

# *The New Republic* and the Holocaust

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While most major American magazines and newspapers buried or ignored news about the Nazi genocide, there was a significant exception: the weekly magazine *The New Republic*. Its editors challenged the Roosevelt administration's refugee policy in ways that were rarely heard in the United States, much less from a publication that strongly supported FDR's New Deal policies.

One of the reasons *The New Republic* took such a forceful stance was that its editorial staff included Varian Fry, who in 1940-41 personally rescued some 2,000 refugees from Vichy France, including the artist Marc Chagall, the philosopher Hannah Arendt, and the Nobel Prize winning scientist Otto Meyerhoff. Fry did so in defiance of the U.S. State Department, which, because it opposed bringing refugees to America, sought to discourage Fry and even refused to renew his passport when it expired, thus forcing him to suspend his rescue mission.

In December 1942, after the Allies confirmed that the mass murder of European Jewry was underway, Fry authored a powerful feature article in *The New Republic*, in which he provided horrific details of Nazi atrocities, based in part on information provided by his former contacts in France. Fry's article and the following week's editorial proposed specific action to aid the Jews, including creation of an Allied commission to rescue Jews; a threat by the Pope to excommunicate Catholic participants in Nazi atrocities; and asylum in the U.S. for all Jewish refugees for the duration of the war. They also urged the British to let Nazi satellite countries "send their Jewish subjects to Palestine rather than to keep them until the Nazis get around to slaughtering them." *The New Republic* warned that if the Allies remained indifferent, "they will make themselves, morally, partners in Hitler's unspeakable crimes...If the Anglo-Saxon nations continue on their present course, we shall have connived with Hitler in one of the most terrible episodes of history...If we do not do what we can, our children's children will blush for us a hundred years

hence." Similar articles and editorials appeared in the magazine throughout 1943.

**THINK ABOUT IT: Do you agree with the editors of *The New Republic* that if the Allies remained silent, they deserved to be considered "partners" to Hitler's crimes?**

*The New Republic's* efforts to stir the public conscience coincided with a similar effort by Jewish activists. A group led by a Zionist emissary from Jerusalem, Peter Bergson (whose real name was Hillel Kook) and the Academy Award-winning screenwriter Ben Hecht sponsored full-page



newspaper ads, organized rallies, and lobbied Congress on the rescue issue. *The New Republic's* editors called Bergson's rescue proposals "excellent, concrete, and workable. It is now up to the Allies."

Not that *The New Republic* was content to wait for the Allies to act. The August 30 issue included an extraordinary 20-page supplement titled "The Jews of Europe: How to Help Them." In a series of eloquent and hard-hitting articles, it detailed "concrete proposals for the actions that can be taken

now,” such as asylum in the U.S. and Britain for refugees; shipments of Allied weapons to Jewish resistance fighters; food shipments for starving Jews, just as food was shipped to Nazi-occupied

Greece; and opening the gates of Palestine to Jews fleeing Hitler. “It is not yet too late,” the editors wrote, “to retrieve ourselves and to prevent our being recorded in history as the tacit accomplices of this most terrible of all crimes.”

The Jewish community greeted the *New Republic* supplement with enthusiasm. A columnist for the Yiddish-language *Morgen Zhurnal* declared: “It should be in the hands of every Jew and should also be spread through the Christian world.” Jewish organizations and others purchased more than 40,000 copies of the supplement within the first week of its publication. That issue of *The New Republic* was the highest-selling of the year, and the enormous demand necessitated a second printing of the supplement—bringing its print run to a total of 90,000 copies.

***THINK ABOUT IT: Many Jewish newspapers printed articles about what was happening to the Jews in Europe, but The New Republic was one of the very few large-circulation periodicals to speak out. Which type of publication was more likely to influence public opinion—and why?***

The *New Republic* supplement appeared at precisely the right moment: the Bergson group’s own campaign of publicity and lobbying was in full gallop, and would soon culminate in a march of 400 rabbis to the gates of the White House, followed by the introduction of a Congressional resolution calling for the creation of a U.S. government agency devoted to rescue.

The resolution found strong support in Congress. The Bergson group’s newspaper ads and lobbying efforts, supplemented by *The New Republic*’s constant and vociferous calls for rescue, made substantial inroads on Capitol Hill. Meanwhile, Treasury Department officials were mounting a behind-the-scenes effort to convince President Roosevelt that the refugee issue was becoming an embarrassment and that Congress would soon pass the rescue resolution. In January 1944, FDR preempted Congress by unilaterally establishing the War Refugee Board, a government agency devoted to rescue—precisely what the Bergson group and *The New Republic* had been demanding. In the final fifteen months of the war, the War Refugee Board undertook rescue initiatives that helped save some 200,000 Jews, including sponsoring the life-saving activities of Raoul Wallenberg. The editors of *The New Republic* could justly feel proud of the role they played in raising public awareness and increasing the pressure on the Roosevelt administration to take action.

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