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'Frightful Crimes': British Press Responses to the Holocaust 1944-45

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Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the British press responded to the extermination of European Jewry in 1944 and 1945, well after the West first received reliable reports about the mass killings of Jews in the middle of 1942. Most historians have argued that the press was reluctant to publicise the mass murder of Europe's Jews in 1942, and they contend that this subject was also neglected in the last two years of the war. But their claims have not been substantiated by a systematic press survey. This thesis provides a systematic analysis of the British press's response to the Holocaust in 1944 and 1945.

There were three crucial developments relating to the extermination of European Jewry in 1944 and 1945. With the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944 its Jewish population of approximately 800,000 faced extermination. Between May and July of the same year almost 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Poland where, at Auschwitz-Birkenau, most were exterminated. In April and May 1945 Allied forces began to uncover concentration camps in Germany into which many Jews (including many thousands from Hungary) had entered after being expelled from Polish extermination camps such as Auschwitz. As the German concentration camps were liberated, many Jews were found among the freed inmates.

This thesis analyses the extent to which the British press understood the scale of the implementation of the 'final solution' during this period. The first chapter will analyse how the press reported the extermination of the Jews when this news first reached the West in 1942. It deals specifically with the question of whether official responses by the British Government to the extermination of European Jewry shaped press reportage on this subject. Chapters two and three examine how the British press reported the threat posed to and the actual extermination of the Jews of Hungary in 1944. Chapter four analyses the press's reaction to the liberation of Jews in German concentration camps during April and May 1945, and will establish whether newspapers understood the scope of the Jewish tragedy during the war.

Declaration

The thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface; due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is 30,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography.

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Introduction

> Public opinion in Britain, the United States and elsewhere was kept informed through the press from an early date about the progress of the 'final solution'. But the impact of the news was small or at least shortlived. The fact that millions were killed was more or less meaningless. People could identify with the fate of a single individual or a family but not with the fate of millions. The statistics of murder were either disbelieved or dismissed from consciousness. Hence the surprise and shock at the end of the war when the reports about a 'transit camp' such as Bergen-Belsen came in: 'No one had known, no one had been prepared for this.'[1]

Was the failure to understand the true nature of the 'final solution' due, as Laqueur claims, to the Allied people's inability to 'identify ... with the fate of millions'?[2] Does this explain adequately why the disclosures about the camps of Belsen and Buchenwald had such an impact? Or was the failure to grasp what was happening to the Jews more attributable to the reluctance of newspapers to give this subject adequate space in their columns? This thesis will examine how British newspapers reported the extermination of the Jews in 1944 and 1945. Is Laqueur right in his claim that people in Allied countries were 'kept informed through the press from an early date about ... the "final solution"'?[3]

The consensus among most historians dealing with Allied knowledge of the Holocaust is that the British press was reluctant to offer more than minimal coverage of the extermination of the Jews in 1942, and that it also failed to give this subject prominent coverage in 1944 and 1945. As indicated above, in *The Terrible Secret* (1980) Walter Laqueur argues that the press kept its readers apprised of the mass murder of the Jews throughout the war. But for Laqueur, the first response of the press to the news was the most important. He contends that most newspapers believed that the first reports that reached London in mid 1942 telling of the planned and systematic extermination of Jews in Poland were 'probably exaggerated'.[4] According to Laqueur, readers of the press may have recalled the allegations made by the British Government during the First World War that Germans had committed

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[1] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's "Final Solution"* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980), 204.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Laqueur points to the *Daily Telegraph* as being the only paper that had correctly interpreted the mass killings as part of a coordinated plan. Ibid., 8-9 and 73-5.

heinous atrocities against civilians in Belgium, some of which subsequently turned out be false.[5] The British press shared its readers' scepticism, and as a result it 'failed to understand' that the murder of European Jewry was planned and systematic. Laqueur did not extend his analysis of the press past 1942, but his study certainly set the tone for subsequent analyses of the way that the British press responded to the Holocaust.[6]

Tony Kushner, in his 1994 article 'Different Worlds: British perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War,' agrees with Laqueur that the press initially failed to convince the British people of the systematic nature of Hitler's anti-Jewish campaign. When the news of the mass extermination of Jews in Poland first reached London, 'the impact of this ... on the British public was minimal and some of the press reported it in terms of a pogrom rather than a systematic programme of mass killing'.[7] By December 1942, he argues, the press's coverage of the Holocaust had reached its apex. 'Thereafter,' he states, 'although there was much detail available, particularly about the death camps, neither the government nor the press was anxious to give it much attention.'[8] He also cites Harold Nicholson (an MP and a member of the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror) as writing late in 1943 that 'the Press was bored with atrocity stories'.[9] Kushner underscores Nicholson's observation, believing that there was 'next to no public response or press interest' in the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in 1944.[10]

In *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (1998), Joanne Reilly is more positive than Laqueur and Kushner in her appraisal of the British press's reportage of the Holocaust in 1942. She argues that the press offered widespread coverage in the summer of that year, especially at the end of June, and 'continued to carry details on the death camps as they emerged, culminating in a series of reports

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[5] Yet John N. Horne and Alan Kramer's study, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) shows that some of the stories of German atrocities committed in World War One did in fact occur.

[6] Laqueur does acknowledge, in a footnote, that there were 'strong, detailed and frequent editorial comments in *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph* and other newspapers throughout December 1942'. Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 93.

[7] Tony Kushner, "Different Worlds: British Perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War," in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London: Routledge, 1994), 254.

[8] Ibid., 255.

[9] Ibid., 258.

[10] Ibid., 256.

during the winter of 1942-3'.[11] But she agrees with Kushner that 'the peak of reporting on the "Final Solution"' was reached in December 1942.[12] 'Over the following years,' she opines, 'interest in and coverage of events in Poland were to decline,' and she too quotes Harold Nicholson's comment cited above that the press had become tired of atrocity stories.[13] Reilly concedes that the extermination of Hungarian Jewry was 'featured,' but 'not so prominently as might now be expected, given the critical nature of the events'.[14] Reilly extends her criticism of the press's response to the Holocaust to the events of 1945. She argues that in April and May 1945 the press's coverage of the liberation of German concentration camps did not emphasise the suffering of Jews in the camps. 'In the immediate wake of the liberations,' she contends, 'the specific plight of the Jews was mentioned infrequently in the newspaper reports and the connection between concentration camps and extermination camps was not clearly established.'[15]

In his 1964 study, *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule*, Andrew Sharf contradicts the consensus view of Laqueur, Kushner (and to a lesser extent Reilly) that the British press was reluctant to emphasise the extermination of the Jews. He asserts that 'between 1938 and 1942 there were few [newspapers] that had not mentioned that the aim of the Nazis was to put an end to Jewish life in all the lands to which Nazi conquests would extend'.[16] Sharf also implies that between 1942 and 1944 there was a large number of articles on the extermination of the Jews.[17] And he shows that there was widespread coverage by the press of the 'blood for trucks' proposal in July 1944, when the Nazis attempted to barter the

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[11] Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a German Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998), 54.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 54-5.
[15] Ibid., 74. David Cesarani provides some anecdotal evidence of the failure of the British press to emphasise the extermination of the Jews when camps were liberated. See David Cesarani, "Great Britain," *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 599-637. In this article Cesarani also offers an analysis of how the British press reported the Holocaust in 1942, although he is largely concerned with the response of the *Jewish Chronicle* here.
[16] Sharf does qualify this assertion with the comment that, 'throughout 1942 it became more and more apparent to the British Press that this was meant in a purely physical sense'. But here Sharf does not precisely define what he means by 'purely physical'. Andrew Sharf, *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1964), 98.
[17] I have inferred from the following sentence that this is what Sharf was implying: 'It was inevitable that between 1942 and 1944 there should have been a vast preponderance of items referring to the persecution and slaughter of Jewish communities, with comparatively few accounts of Jewish resistance.' Ibid., 112.

remaining Jews of Hungary for thousands of trucks and other goods.[18] This seems to contradict Kushner's and Reilly's claim that the British press showed little (or at least insufficient) interest in the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in 1944.

The primary reason for such a large discrepancy between Sharf's analysis and the consensus view of Laqueur, Kushner and Reilly is that the latter was not based on a systematic press survey. Laqueur was more interested in how people understood the information during the war, and whether or not it was believed. Similarly, Kushner and Reilly were largely interested in the question of how the news was perceived by ordinary Britons, as determined by Mass Observation diary entries and surveys. But they devote relatively little space to actual analyses of the press. There are also problems with Sharf's methodology. He devotes only a fraction of his analysis to the press's response to the actual extermination of the Jews (mostly in 1942), and, more importantly, his study was based on a press cuttings collection. With only the cuttings at his disposal, he was unable to incorporate additional data (that is, page numbers and column locations as well as surrounding news items) from the newspapers to more fully substantiate his claims.

The thesis will therefore test Sharf's claim and the consensus view of Laqueur, Kushner and Reilly by undertaking a systematic analysis of the response of the British press to the Holocaust in 1944 and 1945. It will also offer an analysis of the response of the press in 1942 (based largely on secondary sources), given that the consensus view has late 1942 as representing the peak of reporting on the Holocaust. Was the press initially sceptical of an extermination plan early in 1942, as Laqueur has stated? Did press coverage of the Holocaust reach its peak in December 1942? Was the press 'bored with atrocity stories' by 1944, as Kushner and Reilly have indicated in their analyses?[19] In particular is Kushner's statement that the extermination of Hungarian Jewry provoked 'next to no ... press interest' in 1944 accurate?[20] Is Reilly correct in saying that the suffering of Jews was 'mentioned infrequently' by the press when concentration camps were liberated in April and May of 1945? And is she also right in claiming that the 'connection between concentration camps and extermination camps was not clearly established' by the press in 1945?[21]

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[18] Ibid., 115-6.
[19] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 258, and Reilly, *Belsen*, 54.
[20] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 256.
[21] Reilly, *Belsen*, 74.

As well as examining the extent and quality of press reportage, this thesis will also look at the sources of information for the press about the extermination of the Jews. At a number of stages in the war the British Government made official statements about the extermination of the Jews. Did official British responses elicit press coverage of the Holocaust? Was there a relationship between the British Government's view on the extermination of the Jews and the attitude of the press? Did official responses to the extermination of the Jews shape press reportage on this subject? What was the role of Jewish agencies and the Polish Government-in-Exile in providing information to the press relating to the extermination of European Jewry?

This thesis is based on an analysis of four London-based morning newspapers - *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*, and one provincial paper - the *Manchester Guardian*. They have been chosen because they reflect a broad spectrum of political views and they each have a different journalistic style. *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, represent the conservative 'establishment' press. Both had a cosy relationship with Chamberlain's Government in the 1930s and printed what was in the best interests of the Government.[22] For most of the war, however, *The Times* had become more independent from the Government, and had certainly abandoned its pre-war tendency to show unconditional solidarity with the Government and express Conservative Party views.[23] By contrast, the *Telegraph* was the only paper during the war that adopted what Stephen Koss calls a 'discernible [Conservative] party position'.[24] Yet *The Times* and the *Telegraph* still gave the impression of

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[22] For an excellent account of the British press and the appeasement era see Richard Cockett's *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989). For Geoffrey Dawson's (editor of *The Times* during the 1930's) strong support of Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasing Nazi Germany, see Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set: Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 149-50, 152-3, 186-7 and 202-3.

[23] Hence its criticism (shared by the *Manchester Guardian*) of the Government's decision to send 60,000 British troops to the Greek civil war towards the end of 1944. See Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, Vol. 2, *The Twentieth Century* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 618. See also A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914 -1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 713-4.

[24] Its support of the Government was evidenced when Churchill threatened to issue Defence Regulation 2D against the *Daily Mirror* in 1942, which had criticised the Government on a number of occasions. The episode let loose what Koss calls 'a storm of protest,' and many papers, including the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times*, opposed the Government's harsh line against the *Mirror*. Only a few of the major newspapers, the *Telegraph* among them, stood by the Government. See Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, 605-7. The *Telegraph*'s circulation of 640,000 in 1939 and just over 1,000,000 in mid 1947, was enough to ensure that its support of the Government was

representing the interests of the Government. Both, for instance, often gave the Government's view coverage on a page devoted to parliamentary question time, although they occasionally printed a voice in opposition. Furthermore, on the editorial pages of these newspapers there were often substantial articles supporting the Government.

It has been argued that the morning newspapers which enjoyed the largest distribution during the war were those which '[had] gone farthest towards becoming papers of entertainment'.[25] This was certainly true of the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror*. The *Mirror* appealed to the working classes and was well known for its sensationalist reporting and its criticism of what it regarded as vested interests, including the military authorities. Its attacks on the military nearly led to its suppression by Churchill in 1942.[26] The popularity of the *Daily Express*, by contrast, was not confined to a single social class, even though its proprietor's (Lord Beaverbrook's) right-wing propaganda - including the promotion of Anglo- Soviet relations after 22 June 1941 - and Conservative views were often reflected in the paper. The appeal of the *Express* was largely in its entertainment-based style and its spirited reporting of events.[27]

The *Manchester Guardian* was a Liberal newspaper in terms of its editorial views and its connections with the Party itself, even though a survey of its readership in 1950 reveals that it appealed to people with a broad spectrum of political views. Although the *Guardian*'s circulation was small in comparison to *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*,[28] it was highly respected for its sober reportage of current affairs and it attracted readers with a strong political awareness. For instance, 79% of its readers in London in 1950 had a particular interest in

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widely disseminated. For circulation figures see David Butler and Anne Sloman, *British Political Facts*, 5th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1980), 452, and Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and their Controllers* (London: Cassell and Co., 1947), 161-4. See also Lord Burnham *Peterborough Court: The Story of The Daily Telegraph* (London: Cassell and Co., 1955), 208. *The Times*' circulation figures were much lower than the *Telegraph*. On the eve of the war it distributed 203,000 copies and by 1943 this had fallen to 158,000. See McDonald, Iverach, *The History of The Times*, Vol. 5, *Struggles in War and Peace, 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), 63.

[25] A.P. Wadsworth (editor of the *Guardian*) in Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, 615-6.

[26] See Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, revised ed. (London: Pimlico, 1994), 151-2. See also Maurice Edelman, *The Mirror: A Political History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966).

[27] See A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 388, and Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), 121-2.

[28] In 1939 the *Guardian* had a circulation of merely 51,000. See Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, 26.

'international politics,' which shows that it was a 'quality' paper whose readers had a high regard for its independent and comprehensive coverage of world affairs.[29]

The thesis is based primarily on the British press's response to the extermination of the Jews in the following periods, which coincide roughly with significant events relating to the Holocaust in 1944 and 1945: 21-31 March 1944 (the German occupation of Hungary); 27 June - 20 July 1944 (the extermination of Hungarian Jewry); and 16 April - 9 May 1945 (the liberation of German concentration camps). Every issue of the five newspapers identified above has been read for each of these periods.

The following indicators will determine the degree of interest displayed by British newspapers: the number of lines devoted to an article on the extermination of the Jews; the page on which the article appears; the column location on the page; the size of the headline (All headlines and sub-headings are presented in **bold** type. Unless specified otherwise, **12-point text** represents a headline or subheading spanning a single column. **14-point text** represents a headline or subheading spanning two columns. **16-point text** represents a headline or subheading spanning three columns).

The most useful studies about the British press have been Richard Cockett's *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* and Stephen Koss's *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*. Cockett describes the cosy relationship between the British Government and newspaper correspondents (and indeed editors) during the 1930s. Koss identifies the political orientation of newspapers in Britain throughout the war years. Because the first chapter is mainly interested in how the press, via the British Government, responded to the Holocaust in 1942, Martin Gilbert's *Auschwitz and the Allies* has been especially useful.[30] The focus of chapters two and three on how the press reported the impending and actual extermination of Hungarian Jewry, has meant that Randolph Braham's epic study, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*,[31] has been useful. His work helps to understand how the Nazis prepared the conditions for and carried out the Holocaust in Hungary. The final chapter

[29] David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Collins, 1971), 560 and 592-5.
[30] Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London: Mandarin, 1981).
[31] Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Vol.s 1 and 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

draws on articles that describe the final stages of the Holocaust, namely the death marches and the liberation of concentration camps. Some excellent articles on these subjects are to be found in Michael R. Marrus's *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 9[32] and the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*.[33]

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 deals with how the British press responded to the extermination of the Jews in 1942. In particular it will determine whether official responses to the Holocaust in 1942 shaped the response of the press on this subject. As indicated earlier, this chapter is largely an analysis of secondary sources, backed up a more limited examination of primary sources. Chapter 2 analyses how the press responded in March 1944 to the German occupation of Hungary and the threat posed to the Jews of that country. In doing so this chapter will explore whether the press had accepted by 1944 that the Germans were indeed embarking on a policy of exterminating Europe's Jews and, if so, whether it saw the Jews of Hungary as the Nazis' next victims.

Chapter three investigates how the British press, at the beginning of July 1944, reported the actual deportation of Hungarian Jewry to Auschwitz-Birkenau and its extermination there. By analysing the level of coverage devoted to the mass murder of Hungarian Jewry, this chapter will show whether the British press was willing to attest to the veracity of the reports reaching London from sources - independent of the Government - such as the World Jewish Congress and the Polish Government-in Exile. The chapter will also reveal how the press reported the role of Auschwitz-Birkenau in the extermination of Hungarian Jewry. Although this was the largest murder camp used by the Nazis to exterminate Jewry, its main function had not yet been revealed to the West.[34]

Chapter four examines how British newspapers reported the extermination of European Jewry during the period in which Allied soldiers liberated German concentration camps. In particular it will investigate whether the press attached any significance to the presence of Jews in liberated concentration camps and, if so,

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[32] Michael R. Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, Vol. 9, *The End of the Holocaust* (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1989).
[33] *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1990).
[34] Refer to pages 40-1 for a brief discussion of how the news of the extermination of Hungarian Jewry reached London.

whether this resulted in the press publicising what had happened to the Jews of Europe during the war.

Chapter 1

Eliminating 'Useless Mouths':[1] The British Press and Official Responses to the Extermination of European Jewry in 1942.

> Received alarming report that in Führer's headquarters plan discussed and under consideration according which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled Germany numbering 3½-4 millions should after deportation and concentration in East be exterminated at one blow to resolve once and for all the Jewish Question in Europe STOP the action reported planned for autumn methods under discussion including prussic acid STOP we transmit information with all reservation as exactitude cannot be confirmed STOP informant stated to have close connections with highest German authorities and his reports generally speaking reliable.[2]

This chapter examines whether the press was similarly 'alarmed' by reports of the extermination of European Jewry when this news first came to light in 1942, and whether it displayed an understanding of the planned and systematic nature of the killings. It also analyses whether official British responses to the killings - in particular Anthony Eden's 17 December declaration - shaped the press's coverage of this subject. Alternatively, it examines how the press reacted to the mass murder of the Jews as this news was released from sources independent of the Government, such as the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and the Polish Government-in-Exile. Was Laqueur correct in his belief that the press was initially sceptical about the systematic nature of the killings?

In October 1939 the British Government released a White Paper on atrocities committed against German civilians, including Jews but particularly political prisoners, in Nazi concentration camps during the 1930s. Although the plight of Jews in the camps was not viewed by the White Paper to have been especially noteworthy, it nonetheless recounted some of the Nazis' worst anti-Jewish atrocities, including those committed during and after the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938.[3] A concentration camp called Buchenwald was described as having been particularly

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[1] Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 60.
[2] The 'Riegner telegram,' 8 August 1942. Quoted in Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 77. See also Christopher Browning, "A Final Hitler Decision for the 'Final Solution'? The Riegner Telegram Reconsidered." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10 (1996): 3-10. Refer to pages 16-7 for the British Government's response to this telegram.
[3] See Reilly, *Belsen*, 53-4.

brutal towards its prisoners, and its name soon became synonymous with Nazi atrocities.[4]

Notwithstanding the release of the October 1939 White Paper, the British Government did have reservations, at least in the early stages of the war, about using 'horror' stories, particularly those involving Jews, in its domestic propaganda. This may have stemmed partially from a belief that official reports telling of excess German brutality would have been greeted with scepticism in Britain. The British people were aware that some official British stories of German atrocities allegedly committed during the First World War were fraudulent.[5] Thus the Ministry of Information (MoI) advocated a more careful approach to the inclusion of atrocities in its domestic propaganda during the Second World War. A memorandum of the Planning Committee of the MoI (the body in charge of domestic propaganda) dated 25 July 1941 read:

> In self-defence people prefer to think that the victims were specially marked men – and probably a pretty bad lot anyway. A certain amount of horror is needed but it must be used very sparingly and must deal always with treatment of indisputably innocent people. Not with violent political opponents. *And not with Jews.*[6]

Although it is most likely that the MoI realised that the Jews were the innocent victims of Nazi oppression, they were also reluctant to draw attention to the murder of the Jews in domestic propaganda, probably because the Planning Committee perceived that widespread anti-Semitism existed in British society. This belief stemmed from the regularity of complaints about Jews recorded each week by the intelligence branch of the Ministry of Information (Home Intelligence) in the 'Constant Topics and Complaints' section of its weekly digest.[7]

Despite official reservations about the use of Jewish 'horror' stories in domestic propaganda, there were, in fact, several British Government initiatives

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[4] In the final chapter (4) it will be shown how the Government's focus on Buchenwald in October 1939 in many ways predetermined how the press would present the extermination of European Jewry and the existence of murder camps when the Allies liberated German concentration camps in the spring of 1945.

[5] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 8-9. See also Reilly, *Belsen*, 53-4; and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 123-6.

[6] Italics in original. See also Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979) 166-8.

[7] Ibid.

taken to ensure that the British people knew what was happening to the Jews during the Second World War. Early in 1942 the British Government published a 'note' signed by Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, recounting German crimes committed in the Soviet Union between June and December 1941, including massacres of thousands of Jews.[8] The Polish Government-in-Exile published a report not long after detailing similar German atrocities. The Allied Governments also established an Inter-Allied Information Committee which released statements about this subject at different stages of the war.[9]

It was, however, the European broadcast of the BBC (which, incidentally, was also the news service charged with the dissemination of propaganda to the enemy)[10] that, at the beginning of June 1942, carried the first official report that Jews in Poland were being destroyed consistent with what was believed to be Hitler's repeated wish to exterminate all of Europe's Jews.[11] Although there is evidence to suggest that British newspapers were aware of the content of such broadcasts,[12] because of the lack of any public or official confirmation from the British Government (this would come later) most newspapers in Britain failed to inform their readers about the full horror of the anti-Jewish policy perpetrated in German-occupied Poland.

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[8] Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 18-19.

[9] Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 299. See also Sharf, *The British Press and Jews*, 93.

[10] The Ministry of Information initially had five primary functions to be put into operation on the outbreak of war: media (including print) censorship; issuance of official news; preservation of civilian morale; domestic, enemy and other forms of propaganda. Working from the concept of voluntary censorship, during wartime the press was supposed to submit reports which may have compromised the security of Britain, or which might have been useful to the enemy, to the Press and Censorship Division of the MoI. It is most unlikely, however, that the reports reaching the West about the extermination of Jews in Europe would have been viewed by the British Government and press as a security risk. In October 1939 the MoI was deprived of its role of providing enemy propaganda, although it later reacquired some power in this area when representatives from it, along with those from other departments including the Foreign Office, found their way onto the committee charged with disseminating propaganda to the enemy: the Political Warfare Executive (PWE). The PWE was formed in September 1941 when the then Minister for Information Brendan Bracken appropriated the responsibility for enemy propaganda (which included the dropping of leaflets over enemy territory and the European Broadcast of the BBC) to himself, Eden and Dalton, who represented, on the PWE, their respective ministries: Information, Foreign Affairs and Economic Warfare. See Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 59-66 and 88-92. See also Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War I* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), 3-4.

[11] Refer to the foreign BBC broadcast on pages 13-4 below.

[12] See the reaction by *The Times* to the foreign BBC broadcast on page 14 below.

The first report which indicated that the Nazis intended to exterminate European Jewry arrived in London at the end of May 1942.[13] It reached the exiled Polish Government in London from the Jewish Bund (an underground socialist party in Poland) and summarised the details of the Holocaust thus far, including the locations, dates and methods of the killings as well as the number of Jewish dead: 700,000 in all. The Bund report described how, with the onset of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, 'the Germans embarked on the physical extermination of the Jewish population on Polish soil'.[14]

The Bund report also stated that, in addition to the mass murder of Jews by shooting, the Germans were killing the Jews with poison gas at a place called Chelmno, where a 'special automobile (a gas chamber) was used. Ninety persons were loaded each time. The victims were buried in special graves, in an opening in the Lubard Woods. The victims themselves had to dig their own graves before being killed.' The report pointed out that the killings were part of a plan emanating from the highest German authority:

> The above facts indicate without any doubt that the criminal German Government has begun to realize Hitler's prophecy that in the last five minutes of the war, whatever its outcome, he will kill all the Jews in Europe. We firmly believe that the Hitlerite Germans will be held fully accountable for their fearful bestialities at the proper time.[15]

On 9 June 1942, the leader of the exiled Polish government, General Sikorski, broadcast to Europe details of German atrocities, including crimes committed against Jews (indicating that such killings were planned and systematic) in a

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[13] In fact reports had actually been printed in British newspapers well before the Bund report had reached the West, but they were not viewed by the press to have been the result of a Nazi plan to exterminate Europe's Jews. Furthermore, such reports were sporadic and were not very prominent. Journalists interpreted the killings as pogroms and they had not yet realised that a systematic campaign of mass murder was already underway. Thus the London *Sunday Times* correspondent in Turkey reported accurately in April 1942 that 120,000 Romanian Jews had been murdered, but it was only later that this particular massacre was properly interpreted as part of the Nazis' campaign to utterly destroy Europe's Jews. On 16 May, an *Evening Standard* correspondent located in Stockholm reported that 60,000 Jews from the Polish City of Vilna had been shot at a nearby railway station. Again, there was little attention given to this by the press. See Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 72-4. According to Andrew Sharf, the Vilna massacre was reported in the *Evening Standard* on 16 June. See Sharf, *The British Press and Jews*, 92. See also Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 42.

[14] See Jewish Socialist Party, 'Report of the Bund Regarding the Persecution of the Jews,' Folder No. 15 - Polish Underground Study - item 26, quoted in Yehuda Bauer, "When Did They Know." *Midstream: A Monthly Jewish Review* 14 (1968): 57-8.

[15] Bauer, "When Did They Know," 57-8. Excerpt cited above also appears in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 39-40.

statement over the BBC's foreign news service.[16] Sikorski's statement was reported in *The Times* the next day, which quoted the Polish leader as saying: 'Massacres of tens of thousands of Jews have been carried out this year. People are being starved to death in the ghettos. Mass executions are held; even those suffering from typhus are shot.' But Sikorski's reference to the Nazis' determination to kill all Jews in Poland was omitted. Moreover, only 5 (of 43) lines were devoted to the Jews, with the plight of non-Jewish Poles given prominence.[17]

The efforts of the BBC to bring further attention to the Bund report did not lead to widespread reportage of the extermination of Polish Jewry by the British press.[18] A Jewish member of the Polish National Council broadcast the Bund report over the BBC on 26 June, along with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster on the same day.[19] The *Daily Telegraph* did publicise the Bund report the day after these BBC broadcasts, but it was the only paper to do so.[20]

It was, in fact, a press conference held by the WJC in London on 29 June 1942, at which the details of the Bund report were publicised (although here the Jewish death toll was revised to 1,000,000), that elicited by far the most widespread response by the British press to the extermination of Polish Jewry by the Nazis. On the next day *The Times* reported the WJC conference in a relatively inconspicuous position near the bottom of the third column on page 2, but its article nonetheless appeared under a bold headline **MASSACRE OF JEWS - OVER 1,000,000 DEAD SINCE THE WAR BEGAN**.[21] The *Manchester Guardian*'s article on this press conference appeared under a similarly daring title **JEWISH WAR VICTIMS: More than a Million Dead**.[22]

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[16] Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 42. See also John P. Fox, "The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy in 1942." *English Historical Review*, No. 362 (1977): 88. One week earlier the BBC broadcast a similar statement by General Sikorski based on the Bund report. Here the figure of 700,000 Jewish dead was mentioned, but the alleged plan for wholesale extermination was left out. Bauer, "When Did They Know", 52.

[17] *The Times*, 10 June 1942, 3.

[18] The BBC's internal directive on 25 June pleaded for the Bund report to 'be given the fullest possible publicity in all languages'. General Directive, 24 June 1942, BBC Written Archives Centre. Quoted in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 42-3.

[19] Ibid.

[20] I have surmised that the Bund report received exclusive coverage in the *Telegraph* because both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* failed to report it, and also because secondary sources have similarly indicated that the *Telegraph* was alone in its coverage here. Two days earlier, on 25 June, the *Telegraph* printed a separate article based on the Bund report written by a Jewish member of the Polish Government's National Council, Shmuel Zygielbojm. See for instance, Bauer, "When Did They Know," 53.

[21] *The Times*, 30 June 1942, 2.

[22] *Manchester Guardian*, 30 June 1942, 2

In its 39-line article *The Times* paraphrased the leader of the British Section of the WJC, Sidney Silverman, as saying that 'the Germans were making no secret of their intention to exterminate the Jewish race' and that 'already in countries ruled by Germany over 1,000,000 Jews had lost their lives since the war began, either by being shot or by being made to live in such conditions that they died from epidemics or starvation'.[23] The *Manchester Guardian* also quoted the Congress statement to good effect in a 45-line article in the top right hand corner of page 2; this was the page, however, on which share prices, trade notes, sporting results and other such items were placed. Even if this article was noticed here, it was certainly divorced from the context of war news.[24]

The first time that the British Government openly encouraged the press to offer widespread coverage of Polish Jewry's extermination was on 9 July 1942, when Brendan Bracken (the Minister of Information) sponsored a press conference which was also attended by members of the Polish Government-in-Exile (including two Jewish members of the Polish National Council). The conference drew attention to the plight of Poles under German occupation and the extermination of Jews as revealed by the Bund report. But the presence of the Polish Minister of Information, Professor Stronski, at the conference seemed to focus the attention of the press on the threat of extermination against non-Jewish Polish minorities targeted by the Nazis, including Polish intelligentsia and Roman Catholics.[25]

Furthermore, during the press conference Stronski may have inadvertently obscured the planned and systematic extermination of the Jews when he stated that the number of 700,000 Jewish dead 'included both those murdered directly and those who died as a result of the German extermination policy'.[26] The term 'German extermination policy' as opposed to 'murdered directly' perhaps implied that the Germans were killing Jews deliberately but 'indirectly,' that is by starvation

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[23] *The Times*, 30 June 1942, 2. Here *The Times* also paraphrased statements made by a Jewish member of the Polish National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart, and a member of the Czech State Council, Ernest Frischer.

[24] *Manchester Guardian*, 30 June 1942, 2. The *Daily Telegraph*, whose June 30 headline read **MORE THAN 1,000,000 JEWS KILLED IN EUROPE**, accurately asserted that the Nazis hoped 'to wipe the [Jewish] race from the European continent'. The *Telegraph* portrayed the Nazis' plan to include Jews from countries in Western Europe such as Belgium, France and Holland in the murderous campaign that had already started against Eastern European Jews. It was in this context that the destruction of 120,000 Romanian Jews was mentioned. See Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 75-6.

[25] Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 46.

[26] Stronski quoted in Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 75-6.

and disease rather than by mass shooting or gassing. Reporting the press conference, the *Guardian* cast doubt on the idea that the Jews were being systematically exterminated, contending that 'assuming that the Germans were also using starvation, the figure of 700,000 dead [as revealed by the Bund report] had to be accepted as probable'.[27] Later it will be shown that this misconception was perpetuated by the press well after subsequent reports from Europe confirmed that a policy of deliberate mass extermination did in fact exist. [28]

In *The Times* on the next day Bracken's conference appeared under a triple headline which read: **GERMAN RECORD IN POLAND: TORTURE AND MURDER: BRITISH PLEDGE OF RETRIBUTION**. Whilst most of the article was devoted to the threat of 'extermination' facing Poles (appearing under the subheading **AIMING AT EXTERMINATION**), the fate of Jews in Poland appeared at the bottom of the article and was given less urgency, as it was placed under the subheading **THE PLIGHT OF THE JEWS**, and received only 20 (of 85 lines).[29]

From mid to late 1942 reports began to reach London from various sources, including the WJC in Switzerland and the Polish underground, which strongly indicated that a plan originating from the highest levels of the German Government was being carried out to exterminate every Jew in Europe. Initially the British Government dismissed such reports as exaggerations.[30] For instance, after the first report to reach London telling of a plan to exterminate all European Jews (sent from

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[27] *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1942, 5. On 31 August 1942 the *Manchester Guardian* again failed to properly interpret Nazi anti-Jewish policy in German occupied territory when, in an editorial, it argued 'that the deportation of Jews to Poland means that Jewish muscles are needed for the German war effort'. See Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 75.

[28] Even when the British press reported quite frequently the deportation of French Jews 'to an unknown destination' from late July until mid September 1942, the fate of the French Jews was not clear to the press. The details of the Bund report, although reported widely in the British press at the end of June, had not been assimilated by journalists and as a result the press did not link the deportation of French Jews with the massacres in German-occupied Poland. For instance, on 3 August 1942, under the heading **Uprooted Peoples**, *The Times* reported that the recent deportations of Jews from France and Holland 'seemed to suggest Nazi determination to purge Western Europe of all its Jews,' but here the location and ultimate fate of the Jews was not stated. According to the report, the Jews faced 'either extermination or wretched survival in the vast eastern ghetto around Lublin ...'. Quoted in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 54.

[29] *The Times*, 10 July 1942, 3. In response to the press conference, on page 5 the *Daily Telegraph* quoted one of the Jewish members as saying quite explicitly that the Nazis 'were deliberately carrying out their monstrous plans to exterminate Jews,' and gave some specific details of mass killings of Jews. Conversely, the discussion at the conference of the suffering of non-Jewish Poles appeared on page one. See Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 46-7, for a relatively detailed analysis of the *Telegraph*'s response to the press conference.

[30] Ibid., 55 passim.

Gerhard Riegner, the leader of the WJC in Switzerland)[31] reached the Foreign Office on 10 August, David Allen of the Central Department remarked in a note dated 10 September, 1942:

> We have ... received plenty of evidence that Jews deported from other parts of Europe have been concentrated in the Government-General [of Poland] and also that Jews once there are being so badly treated that very large numbers have perished: either as a result of lack of food or of evil conditions, i.e. in the Warsaw ghetto, or as a consequence of mass deportations and executions.
>
> Such stories do provide a basis for Mr. Riegner's report but they do not of course amount to 'exterminations at one blow'.
>
> The German policy seems rather to eliminate 'useless mouths' but to use able bodied Jews as slave labour.[32]

As a result of scepticism towards Riegner's report in official quarters and the Government's failure to recognise publicly and condemn the Nazis' plan for extermination, the British press was unlikely to recognise the seriousness of the Germans anti-Jewish policy.

By the end of 1942 a number of reports had complemented Riegner's initial claim that European Jewry was to be exterminated by the end of the war. Perhaps the most important reached the exiled Polish Government in London from Jan Karski, a courier of the Polish underground. In his report Karski contended that evidence existed which strongly suggested that Himmler had ordered the complete destruction of Polish Jewry by the end of 1942. He also detailed how Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were systematically rounded up and mass murdered at camps which were designed specifically to exterminate Jews in gas and electrocution chambers.[33]

On 25 November the Polish Government-in-Exile gave the report to a member of the British World Jewish Congress (WJC), A.L. Easterman, who proceeded to ask the British Foreign Office if he and the President of the British WJC, Sidney Silverman, (who was also member of parliament), could meet with the

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[31] Refer to page 10 above for Riegner's telegram.

[32] David Allen quoted in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 60.

[33] Karski described what happened to the Jews arrested in the course of the 'manhunts':

> The Jews, when caught, are driven to a square. Old people and cripples are singled out, taken to the cemetery and there shot. The remaining people are loaded into goods trucks, at the rate of 150 people to a truck with space for 40. The floor of the truck is covered with thick layer of lime and chlorine sprinkled with water. The doors of the trucks are locked. Sometimes the train starts immediately on being loaded, sometimes it remains on a siding for a day, two days or even longer ... Those surviving are sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor. Once there, the so-called 'settlers' are mass murdered.

Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Richard Law, to discuss Karski's report. At the meeting, which took place the next day, Silverman advocated an Inter-Allied declaration to be made condemning the extermination of the Jews and promising retribution after the war.[34]

Although Law initially thought that Karski's report could not be verified by further accounts, after meeting with Silverman of the WJC, Law realised that if the reports (including Karski's) thus far were accurate, the British Government would have been viewed as callous if nothing was done about it. There were other reservations expressed in official circles, however, with David Allen cautioning that 'our declaration should, in the absence of clearer evidence, avoid too specific a reference to the *plan* of extermination'. Allen advocated instead a focus 'on condemnation of the general *policy* of getting rid of useless Jews'.[35] But the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was in favour of an Inter-Allied Declaration owing to the increasing public awareness about the extermination of the Jews.[36]

Some newspapers had already responded to the information that had reached London from independent sources such as Jan Karski, with *The Times* on 4 December publishing a 91-line article at the top of the first column on page 3, under the daring title: **NAZI WAR ON JEWS: DELIBERATE PLAN FOR EXTERMINATION**. Informed by Karski's 25 November account, and based partially on news item from a Swedish newspaper, this article confirmed the Nazis' aim to deport the General Government's Jewish population by 1 December, contending that approximately 1.7 million Jews would be 'liquidated, which means either transported eastward in cattle trucks to an unknown destination, or killed where they stood'. It also stated that the Nazis' plan to 'clear' over 300,000 Jews from the Lublin district should be understood 'against the background of Hitler's recent and apparently irrelevant outbursts against the Jews'. Karski's 'memorandum' was quoted as saying:

> One of the war aims of Hitler's regime, and one which has been publicly proclaimed by its highest authorities, is a complete extermination of Jews wherever the rapacious hand of German Fascism made its way. All other war aims of Nazism will fail in the end - and the defeat of German Fascism is inevitable - but this

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Karski quoted in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 94.
[34] Ibid., 93-5.
[35] Italics in original. Allen quoted in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 96.
[36] Ibid., 97.

> particular aim, a complete extermination of Jews, is already being enforced.[37]

But *The Times*' interpretation of the word 'extermination' did not, in fact, parallel the meaning which Karski had so clearly articulated in his recent report. In its opening paragraph *The Times* asserted that: 'For some weeks London has recognised, on the basis of independent evidence, that the worst of Hitler's threats was being literally applied and that, quite apart from the widespread murders, the Polish Jews had been condemned to subsist in *conditions which must steadily lead* to their extermination.'[38]

By December, however, the *Manchester Guardian* had accepted that the Germans were actually implementing a plan of systematic extermination. On 4 December, in a 112-line article at the top of page eight, which was located under the arresting headline **PLIGHT OF THE JEWS: Mass Annihilation**, the *Guardian* declared: 'In each of his last two speeches Hitler proclaimed with defiant certainty that by the time the war was over, and whatever its outcome, Europe would be rid of its Jews. This was no empty statement.' The article went on to say that the extermination of the Jews was being carried out despite the labour shortage in Germany's war industries, and cited figures obtained from 'underground Polish groups' which indicated that the Nazis had already killed over 1,250,000 Jews.[39] In October of the same year the *Guardian* had published an article which similarly attested to the veracity of the reports which stated that a plan existed to exterminate European Jewry.[40]

Whilst the *Guardian*'s article on 4 December more forcefully attested to the veracity of the plan to exterminate Europe's Jews, it was in fact *The Times*' article published on the same day (cited above) that seemed to add pressure on the Government to make an official declaration condemning the German perpetrators of this immense crime.[41] At the same time articles by prominent British individuals began to appear in the newspapers, expressing horror and indignation at the latest revelations and pressing the British government to receive as many escaped

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[37] *The Times*, 4 December 1942, 3.
[38] Italics mine. Ibid.
[39] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1942, 8.
[40] See Sharf, *The British Press and Jews*, 99.
[41] For *The Times*' 4 December article as a contributing factor in bringing about the eventual issuance of Eden's 17 December inter-Allied declaration, see Fox, "The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy," 101; and Cesarani, "Great Britain," 607.

refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe as possible.[42] Almost a fortnight later the British Government gave in to public pressure, when on 17 December 1942 Eden made the following declaration in the House of Commons:

> The German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race, in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended, the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe. From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported, in conditions of appalling horror and brutality, to Eastern Europe ... The number of victims is reckoned in the many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children. The above-mentioned [Allied] Governments and the French National Committee condemn in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination ... They reaffirm their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end.[43]

Eden then promised to make the declaration known to the people of Germany and occupied-Europe over the European service of the BBC. All members in the House then observed a moment of silence.[44]

The British press offered widespread coverage of Eden's declaration, with *The Times* devoting 123 lines to it under the headline **BARBARITY TO JEWS: RETRIBUTION BY ALLIES: COMMONS ENDORSE A PLEDGE**, in a prominent position at the top of page four. *The Times* prefaced its quotation of Eden's statement with the emotive comment:

> There was a deeply impressive scene in the House of Commons today. Moved by the horror of Mr. Eden's recital of German atrocities against Jews, and by the stern protest and warning of retribution which he uttered in the name of the British and allied Governments, the House, prompted by a suggestion from a Labour member, rose spontaneously and remained standing for a minute. Its silence was more eloquent than words of deep sympathy with the helpless victims of terrorism, and emphasised the Commons fixed resolve that the fight against the barbarous regime overshadowing Europe shall be waged to a victorious end.[45]

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[42] See for example page 5 of *The Times*' issue of 5 December 1942 for a letter to the editor by the Archbishop of Canterbury calling for the British Government to 'receive here any Jews who are able to escape the clutches of the Nazis and make their way to our shores'.
[43] Fox, "The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy," 103.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *The Times*, 18 December 1942, 4.

For the *Guardian*, Eden's statement was more significant in terms of its effect on the members of parliament, rather than for the government's official recognition of the extermination of European Jewry. The *Guardian* allotted 105 lines to describing the scene in the House of Commons following Eden's declaration in a similarly prominent location at the top of page five, under an unprecedentedly candid headline spanning two columns: **THE JEWISH ATROCITIES: A Memorable Scene in the House of Commons: UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION**. It began:

> It was complained here on Wednesday that the House of Commons was not doing itself justice in the matter of the Jewish massacres ... The House of Commons certainly redeemed itself yesterday. Its demeanor ... while Mr. Eden was reading the 'United Nations' declaration condemning the 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' was worlds removed from the day-to-day bearing of the House. A stranger intruding might have thought he was intruding on a religious service.[46]

The rest of the press offered coverage of the declaration and for the first time British newspapers universally seemed to accept that Hitler was embarking on the systematic extermination of European Jewry. Sharf cites the following editorial in the *News Chronicle* on 18 December as characterising the attitude of most British newspapers to the 17 December Inter-Allied Declaration:

> The joint declaration issued by the Allies yesterday against Germany's bestial policy and cold-blooded extermination of the Jews says and does no more than the facts fully justify. Whatever verification may be forthcoming or lacking for this or that detail, there is no room for doubt that the German Government is responsible for ordering the wholesale slaughter of Jewish people throughout Europe on a scale, and with a degree of inhumanity which makes its actions one of the foulest in recorded history.[47]

The assumptions of Laqueur and Kushner (and to a lesser extent Reilly) were largely correct. As they have argued, the initial response of the press to the

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[46] Another article appeared below of 118 lines which was critical of Eden's failure to promise effective rescue measures, and which cited the concerns of Jewish groups about the peril facing European Jewry (including Jews in countries not yet occupied, such as Hungary) and the need for immediate relief and rescue measures. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 December 1942, 5.

[47] Sharf, *The British Press and Jews*, 93-4.

mass extermination of Jews in Poland was restrained. This was evidenced by the reluctance of British papers in June and July 1942 to place news items about the extermination of the Jews in prominent locations. Furthermore, there was a failure to understand that the policy of extermination was carried out by the direct killing of Jews (i.e. by mass shooting and gassing), as opposed to starvation and slave labour. For most papers, the latter instruments of Nazi oppression seemed to be a more likely explanation for the widespread Jewish deaths. Historians are also correct in claiming that the press provided relatively widespread coverage of the exterminations in December. Even here, however, there was still a lingering scepticism in some quarters of the press (as evidenced by *The Times*' 4 December article) about a systematic campaign of extermination. The chapter has also demonstrated that the reaction of the British Government to the extermination of the Jews helped to shape the reportage of the press on this subject. Eden's statement in the House of Commons on 17 December 1942 had a striking impact on the coverage given to the extermination of the Jews by the press the next day. But only the *Guardian* seemed to offer unqualified statements about the true nature of the Nazis' systematic drive against the Jews of Europe before Eden's declaration.

Chapter 2

'Safety Jeopardized':[1] The British Press and the German Occupation of Hungary, 21-31 March 1944.

> Within the larger tragedy which was the destruction of European Jewry, the liquidation of the Hungarian Jewish community has a special place. Hungarian Jewry almost survived to witness the downfall of the architects of the Final Solution. Its destruction was undertaken after it was clear that the war was lost for Germany. Moreover, in the case of Hungarian Jewry's liquidation there was no longer any doubt that the Reich intended to wipe out the Jews. In Hungary the Final Solution operated within full view of world opinion.[2]

Was the tragic situation of Hungarian Jewry understood by the British press when Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944? In the previous chapter it was shown that for much of 1942 the press confused systematic mass murder with death by disease, starvation and ill treatment. By December of that year all the newspapers seemed to accept that the Jews were being exterminated *en masse*, but this came only with Eden's 17 December declaration. In March 1944 the British and American Governments again issued a statement warning that the persecution of Hungarian Jewry would not go unpunished. Did this encourage British newspapers to publicise the threat posed to the Hungarian Jews? If so, did newspapers understand that the Jews of Hungary were threatened with systematic extermination? Were Reilly and Kushner correct to argue that the reporting of the Holocaust in 1944 was less extensive than at the end of 1942?

Although they had been slated for extermination along with the rest of European Jewry at the Wannsee Conference held in January 1942, roughly 760,000 Jews were still alive in Hungary at the beginning of March 1944.[3] Owing to Hungary's semi-independent political status under Premier Miklos Kallay,

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[1] *The Times*, 25 March 1944, 3.

[2] Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 248.

[3] Included in this figure, apart from the Jews who lived within the pre-1938 borders (Trianon Hungary) are the Jews who resided in territories incorporated into Hungary resulting from the acquisition of territories between November 1938 and April 1941. Also included in this figure are approximately 100,000 Christians of Jewish origin racially redefined as Jews. See Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, condensed ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 29 and 252. See also Document. 24, "Wannsee Conference on the Final Solution of the Jewish Question (1942)," in *Antisemitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Richard S. Levy (Mass, Lexington: D.C. Heath, c. 1991), 254-8.

Hungary's Jews were to remain relatively safe for most of the war.[4] Kallay had already refused a number of requests by the Nazis to deport them to Poland, arguing that he was not informed of their ultimate destination[5] and, perhaps more importantly, that their large numbers played an essential role in Hungary's economy. Kallay reminded the Nazis that, because a significant proportion of Hungary's economy was contributing to the German war effort, the deportation of Hungarian Jews would adversely affect Germany's military capability.[6]

Fearing that Hungary was not prepared to face the advancing Red Army and that Kallay might try to negotiate a peace deal with Stalin in order to prevent a Soviet occupation of his country, Hitler decided to invade Hungary.[7] On 17 March he summoned Hungary's Regent, Admiral Horthy, to discuss Kallay's weakening commitment to the war and the issue of troop withdrawals from the front.[8] When Horthy arrived at Hitler's headquarters at Schloss Klessheim on 18 March 1944, Hitler explained to him that Germany would occupy Hungary to prevent Kallay from compromising Germany's military position in the Balkans. In Hitler's decision to occupy Hungary, Kallay's failure to solve the 'Jewish Question' in his country was a contributing, but not the decisive, factor.[9]

On the morning of 19 March 1944, a parachute regiment of the German Wehrmacht landed near Budapest, taking all strategic positions and clearing the way for eleven German Army divisions to occupy Hungary. Together with the military vanguard came a group of SS men who had been instructed by Adolf Eichmann a

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[4] Prior to the occupation, Jews residing in Hungary suffered approximately 63,000 casualties due to forced labour abroad and massacres of 'alien' Jews. For instance, in August 1941, before Kallay was Premier (he was appointed by Admiral Horthy in March 1942), the Hungarian Government assembled approximately 17,000 Jews in Hungarian-occupied Ruthenia, and expelled them across the border to the Ukraine, which was then under German occupation. After the Hungarians extracted a few thousand for forced labour, the 11,000 who remained were murdered by German Einsatzkommandos (or killing squads). See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, Condensed ed., 252. See also Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-45* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 455.

[5] Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*, 455.

[6] Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 238.

[7] Ibid., 381-2.

[8] The Hungarians had been fighting the USSR alongside the Germans since June 1941, but the annihilation of the Hungarian Second Army at Voronezh saw rapid troop withdrawals from the front. Emissaries of the Kallay government also contacted the Allies in a bid to remove Hungary from the war, but many of their so-called 'Allied' contacts were in fact German agents. See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 1, 230-48.

[9] Randolph L. Braham, "Hungarian Jews," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds Yisrael Gutman & Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, 1994), 456-66.

week earlier to proceed with the deportation and extermination of Hungarian Jews in the quickest possible time. With the deployment of the SS, along with the appointment of a new pro-Nazi German Minister in Hungary named Edmund Veesenmayer, the fate of Hungarian Jewry had been decided. Veesenmayer proceeded to appoint a pro-German Government that would ensure the exploitation of the Hungarian economy for the benefit of the Reich and which would also show a willingness to carry out with zeal Hitler's Final Solution in Hungary.[10] After much disagreement about the composition of the new Hungarian Government, it was finally decided that the 'defeatist' Premier Kallay was to be replaced by Dome Sztojay, a pro-Nazi who had previously agreed with the Nazis' implementation of the 'Final Solution' in Hungary.[11]

The German occupation of Hungary was reported in the British press on 21 March 1944. But not one paper studied for this day mentioned the word 'Jew' in its response to the occupation.[12] The next day the Jews figured in most of the papers studied, but references to them were hidden in reports about the occupation and appeared under headings that did not emphasise the Jews' plight. This reflected the press's natural preoccupation with military news. Humanitarian concerns, such as the then likely persecution of Hungarian Jewry, were not a priority for the press at this time. For instance, on 22 March a number of papers reported eyewitness accounts of German paratroopers landing on Hungarian airfields. In the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*, references to the Jews were found respectively under the headings: **Paratroops Sent In** and **They Used Paratroops**.[13] On 22 March the British press also gave prominence to the unorganised local resistance faced by the Hungarian invaders. Statements relating to the Jews in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* were found under the headings: **Scattered Fighting**[14] and **Resistance to Germans**.[15]

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[10] Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 1, 406-16.

[11] Sztojay was formerly the Hungarian Minister in Berlin. Dawidowicz, *The War Against The Jews*, 453. See also Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 1, 240. Also appointed to the new quisling regime were László Endre and László Baky as Secretaries of State. Ardent anti-Semites, Endre and Baky provided a legal basis for the anti-Jewish measures to be carried out in Hungary by SS and Hungarian 'dejewification' units. Ibid., 421-5.

[12] This notwithstanding, there were articles about the extermination of Jews in other European countries. For instance, on 21 March, an article appeared in *The Times* about the extermination of Jews in Rumania. But for reasons of space, the thesis must be restricted to analysing press responses to the Holocaust in Hungary.

[13] *Daily Express*, 22 March 1944, 4. *Daily Mirror*, 22 March 1944, 8.

[14] *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 1944, 1.

[15] *The Times*, 22 March 1944, 3.

In these reports on the German occupation, the space allotted to the Jews was relatively insignificant. In fact, more space was usually apportioned to the general subject of refugees, rather than specifically to the subject of the Jews. And when the suffering of the Jews was mentioned, it was usually referred to alongside the plight of Polish refugees; emphasis was sometimes placed on the latter. For instance, the *Daily Telegraph* found only five (of 122) lines for the subject of refugees. Here it gave emphasis to the plight of Polish refugees and seemed to misrepresent the likely fate of the Jews, arguing that their lot would be '(slave) labour ... in the Reich following the occupation of Hungary'. [16]

The *Daily Mirror* apportioned only 8 (of 103) lines to the subject of refugees, merely asserting in the last paragraph that a 'round-up' of Jews and Poles living in Hungary had begun.[17] In *The Times* only seven (of 59) lines were devoted to the refugees; it too emphasised the predicament of Polish refugees in Hungary. Only at the end of the article did it refer to the Jews, stating rather vaguely that 'the plight of Poles and Jews in Hungary will be desperate under German occupation'.[18]

Since Germany's occupation of Hungary, the press had been trying to understand why Hungary had been occupied whilst neighbouring Rumania had remained at least nominally independent. On 23 March the *Manchester Guardian*'s reference to the plight of the Hungarian Jews appeared under the heading **Hitler's Demands, How Antonescu and Horthy Answered**.[19] Here, the *Guardian* apportioned only 8 (of 59) lines to the Jews at the very bottom of the article, lamenting that 'one of the first consequences of the occupation of Hungary will be the persecution of the Jews ... their approximate total number being about 1,000,000'.[20] Of the papers studied for 23 March, only the *Guardian* referred to the plight of Hungarian Jewry.

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[16] *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 1944, 1. I have described the language here as deceptive because the *Telegraph* was the first paper to declare that the Nazis were embarking on a European-wide campaign to exterminate the Jews as early as June 1942, well before the rest of the press publicised the Nazis' plan to murder the European Jews in December of that year.
[17] *Daily Mirror*, 22 March 1944, 8.
[18] *The Times*, 22 March 1944, 3.
[19] Marshal Ion Antonescu was the Premier of Rumania during the Second World War. Before Admiral Horthy was summoned to Schloss Klessheim, Hitler first invited Marshal Antonescu to his headquarters and made the same demands to the Rumanian Premier that he later made to Horthy. Unlike Horthy, Antonescu acquiesced and avoided the fate suffered by Hungary. See the *Manchester Guardian*, 23 March 1944, 5.
[20] Ibid.

On 24 March the British press reported that Germany had occupied strategic military positions in the Balkan region necessary for the defence against the Russian onslaught. On this day the British press also gave the first indication that the new government in Hungary intended to 'eliminate' the Jews. Thus in the *Daily Mirror* this important information was placed at the bottom of an article titled **Hungarian passes occupied: HUNS SEIZE GATES TO THE WEST**.[21]

In the other newspapers studied, references to the Jews were similarly obscured from readers because they were placed under headlines that often emphasised unrelated subjects. On page one of the *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, the news that the Hungarian Jews were to be 'eliminated' appeared under the sub-heading **Budapest Curfew**, which referred to the recent German decree that residents of Budapest could not leave the capital of Hungary without holding 'special permits'. On page six of the *Telegraph* a smaller reference to the plight of the Jews was placed beneath the sub-title **Britons Captured**, which referred to the 600 Britons residing in Hungary feared captured by the new regime.[22] In *The Times* the reference to the Jews was located under the vague title **Hungarian Quisling's Task**, which referred to an announcement made by 'German commentators' that the incumbent Premier would purge all opposition elements in Hungary, the Jews included.[23]

The content and length of the references to the Jews in these reports varied with each paper studied. Perhaps more generous than most papers, the *Daily Telegraph* devoted 20 (of 97) lines of its page one article on the German occupation to the plight of Hungarian Jewry. After discussing the newly-imposed curfew in Budapest, the *Telegraph* wearily stated that 'The *usual* pogrom against the Jews has started'.[24] It then quoted two different sources confirming this observation, which should have indicated to the press that the destruction of Hungarian Jewry was

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[21]Although this headline was three columns wide, I have reduced the size to avoid giving it excessive emphasis here. *Daily Mirror*, 24 March 1944, 1.
[22] *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 1944, 1 and 6.
[23] *The Times*, 24 March 1944, 4.
[24] My emphasis. For the British press, 'pogrom' was probably the word that most closely reflected the plight of the Jews in Hungary (and indeed elsewhere in Europe) at the time. The word was commonly understood, however, to refer to sporadic mass violence against Jews in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, which sometimes had the tacit approval of the government and the involvement of military personnel. See Stephen M. Berk, *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope: Russian Jewry and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, No. 11, *Contributions in Ethnic Studies* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 64-8. See also John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34-5.

imminent. The first was the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture and Supply in Hungary, who stated unequivocally that 'a solution to the Jewish problem is absolutely necessary'. The *Daily Telegraph* then quoted a German news agency, which quite proudly declared that '1,000,000 Jews will be eliminated from the political and economic scene'.[25] Given that the Nazis' policy of mass extermination of Jews was by then well known in Britain, the phrases 'a solution to the Jewish question' and 'elimination from the political and economic scene' were most likely to have been interpreted by journalists as a euphemism for extermination. But there was no attempt here by the *Telegraph* to state categorically that the above-cited phrases meant that Hungary's Jews were to be exterminated.

The ambivalence of the *Telegraph* on this subject continued on page six, where it allotted 14 (of 132) lines to a speech made by the Hungarian Minister in Stockholm (Reviczky) about the plight of refugees in Hungary. Reviczky lamented that Sztojay would not intervene to defend the refugees, including 800,000 Jews, 'from the forced labour in Hitler's camps in Germany'.[26] There was no effort to correct the minister's false assumption here about the likely fate of Jews in Hungary. In its paragraph relating to the purge of opposition elements in Hungary, *The Times* employed an absurdly vague phrase to describe Sztojay's anti-Jewish measures when it stated that the new Premier wished to 'render the Hungarian Jews harmless'.[27] Here too there was no further comment on precisely what the fate of the Jews in Hungary would be. No paper studied thus far mentioned the word 'extermination' in their assessment of the danger that the German occupiers of Hungary posed for the Jews there.

In January 1944 President Roosevelt had commissioned the War Refugee Board (WRB), a government body committed to the rescue and relief of victims of Nazi tyranny. Soon after its establishment there was pressure on Roosevelt from the Board's members for a presidential declaration on German atrocities against Jews.[28] Although this suggestion had initially met with considerable resistance from the U.S. State Department,[29] the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March, which

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[25] *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 1944, 1.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] *The Times*, 24 March 1944, 4.
[28] John S. Conway, "Between Apprehension and Indifference - Allied Attitudes to the Destruction of Hungarian Jewry." *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 27 (1973/74): 38.
[29] Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 200-2.

placed in immediate danger the almost 800,000 strong Jewish community there, propelled the U.S. government into action. On 24 March Roosevelt held a press conference in Washington condemning Nazi and Japanese atrocities against innocent civilians and pledging to punish all crimes committed by Axis states against innocent civilians. A considerable part of the President's statement related directly to the impending threat facing the Jews of Hungary. Although the WRB had wanted the section pertaining to the Jews to appear in the first paragraph of Roosevelt's statement, in the final draft it was pushed into the fourth:[30]

> One of the blackest crimes in all history, begun by the Nazis in the days of peace and multiplied by them a hundred times in time of war, the wholesale and systematic murder of the Jews in Europe, goes on unabated every hour.
>
> As a result of the events of the last few days hundreds of thousands of Jews who, living under persecution, had at last found a haven from death in Hungary and the Balkans are now threatened with annihilation as Hitler's forces descend more heavily upon these lands.
>
> That these innocent people, who have already survived a decade of Hitler's fury, should perish on the very eve of a triumph over the barbarism which their persecution symbolises would be a major tragedy.
>
> It is therefore fitting that we should again proclaim our determination that none who participate in these acts of savagery shall go unpunished. The United Nations have made it clear that they will pursue the guilty and deliver them up in order that justice may be done.
>
> That warning applies not only to the leaders but also [to] their functionaries and subordinates in Germany and in the satellite countries. All who knowingly take part in the deportation of Jews to their death in Poland or Norwegians and French to their death in Germany are equally guilty with the executioner. All who share the guilt shall share the punishment.[31]

The next day most newspapers glossed over Roosevelt's comments on the Jews. In *The Times*, the U.S. President's discussion of the danger facing Hungarian Jewry was conspicuously absent from its coverage of the Washington press conference. It should be noted, however, that according to *The Times*'s official index, Roosevelt's comments on the Jews appeared in a separate article in an earlier edition.[32] The

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[30] Ibid., 203.

[31] Reported in the *Manchester Guardian* on 25 March 1944, 5. The *Guardian*'s coverage of Roosevelt's comments on the predicament of Hungarian Jewry is to be regarded as definitive. All of the other newspapers' responses to this conference will be compared with the *Guardian*'s coverage.

[32] See *The Official Index to The Times, January - March 1944*, (Printing House Square: The Times Publishing Company, 1968), 155.

Daily Telegraph's quotation of the President's speech was placed under the sub-heading **War Criminals Must Pay**, hence obscuring the plight of the Jews.[33] Similarly, the reference to the Jews in the *Daily Mirror* appeared under the main headline **FDR'S CALL TO GERMANY**, which referred to Roosevelt's promise to punish the perpetrators when the war ended.[34] In placing the President's comments relating to the Jews under the heading **One of History's Blackest Crimes**,[35] the *Manchester Guardian* came closer than any of the papers studied to emphasising the plight of Hungarian Jewry, as expressed by Roosevelt.[36]

Most of the newspapers studied did not quote extensively from Roosevelt's statement about the threat of extermination facing the Jews in Hungary. The *Daily Mirror*, for instance, ignored most of Roosevelt's comments relating specifically to the Jews. It merely devoted 9 (of 41) lines to the section in which the American President promised that those who 'knowingly take part in the deportation of Jews to their death in Poland' would face retribution at the end of the war.[37] The *Daily Telegraph* quoted most of the President's comments on the Jews, but, like most of the press, failed to provide any further comment.[38] The *Manchester Guardian*, allotting 21 (of 144) lines, provided by far the most comprehensive coverage of Roosevelt's statements about the threat of extermination facing Hungarian Jewry, quoting it in full.[39] Yet the press almost universally provided no editorial comment to highlight the plight of the Jews.[40]

On the same day the press also discussed the reasons given by the German chargé d'affaires in Budapest for Hitler's decision to invade Hungary. According to most newspapers, the primary reason was to preclude the Kallay Government from 'jeopardizing the safety' of Germany by allowing Hungary to leave the Axis.[41] A significant, but less important, reason was to assure the 'safety' of German troops in the Balkans by removing the Jewish 'threat' in Hungary. But references to the Jews

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[33] *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1944, 3.
[34] *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1944, 1.
[35] This, of course, was taken from the first sentence of Roosevelt's statement in relation to the plight of the Balkan Jews.
[36] *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1944, 5.
[37] *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1944, 1. The *Daily Express* reported Roosevelt's conference on page one, but it similarly failed to give prominence to the threat facing Hungarian Jewry.
[38] *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1944, 3.
[39] *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1944, 5.
[40] In the wake of Eden's speech in the House of Commons on 5 July which condemned the extermination of Hungarian Jewry, both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* responded with substantial editorial articles. Refer to page 46-7 for an analysis of these articles.
[41] *Daily Telegraph*, March 25 1944, 4.

in the press were often lost under headings that were vague and gave no indication that the liquidation of the Jews was imminent in Hungary. Thus in *The Times* the 'threat' posed by Hungarian Jewry to German troops appeared under the subheading **Safety Jeopardized**, and in the *Daily Telegraph* it was located under a similar subheading: **Steps To Occupation**.[42] In the *Manchester Guardian*, however, this news was located directly beneath the coverage of Roosevelt's press conference on refugees, and received a headline spanning two columns:

THE JEWISH REGUGEES IN THE BALKANS

In the *Manchester Guardian* this news formed the basis for a substantial 56-line article. Here it was acknowledged that the Kallay Government's failure to solve the 'Jewish question' was not a primary reason for the occupation, but the *Guardian* recognised that the Germans had pressed the Hungarian Government previously to 'adopt towards the Jews the policy of deportation and mass murder practised by themselves'. It then lamented that 'Now the Germans will certainly set about the extermination of the Jews in these countries, beginning with those who have fled from persecution elsewhere...'.[43] This was the first time that a British newspaper had stated unequivocally that the fate of the Jews residing in Hungary would be wholesale extermination.

The *Manchester Guardian*'s coverage of this story stood in sharp contrast to that offered by *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. As their headlines indicate, these papers only devoted a fraction of their articles to the Jews. *The Times* apportioned only 7 (of 73) lines to the 'danger' posed to German troops in Hungary by what were considered to be opposition elements, including the 1,000,000 strong Jewish community still existing there. It was asserted in *The Times* that 'the German Government could not tolerate the safety of German troops being risked by the presence in Hungary of 1,000,000 Jews (among other opposition elements) behind the Russian front and in the Balkans'.[44] But there was no further discussion or indeed emphasis of the likely persecution that would be directed against the Jews

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[42] *The Times*, 25 March 1944, 3. *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1944, 4. The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express* did not pick up this story.
[43] *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1944, 5.
[44] *The Times*, 25 March 1944, 3.

under German occupation. Furthermore, the somewhat bizarre notion that the Jews were 'belligerents' was not rejected out of hand by *The Times*. The wording of this 'excuse' for the German occupation of Hungary was virtually identical in the *Daily Telegraph*.[45]

Two days later *The Times* responded to Roosevelt's press conference under the heading **GERMAN PURGE IN HUNGARY: FOOD FOR THE REICH**. In the third column of page four, the main news page (especially relating to the war), *The Times* reported that a systematic purge of opposition elements in 'the administrative services, public life and organs of opinion was being carried out in Hungary'. In the next paragraph it expanded on the likely treatment that the Jews of Hungary would endure under the German occupation, which received 18 (of 45) lines:

> There are 1,000,000 Jews in [Hungary], and they face persecution of the most savage kind ... President's Roosevelt's pledge that the German authors and their Hungarian, Rumanian, and other accomplices will be brought to account and his appeal to the free peoples to open their frontiers to the refugees are timely. There is only too much reason to fear, however, that the enemy will not be deterred by warnings from the extermination on which he is clearly bent.[46]

The article then returned to the theme indicated by the headline, namely that one of the reasons for the German occupation of Hungary was the 'requisitioning of foodstuffs' to subsidise the food supplies lost in Russia. Anyone interested in the plight of the Hungarian Jews could not be blamed if they overlooked the above-cited excerpt on the threat facing Hungarian Jewry.

In the same issue *The Times* referred to the welcoming of Roosevelt's declaration on 24 March by Miss Eleanor Rathbone, a member of the National Committee for the rescue from Nazi Terror. It appeared under the heading:

MR. ROOSEVELT AND THE PERSECUTED JEWS

NEW MENACE IN BALKANS

[45] *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1944, 4.
[46] *The Times*, 27 March 1944, 4.

Although this article summarised Roosevelt's comments in relation to the Jews, the size and location of the article virtually obscured the news item from the reader. It was placed in the middle of the third column of page 8, underneath a letter to the editor urging the Government to increase farming subsidies and to the left of the weekend sporting results, thus removing the news item from the context of war news.[47]

Since early March 1944 the British Government had been pressured by Jewish groups to issue a new Allied declaration condemning German anti-Jewish atrocities. The Foreign Office was opposed to this suggestion, arguing that such a formal statement would 'debase the currency' of previous declarations. It did not, however, exclude the possibility of issuing a declaration to Germany's satellites.[48] After Germany had occupied Hungary and in the wake of Roosevelt's 24 March declaration in Washington, the British Government felt obliged to issue its own statement.[49] On 30 March the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden made a prepared speech in the House of Commons after being asked by a Member of Parliament (Sidney Silverman) 'if he [Eden] had any statement to make in relation to the urgent and immediate peril which now faces the Jews and other refugees in these [Balkan] countries'.[50]

> Mr. Eden: Evidence continues to reach us and the Allied Governments that the Nazi policy of extermination has not been halted. The persecution of the Jews has in particular been of unexampled horror and intensity. On that the Government, in common with their allies, now that the hour of Germany's defeat grows nearer and more certain, can only repeat their detestation of Germany's crimes and their determination that all those guilty of them shall be brought to justice.
>
> Apart from direct guilt there is still indirect participation in crime. Satellite Governments which expel citizens to destinations named by Berlin must know that such actions are tantamount to assisting in the inhuman persecution. This will not be forgotten when the inevitable defeat of the arch-enemy of Europe comes about.[51]

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[47] Ibid., 8.
[48] Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 182.
[49] Conway, "Between Apprehension and Indifference," 38.
[50] *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1944, 3. Like its coverage of Roosevelt's press conference above, the *Manchester Guardian*'s coverage of Eden's prepared speech has been regarded as definitive.
[51] Ibid.

Several members of parliament asked Eden some relevant follow-up questions, mainly about the issue of Jewish migration to Palestine. In responding Eden promised to ensure that Germany and its satellite countries heard his declaration, and he defended the British Government's immigration policy.[52]

Of the four papers that reported Eden's declaration the next day, only the *Daily Telegraph* actually referred to the Jews in its headline **MR. EDEN WARNS ENEMY ON JEWISH PERSECUTION: Deeds Not Forgotten on Day of Reckoning**.[53] Furthermore (as indicated by the *Telegraph*'s headline cited above) most of the press neglected to emphasise the word 'extermination' in their headlines, this perhaps being the result of Eden's usage of it only once in his declaration; thereafter he characterised European Jewry's fate as 'persecution,' and this was reflected on 31 March in some of the papers studied.

Although it provided the most comprehensive coverage of Eden's declaration, the *Manchester Guardian* only hinted at the persecution of the Jews in its headline **THE REFUGEES IN HUNGARY: Mr. Eden's Warning**.[54] *The Times* evaded making reference to the Jews by focusing on the perpetrators in its heading **NAZI PERSECUTION IN THE BALKANS: Warning to Satellites**.[55] The *Daily Express* did not even report Eden's declaration, whilst the *Daily Mirror* gave emphasis to the subject of Allied retribution after the war, in its sensationalist headline **HUNS' PUPPET THUGS WILL BE MADE TO PAY, EDEN WARNS**.[56]

The content of the declaration was dealt with differently by the papers studied, but seemed to be treated with much less importance by the mass circulation press than in the 'establishment' papers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, which quoted Eden's speech more extensively. The *Daily Telegraph* reported the speech prominently in a 79-line article at the top of page three, quoting in full Eden's comments pertaining to the Jews residing in Hungary.[57] Much less prominence was given to Eden's declaration in *The Times*; even though it did devote 67 lines to this subject and printed the entire statement read out by the Foreign

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[52] Ibid.
[53] *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1944, 3.
[54] *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1944, 3.
[55] *The Times*, 31 March 1944, 8.
[56] *Daily Mirror*, 31 March 1944, 2.
[57] *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1944, 3.

Secretary relating to the Jews, it appeared at the bottom of the second column on page 8.[58] This was the page usually devoted to parliamentary question time, and may have been located in a more appropriate location (such as the war news page), given the critical nature of Eden's declaration.

In the *Daily Mirror* Eden's speech was reported in the last column at the bottom of page two. In this short article of 24 lines the *Daily Mirror* merely cited Eden's statement that 'the Nazi policy of extermination had not been halted,' and gave emphasis in the article to Eden's promise that punishment awaited the perpetrators. Directly above this article appeared a news item about an American woman who had been unaware of her pregnancy until she went into labour. This story received headlines spanning two columns, whereas Eden's declaration that the Jews of Hungary were threatened with extermination was slotted into a single column at the bottom of the page.[59] Like the press's response to Roosevelt's Washington conference six days earlier, none of the above-mentioned papers offered any further comment on this subject.

The *Manchester Guardian*, however, devoted 112 lines to Eden's declaration, quoting it in full at the top of page three.[60] Of the papers studied, it alone printed two more articles that gave further emphasis to the danger facing Hungarian Jewry. Below Eden's declaration appeared a small 22-line article titled: **MILLION JEWS IN HUNGARY IN PERIL**. It quoted a statement made by the World Jewish Congress in London on the day before, which 'expresse[d] its warm appreciation of the declaration made by Mr. Eden'. The Congress stated that:

> The declaration, with that made by the President of the United States, comes at a time when another great section of the fast disappearing European Jewry is threatened by the overwhelming terror of Nazi ferocity directed against the Jews. The German occupation of Hungary places nearly 1,000,000 Jews at the mercy of the Germans.[61]

The Congress appreciated in particular Eden's assurance that the British Government was committed to rescuing the Jews and quoted his comments to that

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[58] *The Times*, 31 March 1944, 8.
[59] *Daily Mirror*, 31 March 1944, 2.
[60] *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1944, 3.
[61] Ibid.

effect. This statement issued by the World Jewish Congress did not appear in any of the other newspapers studied.[62]

In the same issue a 38-line editorial article about the threat facing the Jews of Hungary appeared in the second column of page four. Titled **THE TERROR IN HUNGARY**, it asserted unequivocally that all political opponents of Hitler in Hungary were being rounded-up and that 'the Jews, because they are Jews and whether they have taken part in politics or not, will be exterminated'. The author then used Eden's declaration to highlight for the reader the perilous position of the Jews in Hungary:

> Little now appears in the press about the massacre of the Jews, but the truth is, as Mr. Eden said yesterday, that the extermination goes on with "unexampled horror and intensity". It is mostly carried out in Poland, to which Jews from all other parts - and always among them young children torn from their families with the most loathsome barbarity - are continuously drafted.... Mr. Eden did what words can do to warn the criminals of the punishment intended for them, and to tell all those who show mercy that their action will not be forgotten in the day of retribution.[63]

This was perhaps the most explicit reference made by a British newspaper about the likely treatment of Hungarian Jewry. It is clear that the British Government's initiative in issuing a public statement condemning Nazi atrocities had a significant impact on the *Guardian* and should have led to more substantive responses in other British newspapers. Despite the clarity of its response to Eden's declaration, the *Guardian* seemed reluctant to refer to the Jews in the headline of the above-cited article.

Reilly and Kushner were correct to argue that the press took relatively little interest in the plight of the Jews in 1944. It is evident, for instance, that the British press, in particular the mass circulation papers like the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*, rarely considered the impending Jewish tragedy in Hungary worthy of a headline or a significant percentage of news space dedicated solely to the plight of Hungarian Jewry. Nor did most papers studied offer a lucid explanation of the treatment that Hungarian Jewry would suffer under German occupation -

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[62] Ibid.
[63] *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1944, 4.

deportation to Poland and extermination in death camps. Although the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* did exhibit more concern for Hungarian Jewry than the mass circulation dailies, even they failed to report this subject prominently. And the recognition by *The Times* and the *Telegraph* (sometimes along with the *Mirror* and the *Express*) of the danger posed to Hungarian Jewry usually came in the wake of official responses in Britain and America. Furthermore, these official responses sometimes shaped reports. Some newspapers, for instance, used the word 'persecution' in their headlines as opposed to 'extermination'; a term employed by Eden himself in the House of Commons on 30 March. Only the *Manchester Guardian* reported the plight of Hungarian Jewry with relative prominence and only it offered substantial editorial comment to highlight the danger facing the Jews of Hungary. Thus it seems that, for readers of most British newspapers, revelations later in 1944 that Hungarian Jewry was being systematically exterminated may have come as a surprise. And if this was due partly to what Laqueur describes as the inability of people to sympathise 'with the fate of millions,'[64] then it was also due to the failure of newspapers, with the exception of the *Guardian*, to give the pending extermination of Hungarian Jewry adequate space and prominence.

[64] Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 204.

Chapter 3

'Worse Than Dachau':[1] The British Press and the Extermination of Hungarian Jewry at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 27 June - 20 July 1944.

> To carry out the deportations of the Jews, Eichmann divided Hungary into six zones ... With the participation of a Sondereinsatzkommando (special-duty commando) that Eichmann had brought from Mauthausen and with the help of the Hungarian police, the Germans began to round up the Jews, concentrating them within the designated zones and deporting them in rapid order ... By 7 July over 437,000 Jews, including some 50,000 from Budapest, had been deported to Auschwitz.[2]

At the end of June 1944 the news reached London that Hungarian Jewry was being exterminated at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. This chapter will examine whether the extermination of the Hungarian Jews was reported soon after the information was available, or whether, as in the case of the German occupation of Hungary, the press waited for Allied leaders to take the first step in bringing this news to the public's attention before reporting it. This chapter examines the claim of Kushner and Reilly that the press was 'bored with atrocity stories' by 1944.[3] Was Kushner also right in arguing that the extermination of Hungarian Jewry 'elicited next to no ... press interest'?[4]

Auschwitz played its most decisive role in what is now called the Holocaust when Hungarian Jewry was exterminated there towards the end of the Second World War. During the first two years of its existence Auschwitz was a massive concentration camp and the majority of its inmates were non-Jewish.[5] From early

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[1] *The Times*, 8 July 1944, 3.

[2] Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews 1933-45* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 455-6. Hungary's Regent, Admiral Horthy, halted the deportations on 7 July after several appeals by prominent public figures including the King of Sweden and the Pope asking for the killing to be stopped. Whilst Horthy's cessation of the deportation of Jews came too late for Hungary's provincial Jews, the Jewish community in Budapest remained relatively intact. See John S. Conway, "Between Apprehension and Indifference," 43.

[3] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 258; and Reilly, *Belsen*, 54.

[4] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 256.

[5] In fact most prisoners in Auschwitz at the beginning of May 1941 were Poles. In October 1941 work had begun on a new division of Auschwitz a few kilometres away from the original camp, called Auschwitz II or Birkenau (in Polish, Brzezinka). Himmler had ordered the construction of Birkenau in March 1941 in anticipation of large numbers of Soviet prisoners of war that were expected in the wake of Hitler's planned invasion of Russia in the months ahead. After hundreds of Soviet prisoners had been killed by Zyklon B gas in September 1941, the commandant of Auschwitz Rudolf Höss envisioned a way to murder Europe's Jews *en masse*. A large industrial camp was also set up nearby at Monowitz (or Auschwitz III) which was designated for synthetic-rubber works to contribute to the German war effort; a vast network of sub-camps affiliated with Auschwitz III were also set up to exploit the masses of slave labour at the Nazis' disposal. See Shmuel Krakowski and

1942 until December of that year, when the campaign to destroy systematically the Jews of Europe by means of poison gas was well underway, only about eleven percent of Jews deported to death camps went to Auschwitz in Polish Upper Silesia, whilst the relatively smaller camps in the Polish General Government received approximately eighty per cent of Jewish deportees.[6]

By mid-1943 Birkenau (or Auschwitz II) had four large gas chambers operational with attached crematoria to incinerate the corpses of massive numbers of Jewish dead. Located near railway tracks that linked the camp to countries all over occupied Europe, Auschwitz was a prime location for the reception and murder of European Jewry. But it was not until March 1944 - with the German occupation of Hungary and the ensuing mass deportations to Auschwitz - that the full weight of the destruction machinery at Birkenau descended upon the Jews.[7]

The anti-Jewish measures that had previously been implemented in Nazi-occupied Europe were introduced at a rapid rate in Hungary following the German occupation in March 1944. The telltale signs that had foreshadowed the extermination of Jews elsewhere in Europe, the mandatory wearing of the yellow star and the expropriation of Jewish property, soon followed.[8] Not long after it was decreed that the Jews were to be isolated from the gentile population of Hungary and temporarily resettled in ghettos, after which they were to be deported to Poland.[9] The ghettos in the areas closest to the Russian front were emptied of Jews

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Jozef Buszko, "Auschwitz," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 107. See also Yisrael Gutman, "Auschwitz - An Overview," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), 16-19; and Raul Hilberg, "Auschwitz and the Final Solution," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), 84-5.

[6]According to Hilberg, this was mainly because the locations from which Jews were sent to Auschwitz were often in countries over which the Germans did not have absolute control. Some categories of Jews from these places were therefore exempted from deportation and, in the case of some Balkan countries such as Bulgaria, governments were often reluctant to hand over their Jews to the Nazis for extermination. See Hilberg, "Auschwitz and the Final Solution," 87.

[7]A new railway track was constructed which led directly to the gas chambers and large pits were dug nearby to facilitate the speedy disposal of bodies. See Hilberg, "Auschwitz and the Final Solution," 87-8. See also Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 2, 780-1.

[8] Andor Jaross, the new Minister of the Interior in Hungary, officially prescribed the identification of the Jews by the yellow star on 5 April 1944. The financial robbery of Hungarian Jewry was facilitated by the racial laws enacted on 15 April, which allowed the approximately 800,000 Hungarian Jews to be officially identified as Jews who thus could easily be deprived of their property. See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 523-6 and 545-8.

[9] Because the number of SS deployed in Hungary was rather small, Eichmann's *Sonderkommando* unit was wholly dependent on the participation of the Hungarians for the Holocaust to be successful there. Indeed, without the aid of the Hungarian Government, police and gendarmes, the 'Final

first, beginning with what was called Zone One, which incorporated northeastern Hungary and the occupied territory of Carpatho-Ruthenia.[10] Although relatively small-scale deportations of Jews from the ghettos in Hungary to Poland had begun in April 1944, large-scale deportations did not begin until 15 May. Within just a number of weeks, hundreds of thousands of Jews had been deported to Poland, where most had been gassed on arrival at Auschwitz.[11]

Although Auschwitz was known by Allied Governments to have been a concentration camp in which, since its inception, many people had been brutalised and killed, until late June 1944 the role that it played in the Final Solution had not been revealed to the West.[12] The news of the mass killings of Jews at Auschwitz became known to the West at the end of June 1944, after two inmates from the Polish death camp escaped to their hometown in neighbouring Slovakia during April of that year. Leaders of the Slovakian Jewish community compiled from the escapees' testimonies a report which detailed in full the systematic process by which European Jews were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau, including the use of gas chambers to kill Jews and the incineration of their bodies in crematoria.[13] According to one of the escapees after the war (Walter Rosenberg), the report was

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Solution' could not have been carried out in Hungary. On 19 April 1944, a clandestine order was issued by the Secretary of State László Baky asking for the close cooperation between Hungary and Germany in pursuit of the solution of the Jewish Question in Hungary. It is also worth noting that the lists from which the Jews were to be selected for ghettoisation were to be complied by the local Jewish authorities. Ibid., 572-83.

[10] Hungary occupied Carpatho-Ruthenia (which in 1938 was self-governed within the Czechoslovak Federal Republic) on 13 March 1939, and thus brought just over 78,000 Jews under Hungarian control. Ibid., 148-50.

[11] According to reports received by the German Foreign Office from Edmund Veesenmayer, the German Minister in Hungary during the occupation, all of the 289,357 Jews from Zones I and II had been deported to Poland by June 7 (or in 24 days) at a rate of about four trains per day, each of which carried approximately 3,000 people. Ibid., 671-3.

[12] As early as May 1941, reports of German brutality in Poland were contained in a 'Polish Note' to all Allied Governments. One of the appendices to the Note was devoted to the inhuman treatment of Auschwitz internees at the hands of Germans. At the end of the appendix it was stated that of all the groups interned in Auschwitz the Jews received the worst treatment. It reported that in Auschwitz beatings and other acts of cruelty such as burning victims alive in crematoria were a common phenomenon. It ended by stating that in December 1940 hundreds of death notices for Auschwitz prisoners had been distributed to relatives from post offices in Warsaw. See Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 15.

[13] Typically referred to as the 'Vrba and Wetzler report,' it was compiled from the testimony of Walter Rosenberg (he used the name Vrba on his counterfeit papers prepared in Slovakia) and Alfred Wetzler after the duo's escape from Auschwitz on April 7, 1944. See Miroslav Karny, "The Vrba and Wetzler Report," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), 553-68.

compiled to alert the Jews of Hungary of their likely fate at Auschwitz-Birkenau.[14] Towards the end of June the Salvadoran ambassador in Geneva received a copy of the report from Budapest, which included information on the fate of the deported Hungarian Jews. A correspondent of *Exchange Press* (Walter Garret) in Zurich transmitted this information to London on 24 June 1944.[15]

On 27 June the mass extermination of Hungarian Jewry in the gas chambers of Auschwitz was revealed for the first time by the British press in two articles appearing in the *Manchester Guardian*. The first report appeared two days after Garret's telegram reached London on 25 June, and was printed near the top of page four under the title **The Massacre of Jews**. Two pages over this news was repeated, but here the **FATE OF JEWS IN HUNGARY** was emphasised.[16]

In the first report of 27 June (on page four) the *Guardian* revealed in an impersonal tone that 'in the Oswiecim concentration camp[17] the Germans are now gassing and slaughtering the remnants of Polish Jews' and asserted that 'one hundred thousand Hungarian Jews had been brought [there] and slaughtered ... in the course of May'.[18] On its page six report the *Guardian* attested to the veracity of this news by reminding its readers that Germany had always been open about its intention to exterminate the Jews of Hungary and that it had been disappointed at Hungary's reluctance to comply with Germany's anti-Jewish intentions.[19]

On 27 June the World Jewish Congress (WJC) held a press conference that provided some specific details about the deportation and extermination of Hungarian Jewry:

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[14]John Conway, "The First Report About Auschwitz." *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 1 (1984): 135-7. It should be noted that Karny disagrees with Conway here about the latter's assertion that the Vrba and Wetzler report made reference to the impending extermination of Hungarian Jewry. Rather, Karny argues that the escapees from Auschwitz were more concerned with the imminent arrival of 'big transports of Greece's Jews' at Birkenau at the time of their escape. Later the testimonies of two other escapees from Auschwitz (Arnost Rosin and Czezlaw Mordowicz) were attached to the Vrba and Wetzler report, which detailed the beginnings of the mass slaughter of Hungarian Jewry at Auschwitz. See Karny, "The Vrba and Wetzler Report," 560. The reception of these reports by Jewish leaders and by the Allies is a protracted and complex story and unfortunately there is not room to discuss it fully here.

[15] Conway, "The First Report About Auschwitz," 144-5.

[16] *Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1944, 4 and 6.

[17] The British press used the word 'Oswiecim,' the Polish spelling of 'Auschwitz', in its news reports.

[18]The source of the report was 'the Jewish underground labour movement,' which had reached the National Council of the Polish Government-in-Exile. The *Guardian* noted at the end of the article that the Polish Government-in-Exile was considering various rescue options, including 'an appeal to the Vatican'. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1944, 4.

[19] Ibid., 6.

> The World Jewish Congress has been informed ... that 100,000 Jews, recently deported from Hungary to Poland, have been slaughtered by mass gassing in the lethal chambers of the notorious German death-camp in Polish Galicia.
>
> News reached the (WJC) on June 17 that in the period from May 15 to May 27 the Germans transported from Hungary 62 railway trucks laden with Jewish children, aged between two and nine years, and that six railway trains laden with Jewish adults passed daily through the station of Plaszow, near Cracow, bound for an unknown destination ... The 800,000 Jews in Hungary, the largest single Jewish community left in Europe, are now in the most imminent peril ... The Germans ... are engaged upon the systematic and deliberate murder of Jewish civilian men, women and children ... The Jewish victims of Nazi mass-murder in Europe now number nearly 4,000,000.[20]

The *Guardian*'s coverage of the WJC statement the next day received 60 lines on page eight and appeared under the bold title: **MASS MURDER OF JEWS**. It is interesting to note here, however, that the 'German death-camp in Polish Galicia' was not identified as Oswiecim. The rest of the press remained silent whilst the *Guardian* offered exclusive coverage of this WJC statement.[21]

Similarly, over the next week, the *Guardian* was almost alone in its reporting of the plight of Hungarian Jewry. On 1 July it drew attention to the brutality of the measures then being applied against the Jews in Hungary under a bold headline which read: **HUNGARY'S JEWS: Extermination with the Most Ruthless Cruelty**.[22] On 4 July the story was continued under an even more daring title which also hinted at the role of Auschwitz in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry: **MASS SLAUGHTER OF HUNGARIAN JEWS: A Notorious Camp**.[23] But on 5 July the first editorial article on this subject was placed under a rather vague heading: **"Major Tragedy."**[24]

In its 1 July report the *Guardian* emphasised the methodical nature of the anti-Jewish drive in Hungary on page six in a 28-line article:

> [The 400,000 Jews in the provinces of Hungary] have been already "liquidated", which means that the younger ones have been sent to labour camps, where they are made to work under conditions of appalling harshness, and the rest of them have been dispatched in sealed wagons to Poland to extermination camps

[20] Reported in the *Manchester Guardian* on 28 June 1944, 8.
[21] Ibid., 8.
[22] Ibid., 1 July 1944, 6.
[23] Ibid., 4 July 1944, 6.
[24] Ibid., 5 July 1944, 4.

> where they are put to death with the most horrid systems of wholesale massacre that the sadistic Nazi mind can design.[25]

A similar report to the one cited above appeared in the earliest edition of *The Times*, which also emphasised the murder of Hungarian Jews in gas chambers.[26] On 4 July the *Guardian* reminded its readers of Hungarian Jewry's fate in a 63-line article. Here it repeated the figure of 100,000 as the number of Jews killed at Oswiecim and asserted that the Germans had planned at the end of April 1944 for a daily quota of 6,000 to 8,000 'inhabitants of the Hungarian ghettos' to be deported to Poland. This article also provided a useful history of Auschwitz and discussed the experiences of Czechoslovakian Jews in that particular camp:

> Polish authorities have long ago drawn attention to the existence of the camp at Oswiecim where, since June, 1940, innumerable victims from all the occupied countries have met their fate ... A Polish underground paper ... describes how Jews from Terecin, the Jewish concentration camp in Bohemia, were sent to Oswiecim for extermination.
>
> 'Last year the Germans sent away two batches of Jews, numbering about six thousand people, to Oswiecim. They were treated suspiciously well at first, being allowed to remain in their family groups and live together in the camp without having to work ... After a few months an order came from Berlin that room was to be made for new arrivals from Theresienstadt. Following this order about 3,800, including doctors and all other personnel and also children, were sent to the gas chamber.'[27]

On 5 July the *Manchester Guardian* printed its first editorial response on the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in a 35-line article on page 4. Here it drew attention to the appeals made by world leaders pleading with Hungary to prevent the murder of the Jews, including a recent invocation by the King of Sweden who, '"in the name of humanity" [asked Horthy] to use his influence to save Hungarian Jews from further persecution'. The *Guardian* urged the Allied leaders to move beyond mere statements and 'join in the effort to prevent the extermination of the last considerable body of Jews in Central Europe'. The *Guardian* then reminded its readers of the dire predicament of the Hungarian Jews and offered some practical

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[25] *Manchester Guardian*, 1 July 1944, 6.
[26] See *The Official Index to The Times, July - September 1944*, 153.
[27] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1944.

measures to be taken by the Allies to save what was left of the Jewish community in Hungary:

> Since his [Roosevelt's] warning ... the Jews have been expropriated and segregated [in ghettos], and many thousands of them have been deported to Poland to extermination camps.... A stern warning by the heads of the three States, Britain, the United States, and Russia, of what will happen to the persecutors is called for. We have the means, through leaflets dropped by our bombers, of reaching the Hungarian people. Why delay?[28]

The rest of the press made a belated response to the news of the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in the wake of a number of Allied statements related to this subject, reported in British newspapers between 6 and 15 July 1944. On 4 July a summarised version of the Vrba and Wetzler report was received by the Foreign Office; it comprised eight detailed pages on the conditions and extermination procedures at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which had been sent from Geneva to a London member of the Czechoslovakian Government-in-Exile. Added to the report was information concerning the deportation to Auschwitz of Jews from Hungarian-controlled Ruthenia and Transylvania. The report had been sent with an appeal to the Allies to denounce the Germans for their crimes at Auschwitz in an official statement.[29]

Although in a War Cabinet meeting on 3 July (the day before the summary of the Vrba and Wetzler report reached the Foreign Office) Eden had baulked at the idea of issuing a fresh statement on German crimes against Jews, he was forced to confront this thorny issue once more in the House of Commons on 5 July:

> Mr. SILVERMAN ... asked the Foreign Secretary whether he had any information as to the mass deportation of Jews from Hungary to Poland for the purpose of massacre and whether he could say how many had been slaughtered in this way in recent weeks and whether the United Nations could take any steps to prevent in the moment of victory the total annihilation of European Jewry in Hitlerite Germany.
> Mr. EDEN: I have no definite information, though there are, I regret to say, strong indications from various reliable sources that the German and Hungarian authorities have already begun these

[28] Ibid., 5 July, 4. On the same day, in a 6-line article towards the bottom of the second last column on page five, the *Manchester Guardian* repeated the news of the King of Sweden's appeal to Horthy to 'use his influence to save Hungarian Jews from further persecution'. In *The Times*, an almost identical 5-line article appeared at the bottom of the third column of page three.
[29] This report is quoted in full in Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 262-4.

> barbarous deportations and that in the course of them many persons have been killed. There are unfortunately no signs that the repeated declarations made by H.M. Government in association with the other United Nations of their intention to punish the instigators and perpetrators of these frightful crimes have moved the German Government and their Hungarian accomplices either to allow the deportation [sic][30] of even a small number of their victims or to abate their persecution. The principal hope of the termination of this tragic state of affairs must remain the speedy victory of the Allied nations.
>
> Mr. SILVERMAN: Does such information as you have tend to confirm the figures given in some quarters that in recent days the number deported was 400,000, of whom the number killed was already 100,000 ...?
>
> Mr. EDEN: I have not heard of the last part. In this terrible business I would rather not give figures unless one is absolutely sure, because it is bad enough, God knows, without doing that. We have done and shall do all that we can. The Pope made representations a little time ago and the King of Sweden has also made an appeal. The action and attitude of the Hungarian Government is one which fills this country with loathing.[31]

Eden's response to these questions was given relatively widespread coverage in the British press, with the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* reporting it on 6 July with varying degrees of prominence. In the *Manchester Guardian* for instance, the above-cited parliamentary discussion was quoted in full and printed at the top of page three under the arresting headline: **MASSACRE OF JEWS: Mr. Eden and "Barbarous Deportations"**.[32] In *The Times* Eden's discussion of the Hungarian Jews was also quoted in full, receiving 81 lines and appearing under a similarly bold heading: **MASSACRE OF THE JEWS: DEPORTATIONS FROM HUNGARY**.[33] But here Eden's statements about the extermination of Hungarian Jewry were located in the section devoted to parliamentary discussions on page eight, and appeared below a debate on the issue of civil administration in the liberated areas of France. In the *Daily Telegraph*, this issue was apportioned 37 lines and printed at the top of the parliamentary section, under a heading which clearly revealed how the *Telegraph*'s concern with the extermination of the Jews was subordinated to its preoccupation with flying bombs:

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[30] In *The Times* the word used here was 'departure'. *The Times*, 6 July 1944, 8.
[31] *Manchester Guardian*, 6 July 1944, 3.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *The Times*, 6 July 1944, 8.

MR. EDEN DENIES SPAIN AIDED FLYING BOMBS

JEWISH DEPORTATIONS: HUNGARY DENOUNCED[34]

Whilst the placement of Eden's comments in the parliamentary sections of *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* may have obscured the deportation and extermination of Hungarian Jewry from their readers, on the same day the above-mentioned newspapers each printed editorials on this subject which were of a considerable length. In the former the persecution of Hungarian Jewry appeared under the unimaginative but clear title **The Jews of Hungary**,[35] whilst in the latter this subject was located under the more emotive heading "**FRIGHTFUL CRIMES**".[36]

For *The Times* it was tragic that before the German occupation Hungarian Jewry had 'constituted the largest single Jewish community left in Europe,' and until the establishment of the 'traitor Government' the Jews had been comparatively well regarded by the 'Magyar' (or indigenous Hungarian) population. It also lamented that 'neither the representations of the Pope nor the recent appeal by the King of Sweden to the Hungarian Regent' had prevented the murder of the Hungarian Jews.[37] In the *Daily Telegraph* the language was more emotive, beginning its editorial article with: 'In all the annals of persecution, black as their record through the centuries has been, there is no parallel to the mass murder of Jews that was the subject of MR EDEN's statement in parliament yesterday.' The other main difference was that in the *Telegraph* there was quite a discernible government position, when for example it defended Eden's claim that he could give no definite figures of the numbers deported from Hungary (despite the Foreign Office having received a summarised version of the Vrba and Wetzler report the day before). The *Telegraph*'s pro-government position was also noticeable when it asserted that: 'The

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[34] *Daily Telegraph*, 6 July 1944.
[35] *The Times*, 6 July 1944, 5.
[36] *Daily Telegraph*, 4. The headline, 'Frightful Crimes,' is taken from Eden's answer to Silverman's question in parliament. Refer to Eden's speech on page 45 above.
[37] *The Times*, 6 July 1944, 5.

only hope of stopping the butchery lies in the speedy victory of the Allied Nations.'[38]

On 6 July the British Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, issued a statement in which he both asserted that Germany's defeat by the Allies was certain and castigated the German General Staff and the German people for the extermination of Hungarian Jewry:

> One would think that in the last fortnight or so most of the members of the Government would have been greatly preoccupied by these flying bombs ... I can tell you that we have another preoccupation, to some of us a great preoccupation, and that is the dreadful situation in Hungary today
> .... What the Germans are doing is nothing less than setting up abattoirs in Europe into which are shepherded thousands of Jews. They are dispatched with the sort of brutal efficiency in which the Prussians delight. This is the biggest scandal in the history of human crime, and the responsibility rests with German people. They may shuffle later on, and say, "Oh, it is the wicked Nazis." The German people have the responsibility, and also the German General Staff, who could have stopped it. I hope that when the time comes for exemplary punishment of the people responsible for these outrages the German General Staff will be the first to be dealt with.[39]

The next day *The Times* printed Bracken's statements in relation to the Jews in the third column of page two, below an article on the issue of voting procedures for members of the armed forces, and was located under the heading **MASSACRED JEWS IN HUNGARY: MR. BRENDAN BRACKEN'S CONDEMNATION**.[40] Comprising 81 lines, this article quoted extensively from Bracken's statements pertaining to Hungarian Jewry. Quite uncharacteristically, the main headline in the *Guardian*, **SURRENDER NAZIS' ONLY HOPE**, gave prominence to the Minister of Information's view that a German victory was impossible, whilst the subheading, **Warning to Hungary** only hinted at Brendan Bracken's concern for the Jews. Similarly, the Minister's comments on the Jews were relegated to the bottom of the *Guardian*'s 55-line article.[41] In the *Daily Telegraph*'s even shorter article of 30 lines there was no hint of Bracken's concern for Hungarian Jewry in its headline **SURRENDER ONLY HOPE FOR NAZIS: MR. BRACKEN'S VIEW**,

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[38] *Daily Telegraph*, 6 July 1944, 4.
[39] *The Times*, 7 July 1944, 2.
[40] Ibid.
[41] *Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 1944, 7.

nor in the content of the article, which completely ignored his reference to the Jews.[42]

On the same day the Polish Ministry of Information released a statement which effectively reiterated the news released by the WJC ten days earlier (reported by the *Guardian* on 28 June 1944). Towards the end of the statement the nature of the Oswiecim camp was highlighted by making a distinction between death camps and concentration camps, and also by revealing the role that Oswiecim played in the extermination of Polish Jews during the war:

> Oswiecim is the biggest concentration camp in Poland. Conditions there are much worse than in the notorious camp at Dachau. In 1942 the Germans erected at Oswiecim gas chambers with installations enabling them to kill daily 6,000 and even more of their victims. Many prominent Poles and thousands of Jews were sent to Oswiecim and put to death there.
>
> When the Germans, in the second half of 1942, started their extermination of Polish Jewry the gas chambers of Oswiecim could not cope with all the victims, so two more death camps were erected - Tremblinka [sic] and Rawa Ruska, near Lwow. In these three camps more than 2,000,000 Polish Jews have been murdered since 1939.[43]

In *The Times* the next day this statement constituted a 40-line article on page two, under the explicit heading **HUNGARIAN JEWS' FATE: MURDER IN GAS CHAMBERS**, and in the subheading **WORSE THAN DACHAU**, *The Times* also drew attention to the distinction made by the Polish Government between concentration and extermination camps.[44] This was the first time that a newspaper other than the *Manchester Guardian* had identified Oswiecim (Auschwitz) as a camp which was exterminating Jews *en masse* with poison gas. Only some readers of the *Guardian* and *The Times* would have been cognisant of this in July 1944. On the same day the *Guardian* printed two articles on page six, the first of which also originated from the Polish Government-in-exile. The first article (located in column one) was placed under the heading **POLISH APPEAL TO THE VATICAN: Slaughter of Hungarian Jews**, whilst the second article was placed in the third column under the title **HUNGARIAN JEWS: Estimates of Numbers Killed**.[45]

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[42] *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 1944, 5.
[43] *The Times*, 8 July 1944, 3.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *Manchester Guardian*, 8 July 1944, 6.

In column one the *Guardian* reported that the Polish Government had 'decided to appeal to the Vatican with the request that the Pope should intervene with the Hungarian Government on behalf of the Jews'. It then repeated the news that 400,000 Jews had been deported to the 'Oswiecim concentration camp, where many thousands have been gassed,' and that 350,000 more from Budapest were also 'being threatened with deportation'.[46] In column three the *Guardian* revised the estimated number of 100,000 Hungarian Jews killed to 'one-third of the 400,000 Jews already deported ...'. It also provided the crucial information that 'the eastern and northern provinces of Hungary are by now denuded of Jews, while three to four hundred thousands are waiting deportation from Budapest and neighbourhood'.[47]

The revelation of mass exterminations contained in the Vrba and Wetzler report elicited widespread responses in the United States, including a number of public announcements by prominent figures condemning the murders, which often placed blame directly on Hungary itself. In Washington on 14 July the U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, publicly denounced the extermination of Hungarian Jews:[48]

> Reliable reports from Hungary have confirmed the appalling news of mass killings of Jews by the Nazis and their Hungarian Quislings. The number and forms of these fiendish crimes is great. The entire Jewish community in Hungary, which numbered 1,000,000, is threatened with extermination.[49]

In a 49-line article the *Manchester Guardian* reported in full Hull's statement at the bottom of page five under the title **AXIS MASSACRES: Mr. Hull's Denunciation**.[50] In *The Times* Hull's declaration was also quoted in full but was placed in a slightly more prominent position on page four and was given greater emphasis under the title **MASSACRE OF JEWS IN HUNGARY: MR. HULL'S WARNING OF RETRIBUTION**.[51] The *Daily Express* found space for this subject in a 51-line article on page one, under the bold heading **1,000,000 people facing annihilation**.[52] Here the Secretary of State's comments in relation to the extermination of Hungarian Jewry were quoted to good effect. Of the papers

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 2, 1260-2.
[49] *Manchester Guardian*, 15 July 1944, 5.
[50] Ibid.
[51] *The Times*, 15 July 1944, 4.
[52] *Daily Express*, 15 July 1944, 1.

studied the *Daily Telegraph* offered the least news space here, devoting only 29 lines to the subject, but placed this news under an arresting headline: **1,000,000 JEWS MAY DIE IN HUNGARY: MR. HULL'S WARNING**.[53]

In April 1944 Adolf Eichmann invited a member of a Budapest Jewish rescue committee (Joel Brand) to act as an intermediary between the Nazis and the Allies in pursuit of what was presented as a mutually beneficial proposal. Eichmann offered to refrain from the extermination of Hungarian Jewry (approximately one million Jews would be handed over to the Allies) in exchange for ten thousand trucks, perishable goods such as tea and coffee as well as military equipment. Eichmann had promised that the Allied trucks and war materials, once in German hands, would only be used against the Soviets, and therefore the proposal was rejected by the British Government as an attempt to split the Allies. The BBC broadcast the controversial proposal on 19 July and the British press provided widespread coverage of the story the next day.[54]

The controversial 'blood for trucks' story appeared in each of the papers studied, receiving bold headlines and unprecedented news space for a subject related to the extermination of Hungarian Jewry. In the *Manchester Guardian* this news was printed at the top of page five under the daring title **USING JEWS AS BARTER: Nazi Blackmail: ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN ALLIED SUPPLIES**.[55] In *The Times* the Brand proposal received even more prominent coverage at the top of page two (the 'Home News' page) under an even bolder headline, the language of which presaged the cynicism that characterised the article below: **MONSTROUS *"OFFER"*:**[56] **GERMAN BLACKMAIL: BARTERING JEWS FOR MUNITIONS**.[57] The *Daily Telegraph*'s coverage of this story appeared on page one under the less imaginative title that reflected the British Government's view of the Brand proposal: **NAZIS TRY TO BARGAIN OVER JEWS: EXCHANGE FOR WAR SUPPLIES OFFERED: *TO BE DECLINED BY ALLIES***.[58] In the *Daily Express* the 'blood for trucks' offer was also printed on page one under a

[53] *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1944, 4.
[54] This proposal is given extensive analysis in Yehuda Bauer's study, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). For a concise summary of the 'blood for trucks' affair, see Breitman, *Official Secrets*, 204-5. See also Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, Vol. 2, 1254-60.
[55] *Manchester Guardian*, 20 July 1944, 5.
[56] Italics mine.
[57] *The Times*, 20 July 1944, 2.
[58] Italics mine. *Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1944, 1.

similar headline: **Allies refuse diplomatic blackmail offer: NAZIS WOULD CHANGE JEWS FOR LORRIES**.[59] In the *Daily Mirror* the Nazis' offer was placed under a headline spanning three columns on page one, which read: **German blackmail bid: Trade lives for lorries**.[60]

In *The Times* a substantial article of 74 lines articulated what characterised the majority of press responses to the 'blood for trucks' offer. *The Times* gave perhaps the most strongly worded statement offered on the subject that had appeared in the press:

> The British Government know what value to set on any German or German-sponsored offer. They know that there can be no security for the Jews ... until victory is won. The allies are fighting to achieve that security; and they know, as well as the Germans, what happens when one begins paying blackmail. The blackmailer increases his price. Such considerations provided their own answer to the proposed bargain.[61]

In the *Daily Telegraph* an article appeared which was almost exactly the same length as the story printed in *The Times*, and similarly defended the Allies' refusal of the offer 'as a barefaced attempt to blackmail the Allies ...'. For the readers of the *Daily Mirror*, the 63-line article in this particular issue must have been informative, but not simply for its instructive discussion of the Brand proposal. In order to place the ransom negotiations in a context that would help its readers to gain a fuller understanding of the situation, the *Mirror* was forced to bring to light the news that 'the massacre of Jews in Hungary caused an outcry of indignation and anger throughout the world,' and added that: 'It was reliably reported that 100,000 Jews had been taken to Poland and gassed.'[62] Being the shortest article on this subject, the *Daily Express*' 43-line article gave a relatively brief recounting of the ransom negotiations, offering a cynical view of the proposal put forward by the Nazis' emissaries. The *Express* contended that 'the Allied Governments were asked to hand over much transport, which might be of great value to the enemy's war effort,

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[59] *Daily Express*, 20 July 1944, 1.
[60] *Daily Mirror*, 20 July 1944, 1.
[61] *The Times*, 20 July 1944, 2.
[62] *Daily Mirror*, 20 July 1944, 1. It should be noted that the *Mirror* reflected the view expressed in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

without anything in return but the Gestapo "undertaking" that the Jews would be taken to safety'.[63]

Of the papers studied, only the *Guardian* ascribed any sort of credibility to the offer, arguing in its 95-line article that: 'What at first appeared to be a suggestion so fantastic turned out on deeper investigation to be a serious German proposal.' But the *Guardian* did not go so far as to suggest that this offer should be considered by the Allies as a realistic opportunity to save the Jews. Rather it contended that the Allies should continue to make public their detestation of Hungary's participation in the Final Solution, even after the Hungarian Regent's recent promise that the deportation of Jews from his country would be stopped, which the *Guardian* argued should not be taken at face value.[64]

Certainly the press was not 'bored with atrocity stories,' as Reilly and Kushner have indicated.[65] Kushner's assertion that the press overlooked the extermination of Hungarian Jewry is also incorrect. But this chapter has demonstrated that the revelation of Hungarian Jewry's extermination at Auschwitz-Birkenau received relatively widespread coverage in the British press only when British or American Governments had publicly acknowledged the mass murders. The exclusive coverage of this news in the *Manchester Guardian* between 27 June and 5 July suggests that scepticism initially prevailed in most of the press. Only after Eden's statement in the House of Commons (made in response to Sidney Silverman's question) did the press respond to the news of Hungarian Jewry's fate, though this did not extend to press coverage in the mass circulation dailies. The comments made by the British Minister of Information Brendan Bracken, and the press conference held by U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, elicited a similar response by the press, although in relation to the latter the *Daily Express* did react by publishing a substantial article on page one. *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, like the *Manchester Guardian*, did publicise the fate of Hungarian Jewry at the Auschwitz death camp, and the tone of the reports quite often displayed genuine sympathy for the Jews. But, unlike the *Guardian*, there was no sense that the above-mentioned papers took any initiative to draw this news to the attention of the public. For instance, all papers studied, except the *Guardian*, failed to respond to

[63] *Daily Express*, 20 July 1944, 1.
[64] *Manchester Guardian*, 20 July 1944, 5.
[65] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 258; and Reilly, *Belsen*, 54.

the WJC press conference on 27 June, over a week before the British Government officially recognised in the House of Commons the crimes against Hungarian Jews. Similarly, only the *Guardian* took the initiative to quote a Polish newspaper in order to illustrate that Jews from the Czech town of Terecin had been sent to Oswiecim (Auschwitz) to be murdered *en masse*. It took the revelation of the now notorious 'blood for trucks' scandal for there to be a universal response by the British press. For example, the *Daily Mirror* broke its silence on the extermination of Hungarian Jewry by printing a headline spanning three columns and printing an article of 63 lines on this subject.

Chapter 4

'Another Atrocity Camp':[1] The British Press and the Liberation of Jews in German Concentration Camps, 16 April - 9 May 1945.

> The atrocities of the concentration camps overrun by the Allied armies are beyond words or pictures when it comes to the task of bringing home to ordinary, kindly, gentle people the depths of sadistic brutality to which the German has reverted. This is no propaganda. It is blunt, spine-chilling fact, testified by trained cameramen and reporters.[2]

During the liberation of German camps, the true nature of Hitler's oppressive camp system was revealed to the British people. The photographs of corpses heaped together and of human beings reduced almost to skeletons were given widespread attention in the newspapers. This chapter examines how the tragedy of the European Jews was treated by the press at this time of liberation. Did the newspapers explain to their readers, who were being confronted with the most horrible images taken from the camps, that even worse places were to be found in Poland, where Jewish inmates were not only starved, but deliberately murdered in their millions? Certainly, as this thesis has demonstrated, some newspapers kept readers apprised of the extermination of the Jews for most of the war. But this news was rarely given prominence, mainly because it was overshadowed by war news. Here, therefore, was the opportunity to bring home to the British public the true nature of Hitler's racial policies. This chapter examines the extent to which journalists appeared to grasp the significance of the part that Auschwitz (and other extermination sites) had played in the genocide of the European Jews (Hungarian Jewry in particular). It will also assess the role that the British Government had in the publicising of the suffering of Jews liberated in German concentration camps. Is Reilly correct in stating that 'the specific plight of the Jews was mentioned infrequently' and that 'the connection between concentration camps and extermination camps was not clearly established'? [3]

Buchenwald, one of Germany's biggest concentration camps, was established in July 1937 and initially received mostly political prisoners deemed enemies of Hitler's new Reich. After the *Anschluss* (the German annexation of

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[1] *Manchester Guardian*, 27 April 1945, 8.
[2] *Daily Express*, 19 April 1945, 2.
[3] Reilly, *Belsen*, 74.

Austria), Hitler's 'liberation' of the Sudetenland and *Kristallnacht* (the 'night of Broken Glass'), all of which occurred in 1938, Jews were interned in concentration camps including Buchenwald simply because of their so-called racial origins. By the time that World War Two had started, however, most of the Jews detained in the 1930s had been released under the pretext that they would leave Germany permanently.[4] But the conflict in Europe ushered in a wave of new arrests, and from the beginning of the war until the liberation of the camps in 1945, Jews in concentration camps were unlikely to survive, in light of the decree issued on 5 October 1942 by the Economic Office of the SS, which called for the deportation of Jews in concentration camps to extermination sites.[5] There were some exceptions to this rule when, for example, many thousands of Hungarian Jews sent to Auschwitz in 1944 were selected for work in German concentration camps. In this instance many were sent from the Polish extermination centre to Buchenwald where they were employed as slave labourers at Buchenwald's satellite camps.[6]

Although it had achieved notoriety in Britain during the period of liberation, Belsen had been established relatively late (compared with other camps such as Buchenwald and Dachau, which were opened in the 1930s) being officially set up in April 1943 as a camp for individuals (predominantly Jews) to be traded for Germans in Allied custody.[7] For the first one and a half years the Belsen camp was divided into five satellite camps, each being characterised by varying degrees of brutality, disease and ill treatment.[8]

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[4] Between 1938 and 1941 the solution of the 'Jewish Question' in Germany and German controlled territory was mass emigration and Jews were allowed to leave concentration camps such as Buchenwald during this period only if they had an authentic visa. See Falk Pingel, "Concentration Camps," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust,* ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 308-17.

[5] Pingel, "Concentration Camps," 316.

[6] More Jews arrived from Auschwitz after it had been evacuated and many of its inmates were sent on death marches into Germany. Hundreds of children arrived in Buchenwald from Auschwitz who were subsequently housed in what was called 'Children's Block 66'. See Yehoshua Büchler, "Buchenwald," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust,* ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 255.

[7] Of the 4,100 Jews sent to Belsen under the pretext that they were *Austauschjuden* (exchange Jews), only a relatively small number of Jews were actually bartered for German nationals. A significant number of Belsen Jews, however, did find safety. On 10 July 1944, for instance, 222 Jews reached the port at Haifa, with immigration certificates to Palestine. 318 others arrived in Switzerland on 21 August, and a further 1,365 reached the same destination in December. Another 136 Jews with South American papers arrived in Switzerland on 25 January 1945. See Shmuel Krakowski, "Bergen-Belsen," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust,* ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 186-7.

[8] One of Belsen's satellite camps, the so-called the 'neutral camp', held 350 Jewish inmates from the end of June 1944 until the beginning of March 1945. Being nationals of neutral countries such as

In mid to late 1944, with the Russian Army fast approaching Germany proper, the Nazis began to abandon camps near the war front and send their prison populations on what are now known as 'death marches' westward into Hitler's shrinking Reich. As a result, many prisoners who had been interned in camps in Poland were forcibly moved into Germany itself by the early months of 1945.[9] Included in this westward movement towards Germany were many Jews who had previously been interned in Eastern European camps, including the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland.[10]

In December 1944 Belsen was placed under the control of a new commandant named Josef Kramer, who proceeded to make Belsen a typical concentration camp. The conditions there quickly deteriorated when the survivors of the death marches began to fill it. From January to March 1945 thousands more concentration camp inmates were marched under armed guard into Belsen (many

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Portugal, Spain and Turkey, prisoners in the 'neutral camp' did not work, were relatively well-fed and suffered milder forms of punishment than inmates in the other four Belsen satellite camps.

[9] Among many historians of the Holocaust the death marches towards the end of the war are considered to have been the final chapter of the Nazis' Final Solution. Camp inmates, including many Jews, were sent on marches which lasted for days and sometimes weeks without food or rest, and those who could not keep up, were often shot. In essence these marches reflected the Nazi Government's intention to conceal its crimes against humanity by removing the remaining witnesses from the concentration camps and also to continue to apply its policy of extermination against racial enemies of the Reich, the Jews in particular. Although the number of concentration camp inmates who died on death marches is difficult to establish, it has been estimated that two hundred and fifty thousand people may have perished during these marches, of which at least half of this number are said to be Jewish. Yehuda Bauer, "The Death-Marches, January-May, 1945," in *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, Vol. 9, *The End of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1989), 492-4. See also Livia Rothkirchen, "The Final Solution in its Last Stages," in *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, Vol. 9, *The End of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1989) 350; and Shmuel Krakowski, "Death Marches," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. in chief Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 351; and Shmuel Krakowski, "The Death Marches in the Period of the Evacuation of the Camps," in *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, Vol. 9, *The End of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1989), 476-90. For a useful collection of essays on the character and role of Nazi concentration camps, see Y. Gutman, and A. Saf, eds., *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Structure and Aims; The Image of the Prisoner; The Jews in the Camps* (Jerusalem: Proceedings of the Fourth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, 1984). Recently Daniel Jonah Goldhagen has also made a useful contribution to the history of the death marches in *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, 1996). For some moving accounts of life in concentration camps such as Belsen by survivors of the death marches, see Editorial Board, "Hope, Victory and Liberation: A Collection of Testimonies," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, ed. Aharon Weiss (Jerusalem: Daf Noy Press, 1996), 431-75.

[10] On 18 January 1945, 60,000 inmates of Auschwitz, most of them Jews, were evacuated from the camp and then transported to a number of concentration camps including Buchenwald in Germany proper. See Shmuel Krakowski, "The Death Marches in the Period of the Evacuation of the Camps," 480.

thousands were Jews who had arrived from Auschwitz).[11] The camp guards refused the inmates the most basic necessities such as food and water; as a result a typhus epidemic broke out and, between January and the middle of April 1945, approximately 35,000 inmates of Belsen were killed.[12] It has been estimated that as many as half of the approximately sixty thousand prisoners who witnessed the liberation of Bergen-Belsen by the British Army were Jewish.[13]

At the end of March and beginning of April 1945, the United States Army's advance into Germany prompted the Nazi Government to issue an order to the commandant of Buchenwald, Hermann Pister, to make the prisoner population of the camp disappear. On 6 April approximately twenty thousand people were evacuated from Buchenwald, among them around ten thousand Jews. When the American Army liberated Buchenwald on 11 April 1945, four thousand Jews (including about one thousand children and youths) out of a remaining prisoner population of around twenty-one thousand, were still alive in the camp.[14]

The death marches from Eastern Europe to the West meant that German concentration camps, including Belsen and Buchenwald, became severely overcrowded. Disease and starvation in the camps were rampant, and many thousands were dead by the time that the British and American soldiers entered the camps in April and May 1945. The disturbing images of corpses heaped on top of each other elicited widespread coverage in the British press. When the Majdanek and Auschwitz extermination sites were liberated earlier (in July 1944 and January 1945 respectively), however, very little attention was given to these events in British newspapers, perhaps because of scepticism about Soviet intentions in releasing atrocity reports and the absence of British and American soldiers at the scene of the liberated camps. But the few reports that did reach the West about Majdanek and Auschwitz told of camps long abandoned and in a relatively sanitary condition, even though there were some gruesome details in the reports about gas chambers and charred remains in crematoria.[15] The camps which were soon to be

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[11] For instance, approximately 20,000 women, many of whom had originated from Auschwitz were forced marched into Belsen at the end of December 1944. Krakowski, "Bergen-Belsen," 188.
[12] Ibid., 188-9.
[13] Reilly, *Belsen*, 75.
[14] See Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 48; and Büchler "Buchenwald," 256.
[15] Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 207-8.

overrun by Allied armies, such as Belsen and Buchenwald, by contrast, were often hastily evacuated and still contained ample signs of Nazi brutality towards their civilian internees.

On 16 April the *Manchester Guardian* printed a 140-line report on the liberation of Buchenwald. Under the heading **GUARDS OVERPOWERED**, which referred to the camp underground's capture of SS guards prior to the arrival of the American army, the *Guardian* referred to the murder of Jews resulting from medical experiments early in 1942. Below, it offered a small 8-line reference to the mass murder of European Jews (among others) at the largest of the Nazis' extermination centres, and for the first time it gave the German name (Auschwitz), rather than the Polish name (Oswiecim) for this murder camp:

> According to prisoners the outstanding place of extermination in the world was Auschwitz, near Cracow, where they said 4,000,000 Jewish Polish and Russian men, women and children have been liquidated. Buchenwald evidence repeatedly writes off hundreds as transported to Auschwitz.[16]

This was the first time that the word 'Auschwitz' had been printed in the press, and there was no attempt here by the *Guardian* to attest to the veracity of the claim that Auschwitz was a centre for the extermination of Europe's Jews. The response by the rest of the press to the discovery of Buchenwald came a few days later, and the eyewitness testimony referring to Auschwitz was not even mentioned in the other British newspapers studied.

On 19 April the liberation of Bergen-Belsen also gained prominence in the British press, but the fate of the Jews in Belsen or elsewhere in Poland was not acknowledged. Here the papers universally quoted a statement made by a British medical officer which described the poor living conditions in the camp, including the 'thousands of typhus, typhoid and tuberculosis cases,' cannibalism, the piles of corpses in the camp and the number who had recently died there. The medical officer only hinted at the plight of Jews in Belsen: 'Those who were too weak to move had no food and died. We found a consignment of Red Cross stores sent to Jewish inmates by members of their race outside. It had not been distributed.'[17]

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[16] *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1945, 6.
[17] *The Times*, 19 April 1945, 4.

The *Manchester Guardian* printed the above-cited reference to the treatment of Jewish prisoners in Bergen-Belsen under the subheading **STARVED TO DEATH**.[18] In *The Times* the statement by the British medical officer appeared under the more controversial subheading **CANNIBALISM**.[19] Similarly the *Daily Telegraph* obscured the treatment of Jews in Belsen from its readers when it placed this news under the subheading **TOO WEAK TO CHEER**, which referred to the inability of women prisoners in the camp to raise their arms in joy when the British Army liberated the camp.[20] The *Daily Mirror* did not quote the statement by the British Medical Officer relating to Jews in Belsen, whilst the *Daily Express* placed this news under the mundane subheading **NO FOOD**.[21] Despite the large numbers of Jews in Belsen liberated by the British Army, this was the only reference made to the Jews in this camp for the period in which the Allies liberated German concentration camps.

On the same day the British Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that General Eisenhower, Commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, had asked Churchill to arrange a parliamentary delegation to be sent to Buchenwald to witness for themselves the atrocities committed there. A White Paper was to be drafted from the accounts of the delegation to verify the reports of the concentration camps that were beginning to reach the West. Nine male MPs and one female MP were sent, including the British President of the World Jewish Congress, Sidney Silverman. It should not be inferred, however, that the choice to send Silverman reflected the British Government's understanding of anti-Jewish persecution in German concentration camps. In fact Silverman replaced, at the last minute, a Labour member of the delegation who had suddenly fallen ill.[22]

Before the official report compiled by the British delegation was printed in British newspapers at the end of April, a preliminary report from the MPs' trip to Buchenwald was printed in *The Times*, which alluded to the extermination of European Jewry. On 23 April the above-mentioned newspaper drew attention to the

[18] *Manchester Guardian*, 19 April 1945, 5.
[19] *The Times*, 19 April 1945, 4.
[20] *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1945, 5.
[21] *Daily Express*, 19 April 1945, 4.
[22] Reilly, *Belsen*, 61-3; Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 212-3.

plight of a boy in Buchenwald who seemed to be of Jewish origin, on page three under the subheading **A SLAVE-BOY'S STORY**:

> [The delegation] saw the 900 children, most of them Polish Jews and orphans ... Mrs. Tate talked with several in German and heard from one of 14 that he had spent five years in prison and five months at Buchenwald ... he told how he saw his brother of 18 shot by the Gestapo and his parents taken off with many others from their home in Radom, in Poland. 'I never saw them again', he said. 'Some of the people escaped and returned to tell us that all the others had been gassed'.[23]

But there was no effort here to explain whether the boy in question was in fact Jewish, and *The Times* failed to demonstrate why the boy had been placed in prison for the most part of the war, whilst his brother and parents were exterminated by the Nazis.

On 28 April the official report of the parliamentary delegation sent to Buchenwald received widespread coverage in the British press. The majority of the newspapers studied quoted extensively from the report, including the following excerpt, some of which related to the plight of European Jews in German camps:

> It was alleged that various experiments in sterilisation had been practised on Jews. Two of our number [British MPs] were taken to the bed (in the improvised American hospital) of a Polish Jew. Number 23397, aged 29, who had been operated on in this way; they saw the scars of the operation, and confirm that the left testicle had been removed. Other subjects of the operation were said to have died; and we were assured that the policy of exterminating Jews had long superseded that of castrating them. We were told that Frau Koch, the wife of the German commandant [of Buchenwald] collected articles made of human skin. We obtained pieces of hide which have since been identified by Sir Bernard Spilsbury as being human skin. One of these pieces clearly formed part of a lampshade.
>
> One of the statements made to us most frequently by prisoners was that conditions in other camps, particularly those in Eastern Europe, were far worse than at Buchenwald. The worst camp of all was said by many to be at Auschwitz; these men all insisted on showing us their Auschwitz camp numbers, tattooed in blue on their left forearms.[24]

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[23] *The Times*, 23 April 1945, 3.
[24] *The Times*, 28 April 1945, 2.

The MPs report on Buchenwald, including the above-mentioned reference to the Jews, was extensively quoted in most of the papers studied for 28 April.[25] But most papers did not emphasise the plight of European Jewry in either the headings or subheadings of their articles on the parliamentary delegation's findings. This was perhaps due partially to the failure of the White Paper to directly connect the extermination of European Jewry with 'the worst camp of all,' Auschwitz. In *The Times* the reference to the Jews appeared under the title **CREMATORIUM EVIDENCE**, referring to the method by which the Nazis disposed of dead bodies in Buchenwald.[26] The *Manchester Guardian*'s subheading under which the Jews were mentioned, **TATTOOED CAMP NUMBERS**, more closely reflected the plight of Jews in Auschwitz,[27] whereas the *Daily Telegraph* seemed more interested in **Doctors' Experiments**, and placed the MPs' statements relating to the Jews under the latter subheading.[28]

In the *Daily Express* the revelation that human skin had been used to manufacture a lampshade gained prominence in its article, with the MPs' report appearing under the more controversial title: **M.P.s brought evidence - Frau Koch's lampshade**. The plight of Jews was mentioned in a relatively brief article of 63 lines, alongside that of other Buchenwald camp internees. Thus it was stated that 'on April 1 there were 80,183 [internees] in the camp made up of Jews, Germans and many European races. More than 50,000 had been killed or died there.'[29] This was the only reference made to the Jews in the *Daily Express* for the period 16 April to 9 May 1945. Of the newspapers studied, the *Daily Mirror* was the only paper that mentioned the word 'Jew' in a heading or subheading relating to the White Paper on Buchenwald. Its reference to the Jews appeared under the subheading **Experiments on Jews**.[30]

Between 20 April and 9 May 1945 there were a number of references made to the Majdanek and Auschwitz extermination sites, camps which are now notorious for playing a decisive role in the mass murder of European Jewry by means of

[25] The report drafted by the parliamentary delegation of conditions in the Buchenwald concentration camp received unprecedented news space for articles relating to liberation of German camps, with *The Times*, for example, devoting 369 lines to this subject and the *Manchester Guardian* allotting 433 lines.
[26] *The Times*, 28 April 1945, 2.
[27] *Manchester Guardian*, 28 April 1945, 3.
[28] *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 1945, 2-3.
[29] *Daily Express*, 28 April 1945, 3.
[30] *Daily Mirror*, 28 April 1945, 5.

poison gas, but were not always recognised as such by the British press during this period. For instance, British newspapers often neglected to explain to their readers (perhaps because journalists themselves did not understand) that the Polish extermination camp (referred to by the liberated prisoners of Buchenwald as) 'Auschwitz' was in fact the same camp in which Hungarian Jewry had been exterminated in 1944, which the press had then identified by its Polish name, 'Oswiecim'.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the British press often failed to recognise that these camps played a crucial role in the extermination of European Jewry. An editorial in *The Times* on 20 April 1945, for example, recognised that both German nationals and Jews had suffered in concentration camps. It then proceeded to mention that citizens from Russia and Poland had 'helped to liberate similar establishments [that is extermination camps], among which Maidanek[31] stands out in Eastern Europe'. But there was no effort here to stress that Majdanek had functioned as a centre for the mass murder of Jews (and Polish intelligentsia, among other groups) even though this information had been printed by *The Times* in August 1944 after this particular extermination camp was liberated in July of that year.[32] *The Times* further downplayed the brutality of Polish extermination camps in this editorial when it implied (whether it was intended or not) that the suffering of concentration camp inmates far outweighed the torment which characterised the experience of prisoners in death camps.

> The photographs [taken of liberated concentration camps] ... show indeed that the slow horrors of torture, starvation, and induced disease, which have been the means of tens of thousands of murders in Buchenwald, Nordhausen, and Belsen, *are more foul than the worst that has been told or suspected*.[33]

On 26 April the *Daily Telegraph*, in a large editorial which attempted to explain how the German people had gradually become 'barbarised,'[34] there was a small reference to the extermination of Jews, among others, in Nazi murder camps.

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[31] The proper spelling of this camp is Majdanek.

[32] The liberation of Majdanek was reported in *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* on 12 August 1944.

[33] Italics mine. *The Times*, 20 April 1945, 5. Reilly offers a more scathing interpretation of this passage in *Belsen*, 76.

[34] Taken from the title of the editorial **HOW NAZI GERMANY HAS BEEN BARBARISED**. See the *Daily Telegraph*, 26 April 1945, 4.

But here the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that methods other than gassing had been employed to kill Jews and other victims at the Auschwitz death camp (refer to italicised text in excerpt below). The *Telegraph* also suggested here that the mass murders in such camps were aimed at the dehumanisation, rather than the total elimination of European Jewry, along with other racial enemies of the German Reich.

> Hitler aimed ... at the destruction of [conquered people's] souls. This political sadist had given long study to this matter. Poles and Polish Jews first, and Russians afterwards, were systematically degraded and debased. It was intended that when the gas-chambers as at Majdanek, *and the massacres by other means*, as at Oswiecim, had done their work of death the survivors should be reduced in habit and mentality to European pariahs and slaves.[35]

Although the name 'Auschwitz' had been described in the *Guardian* on 16 April as a centre for the extermination of European Jewry, on 27 April the *Guardian* revealed the relative unimportance that it attributed to this extermination camp when it referred to Auschwitz under the title **ANOTHER ATROCITY CAMP**. In a brief 8-line article near the bottom of the fourth column on page eight, the *Guardian* stated that:

> The horrors of another German camp were described to-day by a young Jewess who spent a year at Auswitz [sic], Poland. She told of thousands of Jews being cremated, of hundreds who died as a result of the Nazis' sterilisation programme, and of Storm Troopers raping women prisoners.[36]

But here there was no mention of the use of poison gas to murder people, nor was it made clear that the Jews had been the primary victims in Auschwitz. Why did journalists and editors of *The Times* fail to give this story prominence? Possibly this was due to the lack of documentary evidence to support eyewitness accounts of atrocities committed in Auschwitz. Or perhaps journalists and editors of *The Times* were reluctant to draw attention away from the concentration camps such as Buchenwald and Belsen, camps which had effectively conveyed the brutality of the Nazi regime to the readers of *The Times*.

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[35] Emphasis mine. Ibid.
[36] *Manchester Guardian*, 27 April 1945, 8.

On 2 May the *Daily Mirror* printed a similar eyewitness report that captured the brutality of Auschwitz, but which did not recognise the anti-Jewish character of the atrocities committed there. Here it emphasised the unparalleled brutality of extermination camps by contrasting Auschwitz with the conditions of Bergen-Belsen in a 30-line article on page four. Under the sensationalist heading spanning two columns **Nazis burned them alive - to band music**, the *Mirror* stated that: 'A Hun terror camp worse than Belsen [existed], where women and children were burned alive to the music of the camp orchestra.' Being the only paper studied which gave both the Polish name for the camp [Oswiecim] and also its German name Ausshwitz [sic], the *Mirror* quoted a witness to the atrocities committed there:

> In Belsen, she said, there was hunger, typhus, no sanitation, no bread and no water. But in Ausschwitz[37] living, healthy people were burned alive. 'I saw it myself from my hut near the crematorium', she said. 'Children were always thrown into the flames. Adults were always gassed first. During all these mass executions by fire, the camp orchestra had always to play. I know it; I was myself in the band.'[38]

Shortly after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau (27 January 1945) a Russian investigatory body called the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission examined the camp by collecting survivor testimony, official records kept by the camp staff and the gas chamber and crematoria. It was surmised that, based on the capacity of the crematorium working at just under its full strength, around four million people were gassed and cremated in Auschwitz, a figure that is now considered by many historians to be far too high.[39] The Soviet commission's report was published in the Russian paper *Pravda* on 7 May 1945 and appeared in two of the papers studied the next day.

In *The Times* the commission's findings were reported in a 49-line article in the third column of page five, in which the word 'Jew' was conspicuously absent:

4,000,000 DEATHS AT OSWIECIM CAMP

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[37] Note the inconsistency in the spelling of this extermination camp.
[38] *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1945, 4.
[39] According to Franciszek Piper, approximately 1,100,000 people, mostly Jews, were killed at the Auschwitz extermination camp. See Franciszek Piper, "The Number of Victims," *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds Gutman and Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana university Press, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, 1994), 61-76.

RESULTS OF INQUIRY

> Nearly 3000 survivors of various nationalities were interrogated, and on the basis of their evidence and of documents discovered in the camp the commission finds that more than 4,000,000 people perished at Oswiecim between 1941 and the beginning of this year [1945]. They included citizens of the Soviet Union, Poland, France, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italy and Greece.
>
> The commission, which had previously investigated conditions at Majdanek, Tremblinka [sic], and other 'annihilation camps', describes Oswiecim as the worst in its experience....
>
> The report states that most of the deportees who arrived were killed at once in gas chambers. On an average one in six was selected for work. Seven tons of women's hair was found, ready for dispatch for Germany. Human teeth, from which gold fillings had been extracted, were piled several feet high. A vanload of used shaving brushes and nearly 100,000 children's suits of clothes, also used, were discovered in depots ....[40]

On the same day the *Daily Telegraph* printed a story from the same source (that is *Pravda*) in a smaller 20-line article under the unrelated title **DACHAU ORDER: HIMMLER SAID NONE TO ESCAPE ALIVE**. Here the *Telegraph* reported Himmler's recent order that Dachau concentration camp prisoners were not to be allowed to fall into Allied hands alive. Below the *Telegraph* contended that 'Himmler is also stated by the Moscow paper *Pravda* to have organised the prison camp at Aushwitz [sic] ... and acquainted himself with the methods of mass execution. More than 4,000,000 people were exterminated there. On Himmler's instruction the camp was extended and provided with new methods of extermination'.[41] Again, the Jews were not mentioned in connection with the Auschwitz murder camp.

Of the papers studied, between 16 April and 9 May only the *Manchester Guardian* exhibited an understanding of the collective fate of European Jewry during the war by printing two articles solely devoted to this subject. The first of these articles appeared on 25 April. Titled **EUROPE'S JEWRY: Over 5,000,000 Put to Death**, it comprised 29 lines and was placed in the first column of page five. It quoted a former Jewish representative of the Polish National Council: 'Between five and six million European Jews were exterminated by the Germans in Poland,'

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[40] *The Times*, 8 May 1945, 5.
[41] *Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1945, 3.

and cited the small remaining numbers of Polish Jews living in Belgium and France as evidence of the Nazis' European-wide solution of the Jewish Question.[42]

On the next day the largest news item yet printed in the British press about the fate of European Jewry appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*, located on the editorial page (four). Under the title **THE JEWS**, it was stated unequivocally:

> The Nazis have not broken all their promises. They too can boast one victory. In his speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, Hitler prophesied that if another world war began 'the result would not be the Bolshevisation of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe...!' Today the German armies are retreating and utter defeat faces the German nation, but as the Allies liberate Europe they are finding that for once Hitler ... meant what [he] said ... In 1939 there were still over six million Jews in Europe, excluding Russia ...When Hitler conquered Europe all these six million fell into his hands; when he invaded Russia another two million were caught. What has happened to these people today? ... Mr. Alder-Ruel in 'The Future of the Jews' ... puts the number killed or dead at the end of 1943 as 3,030,000. Since then the massacre has gone on without stopping, and it is now considered that over four million have died - possibly over five million. And these men, women and children have not died in battle but in the camps and slaughter-houses of Poland. [43]

Reilly's assertions about the lack of press interest in the extermination of European Jewry at the time of liberation are correct. For British newspapers, the powerful imagery accompanying graphic descriptions of the camps proved the authenticity of wartime accounts of German atrocity stories. Why did this not extend to an effort by the press to widely publicise evidence supporting the idea of a European-wide solution of the 'Jewish Question'? Perhaps the focus of the press on the liberation of Buchenwald obscured the plight of the Jews (and therefore eyewitness testimony indicating the role of Auschwitz in the Final Solution). Did the British parliamentary delegation to Buchenwald miss an important opportunity to draw attention to the plight of European Jewry during the war? For it was only when the parliamentary delegation was sent to Buchenwald (and produced the resulting White Paper on atrocities) that newspapers revealed that the Jews had been targeted for extermination by the Nazis. But even here the extermination of the

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[42] *Manchester Guardian*, 25 April 1945, 8.
[43] The remainder of the article argued for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 April 1945, 4.

Jews in Auschwitz was not emphasised by the British Government's White Paper, and therefore not by the press. Only the *Manchester Guardian* showed that it understood the scale of the Final Solution during the Second World War, acknowledging in two articles that between five and six million Jews had been murdered by the Nazis. But here, the *Guardian* took the initiative to quote a statement issued by a former member of the Polish National Council in order to reach this conclusion. In no other paper studied was there a similar article, or even an explicit statement, revealing the magnitude of the disaster that had befallen European Jewry. Similarly, there was no indication in most papers studied that the Auschwitz and Majdanek extermination camps were understood to be centres for the murder of European Jews, nor was the word Auschwitz associated with the murder of Hungarian Jewry the previous summer (even though some papers did use the words Auschwitz and Oswiecim synonymously; the latter name was associated with Hungarian Jewry's destruction in 1944).

Conclusion

Walter Laqueur was correct in his belief that the press was initially sceptical of an extermination plan. Kushner and Reilly, too, are right in arguing that December 1942 represented the height of reporting on the Holocaust. But it is certainly clear that the press was not, as Kushner and Reilly have both suggested, 'bored with atrocity stories' by 1944.[1] And Kushner's contention that 'the ... blatant, open deportation and subsequent extermination of Hungarian Jewry in the death camps of Poland elicited next to no public response or press interest' is also clearly an overstatement.[2] There were, in fact, a number of important responses by the British press to the extermination of the Jews, particularly in 1944. For instance, *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph* each responded to the news of Hungarian Jewry's extermination with a substantial editorial, even though this followed Eden's statement in the House of Commons a day earlier. Kushner's claim also gives no credit to the *Guardian* for its extensive coverage of the impending and actual extermination of the Hungarian Jews in March and July 1944.

But this is not to say that the reporting of the Holocaust in 1944 by the rest of the press was adequate, as might be inferred from Sharf's claim that there was extensive reportage of the extermination of the Jews during this year.[3] The reluctance of the press to emphasise the persecution of the Jews was particularly evident in the wake of Eden's warning against persecuting Hungarian Jewry (addressed to Germany and Hungary) in the House of Commons at the end of March 1944. The *Daily Express*, for instance, found this declaration to be unworthy of reporting, whilst the *Mirror* considered this news to be secondary to an anecdotal tale about an American woman being ignorant of her own pregnancy.

It is quite clear that the mass circulation papers were unwilling to emphasise the systematic murder of the Jews. Thus the *Daily Express* and *Mirror* either did not report the Holocaust in 1944 and 1945 or they simply sensationalised the subject matter. This was particularly evident when the *Mirror* reported the 'blood for trucks' proposal under the headline spanning three columns (incidentally, this was the only headline of this size on a subject related to the extermination of the Jews in

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[1] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 254. Reilly, *Belsen*, 54.
[2] Kushner, "Different Worlds," 256.
[3] Refer to page three above.

1944 and 1945): **German blackmail bid: Trade lives for lorries**.[4] The *Express* dealt with the subject of the plight of Jews in Buchenwald in a similar way when it reported it under the headline: **M.P.s brought evidence - Frau Koch's lampshade**.[5]

The lack of coverage offered in the *Mirror* and the *Express* presents a stark contrast to the coverage in the *Manchester Guardian*. For instance, of the papers studied, only the *Guardian* responded to two crucial World Jewish Congress statements released in 1944; the first in March predicting the extermination of Hungarian Jewry and the second in July confirming that the extermination of this Jewish community had in fact begun. The *Guardian* also offered exclusive coverage of the role that Auschwitz had played in the extermination of the Jews and the method of murder employed there (that is, by gassing) after this news first reached the West. The rest of the press responded over a week later after Eden was forced to recognise publicly in the House of Commons the extermination of the Hungarian Jews. This highlights what was perhaps the ultimate failure of the press, namely its reluctance to attribute any significance to Jewish atrocity stories released by bodies that were independent of the Government, such as the World Jewish Congress and the Polish Government-in-Exile.

This tendency reflected, in the case of *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, a conservative and sceptical view of atrocity stories that had not been corroborated by further reports. This thesis has shown that British newspapers provided relatively prominent coverage of this subject only in the wake of official government recognition of such atrocity stories. It dismisses the possibility (raised in Chapter one) that Governments held back or censored reports on this subject, but suggests that there was perhaps a relationship between scepticism of reports in official quarters and a paucity of news items on the extermination of European Jewry in the press. Richard Cockett has demonstrated that in the 1930s there were intimate relations between Government ministers and newspaper correspondents (and indeed editors) whereby the press was fed the official Government line, which was often reflected in the newspapers. This may also explain the sometimes uncanny

[4] *Daily Mirror*, 20 July 1944, 1.
[5] *Daily Express*, 28 April 1945, 3.

similarity between the British Government's official view of the extermination of the Jews and the attitude of the press on this subject.

And similarities between official government responses to the murder of European Jewry and the reaction of the press were certainly evident at times, especially in 1944. This was demonstrated when the so-called 'blood for trucks' proposal gained prominence over the airwaves and thereafter in the press on 20 July. The British Government's refusal to countenance such a controversial proposal, which may indeed have been designed to create a rift between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, was reflected in most British newspapers studied, but especially in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The *Manchester Guardian*, on the other hand, whilst critical of the proposal, went further than any of the other papers by suggesting that the proposal was serious and for the *Guardian* it served to highlight the dire predicament of Hungarian Jewry.

Whilst Kushner overstates the press's lack of interest in the Holocaust in 1944, Joanne Reilly was more accurate in her assessment of its response to the liberation of Jews in German camps in 1945. Her argument that 'the specific plight of the Jews was mentioned infrequently in the newspaper reports and the connection between concentration camps and extermination camps was not clearly established,' is sound.[6] The liberation of the camps was, for the press, a time when the 'horror' stories told during the war could be verified with physical evidence. The camps represented the end of the war and, in a way, a justification for having fought it.[7] The liberated camps also challenged the perception in wartime Britain that the Nazi regime was merely a ruthless dictatorship seeking German hegemony in Europe.[8] For the British press, and indeed the Government, it seemed that the liberation of Buchenwald in particular symbolised the ultimate reality of Nazi tyranny: the literal dehumanisation of human beings. But it is also clear, as Reilly suggests, that most newspapers failed to recognise that the suffering of the Jews was the outcome of the Nazi's policy of genocide.

In the period of liberation, whilst the *Guardian* characteristically took the initiative to attest to the scope of the Jewish tragedy, the rest of the papers studied continued to defer their judgement until the British Government (with its White

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[6] Reilly, *Belsen*, 74.
[7] Taylor, *English History*, 727.
[8] Ibid., 553-4 and 559.

Paper on atrocities) took the first step to publicise the plight of Jewry. But even here, the Government only attested to the evidence that it discovered at the camp of Buchenwald, and paid little attention to the claims made by prisoners about the severity of the campaign of extermination against the Jews or the existence of murder factories in Poland. Similarly, in 1945, each of the papers studied, with the exception of the *Guardian*, ignored a statement released by a former representative of the Polish Government's National Council that the Nazis had murdered between five and six million Jews of Europe.

In relative terms, the *Guardian*'s coverage was generous mainly because it had a long tradition of supporting the Zionist cause. Early in the twentieth century its editor C.P. Scott was influential in bring about the Balfour Declaration, which promised the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Moreover, one of its writers, Harry Sacher, helped to draft the famous declaration. The Zionist ambitions of Sacher at the *Guardian* encouraged W.P. Crozier, who would later become its editor (between 1932 and 1944), to take up the cause himself.[9] Thus throughout the 1930s Crozier saw it as his duty to report the Nazis' persecution of Germany Jewry. David Ayerst contends:

> In August 1938 the SS paper *Das Schwarze Korps*, wrote of 'the hard necessity of exterminating this Jewish underworld ... the factual and final end of Jewry in Germany, its absolute annihilation.' The *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Herald* and the M.G. quoted these sinister words. They shocked but they could not surprise *Guardian* readers. Crozier had prepared them by seven years of faithful reporting to understand the 'still darker threats' to which he believed they pointed.[10]

The sympathy of the *Guardian* towards the plight of the Jews explains why seemingly only the *Guardian* attended two important World Jewish Congress press conferences in 1944. It also explains why only the *Guardian* took the initiative, in April 1945, to quote a former Jewish representative of the Polish Government's National Council who stated that the Nazis had murdered millions of European Jews.

The problem of hindsight pervades all studies of history. But this problem is particularly evident when one is dealing with contemporary perceptions of the

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[9] Ayerst, *Guardian*, 382-6.
[10] Ibid., 518.

Holocaust, and therefore any criticism of the press should take this into account. It was not until the disclosures at the Nuremberg trials that the full extent of Hitler's racial policies became clear, including the role that the Auschwitz death camp had played in the extermination of the Jews.[11] For instance, in 1944, when the first reports about the mass murder of Jews at Auschwitz reached the West, British newspapers called it by its Polish name, Oswiecim. Its German name, Auschwitz, which is now used almost synonymously with the extermination of European Jewry, became known to the press only when liberated concentration camp prisoners used it to describe the camp in April 1945. Even here the press (including the *Guardian*) did not understand that 'Auschwitz' was the same camp in which hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews had been destroyed in the previous year.

Furthermore, the war against Hitler had never been, for Britain at least, about preventing the extermination of minorities. In the eyes of the British press, it was fought in order to stop Hitler's uninhibited lust for the aggrandisement of German power in Europe and, of course, to protect the British nation from German occupation. The Holocaust coincided with this major global conflict. The fact that Britain was in a state of war meant that the press was predominantly interested in the progress of the conflict as it affected Britain's military and domestic interests, encapsulated in the popular slogan: 'the people's war'.[12] And war news was, of course, likely to overshadow reports about the suffering of people in foreign countries who were (nominally) citizens of an enemy country. This was evident when on 6 July 1944 when the *Daily Telegraph* gave greater emphasis in its double headline to the subject of flying bombs than to the extermination of Hungarian Jewry.[13]

Similarly, the predicament of Hungarian Jewry gained widespread coverage in the press only when it directly affected Britain's military interests. This was clear when the so-called 'blood for trucks' deal gained prominence in newspapers. The press universally interpreted the proposal as a cunning attempt by the Nazi regime to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies (including Britain) by using the Hungarian Jews as a bargaining chip. But, with the exception

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[11] See Michael Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-46: A Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).
[12] Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 17-18. See also Taylor, *English History*, 727.
[13] See page 46 above.

of the *Manchester Guardian*, the threat of extermination posed to the remaining Jews of Hungary, if the Allies refused the 'offer,' was not emphasised by the press. The *Guardian*'s sober analysis of the 'blood for trucks' deal was, as indicated above, most likely the result of its long-held sympathy for the Jewish people.

This thesis has demonstrated that the consensus view, held by Laqueur, Kushner and Reilly, that the British press was reluctant to emphasise the extermination of the Jews until late 1942, and that it was also unwilling to emphasise this subject in 1944 and 1945, is essentially correct. But this view needs to be qualified. Whilst the mass circulation papers appeared to have been indifferent to the extermination of the Jews, not all newspapers were unwilling to publicise their suffering. The *Manchester Guardian*, for instance, provided relatively extensive coverage of the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in 1944. The 'establishment' newspapers, in particular *The Times*, also offered some important responses to this event, especially in relation to July of that year. The coverage of the press in April and May 1945 was, however, far from comprehensive. Most newspapers, with the exception of the *Guardian*, virtually ignored the plight of the Jews when the concentration camps were liberated. Thus Laqueur's belief that people were 'kept informed through the press ... about the progress of the "final solution,"' is only partly correct. And if people chose to 'dismiss from consciousness'[14] the reality of the Holocaust, as he also contends, then this was certainly made easier by the failure of most papers to provide adequate coverage of the Holocaust throughout the war.

[14] Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 204.

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