

Kindertransport Association Oral History Project
Speech by
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KEY:

- [brackets] describe action in the interview
- *Italics* indicates a word in a foreign language, spelled correctly
- {italics in bracket} indicates a word in a foreign language that may be incorrect
- {brackets} indicate indecipherable words

[FILE: 99_ROK_B_4_LadyJacobvits_6_16_99]

[Man introduces Lady Jacobovits to comment on "Faith." Applause.]

Lady Jacobovits: I'm called, as he said, to comment on my faith. I thought it was sweet when Bertha asked me to comment on faith when I cannot even pronounce it [laughter]. I think you all know what I mean when I say "{indecipherable word} Faith."

I called on it this morning when I had a phone call from Dr. {Rothman} about quarter past 8. She told me: "I couldn't reach you the last few days and we must meet at {indecipherable word} at half past 9. Mr. {Strausberg} needs to have a meeting with us." I don't know how many of you know where Hendon is, but at that time it usually takes about an hour and a quarter, which I had allowed myself to get here. But I had to be here at 9:30. And I drive. It's the quickest way for me. And I called to my faith. And I said to my faith: just don't let me down. Because if there's anyone I respect deeply and cannot give myself a bad name in front of, it's Elizabeth Strausberg. And you know what? I got here long before her. [laughter and applause]

Faith. I'm not a Kind. But many, many, many of my family are and certainly among my very close friends. I even have a cousin here. And Mrs. Munk, my maiden name is Munk, she came all the way to tell me she {wanted to be with us} this morning. I was here yesterday. And I'm here today with you. And I'm totally, totally emotionally involved. Overwhelmed. The warmth of the {German word} and being all together, all of us, is something which is quite miraculous. And therein lies in itself is the faith, this mystique given particularly to us: Jewish people.

I myself am the daughter of Franz Munk, who was born in Paris in 1900, but lost his mother when he was very young and therefore was sent as an orphan to Switzerland to an aunt who became very ill, and then was sent to an orphanage in Germany. Then at the age at 17, and his younger brother at the age of 18, decided it was time to get out of that awful place {indecipherable word}. And that is when my father decided to go into rabbinical seminary. And my uncle, Felix Munk, decided

to go into chemistry and became a doctor of chemistry and research and went on Aliyah in 1933. My mother was born in Nuremberg to {indecipherable word}, who was a president of the main community in Nuremberg for over 30 years.

My father brought us up in French. We always spoke French at home. We went back, miraculously, to France in 1936, when my father was called to come back to the rabbinical community in which he was born. They wanted him back from Germany as their rabbi and he went. At home, we always spoke French. {German phrase}. [Laughter]. Too often for my liking.

My father was called into the army because, as I mentioned to you, he was born French, but he already was the father of four children, therefore he was not called to the front. In 1939, he was called as white-collar worker. When the Nazis came closer— When Germany came closer to France, we, with many thousands and thousands and thousands of French people, tried to escape and managed to escape at the very last wagon, in the very last coach which left Paris before the first few— because Paris wasn't very bombed—before the first few bombs fell on Paris.

My mother had given birth to a little tiny girl just before that. She was 3 months old. And because Mother was desperately nervous—she was a very, very wonderful mother with an enormous amount of joie de vivre—but only when her husband was with her. When her husband was not, she became a very nervous young mother. And the baby could have grown—the fetus was in perfect health, but it didn't grow—and it was born a tiny thing. 3 pounds only. {indecipherable word} in the incubator. She came home from the clinic and {indecipherable word} for the first time. I was at that time just 10. I remember her being absolutely covered in top to toe in bed sheets. But she survived and she's a very strong little lady with a large family.

We escaped with that train.

And of course, there's no time whatsoever. None of us can tell the whole story. Not even in a day, not even in a three-day conference can each of us tell because of each of our stories spans over many, many, many years. And when I'm invited anywhere to speak, I might speak on my own particular private life, what happened to me, I can never understand how I am expected to speak about it in half an hour. So of course, I will not even try, because it will take—like every one of you, it would take to tell your story—it will take a long, long time. Many hours. Many days. Many nights. We all perpetually have this in our souls. In our hearts, in our minds. And once in a while, I must admit, that I'm very, very grateful to my {indecipherable word}, particularly in the schools, particularly the youngsters, even the ones who are not Jewish, who so much want to know what actually happened to us. What actually happened to us is a feeble attempt to us individually.

Occasionally, I'm very grateful to be asked, because even though like every one of you, I think about it day in and day out, moment in, moment out, there's a very big question mark: how is it that I am alive and 6 million are not? What does that mean? What is actually expected from me—not only by God, but by fellow man—to do because he kept me alive? It's with me all the time. I think of it all the time, whether I hear myself speak about it all the time. When I hear myself speak about it, then the depths of my gratitude, plus not understanding, is much deeper to the Almighty than I do when I think about it quietly on my own.

But this is not the place to tell you the details of my own story, my wonderful family story. Let me just jump really quickly. {indecipherable word} At that time, into {indecipherable word} and then to get to Marseilles— The whole story, like all of us who are here to tell the story, in one way or another. We met again in Nice because my father was discharged from the army. And my father at that point had gotten ration cards and was able to keep his family, to a certain, extent, at least alive.

What was food at that time? A little bit of milk, which I managed to get on the ration cards on the family. I was the sent because I was the eldest and the daughter. To {load shoes} three times a week to bring home a kilo of mushrooms. I can't understand why I like mushrooms; I love mushrooms. But I used to stand 3 hours—from 3 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock in the morning—to get one kilo of mushrooms, which at that time was so precious! My mother would be able to sell them on the black market and buy another pint of milk for her family. That's how precious these mushrooms were. And people loved to buy them even though there's no nourishment in it. But it felt like a tiny bit of luxury. So we sold them away on black market.

I was sent twice a week to a factory outside Nice, where I saw the bread which we consumed being made of sawdust and water. And my father explained that although this is not {indecipherable word} in the traditional {indecipherable word} way, we will {indecipherable word} over a piece of bread made of sawdust and water.

One day, my mother felt very ill. Very ill. There was no way that we could go to a doctor. At that point, as well, the Vichy government—the Nazis had already tried to occupy France and they took over the whole occupation of France, because they felt that the {indecipherable word} were too kind. And then this became very, very dangerous. Very dangerous. And they couldn't even call a doctor because you didn't want anyone to know that you were Jewish. Whoever you could hide from—being Jewish, you didn't turn to. In any case, there was no money. And day after day after day, my mother felt worse. And day after day, she grew and she grew and she grew. Low and behold, a family from Belgium, refugees from Belgium suddenly arrived in Nice. And one of them, the head of the family, was a doctor. My father asked him if he would be kind enough to look in on my mother. And he

did. And he said, "I don't know whether this is good news or bad news for you, but Madam Munk, you're expecting a baby." [laughter]

And my parents' friends laughed. As mother grew bigger and bigger, and more and more ill, everybody laughed at my mother. Everybody laughed like they used to laugh at Abraham and Saul: What's the baby going to do? Are you out of your mind? People are being arrested, people are being sent to camps, we don't know anything what's happening to us, when we get up in the morning—by lunch time, by evening time. If you go in bed, you don't know if you're going to be pulled out by Nazis in the middle of the night, and you go and expect a baby? What's the matter with you people? Are mad? What's the matter? Instead of crying, we laugh instead. It's good news.

I came home one afternoon and I had seen something which I had not seen for a very, very long time and that was twins. And I come home and I said to my mother sitting on one of the two beds, which my parents had— We had no chairs; we had a table and two double beds. We were, at that time, very fortunate. And my parents. And I sat on the side of the bed by my mother and I said, "Mamon! Guess what? I saw twins today!" I hadn't seen such a thing. I don't think I'd ever seen twins. "They're gorgeous! Just imagine you had twins!" And she gave me a punch in the face. [laughter] And she said, "Amelie, what is the matter with you? Just get out of my way. We have so many taunts, we have so much to worry about and you come along and suggest its twins?! Get out of my way!"

The next morning, at 6:30 in the morning, my father came and woke me up and said, "We need to take mother to the hospital." I said, "Which hospital? We are not registered? Where are you going to?" I was only just about 11, but at that time, we 11-year-olds— I'm now {indecipherable word}. One of my very closest friends in the whole world, said, "You don't look like you came back from the {indecipherable phrases}. That's what you look like." I said, "I'm an old lady. I've been married 50 years, but at that time, I was 11 and I knew everything."

So I said to my father, "Where are you taking her to? At the hospital, you have to register." So he said, "There's no such thing. Going to the hospital with a woman who is going to have a baby, they won't refuse you even, if you see that we're Jewish. Even if they know that we're Jewish, they will not be cruel enough." And then he went off in a little bicycle, with a little pull back in the back of the bicycle which takes you along. He went up to the first hospital that he could find and of course they took mother in.

When I came back, tried to get a little bit of extra milk with Francoise by my hand, I saw my father sitting at 9:30 in the morning on one of the beds. I said, "Papa! You're back already! What's the matter? How's mama?" "Fine. She's well. She's wonderful and she's fine. And so is the baby." So I said, "Why don't you look absolutely happy? What is the matter? Are they both really fine?" And he said,

“Yes.” And I said, “What is it: a girl or a boy?” He said, “It’s a girl.” So I said, “Why aren’t you completely happy? It’s wonderful! It’s wonderful!” At the age of 11, I myself, didn’t quite realize the terrible, terrible dangers. I knew we lived in difficult times, but I didn’t realize the terrible dangers in which we lived. And then he said, “And it’s also a boy.” I said, “What? You just said it was a girl.” He said, “No, it’s twins!” I said, “What?! Is it because I said it? Because I made that silly remark last night? Almighty! Fate is fate.” There’s a limit. There’s a limit.]

My mother had twins. Each weighed perfectly 6 pounds each. 6 pounds each. Without that food, she’d actually— You imagine. You feed children. You feed women today who are expecting babies with good, nourishing food. A fetus will take from the mother whatever it needs, regardless of whatever the mother takes in. If it’s a healthy fetus, and all of the organs are right, the fetus will take what it needs regardless of what the mother actually consumes.

A few months later, and it’s again too long to tell you, we found out, miraculously— Isn’t it so with each one of you that if we’re here to tell the story, we are a miracle? Which we do not understand. It’s beyond rationality! Why are we here? But every one of us is a miracle by being here. It is a miracle.

We heard by a miracle that we were going to be arrested two days later. Somebody came to tell my father. That night, I found out, but no he didn’t tell his wife. He never told his wife anything of coming danger until much, much, much later. He disappeared that night and mother, of course, was absolutely sure that he would never come back again. He was taken on the streets or something like that. On Tuesday morning, somebody knocked on the door and Francoise opened the door and there was a man standing there and she said, “Mamon, there is a gentleman here who wants to see you.” And Mamon went to the door and it was my father. Francoise didn’t recognize him because he had gone that night to the Marquis and his whole appearance was changed, so that no one should recognize him because we were going to escape. So we were no longer Munk, we were Martine, family Martine with all the kids.

We tried, we tried to escape into Switzerland. I was of course like, like each one of you, to tell my story completely. But I cannot take that time.

We finally left on Wednesday morning, hidden from everything and anything. And tried to get to a farm, which the Marquis had told us we had to get to and they would help us to get over the border. We turned up, miraculously, every one of us in different directions, but we all turned up. Leaving Wednesday morning and arriving at the farm on Thursday night. But the Marquis wasn’t there, they weren’t there! And without them, there was no way that we could find the border. So we had to go back because it was Erev Shabbat. And my father, in his enormous debt of the Torah, was not going to do something on Shabbat which he wasn’t going to be absolutely sure was going to save his life. So he decided to take his family back

to Toulouse. And in Toulouse, miraculously found new helpers who on Sunday told us, "Meet at the farmhouse." And we met at the farmhouse. And I'm jumping a lot of very, very tense times. And we met at the farm.

It was Erev Rosh Hashanah, 1942. And they told us that they were going to take us over the border, to the rest of their group. It was now quarter to twelve. So they took the twins, who were then 13 months old and my mother was still feeding them because she had nothing else to give them, on his back. And we walked to the border. And we arrived in the middle of the night, it was about five to twelve. Suddenly they disappeared. And as somebody said before, you did not trust yourself by saying one word to anybody. Not only because you might put yourself into danger, but because you might put everybody else into danger. You didn't trust any human being, not even yourself. And they said, "We're going to come back." And we did not trust them. We didn't think that they would come back. But, they did come back, after what seemed an eternity. They told us that a hundred yards away from us, they had cut a hole into the barbed wire and if we find that hole, and get through that hole, each of us, if we can make it through the hole, then we come down a hill and we'll be free. And they disappeared.

They took their guns out. They took away everything they could find. There was nothing to find anymore. They were hoping—and you all know that—they were looking for golden teeth in my parents' mouths; they couldn't find any golden tooth. My mother's wedding ring, ration cards, passports, whatever. And then they disappeared. They had taken away something which none of us—I do not know a single human being, the wealthiest amongst my friends have today, possesses today something as precious as the matchbox which they took away from my parents that night. Nobody in the world has ever possessed anything so precious. And they took away that matchbox. And they left.

We made our way through the hole in that barbed wire and we all kind of walked down that hill. My mother rolled down the hill. The twins rolled down the hill; they were 13 months old. And at the bottom there was something which they hadn't told us—and I'm trying to tell you the story as quickly as possible—there was a river. At the bottom, there was a river. The matches had gone and we had no light. It was midnight and there was no way we could negotiate that river. My mother couldn't swim. The twins were too young. We could not negotiate that river. We did not know how deep it was and how wide it was. We couldn't negotiate that river.

And then, my mother was very happy and she kept saying, "But they said we were free! At the bottom of the hill, they said we were free!" But I felt that my father had never, never, never been so tense in his life and I knew we were at that moment in the greatest danger ever, ever, ever. When I saw the light inside the night and the light went off, I said, "Daddy, there is a light over there." I was lying on the grass. And he put his hand on my mouth. And my little brother Max, the twin, started crying like he had never, never cried in his life. A placid, happy child. Never cried

before as he did that night. My mother tried to feed him and tried to sing with him, anything to try to keep quiet, and he wouldn't.

The light had gone off. And the baby still cried. Then suddenly, the light came on again and I could have sworn it was closer to me. This went on for what seemed to be an eternity. As I speak about it now, it seems like an eternity. Then suddenly something very heavy fell on top of me and the baby was still crying desperately. And it was a man who put out his torch and who whispered to my father, "Look at my uniform. I'm a Swiss soldier. I'm a Swiss soldier. Let me have that baby." And he took the baby. And he took the baby twin sister. And he said, "Follow me." And we followed him through the river, which didn't turn out to be very deep nor very wide, and we walked up the other side of the hill, which was very similar, and we came onto the main road.

That man said to my father, to my parents, "I am the father of a large family. I was enlisted as a soldier. I could not bear hearing the baby crying. And I asked the permission from my commander-in-chief, at the cost of my life, to come over into no-man's-land to take that baby and to rescue that baby. Never forget. Never forget that had it not been for the crying of that baby, at midnight, now— The Germans are coming around with their dogs and they would have found every one of you, had the baby not cried." And that was the baby which everybody laughed at when my mother expected it!

How do we explain? Faith is something which begins after rationality. Faith has no reason. Faith is a part of every one of us, every human being. There was a lovely lady who I met upstairs as I came into the hall today. And she said to me, "You're speaking about faith, Lady J. Mine was gone a long time ago." And then she told me that she had a husband who has had heart attacks and who, thank God, is alive. And she said, "I am so lucky. I am so lucky he's with me. He's alive." So I said to her, "That is faith. That is faith!"

Faith cannot actually be explained. And I challenge anyone—the greatest of our {word in Hebrew}, the greatest of our philosophers, the greatest of our thinkers—to explain to anyone, to any human being, faith. What is faith? Faith is that actual divine spark which no human being can explain, but which every human being has in him or her. Each of us—every man, every woman, every child—is born with that extra dimension: faith. Faith.

I have a very dear friend from France who has gone through every single misery you could possibly imagine. Everything. Everything. And she once said to my husband the Rabbi, she once said to him, "Rabbi, you know what? I never argue with the Almighty." And she's not literally a religious Jewess. She's Jewish. And she's religious in my eyes, much more religious than I can be, hard as I try. She said to my husband, "Rabbi, I never argue with the Almighty about any of the tribulations and hardship he sends my way. But I beg of him every time he sends

me something down to cope with to give me the strength to see it through as he expects me to.” And she’s not literally a religious person. That is faith. You cannot explain it. It is a mystique. It is a mystique.

When we, my father, used his Tehillim, little black book, when we tried to get over the border to be free from the Germans. A little black book.

And Natan Sharansky was with us after he came back from Siberia. A couple of weeks after he came up, he spent Friday night with us at our table, here at 85 Huntington Terrace. And I said to Natan, “You know Natan, we all know about the Tehillim, about the psalm book, which your wife had given you before you were arrested. My father used exactly the same psalm book, the same Tehillim, to try for us to escape and to get free as you used in Siberia. Now isn’t that amazing?” That is the divine shape which no human force in the world can ever cut off. It is something which is a mystique. I cannot—Nobody can explain what is this mystique. Natan Sharansky in Siberia. The Martine family Munk in France trying to escape from the Germans many many years before that. What is this? What is this tremendous faith?

I want to only mention two more things before I end. I know you want to have question and answers. The word *yizkor*, which we use as a memorial prayer for the dead, is always mentioned in the Torah in relation— in connection with life. The first time it is used, after the flood, when it says “And God remembered Noah. He remembered him for life, to give him life. He remembered him for what was the future.” The second time it is mentioned is with Sodom and Gomorrah, when God decided to destroy because people were so evil. *Yizkor* {indecipherable word, in Hebrew} who remembered for Life. Again, for life. And then again it is mentioned with Rachel, when she cried out, she cried out to the Almighty and said, “Give me children, or else! I will be dead. Give me children or else I will be my death.” And the Almighty remembered Rachel. For life! *Yizkor* is never mentioned for the dead, but it is mentioned for life in that we should carry on, as the example of which we have had in the past for the future. The Talmud never mentioned it for the past, always mentions it for the future.

I want to end up by saying that my greatest {Hebrew phrase}, except, of course, for the enormous gift that the Almighty has given me, for the enormous gift that all of us have received by just being alive, by promising myself every day that I’ll try desperately to do better tomorrow than I tried to do today, and hopefully do a little bit better today than I did yesterday. My great faith, my great consolation, is that people of not my faith—religious faith—like people like Dr. Maxwell, and the Smiths and all the students in non-Jewish schools who want to hear from me what has happened: how did you keep your faith? That they should give their lives— That they should give their entire lives to somehow explain what has happened. How can human beings be so cruel to other human beings, as we keep on seeing on our television screen day after day at this moment in time. What is this cruelty in every

human being? That cruelty in so many of us when we get together as a group? We become like wolves as a group. Individually, they're great, wonderful people. My prayer is that because of this many—you know many and I know many—outstanding human beings—outstanding human beings!—who have ever kind of quality of mind and of heart which I envy and which I would love to have because of the merit of these individuals—and so many of them here in this hall. Because of the merit of these individuals, what has happened in the past will never happen again. That if the Almighty sees us trying hard enough to do the right thing, to be tolerant to each other—never mind our beliefs! Just be tolerant and try to understand someone else's beliefs. You don't have to take it on. Just be tolerant. Listen. *Shema!* It doesn't say {Hebrew word} Israel, it doesn't say {Hebrew words} Israel! It says *Shema Israel*. Listen, Israel! If we would only learn to do that. And if the Almighty can see us doing that that, praise God, we should meet year, after year in the Kingdom. Their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren, mine included, in a world of perfect *Shalom*. Peace.

[applause]

Interviewer: Now we're moving on to the historian Leon Feuchtwanger.

Leon: – as an independent fraction of the Germans, making it the second largest party. In between, there were clear signals in {indecipherable word} and local elections of the rapid rise of the Nazi party. This experience, traumatic for contemporaries, and almost unprecedented in the annals of democratic election, convinced the makers of the Bonn Constitution after 1945 to impose the 5% barrier. It was a direct lesson learned, for good or evil. You know— I take it everybody knows what the 5% barrier is: in the German present electoral system, you've got to have least 5% of the vote to get any seats, or 3 % of— This is a barrier interposed and a lot of electoral reformers and people who busy themselves with electoral systems of course now think that these are important things to do. Reasonable things to do.

It is, however, by no means certain that the existence of such a barrier in the Weimar Constitution would really have halted the rise of Hitler. His party would not have been represented in the Reichstag before 1917, and Goebbels could not have gloried in the fact that the parliamentary criminal {indecipherable word} after 12 Nazi members were being used to undermine democracy at its own expense. He thought that was marvelous, the sort of thing that appeared to Goebbels warped sense of humor. These people who had liberal expenses and so on were actually using them to undermine the democratic system.

But all this is not, really, I feel, crucial to the course of events. Precisely, it was the fact that large segments of the German population were vulnerable to the Nazi appeal and that Hitler and his minions effectively exploited this vulnerability. This

raises the question whether the judicial process could have been more effectively used to halt the Nazis. As is well known, the Weimar judicial law tended to turn a blind eye to the violence of the Right and was {persistent} in prosecuting the Left. Weimar democracy leaned over backwards to allow freedom of expression to all, and the speaking ban on Hitler imposed after the Beerhall Putsch—the Putsch in Munich in 1923—had been revoked everywhere by 1927. It was a small party, so it was thought justified.

On the other hand, the efforts, mainly in Prussia, to limit the Nazi excesses by law and by judicial process should not be underestimated. It was mainly the Prussian government that was, in conferring with the police in Prussia, that did make some effort to limit the Nazi rise or put a spoke in the wheel of the Nazis anyway by judicial process. Men like Severing, who was at the time the Prussian Ministry to the Interior, Grzesinski, who was also Minister of the Interior and also Berlin Chief of Police, and Bernard Weiss, the Jewish {indecipherable word}. They did their courageous best in pivotal circumstances to be remembered.

But none of this stopped the relentless rise of the Nazis. There were, of course, many causes. I am not in any way arguing here that Hitler was a traffic accident, as is sometimes put forward. But the Great Depression—the slump of 1929—and the way it was handled in Germany {indecipherable}, was however the single most important factor in making the rise of Nazis quite so relentless after it started.

In this I regard that at least two lessons can be drawn and have on the whole been absorbed by governments. Lesson one is that a major economic breakdown such as occurred after 1929, must on all accounts be avoided—at least {indecipherable}. It's easier say than done. But on the whole, western governments are very conscious of this. They've got to be for their own good, otherwise the electorate chucks them out and they know that. The institutions of international economic cooperation have been greatly developed in the 70 years that have elapsed since that time. Remember that in the '60's, people were saying that the institutions of economic cooperation in the West are lagging behind the institutions of security or defense operations. Even in the '60's, {indecipherable}. But there wasn't quite as much in the economic sphere. I think there is more of it now.

Lesson two, and this is specifically drawn from German circumstances, is that you cannot simply afford to ignore the masses, the electorate, the democracy—call it what you will. This is more or less what Brüning did between 1930 and 1932. I don't know if you all remember Brüning, the chancellor for 2 years, which was a hell of a long time in Weimar Germany. And he ruled by decree. He was the sort of man who had been brought up in Imperial Germany and had an excessive respect for the culture of imperialism. He was a Catholic. He was a Catholic who wanted to show he was not a second-class citizen. He believed that the state and its servants were about politics; they were objective. {German phrase} was the word he always used. They ought not to be side tracked by whims of public opinion in which no

one was talking about these kinds of things. So he went doggedly on and on and feeling he was being very courageous, while the Nazi rope went up and up and up. Of course, it now looks that—and certainly almost every historian agrees—a pretty disastrous thing to have done.

Oddly enough, when the deflationary policies obstinately assumed by Brüning, who was an obstinate Westphalian, that created a desperate situation in Germany, the German elites, in blind panic, turned to Hitler because he seemed to have control of the masses. They despised the masses, but they could see you couldn't govern a modern state anymore by just ignoring the masses. And then, mistakenly of course, in utter lack of confidence, it was mainly elites, a small group of people, who then turned to Hitler because he seemed to have the mass movement behind them.

Let me turn to the international aspects about the appeasement of Hitler that has entered so deeply into the consciousness of the century, and then I'll turn to close. Hitler, with a social bargainistic outlook characteristic of him {indecipherable}, feared in 1933 that the Western powers just might launch a preemptive strike that would nip the Third Reich in the bud. Hence, his initial caution in foreign policy and the effort in putting the professions of peaceful intent, a smoke screen as he could allow, to hide his true intentions. The fact that there was no preemptive strike merely increased his contempt for the democracies and confirmed in him the view that they could be overthrown.

In 1940, when the Nazis were on the crest of the wave, Goebbels again boasted how easily the regime could have been overturned from a broad, internal stage and by now in 1940, it was, in his view, on its way to world domination. It's another example of Goebbels' schadenfraude.

From this, the lesson should be learned that evil regimes should be overthrown at the earliest possible opportunity. The longer they're left in power, the greater the cost of standing up to them. Is it, however—and this is the \$64,000 questions—realistic to expect democracies to resort to force early and is it much rather the strength of democracy the slow rise {indecipherable}? Which leads me to a few words about appeasement in the hands of the historians.

First, the {indecipherable word} of Chamberlain and his umbrella, sitting and ordering appeasement, was devastating. The famous pamphlet *Guilty Men* made my Michael Foot and published in 1940 had a powerful impact in British politics and shaped attitudes much beyond these islands for a long time to come. Among the American historians, there has been a reaction—certainly by the 1960's, for we historians live on revisions. The prevailing trend in historiography became something of an apologia of appeasement. The reasons for this reaction were that it was all too obvious why appeasement became the order of the day, and for a time enjoyed wide popular support. The structure of the international system at the time

was such that it fell mainly to Britain and British Prime Ministers and Cabinets, from MacDonald through Baldwin to Chamberlain, to oppose the dictator if there was, in fact, to be any opposition. There were many and ample reasons—from imperial overstretch to economic weakness to the perceived threat from Bolshevism—that successive British governments were slow to take up the challenge.

More recently, there has been something of a reaction against this apologetic tendency. It is all too clear that when appeasement became a fully articulated policy by the time of Chamberlain, it was based on mistaken assessments and illusions. Chamberlain might still have been driven to provocation for a time, but in fact he labored hard and energetically for accommodation with Hitler, which he mistakenly, and in the face of overwhelming evidence, thought was possible. It is quite clear from documents that he pushed on and on, as obstinate as Brüning—he came from Birmingham, Brüning came from {indecipherable}. He was not dishonorable {indecipherable}, but profoundly and above all stubbornly mistaken. Attempts by people like John {Charley} or {Allen Clark}, to rehabilitate Chamberlain and denigrate Churchill's process carry really {indecipherable}.

Where does this leave the lessons of history? It is hardly a new insight that one should not make pacts with {indecipherable} evil, the problem as ever lies in the detail and the fine print. Evil has to be recognized as a system that is effectively organized. Hitler and Nazism remain unique in their deliberate adoption of evil as their good—"Evil be thou my good." Attempts to overturn accepted values as part of a worldwide revolution, reversing much of previous history. This is my {indecipherable}. The position, of course, is rarely so clear-cut. I think those of us who were victims of Hitler's—as I'm sure most of you in this room once were—were in a sense lucky that we were the victims of something that nobody has really seriously thought to rehabilitate and that in my mind cannot be rehabilitated, as long as some of the main fundamental values of our western civilization last.

Well, I've had my say, probably too long. We have a little time for—

{Woman asks an indecipherable question}

Leon W: Well, certainly the treaty at Versailles did play a considerable role.

Well, the great problem before 1929 economically, obviously, was the great inflation of 1923.

{several women speaking, asking indecipherable questions}

Whether it would have happened without the economic difficulty—

- Man: Am I correct in assuming, when Hitler occupied the Rhineland, he was afraid that the French might move in and that they were always given that they should withdraw if the French should march. So as late as 1936, then, it would have been possible to stop him.
- Leon W: That is correct.
- Woman: Did the fact that the West was afraid of Russian communism play a factor in Chamberlain and appeasement?
- Leon W: Yes. Listen, who would deny that it was a serious dilemma? It was a factor. One of the major factors. The other one, of course, was the French were— That is why it occurred in 1936 that the French were politically in a very difficult situation with a large {indecipherable}. The British, after all, for the British something like Singapore was, in a sense, a more pressing matter than what happened at the Rhine because they had troops in Singapore, but they didn't have any troops on the Rhine. It was a mistaken assessment, but Britain was a huge imperial nation and had simultaneously opposed the Italians and the Germans and the Japanese. And it was very costly.
- Woman: Thank you for all of that in a very difficult issue for all of us. In terms of trying to understand my own family's role that got me here, today, what you have been talking about are the wide political considerations and what the politicians could have done for us and what they should be doing for us to prevent such a thing every happening again. What I find useful is to try and drop judgment because we're talking about politics and politics is about seizing power. Hitler is the supreme example of political incorrectness in that he was anti-Jewish, anti-Gypsy, anti-Communist and anti-Gay—probably anti quite a few others as well. I don't think there were many blacks in Germany those days, but he was probably against them as well. So all of us are here because of the Jewish connection, but what I'd like to suggest to this audience is that it comes down to personal responsibility and that certainly when I think of my own relatives who perished—many of them who couldn't believe that this was happening to them, they were after all German and they belonged there, had been very involved in society all along. What struck me while you were talking is that what Hitler achieved in such a short time was to marginalize a group of people who had been central to the Jewish political economy for hundreds of years, and yet in such a short time, that community suffered and became outcasts and ended up here. I don't know that any political leader is going to jump in to prevent that happening. We can see that replicated all over the world, whether it's the Tutsis or the whoevers, Burundi, these groups who have lived together for hundreds of years and suddenly there's a civil war. It seems to me that there is a very strong need for us taking personal responsibility, shouting from the rooftops when we see things happening, act with a sense of urgency at that time. If it's not happening to me, it'll happen to me next time and I need to shout on other people's behalf because of that.

Man: Let us follow on that to be a little bit more positive. After all, we have learned something. Amnesty International is one of the extraordinary events after all. There are a million members to this day worldwide for the very issue of human rights. And I don't think we should write off the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It's a frequently— When it's far away, we don't really want to know. But I think Kosovo is a good indication where the West has got the Gates Treaties—formal treaties not to interfere in another country without agreement from the United Nations—and nevertheless NATO has gone in on the pure issue of human rights. There's nothing particularly to be gained.

Woman: There are some other motives.

Man: You'll find in the newspaper to always find some other motive. But it's very difficult to visualize the insignificant little problems making any serious difference. But perhaps as a historian, you have a better, clearer view of this. So I think some lessons have been learned, some very positive lessons. And let us hope that the future Hitler couldn't reemerge again on a big scale. We have had— If you like, Indonesia took a long time. We have got Burma, where at least the West is still opposing although fairly gently because it is to our economic benefit. But on the whole, I think governments have had to behave very differently. So my feeling is that we have learned.

Leon W: If I could just interpose a moment. It seems to me at this point historically, a significant thing about Hitler is that he totally denied the concept of human rights. Hitler was not just breaching human rights, he said there are no human rights.

Woman: I come from the United States. And I think it's wonderful what we're discussing and I feel that I've learned something, but my fear is even more personal than this lady said over there. It's personal in a way that America—I can only speak for America—the youth, the young kids, so many of them are enduring these bombings and shootings and we're still afraid of taking away the rights to carry arms. I think, and I'd like to know your opinion as a historian, that the Hitler and the Holocaust has unleashed something so evil in this world that I don't know if it's ever going to go back in its box. Especially the young people in America— We have groups, we have Nazis, we have militia. All these anti, anti, anti everything. What do we do about that?

[laughter, chatter]

Leon W: {indecipherable first half of sentence} —defining experience of the first half of the 20th Century, but {indecipherable} occasioned by these events in America—the shooting—and the fact that there are these groups which cultivate violence and so on, and who do sometimes wear swastikas and so on. I would say, perhaps too optimistically, that that's not really the big danger.

Woman: That's what they said—

Woman: If ever there's a place where you can argue until you're blue in the face, and I'm sure there are enough people here who would. Where is the right? Who has got more right? Who is to decide? There are the Jewish people who have right to the land in Israel. This is rubbish. It was written thousands of years ago. The Arabs have got a right to Israel. We're fighting for the last 50 years for the right to exist in our land. How many people have died? What I'm afraid of is that we're beginning to see the trouble around the edges. The same young people you have in America and I'm afraid some of the ideology that has effected them by certain parties—I don't want to mention their names. I don't know whether they're consciously or unconsciously trying to. As somebody said, we got rid of the crusaders, we'll get rid of the blood Jews, too.

Leon W: It seems to me that in the world today, we're always talking, aren't we, about globalized sanction. There is a tendency toward homogenization and against that—A lot of people believe that they must preserve their identity. And any preservation of identity comes up against other identities and particularly there are some situations—whether it's Kosovo or Northern Ireland or to some extent the Israeli situation—where this is a really difficult and immediate thing. I think one has got to say a prayer— In all these situations, you need tolerance, you need liberalism. You need these things. That doesn't necessarily mean that you need to give up your identity.

Man: Is it appropriate, in all these things you mention {indecipherable}, to have constant comparisons with Hitler and genocide when I feel it has absolutely nothing to do and it trivializes the Holocaust. Why aren't those particular situations in each country handled uniquely for it's own particular situation. As far as dictatorships, what has the policy of the US been, until just recently, in Latin America. How did we act? Was it ethnic cleansing? I feel that it's sloppy to say we have to go in and this is what we learned from Hitler's era and so forth. It just doesn't match.

Leon W: That is— I was going to say that the classic case here still is, I suppose, Nasser, Suez, 1956, where I think Anthony Eden, who was after all one of the chief actors at that moment, genuinely thought that he was reenacting or reliving to some extent what had happened in the '30's, you see, where he was up to a point an opponent of appeasement, etc etc (although lots of people say his story is not as clear cut) but there we are. That's why it's so much the defining experience of the 20th century. People keep on harkening back to it, either those people that I mentioned—those group toting guns—or politician {indecipherable}. None of these things apply directly. It's obvious that Nasser wasn't Hitler because Nasser ruled a little tin box country and Hitler ruled a great power to begin with. {indecipherable}

Man: As a British citizen: Mazel Tov.

[laughter]

Man: I have to establish that. We just had the European parliamentary election, as you probably know, and we had 80,000 National Front part of the election. 80,000 in this country. Now that is something to worry about. They didn't get a seat, but considering that there are 80,000 of the so-called Nazis could get that far in this country, that proves the point that we are not become a multi-racial country as well—it's a very small country as compared to America. But it's a danger signal. I think that is something which has to be addressed and confronted. How? I don't know. But it's a serious matter. Thank you.

Man: {indecipherable} The Free Corps really had a free run as the forerunner of the organized Reichstag. That was tolerated and this was where Hitler came from. It was a sort of {indecipherable word}. They were tolerated right in the very beginning of the Weimar Republic. Would you say something to that?

Leon W: Yes, that's— I might say as a preface to that— There were a lot of things in the whole German political culture that facilitated the rise of Nazism. But there were the specific things arising out of the defeat of 1918, the Freikorps were obviously part of the aftermath. I should say one of my many identities is, as you can probably guess from my name, that I'm a Bavarian. I was born in Munich. It was the Bavarian government that was really tolerant of Göring. Göring was a {indecipherable word} Bavarian. I'm that old that I've actually seen Göring. Not many people have, but I swear to it. I saw Göring in the first {indecipherable} on the 12th of November, 1933. At a polling booth—

Man: Are you a relative of Leon Feuchtwanger?

Leon W: Yes, that was my uncle, who did after all try to stop it. He wrote a novel called *Erfolg, Success*, which is— But yes. {indecipherable} It all got so comical. That's part of the trouble. The Bavarian government did all these things of tolerating it because it first of all had this {indecipherable word} in Munich, which put the fear of God in the solidly conservative Bavarian peasants. It wanted to stick out against Berlin, and Berlin was supposed to be red and social democratic. There were so many things that played into this. But, I wouldn't for one moment say that Hitler was just a traffic accident. Even just after 1945, many Germans tried to apologize for this, even a historian said Hitler was like a man from Mars. He wasn't one of us, really. Something like that. It's not so simple—

Woman: {indecipherable} — who spoke to us earlier, he said people could have refused to go along, but I disagree because everybody knew that if they refused, they would be killed.

[chatter]

Woman: Or beaten up.

Leon W: {indecipherable}—outlined in great detail these police battalions from Hamburg were apparently pushed into these things, and then it became who appears as who or does—

[indecipherable woman, chatter]

Leon W: I would say that obviously Hitler would not have gotten where he did about the Jews if there hadn't been a strata—a quite considerable strata—of anti-Semitism in Germany. Whether he could have rose as fast without it, it is doubtful, but anti-Semitism was in some political cultures but not in others.

Man: You haven't mentioned anything about Austria, which claimed to be a victim of Hitler. [laughter]

Leon W: You've said it. [laughter] {indecipherable} There are two things about Austria, that it was the first victim and then the other thing is the fact that Bruno Kreisky, a Jew, was a father of the nation for at least 20 years.

Woman: The other one is that they got away with it.

Man: It seems that the historians have learned the lessons of history, but the politicians haven't because we in Israel are surrounded by evil regimes and nothing is done about it. I don't know why they went into Kosovo, but that the politicians—

Leon W: Actually, as a historian, I don't wish to denigrate the politicians too much because we historians complain about them but they actually do things. [laughter]
{indecipherable}

Woman: Could you clear up one myth and say whether it's true or not: Commander Edward Young was in the British embassy in Czechoslovakia in 1938. And he refused to send a message to the foreign office, but if he opposed Hitler then and there, the generals, the German generals, would not have gone forward in Czechoslovakia.

Leon W: In 1938, before Munich, before the Sudetenland, there was definitely a plot by the German military that was designed {indecipherable word} beginning to concentrate troops around Berlin. All this is common knowledge. And the British government knew all about it. After all, the conspirators sent several emissary letters. {indecipherable} — certainly saw Halifax, the Foreign Secretary. So they knew about a couple of issues. Could the British government really rely on these conspirators to shape its policy? It's a very difficult question because if the conspirators been in earnest, we should have struck and argued afterwards. The

whole German conspiracy from a military perspective particularly, it went on and on. But the foreign government had to say could we take them seriously?

Man: They couldn't have done because the British army in 1940 were practicing with broomsticks.

Woman: Hitler was under an impression that the Jews were going to help the other Jews. It was determined that when {indecipherable} and nobody did it. So Hitler was convinced the Jews couldn't care less.

Leon W: Well, yes, certainly. He knew that the reception of Jewish refugees in other countries was not necessarily popular. While we're celebrating here an occasion when something was done. Let's give credit where credit is dues.

{indecipherable woman, moves into chatter}

Woman: They wrote in a German code in England. They couldn't give too much away or the Germans would have realized it. Lord Cornwall, I think, actually had been suspicious and he was told by Hitler, no know, there's nothing. When actually they had broken the code. It's not all black and white.

Leon W: It is of course difficult. I think we are going to have to end it right there.

[applause]

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