

Representatives of Powerlessness: Viennese Jewish Functionaries in the Era of National Socialist Persecution

Who presided over the Viennese Jewish community when it became the tool of the perpetrators of the Holocaust? Who were the Jewish functionaries who had to announce National Socialist decrees and pass along orders from the SS to their community? These Jewish functionaries enforced the segregation, identification, and registration of victims. In doing so, they initially enabled emigration and then, ultimately, mass murder. Where did they come from, and what became of those functionaries who survived after 1945?

In the 1930s, Vienna had the largest Jewish population of any city in the German-speaking world. The 1934 census counted 191,481 Austrian Jews, 2.8 percent of the entire Austrian population at the time. But by March 11, 1938, probably due to the antisemitic climate—in addition to other political and economic reasons—and despite the influx of refugees from the German Reich, the Jewish population in Austria had dropped to 185,028. The Jewish community of Vienna in 1934 numbered 176,034 members, 9.4 percent of the city's population.¹ Outside Vienna, there were thirty-four Jewish communities in various towns and cities across the country before 1938. The *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (IKG), which fulfilled functions similar to that of “Jewish Councils” elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe during the National Socialist era, was the only official representative organ of Jews in Austria.

The functionaries who worked for the IKG under National Socialism had already been active representatives of the Jewish community before

1 Jewish Community of Vienna, ed. *Report of the Vienna Jewish Community* (Vienna, 1940); Herbert Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung. Die Juden in Österreich 1938-1945* (Vienna: Herold, 1978), 13.

1938. After 1945, however, those who had worked for the IKG as leading functionaries during the Nazi period were no longer permitted to hold such positions within the postwar Jewish community.²

The Decapitation of the Kultusgemeinde

On March 16, 1938, a few days after the so-called *Anschluss*—the German annexation of Austria—the Gestapo stormed the offices of the IKG. Two days later, on March 18, 1938, Reich Commissar Josef Bürckel ordered the liquidation of all organizations unless they were “to fulfill vital tasks for the state and social obligations to its members.”³ The IKG was one of the organizations not considered “vital.” On the same day, SS officer Adolf Eichmann initiated an SS raid on the main office of the IKG.⁴ Eichmann had come to Vienna from Berlin on March 16th, and he also took part in the raid.⁵ Thereafter, Eichmann as the representative of department II-112 of the SS Security Service (SD) began to coordinate antisemitic policies in Austria.⁶

During the raid on the IKG’s office building on March 18, President Desider Friedmann, vice presidents Josef Ticho and Robert Stricker—the latter a former Zionist member of the Austrian parliament—administrative director Josef Löwenherz, and numerous heads of the IKG board, including the president of the Zionist National Association for Austria Jakob Ehrlich, were arrested.⁷ The Jewish community was now at

2 Compare: Doron Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht. Wien 1938-1945. Der Weg zum Judenrat* (Frankfurt a.M.: Jüdischer Verlag, 2000); and Doron Rabinovici, *Eichmann’s Jews: The Jewish Administration Of Holocaust Vienna, 1938-1945* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

3 Dieter J. Hecht, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, and Michaela Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah. Gedenkstättenorte des zerstörten jüdischen Wien* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2018), 122-27; Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 69-81; Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 34.

4 Leo Landau, in “Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde,” report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959; YvS-01/244; 11.

5 Hans Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27. In his recollections, Charles J. Kapralik dates the first raid on the IKG as March 15, 1938 and says that Eichmann was already present. See: Charles J. Kapralik, “Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58 (1981): 52-78.

6 Dan Michman, “roschut u manhigut. Judenrat’ we ‘ichud yehudim’ b’jamei haschilton hanazi” (unpublished manuscript, August 1997), 31-41.

7 I. Klaber, “Report on the IKG Vienna 1938,” noted in 1944 by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, Yad veShemot/74; Leo Landau, in “Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes

the mercy of its persecutors as it lacked the support of its own organization. The remaining functionaries who had not been arrested attempted to temporarily preserve the organization and reopen the IKG.

During the raid, SS personnel found a donation receipt in connection with the referendum planned by Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg that indicated the IKG's opposition to Austria's unification with the German Reich; this receipt, in turn, was a welcome pretext to demand a 500,000 Reichsmark penalty, which was equivalent to the IKG's original donation. The head of the IKG's welfare office, Emil Engel, and the head of its youth welfare office, Rosa Rachel Schwarz, had managed to rescind the money from the Schuschnigg election fund.⁸ Immediately after the closure of the IKG, Engel and Schwarz used these funds—unofficially—to help Jews in need. Various members of the community met as if by chance in coffeehouses or in the Jewish Rothschild hospital to donate money to those who were impoverished.⁹ This financial assistance was greatly needed since most Jews had been deprived of their livelihoods due to work bans and “Aryanization” policies, as well as through manhunts and the newly established system of terror. Moreover, because the IKG was closed, social support could hardly be provided in an organized or systematic manner. Because the number of people in need of food assistance increased from 800 to 8,000 during this period, Jewish officials hoped they would receive permission to re-establish the IKG.¹⁰

der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde,” report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 34.

- 8 Leo Landau, in “Wien von 1909 bis 1939; Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde,” report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 11.
- 9 Leo Landau, in “Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde,” report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 11; Willy Stern, interview by the author, June 7, 1989; Rosa Rachel Schwarz, “Zwei Jahre Fürsorge der Kultusgemeinde Wien unter Hitler,” Yad Vashem Archives (Tel-Aviv, Mai 14, 1944), 2.
- 10 Leo Lauterbach, “The Jewish Situation in Austria. Report Submitted to the Executive of the Zionist Organization,” strictly confidential, April 29, 1938, Zionist Central Archives, S25-981, 7 (hereafter Lauterbach, S25-981); Samuel Graumann, *Deportiert! Ein Wiener Jude berichtet* (Vienna: Stern Verlag, 1947), 26.

The Reorganization of the Kultusgemeinde

In the second half of March 1938, Adolf Eichmann summoned the heads of Jewish organizations to the Palestine Office, a Zionist institution of the Jewish Agency, which worked to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine. Eichmann proceeded to insult, threaten, and mock representatives of the Jewish organizations.¹¹ But despite the terror he spread, Jewish leaders concluded from this meeting that Eichmann was interested in continuing the work of the IKG, albeit through a completely different structure. At this point, the National Socialist leaders aimed primarily at the targeted expulsion of the Jews. To achieve this goal—which entailed backpedaling their initial efforts to dismantle the IKG, Nazi functionaries now recognized that it was important that Jewish functionaries continued their activities.¹²

Eichmann instructed Josef Löwenherz, the director of the IKG administration (*Amtsdirektor*) who was still imprisoned, to draw up a plan for 25,000 destitute Jews to emigrate from Austria in 1938.¹³ Initially, Eichmann urged Adolf Böhm to assume leadership of the community and the Palestine Office. Böhm was a merchant, the owner of a cotton wool factory, and the chairman of the Jewish National Fund. He was also a board member of the IKG and was the highly respected author of a two-volume history of the Zionist movement. However, Adolf Böhm was deemed too old and ill for this role.¹⁴ In April 1941, Böhm was suffering from a severe nervous condition he contracted in 1938 after his encounters with Eichmann. He was killed in 1941 in Hartheim within the framework of the T4 euthanasia program.¹⁵

Instead of Böhm, the younger Alois Rothenberg became the head of the Palestine Office. The Gestapo told him that he had to liaise between the German authorities and Zionist organizations.¹⁶ The Zionist envoy Georg Landauer described Rothenberg as “a well-intentioned, hard-working, but weak, very sick Zionist, completely exhausted by dealing with the Gestapo, and sometimes even shy.” According to Landauer,

11 William R. Perl, *Operation Action: Rescue from the Holocaust* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1983), 10–12.

12 Letter to Ch. Barlass, Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, unsigned, Strictly Confidential, Zurich, May 7, 1938, Central Zionist Archives, S6-4564, 2 (hereafter Barlass, S6-4564).

13 Barlass, S6-4564, 2.

14 Lauterbach, S25-981, 9.

15 Hecht, Lappin-Eppel, and Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah*, 125.

16 Barlass, S6-4564, 5.

Rothenberg sought to avoid anything that might provoke the objection of the Gestapo.¹⁷

Eichmann ordered Josef Löwenherz, who had been arrested, to work out a strategy to enable 25,000 Jews without means to emigrate from Austria that same year. On April 20, 1938, Eichmann had Löwenherz released from prison.¹⁸ Rothenberg was ordered to work out a draft for a Zionist Central Association in five days and enclose a list of names of members for its advisory council. Löwenherz had to draw up a plan for the IKG with precise information concerning appointments and personnel.¹⁹ Eichmann would not allow Löwenherz and Rothenberg to put any “organized assimilationists” on the list, i. e., members of the *Union Österreichischer Juden* (Union of Austrian Jews).²⁰ Moreover, Eichmann did not accept Löwenherz’s initial plans.²¹

Löwenherz had been a member of the IKG Board since 1924 and later became vice president.²² In 1936, he had moved to the post of *Amtsdirktor*.²³ President Desider Friedmann, Vice President Robert Stricker, and the president of the Zionist National Association for Austria Jakob Ehrlich had been deported to Dachau concentration camp in 1938. The decision of Friedmann and Stricker not to be restored to their former leading positions as the political heads of the Jewish community may also have been related to the fact that Friedmann and Stricker were members of the Jewish fraternal organization *B’nai B’rith*. The Nazis considered this association to be a hostile global Jewish organization. Friedmann’s support for the Austrian government prior to the annexation also militated against his reinstatement as IKG president. Both Friedmann and Stricker remained in contact with Löwenherz, and both defended the IKG’s strategy of cooperation in the deportations, even while in Theresienstadt.²⁴ Jakob Ehrlich

17 Internal, confidential report by Dr. Georg Landauer, Trieste, to Dr. Martin Rosenblüth, London, England, on his experiences in Vienna, May 9, 1938, CZA, S-5/439, quoted in Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 73.

18 Barlass, S6-4564, 2.

19 Barlass, S6-4564, 3.

20 Barlass, S6-4564, 4.

21 Barlass, S6-4564, 4.

22 Isidor Oehler, Ansprache zum 60. Geburtstag des Amtsdirektors Dr. Josef Löwenherz, 6. 8. 1944. I would like to thank Evelyn Adunka for having given me a copy of this document.

23 Willi Ritter, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz (in Hebrew), Haifa, Israel, October 5, 1988, Yad veShem 0-3/3982, 2-3. Compare: Baruch Schnittlich, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz, Tel-Aviv, October 4, 1988, Yad veShem 0-3/6002.

24 Transcript of Siegfried Kolisch before the Vienna State Police, 30. 8. 1945, criminal case against Dr. Emil Tuchmann before the Landesgericht für Strafsachen Wien als Volksgericht, Vg 3c 1955/45, 24; Rabinovici, *Eichmann’s Jews*, 120 and 159.

was murdered on May 17, 1938 at the SS shooting range in Prittlbach near Dachau.²⁵ Stricker and Friedmann were transferred from Dachau to Buchenwald in September 1938. Löwenherz negotiated their release from the camp in 1939. They were, however, banned from emigrating and were deported from Vienna to Theresienstadt in the fall of 1942, where they were appointed to the “Council of Elders.” In October 1944, the two men were deported to Auschwitz and murdered immediately upon arrival together with their wives.²⁶

As a lawyer, Löwenherz was familiar with bureaucratic matters. Adolf Eichmann seemed to enjoy humiliating the elder academic. For example, Eichmann offered the representative of the Graz Jewish community a chair but left Löwenherz standing during an hour-long conversation.²⁷ Eichmann also slapped Löwenherz in the face during their first meeting.²⁸

The Jewish community of Vienna became the prototype of Jewish self-administration under National Socialist rule. The re-organized IKG was a predecessor to the *Judenräte* that were established throughout occupied Polish territory from 1939 onward.²⁹ Löwenherz was to be solely respon-

25 Evelyn Adunka, “Jakob und Irma Ehrlich,” *Chilufim—Journal of Jewish Cultural History* 7 (2009): 205-8; Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider and Rudolf Leo, “*dachaureif*,” *Der Österreichertransport aus Wien in das KZ Dachau am 1. April 1938* (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, 2019), 91.

26 Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 38; Dieter J. Hecht, “Robert und Paula Stricker,” *Chilufim—Journal of Jewish Cultural History* 7 (2009): 169-77; Kuretsidis and Leo, “*dachaureif*,” 106-7 and 272-73; Dieter Josef Mühl, Die “Wiener Morgenzeitung” und Robert Stricker,” in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Verfolgung. Deutsch-jüdische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften von der Aufklärung bis zum Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Michael Nagl (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002) 256-57. “Prominententransport,” accessed August 10, 2023, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prominententransport#-Liste_der_H%C3%A4ftlinge.

27 Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 72.

28 Jochen von Lang, ed., *Das Eichmann-Protokoll. Tonbandaufzeichnungen der israelischen Verhöre* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1985), 49. Compare with Bettina Stagneth, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem. Das unbehelligte Leben eines Massenmörders* (Zurich: Arche, 2011).

29 For the discussion of the “Judenräte,” I want to refer in particular to: Dan Diner, “Jenseits des Vorstellbaren. Der ‘Judenrat’ als Situation,” in *Gedächtniszeiten. Über jüdische und andere Geschichten* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003), 135-51; Beate Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*; Dan Michman, “Judenrat,” in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. 3, ed. Dan Diner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2012), 236-42; Dan

sible for the affairs of the institution to the new rulers. The IKG's advisory board was only permitted to support Löwenherz.³⁰ This body consisted of eight members, six of whom had belonged to the former board of the IKG. Three were representatives of the general Zionist faction, one was from the religious Zionist *Mizrachi*, and one was from the Orthodox anti-Zionist *Aguda*. Another board member, Leo Landau, had once been a candidate for the *Jüdische Partei* (Jewish Party) and had formed a coalition with the Zionists. Two members, the Zionist R. Ornstein and the anti-Zionist and Orthodox Julius Steinfeld had not been members of the previous IKG board.³¹ Representatives of the *Union Österreichischer Juden* were not allowed to sit on the IKG's advisory council. The main task of the IKG board was to facilitate the emigration of Jews from Austria—whether to Palestine or elsewhere—as quickly as possible.³²

After September 1938, only two members of the first board appointed after the *Anschluss* remained in their positions: Leo Landau and Josef Löwenherz.³³ The head of the foreign exchange office of the IKG, Charles Kapralik, reported after the war that other functionaries and rabbis had tried to leave the country as quickly as possible. Among them was Chief Rabbi of Vienna Israel Taglicht, who, after being deported to a concentration camp, managed to escape to England with his family in 1939. According to Kapralik, a bitter *bon mot* circulated among Viennese Jews: “They have gone ahead of their community.”³⁴ Some functionaries, for example Josef Löwenherz in 1939, traveled to foreign countries to negotiate

Michman, *Jewish Leadership in Extremis: The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 319-40; Dan Michman, “Kontroversen über die Judenräte in der jüdischen Welt 1945-2005. Das Ineinandergreifen von öffentlichem Gedächtnis und Geschichtsschreibung,” in *Der Judenrat von Białystok. Dokumente aus dem Archiv des Białystoker Ghettos 1941-1943*, ed. Freia Anders, Katrin Stoll, and Karsten Wilke (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 311-17; Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: ‘Jewish Councils’ in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

30 Hugo Gold, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien* (Tel Aviv: Ed. Olamenu, 1966), 81; Kapralik, “Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39,” 56.

31 I. Klaber, “Report on the IKG Vienna 1938,” noted in 1944 by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, *Yad veShemot* 74.

32 Gold, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien*, 81.

33 Leo Landau, in “Wien von 1909 bis 1939; Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde,” report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, *YvS*-01/244, 12.

34 Kapralik, “Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39,” 57.

with Jewish aid organizations but came back to Vienna. The functionaries who remained in Vienna were held responsible for the return of those who were sent abroad.³⁵

The Beginning of Mass Expulsions and Changing IKG Leadership

Following the *Anschluss* and the reinstatement of the IKG, an emigration department was established. This department was placed under the care of the *Fürsorgezentrale* of the IKG.³⁶ Within this management structure, which was directly under the authority of Josef Löwenherz, technocrats were now needed, notably individuals who were capable of organizing the mass transport of thousands without displaying compassion for the fate of individuals. In the course of a few months, they were to gain the same prominence as those who had worked as welfare workers during the initial closure of the Jewish administrative apparatus.

Eichmann tasked Löwenherz with writing a “draft of the action program of a central office to be founded for the emigration of Austria’s Jews,” whereupon Löwenherz outlined an institution that would have been a kind of service point, advice center, and support office.³⁷ Löwenherz had no idea to what extent his intentions would be twisted in the opposite direction. Upon the establishment of the *Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung* (Central Agency for Jewish Emigration) in August 1938, which was formally led by Franz Stahlecker but effectively controlled by Adolf Eichmann, the terror against the Jews escalated.³⁸ Alongside the Gestapo, the *Zentralstelle* became the instrument of oppression and control of the Jewish religious community and the coordinator of Nazi “Jewish policy” in Austria. At the *Zentralstelle*, Jews were forced to hand over all their belongings. That Vienna became the model city of National Socialist “*Judenpolitik*” is clear from the fact that *Zentralstellen*

35 Josef Löwenherz, Alois Rothenberg, and Emil Engel to the Geheime Staatspolizei, Leitstelle Wien, January 4, 1939, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-165, 1, 000087.

36 34th weekly report of the IKG Vienna from January 3, 1939, at the same time, activity, and situation report for the period from May 2, 1938 to December 31, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-165, 1, 3.

37 Draft action program of a newly to be founded *Zentralstelle für Auswanderung*, no date, without authorship, Yad vaShem 030/94.

38 Gabriele Anderl and Dirk Rupnow, *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution* (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2004), 109-12.

für jüdische Auswanderung were subsequently established in Berlin, Prague, and Amsterdam.³⁹

The Jewish functionaries of the IKG were under constant stress, and in the climate of general panic and distress, the pressure on the leading functionaries only intensified. They had to appear several times a day at Gestapo headquarters; they had to accept humiliating instructions; and they tried to negotiate with Eichmann. At the same time, they had to take care of tens of thousands of victims. Before the *Anschluss*, Rosa Schwarz, Emil Engel, and Leo Landau had engaged in humanitarian activities. Yet during the course of 1938, and especially after the November pogrom, Emil Engel was psychologically unable to cope with the visits to the Gestapo and the *Zentralstelle*.⁴⁰ In 1940, Emil Engel, Rosa Schwarz, and Leo Landau escaped to Palestine. Mass emigration now became a priority for the Viennese Jewish community. Those who had taken over the welfare tasks of the Jewish community after the *Anschluss* and were considerate of individual needs now lost their standing in the community. Technocratic organizers who displayed a certain callousness toward individual fates and knew only how to think in terms of large numbers achieved greater importance. Scholar and rabbi Doctor Benjamin Marmelstein exemplifies the latter group.

Benjamin Marmelstein, born in Lemberg in 1905, came from an Orthodox Polish Jewish family and had studied philosophy at the University of Vienna and, at the same time, the *Jüdisch-Theologische Lehranstalt* (Jewish Theological College). In 1927, Marmelstein earned his doctorate.⁴¹ On January 1, 1931, Marmelstein took up the post of community rabbi and also taught religion at various secondary schools.⁴² Also in 1931, Marmelstein began lecturing at the *Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt*.⁴³ As luck would have it, Marmelstein lived in the same house as Josef Löwenherz. Sophie Löwenherz came to appreciate Marmelstein's organizational skills in the chaotic atmosphere of March 1938. When

39 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*.

40 Jonny Moser, *Dr. Benjamin Marmelstein, ein ewig Beschuldigter? Theresienstadt in der Geschichte der nazistischen 'Endlösung der Judenfrage'*, typescript, Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands 24931.89.

41 Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands 6802, as quoted in Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 37-38.

42 Pierre Genée, Record of a two-hour interview with Dr. Benjamin Marmelstein, Rome, Italy, May 1989, 3 (hereafter Genée, interview with Dr. Benjamin Marmelstein). I would like to thank Pierre Genée for making this record available to me.

43 Board of Trustees of the Israelite Theological School to Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Marmelstein, Vienna, March 22, 1931, Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHPJ), P-151/5

Josef Löwenherz, together with the other leading functionaries, had been released from prison after his arrest in the first days after the *Anschluss*, she recommended her husband utilize the skills of the young rabbi on behalf of the IKG.⁴⁴

Murmelstein demonstrated his abilities when he compiled statistics on Jewish emigration and welfare at Löwenherz's request. Murmelstein also wrote descriptions of the *Kultusgemeinde* for foreign aid organizations, and he wrote summaries on Jewish history, various Jewish organizations, and on religion for Eichmann. Murmelstein believed that it was necessary to confront the problems of the time with harsh resolve so that the SS would have no leverage over the Jewish community. The Jewish administration itself had to ensure discipline and order.⁴⁵

The functionaries, who as previously mentioned already held leading positions in the pre-1938 IKG—whether in the field of social welfare (Emil Engel) or as a community rabbi (Benjamin Murmelstein), or even the *Amtsdirktor* (Josef Löwenherz)—were no longer representatives of the Jewish population; they were appointed by the National Socialists. Despite differences in their personal conduct, basically all the Jewish functionaries saw no alternative to cooperating with National Socialist and state authorities in view of their predicament.⁴⁶ Viennese Jewish associations were not subordinated to Berlin Jewish organizations but remained mostly isolated from them. The IKG had to announce when Jewish envoys arrived in Vienna from abroad.⁴⁷

By the time the German borders were finally closed to Jewish emigration in November 1941, 128,500 Jews had managed to flee Austria, and 55,505 had made their way to other European countries, where many were now, again, threatened by the the National Socialist state.⁴⁸

44 Genée, interview with Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, 4.

45 See: Benjamin Murmelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt. Stellungnahme eines Beteiligten," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 17, 1963, 3; Benjamin Murmelstein, "Das Ende des Ghettos Theresienstadt. Die Stellungnahme eines Beteiligten. Eine Antwort an diejenigen, die nicht dabeigewesen sind," *Die Welt*, January 14, 1964, 6.

46 See, for instance: Report on the subpoena with Commissioner Brunner of June 13, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-301, 2.

47 For example: Josef Löwenherz and Alois Rothenberg, Memo of the meeting with SS-Hauptsturmführer Eichmann, October 29, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-465.

48 Erika Weinzierl, *Zuwenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938-1945* (Graz: Styria, 1969), 52.

IKG Administration during Deportation and Extermination

As soon as the numbers of Jewish refugees dropped, Eichmann threatened the remaining Jews in Austria with anti-Jewish measures and antisemitic pogroms. On June 16, 1940, Josef Löwenherz appeared before Eichmann and reported on a directive issued by the Ministry of the Interior calling for the IKG registers to be handed over to the city administration on June 30, 1940.⁴⁹ Deportations were not yet mentioned in this regulation. Löwenherz was still trying to help Jews flee Austria. On October 13, 1940, the Gestapo informed him that a ration card register had to be established for the 60,000 Jews who remained in the country, including nonpracticing Jews. The IKG was ordered to assign thirty people to set up this central register. From November 1, 1940 on, the ration cards of all registered Jews had the word “*Jude*” stamped on them.⁵⁰ Anyone, young or old, who wanted to eat had to be registered. The Jewish administration was deceived. The register that had been ostensibly created to centralize the coordination of food rations was used to maintain a record to enable the exploitation of the Jews and, eventually, help facilitate their deportation and murder.

During the first deportations in spring 1941, emigration from Vienna was still possible, so by the end of the year, more than 6,000 persecuted people were able to escape the Third Reich. In November 1941, Alois Brunner—who had officially been appointed head of the Vienna Central Office in January of that year, but who had already assumed de facto leadership in 1939 after Eichmann left Vienna—informed Löwenherz that Jewish IKG personnel was required to assist the SS in forcing Jews out of their apartments and into assembly camps (*Sammellager*) so they could be deported.⁵¹ Löwenherz refused to provide Jewish workers for this task. Consequently, Brunner himself recruited Jewish henchmen to carry it out, selecting particularly disreputable individuals, and ordering them to proceed brutally. In this situation, to prevent the worst excesses, Löwenherz eventually agreed to recommend “reliable and decent” employees to the SS.⁵²

49 Wilhelm Bienenfeld, Bericht über die IKG in der NS-Zeit, 16. 6. 1940. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands, 8919/1 (hereafter referred to as the “Löwenherz Report”).

50 Julius Rosenfeld, Report, April 1956. Yad veShem 01/177, 2; “Löwenherz Report,” November 1, 1940.

51 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, 118.

52 Testimony by Wilhelm Bienenfeld, criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Viennese

The lists of those destined for deportation were drawn up by the *Zentralstelle* and later, after the dissolution of this institution in March 1943, by the Gestapo.⁵³ The Jewish administration had to remove from the list those who, according to the terms of the *Zentralstelle* and the deportation guidelines stipulated by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA), were not yet designated for transport.⁵⁴ The Jewish administration could also protect from a deportation individuals who were indispensable for the operation of its own administration, but another victim had to be found to replace each one who was “put on hold.” However, the IKG was not required to select who was to be deported in place of “deferrals” during the large mass deportations since the lists of the *Zentralstelle* already included substitutes. At least for the major mass transports of 1941 and 1942, which included about a thousand persons, a list of sometimes 1,100 or 1,300 persons was given to the IKG in advance. On this point, therefore, researchers who believe that the Jewish administration itself selected replacements seem to be wrong.⁵⁵ When the files speak of the *Kultusgemeinde* “having to provide for replacements,” this is expressed in bureaucratic language that meant that instead of those whose deportations were to be “postponed,” other members of the IKG were designated for deportation—by the National Socialist authorities.⁵⁶

Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45; Statement by Robert Prochnik, June 24, 1954, criminal proceedings against Robert Prochnik before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People’s Court, Viennese Provincial Court Archive, Vg 8c Vr 3532/48, continuation: Vg 8c Vr 41/542, 63-64.

53 Anderl and Rupnow, *Zentralstelle*, 293; Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men*, 120.

54 Alfred Gottwaldt and Diana Schulle, *Die “Judendeportationen” aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941-1945. Eine kommentierte Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2005), 61, 87-88, 139-45, 262-78, 372-83.

55 Compare, for example: Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 285; Lisa Hauff, *Zur politischen Rolle von Judenräten. Benjamin Murrelstein in Vienna 1938-1942* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014). Compare: Anna Hájková, review of *Zur politischen Rolle von Judenräten*, by Lisa Hauff, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* 31, ed. Rüdiger Hachtmann and Sven Reichardt (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 195-98.

56 The postwar accounts of Wilhelm Bienenfeld and National Socialist perpetrators Johann Rixinger and Anton Brunner testify to this. See: Testimony of Wilhelm Bienenfeld, 3.10.1947, criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People’s Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46 /HV 1319/47, 49; Testimony of Anton Brunner (Brunner II), 12.10.1945, criminal proceedings against Anton Brunner before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People’s Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 2d VR 4574/45; Testimony of Johann Rixinger, October 6, 1945, criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People’s Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46 /HV 1319/47.

Josef Löwenherz had known about atrocities and mass shootings in the east since the summer of 1941, but he had only heard about the systematic exterminations of Jews after the deportation of the Viennese Jewish community had already been carried out at the end of 1942. Löwenherz went to see the head of the Vienna Gestapo, Karl Ebner, to inquire about the fate of the deportees. Ebner described the incident after 1945:

One day after 1942, probably in 1943, Löwenherz came to me completely broken and asked to speak to Huber. I asked him what he wanted, and he told me that he had heard that the Jews were supposedly being killed and that he wanted to know for sure whether this was true. I said that he would go down badly with the boss and that he might prosecute him for spreading enemy radio news. Löwenherz said he didn't care. We then went to Huber. After Huber had been informed, he called Amtschef IV of the RSHA on the direct line (Müller), and we waited outside in the meantime. When we came back inside, Huber told us that Müller had dismissed these allegations as bad news. Löwenherz was visibly relieved.⁵⁷

In November 1942, the IKG was dissolved and transformed into the *Ältestenrat der Juden in Wien* (Council of Elders of the Jews in Vienna). The *Ältestenrat* was responsible for all those who were persecuted as Jews as a result of Nazi antisemitic and racist policies—regardless of their religious affiliation. The transformation of the IKG into the *Ältestenrat* had financial motives: under public law, the property of the institution was now to be transferred into the ownership of the German Reich.⁵⁸ From the German perspective, the assets of the IKG had served their purpose; welfare, emigration, and deportation had been partly paid for out of the property and funds of the Jewish administrative apparatus and other Jewish foundations in Vienna.⁵⁹

Even in the months just before the liberation, when the Jewish community in Vienna had long been destroyed, the *Ältestenrat* continued to work. There were still Jewish people living in Vienna who were married and related to non-Jews and whose families the Nazis had to take into consideration. The remaining Jews had to be cared for—in the interest of the non-Jewish population. They needed medical care to prevent possible

57 Explanation by Karl Ebner, September 20, 1961, quoted in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, student edition (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 178.

58 Willy Stern, interview by the author, June 7, 1989.

59 Franz Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991.

contagious diseases and epidemics from spreading to their non-Jewish surroundings. However, they were to remain under the control of Jewish institutions and were not to be admitted to “Aryan” hospitals because racial segregation had to be maintained. Marked with the yellow star, these Jews were still allowed to live in Vienna, but the machinery of extermination was waiting for them. For example, as soon as an “Aryan” husband died, his single Jewish widow, if she was not protected by other relatives, was deported.

Despite Jewish functionaries’ limited room for maneuver, it is important to understand the personal differences between them. While, for instance, Benjamin Marmorstein was counting on cooperation to buy time and prevent the worst outcomes for Vienna’s Jewish population, the sole remaining Jewish welfare worker, Franzi Löw, tried to support people beyond her official capacity by transgressing National Socialist laws to forge papers or aid those in hiding. Löw, born in 1916, grew up in a religious but not kosher, Zionist, and—at the same time—social democratic family, and she was a trained welfare worker who had applied for a job with the Vienna municipal government after completing her training but had been rejected. She was employed by the IKG in 1937. She remained a welfare worker for Jewish victims of persecution throughout the entire Nazi era. Two bakers agreed to give Löw two ten-liter bottles of whole milk and twenty kilos of bread every morning, which was illegal at the time. Franzi Löw carried this whole milk and bread to children in the Jewish orphanage at five o’clock in the morning across National Socialist Vienna since Jewish people, even minors, were excluded from receiving these food items starting in the summer of 1942.⁶⁰ Löw also helped people who survived in hiding, risking her own life.⁶¹ Children who had a non-Jewish parent and were considered “half-Jews” were also saved with Franzi Löw’s help. Löw even managed to free from a *Sammellager* (assembly camp) a boy whose mother had been deported in 1941. Löwenherz knew about Löw’s illegal activities but kept her on as an employee.⁶² Franzi Löw risked her own life, and her activities clearly demonstrate that cooperation and resistance could be intertwined.

60 Joseph Walk, ed., *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat. Eine Sammlung der gesetzlichen Maßnahmen und Richtlinien—Inhalt und Bedeutung* (Heidelberg: Müller, 1981), 280.

61 Franzi Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991; Franzi Löw, interview, in *Jüdische Schicksale. Berichte von Verfolgten*, ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands (Vienna: ÖBV, 1992), 185-87; Hecht, Lappin-Eppel, and Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah*, 281-87, 508-9.

62 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 188-90.

The Postwar Fates of Leading IKG Members

The Case of Franzl Löw

After 1945, despite all their differences—whether a functionary of the IKG had provided significant assistance during the deportations or not, and whether a person had acted benevolently like Franzl Löw or imperiously like Benjamin Murelstein—all those who had worked for the Jewish administration were suspected of collaboration. This suspicion after 1945 affected not only those who held executive roles in the IKG under National Socialist control but also, as we will see, lower-level employees too.

After liberation in 1945, Franzl Löw entered the employ of the city of Vienna. She no longer worked for the IKG but was initially elected to its board. In 1947, a complaint against Löw was submitted by Aron Moses Ehrlich, a political opponent of hers within the IKG. In an open letter Ehrlich wrote the following about Franzl Löw: "... the same person was in Vienna during the entire Hitler era and was a frequent visitor at the Gestapo. The Jewish population demands clarity and the immediate appointment of a commission of enquiry. In particular, I was informed in a somewhat sensational way that the *Kultursätin* Franzl Löw allegedly also enters into marriage or has already entered into marriage with a Nazi judge only recently."⁶³ The so-called Nazi judge was Wilhelm Danneberg, who, together with his entire family, had supported Franzl Löw's welfare work despite the constant risk to his life. Wilhelm Danneberg was even suspended from his job in 1938 because of his "friendliness towards Jews."⁶⁴

The complaint did not lead to a trial. However, Franzl Löw drew her own conclusions and withdrew from her role in the IKG, but she served as the chief social worker at the Viennese Health Department. She married Wilhelm Danneberg in 1948. In 1966, Franzl Danneberg-Löw received the Golden Cross of Merit of the Republic of Austria, which was presented to her by the Mayor of Vienna.⁶⁵ She retired in 1979.⁶⁶ Franzl Löw-Danneberg died in 1997, and her achievements were never publicly acknowledged by the Jewish community until after her death.

63 Aron Moses Ehrlich, "Addendum to my open letter", June 12, 1947, complaint about Franzl Löw, Viennese Provincial Court Archive, Vg 5c Vr 6078/47, 2/1 KVG.

64 Franzl Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991; Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 187.

65 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 197.

66 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 197.

The Case of Wilhelm Reisz

Jewish individuals accused of collaboration with the perpetrators were often judged more severely than National Socialist criminals. For example, Wilhelm Reisz, who was charged with collaboration, had been one of the employees selected by Löwenherz when Brunner had forced him to appoint Jewish employees to accompany SS men when removing those who were to be deported from their flats. After the war, Reisz was denounced by some survivors for having behaved brutally in this role.⁶⁷ A trial against Reisz was initiated in 1946.⁶⁸ Although Reisz denied the accusations, the Austrian People's Court, based on the witnesses' statements, found him guilty and sentenced him to fifteen years of hard imprisonment, including a quarter of a year in a camp.⁶⁹

The sentence is particularly noteworthy, especially compared with the sentencing practices of the Austrian judiciary after 1945. For example, the notorious and brutal SS man and Blood Order bearer Ernst Girzik was sentenced to fifteen years in prison but was granted amnesty by the Austrian Federal President in December 1953.⁷⁰ Johann Rixinger, the Gestapo's Jewish affairs officer in Vienna (the *Judenreferent*) who had been vested with high-level decision-making powers during the deportations and had been involved in the administrative dimensions of mass murder, was sentenced to ten years in prison. He served only six and a half years of his sentence.⁷¹ Reisz received five years more than Rixinger, who had already been active as an (illegal) Nazi before the *Anschluss*.

The day after Rixinger's sentence was pronounced, Wilhelm Reisz hanged himself in his cell.⁷² Reisz had not expected the guilty verdict and saw himself not as a perpetrator but as a victim.

67 Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

68 Main hearing against Wilhelm Reisz, July 8, 1946, Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45, 135.

69 Judgement against Wilhelm Reisz, July 8, 1946, Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

70 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, 329.

71 Criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46/HV 1319/47.

72 Prison II to Provincial Court, Vienna, July 11, 1946, criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

The Case of Benjamin Murrelstein

Benjamin Murrelstein (Image 1) became the symbol of all the accusations made by survivors against Viennese Jewish functionaries after 1945. In January 1943, Murrelstein was deported to Theresienstadt together with eleven other leading Jewish functionaries from Berlin, Vienna, and Prague. Murrelstein soon became the second deputy of the *Judenältester* there. After his predecessors had been murdered, Murrelstein was appointed *Judenältester* of Theresienstadt on December 13, 1944.⁷³

In May 1945, Murrelstein relinquished his role as *Judenältester*, and by June of the same year, he found himself under arrest. His pre-trial detention lasted eighteen months. He was accused of collaboration by other survivors. On December 6, 1946, the public prosecutor of the People's Court in Leitmeritz withdrew the indictment against Murrelstein because of insufficient evidence. Murrelstein was released the same day after he waived his right to compensation for imprisonment.⁷⁴

In 1947, Murrelstein testified as a witness for the prosecution at the trial of camp commandant Karl Rahm.⁷⁵ In 1947, he moved to Rome because of a vacancy in a rabbinical seminary there. In August 1948, Murrelstein had to face the court of honor of the Organization of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy. However, he was again able to counter the accusations.⁷⁶ He left Rome and moved to Trieste, where he was offered a rabbinate. But he soon had to resign again. In an interview in 1979, he declared that he had gotten into a power struggle with an official of the Trieste Jewish community:

In reality, the matter was quite simple. I was not willing be bullied by a moneybag ... I said to them "it was an honor" and left ... That was the most natural thing to do ... I was used to other things and was no longer willing to be regarded as some petty official of the *kille*

73 Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, 30.

74 Murrelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt," 3.

75 Judgment 441/47, 30. 4. 1947, translated and quoted in Murrelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt," 3. Compare: Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*; Anna Hájková, "Der Judenälteste und seine SS-Männer. Benjamin Murrelstein und seine Beziehung zu Adolf Eichmann und Karl Rahm," in *Der Letzte der Ungerechten. Der Judenälteste Benjamin Murrelstein in Filmen 1942-1975*, ed. Ronny Loewy and Katharina Rauschenberger (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2011) 75-99.

76 Philip Friedman, "Aspects of the Jewish Communal Crisis in the Period of the Nazi Regime in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia," in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought*, ed. Joseph L. Blau, Arthur Herzberg, Philip Friedman, and Isaac Mendelsohn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 230.



Image 1: Benjamin Murelstein. Source: Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, P 151/1.

[Yiddish for community], dependent on the whims of the chairman and the committee. Don't forget that in Vienna or Theresienstadt, I had been in charge. It might have been better if it hadn't been the case, but unfortunately that's how it was. You must therefore understand, Professor, that psychologically, this demotion was a little too much.⁷⁷

The former Elder of the Jews was no longer content to be a minor spiritual official. Benjamin Murelstein regarded the move from Elder of the Jews in Theresienstadt under the Nazis to the rabbi of the Jewish community in Trieste a demotion of sorts. He settled in Rome with his wife and son Wolf. He attempted initially to establish his own business, then he started making money as a furniture salesman and demonstrated a talent for business.

⁷⁷ Benjamin Murelstein, several interviews by Leonhard Ehrlich, Rome, 1977. I am grateful to Professor Leonhard Ehrlich for providing me with copies of these interviews, and to Dr. Pierre Genée who transmitted them to me, Series I, Tape 2 B, 31-32.

In 1949, legal proceedings against Benjamin Murelstein were again initiated in Vienna. The investigation seemed to come to nothing, though it continued into 1955, but this case was closed again in the autumn of the same year.⁷⁸ During the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, Murelstein published an Italian-language book about his views on the Terezín ghetto.⁷⁹ He was not called to testify at the trial. Murelstein lived in seclusion in Rome until his death. From time to time, he received historians or interested persons for interviews. He answered some of their written inquiries.⁸⁰ His interview with Claude Lanzmann, which served as the basis for Lanzmann's film *The Last of the Unjust*, became famous.⁸¹ He died on October 27, 1989.⁸²

Murelstein was judged much worse than other Jewish functionaries. The theologian, intellectual, and historian was convinced that he had done the right thing. It was precisely his cold imperturbability, which at the time did not make him seem more amiable but rather pitiless, that in retrospect reinforces the significance, indeed the authenticity, of his reports and his justifications. Murelstein remained convinced of the correctness of his actions even after the reality of the mass murder of the European Jews became clear.

The Case of Josef Löwenherz

Josef Löwenherz (Image 2) had already suffered noticeably from his position in 1938.⁸³ The mass deportations made Löwenherz despair. On July 14, 1941, the German-language newspaper of Palestine *Jedioth Achronoth*

78 Compare: Criminal proceedings against Dr. Benjamin Murelstein before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 7a Vr 895/49, continuation Vg 8e Vr 698/55; Gauakte Murelstein, Archiv der Republik, Zl.26 271-2/56.

79 Benjamin Murelstein, *Terezin. Il Ghetto-Modello di Eichmann* (Bologna: Capelli Editori, 1961); Benjamin Murelstein, *Theresienstadt. Eichmanns Vorzeige-Ghetto*, ed. Ruth Pleyer and Alfred J. Noll, trans. by Karin Fleischanderl (Vienna: Czernin, 2014).

80 Herbert Rosenkranz to Benjamin Murelstein in Rome, Jerusalem, April 10, 1980; Benjamin Murelstein to Herbert Rosenkranz in Jerusalem, Rome, April 27, 1980; Herbert Rosenkranz to Benjamin Murelstein, June 1, 1980. I thank Herbert Rosenkranz for providing me with a copy of these documents. Copies of the letters in author's possession.

81 *The Last of the Unjust*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (Vienna, 2013).

82 Gabi Anderl and Pierre Genée, "Wer war Dr. Benjamin Murelstein. Biographische Streiflichter," *David. Jüdische Kulturzeitschrift* 10 (1998): 9-20, here 18.

83 Arieh Menczer and Menczer Mordechai, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz (in Hebrew), Haifa, June 6, 1976, Yad veShem 0-3/3913, 29.

Olei Germania We Olei Ostria reported: “A news report from Zurich says that Dr Josef Löwenherz, the chairman of the Jewish Community in Vienna, had to be taken to hospital because of a nervous breakdown when he received orders from the Gestapo to assist in the deportation of all Viennese Jews to Lublin.”⁸⁴ Löwenherz had burst into tears in the middle of the synagogue that day.

In May 1945, Löwenherz was arrested by the Soviet authorities.⁸⁵ Investigations of his activities were opened in Prague.⁸⁶ On August 10, 1945, the German Jewish New York newspaper *Der Aufbau* ran an article on the Löwenherz case in which the new deputy head of the IKG, Benzion Lazar, was quoted making accusations against Löwenherz. *Der Aufbau* doubted Lazar’s statements.⁸⁷

After the investigations in Prague were concluded and the accusations were refuted, Löwenherz was able to leave the country with his wife. In Palestine, Alois Rothenberg, the former head of the Palestine Office, tried to find entry possibilities for Josef and Sophie Löwenherz, and Chaim Weizmann is said to have personally requested two certificates for Prague, which were intended for the two of them.⁸⁸ But Josef and Sophie Löwenherz wanted to join their children in the United States. They traveled first to Switzerland, then to England, and then finally departed from there for New York.⁸⁹

In the spring of 1946, Joseph Löwenherz was invited by the Association of Jewish Refugees in London to deliver a lecture on his activities within the IKG during the Nazi regime.⁹⁰ Löwenherz tried to explain that he had attempted to save human lives. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on his lecture:

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Löwenherz and his colleagues, 136,000 out of a total of 206,000 Austrian Jews were able to emigrate (several thousand even during the war via Siberia or Lisbon); 15,000 died from

84 *Jedioth Achronoth Olei Germania We Olei Ostria*, July 4, 1941, 2, quoted in Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 135.

85 Wilhelm Bienenfeld to State Secretary, May 22, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4.

86 Wilhelm Bienenfeld to Josef Löwenherz, September 11, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4, 14.

87 Transcript of an article from the newspaper *Aufbau*, vol. XI, no. 32 (August 10, 1945), 6, in Yad veShem 030/4.

88 Arno Erteschik to Josef Löwenherz, October 26, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4.

89 Letters from Erna Patak to Josef and Sofie Löwenherz, Yad veShem 030/4. Helga Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen. Juden in Österreich nach 1945* (Vienna: Picus, 1945), 32.

90 Evelyn Adunka, *Die vierte Gemeinde. Die Geschichte der Wiener Juden von 1945 bis heute* (Berlin: Philo, 2000) 19.



Image 2: Dr. Josef Löwenherz (middle), a lawyer and the administrative director of the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde of Vienna* together with two other Jewish functionaries, Dr. Leo Landau (left) and Dr. Ignaz Hermann Körner (right). Source: Yad Vashem Photo Archive, YVS 01/244.

natural causes; 47,000 were deported and of these only 1,300 have returned; and 6,000 who are married to non-Jews were able to remain in Vienna.

Dr. R. Bienenfeld, who was in the chair, emphasized that Dr. Löwenherz, whilst himself being in constant danger of his life, has saved the lives of tens of thousands of Jews. Of all the Jewish communities under Nazi rule, Austrian Jewry had suffered the smallest loss in proportion—about 25 per cent—in spite of the hostile attitude of the Austrian population. Amidst the applause of the audience, he thanked Dr. Löwenherz on behalf of the Austrian Jewish refugees.⁹¹

Löwenherz settled in New York, but it is said that he never found peace there either as he often met Viennese Jews and felt compelled to justify his behavior.⁹²

91 “Former Director of Vienna Jewish Community Succeeded in Saving 136000 Austrian Jews,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 15, 1946, YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research) Archives, DP Camps in Austria, Reel 1, 0283. I am grateful to Evelyn Adunka for giving me a copy of this document.

92 George E. Berkley, *Vienna and its Jews: The Tragedy of Success* (Cambridge: Abt Books, Madison Books, 1988), 343; Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen*, 32.

During the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, Josef Löwenherz was asked to act as a witness for the prosecution. He was already a sick man. The Israeli consul visited Löwenherz during the preparations for the trial. Löwenherz was very agitated and promised to fill out a more detailed questionnaire soon. He was never able to finish this work. The memory of Eichmann was too much for him. He suffered a heart attack and died three days later.

Löwenherz, like many of those who had worked with the SS and Gestapo during the deportations and survived, suffered from feelings of guilt even though he was not charged with any crimes.

Conclusion

In Vienna in 1938, the National Socialist rulers saw no need to replace all of the IKG's leading functionaries. In fact, most of them retained their offices. These Jewish representatives cooperated with the National Socialist regime in order to save as many Jews as possible, but by fulfilling the obligations placed on them by the authorities, they helped the perpetrators of the Shoah murder most of the more than 60,000 Jews who remained in Vienna. It is important not to lose sight of the difference between their cooperation and complicity. Individual Jews, as well as Jewish officials, could become collaborators as a result of the coercion they faced, but non-Jewish collaborators in occupied countries participated in the crimes voluntarily. Historians such as Raul Hilberg, Isaiah Trunk, and Yehuda Bauer came to understand collaborators as the accomplices of non-Jewish groups in territories occupied by the Wehrmacht.⁹³ Evgeny Finkel cautiously uses the term collaboration to refer also to Jewish strategies of dealing with the National Socialist authorities, but he also sharply distinguishes it from non-Jewish behavior and especially from Jewish complicity in the Shoah.⁹⁴

The conditions in Vienna, however, were characterized by very specific circumstances that were different from those discussed by Hilberg, Trunk, Bayer, and Finkel. Deportations started in Vienna while emigration was still possible. The nature of Jewish cooperation and the Jewish

93 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 145-48; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 570-75.

94 Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 72.

administration, whose attitude had already been formed when thousands fled the country, changed only gradually.

The extent of the crime became clear only after the majority of the remaining Jewish community of Austria had been killed. When the first mass deportations started in early 1941, it was still unclear what awaited the Jews in the east. Only after the largest mass deportations in autumn 1942 did the Jewish administration in Vienna hear of the systematic extermination of European Jewry. The Jewish functionaries in Austria saw no alternative to cooperating because they cherished the hope of being able to rescue some of the community. Cooperation with the Nazis appeared to be the lesser evil as the National Socialists' goal of total annihilation was still unimaginable and incalculable.

After 1945, Jewish survivors sought a new beginning following their persecution and the extermination of their communities. The rejection of former functionaries and employees of the Council of Elders served to reconstruct Jewish identity after the mass murder. Jewish officials who had led the Jewish community in the era of National Socialist persecution, most of whom had been prominent community leaders before 1938, therefore, played no further role in postwar Jewish life.