

What would Peter Bergson do?

The Holocaust hero offers a model for confronting Iran

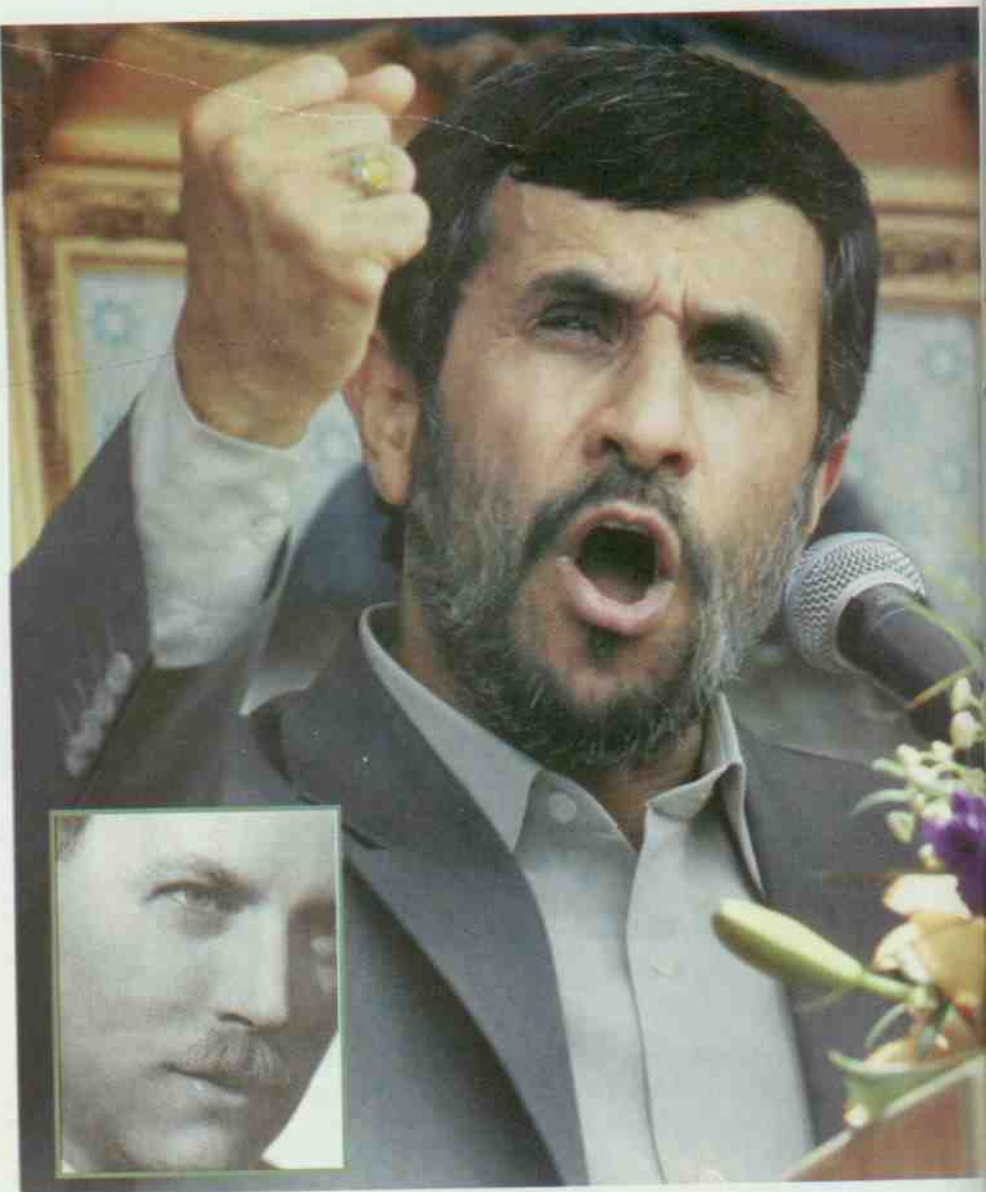
• By ELIHU D. RICHTER

MANY PROMINENT Israelis are petitioning Yad Vashem to honor Peter Bergson, the most effective advocate for American action to rescue Jews from the Holocaust. Bergson led a brilliant public campaign that generated the pressure which forced US president Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 to set up the War Refugee Board, which helped save over 200,000 Jews, mostly from Hungary. Bergson's courageous activism awakened the conscience of a nation. He serves as a model today for stirring the international community to action against the genocidal threats of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Bergson, whose real name was Hillel Kook, was the nephew of the legendary religious Zionist who served as Israel's first chief rabbi. Bergson was in his 20s when he was sent from Mandatory Palestine to America in 1942 to lobby for a Jewish fighting force to join the Allied struggle. In Washington, he heard about the hush up of the Nazis' mass murders of Jews, abruptly changed direction, and together with Hollywood screen writer Ben Hecht, journalist Max Lerner and others, began organizing campaigns to pressure Roosevelt into rescuing Jews.

Bergson's group used "in-your-face" methods: mass rallies in Madison Square Garden, public demonstrations, a march on the White House by 400 rabbis, and full-page ads. One ad (reproduced here) was typical of the blunt language: "FOR SALE TO HUMANITY: 70,000 JEWS - GUARANTEED HUMAN BEINGS AT \$50 A PIECE," urging the Allies to accept Romania's offer to let its Jews emigrate for the cost of transportation.

Some of Bergson's actions antagonized American Jewish leaders, notably Rabbi



Stephen Wise, who preferred a behind-the-scenes approach, fearful of a backlash from the pervasive anti-Semitism produced by the pre-war incitement of Father Coughlin and others. Using mass media, shoe-leather networking, lobbying and plain chutzpa, Bergson built a ragtag coalition that included liberals and conservatives, trade unionists and civil rights activists, Christian clergy and non-Jewish congressmen, including Rep.

Tommy D'allesandrio, father of current Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Perhaps the most intriguing and influential of Bergson's supporters was media magnate Randolph Hearst, the Rupert Murdoch of his time. Most remember Hearst as the inspiration for Orson Wells' classic movie *Citizen Kane*. Few know that he gave the Bergson group free ad space in all his newspapers.

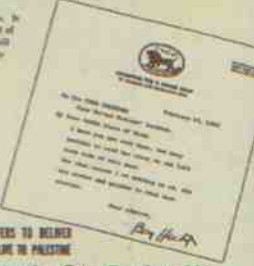
FOR SALE to Humanity 70,000 Jews

Guaranteed Human Beings at \$50 a Piece

Business is kind of killing Jews. It has killed one hundred thousand of them in two years. Hundreds will now give Jews away gratuitously for nothing.

SEVENTY THOUSAND JEWS ARE WAITING BEETS IN BROWARNA CONCENTRATION CAMP.

Business Will Give These 70,000 Jews to the Four Freedoms for \$3,500,000,000 (3.5) a Piece. The Jews Come. All Transported. Best Exposure.



ARMY OFFERS TO BELIEVE THESE THOUSAND JEWS TO PALESTINE

Attention Four Freedoms!!!
NO MORE NEED BEING KILLED THE JEWS WHO WILL COME TO PALESTINE...

Attention Humanity!!!
PALESTINE IS THE ONLY PLACE WHERE THE JEWS CAN LIVE AND BE HAPPY...

Attention America!!!
THE GREAT AMERICAN EXAMPLE IS NOW THE BIRTH PLACE! BY AN EXPEDITIONARY OFFICER!

The Doors of Rome are Opened At Now!

Conditions for a Jewish Army
of Southern and Palestine Jew

When Needed - 1st or 2nd - 3rd - 4th - 5th - 6th - 7th - 8th - 9th - 10th - 11th - 12th

MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD.
Studies show that when rulers of autocratic states start to speak of genocide, they should be taken very seriously.

INSET: Peter Bergson

ABOVE: One of the posters that helped save 200,000 Jews.

WHAT WOULD Peter Bergson have done today to prevent Iran and its surrogates Hizbullah and Hamas from pursuing their genocidal objectives? Ahmadinejad and his cohorts have clearly signaled their deadly intentions. Immediately upon being elected in October 2005, Ahmadinejad made the first of many inflammatory statements calling for the destruction of Israel. "The Imam [Ayatollah Khomeini] said the Jerusalem-occupying regime must be erased from the page of time... [so the] stain of disgrace will be cleaned from the garment of the Islamic world, and this is attainable..."

Exactly three years earlier, in October 2002, the leader of the Iranian proxy

Hizbullah, sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, proclaimed that, "the Jews... will gather from all corners of the world in occupied Palestine... so that Allah can save you [Muslims] the trouble of tracking them down... The battle will be decisive."

Since 2006, Ahmadinejad, Nasrallah and their accomplices have used increasingly inflammatory language to label Israelis and Jews "the source of plague and typhus"; "poisoners of wells belonging to Christians"; "parasites"; "cancerous tumors that need to be removed"; "cancerous microbes"; and "a germ of corruption," among other slanders. These were the very terms used by Adolf Hitler in his *Mein Kampf*.

Words, not machinery, produced Auschwitz. Scholars have established that when leaders of authoritarian regimes use such language, they are preparing their followers and the outside world for the next step – extermination. Perpetrators use incitement to dehumanize their targeted populations and mobilize accomplices. This happened in the Holocaust, as well as in the genocides against the Armenians in Turkey, in Rwanda, Cambodia and Darfur, and the Assyrian and Pontine Christians in the Near and Middle East. Iran's rush to nuclear armament, its development of long-range missiles, its extensive oil and gas reserves, and its burgeoning regional influence make its genocidal threats especially ominous, even more so given Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust.

TODAY, A Bergson-style coalition needs to be organized to stop Iran's march toward nuclear genocide by prosecuting its leaders for incitement. A campaign to indict Ahmadinejad is already underway, launched by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and endorsed by Elie Wiesel, Canadian MP Irwin Cotler, the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and Scholars for Peace in the Mideast, among others. Thanks to the work of Richard Hellman of CIPAC, the US House of Representatives voted 411 to 2 for a resolution endorsing indictment. The Canadian parliament's subcommittee on international human rights has endorsed a similar resolution, and Prime

Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia is exploring the possibility of legal action. Nearly 60,000 Christians worldwide have signed a petition initiated by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem calling on the UN to start proceedings.

Bergson felt that his race against death was largely a failure. Yet by shattering the consensus that rescue attempts would divert resources needed for winning the war, his group accomplished what no else had, and helped bring about the rescue of over 200,000 Jews. The War Refugee Board started working some five to six years after the Nazis first began carrying out their mass murders, and more than a decade after the first warning signs of hate language were used against Jews.

Almost three years have elapsed since Ahmadinejad declared his genocidal intentions. If Bergson knew what we know today about the toxic effects of such incitement, he might well have begun working in the 1930s.

Genocide results from human choice – both by its architects and by the inaction of bystanders. UN Security Council Resolution 1674, passed in April 2006, specifies a world responsibility to protect communities threatened by genocide. The message of Peter Bergson's story is: There is a need for massive community pressure on governments to use international law to prevent genocide by pursuing, prosecuting, ostracizing and punishing those who incite to genocide, and to shame complicit bystanders.

A new human coalition would include representatives of all the victims of genocide – Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, the Congo – as well as the major media chains, the Hearsts of our times. In this vein, it is encouraging to note that the International Criminal Court is seeking arrest warrants against President Omar al-Bashir and other leaders in Sudan.

We need to now use the Bergson model to prevent genocide beforehand, not after the fact.

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Prof. Richter is an epidemiologist at Hebrew University-Hadassah who is applying public health models to the prediction and prevention of genocide.