

THE DISSOLUTION OF EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY

The
Dissolution
of Eastern European Jewry

By Walter N. Sanning



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Cover Illustration: Eastern European Jewry, symbolized by the Star of David and the Menorah, dissolves between the combined onslaught of National Socialism from the West and Soviet Communism from the East.

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“[...] it is questionable whether one should accept improbable figures supplied by a not overly friendly source.”

— *American Jewish Year Book*, 1972, Vol. 73, p. 536,
on the Soviet Union being engaged in making Soviet
Jews disappear statistically

Foreword

It is an understatement to say that the study of 20th century Jewish population changes presents us with irresolvable problems, but there is much that can be reliably observed. The principal background developments were the rise of Zionism as a significant international political force and the rise of anti-Jewish movements in Europe, notably in Germany. Implicit in both developments were policies, however differently motivated, that would have relocated European Jews in great numbers. Indeed this common objective was the basis for a not negligible amount of cooperation between Zionist and German authorities in the 1933-1939 period.

Other background developments were the adoption of pro-Jewish policies by the USA and the USSR, the latter maintaining those policies through 1948 (the year of Israel's establishment). These victors in World War II continued, also from various motivations, processes of relocating Jews that had been carried on by Germany, while Germany in turn had not been the first in the field, as large relocations of Jews had been carried out earlier under Zionist and Soviet auspices.

As these massive movements subsided to trickles in the postwar period, the broad outlines of what had happened were clear. Jewish communities had drastically shrunk or even virtually disappeared in much of central and eastern Europe, particularly Poland. Correspondingly, there had been great transfers of Jews to Palestine, the USA and other countries, employing means provided by Jewish organizations or by the U.S.-controlled UNRRA, whose Directors had been New York Zionists Herbert Lehman and Fiorello LaGuardia. There had also been a large dispersion of Jews, especially Polish Jews, into the Soviet Union. Thus the excellent title of this book.

While such broad outlines were clear, many details remain obscure, shrouded or inaccessible. Particularly troublesome are quantitative aspects. We do not know how many were absorbed into the Soviet Union, how many emigrated to the USA or other specific countries, or how many remained or resumed living in central or eastern Europe, and the not insignificant number of those who perished has not been firmly reckoned. On the last matter, only propagandists and uninformed people come forward with a purportedly accurate number.

Reasons for this ignorance are not difficult to give. The movements of Jews through the UNRRA camps were camouflaged as much as was possible under the circumstances, for the excellent reasons, among others, that the

subsequent movements to Palestine were illegal and in any case UNRRA was supposed to be for “United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation” in a war ravaged continent, not for conquest of non-European territory by indigenous European populations.

Useful data on postwar migration and resettlement is difficult to impossible to obtain. Since 1943 the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service has made no attempt to count immigrant Jews as such, and Soviet-dominated eastern Europe does not welcome foreign or scholarly curiosity on politically sensitive matters.

Census data is not of much help. In the USA, which is today the leading center of Jewish population, “Jews” are not a category for census purposes, and indeed Jews do not like being counted. The ongoing controversy in Britain on this point is a current illustration of this aversion.¹ The Soviet census attempts to count Jews, but the procedure of the census takers is to accept the word of individuals on this question. When to that observation is added the aforementioned Jewish aversion (operating in a state-encouraged climate of anti-Zionism) and the usual skepticism appropriate to evaluating Soviet claims, the Soviet census figures are seen to be of little value. Jewish spokesmen in the West claim that the Soviet figures are unrealistically low.²

To these considerations should be added the difficulty of producing an operationally useful definition of a “Jew.” This is an especially grave problem in western liberal democracies, on account of the large extent of intermarriage and the larger extent of religious apostasy.

This book jumps squarely into the uninviting waters of 20th century Jewish demography and migration and attempts to reconstruct these Jewish population changes, especially in their quantitative aspects. One immediate consequence of this choice of subject is that the person looking for light reading is advised to look elsewhere; this book is difficult to read even for somebody who is accustomed, as I am, to reading texts with high quantitative components. Another consequence is that the reader looking for final and definitive answers to “how many?” type questions, as distinct from at best provisional estimates, will be disappointed. There is scarcely an estimate arrived at in this book that cannot be challenged on some plausible grounds.

Such limitations of this book are not the author’s fault. There is no way his subject can be served adequately with easily readable text, and there is no way to determine the more important numbers involved with the accuracy and reliability of, say, a total population census in a contemporary western country. The author is well aware of such constraints and limitations, and

¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 Dec 79, p. 5; 7 Mar 80, p. 9; 11 Feb 83, p. 4; *Patterns of Prejudice*, Jan 80, pp. 24+.

² *American Jewish Year Book*, 1981, pp. 239f.

specifically cautions the reader that one vitally important estimate “has no claim on absolute certainty.” If I were to select only one respect in which I wish the author had done something differently, it would be that I wish he had been more emphatic on the rather tentative nature of most of the quantitative conclusions reached here.

Such negative features of this book having been conceded at the outset, what are the positive features that excited my admiration for this work when it was in manuscript, and caused me to strongly urge its publication?

This book is the first full-length serious study of World-War-II-related Jewish population changes. Its esoteric air is perhaps, on the perceptual level, the perfect antidote to the vulgar idiocies that are today monotonously peddled by the media, for whom recent Jewish population changes are also of major interest, although such dry terminology is rarely employed by them.

This book presents the fundamentally correct account of the subject. While the basic structure of that account is not original with this book, the scope and depth of the study are great enough that I daresay that, barring the miraculous release of hitherto confidential data – especially by Zionist and Soviet controlled sources – the treatment has been carried here about as far as it can be.

While the complexity of the subject may disturb some, it is important to learn, as we do from this book better than from any other, why this complexity exists. While many of the numerical estimates are not conclusive, it is important to learn, as we do from this study better than from any other by examining its sources, that such estimates can be made by conscientious deduction from widely accepted, accurately cited and, on very important points, mostly Jewish literature.

The result is that the simplistic legends that have petrified postwar thought on the Jewish aspect of World War II are dealt another of the many blows they have received in recent years.

*Arthur R. Butz
Evanston, Illinois
February 1983*

Addendum for the 2015 edition

In 1983 I wrote, “these massive movements subsided to trickles in the postwar period,” but now it is 2015, and the trickles have changed many details. Notable was the passage in the U.S. in 1974 of the “Jackson-Vanik Amendment,” dropped in 2012, which successfully encouraged, especially after the mid-1980s, emigration of Jews from the Soviet bloc.

In that period the population of Israel has grown from about 4 million to more than 8 million today, much of the increase consisting of Jews from the former Soviet bloc and elsewhere.

Thus an analysis of Sanning's subject would produce some different numbers today, but that is inevitable. The subject matter, after all, is "the Wandering Jew," and it just won't stand still!

*Arthur R. Butz
Evanston, Illinois
February 2015*

Introduction

Just one hundred years ago eastern Europe – Galicia, Ukraine, Hungary – was the center of the world’s Jewish population, but today that center has moved overseas to the Western Hemisphere and Israel. Whereas previously there was little doubt as to who was a Jew, today it is much more difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition. The increasing secularization of industrial society in the recent past affected the Jewish people in particular. No wonder that today the question of the numerical size of the world Jewish population is one of the most controversial of demographic statistics. Nowhere does one encounter as many contradictions as in the attempt to assess the world’s Jewish population even within the margin of error of a million. The reputable *American Jewish Year Book*, for example, lists the size of the world’s Jewish population in 1979 as 14.5 million; looking a little closer, the surprised layman will find that this number includes several hundreds of thousands of gentiles. Other highly regarded experts such Dr. Nahum Goldmann, for example, believe that Israel’s almost 3.3 million Jews constitute almost one-fifth of World Jewry; in effect, he has put the figure for the world’s Jewish population at 16½ million.

Also, if one learns that only eleven million Jews are supposed to have survived World War Two and that this decimated remnant – with the exception of the Israelis – experienced a very slow natural growth in the post-war period due to over-aging, small families, rising assimilation tendencies and widespread mixed marriages, both of the above figures for the world’s Jewish population become questionable.

Any attempt to trace the flow of migration of the Jewish people during the past fifty years and to narrow down the size of the Jewish population – then and now – can only be successful if the enigmatic demographic characteristics of the Jews in their areas of departure – *i.e.* eastern Europe – become unraveled and, furthermore, if the migration movements are seen in the historical framework.

Unquestionably, the Second World War had by far the largest impact on the numerical development of the Jews in modern times. For this reason, especially the German-Soviet confrontation until 1945 and, thereafter, the determined effort of the Jews to leave the devastated historical countries of origin deserve to be paid the utmost attention.

Primarily in order to meet possible objections, this analysis is based almost entirely on Allied, Zionist and other “sympathetic” sources. The

significance of the statistical accountings in this study is also in the demonstration that they at least *can* be made on the basis of allegedly authoritative and largely Jewish sources. The most striking findings of this study are:

- A. The world's Jewish population faced a serious demographic crisis even before World War Two. This was also true of the Jews in eastern Europe.
 B. During the 1930s roughly one million Jews left the historic places in central and eastern Europe for North and South America, Palestine, western Europe and several other minor recipient countries.
 C. At the beginning of World War Two there were fewer than 16 million Jews in the world (Zionist data are listed in parentheses):

United States	5.0	(4.8) million
USSR (incl. Baltic states)	5.3	(3.3) million
Palestine	0.4	(0.4) million
European countries occupied by Germany during WWII	2.9	(6.0) million
Rest of the world	2.4	(2.2) million
	<hr/>	
	16.0	(16.6) million

- D. Of the 5½ million Jews in the Soviet Union at the outbreak of WWII, by far the largest part was evacuated to Siberia; less than 15% fell into German hands.
 E. One million Jews died while fighting in the Red Army or in Siberian labor camps; this aspect is generally passed over in Zionist accounts.
 F. 14¾ million Jews survived the last war (Zionist data in parentheses):

United States	5.2	(5.0) million
USSR	4.3	(2.0) million
Palestine	0.6	(0.6) million
European countries occupied by Germany during WWII	2.4	(1.1) million
Rest of the world	2.2	(2.3) million
	<hr/>	
	14.7	(11.0) million

- G. Today, the world's Jewish population numbers 16½ million (*American Jewish Year Book* data listed in parentheses):

United States*	6.7	(5.9) million
USSR	3.4	(2.6) million
Israel	3.2	(3.2) million
European countries occupied by Germany during WWII	1.0	(1.0) million
Rest of the world	2.0	(1.8) million
	<hr/>	
	16.3	(14.5) million

* including several hundreds of thousands of gentiles in the case of the 5.9 and 14.5 million figures of the *American Jewish Year Book*.

H. The Jewish world population is likely to decrease at accelerating rates during the coming decades.

This study represents just one step in the attempt to trace the dissolution of Eastern Jewry in the course of the last fifty years. Many of the figures presented will, no doubt, be adjusted as further research discovers new and/or more reliable sources. In particular, it is to be hoped that students of this fascinating subject will follow the main thrust of this analysis which points to three distinct areas where further search should prove rewarding:

1. Soviet deportation of civilians, particularly Jews, before and during the Second World War.
2. The importance of Turkey as a transit country for refugee Jews arriving there by train (Bulgaria) or by ship (Constanza/Rumania); Turkish archives are virgin territory in this respect.
3. Jewish displaced persons camps (UNRRA) from Iran to Morocco.