Response of the Jewish Daily Press in Palestine
to the Accession of Hitler, 1933

Benny Morris

Eretz Israel is being built from the rubble of the Diaspora. . . . The losses inflicted on world Jewry have greatly abetted the rapid growth of the National Home at this time . . . and Eretz Israel will absorb the few who escaped the process of destruction and devastation.¹

This article surveys the attitudes of the Palestinian Jewish press toward Hitler’s accession to power and the Nazi upheaval in Germany in 1933. The study hopes to shed light on the nature of this press, the consolidation of the Yishuv’s attitude toward the Nazis, and the patterns of thinking and action adopted by the Zionist movement in the 1930s.

The press at a specific time, with respect to a certain subject, is of dual value to the historian. First, it reflects how certain topics and events were viewed and construed during the period studied, and each individual newspaper reflects the specific perspective of a given political party or social circle toward the processes and events. Second, the press influences public opinion and helps shape certain groups’ perceptions and understandings of the events they witness. Sometimes, too, the press provides facts about events and communicates the views of the personalities about events by means of interviews and features.

This article focuses on several themes: the response of the Palestinian Jewish press to the elections in Germany in July and November 1932; its responses to Hitler’s accession to power on January 30, 1933; and the effect of Yishuv politics on these responses.

The Jewish Press in the Early 1930s

In 1932, three daily Hebrew-language newspapers were published in Palestine: *Ha'aretz*, an independent liberal paper; *Davar*, the newspaper of the Histadrut and, unofficially, of Mapai; and *Do'ar ha-Yom*, an independent newspaper identified with the right-wing and, for some time, owned by the Revisionist movement.

*Ha'aretz* was established as *Hadshot Ha'aretz* in 1919. At the end of that year, it was renamed *Ha'aretz*, and its editorial office relocated from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. From 1922 on, it was edited by Moshe Glücksohn, a Polish-born journalist and liberal Zionist functionary who had attended the universities of Berne and Marburg and held a Ph.D. in philosophy. In 1907-1911, Glücksohn served as secretary of the Hovevei Zion committee in Odessa. In 1921, he settled in Palestine and helped found the Democratic Zionists and then the General Zionists. Glücksohn edited *Ha'aretz* until 1937, when an immigrant from Germany, Zalman Schocken, acquired the newspaper and appointed his son, Gershom Schocken, as editor.

*Do'ar ha-Yom* was edited by Itamar Ben-Avi, son of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, born in Jerusalem in 1885. Ben-Avi was famous for having been “the first Hebrew child,” raised and educated solely in Hebrew. He attended the Teachers' College in Paris and the Institute for Eastern Studies at the University of Berlin, and helped his father edit *Ha-Tsevi* and *Ha-Or*. Ben-Avi helped found *Do'ar ha-Yom* in 1919, and edited the paper until 1928. At the end of that year, the newspaper was acquired by the Revisionist movement; Ze'ev Jabotinsky became its editor. However, Jabotinsky and his associate editors — Abba Ahimeir, Haim Yeivin, and Eliahu Ben-Horin — evidently failed to meet their undertakings to Ben-Avi with regard to freedom of expression and publishing his articles in the newspaper. In 1930, Ben-Avi regained control of the newspaper and again served as editor until his retirement in mid-1933.

According to Ben-Avi, *Do'ar ha-Yom*’s circulation was 7,000 in 1928; approximately 2,000 in the Revisionist years (1929-1930); and 4,700 in the
As editor-in-chief, Ben-Avi, had several associates: Issachar Dov Bar-Drora, a Polish-born journalist who was the permanent editor; Uri Kesari, secretary of the editorial board; and Y.D. Drori as “editor in charge” (night editor). Although Ben-Avi had editorial autonomy, the newspaper usually expressed a Revisionist line. In early August 1933, Ben-Avi was succeeded as editor by S. Perlman and Pessah Ginsburg — the latter was subsequently the night editor of *Ha’aretz* — and Moshe Smilansky worked with them as a permanent associate editor.

*Davar* was founded in 1925 by the Histadrut Labor Federation and Berl Katznelson, a major figure in Mapai and the Labor movement. Katznelson, born in Russia, settled in Palestine in 1908, and officially served as the editor of *Davar* from the time the paper was founded until his death in 1944. In practice, however, Moshe Beilinson edited the paper and wrote its lead articles during most of the 1930s. Beilinson, also born in Russia, had completed medical school in Switzerland and settled in Palestine in 1924. He joined the editorial board at the time the newspaper was founded and worked in *Davar* until his death in 1936.

There was a fourth Jewish daily, the English-language *The Palestine Post*, established in December 1932 on the foundations of a newspaper — which was more like a governmental manifesto — called *The Palestine Bulletin*. In January 1937, the *Post*’s daily circulation was 4,500 copies. Its founder and editor was Gershon Agronsky (Agron), born in the Ukraine and raised in the United States. Agronsky settled in Palestine after World War I, edited the *Post* until 1955, and subsequently became mayor of Jerusalem.

The newspapers in Palestine were fed news by a small number of correspondents and by the Palestine Telegraphic Agency (PTA), a branch of the worldwide Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). In 1934, the Jewish Agency established Palcor (Palestine Correspondence Agency), headed by Joseph Garbitsky and Julian Meltzer, to compete with the PTA. Moshe Shertok, head
of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, explained why this was necessary:

The work of [the JTA] was characterized by (a) an utter lack of understanding of matters of public interest, Palestinian irresponsibility in Zionist matters and some Jewish matters generally; (b) hopeless ignorance of Palestinian things; (c) cheap sensationalism; (d) crypto-revisionism; (e) a tendency for intrigue, public and personal.  

The main sources of foreign news were the foreign news agencies — mainly Reuters and United Press International — and foreign newspapers such as the Times of London (from which articles and reports were sometimes reproduced). The Palestinian newspapers sent correspondents abroad only irregularly, and occasionally an editor would visit a foreign country and report from there for a short time. Ha'aretz, for example, obtained reportage from Germany in the 1930s from two correspondents: Robert Weltsch, editor of the main German-Zionist newspaper, Jüdische Rundschau, and a journalist named Herman Swit. In the summer of 1933, Beilinson himself visited Germany and published a series of articles in Davar.

There were also several weeklies and monthlies published in Palestine; for example, the monthly journal Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir (founded in 1931) by the movement of the same name and Hazit ha-'Am (People's Front), published weekly or biweekly in the format of a daily newspaper. The latter, established in 1931, after Jabotinsky lost control of Do'ar ha-Yom, was the main organ of Berit Habiryonim. Hazit ha-'Am was edited by Abba Ahimeir; Dr. Hareven was the "editor in charge" and worked under Jabotinsky's supervision. In 1934, Jabotinsky was succeeded as editor-in-chief by Eliahu Ben-Horin, a Revisionist activist. The magazine was subsequently renamed Ha-Yarden; then, in the late 1930s, Ha-Mashkif and Ha-Yom.

During the first half of the 1930s, the Jewish press in Palestine was mobilized and dedicated to the cause of Zionism, which each newspaper construed in a slightly different way. All focused on domestic and Zionist-movement affairs in their news reportage, commentary, and articles. In 1938, Moshe Shertok,

4 Shertok to Dr. Hexter, April 11, 1938, CZA, S25-2117. Maurice Hexter, an American Zionist, settled in Palestine in 1921, and represented the non-Zionists in the expanded Jewish Agency Executive.
head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, expressed his view on this matter in no uncertain terms:

The notion that a news agency or a newspaper must not be controlled by a governmental or semi-governmental body, such as we [the Jewish Agency] . . . but must in all cases be “independent,” in my view [is] a prejudice which I cannot share. . . . I am not unmindful of the dangers to which a “controlled” news service is exposed, but if I have to choose between such potential dangers on the one hand and the patent evils of independence . . . I opt for the former.⁵

In the same letter, Shertok spoke frankly about the newspapers’ need for guidance from on high, especially *The Palestine Post*:

[The Jewish Agency] must be vitally concerned . . . that a journal occupying a position of such unique importance should pursue a general line of policy consistent with fundamental basic Jewish interests. . . . I know that [Agronsky and I] shall pull together and that in case of disagreement over a serious issue Agronsky will in the last resort accept my advice not because my wisdom is superior but because I happen to be at the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency.⁶

During the 1930s there was friction between the Political Department and the Yishuv journalists. Sometimes the heads of the department attempted to dictate lead articles or main headlines; on other occasions they complained about specific reportage or editorials. In May 1937, for example, Shertok wrote to Agronsky:

I call your attention to the article about the murder of a Yemenite Jew near Wilhelma, which this morning’s edition of your newspaper ran under the headline, “Yemenite Found Dead.” You would do well to inform whoever needs [this information] that an undifferentiated “Yemenite” is an Arab from the land of Yemen. In this case, the headline should in any event have been “Jew Found Killed.” After all, had the deceased been a Jewish immigrant from Germany, would the PP [*Palestine Post*] have proclaimed “German Found Killed”? The article proper mentions a rumor concerning an Egyptian who had been found killed, and it certainly referred to a real Egyptian as opposed to a Jew from Egypt. What’s the difference between

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
a Yemenite and an Egyptian? I suspect that the headline writer had no idea that there is still a people in Yemen other than our Yemenite Jews.  

The mandatory government also attempted to influence what the Palestine newspapers printed. For the most part, Mandate officials confined their intervention to the British-Arab-Jewish triangle and the conflict between the parties. At times, however, matters touched upon the way the papers should treat and write about Germany and Germany’s ally, Italy. During the Munich crisis in September 1938, for example, the authorities feared that the local newspapers might speak ill of the Italians. After The Palestine Post printed sardonic comments about the Italians ("Italian ice-creamers on the Brenner"), the acting chief secretary, Sidney Moody, summoned the editor, Agronsky, for a talk and reprimand.

Ordinarily, the Palestine press took an interest in external affairs only when foreign events affected — or were liable to affect — the Zionist enterprise, the Yishuv itself, or a large Diaspora community. Thus, Europe’s internal affairs, which would soon give rise to World War II, troubled the Yishuv newspapers mainly because they affected the Jewish world or Palestine. When no such effect seemed visible, they commanded little if any space in the newspapers. One presumed reason for this, apart from provincialism (narrow horizons and an excessive fixation on domestic problems, which were never lacking) — was the small size of the newspapers. Most contained only four pages (which were smaller than those of Ha’aretz or The New York Times today), including profuse advertising and government notices. The papers were too small to carry all news from Palestine, let alone world and European news.

The Press and the Nazis in 1932

On June 28, 1932, even before the general elections in Germany on July 31, the increase in antisemitism in that country prompted Ha’aretz to devote a lead article to the future of Germany and its Jews. The editor, Glücksohn,

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7 Shertok to Agronsky, May 25, 1937, CZA, S25–2117; see also Shertok to Agronsky, June 6, 1938, ibid.
8 G. Agronsky, “Talk with Mr. Moody, Acting Chief Secretary, Thursday, September 29, 1938, at Government Offices” CZA, S25–2089. Agronsky evidently sent the report to Shertok in order to keep him informed.
expressed grave apprehension: the German “psychosis” and “illness,” he wrote, are not transitory — the Nazis are progressively taking the country’s hearts “literally by storm.” The “chaos. . . bitterness, disillusionment, and hate” are giving rise to a “new” world:

This whole generation [after World War I] has been poisoned to its roots, to the depths of its psyche, with benighted hatred of the Jews. . . . A profound, bleak, recurrent hatred that no rationale of mind and wisdom can defeat. . . . For the Jews of Germany, the Emancipation has ended; the middle ages are nigh. . . .

Amazingly, however, *Ha’aretz* devoted no lead articles to the German elections in July and November 1932. It confined its coverage to reports from news agencies and several widely spaced articles from independent correspondents such as Yeshayahu Klinov and Herman Swit, who reported from Berlin.¹⁰

The only attempt to confront Nazism and its success, especially with respect to its antisemitic dimension, occurred in an unsigned article on November 11, 1932, five days after the elections in which the Nazis lost some of their electoral strength:

Antisemitism, however enticing it is for benighted masses who find themselves in a state of emergency, is not legal tender in Germany. This people is too steeped in culture to accept a demand for discrimination in rules and regulations against citizens who share its homeland. . . . The middle ages probably will not return quickly to the land of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine. ¹¹

*Davar,* as the voice of the Palestine Jewish labor movement, which considered itself a branch of the world socialism, was more attentive to the 1932 election campaigns and discussed the Nazis’ climb to power. In a series of articles in early August 1932, after the Social-Democrats were defeated in the elections in July, *Davar* identified with “the forces . . . that are fighting Hitler — the forces of the German worker. . . . They must know how to...

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¹⁰ See, for example, “After the Elections in Germany,” *ibid.,* August 2, 1932.
¹¹ “Hitler’s failure,” *ibid.,* November 11, 1932.
withstand the black tide bravely... and move from mere defense to a bold offensive against the blight that is consuming Germany.”

*Davar* also took an interest in the Jewish aspect of German politics but, like *Ha’aretz*, confined its coverage of the political turbulence in Germany to daily reportage in the news columns, without devoting a separate article to the matter.

The most interesting newspaper in Palestine in this context was undoubtedly *Do’ar ha-Yom*. Ben-Avi, who signed most of this paper’s leading articles, realized in the course of 1932 that Germany was marching toward Nazism and expressed his concern. He also understood that German Jewry would be: “Never has there been an atmosphere so poisoned with antisemitism.” Despite the warnings, he said, German Jews “are resting on their laurels... and talking about ‘their German national home’ instead of emigrating to Palestine.” The editors of *Do’ar ha-Yom*, however, were pleased by the other fascist victory in Europe, in Italy. Ben-Avi wrote about Hitler’s “glittering personal triumph” in the elections and argued that the Hitlerist prescription for ending Germany’s crisis was “essential.” Occasionally he explained to his readers that imitating Mussolini was not necessarily a bad thing. On August 4, the newspaper ran a lengthy piece by Mussolini himself, and the next day Ben-Avi defined Mussolini as “the leaven in the [European] dough,” a source of an “uninterrupted ferment” that the editor viewed favorably. In November, Ben-Avi went so far as to recommend the adoption of the fascist solution in Palestine:

Mussolini’s Government... tries almost every day to do something for the betterment of the people and the country... The fascist experiment is creating room for a grand experiment, one that would undoubtedly

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succeed here as well. Is it not time for our Palestine, too, to follow in Mussolini’s footsteps? . . . What Italy can do, so can Judea! 18

On December 2, 1932, The Palestine Post devoted a lead article to Germany and, like many British newspapers, explained Nazism as the response of millions of unemployed and an entire generation of young people who felt “they have no place in the world,” and an expression of their wounded pride — since Germany had been discriminated against, as it had neither an army nor a navy. 19

Hitler’s Accession to Power

If the Palestinian newspapers devoted little space to internal developments in Germany in the second half of 1932, events in Berlin, Munich, and Hamburg commanded a central place in most newspapers almost every morning starting in late January 1933. German affairs — Hitler’s behavior in repressing the opposition and imposing his authority, and the Nazis’ actions against the Jews, both nationally and in local eruptions in various parts of the Reich — frequently dominated the main front-page headlines and commanded considerable space on the editorial pages (usually on page 2 of each newspaper).

All the newspapers understood that Hitler’s appointment as chancellor of Germany was a historic event that portended disaster for German Jewry and, perhaps, for European and world peace. Davar delivered the following judgmental, almost apocalyptic, remarks:

It is a bitter and grim day as the “new Vandal” assumes the throne in republican Germany. It is a bitter day for the German people . . . . It is a bad day for all the peoples in Western and Central Europe, Germany’s neighbors, for whom Hitler’s ascent may also serve as a signal to confront the benighted forces that are waylaying civil freedom, the attainments of labor, and peace among peoples . . . . This day is many times worse and more bitter for German Jewry and for all of world Jewry . . . . Will anyone also embrace this hatred and incitement . . . [and] carry out his schemes and exhortations? That is the fear that envelops all of world Jewry today;

that is the fear that has overtaken the entire labor movement and everyone who cherishes freedom and peace in Europe. 20

About six weeks later, an article entitled “At German Jewry’s Hour of Shoah” stated that “Germany Jewry is facing destruction.” 21

In Ha’aretz, the first response to Hitler’s accession was less categorical. A lead article signed by Glücksohn stated, “The transfer of power in Germany . . . [to] Hitler and his comrades is an enormously negative historical event with unforeseeable results.” Glücksohn noted the dread that had gripped German Jewry but added, “The extent of the evil need not be overstated to be found large and quite troubling. There is certainly no reason to fear the ‘night of the long knives’ . . . or the official repeal of the principle of equal rights for Jews, or a general Nazi-Bolshevist regime.” 22 Glücksohn did expect “the little” Jews to be adversely affected and ousted from their civil-service jobs.

The next day, Ha’aretz took a slightly fiercer tone (although not in a prominent article), asserting that Hitler’s accession

...has terrified all Jews in the world. . . . It is true that antisemites have headed various governments, but never a man such as this, who has befooled his mouth by demanding the Jews’ blood, literally [their] blood. . . . [Germany] will not be able to deport the Jews to any significant extent, for the simple reason that the Jewish masses have nowhere to go . . . and it is certain that pogroms will not occur either. 23

Do’ar ha-Yom termed Hitler’s accession an important event that carries a load of “fears and trauma.” However, it is neither unexpected nor “unnatural.” Ben-Avi remarked that the British newspapers had avoided reproachful remarks about Hitler himself. “Hitler the Chancellor will surely be different from the Hitler of the people’s rallies,” but it is equally certain that German Jewry is

20 “D’var ha-Yom,” Davar, February 1, 1933, p. 1. At that time, Davar editor Berl Katznelson wrote, “I cannot rid myself of the feeling that our people is in great danger and that our generation must rescue [the Jewish people].” Katznelson (Tel Aviv) to WIZO activist Miriam Zimmels (Vienna), February 8, 1933, Anita Shapira and Esther Reisen, eds., Letters of B. Katznelson, 1930–1937 (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1984), p. 101.

21 Signed by “Spectator,” Davar, March 17, 1933.


23 “Upon Hitler’s Rise to Power” (unsigned), February 1, 1933.
facing “a bleak episode with much misery and hardship.” In the same edition of the paper, Uri Kesari termed Hitler “Adolf the Wretched” and urged Jews to emigrate to Palestine: “Who knows? …In another two hundred years we may have a Hitler of our own here.”

At that time, the front page of Do’ar ha-Yom regularly carried excerpts from news agencies’ reports from Berlin about what was happening among the citizens of Germany — spiced with its own commentary and assessments. For example,

[Hitler’s] regime will not lead to a Shoah [this is the first use of the word Shoah that I found in the press — B.M.] as is feared. The new Government, of which only one-third is Nazi, will merely be very conservative and does not wish to set dangerous events, internal or external, in motion.

The newspapers tended to look at the events from a narrow perspective, that is, in the context of the future of the Jewish people and the Zionist enterprise (primarily the latter). This was manifested inter alia in articles by the Revisionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who castigated the Yishuv newspapers for “not wishing to see that German youth is streaming” to Hitler and accused them of discussing Nazism with exemplary superficiality. In his attacks on the newspapers, Jabotinsky mentioned by name the journalists Robert Weltsch and Yeshayahu Klinov (who wrote for Ha’aretz), who advised Jewish voters in Germany to vote for the Communists. Nazis and Communists were indistinguishable, he alleged, except that Nazis were “subjective” antisemites and Communists were “objective” antisemites. As a consistent repudiator of the Diaspora, Jabotinsky considered Hitlerism an “essential and objective” phenomenon of destruction, brought to bear against a “non-territorial people with neither statehood nor sovereignty.” He asserted that:

German Jewry bears much guilt for the affliction that has befallen it. Each and every assimilationist article . . . poured fuel on to the flame of Hitlerism. . . . Jewish public circles have much to learn from Hitler, the

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24 “What’s in Today’s Mail?,” Do’ar ha-Yom, February 1, 1933.
25 “From My Point of View,” column of Uri Kesari, ibid.
26 “Jews of Germany Fear for Their Safety and Property,” ibid., February 3, 1933.
science of learning from one’s enemies. . . . Hitler has reminded assimilated German Jewry . . . of its origins. . . . If our people’s public figures draw the appropriate conclusions . . . we will be able to say that we made the best of the worst. 27

Over a period of several weeks following Hitler’s accession, the German-Zionist leader, the economist Fritz (Peretz) Naftali (later a member of the Knesset and a cabinet minister in Israeli governments in the 1950s), published a series of articles in Davar on the events in Germany. 28 In February-April 1933, both Davar and Ha’aretz carried copious front-page reportage of the German authorities’ persecution of Jews and oppositionists. When the persecution of the Jews began, Do’ar ha-Yom also seemed to change its policy. The brief flirtation was over. Ben-Avi, recently returned from a visit to Germany, claimed that both the Nazi right and the Bolshevik left were hostile to Judaism. There was real reason to fear, he stated, that the extremes would unite one day and that one or the other would conquer most of Europe. 29

During Hitler’s first few weeks in office, the Palestinian newspapers made a perceptible if fleeting attempt to understand him and Nazism. In Do’ar ha-Yom, Jabotinsky wrote that some Jews argued that (1) Hitler would become a “statesman” and halt the attacks; (2) his regime might not survive long; (3) the president of Germany, Marshal Hindenburg — to whom the chancellor was officially subordinate — would not allow violence in any case; and (4) it was a mistake to think that antisemitism played an important role in the Nazis’ plans. These notions were pleasant to the ear, Jabotinsky wrote, but the truth was different.

He explained that he had read both volumes of Mein Kampf (for some reason, Jabotinsky called the book Hayay, “My Life”) and stated that Hitler’s writings did not allow one to adduce that the man was crazy, even though the book was written “ineptly and disingenuously.” Hitler undoubtedly “has . . . an honest intellect [and] knows the secret of polemics.” He also has several

27 “It Won’t Rise Unless Raised by the Lash,” Hazit Ha’am, second editorial, February 3, 1933.
28 For example, “The New Repression of the Counterrevolution in Germany,” Davar, February 19, 1933, p. 2; “Hitler’s Regime and Antisemitism,” ibid., February 24, 1933.
29 “Germany—the Decisive Point,” Do’ar ha-Yom, January 30, 1933.
talented advisors: “Strasser is both learned and clever; Goebbels is tremendously gifted.” There is no assurance that a man in power becomes more moderate, Jabotinsky wrote. “Presumably ... Hitler will not be overly moderate.” Even Hindenburg cannot be trusted to check the antisemitic eruptions. Finally, the Jews’ weighty role in Nazi propaganda may be absurd, “but I fear that this is actually an integral part, the most important part, no less, the collective psychology.”

In Ha’aretz, editor Moshe Glücksohn made attempts to understand why Nazism had arisen and from what wellsprings it drew. Glücksohn cited “the great distress of the masses, the terrible unemployment, starvation, bitterness, and disillusionment” as the factors that led to “mass psychosis” and Hitler’s victory. These would not have sufficed, however,

...had [Nazism] not been able to call on substantive national elements embedded in the soul and fate of the German people — irrational elements more profound than those that usually prove decisive in every large mass movement. ... It would be a shallow illusion to regard this as a transitory, passing phenomenon, the result of random and exogenous events. ...  

It would seem, he wrote, “that we are facing a new era in the history of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe — the beginning of a process of fascist encroachment in Germany and its neighboring countries ... that endangers the foundations of human civilization at large.” Although Glücksohn predicted hard times for German Jewry,

[the Nazis] won’t subject them to pogroms and may not attempt to deprive them of their civil rights officially and legally. Instead of a Ukraine-style pogrom, a continual social and economic pogrom will ensue. ... The emancipation era has ended. German Jewry is at the gates of a new ghetto.

In Davar, Beilinson reached a similar conclusion. In the March 5 elections, he wrote, the labor movement

30 Ze’ev Jabotinsky, “Germany” (in two installments), ibid., February 22–23, 1933.
31 “On the Agenda,” “From Era to Era,” Ha’aretz, March 7, 1933 (The following quotations are from the same article).
[suffered] a defeat and the German masses endorsed the rule of tyranny and antisemitism. The Nazis’ message has captured the masses, the spirit of one of the enlightened peoples. . . . The vanquished people . . . endured suffering and afflictions as the short-sighted, hard-hearted victors made it shoulder an unbearable burden.  

The most erudite effort in the Hebrew press at that time to understand Nazism — above all, its ideological core, the racial doctrine — was in a lengthy, three-part article in Ha'aretz, on March 17, 20, and 27, written by the economist Dr. Gustav Krojanker, a German-Zionist leader who had emigrated to Palestine in 1932. Few newspapers invested much space in attempts to decipher the phenomenon, and some in the Yishuv actually objected to extensive preoccupation with Germany and recurrent attempts to understand it. In March, Ha’aretz printed an article by a man named Kharbi Avraham, who considered the fixation with Germany excessive:

The Hebrew press in Palestine has devoted more space each day [to Germany's affairs] . . . than is warranted by its political, economic, and cultural value to the world generally and to our people specifically. . . . By so doing, it has relegated Middle East affairs to cullings from the wretched Arab press and [treats] the entire world as less worthy [of coverage] than the mess in Germany.

The editors of Ha’aretz felt it necessary to augment the article with “explanatory” notes of their own, in which they objected to “the basic premise that seemingly identifies Hitlerism’s spasm of atrocities with the historical countenance of the German nation. Even at this time, we [cannot] forget the other Germany . . . that of Kant, Goethe, and Schiller, which Mr. Kharbi Avraham mentions contemptuously.”

Germany and the Revisionists

In those first months, the leftist parties — and Davar — regularly associated Nazism in Germany with the Revisionists in the Yishuv. Beilinson described

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32 “At the Threshold,” editorial, Davar, March 8, 1933.

33 “Monitoring Our Attitude Toward Germany,” and “Editors’ Remark,” Ha’aretz, March 17, 1933 (The following quotations are from the same article).
Jabotinsky’s visit to Berlin three weeks after Hitler’s accession in the following terms: “Members of Betar stood in a public gathering dressed in brown shirts like the persecutors of the Jews.” Their behavior was an “absolute emulation,” and Jabotinsky inveighed against Marxism as if having accustomed himself to “the complexion of the place.”  

Following the assassination of Chaim Arlosoroff (director of the Jewish Agency Political Department) in June, Beilinson, in Berlin, wrote a personal letter to Katznelson — not for publication — in which he commented about the Revisionists, “Didn’t they sing the praises of fascism and Hitlerism? . . . Didn’t they point to the rulers of Italy and Germany and tell the camp of enflamed young people that this is how the ‘traitors’ should be dealt with?”

The left-wing papers and their editors referred to the Revisionists in the same terms as did Ben-Gurion, the leader of Mapai, who drew a connection between the Nazis and their ascent and the Revisionist movement. At a meeting at this time of the Histadrut Executive Committee, for example, Ben-Gurion said: “If only he could, Jabotinsky, would do to us what Hitler is doing to the socialists in Germany, but not all members of Betar are willing to carry out Jabotinsky’s wishes . . .”

However, the same group of personalities also made statements to the opposite effect. In April 1933, after Labor Movement youth attacked a parade of young Betar members in Tel Aviv, Katznelson stated in protest that the act resembled the European fascists’ treatment of their opponents. “I do not believe in exorcising the demon by emulating his actions.”

Fixation on the Jewish-Zionist Cause

The Yishuv newspapers were largely silent about the international aspects of Hitler’s accession. They wrote little about the implications of the event for Europe and the world and said even less about what the Great Powers should

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34 M. Beilinson, “I’ve Been Reading . . .,” Davar, March 13, 1933.
35 Beilinson (Berlin) to Katznelson, undated, but from June 1933, Labor Party Archives, Beit Berl (LPA) Division 6, File 10.
36 Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, March 29, 1933, Lavon Institute, Labor Archives (LA), M/20. See also Ben-Gurion’s statements at a meeting of the Mapai Central Committee, Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, March 15, 1933, LPA, 2, 23/33.
37 Berl Katznelson to Mapai Central Committee, April 20, 1933 (24 Nissan 5683), LPA, Division 6; Shapira and Reisen, eds, Letters of Berl Katznelson, 1933, pp. 1–24.
do about the Nazi regime — eradicate it, impede it, appease it, or anything else.

There were several reasons for this: the Jews' natural preoccupation with German Jewry and the Jewish problem in Germany, the provincialism of the Palestinian press, and the shortage of space in the papers. The main reason, however, was the editors' feeling that neither they nor the Yishuv at large had or could have any influence on Hitler's regime. In other words, since the Yishuv had neither power to wield nor a role to play in the international arena, there was no point in making practical political statements and recommendations. Pronouncements in the *Times* of London, for example, might be valuable because they could influence His Majesty's Government and its policies, the international constellation generally, and Germany specifically. But what effect could the Palestinian press have on Whitehall or Berlin?

Only one newspaper dealt seriously and persistently with the impact of Hitler's accession on Europe and on world peace: *The Palestine Post*, which addressed a non-Palestinian readership. It even failed to address mention the Jewish angle in its editorial leader after Hitler's accession. On January 31, 1933, its editors wrote:

> The change [of government] in Germany . . . is dramatic. [But] it does not necessarily follow that drastic consequences will result. . . . Responsibility nearly always brings with it a newly acquired gift of moderation. [Moreover,] Hitler lacks a majority in the Reichstag. [There may be grounds for fear] but their fears may prove to have been over-vivid. Of more importance to the rest of Europe and the world is the effect of the triumph of Hitlerism on international relations and the problems of disarmament. One assumes, at once, that the attitude will be more rigid, more nationalist and generally more assertive. . . . The militancy inherent in Hitlerism is not a good omen for the future.  

Four days later, *The Post* devoted an editorial to Germany — again with no reference to the Jews:

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That Hitler’s campaign should be directed primarily against the threatened Bolshevizing regime in Germany is not without a basis in reason; outside Russia, Communist parliamentary representation is at present stronger in Germany than in any country in the world. Consequently, his warning that “One year of Bolshevism will destroy Germany” is by no means an empty slogan. [And] Hitler has Germany’s youth at his back."39

The Post spoke of Hitler objectively, attempting in a way to give him the benefit of the doubt. By doing so, it accurately reflected the trend of thought in the conservative British press at the time. On the news pages, the Post consistently reported the Nazis’ actions against their opponents and the Jews. The leaders, however, remained even-handed and objective. Four years later, Agronsky explained his newspaper’s international policy:

In foreign affairs the paper followed the British lead. It did that because it believed in the community of British and Jewish interests in Palestine, and strongly advocated an Anglo-Jewish partnership. Unfortunately the partnership was somewhat one-sided as the British were not as eager to have us as partners as we are to have them. As an English-language newspaper in a part of the world which . . . fell under the British sphere of influence, we were naturally exposed to British influence and our news sources were British.40

The Post noted Hitler’s erstwhile vocation as an illustrator of postcards, his commendable military service in the world war, and his “extraordinary intensity.” The newspaper stressed Hitler’s belief in German raciality and his wish to rid his country of foreign influences, including those of Communism and the Jews. It termed Hitlerism “the futile gesture of the childlike pagan.”41

On March 17, the Post ran its first editorial on the subject of Germany and the Jews. Under the headline “The New Germany and the Jews,” the following appeared:

It would be futile optimism and foolish blindness to conclude that there is nothing but hysteria and exaggeration behind the news pouring out of Germany about violence and murder, and a virtual reign of terrorism, aimed at the Jewish citizens of Germany. It is, at the same time, difficult to

accept the idea that this is a policy of terrorism deliberately perpetrated and systematically inspired and organized by responsible leaders of the “Dritte Reich,” the Germany that is consciously straining after self-respect and seeking to make itself a respected Power in the sight of the rest of the world . . . a self-respecting Germany is not likely to tolerate for long a course of action that brings with it the lowering of social standards . . . and the loss of the respect of the world outside.42

The Post persisted with its appeasing tone for the next few months. On March 26, it devoted much of its front page and its editorial to Germany’s wish to revise the Versailles settlement.43 Six months later, the Post again sympathized with Germany with regard to the offense it had suffered at Versailles; it also reported the Germans’ desire for rearmament.44 In the Post’s attempt to understand the government of Germany, it did not overlook the Jewish problem:

The business of the Press is to purvey “news”. . . [and is] more generally applicable to ill-fortune and what is irregular than to good fortune. [Hence], it is natural that Jewish news sources should underline irregularities of which Jews or some Jews have been victims. What we may not conclude is . . . that these “irregularities” have become regular. . . .45

On April 2, the day after the announcement of the anti-Jewish economic boycott, The Post added: “[It is best ] to give credit to possible good intentions of leaders rather than wax hysterical over the wild outbreaks of the irresponsible. . . .”46

In late March, The Post began a series of background pieces on the Nazis’ repression of various groups in Germany. On April 16, the newspaper added a leader that assailed German nationalism as “pathological,” “sickly,” and “deranged.”47 These remarks, however, were but brief and transitory exceptions to the newspaper’s policy of appeasement. In July, The Post praised a speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who,

42 Ibid., March 7, 1933.
43 “Article XIX,” ibid., March 26, 1933.
44 “The Disarmament Conference,” ibid., September 15, 1933, editorial.
45 “Hitlerist Germany and the Jews,” ibid., March 30, 1933, editorial.
46 “Germany and Jew-Baiting,” ibid., April 2, 1933, editorial.
47 “Mildly Mad,” ibid., April 16, 1933, editorial.
...admits that there is, in the present German revolution, much, and very much, which is praiseworthy. Sympathy, as the archbishop said, must go out to those, and especially the younger generation of the German people, who have made this strong effort of hope and confidence which is to restore self-respect to a generation of Germans. . . . But precisely because of the possible good in the present nationalist movement, the Archbishop’s appeal to Herr Hitler and the German nation [to stop the maltreatment of the Jews] comes with the greater force.  

A report on a traffic accident in which Hitler was involved and the mortal danger he faced whetted the imagination of The Post editors — but not in the way one would expect:

The general feeling among [German Jews] is not one of revenge. . . . The foremost necessity of German Jews is not to get rid of Hitler (who has half-a-dozen like-minded fanatics ready to take his place the moment he leaves it) but to get as far away from him as they can. In their present plight they will be . . . thankful . . . that Hitler escaped injury. . . .

The Post’s interest in the international effects of Hitler’s accession is attributable, in the main, to its relationship with the British press, from which it derived its areas of interest, coverage, and patterns of writing. In this sense, The Post sat in splendid isolation among the Jewish newspapers in Palestine, most of which covered and analyzed Hitler’s accession and his first few months of rule with a large measure of Palestino-centrism or Zionist-centrism. The Nazi accession, in the sense of a historical event, and the antisemitic oppression that the Nazi regime gradually introduced, were perceived mainly — and sometimes exclusively — through the narrow prism of their effects on the Yishuv and the future of Zionism. At times, the horizon was broadened to include Jewry at large, i.e., how Hitler’s ascent would affect the future of German and European Jewry.

The left-wing dailies and monthlies, such as Davar and ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir, also discussed the rise of Nazism from the standpoint of the future of the left — or the socialist movements — in Germany and in Europe. They perceived the mounting repression of leftist forces in Germany as a severe if not fatal blow to worldwide socialist aspirations; some were also concerned that the

49 “No Foul Play,” ibid., August 17, 1933, editorial.
events in Germany would impact directly on internal (left-right) politics in the Yishuv.

The newspapers in Palestine devoted little space to questions such as how Hitler’s accession would affect the balance of power in Europe, the efforts to achieve disarmament, and British policy in the Middle East; whether a constellation of clashing alliances would again take shape; whether Germany would attempt forcibly to revise the Versailles accords; and whether, in the final analysis, humankind was facing another world war. In the first years of the Nazi reign in Germany, the Hebrew newspapers in Palestine hardly asked these questions, and when they did, they did so in passing.

Interestingly, Do’ar ha-Yom, the most nationalist of the Hebrew morning dailies, took the most consistent interest in the international effects of Hitler’s rise to power. At the early date of February 10, 1933, Ben-Drora wrote: “In fact, Hitler has not yet made his voice heard. . . . The Nazis’ mayhem in the streets, the assaults, the murders of little children. . . all of this and its like are not what counts. . . .” Bar-Drora assumed that the Nazis would manage to subdue the left. The real questions, he said, were different — would the Nazis revitalize the Germany economy? How would they overcome Soviet Russia? “What will come of the demand to restore Germany’s stolen colonies? . . . [and how] will the question of the ‘corridor,’ which frightens Poland so badly, [be resolved]?” In these matters, he wrote, Hitler has been silent for now —“and this silence is fear-instilling. It terrifies the world more than the reports of gunfire. In the Polish Sejm, there is talk of a new war,” and the Germans evoke fear in Czechoslovakia and France. “There is no doubt . . . that something important and decisive is cooking in the Nazi kitchen . . . and the world will soon receive a new omen. . . .”

By August 1933, the editors of Do’ar ha-Yom had no doubts about Germany’s intentions. The newspaper ran a series of political commentaries by Aharon Reuveni, an author and researcher who dealt inter alia with political affairs. On August 16, Reuveni wrote — in lieu of an editorial — about the conciliatory attitudes with which Britain, France, Russia, and Italy were treating the

50 “What’s in Today’s Mail?,” “What’s Happening in Hitler’s Mind?” Do’ar ha-Yom, February 10, 1933; see also “What’s in Today’s Mail?,” “Heading for Peace or War?,” ibid., March 12, 1933.
German threat. Germany was steadily rearming, the newspaper alleged, and the Four-Power Pact “will prepare to isolate Germany totally and defeat it once and for all.”

Do’ar ha-Yom understood that rearmament — “the establishment of a mighty army” — was the Nazis’ way of healing the economic ills of Germany, and then “they will go to war against France and the Petite Entente peoples and defeat them violently. Then they will settle their old scores with Italy.” Such, according to Reuveni, were Hitler’s plans. However, Reuveni added, “it is hard to believe that France, England, and Italy will just sit and wait for these things to come to pass.”

Ha’aretz and Davar hardly discussed the implications of Hitler’s rise to power for the international situation in those months of 1933. Their editors may have considered gloomy forecasts and prophecies inconsistent with the image of a serious newspaper; however, one could have interpreted the facts without resorting to unfounded and hair-raising prophecies. The newspapers’ silence in this matter, therefore, is conspicuous and bewildering.

Ha’aretz gave the matter its first serious attention on April 5, when a commentator under the pen name “Xenophon” expressed his opinion about the pacifist spirit that had overtaken Great Britain and about the Nazi threat in Central Europe. “Xenophon” believed that Germany would strive to resolve the question of Danzig and the Polish “corridor” by force and that Poland would not forfeit those areas without war. “Therefore, we must monitor with great trepidation the unfolding of events on Germany’s ‘eastern front,’ whence the evil will befall all of Europe.” The writer did offer a glimmer of hope, based on the diplomatic talks that were meant to put a brake to Hitler’s aspirations.

Davar was also concerned about the spread of pacifism in Britain. In April, it published an article by the British commentator H. N. Brailsford that explained why the British were reluctant to embark on a new world war and favored instead the revision of the Versailles agreements. For the most part, however, Davar discussed the effect of Hitler’s rise to power on the Jews, the Zionist enterprise, and the labor movement. It devoted nothing but asides and

\footnotesize{51 “Results of the Four-Power Pact,” ibid., August 16, 1933. 
52 “Political Writings,” “Hitler’s Ways,” ibid., August 31, 1933. 
53 Xenophon, “Political Writings,” Ha’aretz, April 5, 1933. 
54 “England and Hitler,” Davar, April 14, 1933.}
the odd sentence in articles on other matters to the potential international effects of this event.
This was not for lack of understanding; the editors certainly realized that Hitler's rise to power might have sweeping implications for the international arena and provided evidence of this in main headlines and subheads on the first page. The lead article on March 13, for example, was sub-headed, "War Clouds Looming Over Europe." The article quoted a report from The Times of London about the spreading fear that a new world war was about to erupt and the need for British and French collaboration to stop Hitler.55 However, the newspaper consistently kept the matter out of its editorial columns.

Censuring and "Declaring War" on Germany
The persecution of Jews during Hitler's first weeks in power placed world Jewry, including the Yishuv, on the horns of a dilemma — should it condemn the crimes and policies vociferously ("declare war" on the kingdom of evil, in the argot of the time), or remain silent and act quietly behind the scenes? No one construed the Nazis' actions as anything but contemptible. The question, however, was one of utility, not abstract justice: which of the two paths would accomplish more for the beleaguered German Jews? Which would do the most to restrain the antisemitic spirit and actions?
The advocates of loud public censure — who, in Palestine, were concentrated on the Revisionist right — believed that such condemnation could have some direct influence on Germany; it would inspire world Jewry and foreign governments to condemn Hitler and thus restrain his antisemitic policies. The opponents argued that any condemnation emanating from Jewish and Zionist institutions, in Palestine or elsewhere, would merely anger the tyrant and make the persecutions worse. Such a condemnation might also prompt the German regime to terminate Zionist activity in Germany, including emigration to Palestine. Some also argued that a global spate of condemnations from

55 Ibid., March 13, 1933.
Jews would reinforce the Nazi argument that Germany was indeed facing an onslaught from the “Elders of Zion” around the world.

Most of the Yishuv newspapers expressed the dilemma in some way. An editorial in Davar on March 24, 1933, encapsulated the problem:

The entire Hebrew nation was horrified. . . . It is proper and natural that Jews, wherever they dwell and have not been silenced by tyranny, have raised their voices in condemnation of this evil . . . . We shall protest with all of our strength. . . . We shall not forsake our brethren. . . . We shall not silence the voice of pain and protest. However, being well schooled in afflictions, we must ask ourselves what the most appropriate ways and means are, those that will focus most accurately on our goal: to rescue German Jewry from the tentacles of tyranny and mistreatment.  

Davar doubted the possibility of modifying Berlin’s policies by mobilizing international opinion and argued that world Jewry should concentrate on one thing — to demand that Hitler allow German Jewry to emigrate and settle in Palestine. By implication, however, the paper also took exception to the option of public denunciation. On March 29, 1933, three days before the economic boycott of German Jewry, and in the shadow of this event, a subhead on the main news page stated, “Protest Movement Against German Persecution, Nazis to Respond with More Vigorous Action Against Jews.”

In February-April 1933, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and various institutions in the Yishuv discussed whether to condemn (“declare war” on) Nazi Germany. On April 9, in a debate in the Jewish Agency Executive, Dr. Emanuel Neumann, an American-Zionist leader and the head of the Economic Department of the Zionist Executive, objected to WZO participation in a “political action,” or a “war against the government of Germany,” for “this may result in the closure of the Zionist Organization in Germany.”

Some German Jews advocated world-wide censure of the Nazi regime. Other Diaspora leaders objected. Itzhak Gruenbaum, head of the General Zionists in Poland, for example, feared that the government of Poland would harm Polish Jewry if world Jewry inflicted damage on Germany. “We will support actions meant to induce the government of Palestine to allow Jewish immigration and

56 “At the Threshold,” “When an Entire Diaspora is Trampled,” ibid., March 24, 1933.
57 Ibid., March 29, 1933.
58 Minutes of Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 9, 1933, CZA, S100–14b.
the government of Germany to allow the removal of Jewish capital or Jewish emigration." By implication, Gruenbaum would not support actions that would not lead to these results.  

The issue of whether the World Zionist Congress should publicly “declare war” against Germany was taken up by the Yishuv leadership in the summer of 1933, and the debate came to a head in the Eighteenth Zionist Congress in Prague (August 21-September 4, 1933). The discussion was overshadowed by the fear that such a condemnation would terminate Zionist and pioneering activity in Germany.

According to the newspapers, only it took the delegates several days to reach the burning issue — the condition of German Jewry.  

Before the Congress convened, the Zionist General Council had decided not to debate the matter publicly; the Revisionists, who boycotted the Congress, insisted on a public debate on a declaration regarding a “systematic, orderly [boycott] of German goods, [sponsored and] managed by the Zionist movement, and a worldwide propaganda campaign against Germany.”

Jabotinsky also urged the Great Powers to leave the Versailles settlement intact and not to amend it to Germany's advantage. This was in contrast to congress delegates, such as Glücksohn, who expressed doubt about whether the settlement had ever been an “ideal of justice and probity,” and went out of their way to explain that “our war. . .[is not] against the German people and its political aspirations.”

Despite the General Council resolution, several delegates stood up and made anti-German statements. According to Glücksohn, they failed “to take into account the situation and wishes of the German Jews themselves, who wanted few statements and minimal public intervention in their affairs.” Some Mapai delegates favored a united censure by the Congress; others favored individual statements of censure by every faction, but not by the Congress as such. Katznelson objected to any type of public censure — by the Congress

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59 Minutes of Meeting [of senior Mapai officials] with Itzhak Gruenbaum, April 30, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
or its constituent factions. Zionism, he said, had one purpose only: to build the country. Everything should be subordinated to it — and better to bring German Jews to Palestine than to condemn Germany.  

On August 25, the Congress adopted a compromise proposal by Shertok: a relatively mild censure from the Congress itself. The plenum proclaimed:

The Congress . . . considers it its duty . . . to raise . . . its voice and express its horror and bitter rage about the tragic fate of German Jewry, including its disenfranchisement and the desecration of its dignity. The Congress calls on all peoples — and the League of Nations — to help settle the Jews of Germany in Palestine.

The plenum refrained from declaring “war” against Germany and from calling for a world-wide boycott against it.  

Do’ar ha-Yom expressed the same conclusion in its own way, with a massive across the page leading headline (“What? — Do the Events in Germany Teach Us — What? That There Is No Basis for Hope to Work Out a Totally Desirable Answer to the Question of Our Existence Among the Gentiles. No Basis Whatsoever!”) with no accompanying article! The newspaper reiterated the point more bluntly a month later: “Let us not forfeit this propitious moment to turn the disaster of German Jewry into a building block for Palestine. The idea of emancipation has gone bankrupt.” German Jewry must be brought to Palestine, Do’ar ha-Yom wrote.  

The newspapers did not notice the ostensible contradiction between the paper’s support of mass emigration of German Jews to Palestine and the Revisionists’ opposition to the Ha’avara plan.

The Boycott and the Ha’avara Plan

Many in the Yishuv believed it was insufficient to mobilize Jewish organizations and international opinion in a condemnation of Germany. A
government as malevolent and fanatical as that in Berlin would not be overly affected by words. Instead, the regime should be dealt a painful physical blow, i.e., Germany should be hit in its wallet. Just as the brown-shirted thugs in the streets of Germany attacked Jewish shops and enterprises, so should Germany and its products be boycotted around the world. Others, however, argued that a boycott of Germany would be of no use and would not affect Hitler's policies; it would only trigger a counter-boycott and, perhaps, new repressive measures against German Jewry. Moreover, it might also bring about a boycott of Palestinian products in Germany, which had become an important market for Jaffa oranges. Finally, it was not clear that the German Jews themselves wanted such a boycott of the Nazi regime and German products.

In the second half of March 1933, many American, French, British, and Polish Jews — and many in the Yishuv — began spontaneously to boycott German goods. Beilinson was one of the first and most consistent opponents of the idea. “What’s the point of singling out Germany for a boycott?” he wrote in Davar. “Why not Italy...? One doubts that the boycott movement can spread significantly... One cannot imagine the boycott bringing the Hitlerite regime to its knees...”

Beilinson likened this boycott movement to that imposed decades earlier against Czarist Russia; it had done nothing to abate official antisemitism. Beilinson also argued that the Nazi regime would exploit the boycott in order to enhance internal cohesion and would respond with a counter-boycott against German Jewry. Beilinson then drew a connection between the idea of the Jewish boycott and the ostracism of Germany by the community of nations, which might lead to a second world war: “The labor movement has no interest in hastening the... process that will end with destruction and ruin... in worldwide bloodshed.” Summing up, he advocated a search for other ways “to help [our brethren] in Germany.”

The Palestine Post was also decidedly unenthusiastic about the boycott idea:

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67 “I've Been Reading...,” Davar, March 28, 1933.
Proposed anti-German boycotts outside Germany have provoked the quick retort from Germans of a universal boycott by the Nazi Party against the Jews within Germany. . . . This if it should materialize is a disaster far worse than the first outburst of the Hitlerist spirit.

Individual anti-Jewish eruptions, *The Post* argued, would be replaced by an official policy of antisemitism. A boycott of German goods would cause Germany a minimum of discomfort; a German boycott of German Jews “threatens the ruin of a half-million respectable, harmless citizens.” Two weeks later, *The Post* took up the matter again.68

Chaim Arlosoroff discussed the matter in the summer of 1933. He had spent about a month in Germany — from late April to late May 1933 — dealing with ways to hasten Jewish emigration, reinforce Zionist activity, and bring German-Jewish property to Palestine.69 Regarding the boycott, he said,

The boycott of German goods and the concomitant decrease in [German] exports have made an impression only among the small circles that deal in the matter. . . . The German people, drunk with joy and emotional release with respect to the new regime, are not yet impressed by the damage that the boycott is causing them. . . . [However,] the German Jews are greeting the boycott favorably.70

Beilinson, who visited Germany that summer, also felt that German Jewry supported the boycott unanimously (“not only the Zionists . . . [but] all the Jews hate this regime and the German people”). However, he was more strongly opposed to the boycott idea than ever.71

*Ha’aretz* sided with *Davar* on the boycott issue: “In the human and ethical sense . . . no movement is more justified than this. The regime that has taken over Germany is our mortal enemy. . . . However, even at this moment of

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70 Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, June 15, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.

71 Minutes of Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, July 14, 1933, LA, 40/20.
anguish, fury, and pity — We should not act rashly. . . . Let us not allow emotion . . . to swerve us from our clear wisdom.”

In the Yishuv and in Europe, the Revisionist movement stationed itself at the forefront of the boycott advocates, and Do’ar ha-Yom served as its mouthpiece in the Palestinian press. On March 28, the newspaper came out with a massive headline across the front page: “Germany [Exports] a Million Pounds [in Goods] to Palestine Each Year — Does Hitler Want to Lose This?” The subhead added, “Our Entire National Home Embraces the Boycott Movement.”

The next day, editor Ben-Avi wrote, “Indeed, it is a war: the war of world Jewry — which has awakened to take action on its own . . . not against the entire German nation. . . but against the Junkerite [sic] antisemitic faction.” “A trade boycott” is one of the best ways to influence the government in Berlin, he wrote, “and our Palestine has a primary role to play in this trade war . . . . No German machine, no German textiles, no German film, no German medicine, no German book or newspaper will be purchased here by the Hebrews. Boycott! Boycott!”

When the media affiliated with the mainstream of the Yishuv condemned the boycott exhortations, Do’ar ha-Yom replied:

It is hard to find another example of frightening political myopia and intellectual foolishness, prompted by sheer plenitude, as the attitude of the Yishuv and its institutions toward the disaster that has befallen German Jewry. It was not the Yishuv that launched the protest . . . [but its] supreme institution . . . [the Va’ad Le’umi] has rushed to banish the tempest from mind and attempt to defeat the Jewish protest worldwide. Jews all over the world have proclaimed the boycott; we in Palestine have been laggards in protest and in boycott. Furthermore, none of our institutions has proclaimed a boycott. The Va’ad Le’ummi has stated that “no Jewish institution is authorized to declare a boycott against Germany.” That style deserves to be called a stab in the back of the entire worldwide protest movement . . . and the consignment of Germany Jewry to the mercies of Hitler’s government.

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Do’ar ha-Yom, March 28, 1933.

Itamar Ben-Avi, “Hear, O Hitler!,” ibid., March 29, 1933.

Despite the stance of the Yishuv leaders, a boycott of some kind was implemented. Although sporadic, partial, and not especially effect, it gradually took hold during spring 1933. Many stopped buying German goods and refrained from conducting business with Germans. Even those who had initially opposed the boycott could not bring themselves to oppose its continuation publicly. Thus, Beilinson wrote from Berlin in a personal letter to Katznelson: “I oppose the boycott [but] will explicitly oppose canceling it.”

Almost from the outset, the boycott was linked to the Ha’avara agreement. Contacts between the German authorities and Jewish merchants and Zionist officials began in April 1933, and the first Ha’avara agreement, in the sum of one million marks, was signed on May 19. It enabled Jewish emigrants from Germany to transfer much of their wealth to Palestine at a time when the Nazi authorities allowed hardly any direct capital outflow. Additional Ha’avara accords were concluded in subsequent months and in 1934.

As the Nazi pressure on German Jewry mounted, so did the number of German Jews who wished to emigrate. Emigration involved innumerable problems, including obtaining entry visas to other countries. The Zionist movement, in its desire to allow or induce the emigrants to head for Palestine, prodded the British authorities to make their immigration possible. German Jews who wished to emigrate and Zionists who were interested in receiving them in Palestine had a common interest: to take out capital from Germany and invest it in Palestine.

Support for the Ha’avara accord was reinforced by the damage caused to the Palestinian economy by the worldwide economic depression which began in 1929. Many Yishuv leaders regarded the Ha’avara accord, either from the outset or after it went into effect, as a lifesaver for the Yishuv and the Zionist movement, which confronted depleted coffers in the early 1930s. The Germans, in turn, considered the accord a way to facilitate the emigration of as many Jews as possible, to boost German exports, and, perhaps, to

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76 Beilinson to Katznelson, June 13, 1933, LPA, Division 6, File 10.
78 Gelber, ibid., pp. 98–99.
undermine the anti-German boycott in Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora. The German consul in Jerusalem, Heinrich Wolff (a major supporter of the *Ha’avaara* idea), and the businessman Sam Cohen evidently discussed the anti-boycott potential of the accord. The consul even informed Berlin that Cohen, a shareholder in *Do’ar ha-Yom*, had to some degree promoted the replacement of the ownership and leadership of the newspaper that summer in order to change its policy toward the boycott and the *Ha’avaara*. The veteran pro-boycott editor, Ben-Avi, was, in fact, replaced by a team, including Moshe Smilansky, that opposed the boycott staunchly.80

On March 16, 1933, Beilinson proclaimed in *Davar*, “It’s time for an exodus — in view of its catastrophe, German Jewry must emigrate.”81 Both the Jews of Germany and their wealth must be rescued: “All private wealth . . . is potentially national wealth . . . [and if lost, it will also be lost] to the Hebrew economy in Palestine.”82

From the outset, the Yishuv leaders were not interested merely in helping the emigrants leave Europe and remove their wealth. They wanted both emigrants and their wealth to relocate to Palestine, where they would help build the country.83 As David Remez, a leading Mapai figure, expressed it, “The question is how to make sure the money will be invested in Palestine. We will not just help remove money from Germany . . . It must be connected with the Zionist enterprise . . . ”84

The *Ha’avaara* agreement was hammered out in secret talks between representatives of the Jewish Agency, Jewish merchants, and German economic officials and bankers. From the beginning, the discussions and contacts were led by the merchants, not the Jewish Agency leaders and officials. When these leaders realized that the boycott was popular and the agreement less so, they attempted to dissociate themselves from its formulation and implementation as if to say they were uninvolved — as if to

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80 Esch, *Ha-ha’avaara*, p. 64. The staff reshuffling at the newspaper took place on August 1–2, 1933.
81 "I’ve Been Reading . . . ," *Davar*, March 16, 1933.
82 "At the Time of Holocaust for German Jewry," by “Spectator,” ibid., March 17, 1933.
84 Minutes of Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, July 31, 1933, LA, 40/20.
say the merchants and the German officials had reached the accord without their knowledge or approval. The truth was different, of course: every minute step in phrasing the series of Ha’avara agreements was reported in “real time” to, and was first approved by, the Zionist leadership in Palestine and in Germany.

On August 25, Davar at last came out publicly in favor of the Ha’avara arrangement:

[Our people] have been laboring for several months to eliminate this obstacle [the ban on removing the money or property of Jewish emigrants]. The main aim is to find an appropriate way to remove the Jewish wealth from Germany, one that would also be acceptable to the regime. . . . The thinking has come around to a way . . . to export commercial assets in lieu of cash . . . to purchase assets (goods, machinery) with German Jews’ money, remove these assets from Germany, and use them to build Palestine. . . . For the time being, there is no evident alternative way to save what can be saved of German Jews’ property and to invest it in building the country. . . . An agreement has [recently] been concluded to remove a certain portion of German – Jewish wealth in the form of goods and machinery that will be brought to Palestine and invested in its economy. . . . This agreement may be viewed as the beginning of a way to fulfill the great role that the events in Germany have foisted on us: a large-scale transfer of German Jews to Palestine, where they will enrich the upbuilding [enterprise] and find their true homeland.

On September 3, the readers of Hebrew newspapers in Palestine were informed that the government of Germany had approved the Ha’avara accord (the “goods agreement”).

That summer, the boycott idea was presented — and construed — as the other side of the coin, i.e., a political alternative to the Ha’avara accord. Under the Ha’avara, German goods were to be purchased by and exported to Palestine. The boycott, in contrast, aspired to ban trade with Germany and the arrival of German goods in Palestine, as well as anywhere else in the world. However, supporters of the Ha’avara arrangement did not have the nerve to attack the boycott idea publicly, because of its popularity among Jews in

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86 Davar, March 25, 1933.
87 A small but boldfaced report, ibid., September 3, 1933.
Palestine and abroad — its popularity increasing with each new report about German antisemitic actions.

Jabotinsky continued to favor the boycott and to oppose the *Ha’avara*. “This [*Ha’avara*] agreement,” he said, “is base, disgraceful, and contemptible. Were it to come about, the Jewish masses, especially in Palestine (which is at issue here) would refuse to uphold it.”

Matters were less clear to *Ha’avara* supporters. For example, in a session of the Eighteenth Zionist Congress, held in early September, Berl Katznelson, Baruch Zuckerman, and Arthur Ruppin favored the *Ha’avara*, whereas Stephen Wise opposed it. Right-wing representatives condemned the agreement — for reasons that included their feeling that it would harm the boycott efforts — and attempted to persuade the Congress plenum to adopt a general resolution condemning and nullifying the agreement. However, in the end they refrained even the matter for debate.

In September, the Histadrut Executive Committee discussed the issue. Several of the participants sought to relate to the *Ha’avara* and the boycott as a single issue. The question was resolved by Beilinson and Shertok. Beilinson said,

> We should fight on the altar of this value — building the country. Only if we stay out of the boycott [can German Jews be moved to Palestine]. . . . Hitler is not concerned about Jewish immigration to Palestine. Only because of our neutrality . . . is Zionist activity [in Germany allowed to continue]. If we change our stance, all Zionist activity will be prohibited and, the main thing, Jewish immigration to Palestine from Germany will be halted. . . . I have not yet seen anyone succeed in an economic boycott [that was launched] for political reasons. . . .

Shertok, Arlosoroff’s successor as head of the Jewish Agency Political Department, spoke frankly and logically:

> I agree with Beilinson. . . . I refuse to understand the concurrence of the boycott and the transfer of goods. I have opposed the boycott from the beginning, it is a Diaspora tactic. . . . A political movement cannot act on

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88 Quoted in Gelber, “Zionist Policy and the *Ha’avara* Agreement,” p. 129.

89 Minutes of Meeting of the Political Committee of the Congress, Ninth Session, September 2, 1933, CZA, S25–10125.
the basis of emotion only. . . . We must not lose the market for oranges that we have acquired in Germany. . . . [However,] we haven't the courage to tell our comrades that our war with Germany is to build the country and that we must focus on this. [The Ha’avara agreement] is causing grave damage to Palestine’s products. . . . But protecting the country’s products should be treated separately from the boycott. We must realize that this matter [the Ha’avara accord] breaks the boycott in Palestine. . . . It will lead to breaking the boycott. . . . I did not say we should oppose the boycott in the Diaspora, but insofar as [breaking] the boycott in Palestine will break the boycott in the Diaspora, this matter must not be disregarded. Importing [German] goods cannot but break the boycott in Palestine and weaken it in the Diaspora. . . .

Shertok mentioned the oranges because Germany was the second-largest importer of Palestinian oranges (after Great Britain) in the early 1930s. Thus, the Yishuv leadership had to take into account the need to sustain this market as it weighed its decisions on both the boycott and the Ha’avara. An official boycott by the Zionist movement or the Yishuv, it was believed, would end exports of oranges from Jewish Palestine to Germany and would cost the Yishuv its German market.

Leading Jewish citrus growers, such as Moshe Smilansky, urged the Yishuv leaders not to adopt a policy that would lead to this. But the opponents of the Ha’avara accord among Polish Jewry (the largest community in Europe) quickly latched on to this: “Palestine of the orange,” they said mockingly, accusing the Yishuv of selling out the boycott for a “pot of lentils.”

Shertok realized that the boycott-Ha’avara nexus embodied a natural conflict of interests between the Yishuv and Diaspora Jewry, or, in any case, those Diaspora Jews who favored the boycott. Beilinson and Shertok were right, of course: to affirm both the Ha’avara and the boycott — a course of action favored by many of their comrades — was both illusion and folly. The boycott restricted the purchase of German goods, whereas the Ha’avara arrangement prescribed the purchase of German goods and their importation to Palestine. Support for the Ha’avara would obviously undercut the boycott in Palestine and harm it elsewhere. However, in Davar these matters were not expressed.

90 Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, September 25, 1933, LA, 40/20; see also Gelber, “Zionist Policy and the Ha’avara Agreement,” p. 132.
91 S. Samet, “Attack in Poland Against the Palestine-Germany Orange Contract,” interview with H. S. Wolkowicz by S. Samet, Ha’aretz, October 11, 1933.
clearly; it was difficult to vehemently oppose the boycott openly, and perhaps even harder to honestly explain the contradiction between the two “pro” approaches — pro-boycott and pro-Ha’avara.

Promotion of Jewish Immigration — But Which Jews?

As the Yishuv girded itself in early 1933 for the expected influx of Jews from Germany, it encountered three problems: (1) ideology — whether a given immigrant was a Zionist, or simply a refugee who might leave Palestine at the first opportunity; (2) age — should adult and elderly people be allowed to enter, or should entrance certificates be issued only to the young; and (3) occupation — should professionals be admitted, or should there be a preference for manual laborers, pioneering farmers, and the like. In any case the zero-sum situation had to be kept in mind, i.e., since the number of entry visas was limited, the immigration of a septuagenarian physician might rule out that of an eighteen-year-old pioneer who had received agricultural training. Most German Jews were non-Zionists — if not anti-Zionists. Until the 1930s, German Jews considered their country the consummate land of emancipation and assimilation. The introduction of state antisemitism in 1933 undermined their conventional values and prompted the Yishuv to expect many of those who were actually persecuted or potentially in danger to embrace Zionism and emigrate to Palestine. Suddenly, large-scale immigration from Germany — voluntary or otherwise — seemed possible.

Do’ar ha-Yom predicted that an attack on Hitler would trigger a “general slaughter of the Jews.” In the meantime, Germany “had begun to . . . to vomit” the Jews from its midst, and the Nazis were threatening to deport all Jews who had reached Germany after 1914. “[This threat] is perhaps being implemented. We are living in a time of unlimited possibilities. Until now, German Jews have not given Palestine a thought. Now, however, they would do best to come — but will they?”

Several potential obstacles stood in their path. First, it was not clear whether the British would allow so many immigrants into the country. Second, the desirability of all German Jews as immigrants was moot. In early 1933, Jewish

92 “What’s in Today’s Mail?,” Do’ar ha-Yom, March 1, 1933.
Agency officials began to discuss both issues with the mandatory authorities, i.e., an increase in the quota of immigration visas and the kind of immigrants desired. As Dr. Arthur Hantke, an economist and jurist who had emigrated from Germany to Palestine in 1926, and headed Keren Hayesod in 1933, expressed it thus:

I object to bringing people here who will return a few weeks later. We need people who are interested in Palestine and are willing to come here not only because Hitler is persecuting them. We should select the people very carefully.\(^{93}\)

However, Hantke claimed that Palestine could absorb about half of the Jewish emigrants from Germany and that “20,000 people in two years may strengthen the Yishuv greatly. . . . Desirable people, Zionists, are coming from Germany.”\(^{94}\)

In March and April 1933, the mandatory government reserved 1,000 immigration visas for Jews from Germany. Arlosoroff reported to his Mapai comrades that “the government is insisting — correctly — that the visas be given to people no older than thirty-five.”\(^{95}\)

The leaders were of two minds about giving visas to non-Zionists. According to Eliyahu Dobkin, Arlosoroff himself was concerned that non-pioneers might obtain some of the “certificates.”\(^{96}\) Some agreed with Eliezer Kaplan that “German Jewry is experiencing a catastrophe and rules [concerning the types of Jews who should be brought to Palestine] should not be dictated to them. . . . There should be no objection to issuing visas to a few idlers!” Most of the leadership, however, concurred with Enzo Sereni, who advocated precautions to prevent the “arrival of undesirable immigrants.”\(^{97}\)

It soon transpired that, in reality, many of the immigrants were bourgeois in search of an urban life. Therefore — in the view of Walter Preuss, (a Histadrut

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\(^{93}\) Minutes of Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 14, 1933, CZA, S100–14b.

\(^{94}\) Minutes of Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 19, 1933, ibid., S100–14b.

\(^{95}\) Minutes of Consultation Among Members of the [Mapai] Central Committee, April 11, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.

\(^{96}\) Minutes of Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, March 9, 1933, April 12, 1933, LA, 40/20; see also remarks by Frumkin and Golomb, Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, July 14, 1933, LA, 40/20.

\(^{97}\) Minutes of Consultation Among Members of the [Mapai] Central Committee, April 11, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.
economist who had emigrated from Germany to Palestine in 1922) — potential immigrants should first be trained in agriculture and only then be admitted to the country.  

Although participants in closed meetings of Yishuv institutions debated the nature of the immigrants and the possibility of applying a selective policy, the newspapers never discussed the matter. First, the subject was too sensitive. Second, other developments drove the matter off the national agenda. Third, as the months and years passed, the British eased their requirements and allowed almost all German Jews who wished to enter Palestine to do so, until they began to close the gates in the summer of 1936.

The Rescue Fund — Under Whose Control?

Another matter that preoccupied Zionist functionaries during the first months of Hitler’s rule — also hardly discussed in the press — was the formation of a rescue fund to assist German Jewry. The matter came up in closed meetings of most leading Yishuv political institutions, but, unlike the Ha’avara and boycott issues, it did not become a bone of contention among the political parties. Nevertheless, in terms of Yishuv-Diaspora relations, it led to a great deal of friction between the Yishuv and Diaspora Zionist and Jewish leaders in the spring, summer, and autumn of 1933.

In March-April 1933, the Yishuv institutions and the World Zionist Organization began to discuss the establishment of the fund. The main aim was to help virtually dispossessed German Jews to emigrate. The disagreements erupted almost at once: who should organize the fund and control its money — representatives of world Jewry, of the Zionist movement, or of the Yishuv? Who should receive the relief — the persecuted Jews in Germany, Jews emigrating from Germany to any destination; or only Jews emigrating from Germany to Palestine? The matter became especially urgent in April, when the pace of German Jewish emigration increased dramatically.

The Yishuv leaders argued unanimously that the fund should be managed by Zionist leaders — preferably themselves. In April, Eliezer Kaplan said that the fund-raising effort should be initiated from Palestine and run by Palestinian

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98 Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, July 14, 1933, LA, 40/20.
Jews. The Jewish Agency Executive first discussed the problem of Germany Jewry on April 9, 1933, in the context of the proposed fund. The speakers disagreed about who should control it — Zionists or world Jewry — and who the money should go to — immigrants to Palestine, emigrants from Germany in general, or German Jews still living in the country. Months of debate about the management, and the disposal of the funds ended with no progress. Another reason the discussions never came to anything in any practical sense was the Zionists' concern that the donations would be wasted abroad and would ultimately be at the expense of contributions to the Zionist enterprise. Arlosoroff, who visited Germany and Western Europe in May (to promote the fund, among other reasons) explained, “There is a great danger that most of the money will be used up in various kinds of urgent relief in Germany proper...”; i.e., that most of it would not reach Palestine.

Some in the Diaspora also opposed the fund. Itzhak Gruenbaum said, “If this enterprise of Weizmann’s is pledged to the benefit of Jews in Germany, ruins the struggle for our rights in the Diaspora, or destroys the idea of the World Jewish Congress, then we will oppose it.” The Polish-Jewish community was saying, in effect that money sent to the tormented community in Germany would be at its own expense.

Conclusion
What do we learn from this study of Jewish newspapers in Palestine and their attitude toward Hitler’s rise to power and the first year of Nazi rule in Germany?
First, by March-April 1933, most of the newspapers gave their readers a strong sense of the grave crisis and encroaching threat. Only The Palestine Post downplayed the importance and the severity of the events for the Jews.

99 Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, April 20, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.
100 Minutes of Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, April 9, 1933, LPA, S100–14b; see also Minutes of Consultation Among Central Committee members, April 11, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33; and Minutes of Meeting of the Histadrut Executive Committee, April 12, 1933, LA, 40/20.
101 Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, June 15, 1933, LPA, Division 2, 23/33.
102 Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, April 20, 1933, ibid.
Several papers even wrote occasionally about an impending Shoah or “destruction” (hurban), although they could hardly have envisioned anything as intense and comprehensive as the Holocaust that took place.

Second, most coverage and analyses of the events in Germany fixated on Palestine and Zionism. The articles that appeared in the majority of newspapers viewed Germany and developments there through the prism of Zionist interests or, at most, of those of the Jewish people in general. In general, they focused on how the events in Germany would affect the Yishuv, the Zionist movement, and, at most, German Jewry. The newspapers invested very little space (oddly, and perhaps instructively) to an attempt to understand Hitler and Nazism —its origins, nature, and the significance of its perspectives, statements, and actions. The newspapers also devoted little space and thought to the implications of the rise of Nazism for Germany’s neighbors and world peace. The exception in this regard was The Palestine Post, which from the outset focused on the European and global significance (as opposed to the Zionist-Jewish significance) of Hitler’s accession. In this sense, The Post emulated the patterns of reportage and analysis of the British morning newspapers.

Third, most of the newspapers, especially Davar and Ha’aretz, portrayed the German crisis as a source of hope for prosperity for the Yishuv. In other words, the destruction of German Jewry and the relocation of many German Jews and their wealth to Palestine were perceived as actions that would reinforce and enrich the Yishuv and the Zionist movement. The attitude expressed — for the most in private, but sometimes in the newspapers as well — was explicitly utilitarian. Editorial writers (and, behind the scenes, functionaries) considered rescuing German Jews mainly insofar as these Jews could be useful to the Yishuv and the Zionist movement. The reader of these texts may at times get the impression that the Yishuv was concerned less about the suffering and hardships of German Jewry than about how to bring the masses and wealth of German Jewry to Palestine to bolster the Zionist enterprise. These attitudes came to the fore in the discussions of issues such as the boycott and the Ha’avara.
Fourth, readers of newspapers from 1933 on, may perceive, above all, the helplessness and impotence of the Yishuv, which at that time had a population of only 240,000. It was under British rule and completely lacking in instruments of state and, in this sense, was incapable of offering substantive aid to the Jews of Germany. Thus, when all was said and done, all that the Yishuv could offer or do could barely affect the fringes of the enormous problem posed, let alone penetrate its essence.

Translated by Naftali Greenwood