

Bergson Group

Several members of the *Irgun Tseva'i Le'umi*, a Zionist Revisionist underground movement based in Palestine. They were active in the United States between 1940 and 1948. The group was named for its leader, Hillel Kook, who called himself Peter H. Bergson in the United States.

Because the Bergson Group consisted of Jews from Palestine, it did not owe allegiance to any one Jewish leader or group in the United States, or suffer from dual loyalty hesitations like many American Jews. Thus, Bergson Group members were able to be more forward and unconventional in their methods of rescuing European Jews—leading to a grave rift between them and American Jewish leaders.

In late 1941 the group formed the "Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews." However, when information about the mass murder of Jews in Europe went public in November 1942, the group decided to scrap its campaign for a Jewish army and focus all its energies on rescue efforts. The Bergson Group chose to use American public opinion to pressure the United States government into helping European Jewry. They riled up public response through mass demonstrations, like the one at Madison Square Garden in March 1943, which rallied around the motto "We Will Never Die."

After the unsuccessful Bermuda Conference on refugees in April 1943, the Bergson Group instituted the "Committee to Save the Jewish People in Europe." The committee's goal was to convince the US government to create an official agency that would deal solely with the rescue of Jews. Many public personalities, such as Congressman Will Rogers, New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, and publisher William Randolph Hearst supported the committee.

The committee's lobbying for a government rescue agency was seemingly successful. In November 1943, committee supporters introduced resolutions to establish a rescue commission. Soon, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau revealed that the State Department was sabotaging rescue efforts. Public calls for action, plus the looming State Department sabotage

scandal, led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board (WRB) in January 1944.