

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

By Walter Zander

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A meeting of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem is being held this week under the chairmanship of Dr. Chaim Weizmann; and many distinguished visitors, including the Rector and the Administrator of the University, have arrived in London for this purpose. Six years have passed since the last meeting of the Board of Governors took place. During these years one of the greatest conflicts in modern history has been fought. The attempt of Nazi Germany to exterminate the Jewish people from the face of the earth - in spite of immeasurable losses - has failed, but the structure and the position of the Jewish remnant is changed completely. Eastern Jewry which for generations had been the most dynamic element of all Jewish communities in the world and which had provided the greater part of the rank and file of the Zionist movement, is either destroyed or finds itself involved in the great social transformation which since a quarter of a century has been going on in the Soviet Union. The apparent inexhaustible reservoir of Jewish vitality in the East is no longer providing new strength to the West; and Zionism has lost what up to the outbreak of this war has been its most important "Hinterland." On the other hand, during the same years, the horrors committed under Nazi rule have stirred and greatly increased Jewish consciousness in the Western world, and the interest in and work for Palestine have largely shifted to the Anglo-Saxon sphere. The world, therefore, is very different from that which the Governors had to face when they assembled in Geneva in August 1939.

Palestine itself has been spared the devastation of war, and although the number of students at the University fell from 1,100 to 600 - 350 students joined voluntarily the armed Forces - the University like the Yishuv, could maintain itself during the war, and even develop. The Department of Agriculture was opened in 1940/41 and the general scope of the University, as shown in the Annual Budget, has greatly expanded. The war has also seen the development of a more intimate relationship between the University and the Yishuv. Not only have the various research departments of the University, particularly in physics and chemistry, given valuable help to Palestinian industry and agriculture, also the "extra-mural activities," i.e., lectures and courses, given by teachers of the University to the general public, had expanded to such an extent, that during the last year about 3,000 lectures were given in towns, villages and agricultural settlements.

The immediate tasks for the further development of the University arise out of the needs of the country. One is the establishment of a department of Economics and Social Sciences in which Jewish civil servants can be trained for municipalities, Trade Unions, business organisations and general administration. Another task is the establishment of a fully-fledged Medical Faculty. Up till now no student can be trained as a doctor in Eretz Israel and although the number of medical practitioners in the country is still comparatively great, their average age is much higher than anywhere in the world; and the day is not far off when Palestine may be faced by an actual shortage in the medical profession. But the importance of the University is by no means limited to the Yishuv. It has gained an over-riding significance for World Jewry. The great centres of Jewish learning in the East of Europe are destroyed, and to an ever-increasing extent Palestine is becoming the new centre and reservoir of Jewish life. Rabbis, teachers and social workers for the Jewish communities in dispersion will find in growing numbers their education at the University of Jerusalem, and will draw their strength from the living community in the Holy Land.

For all this more is needed than the providing of technical knowledge in the various fields of learning. What is required in spiritual leadership? When in 1918, Dr. Weizmann laid the foundation-stone of the University, as the first step towards the realisation of the Balfour Declaration, he showed that the Jewish re-birth should be connected with the spirit, and that for Zionism, to quote the noble words of Edith Cavell, "Patriotism is not enough." On the University, therefore, rests the highest responsibility, and hardly ever has our need for vision and leadership been greater.