But a labor draft can be successful only if the public is convinced that it is the fairest and most efficient method of distributing the burdens of war. In England the demand for a labor draft came very largely from the common people, who knew that sacrifices must be made and who asked only that they be made by everyone. Organized labor was strongly behind the plan. There is no reason to believe that American labor would react any differently if it were given an effective voice in planning the details of the program and were assured that the interests of the average worker would be adequately safeguarded.

In its present form the Austin-Wadsworth bill virtually ignores labor’s interests. It contains no provision for protecting organized labor in union or closed shops against dilution by unorganized workers. There is nothing in the bill that would prevent a skilled worker from being moved arbitrarily from a highly paid to a poorly paid job in the same or another industry. Nor is there protection against discrimination because of race, sex, or union affiliation. Passage of the Austin-Wadsworth bill without these elementary safeguards might stir up a hornet’s nest of labor opposition that would seriously delay the war effort. But we believe that it is possible to work out a compromise measure that will prove acceptable to all groups in the population.

While the Jews Die

By Freda Kirchwey

Jews in Europe are being killed because they are Jews. Other innocent people are being killed too—hostages, men and women who resist oppression, old people who consume food needed by German soldiers and workers. But only Jews are being killed without other excuse or cause than the fact that they belong to a single religious-racial group. Hitler has promised their total liquidation, and he is carrying out that promise as fast as his Mobile Extermination Squads can work. They work fast. Seven or eight thousand Jews a week are being massacred. The ghetto of Warsaw, two years ago the dumping ground for Jews from all over occupied Europe, is now depopulated. Every Jew is dead. In Cracow, where 60,000 Jews lived, 56,000 have been killed.

The ways in which these slaughters are conducted have been reported. The numbers have been verified. The story is old. But the killing goes on. And as Hitler’s armies are forced step by step back into Europe, the tempo of extermination quickens. He must hurry now lest the liberating armies arrive in time to rescue some fragment of the doomed race. It is not fantastic to believe that even when Hitler is overthrown, he will find profound compensation in leaving behind him a Europe “cleansed” of the hated Jew.

If this happens, no one living today will escape retribution for the crime. For the purge of the Jews is only positively a Nazi crime. In this country, you and I and the President and the Congress and the State Department are accessories to the crime and share Hitler’s guilt. If we had behaved like humane and generous people instead of complacent, cowardly ones, the two million Jews lying today in the earth of Poland and Hitler’s other crowded graveyards would be alive and safe. And other millions yet to die would have found sanctuary. We had it in our power to rescue this doomed people and we did not lift a hand to do it—or perhaps it would be fairer to say that we lifted just one cautious hand, encased in a tight-fitting glove of quotas and visas and affidavits, and a thick layer of prejudice.

Today we hear something is going to be done. Secretary Hull has suggested a meeting at Ottawa of the executive committee of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees appointed at the Evian Conference in 1938. This group will undertake “preliminary exploration” of the problem of the Jews in occupied Europe. But the exploration, it seems, is to proceed along rather well-worn trails. For, as Mr. Hull assured the British government, the United States government feels “that it has been and is making every endeavor to relieve the oppressed and persecuted peoples. In affording asylum to the refugees, however, it is and must be bound by legislation enacted by Congress determining the immigration policy of the United States.”

By all means let’s have the conference. But let’s remember that it wasn’t called because our government felt impelled to do something about the greatest crime committed in our generation. Not a move of any sort was made until a delegation of prominent Jews called on Secretary Hull and the President of the United States on December 8 and presented them with verified accounts of the massacres in Poland which were simultaneously released to the press. The President and Mr. Hull promised action. But nothing happened until more than a month later, on January 20 to be exact, when Lord Halifax presented an aide-mémoire to Secretary Hull expressing the “concern” of the British government over the killings. And then it took another month for Secretary Hull to reply with the note quoted above. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fell into their self-dug graves while our government, with glacial slowness, moved toward a proposal to confer and to explore. And in view of this record of delay it is fair to wonder whether even this modest step would have been taken if a great mass-meeting of protest had not been called for March 1 in Madison Square Garden in New York—a meeting organized by the American Jewish Congress and sponsored by a group of important labor and liberal organizations. Mr. Hull’s note to Lord Halifax was dated February 25. It was
made public the day after the mass-meeting took place.

Whatever the sequence of events, we must be glad that some voices were loud enough to penetrate the official armor. But let us not bank too much on the new "Evian" conference. The first one was held in 1938 while it was still possible to save the Jews of Europe. But Hitler is still busy with the job of exterminating 5,000,000 of them. Let us be hopeful—but not sanguine.

And let us also acknowledge the uncomfortable fact that if a group of American Jews had not demanded action, nothing, not even a conference, would have resulted from the horrors in Europe. Let us acknowledge that in shame. And let us ask ourselves what has come over the minds of ordinary men and women that makes it seem normal and indeed inevitable that this country should stolidly stand by and do nothing in the face of one of the world's greatest tragedies until the Jews themselves press for action.

But what on earth could we have done more than we did do? We let in refugees until people protested that jobs were being taken from good Americans by an invading army of aliens. We let them come in to the limit of the quotas—provided, of course, that they had money and good sponsors and respectable political views. We did our best—all that public opinion and Congress and our State Department would permit. And why should we do it all, anyhow? How about Palestine? Why don't the British let them in there? And how about South America and Canada and Australia?

This is the sort of question non-Jewish Americans ask when they are faced with Jewish suffering and the reproaches of their own conscience. But the questions are not impressive, and the answers are easy.

One answer is that we could have cut down those barbed-wire defenses strung along our shores. We could have suspended the immigration quotas for the duration of Hitler. We could have raised funds to support refugees who couldn't bring out any money. We could have chartered ships to bring them from Europe. We could have put any questionable individuals in detention camps or segregated them on a Caribbean island. We could have offered an example of decency and humanity to a world hungry for evidences of good feeling.

We could have done all this. But we wouldn't have had to be quite so generous. An easier answer was at hand. We could have made the resolutions of the Evian conference a reality instead of a hollow gesture. We could have entered into an agreement for common action with the other anti-Axis nations—an agreement to absorb all the victims of Hitlerism who were physically able to escape—each nation taking a quota decided upon with due regard to its size and wealth and capacity to absorb immigrants. If the United States had taken the lead in such a move, I am certain that no nation would have refused its cooperation. And under such a scheme, the burden on each would have been insignificant.

But nothing was done. Every nation established its own restrictions, the United States admitting no more immigrants than in the days before the persecutions began. And so we come to the horrifying present.

The resolutions adopted by the mass-meeting at the Garden the other night were restrained and practical. Here they are, in summary:

1. Through neutral intermediaries, Germany and the governments of the states it dominates should be asked to release their Jewish victims and permit them to emigrate.
2. The United Nations should designate sanctuaries, in Allied and neutral states, for Jews whose release may be arranged for.
3. American immigration procedures should be revised in order that refugees may find sanctuary here within existing quotas.
4. Great Britain should be asked to receive a reasonable number of new refugees and accommodate them for the duration.
5. The United Nations should urge the Latin American republics to modify their immigration regulations sufficiently to provide refuge for agreed numbers of Nazi victims.
6. England should be asked to open the doors of Palestine for Jewish immigration.
7. The United Nations should provide financial guarantees to neutral states offering refuge to Jews from occupied territory.
8. The United Nations should organize the feeding through neutral agencies of victims forced to remain under Nazi oppression.
9. The United Nations should undertake the financing of the program here outlined.
10. The United Nations are urged to establish an intergovernmental agency to implement the program of rescue here outlined.
11. The United Nations are urged to appoint a commission forthwith to implement their declared intention to bring the Nazi criminals to justice.

This is a good program, though more moderate in several details than I would wish. How far it will influence the coming conference at Ottawa remains to be seen. One thing is certain. The United States—or the United Nations as a whole—will save only as many Jews as they are inflexibly determined to save. If the representatives of the anti-Axis powers meet in a mood of impatience, prepared to deal on a minimum basis with a difficult and irritating problem—if, in short, the mood of the past prevails—nothing will happen at Ottawa or after. Europe's remaining Jews will be saved only if their anguish has become unbearable to men and women who live in safety at a distance. They will be saved only if we recognize their fate as inextricably linked with our own.