



## New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies

The Representative Organisation of NSW Jewry

ועד הקהילה היהודית בנ.ס.ו.

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**ARE WE AT THE FIRST  
STATION ON THE ROAD  
THAT LEADS TO  
AUSCHWITZ? WHEN  
WOULD WE KNOW?**

**David D. Knoll**

**President, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies**

According to a 1941 census, Hungary, including the recently annexed territories, had a Jewish population of 825,000, less than 6 percent of the total population.

This figure included 100,000 converts to Christianity who, under Hungarian race laws passed between 1938 and 1941, were classified as Jews.

The Hungarian racial laws were modelled on Germany's Nuremberg Laws. They reversed the equal citizenship status granted to Jews in Hungary in 1867. Among other provisions, the laws defined "Jews" in so-called racial terms, forbade intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and excluded

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Jews from full participation in various professions. The laws also barred employment of Jews in the civil service and restricted their opportunities in economic life.

Among those affected were my forbears.

One of my forbears was my maternal grandfather, Dezso Antal. His original surname was "Weisz" but it was changed to the more traditional Hungarian surname, "Antal", before qualifying as a civil engineer. He was fortunate enough to be admitted to the Institute of Engineers before the *numerus clausus*, which limited the number of Jews permitted to enter each profession. Dezso's skills were such that he was employed as the chief engineer at the Tungsram plant in Ujpest.

Dezso and his wife Ilona had one child, a daughter, Jutka, who was born on 7 April 1937 in Budapest Hungary.

Life for the Jews in Hungary in general and for the Antal family in particular wasn't exactly a bed of roses even before the Nazi occupation. Hungary was a military and ideological ally of Nazi Germany. Little by little the Jews were stripped most of our civil and human rights.



Jutka's mother, Ilona Berman had a dressmaking salon at home. The Antals were a fairly typical middle class Jewish family. Their apartment was in the 5<sup>th</sup> suburb of Budapest called Lipotvaros. The building was declared a yellow star building, and only Jews could live in Jewish buildings. They had to be separated from pure race Aryans and Magyars. The Antals had a live in nanny whose name was Maria Lapedus. She was a Roman Catholic, and had to move out.

After the German defeat at Stalingrad on the eastern front in 1942-1943, a battle in which Hungarian units suffered tremendous losses, Admiral Miklos Horthy and Prime Minister Miklos Kallay recognized that Germany would likely lose the war. With Horthy's tacit approval, Kallay sought to negotiate a separate armistice for Hungary with the western Allies. In order to forestall these efforts, on March 19, 1944, the German Nazi troops roared into Budapest. There was no popular Hungarian opposition to that event.

In some Hungarian cities, Jews were compelled to live outdoors, without shelter or sanitary facilities. Food and water supplies were dangerously inadequate; medical care was virtually non-existent. Hungarian authorities forbade the Jews from leaving the ghettos and police guarded the perimeters of the enclosures. Individual gendarmes often tortured and extorted personal valuables from Jews. None of these ghettos existed for more than a few weeks and all the ghettoed Jews were sent to their deaths within days.

In mid-May 1944, the Hungarian authorities, in coordination with the German Security Police, began to systematically deport the Hungarian Jews. SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann was chief of the team of "deportation experts" that worked with the Hungarian authorities. The Hungarian police carried out the roundups and forced the Jews onto the deportation trains.

On 22 June 1944, when Jutka was just 7 years old, Dezso and other Jewish employees of Tungsram (including Dezso's younger sister, Ilus, were ordered to move in and live at the factory.) Dezso took with him two teddy bears; one was faun coloured to remind him of his daughters beautiful hair and the other was white to remind him of his wonderful wife.

On 22 June 1944, Dezso, Ilus and the other Jews were deported from that workplace. Dezso was never seen by his family again.

After Dezso had been arrested, his older sister and her son went into hiding. His brother in law was conscripted into a forced labour brigade, the "Munkaszolgalat".

Ilona then tried to obtain false documents in the form of a "Schutzpässe". Apparently, her salon supervisor had a connection. This lady was called Kato. Her husband, whose name was Kornel, had become aware of an escape route to Sweden. Application was made to the Consul, Raoul Wallenberg, for a Swedish passport for Ilona Berman and her daughter.

Jutka found out much later that the documents arrived at the Lipotvaros apartment just one day after the Nazis had arrested her mother.



Raoul Wallenberg is credited with saving the thousands of lives of Jews who were taken into Hitler's concentration camps during World War II. His devotion and honoured Swedish heroism earned him his recognition we acknowledge today.

By the time Wallenberg arrived in Budapest in July 1944 more than 437,000 Jewish men, women, and children had been deported on 148 freight trains between May 14 and July 18. When Wallenberg arrived there were only 230,000 Jews left. No one knows what happened to this hero who was arrested by the Soviet troops in 1945. He was accused of being an "American spy." Were he alive he would 92 on August 4, 2004.

After Dezso was taken away, Ilona made an arrangement with Jutka's nanny to take care of Jutka should she be arrested like her husband, before the Swedish documents arrived.

Ilona was indeed arrested not long after the Nazis rounded up all the remaining Jews on the block, and she was taken to a town square called "Kisok Palya" and then transported to her death.

We know that Consul Wallenberg personally pulled people from trains and tried to ease the suffering of others on marches with truckloads of food, water, blankets and medicine. He was however unsuccessful in securing Ilona's release from the train that transported her to her death.

Kato then took Jutka to her small home, which was only a few blocks away from where the Antal family had lived, and hid her. Jutka's bed was their bathtub. She stayed there until the winter. She was spared the excesses of the Arrow Cross regime which in November 1944, ordered the remaining Jews of Budapest into a ghetto which, covering an area of 0.1 square miles, became temporary residence to nearly 70,000 people.

On Christmas Eve 1944, Maria Lepedus, Jutka's nanny, known to the Antal family as Tantika, came to collect her. It was a trudge of many hours in the snow, but it was safest to go on foot. Maria took Jutka in as if her own daughter. Maria's home was a small house in a garden suburb of Budapest. It was not an area where Jews were known to live, and no one thought to challenge the little 7 year old girl as a Jew. Instinctively Maria did not contact other members of Jutka's family until the war had ended. This wise move probably saved Jutka's life. Although, Jutka's other relatives must have guessed where she had been hidden, they too did not attempt to make contact. They stayed out of touch until the war had ended. Then, a few weeks after Budapest was liberated, Jutka's maternal aunt, Mariska, came to collect Jutka.

Jutka moved in with Mariska and her sister in law Claire. Then some weeks later, Mariska's husband, Imre, managed to return from the camp to which he had been taken.

Imre Doktor was always a big man but he arrived home early in May, skin and bones. He was liberated in Mauthausen and partly walked and partly hitched rides home to Budapest. Mariska managed to nurse Imre back to health.

Imre and Mariska were always very close to Jutka as her aunt and uncle, and they had no children of their own. So Imre formally adopted Jutka, but when he asked Jutka to change her family name to Doktor, she declined, always believing that her parents would return one day, just like Imre.

Jutka had found Imre sitting at home one day when she arrived home from school. She hoped and prayed that she would one day find her father and mother the same way. Tantika continued to come and spend every weekend with Jutka, and Jutka was surrounded by a lot of love and care.

We now know from the Red Cross that Ilona was transported to Venusberg, a subcamp of Flossenburg. Jorg Skriebeleit the current head of the Flossenburg memorial site has kindly searched the records to find details of what happened to Ilona. The records however come to dead end. Ilona may have died in forced labour, on the 14 April death March to Mauthausen or simply from untreated illness.

Dezso's last known place of being alive was recorded by the Nazi's as Allach, a subcamp of Dachau on 12 April, 1945. It would seem that Jutka's parents died within days of each other never knowing the other's fate, no doubt praying that their daughter had been safely hidden.

Aunty Claire left Hungary shortly after the war, and came to Sydney, Australia. She and her husband Fred, later sponsored Jutka to immigrate here.

Jutka had waited in vain for her parents to return after the war, and she escaped Hungary following the turmoil of the 1956 revolution. She took up Aunty Claire's invitation to come to Australia, and not long after arriving, by chance, one day walking along Oxford Street, bumped into her sweetheart from Budapest, whose name was Aladar. They married in Maroubra Synagogue on 30 March 1958.

Aladar, better known as Ali, unfortunately passed away at the age of 60 before the birth of his first grandson, Avi, in October 1989. Ali only ever saw ultrasound pictures of his grandson.

As a teenager, Ali had survived the Holocaust working in the Jewish underground. He ran errands, and delivered bribes by which other Jews escaped. His father, a much loved Jewish publican, had been taken away early in the Nazi deportation program, and neither Ali nor his mother,



Erzsebet, could bear to leave Hungary themselves, in case Ali's father should manage to come back.

Ali also participated in the Bricha, a "secret Jewish organization". He drove trucks filled with other Jewish teenagers out of Hungary headed for Palestine. He drove at night, always returning before breakfast time.

Aladar's father, David Desmond Knoll did not return.

His name however is not forgotten. I am his grandson, and I bear his name.

Following the unprecedented tragedy of the Shoah it was hoped the re-establishment of a Jewish State would finally put an end to centuries of anti-Jewish vilification. Despite the ongoing rejection and threat of destruction by hostile neighbours, the dynamic, vibrant, democratic State of Israel has successfully integrated its diverse population into one of the developed world's foremost successes. Making significant contributions to agriculture, technology, medicine, the arts, and academia, Israel has emerged as perhaps the success story of the modern age.

Israel has afforded Jewish people the confidence to live, prosper and contribute where they choose, in the security that simply being Jewish is not inherently equated with danger.

Tragically, the Jewish people having their own nation, just like other peoples, has not brought about the end of anti-Jewish discrimination.

Furthermore, in what may seem a bitter twist of fate – the incredible accomplishments of the State of Israel since re-establishment in 1948 have spawned a new ‘strain’ of the noxious disease, anti-Zionism.

Former European Commission President, Romano Prodi, a few years ago admitted that the rise in antisemitism has been aided by blurring the distinctions between constructive criticism of Israeli government policy and unwarranted attacks on the Jewish State and its people. Attending the same forum, British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks spoke of an ‘unholy alliance’ between the Left, the far-Right and the Islamic street’ that was resulting in millions being indoctrinated with the idea that ‘alone among nations, Israel has no right to exist and that all the troubles of the world are the work of the Jews’. In his New Year’s Day address he called this new wave of Antisemitism a “Tsunami”.

In an interview with BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme, broadcast on 1 January 2006, Dr Sacks admitted he was "very scared" by the rise in anti-Jewish feeling, which had led to Holocaust denial, attacks on synagogues and a boycott of Jewish groups on university campuses.

And just so that we are clear, the word: “Antisemitism” is no more and no less than a special word for racism against Jews.

It is now abundantly clear that “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” - used by Nazis to stir up hatred of Jews even though it was long known to be a

forgery - is again being circulated, this time by Muslim scholars and Islamic Governments. There is much Antisemitic literature, journalism and TV in Arab countries. No effort is made to diminish or confront such blatant racial hatred.

The Antisemitism exhibited in the Islamic World, and this is not new, is sourced in Europe. As these forces coalesce, reliant upon various forms of Antisemitic behaviour catalogued by Natan Sharansky, the former Israeli Minister who had spent years in a Soviet prison for the crime of being Jewish, need to expose this new or resurgent antisemitism as fundamentally an attack on human rights becomes a vital imperative of the public agenda.

Canadian Professor Kathleen Mahoney notes in her article in the first issue of the Australian Journal of Human Rights entitled: "Hate Vilification Legislation and Freedom of Expression - Where is the Balance?"<sup>1</sup>

*In recent years, racial hatred has evolved from words to action in ways in which the Western world has not seen since World War II. ... Some forms of hate propaganda are more pernicious than others. Holocaust denial is especially pernicious because the survivors of the holocaust, it is the essence of cruelty. It not only denies the harm done to them and belittles*

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1  [\(1994\) 1 AJHR 353-369, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AJHR/1994/1.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AJHR/1994/1.html)

*the enormous, indescribable pain they suffered and still suffer to this day, for those that were murdered, it defames their deaths.*<sup>2</sup>

Professor Mahoney concludes that denial of the Holocaust is not just a Jewish interest, but rather a human rights concern because it undermines efforts to learn from history. She also makes the argument that free speech is enhanced when vulnerable groups are protected from serious harm through racial hate speech.<sup>3</sup>

What about Christianity?

At Vatican II 41 years ago the Catholic Church ended its commitment to the canard that the Jews killed Christ.

In his specially written remarks, for the Sydney Commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Nostra Aetate, Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Relations with the Jewish People, pointed out that the teachings of Vatican II have never been more relevant and fundamental, and it is clear that the Church sees relations between the Church and the Jews as something special. The Church seeks and indeed yearns for friendship, not just dialogue. It is a friendship based on mutual learning, and it is becoming one based on social action.

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2      Id. at page 2 of 13

3                      Id. at page 4 of 13. In a media release issued on 27 June 2003, Mr Jones echoed Professor Mahoney's approach hailing the Full Federal Court decision as "a significant victory for all those concerned with human rights in Australia". <http://www.ecaj.org.au/media/270603.htm>

Cardinal Kasper recognised the evolution of *Nostra Aetate* as a living document.

Suspicion of other faiths needs to be removed. Indifference needs to be overcome.

Indeed, just 4 years ago building on the work of Prof. Tommaso Federici, His Eminence wrote that: "*the document Dominus Iesus does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in order to be saved by God. On the contrary, it declares that God's grace, which is the grace of Jesus Christ according to our faith, is available to all. Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to his promises.*" Thus, on Good Friday Catholics no longer pray for conversion of Jews.

The challenge remains for other branches of Christianity to move from their engagement in mission to the Jews and accept instead engagement with the Jews.

Total eradication of racism and antisemitism from human society is probably impossible. Nevertheless, thoughtful and comprehensible education of the broader community about the experiences of those targeted can lead to important attitudinal change.

Recent Australian parliaments have passed motions condemning antisemitism and warning of the inherent dangers in failing to discern between reasonable criticism and unbalanced, unfair slander of Israel, Zionism and Jewish people.

But the principal duty continues to rest with the Jewish people. Not because it should, but because it does.

For us it is an obligation to fulfil the 614th commandment of the Jewish covenant.

The Torah of course contains only 613 commandments.

The 614th commandment was penned by the late [Emil Fackenheim](#). It is: "Thou shalt not give Hitler a posthumous victory."

Born in Halle, Germany, in 1916, Fackenheim was affected profoundly by the Holocaust. As a rabbi and philosopher, he spent his life trying to understand its meaning, writing dozens of books on the subject, including "To Mend the World".

He is perhaps most famous for his assertion that after the catastrophic event, Jews have not only 613 commandments to obey, but 614. The last commandment, Fackenheim asserted, was to be actively Jewish, thus denying Hitler a posthumous victory.

Rejecting any account that analyzes [Auschwitz](#) as the result of Jewish sin, as well as repudiating the literal notion of "explanation" as regards the Holocaust, Fackenheim urges Israel to continue to believe despite the moral outrage of the [Shoah](#). God, on this view, is always present in Jewish history, even at Auschwitz. We do not, and cannot understand what he was doing at Auschwitz, or why he allowed it, but we must insist that he was there.

Jews are, that is, under a sacred obligation to survive. After the death camps, Jewish existence itself is a holy act: Jews are under a sacred obligation to remember their martyrs: Jews are, as Jews, forbidden to despair of redemption, or to become cynical about the world and humanity, for to submit to cynicism is to abdicate responsibility for the world.

The Jewish people still symbolized for Fackenheim true humanity and its universal ethical values. The commandment to make a second Shoah impossible was for him a commandment to all humanity "to mend the world." It was and is an act of loving kindness.

Are these not the very sacred obligations that underpin human freedom?

To insist on hope in the face of despair. To insist that children are filled with love of their neighbour rather than the polemic, and today too often, the theological polemic of hate for one's neighbour.

The armed conflicts that rage in all quarters of the world have produced appalling abuses of children's rights. Hundreds of thousands of children have been pressed into service as soldiers. Millions have become refugees – displaced from their homes, often separated from their families; their future and safety uncertain.

The recruitment of child soldiers, built on a foundation of hate, continues in too many parts of the world. There are too many examples, but one that jars encouragement of children to participate in suicide bombings of neighbours whose only crime is that they are Jewish, Christian or Hindu. The children are told they will die as a Shahid (Martyr for Allah). This is a most cruel abuse.

To Australians, celebrating the murder of innocents reflects a fundamental and persistent disregard for the right to life. It reflects values we simply do not share, and which we find difficult to understand. After all, if you teach that life has value for all human beings regardless of race, religion or other differences, then those who destroy life will be cast out rather than celebrated.

Children must learn peace and not war. Children must not be promised paradise for the murder of their neighbours. This can only lead to psychological trauma in the upcoming generations.



It should be obvious that how we raise our children demonstrates most clearly the society we want them to inherit.

Hungarian Jewry before World War II, despite the *numerus clausus*, and other harbingers of trouble, believed in the dignity of man, but did not see articulating an obligation to their non-Jewish neighbours as part of their obligations as Jews. BY not doing so they did not do the one thing that was essential to their human survival, even in an open democratic society. They did not insist that they were to be in every respect the equals of their non-Jewish neighbours.

In societies that have rejected the proposition that every human being is entitled to dignity and respect, the Jew has also been rejected. The ghettos of Europe are a case in point. They were not created by Jews seeking to sever themselves from society. They were created for Jews whose dignity had been rejected by the society to which they endeavoured to contribute. In Nazi Germany and in the Gulags of the Soviet Union and in the ghetto of Damascus and the desert villages of Gondar, Ethiopia, rejection of dignity led to ghettoisation of the Jew, in each case accompanied by social decay.

Therefore, it is the duty and responsibility of everyone here today, as Australians committed to a decent and fair Australia to disseminate as much information as possible in order to redress the ignorance, lack of knowledge, and disinformation that fuels anti-Jewish sentiment in Australia.

It is not however enough to stand up for human rights. We must stand up for the Jewish right to human rights, whenever and wherever, it is challenged. We preserve humanity by preserving our particularity and insisting that it be respected in each society that we live in.

We must all preach, teach and behave as if racial and religious hatred were completely unacceptable in today's society. We must make that unacceptability a self-fulfilling prophecy, for all men and women of faith. The challenge after that - for which 4 decades of *Nostra Aetate* sets the paradigm - will then be to move from tolerance of difference to a society that practices wholehearted mutual respect.

The Catholic Church 40 years ago led the way in jettisoning theological antisemitism. That is worth celebrating, but *Nostra Aetate* is still a work in progress. The moral courage has been expressed, the visual symbolism has become great, and now the hard work at the operating levels of our communities must be undertaken. We must continue to work to overcome the pockets of Christian theological antisemitism - and its transmogrification in the Islamic World - that continue to exist and which operate as a renewed threat to Jewish political and religious security across the world.

In repairing this broken world, we thank our friends for their commitment to fearlessly and publicly stamping out antisemitism against the Jew both individual and collective.

Antisemitism today rears its ugly head in the form of demonisation of the State of Israel, and it has already travelled the short step from hatred of the collective Jewish identify to hatred and violence against each individual Jew; a step that has become a march on some European and Middle Eastern streets.