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The Association of Jewish Refugees

This article examines the most important of the representative organizations set up in Britain by the Jewish refugees from the German-speaking lands, the *Association of Jewish Refugees*, which has never before been described in detail in an academic publication. The article concentrates on the AJR's earlier years, its foundation in 1941, its activities during the wartime years and the development of the services it offered to its members in the post-war decades. It refers to many of the personalities who played a role in the AJR and contains a brief overview of the current state of the Association.

Founded in 1941 and still flourishing today, the *Association of Jewish Refugees* (known for many years as the *Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain*) is the largest, longest-lived and most important organization established to represent the interests of the Jewish refugees from the German-speaking lands who fled to Britain to escape Nazism before the war. Over the decades, it has widened its membership to include other groups of post-war Jewish refugees from Europe. But although the AJR, as it is fondly known by its members, is an institution central to the communal life of the 50,000 or so Jewish refugees from Central Europe who settled in Britain after 1945, no serious scholarly study of it yet exists. Ronald Stent devoted some three pages to it in his article on refugee organizations in the volume *Second Chance*; and a special issue of its journal, *AJR Information*, published in 1962 on the twenty-first anniversary of the organization's foundation, contains a number of short articles that look back on its history and achievements.¹

One reason for the paucity of academic work on the AJR – remarkable at a time of unparalleled interest in the Holocaust, Jewish survivors and immigrants and minorities generally – is the lack of sources on which scholars can draw. The AJR has no archive, and its membership files and other records from its early decades have not been preserved. Another reason, however, is rooted in the nature of the organization, which displays many of the characteristics of the pre-Hitler German-Jewish community from which it sprang. Solid, unpretentious, efficient, a touch bureaucratic but scrupulously correct, the AJR is recognisably heir to the communal organizations of German Jewry, especially the *Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger*

jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.), the great organization of the assimilated German Jews, and its successors under the Nazis, principally the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland*.

As the AJR rapidly came to enjoy the undisputed support of the bulk of the German-speaking Jews settled in Britain, and as over the decades it became wealthy, it had little need for publicity and self-promotion; it boasted no high-profile figures like Greville Janner of the *Holocaust Education Trust* or *Beth Shalom's* charismatic Stephen Smith. Instead, the outstanding figures who shaped the organization in its early years came either from the ranks of organizations like the C.V., conscientious but self-effacing administrators who made their contribution by devoted hard work behind the scenes, or from among professional men, lawyers, accountants and bankers. It has aptly been called the best-kept secret in the Jewish community in this country.²

Werner Rosenstock, who as Secretary, General Secretary and Director was the mainstay of the AJR's administration over four decades, from 1941 until 1982, had studied law before working for the C.V. as a young man, then for the *Reichsvertretung*; and Hans Reichmann, who bore much of the burden of directing the AJR when the founding Chairman, Alfred Schoyer, returned to Berlin after the war and who acted as Chairman from 1953 to 1963, also studied law, rising to a senior position in the C.V. before 1933. Reichmann's successors, Alfred S. Dresel (1963-74) and Werner M. Behr (1974-76), came from careers in the world of banking and finance. Ludwig Spiro, Chairman from 1976 to 1987 and subsequently the AJR's revered Life President, had also trained as a lawyer in Germany. Even when a change of generations occurred in the mid-1990s and British-born children of refugees took over as senior officers of the AJR, the pattern did not alter greatly. Andrew Kaufman, Vice-Chairman since 1994 and Chairman since 1996, is a lawyer, and David Rothenberg, Hon. Treasurer since 1994 and Vice-Chairman since 1996, an accountant, both men of high standing in their professions.

The Founding of the AJR and the Wartime Years

Before the outbreak of war, no substantial representative organization was created by and for the Jewish refugees themselves. The necessary work was carried out on their behalf, mostly by Anglo-Jewish organizations established for the purpose, notably the Jewish Refugees Committee (German Jewish Aid Committee) and the various other

bodies located at Woburn House and later at Bloomsbury House. The only exception was a small organization called *Self Aid for Refugees* or *Deutsche Selbsthilfe*, which held its inaugural meeting in February 1938 and whose main function was to collect money for distribution to those in need. Though *Self Aid* maintained an office on Finchley Road, NW3, it became absorbed into the AJR and its annual fund-raising concerts came under AJR management. The outbreak of war greatly increased the refugees' need for an effective organization of their own, as they had now been made 'enemy aliens'³ and were subject to various restrictions on their movements and activities; the mass internment of refugees that commenced in May 1940 brought to a halt any plans for a new organization run by refugees.

However, such plans could be developed in more detail in the enforced idleness of the internment camps on the Isle of Man, where the matter was discussed more systematically.⁴ Once the bulk of the internees had been released, the time was ripe in summer 1941 for the founding of the refugees' own organization. According to Ernst Lowenthal, a circular signed by nine Jewish refugees from Germany, six of whom (including Lowenthal) were to become members of the AJR's wartime Executive, was sent out on 27 June 1941 to several dozen refugees, inviting them to a meeting on 6 July at 26, Belsize Park, London N.W.3.⁵ According to Ronald Stent, the AJR was officially born at a meeting on 20 July 1941 attended by twenty invited people, who elected an Executive consisting of three Orthodox Jews, three Liberal Jews and three Zionists, an indication of the AJR's intention to represent the entire range of the refugee community.⁶ Admittedly, although the AJR did represent Jewish refugees from all the German-speaking countries and across the length and breadth of the UK, the bulk of its members were assimilated, secularised Jews, either Liberal or non-observant, and far fewer were Orthodox or Zionists.

The inaugural meeting elected an Executive Committee of six, with Adolf Schoyer as Chairman, Adolf Michaelis as Vice-Chairman, Kurt Alexander, Walter Breslauer, Salomon Adler-Rudel and Eugen Mittwoch; to that number were soon added Ernst Lowenthal and Rudolf Bienenfeld, the sole Austrian, while Alexander became Treasurer, then General Secretary.⁷ Werner Rosenstock was appointed as the AJR's first official, employed to conduct the administration; he was joined by Adelheid Levy, the AJR's first social worker. Adler-Rudel and Michaelis were to leave for Israel, Schoyer and Lowenthal for Germany and Alexander for America, while Professor Mittwoch

died during the war. But those that remained, above all Rosenstock, formed the AJR's solid organizational core, and they were joined by men like Max Pottlitzer, Paul Goldschmidt, Abraham Horovitz, Arthur Prager and Menki Zimmer, to whom were added after the war others like Frank Falk, Simon Bischheim, Arnold Horwell and Hans Blumenau. The Executive (or Committee of Management) was complemented by the AJR's Board, a larger body consisting of distinguished members and of representatives from related organizations and from the AJR's local groups; the Board was known as 'the parliament of the AJR' and met either once or twice a year.

For many years the AJR's senior officers were almost exclusively men. This may seem to contradict the view that women on the whole adapted better and more flexibly to the demands of exile, often taking on the role of breadwinner and holding the family unit together, as has been argued by Gabriele Kreis and Heike Klapdor. As Charmian Brinson has put it, what was needed in exile was flexibility, and it was here that women outstripped their less adaptable husbands.⁸ This theory of an exchange of roles between husband and wife in emigration should not be applied too sweepingly; above all, it needs to be differentiated according to the age of the couples concerned.

In the case of older couples, above the age of around 45, the burden of providing for the family often fell on the wife. One can distinguish some clearly definable categories here. These include couples in which the husband was prevented from following his profession by his inability to master the English language; the case of the writer and critic Alfred Kerr and his wife Julia, as described in their daughter Judith Kerr's semi-autobiographical account *The Other Way Round*,⁹ is a typical example. Another category was that of couples in which the husband subsisted on his wife's earnings until he was able to establish himself professionally; Erich Eyck, later a distinguished historian and author of an acclaimed study of the Weimar Republic, initially lived on the income from a boarding house that his wife had opened. Sometimes the husband's qualifications were useless in Britain, as was the case with lawyers from Central Europe, or were not officially recognised, as was the case with doctors and dentists. A special group were those husbands who had been among the 25,000 or so Jewish men imprisoned in concentration camps by the Nazis after the pogroms of November 1938 and who never recovered sufficiently to work.

Among the younger married couples in the age range 25-45, however, such reversals of the traditional marital roles were far less

common. Speaking as the son of Jewish refugees from Vienna who moved in a large social circle of such people, I can think of hardly any where the wife was the principal breadwinner in the early days of emigration, though plenty where both played a more or less equal role. The younger husbands were no doubt more flexible, enterprising and adaptable than those over 50, more capable of taking new initiatives to provide for their families. A further factor, apart from age, was the financial situation of the husband. Among the founding members of the AJR Executive, for example, men like Rudolf Bienenfeld and Adolf Schoyer were wealthy enough for their wives never to have had to work. Among the younger generation of AJR officers, the men were the main earners: Werner Rosenstock worked, while his wife Susanne stayed at home and looked after their son, until she took a job after the war as a secretary in the United Restitution Organization, and though Hans Reichmann's wife Eva became a respected historian and worked at the Wiener Library after the war, she would not have been the principal provider.

At the outset, the AJR stated its aims; it announced that it 'aims at representing all those Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria for whom Judaism is a determining factor in their outlook on life'.¹⁰ This emphasis on Judaism, somewhat unexpected in an organization consisting preponderantly of assimilated Jews, was intended to differentiate the AJR from two other refugee organizations that had very different aims. The *Free German League of Culture* and the *Austrian Centre* had been set up by politically conscious refugees, often Communists, with the intention of persuading their members to return after the war to Germany and Austria respectively.¹¹ For them, the refugees were Germans or Austrians first, potential ideological adherents whose Jewishness was systematically downplayed. The AJR, on the other hand, recognised the Jewishness of its members as fundamental, in the sense that it was the reason for their having been forced to emigrate in the first place and provided the common element that bound the Jewish refugees together. More realistic in its assessment of these refugees' attitude to their native lands, the AJR recognised that the overwhelming majority of them would not wish to return to Germany or Austria and that, after the treatment meted out to the Jews by the Nazis, most refugees would find it impossible to reestablish any kind of close relations with the society that had persecuted them and their families so savagely. Both the rival organizations ceased to exist soon after the war's end.

The AJR's twin strategic objectives were laid out in the initial statement of its aims: 'We want to make clear to the authorities and the public that a Jewish refugee is unconditionally opposed to Nazi Germany [...] We shall press for the removal of restrictions which prevent full utilisation of the services of these refugees in the common cause against Nazism.' The manifesto was sent out to members in the first of a series of circulars, published at irregular intervals during the war, which were the AJR's principal means of communicating with its membership before the appearance of *AJR Information* in 1946. The circulars repeatedly stressed the refugees' eagerness to participate to the fullest extent in the war against Nazism, whose first victims and bitterest foes they were. Their opposition to Nazi Germany was expressed in terms of wholehearted support for the Allied cause and unreserved loyalty to Britain. To assist the more effective prosecution of the war, the AJR called for the removal of the restrictions imposed on the refugees as 'enemy aliens', which prevented them from contributing to the best of their ability to the war effort, in the armed forces, in factories and workshops or in civil defence. In the longer term, the AJR calculated that such demonstrations of loyalty to Britain would help to secure the right of the refugees to remain in Britain after the war, as permanent residents with full citizenship.

Although the wartime restrictions on the refugees' movements and activities were gradually eased, allowing them to join almost all branches of the forces and expediting the release of the remaining internees, their position remained very difficult. They were exposed to all the disruption caused by the war, the bombing and shortages, the dislocation and hardship, but as recently arrived immigrants they also lacked the stable foundations on which to build a settled life, being mostly without family networks, adequate financial means, easy access to employment and any long-standing familiarity with and integration into the society around them. They were also the butt of xenophobic hostility, both as Jews and as 'Germans', and unlike refugees from countries like Poland or Czechoslovakia did not enjoy the protection of a government in exile or any official representation.

The AJR struggled manfully to alleviate its members' situation, offering them the services of a trained social worker, legal advice hours and the broader security of knowing that they had an organization of their own to which to turn. But it was sorely ill equipped to deal with the workload created by the stream of individual members who wrote or called in person with their many and varied problems, in addition to the day-to-day running of the organization

itself. Werner Rosenstock has left a vivid picture of his early days at the AJR, when he worked close to a seven-day week, in cramped and insalubrious premises at 279a, Finchley Road, with finances (mostly subscriptions from hard-up members) so short that the staff had to go without pay for a period and had to clean the office themselves.¹² Even when in 1943 the AJR moved the short distance to 8, Fairfax Mansions, N.W.3, where it remained for many years, it was seriously under-resourced to meet the demands it faced.

The AJR's achievements under daunting wartime conditions were nevertheless remarkable. It provided basic services for its members, in the form of assistance and advice, and kept them in touch by means of its circulars and by organising meetings. It established local groups in a large number of towns and cities across the country, as well as professional groups, for refugee doctors and dentists, for example. It soon began to organize public events, the first of which was held in summer 1941, immediately after its foundation, in memory of Otto Hirsch, a leading figure in the *Reichsvertretung* murdered by the Nazis; a second was held in late 1942, in memory of Heinrich Stahl, another victim of the Nazis. In December 1941, a public meeting was held at Woburn House, where a sizeable audience was informed about the AJR's objectives; and in July 1942, a public meeting held at the West London Synagogue's Stern Hall in memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism, with the Liberal M.P. H. Graham White as principal speaker, attracted some 300 people.¹³

The attendance at these meetings proved to be gratifyingly large. Already in 1943, over 350 people attended a meeting arranged by the AJR at Conway Hall to commemorate the Nazi boycott of Jewish shops and businesses on 1 April 1933, the initiation of systematic Nazi persecution of the Jews. A meeting held at the Embassy Theatre in Swiss Cottage on 27 May 1945, to mark the end of the war, was so successful that 800 people packed the venue, leaving 200 more outside. So many hundreds of people turned up for the AJR's next public meeting, on 3 September 1945 at the Embassy Theatre, that an overflow meeting had to be held at the Friends House in Euston Road on 9 October, at which a further 1,200 were present. The AJR also adopted the device of holding concerts to raise funds from music-loving refugees, to cover the deficit between its expenditure and the income it received from subscriptions; advertisements in the programmes provided the main source of income. The concerts, which were held at the Wigmore Hall, the Embassy Theatre and the Phoenix Theatre, featured artists of the calibre of Franz Osborn and Louis

Kentner, with Fritz Berend conducting his International String Orchestra. The successors to these concerts, the concerts that the AJR took over from *Self Aid for Refugees*, were so successful they later transferred from the Wigmore Hall to the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

The AJR rapidly widened the scope of its activities, as Werner Rosenstock indicated when he stated at the AJR's first annual general meeting in April 1942 that its work centred on three problems, 'the safeguarding and improving [of] our status as technically enemy aliens, efforts to bring relief to those left behind on the Continent, and preparation for the post-war period, e.g. granting of permanent residence and restitution'.¹⁴ To these ends, it established contacts with influential people and institutions, such as Eleanor Rathbone M.P., who chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees. Towards the end of the war, the AJR organized a series of lectures at Holy Trinity Church Hall on Finchley Road, where members of parliament like Harold Nicolson, Captain Hubert Beaumont and Sir Jocelyn Lucas spoke – as individuals – on British institutions and the British way of life to large gatherings of AJR members keen to learn about their adoptive homeland. The AJR was also concerned to put its point of view across in the press, successfully rebutting anti-Semitic slurs aimed at the refugees and pointing out the contribution they were making to the host nation. When the *New Statesman* of 27 February 1943 printed a letter attacking the 'foreign Jews in our midst' by Mrs Eugenie Fordham, one of the Hampstead residents who later fomented the short-lived petition against 'aliens' in that borough, the response was a firm and dignified letter of rebuttal from AJR Chairman Adolf Schoyer.¹⁵

The AJR set up a range of sub-committees to deal with 'special tasks', such as organization and propaganda or public relations, as well as specific areas of importance: a sub-committee was formed to assist refugees serving in His Majesty's Forces,¹⁶ by collecting reading material for them or providing them with accommodation and hospitality when on leave. Other sub-committees were concerned with the requirements of children and adolescents, the special needs of groups like ex-servicemen and employees, and legal problems. The AJR was planning ahead for the post-war period. Its top priority was to secure the right of its members to remain permanently in Britain and to combat any proposal to have them repatriated to their native lands after the war. It was accordingly delighted when Prime Minister Winston Churchill himself, replying to a question in Parliament on 15 May 1945, a week after the war's end,

firmly rejected a demand for the repatriation of the refugees.¹⁷ The AJR was also looking ahead to post-war problems of employment and the legal status of the refugees, which it wished to see resolved by their naturalisation.

There was, in addition, an international dimension to the AJR's work. As almost all its members had relatives and friends trapped in Europe, it was urgently concerned to help Jews whose lives were under threat from the Nazis, insofar as this proved possible at all. It participated in campaigns to secure the rescue of Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe, unavailing though they were, and it sought to concentrate public attention on the suffering of the persecuted Jews and to bring pressure to bear on British, Jewish and United Nations organizations concerned with their well-being.

The AJR was represented on the *European Relief Committee* that was set up in 1943 by leading Anglo-Jewish organizations to carry out relief work for Jews on the Continent as soon as this became possible.¹⁸ It also worked with the *National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror*, a pressure group that included many leading religious, political and other figures; in 1943, this body issued a twelve-point programme for the rescue of Jews from Europe in the wake of the Bermuda Conference on refugees, and in February 1944, by which time the AJR had become a corresponding member, it organized a mass meeting at Central Hall, Westminster, to bring the peril threatening European Jewry to the forefront of public awareness.¹⁹ The AJR also provided material relief, by organising the collection of clothing for destitute Jews who had found their way to neutral countries; and it set up its Transmare address scheme, a card index intended to create a register of refugees in Palestine and overseas, to help members renew contact with those from whom they had been separated by emigration.

To this was later added a register of refugees in Britain who had relatives on the Continent, so that Jews liberated from Nazi rule could more easily locate family members in Britain. Though the number of German and Austrian Jews who survived to make use of it turned out to be pitifully small, the Transmare scheme was an early example of the tracing services that enabled refugees to establish the fate of their relatives after the war. The AJR was also thinking ahead and planning for the rebuilding of Jewish life after the war; the issue of restitution, which was to become one of the most important parts of the AJR's work, was already prominent here.

The AJR in the Early Post-war Period

One of the most significant developments that followed the end of the war was the creation of the AJR's monthly journal, *AJR Information*, which first appeared in January 1946, after wartime restrictions on the use of paper had been eased, and has been appearing regularly ever since. The journal has been the voice of the AJR for over sixty years, providing a means of communication between the *Association* and its members and articulating the values, interests and concerns that have bound the community of Jewish refugees from Central Europe on British soil together. A remarkable degree of continuity has greatly helped *AJR Information* to perform the latter task: Werner Rosenstock was its editor from 1946 to 1982 and Richard Grunberger, a Kindertransportee from Vienna whose erudition matched the incisiveness of his pen, from 1982 to 2005, between them spanning over fifty years at the editorial helm.²⁰

The AJR has always published its journal in English, unlike *Aufbau*, the former publication of the Jewish refugees from the German-speaking lands in the USA, to demonstrate that its members consider themselves British, not German or Austrian. The eagerness with which the arrival of the journal has come to be awaited at the start of each month is proof of the hold that it has established over its readers and of their loyalty to the organization it represents. Anyone who has worked in the editorial office will have experienced the letters of complaint that arrive whenever the journal's delivery is delayed, as well as the often moving letters of thanks from readers in countries near and far for whom the journal is the means of contact with their native culture and who regularly read it from cover to cover.

As editor of the journal since January 2006, I am well placed to testify to the warmth of its readers' reactions, as a selection from recent letters to the editor will demonstrate. 'There is something unusual about the *AJR Journal*. In contrast to all the other journals that land on my doorstep, I read it from cover to cover' (May 2007, from a reader in Newcastle upon Tyne). 'I am taking this opportunity to thank you for the *AJR Journal*. Without it I would be even more cut off from many activities' (October 2007, from a reader in Auckland, New Zealand). 'I have had many thoughts regarding the renewal of my 50-year membership. On browsing through the November issue, I discovered that life would be difficult so many miles away from your efforts to "keep things going" and will therefore renew my membership. With very best wishes for "keeping things going" and the

pleasure this gives us so many miles away who are so enlivened by a feeling of common heritage and fate!' (January 2007, from a reader in Woollahra, Australia). 'Thank you very much for sending me your newsletters, which are excellent' (December 2007, from a reader in Sheffield).

Once the refugees were no longer threatened with repatriation, the AJR's next objective was to secure their legal status, through their acquisition of British citizenship by naturalisation. On its very first page, *AJR Information* reported Home Secretary Chuter Ede's announcement in autumn 1945 of the resumption of naturalisation (which had been suspended during the war) for certain priority categories of applicants. The journal kept a close eye on the progress of naturalisation, reporting regularly on its initially slow pace, then with increasing confidence as the priority categories were extended, until the great majority of the refugees had been granted British citizenship by the end of 1949. This marked a definitive milestone in the history of the Jewish refugees, as they now had the same rights of permanent residence and nationality as the native population and could build their private and communal lives in Britain on a secure foundation.

The AJR was able to turn to the pressing, if bread-and-butter problems of daily life affecting its members. Top of the list was employment, with special emphasis on demobilised members of the armed forces returning to the civilian job market. The post-war Labour government's policy of full employment meant that there was no repetition of the mass unemployment of the interwar period; and in the 1950s, the swelling tide of consumer prosperity of the 'Never Had It So Good' years swept many refugees, especially those with professional skills and entrepreneurial ability, onto a secure, if often still modest level of prosperity. Nevertheless, there remained many members who were ill equipped, through age, inadequate knowledge of English or disability, to compete on the employment market. For these the AJR established in 1948 its own Employment Agency, which dealt with some thousands of cases over the years, developing links with employers who notified it of vacancies; the 'Employment' column in the classified advertisements section of *AJR Information* listed the details of these and other positions vacant and of those seeking employment, who could state their requirements and skills.

Accommodation was a particular problem for the refugees, many of whom lived in flats and bedsits and spent a higher than average proportion of their income on rent. As they turned to the AJR

in considerable numbers for help, its staff had to help to find suitable accommodation for them, and sometimes to intervene in disputes between tenants and their landlords. Problems of health also affected the AJR's membership disproportionately heavily, partly because of the numbers of elderly people among the refugees, partly because of the high incidence of psychological problems in a group that had suffered the traumatic dislocation of forced emigration and the loss of family members in the Holocaust. For this reason, the AJR's Social Services Department came to employ social workers, initially mostly refugees, trained to cope with such cases. Though the number of AJR members who were survivors of the wartime camps was relatively small, they presented problems of a special order.

The AJR sought to relieve the problems of loneliness that affected many of its members, mostly elderly, who lived alone without family members near at hand to visit and care for them. It sought to bring those suffering from isolation together with other members willing to help, helping to promote a *Nachbarhilfe* (help your neighbour) scheme. At the other end of the scale it supported *The Hyphen*, an organization set up in 1948 on the initiative of Peter Johnson (Wolfgang Josephs) that acted, as its name implied, as a link between the Continental and English worlds and that provided a social forum for the younger refugees who did not have secure roots in either world – in which aim it succeeded admirably, to judge by the number of married couples who met through it.

The AJR also established a lending library of German books – many of which probably came from the bookshelves of deceased refugees – to meet the demand from those who maintained their love for the classics of German literature. This was one visible indication of the AJR's efforts to preserve the cultural heritage that its members had brought with them from Central Europe. The AJR took great pride in the cultural traditions from Germany and Austria on which its members could draw; its journal publicised and promoted literary, musical and artistic events and published reviews of high quality of books, exhibitions and works of scholarship relating to those areas. The AJR distinguished scrupulously between National Socialism and German culture as a whole, refusing to see the latter as inevitably tainted by association with the Hitler regime, most obviously in the case of German-Jewish writers and artists and known champions of the Jews like G.E. Lessing. This set the AJR apart from other Jewish organizations in Britain, which tended towards a wholesale rejection of all things German.

Typical of the AJR's efforts on behalf of its disadvantaged members was the AJR Club established in 1956, initially at Zion House, 57, Eton Avenue, N.W.3, and subsequently in premises of its own in nearby Adamson Road; the AJR office itself moved to 9, Adamson Road (Hannah Karminski House), when it eventually left Fairfax Mansions. The Club became a second home for large numbers of lonely and elderly refugees, under the caring eye of Margaret Jacoby, the Chairman, and Gertrud Schachne, the Hostess, who sought to provide them with afternoons and evenings of companionable social life, with tea and sandwiches, monthly concerts and lectures, and celebrations on Jewish holidays. This generous tradition of compassionate care continued at the AJR's Day Centre in Cleve Road, N.W.6, where for many years a devoted team has provided lunch and a programme of entertainment for an inevitably ageing clientele.

The International Dimension

The end of the war and the resumption of communications between Europe and the rest of the world brought about a decisive change in the AJR's international role, for its location in Britain made it the natural bridgehead between the Jewish organizations overseas and the destitute and desperate Jews of Europe, whose relief became an urgent priority. The AJR in London became the fulcrum of a group of international organizations created to meet the new post-war situation, and in particular to serve the interests of the Jews from Germany and Austria. In 1945, the three leading organizations of the exiled German Jews, the AJR, the *American Federation of Jews from Central Europe* and the *Irgun Oley Merkas Europa* in Palestine, together formed the *Council of Jews from Germany*, whose aims were conveyed in its original title, the *Council for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Jews from Germany*; representatives of the Jews from Germany in countries in Western Europe and Latin America joined the *Council* later.²¹ As the *Council* participated in the negotiations with the West German government over matters like restitution, it was in such areas not able to represent the interests of the Jews from Austria, for whom a parallel organization was created.

In 1945, with the arrival in London of Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck, the spiritual leader of German Jewry who had survived Theresienstadt, the *Council* moved its administrative headquarters from New York to London, where Baeck became its President, Walter Breslauer Vice-

President and Kurt Alexander administrative director. Thus the body that negotiated on behalf of German Jewry worldwide located itself in London, with the closest links, both institutionally and in terms of personnel, to the AJR. Also organizationally interlinked with the AJR was the *United Restitution Office*, later *United Restitution Organization*, which for some time shared the AJR's premises; its director from 1947 was Frederick (Fritz) Goldschmidt. The *Council of Jews from Germany* had allocated responsibility for restitution to the London Section of its Executive, as the nearest to Germany of the three principal countries of refuge.

The amelioration of the plight of the Jews in Germany, both the surviving German Jews and the Jews from Eastern Europe languishing in camps for Displaced Persons, was a top priority for the AJR. *AJR Information* published reports on the conditions under which they lived, information about survivors and the Jewish communities re-established in Germany, and appeals designed to rally support for them. There were also concrete forms of assistance: on the front page of the journal's first issue, a boxed advertisement urged members to contribute towards the 12,000 garments that the AJR Clothing Depot, at 1, Broadhurst Gardens, N.W.6, was aiming to send every month to the Jews in Europe. The journal's 'Missing Persons' column performed an important role in helping refugees seeking to contact relatives and friends lost during the war, giving details of enquiries that came direct to the AJR as well as via organizations like the United Kingdom Search Bureau at Bloomsbury House. Reports on events in West Germany and Austria, and to a lesser extent East Germany, remained prominent in *AJR Information*, indicating the great interest that AJR members always took in their native countries and continued to take after the reunification of Germany.

Palestine was another area of consuming interest for the AJR. It campaigned vigorously for the admission of Jewish refugees to Palestine, and frequently expressed its dissatisfaction with British policy in this respect: on its very first page, *AJR Information* described the British Government's recent announcement of a meagre monthly quota of immigrants as a 'bitter blow' to the many thousands of Jews longing to leave Europe for the 'Jewish National Home'. The journal was also eloquent in its criticism of conditions in the camps in Cyprus where the British held illegal immigrants into Palestine and of the treatment by the British of the unfortunate Jews on board the celebrated vessel *Exodus 1947*.²² But the AJR was not a Zionist organization, and it remained strongly loyal to Britain, despite its

criticism of aspects of British policy. It was highly critical of Jewish terrorist attacks on British personnel in Palestine, reacting in horror to events like the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946.²³ It did not advocate the creation of an independent Jewish state before 1948, as this would have run directly counter to the very foundations of British policy in Palestine; it referred only to the 'Jewish National Home' to be established there, following the British Government's wording in the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

The AJR was able to make its voice heard in the highest quarters on the subject of Palestine. In 1946, the Anglo-American Commission of Enquiry on Palestine invited it to give evidence; the AJR Executive submitted a memorandum on the problem of Jewish displaced persons in Europe, which, it said, could only be resolved by opening the gates of Palestine to those who had nowhere else to go. When the Commission held its hearings in London, in the hall of the Royal Empire Society, it invited the AJR to appear, and Rabbi Leo Baeck, accompanied by Adolf Schoyer and Salomon Adler-Rudel, Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the AJR, spoke for the refugee community. In his testimony to the Commission, Baeck expressed clear reservations about the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. *AJR Information* reported:

He warned the Commission not to get confused by terms such as a Jewish state. The idea of a Jewish state did not mean narrow nationalistic sovereignty, but a significant contribution to humanity, it was a moral and a human task, every state being part of the great community of the world and every nationality being a treasure house of humanity.²⁴

Baeck also believed that Jews and Arabs could still live together amicably: 'There may not be friendship between Arab committees and Zionist committees but there is friendship between Arab villages and Jewish villages, and in the end villages are more important than committees.' Coexistence at local level would, this seemed to imply, render a separate state irrelevant.

Nevertheless, when the British withdrew from Palestine, the AJR warmly welcomed the foundation of the State of Israel and the victory in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 that ensured the survival of the Jewish state. It loyally supported Israel in times of crisis, such as the wars of 1956 and 1967, and its journal carried plentiful reports on events in Israel, almost exclusively from a positive perspective. Israel has continued to be a priority concern for the AJR, though to judge by

the letters to the editor in *AJR Journal* (as *AJR Information* was renamed in 2000), its membership contains a higher proportion of doves than does the readership of more hawkish Anglo-Jewish publications like the *Jewish Chronicle*.

One of the most significant parts of the AJR's work was concerned with restitution. In the years after the war, a patchwork of restitution legislation was established in West Germany, by the occupying allied powers, by the *Länder* and by the Federal Government, which enacted the *Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* (Federal Law on Compensation) in 1953 and the *Bundesrückerstattungsgesetz* (Federal Restitution Law) in 1957. This was an area of enormous complexity where the AJR assisted the *United Restitution Organization* in its work, by publishing portions of regulations newly promulgated by the Federal Government in *AJR Information* with explanatory comments to help claimants understand them, by working with the Foreign Office to put the refugees' case to the West German authorities and by direct contacts with the responsible bodies in Germany.

The AJR also involved itself with the difficult task of securing restitution from Austria. Taking their cue from the Moscow Declaration of 1943, in which the Allied Powers had designated Austria as the 'first victim of Nazi aggression', post-war Austrian governments proved far more reluctant to acknowledge their responsibilities towards their Jewish ex-citizens, claiming that Austria had been an occupied country after 1938, not an integral part of the Third Reich. Austria dragged its heels for so long that Austrian restitution arrangements were still being put into place fifty or sixty years after the war, long after the comparable arrangements for (West) Germany had been settled. As the various organizations dealing with restitution have been wound down over the years, the AJR, which maintains a section for restitution claims, has become a leading centre of expertise on the subject, of advice to its members and of action on their behalf.

The AJR's involvement was not limited to action concerning the claims of individual members who were victims of Nazi persecution. It was also involved in the area of compensation for former Jewish property in Germany that was unclaimed, heirless or that had belonged to Jewish communal bodies now defunct. The *Council of Jews from Germany* attempted to ensure that the organizations representing the former German Jews were allocated a fair share of the funds received as restitution for such ownerless property; to secure even a modest share of these funds, it had to wage a sometimes bitter

battle against the competing claims of other Jewish organizations, which wished to see the money used for the benefit of Jews worldwide. The allied authorities had set up 'successor organizations' in Germany, the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization in the American Zone of Occupation and the Jewish Trust Corporation in the British Zone. These then passed the money allocated to the German Jews in Britain on to the Central British Fund for German Relief and Rehabilitation (CBF), an Anglo-Jewish body that had been founded in the 1930s to assist the Jewish refugees from Germany. Under the CBF's auspices, an Allocations Committee was set up to decide on the distribution of the funds in Britain; its ten (later twelve) members included three from the AJR.²⁵

The AJR's Activities over Recent Decades

The principal purpose to which these funds were put was the building of homes for elderly refugees, in which the CBF cooperated with the AJR. The AJR came to take the leading role in the management of these homes, one of its most important activities on its members' behalf. The first of the homes, Otto Schiff House in Netherhall Gardens, N.W.3, opened in 1955, had 41 beds. It was followed in 1958 by Otto Hirsch House in Kew, with 49 beds (the first to close, demand from refugees in South-West London being insufficient), and by Leo Baeck House, with 43 beds, in The Bishops Avenue, N.2. In the 1960s, two further homes in The Bishops Avenue, Osmond House (38 beds) and Heinrich Stahl House (54 beds), were opened, as was a block containing 'flatlet homes', Eleanor Rathbone House in Avenue Road, N.6. A Management Committee composed of members of the CBF and the AJR was established to deal with overall policy regarding the homes, while a Pre-Selection Committee screened the applications for admission; each home had its own House Committee, as well as its Matron and Medical Officer.²⁶ The AJR's contribution to the provision of accommodation for some of its most vulnerable members must count as one of its proudest achievements.

But as Hans Blumenau, Chairman of Otto Schiff House Committee, predicted in 1962, demand for places in the homes, which then far exceeded their capacity, would eventually fall away: 'They [the homes] will probably be adequate after some years, when the number of "refugees" will become less. Once the generation born here grows old, the need for our special kind of Old Age Homes will cease to

exist.²⁷ The evolution of the AJR over the intervening decades has indeed been determined in considerable measure by the gradual but inexorable decline in the numbers of its members born in the countries of origin and by the advancing age of the surviving members from that generation. But the *Association's* history since the 1950s has also reflected the overall integration of the refugee community, its children and grandchildren into British society, and the significant degree of financial security and prosperity enjoyed by broad sections of the refugee community; both these trends have tended to render redundant some of the special services and institutions set up by the AJR for its members.

A striking indication of the extent to which the refugees had come to feel settled in their adopted homeland and to identify with it was the establishment in the 1960s of the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund. Originally the brainchild of an AJR member, Victor Ross, the Fund was taken on and administered by the AJR. It became one of the *Association's* most notable achievements. Intended to serve as 'a perpetual memorial of our gratitude' to the British people,²⁸ the Fund was launched in 1963 and proved to be a remarkable success; it easily exceeded its original target of £40-60,000, reaching the substantial sum of £96,000 (several hundred thousand pounds in today's money) by November 1965, when a cheque was formally handed over by the Nobel prize-winning scientist Sir Hans Krebs, in the name of the Jewish refugees, to the *British Academy*, at a ceremony in Saddlers' Hall in the City of London. The *British Academy*, a distinguished body that supports academic research in the Humanities, used the money to hold annual (later biennial) lectures and to award Research Fellowships in areas that would promote the welfare of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, on the model of the Beveridge Report that had laid the foundations for the post-war welfare state. The AJR, which had promoted the Fund vigorously, had every reason to feel proud of the results of its efforts: it published a list of over 3,000 contributors to the Fund, most of them AJR members, with the April 1965 issue of *AJR Information*.

The smooth integration of the refugee community into British society meant that from about 1950 the AJR had little need to devote time and effort to campaigns designed to improve the conditions of its members specifically as refugees in their adopted homeland; a rare exception was the campaign to exempt certain regular restitution payments from Germany and Austria ('Renten') from U.K. taxation, which achieved its aim in 1961. As early as 1949, *AJR Information*

reported that the *Association* hardly ever had to take action in instances of discrimination by state agencies against the Jewish refugees: 'Fortunately, in the political field actions of general discrimination have been negligible in the recent past.'²⁹ Most of the refugee community also came to enjoy a level of comfortable prosperity as large sections of it integrated economically and occupationally into the British middle class, though pockets of deprivation undoubtedly persisted among the elderly and unskilled. But by the 1960s only a minority were affected by employment and accommodation problems: in 1956/57, the employment column of *AJR Information* was instead filled by advertisements from Jews who had fled Egypt after the Suez crisis and Hungary after the uprising in that country.

The broad framework of the AJR's activities was set in the post-war decades, and it has remained largely constant, except insofar as the community the *Association* represents has aged and declined in numbers, at least as far as the original refugees from the German-speaking lands are concerned, causing the demands made on the *Association* to change accordingly. Today, the AJR, which has effectively severed its links with the homes for the elderly, has a substantial and dedicated social services department providing support and assistance for elderly and infirm members, acts as a centre for advice on restitution claims and publishes its journal. It has in recent years energetically promoted the establishment of local groups, now numbering over forty across the country. The establishment of local groups is one of several initiatives designed to increase the AJR's membership. As the organizations representing the Jewish refugees from the countries of Eastern Europe in Britain have ceased to exist, the AJR has taken their place, admitting Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Britain from across Europe. A major boost to numbers occurred when the organization representing the Jewish children who had escaped from the Reich on Kindertransports decided to affiliate to the AJR after the last reunion of the Kindertransportees in 1999; more recently, the *Child Survivors' Association of Great Britain* affiliated in 2007.

AJR membership has in consequence tended to increase somewhat over recent years, to around 3,300, a figure that includes some children of refugees, the second generation. In the absence of records, one can only estimate the numbers of AJR members in the post-war decades. Ronald Stent states that membership had reached about 5,000 by the end of the war, that it declined somewhat

thereafter, but rose again when refugees turned to the *Association* as a source of expert advice on their restitution claims. More questionably, he maintains that membership 'remained more or less steady in post-war years at around 4,000', which seems like a substantial underestimate.³⁰ During the AJR's peak years, roughly speaking from the 1950s to the 1970s, it represented a community of about 50,000 in Britain alone, and all the evidence from commercial and classified advertisements, from editorial pronouncements and from articles about restitution in its journal suggests that it acted as a focal point for a sizeable proportion of a vigorous and energetic community. The fact that over 3,000 people, mostly AJR members, contributed to the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund indicates that the total membership would have been several times greater. The AJR's two publications, dating from the 1950s, *Britain's New Citizens* and *Dispersion and Re-settlement*, the latter carrying twenty-seven solid pages of advertisements from businesses, up to ten a page, also strongly suggest a membership in five figures rather than four.³¹

Few would have predicted in 1941, when the AJR was founded, that it would still be flourishing over sixty years later. Reflecting the decline in the number of Jewish refugees living in the original heartland of settlement, in N.W.3 and N.W.6 (Hampstead) and N.W.11 (Golders Green), the AJR moved in 2003 to new offices in Stanmore, all of its previous four offices having been on or near Finchley Road, N.W.3, at 279a, Finchley Road, 8, Fairfax Mansions, 9, Adamson Road and 1a, Hampstead Gate, Frognal. The annual membership fee, which includes free delivery of the journal, has for many years remained set at the modest level of £25 (reduced for members in the greatest need). The AJR has become wealthy enough to fund a very substantial outlay on the social and welfare services it provides for its members. Over the years it has been the recipient of considerable sums of money in the form of legacies, donations and gifts by deed of covenant; it also acts as administrator of monies allocated for onward disbursement to survivors through organizations like the *Claims Conference* to Jewish organizations providing services to the victims of Nazism. It now funds projects designed to memorialise the experience and history of the refugee community for posterity: the exhibition 'Continental Britons', which was shown at the Jewish Museum in London for six months in 2002, and the 'Refugee Voices' programme of 150 filmed interviews with former refugees, currently nearing completion, which will form an archive of testimony on which scholars and researchers can draw.³²

Equally unexpected is the survival of the name *Association of Jewish Refugees*, now generally recognised to be something of an anomaly, as the former refugees have long been settled in Britain and have put their refugee status far behind them. Proposals to change the *Association's* name have surfaced regularly over the years, starting as early as 1947,³³ but no consensus has ever been reached on a new name omitting the word 'refugees'; all the alternatives suggested, which involved clumsy phrases such as 'new citizens' or 'ex-refugees', were seen as having more drawbacks than the original name. As a result, for want of a better alternative, the *Association of Jewish Refugees* will doubtless continue to serve the community it represents under the name with which its members have long been familiar.

Notes

¹ Ronald Stent, 'Jewish Refugee Organizations', in *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, ed. by Werner Mosse (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), pp. 579-598; *AJR Information*, October 1962, 'Anniversary Issue. 1941-1962, Twenty-one Years Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain'.

² It is not clear where this commonly used description of the AJR comes from.

³ For a good account of British government policy towards the refugees at the start of the war, see Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, original edition 1979), pp. 81ff.

⁴ Stent, 'Jewish Refugee Organizations', p. 596.

⁵ Ernst G. Lowenthal, 'By Our Own Efforts: The Beginnings of the AJR', *AJR Information*, October 1962, pp. 4f.

⁶ Stent, 'Jewish Refugee Organizations', p. 596.

⁷ This information appears in the first wartime circular issued by the AJR, dated summer 1941; these circulars were sent to the membership at irregular intervals up to late 1945 and much of the detail in this section on the wartime AJR is taken from them. They are held in security at the AJR's offices in Stanmore.

⁸ See Gabriele Kreis, *Frauen im Exil: Dichtung und Wirklichkeit* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1984), Heike Klapdor, 'Überlebensstrategie statt Lebensentwurf: Frauen in der

Emigration', in *Frauen und Exil: Zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung*, ed. by Claus-Dieter Krohn *et al.*, *Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, 11 (1993), pp. 12-30, and Charmian Brinson, 'Autobiography in Exile: The Reflections of Women Refugees from Nazism in British Exile, 1933-1945', *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, 3 (2001), pp. 1-21, esp. pp. 9f.

⁹ (London: Collins, 1975).

¹⁰ Quoted in AJR circular of summer 1941, and again in circular of May 1942.

¹¹ On the Austrian Centre, see Marietta Bearman, Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove, Anthony Grenville and Jennifer Taylor, *Out of Austria: The Austrian Centre in London in World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); on the Free German League of Culture, see the article in this volume by Charmian Brinson and Richard Dove, pp. 3-27.

¹² Werner Rosenstock, unpublished autobiography, Part II (from 1941), p. 3, and Lowenthal, 'By Our Own Efforts', p. 5.

¹³ AJR Circular, August 1942, p. 5.

¹⁴ Rosenstock, unpublished autobiography, Part II, pp. 8f.

¹⁵ Both letters are reprinted in the AJR circular of April 1943, pp. 5f.

¹⁶ 'Refugees in H.M. Forces', AJR Circular, May 1942, p. 7.

¹⁷ The exchanges in the House of Commons appear verbatim in the AJR circular of June 1945, p. 5, as does a summary of those in the House of Lords, which also rejected the repatriation of the refugees.

¹⁸ *AJR Circular*, April 1943, p. 3.

¹⁹ *AJR Circular*, June 1943, p. 4, and April 1944, p. 10.

²⁰ Initially, Rosenstock's co-editors were Ernst Lowenthal, who left in 1947 to join a Jewish relief unit in Germany, and Herbert Freedman (Friedenthal), who left for Israel in 1950. From 1982-86 Murray Mindlin was editor and from 1986-88 Cäsar Aronsfeld. I have been the editor since January 2006.

²¹ See the brief historical overview, 'Council of Jews from Germany', *AJR Information*, January 1951, p. 1.

²² See the articles on both these subjects in *AJR Information* of October 1947.

²³ See the exceptionally outspoken condemnation of Jewish terrorism, 'Plough versus Gun', on the front page of *AJR Information*, February 1947.

²⁴ *AJR Information*, March 1946, p. 1.

²⁵ The background to this dispute and the AJR's sense that German Jewry's claim to its former property was being ignored is set out at some length in 'The Material Heritage of German Jewry', *AJR Information*, January 1954, pp. 1f., and 'German Jewry's Rights Ignored', *AJR Information*, April 1954, pp. 1f. Details about the successor organizations and the allocation of the funds secured through them are given in 'Some Facts', *AJR Information*, April 1954, p. 1.

²⁶ Hans Blumenau, 'Homes for the Aged', *AJR Information*, October 1962, p. 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *AJR Information*, September 1964, p. 1.

²⁹ *AJR Information*, October 1949, p. 1.

³⁰ Stent, 'Jewish Refugee Organizations', pp. 597f.

³¹ *Britain's New Citizens: The Story of the Refugees from Germany and Austria* (London: Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, 1951), and *Dispersion and Resettlement: The Story of the Jews from Central Europe* (London: Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, 1955).

³² Both these projects were directed by Dr Bea Lewkowicz and myself.

³³ 'What's in a Name?', *AJR Information*, August 1947, p. 1.