

The Joint's Activity Among the Jews of Romania

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It was then, in this very period, when the Romanian government was evading its responsibility for the dreadful state of the Jews, that the Joint came to the aid of the Jews and, very simply, saved them from starvation and total degeneration. The Joint had actually been proffering help to Romanian Jewry since 1943, and stepped up its aid when the needs of the community intensified, beginning in August 1944. Help was extended to the surviving deportees, the returning evacuees, the orphans and the disabled, and to those liberated from the forced-labor squads and the death camps. The Joint set up co-operatives and rehabilitation centers for political prisoners and for deportees from neighboring countries who managed to make their way to Romania. It also maintained entire local communities, helping to underwrite the upkeep of their institutions, hospitals, old-age homes, schools, training centers, and publishing houses, as well as supporting artists, pioneers and students. In the initial post-liberation period, from September 1944 to May 1945, the Joint in Romania became the center for refugee aid. In this period, the Joint secured itself a paramount place in the life of the Jewish community, and the heads of the organization acquired tremendous power, well beyond the authority originally vested in them. The Jewish Communists conducted a persistent war of attrition against the Joint, hoping to gain control of this major source of influence in the Jewish community. To that end the Communists took advantage of the immense dissatisfaction prevalent among many of the welfare cases, and particularly among the returned Transnistria deportees.

The scope of the Joint's success was matched only by the size of its mistakes. Its achievements stemmed from the abundant material means at its disposal; its mistakes were the result of a lack of a clear-cut policy among the organisation's directors in the United States. These executives waffled over the ultimate objectives of their aid, a state of affairs aggravated by their inability to grasp the political situation in countries liberated or captured by the Soviet army. For example, the Joint erred when it allocated relatively large

sums for the rehabilitation of Jewish community institutions in Romania, which were then nationalized. Nevertheless, it was the Joint that saved over half of Romania's Jews from starvation and possible death.

Source: Gutman, Yisrael and Saf, Avital (eds.), *She'arit Hapleta 1944-1948, Rehabilitation and Political Struggle, Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1990, pp. 156-157.