

Bobine 203

TAMIR 1

C.L. Mr Minister, I would like to explain something: one of the main characters in this film - one of the main protagonists in spite of the fact that I never met him and that he is dead - is Rabbi Weissmandel. I could explain why, but I know that you met him. I would like to know in which circumstances, in which purpose and what was your impression of the man.

T. We came across - during the trial - a document, most appalling, heart-tearing. The outcry from the depths of death to the free world ending with the accusation " You are madmen , you are murderers . You view it, you are silent, you do nothing when we are being led to death by hundreds of thousands, by millions." When it was first presented by me to the court I knew it as a letter written anonymously. I believe I received the document from Joel Brand, from his archive. Later , during one of the testimonies, we found out that the writer was Rabbi Michael Weissmandel and one couldn't but be deeply impressed by the personality, by the sincerity , by the most unique power of expression , by the political wisdom and leadership; and I started to enquire

" Where is the man? " I was told that he was one of the escapees from the death trains. He has jumped from a death train while his family has not managed to escape - his wife and a good number of children. I was further told that for a good while he stayed in Switzerland and later he moved to Mount Cisco in New York - New York State where he led a Yashiva with a good number of rabbinical students. He was described to me as a man who was crying for years , day and night, never being in a position to recover himself from the general tragedy and the personal tragedy.

C.L. Exactly.

T. And I decided to try and meet him and get information from him. And I did it in January 1956. If you are interested in the facts I can continue.

C.L. I am. You went to America.

T. I went to America.

C.L. To Mount Cisco.

T. To Mount Cisco and I asked and I needed a lot of intervention and influence of people to meet him. And he met people only at night ; and I was brought to him on a very chilly night in the midst of January - a snow night - at two or three in the morning.

C.L. So late?

T. Yes. And when I came into the room he knew the purpose; he knew of the trial - of the Kastner trial.

he knew my role , he knew I was searching for the facts but he was very much against the whole Zionist process . And in principle he wouldn't cooperate with anything Zionist . And it was very astonishing at the beginning to enter the room , to see the man -a very impressive man - deep in sadness and thoughts . And I came and I introduced myself and he says " Welcome ". I wasn't offered a seat. Because I came from over there , from the wrong place , from the wrong people - not from the wrong place but from the wrong people - not people but regimes . I wasn't offered a cup of tea and I was sick then and my throat was in poor condition . And he started to ask me very simple questions : what do I want ? And I said I want material - documents , facts - for the continuation of the truth-revealing trial . And he said " I will not help a Zionist court .I shall not cooperate with a Zionist court , with anything Zionist." I told him this is the only court which found the truth . He stuck to his attitude.

C.L. The trial was already finished ?

T. No . A good part of it was over . '56 - actually the judgment was already there but other trials - civil cases - developed and the appeal was still pending

C.L. And Kastner was alive .

T. And Kastner - in '56 - January - Kastner was alive

Eventually, after a few questions and answers , I was offered a seat and the conversation started to develop and I regained my voice and started to be aggressive . I said if you are really interested in the facts we are all blood and flesh and you are not too young . This is the last opportunity to expose and reveal the facts through any tribunal . And you have to do this service to the truth and to the Jewish people . Apparently he was studying me , trying to find out what are my real motives before he will talk . And he started to open up and after about half an hour He said " Would you have some tea ? " and , still later I was offered even fish . But the serious thing was that... I talked more than him at the beginning , until he said " You know something ? I'll ask you a question . And he started to talk . And the question was very long and he started to tell me facts . And after thirty minutes of fact-revealing story he said " And now the question therefore is ..." which was apparently a way to justify his cooperation with the Zionist cause by not just telling me facts but ending up with a question . I say he is cooperating because at the beginning I said ' I came to ask you to come to Jerusalem to testify, ' and this he refused totally . But then he started to give me facts and giving me facts was also cooperation . In the middle of his

question I said may I take notes from your question and he said " Later ", and then he allowed me to take a pencil and paper and start writing . And we sat for , I think , close to the morning hours , and I took notes . After two hours , I think , he said " I'll show you something , " and he started to bring about - not this single letter... outcry.

TAMIR 2

T. So not only the single outcry - an extremely strong one - but additional ones , more and more of them; letters , dispatches , messages sent from the underground to the free world.

C.L. They were sent to Istanbul , to Switzerland .

T. It was meant to arrive in England , in the United States . And together they combine facts and atmosphere ; and these were original , original documents from the time of the actual slaughter and as far as testimony is concerned, it was extremely important for me . Eventually , years later , it was published in a book a book which he didn't manage to edit properly and he was worried that he won't have time to do so . Anyway he showed me the letters and I asked him to give them to me so that I can produce them as documents in court .

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

but he refused . He said " You won't get it from me . I won't cooperate with a Zionist court . Maybe you'll get it some day , some way , I shall not give it to you ! " And this was bringing us to the morning hours . I gathered the information that I did . He has developed his philosophy , how it all came about , what were the responsible factors , and he has agreed to see me again , in his office somewhere else - not in the Yashiva and the apartment . And we met a few days later
C.L. In Williamsburg(?).

T. I guess so . And then it was altogether another talk . He controlled the English language in a beautiful way . He knew a lot on issues and matters and fields which had nothing to do with rabbinical life - on modern life, on modern sciences , on modern culture . He knew a lot about Israel . He challenged the Zionist thinking and philosophy as compared to the religious - to the totally faithful religious one as he understood it . And I still remember how he said that the secular culture is bringing the world to emptiness and to an eventual annihilation . The more I heard the man the more I developed an admiration for him although we were from very different worlds , and my respect for him , which was attached originally to that single document, became much wider . We had an additional few contacts,

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

not only during that visit to America . An interesting episode which had to do with this visit was that three hours before I left the United States , after a combination of coincidences , I was handed over copies of all the documents which I had seen in his home by another Rabbi , which , on the face of it , could have nothing to do with Rabbi Weissmandel. Still I believe , to this very day , that he found a way to give me the documents and to allow himself , in one way or another of justification , to give it to me in trust because , apparently he decided that my motives were pure . And I had the documents - I still have them . Eventually I saw them in his book . I couldn't forget the outcry which was sent to the free world in the very beginning of the dispatch of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz . It was written on May 15 1944 , the cover was in a cave near Lublin . It wasn't there . It was from somewhere in the heart of Slovakia .

C.L. Slovakia , yes .

T. I won't read it to you in all but ... He describes very meticulously , almost in a scientific way , how , every day , twelve thousand Jews are being put into the trains , led to Auschwitz , cheated, brought into the gas-chambers , put to death and , eventually burnt . Then he continues with his demands and with his accusations : " You , our brothers

in Palestine , in all the countries of freedom ;
and you , ministers of all kingdoms , how do you
keep silent in the face of this great murder -
silent , while thousands and thousands - reaching
now to six million Jews - were murdered , and
silent now , while tens of thousands are being
murdered and waiting to be murdered . Their destroyed
hearts cry to you for help as they bewail your
cruelty . Brutal you are , and murderers , too ,
you are because of the cold-bloodedness of
silence in which you watch , because you sit with
folded arms and you do nothing , though you could
stop or delay the murder of Jews at this very
hour . In the name of the blood of thousands of
thousands who have been murdered , we beg , we plead ,
we cry out and demand that you take action , that
you do deeds now - at once - that the ministers of
kingdoms and all the lands raise a loud and piercing
outcry that must enter the ears of the world , the
ears of the German people , the ears of the Hungarian
people . Let them cry out a warning to the German
murderers ; let them proclaim that they know all
that has been done in the past and that which is
still being done ." And then he goes on and he
describes Auschwitz and he demands the bombing of
Auschwitz , and the bombing of the trains leading

to Auschwitz

C.L. On the way ?

T. On the way . And he winds up : " Drop all other business to get this done . Remember that one day of your idleness kills twelve thousand souls . You our brothers , sons of Israel , are you insane ? Don't you know the hell around us ? For whom are you saving your money ? How is it that all our pleadings affect you less than the whimperings of a beggar standing in your doorway ? Murderers ! Madmen ! Who is it that gives charity ? You who toss a few pennies from your safe homes or we who give our blood in the depths of hell ? There is only one thing that may be said in your exoneration - that you do not know the truth . This is possible . The villain does his job so shrewdly that only few guess the truth . We have told you the truth several times . Is it possible that you believe our murderers more than you believe us ? May God open your eyes and give your heart rescue in these last hours that remain . Most important , " he repeats , " is that which I write about the bombing of Auschwitz crematoria and the bridges leading to them . Such bombing can vitally delay the evil work of our slaughterers , and God who keeps alive the last remnants of Israel will show his mercy , for which

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

I pray . I pray as I write out of the sea of tears of the people of Israel . We await God's help , one from the market who witnesses the woes of his people . " I had a telephone call with Rabbi Weissmandel on another visit and he gave me directly a few tips as to how to go about the trial . And one day I heard that he passed away and I recalled a picture

TAMIR 3

T. And one day I heard that he passed away - heart failure - and I recalled that mid-January night and the snow , the dozens , perhaps hundreds , of students , pale , meagre , praying and studying in the middle of the night . And he , seated among his admirers , thinking the morning , with a lot of strength , spiritual strength , still prevailing ; but with all this sadness and despair in his expression .

C.L. Did he talk with you , or did you talk with him , about Kastner specifically ?

T. Yes . And he had his opinion .

C.L. I would like to know what did he think , not only of Kastner , but of the achievements of Kastner ? He said it ?

T. He was critical of Kastner , although Rabbi

Weissmandel and a few people were led to the Swiss border in an operation in which Kastner was involved .

C.L. I know . At the moment the Russians enter Slovakia

T. That's right . And he was led to the Swiss border with Herman Krumai (?), the number two man after Eichmann . I knew why the cooperation was organised by Krumai and Kastner . It was meant to save Krumai and make him cross the border , and Rabbi Weissmandel and a few Jews with him were the pretext .

C.L. There were twenty-three , I think .

T. I think so . And I have interrogated Kastner a lot about this operation and , if you allow me, I will come to it a bit later . But still , coming back to Rabbi Weissmandel , he was critical of Kastner but he viewed the Kastner operation very much differently from mine .

C.L. Yes . This is the reason why I ask you .

T. I thought that what happened to Kastner was basically psychological . I thought that the man who started as a young , active , dynamic Zionist socialist with good intentions , under the German Nazi pressure , gradually developed a fantastic egomaniacal attitude and gradually was overtaken by the so-called power vested in him until he forgot where he belonged . And I suggested to the

court that his soul was burned in Auschwitz , until he became a fully - fledged collaborator with the Nazis . He was a victim - A most dangerous victim .

C.L. I think it is a beautiful formula : ' a dangerous victim '.

T. But Rabbi Weissmandel told me , " You are involved in too much psychology . Look for the money ." And he repeated it , " Be much more down to earth, look for the money ." And I didn't agree with him because even in the district court , although one of the accusations against Kastner had to do with money - Becher himself ... money involved , the court didn't find enough proof , or any proof, to justify this allegation and dismissed it . While the court said that he did collaborate , the explanation of the courts were similar to those which I presented during the trial . And Rabbi Weissmandel even in the last telephone call , said , " Look for the money ! " There was a very long and very involved story about money which had to do with Kurt Becher , and I have no doubt that Becher looted the Jews and started his richness , and he is a most wealthy multi - millionaire today in West Germany.....

C.L. I know .

T. ... from Jewish property . But I have no facts to state that Kastner personally made any money out of

it. I have no facts at all and I wouldn't say it .

C.L. I don't think so , personally .

T. But this was the attitude of Weissmandel . He
uttered it in a general way and he repeated it ,

" You are too involved in psychological explanation " !

C.L. No , I asked you this question about what did
Weissmandel think actually of Kastner because I
would like to know if he talked really to you about
it , what did he say about Kastner and what you
yourself , personally think , not about Kastner -
we will come to this later on , but Weissmandel was
the first one who initiated , in Slovakia , the
negotiations with the Germans to rescue Jews for
money. This was the Kastner line .And Weissmandel
even advised Kastner around the people of the
so-called Varada in Budapest to negotiate with Wis-
itzeny. Wislitzeny brought to them a letter for
Weissmandel on the so-called 'working hope of
Slovakia'. Weissmandel gives it to Eichmann(?) -
all these people . And I don't think ... He was
not against the negotiation of Jews for money ?
He was not . Did he talk with you about it ?

T. Yes , yes . He was not against but it was clear in
our conversation between usAnd I thought so then
and I still maintain it , that it is a complete
absurdity to look from now backwards , or from a
safe haven to the depths of hell , and give
judgment . He was right here , and he was wrong

there ; and what was the exact attitude which had to be adopted , I never maintained that we can sit so calmly and judge . I felt , and apparently on this we have agreed , that , between the fighters against the German Nazis in the forests and the underground warriors in the one extreme , and between the fully-fledged collaborators , who served the Germans for money , for example , or because they were totally identified with them ideologically , there was a very wide spectrum of people , an extremely wide spectrum of people , who took different attitudes in the tragedy.

C.L. Yes , it is true .

T. And I felt , and we may discuss it when we come to Kastner , that Kastner definitely , at a given time , crossed the demarcation lines so extremely , in such a far reaching way , that even backwards - thinking backwards and looking backward - and even from safety today , you can say , yes , he was a Nazi collaborator . I would be very hesitant , and I'll think over hundreds of times before saying it on Judenrat A and Judenrat B and people who were under agony , who have tried their best to save lives . I wouldn't have said it about Kastner in the first steps of his activity , when he started to negotiate , when he met them , when he tried to please them , when he wanted to gain time . Who are we to come and judge : ' You should

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

have done exactly this or that .' He crossed the line . He , in the beginning of the year 1945 , when German generals were standing by Hitler , he became part , an integral part , of the last remnants of the loyal S.S.

C.L. When do you date this , if it is possible to do so

T. This is January , February , March and April 1945 .

In Vienna , in Berlin , he went wherever the high-command of the S.S. was and he became an integral part of it . He wasn't a Judenrat.

.Bobine 206

TAMIR 4

T. He was not a Judenrat and and he was not typical .

To the best of my knowledge , this is a very singular case - to such an extent and so deep . Every nation , every people , has its wonderful elements and it has its weak ones ,who become the victims , the dangerous victims as I said . This is the exception , this is not the general thing . And what actually gave the final proof of this horrifying collaboration was the fact that , after the war , in Limburg , in 1947 ...

C.L. He testified for Becher .

T. ... he testified for Becher ,he saved him from

punishment by giving false affidavits , totally false . He has tried ? which is known less, to save Krumai . And he succeeded in the beginning . And he wrote Krumai an unbelievable letter , that he will never forget his help - the man who was number two to Eichmann . He has tried to persuade the Americans to bring Wislitzeny from the hands of the Poles and the Slovaks , where he was bound to face what was due to him - death , to an American part of Germany where his life could be rescued . And this is documented , too . And he has given testimony relating to Jüttner , to S.S. general Jüttner as well . So , in a wholesale way, he tried to save arch-Nazi killers , because , towards the end of the war , he crossed the line totally . And this is a very unique case , I don't know of any other one .

C.L. But would you say that he was You talked some minutes ago about the ideological collaborators , who identify themselves ...

T. No , he was not an ideological collaborator . I think he was caught by his own activity into the feeling that he was a part of the strong , of the winning side , of the successful , of those who control the lives of hundreds of thousands ; and he became part of them , he gradually identified himself with them - not ideologically .

C.L. You say 'the winning side' . For the Germans at the end of the war...

T. At the beginning , at the beginning . At the beginning when they came and took over Hungary and they had full control of the lives of the Jews In the war between Germany and the Jews they , unfortunately were the winning side .

C.L. Yes , yes definitely .

T. And he was ... He came to represent the Jews . I say again , the man started as an idealist - a Zionist , socialist idealist , but power , power totally blinded him . I'll never forget how , once he was asked , by a journalist , during the trial in an interval - " Can you give us a description of Kurt Becher ? How was he ? How did he look ? Was he handsome ? Was he good-looking ? Was he strong ?" And he said , " He was as handsome as God . " - about Kurt Becher . The very expression , the identity was twisted . It's a tragedy . It's a unique case , I say . It is very untypical . It is nothing to do with the Judenrats .

C.L. But he was very clear , he was very lucid in some way . I found in his report at least two passages where he is ... If you permit me , I will translate for you . When he is negotiating with Eichmann about the transport from Kljuc(?) . This was for three hundred and eighty-eight people , which is not much , And Eichmann is always delaying ,

delaying . And he writes to Kastner . And now
Eichmann simply stated that he did not want to
keep his word , not even to these few . " If I
take this as so , " this is Kastner who writes ,
" We become accomplices to the deportation of
people who , after so much suffering , have been
chosen to be rescued . With this , the lowest
point has been reached ; we cannot go on in this
way ." He knew the line .

T. This was quoted by Judge Halevy , the president of
the district court .

C.L. Yes.

T. But it was a very ... This was put by him , himself
in a very sophisticated way to show that he had
it in mind and he escaped from this situation .

C.L. This one is even less sophisticated ."If now
Eichmann cannot be forced to come to reason , then
the Varada , entering this game of roulette with
human lives , putting its money on the German side
was as naive a loser as many others of us in occ-
upied Europe - then the millions paid were complet
craziness . The loser in this game is also called
a traitor ."

T. The word 'roulette ' is very typical of the attitude
of this man - roulette ! with the lives of hundres
of thousands . He simply lost , in the tragedy ,
the last senses of values . Although he did not

live in a death camp , or in Treblinka , or in Majdanek - he lived in Budapest , in relatively comfortable conditions ; but his mind was totally twisted by this horrifying pressure . This happened to leaders of other nations who crossed the line and collaborated . The tragedy here was that if you take a Quisling ...

C.L. Or a Laval .

T. Or a Laval . They betrayed sovereignty , freedom , independence . Their justification , which was no justification , but their justification - coming from them - was that someday the situation will change , and we will have saved the people and saved the country physically and freedom will dawn upon us one day . This they could whisper to themselves , perhaps . It is no justification . Kastner collaborated with a death-machine . Behind this collaboration there was no future . There was only one thing - the few who will escape who he will choose . Of course we have debated this horrible dilemma time and again . And we have posed the question , we have posed the question to the court : ' If you are the captain of a boat , in charge of one thousand passengers, and all of a sudden you know that something bad is going to happen to the boat . Are you allowed to pick ten members of the passengers , quietly , calmly ,

hiding the facts from the nine hundred and ninety ,
put them on a small , tiny boat and save your
lives . Or , is it your duty to announce that the
boat is about to be wrecked and that everybody
should try to save his life - " I can't take care
of all of us ." My line was that the minute you can
take care of the lives of everybody and save them
your only duty is to share with them the facts and
everybody will be responsible for his own life .
When you hide the facts , to save the ten , you are
pushing the nine hundred and ninety to their death
knowingly - this is the collaboration . And we have
proven that he did hide the facts from the people ,
for the sake of rescuing the few - this was the
collaboration .

C.L. You know what the people who support Kastner today
and there are still people who support Kastner...

T. Yes , who will vouch for him .

C.L. You know what they answer to this ? They answer
several things . They say once that - I don't
agree with them , personally - they say that Kastn
tried to warn them , that he sent - this is a new
finding - that he sent Haimutzim(?) into some
ghettoes in order to warn the people of the ghetto
and....

Bobine 207

TAMIR 5

C.L. You know what the supporters of Kastner , and there are still many , answer to your argument. They say two things . They say that , first of all Kastner tried to warn the people of the ghetto ; that the Varada sent young Haimutzim(?) into several ghettos , that they told the truth , but that the people didn't want to believe it. And the second thing they say is that to warn would have been completely useless for this very reason , that the majority of the people didn't want to believe and wouldn't have wanted to believe in any case. to which I answer , personally, that it is not true. Because , I think , that if the natural chiefs of the community had spoken , themselves , and said the truth , maybe things would have been different . But what is your own answer ?

T. The two arguments are contradicting each other .

C.L. It is true .

T. Because had they really .. had Kastner really believed or taken the line of warning the masses then the other story , that it wouldn't work , Wouldn't have come . The other argument of his supporters shows that they didn't believe in this line . I don't want to argue the fact that , maybe

at the beginning , a few warnings were made , although all the elements of proof were contrary to that . But what does it mean to warn ? The natural instinct of a man is to disbelieve that death is coming upon him . Ask every sick man with cancer . Most people will hope that somehow it won't happen , that it isn't cancer , that it isn't that bad . The natural human desire for life pushes aside any information that he is doomed . Therefore the duty to warn must be a very heavy one , and the warning must come from a very competent authority in order to neutralize the natural instinct of disbelief .

C.L. Very right .

T. And therefore it had to come from very authoritative sources , who are trusted - their leaders , their accepted leaders . Then the two lines couldn't go together . The Germans gave Kastner , or promise to „ give , the three hundred and eighty which later developed into a slightly larger number .

C.L. Six hundred and eighty .

T. Six hundred and eighty ; one thousand two hundred . And it was exploited for a very long time , every time for another purpose . But the main purpose , at the beginning , was to blind the masses by taking the leaders and putting them into a special category so that their interests will conflict with the interests of the masses . The interest of the

masses was to know , to escape , to revolt , to hide to save themselves . The interest of the few who were chosen to be put on a train and led to eventual safety was to keep calm , not to notify , to let the programme develop , while they are put in safety . And this was the satanic gimmick of Eichmann , with which Kastner collaborated .

C.L. Yes.

T. The conflict of interests developed immediately when a group of selected ones was put aside . At that moment the tragedy started , and he was dedicated to the mission , he was ambitious , he wanted to succeed . He called it the Ark of Noah ; he made it an ideology . And that moment he , objectively , started to be a tool in the hands of the Nazis . Later he became a knowing tool , which was done already , wilfully . Not that he wanted to see the death of the masses . He developed the other terrible phenomenon , the apathy to the hundreds of thousands . They are dead they are hopeless , they actually are not regarded any more ; although they are still alive . But the order of death is over their heads - nothing doing . And all the efforts should be concentrated on the few . And I could say , As Supreme Court Judge Zilber eventually judged , " There is no human being who is authorized to take the place of

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

God and say ' You will go to death - masses -
and you few will be rescued because I have chosen
you . And I am paying a price for your safety .
Not just that I rescue you and the others are sunk
in a hurricane . I am paying a price . Because the
masses rely on me ; because I could have divulged
a story ¶ And the collaboration became so close
that he knew everything , he was in the picture
already, and the Generals really could trust him .

C.L. He knew everything about Auschwitz .

T. He knew everything about what was going on among
the Germans themselves . He became part of the
Nazi milieu in Hungary , gradually . Gradually ,
and eventually , in the beginning of 1945 , they
took him all around , all around .

C.L. Yes .

T. He came back from Switzerland to Vienna when there
were almost no Jews there , to accompany the Nazi
leaders .

C.L. He was an alibi for them .

T. He was the alibi for them and they kept him and
they trusted the developments that even in the free
world he would continue to give them an alibi .

C.L. Yes . And he was a kind of inspector of the
concentration camps .

T. According to some reports . I don't know the facts
for that .

C.L.No,no . I know at the end , objectively , when he went to...

T. Not an inspector . There were rumours that even... There were all kinds of rumours as to how deep and how close this friendship and fraternity developed between them and himself .

C.L. No . But , anyhow , I agree with you the tragedy is the selection . It started with it .

T. It started there . But it developed into a much deeper abyss .

C.L. Yes . We could say this - that he was negotiating with Eichmann in order to save some Jewish lives . And because he was negotiating to save some , he had to keep the silence and the secrecy towards all the others . This is the paradox of the negotiations .

T. That's right .

C.L. Because , in principle , he was negotiating to save Jewish lives .

T. That's how it started .

C. L. Yes .

T. But towards the end he didn't save anybody . He simply became ...

C.L. This leads us to something else and I would like you very much to talk about this . About - and I know it's very difficult to formulate ; and I don't even know how to formulate it myself -

Who did he select in Kolozsvar (?) . He selected mostly a kind of elite , or which he considered as an elite , the Zionists and some other prominents.

But in one way ...

T. Not necessarily Zionists .

C.L. Oh , Yes .

T. No . He took from all branches .

C.L. Not in Kolozsvar , afterwards in Budapest .

T. In Kljuc , in Kolozsvar , there were twenty thousand Jews , and among them there were thousands of Zionists . He picked leaders , or what he considered leaders , or activists , or prominent people . This was the word - prominent .

C.L. Yes .

T. Among them , of course , were Zionist prominent people , but not only them . Some of the people , apparently , were put on the list because they have donated to the fund of the committee , not to his personal purpose ; there were a few very religious people , there was Rabbi...

C.L. Michelbaum .

T. Michelbaum was there . But the Zionists and the Zionist official party were among those who were firstly selected for this prominent group .

C.L. Yes . If I give you two pages , twenty and twenty-one , maybe you put the question in , yourself . I think what is very wrong , and you said it

perfectly , is the idea of selection . But it is true too , that everybody couldn't be saved .

TAMIR 6

C.L. Well you know the point of view of the people who support Kastner's stance ; it's what they said during the trial and what they go on saying today , that because it was impossible to save everybody it was perfectly right to choose - to choose a kind of sample and people of its own kind . They say that it was always so in Jewish history . If they have to choose they choose the people of their own family , of their own political party . And what I don't like in all this is the idea of an elite . I agree completely with you . But I think , and I say this myself - you are not obliged to agree with me - that Zionism was born with the idea that it was necessary to redeem the Jewish people . And , of course , it's not so difficult to trace a line which says if it is impossible to save everybody it is better to save the people who redeem than the others who won't . And for instance , Kastner's lawyer during the trial , Judge Chaim Cohen , had the striking , and for me very horrifying words in the sentence he wrote : " For those , and millions of Jews like them the Jews who were murdered , came true the old curse ' And lo they were meant but to be taken like sheep for slaughter , for killing , for destruction , for crushing and shame . ' " Which is a biblical

saying , as we know . But he goes on . He says ,
" There was no spirit in them , the Jewish masses
in Warsaw were in the same condition . " What
would you say ?

T. I'll first react to your first point , where you
say that if you can't save everybody , you save those
that you can .

C.L. I don't say this , myself .

T. Or that is claimed . For example , if many people
are in danger , you take care of your family .
Definitely and naturally . The private citizen ,
the private member of the community , or even the
small activist (I call it 'small',) when he sees
danger around , and many people are in danger ,
he has his wife , his children and his parents .
It is perfectly natural that he will do his utmost
first to save those who are close to him . I'd be
the last to argue against such a natural , inborn
attitude . I'm talking of the role of the leader ,
who is entrusted with a mission - a rescue mission
a rescue mission of hundreds of thousands - who
capitulates and winds up in a personal rescue
operation , or a semi-personal rescue operation ,
at the price of collaborating with the killers of
those whom he was destined , or sent , or took upon
himself , to rescue . This makes all the difference
in the world .

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

C.L. I said , too , not only the family , but the people of their own parties , political parties .

T. Political parties are another story . I don't think a man has a duty , any duty , in a moment of danger , to prefer members of one's own party to the members of somebody else's party . The framework of political activity has nothing to do with the saving of lives , and so on . But , as to your second point . You made a quote from the attorney-general , the then attorney- general , Chaim Cohen , today member of the Supreme Court . I bitterly contested , in the trial , this attitude . First of all , nobody , neither Kastner nor any other Zionist leader then , had the right to say : " Those are the doomed ones , and those are the chosen for life . " And who is to say that there was no spirit in them ? I answered in court and I feel it today with the same conviction : ' No spirit ? Hanna Senech (?) , the Jews of Hungary ?

C.L. They didn't know about Hanna Senech .

T. He talked of the masses . How many Hanna Senechs were there in Hungary whose names we don't know because they are dead ? Out of the same Hungary came a boy who was later known as Dov Grüner (?) , who was put to the gallows by the British here , in this country . Or Weiss , or Perets Goldstein . Do we know who had the spirit and who didn't have spirit ? Mothers had no spirit to rescue , and ri

their own lives , to save their children ; husbands to protect their wives with their own bodies , had they known all the facts . How many people like Rabbi Weissmandel - not as eloquent , not leaders - but with the same soul , the same spirit , and the same readiness to be active . Hundreds of thousands , hundreds of thousands of people ? To justify him you have to put after their death , an epitaph over their dead bodies - ' They had no spirit . ' Because the leadership failed . I bitterly disagreed then , I bitterly disagree today , and I think it's totally wrong.

C.L. How do you explain that they came to such extremities to think like this ?

T. This is a question that should be posed to the people who said it .

C.L. I'm not so sure . Do you think that it is an explanation given by a single man ?

T. In the trial it was given by the attorney-general who defended the case of Kastner against our charges . And he has raised every argument . I think that philosophically , morally , from any standard of values , it is wrong . It is wrong .

C.L. I think so , too. You cannot elaborate more on this ?

T. No , because as to the old debate , on Zionism , I could only say this : Zionism , and here I totally disagreed with this wonderful man Rabbi Weissmandel , Zionism was never meant to save the few at the

expense of the many . The founders of Zionism , Herzl , Nodau , eventually Jopotinsky(?) came to the Zionist conviction with one aim , one paramount aim , to save Jewry , all of Jewry , and, to begin with , European Jewry , from the danger of extinction . Sixty years ago , Max Nodau , the famous writer and the aide of Herzl , said , almost in quotation : ' Five million Jews are in danger of extinction in Europe . And Zionism is established in order to uproot them from Europe and replant them in the land of Israel . '

C.L. To save the masses .

T. To save the masses . And this was Herzl's line . Herzl didn't envisage a small , tiny , Jewish community in Palestine which would be only a sample of something special , of the elite . He meant the replanting of the Jewish masses in a new renaissance , spiritual but physical as well . And this was the line of Jopotinsky . Mass evacuation and mass...

TAMIR 7

T. This was the idea of Jopotinsky - mass evacuation , mass rescue , and the building of a new country

with the very same people . But in altogether a new environment , a new climate , a new framework of sovereignty . Zionism , original Zionism , is basically a humanistic movement , and its uppermost consideration was the rescue of the Jews , not just a spiritual movement . And , therefore , this exceptional case of betrayal is anti-Zionist , is contrary to Zionism . It is a single case and it is very far from being typical of Zionist activity .

C.L. Yes , I agree fully with you . But don't you think that the picture was distorted a little bit later ? This quotation of Chaim Cohen's is not unique , not only the quotation , but the attitude . For instance , you talked about rescue ; there was a rescue committee in Palestine during the war - 1942, 1943 , 1944 - and the president of this rescue committee was Isaac Greenbaum . There are many traces of speeches that he gave in which he says : ' We have no money , but the little money we have if we have to choose between giving this money to the Kerren Kaien Medz (??), the Jewish national fund in Israel , in order to buy land , or to buy cows and so on or to give this money to rescue the masses of the Jews of Europe , who are in danger of extermination , then , very consciously , I choose the cow . '

T. I'm not sure that your quote is totally accurate ,

REPRODUCED FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM ARCHIVES

but the spirit was , his spirit was , his line .
was that the work of building the country and
concentrating on this operation has priority ,
even over sending money to rescue Jews in Europe .
I think it was a very wrong attitude . I attacked
this attitude in Kastner's trial . I think it is
a very egocentric , non-Zionist attitude . And
the failure of this philosophy was proven in a
very catastrophic way . This was not the only
mistake , grave mistake , of leadership in the
free world . Apparently , among all people , the
immediate slight pain of your own is much more
important to you than the most horrible , savage
atrocities committed against tens of thousands
far away . The human being is built in a very
egotistic way . But although it can be understood
in private people , it still remains a very grave
mistake , sometimes a crime , when it remains in
the leadership , especially of your own people .
But this is an internal , retroactive , deep ,
painful debate among our own people . We have been
faced in the Second World War , in the time of
the holocaust , with a combination , the most
dreadful combination that any people , any nation
any community ever faced . Killers over our heads
in Europe headed by the Nazi Germans , who worked
in cooperation with Hungarian Nazis , with Rumanian

Nazis , with Polish Nazis , with Ukrainian Nazis , with French Nazis and so on . And the other world , the free world , which was fighting Nazism , England , America and even the Soviet Union - and there is a reason why I say 'even' because it was their fate to rescue a good number of Jews eventually - The rest of the world has acted in a conspiracy of silence , of acquiescence with the death of the Jews . Not only acquiescence , there was even a partial , indirect cooperation in bringing about their death because of the refusal of England and America to despatch one single bomber to explode Auschwitz crematoria - thus saving tens of thousands , if not more , Jews - was not just an omission , it was an act of cooperation with death , because it was done knowingly . And that is what contributed greatly to our revolt against the British towards the end of the Second World War , in this country , in Israel , in Palestine , in the then - Palestine . So we were trapped between killers and conspirators of silence - of the whole world - isolated . And , in view of this combination, all the debates that we have internally , as to what were our mistakes , or mistakes of our leadership are faded in comparison to this dreadful , unique , unprecedented combination of evil-doers , Nazi warmongers , killers fanatics , exterminators and the calm , nonchalant , possibly ,

somewhere , satisfied people elsewhere who saw the death of the Jewish people and did nothing specific to save the Jews in their worst hour .

C.L. What do you remember yourself , personally of this time ?

T. I do . I do . I was a very young man and we heard rumours that there may have been chances of rescue and they were not exploited . And we were here in the safe Palestine , then Palestine . We knew of boats who were turned back by the British , loaded with refugees . Even at the beginning of the war we had the case of Strauma(?) , the boat with close to one thousand Jews , men , women and children , which was not allowed to continue on the way to Palestine - sunk into the ocean . This was a direct result of British policy . This was one of the very strong contributing factors that pushed a young man like me into the underground , to fight the British , while the war was going on . I can go into details . I remember the real , direct push to join the underground , the Conseil Leumi (?) , was the desire for an independent country of our own . On the other hand , there were all kinds of deterrent elements - fear , doubts as to whether we could be successful . There was a certain balance in the calculations in the mind . Should I do it or shouldn't I ? It involved endangering

your own life and everything that is connected with it . The deciding factor , which brought about my decision : Yes , take all these chances , was the holocaust and the feeling that the British , who fought Nazis , at the same time prevented the Jews from rescue . So it was a fight for freedom , combined with a reaction to the role of the good part of the world in the horrible tragedy .

C.L. Excuse me but you

TAMIR 8

T. Paradoxically , and tragically , the British , who fought the Nazis , at the very same time , prevented the Jews from being rescued so both the most evil part of the world , Nazi Germany and and the bastions of freedom , England and the United States, were in this dreadful combination - by active killing and by passive acquiescence , mount up with the fact that the Jews were slaughtered . And this feeling pushed boys like me , in this country then ,to feel that we are not better off than our brethren in Europe and that we have to take the ultimate risk , and to take all chances to put an end to this situation where Jews are being squeezed between killers and conspirators of silence - and eventually go to death-chambers. And therefore the fight for freedom , for sover-

eighty , for independence , for a new , Jewish
renaissance .

C.L. But , where rescue was concerned , the rescue of the
European Jews , did you have a feeling of helplessness ?

T. We felt that ...

C.L. Of powerlessness ?

T. There were the efforts , you know , of the para-
chutists , the few parachutists who were sent to
Europe by the Haganah . And there was an attempt
to organise a similar group , a bigger group ,
by the Irgun , which failed because it was dependent
on the British . But , above all , even in '44 , our
actual knowledge , in this country , was very
limited , very obscured and this is altogether
another story . But it is a very important one -
how the facts were brought to the knowledge of the
people in a way which didn't call them to an all
out alarm . There were elements who knew the facts
for sure , the detailed facts .

C.L. Do you think it was done on purpose ?

T. Some people thought this was the wise way . That
things should be handled diplomatically . That
actions should be done in a way which won't create
storms which may endanger this development or that
development . These were very grave mistakes ,
looking on them retroactively , very grave mistakes .
But again , this is an internal accounting that we
do among ourselves ; and we have to do as a lesson

for the future . But in the face of what we faced from the outside world , in the global situation , all the Jewish mistakes fade in comparison , although , between ourselves , we have to go deep into them .

C.L. Yes . Now I'll come back just once more to Kastner and Weissmandel . I said , at the beginning of this conversation , that Weissmandel was the one who initiated the bargaining with the Germans to save Jews with money and it's a very extraordinary and very beautiful story because the Germans were interested in the idea of Jewish power , international Jewry . And that international Jewry was powerful and full of money . It was not true , of course , and Weissmandel had to invent even , to create characters that he invented and he said to the Germans with whom he was dealing , " This is the money from this one , who represents the international Jewry . " But , yourself , in principle , were you , or are you opposed to the idea of these negotiations ?

T. No . I saw nothing wrong in trying to save Jews with money , or in any other way . Weissmandel , in my opinion , never crossed , never came close to the demarcation line between an attempt to rescue and collaboration . Never . Very far from it . He was a beautiful soul and the attempt to save souls with

money , with ransom , is legitimate , it's tragic
but it's totally legitimate . It's so humane .

What is money in comparison to a single human life ?

C.L. And it is what Weissmandel actually asked .

T. And he asked apart from other things . But he saw
the whole scope . He said : ' Send us money to do
it with money . Help us with other elements...

C.L. Bombers ?

T. No , no . Before the bombers , to let people hide .

'Send bombers to drop leaflets all over Hungary ,
so that the people will know , for sure , that they
are doomed and do everything to save their lives .'
This is contrary to the whole Kastner operation .
And then he said , ' Bomb the bridges . Bomb
Auschwitz .' He made an outcry . ' Make the major
powers declare to Germany and to every German that
he will be punished - to death - after the war ,
if he participates in the atrocities . ' He saw
all these courses of activity because his heart was
with his people . He identified himself with the
people , he was a leader of the people . He was in
the underground . And among other things , he tried
the money element . Where is Weissmandel , the pure
Weissmandel , really the leader of his people ,
who initiated everything , who cried his heart out ,
who did everything , in comparison with this
terrible , single phenomenon , frightful , who

wound up in such a shameful collaboration . Single ,
not typical , who we can lament , and I would
again define : ' A man whose soul was burned in
Auschwitz . '