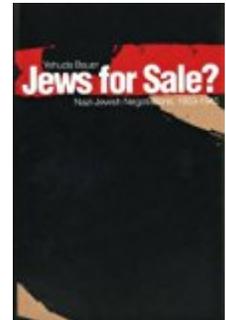


Yehuda Bauer. *Jews For Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945.* New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1994. xiii + 306 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-05913-7.



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Frayed emotions, conspiracy mongering, endless feuding, and flights into counter-factual history characterize much of the literature concerning negotiations with the Nazis for Jewish lives. *Jews for Sale* permits Yehuda Bauer's reasonable voice and scholarly virtues to enter this acrimonious debate in an attempt to counter some of the more impassioned accusations arising from it and to divine the truth. He is calming, enlightening, persuasive, and of course, not wholly successful in his efforts—largely because of the subject's inherent difficulties and because he too has an agenda.

The Transfer Agreement (1933-40), the Evian Conference (July 1938), negotiations in Slovakia (1942-43), and the "trucks for blood" parleys in Hungary (1944) are the best known examples of efforts to save Jews from Nazi persecution and form the crux of Bauer's investigation. He reconstructs the process of negotiation, often in minute detail, analyzes the misperceptions and cross purposes of the various parties that made such contacts possible, and once again raises the familiar ethical questions. The book makes use of much archival evidence, corrects a number of miscon-

ceptions (and outright lies), and struggles to set the record straight. Yet Bauer candidly admits that historical methodology soon reaches the limits of what it can accomplish in so murky a realm. Bluff, bribery, and brazen double-dealing, as well as post-facto claims and indictments, honest apologia and self-serving lies, make for a more than usually tangled diplomatic history. The text abounds with phrases such as "no documentation has turned up," "we just do not know," "the date is not certain," and so forth.

Bauer treats the pre-Final Solution relations between the Jews and their tormentors as the product of a temporarily shared community of interests. Until 1942, the Nazi solution to the Jewish question was emigration with extensive expropriation or outright expulsion. The desperation of many German Jews to emigrate created the basis for the complex Transfer Agreement. But negotiations between Nazis and Jews also continued after the solution of the Jewish question had evolved into systematic extermination. The results of these efforts, most notably in Slovakia and Hungary, were not inconsiderable. Nonetheless, actors

in these events and a number of later historians were convinced that many more lives could have been saved, and even that under the right conditions, the Nazis would have been willing to stop the Final Solution. They have cast the blame for failure far and wide, charging other participants, the Zionists, the Red Cross, and the West with callous betrayal. Bauer is not afraid to call a scoundrel a scoundrel, nor is he incapable of appreciating even flawed heroes. Yet a major aim for Bauer is rehabilitating the honor of mainstream Zionists, and much to his credit, he avoids blackening the reputations of their accusers.

The indictments of participants are most damning but, for Bauer, least convincing. Cut off from the larger world, passionately involved in a life and death struggle, they were ill-informed as to the realities of the situation and ill-prepared to read Nazi intentions. When Nazi demands for huge ransoms were not met, Jewish negotiators attributed this to the niggardliness of "world Jewry." They were apparently just as convinced as the Nazis that there was such a thing as "world Jewry" in control of vast resources. But during the war, the transfer of hard currencies was nearly impossible, thanks to an array of governmental regulations and prohibitions. Even had the astronomical sums been available, they could not have been brought to those who desperately needed them. Bauer documents the heroic efforts of Joint Distribution Committee operatives to overcome these obstacles but concedes their failure.

Survivors of the Final Solution in Slovakia and Hungary, among them Orthodox anti-Zionists, also claimed that some negotiators, particularly the Zionists, were remiss in warning the Jewish population of the fate that awaited it, even though they knew clearly what that fate would be. Bauer confronts these accusations in two ways. First, he shows that the Zionists on the scene and abroad did everything in their power to warn Jews about what deportation meant. Zionist youth, in particular, undertook dangerous missions to provincial

communities. Yet their warnings were either disregarded or disbelieved. In this regard, Bauer develops a second point by distinguishing between raw information and its internalization. The truth was so horrific and unimaginable that many of those who were caught up in the events and even many of those beyond immediate danger were unable to proceed from mere knowledge to the ability to act upon it. Even Zionists were not immune to this condition.

Jewish motives for dealing with the Nazis were obvious. They attempted to stave off catastrophe and to save what could be saved. Nazi motives were more puzzling, and here Bauer advances several interesting hypotheses. The notion of many Jewish negotiators that the machinery of destruction could be halted or that massive numbers of lives could be saved never had any reality, according to Bauer. At most, Heinrich Himmler was willing to exchange some Jews if palpable advantages for the Third Reich were the result. This tactic, for which Himmler had the oral backing of Hitler, came into greater play as Germany's military fortunes began to decline. But Himmler--and here Bauer is most convincing--never had any intention of desisting from the Final Solution; at most, he envisioned a short postponement for a small number of Jews. After the expected recovery of German strength and the eventual conquest of Europe, these Jews would be retaken and murdered.

Bauer also gives another explanation for Himmler's willingness to countenance negotiations in late 1943 and the first half of 1944. He theorizes on the basis of admittedly circumstantial evidence that Himmler had partly learned of the conspiracy against the regime which eventually failed in July 1944. Without being privy to the particulars and probably ignorant of the conspirators' deadly intentions regarding Hitler, Himmler nonetheless had to consider the possibility of a radically changed political situation, and even the possibility of military defeat in the East. For these

reasons he wanted to make contact with the West; he would perhaps find it necessary to negotiate a separate peace with the western allies so that they could together fight off the Bolshevik hordes and save National Socialism. Himmler, the sincerest of antisemites, firmly believed that the Jews were the real power behind all of Germany's enemies and that the best way to get to the West was through low level Jewish spies (several of whom figured in the Slovakian and Hungarian negotiations). Such individuals could be easily disavowed if his scheming became known to Hitler. These considerations explain Himmler's willingness to deal through his subordinates and suggest a degree of "sincerity" from the Nazi side. Yet the hard evidence concerning Himmler's motives, the true extent to which he actually knew what was happening, and the degree of his "good faith" is, I think, slim indeed.

Whether a great many more Jews could have been saved from death at certain junctures of the Holocaust remains moot. Still, Bauer, tolerant of the shortcomings of most of those engaged in the struggle to save lives, is unsparing in his criticism of the West. The United States and Great Britain refused to relax immigration quotas at home or in Palestine and would not ease currency transfers. Both rejected "paying ransom" to the enemy or in any way strengthening Germany's ability to carry on the war. Both were leery of offending the always suspicious Soviets by engaging in separate negotiations with the Nazis. Neither the Americans nor the British could be brought to understand that Nazi persecution of Jews differed from that of other ethnic or religious groups, or that they had been ideologically singled out for total annihilation. By the time this death sentence became indisputable, the Allies were unwilling to endanger the certainty of victory over a questionable humanitarian project.

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