United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Louis Walinsky
March 24, 1995
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PREFACE

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LOUIS WALINSKY
March 24, 1995

Q: For the record, will you state your name, date of birth, place of birth.

A: Louis J. Walinsky, born in London, England, April 19, 1908.

Q: When did you come to the United States?

A: At the age of four with mother and sister. My father was already here at the time

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

A: Well, my father had a been a revolutionary in Russia in his youth. Because he was only 16 when he had left. He got in trouble with the police for political activity; demonstrations and so on. In London he had any number of jobs: He barbered, he was a weaver of baby carriages, and so on. But he also became a member of Prince Peter Kropotkin's Anarchist's Circle; and he got involved in journalism and I don't know how many years exactly that he lived in London before coming to this country. He must have come in 1911 -- the family a year later. When he got here, as I said, he had been offered a job in Toronto so we moved there. And we were there two years. He managed a local union. My mother had two brothers in New York who were embroiderers by trade; and they belonged to the ?__Embroiderers and Pointers Union. And they were instrumental in getting that union to offer my father a job managing their local union in New York. And that is what brought us down from Canad

A: Then I went to school. I did pretty well in school. I went to Cornell and studied economics, which became my profession later. I had two or three minor jobs, and then decided to teach school. So I got a teacher's license in economics in New York. And then, in -- that would have been 1931. Well, in 1932, a friend of mine who was a great drover, came and said "We ought to go to Germany, because this guy Hitler is coming to power and it will be an interesting place to be. I'm going to go to the university; why don't you come?" Well, while I was still at school at Cornell, I had taken out some insurance policy, so I had a little equity in it. And I was able to get $500 or $600 on that, and that took me to Germany. You have no idea what prices were in those days, but on the German/American Line, travelling -- I think it was called

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"student class"; it was really not very different from steerage -- the round-trip fare was under $200. In Berlin, I lived very, very frugally; I had to, because I had to stretch that money. And, well, you got breakfast with your room -- that is, a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. And then for lunch and dinner, I would go to the student house in the Aranienburg Strasse where you had two choices, I believe it was. You had an Eintopfgericht, a stew; or you had soup and a stew. And for one, you paid 60 pfennigs;

that was 15 cents. But the other, you paid a mark; that was a quarter. And the system was: You could get a second on the soup and a second on the vegetable, but not on the meat. So you would go with a friend and you would get your meal, the soup and the dish, and you would eat the soup fast and the vegetable, and your friend would go off and get the second, the refill. And then you would have -- well that was 25 cents and two ate on it. And in the evening, you'd go to the automat where they had a very, very hearty bean soup that cost maybe 40 or 50 pfennig; and so those were the meals. Obviously, I wasn't

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spending very much money. One thing in Germany in those years, there were student rates on the metro equivalent -- at the film, theater, opera; so you could go very, very cheaply. Anyway, you know, very soon, late in 1932, the Nazi business became quite tense. And some of my friends, Germans, were extremely concerned because they felt vulnerable. And there would the Nazis be out on the streets shaking their collection boxes Einweg nach Jerusalem, oneway to Jerusalem. I was at a student ball in the Reichsgarten the night of the Reichstag fire. When I came out at about 1:00 a.m. that night, it was very strange; there were policemen all around the place. And I asked one, I said "What's happened?" And he said "There's been a fire in the Reichstag." And I looked down, because it was in plain view down at the end of that walk, there were no signs of external fire damage. So whatever fire there had been, it was strictly internal. But of course when the press came out and Goebles made a story out of it, you'd think the whole building had been burned down; and this was not true. Anyway, that was a little background to the DP thing that came later, you know; that eight months or so in Germany. And after the election -- the elections were in March and early in March. And Hitler was confirmed; he had already been in the Reichstag seated. I had run out of money, and my father refused to send me any. He thought it was a good place to get out of. I didn't feel I was in any danger, and I don't think I was. But I did run out of money and I had to come.

Q: Is there anything else you can tell me about your eight months in Germany and the change of the mood of the people or ...

A: Yes, a few things. There was a landlady of my friend who said, "You know there have been five major elections in Germany in one year, and not one of them succeeded in creating a majority government?" And that was one factor in what happened later, because people gave up on the democratic process; it wouldn't work. But I've never seen that mentioned as an element contributing to Hitler's coming to power, and I think it was. Anyway, how did I get there? I was on a train of thought.

Q: Well, I was asking you a little bit about the mood in Berlin at that time and anti-Semitism.

A: Yes. So this lady, this Wirtin, the Hausfrau, the landlady, she said she was voting for Hitler because after Hitler, the communists would come and that's what she wanted. I

thought this was a strange prognosis -- psychology. But I initially had rooms with the widow of a professor. So she was Frau Doctor Professor Resica (ph.) and a very German lady. I subsequently took a room with a Jewish family, and I was with them until March, when things had already become quite bad. They had no intention of leaving. They didn't think it was necessary; they didn't think they ought to run or had to run. They were German, so -- anyway it's not easy to recall all of it, but there's enough to make it a very tense and dramatic experience.

Q: Was there a palpable sense of the anti-Semitism, of restrictions against people in those days?

A: Well, no, the more open expressions of anti-Semitism -- the badge, the tagging of stores and so on, that mostly came later. There wasn't much of that in the first months; and don't forget, I was out by March of '33.

Q: Were you there during the book burning; was that during that time?

A: I don't remember if that came then or shortly after.

Q: The other thing I wanted to ask you about your family background: Was your family very conscious of being Jewish?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes. I grew up on a Bronx street, 176th Street; and our side of the street was all Jewish, the other side of the street was all Irish. We kids did not play with one another. We just -- they were there we were here and that was it. So my family's friends were all Jewish, and the only Gentiles really I knew as a boy growing up were our teachers at school.

Q: _____

A: Well, as a union leader, my father was a great activist.

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Then he was also a meagerist(?); and he liked to dramatize and he liked to play a public role, be a public figure. And his union was not big ,and it didn't have a very large treasury, but he could always could come up with a $5,000 donation here or a $10,000 there toward the building, let's say of a -- toward the purchase of a house for YVO -- you know, the Yiddish Research Institute -- or to make a gift to the Urban League or whatever. And he was a very popular speaker, always invited to speak at banquets and so on. So he wasn't home very much, but by the same token, we knew of his activities and this was part of the milieu.

Q: The reason why I was asking was to try to get a sense of if your background prepared you

or motivated you for some of the work that you did later on.

A: Well, my first real job after the university was teaching school. I taught at the Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn. And it was a new school with a very enterprising principal who had organized a great faculty. And the student population was, I suppose, 80 percent Jewish. We had a few Blacks, and we had some Catholic children. But in those days, the Teachers Union was a very active organization. And actually, the communists tried to take it over from inside. And so the less inclined split off and

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formed the Teachers Guild. And so that was also a part of a social milieu, you know. And I was with the Teachers Guild. I was also, in those years, trying to write plays. I wrote one play about Hitler's coming to power which was published but not produced. And I wrote a number of other plays in the thirties after I had returned from Germany. And you know, I wanted to be a playwright, but I couldn't make it to Broadway; and so at a given point, I said to myself "You can't do both things. You've got to pick one or the other." And so I decided to stay with teaching and I gave up play writing. But I had a play produced in Paris, a dramatization of Aldus Huxley's "Brave New World." But then, the war came and I had the opportunity to join the War Production Board, which I did.

Q: In what year?

A: This is in '43. And I was with the War Production Board into its demise early in 1947; and that was a great experience. It didn't have anything to do with Jewishness or Jewish causes or whatever, but I made the acquaintance for example of Lucius Clay who represented the Army at the Requirements Committee in the War Production Board. And when I went to Germany later for the ORT I went to see him, and he received me very graciously. We spent 70 minutes together. And it ended with his giving our organization access to those enemy supply dumps, which was an important element in equipping our schools, which were pretty barren at the time.

Q: What were your responsibilities with the War Production Board?

A: The War Production Board had a Program Committee and it had

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the industry divisions which were operational -- steel, copper, paper, whatever. The operating divisions were run by people from industry. The Program Committee had responsibility for reviewing the proposals made by those operators. And we were largely academic. So I was taken on as the pulp and paper specialist, because there was that opening. I knew nothing about pulp and paper. When I was offered that assignment to start, let's say, two weeks from then, I went back home and lived in the New York

Library for a couple of weeks and studied pulp and paper. And so I became an instant expert, as a lot of us did in those days in the War Production Board, and in the Government, generally. So for most of time, that was my beat. But towards the end, I got more responsible assignments; because I became head of the Research and Analysis Group, which covered all the work of the program people. And so that got me into steel and copper and oil and any number of other things. And we had an interesting arrangement at the War Production Board. The U.S., the U.K. and Canada had a Combined Raw Materials Board. And the people in my group, our program committee types, 95 percent of our work was on the U.S. but we also served as U.S. staff to the Combined Raw Materials Board. And we had toward the end a Combined Pulp and Paper Committee, on which I served as executive secretary. And after VE Day, but before VJ Day, I was one of a

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commission of two sent to the U.K. and Sweden to line up paper supplies for the liberated areas. France had an important national election coming up and they didn't have any paper for posters and voting materials; and I earned an undying love from one of my French colleagues for getting them 20,000 tons of paper for those elections. Why am I doing all of this? This has nothing to do with the ORT.

Q: Well, I was just trying to get some background. Although actually, what you're talking about right now seems to me to be some training for all of the logistics and procurement that you got involved with for the Board. Why don't you tell me how you got to ORT from War Production Board.

A: Well, it was through my father, who was a friend of Louie Boudine (ph.) who was one of three grand old men of the ORT and chairman of the American ORT Federation. He had already, starting in '46, had more than a little difference of opinion with Lubovitch (ph.) and Singalovsky (ph.) the two European chiefs. And he had won a vote to create a financial and accounting office for the ORT in New York, where there would be some control over the numbers and statistics, so when the American ORT went to the Community Funds and foundations for grants, they'd be able to demonstrate what they had done with the money. Because he couldn't up to that point; he couldn't get the data out of Europe. So he asked my father for some help. And my father persuaded me to go see him. And so our understanding was that I would come to the ORT for a limited period of time to set up this office and get it going. So that's how I came there. And that office was in New York on 72nd Street next to Broadway. And I had got that under way two or three months only, but it was already rolling when -- I guess Boodine mostly, but others in the American ORT became concerned about the way things were going in Germany where they feared the program would collapse. And in their view everything depended on Germany and the DP camps. So they asked me to go over and take responsibility for the operation in Germany, U.S. Zone and Austria and British Zone.

Q: Let me just stop you there. Why was there so much concern about the European operations?

A: Well, Dr. Lubovitch, who had started the work of the -- not started the work. He got the organization there, but Jacob Olaseky (ph.) who had been a director of ORT in Kowno before the war on his own steam and initiative, he had started an ORT school in Landsberg where he was liberated. And then he got some of his former friends who were in other areas to start training operations there; but they were scrounging, they were barefooted and bare-knuckled, and they had no outside support at all. Lubovitch came into that situation, you see, and "all right, here's the ORT, I'm the ORT." and made all sorts of commitments and promises of supplies and funds; and in order to help hiring instructors, they were promised -- you know the marks they would be paid were meaningless. The cigarettes they would be given would help. But the important thing was the few pounds sterling per month they were promised upon completion of their service in Germany when they came out. Well, already in 1947, some people were coming out and they would come to an ORT office, whether it was Paris or Geneva or New York, and say "I'm so-and-so; I had so many months of service with ORT; you owe me so-and-so many pounds." But the people had no documentation. They had never been notified that nowhere was there a list of people who had been made that commitment and what their service had been and what they were entitled to. So some of these stories were already getting around, and it had elements of scandal. So that was one of the things that really terrified the Americans. They

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were already not in very good odor with the Community Funds all around the country, because they hadn't been able to supply them with data on how many courses, where, how many students, what -- and so they felt pretty low before this happened. And as I suggested earlier or hinted earlier, Boodine was already into some kind of feud with Singelovsky and Lubovitch, and he was really determined to break their -- what he thought was a death grip on the organization.

Q: Is there a way to sum up what the basis for the feud was; is it too complicated?

A: Well, neither Lubovitch or Singelovsky had any administrative capabilities. What records they had were little slips of paper or chits in this pocket or that pocket; but no books, no sense of organization. In presenting data requested by our office in New York, this new financial and accounting office which we had to turn over to the AJDC budget -- I didn't mention that in '47, ORT had always raised its own funds; not very successfully. But in '47, they made an agreement with the American Joint Distribution Committee. The AJDC would give us a subvention of $2 million a year to the ORT in return for which ORT would refrain from any attempted individual fundraising. Well, the material that came from our Paris and Geneva offices to the AJDC in Paris on request was just -- "never, never land"; and pitiful, really. And then there's a third element which was personal. You

know, in the course of my, I guess it was two and a half years I suppose, with the ORT at different times in a personal conversation with Dr. Singelovsky said: I am the ORT. In a personal conversation with Lubovitch, he said: I am the ORT. And finally, to my surprise, in a personal conversation with Louie Boodine, he said: I am the ORT. So here you had these three egos. All of them old men, Lubovitch ill, Louie Boodine nearly blind -- but a bulldog; and he was determined to wrest what he thought was their death grip or chokehold on the organization.

Q: Was the New York operation pretty controversial?

A: Which?

Q: When you were in Europe...

A: The financial and accounting office?

Q: Did the Europeans react to that?

A: Oh, yes, yes. Singelovsky, chiefly, he sabotaged it. But of course, I started out -- I think I made a mistake at the beginning. I should have gone over and gotten acquainted personally. Instead of which, I sat there in New York and I dreamed up these beautiful reporting forms, you know -- financial and educational -- and developed a system where they would go out and they would come in a certain way and the information would be collated and so on. And Singelovsky wasn't happy with that. And then quite soon, I told you I was sent over to Germany to take over there, operationally. And I got a friend to take over in New York for me. And while I don't think I was terribly politic, he was certainly less so. And both Singelovsky and Lubovitch couldn't abide him. They thought he was arrogant. But -- he was trying to do a job, but not in a terribly sensitive way.

Q: So you were sent to Germany; where were you sent?

A: Munich. Munich was the headquarters of the USO, and it had had its own turmoil. There had been a conflict between Jacob Olaseky, who's the real hero in this whole thing, and the Westerners who had been sent in by Lubovitch to oversee the operation. Olaseky was a DP. He had no face or status with the IRO or the U.S. military. The liaison with them was important. Lubovitch knew that so he sent him people thinking they would play that role, but they would not attempt to interfere with the management of the actual training operations. Well neither of the people he sent in took it that way; they wanted to boss Olaseky. He wasn't having it. And so things there were also not very well. Well, the first time I was introduced to Olaseky, George Bacca (ph.) was there. And he was the president of the American ORT. And I forget who else, maybe it was Lubovitch. And Olaseky. And it was plain that Olaseky was resentful. He was another mischief-maker, another outsider. "I've done all of this work; whatever is here, I've made without help, and now you're going to..." So when I saw how this was going I said to Jacob, "Let's you

and I step out of this meeting and have a word with one another." And we did. And when we were alone, I asked him, "What really is your problem here?" He said, "I have been the director in the U.S. Zone and I cannot lose face by having someone coming in over me." I said, "What's your proposed solution, then?" He said, "Let the ORT appoint you to be director for Germany and Austria; then I can be under you, but I still am the chief in the U.S. zone." I said "wonderful." And from then on, we never had a spat or difficulty of any kind.

Q: In terms of how all these different groups worked together when you went over there, and you know was the UNRRA with the IRO at this point, maybe? During that period the UNRRA became IRO but it the same organization, yes.

Q: How did ORT work with all these organizations over there?

A: Well, we didn't have very much to do with anyone except the joint -- the AJDC. We had some important business to do with them. You know, it was the joint who gave supplementary rations. Supplementary rations were very important for us to be able to offer our students who were doing manual work in the metalworking shop and the woodworking shops. So one the things was to get the joint to classify students as being eligible for supplementary rations, which they did. Another thing was: It was a big organization, you know; they had a very large staff in Germany.

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They had all sorts of warehousing and supplies. And I was able to arrange with them where they had supplies that we needed and could use, for them to make them available to us and charge it off against our subvention, which they did. So that sort of thing was the relationship with joint. But we had nothing to do with other NGO's, or other voluntary organizations.

Q: What about the US Military, did you work with them?

A: I told you of the thing with Clay after that it would be up to our district directors to work with the military guys in charge of their areas. We didn't have to much to do them actually. But we had a certain number of our people in uniform. And the uniform was important because it entitled us to -- well, it entitled the wearer to mess privileges, to PX privileges. The PX privileges was awfully important. You could buy a carton of cigarettes at the PX for eighty cents. That was worth 1,500 dollars in the equivalent Marks on the streets. So you know, this was important trading. And there were guys who made full use of that sort of thing. The guys --

Q: For themselves? A.Huh?

Q: For themselves or for themselves?

A: For themselves; for themselves. One American I brought over I known as a specialist in -- what would be the term -- what would be the term? In testing.

Q: _____??___ What sort of administrative hurdles did you have as director of these organizations?

A: You mean on the spot in Germany?

Q: You got over there and you found a system in place which didn't appear to very organized?

A: Right.

Q: What did you find? What were you able to do to improve that problem?

A: Well, I think the first thing was to develop some hard facts on what we needed by way of equipment and supplies from outside, and to initiate the actions that would bring the men. Another was to organize or supervise procurement within Germany. There, there were two things: There was the Army helping us; and the other was purchasing with cigarettes. We bought Italian lathes that were worth twelve thousand dollars for twelve cartons of cigarettes. You know, so you could -- and when you imported those at eighty cents a carton and you had thousands of cartons a month allowed you as incentive goods for your instructors and students, you could go a long way with that. So cigarettes were good currency.

Q: Was this a legitimate process or was this --

A: No.

Q: -- did you improvise?

A: I think it was in the atmosphere. Everyone had been doing it before I got there, I did not invent it. And as a matter of fact, when sometime later on a disgruntled colleague went after Olaseky, he wanted to bring him down. And he reported to the IRO that the ORT under Olaseky was black marketing and keeping two sets of books. Well, they came after Olaseky. And I said no, I will go to meet your invitation. It's not for you. And I think the IRO headquarters is Frankfurt, if I'm not mistaken. When I came there, they told me there were these charges against Olaseky. And I said "of course." You mean you -- you acknowledge you have two sets of books? I said "of course." They said, well -- I said, but look ,if you want to come after me, you have to go for the Joint, you have for the Red Cross, you have for the Church World Service, we are all doing it. Because we have got to stretch our means to meet our needs. That was the end of it. So -- well, that was an administrative hurdle of some kind. But that kind of thing there was plenty of.

Q: Are there other examples you can give of the creative procedures?

A: I don't know.

Q: How you were able to stretch human end resources to make your work effective?

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A: Well, I think I mentioned the chief ones. In addition to the subension (ph) from the Joint, much of which was to finance the work of the DP camps, the Women's American ORT -- the Ladies' ORT -- they were prohibited from raising funds, as such; but they could have value-received functions. And they raised some money that way. They came and got around and looked and tried to be helpful and contributed here or there with -- toward various projects.

Q: For example?

A: Well, like providing a car for Olaseky, so he could have transportation; things like that.

Q: What other problems did you spot when you went over there that needed to be corrected?

A: Supply, I think, was the first and most basic. Organizing the courses of instruction; because they been very al fresco. They had initially been left to the artisans who took responsibility for running the course; but these courses had to be developed and organized and more standardized and so on. We had to develop an inspectorial staff who would go round and check out and make suggestion and try to give superintendency. We had a transportation problem of some seriousness, because we were spread all over the country. Means of transportation were -- you know, you didn't have trains or planes. So we needed cars for our district directors and so on.

Q: _____

A: Has you question been recorded?

Q: No, but it doesn't need to be.

A: Well, I have been -- I've been trying to state, I think, all along what the general and particular situations were that we had to face and how tried to cope with them.

Q: Is there anything else that you can think of; you mentioned different areas of professional training, supplies. What about, did you have focus at all on the living conditions for the DPs, or anything like that?

A: The chief thing on that had to do with the supplementary rations for the students; and that I have already been onto. We also, you know, gave -- I forget, now, how many -- but at least a few cigarettes each week to the students, and more to the instructors. And these were a very important part of their compensation. But the supplementary rations was really a most important factor in the students' well-being and their interest in continuing the work. You know, already, late in '47, I suppose it was, we were getting visiting delegations from countries considering opening immigration to DPs. Canada and Australia were particularly interested and open. The people in the camps knew that when they were interviewed as candidates, to be able to say they had a skill or show they had a skill or show a diploma of proficiency was a very important element in their being accepted. So that was one of our big inducements. And

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these other things, the rations and cigarettes, were perhaps as important.

Q: What did you think was your biggest challenge?

A: I don't know whether this is challenge, but my greatest difficulty was, in a way, mediating between the Americans and the Europeans. This had nothing to do with the training operations in Germany. But it involved all sorts of things periodic meetings in Geneva and Paris; flying back in mid-winter to New York for a critical meeting when the American ORT was ready to cut off transfers of funds to our Geneva and Paris offices and wanted me to be the hatchet man, and serve as the president's deputy and do the money control myself, which I refused to do. But that was a very trying and tense and distasteful part of the job; but unavoidable.

Q: Did you have a sense that the European ORT program and the US or the camps in various zones were administered differently?

A: I don't get your question.

Q: Well, I am wondering if, for example, in the British zone, where clearly there was more of a different kind of interest in Palestine and in training and all of that, whether they allowed the same amount of democracy and choice as in the US Zone, where I think we were much more eager to prepare people for Palestine?

A: Who's we?

Q: The U.S.; the American ORT; no?

A: No. I don't think the American ORT people the Board, were hot Zionists, no.

Q: I just thought maybe that the British-run camp might have a different interest. But maybe

not.

A: There weren't enough of them to have significance from a policy point of view anyway.

Q: Did any of this bickering between European and the Americans ORT organizations translate into the vocational program? Did they affect that at all?

A: Not in terribly significant ways, but one instance that come to mind was, not long after I had been there, I had put the whole organization to work to develop a list of requirements, how many of this, that and the other machines do you need in your school, in your district, in the Zone? And this was a painstaking operation in which the whole organization participated. And when it was done and I had reviewed and I done some pruning, I went to Geneva for a meeting with Dr. Singelovsky and Dr. Lubovitch, and we arrived at an understanding of how much this thing would cost -- his engineers there did the estimating -- and who would what. Singelovsky undertook to do a significant part of the procurement. Well, it turned out months later he hadn't done a damned thing about that part of the procurement. Well that was an effect; that affected the pace and progress of the work. But he was not a killer diller.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: What was the general philosophy behind the ORT training in the DP camps?

A: You're confident there must have been one?

Q: Wondering?

A: Well, you know the ORT got founded originally in response to a widespread belief that the Jew was a Luftmensch you know; an air person, feet off the ground, not a down-to-earth, productive person. And in a way the thought was, through acquiring a skill and being an artisan, the Jew would demonstrate that this was a canard; it was not true. He was normal like everybody else. In Germany, I don't know how much philosophy there was. There was job to done. There were these people who were there waiting for a chance to emigrate who were idle; who had to have some constructive occupation. It was natural place and setting for Olaseky to undertake what he did. It was natural for the ORTs to see a great challenge and opportunity to go in there and make a real program out of it. He could not have gone very far by himself without the means. But I don't know that this adds to a philosophy. Opportunity, obligation, community. There was great sympathy in this country for the people for the people in the DP camps, you know. And you know, you don't give a man fish; you give a rod and line and teach him how to fish to support himself.

Q: How large of an effort was the ORT operation at DP camps?

A: We got up to something like ninety training instillations; something like ten or eleven thousand students/enrollees; and something like a thousand employees, of whom about seven hundred would have been instructors and the others would be support staff of one kind or another. And I think that's about where it peaked. When I came in early in '47, we had in the U.S. Zone about forty-five hundred people -- enrollees; and four hundred-odd staff. But it was growing very rapidly, and by the

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end of the year it was up to eight thousand students and seven hundred-odd staff. I think, you know, for the first year, the people, the DP's, didn't really know what was happening and what was likely to happen. But then it became obvious that immigration was not going to be tomorrow; and it soon became obvious that they would need a skill or demonstrable skill. That would be important factor in their being accepted for emigration. So this is why they started coming in in much larger numbers. And --

Q: Were the courses specific to any particular country or destination?

A: No, no. They had no way of knowing where they were going. Remember in '47, this was

before the creation of the state. It was still Palestine, and the Brits were still very, very restrictive on admitting immigrants. Also sorts of tragic incidents of which you know.

Q: Did the immigration authorities you would work with from time to time, they were looking for --

A: I had no occasion to --

Q: -- metalworkers?

A: I had no occasion to --

Q: You said they were coming through from --

A: Yes, they were; they were. And they visiting camps and interviewing people. And I don't -- I don't know that -- that say, Australia or Canada at any given time had in mind a concentration on metalworkers or machinists or what have you. They were looking people, though, who could become productive and self-sustaining.

Q: What kind of courses were given?

A: I showed you that long list you know.

Q: Well, give me a since of the range.

A: Well, metalworking, carpentry, woodworking, mechanics, radio mechanics, electricians, dressmaking and millinery. We had some in dental assistance.

Q: How do you -- how did people -- how did the organizations decide what sorts of courses to offer; was there any plan?

A: No. It was opportunistic in terms of the skills that were found there among the DP's. People who would be competent to transmit a skill. And so that became the basis for a course.

02:09:

Now, there is something else I didn't say earlier and is an important element here: '46, '47, '48, people wanted to get out. They wanted a chance to immigrate. If you offered a course, let's say, that would be a two-year course of training in something, no customers; one-year course, no customers; three months, yes. So you'd start off with a three-month course in metalwork. When that was concluded and nothing had happen on the immigration front, you organized a sequel to it, another three months. And that was how -- but they were all short courses. They had to be; that was the psychology. People would

not commit themselves, couldn't commit themselves to a more prolonged stay when they didn't -- that was not what they wanted.

Q: Could people choose whatever course -- whatever kind of study they wanted?

A: Yes. Yes. If it was being offered, if there was an instructor to give it and there was room.

Q: And were the opportunities different for men and women?

A: Well, they'd be different -- different courses of study, but the opportunity were there for everyone. Helena Volcalvich (ph.) who subsequently became Helena Olaseky, she was in charge of all the women's courses. She is an admirable, highly competent, attractive woman and she did a great job.

Q: So there women courses?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: But all programs would have been open to anybody who --

A: Yeah, but I don't think we had men going for dressmaking or millinery; and we had very few girls signing up for woodworking or metalworking. Auto mechanics, that was what I didn't mention before that was quit popular.

Q: Was there any effort to meet educational standards or anything like that?

A: That was coming in later ,say toward the end of '48 and then in '49, it became -- it became -- it raised standards to a degree that impressed Franklin Keller, who had been a long-time principal of a vocational training high school in New York City and who is there as a specialist for the Army, and our French Dr. Frankel who had a life time of experience in vocational training. They were much impressed with the level that had been achieved. But it happen very quickly.

Q: Who did most of the teaching in the training?

02:13:

A: DP's. DP's who had been artisans, craftsmen; very few had been pedagogues. But in some of the more recent technologies like radio mechanics, electricians, we didn't have very many among them the DP population and we hired Germans.

Q: Did that work out pretty well?

A: Well, it apparently it worked all right. It jolted me when I first got exposed to it; I

couldn't -- I think I mentioned to this to you on the way here: When I was taken for the first time introduced to a German instructor and he held out his hand, I couldn't take it. But my host, Jacob Olaseky, who had been liberated in Landsberg, he had no problem fraternizing. Another time I didn't mention this earlier, we had been out on the road and it was time to stop for meal, and Olaseky and I went in to eat, he invited the driver to come with us, the driver who was a German?

Q: Did you think that that was indicative of the general attitude_?

A: I didn't know. I don't think it was general. I told you another story of a very different kind of Gordon who wanted me let him to qualify to drive truck, because he wanted to find a crowd of Germans and run the truck over them. So the feelings

02:15:

were mixed to the individual.

Q: What about training facilities; where were all these installations?

A: Well, they were in camps or in the residential community where the DP's gathered in the given town, and there was always a camp committee, and the camp had to allocate space. And some were more generous, some were more desirous of helping and doing everything they could; and others were not so interested and not so benign in the facilities they provided; but that is how it went.

Q: Did you ever need to coordinate with or use German facilities?

A: Not to my knowledge, but I would not have been involved with that sort of thing very much.

Q: Or what about programs at German factories, anything like that?

A: No. I know about those only as they were described to me, but I -- I never found time to go and see one of those things in operation.

Q: But just for the record, there was training in German factories?

A: I don't know if you'd call it training. It was the equivalent. What happen was that often, our people in their institutions didn't have the materials necessary for the training; and these would be consumables like textiles, for instance. If you're going to make dresses, you need yardage. But if you don't have the goods, then what do your kids do? And sometimes in a class, you have a one sewing machine and 15 pupils. This was early on. So improvising, our people at the headquarters made arrangements occasionally for some of our students to work in a factory as juniors or assistants or whatever, so they would get

some training that way. But this is really learning by doing, more -- vocational training is learning by doing anyway, but a -- taking part in a production process would not develop an artisan, it would train in a particular

02:18:

operation rather than a general skill.

Q: Were there efforts to provide psychological support or social services as well at some of the vocational school?

A: I brought in one guy from the States who had taken a doctorate in guidance. And I thought he could make a real difference and I thought we needed such a person. But there was an unhappy outcome there. He hadn't been very long on the spot in Munich when it was reported to me that he was in trouble. He had been to Switzerland and he was caught at the borders smuggling silver ingot. So I had no recourse; I had to put him on the next train to Paris. I had to get him out of there or otherwise he would have gone to jail. That was the end of vocational guidance specialist program.

Q: A lot of these displaced persons needed all kinds of counseling and psychological support, doctors?

A: Well, maybe they did, but I don't think they got it from the ORT in any formal way. It would've been truly incidental to the major activity.

Q: Would you say that the real enthusiasm for the training is

02:20:15

being given?

A: I don't know how to answer that. I visited a certain number of schools and training operations briefly. I found them busy, active. I think the trainees were interested in what they were doing. I think they found it valuable. I think their instructors were doing there best to be helpful. But when you ask about enthusiasm, I don't know -- I don't know how to answer that. These people have been, I think, too recently bruised to be very enthusiastic about anything, including life.

Q: There was a commitment to --

A: There was a future. They knew that. That was their objective: To qualify for and make possible the future. I don't think "enthusiasm" is the right word.

Q: Do you think that the operation was largely successful, from your experience; from what

you saw?

A: Of course. Of course. It was very, very far from perfect. It was certainly less than ideal, but considering the circumstances, the difficulties, the obstacles and everything else that went with the beast, I think one could take satisfaction in the accomplishment.

Q: Were there certain programs that were more successful than others, in terms of job skills or...?

A: I don't know how to answer that.

Q: The DP's, themselves, who seemed to enroll in these courses?

02:23:

Is there any demographic breakdown to that?

A: By demographic breakdown, you mean age groups, for example, sex?

Q: Age, sex, yes.

A: Well, I suppose mostly youngish people and young people. As many women as men, surely. Some youngsters and a few older people. It was a mixed --

Q: Did a lot of these people come with prior job skills?

A: Well, the younger ones would not have had many job skills. They wouldn't have had the opportunity to develop them. The job skills were among our instructors.

Q: What was general morale like in the camps?

A: I think it varied. It varied with the same people from month to month. You know, it wasn't -- I told you that there were an awful lot of big bellies among the women because, it seemed, after experiencing all that death and observing all that death and losing so much family, everyone wanted to produce a baby. And the women were getting pregnant as fast as they could

02:25:25

and hoping.

Q: Did that pose any special problems or challenges?

A: You mean the pregnancies? No. That was very welcomed. It was a sign of health and

invigoration in what had been a horrible down, you know. And the women who had already produced a young one were so happy and doted on them and --

Q: Was this more of a thing the camp administration had to deal with?

A: Well, I think, in terms of camp administrations, I imagine there was quite a disparity of manner, quality, interests, humanity; and adressed it very much with the individual commander how those things were done.

Q: Were there a few camps that you spent most of your time at?

A: No, I was based in Munich. And as it turned out, I soon became involved in a triangular run from Munich to Geneva or Zurich to Paris; because that inner conflict within the ORT, by 1948, I hadn't been there quite a year, the Americans insisted that as part of the solution to that organization or crisis, or so they conceived it, that I be designated as Secretary General of the World ORT Union. So I had to take that on on top of, you know, Germany; and it meant that I had to spend a certain amount of time at the Paris headquarters and I had to spend a certain amount of time in Geneva back when it was in Singelovsky. I didn't -- I didn't really give the DP operation the full attention it needed, because I didn't -- I had these other things thrust on top of it.

Q: _____

A: I don't recollect talking about a rift. When the State was inaugurated, early in '48, the Jewish Agency from Palestine, the Sochnut, became very active in organizing an Alyah and they did the rounds of the camps -- and the response was very strong; it was very good. Because immigration to other countries had not really opened up in a big, significant way. So it was clear that

02:29:

most of the DPs would be finding their way to Israel. And so that became the point of concentration. And because of that, you know, I started, without authorization, shipping machine equipment to Israel so it would be there when people got there, and we could have the training operation essentially shift. And that's what did happen.

Q: How were you able to do that?

A: (Laughs) We loaded the machinery on ships and sent it.

Q: It was that simple?

A: Well, more or less. I had a -- I had a very good supply man who made the arrangements. I think, actually, our stuff went by rail through Italy, and was put on board ship there.

Q: This was all through ORT channels?

A: No. I think -- well, we were ORT, weren't we? Singelovsky opposed this. He did not see a future for ORT in Israel. He thought the future of ORT was in East Germany. And when he learned that I had already initiated this program of shipping are machines to Israel, he had me called to a meeting of the executive committee in Geneva, and put me on the carpet for this unauthorized action, which I naturally defended. And the decision of that committee at the end of the meeting -- and these were his people -- I mean, his -- Swiss and other French and other friends who are on the executive -- the end of that meeting, the upshot was he was instructed to go to Israel and start the work there. He didn't win that one.

Q: How important were the ORT activities there in terms of providing a base for future Israel?

A: Well, this a question that's germane to the DP operation.

02:32:

It's not germane to the very scanty training there was in the U.K. or the somewhat larger training that took place in France. It was -- or Holland or Belgium. It was the DP population. And there it was most significant, because here came large numbers of skilled artisans who were the instructors and administrators, and trainees, who had developed from minimum to pretty decent skills in their chosen occupations. And then, of course, the training got underway very quickly in Israel, because the ORT operation grew rapidly, because Olaseky went there. And this man was a dynamo. Actually, he's the man who saved the ORT. And so whereas Lubovitch and Singelovsky and Boodine all thought that they were ORT, he was really the ORT. He was the heart and the soul and the dynamo. And I ended up loving this guy. He's a marvelous person. But you know what he told me once, though? It's very distressing. He said, "Louie, the best people in the camps did not survive. We who survived were not the best people." And you know what he meant? The people who stole other people's rations, you know, who really managed at the expense of others. And the abnegating, the gentle, the kind, the good; they're the ones who did not survive. And he felt this very, very strongly.

Q: What made him so effective?

A: Imagination, energy, creativity. It's hard to describe. One of the things I gave to the museum a few years ago was a book about him that was done after his death which is composed largely of testimonials of any number of people; a small one from me. And so they show a number of facets of this man. But just -- just bursting with energy and creativity.

Q: Now, we're talking about the role of the DPs and the training in Europe and providing a foundation for Israel. Is there anything more that you want to add there?

A: No. I think that's -- that's the -- that's an element which I think is significant, that made a significant contribution to the early growth of the State, helped provide a foundation for its economy and enabled the newcomers to contribute to the building of the State. And maybe the most important thing that came out of the DP experience was that contribution.

Q: _____

A: And I'm not sure I want to inflict them.

Q: _____

A: But I must tell you my experience with the ORT was my first experience with a Jewish organization. And I had a subsequent one with the World Jewish Congress, another connection. And I thought, among the so-called leadership -- not only the triumvirate whose names came up so often earlier -- but, you know, members of the executive, members of the leadership ranks; a good deal of the motivation was that of personal ego, rather than, you know, the desire to do a good work. And this is not very --

Q: How's it going?

A: Well --

Q: _____

A: What's, you know -- that --

Q: Maybe you can address it?_____

A: No. It's a reflection, that's all. But it's the human condition too, maybe.

Q: How do you personally feel about going over there as a Jew and the work that you were able to accomplish, or what you saw?

A: I felt very good about it. I was grateful for the opportunity to do it. It didn't turn out to be unalloyed pleasure, as I've indicated more than once. But I thought it was an opportunity to render service; and I was glad to do it, thankful for the opportunity. Some years -- many years later, World Jewish Congress created an International Economic and Social Commission to try to anticipate some of the results of the desired peace in the Middle East. We became really an inquiry into the status of the issues facing world Jewry and, particularly, Israel to the Diaspor

A: And I had a wonderful

02:41:30

commission, some great people on it. But I had to carry the ball. And I was very grateful for the opportunity to do that.

Q: When you went over to Europe in '47, and you took a look at the situation -- not just the ORT situation, but the general DP situation, was it -- was it what you expected?

A: No. Because it was so personalized. You know, it wasn't ORT. It was Olaseky, it was Lubovitch, it was Singalovsky, it was Boudine, it was clashes, it was this, it was that. So -- it really took one off -- you know, the golfer says you come off the shot. Do you play golf?

Q: A little bit. _____

A: Well, you come off the shot, and you spoil it. But it's lifting your body away instead of going through. Well, in any activity, there's a danger of coming off the shot. And there was a lot there to take you off the real shot, which was the DP training operation.

End of Tape #2
Conclusion of Interview