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British Jewry and the Attempted Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1939[1]

Abstract: *The article deals with the boycott of Nazi Germany, which the British Jews attempted in the years 1933–1939. The main question is why the Jewish boycott in Britain culminated in the summer of 1933 and why it was followed by years of stagnation. To what extent did the boycott movement have the chance to succeed is another key question as the main goal of the movement was nothing less significant than removing Hitler's regime and thus preventing the war. The study is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the initial phase of the boycott (1933–1934) and emphasises the fact that the main organisation representing British Jews, The Board of Deputies of British Jews, refused to make the boycott official. The second part points out gradual stagnation and the boycott's downturn in the years 1935–1939. Although the Berlin Olympics in 1936 would have been a great incentive for the movement, they were not boycotted in the end. Then the movement was further weakened by the British policy of appeasement. The third phase of the study shows how the representatives of British Jewry attempted to influence the opinion of the government, especially the Foreign Office. Nevertheless, they failed in swinging political opinion towards the support of German Jews or the idea of a boycott. It became clear that the success of the boycott movement strongly depended on the official support; however, the mainstream political opinion preferred negotiations and agreement with Germany. The whole article is significantly based on yet unpublished sources from British and German archives.*

Keywords: *Jewish boycott – Nazi Germany – 1930's – Jews in Britain – international relations*

On 20 July 1933, London saw a mass demonstration proceeding from the East End to the northeast edge of Hyde Park, near Marble Arch. More than thirty thousand people came out to protest against the anti-Semitic policy of Nazi Germany. The East End as the main starting point of the march had been for days literally flooded with anti-Nazi leaflets. Jewish entrepreneurs had been receiving calls to close their shops on July 20th and join the protest to show their solidarity with the persecuted Jews in Germany. Most responded and therefore, almost all Jewish shops in Whitechapel,

1 The study is a part of GACR (Grant Agency of the Czech Republic) Project no. 16–02274S *Jewish Boycott of Nazi Germany (1933–1941)*.

Mile End, Stepney and Hackney remained closed. Not a single stall of the Middlesex Street Market opened that day. Cars with banners calling for the boycott of German goods were cruising the streets of London.

The march itself commenced from Stepney Green in the early afternoon. People started pouring in from other streets and the crowd soon had to slow down because it had become too difficult to manage for the assisting policemen. The route of the march covered Whitechapel Road, Commercial Street, Great Eastern Street, City Road, Pentonville Road and Euston Road to the Marble Arch. At around five p.m. the march reached Hyde Park. The demonstration was quiet, only few protesters carried banners proclaiming "*Hitler is violating the laws and men and God*" or "*Restore the rights of Jews in Germany; protect the world against Hitlerism*".[2] The press wrote about the impressive calm and peace of the march.

Many other protest marches followed: in October 1935, *the British Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council*[3] organised another march in Hyde Park and the event was attended by around 20,000 protesters. Still, the march of July 20th, 1933 remained the most powerful of these protests – in size as well as the response it incited. This date represents the culmination point of the boycott campaign. Although many Jewish organisations participated in the march, there was one significant exception. There were no representatives of *The Board of Deputies of British Jews* (hereinafter referred to as the BoD). The oldest and most significant organisation representing Jews in Britain[4] distanced itself from the march. Three days later, after closed negotiations, the BoD decided to openly reject the official boycott, which had been spontaneously spreading through many countries, including Great Britain, since March 1933.[5] This was the end (although not definite) of long-lasting discussions concerning the standpoint of the official Jewish representatives on the boycott campaign.

Why did the BoD choose to reject the boycott, when it could have taken on the campaign´s leadership as the main Jewish organisation in Britain? Many questions can

2 *The Times*, 21 July 1933, p. 13.

3 *The Times*, 28 October 1935, p. 16. *The British Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council* was a British version of the American *Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights* founded in New York in 1934. It main goal was to spread the boycott idea as a matter of general urgency, not a merely Jewish issue.

4 *The Board of Deputies of British Jews* was founded in London in 1760 as George III ascended the British throne. The Board originally consisted of seven members representing the English community of Sephardic Jews. They were soon joined by the representatives of the Ashkenazi Jews. Todd M. ENDELMAN, *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000,* Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2002, pp. 105–106.

5 *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1933, p. 11; *The Times*, 24 July 1933, p. 7; *The Jewish Chronicle*, 28 July 1933. For *The Jewish Chronicle* see: London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), ACC 3121/E3/36/1.

be asked about the boycott´s culmination in the summer of 1933 and its stagnation in the following years, when the Nazi anti-Semitic policies continued with greater intensity. The boycott´s failure to reach its main goal, i.e. bringing down Hitler´s regime, also requires deeper analysis. Did such an ambition have any chance in the first place? It is true that the members of the boycott movement were very determined in the beginning and their aim to overthrow Hitler was repeatedly declared.[6]

The above-mentioned questions have been posed, but historiographers have so far focused mainly on British anti-Semitism or anti-Nazi campaign. Except for refugees (mainly Jewish) from Germany,[7] the Nazi Germany boycott issues[8] have been generally left aside not only by the British, but also Czech historiography.[9] Although several important studies concerning the Jewish boycott are available (even if focusing mainly on the BoD activities)[10] and an abundance of archive material is available,[11] it is still true that

6 Overthrowing Hitler was the movement´s main goal repeatedly declared mainly by the boycott committees and organisations in the United States. The boycott itself was seen as a very effective process equal to armed intervention throughout 1930´s. In April 1938, one of the boycott´s leaders in the U.S., dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, claimed: "*Economic pressure can stop Hitler without blood shed.*" See Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (New York), RG 283, Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum Papers, box 1, folder 1. Compare: *Nazis Against the World. The Counter-Boycott is the Only Defensive Weapon against Hitlerism's World-Threat to Civilization*, New York 1935; Moshe GOTTLIEB, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance, 1933–1941. An Historical Analysis*, New York 1982.

7 Louis LONDON, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust*, Cambridge 2000; Ari Joshua SHERMAN, *Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich, 1933–1939*, London 1973.

8 Gisela C. LEBZELTER, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918–1939*, Basingstoke – London 1978; David ROSENBERG, *Facing Up to Antisemitism: How Jews in Britain Countered the Threats of the 1930s*, London 1985; Elaine R. SMITH, *Jewish Responses to Political Antisemitism and Fascism in the East End of London, 1920–1939*, in: Tony Kushner – Kenneth Lunn (eds.), Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain, Manchester 1989, pp. 53–71.

9 See the study of Martin Kovář and two monographs of Jakub Drábik. Martin KOVÁŘ, *Sir Oswald Mosley, British Union of Fascists and British Political Elites in Interwar Britain*, in: Prague Papers on the History of International Relations 2007, pp. 457–462; IDEM, *A Contribution to the Development of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in Great Britain between the Two World Wars (1918–1939)*, in: Prague Papers on History of International Relations 2004, pp. 229–249; IDEM, *Fascism and Anti-Semitismm as a Part of Political Extremism in Great Britain in the 1920s and 1930s*, Prager wirtschafts- und sozialhistorische Mitteilungen = Prague Economic and Social History Papers 8, 2007–2008, pp. 141–148; Jakub DRÁBIK, *Mýtus o znovuzrození: Britská unie fašistů a její propaganda*, Praha 2014; IDEM, *Fašista: Příběh sira Oswalda Mosleyho*, Praha 2017.

10 Sharon GEWIRTZ, *Anglo-Jewish Responses to Nazi Germany 1933–39: The Anti-Nazi Boycott and the Board of Deputies of British Jews*, Journal of Contemporary History 26, 1991, pp. 255–276; Bernard KRIKLER, *Anglo-Jewish Attitudes to the Rise of Nazism*, unpublished typescript, The Wiener Library, London.

11 Mainly the large fonds of the BoD (fonds ACC 3121) in London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). Other sources are available in The National Archives (TNA) in Kew, which are, however, not in form of a single fond. The most sources related to the Jewish boycott of Germany can be found in different sections of the Foreign Office archive. German perception of the boycott movement can be studied

"*despite this wealth of material, the boycott presents the historian with peculiar difficulties. The material itself – the same hope and despair, the same resolutions, the same desperate urgency reflecting the frustration rather than the achievements of those involved – is endlessly repetitive*", as Bernard Krikler claimed fifty years ago.[12] The lack of historiographic interest is probably caused by the boycott´s failure. The movement failed in improving the treatment of Jews in Germany and thus, its complex activities have been almost forgotten.

The Jewish community in Britain, beginning of the boycott movement (1933–1934)

Jewish communal life in Britain had been traditionally led by the assimilated Sephardic elite, i.e. families mutually interconnected through marriage and economic ties. This old elite, which successfully struggled for Jewish equality in 1840´s–50´s, was gradually replaced by a new generation of immigrants. In the years 1881–1914 Britain saw the arrival of 120,000–150,000 Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, especially Russia. Many Jews came with the plan to join the English middle class and integrate economically and socially.[13] In practical life it meant above all to accept middle-class ideals. Being tolerated and gradually accepted brought with it a great degree of caution. Once a Jewish immigrant gained the trust of his English middle-class neighbours, he did everything not to lose it. Therefore, since 1860´s, there were clear attempts to limit further immigration to Great Britain. The existing Jewish community feared that an uncontrolled influx of their poor compatriots from Eastern Europe would disrupt their well-established position within British society.[14] At the same time, the assimilated elite were resolute in their refusal of alternatives of Anglicisation. The traditional ideal of Anglicisation could not be attained by all due to mass immigration and thus, there existed many alternatives: socialism, Zionism, various forms of orthodoxy which did not correspond with the standards of the Anglicised orthodoxy of the existing elite. Such alternatives were fully legitimate

from the sources archived in Berlin: in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive and the Bundesarchive. In both archives, the sources are not centralised into a single fond. As to the Bundesarchive, most sources can be found in the Reichstag fond (R-43), in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive the sources are available in Referat Deutschland.

12 Bernard KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, Wiener Library Bulletin 23, 1969, no. 4 (New Series no. 17), p. 26.

13 Jewish community in 1881–1914 with a view to immigration see T. M. ENDELMAN, *The Jews of Britain,* chapter 4, "Native Jews and Foreign Jews", pp. 127–180.

14 Geoffrey ALDERMAN, *Modern British Jewry*, London 1992, p. 115; Daniel GUTWEIN, *The Divided Elite: Economics, politics and Anglo-Jewry, 1882–1917*, Leiden 1992, p. 13. British reaction to pogroms in Russia in 1881–1882 see in: Sam JOHNSON, *Pogroms, Peasants, Jews. Britain and Eastern Europe's "Jewish Question", 1867–1925*, New York 2011 (esp. chapter 2, pp. 41–66).

because the ideal of assimilation was neither available nor attractive for everybody. Many immigrants from Eastern Europe brought to Britain the influence of new ideologies.

The interwar Jewish community in Britain was ideologically rather fragmented and refused to blindly accept the official policy represented by the BoD. Despite all kinds of pressure from the BoD, the Jewish community kept its plurality of opinions, which became clear in the varied approach to the boycott movement. British Jews had indubitably followed the situation in Germany carefully and had viewed Nazi policy with great concern even before Hitler´s official step into the position of the Reich´s Chancellor (30 January 1933). In November 1932, *The Jewish Chronicle* foretold the grim future of the Jews in Germany in the article entitled "*In darkest Germany. The Nazi Peril – Questions which Hitler Will Not Answer. A program of persecution*".[15] On the other hand, a large segment of the British public saw anti-Semitism as an inappropriate, but unfortunately significant feature of the Nazi Party programme. In 1933, the prevailing opinion viewed anti-Semitism as a necessary but temporary tactic helping the Nazis to gain power rather than the core belief of the party. It was hoped that such radicalism would naturally die down.[16]

The British boycott started in the second half of March.[17] It was part of an international reaction to the anti-Jewish actions which took place in Germany in the first two weeks of March.[18] On the 24th of March, around two thousand Jewish as well as non-Jewish East Enders demonstrated in front of the German embassy. Cars passing the streets of East End bore banners with "*Buy no German goods*" and many shop windows displayed posters ordering "*Boycott German imports. Agents representing German manufacturers, please do not call.*"[19]

The early enthusiasm was displayed also in *The Jewish Chronicle*:

> *"If, as seems evident from the flood of letters that have poured into this office, there is a strong longing to institute a boycott of German goods and services, by all means let it be done. Let Jews, here and in every land, borrow from Germans their weapons of the boycott and turn it against them… In America, Poland, Romania, Palestine, the boycott is being preached, or has actually begun. It must be widespread, if this is to be effective, and it must be unflinchingly pursued. ´Not an ounce of German goods!´ ´Not an atom of German service!´ till the Nazis desist from their devilries. To the cry of ´Perish Judea!´ let the answer ´Jewry, awake!´"*[20]

15 B. KRIKLER, *Anglo-Jewish Attitudes*, pp. 25–26.

16 Ibidem, p. 17.

17 The German embassy first mentioned the boycott in its report of 22 March 1933. See Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA), Referat Deutschland, R 98 443. See also B. KRIKLER, *Anti-Jewish Attitudes,* p. 54.

18 S. GEWIRTZ, *Anglo-Jewish Responses,* s. 258. See the articles in newspapers: *Manchester Guardian*, 13, 24, 29, 30 March 1933; *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1933.

19 *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1933.

20 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 March 1933.

The BoD reacted with restraint and kept their caution throughout the whole of 1930´s. Silent agreement was gradually overshadowed by an over-cautious policy and the inability to voice official support for the boycott. At the BoD meeting held on March 26, the calls for an official boycott and the organisation of a Jewish protest meeting were rejected. The BoD president, Neville Laski (1890–1969), referred to the tense situation in Germany and the fear of even greater radicalisation of the Nazis:

> *"You must remember that a Jewish meeting of protest will be the registration of an axiomatic fact, namely, the sympathy which any Jew, however far removed from his people, must as a Jew, feel for his German brethren. So long as there is the slightest chance (and there is some chance) of an amelioration of the situation, we must do nothing and say nothing which can be misinterpreted and utilized by the left wing of the Nazi movement to crush the advice and the execution of the advice which von Papen and the moderates in the German government have given to their followers…"*[21]

When asked whether the BoD support the boycott of German goods, Laski answered:

> *"The Board of Deputies are taking no part in it. The Board recognize not only as a body, but as individuals composing a body – as every individual must recognize – that feeling in the Jewish community in a time of such crisis must necessarily run high. These boycotts and these meetings are spontaneous outbursts of indignation. They would lose their value if they were organized. It is only because of my official position that I do not take part in the boycott. I stand aside and watch, but as an individual I watch it gladly."*[22]

At the same time Laski stressed that German Jewry itself are asking the BoD for reticence and do not wish for a boycott of any form. That was true to some extent: the German Jewish organisations, especially *Zentralverein der deutschen Bürger des jüdischen Glaubens* (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), issued resolutions and sent out requests to stop the boycott. They feared further escalation of radical Nazi policies.[23] Laski also hoped that there still was a chance of improvement after the German revolution "calmed down".[24]

But the situation only seemingly defused and the position of Jews kept worsening. April 1 saw a one-day boycott of Jewish shops in the whole Germany. This excess gained only very limited popularity among Germans and was widely condemned abroad and therefore, the discrimination of Jews became more sophisticated. Several anti-Jewish acts

21 BoD Minutes, 26 March 1933, in: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026 (original document), quotations from the microfilm: LMA, MF 041/049, pp. 53–54.

22 *The Times*, 27 March 1933, p. 14.

23 PAAA, Microfiche No. J, BN 9844; PAAA, Referat Deutschland, R 98448.

24 At the end of March, world press briefly reported about the supposed end of anti-Semitic excesses, see: "Nazis End Attacks", *The New York Times*, 27 March 1933.

were passed in April 1933 with the aim to gradually isolate Jews in Germany. *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* was passed on April 7. Its section 3 became known as the "Aryan Paragraph" and it excluded non-Aryans from civil service. Another act was passed on April 25, it was *the Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools* which affected strictly non-Aryan students. Within the same month, Jews began to be gradually pushed out of legal and medical professions.[25]

None of these events had any impact on the cautious standpoint of the BoD, which is proved by Laski´s proclamation of 15 May 1933:

> *"It has been said that our policy has not succeeded; this must be admittedly true if you argue that the Nazi regime and policies are still in force. But world opinion is in our favour, and we must see that we retain it. I give you my word that we have been active… The Jewish masses may be dissatisfied with our work, as you have been told, but I do not believe it. We of the Board of Deputies can have no official association with a boycott."*[26]

Such proclamations completely entrapped *The Jewish Chronicle*. Its positive approach towards the boycott was replaced by the loyalty to the BoD, which meant another victory of political caution. Instead of the repeated call "*Jewry Awake*", the paper in the summer of 1933 reported:

> *"This brings us to the resolution in favour of an official sponsorship of the boycott, which is to be proposed at next Sunday's meeting of the Deputies […]", hoping that "this motion will not be pressed. If the Jews of this country are what we may call boycott-minded […] they will not need the stimulus of official sanction to act and organise […] An official pronouncement […] will make little difference in matter of sheer effectiveness, but it may very well have the result of consolidating the German front."*[27]

During the next few months, *The Jewish Chronicle* fully supported the official standpoint of the BoD leadership and refused the official boycott. It, however, retained certain degree of autonomy as it simultaneously campaigned against all contacts with Nazi Germany.[28]

The actions taken by the BoD in 1933 and later years followed three main rules: 1) gain majority support of English Jewry and formulate a policy which would not divide the

25 On anti-Jewish legislation see Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. Vol. 1. The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939,* pp. 26 ff.

26 *JTA Bulletin*, 15 May 1933. BoD Minutes, volume 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026. Microfilm: LMA/MF/041/049.

27 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 21 July 1933.

28 David CESARANI, *The Jewish Chronicle and the Anglo-Jewry, 1841–1991,* Cambridge 1994, pp. 145–147.

community; 2) take no action which would be adversary to the government; 3) take no action which would further complicate the position of German Jews.[29] All steps towards helping German Jewry had to be taken with those rules in mind.

Older historiography assesses this approach rather negatively.

> *"[…] it does seem, in the early years anyway, that the Board failed to identify itself sufficiently with the mass of the community, and failed also to provide the positive leadership that was needed. It may have been partly a failure of public relations but also it revealed deeper schisms within the community. Certainly public opinion and public militancy seemed often to run ahead of the Board and its cautious pronouncements."*[30]

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned BoD´s approach had its internal critics from the very beginning. Boycott supporters saw it as a sign of unacceptable passivity. They perceived the official policy pronounced by the BoD as the "*policy of the assimilationist Jews; that is Jews as Jews don't count, we are to act only as citizens of the country. We are to leave it to others, to the great men, to the Press to make a protest. We are to do nothing ourselves.*"[31] Pinchas Horowitz was one of the most perseverant critics of such passivity. He was one of the BoD members and, at the same time, one of the leaders of the *Jewish Representative Council for the Boycott of German Goods and Services.* At the BoD meeting on 18 February 1934, Horowitz said:

> *"From the very beginning there have been two opposing attitudes. Yours was 'All we can do is to protest. Positive action on our part would do more harm than good.' Against this there was another attitude: 'We must proclaim in words and actions our hostility to that philosophy of life which excludes Jews from the life of the nation'. We do not believe in lying low and keeping quiet. If there is one thing that is likely to impress public opinion, impress Hitler and rouse the spirit of Jewry throughout the world it is a clear and unequivocal declaration of our attitude."*[32]

Those, who spoke after Horowitz, labeled his criticism as unconstructive and Neville Laski was suspicious of Horowitz´s power ambitions. Horowitz represented the BoD´s Zionist section, the rise of which worried Laski and his colleagues. Horowitz, however, declared the organization of the boycott as his only ambition and denied any attempts

29 B. KRIKLER, *Anglo-Jewish Attitudes,* p. 39. See Laski´s proclamation of 26 March 1933 cited on the previous page.

30 B. KRIKLER, *Anglo-Jewish Attitudes*, p. 36.

31 Morris Meyer's speech at the BoD meeting, 14 May 1933. JTA Bulletin, 15 May 1933. Original document: ACC 3121/A/026. Quotation from microfilm: LMA, MF/041/049.

32 *JTA Bulletin*, 19 February 1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/027. Quotation from microfilm: LMA, MF/041/049.

to gain power or a higher position in the BoD.[33] Laski´s worry is partly understandable. Laski, who came from a rich and fully assimilated Mancunian family, was elected the BoD president rather recent, on 16 January 1933. The opposing candidate, Major Salomon Nathan, was a Labour MP and a member of the Zionist section of the BoD. Laski received 128 votes against 79 and he was aware of the growing Zionist influence over British Jewry.[34]

The BoD refused to take part in the international boycott events. They refused participation in the World Jewish Economic Conference in the summer of 1933 as well as in the World Jewish Conferences in Geneva (1934, 1935), to which they were repeatedly invited. Preparations of the Jewish Economic Conference had started before the boycott. It was originally meant to take place in June, parallel to the World Economic Conference, but in the end the event was moved to July to enable the participation of dr. Samuel Untermyer (1858–1940) from New York.[35] This lawyer, a Zionist, member of the Democratic Party and a well-known civil rights activist was one of the most fervent boycott organisers in the U.S. On 28 February 1933, Neville Laski met the representatives of the Federation of Jewish Relief Organization and spoke rather sceptically about the possible success of the conference.[36] He was mainly referring to the absence of the American Jewish Committee, a U.S. organisation of a similar position as the BoD held in Britain, which also refused to join the boycott.[37] The conference venue was moved from London to Amsterdam and the actual event of 19–21 July 1933 did receive some publicity, although its results were disappointing. Had Untermyer travelled to Britain with the aim to make the BoD actively support the boycott movement, he tried in vain. Untermyer saw Britain as the weak point of the world´s boycott movement and tried to provide another incentive for British involvement by organising an international conference in London in November 1934. This second attempt to gain official support of the BoD was equally unsuccessful as the previous one. Some degree of support was expressed by individuals, such as Lord Melchett or a Conservative M. P., Thomas Levy.[38]

The World Jewish Conferences in Geneva had a rather complex agenda focusing mainly on the preparation of the World Jewish Congress. Although the boycott was

33 *JTA Bulletin*, 18 September 1933. BoD Minutes, volume 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026. Microfilm, LMA/MF/041/049.

34 *JTA Bulletin*, 17 January 1933; *The Jewish Chronicle,* 20 January 1933. BoD Minutes, volume 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026. Microfilm, LMA/MF/041/049.

35 M. GOTTLIEB, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance*, pp. 71–75.

36 LMA, ACC 3121/B04/WO/022.

37 M. GOTTLIEB, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance*, pp. 42–43.

38 Thomas Levy (1871–1953), in 1931–1945 a Conservative M. P. (the constituency of Elland, Yorkshire). The conference in London on 26–28 October 1934 see the Gestapo report of 28 December 1934, PAAA, Referat Deutschland, R 99532.

mentioned during some sessions, most of the agenda was devoted to the Jewish refugees from Germany. The BoD refused to participate in both 2nd conference (5–8 September 1933) and 3rd conference (20–23 August 1934).[39]

The BoD´s lack of interest certainly did not mean that British Jewry had ignored the Amsterdam Conference or the World Conferences in Geneva. Neither had they all rejected the official boycott. Sir Henry Ludwig Mond, the 2nd Baron of Melchett (1898–1949), actively supported the conferences in 1933–1934 trying to expand their agenda by discussing the boycott and gain greater support for its implementation. Although Lord Melchett was the Chairman of the Administrative Board of *Imperial Chemical Industries*, one of the world´s largest industrial conglomerates,[40] it had very little impact on his chances to push the boycott idea through. He never acted on behalf of the conglomerate, but always chose to speak of his individual views or on behalf of Jewish organisations or committees. His opinions, adverse to the official BoD standpoints, burdened his negotiations with the Foreign Office which he strove to involve in his boycott plans. Soon after the beginning of World War II, in the autumn of 1939 and again in 1940, he proposed the involvement of neutral countries, especially in America, in the German boycott. His initiative, however, was met with a reserved reaction by the British government.[41]

The BoD´s reluctance towards a general boycott led many individuals and organisations that simply wanted "to do something" to finding an organisation which would coordinate all boycott activities. *The Jewish Representative Council for the Boycott of German Goods and Services* (JRC) was established in September, much to the dislike of the BoD leaders. They were not only in opposition to the official boycott, but also feared that their authority as the spokesmen of British Jewry may be undermined.[42] Zionist inclinations of several

39 Conference reports, including the mention of British absence see in PAAA, Referat Deutschland, R 98458. See also M. GOTTLIEB, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance*, pp. 71–75.

40 Imperial Chemical Industries were founded in December 1926 through a merger of Brunner Mond (family firm of the Monds), Nobel Explosives, the United Alkali Company and British Dyestuffs Corporation. It was Britain´s largest employer and one of the world´s most important corporations in chemical industry. Alfred Moritz Mond, the 1st Baron of Melchett (1868–1930) was the first Chairman of the Administrative Board.

41 On 14 September 1939, Melchett sent his proposals to the Minister of Economic Warfare, Sir Ronald Cross. See NA, CO 852/266/9. On September 28, he received the minister´s polite but dismissive answer. The Foreign Office received similarly negative reactions from British diplomats in the neutrals states (Argentina, Brazil, Denmark, the Netherlands). They all preferred to keep low profile believing that putting pressure on neutral governments would result in their inclination towards Germany or increased anti-Semitism. See NA, FO 371/23949; FO 371/25169.

42 Gordon Liverman, treasurer of the BoD, speaking at the BoD meeting on 17 September 1933. *JTA Bulletin*, 18 September 1933. BoD Minutes, Volume 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026; microfilm: LMA, MF/041/049.

JRC´s leaders, e.g. its president Morris Harold Davis (1894–1985) or Pinchas Horowitz and Lord Melchett, were another obstacle.[43]

The JRC was established at a conference on 5 November 1933, was attended by 360 Jewish organisations with a total of 170,000 members. 530 conference delegates declared their readiness to "*abstain from the purchase or use of German goods and services so long as full equality of status shall continue to be denied to the Jews of Germany*".[44] Still, this powerful boycott declaration failed to win the BoD´s backing. Neville Laski tried to discourage the JRC from an official declaration of the boycott and forwarded letters from Germany in which individual Jews and whole organisations expressed their fear of a Nazi reaction to the official boycott. A letter from Nuremberg addressed the JRC conference on their boycott announcement:

> *"The result of such an announcement would undoubtedly be similar attacks on the Jews, such as the ones that took place in Nuremberg nine weeks ago. Is it not possible to induce Mr. Laski to prevent such action? Why not allow it to remain unofficial? Matters cannot be improved by shouting it from the rooftops. […] Any body taking responsibility of an official boycott will have cause to regret it."*[45]

The very first months thus showed how deeply the approach to the idea of official boycott divided British Jewry. Enthusiasm of the boycott movement and the desire to act was clashing with the official low-profile strategy. Inaction of the BoD leaders permanently scarred the reputation of the Board within the Jewish community.

Laski and other BoD leaders in their proclamations suggested that they did not refrain from the boycott as a strategy of individuals, but they refused to support it officially. All protest actions seemed to fulfil one main goal: to meet the emotional need to vent one´s frustration over the situation in Germany. Leonard Montefiore, of the Joint Foreign Committee (JFC) of the BoD said, "*People must express their feelings or they will burst*".[46] The old elite were weakening the meaning of the boycott primarily to its psychological function, denying its power as a political or economic weapon.[47]

Nevertheless, people participating in the boycott movement had higher aims. The main goal was terminating Jewish persecution by overthrowing Hitler and the boycott

43 Morris Davis was a Labour Party member. G. ALDERMAN, *Modern British Jewry*, p. 173.

44 *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 November 1933; *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 1933.

45 Laski´s letter to Horowitz (1 November 1933) with attached letters from Germany. LMA ACC 3121/E3/36/1.

46 JTA Bulletin, 27 March 1933. BoD Minutes, volume 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026; microfilm: LMA, MF MF/041/049.

47 S. GEWIRTZ, *Anglo-Jewish Responses*, p. 261.

was meant to be one of the means of bringing Germany down on its knees. The main argument during the first year of the boycott was clear:

> *"Once the sixteen million Jews inhabiting the world stop buying German goods, they will represent a power which no country will be able to ignore" and "A properly carried out boycott will cause Germany´s economic collapse within a year".*[48]

Those optimistic words may well have been uttered to strengthen the boycott movement. It was virtually impossible to estimate the actual impact of the boycott on the German economy. On one hand, the German press suggested that the boycott did have the desired effect. On 28 October 1933, *The Manchester Guardian* reprinted an article from *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, a German financial paper:

> *"It is useless to close our eyes to the fact that the boycott propaganda abroad is producing serious results. Gradually German products are being replaced by British, Swiss or Italian goods… This is especially true of goods in which Germany previously had a monopoly – chemicals, electro-chemical articles, textiles and metallurgical goods, particularly machinery."*[49] *On the other hand, Great Britain still was one of Germany´s main economic partners. A lower rate of German foreign trade was connected to the ending economic crisis as well as the growing isolationism of the country, which was preparing for the war.*[50]

The boycott movement continued throughout 1934. It was joined by individuals as well as organisations and from the beginning, it was more than a purely Jewish activity. One of the most fervent organisers of the boycott, Captain Walter Joseph Webber, invested so much of his own financial resources in the movement that he got on the verge of bankruptcy.[51] *Captain's Webber's British Boycott Organization* had its headquarters in London´s East End and it carried out intensive propaganda in Yiddish and English. It was aiming at both Jewish and non-Jewish businessmen trying to persuade them not to sell or buy German products (see the picture 1).[52]

Not all Jewish businessmen, however, embraced the boycott idea. Reluctance of some shop-owners was often balanced by eagerness of their customers. In July 1933, just a day after the large protest march from the East End to Hyde Park, a woman noticed the sign "Made in Germany" on a parcel delivered to the warehouse of an importer of toys in

48 Opinion of Mr. Pinchas Horowitz (*The Manchester Guardian*, 16 November 1933) and Mr. Samuel Untermyer (*The Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 1933).

49 *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 October 1933.

50 B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, p. 30.

51 The National Archives (TNA), Metropolitan Police, MEPO 2/3282. Article on Webber in Sunday Referee, 30 June 1935.

52 LMA, ACC 3121/E3/36/1 (*see the pictures 1 and 2*).

Whitechapel. The report spread quickly and within just minutes, the place was flooded with hundreds of people. The police were called to disperse the crowd, but they were not successful. Captain Webber described his impressions for *The Manchester Guardian:*

> *"There must have been more than a thousand people surrounding both the shop in Sidney Street and the warehouse in Wolsey Street. Things were looking very ugly, but the importer at once accepted my advice to send the goods back. Not until every case had been taken away did the people disperse."*[53]

Similar events showed people´s willingness to participate in the boycott. The official opinion, however, saw these activities as undesirable and disruptive to public order.

The boycott´s implementation had been complicated from the beginning by the so-called Transfer Agreement (Ha'avarah in Hebrew). It was an agreement concluded between the Zionists in Palestine and Germany and enabled Jews to emigrate from Germany with a part of their financial capital. Capital was transferred by means of purchase of German goods, which expanded German export to Palestine.[54] Rather than a boost of foreign trade, Germany saw this as a blow to the Jewish boycott and an incitement for Jewish emigration. With the diminishing fear of the boycott, the Nazis continued to fulfil the provisions of Transfer Agreement mainly because they wanted to get rid of Jews.[55]

Transfer Agreement proved the internal weakness and fragmentation of the movement. It was basically a sabotage of the boycott, which was immediately seized by the German propaganda. The German press reported on the Palestinian "hole in the boycott".[56] The Zionist movement itself saw the Agreement as rather controversial.[57] It was rejected by the representatives of the American Jewish Congress as well as the Zionist Revisionist party.[58] Their leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, on the 18th Zionist Congress in Prague (21 August – 3 September 1933) strictly declined the Ha'avarah and expressed his support of the boycott:

53 *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1933.

54 David YISRAELI, *The Third Reich and the Transfer Agreement*, Journal of Contemporary History 6/2, 1971, pp. 129–178; Yf'aat WEISS, *The Transfer Agreement and the Boycott Movement: A Jewish Dilemma on the Ave of the Holocaust*, Yad Vashem Studies 26, 1998, pp. 129–172 [electronic version: https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20–%203231.pdf; 3 August 2017]. German politics in Palestine see Ernst MARCUS, *The German Foreign Office and the Palestine Question in Period 1933–1939*, Yad Vashem Studies 2, 1958, pp. 179–204; Christopher BROWNING, *Referat Deutschland: Jewish Policy and the German Foreign Office (1933–1940)*, Yad Vashem Studies 12, 1977, pp. 37–73; Francis R. NICOSIA, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question*, Austin 1985.

55 Yehuda BAUER, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945*, New Haven – London 1994, pp. 9–10, 15–16.

56 *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, 27 May 1935. LMA, ACC 3121/C11/12/37. See Y. BAUER, *Jews for Sale?*, p. 19.

57 Dr. Chaim Arlosoroff, left-wing Zionist and the main organiser of the Agreement, was murdered two days after his return from Germany. It has never been proved that the murder was motivated by him signing the Agreement, but the timing of his assassination supports this theory.

58 Y. BAUER, *Jews for Sale?*, pp. 16–17; B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, p. 29.

"The Revisionist party would constitute itself as the guiding body for organizing and directing an anti-German economic boycott. […] German threats to hold half a million German Jews as hostages if world Jewry does not keep silent will be ignored."[59]

His speeches at the Zionist-Revisionist Congress in Krakow (8–11 January 1934) or during his visit of Czechoslovakia in 1935 were held in a similar tone.[60]

The assessment of the boycott´s first year would not be complete without the German view. German embassies kept Berlin informed on the course of the boycott in individual countries. The London embassy also provided its government with regular and detailed reports sent several times per month in the years 1933 and 1934. These reports captured well the boycott movement´s problems. The report of 13 September 1933 stated that the Jewish boycott had no official support and the organisations traditionally considered to be the main representatives of British Jewry, i.e. the BoD and the *Anglo-Jewish Association*, repeatedly refused the idea of organised boycott. Thus, the boycott remained largely an activity of individuals and individual businesses. There were also significant regional contrasts: the boycott was strong in London´s East End, Manchester and Leeds with significant Jewish populations. The overall scope and impact of the boycott can hardly be estimated: "*The field which suffers most, is fur trade and the cheaper, yet important, goods such as toys, haberdashery, home appliances and kitchen utensils, women´s clothing. Jewish doctors have stopped buying German pharmaceutical goods. German boats have lost almost all Jewish passengers.*"[61]

Since 1934 the reports concerning the boycott became less frequent until they stopped mentioning the issue altogether. It could have signified the movement´s stagnation or the conclusion of German diplomats that the boycott´s impact was insignificant and therefore did not have to be dealt with.

59 B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, p. 30; *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 August 1933; *The New York Times*, 22 August 1933.

60 The Congress in Krakow see Gestapo report of 6 February 1935, PAAA, Referat Deutschland, R 99532. Visit in Czechoslovakia see PAAA, Ref. 117, Altes Amt, Deutsches Konsulat Kaschau, Paket 4a, Aktenzeichen Aia Juden, Band 1 (1933–1938), Judenfrage und Boykott deutschen Ware; PAAA, Referat Deutschland, R 99 532.

61 NA, GFM 33/4735/L1670, Referat Deutschland: Jewish Boycott Conference, pp. 1–5 (quotation p. 4). The same report is located in Berlin´s Archive of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: PAAA, BN 98427.

The boycott´s stagnation and downturn (1935–1939)

Legislative persecution of the Jews in Germany peaked in 1935 by the so-called Nuremberg Acts.[62] It became clear that the Nazis had no intention to seize their anti-Jewish policy. Even Neville Laski had to acknowledge this in his speech at the BoD meeting on 2 October 1935. He referred to the main anti-Jewish acts and other acts of oppression suffered by the Jews in Germany. He admitted that his original view of Hitler as "a moderate politician" was wrong: "*He is apparently at one with Herr Streicher, dr. Goebbels, and the violently anti-Semitic leaders of the party.*" His speech was full of resignation and open scepticism about helping to change the fate of Jewish communities in Germany:

> *"The question we anxiously put to ourselves is: In what way can we hope to help the Jews of Germany? It is sometimes doubtful whether the adoption of some courses has been helpful at all. Protests by eminent Jews and by Jewish organisations have been made in large numbers. They have relieved our feelings; they have manifested our resentment and self-respect. Yet it has still to be shown that they have had the slightest influence on the oppressor."*

Most Jews had to rely on the help of non-Jewish subjects. Their involvement in the boycott was especially welcomed by Laski. He also admitted that many Jews in Britain had expected more decisive action against Germany. In this respect, however, Laski´s views remained the same: the Jews, as loyal citizens, were supposed to obey the official course of British policy.

> *"Many feel that our attitude and conduct in this country lacks aggressiveness and that it is not sufficient merely to bring succour to our friends. They wish to strike the enemy. Their feelings are understandable. I have said on more than one occasion that no self-respecting Jew would buy German goods or make use of German services. I emphatically repeat that statement. I would go further and say that every action designed to show the Nazi regime that persecution does not pay is commendable, but I would add, and as a loyal citizen it is essential that I should add, that such action as is taken must be always be conditioned by and be subject to the overriding consideration of duty and loyalty to the country of which we are citizens."*[63]

Great opportunity to "hit the enemy" and liven up the boycott movement came about in 1936 with the Olympic Games in Germany (winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and summer Olympics in Berlin). Boycotting the Olympics would have a great impact because it would be a single decisive action concentrating the total

62 S. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 141–151.
63 LMA, ACC 3121/C11/12/21/2.

power of the movement.[64] Discussions of the Olympic boycott were intensive and most serious, especially in the U.S. and had already started in 1933. It is clear that without U.S. participation, the Olympic Games would have been significantly undermined. That, however, did not happen. The *American Olympic Committee* stood for U.S. participation and after some hesitation was joined by the *Amateur Athletic Union*, the leading sports organisation in the U.S.A.[65]

The possibility of the Olympic boycott had been discussed in Great Britain during the end of 1935. An impulse for such discussion came with the controversial invitation of the German national football team to England in December 1935. Both the Foreign Office and Home Office were flooded with letters of protest, mainly from British Jewry, left-wing organisations and the unions. The main argument against the invitation was Nazi control over German sports and the fear of agents infiltrating Britain. The Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, was also worried about the possibility of violent demonstrations. Calling the match off would, however, mean admitting loss of control and would be rather inconvenient for the ongoing political negotiations with Germany (the naval agreement was concluded on 18 June 1935). Furthermore, according to British tradition the state stayed away from the matters of sports organisations. The only satisfaction was that the English national football team won the match at the stadium of Tottenham Hotspur 3:0.[66]

The football controversy was at the root of the debate concerning British participation in Berlin Olympics. This debate was not as heated as in the U.S. and although the boycott was proposed, the Amateur Athletic Association unanimously refused it. Olympic participation was supported even by the famous Jewish sportsmen, e.g. Harold Abrahams, winner of the 100m sprint from the Paris Olympics in 1924, currently a member of the AAA committee. Such an approach helped to marginalise the anti-Olympic sentiment. The Nazis promised not to prevent Jewish participation in the games.[67] The British government, especially The Foreign Office, made it repeatedly clear that they would not interfere in sporting matters. At the same time, it was completely clear that they politically preferred Britain´s participation in the Olympics. The Olympic boycott failed because individual governments refused to intervene and neither the International Olympic

64 B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, p. 31.

65 M. GOTTLIEB, *Anti-Nazi Resistance*, pp. 231–235; Allen GUTTMANN, *The ‚Nazi Olympics' and the American Boycott Controversy*, in: Pierre Arnaud – James Riordan (eds.), Sport and International Politics, The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport, London 1998, pp. 31–50.

66 Richard HOLT, *The Foreign Office and the Football Association. British sport and appeasement, 1935–1938*, in: P. Arnaud – J. Riordan (eds.), Sport and International Politics, pp. 53–58.

67 Ibidem, pp. 58–60; *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1935.

Committee, not majority of national Olympic committees found the courage to denounce the Olympics in Germany.[68]

After the Olympic Games the boycott theme slowly faded out of press reports. Although the U.S. boycott movement kept its activities going, in Great Britain the interest was definitely lost. The boycott´s downturn was clear from the lower frequency of articles on this theme published in the main British papers in comparison with the years 1933 and 1934.

The first year of the boycott movement indicated that the low-profile policy of the BoD was partly motivated by their fear of growing Zionist influence. Neville Laski and Leonard Montefiore saw Zionism as a threat to the BoD´s unity as well as their individual positions. In March 1936, Zionists within the BoD requested a delegation to be sent to the World Jewish Congress (WJC). One of the aims of the Congress was to coordinate the global economic boycott of Germany. Laski, who had originally been just cautious, changed his opinion within a single month towards a complete refusal and did his best to prevent participation in the WJC.[69] Zionists then complained that Laski had manipulated the BoD members and that he had abused his power of the president to block WJC participation.[70] The refusal of WJC participation was again connected to British official government policy. The prevailing opinion in the BoD believed that the Congress would strengthen the boycott movement, but the BoD´s participation would lead to the loss of influence on the British government.[71]

The boycott movement died down in the second half of 1936 also due to growing anti-Semitism in Britain. The BoD and other Jewish organisations have traditionally devoted their efforts to fighting anti-Semitism in Britain and thus, they logically focused more on this matter rather than on the boycott of Germany. The British Union of Fascists led by Sir Oswald Mosley were stepping up their anti-Jewish activities, which culminated on 6 October 1936 by the so-called Battle of Cable Street.[72] Growing politically-motivated violence in the streets of London, especially the East End, led to passing an act on political

68 B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, pp. 31–32.

69 LMA, ACC/3121/C/11/10/1.

70 Ibidem, letters from M. H. Davis, P. Horowitz, H. Jochelman, M. Myer and M. L. Perlzweig to Laski, 29 April 1936 and 1 May 1936.

71 LMA, ACC/3131/C/11/10/1. Letter of Lionel L. Cohen to Neville Laski, 20 March 1933.

72 See Tony KUSHNER – Nadia VALMAN (eds.), *Remembering Cable Street. Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society*, London – Portland 2000. "The battle of Cable Street" was a peak of a long conflict. The first violent clashes between Mosley´s Fascists and their Jewish and non-Jewish opponents took place in London in the spring of 1933. See Daniel TILLES, *British Fascist Antisemitism and the Jewish Responses, 1932–1940*, London 2015, pp. 101–103. Generally, on anti-Fascism in interwar Britain see Nigel COPSEY – Andrzej OLECHNOWICZ (eds.), *Varieties of Anti-Fascism. Britain in the Inter-War Period*, Basingstoke 2010.

extremism. *Public Order Act* forbade wearing political uniforms at all political events or in public places. At the same time, the Metropolitan Police, on order of Sir John Simon issued on 16 July 1936, started monitoring the activity of both Fascists and anti-Fascists with even greater intensity.[73] Regular monthly reports speak of frequent anti-Fascist activities in which the BoD played a completely insignificant part. The BoD´s leadership pursued their low-profile strategy, which was however no longer appealing to the Jewish population of the East End, especially its youth.[74]

In 1938 the boycott movement reached a dead end. The endeavour of individuals and organisations, Jews and non-Jews, could not bring the Nazi regime down. Without the support of state governments, the movement was bound to fail. While the boycott movement strove to influence customers, the British government concluded trade agreements and political pacts with Germany. In spite of the boycott, Great Britain was in the 1930´s, Germany´s main trading partner.[75] The above-mentioned naval agreement, signed in 1935, represents a breaking point from which Britain took the path of open appeasement with the aim of preventing the war. When Neville Chamberlain became the Prime Minister in 1937, the appeasement policy grew stronger and culminated in 1938.

Peaceful diplomacy instead of the boycott? The BoD and its version of the appeasement

The Jewish boycott of Germany was an international activity and can be understood as a type of Jewish foreign policy. Within the BoD, foreign policy was the responsibility of *The Joint Foreign Committee* (JFC), a joint body of the BoD and the Anglo-Jewish Association, founded in 1878. The JFC had traditionally monitored the situation of Jews in other countries focusing especially on anti-Semitism and informed British public as well as official political representatives. The JFC reports enabled the BoD to take action and try to make the British government act. In 1933–1939 the JFC was led by two co-presidents, Neville Laski (as the BoD´s president) and Leonard Montefiore (president of the Anglo-Jewish Association).

73 NA, MEPO 2/3043, pp. 329–331. The police with the secret services (MI5) monitored the radical right-wing and Fascist movement since mid-1920´s. Nevertheless, the order of Sir John Simon, influenced by the personal intervention of Harold Laski, made the police act with even greater intensity.

74 Metropolitan Police report to the Home Office of 5 November 1936, NA, MEPO 2/3043, pp. 256–257, 265.

75 Martin GILBERT – R. GOTT, *The Appeasers*, London 1953; chapter 11 and especially pp. 189–190; Benny MORRIS, *The Roots of Appeasement The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During 1930's*, London 1991, pp. 67 ff. On the Anglo-German Naval Agreement see Zara STEINER, *The Triumph of the Dark. European International History 1933–1939*, Oxford 2013, pp. 90–93.

The JFC´s original attitude was no different to that of the British public and press (e.g. *The Times*): violence against the Jews was probably just a temporary phenomenon related to the overall radicalisation of German politics; anti-Semitism was promoted by the "left-wing" of the Nazi party and it was hoped to be erased by the moderate political elements. No steps which would anger the German government were to be taken to keep mutual relations open to the negotiations held between Britain and Germany. This attitude was clear from the first BoD meeting openly addressing the situation of the Jews in Germany.[76]

The optimistic view of German anti-Semitism as a "temporary excess" was rather short-lived. After the declaration of the anti-Jewish boycott on April 1 (although it was only a one-day event) together with the implementation of the "Aryan Paragraph" in Germany in April 1933, made the JFC leaders believe that Nazi persecution is no "fleeting hysteria".[77] An abrupt end to the illusion that Hitler is a responsible politician, while anti-Semitism is promoted only by Julius Streicher and Joseph Goebbels, came about with the Nuremberg Acts.[78]

The JFC closely cooperated with organisations handling Jewish emigration and got involved in fundraising for refugees. After Hitler came to power, the Zionists turned their attention to the support of emigration which they saw as the only solution for German Jewry. The non-Zionist JFC persisted in trying to ensure "civic equality" for the Jews in Germany. Only after the November pogroms in 1938 did the officials acknowledge their failure and admitted that there is no point in continuing this effort. Neville Laski came with a statement full of resignation: "*Life of Jewry in Germany has been actually destroyed*".[79]

The JFC´s attempts to re-establish civic equality of Jews in Germany led to two types of activity. First, the JFC contacted prominent public figures to make them protest against the persecution of German Jews. In June 1933, the JFC organised a non-Jewish meeting of protest titled "On the Oppression of German Jews" and invited leading members of the Conservative Party. Speakers including Viscount Buckmaster[80], the Earl of Iddesleigh[81] or

76 Neville Laski speech at the BoD meeting, 26 March 1933. LMA, ACC/3121/A/026; cited from the microfilm: LMA/MF/041/049, Minutes Volume 26, 1932–1934.

77 Leonard Stein, delivering report of JFC at BoD meeting on18 June 1933, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 18 June 1933.

78 Neville Laski speech at the BoD meeting, 2 October 1935. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/028. Microfilm: LMA/MF/041/050. BoD Minutes, volume 28, 1935–1936.

79 For the quotation see the microfilm: LMA, MF/041/050 (original document ACC/3121/A/029), BoD Minutes, vol. 30, 1938–1940. Further see: Laski speech at BoD meeting on 16 November 1938, in: *The Jewish Chronicle*, 25 November 1938.

80 Stanley Owen Buckmaster, 1st Viscount Buckmaster (1861–1934), liberal politician and lawyer.

81 Henry Stafford Northcote, 3rd Earl of Iddelsleigh (1901–1970).

the Archbishop of Canterbury[82] expressed their respect for Germany´s right to "go its own way" and sympathy for the German "national movement", but they called for tolerance, justice and equality of all nations living in Germany.[83] The Earl of Iddesleigh said:

> *"Our purpose to-night is to protest against certain acts of injustice that have taken place in Germany: respectfully but very firmly to tell Herr Hitler that these acts have shocked our consciences, and, as subjects of a friendly state, to warn him that, in our opinion, the continuance of such policies will nullify all the good which he has wrought and may end in the collapse of his regime."*[84]

The second type of activities mainly included the dialogue with the British government on the possibility of diplomatic intervention to help the Jews in Germany. This strategy was rooted in the belief of the British Jewish community that the government will support them as long as they keep loyal to its policies.[85] That, however, proved wrong. The official British standpoint was clear from the very beginning. On 2 March 1933, The Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, informed the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold, about how worried the Jews in Britain were about their fellow Jews in Germany. At the same time though, Sir John stressed that while Britain must report every Nazi action against British Jews to the German government, the Jews in Germany are not their responsibility: "*We have no locus standi to make representation as regards German subjects.*"[86] The British government was equally resolute in lifting no obstacles to Jewish immigration, as John Gilmour, the Home Secretary, explained to the House of Commons on 9 March 1933.[87] For the rest of the decade, the British government kept averting its eyes from all matters which would complicate British-German relations and thus threaten the on-going negotiations. Thus, a mere reference to the Jewish question, let alone diplomatic pressure, was out of the question.

The Foreign Office carried out a type of policy which could be summarised by a single imperative: "stay out of it". Robert Hankey explained the situation to both Leonard Monterfiore and Neville Laski on 21 March 1933. When Laski mentioned the possibility of the anti-German boycott, Hankey dismissed the possibility claiming that such action

82 William Cosmo Gordon Lang, 1st Baron Lang of Lambeth (1864–1945), Archbishop of Canterbury (1928–1942).

83 Speeches delivered at a Meeting of Protest held at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place, W1 on Tuesday, 27 June 1933. LMA, ACC/3121/B4/Q/2.

84 Ibidem, p. 17.

85 Laski´s speech at the BoD meeting of 26 March 1933; BoD Minutes, vol. 26, 1932–1934. Original document: LMA, ACC 3121/A/026. Microfilm: LMA, MF/041/049.

86 John P. FOX, *Great Britain and the German Jews 1933*, Wiener Library Bulletin 26/1–2, 1972, p. 41.

87 *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Commons, Fifth Series, vol. 274, col. 1597; vol. 275, cols. 1351–1352.

would seriously hurt German Jewry and Sir Horace Rumbold in Berlin agreed.[88] When the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, informed Rumbold on 12 May 1933 about how worried the main Rabbi and others were by the reports of Nazi repressions of Jewish communities in Germany and asked him to enquire unofficially about the situation, Rumbold sceptically responded that he would only be told "to mind his own business".[89]

The JFC retained their belief in "peaceful diplomacy" for the whole of 1930´s. At the same time, they defended the government policy against those who demanded a more decisive reaction. At the BoD meeting in December 1934, Laski claimed:

> *"We must realise that for statesmen European peace is the paramount consideration; and that the Jews are only one facet in the problems which have arisen since the signing of peace […] Flamboyant protests can do no good. But much can be done by discussion face to face and by gentle conversations across the table […] We must look at the matter in proper proportion, and we cannot expect that the Jewish question should assume first consideration. We can only do our best with the limited means to our hands."*[90]

When negotiating with the Foreign Office, Laski stressed that he acted as a British subject representing the opinion of the majority. He referred to prominent public figures who had voiced their concern about the situation in Germany. He kept providing the Foreign Office with documents proving the continuing and growing discrimination of Jews in Germany and other European countries.[91]

The BoD put great effort into getting the Foreign Office on their side. This tedious process may have projected the government´s negative approach to the boycott into the standpoints of the BoD leadership. The BoD leaders were, above all, British subjects and had no intention of provoking their own government. The government´s negative reaction to the Jewish protest movement was rather clear: on 13 October 1934, Neville Laski met with Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, who voiced his grave concern about the Jewish boycott and especially its intensity in the East End. Vansittart warned Laski about the possible adverse effects of the boycott

88 TNA, FO 371/16720, fol. 82 ff (Record of the conversation on 21st March with Leonard Montefiore and Neville Laski); *Documents on British Foreign Policy, Second Series,* vol. 5, London 1956, p. 14 (Sir Horace Rumbold to Sir John Simon, 31 March 1933).

89 TNA, FO 371/16723, fol. 187, 199.

90 The BoD meeting on 16 December 1934. See LMA/MF/041/049 (original document ACC/3121/A/027), BoD Minutes, volume 27, 1934–1935.

91 A letter to Vansittart, 25 February 1935: LMA, ACC/3121/C/11/6/4/2. Memorandum on the position of Jews in Italy and Tripolitania, sent to Vansittart by 15 April 1937: LMA, ACC/3121/C/11/6/4/2. Memorandum on the position of Jews in European countries sent to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, on 31 October 1938: LMA, ACC 3121/C11/6/4/1.

movement organised by the JRC, especially the risk of growing anti-Semitism in Britain. He referred to the U.S., especially the American Jewish Congress and the activities of Samuel Untermyer. Although Vansittart did not directly oppose the economic boycott of Germany, he disagreed with methods that were too radical.[92]

Laski clearly hoped that humanistic tradition, as well as the power of liberal thinking, would prevail and the Foreign Office would officially denounce the situation in Germany. The exchange, which took place on 1 January 1937 between Laski and Orme G. Sargent, the Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, was rather typical.[93] Laski proposed that the British government in its own interest should step up pressure on Germany "*at the appropriate time, in a firm but friendly manner*". The response he got must have disappointed him: Sargent reacted with great restraint, exactly in line with the official policy. The British government had no intention to act. They merely declared their readiness to "*keep a close watch on the situation*" and "*to take advantage of any favourable opportunity that might present itself*".[94] Unfortunately, such favourable opportunity occurred only after the outbreak of World War II. The British government officially denounced Nazi anti-Jewish policy on 31 October 1939.[95] Nevertheless, by that time the war had completely changed the situation and the boycott, in the form in which it was carried out in 1930´s, lost its meaning.

Conclusion

The beginning of World War II meant total failure of the boycott movement. The hope that Hitler´s regime would be destroyed, without the war, was a disappointment for many reasons. Even without analysing the boycott´s international dimension and focusing only the boycott movement in Britain, the reasons are clear. Above all, there was the inability to make the boycott a collective, official matter, which would be pushed through as part of official British policy. The boycott could have only succeeded if supported by the government. However, the government never even considered a step as radical. The fact that the influential Jewish organisations, especially the BoD, refused the official boycott too, represents another key factor. Although many Jews disagreed, the BoD´s standpoint remained the same. Part of the problem was that the boycott in Britain was pushed by

92 Report of the meeting with Sir Robert Vansittart. LMA, ACC 3121/C/11/6/4/2.
93 Interview at the Foreign Office with Mr. O. G. Sargent. LMA, ACC 3121/C/11/6/4/2.
94 Ibidem.
95 S. GEWIRTZ, *Anglo-Jewish Responses*, p. 267. Laski speech at the BoD meeting, 16 November 1938. LMA, MF/041/050 (original document ACC/3121/A/029). BoD minutes, volume 30, 1938–1940.

the Zionists, while the traditional non-Zionist BoD leaders tried to limit their growing influence.

Older historiography had a rather sceptical view of the boycott. Bernard Krikler holds that the boycott was doomed from the beginning: "*Given the industrial potential of Nazi Germany and the acquiescence of the major powers, these fundamental weaknesses – the source of endless conflict, apology and escapism – doomed the boycott from its inception.*"[96] On the other hand, some, like the author of this text, believe that the boycott´s effect should not be underestimated. It is important from the point of view of modern Jewish identity and the strengthening of Jewish self-respect. Rather like Zionism, the boycott movement denounced the traditional image of Jews as passive victims of their fate.[97] All in all, the boycott of 1930´s represented one of the few Jewish weapons (if not the only one). The boycott movement concerned the whole country and carried across the whole Jewish community, both men and women. Last, but not least, the boycott´s failure finally uncovered the paranoid core of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic myth is rooted in the belief in the omnipotent global Jewish conspiracy attempting to seize the rule of the world. Had something like that existed, the boycott would have had to succeed. Therefore, even though the boycott effort was only partially successful, its importance cannot be denied, although it had more significance for the British Jews rather than for the situation in Germany. The boycott contributed to the differentiation of Jewry and confirmed that already in 1930´s there was no single organisation which would represent all British Jews.[98] Likewise, no single organisation would be able to carry out a policy which would please the whole community. Despite the popular anti-Semitic belief in a unified British Jewry, there was no such single entity.

The study of the boycott uncovers a plethora of other relationships, issues and topics. It indicates different forms of anti-Fascist movements; internal tensions within Jewish communities; the clash between traditional assimilated elites and the Zionist orientation of "new people"; the complex issue of immigration; etc. Although marginally, the boycott movement does belong to the realm of international relations and great-power diplomacy, which in the end determined the boycott´s failure. Jewish organisations attempted to persuade different governments to join their effort, but failed. British relationship with Germany was defined by the attempts to prevent the war and the appeasement policy did not allow for the full development of the boycott as a tool for putting pressure on Germany. The boycott lost most of its drive mainly under Chamberlain´s government, during which the appeasement policy peaked. Jewish organisations, mainly the Board

96 B. KRIKLER, *Boycotting Nazi Germany*, p. 27.
97 Ibidem.
98 Ibidem; B. KRIKLER, *Anglo-Jewish Attitudes*, p. 60; S. GEWIRTZ, *Anglo-Jewish Responses*, p. 256.

of Jewish Deputies, were bound by their loyalty to the government and their careful attempts to provoke action had no chance of succeeding once the chosen path led through negotiations and compromises with Nazi Germany.

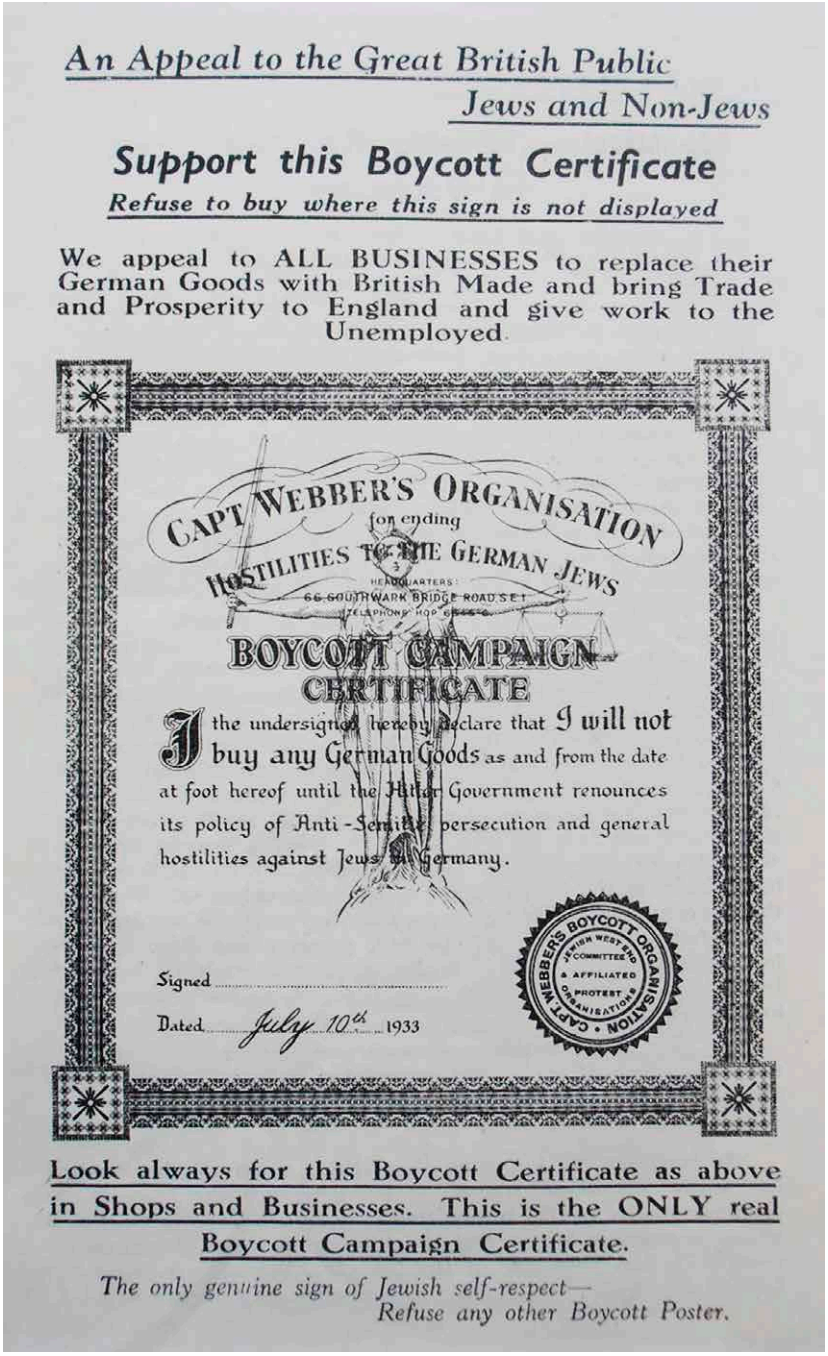

Fig. 1-2: Two examples of anti-German boycott leaflets issued by Captain Webber's Boycott Organization in London in 1934. London Metropolitan Archives, Board of Deputies of British Jews, ACC 3121/E3/36/1.