

# JOURNAL

## '45

OF THE AID SOCIETY

No. 12

MARCH 1985

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Page 1	COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND EDITORIAL BOARD	
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Page 2-3	EDITORIAL	
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---

Page 4-7	"YOUTH" REMEMBERED	Michael Etkind
----------	--------------------	----------------

---

Page 8-11	HERE AND NOW	Dr. A. Polonsky
-----------	--------------	-----------------

---

Page 12-17	FROM OUR FRIENDS AND WELL WISHERS	(the late) Leonard G. Montefiore
------------	-----------------------------------	----------------------------------

---

Page 18-24	THE 7TH LEONARD G MONTEFIORE MEMORIAL LECTURE	Professor W Laqueur
------------	---	---------------------

---

Page 25-39	THE 8TH LEONARD G MONTEFIORE MEMORIAL LECTURE	Martin Gilbert
------------	---	----------------

---

Page 40-41	REVIEWS	Ben Helfgott
------------	---------	--------------

---

Page 42	OBITUARIES	Greta Levent (nee Dawidowicz)
---------	------------	-------------------------------

---

Page 43-45	MEMBERS' NEWS	
------------	---------------	--

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Page 46-49	FORTHCOMING EVENTS	
------------	--------------------	--

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JOURNAL OF THE '45 AID SOCIETY

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## EDITORIAL

The 30th Anniversary of our Liberation inspired the initiative to found the Journal of the '45 Aid Society, which replaced the Society's Newsletter. The Newsletter of Autumn 1974 carried articles about the 30th Anniversary, and what was said then could also be said now, ie. ten years later. Nevertheless, the approaching 40th Anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe can hardly pass without comment in our Journal.

People often look to anniversaries as sources of "historical lessons". Yet history does not teach any clear lessons, and if we insisted on commemorating historical events only if they taught us clear lessons, we would not have any commemorations. Indeed, different people may have quite divergent motives for commemorating the same event. However, Members of our Society have at least one motive for commemorating the end of the Holocaust, which we all share: that commemoration provides an inevitable opportunity for remembering our lost families and the manner in which we lost them. This shared loss is one of the characteristics of our Members which helps explain the evident comradeship and deep sense of loyalty among them.

This 12th issue of our Journal is special, not only because its appearance roughly coincides with the 40th Anniversary of our Liberation, but also because it is unique in a particular respect compared to earlier issues. Addressing our Members the Editorial of the first issue noted that:

"..it will be clear to you that our Journal can be published only if Members send us material for publication. Very occasionally we may be able to publish articles by "outsiders", but as a rule this must be a Journal by our Members not for our Members. The Editorial Board trusts that your response will be such as to ensure the success of the Journal. Lest you think that our hopes are misplaced, let me say that we interpret "success" in a modest way. To begin with we would like to publish the Journal once a year... Should contributions simply pour in we would be happy to publish more often."

Although successive Editorials did contain exhortations to Members to submit articles, the cautious optimism expressed in the first Editorial seemed to be justified. Between 1976 and 1984 we published two issues a year in only two years, 1976 and 1978, and for the rest we published one issue per year. Still, the bulk of each issue consisted of contributions by our Members. This is not the case with the present issue, even if it coincides with the 40th Anniversary. Yet, the view expressed in the first Editorial about who should be our main contributors seems to be as appropriate now as it was then. Therefore the time has come to re-consider the future of our Journal, ie. to consider whether it has a future. That can be decided only by our Members. Quite soon motions will be put before our Committee and our Editorial Board. The motions will propose that, unless by 1st November 1985 the Editorial Board received at least sixty letters from our Members which express not only support for the continuation of the Journal but also give commitments to submit contributions, the Journal should cease publication. Whether these motions will pass remains to be seen, but they will include a clause to the effect that anyone opposing them will be deemed to have written the kind of letter just described!

Although this is a special issue in at least the two respects mentioned above the Editorial would not be complete without a few comments on the contents of this 12th no.

Our first Section, "Youth" Remembered, would have had to be omitted unless we had received contributions from our Members. In the past we usually had several contributors. Now we must thank Michael Etkind once again for occupying a position perhaps best described as that of an inadvertent monopolist, a position he also occupied in our last issue.

The Section Here and Now of course was intended to feature articles from our Members. In their absence we are extremely fortunate to have been offered the piece by Dr A Polonsky, known to us from his 1980 Leonard G Montefiore Memorial Lecture, and from his participation in academic historical activities also related to our own experience. Some of our Members attended the Oxford Conference which Dr Polonsky describes. Those who did not attend, but have views on the subject of Polish-Jewish relations, will be grateful to Dr Polonsky for offering them a glimpse, as well as indicating the flavour of the learned discussions which took place at Oxford last September. No doubt Dr Polonsky would hope that our Society might consider the appropriateness of supporting the publication to which he refers in the last sentence of his article.

Not only does it seem that the pens of our Members have dried up, but those of the Second Generation seem to have suffered a similar fate. Therefore the Section entitled From the Second Generation has had to be omitted.

On this occasion the next Section, From our Friends and Well Wishers, requires special comment. Our Newsletter of 1974 contained a reprint of one of Leonard G Montefiore's articles about us. The Newsletter however, was not divided into Sections, and to put the late and lamented Mr Montefiore merely into the category of one of "our friends and well wishers" must be the most monumental understatement ever to appear in these pages. Mr Montefiore spared no effort on our behalf and worked tirelessly for our welfare. The innumerable articles he wrote about us shortly after our arrival in this country show that his concern for us turned almost into an obsession. In some people obsessions very easily turn into an utterly illiberal dogmatism. Leonard Montefiore did his best to protect us from dogmatic, intolerant and illiberal influences, which he so rightly regarded as evil. He was also right in thinking, that, if given the choice, many - indeed most - of us would prefer to live in the U.K. or the U.S.A. rather than Palestine, as it then was. In his 1946 talk reprinted below he was wrong on only one, relatively insignificant, point, when he observed that: "by no stretch of imagination is it conceivable that any of these children will become a member of the Reform Synagogue". In due course he discovered that some did become members; perhaps he merely made the remark because it fitted in well with his theme, which should have been applauded then as it is to be applauded now, that "... I am not seeking recruits for my own particular tabernacle". We missed Leonard Montefiore's presence at our commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of our Liberation in 1965, when an eulogy was delivered for him. We shall miss his presence no less twenty years later. Yet, in which other Section could his article have been placed?

This issue contains two Leonard G Montefiore Memorial Lectures, because we could not publish the 1983 Lecture in 1984.

The last time we had an issue without obituaries was in March 1981 and the present one, alas, also carries one. As we become progressively younger the chances of any issue being devoid of an obituary become ever smaller. At this point it is perhaps as well to say that, since this may well be the last issue of this Journal, this is the last Editorial you are likely to read.

## "YOUTH" REMEMBERED

By Michael Etkind

The author wishes to thank Aloma Halter for her helpful suggestions on the style and content of the items published here. (Ed).

## THE DEATH OF FAVEL

Favel. I never knew his surname.  
Two metres tall; the biggest in our cell.  
Broad shoulders, strong, a face  
that anyone would trust.  
We slept on bare boards, thirty to a cell.  
There were no bunks, no straw;  
the prixon Marysin, in Lodz  
The 3rd of March, 1944.  
This was to be our last night in the cells.  
Next day, at dawn, the cattle trucks  
would shunt us to the camps.

That night they fed us well;  
the thickest soup we'd had for months-  
with lumps of meat, potatoes, kasha, gruel-  
a soup in which the spoon could stand.  
Each sip, each mouthful, was a lease of life.  
And bread, we all were given half a loaf.  
The mood improved, we sang, made jokes,  
and Favel was the loudest of us all  
when suddenly the news arrived:  
a man from the cell above had jumped,  
and broken his leg. He'd tried to kill himself,  
and botched it. An ambulance took him away.

Out of the pause, the awkward silence,  
someone tried to joke;  
'Why rush to die, there'll be plenty of opportunities'  
A strange foreboding hung about our group,  
But none expected Favel to break down.  
"At least", he stammered in between the sobs,  
"people will know his burial place. He'll not  
be buried like a dog, somewhere beside a fence."

Two months passed - a lifetime and a half in camps,  
and Czestochowa was far from Lodz.  
One day they took a dozen of the strongest men  
to clear some burning buildings, bombed by partisans.  
The rumour had it thus: at dusk they brought him back,  
his face a purplish blue, and doubled up with pain.  
The men'd found food and beer inside the burning sheds.  
One of the bottles Favel found was brown, resembled beer.  
But it contained a poison painters used.  
Next day we buried Favel in the camp, beside the wire fence.

THE PIOUS FIRST

And he who prayed  
    from dawn to dusk  
to his revengeful, jealous,  
    silent God.  
who wore his "JUDE"  
in its gothic script  
upon his chest and back, his badge  
of shame of shame;  
as he, who placed his trust  
in his uncompromising  
    Fuehrer's hands,  
whose "GOTT MIT UNS"  
would shine upon  
the buckle of his belt;

both lost to time;  
the pious first,  
    the other, afterwards.

And you, whom death has spared awhile;  
whom luck has placed outside  
the reach of hate; don't gloat -  
    self-righteous and content -  
but thank some deity for your luck,  
and ponder on man's lot,  
    of strange unfathomed twists of fate.

## HIS FAVOURITE VERSE

Since then, a lot of sky has passed above my head  
and yet I still recall that song with its refrain,  
the men who marched with me in snow and rain  
whose song stopped there.

He was the German head of our Ukrainian guards  
who watched us night and day, and led us  
from the camp to work and back, and back to work again.  
And as we marched we had to sing the song he loved -  
the better singers marched in front -  
the rest, back in the rear, had to repeat in tune,  
and to a perfect beat - eins, zwei, drei, vier -

He used to quote from Goethe (I believe):  
'Man is naked when he comes,  
and just as naked when he leaves'  
as, of the few possessions still our own:  
a watch, a ring, a leather case...  
relieving us. His black revolver  
bulging on his hip, the leather whip  
he would so lightly pat against his boots.  
Polite, he smiled as he explained,  
'Man does not need possessions when he's dead'.

I still recall that song. I learnt the words by heart.  
They speak of clouds blown by the winds,  
above the lands and seas, blown to and fro;  
and man who lives but once, and dies, and is no more.  
About the home he wanders from.  
It sounded better in the German tongue:  
more real, more bitter-sweet.

## HEARING OF HITLER'S DEATH

The column reached a small Sudeten farm. The guards announced a stop. A barn was found for the night. Again, there was no food. We crowded in and lay down on the straw. The guards, posted at the open doorway, sat on stools with their guns resting on their knees. They were talking quietly in their alien, Germanic tongue when someone closeby overheard the words: "Hitler is dead".

Those three words were like a match thrown into the barn: in seconds the fire had spread from mouth to ear, from ear to mouth. And then there was a moment of silence. Suddenly, the 'Joker' - the man who'd kept the rest of us going with his humour and jokes - the man from my hut in Sonnenberg, jumped up. Like a man possessed, like a lunatic, he began to dance about waving his arms in the air; his high-pitched voice chanted with frenzy:

"I have outlived the fiend,  
my life-long wish fulfilled,  
what more need I achieve -  
my heart is full of joy.."

he sang in a transport of ecstasy. We watched him in horror, speechless. His lanky frame was swirling round until it reached the open door. No-one could move. He'd run into the field outside.

One of the German guards lifted his gun, took aim.

We saw the Joker lift his arms again, stand up, turn around, surprised (didn't they understand, hadn't they heard, that the Monster was dead?) and, like a puppet when its strings are cut, collapse into a heap.

## WILL HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

Why should the poison plant  
not yield its poisoned fruit?  
The seeds are there, the climate  
and the fertile soil.  
Why should the times through which we lived  
not come again, albeit in a different form.

Unless the outrage  
at what happened there  
is greater than the force that gave it birth  
it will recur.



## HERE AND NOW

By Dr A Polonsky

The author is Reader in International History at the London School of Economics.

### OXFORD CONFERENCE ON POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS

Between 17-21 September 1984, over 100 scholars from Poland, Israel, Western Europe and North America met in Somerville College to discuss Polish-Jewish relations in modern history. The Conference was held under the auspices of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London University, All Soul's College, Oxford University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Diaspora Research Institute, Tel Aviv University, The Russian and East European Studies Council, Yale University, the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London and the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies. It was made possible by financial contributions from a large number of bodies and individuals, including the Grabowski Foundation, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, the Lanckoronski Foundation, the John F. Cohen Foundation, Blackwells, the British Council, the British Academy, the Association of Jewish ex-servicemen and the Association of Jews of Polish origin.

The Conference built on the achievements of the similar meeting which was held in New York in March 1983 (discussed in Soviet Jewish Affairs, vol.13, no.2) and indeed many of the same individuals participated in both events. The official visit of over 20 Israeli academics to Poland in spring 1984 cemented personal ties which further contributed to the open, frank and uninhibited nature of the discussions. The peaceful and yet stimulating character of Oxford and Somerville College also helped to create an atmosphere in which the reasoned exchange of views prevailed. Indeed it was generally agreed that a genuine dialogue had been established and with it the prospect of further fruitful collaboration on the history of the Jews in Poland. The success of the Conference was partly the result of one of the significant differences between the New York and Oxford meetings, the participation in the latter of a considerable number of individuals from Poland. Nearly 15 Polish scholars were present, including Professors Jozef Gierowski and Jan Blonski, Rector and Vice-Rector of the Jagiellonian University, the editor of Tygodnik Powszechny, the principal Catholic weekly in Poland, Dr Jerzy Turowicz and Professor Jerzy Kloczowski of the Catholic University of Lublin. In addition the Director of the Polish Cultural Institute in London, which is attached to the Polish Embassy, Mrs Irena Gabor-Jantczak, was present at most of the sessions. This is not to say that all those invited were able to attend. The Polish Academy of Sciences refused to allow any official participation by its members and a similar ban seems to have been placed on the attendance of members of the University of Warsaw. This was a matter of considerable regret and it is to be hoped that in future all those asked will be able to take part.

The Conference opened with messages of support from Pope John Paul II and the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Sir Immanuel Jakobovits as well as from the Warden of All Souls' College. Introductory statements were made by Dr Antony Polonsky, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, Dr Stephen Roth, Director of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, Professor Gierowski and Czelsaw Milosz, who, in a short but moving address, stated that before the war he had lived in Wilno, a town of many nationalities but dominated by its Polish-Jewish communities. The present gathering reminded him of the atmosphere in which he grew to intellectual maturity. The Conference then proceeded to plenary discussions in which the problem of Polish-Jewish

relations was analyzed chronologically. The first session was devoted to the period down to 1795. It began with the submission of a paper on the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Poland by Professor Alexander Gieysztor, who unfortunately could not be present as he had to attend another meeting in Greece. In his absence his argument was ably summarised by Dr Norman Davies. Dr Andrzej Ciechanowiecki read an elegant account of the ennoblement of Jewish converts, based on the history of his own family, and Professor Jakub Goldberg of the Hebrew University presented a characteristically erudite discussion of the privileges granted to Jewish communities in the Polish commonwealth and the way these secured Jewish support for the state. Dr Daniel Tollet of the Centre for Polish Studies at the University of Paris compared the position of merchants and businessmen in Cracow and Poznan between 1588 and 1668 and Professor Hillel Levine of Boston University attempted to establish a link between the role of Jews in the liquor trade and the increasing frequency of blood libel accusations. The final paper in the session was an impressively thorough survey by Professor Gershon Hundert of McGill University of the implications of Jewish economic activities for Christian-Jewish relations in the Polish commonwealth.

The afternoon session was devoted to the period of the partitions. It began with an elegant tour d'horizon by the doyen of Polish historians, Professor Stefan Kieniewicz on 'Polish Society and the Jewish problem in the nineteenth century', which in Professor Kieniewicz's absence was summarised by Antony Polonsky. Professor Daniel Beauvais of the University of Lille then discussed Polish-Jewish relations in the territories directly annexed by the Tsarist Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century and Professor Ryszard Bender of the Catholic University of Lublin gave an account of the political attitudes and activities of Jews in the Lublin region in the run-up to the 1863 uprising. Professor Moshe Mishkinski described the views of Polish socialists towards the Jewish question in the early 1890s when both the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and SDKP (Social Democracy of the Congress Kingdom) were founded. Finally, Professor Frank Golczewski of the University of the Federal Armed Forces in Hamburg placed the nature of rural anti-semitism in Galicia before 1914 in the context of the bitter political conflicts which racked that part of Poland.

The session devoted to the interwar period was opened with a passionate defence of the Jewish assimilationists by Dr Joseph Lichten of the anti-defamation League of the Bnai Brith in Rome. He was followed by Dr Jacek Majchrowski of the Jagiellonian University, whose attempt to equate the views and activities of Polish and Jewish nationalists aroused strong objections from the floor. Jerzy Holzer's subtle and penetrating account of the relationship of the Polish and Jewish left in these years was summarised in his absence. It was followed by the well-researched account of Dr Shlomo Netzer of Tel Aviv University of the Polish-Jewish political confrontation between 1918 and 1930. The session concluded with one of the outstanding papers of the conference, Professor Ezra Mendelsohn's survey of the historiography of the Jewish 'problem' between 1918 and 1939 under the provocative title, 'Interwar Poland: Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews'.

As was to be expected the most heated discussion was aroused by the complex and difficult subject of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War to which a whole day was devoted. Dr Lucjan Dobroszycki of YIVO, New York, opened the session with a clear and well-argued account of the way this issue has been handled in post-war historiography and the mass media, while Dr Teresa Preker of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw gave a straightforward description of the role of the Relief Council for Jews in

Poland which was established by the Home Army in 1942. Dr Shmul Krakowski of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, in a paper which aroused strong criticism from a number of Polish participants, described, on the basis of personal accounts in the Yad Vashem archives, the attitude of Polish society to Jewish fugitives in hiding outside of Warsaw. The next 3 papers were less controversial. Dr Jan Ciechanowski of Ealing College of Higher Education and London University set out the response of the Polish government-in-exile to the Holocaust. Dr Jozef Garlinski outlined the course of the revolt in the Jewish Sonderkommando in Auschwitz on 7 October 1944 and Professor Jerzy Kloczowski of the Catholic University of Lublin gave an account of the way religious orders aided Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The discussion concluded with a great set-piece debate between two of the principal experts on the painful and tormenting subject, Professor Israel Gutman of the Hebrew University and Professor Wladyslaw Bartoszewski of the Catholic University of Lublin. They are both men of transparent intellectual honesty, both men who survived Auschwitz (and in the case of Professor Bartoszewski several subsequent imprisonments). Moreover, both had the moral credentials to speak on the subject. Professor Gutman because of his desire to go beyond narrow anti-Polish stereotypes and Professor Bartoszewski because of his role in the Relief Council for Jews in Poland during the war, for which the title 'Righteous among Nations' was conferred on him by the Israeli government. The debate, which was conducted in Polish, was often tense and difficult, but at the end both sides had a much better understanding of how the other thought and felt and some degree of catharsis was achieved.

The discussion on the post-war period proved much less controversial. Dr Michael Borwicz of Paris gave a moving account based on his own personal experiences of Polish-Jewish relations in the tense period 1944-7. Dr Lukasz Hirszowicz of the Institute of Jewish Affairs presented a characteristically well-researched and documented account of the role of the Jewish question in Polish communist politics since 1948 and Dr Bogdan Cywinski, who could not be present, sent a paper on Polish-Jewish relations within the opposition in the '70s. The role of national minority questions - not only relating to Jews, but also to Germans, Byelorussians and Ukrainians - in Solidarity's political stance between the Gdansk agreements and the introduction of martial law was penetratingly analyzed by a young Ukrainian scholar Dr Roman Laba of Harvard University. The session was concluded by Boleslaw Sulik of London who gave an account of the controversy aroused by Andrzej Wajda's film version of Reymont's novel The Promised Land.

Two sessions were devoted to non-historical topics and they illustrated how helpful other disciplines can be in elucidating the historical problems connected with Polish-Jewish relations. That devoted to literature was chaired by Czeslaw Milosz and it proved to be one of the most interesting of the Conference. It illustrated well the ignorance of each others ways of thinking in which Poles and Jews lived, an ignorance which only began to break down in the period after 1918. Both Dr David Patterson of the Oxford Hebrew Centre and Dr Israel Bartal of the Hebrew University dealt with Perez Smolenskin's Hebrew writings in which he attacked Jewish participation in the Polish revolt of 1863. Professor Mieczyslaw Inglot of Wroclaw University examined the image of the Jew in Polish prose fiction of the romantic period, while Dr Magdalena Stomma-Opalska described the way Polish-Jewish relations during the 1863 uprising were handled by Polish writers. Two papers dealt with the twentieth century: Professor Jan Blonski of the Jagiellonian University provided a subtle group portrait of the Polonized Jewish writer, examining the works of Adolf Rudnicki, Julian Tuwim, Kazimierz Brandys, Artur Sandauer and Julian Strykowski, while Professor

Chone Shmeruk of the Hebrew University gave a penetrating account of the manner in which Polish-Jewish relations were portrayed in the anthology of Yiddish prose edited by J Trunk and A Zaitlyn, Antogye fun yiddisher proze in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes (New York, 1946).

Similarly many insights were provided by the session devoted to ethnology. Dr Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett of New York University sketched the Polish contribution to the study of Jewish folklore while Dr Wladyslaw Bartoszewski jr of Cambridge University gave an account of the relationship between Polish peasants and Jews living in shtetleykh which aroused some criticism for what some participants felt was its underestimation of the strength of popular anti-semitism. Dr Olga Goldberg of the Hebrew University gave a description of the figure of the Jew in the Polish Folk Theatre while Professor Dor Noy of the same institution outlined the influence of Polish traditions on Yiddish balladic folksongs.

The final day was devoted to an attempt to sum up the discussions at the Conference. Important contributions were made by Professor Chimen Abramsky, Professor Gierowski, Professor Shmul Ettinger and Dr Jerzy Turowicz. Mr Rafal Scharf, Treasurer of the Conference, made a moving personal statement and Maciej Jachimczyk, secretary of the Organising Committee, protested at efforts to cover up the role of the Catholic Church in creating and perpetuating anti-Jewish stereotypes. The proceedings at the Conference were considerably enriched by the evening meetings. These included Monika Krajewska's impressive set of slides of presentation of their film Image before my eyes and poetry readings by Jerzy Ficowski and Czeslaw Milosz. All these evenings were deeply moving, and contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the Conference.

All in all the Conference was a considerable success. Close personal ties were established and the real exchange of views was made possible in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. As one of the speakers put it, this was a meeting for those who believed they had something to say to each other. Those on both sides who saw no need or purpose in a dialogue naturally stayed away. There was a general desire to continue the intellectual interchange. It was agreed that future conferences should be smaller and devoted to specific topics so that more detailed discussion would be possible. Such meetings were mooted for the future in Cracow, Jerusalem and Brandeis. In addition the project of an international journal devoted to Polish-Jewish relations received much support and it is expected that it will soon be established. Finally, it is to be hoped that the many fine papers presented at the Conference can soon be edited and published so that they can reach a wide audience.

FROM OUR FRIENDS AND WELL WISHERS

Address given to the Cambridge University Jewish Society on 18th October, 1946

by the late Leonard G. Montefiore

When your Secretary was kind enough to ask me to address this Society he suggested as my subject - Reform Judaism. Such an address should have completed a series, Orthodox, Liberal and then Reform, which as some people think, should follow a middle path. I hope, perhaps on another occasion, I may be allowed to attempt that subject. It will keep. But I wanted, while it is still fresh in my mind, to say something about an experiment in education or rehabilitation that before so many months or years will be concluded and become, unlike Reform Judaism, a piece of past history.

For the past 15 months, I have been looking after some 700 Jewish orphans brought to this country from the concentration camps in Germany and Austria for a period of rest, re-training and rehabilitation in mind and body before leaving for their permanent homes, wherever those permanent homes can be found, in Palestine, in America or the British Commonwealth.

The Anglo-Jewish community has had long experience of refugees, displaced persons that is, people compelled by force to leave their homes and start life afresh in another country.

It is a problem that has been growing steadily more difficult to solve. The large numbers of Jews who left Russia in the eighties of the last century and the steady stream that followed the first exodus almost all went to the United States. Many of them came here for a few weeks. All that was needed in those days was money to buy a steamship ticket. Arrangements were made to shelter and house each fresh batch and then they left by the next boat. Shipping companies competed for the traffic. The immigrants did not ask for expensive accommodation. It was a kind of human freight useful to fill up odd corners on the boats.

Then came 1933 and the emigration from Germany. By this time, the difficulties had increased. Immigration laws and quotas and formalities of every kind had been introduced. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of shipping and by one means and another thousands were helped to proceed on their way.

But in 1945 matters were very different. Before any thought could be given to displaced persons, prisoners of war had to be sent home, troops in their thousands and millions had to be redistributed, G.I. brides, British brides, Canadian brides had to be provided for. Priorities of all kinds had to be considered.

We had, in this country, in the six years between Hitler's accession to power and the outbreak of war, raised by voluntary contributions something like three million pounds for assisting Jewish refugees. We had brought through the Baldwin Fund some 10,000 children in 1938 from Germany and thus saved their lives in the very nick of time. Some time I hope the history of those children will be written and the contribution they made, are making and in my opinion will make to the country which provided a safe refuge. All this work ceased in September, 1939. The Government took over much of the actual relief work when it was necessary and shortage of labour very soon made it easy to absorb all the refugees in industry.

With the end of the war in sight, it became necessary to consider what, if anything, could be done to help the Jews who had survived on the Continent. The concentration camps had been liberated and appalling stories were reaching this country of the conditions disclosed. There was a very widespread and urgent feeling that something must be done. We could not just sit down and say the task must be left to UNRRA, to AMGOT or to the American Joint Distribution Committee.

I was in Paris myself in May, 1945, and I saw some of the first arrivals brought by air direct from the camps. I have never seen anything so ghastly in my life. The people I saw were like corpses that walked. I shall never quite forget the impression they made. But when we got down to considering what could be done, there were immense difficulties. No money could be sent out of the country, and if money had been sent, there was nothing to buy. But if we could bring the people we wanted to help to this country, then the currency difficulties were cleared out of the way.

In June, 1945, the Home Office gave permission for 1,000 orphans under the ages of 16 to be brought over for recuperation and ultimate re-emigration overseas. We pointed out immediately that it was unlikely that any documents would be available giving proof of age, and that children rescued from the concentration camps would most probably have no identity papers of any kind.

Then we went back to the Army and enquired if they had found any children still alive in the camps. At first we were told there were no children left alive at all, and it seemed as if our plans had been made in vain. But in August, relief workers for UNRRA told us there was a group of 300 children from Theresienstadt who could be evacuated. This group had been collected at Prague and had been passed fit to travel by a local doctor approved by the British Embassy.

The camps had been overrun by Allied troops in April or May and it was now August. But I still had in mind the walking skeletons, with sunken eyes and yellow parchment skins I had seen in Paris a few months earlier.

It was a shock and a pleasant surprise to see the first batch get out of the planes, looking much fitter and stronger than anything we had expected. With them came some adults who had acted as escorts and who had near relatives in this country. By this means in some cases, women who had escaped to this country before the war met their husbands whom they had never expected again to see alive.

Relief work is rather a drab and tedious business. The highlights are few and far between. People usually cry from sorrow or from pain, or from fear, but tears shed from pure joy are one of those sights that must rejoice God in heaven, always assuming He is interested in affairs of this earth. A room full of people hugging each other, and splashing their cups of tea with tears is a very beautiful sight, something that is more moving than any human words can describe.

But so far as the 300 boys and girls were concerned, there were no family reunions of that kind. Occasionally uncles or aunts turned up, but the children had never seen them, or if they had seen them, it was long ago and they had become strangers.

A number of these orphans have distant relatives and when relationship can be proved, they have every right and indeed the duty to take these children into their own homes. Probably in most cases the arrangement works well, but I wish I could feel confident that it works well in all cases. With a

small child, who can be petted and made much of and can rapidly adapt itself, I have no fears, or much fewer, but with the adolescent in its 'teens, there must be mutual give and take and compromise. It is asking a lot from both sides. The boy or girl is bitterly averse to being regarded as an object of charity. On the other side, there can hardly help being some consciousness that this is a duty to be performed, and that some gratitude should be shown for hospitality. But these domestic problems arose only in exceptional cases. For the remainder, we had a team of workers, nurses, teachers, cooks, a Rabbi, most of them drawn from Jewish youth groups, and, on account of the language difficulty, people who could speak German, or Polish, or Yiddish.

At the big Windermere Hostel, the children lived for about three months. They were given a complete medical and dental overhaul. Some had to be sent to hospital and we arranged a mass X-ray for suspected tuberculosis.

Then we started to try and find out which each child wanted to do. Most of us have had, to a very large extent at least, our lives made for us. "So free we seem, so fettered fast we are," as Andrea del Sarto says in the Browning poem. Most of us take the line of least resistance and that line is not always the worst to adopt. Few people strike out for themselves. In your generation as in mine, circumstances over which we have no control fashion our lives. Family tradition, military service, it is only in very exceptional cases there is a really free choice. So when we asked these children what they wanted to do and occasionally were told they would like to spend seven years in this country studying to be a doctor, or a professional pianist, or to become a portrait painter, we had to say. "Think of something else". Somehow we had assumed that the answer Palestine or the USA, the reply given in most cases, would be given in all cases. We had assumed, too easily perhaps, that an answer could be given after five years spent in prison, and those five years from 13 to 18. They had gone to prison, children, and they came out in some ways mature beyond their years and in other ways just as when they had been separated from their parents for the last time. For years these boys and girls have been accustomed to be treated as a mass, a group, a unit, call it by what name you please, but not as individuals. We, too, have in a different way experienced group treatment. The school thinks so and so, or the class or the regiment or the college. We take our opinion in all indifferent matters from our neighbours, some things are done, others are not, some things are thought, others are not. How many of our reactions are the result of training, environment and not the result of our own thoughts? For instance, we assume, most of us at least, that the public good takes precedence over private advantage. Unless we thought that instinctively, no civilized state would work. We dimly realise it, and if we pick up a ration book that someone has dropped, we return it to the Food Office. We have formed social habits, we form queues, we accept discipline. But life in a concentration camp taught a very different lesson. Life was prolonged firstly by physical strength and endurance and courage. Those were the primary requisites. But almost equally important were ingenuity, fraud and disregard of others. It is quite true there were many examples of self-sacrifice, of prisoners taking the place of those too weak to move, of escapes concealed by volunteers taking the missing numbers in some convoy destined for death. Nevertheless, it was those who broke rules and regulations who survived rather than those who observed them. "The reason I am alive", one boy said to me "is that I was strong enough to take a piece of bread from someone who was too weak to eat it". None of us have ever experienced the law of every man for himself. We have never been thrown completely on our own resources in order to remain alive. We have remained civilized and civilized people co-operate. They must co-operate in order to remain civilized. Co-operation is civilization's hall-mark.

Nearly a year after their arrival in this country, I suggested to one of these boys that it would be a useful piece of work to help in the harvest fields. After all, he was a guest in this country and food was short. I used the stock arguments that would have been accepted with resignation, if not with enthusiasm, by any Sixth Former. Not so the ex-inmate of Buchenwald. He merely said that he was not interested in the British harvest. His work among the sheaves was unlikely to increase his bread ration and that was the only thing that interested him. The reply was unexpected, but when you come to think of it not unnatural. The only work that boy had ever done in his life was forced labour for the Nazis. Work pro bono publico was unknown. Or again, a boy was found tucked up in bed about eleven o'clock in the morning. To suggestions that it was about time to get up, he merely replied, "For the past three years I worked 16 hours a day for the Nazis. If you imagine that I am going to do another hand's turn for the next three years, you are greatly mistaken."

Yet, in other cases, boys will make considerable sacrifices in order to acquire learning, and have had to be restrained from sitting up till the small hours of the morning over their books.

They are still very group conscious and reluctant to form their own opinions and judgments. Here again the contrast between these camp boys and the average Sixth Former, or for that matter of that of most English lads, is very marked. When they first arrived, the divisions were sharply marked, the Orthodox, the Zionist, and the various shades of opinion within these groups. Jewish politics played a big part in their lives since their liberation and they had been carefully drilled in their opinions.

It may conceivably be a not unimportant part of the work of rehabilitation to give these boys and girls an opportunity to notice that in a free and civilized country, men and women of very different political and religious views can live together and work together amicably without saying or believing that those who differ are necessarily scoundrels and traitors. They will learn, I hope, that there are other things of value in life besides politics, religious or secular. If one can imagine that, in the future, they may realise there are many people who were interested in them, not as possible recruits to some particular party or section, but merely as human beings, a useful result will have been achieved.

Oppression and cruelty breed intolerance. These children have been cruelly treated and one of the results is they are very intolerant, very reluctant to make the smallest concession or compromise. I suppose it is also reaction. For years they were made to do things by physical compulsion and menace. Now all rules are suspect. In camp, unless they were on the spot to seize their ration of food, they went hungry. Now they are in a free country and therefore meals must be ready for them at any time. In camps they were driven off to any destination their gaolers chose. Now in freedom they refuse to realise that accommodation is limited, that housekeeping is difficult, although they are free to come and go as they like. If they want to visit a friend in Liverpool or Glasgow why not, they are free, free to do what they please. "We are not at Buchenwald any more, we thought England was a free country; those are concentration camp methods." We are used to self-discipline, we depend on it. These children have only experienced discipline imposed from without. The mark of civilized man is self-control, and it is a lesson most easily learned in childhood. The concentration camp children tend to suspect ulterior motives. One group accused me of wanting to make Englishmen of them. I tried to explain that I had no wish to do that, but I wished very much to teach the virtues of compromise, of level-headedness, of readiness to see and appreciate the



other fellow's point of view. I do not think peace can be achieved, and still less maintained, if we train children to be fanatics however sincerely we believe in any particular cause. That I admit is an idea which many Jewish educationalists do not share. They believe that, having themselves a perfect knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, it is their duty to train up pupils who will conform to the rules, think as they are taught to think and act as they are taught to act.

In dealing with what is in effect a very large school with 700 pupils, with no home influences to help or to hinder, we have only aimed at giving freedom, freedom of movement from place to place, freedom to choose employment, and, so far as funds permit, freedom to choose training and education.

One day, perhaps, we shall learn what the effect of some months or years spent in Great Britain (we have hostels in Scotland) has had on these Jewish children from Poland.

I think certain things have impressed them, or some of the more intelligent of them. They were impressed by the kindness of the RAF who gave them a great welcome and very special teas at the airports when they arrived. They have been impressed with the kindness of educational authorities who welcomed their attendance at evening classes and continuation schools. They have been impressed by the absence of anti-Jewish prejudice.

No doubt there have been certain disappointments. They thought England was a very rich country where all the things they had missed for so many years would be provided by the incredible number of incredibly rich Jews who lived here. They had not the faintest conception of economic conditions prevailing in this country.

I wish they could have made more contacts, but they are not very keen on private hospitality. "We don't want to be made to feel schnorrers", they say! And they do not like leaving the protective familiarity of the group, the hostel where they are among friends who have been with them during their camp life.

The seven hundred have been split up among 24 or 25 residential hostels, and a number have gone into Jewish boarding houses, while others are being looked after by relatives. Many are now at work and earning reasonable wages, others are at school.

On the whole their health is good. But we have a few hopeless invalids, boys of 17 or 18 who are consumptives and who can never hope to recover. It has been very difficult indeed to provide for these cases that need specialised treatment. However kind and well-meaning the English staff may be, these Polish boys are lonely figures in the ward, and there is very little one can do to mitigate the loneliness.

But the hostels are happy places. The boys and girls live in the present and do not worry unduly about the future. And yet, one cannot help wondering how one would feel if at sixteen one had been left utterly alone without a single relation in the whole world, with no one who cared very much if you lived or if you died if you were happy or if you were miserable.

We take so many things for granted. The home that always has been and always will be open to us, under all circumstances, whatever we do or leave undone. I contrast my own boyhood with that of the boy I visited a few days ago. He has spinal tuberculosis and is semi-paralysed. He is having every care and attention but the clinic is in the country and some distance from London. On Sunday afternoon, visitors come and there is a cheerful buzz of

conversation in the ward. But the Jewish boy lies alone staring into vacancy. Yes - Hitler has passed this way.

Not all the gold of Ophir or the wealth of Croesus can help him, but for the majority of these orphans, so long as they remain in this country, money can do a good deal if it is wisely spent. I admit the numbers we can help are very small and I admit if I were working in a DP camp in Germany, I should look enviously on the care that is being lavished on the fortunate few who have been brought to this country. I think one can call them fortunate on account of the freedom that is theirs, the nearer approach they can make to the life of an ordinary boy and girl who has not been in a concentration camp and whose parents have not been murdered. However much is done in a DP camp, it remains camp life.

Something in fairness must be put on the other side. For the comparatively small number of young children (the Germans ruthlessly destroyed nearly every Jewish child too young to work at munitions or in the mines), a first-class country home is maintained and staffed by the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Moreover, in the case of the adolescents, it seems likely that Youth Aliyah Certificates for entry into Palestine will be distributed on the Continent rather than in this country. Zionists sometimes have said to me that for those who wish to settle in Palestine, in a Kibbutz or Kvutzah, training in Germany is a better preparation than the rather freer life led in this country. I think it can be argued that, in the long run, there is a compensating advantage in having seen life in many different aspects, town as well as country, and for having made contacts with non-Jews as well as Jews. For those children who have relatives in America and will eventually go to the United States, there are obvious advantages in opportunities for learning English and for industrial training. Totalitarianism is, in my opinion, an evil thing, in education just as elsewhere. There is no one kind of existence that is supremely good. God and man can be served on the farm or in the workshop, in the school or in the university, behind the shop counter or the street stall. So far as it is possible to avoid pressure in one direction or another, it should be avoided. Let those children, this handful of survivors be free. Let them be free to fashion their own lives after their own wishes so far as that may be. Above all, perhaps, let them become individuals, each with a mind and an opinion of his or her own, not selfish but social, not egotistic but co-operative.

And thus I come back to where I started - the West London Reform Synagogue in Upper Berkeley Street. By no stretch of imagination is it conceivable that any one of these children will become a member of the Reform Synagogue. So I can, at least, say that I am not seeking recruits for my own particular tabernacle. I hope when they leave this country there will be the same diversity of outlook among these children as when they arrived. That diversity has made them a very interesting group. I hope they will have gained insight into and appreciation of the essential virtues of this country, its kindly tolerance, its profound sympathy with suffering, its willingness to help if given the opportunity. And, just here and there, perhaps, there may be a few people who would otherwise have remained ignorant, who will have learned the virtues of the Polish Jew, his courage and patience, his humour and gaiety, his many engaging characteristics which have survived undimmed the years of persecution and cruelty.

## THE 7TH LEONARD G MONTEFIORE MEMORIAL LECTURE

Delivered at the Stern Hall on Thursday, 17th February 1983.

By Walter Laqueur

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### The View from the Reichstag

They began to arrive an hour ago, and some are still queuing up. There was a far-ranging keynote speech, greetings were conveyed by the President of the Bundestag, the television cameras were whirring. Now my turn has come; I'm chairing the discussion. The panel is first rate, nothing much should go wrong - except that any debate can go astray. The occasion is not commonplace, for we are meeting in the Berlin Reichstag, the date is January 1983, and the discussion is about the events that occurred in this very place fifty years ago, almost to the day. I have the suspicion that even these veterans of a hundred speeches, discussions, and conferences are a little more agitated than usual, which is not unnatural under the circumstances. The spiritus loci affects the mind: once upon a time a great disaster took place, many millions of people were killed, world history took a different turn - and it all began on this spot. So this is something more than a routine academic occasion, and most seem to feel it.

Fifty years ago Hitler came to power, partly as the result of a genuine national mass movement, partly as the result of old-fashioned intrigue. President Hindenburg, the war hero grown senile, was persuaded to invite Hitler to head the new government. It was not an inevitable decision; Hindenburg had turned down the idea several times before. True, Hitler was the leader of the biggest party in the land; true, its rise, within four years, had been phenomenal. Still a mere sect in 1929, it had become almost overnight the second strongest party, and three years later it polled 37 percent of the total. But then, in the second half of 1932, there were signs of decline. In the elections of November 1932, Hitler lost two million votes. The party was financially bankrupt; it could make no further headway against the hard core of working-class and Catholic voters. There were splits among its leaders. Many contemporaries predicted that unless Hitler had some quick successes, the impetus of his movement would be lost forever. "The great onslaught of the Nazis has been defeated," the Frankfurter Zeitung stated in an editorial on January 1, 1933. Harold Laski, the oracle of the British left, said that Hitler would end his days an old man in some Bavarian village, telling his friends in the local Biergarten the same story time and again: how it had almost come to pass that he had overthrown the German state. And Goebbels noted in his diary on the last day of 1932: "What a horrible year it has been - away with it!" But Hitler did not spend his declining years in a Bavarian Biergarten, and this is why we are discussing him tonight.

The new Reichstag is a very modern, even elegant building, at least inside, with the stress on space and light. Seen from the outside, it has hardly changed; it is more or less the same castle-like site - minus the enormous glass dome that was the main landmark before 1933. The big meeting hall is full tonight: young people, old people, people well known and obscure. They follow the debate with evident interest. Seats were sold out weeks before, which I am told, does not happen in the former German capital these days, even for the most famous pop stars. There was a long general debate in Germany a month or two ago, about whether the media and the authorities were not overdoing it. Would there ever be an end to the ruminations about Nazism

and Hitler? One understands the impatience. The right thinks it detrimental to German prestige abroad; for different reasons, the extreme left feels uneasy with the subject. But the fascination among the general public is as strong as ever before; it is probably greater now than it was in the 1950s, when Germany was preoccupied with more immediate tasks.

The dead Hitler will not go away. Even looking out of the window, one is reminded of the legacy of Nazism: the television of East Berlin, and, right down at our feet, the Berlin Wall, symbol of a divided Germany, and the East German border police. When repair work is to be done on the eastern wall of the Reichstag, the East Germans must be asked permission; it can be approached only from the territory of a foreign country. If not for Hitler... We shall have to return to the subject.

How to commemorate the greatest disaster in German history? Many German leaders pondered the question in recent weeks. How to explain to new generations that there was more to National Socialism than a handful of demagogues and criminals, the Mafia-Arturo Ui-Bertolt Brecht version of recent German history? That there was an immense amount of goodwill, of faith, of intense belief, and yes, even of idealism? Why did German soldiers continue to fight for years after it was clear beyond any reasonable doubt that the war had been lost? It was not only, not even mainly, the fear of the Gestapo that made them fight. One remembers the shining eyes, the quasi-religious faith, the willingness to accept sacrifices. Among the lessons to be learned from the Nazi experience, one of the most important is that the intensity of belief of the believers, and even their personal integrity, should never be the yardstick for judging whether an idea is good or bad. A great many excellent people have believed the most pernicious nonsense throughout history, and not only in Germany.

The Reichstag: an older friend took me around when I was a boy, and I remember some of the sights, above all the impressive entrance. I only later learned that the Germans had not been lucky with their parliament. There has been a Reichstag ever since there was a Reich, which is to say since 1871, but for the first twenty years it met in a porcelain factory. By the time they finished the new building in 1894, Bismarck was no longer there, and, in any case, parliament was not the place in which the important decisions were made. The inscription, "To the German People" was chiseled on the entrance only during World War I, when the going was no longer good and popular support was badly needed. Then there came a time, ten years perhaps, from 1919 to 1929, during which the German parliament did play a political role broadly comparable to that of the United States Congress. At the end of the decade, the anti-democratic parties of the left and right had a majority, and effectively prevented parliamentary government. They also made the Reichstag a laughing stock; there were obscene interruptions, sessions had to be suspended. In the public mind the Reichstag became the Schwatzbude, the symbol for idle talk. The real decisions, the Nazis predicted, would be made in the streets.

Then Hitler came. How they underrated him, his allies and his enemies alike! "Berlin Remains Red," the Social Democrats and the Communists proclaimed in their editorials and leaflets. And Hitler's conservative allies were so sure: when the coalition was set up on that January day they said, "We've got him tied hand and feet." True enough, apart from Hitler there were only two Nazis in the Cabinet. Surely they could outvote him any time. Poor idiots. They did not realize that there would be no more voting.

Hitler was appointed at 11 am on January 30, 1933. On the same evening there was a huge torchlight parade right here in front of the Reichstag, with flags and drums and sundry brass bands. Among the observers was his French

Ambassador, Francois Poncet; the balcony of his embassy, next door to the Reichstag on Pariser Platz offered a grandstand view. "A stream of fire advancing mightily into the heart of the capital," he noted in his diary. The clacking of the jackboots, the rhythmic slogans, the fighting songs, evoked some dark premonitions. Francois Poncet was a formidable intellect; he was made a member of the Academie Francaise in later years. He saw what was coming, which did not prevent him from extolling the virtues of appeasement for six more years. Marinus van der Lubbe, the young Dutchman arrested the fateful night of the Reichstag fire, never attended a university. He was not a formidable intellect; he left school at fourteen and became a vagabond. But he had realized, as he told the German police interrogating him, the moment Hitler came to power that there would be war.

The subject of the discussion is "Fascism as a non-democratic method of solving a crisis," a topic not of purely academic interest. We again confront a crisis, and the great majority of the members of the UN have chosen nondemocratic solutions in any case. There is more than a little Western ethnocentrism in the assumption that parliamentary democracy is the norm and dictatorship the exception in the contemporary world. In 1933, on the other hand, the civilized world was thought to be democratic - Mussolini's Italy was an aberration, Russia was a backward country, and the Balkans did not count. As the Depression deepened in the early '30s, there were rumors in the air about coups. The Voelkische Beobachter reported in January 1933 that a distinguished American named Colonel House had declared that President Roosevelt would be a dictator, and a great many Americans (German readers were told) thought like Colonel House. Anything seemed possible in America, but it still appeared most unlikely that a civilized, democratic country in the center of Europe would become a dictatorship. Surely the trade unions, the churches, the army, the police, the whole state apparatus would not stand for it, nor would Britain and France and the Little Entente stand idly by. It seemed impossible to imagine.

Again the scene shifted to the Reichstag. Hitler had no majority; he needed one more election. It was a gamble, but he had taken, and was to take, much greater gambles in his life. Nazi propoganda had been far more effective than the rest taken together, and now, from an inside track, with the authority of the state supporting him, with his speeches broadcast three times daily over the state radio, he thought he was bound to get what he wanted. Hitler and Goebbels also made it clear that this would be the last election for a long time, perhaps forever. When he entered his new office, Hitler said to his confidants that no one would get him out of this building alive. This prediction was borne out by events, but the immediate task in January 1933 was to make sure that no one could displace him.

On the evening of February 27, at five minutes past nine, Hans Floeter, a student of philosophy and theology, was passing by the front entrance of the Reichstag on his way home, minding (as he said) his own business. Suddenly he heard a noise as if the glass of one of the windows in the building had been broken. He stopped, and within a few seconds he heard the same noise again and saw, or thought he saw, the figure of a man leaning out of the window of the Reichstag restaurant. Next he saw a flame, whereupon he started running, to tell the police guarding the building. Only two or three minutes passed before he found the sergeant in charge, who needed another couple of minutes to ascertain that it was not a false alarm. At 9.18 the fire brigades started to arrive, but they realized presently that they had come too late. There were several fires spreading rapidly, and there was little they could do. The fire raged for two hours; in the end little more than the walls were left. Meanwhile, another police patrol had seized a young man in the corridor, half-naked, obviously a foreigner: "Why did you do this?" the