

***Aufbau*, 15 September 1939: article on the significance of this war
for the future of the Jews¹**

*'Chosen' again – in this conflict too!
The fate of all Jewry hangs in the balance*

m.g.² Now the world has its war. The war that it wanted to prevent – and which it did nothing to prevent. Selfish social interests and an almost inconceivable stupidity in grasping the situation on the one hand, megalomania, bloodlust, and a manic imperialism on the other, have contrived to turn Europe into a battlefield. A bloody sky hangs over the entire continent. And it weeps bloody tears over its lost child, the earth.

We Jews stand between the warring nations. We are so remote from these events that not even Hitler has exposed us to the horrors that are now unfolding, other than through a few bellowed platitudes. We are so remote from them, and yet so near, that the body of our people will be no less torn apart and shattered, tortured, and mutilated, by fire and by lead, than that of other nations.

If anyone had cause to tremble at the prospect of this war, because he was afraid for his brothers, it was the Jew. There may be some among us who, out of unbridled hatred and a natural thirst for revenge, watched with joy and excitement as the world's arsonists in Berlin stumbled into their most fearful trial to date, but anyone who could see beyond himself and his own impure and confused feelings knew from the very start that even if the Jews have nothing to do with this war, their fate depends on its outcome. No one can or will escape this war. Most people have barely begun to understand. This is the second part of the World War, and its consequences will continue to destroy the ways of life to which we are accustomed. To an irreparable extent and degree. The horrors that have already occurred are just child's play compared with what is to come. The present theatres of war are narrow little enclaves compared with the vast extent of the battlefields where the final outcome will be decided. To put it in biblical terms: it is fair to say that a last and extreme trial of hellish proportions is upon us, and that over large areas of the earth not one stone will be left standing upon another.³

1 "Auserwählt" – auch in diesem Kampf!, *Aufbau*, no. 17, 15 Sept. 1939, pp. 1–2. This document has been translated from German. *Aufbau* appeared from Dec. 1934 and was published by the German-Jewish Club in New York – fortnightly until 1939, and thereafter weekly. Circulation rose from 500 to 8,000 in 1938.

2 Probably Dr Manfred George, born Manfred Georg Cohn (1893–1965), lawyer, journalist, and writer; worked for the Ullstein publishing house, 1917–1923, and for the Mosse publishing house, 1923–1928; co-founder of the Republican Party of Germany (RPD), 1924; features editor for the *Tempo* newspaper, 1928–1933; emigrated to Czechoslovakia in 1933, and to the USA in 1938; editor-in-chief of the journal *Aufbau*, 1939–1965; author of *Theodor Herzl: Sein Leben und sein Vermächtnis* (1932).

3 The allusion is to Jesus's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem: 'For the days will come upon you when your enemies will [...] surround you and close in on you from every side; they will demolish you – you and your children within your walls – and they will not leave you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God' (Luke 19: 43–44).

None of us knows what the world will look like at the end of what has now begun. Some statesmen are talking about fighting ‘to the bitter end’.⁴ They are still able to picture what that might mean. Everything that is happening now is imaginable – for now. But soon it will all be unimaginable! What is happening in Poland now, this trampling of an entire country, where even the unborn child is no longer safe, and hospitals for girls suffering from tuberculosis are already being targeted by dehumanized airmen; what is going on in this country, whose fields and inhabitants are being cooked up together in a red pulp of shattered human flesh and churned-up earth – this is only the beginning. The deadly gases have yet to be released, the flamethrowers are not yet pumping out fire, the rivers have not yet been poisoned, and germ warfare has not been unleashed.

This war will be the bloodiest and most comprehensive slaughter that the world has ever seen. It is bound to be, because it was started by the bloodiest and most relentless murderers who have ever put themselves at the head of a nation. Not for nothing has Hitler pronounced the barbaric Genghis Khan to be a ‘Nordic Aryan’. He needed a suitably racist moniker for his role model.

We Jews must brace ourselves for such a war. We are powerless, and weaker than ever. In Poland alone, 3 million of us are facing the guns of our deadly enemies at this moment. Millions are scarred with the leprosy of their wretched refugee status, scattered to the four winds, and not knowing which frontiers they will be hounded across tomorrow. Only a small fraction are living under more propitious skies. And even Palestine, the land of the future for young Jews, is bristling with arms, and these arms are carried by Jews.

That is why this war, which is not of our making either in its causes or in its aims, is also our war. Because our lives are now at stake. The fate of Jewry will be decided in this war, far more definitively than the fate of other peoples. The future of each and every one of us depends on the outcome of this war. We cannot grasp this vital truth early enough, nor deeply and earnestly enough. For those forces that win this war – and nobody knows which forces it will be – will largely determine the entire future of the Jews.

This war is, of course, not just a war involving human bodies, but a war of fundamental moral attitudes, even if it has burst upon this warm, sunny autumn like an explosion of gases from a cesspool filled with immorality. And so, to the sympathy and the action that we bring to the battle against evil, we must add one more thing: the belief in the value that we, as a people bound together by a godly morality, represent for this world of ours, in which all that was once held true has now been cast into doubt. If the concept of being ‘chosen’, hopelessly misunderstood as it so often is, has any temporal meaning at a time like this, when chaos threatens to engulf us, then it is this: that as well as being willing to fight with every ounce of strength, and with everything that we are and everything that we possess, we are also faced with a challenge a thousand times more difficult, namely to salvage from the tumult our faith in humanity, justice, and morality. Not just for us, but for the whole world.

Such is the significance of the great hour of destiny that has now struck for us with a fearsome, thunderous toll.

4 The British secretary of state for the dominions, Anthony Eden (1897–1977), had declared in a radio address on 11 Sept. 1939 that the Commonwealth would, if necessary, fight to the bitter end to free the world from Hitler: ‘Nazi Leaders’ Illusions: Mr. Eden on British Determination’, *The Times*, 12 Sept. 1939, p. 8, and ‘Text of Anthony Eden’s Address’, *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1939, p. 18.