

A
REMEMBRANCE
OF TIMES PAST,
FOR THE PRESENT
AND THE FUTURE

BY ALAN GOLD

Seven days ago, ten thousand young men and women gathered at ANZAC Cove in the Gallipoli peninsular of Turkey to commemorate the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who died there in 1915 and 1916.

It was a remarkable sight. The First World War happened nearly a century ago. Yet despite the distance in time, the show of respect for the diggers grows as the years go by. Thousands of young backpackers who had no contact with a war which occurred at the beginning of last century were moved to tears because of the deaths of people they couldn't possibly have known. And across Australia, in New Zealand, in East Timor, in London, Australians, young and old, bowed their heads out of respect for the thousands who gave their lives in the service of their country.

There are very few ANZAC survivors alive today out of the thousands of soldiers sent to their deaths in a merciless war. We revere these dead soldiers; we respect them; we acknowledge their sacrifice; our Prime Minister, Mr. Howard made a special trip to the other side of the world in order to consecrate a memorial to their legend.

No one *dares* to deny the ANZAC legend! **Nothing** is allowed to diminish the heroism of the soldiers of the First World War!

Yet, how very different is the world's remembrance of the Holocaust; of the six million Jews who died in the concentration camps and ghettos of Nazi Europe. We Jews remember our martyrs, but outside of the Jewish community, who today remembers the men and women and children who were slaughtered in the Second World War?

The Shoah is the greatest crime in the history of the world. All other crimes committed in the name of religion, patriotism or philosophy pale against this crime. Yet

as the years go by, the magnitude of this crime is becoming dulled in the minds of non-Jews.

As World War II recedes into the last century, the Holocaust is being undermined in the collective consciousness of non-Jews. We Jews are being told that we should put the Holocaust behind us; that the world is suffering from 'Holocaust fatigue'. Late last year I heard a media representative in our very own Holocaust Museum in Darlington quote a response that he commonly hears in his television station about the Jewish experience: 'Does the world really need another Holocaust story?'

If we can rightfully ask, 'Who dares to forget the ANZAC legend?', isn't it just as important for us to demand, 'How *dare* anyone grow tired of the events of the Holocaust?'

It certainly isn't the survivors themselves for whom the Holocaust isn't a phenomenon of History, but something with which they live every day of their lives. The Holocaust robbed many Jews alive today of their youth, their vitality and their zest for living. Even today, it is an unwelcome tenant in the homes of all too many of them and their children; the Holocaust has been in residence in Jewish homes for each and every one of the fifty five years since the War. To this day, it conditions survivors' thoughts, their behaviour, their responses to their family, their reactions to government and authority. The victims of the Nazi Holocaust have remained victims from the past to the present. The Holocaust, indeed, is every survivor's existence.

And so, at the beginning of this century, as we enter the new millennium, it is proper and fitting for the topic of this year's Yom ha Shoah commemoration to be: Remember and Do Not Forget.

To fully understand why it's so important for us, and the rest of the world, never to forget, for the next few moments I'm going to ask you to journey with me back to the days in the earlier part of the last century, when the Nazis were beginning to control the hearts and minds of a willing German nation, and the rest of the world was willingly and culpably ignoring what was happening in the vain hope that it would go away.

At that time, a small core of dedicated anti-Semites made decisions which not only changed the course of Jewish history but undermined all notions of the progress of civilization. This was the conscious decision to of the Nazis to dehumanise the Jews. The process was simple enough. Re-define them as *Untermenschen*.... make them into a non-

people. Label them as a group, identify their person with a derogatory outward sign, take away their rights, their property, their ability to live; and then the next logical step, life itself.

Hitler, and through him the German people, collectively and as individuals, took upon themselves the power of the divine, the power of life and death over Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, Slavs, and any other group which they re-defined and identified as unworthy of living in the land of the Aryan. In Nazi Germany, one lived or died according to the label ascribed to you.

We Jews, more than anyone, know the nature and damage of the Holocaust. We know because we listen to the statements of victims, perpetrators and eye-witnesses. We look at the film footage; we visit the physical remains of Bergen Belsen, of Auschwitz-Birkenau, of Treblinka and Majdenek and the other death and concentration camps. We know the mechanics of the Holocaust. We know the methods of transportation; the percentages and tonnages and numbers and figures and statistics. We know almost everything there is to know. We feel the pain of those that suffered. We know. We sympathise. But do we understand?

Along with the process of dehumanising the Jews, the other process which was undertaken was the manufacture of Hitler into the status of a god. Even today, when elderly Germans are interviewed about their participation in the Holocaust, and asked '*How could you, a family man, have participated in this horror?*' the answer is invariably '*when I listened to Hitler, it was like listening to God.*'

So what is it that we understand happened? We understand that the Nazis, the ordinary Germans, wanted their world to become clear cut, certain, systematic, mechanical. This was divine power processed and mechanised.

This is truth in history. This is what really happened.

But as we face a new century, one of increasing uncertainty, we must not forget those factors which have shaped our history. What caused the Holocaust must always be a part of our present.

Let us examine for a moment, several events which have occurred during the past few months, seemingly isolated events, but which have profound implications for Jews around the world.

The first event is the elevation in political status of Jorg Haidar's Freedom Party in Austria, now the most powerful fascist grouping in government in Europe.

The second event is the recent apology by His Holiness, John Paul II for two thousand years of Catholic-inspired hatred.

The third event is the trial in London of Penguin Books and Professor Deborah Lipstadt, who were accused by the Holocaust revisionist, and now totally discredited historian, David Irving, of libel.

All of these events have a common thread running through them. And that thread has to do with the distortion of the truth of history. In the case of Haidar and Austria, he and his party deny the evil of the Waffen SS and praise Hitler's employment policies; with regard to the Papal apology, the church has failed to confront the full extent of the wartime Pope's complicity in the Holocaust. Yes, the Vatican has made an apology! But an apology in which His Holiness pointedly said little about the church's record on anti-Semitism and in which he failed to criticise the murderous silence of his predecessor, Pius XII during the Nazi rampage through Europe. Further, the Vatican has yet to abandon its move to Canonize this pope who, by his silence, allowed evil to flourish.

In the case of the trial of Professor Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books in London, Holocaust denier David Irving sued for libel because she called him to account for his claims that the numbers of Jews killed in the Holocaust was a fabrication; As we all know, the case was lost by Irving, even though he still intends to take the judgement to appeal. It's interesting to recall some of the words of the trial judge, Mr. Justice Gray, who called Irving an active Holocaust denier, an anti-Semitic and racist and that he associates with right wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism. These are perhaps some of the harshest words ever used by a judge against a plaintiff.

So why is history being perverted? Why are men like Irving saying that six million Jews didn't die in the Holocaust? Why are populist European politics swinging so far to the right? What is happening in a world which, just sixty years ago could mechanize the deaths of an entire continent of Jews, and yet which can now so easily turn its back on its own history and begin the processes which have the capacity to repeat the same catastrophe? Why is it that, despite the knowledge of the end result of anti-Semitism, this evil philosophy is yet again on the increase?

Many answers to these questions have been proposed. Some take a psychological perspective, others look at nationalism and at the romance of Teutonic legends, and others at the economic circumstances. But there is one factor which enables these histrionic outcries to become national policy and that is political expediency. There are times when it is politically convenient to harness hatred and guide it to a particular target. How many governments do we know which have marshalled popular hatreds and fears and turned them to their own advantage? While the governments of Germany, Italy, Austria and Russia spring most easily to the Jewish mind, we must also remember that recently Indonesia, Malaysia, governments in South America, in Africa and even Australia are far from blameless.

So has the world learned anything from the horror of the Holocaust? Yes, we can take some comfort in the fact that 14 European nations immediately upon the election of Jorg Haidar made Austria into a political pariah state. We can also take comfort from the fact that many senior Prelates throughout the world feel severe discomfort at the growing conservatism and denialism of the Vatican Curia. And we can all breathe a huge sigh of relief that David Irving and other Holocaust deniers have been identified for what they are...anti-Semites and haters of anyone who doesn't fit into their obscene and narrow view of humanity.

These, though, aren't the only recent occurrences which have profound consequences for Jews. There are other events which have recently taken place which can give us some grounds for comfort. In these events the force of Jewish pressure groups has compelled industries and governments to be called into account before the eyes of the world.

We can take some comfort in the retributive justice about to be considered in the case of Konrad Kalejs, in which many nations are assisting the Government of Latvia in the prosecution of an alleged war criminal, despite the fact that fifty five years have elapsed since the commission of his crimes.

We can also take some comfort in the fact that major corporations and governments have now been grudgingly forced to the negotiating table to make good for the actions of previous generations during the war. With the German industrial companies and the Swiss government, Jewish pressure groups have forced unwilling eyes

to see, and forced open once-closed ears to hear the truth of the crimes which their predecessors committed during the war.

Switzerland and some of its banks have offered restitution and compensation to Jewish victims for their complicity with the Nazis; and in October of last year, German corporations offered \$3.3 billion in compensation to Jewish slave labourers. These firms included Deutsche Bank, DaimlerChrysler, Hoechst, Siemens and Volkswagen, as well as Mercedes and I G Farben, who have at last admitted their complicity in the slave labour programme of the Nazis. The management and officials of these companies and governments were not *themselves perpetrators* of crimes against the Jewish people but they recognise that as the financial beneficiaries of corrupt policies they do owe compensation. So now, despite the intervening half century, a nation state, world banks and global corporations are making amends for their co-operation with the Nazis.

Yes we can take comfort. But not much comfort. And we certainly can't afford to be relaxed and comfortable. Why?

Because the world also knows that less than half a century after the devastation caused by Hitler and the Nazis, there is a new growth of Fascism. That anti-Semitism is again on the rise. This neo-fascism is growing within our very own countries, and there isn't the political will to stand up and fight it. Here in Australia, we have sections of our media which positively encourage fascism. Listen to the way in which Howard Sattler, Ron Casey, Alan Jones, Stan Zemanek and other pundits of intolerance support and inflame the prejudices of their callers on talkback radio, and you'd wonder if we're living on the same planet. Even in Australia, surely one of the great models of democracy, did our Prime Minister, Mr. Howard, have the will to say that Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party is based on evil and unacceptable grounds? And when will Mr. Howard gather the decency and moral courage to acknowledge the crimes of the past and apologise to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters for the genocide which we white people have conducted against them since our arrival here...a genocide, I might add, which has continued in one form or another until the 1960's. European governments, banks and corporations have apologised ...why can't our Prime Minister?

These events have touched the hearts and souls of so many of us; have made us feel angry; have made us wonder if there is any true memory of history and the lessons

we are supposed to learn. Here again we ask, why it is that, despite the knowledge of the end result of anti-Semitism, this evil philosophy is yet again on the increase.

Isn't it time that we came to the understanding that anti-Semitism isn't a problem of the Jews. Anti-Semitism is a problem for gentiles. We as victims don't have a problem. Gentiles, as the nations which hosts anti-Semites, do have a problem. And so isn't it up to us, as victims, to remind the aggressors that they're acting outside of the mandate of humanity. And we must remind the aggressors in every forum, on every occasion, that the words and statements and sentiments of anti-Semitism are used. We must do so whenever the language of denial rears its evil head, as it so recently did in the leaked Australian Government submission denying the history of the Stolen Generation.

So if we, in this paradise of Australia, with our constitutional safeguards, our fiercely independent judiciary, our openness and friendship...if we don't have the will in sections of our broadcast media and of our political leadership to take a moral stance and deny the evil of the Pauline Hansons, the Frederick Tobens, the Church of Christian Identity and the League of Rights; if we in this country continue to allow old Nazis like Konrad Kalejs the supreme rights of citizenship; if we in this country close down Robert Greenwood's Nazi-prosecuting Special Investigations Unit on the spurious grounds that it's not worth wasting money on prosecutions which might fail, regardless of the morality of forcing mass murderers to confront their crimes; if we don't have the guts, then which country in the world can you name, that has?

Remember, and Do Not Forget.

We will never forget the attempted genocide of the Jews. The Holocaust is the defining episode of the modern Jewish experience. It is also the defining event of all genocides...the genocide by which all others must be measured. How then can we Jews convert our past and our present into a future that can benefit from our hard-earned understanding? Surely it is through assisting our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering. Surely we, as a literate and educated community, can contribute to the prevention of future genocides, be they directed against Jews or Non-Jews?

Jews have never been very good at forgetting. We remember every death for generations; we revere our ancestors for centuries; we have books which identify evil

pharaohs and slavemasters and the misery which happened to us in Egypt three thousand years ago.

But who today remembers the deaths of a million children in Biafra in 1967? And who, tomorrow, will remember the slaughter of civilian Bosnians and Serbians and Croats and East Timorese? And who, apart from we Jews, will remember the Holocaust in fifty years time?

If the world forgets, then it **will** happen again. And if we apply this formula to every other genocide, we can see how convenient it would be for society if we **did** forget...how convenient it would be for Turkey if we all forgot the Armenian genocide; how convenient for Indonesia if we forgot the Timorese genocide; how convenient for the whole world if we forgot the Holocaust.

Are there not strong and moral grounds for we Jews, who have suffered so greatly throughout our history, to be the standard-bearers for a more decent and better world in which even the desire for genocide disappears off the face of the planet? If we accept the fact that anti-Semitism isn't our problem, but theirs, isn't **now** the time to ensure that they remember it. Isn't now the time to learn more about the causes, impetus, mechanics, conditions and methodologies of **all** genocides, so that, God forbid, when the circumstances are again leading to another mass murder, we Jews stand up and say, **'There is evil going on here, and we must do something about it.'**

This is surely our responsibility. Anyone who has survived the Holocaust knows that the most important element of their suffering is that it should be remembered. And in remembering, we must learn lessons. And if we are to ensure that the entire world learns of the true and hideous nature of the Holocaust, then we Jews must ensure that it not only doesn't happen again to us, but that it never, ever happens again, anywhere, to anybody, on the face of the earth. If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

Isn't now the time to apply our intelligence, our sense of morality and our strength of purpose to the needs of other victims of prejudice and oppression. Because their oppression is our problem. As Australians of privilege and influence, the peddling of racism across the airwaves, and in political policy is our problem, regardless of against whom it is directed. As a people whose identity is forged as much in our suffering as in our intellect, and who have been defined by the oppression of our history, let us use our

understanding of that experience to prevent it happening again on any scale, to any people. Not again. Not ever. Not to anyone.

REMEMBER, AND DO NOT FORGET