97\)

homes, other types of residential institutions or hospitals) and 5 percent for meals for the needy; Prochnik, "Bericht," pp. 12-14.\(^{96}\) Ibid., pp. 15-17.

\(^{97}\) "Brief von Selma Ebert an die RV-Bezirksstelle Brandenburg-Ostpreußen, eingeg. am 14.9.1941," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 739, fol. 15. On living conditions, see ibid., fols. 54, 130, 154; "Notizen," March 27 and February 14, 1939, June 14, 1940.
The situation of this isolated and totally impoverished woman is reflective of the plight of a large segment of the Jewish population in the autumn of 1941, on the eve of the deportations. In September, the Nazi leaders finally decided on a concrete date for the long-prepared deportations; at the end of the month, it informed Jewish officials of this fact and ordered them to take part in organizing the planned transports. The Kultusgemeinden were required to establish camps for those to be deported and equip the transports, which were slated to begin in mid-October. In Hamburg alone, the costs for food, blankets, clothing, travel, etc., for the period October to December 1941, amounted to almost a quarter million marks.

The initial transports precipitated new social problems, since among the deportees were thousands of forced laborers who had been supporting their relatives with their meager incomes. Overnight, the number of places in homes for the aged or in homes for children torn from their foster families had to be increased once again. Although the burden on Jewish welfare offices was eased as a consequence of the drop in the number of needy community members, reduced spending for schools, etc., this was cancelled out by the new financial constraints. Confiscation by the Reich of the property and assets of deportees in accordance with the Eleventh Decree on the Reich Citizenship Law also put an abrupt end to maintenance payments from blocked accounts for needy relatives or friends.

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98 "Notiz über Vorsprache Löwenherz bei Brunner," October 2, 1941, cited in Hans Safran, *Die Eichmann-Männer* (Vienna and Zurich 1993), p. 120. The Jewish Community in Berlin was informed on October 1 about the "partial evacuation"; "Bericht Hildegard Henschel," p. 3, YVA, 01/51, no fol.

99 Especially as a consequence of the transports, the clothing distribution shops were under a heavy strain. In October, 840 persons had to be given clothing, as opposed to a previous monthly average of 300; "Bericht über Arbeit der Religionsgemeinde im Jahr 1941," State Archives Hamburg, 522-1, no. 991 a, fol. 48.

100 Ibid., fol. 42. See also Schüler-Springorum, "Fear and Misery," pp in this volume.

As the deportations got underway, the RV was told to reduce by 20 percent all welfare payments from Jewish institutions. This meant, for example, that benefits for the Jewish needy in Berlin fell below the estimated minimum for survival. Yet due to special taxes, the take-home pay of those still on forced labor was also insufficient. This proved especially disastrous in cases where relatives had to be fed and cared for. For that reason, many forced laborers were also compelled by circumstances to work illegally at another job, concealing their yellow badge, while others sold their last belongings in a bid to improve their desperate lot. Large families were particularly pinched, with too little money even to buy the reduced food rations.

Starvation had begun to spread. Of the approximately 130,000 Jews still in Germany in the winter of 1941-1942, some 18,880 were dependent on welfare from the JWH. In Breslau, almost one in three of the 6,467 Jews there had to be given supplementary welfare relief; that was in marked contrast with the picture in Berlin, where only 9 percent of the Jewish population of 58,000 were receiving extra aid. The labor situation in Berlin was characterized by a large number of Jews employed in Jewish institutions and especially unscripted into work industry.

Deportations, suspended toward the end of the winter, were resumed in late March 1942. On April 2, Heydrich issued a directive that the assets of the RV should in future be utilized "primarily for the final solution of the Jewish question in Europe." Consequently, these were to be regarded "as assets

103 The Jewish Community in Berlin was permitted to provide the needy with only RM 24 a month per person instead of RM 30, which was the amount at the time deemed the necessary minimum for survival; "Tabelle mit Richtsätzen der RV-Bezirksstellen, Anlage zum Vermerk vom 19.8.1942," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 759, fol. 2; Prochnik, "Bericht," p. 23.
104 Margarete S., a forced laborer at Siemens, was moonlighting at her old profession as a seamstress; see transcription of interview with Margarete S., Berlin, March 25, 1990, p. 9.
105 Schüler-Springorum, "Fear and Misery".
106 In Breslau, there were almost 2,000 persons, in Berlin 5,000. In 1940-1941, the total figure amounted to 37,000 of 170,000 Jews, slightly over 21 percent; "Bericht der RV/Abt. Fürsorge über die JWH 1941/42"; Gruner, "Die Berichte über die Jüdische Winterhilfe" p. 341, doc. no. 4.
already earmarked for purposes of the German Reich." Subsequent to a decision by Hitler, Eichmann informed RV representatives at the end of May that preparations were being made for the "entire evacuation of the Jews ... to a place of permanent residence"; i.e., all those under the age of sixty-five were to be sent East and the elderly and disabled veterans were to be confined in Theresienstadt.

Now the German state literally stole the last shirt off the backs of the German Jews. They were ordered to surrender all articles of clothing not essential for a "modest standard of living," along with necessary household appliances such as electric heaters, hotplates, and vacuum cleaners. Education for Jews was totally banned.

From this point on, poverty or welfare dependence were regarded as sufficient grounds for early deportation. The Gestapo informed the Jewish Community in Berlin that anyone receiving any form of social assistance had, "for budgetary reasons, to be induced to emigrate." This applied to everyone receiving support from Jewish institutions, which, at that point in the Reich, meant a total of 2,718 Jews, including the elderly. This was followed in September by the largest deportation wave for 1942 - more than 12,000 - about 10,000 of whom were sent to Theresienstadt.

By the spring of 1943, most of the Jews still remaining in Germany had been shipped East to be murdered. In June, the RSHA dissolved the organizational structure of the RV, along with its district offices. After the Reich had

107 "Runderlass RSHA (IV B 4), "April 2, 1942, Wiener Library, doc. no. 605, no. fol. My thanks once again to Thomas Jersch for pointing out this reference.
110 "Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt" (June 19, 1942).
112 "Aufstellung der RV/Abt. Fürsorge vom 4.9.1942," BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 759, fol. 3.
113 "RV-September-Statistik," YVA, 08/no. 14, no fol.
confiscated its entire assets, a newly created "rump" organization was allocated a mere RM 5 million for all expenditures.\textsuperscript{114} This "New Reichsvereinigung" was headed by Dr. Walter Lustig and consisted only of the central office, a medical department, and a welfare section. The latter was now directed by Dr. Königsberger.\textsuperscript{115} The officials newly appointed to replace those who had been deported and the new staff workers, largely from "mixed marriages," had to take up their work in rooms at the Berlin Jewish Hospital on Iranische Strasse. The hospital served simultaneously as a sick ward, a prisoner camp, and a makeshift children’s home. In place of the previous RV branches, i.e., the Gemeinden and district offices, there were now "agents" in forty-one cities whose task was to maintain contact with Berlin and organize welfare services locally.\textsuperscript{116}

Down to the war’s end, Jews in "mixed marriages" and Jewish "Mischlinge" (with one or two Jewish grandparents) were subjected to new conditions of persecution modeled on the compulsory community. Forced labor and residential concentration in Judenhäuser were once again characteristic features of such persecution.\textsuperscript{117} Even in these dire circumstances, RV - officials attempted to make social conditions more tolerable for the victims, so as to enable them at least to survive.\textsuperscript{118} Yet only with the Allied victory did genuine prospects emerge: not just for the small numbers of Jews who had survived the slaughter in the East, but also for the development of an independent, self-determining, pluralistic Jewish welfare system such as was soon to crystallize in the DP camps.

Conclusion

The anti-Jewish policy of the Nazi state, which, particularly in 1938, had aspired to demolish the very foundations of existence for German Jewry,

\textsuperscript{114} "Vermerk Leo Schindler," August 12, 1943, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 9, fol. 780.  
\textsuperscript{115} "RV-Organisationsplan vom 1.7.1943," ibid., no. 10, fol. 7.  
\textsuperscript{117} Gruner, \textit{Der geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz}, pp. 322-330.  
\textsuperscript{118} See "Notiz Kleemann," October 15, 1943, and "Bericht Neumann für Lustig," October 8, 1943, BA, 75 C Re 1, no. 61, fols. 45, 48.
deliberately and systematically, led to massive pauperization. From 1939 on, there was no longer any upper class within the Jewish population. Even when assets still existed, they lay deposited in blocked accounts. Conditions were compounded by a ban on commercial activity and forced labor, which closed the door on any ways to earn an independent living. The abrogation of state welfare in the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom—at the same moment that vast numbers of Jews found themselves dependent for the first time on welfare support—created a completely new situation for Jewish welfare offices. Up until that juncture, they had provided only "charitable" aid intended to supplement public-welfare benefits. But the policies of the Nazi state brought an abrupt end to the voluntary community of solidarity and responsibility based on donations by the wealthy and care for the needy.

The traditional aid was supplanted by a Zwangsgemeinschaft, a compulsory community of the Jews in Germany. The new direction in "persecution policy" after the November 1938 pogrom was the driving force behind both the establishment of the new Reichsvereinigung under RSHA supervision and the creation of a separate "Jewish" welfare system. Even if some of the same personnel, all the way to members of the executive board, and part of the infrastructure of the old Reichsvertretung were utilized to set up the new compulsory organization, the RV, the differences in historical, political, and social conditions between the two organizations are striking, as is the discontinuity in previous goals and perspectives.

Under the press of constraints, assistance for individuals was no longer its main concern; rather, the work of the Jewish welfare came to center on securing the subsistence of tens of thousands of persons condemned to a life of poverty and want. To effect this, it was necessary to build up a whole separate system of basic welfare care. In contrast with the previously dominant view among historians, there was thus no simple demolition or dismantling of Jewish welfare. Rather, the new situation was characterized by the historical paradox of a centralized expansion of Jewish institutions in 1939 and 1940, under the stringent surveillance of the Security Police. This new centralized structure replaced the pluralistic infrastructure of earlier aid societies and welfare institutions.
Priority was given to those interests that served the persecution policy; there was also close surveillance over the organizational bureaucracy, finances and their use. In the spring of 1941, a radical disassembly of the system was initiated once again in light of the imminent deportation of the German-Jewish population. After the completion of the deportations, an organizational rump was allowed to carry on, perforce as a shadow of its former self and geared to providing for Jews in "mixed marriages" and so-called Geltungsjuden.\textsuperscript{119}

The lack of any future perspective constituted the fateful fundamental constellation for the self-sacrificing and dedicated work of many officials, staff workers, and volunteers employed in the Jewish welfare offices. A long-term welfare policy was impossible. From 1939 on, to combat mass poverty in the Jewish population in the Third Reich meant creating halfway acceptable social conditions for a burgeoning number of the needy using a shrinking base of funds. After the war broke out, aid was oriented only to securing the basis for survival. Instead of positive promotion of the economy, the daily tasks centered initially on helping people to flee and, later on, easing the fate of forced laborers prisoners and deportees.

Relief for structural poverty due to persecution resembled the labors of Sisyphus, because what one day had been laboriously constructed under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo was called into question the next by new harsh measures. The lives of officials and their staff workers were in constant danger. The "control agency" shipped off several members of the RV executive board to concentration camps for minor infractions. Among them was the head of the welfare department, Dr. Conrad Cohn, who perished in 1942 in Mauthausen.

The mass poverty generated by the persecution had a significant impact on fundamental political decisions by the Nazi leadership that affected the fate of

\textsuperscript{119} In Nazi "racial biology," the category Geltungsjude comprised persons with two Jewish grandparents who were nonetheless "considered in legal terms" as full Jews (\textit{Volljuden}) —and not as so-called first-degree Mischlinge — because at the time the Nuremberg Laws were promulgated they had belonged to the Jewish religious community or were married to a Jew; see Horst Seidler and Andreas Rett, \textit{Das Reichssippenamt entscheidet. Rassenbiologie und Nationalsozialismus} Vienna and Munich 1982), pp. 114-115.
the Jewish population as a whole, as well as their segregation and later deportation. For the individual victim of that policy, poverty and the welfare aid it necessitated constituted an enormous obstacle to successful emigration in the years 1938-39. In 1939 and 1940, both factors provided the labor offices with an argument for conscripting individuals for forced labor—and finally, in 1942, with a rationale for early deportation by the Gestapo.

Translated by William Templer