THIS REPORT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION,
J.B.
Henry G. Alsberg and Jacob Billikopf arrived in Vilna on the evening of Saturday, June 7, 1919. They went to Vilna on behalf of the Joint Distribution Committee to make a report concerning the relief needs of the Jewish community there. They had an authorization from Colonel Grove, of the American Relief Administration, in Warsaw, to make this visit. They were warned to restrict their activities entirely to relief work. Any investigation of the April massacres and persecution since that date, they were told, might lead to such terrible occurrences as the massacre in Pinsk. They were told to be most careful to visit the Commander of the city at once on arriving and explain to him why they had come, and that they were in Vilna for no other purpose than to regulate the Jewish relief work. Actually the morning after their arrival they called upon the Commander of the city but did not find him in his office. They, however, explained to his aide in great detail the object of their visit. Thereafter they tried in every way to avoid every act that might be regarded as an investigation of the Vilna massacre and persecution, because they did not wish by such acts to bring further suffering and trouble upon the Jewish population.

For this reason, to specify only one instance, they did not attempt to interview the multitude of Jewish captives who were said to be held prisoners by the Poles in the local jails. This in spite of appeals by prominent Jews who asked Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf to visit these unfortunate people alleged to be dying of hunger and disease. For a similar reason they did not even appeal to the military authorities with the request that the Jewish community be allowed to furnish food and medical assistance for these prisoners; although dozens of women, relatives of these people, searched them out and begged in the most heart-rending manner, with tears and cries, that Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf make such an appeal.
Despite the efforts they made to avoid all suspicion that they were investigating the Vilna outrages, Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf could not in the last analysis shut their eyes and ears to the unsolicited information about the pogroms which poured in on them during their short stay in Vilna. They arrived in Vilna Saturday evening, on the 7th of June. Mr. Alsberg left early Monday morning. Mr. Billikopf left Wednesday morning.

Saturday evening on the day of their arrival, they visited Dr. Shabbad, the well-known Jewish physician and scientist, and one of the most highly respected members of the community. Dr. Shabbad has just been elected member of the Jewish Congregation of the city, and as such was charged with the conduct of the Relief work for the support of which the Joint Distribution Committee furnished funds. During the course of the evening Dr. Shabbad related his own experiences during the pogroms. He said there had been some fighting before April 19 in Vilna between the Poles and the Bolsheviks. The fighting was not severe, was restricted to a fairly limited area, and practically no non-combatants were injured. The Bolsheviks were not in great force and were easily beaten by the Poles. After the Poles occupied the city the pogroms began. On the morning of April 19, Dr. Shabbad had gone out to make an urgent medical call. The city was full of Polish soldiers rioting and looting shops. He had relied on his reputation as a citizen of prominence and the nature of his errand to be allowed to pass along the streets unmolested, but he was seized by the soldiers, herded with a multitude of other people, put up against a wall and threatened with death. He expected any moment to be shot. He was kept in this terrible suspense for several hours, and then finally released. He saw many people
maltreated during this period and several persons killed. He owed his release to the intervention of a friend who appealed to the authorities on his behalf. He told us that the last month and a half had been the most terrible of his life, and he had spent all of his days and nights trying to protect the Jewish population against Polish persecution, to secure the release of the captives from jail and to provide for their families. The whole life of the Jewish community had been reduced to chaos. More than sixty Jews had been killed but the list was not yet complete. For many days after the first outbreak Jews dared not go out into the streets. Many Jews were ruined; their stores and houses had been emptied by the soldiery. He said the Polish populace had taken part in the pogroms, and had helped to maltreat the Jews seized by the military. The condition of the Jewish population has become deplorable. From a fairly prosperous community the Vilna Jews had been reduced to the point where their situation was most precarious in every respect. They were subject to arrest at all times of the day if found on the streets, and might then be taken to do forced labor at the front. Here they were maltreated, starved, and beaten—in some cases beaten to death. 

Mr. Aisberg and Mr. Billikopf were not surprised by this statement since they had learned in Lwow (Lemberg) that here too the Poles had introduced a system of forced military labor for Jewish civilians in the trenches. Dr. Shabbad said that any Jew whatever his age or condition might be seized on the streets and be driven with kicks and blows to the front where many died from the effects of this Polish adoption of the corvee system.
Much of the next day (Sunday) Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf spent in visiting various Jewish philanthropic institutions. Most of these had been entered, robbed and plundered by the Polish populace and soldiers. In fact, the Jewish school for technical training for boys was plundered, or at least robbed twice, once only a week before the visit of Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf who saw the smashed furniture and broken cupboards.

During the course of Sunday morning Mr. Billikopf went with Dr. Makover to visit the Jewish ambulatory. On the way Dr. Makover stopped to pay a visit to one of his patients. This patient was an elderly Jew who three days ago had been seized and carried away to do forced labor. He had never done heavy work of this kind in his life before; nevertheless he was forced to labor at digging for some time when his strength failed. The Poles exasperated because he could not work any longer had him stripped and whipped. He was forced to count the lashes as they fell from one to fifty. After that the Poles were about to make an end of him when a woman interceded, and he was sent home on a stretcher. When Mr. Billikopf saw him this man was in bed delirious, his children at his bedside, weeping and wailing. In his delirium this unfortunate creature cried constantly, 'For God's sake kill me, but don't torture me any longer.' The sheet covering the man's body was pulled down exposing the terrible welts which covered almost every inch of it. An hour after Mr. Billikopf left this old man died. A picture of his tortured body is submitted herewith, and Mr. Billikopf vouches for the fact that this is the picture of the body of the man he saw.
In the afternoon was held a meeting of the local Kehilla (Jewish Congregation). Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf as representatives of the Joint Distribution Committee were invited to be present. When they arrived at the entrance of the hall they were surrounded and followed by a crowd of weeping and wailing women. They had great difficulty therefore in making their way into the assembly, and, although their business in Vilna was not that of inquiry into pogroms, they could not help learning that these women were the widows, the mothers, the sisters, or the children of men killed, imprisoned or transported by the Polish authorities. The scene proved very painful.

A Mrs. Philipowsky insisted on violating all the ethical and political consideration that should hedge about a relief worker and told her story then and there. On the day after the seizure of the city by the Poles, four legionaries came into her home and seized her husband who was sick in bed and her son and drove them amidst a hooting mob down the street. From this same house at the same time were taken four men whose names were Goldburt, Garger, Chait and Kaplan. Mrs. Philipowsky and her daughter tried to follow the soldiers and their prisoners, but the crowd would not let the two women out of the house. The next day Mrs. Philipowsky and her daughter went out to the cemetery in Lipowka whither the men had been taken and shot. The Legionaries beat the two women and robbed them of everything of value they were wearing, and threatened to throw a hand-grenade at them. But the two women could not gain access to the cemetery. They could not recover the bodies of these murdered men for a long time. After repeated petitions and appeals the bodies were given to the relatives.
The bodies had been dreadfully mutilated. The eyes of one corpse had been gouged out and the cavities filled with filthy rags.

Mrs. Philipowsky and the other relatives were allowed now to bury their dead, but were not allowed to have a burial service of any kind. Mrs. Philipowsky said of her son,

"My son was a good boy, a wonderful scholar. All the teachers at the memorial services held in the school he went to said that not only did I lose an only child, but the Jewish people had lost one of its most talented sons. He was a student of the Talmud and he could talk Hebrew like a Rabbi."

Mrs. Philipowsky had a picture of the six bodies as they lay in their graves. It is not a "close-up" picture because the Legionaries would not let the enterprising photographer, who made it a business to get pictures of many of the pogrom occurrences, come within "close-up" range. The picture is annexed hereto.

After being forced to listen to Mrs. Philipowsky's story, Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf went into the Kehilla meeting. The chief purpose of this meeting was to find ways and means to supply the multitude of Jewish prisoners in the city jail with food and medical help and their families with relief. The meeting was long and stormy. The whole history of pogroms and persecutions since their original outbreak was recited in detail and with great emotion. The room was packed with a mass of excited and wrought-up Jewish people, all of whom contributed some personal pogrom experience of his very own. Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf stayed only a short time, but they made the acquaintance at this meeting of a well-known Jewish poet, Jaffe, who confirmed for them the story they had
heard earlier in the day, and which was repeated during the meeting; namely that a man by the name of Chaim Warnien had been tied by a rope to the horse of a legionary, and dragged at a smart gallop through the city streets. Another story which was told to Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf, and frequently confirmed, was to the effect that two Jews on the eleventh day of the terror were seized by soldiers on the streets, were taken to a spot where lay in a pool of blood the bodies of a man and two women (Jews) and forced to bury them. One of these enforced grave diggers was almost positive that of the two women one was not yet dead; nevertheless they were forced, to their great horror, to bury her body as well. This story was published in the "Yiddish News" in Vilna on the 26th day of May over the signature of A. Kobran who alleged that he was one of the two men who were forced to do the burying.

Before the Kehilla meeting Sunday afternoon, Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf visited the famous and ancient synagogue of Vilna. This synagogue is renowned because one of its Rabbis was the great Jewish scholar known as the gaon (genius) of Vilna. They were told by the officials of the synagogue that during the pogroms the soldiers and mob had entered the building and stolen all the brass menorahs (sacred candelabra) and had desecrated the altar. While in the synagogue a great number of Jews forced their way into the presence of Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf and told them that only the Saturday before every Jew who went out on the streets had been robbed of his money and that many of these Jews had been terribly beaten and maltreated. One old man who walked with a crutch said he had been kicked by a soldier and that his lameness was due to this cause.
Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf were told that it was quite customary for the soldiers and populace to draw a cordon across one of the main thoroughfares, to beat all the Jews who wished to pass through and rob them. This happened very frequently. One old gentleman, a rich Russian, whom Mr. Alsberg visited, said he no longer dared to go out on the streets for fear of suffering some indignity. He said, "I believe I should have to commit suicide if I were maltreated in this manner." "Revisions" so-called seemed to have been very frequent. Finally, after continued complaints the military commander issued an order stating that because many men in Polish uniform had under cover of pretended "revisions" been committing robberies, thereafter nobody without proper credentials should be recognized as having the right to make "revisions". Unfortunately, this order, like General Haller's memorable order to his legionaries in Cracow, did not lead to the expected results. General Haller, on the day Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf were in Cracow about a week before their visit to Vilna, issued an order forbidding his soldiers to commit excesses upon the Jewish population. The day after this order was issued Cracow suffered from a serious anti-Jewish outbreak in which General Haller's troops were the leaders and engaged in assaulting the Jews. The Vilna commandant's order, dated May 16 and given publicity in the Jewish Press, did not prevent "the unauthorized men in Polish uniforms" from continuing their revisions to the great injury of the Jewish population. It would have been quite superfluous for a Jewish householder to demand a sight of the revision official's credentials. The best credentials in such an event are to be found in the clubbed end of a rifle.
Monday morning, at six o'clock, Mr. Alsberg left for Warsaw.
Mr. Billikopf stayed on in order to complete the monthly budget which was to cover all of Vilna relief work. During the course of the day he had another meeting with Jaffe, the Jewish poet. Jaffe then told him how his friend, A. Weiter, a distinguished Jewish author was murdered. Jaffe and Weiter and a friend and their respective families had taken refuge together in a house. They stayed there all of the first night of the pogrom. In the morning the soldiers and mob entered the house, drove the men out on the street, and Weiter fell amidst a hail of bullets from the soldiers' muskets. Weiter's friends could not stop to assist him. The street was strewn with dead. They were driven along amidst blows and abuse out of the city in constant peril of their lives. Finally they were taken to Lida where they were kept incarcerated under horrible conditions for a long time. Then they were released and sent back home.

Mr. Billikopf stayed in Vilna until Wednesday morning. Before leaving he visited the Jewish Legal Aid Bureau established by the Jewish Community. He listened for some time to the proceedings there. Dozens of people came into this office and made affidavits as to the wrongs they had suffered. These wrongs were not only occurrences of the first outbreak, on April 19th and the days immediately following. They were wrongs suffered within a short time of the complaint. Robbery, assault, illegal "revisions", arrests, kidnapping for forced labor—these were the burdens of the affidavits. In connection with the kidnapping for forced labor, a good parallel can be found in the case of Lemberg. Here the military, after the pogroms of November and December,
engaged in a similar practice, Jews of all ages and conditions were seised without warning and carried off to the front. Even the Rector of Lemberg University, a Jew was kidnapped and put to work with a spade. Finally, the Lemberg Jews solved their difficulty with admirable ingenuity. There were many Jewish unemployed in Lemberg. The community made the following agreement with the military authorities: The Jewish notables were to be allowed to issue exemption cards to such members of the Jewish community as paid a certain specified head tax. This tax was then used to cover the wages of the unemployed Jews willing to work at the front. The military was satisfied so long as a certain number of Jewish laborers (they did not take any Poles for forced labor) were furnished by the Jewish community.

Coming from one of his visits to a charitable institution, Mr. Billikopf crossed the Vilna passage (market building). The Jews had their booths on one side of the building and the Poles on the other. While Mr. Billikopf was going through the building he saw the crowd set upon the Jewish vendors, upset their booths, and steal their wares. He was followed by a mob of these unfortunate people who pleaded with him (he was in an American uniform) to help them to intercede on their behalf with the authorities. Mr. Billikopf was accompanied by one of the leading Jewish citizens who explained to him that this sort of thing occurred frequently, that appeals to the commandant could not be effective because the commandant was inaccessible. Mr. Alsberg and Mr. Billikopf had been told the same thing in Lemberg a week before; namely, that appeals to the authorities for protection against mob violence were useless. Late Tuesday night while
returning from the meeting of the Budget Committee of the Kehilla where the monthly budget which the Joint Distribution Committee would cover was finally fixed, Mr. Billikopf was walking along towards his hotel with a Mr. Finkelstein when he suddenly heard some groans and sobs issuing from a side street. On further investigation he discovered a little boy and girl weeping bitterly. They said their father had been killed during the pogrom, and their mother had died of the shock and they themselves had been starving and homeless ever since. Mr. Billikopf and his friends got these two pogrom orphans housed for that night. The next day he came with a photographer and had their picture taken. This picture is annexed hereto.

Mr. Billikopf's business having been completed successfully with the fixing of the Vilna budget and being under strict orders not to investigate the pogrom or engage in any political activity he now left for Warsaw. The next day he was in Lida for a few hours to fix local budget. Lida is the town where a number of the kidnapped victims of the Vilna pogrom were taken. But Lida had troubles of its own. About thirty people were killed there toward the end of April. The names of these persons have all been published. But the Jewish inhabitants of the town, so Mr. Billikopf was informed at least, have had to sign a statement to the effect that no pogrom took place nor any outrages. Lida is the city where the Polish Military Headquarters in Lithuania are situated, and is only short distance from Vilna. Mr. Billikopf took a droshky to go to the Lida station. The driver of the droshky was a Jew. Mr. Billikopf gave the driver twenty marks in payment of the fare. Two soldiers were standing...
near by. One of them went up to the drosky driver, seized him by the beard and was about to seize the twenty marks when Mr. Billikopf intervened. The soldier seeing an American uniform apologized, released the drosky driver and went away. The driver then said to Mr. Billikopf, "If you could only stay here! You have saved me this time; and I do not know what will happen to me after you are gone."