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Benjamin Sagalowitz (1901 – 1970), a Journalist Against the Nazi's

The Israeli study, which deals with the Holocaust period and the years preceding it, hardly referred to Switzerland, although this country was an important junction in the Zionist Movement, in general, and from the whole Jewish standpoint, in particular. Out of the 22 Zionist Congresses that had convened until the establishment of the State of Israel, 14 were held in Switzerland. Jewish Zionist as well as non-Zionist leaders met there. The Committee for the Protection of the Jewish Minority Rights, the Zionist Representative affiliated to the League of Nations, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Jewish Agency, the Joint and the World Center of ORT all convened in Geneva. Information regarding the fate of the Jews in Europe, under the Nazi occupation, mainly flowed through Switzerland.

During the years 1938 - 1964, the journalist Benjamin Sagalowitz (1901 - 1970) was running the Jewish Press Agency "JUNA" (Juedische Nachrichtenagentur). JUNA operated as a tool for defense and information (Abwehr und Aufklaerung) of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland - SIG (Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund).

In the frame of his work, Sagalowitz edited a bulletin that was sent to the Swiss newspapers' editorials with the objective of expressing an opinion about Jewish matters and concerning the persecutions under Hitler's regime. He collected a great deal of evidence, which documents the rise and operation of the Nazi regime in Germany, and was among the first ones to assemble a complete picture emerging from the pieces of information regarding the annihilation of the Jews in the East. The industrialist Edward Schulte, who established his place in history as the bearer of the news concerning the decision of the Nazi Heads to annihilate the European Jews, reported to Sagalowitz in

July 1942. He forwarded this information to Gerhart Riegner, the secretary of WJC in Geneva. Riegner sent a telegram, which included this information, to the Free World (the famous Riegner's telegram) but for political reasons publication was delayed for months.

During the War Sagalowitz rose against the submissive policy of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland - the SIG - regarding the refugee issue. In the frame of his work, he and other people too, of course, became the "conscience" of the Swiss Jewry.

The documentary material collected by Sagalowitz was used in Prof. Carl Ludwig's report, which was ordered and issued by the Government of Switzerland in 1957. Ludwig's report was the first historic study regarding the Swiss Government's conduct towards the Jewish refugees.

At the end of the War, Sagalowitz followed the trials against the Nazis and acted as a correspondent for the prominent newspaper NZZ (Neue Zuercher Zeitung) and other media.

In November 1943 SIG appointed Sagalowitz to compile documentation about the fate of the Jews under the Nazi regime. Sagalowitz had already begun before with this project at his own initiative. At the end of the War he completed his manuscript into a book. I found correspondences with various parties regarding the publishing of the book; however, in practice, the book has never been published. and it should be investigated and checked what the reasons were.

A copy of the manuscript can be found at "Yad Vashem". Sagalowitz's sources are first-hand testimonies from newspapers, official decrees and the speeches of the Nazi leaders. Sagalowitz planned to bring out a three-volume documentary book. The title of the first volume was "The Annihilation Campaign against the Jews in the Third Reich" (Der Vernichtungsfeldzug gegen die Juden im Dritten Reich). The first volume focuses on the period from the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933 until the War. The second volume focuses on the years between 1939 and 1945. Later, the title was changed to: "The Road to Maidanek, the fate of the Jews at our times 1933 - 1945" (Der Weg nach Maidanek, vom juedischen Schicksal in unserer Zeit). The first draft of the book was ready for printing in 1947. The planned third part was meant to describe resistance to the Nazi regime.

Papers that have been written until today describe the activities of Benjamin Sagalowitz as manager of the Jewish Press Agency JUNA. During that period he was part of the internal unofficial opposition at SIG against Saly Mayer, President of the Organization.

The Nazis followed closely the activities of Sagalowitz. An article published against him in a Nazi newspaper can be found at Yad Vashem. Swiss researchers called Sagalowitz "a key person in the publicist defense against anti-Semitism in Switzerland".

The researcher Raja Adler wrote in her article about Sagalowitz: "he did not fail (in comprehending the nature of the information R.S.), not because he was in possession of different news from the others, but because he had a political perception that dictated a systematic follow-up and a constant experience to see the nature of the things underlying the phenomena". As mentioned above, the issue of Switzerland during the Holocaust is not studied in the Israeli Academia, and the number of papers on the subject is scarce. The goal of this paper is to add another layer in this important historic chapter. Sagalowitz was primarily an observer who fought his war as a Zionist and Socialist Jew through his pen.

The following aspects should be investigated:

Sagalowitz's journalistic activities against the Nazis, prior, during and following the War.

The fate of the book "The Road to Maidanek"

The biography.

Sagalowitz was an East-European Jew (Ostjude) and most of his life was devoid of Swiss citizenship. He was a typical victim of the Swiss policy against foreigners. The years in which his activities were of utmost importance were overshadowed by his lack of citizenship and the existential threat emerging from it.