

JEWISH YOUTH IN THE CRISIS

By Walter Zander

Of all Youth Groups today none seems to be less significant than the Jewish refugees. Youth without a country, without arms and flags, scattered all over the world, at the mercy of other nations. But these seemingly miserable people can make a great contribution to the world, and their very suffering gives them a unique chance, provided that they face their lot, and react in the right way.

It needs, indeed, much courage to see our situation without illusions. The attempts of assimilation have broken down nearly all over the Continent; Palestine is under a dark cloud; the Jews in Europe are threatened with extermination; the Jewish position is getting more uncertain everywhere and, worst of all, the very ideals upon which Jewish life has been built since the French Revolution, are undergoing a grave crisis.

However black the future may appear, Youth, fortunately, will never give in. But beyond maintaining ourselves we must build up again the foundations of our life. This will only be possible if we mobilise our innermost forces and go back to the roots of our existence.

Whoever looks at our history will agree that our greatest achievement, revealed again and again, has been the conception of the all-embracing unity of the world, not only in a material, but in a spiritual sense. This vision which has given infinite value to the human soul, and which is the basis of our moral order, has been our contribution to civilisation, and Mr. Winston Churchill touched the centre of the problem when, in his recent message to the Jews, he said: "Once again, at the appointed time, the Jew will see vindicated those principles of righteousness which it was the Glory of his Fathers to proclaim to the world." Here, indeed, is our root and from here we can derive unlimited strength. The best Forces today are longing to restore a spiritual unity, and if we, according to our tradition, devote ourselves to this aim, we shall help to meet a fundamental requirement of our time.

The Nazis have undertaken to heal the world, which had been split into innumerable groups, by the establishment of totalitarianism. They have proclaimed the National State, based on "blood and soil," as the ultimate value, and try to make this the basis of a New Order. It is no accident that this attempt has resulted in war and devastation. For, as long as the National State is the supreme principle, it is impossible to create any satisfactory relationships to other peoples; and the best which can be achieved is a sham unity.

We Jews had once the vision of another Totality, based on a conception much more profound than the ideas of flesh and blood, nation and state, and we called it the Kingdom of God.

Its realization was not sought in war and force but in the human heart. Human relationship was expressed by Shalom, the wish of Peace, which still is our salutation. This conception made Justice the basis of international relationship. The subjection of every action to this one ultimate value aimed at the sanctification of the whole life, and this is our Jewish vision of Totality.

We are, of course, far away from the realization of this aim. But this ideal can achieve far more than the desperate attempts of Totalitarianism. Our task as Jews can only be to serve the true Totality.

Hitler's hatred against the Jews is not accidental. It springs, perhaps, out of the unconscious feeling that the Jew, even in decay, is still a personification of the immortal longing for true unity which the haunted heart of the unfortunate man is seeking in vain on the battlefields.

Therefore we should see in the persecutions which have fallen upon us not only distress but a warning to remember again our true nature. In such a sense one could even say that we should show ourselves worthy of our persecutions. There should be no depression nor, on the other hand, pride and self-conceit. Humbly and cheerfully we must go to work, each of us doing our duty wherever we are, offering service, love, and, if need be, sacrifice. Nobody need wait. Everybody can begin immediately everywhere.

Nazism requires always an opponent as an object of hate and defamation, and nearly all neighbours of Germany, one after the other, have had to serve this purpose. Devotion to true Totality, however, is free from hate and bitterness. As long as we hate a person we are still dependent on him. It must, therefore, be our task to free ourselves entirely from any bitter feeling even against those who have caused our suffering. If we can attain this state of mind, our inner strength will increase much, and we will attract powerful creative forces.

It will, perhaps, be said that our number is small and that only few among us would achieve this aim—that such action cannot, therefore, make any difference to the world. But such an outlook would be wrong. For, every moral action can exert an infinite influence, and thus everyone of us has his chance.

It is worth mentioning that Ghandi also, when some years ago he made his suggestions as to how the Jews could resist the Nazi terror, referred us to the fundamental principles of our religious vision and proclaimed: "Given the will, the Jew can refuse to be treated as the outcast of the West ... he

can command the attention and the respect of the world . . .
and can turn the winter of despair into the summer of hope.”

Everywhere forces are springing up seeking the Good. It is in our hands whether we Jews will be a living force in the reshaping of the World. This will not be decided by discussions but by the strength of real life in face of deadly perils. Youth has to play a fundamental part in this. What has been done by them up till now is encouraging. Let us continue our task with all the strength of our hearts.