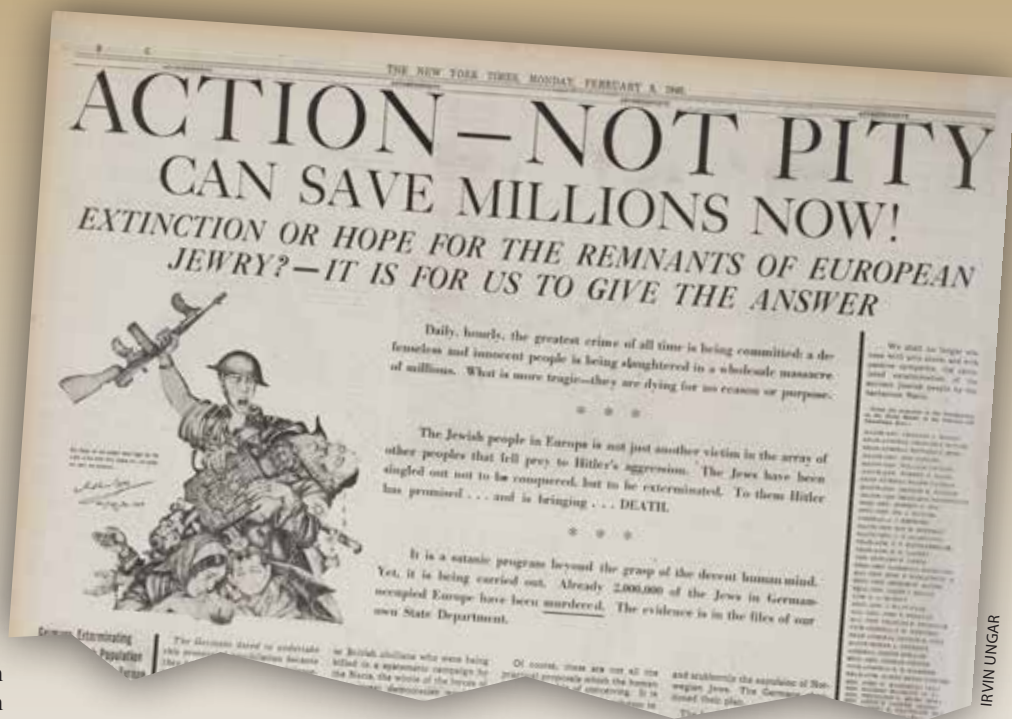


Tears of rage

By Irvin Ungar



IRVIN UNGAR

BOTH THE soldier and the Jewish artist who created him died more than 70 years ago, yet they still have the visual power to call to action the necessary military response to the massacre by Hamas terrorists.

Polish immigrant Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) who left Europe in the wake of the Holocaust, was known as a fighting artist. During World War II, he dedicated his portrait of America's commander-in-chief to Eleanor Roosevelt, signing it "F.D.R.'s Soldier in Art." Referencing Szyk's popularity among US servicemen and the praise in the American press for his political cartoons and vitriolic visual commentary against the Axis of evil, the First Lady wrote in her January 1943 syndicated newspaper column *My Day*: "In its way [Szyk's work] fights the war against Hitlerism as truly as any of us who cannot actually be on the fighting fronts today." Of Szyk, we can also say that his fighting spirit hovers over the people of Israel in its righteous determination to kill Hamas terrorists.

Perhaps the best representation of Szyk's soldiering on is seen in his once well-circulated drawing of 1942, *Tears of Rage*. It captures the screaming anger of a World War II Jewish soldier, with an American helmet and rifle held high, cradling an elderly Jew with a Nazi dagger in his back. In front of them and below a clutched Torah scroll we witness a baby shot in its head, a dazed grieving mother frozen in time,

her dead husband leaning on her back, and tears flowing from the baby's grandmother's eyes. Were Szyk alive now, ads showing this image would most certainly appear in today's *New York Times* and *Washington Post* just as they did in 1943, responding instead to the unspeakable slaughter of innocent Jews in Israel by Hamas.

At the time this ad appeared, with text written by Hollywood playwright Ben Hecht (both Szyk and Hecht were an integral part of Peter Bergson's activist groups for a Jewish Army), its full page emphasized "Action - Not Pity." Szyk's own caption under the image read "To those of my people who fight for the right to die with their boots on - my pride, my love, my devotion."

This is the time for full scale action by Israel's military as well as the time for a moral world to be devoted to it with an un-failing and sustained commitment to its just cause. It is a time for boots on the ground, planes in the air, ships in the sea, and a world sick and tired of terrorism. It is a time to thank Israel for being that one nation that is willing to put its sons and daughters on the "fighting fronts" to rid its nation of terrorism while serving as an example for all nations to elevate their own moral and

Arthur Szyk: 'Action-Not Pity,' *The New York Times*, February 8, 1943.

physical courage against terrorism and evil more forcefully.

Prior to its appearance in the referenced newspapers above, Szyk's *Tears of Rage* accompanied a December 7, 1942 ad in *The New York Times* coinciding with the first anniversary of Pearl Harbor. (It also appeared less than one month after the US State Department announced that 2 million Jews had been murdered by the Nazis in Europe.) This time the soldier with the dead and mourning Jews was featured with a "Proclamation on the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews" (that is, the displaced Jews of Europe and those Jews living in the land of Israel). The Proclamation called for the formation of a Jewish Army of those Jews (not American or British Jews) to fight alongside the Allies. It called upon the free world to support its moral obligation to allow Jews to defend themselves under their own "flag" and fight on behalf of their brothers and sisters who were being slaughtered. Now the world is called upon again to support the right of Jews to do the same thing. With Jew hatred, antisemitism, and down with Israel chants echoing worldwide today, it is apparent that



Arthur Szyk. F.D.R.'s 'Soldier in Art.' New York. 1944.

—
 Arthur Szyk: 'We Will Never Die.'
 Official Program journal cover.
 Madison Square Garden, New York,
 March 9, 1943.

Official Program 25c



the Jewish people are not only confronted with the right to defend themselves but challenged to justify their very existence itself.

In 1943, five US cities (New York and Washington, DC among them), held dramatic pageants entitled “We Will Never Die” (again, written by Ben Hecht), calling attention to the mass murder and annihilation faced by European Jews. On the cover of the journal distributed at the gatherings (40,000 people attended the pageant in New York’s Madison Square Garden on March 9th alone), Szyk’s soldier once again engaged those who were enraged with tears, proclaiming “We will never die.” Indeed, Jews are willing to fight with their boots on, and to them – our pride, our love, our devotion. ■

Irvin Ungar is the curator emeritus of The Arthur Szyk Society. His book, Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art, was a winner of the 2017 National Jewish Book Award.

“WE WILL NEVER DIE”
 A Mass Memorial Dedicated to the Two Million Jewish Dead of Europe
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN—March 9, 1943

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