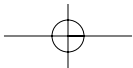
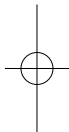
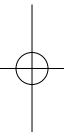
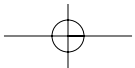
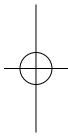
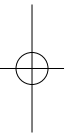
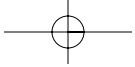


Educating for Life





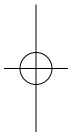
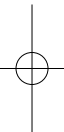
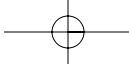
Educating for Life

New Chapters in the History of ORT

Edited by

*Rachel Bracha
Adi Drori-Avraham
Geoffrey Yantian*





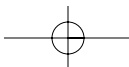
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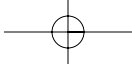
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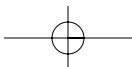
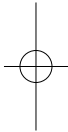
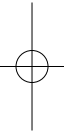
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This book is dedicated to our parents, who fled Eastern Europe for Mexico with little more than their Jewish culture and religion. As we remember them now, we realize how ORT must have touched them in many ways. It must have been that way because they were, at heart, natural ORTists.

HELEN AND MAURICIO MERIKANSKAS



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Joseph Chorin and Vladimir Halperin, 'Report on Mr J. Chorin's and Mr V. Halperin's Mission to Poland, 10th–25th September, 1957', 23 October 1957. World ORT Archive, ref. d07a264.

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Foreword

Sir Maurice Hatter, President of World ORT 2004–2008

ORT leaders through the decades were equally men of action and men of letters. People such as Gregory Aronson, Aron Syngalowski, Nathan Gould and many others shaped the fate of the organization with relentless hard work and true belief in its cause. At the same time, they never ceased writing about and debating the character of ORT and the changing social and political milieus in which it operated. From its very early beginning, ORT leaders understood the value of documenting the story of one of the most remarkable organizations in the Jewish world. It is up to us to cherish and preserve their words and their experiences. Reading the articles in this book, one is astounded by the achievements of the past generations of ORTniks: the men and women who led the organization through civil wars, revolutions and two world wars, through the worst tragedy in the history of the Jewish people but also through its greatest triumphs. In the shtetls, the towns and the ghettos. In the DP camps after the war. In the newly founded State of Israel. In Jewish communities all over the world, from the United States to Iran, and from Argentina to India. The World ORT archives are bursting with more than a century of dreams, plans and memories, and this new book is a wonderful opportunity to share the wealth of our archives with the general reader.

The first section of the book includes historical studies and original documents from archives in London and Russia, many of them never published before. The second part of the book continues from Leon Shapiro's *The History of ORT* (1980) and documents the changes and developments in our network in the last 30 years. It is our contribution to ORT's long epistolary tradition and our gift to the ORTniks of tomorrow.

ORT is remarkable in so many ways. Firstly, its sheer age. In its 130th year and still fulfilling the mission that its founders set for it at the beginning. Secondly, the nature of the work that we do is so very special. We don't give charity hand-outs. We give self-esteem. We help people achieve independence and self-sufficiency. We do so by providing them with education and training that can help them to earn their livelihood with dignity. What greater *tzedakah* is there than that?

For me, personally, the great attraction of ORT is its commitment to the teaching of technology combined with basic human and Jewish values. By teaching our children to understand and use technology wisely, not only are we making a difference to their lives, we are equipping them to make a difference to the world.

Foreword

Robert Singer, Director General and CEO, World ORT

This second volume of this two-part set, *Educating for Life: New Chapters in the History of ORT*, presents new perspectives on ORT's history as well as describing the organization's activities from 1980 until 2009. It features scholarly essays written by a team of academic specialists as well as significant contributions by some of ORT's own experts. Drawing on World ORT's own archive as well as material recently made available from a variety of other collections, this new work firmly sets ORT into the Jewish historical context of its times.

The closing years of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century were a seminal period in the development of European Jewry, and ORT's growth during this time mirrored the ebb and flow of the forces that governed the fortunes of the Jewish people. In the first chapters we see how the streams of social and intellectual development as well as the prevailing political and economic climate – often tempered with a considerable measure of anti-Semitism – underpinned ORT's own progress and development.

The latter chapters of the book chart ORT's development as an international organization in what we can begin to recognize as a modern context. The forces of intellectual argument are replaced by the realities of relentless technological development and the imperative to raise funds in a climate characterized by increasing sophistication. A significant high point, which will be recognized by many, is the return of ORT to post-Soviet Russia and its key role in the development of nascent Jewish communities there.

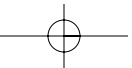
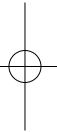
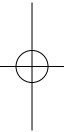
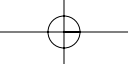
This examination and the historical contextualization of the pivotal characters of ORT's history result in a collage of scholarly perspectives that reflects the diversity of ORT itself.

The whole provides us with humbling insights into the hard work, perseverance and bravery of ORT staff, lay leaders and students over the years. Standing at our junction in history, we can feel confident that, no matter how rough the road may be in the future, ORT has the resolve and resources to tackle the challenges that face it.

We are indebted to Mauricio and Helen Merikanskas for their generosity in sponsoring the publication, and their vision in understanding the importance of bringing this record into the public domain. So many people have been involved in the production of this work and they, too, deserve our approbation. Here I include not only the professionals and volunteers inside and outside of the World ORT who have invested so much time and effort in researching, writing and designing these volumes, but also those countless individuals who, over the years, have made it their business to preserve the records of a constantly changing and developing organization, thus making them available for future generations.

Finally, we have to acknowledge the size of the editing task involved in preparing a work of this nature and that, necessarily, more material has been excluded than included. We apologise to readers who may feel that certain facts, accounts or descriptions of personalities have been undeservedly omitted. You are right; none of them deserves to be excluded; however, the realities of time and space cannot be ignored and painful decisions have had to be taken.

I am sure that you will all find these pages as inspiring as I have.



Introduction

Gennady Estraiikh

Scholars have paid undeservedly little attention to the history of ORT, often signoring this organization's role in shaping various aspects of modern Jewish life. ORT's enviable longevity, still without showing any visible signs of ageing, indicates that this institutional organism has a remarkable genetic structure which promises instructive insights into the history of Jewish communities and ideological currents. Leon Shapiro's 1980 monograph *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* forms a solid basis for any student of ORT's history. However, one book-length analytical chronicle cannot exhaust the variegated experience of an organization of ORT's scale and import. The authors of this present collective volume also did not aspire to compile comprehensive annals of the venerable organization. Rather, it is only the second volume of a history whose research will no doubt be continued by other scholars, especially as ORT's contemporary activities keep generating new material for academic inquiry. In the mean time, this volume looks both to the past and to the present, bringing together historical study (Chapters 1–7) and updates on the organization's more recent work since the publication of *The History of ORT* (Chapters 8–12).

Philanthropy has deep roots in Jewish tradition. Collective forms of Jewish religious life often laid the foundation for organizations dedicated to mutual assistance. For instance, charitable functions were characteristic of the *hevrah* (society) that were similar to the artisans' guild in medieval Europe, but which also had the express purpose of praying and of owning a scroll of the Torah.¹ In the nineteenth century, Jewish philanthropy was ready to establish radical new forms of activity: national and even international organizations emerged within the landscape of Jewish life, alongside old and new home-grown local endeavours. This phenomenon reflected the general processes of liberalization in various countries and the associated improvement in the status of Jews, whose intellectual and business elites became increasingly affirmative and demonstrative about their desire to find effective solutions to problems of Jewish individual and national survival.

In Russia, where emancipation would not be achieved until 1917, the process of establishing national Jewish organizations was stimulated by the appearance of the St Petersburg Jewish elite. In March 1859 Alexander II allowed Jewish merchants of the first guild (by that time 108 Jewish individu-

18 Introduction

als belonged to Russia's super-rich financiers and entrepreneurs) to settle outside the Pale of Jewish Settlement. During and after the 1860s the Russian capital housed several Jewish-owned banks, most notably the Gunzburgs', whose financial operations had headquarters in St Petersburg and Paris. Marriages and business interests linked this merchant dynasty with virtually all notable Russian and European Jewish financiers. Significantly, the Gunzburgs were no strangers at the Russian royal court and in the Russian *beau monde* in general. Although they never became part of the Russian hereditary aristocracy, they were permitted to use the title 'Baron' bestowed upon them by the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt.² This enlightened, westernized family was destined to play a central role in all important philanthropic projects in imperial Russia.

The Pale of Jewish Settlement demarcated the western and southern European localities, where the authorities allowed the Jews to reside. These territories were a mosaic of shtetls (market towns) which constituted the overpopulated and poverty-stricken main habitat of Russian Jews. Among the many challenges created by modernization, the development of capitalism urgently demanded radical changes in Jewish occupational structure, formed in the feudal environments of Poland and later Russia. The majority of Jewish artisans could satisfy only their traditional customers – peasants and shtetldwellers. A *latutnik*, patch-maker, was not trained to be a proper tailor and therefore had problems with getting orders in the increasingly competitive market of goods and services. At the same time, he and his offspring could not allow themselves the luxury of prolonged vocational training and, as a result, were doomed to precarious, lumpenproletarian existence. Many families lived virtually from hand to mouth, remaining hungry till the evening when the breadwinner was paid a few coins for his work.³

The economic condition in the Pale perturbed the nascent Jewish intelligentsia. Ilya Orshanskii (1846–75), one of the most outspoken Jewish intellectuals of his time, described the deprivation of the Jewish masses in his 1877 book *Jews in Russia: Sketches of Russian Jews' Economic and Civic Life*. Orshanskii's book was published in St Petersburg by Osip Bakst. Three years later, Nikolai Bakst, Osip's brother, persuaded Baron Gunzburg and several other Jewish bankers to establish the *Obshestvo Remeslennogo i zemledelcheskogo Truda sredi evreev v Rossii* (Society for Trades and Agriculture among Jews in Russia) – ORT (see Chapter 1).

Nikolai Bakst and his fellow intellectuals were loyal to the Russian imperial family. They did not believe in emigration as a solution to the problem of the Jewish masses and rather sought to facilitate their integration into the Russian mainstream. Jewish adherents of Francis Bacon's postulate 'knowledge is power' usually came to the conclusion that the problem of integration could not be solved without enabling the Jews to become economically self-sufficient and, importantly, *useful* to both the imperial regime and the Jewish

community. Destigmatization of the allegedly parasitic role of Jewish wheeler-dealers and other 'exploiters' was at the core of these intellectuals' dream. They hoped that alongside the mitigation of economic hardship of poor shtetl dwellers, the increasing number of people with a gainful occupation would change the negative attitude of the Christian majority towards the Jews. Their programme also echoed the Russian government's general line of seeing skilled artisans as the most useful constituent of the Jewish population. The law of 1865 even permitted (albeit with numerous limitations) Jewish master-artisans to reside anywhere in the empire, provided that they possessed the necessary legal evidence of proficiency in their crafts.⁴

From the very beginning of its existence, ORT became committed to integration-without-assimilation through vocational training. Initially, such projects emerged as an attempt to 'unburden' the Pale. However, three decades after the introduction of the 1865 law, less than 10,000 Jewish artisans were settled outside the Pale, which by the end of the nineteenth century was still home to almost 94 per cent of Russia's Jewry.⁵ For all that, vocational education, sponsored by ORT and other Jewish organizations, improved the lives of many thousands of Jews who stayed in the Pale or emigrated to other countries. For ORT, economic and social integration ultimately became a life-long commitment. In the 1920s and 1930s ORT-sponsored schools and courses helped Jewish artisans in Poland and Rumania bypass the difficulties of getting their businesses officially registered, and European graduates of ORT schools had a better chance of finding refuge in the 1930s and 1940s (Chapter 4).

Integration and full emancipation, ORT's main catchwords in the first quarter of a century of activities, were in the mid-1900s complemented with a strategy of building alternative educational, financial and productive components of Jewish economic life. This strategy of promoting autonomous forms of Jewish economy was rooted in contemporary ideological discussions and marked the beginning of a new chapter in ORT's activities. It reflected the disappointment of ORT's activists with integration processes and their growing belief that Jewish communities could survive as more or less independent economic organisms. In the 1900s and 1910s, ORT helped organize numerous cooperatives. In the 1920s and 1930s, ORT supported the development of Jewish autonomies in the Soviet Union, first in the Crimea and later in Birobidzhan despite serious ideological concerns about working too closely with Soviet Communists (Chapter 5). ORT also actively participated in building autonomous forms of Jewish economy in post-Holocaust Poland (Chapter 7). In the 1940s, emphasis shifted to reinforcing the economic and political independence of Israel, and this emerged as the dominant vector of ORT's programmes.

The 1905 revolution in Russia made it easier to develop institutions of civil society. As a result ORT was eventually allowed to expand and become a

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proper large organization with affiliations in several cities and towns, whereas during its first two and a half decades it had existed as a provisional committee – it was only in this embryonic state that ORT could operate in Russia's ultra-nationalist political environment (Chapter 2). The expansion of ORT's activities was accompanied by a generational change among Jewish activists in Russia: representatives of radical political currents occupied the domains of activism which used to be dominated by loyal monarchists. Like other Russian Jewish organizations, ORT attracted numerous ideologists who despaired at the conditions of Russia's Jewish population and were looking for an outlet for their political energy as the repressive atmosphere in Nicholas II's Russia prevented them from participating directly in political life.

One of the most vociferous groups of the new ORT leaders belonged to the Territorialist movement of anti-Zionist socialists. This movement preached emigration and strove to build somewhere (preferably not Palestine) a Yiddish-speaking statehood, because they did not believe that co-territorial ethnic groups, such as the Poles and the Russians, would tolerate the transformation of the Jewish population into a successful modern nation. From the mid-1910s until the mid-1950s, Territorialists and Yiddishists of other denominations played central roles within the ORT leadership. A significant part of the organization's correspondence, minutes of its meetings and congresses, periodicals and books appeared in Yiddish. The bias in favour of Yiddish underscored the anti-Zionist stand of this Ashkenazi Diaspora-oriented organization. Vocational education, most notably ORT-sponsored schools and courses, reinforced the nascent Yiddish-language teaching in eastern Europe. While non-vocational Yiddish schools predominantly attracted children of either ideologically driven or poor parents, the majority tended to educate their children in the national language of the country. Vocational training broadened the constituency of Yiddish schools. In the interbellum period, the Vilna Technicum (1921–1939) was the flagship of the ORT educational network.⁶

During World War I, rescue operations emerged as another important domain of ORT's work. In 1914–17, ORT's leaders managed to establish a *modus operandi* with the Russian government. Central Russian agencies, which were interested in the effective use of Jewish artisans and workers, even emerged as one of the principal sponsors of the organization's programmes. Based on this very useful experience, cooperation with governments would become one of the cornerstones of ORT programmes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Following the post-1917 disintegration of the Russian Empire, former provinces such as Poland, Lithuania and Latvia achieved national independence. Ukraine too enjoyed a few years of independent nationhood. As a result, new state borders fragmented the pre-1917 ORT structure. In addition, the

bulk of the former empire was engulfed in civil war and the Soviet regime did not welcome independent organizations. The new situation demanded cardinal changes in the structure and status of ORT and the Russian Jewish organization had to transform itself into an international body, World ORT Union, even if this meant initially only adapting to the new political landscape (Chapter 3). The establishment of the new headquarters in Berlin, outside the operational terrain, was a wise step strategically. Germany had diplomatic relations with all remnants of the Russian Empire and the German capital became the main European centre for Jewish organizations. As a result, many questions of coordination could be solved without international travelling. Also, if it were necessary to travel to Paris, London or New York, Berlin was a very convenient point for such trips.

By the end of World War I, thousands of Russian-born Jewish graduates of secondary schools and universities combined cosmopolitan education with profound Jewish interests. They populated all Jewish ideological currents, media, labour and relief organizations, and were widely represented in political, cultural and academic circles in Europe and America. For ORT leaders, who themselves belonged to the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, it was not hard to find like-minded people (including old friends) in New York, London, Paris or Johannesburg. Russian Jewish intellectuals, particularly those who had been educated in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, felt particularly comfortable with the German culture and language. Cultural and ideological affinity helped them to establish close links with the German Jewish community leaders and their counterparts in other countries. Initially, the ORT organizations founded in Europe, the United States and South Africa, did not aim at developing vocational education and other training programmes for Jews living in these countries. Their main objective was to raise funds for, and facilitate the implementation of programmes in East Europe.

This distinction between sponsors and beneficiaries worried ORT's activists, who wanted to see their organization as a mass movement, based on mutual help rather than on traditional philanthropy. In the 1920s, some intellectuals even used the term 'ORT-ism', arguing that ORT represented a new ideological and practical approach to modernizing the Jewish nation. Instead of distributing alms, ORT empowered the Jewish population by increasing its 'productive' elements.⁷ There was a strong component of self-hatred in the intellectuals' obsession with 'productivity', because they regarded themselves, people of liberal professions, as a 'non-productive' Jewish contingent, though the main wrongdoers were, of course, the Jewish bourgeois and petty-bourgeois – usually the main sponsors of ORT programmes. Although handicraft, science and technology would remain the main areas of ORT's educational system, the organization later did not preach the radical 'ORT-ism'. Moreover, it became involved in training of 'non-productive' professions, such as traders.

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As for developing ORT from an organization with numerous supporters into a real mass movement, this objective essentially remained an unmet goal, primarily because the very modest dues paid by the rank-and-file members could not make such a movement sustainable. On the other hand, any tangible increase of membership contributions would immediately result in a decline of the organization's constituency and a change in its social profile. Despite condemning philanthropy as an essentially harmful method of running a relief organization, ORT had no choice but to apply well-trying forms of philanthropy, which, in fact, remained one of the primary sources of its budget. Importantly, however, ORT avoided philanthropic principles of distributing the funds as alms. In addition, ORT successfully built an international fundraising network of supporting groups and circles, notably the Women's American ORT (Chapter 10), American *Landsmanshaft* associations, British ORT and ORT South Africa, whose experience deserves a separate study (Chapter 11).

ORT representatives, including its leaders, were not armchair bureaucrats. They travelled all over the world, establishing contacts with governments, communities and individuals. The outstanding (multilingual) communicative gifts of ORT's 'triumvirate' – Leon Bramson, David Lvovitch and Aron Syngalowski – contributed immensely to the financial success of the organization. Their prestige in Jewish circles helped them to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with various other relief organizations. To all appearances, cooperation played a much more significant role than behind-the-scenes ideological, institutional and personal conflicts. For instance, many of ORT's programmes were sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). In the 1920s and early 1930s, ORT and OSE (Jewish Organization for Health Care) were partners in their fundraising campaigns. Emissaries of ORT and of the World Zionist Organization coordinated their trips, trying to avoid unnecessary competition.

The Nazification of Germany forced ORT to move its headquarters to France (Chapter 4). It also meant that German Jews were no longer able to sponsor projects in eastern Europe, because they themselves desperately needed the support of rescue organizations. Thus for the first time ORT had to deal with non-eastern European communities as recipients of its aid programmes rather than as target groups for fundraising campaigns. Refugees were increasingly the main object of ORT's activities. In the 1930s and 1940s, ORT organizations trained new immigrants in such countries as Canada, Argentina and Uruguay. After the end of World War II, ORT-sponsored projects were developed in the camps for Jewish displaced persons (Chapter 6). Beginning from the 1970s, thousands of Soviet Jewish refugees in the United States benefited from ORT's courses.

The post-World War II period saw an unprecedented geographical expansion of ORT activities, as was surveyed in Leon Shapiro's *The History of ORT*.

This new volume maps more recent major developments in the organization's work around the world (Chapter 12). A separate page in the history of ORT belongs to the organization's work in Israel. Two main factors contributed to this watershed change in the relationship between the Zionist establishment and the ORT leadership. First, in its early years, Israel desperately needed assistance in virtually all domains of its economic life, including vocational training, and was even prepared to cooperate with organizations with an anti-Zionist pedigree. Second, after the Holocaust numerous previously anti-Zionist Jewish activists became enthusiastic supporters of Israel. For ORT, which worked with Jewish refugees in Europe, it was only logical to continue working in Israel with the same category of survivors. In addition, the ORT leadership always emphasized the a-political nature of their organization and the *aliyah* of the 1930s and 1940s brought to Israel a number of ORT activists who formed the nucleus of the local branch. Significantly, ORT activists, who occupied commanding positions from 1947, usually had nothing to do with the old ideological scores of Russian Jewish intellectuals and had no doubts that Israel was the centrepiece of contemporary Jewish life. Apart from opening numerous schools and courses in Israel, ORT trained potential immigrants, for example in North Africa, which facilitated their later integration in Israeli society. Ultimately, ORT became an organic part of the Israeli educational system.

Not only years separate contemporary ORT from the organization conceived in imperial Russia. In dozens of countries, including contemporary Russia (Chapter 8), ORT students study electronics and other modern technologies rather than craftsmanship skills. Some ORT schools have become transformed into institutions of higher education, such as the ORT Uruguay University in Montevideo and the Bramson College in New York. For all that, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the original, end-of-the-nineteenth-century noble mission of the organization remains essentially the same: to empower people, Jewish and non-Jewish, with the knowledge and skills to improve their lives.

1. Isaac M. Rubinow, *Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 530–31.
2. B. V. Ananich et al., *Kredit i banki v Rossii do nachala XX veka: Sankt Peterburg i Moskva* (St Petersburg: St Petersburg University Press, 2005), pp. 244–49.
3. Ilya Orshanskii, *Evrei v Rossii: ocherkii ekonomicheskogo i obshchestvennogo byta russkikh evreev* (St Petersburg: O. I. Bakst, 1877), pp. 21–22.
4. G. Samoilivich, *O pravakh remeslennikov* (St Petersburg: n.p., 1894); Rubinow, *Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia*, p. 489.
5. Rubinow, *Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia*, pp. 490, 491, 522.
6. See 'Records of the ORT Jewish Vocational School (Technicum) in Vilna', YIVO Archive, collection RG21.
7. See, in particular, Esther Elyashev, 'Ortism', in *Arbet: zamlbukh far di oyfgabn fun 'ORT'* (Kaunas: Lithuanian ORT Committee, 1924), pp. 19–22.

Note on the archive materials

Archive materials in this volume are taken from the World ORT Archive, the Russian State Archive of Economics and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. The texts are those that appear in the archive documents and have not been edited for publication, other than to make minor corrections in exceptional cases where it was clear there was a misprint in the original.

I. HISTORY

A Quest for Integration: Nikolai Bakst and 'his' ORT, 1880–1904

1

Established in St Petersburg in 1880, ORT's foundation was a product of the nineteenth century and its 'enlightened' attitude to East European Jews. Although Jews had to earn the right to be accepted into 'civilized society', they were viewed as a religious-cum-social group, whose detriment to Christian society could be alleviated not only through conversion – the most straightforward, albeit least popular route to integration into Russia's mainstream – but also through resettlement, education, and diversification of occupation.

In Russia, the foundation for this approach had been laid by the poet and statesman Gavriil Derzhavin. His blueprint, based on his fact-finding trips to the western regions of the Russian Empire, strongly influenced the Statute of 1804 – the legislation concerning the Jewish population. One of the main objectives of the Russian imperial court was to make the Jewish population self-productive, and the government sponsored the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies in the south of Russia, as part of a concurrent campaign to populate the vast territories previously controlled by the Turks, Crimean Tartars, and Ukrainian Cossacks. Despite its limited extent, Jewish colonization had succeeded in producing a class of Jewish peasants and, perhaps more importantly, inspired similar projects in Palestine and the Americas.¹

Around the same time, the tsarist government created a network of essentially missionary German-medium, and later Russian-medium crown schools for its Jewish subjects in order to liberate them from the allegedly harmful influence of the Talmud. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, Talmud phobia was still widespread among Russian grandees. Nicholai Bunge, the relatively Liberal Minister of finance in the 1880s, wrote:

The Jews, of course, are sharply distinguished by obvious racial features; they profess a special faith; they have their own language, which, although unusual, is in the service of God. However, the essence of Judaism consists not in this, but in the totality of civil and everyday rules which are elucidated by the Talmud. The Talmud is not dogma, but a civil code, full of barbarous fanaticism and thoughtless prejudices.²

The tsarist government began fighting Talmudic 'barbarism' in the 1820s, encouraging Jewish parents to send their children to general and special state

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schools through a carrot and stick approach of rewards and penalties. Paradoxically, Jews were given access to secondary schools that were closed to the Slavic peasantry; the core of the national population was not allowed education, while the Jews had it force-fed to them.

Concerned that their children may be lured into conversion, however, the Jews greeted the opportunity for state education with a degree of wariness – at least until the 1860s, during the reign of the ‘Righteous Tsar’ Alexander II, when thousands began to view education as a route towards social upward mobility and a growing number of young people realized the advantage to be gained by Russian schooling. New legislation in the 1860s and 1870s awarded alluring benefits to Jewish graduates, most notably the right to reside outside the Pale of Jewish Settlement and access to some state employment. In 1861, for example, a decree was enacted that enabled Jewish graduates with degrees in medicine, surgery and teaching to join university faculties.³ As a result, Jews began to appear in many places and social circles for the first time; in around 1880, 10 per cent of all medical students in Russian universities were Jewish. This relatively large proportion of Jewish physicians gave the profession, already considered the humblest among intellectual occupations, a stigma of racial inferiority.⁴ Harold Frederic, an American journalist who had travelled to Russia to study the conditions of its Jewish population, wrote:

In our own century the Jewish doctor made the pioneer experiments with that ticklish affair, the toleration of a Slav. After him came the Jewish scholar, then the Jewish merchant prince ... Besides the Jewish physicians and surgeons, graduates of universities, and merchants of the first guild ... skilled artisans were now allowed to move into Russia proper, and settle where they pleased. They did this under restrictions and conditions of espionage and arbitrary attacks which in any free land would seem incredible, but to them this enlargement of their horizon was so wonderful that they still refer to the time as the ‘golden age’ for Jews.⁵

In the 1870s, the two dominant Judeo-phobic motifs – ‘exploitation’ (of Christians by Jewish merchants and industrialists) and ‘fanaticism’ (which ‘explained’ why Jews were so resistant to conversion or, at least, to any changes in their traditional life style) – were joined by a third: Jews were now also feared for their revolutionary activities. Indeed, some Jewish individuals and clandestine groups, known as nihilists and *narodniks* (populists), began to play a conspicuous role in the rising revolutionary movement. Although the number of Jewish radicals was not significant, the figure of the Jewish revolutionary soon became a bogeyman in Russian nationalist propaganda.

In the meantime, several rich and intellectual Jews began developing philanthropic projects aimed at ‘improving’ the Jewish people and their public image. The Society for the Dissemination of Enlightenment among the Jews in Russia (OPE), which had Baron Evzel Gunzburg as one of its principal

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patrons, was founded in 1863 and paved the way towards expanding the stratum of 'civilized' and self-productive Jewish subjects. The baron's son, Horace Gunzburg, shared his father's devotion to Jewish social and cultural issues and would later become one of the founders of ORT.

The Gunzburg family, who in 1859 set up the first Jewish bank outside the Pale in St Petersburg and enjoyed unparalleled access to key figures in tsarist Russian bureaucracy, were the crust of a very small Russian Jewish aristocracy.⁶ They and their circle of financiers and literati (the 'Gunzburg Circle', to borrow historian John Klier's term) played a central role in St Petersburg's Jewish community – the largest outside the Pale – and to a considerable degree in the whole of Russian Jewish life as *shtadlonim*, or semi-official Jewish representatives at the imperial court.⁷

Although 'we have no Jewish Balzac, no Jewish Stendhal, and no literature describing the coming into their own of a group of [Petersburg Jewish] men and families, whose work and destinies in the not-too-friendly Russian surroundings are intriguing ingredients of Russian Jewish history',⁸ memoirs give us glimpses of those times. One of the authors of these memoirs, Rueven Brainin, a significant Hebrew and Yiddish writer, recalled his St Petersburg experiences:

In those days, Baron Horace Gunzburg, Samuel Poliakov, Leon Rosenthal, the bank director [Abram] Zak and a couple of other St Petersburg-based Jewish magnates had the upper hand over all important Jewish interests in the whole of Russia. The Jewish scholars, thinkers and poets would secretly, in their study or in an inner circle, vehemently criticize the leadership, the despotism and the weird caprices of the Jewish plutocracy ... Spirited anecdotes and sharp pithy jokes about the leadership circulated among certain groups of people, but in reality the intellectuals had surrendered to the rich people without even attempting to struggle or to voice their protest.⁹

Both the intellectuals and the rich were concerned about anti-Jewish sentiments in Russian society. Such sentiments were fuelled by Judeo-phobic writings in various publications, pseudoscientific and otherwise. The most notorious was *The Book of the Kahal* by the apostate Jew Iakov Brafman, who claimed that an international Jewish conspiracy sought to enslave Christian civilization. Anti-Semitic views were reinforced during the Russo-Turkish War of 1873–74, when many Russians, including the top echelons of society, took fantastic stories of alleged Jewish corruption and cowardice at face value.

Russia's radical populists, including those of Jewish origin, often shared the general public view of the Jewish middleman as a parasite upon society. This view was part and parcel of their hostile attitude towards capitalism and industrialization – with which Jews were conspicuously identified.¹⁰ An anonymous Jewish radical wrote to pioneer socialist Aron Liberman: 'Russian

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Jews have only one idol – profit. For the sake of money, they are ready to sacrifice everything, even their honour. They don't deserve the energy that might be expended on them.¹¹ Chaim Zhitlovsky, an authority among Jewish socialists, recalled how he viewed the situation in his youth:

... Poliakov builds railways in Russia. These railways ... are built on the skeleton of the Russian peasantry. My uncle, Mikhail, brews spirits in his distillery for the Russian people ... My niece, Liza, sells spirits to the peasant. The whole shtetl lives from the Russian peasant. My father employs him to cut down Russian woods which he buys from the greatest exploiter of the Russian peasant – the Russian noble ... Wherever my eyes rested, I saw only one thing ... the harmful effect of Jewish tradesmen on the Russian peasantry.¹²

To counteract such stereotypes, the Gunzburg Circle sought to demonstrate that the Pale's dwellers were ready to shed their middlemen's turpitude. 'Productivization', a perennial passion of the *maskilim* (enlightened Jews), was to fulfil the economic and social goals that preoccupied the Jewish circles of the rich and educated. This motivation explains the Gunzburg Circle's 1880 initiative to establish an organization for promoting handicrafts and agricultural work.¹³

Any philanthropic initiative in Russia at that time had to be sanctioned by the government, which later closely monitored the charity to ensure that it did not overreach its officially stated goals. In their application, ORT's founding fathers – Samuel Poliakov, Horace Gunzburg and others – professed their devotion to the imperial family, and emphasized that their initiative commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reign of Alexander II. On 30 September 1880, the Minister of Interior approved the 'Statutes of the Provisional Committee', which was expected to transform itself into a proper society. In reality, this would happen only a quarter of a century later, because setting up the society turned out to be a much more difficult business than anyone had expected.

A self-made millionaire and one of Russia's richest railroad magnates, Samuel Poliakov gave a substantial portion of his fortune for various charitable endeavours, including professional education. In 1867 he founded a high school and a technical school for his railroad personnel. Each year, a certain amount of money for each railroad mile under Poliakov's management was withdrawn from his profits and assigned to an educational fund. For a Jewish 'upstart', charitable activities were vital in order to be accepted by the Russian aristocracy.¹⁴ As a philanthropist, Poliakov preferred general rather than specifically Jewish causes. In fact, ORT was the only significant Jewish-related project that he ever agreed to sponsor.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his rail-building enterprises provided employment for many Jews.¹⁶

ORT's real ideologist was Nikolai (Noah) Bakst, a scientist, educator and

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intellectual. A model product of Russia's new attitude towards the Jews, he came from a family committed to Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*). Bakst's father, Isaac, was a rabbi and faculty member at the Zhitomir Rabbinical Seminary, established in 1847 to train state-appointed rabbis and teachers for work in Jewish elementary state schools. Numerous Jewish cultural figures studied at the seminary, including the 'grandfather' of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature Mendele Moykher-Sforim, the eminent educator and Hebrew writer Abraham Jacob Paperna, and the founder of modern Yiddish theatre Abraham Goldfaden. There is no doubt that Nikolai Bakst, also a student at the seminary, knew all or some of them. Students at the seminary were taught mainly in German;¹⁷ it certainly proved useful to those of them who later continued their studies in Germany.

It appears that the authorities respected Isaac Bakst, seeing him as an exemplary enlightened Jewish scholar. In 1868 he became the owner of the Zhitomir-based Jewish publishing house, taking over from the Shapiro brothers who had been denounced for their alleged religious fanaticism and unwillingness to print secular literature.¹⁸ Although Bakst published predominantly Hebrew texts, he also produced the pioneering Yiddish dictionaries compiled by Yeshue-Mordkhe Lifshits, whose outlook combined devotion to Yiddish with a strong desire to promote the values of productivity among the Jewish population.¹⁹

In the late 1850s Nikolai and his brothers Vladimir and Osip (Joseph) were students in St Petersburg, where their home became a meeting point for intellectuals. The University of St Petersburg and other higher education institutions became the main breeding ground for the Jewish intelligentsia – a new and distinctively Russian social class with much cultural and ideological influence.²⁰ Osip later became a notable man of letters and publisher, while Vladimir (also known as Woldemar Baxt) was best known as a follower of the London exile Alexander Herzen, the most radical voice in Russian intellectual life. Vladimir also studied at the University of Dorpat, where he translated the monograph *Physiologie des Menschen*, published in St Petersburg in 1860.²¹ Nikolai, too, concentrated on studying physiology. The Bakst family exemplified how Jewish integration had to some extent become a reality in the second half of the nineteenth century, and that Jews began taking important and conspicuous positions in Russia's hierarchical society.²²

The Russian government responded to the 1861 student unrest by temporarily closing down the University of St Petersburg. The Ministry of Public Education sent young scientists (graduate or postgraduate students), Nikolai Bakst among them, 'to prepare themselves for their professorships' abroad. Nikolai and Vladimir travelled to Heidelberg, which at that time saw an unprecedented gathering of talented Russians. The railway line from St Petersburg to Berlin, completed in 1862, helped bring to Heidelberg some of Russia's most brilliant young minds, as well as some of its most radical.²³

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Together they formed a student colony, portrayed in Ivan Turgenev's 1867 novel *Smoke*, which mentions the Russian periodical published at that time in Heidelberg under the title *A tout venant je crache!* (We don't care a hang for anybody!). The periodical targeted 'over a hundred Russian students; they're all studying chemistry, physics, physiology – they won't even hear of anything else...' ²⁴ Vladimir Bakst was unofficially acknowledged to be the leader of the obstreperous and intolerant Russian student colony, whose official guardian was Nikolai Pirogov. ²⁵

The surgeon and liberal educationist Nikolai Pirogov left a distinctive mark on Jewish intellectual life, particularly during his time in charge of the Odessa school district in the second half of the 1850s, when he developed an interest in the Jewish people and became a philosemite. Importantly, he supported the creation of the Jewish press in Russia, which – in the absence of any organized forms of social or political life – played a paramount role in Jewish intellectual life. ²⁶ In his eulogy for the late Pirogov in 1881 Nikolai Bakst claimed that the roots of Pirogov's virtues, including his support of Jewish causes, rested on his scientific outlook and deep knowledge of biblical traditions. Bakst quoted Baruch Spinoza's *The Ethics*: 'Men who are governed by reason – that is, who seek what is useful for them in accordance with reason, desire for themselves nothing which they do not also desire for the rest of mankind'. ²⁷

In the meantime, Bakst was busy conducting pioneering studies in physiology under the supervision of Hermann Helmholtz and in 1867 defended his dissertation. ²⁸ He returned to Russia and began teaching at the University of St Petersburg, but soon continued his own academic studies at the Physiology Institute in the University of Leipzig. He returned to St Petersburg in 1871 and from 1877 to 1886 was a professor of physiology at the Women's Medical School, where a third of the students (known as *kursistki*) were Jewish. ²⁹

By the 1870s St Petersburg replaced Odessa as the main hub of Jewish integration and became the centre of Jewish social and cultural life. The number of university-educated intellectuals among St Petersburg Jews was growing steadily. In 1868, only fifty-seven Jewish residents, or 2.8 per cent of the city's Jews, were physicians, lawyers, academics, writers and artists, whereas in 1890 their number reached 1,747 – 11.4 per cent of the city's Jewish community. ³⁰ Graduates of Russian universities, together with the aristocracy, wealthy merchants and some types of artisans, were part of a rarefied Jewish circle that was allowed to leave the Pale of Jewish Settlement via 'selective integration'. ³¹ Bakst, whose interests ranged far beyond physiology, joined the Gunzburg Circle and participated in the activities of the Society for Enlightenment. He became particularly close to Samuel Poliakov.

In the late 1870s, Bakst's articles in the influential Petersburg newspaper *Golos* (Voice) helped to rid the periodical of its virulent Judeophobia. ³² However, his work with *Golos* ultimately ended because of his disagreement

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with the newspaper's liberal stance. Unlike his radical brother Vladimir, Nikolai Bakst was conservative to the core. 'Bakst was an opponent of Russian liberalism ... He always underlined his dislike for a number of individual journalists whom he openly accused of being underhand in provoking anti-Semitism.'³³ Like other members of the Gunzburg Circle, Bakst disapproved of Jewish intellectuals who criticized aspects of contemporary Jewish life and argued that such criticism only played into the hands of anti-Semites.³⁴ Rather than public outpourings of self-criticism, Bakst preferred looking for practical ways of improving the conditions of Jews.

In the life of the Jewish intelligentsia in St Petersburg, the years 1879–80 were filled with torment and ardour. The Russo–Turkish war was over. The Jewish publications *Rassvet* (Dawn) and *Russkii evrei* (Russian Jew) began to appear. The general attention was focused on the difficult economic situation of the Jewish masses and on their inability to obtain civic rights. This social effervescence sought expression, and found it, in literary and philanthropic activity. In the winter of 1879 there were frequent meetings of various small groups wherein national sentiment affirmed itself.³⁵

Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hakohen, a young *Rassvet* journalist, joined the paper in 1879 and later distinguished himself in Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew journalism and played a noteworthy role in Jewish life. In his 1911 memoirs, he described Jewish intellectual life around 1879 in the Russian capital:

Self-help was the watchword of the social elite. ... The fund, established later by S. S. Poliakov, reflected the prevailing climate of that time. The government was less and less disposed to grant equal rights to all Jews; at least those privileges granted to Jewish craftsmen should be made available to the greatest possible number of persons. Therefore progressive Jewish circles enthusiastically welcomed the initiative to create a class of skilled craftsmen. At that time hope was entertained that it would be possible to develop farm labour among the Jews; it was still believed that the government would allot plots of land to Jews. Some even spoke about certain regions where this would be done ...³⁶

Like many other intellectuals of his time, Bakst believed that mundane philanthropy trivialized the solution of existing social injustices and reduced them to a question of aid.³⁷ Presumably, he knew about the vocational education programmes developed in West European Jewish communities.³⁸ Bakst, too, sought to create a system for giving less fortunate Jews general education and professional training as a prerequisite for well-being and social mobility (this, of course, became one of the founding principles of ORT). He came to the conclusion that the Jewish population lacked influential spiritual leaders and suggested establishing a rabbinical academy for training mentors. He also sought to modernize the traditional *yeshivot* (religious schools) by intro-

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ducing some Russian language and other general subjects into the curriculum.³⁹ Like Bakst, many scientists in the second half of the 1880s were taking active roles in building Russian civil society. At this early stage of its history, ORT can be seen as a Jewish 'component' of the empire's civil society – in Russian, *obshchestvennost*, a term which 'implied a westernized elite, but one based on education and expertise rather than birth, and drawn from diverse social groups and estates. In addition, it also implied a set of values – rational and secular – as well as a disposition to actively serve the broader public good.⁴⁰

The general political situation as well as personal conflicts limited the activities of ORT during the first twenty-five years of its existence. A product of the relatively liberal environment of Alexander II's reign, ORT had to continue conducting its activities in an atmosphere of stifling restrictions and persecutions under Alexander III. Jacob (Iakov) Galpern, co-author of ORT's first constitution and head of the organization after Bakst's death, recalled later: 'Every Jewish social initiative, even the most useful ones ... began to be viewed with mistrust and suspicion. A secret Jewish agenda was apparent in all of them: an attempt to seize something or deprive someone, or a desire to take possession of everything.'⁴¹ The words of one high official in the imperial court reflect the prevailing mood, advocating 'the abolition of everything that sets Judaism apart. ... Special Jewish finances should not be allowed to exist. As regards special Jewish social institutions – hospitals, almshouses, and others – one would think it desirable to combine them with heterodox institutions of the same nature.'⁴²

The statute of ORT was shelved by the High Commission for the Revision of Current Laws Concerning Jews, which operated from 1883 to 1888. However, it was not the worst outcome possible – in the hostile environment of the 1880s and 1890s the government could have simply dissolved the ORT Provisional Committee or significantly limited its sphere of activities. It was no doubt helpful that some of the experts assisting the commission were members of the Gunzburg Circle.⁴³ Henry Sliosberg, a member of the Circle, later recalled:

The commission was engaged in extensive studies of the Jewish question and would invite experts to participate in its meetings. Among them was Nikolai Bakst. Needless to say, Bakst was very well respected by [the] commission and his remarks, which were trustworthy and always founded on his vast knowledge, influenced its conclusions. Meanwhile, he concentrated his journalistic activities predominantly on the Jewish question.

Around that time he met the wonderful man, now deceased, who did quite a lot for the Jews although he himself was not Jewish. I am speaking about Ivan Bliokh (Bloch).⁴⁴ His considerable wealth allowed him to develop research into the conditions of the Jews, collecting statistics and

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distributing special questionnaires. Nikolai Bakst actively participated in Bliokh's project. The result ... was Bliokh's invaluablely informative and important work in five volumes, devoted to the situation of Jews in Russia and their influence on the general economic system, particularly on the peasantry. Bliokh's work was not in accord with the mood in governmental circles, and the government ruled therefore that the publication was to be destroyed. Only a few copies survived this auto-da-fé around the end of the nineteenth century.

At more or less at that same time, in the mid 1880s, Bakst began collaborating with the renowned Baron Mourice de Hirsch. Under Bakst's influence, this remarkable philanthropist came up with the idea of establishing a network of schools for Jewish youth. He allocated a colossal sum, fifty million francs, for these schools. Strictly confidential negotiations were conducted, with Bakst's direct participation, between Baron Hirsch and the Ministry of Public Education. ... A project was drawn up. Baron Hirsch's suggestion was received with sympathy and reported to the Tsar. It seemed that Russian Jewry was entering an era of general education. ... However, the project was not implemented as the Ministry of Public Education refused to give Hirsch's teachers the status of civil servants.

Baron Hirsch turned his attention to other philanthropic projects. His most cherished dream was to see Jews cultivating land. As a result, the idea to colonize the Argentine steppes was born. Following the assessment of the situation in Argentina, Baron Hirsch sent Sir Arnold White to Russia to negotiate permission for the Jews to emigrate and colonize the vast expanses of Argentine land purchased by him. He [Hirsch] established the Jewish Colonization Association and sought to open a chapter of the organization in Russia. Nikolai Bakst abruptly fell out with Baron Hirsch; Arnold White's mission met Bakst's categorical and irreconcilable objection. He would not deal with the JCA again and was at odds with the JCA's central committee in St Petersburg till the end of his life. He did not change his attitude after Baron Hirsch's death or, later, when the JCA's activities deviated from its initial task and it played an increasingly active role on the domestic Jewish scene, even turning to what was the apple of Bakst's eye – the development of vocational education for Russian Jews.

It is well known that from the very beginning Bakst disliked Zionism. However, it would be wrong to conjecture that Bakst was not a nationally spirited Jew. Apart from Bakst, hardly anyone else within the Jewish intelligentsia was this committed to Jewishness and had such a love of Jewish traditions. People in the orthodox Jewish sector sensed his commitment. This explains why he was always invited to participate in solving problems in their sphere of interests.⁴⁵

Bakst and other ORT activists knew that there was no need to increase the

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number of Jewish artisans, because their number, especially in the Pale, already exceeded the economic need for them. The overcrowding in the Pale was a problem that constantly worried both the government and Jewish intellectuals. Baron Hirsch's aborted project aimed to remove the bulk of Jewish dwellers to agricultural colonies established overseas. Initially, ORT's main attention was directed towards raising the standards of artisans and providing them with recognized qualifications that might allow them to settle legally beyond the Pale. In reality, the results of this endeavour were very poor, primarily due to various factors beyond ORT's control. Guild-registered artisans, who according to the 1865 law were allowed to apply for permanent residence outside the Pale, could settle in Russia proper only following a long and not always successful bureaucratic procedure. It included a set of practical examinations, as journalist Harold Frederic describes in his travelogue:

This was always a fruitful source of injustice and iniquity. The examiners would habitually find out what branch of shoemaking or watchmaking he [Jewish artisan] knew best, and then set him to show his proficiency on another branch. ... It enabled the Christian craftsmen of each little town to regulate the number and skill in workmanship of their Jewish competitors; it allowed them to pass in as artisans other Jews who really had no trade at all but would pay for an artisan's certificate, and it afforded a broad and fertile field for the cultivation of blackmail, which the Christian guild and the police tilled industriously on shares.⁴⁶

More than five million Jews were counted during the 1897 census, only 4.1 per cent of whom lived outside the Pale.⁴⁷ Despite its emphasis on helping migrants from the Pale – more than half of the funds had been allocated for this purpose in 1881 and 1882 – ORT's contribution to the resettlement was negligible: in the 1880s, it helped 223 artisans and their families to leave the Pale.⁴⁸ The resettlement to agricultural colonies also embraced a very small segment of the Jewish population and, therefore, could not solve the problem. Significantly, the government blocked the Provisional Committee's plans to purchase additional parcels of land for Jewish agricultural colonization.⁴⁹

Samuel Poliakov died in April 1888 leaving an estate estimated at 31.5 million roubles.⁵⁰ Even the paltry amount of money that he left to Jewish organizations never reached them, because his son, Daniil Poliakov, did not execute his father's will. He did, however, allow the Provisional Committee to occupy gratis premises at his Petersburg residence.⁵¹ The office became Bakst's powerbase; he was known for his authoritarian manner of running the Provisional Committee. Even Baron Horace Gunzburg did not play an active role in the committee. Either in order to avoid a clash or because it reflected their real interests, the two men concentrated on parallel projects: Gunzburg invested his energy in agricultural colonization, mostly in the Kherson and Ekaterinoslav provinces, while Bakst focused on craftsmanship.

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A person of extraordinary gifts and accomplishments, an indefatigable hard worker with impeccable probity, a clear head and a pure soul, and an unshakable and independent prominent figure, for twenty-four years he [Bakst] unselfishly devoted his valuable work, his time, and all his energy to the [Provisional] Committee. ...With the earnestness and thoroughness characteristic of him, he paid attention to every detail in each issue and application, thinking through and weighing every step, every action, virtually every written line in the correspondence of the committee, as if he fused with it. In the course of almost a quarter of a century it was impossible to think about the Provisional Committee without associating it with the name of Bakst. Indeed, all the threads of the committee ... led to him, everything emanated from him and came back to him. And this state of affairs had an explanation. No one else was willing and able to devote as much effort and time to the committee as Nikolai Bakst did, who would take time from his academic commitments and from his relaxation, which he never allowed himself, however necessary it was.⁵²

Bakst was clearly the best person to run ORT in the times prior to the first Russian revolution in 1905. His own experience showed him that in Russia even a benign initiative might have disastrous results. Such was the result of the volume *Russian People about Jews*, an anthology of previously published texts edited by Bakst. Published in 1891, the authorities ordered the destruction of all 930 copies after the censors claimed that the volume pointed at systematic injustices towards the Jews and that '[f]rom the numerous arguments formulated in the book, the reader has to deduce that the only way to erase this alleged stain from our legislation is to make the Jews completely equal with other citizens and to give them access to all kinds of state and public occupations'.⁵³

The political stagnation of the 1880s left its mark on the Provisional Committee. It was tolerated by the authorities but could not evolve into a proper organization. It functioned as a bureaucratic office and was out of touch with the provincial masses – not at all the Committee's original intentions.⁵⁴ As late as 1914, a Jewish educator from the Ukrainian town of Ekaterinoslav pointed out that in south Russia 'people heard something about a society founded by Poliakov, but only few had an idea of its objectives and tasks', whereas others, from the Belorussian town of Mogilev, maintained that 90 per cent of local artisans had never heard about ORT, and the remaining 10 per cent knew very little about it.⁵⁵

For all that, ORT managed to survive, perhaps because Bakst was careful to refrain from vexing the government with attempts to expand ORT's activities. He preferred to tread carefully, concentrating on a few 'small but useful deeds'.⁵⁶ As a result, thousands of Pale dwellers benefited from ORT's training

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programmes and from credits on easy terms for better machinery, tools and materials.⁵⁷ Jacob (Iakov) Teitel, a judge and civil leader, knew a dozen or so Jewish artisans, male and female, in the Russian cities of Samara and Saratov whose lives – and the lives of their families – had been radically improved thanks to the support of the ORT Provisional Committee. Importantly, Bakst sought to improve the financial position of ORT by combining fundraising for specific projects with increasing its core capital, which grew significantly during the years of his leadership.⁵⁸

In the 1890s, Jewish life in the Russian capital and provinces became somewhat more active. However, this had little effect on ORT's modus operandi.⁵⁹ Bakst's mind-set had little room for changes and exchanges of views. New initiatives were at that time more welcome at the Jewish Colonization Association, which Bakst regarded as a competing agency.

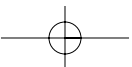
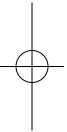
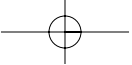
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35. Gregory Aronson, 'The Genesis of ORT', in *80 Years of ORT: Historical Materials, Documents and Reports* (Geneva: ORT Union, 1960), pp. 19–20, World ORT Archive, ref. d04a016.
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38. See, in particular, Lee Shai Weissbach, 'The Jewish Elite and the Children of Poor: Jewish Apprenticeship Programs in Nineteenth Century France', *AJS Review*, 12/1 (1897), pp. 123–42.
39. L. I. Katsenelson, 'Kharakteristika N. I. Baksta, kak cheloveka i evreiskogo deiatelia', in *Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1908 god*, pp. 63–68.
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49. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, pp. 32–33.
50. Boris V. Anan'ich, 'The Russian Private Banking Houses, 1870–1914', *The Journal of Economic History*, 48/2 (1988), p. 403.
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53. Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii*, pp. 418–19.
54. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', in *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god* (Petrograd: ORT, 1915), p. 7, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a284.
55. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, pp. 11, 37.
56. Gal'perin [Halpern], 'Kratkii ocherk istorii vosniknoveniia Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii i deiatel'nosti Vremennogo Komiteta', pp. 35–6; Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 41.
57. Gal'perin [Halpern], 'Kratkii ocherk istorii', 31; Bernard D. Weinryb, *Jewish Vocational Education: History and Appraisal of Training in Europe* (New York: J.T.S.P. University Press, 1948), p. 60.
58. Jacob Teitel, *Aus meiner Lebensarbeit: Erinnerungen eines jüdischen Richters im alten Russland* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 1999), p. 80. See also Ya. M. Halpern, 'N. I. Bakst, kak deiatel' Vremennogo komiteta po obrazovaniiu Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda', in *Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1908 god*, pp. 85, 88.
59. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', pp. 7–8.



From the archive

СПИСОКЪ
ПОЖЕРТВОВАНІЙ

ВЪ ПОЛЬЗУ ОБРАЗОВАНІЯ

„ОБЩЕСТВА РЕМЕСЛЕННАГО И ЗЕМЛЕДѢЛЬЧЕСКАГО ТРУДА

СРЕДИ ЕВРЕЕВЪ ВЪ РОССИИ“.

ВЫПУСКЪ II.

Единоновременныя пожертвованія, поступившія съ 1-го
ноября 1880 г. до 1-го октября 1884 года, и ежегодныя
пожертвованія за 1880—1883 гг.

С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.

Типографія и Литографія Л. Бермана и Г. Рабиновича. Измайловскій пр., д. № 7.

1884

Title page of book, published in St Petersburg, 1884, listing the donations made in aid of the creation of The Society for Trades and Agriculture Among the Jews in Russia [ORT] between 1880 and 1883.

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Gregory Aronson was Secretary General of World ORT Union in Berlin 1926–1932. His article ‘The Genesis of ORT’ was published in 80 Years of ORT: Historical Materials, Documents and Reports (Geneva: ORT, 1960) and appears here in an abridged version. The original text can be found in the World ORT Archive.

The Genesis of ORT: pages from the history of Russian-Jewish intelligentsia

Gregory Aronson

In the life of the Jewish intelligentsia in St Petersburg, the years 1879–80 were filled with torment and ardour. The Russo–Turkish war was over. Jewish publications, *Rassvet* and *Russkii Evrei*, began to appear. General attention was focused on the difficult economic situation of the Jewish masses and on their inability to obtain civic rights. This social effervescence sought expression, and found it, in literary and philanthropic activity.

The tendencies of the contemporary Jewish circles in St Petersburg are accurately described in a study by M. Margoulis, published in numbers 3–6 of *Rassvet* in 1879. In this study the author attempted to give the Jewish reader a full picture of the economic problems of the Jewish masses in Russia and to indicate a possible solution. Under the significant title ‘What is the Way to Determine the Fate of Russian Jews?’ he extended an invitation to the public to create a society with the aim of promoting productive work among the Jews. ‘By “productive work”,’ wrote Margoulis, ‘we mean work in crafts and on the farm.’ As to the tasks of the proposed society, which, it appears, were discussed in the intelligentsia circles of St Petersburg – he wrote: ‘We must obtain from the government an authorization to found a society that would create vocational and agricultural schools for Jews and would attend to the transfer of Jews to the provinces of the interior.’

The period of the preparation of public opinion and of the vital social forces was about to end. The idea of ORT was ripe and was ready for embodiment.

The first official document of ORT is

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a 'private letter' dated 10 April 1880. Thousands of copies of this letter were sent to well-known personalities and to leaders of Jewish communities in all towns and important villages of Russia.

The letter of the Minister of the Interior to Mr Poliakov, which mentions the 'private letter' – refers to a philanthropic action in general and without definite aims. But the first grant of Mr Poliakov was not connected with any precise aims, either. Intentionally, no doubt, matters were left rather vague. Nevertheless we know that the aims and tasks of this fund were clearly set out already in the winter of 1879/80. And even before this 'private letter' was sent out, *Rassvet* (28 March 1880) wrote: 'We are informed by a reliable source that a vocational school will be opened in the Jewish orphanage of our city in commemoration of the 19 February. Furthermore, Mr Poliakov has made a gift of 25,000 roubles, also in commemoration of this date, intended for a philanthropic organization; the chief aim of this organization will be to help young apprentices and to develop productive work. The statutes of the said organization will be formulated in detail when the capital intended for the above-mentioned aims will reach a substantially sufficient amount. It is said that high authorities have already approved the establishment of such an organization.'

Just like the 'private letter', this notice in the *Rassvet* reveals the prevailing state of mind: from the allusion to 19 February, i.e. to the 25th anniversary of the reign of Alexander II, to the insistence on the philanthropic character of the society and its aims – the support and the development of vocational schools for youth in the first place – all is intended as an adaptation to the political regime; for it was possible to obtain the authorization for the society only by stressing the humble and loyal character of the request.

Nevertheless this 'private letter' was a harbinger of a new spirit. 'We are particularly interested in the widest possible participation in this subscription, and one rouble from a poor man is no less precious than a gift of tens of thousands of roubles.' Mr Poliakov and Baron Gunzburg used such words to express the need of transforming the fund into a mass membership organization, and appealed for a mass response, because the idea of creating around the new endeavour a vast social movement, embracing all classes of the population, was already sufficiently developed in the minds to be understood and accepted by these pillars of philanthropy. Thus the initiators of ORT – financiers and industrialists, barons and professors – broke with the tradition that made them spokesmen of heretofore passive Jewish masses and opened the door to a social activity founded on wider democratic bases.

From the day of the posting of the 'private letter', general attention was drawn to the necessity to collect the funds that would serve as a financial basis of the future society. It is enough to glance at the *Rassvet* and the *Russkii Evrei* of those days to realize how vast and deep was the response of the Jewish people to these first practical measures of the initiators of the scheme.

The Russian press (in which several Jewish journalists worked too) was, as a rule, kindly disposed to the idea of ORT. Liberal circles respected the idea of more Jews in productive trades and less of them in shop-keeping and petty trading; furthermore, they thought, ORT's programme was a way towards the civic emancipation of Jews. It is interesting to observe the attitude of journalists grouped around the *St Petersburgskie Vedomosti*, a newspaper close to governmental circles. In expressing its sympathy with the idea of creating ORT this newspaper deemed it its

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duty to add that the obstacles were not made by the authorities, but by the Jews themselves. 'All they have to do to become fully fledged Russian citizens is to abandon their medieval occupations'. The newspaper then recalls a number of privileges granted to some categories of Jews (privileges by comparison with the status of other Jews), and the abolition of a few severe decrees – all this as a proof of the liberal tendencies of the government on the Jewish question. It is obvious that no one was fooled by these writings. *Russkii Evrei*, in December 1880, went even as far as to state that it did not share the opinion of the newspaper, according to which 'the issue of the matter depends on Jews themselves', but at the same time expressed the hope that Russian Jews would obtain equal civic rights after showing their sincere desire to devote themselves to productive trades.

It was thus that the idea of equal civic rights for Jews gradually hewed its way through the thick wall of Russian imperial censorship to reach public opinion.

Among the first historic documents of ORT we should mention the 'Statutes of the Provisional Committee' which were approved by the Minister of the Interior, Loris-Melikov, on 30 September 1880, i.e. five months after the 'private letter' was posted. These statutes stipulated that a Provisional Committee was to function while awaiting the establishment of the Society for the Promotion of Handicrafts and Agricultural Work. Its main tasks were the organization of the collection of funds, the preparation of statutes and the recruitment of members for the future association. On this last point it was expressly stated that 'measures must be taken to find as many supporters as possible for the association'. Furthermore, the statutes indicated that the functions of the Provisional Committee would be of a temporary character and that in future

they would be assumed by a regularly constituted society. The first general assembly was to be convened immediately after the approval of the statutes; it was to elect a board of directors to which the Provisional Committee was to transfer the funds collected. The board of directors was not authorized to spend the capital of the fund; it could only use the interest and the annual membership dues for the purposes mentioned in the 'private letter', viz. establishment of vocational schools and farm settlements, transfer of craftsmen etc. The full text of these statutes was published in the press.

A statement of the Provisional Committee, published in November 1880, gave the list of its members; it also indicated the total amount collected between 30 April and 30 October 1880 and contained a report on the meetings of the committee.

The Provisional Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr S. Poliakov, included the following personalities: E. Bank, N. Bakst, Baron H. O. Gunzburg, Rabbi A. Drabkin, J. M. Halpern, A. Warshavski, A. I. Zak, M. Friedland, I. Kaufman, and L. Rosenthal.

At its first meeting, on 12 November 1880, the Provisional Committee elected a commission to draft the statutes of the future association; members of the commission were Messrs Bakst, Halpern, Kaufman and Zak. Draft statutes were submitted for approval to the government in 1885.

From 30 April to 30 October 1880, that is, during its first six months, a total of 204,000 roubles were turned over to the philanthropic fund. A particularly remarkable circumstance that should be remembered is that the list of donors proved the essentially democratic character of the enterprise and stressed the underlying spirit of solidarity. Suffice

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it to note that 12,457 individuals contributed to the fund. ORT's initiators and the Jewish-Russian press had so profoundly moved public opinion and their ideas were met with such a response from the Jewish masses that contributions came in from even the poorest communities.

From March 1880 *Rassvet* and the *Russkii Evrei* regularly published the results of the campaign. The *Russkii Evrei*, in its issue no. 14 of 2 April, reported interesting details about the first donations. All were more or less informed about the 25,000 rouble gift of Mr Poliakov. On the other hand, not so much was known about the 25,000 rouble donation of Baron Gunzburg who, furthermore, subscribed an annual fee of 1,500 roubles. Mr Zak gave 500 roubles and pledged 500 roubles annually; Mr Malkiel gave 2,500 roubles and pledged 300 roubles annually; Mr Warshavski – 2,000 roubles; Mr Rosenthal – 1,500 roubles and 500 roubles annually; Mr Friedland – 1,500 roubles with an annual subscription of 300 roubles; Mr Kaufman gave 1,000 roubles and pledged 200 roubles a year.

'And to these donations,' wrote the *Russkii Evrei*, 'will soon be added the contributions of other capitalists. But we don't have many big capitalists ... Therefore, as long as we are unable to count on the help from the middle classes, that is, on the help of well-to-do Russian Jews, this great and noble impetus will not give concrete results.'

On 9 July 1880 the *Russkii Evrei* informed its readers that the first subscriptions totalled 63,000 roubles in St Petersburg, 20,000 roubles in Kiev and 10,000 roubles in Moscow. In 130 other towns and villages participating in the collection, 44,900 roubles were raised. During the first three months of the campaign a total of 2,800 persons

contributed to the fund; twenty-two of them gave 1,000 roubles or more and 102 from 100 to 1,000 roubles. The biggest contribution was that of 25,000 roubles, and the smallest was twenty-five kopeks.

On 17 July 1880, *Rassvet*, drawing up a balance sheet of the collection, reminded its readers that in the 'private letter' the initiators of the campaign announced that those contributing before 15 July will be considered as founding members of the future association. '15 July has come and gone,' wrote the *Rassvet*, 'and the money in the till of the philanthropic fund does not make up even a fifth of the sum expected. A total of 150,000 roubles had been paid in, and if we subtract the 60,000 roubles donated by large financial enterprises, hardly 100,000 roubles remain.'

The periodicals published letters from the farthest regions of the country. They mentioned the difficulties encountered in the conduct of the campaign and suggested many ways of ensuring its full success. Pessimistic views were expressed in several towns. 'The masses know nothing about this fund,' stated a correspondent from Rovno where the campaign was unsuccessful. From Verkhodneprovsk it was reported that in spite of a meeting held in the synagogue the workers were extremely reserved about this matter, and the writer added: 'There is no one here to make them understand what this is all about.' In Radomisl, too, hardly anything was known about the fund; furthermore, strange rumours were spreading; for example it was said that 'the Turkish Sultan became a Jew and that he invited all the Jews to come to him, and that is why the money was needed'. It was also rumoured that 'the nine tribes had been found, that they lived in a profound misery and that the money was collected for them.'

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In analysing the results of the campaign the *Russkii Evrei* noted numerous gaps. For example the participation of the town of Berditchev (an important Jewish centre) was inferior to that of a handful of persons in Ehrenburg. The large community of Vitebsk collected much less than the little town of Belz. Odessa's contribution was half of Kiev's although the former community was larger and better organized. 'Those who follow attentively the growth of the philanthropic fund,' wrote the *Russkii Evrei*, 'are compelled to recognize that what this enterprise needs is an energetic and active initiative in most of our communities.'

Here is an interesting detail that throws a light on provincial mentality: several philanthropic organizations felt offended because they did not receive the 'private letter' from the leading Jewish personalities of St Petersburg, and therefore refused to contribute to the fund. From Bolshoi Tokmak it was reported that 'the circular letter is a sort of an excuse for our rich; those of them who have not received it in person give but little.' In Bobrinetz (in the Kherson province) it was thought that the initiators of the fund entertained exaggerated pretensions about themselves, and that they 'did not deign to honour with their letter certain persons who are well known in our bare corners but not in the outside world.' It goes without saying that these grievances exercised an unfavourable influence on the results of the campaign, and to such a point that the *Russkii Evrei* thought it necessary to inform its readers that it was ready to transmit to Mr Poliakov all protests about the non-receipt of the letters. This paper went to the trouble to explain to the 'offended' parties that certain involuntary omissions in addressing the letter were only natural,

as it was absolutely impossible to know in St Petersburg all the persons in Russia who could be useful to the cause.

The reports devoted to the organization of the campaign discussed at length the question of the cooperation of certain rabbis: should they be asked to help or not? In an article entitled 'Philanthropic Fund and the Prerequisites for Success' (*Rassvet* nos. 47-52), Mr Brandt mentioned the 'brilliant' participation of the town of Kiev and dwelt at length on the impressions he had gathered in the towns and villages in the provinces of Kiev and Podolsk. The meagre financial results, he explained, were due mainly to the fact that the support of the rabbis was not secured at the right time. And the author came to the conclusion that the Provisional Committee should invite the participation of some well-known rabbis, so that 'they should duly approve' this action in the sight of all the Jews. In a letter published by the *Rassvet*, a Mr J. Ginzburg from the small town of Mezeritch was even more outspoken on this point: 'Repeatedly, I have noticed the distrust entertained here in the initiators of the fund, a distrust connected with the "kashrut" of this campaign. The letters received here were in Russian and did not mention the name of any rabbi. But, as a rule, it is precisely the rabbi that makes philanthropic initiatives "kosher". So it is not surprising that religious Jews entertain some doubts...' For the fund to become a cause for the broad masses of Judaism, the author proposed, 'it is necessary to secure the cooperation of eminent rabbis.' And since we are talking about rabbis, it is perhaps worth while to mention a curious bit of information from Bobruisk where the results were not satisfactory, because 'our rabbi, who is one of the best of men and derives his glory from being a direct

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descendant of the Just, is only interested in those things that can bring him a profit...'

Among other causes impeding the smooth development of the campaign we have noticed only one case where difficulties were due to the ill will of petty officials of the administration, as was mentioned in the editorial of the *Rassvet* on 16 July 1880. As a rule, however, the authorities did not interfere any more than in other Jewish affairs.

It is worthwhile to mention another circumstance, stressed particularly by a correspondent from Mezeritch. The 'private letter' which was to stimulate the campaign, was written in Russian and therefore could elicit a response only from a limited circle of the intelligentsia and the 'Israelites' who knew Russian. In certain towns, such as Ekaterinoslav and Pinsk, it was decided to translate this letter into the 'holy language and to post it in the synagogue'. Only in this way could it reach the broad masses of prospective donors. In another letter we find a suggestion to draft this letter in Yiddish; after all, its subject was a popular movement and, therefore, it should be in the language of the people. In another letter, published in the *Rassvet* on 16 July, a reader makes the following remarks:

It seems to us that it would have been better to send out as many copies of this appeal as possible, drafted in our simple 'jargon' [i.e. Yiddish]; then it would have been understandable even to the most modest classes of the Jewish population. Our fund is important for all Jews; it is raised in the interests of the people: let it be built-up by the people!

A total of 206,000 roubles were

turned over to the fund by 12,457 persons residing in 407 towns and villages of the country. A few figures will show the breakdown of towns on the basis of the amount contributed:

- 4 towns contributed 10,000 roubles or more
- 21 towns contributed 1,000 roubles or more
- 94 towns contributed from 100 to 1,000 roubles
- 41 towns contributed from 50 to 100 roubles
- 63 towns contributed from 25 to 50 roubles
- 74 towns contributed from 10 to 25 roubles
- 110 towns contributed from one rouble or less to 10 roubles.

It should be noted that the four towns of the first category, viz. St Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa and Moscow contributed a sum of 125,793 roubles (from 1,094 donors), or more than 60 per cent of the total collected.

An analysis of the situation in other towns gives us the following picture: Odessa at the lead with 513 donors, then Kiev (351), Elisavetograd (331), Riga (326), Minsk (310) and Kherson (305). Follows is a group of towns with less than 300 donors, such as Kremenchug (299), Vinnitsa (271), Pinsk (260), Kovno (255), Rostov (246), Mogilev (227), Balta (212), Grodno (205). In other towns the number of donors was 150 or less. Various well-to-do Jewish communities made a very poor showing. For example in Vilna only 139 persons contributed to the fund; 130 in Vitebsk; seventy-nine in Kishinev; seventy-nine in Bialystok; sixty-three in Brisk; sixty-one in Zhitomir and thirty-four in Bobruisk.

The response of the Polish towns to

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the appeal was even weaker; one would have thought that Polish Jews regarded this campaign as of no concern to them, but aimed at Russian Jews only. In a town such as Lodz seventy-six persons contributed to the fund, and in Warsaw only fifty.

The breakdown of donors according of the amounts contributed gives us the following picture:

- 2 persons contributed 25,000 roubles each
- 1 person contributed 10,000 roubles
- 20 persons contributed from 1,000 to 5,000 roubles each
- 230 persons contributed from 100 to 1,000 roubles each
- 229 persons contributed from 50 to 100 roubles each
- 527 persons contributed from 25 to 50 roubles each
- 11,448 persons contributed one rouble or less to 25 roubles.

In other words, 92 per cent of all donors were persons of modest means. For it must be remembered that the majority of those who at that time could contribute three or four roubles were in relatively easy circumstances, since poor Jews, try as hard as they might, could not have produced these few roubles. It is quite probable that they never even heard of the fund.

It is also interesting to note that in one way or other, non-Jews also contributed to the fund. They belonged to the contemporary progressive elements who regarded economic self-help as a solution to the desperate situation of the Russian Jews. In issue no. 49 of the *Russkii Evrei* we find the following statement on this subject: 'We are informed that Mr N[ikolai] Pirogov, who has already done much for the Jews, contributed fifty roubles to the philanthropic fund.'

It may be said that ORT was born under a lucky star. There was hope in the air for the improvement of the legal and economic situation of the Jewish masses. The appeal of ORT's founders was ardently responded to by broad circles of the Jewish population. To the progressive elements of the Jewish intelligentsia the establishment of ORT was the beginning of the realization of their dreams; they saw their people relieved from bureaucratic oppression, living with a healthy economic structure and moving towards emancipation and association with European culture. The average citizen, influenced by educational propaganda, saw in the development of handicrafts and agricultural work the salvation of the impoverished masses. The contemporary leaders of the bourgeoisie, the financiers and industrialists, the *shtadlonim* were, in turn, won over by the general enthusiasm and placed their names, their relations, their influence at the service of this useful cause.

But the clouds of political reaction were again darkening the country. And it was not only a political reaction, but a social reaction as well. The twilight of the 1880s cut short all initiatives in the social field and the Provisional Committee suffered the fate of all the others. The transition from enthusiasm to disappointment was expressed in an article of the *Russkii Evrei* of 22 September 1882:

Not so long ago, a year and a half at the most, we often mentioned in these columns the noble efforts which well-situated Russian Jews were making on behalf of the poor Jewish masses. It was the time when the Fund for Handicrafts and Agricultural Work was created. The insufficiency and the precariousness of the means of

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existence of the Jews in towns and their growing proletarianization brought forth the conviction that only the resurrection and the re-establishment of handicrafts among Jews could guarantee the existence of the impoverished masses. The elite of Judaism, weary of pretty speeches and beautiful dreams without any future decided to act realistically and to undertake a vital and fruitful task in order to modify the social and economic structure of Jewish masses ... The evolution of ORT was slow but constant; it was helped along by an influx of funds, of power and energy, indispensable for the development of its future activity. And now, in so short a time, everything is changed ... Pogroms have broken out, a vast emigration has commenced, and to cap it all there are those well-known decrees against Jews, decrees which, in a way, are a corollary of the pogroms. All farms and agricultural settlements, all vocational schools have gone up in smoke with other Jewish property devastated by the bandits. Pogroms, imperilling the life and the property of Jews destroyed their confidence in the future. The interim decrees have destroyed the well-being and the bases of existence of several thousand families and they continue to exercise their baleful influence.

The assassination of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881, after seven other similar attempts, only precipitated the return of arch reaction, undisguised by any phraseology. His successor, Alexander III, who even during his father's lifetime had savagely opposed all ideas about a

constitution, became even more implacable after the assassination of his father.

The situation of the Jews, which in the days of Alexander II had enjoyed a brief respite, again became desperate under the pressure of ruthless reaction. Pogroms and expulsions from villages followed in the wake of each other, and administrative anarchy reigned over this chaos. Anti-Semitism, officially professed by the government and poisoning the atmosphere, began to appear everywhere – in the street, in society and in the press.

It is obvious that these reactionary tendencies had their influence on the activity of the philanthropic fund and on the future of the ORT society. First of all, let us dwell on the question of the statutes. At its first general assembly, the Provisional Committee had elected a commission to draft these statutes. This commission submitted draft statutes to the appropriate authorities. But in spite of all efforts the interventions of the committee failed to achieve any results.

Peculiar to the reactionary current of the times were the measures taken against the vocational school in Zhitomir, for they bring into a sharp focus the conditions in which ORT's founders were compelled to work. It so happened that the ORT school in Zhitomir, which was the first Jewish vocational school in Russia, was also the first victim of the wave of anti-Semitism. In 1884 the government ordered the closing of this school; once again the pretext was the 'harmfulness of Jews'. The order to close the school reads:

In view of the fact that in the towns and villages of the south west, the majority of craftsmen are Jews, and that they impede the development of work among the rest of the population for whom nothing remains but to be

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*exploited by Jews, the existence of a Jewish vocational school – at a time when no similar schools exist for the Christians – constitutes a new instrument in the hands of Jews for the exploitation of the indigenous population.*¹

This situation did not fail to exercise an unfavourable influence on the work of the Provisional Committee. Social work slowed down. Collections for the fund stopped. 'The committee was obliged to reduce its activity for various reasons; it was done at first against the wishes of the committee and then through the force of inertia,' wrote Leon Bramson. Born of a vast social initiative on which so many hopes were pinned, the committee, after twenty-five years, became a modest and even a stunted institution; working from day to day, avoiding great problems and great efforts; and the value of its social work diminished accordingly.

The long period of political reaction left its imprint on the social development of Jews in Russia and cut short their aspirations to civic equality. The material and legal situation of Jews was constantly deteriorating. And they started to pack their suitcases... A new word, and yet infinitely old, was on the lips of all: Emigrate! Go away, to America or elsewhere, it does not matter where, but leave Russia where things will surely come to a bad end. It was at this time, too, that the Chibat-Zion movement developed. The idea of a Jewish state added another name to the list of emigration countries – Palestine.

The period of decadence lasted for a quarter of a century. The entire Russian nation was to be deeply shaken up before the Jewish people, in their turn, could forget their agony. The 1905 revolution opens a new chapter in the history of ORT, a chapter that in decades to come

takes the Society for the Promotion of Handicrafts and Agricultural Work to heights never yet attained by any Jewish social organization.

1. Excerpt from Leon Bramson's report, 'The Conference on Jewish Vocational Training in 1903–1904', JCA Edition, 1905.

Building a Jewish Economy: the last decade of the Russian Empire

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An ORT conference was held in St Petersburg in February 1914, to evaluate the organization's activities and consider its future direction with new and ongoing projects. By that time, ORT had evolved into a proper organization with fourteen branches in Moscow, Mogilev, Ekaterinburg, Kovno, Minsk, Ekaterinoslav, Saratov, Gomel and other places.¹ This kind of development was made possible because of the climate of revolutionary tumult, which had turned Russia into a constitutional monarchy of sorts. The October Manifesto of 1905 had granted the Russian people 'the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association'.²

Following the death of ORT's leader Nikolai Bakst in 1904, the organization was targeted by people who challenged its old-fashioned philanthropic style, but sought to take advantage of its name, reputation and fundraising network. ORT was finally revitalized thanks to a group of intellectuals, many of whom lawyers, who turned their attention to economic and educational reforms. In turn-of-the-century Russia, a 'third element' was beginning to take centre stage: doctors, teachers, agronomists and other qualified personnel in institutions run by *zemstvo* (an elected local self-government). Within the pyramid of Russian power, *zemstvo* itself was the 'second element'; the central government and its administration was the 'first'. In 1890 Jews were deprived of the right to vote in *zemstvo* elections. Left outside the mainstream power structure, the Jewish 'third element' carved its own niche of activities in organizations such as ORT. In the aftermath of the 1907 constitutional coup, which saw the dissolution of the Russian parliament and the persecution of its socialist deputies, ORT and similar organizations were attracting radicals disillusioned by direct political activism.

The majority of younger people who joined ORT in the 1900s, however, were Jewish liberals, cultural autonomists, and middle-of-the-road Zionists. Many of them participated in the activities of the League for the Attainment of Equal Rights for Jews of Russia (created in Vilnius in March 1905) and its later reincarnation, the Jewish People's Group. By the end of the 1900s, the group turned its attention to the deteriorating economic conditions of Russia's Jews; in 1908 and 1909 it organized conferences that discussed economic issues in the context of Jewish community building.³

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The Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) remained ORT's main competitor in the domain of vocational education and the cooperative movement. Some people even argued that ORT duplicated the functions that had been developed by the JCA's Russian branch, set up in 1892. Following Baron Hirsch's death in 1896, the leadership of the branch (most notably, Chairman Horace Gunzburg and Secretary General David Feinberg) succeeded in persuading the international board of the JCA to change its orientation: while emigration continued to be its strategic objective, tactically it concentrated on improving the economic situation of Russian Jews – a task which, strictly speaking, had little to do with emigration.⁴

In 1907, Vladimir Grossman, who would later become an important figure in World ORT, joined the JCA's office in St Petersburg. Writing his memoirs in the 1950s, he recalled how surprised he was to learn that an organization of this kind could establish itself in the Russian capital and play an exceptionally dominant role in the life of Russian Jewry while enjoying the respect of government circles. A 'component of organized Jewish public life, the Petersburg chapter of the JCA was led and financed by the JCA's central office in Paris ... and was, in fact, a Jewish government of sorts'. One of the office departments 'dealt with vocational education. This department worked in close contact with ORT ... The ORT organization emerged and developed from this close cooperation with JCA.'⁵

ORT supporters pointed out that despite its impressive achievements, the JCA remained an essentially bureaucratic philanthropic structure and that only a voluntary democratic society could properly coordinate public activities.⁶ As a result, people such as Leon Bramson, director of the JCA central committee from 1899 to 1906, and Boris (Ber) Brutskus, head of the JCA's agricultural department from 1896 to 1907, changed their allegiance and joined ORT. Henry Sliosberg, leader of the League for the Attainment and the Jewish People's Group, must be mentioned as one of the people who breathed life into the then ossified ORT. For many years, Sliosberg advised Baron Horace Gunzburg on Jewish matters and was highly popular for his tireless defence of Jewish rights. In the newly revitalized ORT, Sliosberg was the deputy of Chairman Jacob Halpern. Leon Bramson, who in 1906 was one of the twelve Jewish deputies in the first Russian parliament (Duma), also took part in formulating ORT's new constitution. This saw ORT move on from its embryonic stage and become an organized society with a member-elected executive body and the potential to open branches all over the empire.

In practice, the geographical spread of ORT remained disappointingly limited, notwithstanding hundreds of circular letters and thousands of pamphlets sent from the Petersburg office. The new constitution simplified the process of opening a provincial branch and made it available to people with low incomes: a branch needed fifteen members only, and the annual membership fee was three roubles.⁷ In reality, however, a widespread network of local

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organizations in and beyond the Pale remained an unattainable goal. Petersburg functionaries tended to blame the reactionary atmosphere for ORT's woes. Either way, ORT failed signally in many places, and experienced insurmountable problems when trying to establish branches in villages or small towns. Of the initial eighteen branches opened in 1907, four had to be phased out, while the majority of the remaining operations showed little activity. Bramson ruefully called these branches 'dead souls', and noted that ORT's leadership often preferred to cooperate with independent local artisan and labour organizations, even though one of its most important missions was coordinating and sponsoring grassroots initiatives.⁸ Among the fifty-six persons who participated in the 1914 conference, the majority represented a patchwork of other agencies, including the Vilnius, Warsaw, and Vitebsk branches of Help-through-Work.⁹ Judging from available records, there were no women among the delegates, though the conference did discuss measures aimed at improving the vocational education of female artisans. Statistics show that workshop owners tended to employ women and children who were paid lower salaries.¹⁰

Apart from the central organization, the most active branch was Moscow, established in 1909. It became an ideas laboratory, testing various (and sometimes fanciful) schemes to develop economic ties between Moscow retailers and Pale-based artisans. For example, the branch encouraged a Jewish-owned shoe company in Moscow to order goods from the town of Orsha. However, this experiment failed because the Orsha shoemakers, whose traditional buyers were peasants from the surrounding villages, could not satisfy the tastes and standards of customers in the big city. The Orsha artisans, moreover, did not have sufficient working capital for sustaining such business links. Another, more successful, project involved three other Jewish-owned Moscow shoe companies and a group of Mogilev artisans. This project resulted in establishing the ORT Mogilev affiliation, which remained subordinate to the Moscow centre.¹¹

Organizing and running cooperatives became an important part of public activity. Although the cooperative movement emerged in Russia as early as the 1860s and gathered momentum in the 1890s, its rapid development coincided with the revolutionary upheaval, when the authorities tended to be more tolerant of such initiatives. Activists of different associations sought to facilitate changes in the local economy and create a generation of socially minded people who could reconcile their individual interests with the common good.¹² Although cooperative ideas took a while to permeate the Jewish artisan community, delegates at the 1914 ORT conference already had experience of dealing with Jewish savings-and-loans associations and, to a lesser degree, production cooperatives.

The first Jewish savings-and-loans association was established in Russia in 1898; by 1911, there were 599 associations, with about 300,000 members. On

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average, 60 per cent of their capital was based on deposits, and the rest on private loans and members' shares. These associations aimed to compensate for the lack of state- or local government-sponsored financial institutions to support Jewish artisans and traders, and became one of the most developed forms of cooperation among Jewish artisans. The main body to establish such associations initially was the JCA, which was involved in these initiatives from as early as 1902.¹³ Despite all this, the savings-and-loans associations had limited economic impact: their modest capital was sufficient only for small, short-term loans that had limited impact, and the wealthy merchants who usually headed these associations had very little real interest in promoting artisans. Production and consumer cooperatives too were rarely successful among Jewish artisans, despite the public support of many ORT activists.¹⁴

The problems in the Jewish handicrafts sector attracted the attention of Marxists of various hues, some of whom participated in the 1914 conference. Jacob Lestschinsky, the head of the Vilnius Bureau for Jewish Statistics and Economics, belonged to Jewish socialists who subscribed to the theory of 'non-proletarianization' of Jewish workers. According to 'non-proletarianization' theory, formulated in 1902 by Chaim Dov Hurwitz (a pioneer of economics journalism in Yiddish and head of the JCA's department for savings-and-loans associations), Russia's anti-Semitism meant that Jewish workers were disadvantaged in the labour market: they could be employed in handicrafts and domestic services but had little chance of becoming factory workers, i.e. real proletarians. Hurwitz based his theory on the work of nineteenth century German economist Wilhelm Roscher, who contended that Jews could play a significant role only in pre-market economies. Although Hurwitz soon distanced himself from his thesis, it was taken up by Lestschinsky, an ideologist and the most serious social economist in the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party. The Zionist Socialists sought to direct emigration from Russia's Pale of Jewish Settlement to places where proletarianization might be eventually achieved.

In his 1906 treatise *The Jewish Worker in Russia*, the ideological cornerstone of the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party, Lestschinsky argued that the number of Jewish factory workers could never increase in the Russian Empire, where only minor, parochial Jewish entrepreneurs tolerated the reputation of a 'Jewish business'. Enterprises with markets outside the Pale shunned the Jewish 'label' and preferred to employ gentile workers. Characteristically, Emil Perets, a Warsaw delegate to the 1914 conference, pointed out that 'in Poland, small-scale industry is the only refuge for Jewish proletarians and artisans. Although in our parts [of Russia] large-scale industry is owned, to a considerable degree, by Jewish entrepreneurs, even they don't employ Jewish workers at their factories and plants.'¹⁵

Entrepreneurs often regarded Jews as a volatile workforce, because they had a much stronger class awareness and a propensity to strike. More importantly, however, industrialization introduced a number of simple technologi-

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cal operations, which could be performed by less qualified people, including urbanized peasants who were physically stronger and willing to sell their labour for less. Industrialization did introduce some positions for highly qualified workers, but as the bulk of Jewish workers were neither highly skilled nor totally uneducated they had little chance of getting such work. As a result, non-Jewish workers were increasingly replacing their Jewish counterparts, particularly in large, mechanized factories.¹⁶

Agriculture played a marginal role in the reformed ORT. The economist Boris Brutskus, who was a member of the ORT Central Council, explained:

Although the development of farming should not be completely excluded from ORT's aims, we have to take into account that the existing legislative limitations have hindered the access of Jews to agriculture and that the few available possibilities have been widely used by the JCA, which has developed numerous Jewish agriculture activities in Russia. In these circumstances, our organization could only have auxiliary programmes in conjunction with the JCA, and would need to work in strict coordination with it on all its projects.¹⁷

There was another strategic transformation in ORT's programmes during the last decade of Imperial Russia: instead of integrating Jewish artisans into the Russian economy, as was the initial aim, the focus now turned to building semi-autonomous pockets of Jewish economy. Several delegates at the May 1910 ORT convention, suggested to stop supporting graduates of vocational schools if the latter wanted to resettle in Russia proper, because this made the task of improving the level of handicraft in the Pale more difficult.¹⁸ In the 1910s, ORT had deserted almost completely the unpractical plan of 'unloading' the Pale, though the question continued to reappear on the agenda of various forums.¹⁹ I. B. Gurevich, one of the main speakers at the 1914 conference, explained:

Once, not very long ago, we presumed that the Pale was overcrowded by Jewish artisans and that was why their labour was so cheap. We contended then that in order to improve our artisans' life it was necessary to resettle some of them (notably the best artisans) outside the Pale and that, as a result, the artisans' labour supply would decline, pushing up their income. Moreover, many of us believed at that time that resettlement outside the Pale could radically improve the welfare of Jewish artisans. However, after further research we realized that there were also other reasons for the problem.

According to our studies ... Jewish artisans are forced to employ Christian peers, because there are not enough Jewish ones. This means that one cannot really say that the Pale is overcrowded by Jewish artisans. ...

Once, also not very long ago, many of us thought that the market in the

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Pale was too small and too weak to absorb products of Jewish artisans, in any branch of handicraft ... Nevertheless, our economists proved that this pattern was not necessarily correct ... As in many other cases, a straight line was not the best way to understand the problem.²⁰

During the 1914 conference, Brutskus reminded delegates that some ORT activists were still considering supporting the migration of Jewish artisans. He argued that such projects were not directly relevant to the development of handicrafts among the Jews. Moreover, resettling Jewish artisans was almost impossible under the existing administrative regime, and it was therefore much more practical to concentrate on supporting Jewish artisans inside the Pale, finding jobs for them and assisting them in selling their produce. There were two parts to this task, according to Brutskus: first, marketing existing merchandise and second, establishing new branches of handicraft production, based on the demand outside the Pale. At the same time, he advised ORT to avoid investing money in form of production that competed with gentile *kustars'* (village-based craftsmen), whose prices were extremely low.²¹

In all, by the time of the 1914 conference, the principal purpose of ORT's activities was to support Jewish artisans, primarily Pale dwellers, by helping them to find or create a niche in a competitive economy and improve their work conditions.²² Brutskus spoke about vocational education and cooperation as the two main directions of ORT's activities:

Vocational education has to be brought to the forefront. Normally, the state, organs of local government and guilds take care of vocational education; in our case, voluntary organizations must assume responsibility for it. Our organization will have to concentrate its attention on those additional, extracurricular forms of vocational education, which help channel professional skills to the working masses. [This could be accomplished through] courses ... training workshops and reorganized apprenticeship.

The second task, which is improving the economic conditions of Jewish handicraft, implies the fulfilment of specific managerial and entrepreneurial functions, which the society is not fit to do. On the other hand, it could support the emerging cooperatives that aim to do just that. The excellent progress of the Jewish savings-and-loans associations, notwithstanding the conditions that bar them from forming united bodies, indicate a strong organizational potential among the Jews even by western European standards. No doubt, it is much more difficult to organize handicraft [production] cooperatives than loan cooperatives. However, given the enthusiasm shown by Jewish artisans for establishing handicraft cooperatives for loans, purchasing materials, selling produce and sharing machinery, one can hope that the organizational aptitude of the Jewish population will overcome many of the current problems and that this movement will also

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achieve significant results. Right now, when this movement is still in its embryonic stage of development, our society must support it with organizational and financial assistance.²³

Delegates finally admitted that Jewish artisans often could not compete with their gentile counterparts in producing high-quality goods. M. M. Bickerman, a delegate from Odessa, pointed out that while his city boasted many Jewish bakers, it did not have any Jewish confectioners – the only Jewish-owned confectionery employed only non-Jews – and that while there were Jewish printing shops in Odessa, there were no Jewish zincographers' shops.²⁴ The turn-of-the-century market increasingly demanded sophisticated products, but Jewish artisans continued to be involved in less-developed sectors of work. According to the prevailing opinion, reinforced by controversial theories of the German political economist and sociologist Werner Sombart, Jews were unimaginative and incapable of producing original artworks. The real reasons were different, and had more to do with lack of qualifications and assets. In fact, some Jews were the best craftsmen in their town. The vast majority of Jewish artisans, however, produced goods of low quality, reinforcing the negative stereotype of 'Jewish bungle'. Characteristically, some shops preferred not to reveal to their customers that their goods (such as furniture) were produced by Jews.²⁵

Some of the statistics collected by ORT showed that Jewish youth generally did not wish to be apprenticed, especially by low-qualified artisans,²⁶ particularly since artisans were generally considered by traditional Jewish society to be socially inferior.²⁷ Emigration, too, contributed to a diminution of apprentices. As a result, Jewish artisans had to accept non-Jewish apprentices (if they were at all available) or to work without apprentices' help. This made production more expensive and prices less competitive.²⁸

While apprenticeship declined among the Jews, there still was an increase in the number of apprentices from 'non-productive' families. Lestschinsky was happy to detect a trend of 'labourization' among Vilnius-based Jewish apprentices, indicated by the professions of their parents: 54.6 per cent were artisans, 20.6 per cent were middlemen, 9.9 per cent coach drivers, 4.9 per cent office workers, 3.2 per cent religious professions, and 1.1 per cent liberal professions.²⁹ There is no doubt that only a small minority of those hailing from 'non-productive' families chose apprenticeship for ideological reasons. The vast majority of them took this route because they (or their parents) saw handicrafts as the only opportunity to earn a living. Lestschinsky found that 23 per cent of apprentices in Vilnius were over 15 years old by the time they started learning a trade. Among them were 'many boys of other towns, who struggled with poverty, but finally had to leave the yeshivot or their parents' empty shops, move to the city and find jobs in the workshops.'³⁰

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Jewish labour migration inside the Pale became a very significant factor. For instance, every fourth Jewish metal worker in Warsaw was a migrant from the non-Polish provinces of the empire.³¹ Thousands of Jewish migrants from Lithuania, Belorussia and Volhynia moved also to other industrial centres, such as Lodz, Bialystok, Vilnius, Odessa and Ekaterinoslav. Two patterns of Jewish migration emerged at the turn of the century: cities in Poland and Lithuania predominantly attracted people from surrounding shtetls, while migration to Ukrainian cities brought people from distant areas.³²

Both those who migrated and those who chose to stay in the Pale needed professional skills in order to compete in the job market. ORT sought to create conditions for training highly qualified Jewish artisans in vocational schools, specialized classes in general schools and courses outside the school system. Vocational schools represented the most expensive route to professional training. However, their graduates rarely ended up being artisans and usually found jobs in large factories – these schools, argued some conference delegates, failed to play a significant role in raising the standards of Jewish handicraft.

Apprenticeship proved to be a better way of training artisans, but only if training was conducted in an appropriate manner. ORT endeavoured to reshape the traditional apprenticeship by employing highly qualified technical inspectors (Jews and non-Jews), who selected workshops with suitable masters, oversaw the training in the workshops, and ran additional evening courses. In many of the towns and shtetls there were well-established communal organizations for learning a trade – Yad-Harutsim. In Bialystok, for instance, the local Yad-Harutsim was founded as early as the 1870s; in Vilnius and Minsk they had been active since the 1880s. They usually worked with illiterate children, predominantly from disadvantaged families. Since 1911, under the influence of ORT, some of these charity organizations had begun to transform themselves, introducing modern forms of apprenticeship for a wider group of young people. The most successful results were achieved in Bialystok, where instructor-led classes trained three separate categories of craftsmen: workshop masters, workers, and apprentices. After eighteen months' training, the Bialystok furniture makers, who used to make waxed furniture, began to produce more expensive and profitable lacquered items.³³

Despite all this, there were still some serious problems that affected the training programmes:

There exists a widespread myth about literacy among the Jews (at least among the male population). This myth is based upon the correct assumption that the majority of males have received the traditional instruction in the religious schools and therefore could read the prayers and even the Bible. What is often forgotten, however, is that the instruction concentrated primarily on reading, not on writing, and that the reading of Hebrew characters in the prayer book did not guarantee the ability to read newspapers, books, etc.³⁴

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In addition, even literate Jewish artisans usually did not master the basic mathematics required for vocational education.³⁵ Jewish activists from various regions brought to the conference alarming information about the decline of literacy among Jews, which was a by-product of pauperization, particularly in the slums of industrial centres such as Ekaterinoslav and Warsaw. In addition, gifted children of artisans tended to choose more prestigious occupations, whereas handicrafts remained the fate of less talented children. Up to 18 per cent of Warsaw's workshops, for example, hired workers and apprentices who could read and write only Hebrew characters, while up to 16 per cent of workshops hired workers who were completely illiterate.³⁶

Although Russian was the main language used for ORT's conferences, meetings and documents, the predominance of Yiddish literacy among Jewish artisans encouraged the organization to publish its literature in this language too.³⁷ Jacob Lestschinsky and I. I. Estrin, a Bobruisk activist, proposed the establishment of Yiddish periodicals for various artisan groups. Apart from practical reasons, the turn to Yiddish reflected its rising prestige and ideological value among Jewish socialists, whose presence became increasingly visible within ORT.

The 1914 conference helped ORT's leaders to form a comprehensive picture of the economic situation in the Pale of Jewish Settlement. It also gave them the knowledge and experience to restructure the organization. However, less than six months later World War I dramatically changed the situation of East European Jewry.

The Russian government and army officials suspected that Jews sympathized with Germany, and so initiated mass deportations from areas near the front line, particularly in the Kovno province of Lithuania. Many others who were not deported chose to flee the hostilities of their own accord. This was 'one of the largest cases of forced migration before World War II', and it brought a rapid development in Jewish aid activities. Furthermore, 'wartime events contributed substantially to the mobilization and consolidation of disparate Jewish communities into a more unified, democratized, and radicalized minority'.³⁸ In October 1914, the central office of ORT established a Relief-through-Work department, which acted to find profitable occupations for displaced artisans and workers. The new department became ORT's flagship operation during the wartime period and coordinated its activities with the Central Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (EKOPO), the Society for the Health of Jews (OSE, which effectively acted as the health wing of EKOPO) and the JCA.³⁹ By early 1916, EKOPO registered 118,500 individuals who had fled or been expelled from the war zone. The official figures represented only a fragment of the real numbers of Jewish refugees, such as the Lithuanian shtetl-dwellers who were displaced during the spring and summer of 1915.⁴⁰

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Lestschinsky's work at ORT's Relief-through-Work department enabled him to monitor the economic situation among the Jews.⁴¹ He was concerned about the forced mass migration from the war-ridden Pale, particularly because this separated Jewish entrepreneurs from Jewish workers and could emasculate the Jewish economy.⁴² At the same time, he did notice that the war benefited some Jewish artisans economically and forced many 'non-productive elements' to turn to more productive occupations.

After the war broke, almost all the provinces of the Pale were overwhelmed by a crisis which affected all classes and strata of society: trade came to a standstill, many workshops closed down, and industrial activity declined. However, just three or four months later it turned out that the army needed an enormous number of workers, including a considerable demand for *artisans*. From the very beginning, the demand for artisan labour concentrated in the home-front areas, *situated not very far* from the battle zones. These areas, which included many provinces of the Pale, became centres for producing uniforms and equipment. Given the fact that the provinces had a limited number of artisans, other members of the population, most notably women, were increasingly recruited and trained for the production of uncomplicated items of clothing and equipment. Due to the interruptions in regular transport services to and from industrial centres, many items that were formerly brought to the provinces from elsewhere were now being produced locally. As a result, five or six months after war was declared the situation began improving even for artisans who were not directly producing goods for the military. Even trade started reviving in these provinces ...

A completely different situation prevailed in the provinces that were directly affected by the military operations and ... deportations. Over one hundred thousand people who were expelled from their homes gathered in Poland's large urban centres, Warsaw in particular.⁴³ Due to the proximity of the front, entire sectors of the industry were completely paralysed, while many other industries reduced their output. As a result, *tens of thousands of unemployed* people also became destitute. Their plight was even harder than the situation of those who had been expelled, because no charitable committees were concerned about them; they were left to their own devices or, to be precise, they were condemned to hunger and death. It triggered a chaotic flight of unemployed and displaced people to the provinces of the old Pale of Jewish Settlement ... Agents recruiting workers for Minsk, Kiev and other places, appeared in Polish towns; other agents appeared too, recruiting young girls who were willing to sell their bodies ...⁴⁴

Brutskus, now also an activist of the Relief-through-Work department, came to similar conclusions in his analysis of the situation. He echoed Lestschinsky's assertion that areas outside the main centres (such as Ekateri-

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noslav)⁴⁵ were best suited for Jewish refugees, because Jewish presence in local economies helped newcomers to find jobs or niches for business enterprises. At the same time, economic hubs outside the Pale (such as Kharkov, Saratov, Samara, Kazan, Tsaritsyn, Astrakhan, Perm, Rybinsk, and Iaroslavl) also created economic opportunities for the refugees.⁴⁶ The expulsions had broken the Pale, whose boundaries were crossed by two fifths of all displaced Jews. First, the Voronezh, Tambov and Penza provinces were opened for Jewish refugees, then Jews were allowed to settle in any urban area of the empire apart from Petrograd (this Russian name replaced St Petersburg, reflecting the anti-German atmosphere in war-ridden Russia), Moscow, the Caucasus and the Cossack lands. None the less, this much-fought-for historic liberation was associated with the suffering of many thousands of displaced people.⁴⁷

For all that, ORT activists tried to concentrate on the positive effects of the forced migration, and Brutskus's research revealed examples of successful integration. According to him, tailors, shoemakers and seamstresses, whose numbers were significant among the refugees, were in strong demand by the military. Meanwhile, the process of 'labourization' continued to encompass tens of thousands of refugees.⁴⁸ In this environment, 'Jewish activists were faced with a task of great historic significance – to remedy the evils of the evacuation and to save the masses from physical degradation and spiritual demoralization'.⁴⁹

ORT's activities expanded rapidly during World War I: its branches increased from eleven in 1914 to thirty-seven in 1916, with 158 institutions functioning under the auspices of ORT. The financial situation of the organization improved significantly, but became dangerously dependent on refugee-related funding, with 85 per cent of its budget covered by EKOPO. ORT Memberships fees constituted only a fraction of the general budget. EKOPO funds came from several sources, most notably the Ministry of Internal Affairs and charitable organizations, including the government-sponsored Tatiana Committee for the Relief of War Victims (the Tsar's second daughter Tatiana was its patron) and Jewish foundations.⁵⁰ The sponsorship of the state reflected criticism from civilian authorities over the deportations and pogroms conducted by the army, particularly by its Cossack units.⁵¹ Some donations had arrived from Jewish labour organizations in the United States and United Kingdom. According to David Lvovitch, one of the central figures in post-World War I ORT, 'the first contact between ORT and America occurred in 1916 or thereabouts, when a 15,000 dollar appropriation for Russian ORT was made by several American Jewish labour organizations, led by the Arbeiter Ring [Workmen's Circle] ... The whole transaction, however, was in the nature of a solitary episode, and was soon forgotten.'⁵²

In February 1916, ORT convened a conference initiated by the Relief-through-Work department. The conference's ninety-five participants repre-

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sented the main Jewish organizations (ORT, EKOPO, JCA, OPE and OSE), local branches of ORT and scores of various organizations scattered all over the European part of the empire, apart from areas occupied by the Germans. Many other delegates were prevented from attending due to railway disruptions in south Russia. In addition to the core group of ORT activists, such as Sliosberg, Bramson and Lestschinsky, many newcomers attended the conference, including a group of Zionist Socialists. Several of them later turned to Bolshevism – figures such as Moshe Litvakov, editor of the Moscow Yiddish daily *Der emes* (Truth); Isaiah Khurgin, a Soviet diplomatic and trade representative; Ephraim Loiter, director of Yiddish theatres in Ukraine, and Iakov Slonim, a translator from Yiddish into Russian.

The ideological differences between the various participants at the conference became clear once the agenda turned to the Jewish employment bureaus. These employment centres were very popular among artisans and unskilled people even before the war (the Warsaw labour exchange was handling over 4,000 applications in 1913)⁵³ and by 1916 ORT alone was operating as many as fifty-six centres.⁵⁴ However, several Marxist delegates of Bundist orientation felt apprehensive about this ‘them-and-us’ mentality and advocated an internationalist approach to institutions aimed at regulating the job market. They argued that it was necessary to fight for the interests of Jewish workers within the framework of general labour exchanges, and that their isolation stemmed from a ‘ghetto psychology’. According to the delegates, this could have been justified if Jews had operated within an autonomous economy in which Jewish labourers were cooperating with Jewish entrepreneurs but this was not the case: in reality Jewish factory owners in Lodz would not employ Jewish workers.

Another group of Marxists, from the Zionist Socialist stream, took a different view on the issue of Jewish exchanges. Litvakov argued that the historical and contemporary peculiarities of the Jewish ‘economic mode of life’ (*ekonomicheskii byt*) necessitated separate institutions, or at least separate sections within general institutions, that could deal with issues concerning the Jewish masses. In addition, Jewish artisans and workers were better educated and better organized for creating bodies such as the employment bureaus so it would be counterproductive for them to join general labour exchanges. In fact, Jewish employment bureaus could form the nucleus of labour exchanges serving the needs of various communities.⁵⁵

The debate between the Zionist Socialists and the Bundists continued after the 1916 conference. When talks ended in deadlock during the June 1917 ORT conference in Petrograd it was decided to put off the final decisions until the next conference. This, however, did not happen – and the Bolshevik Revolution changed the situation completely.⁵⁶

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1. B. L. Shlosberg, 'Ob organizatsii deiatel'nosti Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda na mestakh', in *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god* (Petrograd: ORT, 1915), p. 27, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a284.
2. Gilbert S. Doctorow, 'The Government Program of 17 October 1905', *Russian Review*, 34/2 (1975), pp. 123–36.
3. See Sidney Harcave, 'The Jews and the First Russian National Election', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 9/1 (1950), pp. 33–41; Alexander Orbach, 'The Jewish People's Group and Jewish Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1906–1914', *Modern Judaism*, 10/1 (1990), pp. 1–15.
4. Saul M. Ginsburg, *Amolike Peterburg* (New York: Tsiko, 1944), pp. 122–23.
5. Vladimir Grossman, *Amol un haynt* (Paris: n.p., 1955), pp. 18–19 (author's translation).
6. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', in *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 8, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a284.
7. *Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1908 god* (St Petersburg: ORT, 1908), 2; *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 36.
8. 'Delo pooshchereniia truda v evreiskikh obshchinakh', *Russkii evrei*, 44 (1883), p. 3.
9. *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 4; Shlosberg, 'Ob organizatsii deiatel'nosti Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda na mestakh', pp. 26–29, 41. For a history of Vilna's trendsetting Help-through-Work, see Hirsz Abramowicz, *Profiles of a Lost World: Memoirs of East European Jewish Life before World War II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press: 1999), pp. 223–28.
10. *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 16; Shlosberg, 'Ob organizatsii deiatel'nosti Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda na mestakh', p. 33; Jacob Lestschinsky, 'K polozeniiu remeslennykh uchenikov v Vil'ne' in *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 75.
11. *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, pp. 35, 117–22.
12. Eugene M. Kayden, 'Consumers' Cooperation', in *The Cooperative Movement in Russia during the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 4–10; Anita B. Baker, 'Community and Growth: Muddling Through with Russian Credit Cooperatives', *The Journal of Economic History*, 37/1 (1977), p. 143.
13. Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 46; A. M. Ginzburg, 'Rossiia s 1772 g. Ekonomicheskaiia deiatel'nost', *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 13 (reprint Moscow: TERRA, 1991), pp. 652–53, 673.
14. *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, pp. 11–12, 14–15, 40; E. A. Arkin, 'O sbyte remeslennykh izdelii' in *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 116.
15. *Otchet o soveshchaniu Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 13.
16. See, in particular, Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, 'Split Labor Market and the State: The Effect of Modernization on Jewish Industrial Workers in Tsarist Russia', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 92/6 (1987), pp. 1435–60.

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17. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', p. 8 (author's translation). For Brutskus see, for example, Nina Rogalina, *Boris Brutskus – istorik narodnogo khoziaistva Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i kartografiia, 1998).
18. *Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1911 god* (St Petersburg: ORT, 1912), p. 7, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a282.
19. *Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1911 god*, p. 41.
20. I. B. Gurevich, 'O sbyte remeslennykh izdelii', in *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, pp. 109–110 (author's translation).
21. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', p. 9.
22. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 2.
23. 'Doklad chlena komiteta B. D. Brutskusa', p. 9 (author's translation).
24. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 88. Zincography is the process of engraving zinc printing plates.
25. Ginzburg, 'Rossiia s 1772 g. Ekonomicheskaiia deiatel'nost', *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 13, pp. 652–53, 673; A. I. Kastelianskii, 'Stoliarno-mebel'noe proizvodstvo v cherte evreiskoi osedlosti', *Materialy i issledovaniia o evreiskoi remeslennoi promyshlennosti*, vol. 1 (Petrograd: ORT, 1915), pp. 115, 118.
26. M. L. Bolotin, 'Remeslennoe uchenichestvo i instruktorstvo', in *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 50.
27. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 247; Arcadius Kahan, *Essays in Jewish Social and Economic History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 25.
28. Kastelianskii, 'Stoliarno-mebel'noe proizvodstvo v cherte evreiskoi osedlosti', p. 114.
29. Lestschinsky, 'K polozheniiu remeslennykh uchenikov v Vil'ne', p. 68.
30. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 66 (author's translation).
31. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 16.
32. Jacob Lestschinsky, 'Problemy trudovoi pomoshchi', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, 2 (1916), p. 5, World ORT Archive, ref. RG/2/7/22.
33. Bolotin, 'Remeslennoe uchenichestvo i instruktorstvo', pp. 53–9.
34. Kahan, *Essays in Jewish Social and Economic History*, p. 45.
35. Bolotin, 'Remeslennoe uchenichestvo i instruktorstvo', p. 55.
36. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, pp. 12–14.
37. Shlosberg, 'Ob organizatsii deiatel'nosti Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda na mestakh', p. 29.
38. Eric Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I', *The Russian Review*, 60 (July 2001), pp. 404, 419.
39. Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 148; Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), pp. 74–75.
40. B. S., 'Rasselenie i sostav evreiskikh bezhentsev i vyselentsev', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, 5 (1916), pp. 7–10; Genrikh Ioffe, 'Vyselenie evreev iz prifrontovoi polosy v 1915 godu', *Voprosy istorii*, 9 (2001), pp. 85–97.
41. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 75, 81.
42. See Gabriele Freitig, *Nächstes Jahr in Moskau! Die Zuwanderung von Juden in die sowjetische Metropole 1917–1932* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 64–5.

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43. At the beginning of 1915, over 80,000 uprooted Jews arrived in Warsaw within days. See Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews', p. 410.
44. Lestschinsky, 'Problemy trudovoi pomoshchi', pp. 5–6 (author's translation).
45. Importantly, a part of Ekaterinoslav province was not under military rule. Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews', p. 411.
46. Boris Brutskus, 'Osnovnye printsipy v dele rasseleniia bezhentssev', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, 5 (1916), pp. 5–7.
47. Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, pp. 145–46; Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews', p. 418.
48. Brutskus, 'Osnovnye printsipy v dele rasseleniia bezhentssev', pp. 5–7.
49. Lestschinsky, 'Problemy trudovoi pomoshchi', pp. 5–6 (author's translation).
50. Leon Bramson, 'Ocherednaia rabota', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, 10 (1916), pp. 1–5.
51. Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews', pp. 411, 415.
52. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson and World ORT', *ORT Economic Review*, 4/2 (November 1944), p. 3, World ORT Archive, ref. d05a088.
53. *Otchet o soveshchanii Komiteta: Otchet Obshchestva remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii za 1914 god*, p. 15.
54. Bramson, 'Ocherednaia rabota', p. 1.
55. 'Iz itogov minuvshago soveshchaniia', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, 3–4 (1916), pp. 39–41.
56. Mikhail Beizer, *Evrei Leningrada, 1917–1939: Natsional'naia zhizn' i sovetizatsiia* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Mosty kul'tury/Gesharim, 2004), p. 242.



From the archive



Hat making at an ORT Union workshop, Odessa, Ukraine, 1935.

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The three following passages are extracts from articles published in Materials and Memoirs: Chapters for the History of ORT (Geneva: ORT, 1955). The first extract is 'Stages of ORT Activities', written by Jacob Frumkin, the first ORT chairman in Berlin and director of the New York office of World ORT Union in 1948. The second extract, 'Souvenirs' was penned by L. V. Frenkiel, an ORT veteran who was involved with the ORT Technicum in Vilnius in the 1920s and who later became director of ORT technical instruction services. Lastly, Abraham C. Litton, writer of the third extract from 'My First Steps in ORT', was the national vice president of the American ORT Federation in the 1950s.

Stages of ORT Activities

Jacob Frumkin

I became a member of ORT, the organization for the furthering of artisanship and agricultural work, at the very moment, in 1906, when the organization at last received official confirmation of its status. Finally, legal recognition of the Provisional Committee which had functioned from 1881, was achieved. Now the organization could operate normally with general membership meetings, elections of administrative officers, etc. It was also the moment when a new and very influential group of social workers entered ORT along with such democratic Jewish leaders as Leon Bramson, Rubin Blanc and Ber Brutskus. Leon Bramson, whom I had known from my early youth, convinced me to join their ranks.

My earliest ORT activities were devoted to the Revisions Committee to which I was twice elected. I cannot even now forget the setup at that time, the struggle by the youthful 'opposition' for new ideas, and their demands for a new approach and new social work methods. They were uncompromisingly critical of the routine carried over from the previous epoch.

The 'opposition' presented their program at the meetings as well as to the press in 1907, listing a number of important basic requirements for ORT's future activities. First was the need for raising the quality of Jewish labour, both artisans and farmers, amelioration of their technical level and productivity, and the introduction of new occupations among Jews. At the same time they requested cheap credit arrangements to help the Jewish artisan avail himself of better equipment which in turn would increase his productivity and ease his economic

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situation. In order to be able to work out an efficient system it was necessary to do a survey of Jewish economic activities, vocational education and training facilities, as well as the prevailing labour conditions. The 'opposition' insisted that all these steps could be affected by the Jewish population itself.

I started my work in ORT while peace still reigned between both generations. At the time of my election to membership on the Revisions Committee the atmosphere was conciliatory. The younger elements prevailed at the meetings despite the fact that the older people constituted the majority of the committee. It must be noted that the representatives of the older generation were eager to compromise with the younger. Although Mr. Jacob Halpern, earlier a member of the Provisional Committee, now Chairman of the ORT Committee, was one of the older leaders, he played an important part in this effort toward co-existence. Mr. Halpern was an important official of the Ministry of Justice and Vice-Director of one of the Ministry's departments. He rightly enjoyed the respect of all and was sympathetic to the introduction of more modern methods in our social work. One could discuss matters with him and arrive at compromises. I remember one special instance when the younger group had proposed my name as candidate for the chairmanship of the Revisions Committee. It was in 1912 and the atmosphere was very charged. In my report to the meeting I criticized a series of decisions taken by the Committee. After the meeting which he had chaired, Mr. Halpern expressed his appreciation of my objectivity.

Souvenirs

From the diary of L. V. Frenkiel

If personal memoirs of one's early days can have some value, then I shall start with some of my outstanding recollections of that special milieu – the Jewish student circles in the Riga Polytechnicum where I had my first taste of social work. While I grew up, it is true, in a good Jewish family, I barely had the opportunity to absorb much of Judaism in the town where I was born – the Russian Volga town of Samara. It was no coincidence I feel, that a number of Jewish engineers who graduated at that time from this same Polytechnicum of Riga did not look for work in private factories. They decided to devote their lives and energies to the work of vocational education. Some years before my graduation from the Riga Polytechnicum, the well known Engineer Bolotin graduated, to become, subsequently, Inspector of the big Vocational School in St Petersburg, and then, Director of ORT. This same high school for engineering gave us Engineer Tarasztchanski, later Director of the Vocational School in Grodno; Engineer Kagan, Director of the Vocational School in Mohilev; Engineer Steinberg, Director of the big old school in Odessa ('Trud'); Yosef Abramovitch Blum, Director of the Central Committee of JCA in St Petersburg, and a devoted ORT worker; Dr. Hoffman, the famous publicist with the penname Zivyon; and Laserson, who now lives in Australia, etc.

Yes, it is certainly interesting to recall today the details of my first meetings with the central Jewish institutions of that remote period and to remember the way they approached the problems of Jewish vocational education.

It was a very serious process to them. The candidate was questioned and fully

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investigated in a very special way. They were looking for engineers who were not technicians only. They needed people with a social sense – this was more important even than finding good engineers. This was the theme of the new epoch.

It was arranged that I prepare myself for the job during a full year's time. I went to work in various factories so that I might fully acquaint myself with the occupations which were to be introduced into the curriculum of the Jewish Vocational School in Vilna. I visited various cities where outstanding factories functioned. In St Petersburg itself I found a very interesting Jewish enterprise. This was a famous factory making first class furniture and particularly famous for its superb woodcarving. The owner, a Jew named Wolkowsky, had gathered together a group of carving specialists, all real artists. He was even commissioned by the court to produce furniture for the Palace of the Tsar. I worked for a time at this factory because we planned to initiate carpentry and wood-working classes in the school at Vilna.

Then I was sent abroad to acquaint myself with the most modern methods of vocational education. I visited Germany, Austria and Switzerland. I acquired new knowledge, new ideas.

I worked for several years at the Central Committee of JCA. During this period I visited Odessa to acquaint myself with the work in the large and well known Jewish vocational school 'Trud'. This was an old and solidly entrenched institution, and now the time had arrived to modernize the school. I remained there for a few months and we worked out quite a programme of changes which were realized gradually.

Odessa was at that time a huge Jewish centre, very much alive, very responsive to the new social movements. The Jewish

community was very conscious of 'Trud's' being one of their proudest achievements. I was busily preparing myself for work in Vilna, where I arrived in 1907. However, my transfer to Vilna was not to be that simple. By coincidence, I was arrested in the home of a friend who was suddenly visited by the police. Together we were arrested and spent several months in jail without being accused of any crime whatsoever. Fortunately, another coincidence released me from jail – a Crown Prince was born to the Tsar and quite a number of 'criminals' were granted amnesty. I was one of the lucky 'criminals'. The situation for me was precarious, however, as the administration had to confirm my appointment as director of the Vocational School in Vilna. Those few months in jail weren't the best recommendation. I had to personally approach the Deputy Minister of the Interior to plead my cause and to get a 'clean bill of health' from him. Happily, I did receive this official confirmation.

II

Before I left for Vilna I had an opportunity of meeting ORT's first director, Wessjoler, and discussing with him the reorganization of the only big school which ORT conducted at that time, which was in Dvinsk. He had a very modest office, just as everything this organization did at that time was modest and without publicity. Wessjoler was the director during all the many years when the organization did not yet have its status confirmed by the government, existing for decades as a 'Provisional Committee'. Besides the school in Dvinsk, the organization conducted quite a number of vocational classes which functioned as annexes to the general Jewish schools. These special classes used to receive some machines, instruments and a little financial support from the centre. It must

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be said here that these quasi-legal vocational classes were in conformity with the general spirit of the new important developments in all Russia. Such classes existed throughout the entire country as annexes to the Russian public schools.

It made a profound impression on me, when Wessjoler told me of the magnificent response the organization had received from Jewish communities in all parts of the country when an appeal for assistance and cooperation was published. Not only communities but individual persons living in the remotest corners of the country, from Siberia, from the Caucasus, from Poland, sent in their contributions, big and small, as part of a spontaneous, unorganized movement. It was evident that the first appeal to the Jewish public by ORT released sources which were ready for such action. The amount of money received as a result of this appeal was quite substantial, something like 450,000 rubles, an amount which represented large capital some 75 years ago. Besides these one time contributors, there were a great number of organization members who paid annual membership dues to the centre. These 'revelations' gave me a new picture of what the problem of vocational education meant to the Jewish population of Old Russia.

It was Engineer Bolotin, successor to Wessjoler, who first introduced me to the special problems of Jewish vocational education. He was at the time head of the Jewish Vocational School in St Petersburg. What a magnificent personality Bolotin had! A tall, forceful figure, almost square, with a large broad back – never tired – always bubbling over with new ideas – ever anxious to help his fellowman. He was a person of strong will – not particularly good-looking. He had warm blue eyes and made a profound

impression on everyone who came into contact with him. People invariably responded to his dynamic quality.

III

In my opinion, Vilna at that time – and the impression lingers with me at present – was the humming centre of Jewish life. There everyone was captivated by and devoted to the idea of vocational education. It was at the time – and so remained for years – a kind of large experimental laboratory where organizations for specific purposes, were established, problems were studied and discussed, methods were devised for meeting practical problems, and where the foundation was laid for the strong and deep-rooted movement that eventually grew up. I list here only the most important of these organizations which functioned at that time in Vilna: a. The Vilna Artisan School; b. Antokolsky Society for Art and Handicrafts; c. Women's Vocational Training Society; d. Women Patrons for Artisan Pupils; e. Society for Labour Assistance; f. Artisan School for the Deaf and Dumb.

Everyone of these organizations made its specific contribution and tremendous efforts were directed to arrive at a maximum of efficiency. In this connection the Society for Labour Assistance played a special part. The head of this organization was the clever and extraordinarily energetic Dr. Makover, a man of strong will and of action. He was the soul and driving force of the society. This society developed activities in many directions. It is worthwhile mentioning them now.

At one time problems arose that endangered the expanded Jewish furniture industry. This industry was of importance to the entire Jewish population of Vilna. The industry worked mainly for export. It produced simple, inexpensive furniture for shipment to Central Russia. Orders began

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to fall off substantially – not because the market had disappeared, but because the requirements of the consumers had become more exacting. The challenge came from Warsaw where better furniture was being produced. It was competition based on quality. Something serious had to be done to save this important branch of Jewish industry. Obviously, money alone was not the answer to this challenge. The Society for Labour Assistance worked out other plans. A first class specialist was invited from Austria to raise the quality of labour in the furniture industry. A model workshop was established for foremen and their assistants. Only select craftsmen were admitted to this model workshop. Evening courses of high standard were organized for the foremen. A special office for consultations and for individual technical problems was arranged. Workshops which received complicated orders could appeal to this office for technical advice.

A cooperative to absorb ready merchandise was organized, and trade centralized. There was no longer a question of amateur work. Everything had to be rationalized. The quality of production had to meet certain standards. Important results were immediately registered. In this connection I would like to mention the name of the famous master Leibetshke (Berman) who started in our school as a kind of *wunderkind* with 'golden hands', and grew up to become a superb specialist.

In order to prepare the proper cadre from the start, a Carpentry Department was established in the Artisan School of Vilna. They aimed at reforming the entire setup, and they achieved it.

A patronage system was evolved around everyone of the vocational school to secure the welfare of both the school and its pupils. The Central Committee

of ORT paid particular attention to this system. Engineer Bolotin made a special trip from St Petersburg to Vilna to participate in this work which brought together all these patrons.

An important achievement at that time was the organization of special courses for electrical technicians. ORT supplied the money as well as the technical assistance. The Antokolsky School for Art and Handicraft was conducted by the nephew of the great artist. Its main purpose was to develop the artistic tastes of the Jewish labourer, stimulate his artistic curiosity and appetite, and make him receptive to artistic expression. The school had drawing classes, courses in painting, etc.

The contact between JCA, which for years had been legally recognized and thus had the opportunity to expand its activities in the field of vocational education and training, and ORT, grew closer and more active. It could not be otherwise since ORT participated in all activities which had to do with vocational education. So it was in Vilna that ORT, little by little, became the centre for handling the education of the Jews in the manual trades.

IV

The great Jewish centre of Vilna suffered a terrible shock at the very beginning of the First World War. As soon as the Russian Army received its first setbacks, Vilna, overcrowded with thousands and thousands of Jewish refugees, became a babel of chaos. The Jewish refugees were completely destitute. They were without food, shelter or clothing. They could only be provided with these necessities if they could be gainfully employed. Here ORT took the initiative and created work possibilities. With the assistance of the Society for Labour Assistance, ORT set up

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big industrial workshops which received orders from the army to provide uniforms and footwear. The refugees were on their way to regeneration.

The main task of the ORT Committee, established in 1919, was to rehabilitate the Jewish artisan who was left homeless, without machinery and tools. The ORT Committee started to purchase machines and equipment on the spot and also asked the Delegation in Paris to collect other necessary equipment and send it to Vilna.

Even now, some 35 years after these events, I remember with admiration the intensity of the ORT activities in Vilna, its rich initiative and forcefulness. The Committee organized production cooperatives for the various occupations which helped immediately to establish credit for the artisans against future sales.

Looking for various opportunities which would help to re-establish the Jewish economy, the Committee worked out a plan of so-called 'portable workshops'. A special programme was conceived for these schools covering three specialities: tailoring, carpentry and footwear. The course had a two-year programme. The schools of the three occupations remained at one spot for two years, then moved on to another town and an exchange of specialists was arranged. This exchange system worked well. New life was injected into the Jewish people, new energies emerged, new hopes crystallized. The activities in the numerous vocational schools and the revival of Jewish agriculture in the small townships considerably altered the entire atmosphere. It was then that the vigorous and enthusiastic Boris Kagan had the idea of starting vegetable gardens around each school. A huge tract served as a collective summer garden. More than 2,000 school children spent some time in this garden.

V

The creation of the Technicum in Vilna certainly was the most significant achievement of ORT between the two wars. It might be interesting to recount how such an idea was born and how it materialized. A group of Jewish engineers organized what they called Polytechnical Courses. To this group belonged Messrs. Okun, Schreiber, Yanof and Idelson. These men were interested in founding an institution dedicated to higher technical learning. They had neither the necessary buildings nor equipment. Because of this lack, their project could not succeed. A fully rounded programme was not feasible. ORT offered this group of engineers a concrete plan. They would give them a building and all necessary equipment on one condition – that the new institution be a real Technicum with a properly constituted programme for two departments – mechanics and electricity. The group accepted the conditions. Mr. Schreiber became the first Director of the ORT Technicum where all subjects were studied in Yiddish. There was much difficulty in finding the proper texts in Yiddish, etc. but obstacles were overcome. Technical books in Yiddish were published covering all subjects. It is history now that this Technicum was a success. Many first class engineers graduated from this school.

And then everything went up in smoke ...

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My First Steps in ORT

A. C. Litton

I was a youngster of 20, studying at the Commercial Institute of Moscow in 1913, when I first learned of ORT's existence. Actually it was more than just having heard of the organization, for I had found an evening job as one of the personal secretaries to Mr. Lazar Poliakov, brother of the founder of ORT. I was involved with his welfare activities and received a salary of 35 rubles monthly. Lazar Poliakov was very popular with Russian Jewry at that time. Born in Orscha, Province of Mohilev, he became extremely wealthy and received the title of Privy Counsellor. The elder Poliakov, Samuel Salomonovich, Chairman of the first ORT Committee, was a railway king, and the second brother, my employer Lazar Salomonovich, was a financier and banker. The brothers were important philanthropists. Lazar Poliakov was particularly interested in Jewish welfare work. He was the President of the Jewish Community of Moscow and is said to have built Moscow's first synagogue.

Mine were merely routine functions. I received the visitors, mostly rabbis asking for assistance, made notes of their applications, reported to Lazar Salomonovich and then arranged matters. He was not a very learned man but he was shrewd and tactful and sincerely devoted to education. He was a gentleman and respectful of Jewish tradition. He religiously attended synagogue services each Saturday.

One evening when I was hurrying to leave the secretariat after my work was done, to attend a lecture at the Commercial Institute, Poliakov retained me and asked that I remain for the evening to take minutes of the local ORT Committee meeting. When I asked what

ORT was, he responded with: 'You will attend the meeting and get to know what it means.'

In this most unpremeditated fashion I was introduced to ORT. The meeting took place in Lazar Poliakov's office. A number of wealthy Moscow Jews and outstanding representatives of the liberal professions, attended. As far as I can remember, David Wysotsky, the architect Weliekofsky, O. Khichin, the engineer Arkin, Dr. Pevsner, Michael Poliakov – eldest son of Lazar Poliakov, A. G. Rosenblum, the lawyers A. L. Fuchs and I. S. Bisk, were there. The famous Rabbi Mase of Moscow was also present. Despite the fact that my attendance at the ORT meeting was accidental and that my job in Poliakov's secretariat was for the sole purpose of earning money, I was immediately captivated by the spirit of idealism which prevailed at this meeting. The participants were decent persons, but because of their wealth and conservatism one might think them incapable of being influenced by the romantic spell. But when they started to talk about Jewish needs, the struggle for existence of the helpless Jewish population within the zone where they were permitted to live, these substantial people changed strikingly to express sincerity and profound human sympathy. From merely being a sympathetic observer, I slowly became a more and more active participant in ORT, finally assuming the secretaryship of the Moscow ORT Committee, this time without a salary.

In the overcrowded Pale of Jewish Settlement, the competition among inefficient tawdry grocery shops, petty vendors in the markets, and pathetic stands in railroad stations served naught but to throttle the livelihood potential of these really economically useless luftmenschen [lit. 'air people', impractical dreamers] so richly described by Sholem

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Aleichem. What could be done for these miserable people in their overpopulated townships? Very little indeed. Was there a solution possible in the face of the oppression perpetrated by the regime?

It was evident that philanthropy was not an effective weapon against poverty. ORT worked out a radical programme for Jewish economic reconstruction and planned measures for increasing the productivity of the Jewish workers, artisans, farmers and labourers. The principal goal of the ORT Committee in St Petersburg included assistance to agricultural colonies, Jewish artisans, and to schools and workshops where trades were being taught.

On an ORT mission I visited the well-known Dubrovna township and gathered many impressions about the life of the weavers. The only Jewish centre for fabrication of talliths for Russia's entire Jewish population was in Dubrovna. The textile industry up to the end of the last century was very primitive. The weavers worked at home with the whole family participating. The buyers and the middlemen exploited them brutally and the workers lived in abject poverty. Income barely exceeded one or two rubles weekly. Little by little, thanks to the intervention of Jewish social-minded elements (the brothers Poliakov, Baron de Gunzburg, A. G. Rosenblum and O. Khichin participated) monies were collected and a mechanical weaving factory, the so-called Dnieprovsk Cotton and Wool Factory, was set up in Dubrovna. Worker income immediately rose. On my last visit to Dubrovna I found that there were 600 employees and 225 looms. By 1908 the average wage had already risen to 17.25 rubles monthly and production amounted to more than 1.5 million metres.

As in a dream I recall my first meeting with ORT and my first timid steps in the

organization's peacetime existence. But this was to be followed by great historical events, catastrophes and upheavals which decimated and dispersed the Russian Jews.

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Champions of Territorialism began playing an increasingly influential role within ORT towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Territorialism, which strived for a Yiddish-speaking Jewish homeland outside Palestine, sought to perpetuate the millennium-long Ashkenazi cultural tradition rather than revitalize the pre-Diaspora model of Jewish life. Followers of Israel Zangwill, a successful English-born writer and founder of Territorialism, were free of Zionism's historical romanticism and did not believe that God gave Palestine to contemporary Jews. In their view, the criteria for a suitable territory for Jewish colonization were appropriate political, demographic, economic and social conditions.

The Territorialist movement in eastern Europe was based in Kiev, where in 1903 a group of intellectuals established the *Vozrozhdenie* (Renaissance) group. Two separate branches evolved from *Vozrozhdenie* in 1904 and 1906: the (Territorialist) Zionist Socialist Workers' Party and the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party. The latter was ideologically affiliated with the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party.¹ In May 1917 they amalgamated into the *Fareynikte Partey* – United [Jewish Socialist Workers'] Party – which had considerable leverage among ORT activists.²

In 1917, prominent Territorialist David Lvovitch (Davidovitch) returned to Russia from America, where he lived during World War I. He was soon elected by the Jewish colonists (farmers) of southern Ukraine as the only United Party delegate at the Constituent Assembly, an important station on the way to a legitimate democratic government in post-imperial Russia.³ When the Bolsheviks violently interrupted the democratization process in Russia, dissolving the assembly and suppressing opposition, Lvovitch fled to Kiev, capital of the short-lived independent Ukrainian Republic. In January 1918, Ukrainian Jews were officially given extra-territorial autonomy by the republic. In particular, the state promised to support Jewish educational and cultural programmes, and Jewish political currents were represented in the government. The independent country was beginning to look as if it could accommodate the political and cultural programmes of the Jewish socialist and democratic parties.

At that time ORT appointed a foreign delegation to carry out fundraising and other missions abroad and Lvovitch was asked to join as one of its two

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members. Forming foreign delegations was a common practice among Russian socialists, and Lvovitch later recalled how he took up the invitation to be a member of ORT's team:

At the beginning of 1919 I was in Kiev, where Bramson was working with the Ukrainian ORT. It was there that I was informed of my appointment, together with Bramson, as a member of the ORT Foreign Delegation. The appointments had been made by the ORT Central Committee in Petrograd. Our delegation's objectives were to establish connections with the western world and to obtain financial assistance for Russian ORT. ... In March 1920, Bramson and I met in Paris, and this period marks the beginning of the ORT Foreign Delegation's activities.

At first, our objectives were rather limited. We wished to provide financial means for Russian ORT, which was still functioning in the early days of Soviet power. However, towards the end of 1919 ORT organizations in Russia were taken over by the Soviet government and our relations with them ceased. We were compelled to redefine our objectives, taking stock of the new situation. ...

The famine hit our Jewish agricultural settlements in the Ukraine. Since I had once represented them in the Constituent Assembly, they now sent me an appeal for help. At the same time, we saw the beginning of a movement 'back to the land' among déclassé Jewish masses in White Russia and the Ukraine.⁴

After the end of the civil war, thousands of Jews found salvation in farming by obtaining plots of land attached to the shtetl. This was not a legally straightforward affair, particularly for an individual farmer, but a loophole in the law allowed Jewish shtetl inhabitants to get land if they organized an agricultural cooperative. In effect, Jews were usually happy to form cooperatives because they lacked individual experience of agricultural work.⁵ According to Lvovitch, the foreign delegation managed to send 100 carloads of seed grain and tools to both new farmers and farmers in the famine-stricken old Jewish colonies.

A part of these implements had been purchased by us from American army stocks left in France. ... These instruments were sent not only to Russia, but also to Poland, Lithuania, and Rumania. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the Jewish craftsmen in these countries were accustomed to Russian and German tool measurements, and found it difficult to adapt themselves to American instruments. These problems led to the establishment of a special Purchasing Bureau in Berlin. The bureau was to take charge of buying the necessary machinery and tools, and distributing them to the Jewish population of Poland and other border countries. In 1920, Bramson and I went to Berlin to set this plan in motion. ...

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Farmers supported by ORT in the village of Pervomaisk,
Odessa district, Ukraine, 1920s–1930s.

In 1920 the Jewish World Relief Conference took place in Carlsbad. ... Bramson and I attended the conference, and there we met delegates from the United States, England, Argentina, and South Africa. This conference led to the idea of enlarging the framework of the ORT organization. ...

After considerable preliminary work conducted by our Paris office, the first conference of the European ORT organizations was summoned in Berlin in August 1921. Delegates came from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, France, Germany, and England. J. S. Zegelnitzky [Tsegelnitski], then general secretary of the Russian ORT Central Committee, came from Soviet Russia. Dr Paul Nathan represented the German Jews, while our Berlin Committee sent its chairman, J. G. Frumkin, and Dr A. Z. Syngalowski. The latter's brilliant eloquence attracted general attention. The Berlin conference laid the foundation of World ORT. An executive committee of three (Bramson, Zegelnitzky and myself) was elected. Berlin became the seat of our office ...⁶

While ORT was transforming from a national to an international organization (World ORT Union), the former Russian Empire was in the midst of disintegrating into a number of states, each with its own network of ORT organizations. Given Germany's diplomatic, economic, cultural and transport links with the Baltic States as well as with Poland and Soviet Russia, it indeed

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seemed sensible to locate ORT's headquarters in Berlin. The German capital attracted tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants, including a flood of ORT activists, who fled the chaos in the former Russian Empire: Jacob [Iakov] Teitel, chairman of the Union of Russian Jews in Germany, who used to be on friendly terms with Nikolai Bakst and other early activists of ORT; Jacob Lestschinsky, the representative in Berlin of the American Yiddish daily *Forverts* (Forward), who was also conducting economic and demographic studies of contemporary Jewish communities; and Boris Brutskus, who had attempted to survive as a scholar in post-revolutionary Russia, but was expelled by the Soviet authorities. He settled in Berlin and worked at Russian émigré academic institutions.

Jacob Frumkin was one of the first ORT activists to arrive in Berlin after the Bolshevik Revolution. He had met Lvovitch in 1912 in St Petersburg when the latter led a campaign to establish an immigrant bank, and they worked together at the Information Office for Jewish members of the Duma. In 1920, Lvovitch, on behalf of the foreign delegation, asked Frumkin to organize an ORT Committee in Berlin. Aron Syngalowski, one of the few people invited to join the committee, was a veteran Zionist Socialist, known to party members



Early ORT France meeting in Paris, 1923. Dr Syngalowski (*standing*) with Leo Glaser, President of ORT France.

as Aron Tchenstokhover. Syngalowski received his tertiary education in Russia, Switzerland and Germany and in 1912 obtained a doctorate in philosophy and law. He settled in Berlin in 1915 and four years later edited the short-lived Yiddish weekly, *Fraytag* (Friday). Syngalowski's work at the committee was limited initially to editing a newsletter and producing 'oral and written propaganda'.⁷ However, he soon became the organization's secretary-general and later on, its vice-chairman. He emerged as the main ideologist of ORTism, a theory that attached paramount importance to Jewish economic emancipation.⁸

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Syngalowski was equally at home in the Jewish, Russian and German intellectual worlds and in their cultures and languages. Above all, he had a particular passion for Yiddish and his 'brilliant presentations in Yiddish hypnotized his audience'.⁹ His talents as an orator were apparent also to his German-speaking audience, who 'experienced the inspiring force of the eloquence of the creator of ORT ideology, Dr Syngalowski – an eloquence springing from a warm Jewish heart and an incisive mind'.¹⁰ Syngalowski was in his element within ORT's Yiddishist circle, whose inaugural governing board was chaired by Dr Zalman Szabad, founder of the Yiddish institutions in Vilnius, the de facto capital of Yiddishism (Szabad's son-in-law, Max Weinreich, founded the Jewish Scientific Institute (YIVO) in the city). In June 1922, the editors of the Labour Zionist body *Undzer bavegung* (Our Movement) expressed their surprise when receiving ORT materials in Russian, particularly as ORT's 'governing body consists of Jewish labour activists, who love the Yiddish language and culture'.¹¹

Russian, however, continued to be the main language spoken and written in ORT's offices. Sussia Goldman, who joined ORT in July 1926, recalled four decades later:

When I came to work in ORT, the main language there was *Russian*. Even Secretary-General Grigori [Gregory] Aronson (today a distinguished essayist in Yiddish) was not too proficient in Yiddish.¹² Why then should I say the main language – no, the only language was Russian. Russian was spoken even by such Yiddishists as [Abraham Rosin] Ben-Adir (J. Rosin) who published the Yiddish *ORT News* and the young secretary Rosa Gutman (she has recently published in New York a very successful new booklet of Yiddish poems).¹³ All meetings were conducted in Russian; the minutes were written in Russian; the correspondence was mostly in Russian.

If I were not so modest, I would say that with me the Yiddish era began at the central office of the ORT Union. The only one who dictated to me in Yiddish and would not permit a dot on the 'i' to be changed was Dr Syngalowski. His punctiliousness in the choice of words as well as in spelling bordered the fanatic. But I must confess that although I always considered myself an expert in Yiddish, I learned a great deal from him. ...

It was not easy to work with Syngalowski. Firstly, he was easily angered and secondly, he never had regular working hours. He could come into the office just before the lunch break and start work, and those with whom he worked had to stay with him. And in the evening, when everybody was getting ready to go home, it would happen that Syngalowski was just about to sit down and work – and preferably with a crowd around him. He could not stand the least correction in a letter or an article which he had authored. Everything that went out over his signature could be copied over and over again, but each comma had to be in its appointed

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place; a sentence with a hint, an insinuation, etc. had to end with two dots, only two and not three, God forbid. (Why he disliked three dots is a secret which I could never fathom.) ...

Syngalowski liked – in the rabbinical manner – to sit at the table. The magic of his office was his personal magic, a magic which worked on everyone who came in touch with him. He possessed the talent to create around himself, in his office, at his desk, that atmosphere which would divest anyone of his workday clothes. At his table one learned Torah, and it was not even always ORT torah. Whether he dictated a letter or a memorandum, or whether he just talked about literature, politics, about Jewish or general matters, it was always as if he was delivering a speech in public. He studied carefully the reaction of his lone listener to a saying or an anecdote of his, to gauge the effect it might have on hundreds of listeners. We thus heard in his office, fragments of what would later appear in his speeches.¹⁴

In April 1921, Bramson and Syngalowski went to the United States, where they hoped to find their main source of financial support even though by that time ORT already had supporters in England.¹⁵ The ORT leadership set their biggest hopes on America, where fundraising had become ‘the most universal expression of Jewish identification and communal participation’.¹⁶ Their main contact in New York was Adolf Held, the European director of HIAS. (Held later chaired the union-owned Amalgamated Bank and the Forward Association, publisher of the daily *Forverts*; he also held senior positions at ORT.)¹⁷

On 12 June, the two delegates organized a meeting of Jewish activists. Among the participants were the Yiddishist authority Chaim Zhitlowsky; the economist and Marxist expert Isaac Hourwich; the leading representatives of HIAS John L. Bernstein and Jacob Massel; and the socialist journalist and activist Louis B. Boudin. Together they decided to establish a local ORT Committee called American Society for the Promotion of Trades and Agriculture among the Jews. It was chaired by the prominent socialist Judge Jacob Panken (Zhitlowsky, Bernstein and Boudin were his deputies) and began to operate in the autumn of 1922. Its objective was to become a mass-membership organization, but this was never realized.¹⁸

The list of American ORT’s members from that time reveals its political and cultural affiliation: virtually all of them belonged to the socialist and labour circles. Representatives of trade unions and socialist groups dominated the first convention of American ORT held in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, in 1922.¹⁹ In the Manichaeic world of American Jewish politics, the New York Yiddish Communist daily *Frayhayt* (Freedom) derided ORT for its ‘looking for hand-outs’ mentality, unworthy of revolutionary proletarians.²⁰ *The New York Times* reported the establishment of ‘a branch of the largest Jewish organization in Europe’, which ‘has been built on a democratic foundation from the

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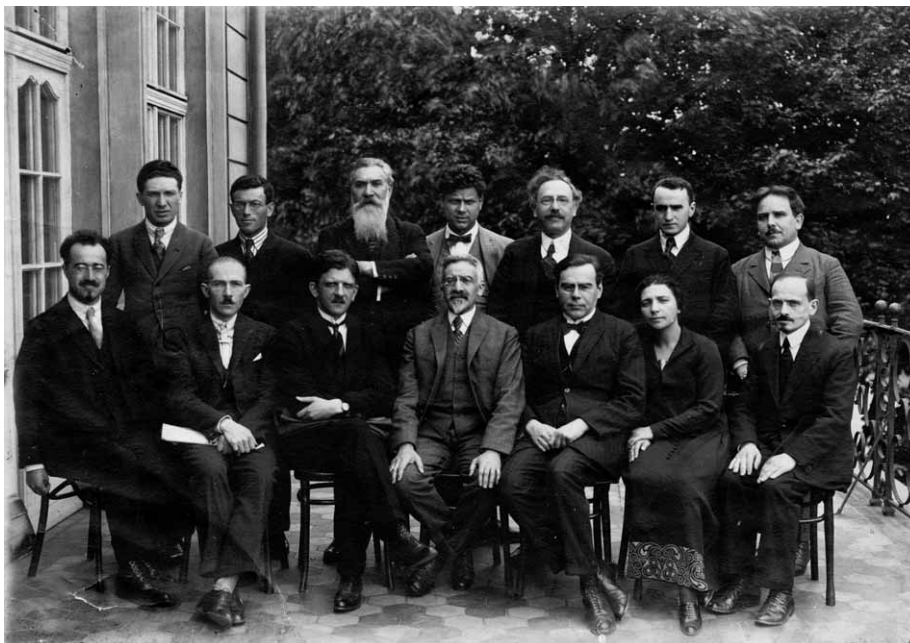
bottom upward, and embraces more than fifty-five ORT committees in as many cities of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Rumania, Soviet Russia, and the Ukraine'.²¹ (In fact, Soviet ORT did not belong to the federative structure of World ORT.) At that time, ORT's organizational-cum-fundraising campaigns focused on support for existing Jewish colonists and promoting agricultural work among shtetl dwellers. Work opportunities for artisans and vocational education for Jewish youth were only secondary goals in these early campaigns.

There was some division of labour between Bramson and Syngalowski. While Bramson, a respected civil and political leader in pre-1917 Russia, was better suited for liaising with affluent American Jewish circles, Syngalowski had a good rapport with the Yiddish-speaking labour audiences. Characteristically, on 30 April 1922 he addressed a convention of the Workmen's Circle, an influential socialist mass organization, closely linked with the biggest Jewish daily *Forverts*.²² The Workmen's Circle became one of the most significant sponsors of ORT and provided the core funds for its American operations.²³ However, ORT counted on the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), established in 1914 to help the Jews in war-ridden Europe.

In 1923, the American ORT Committee merged with People's Relief. Along with the Jewish Relief Committee, which targeted the wealthier American Jews, and the Central Relief Committee, which fundraised among the Orthodox Jews, People's Relief was a constituent of the JDC and involved itself with the workers.²⁴ In November 1923 Bramson and Syngalowski came again to the United States. Although they already knew about plans that were being made to dissolve the JDC, the 'inevitability' (as it misleadingly seemed then) of the organization's full liquidation only became clear to them in New York, when they spoke to JDC leaders. A fundraising dinner organized by People's Relief-ORT on 16 December taught Bramson and Syngalowski a lesson in the huge differences between the *pledges* made during such events and the *real money* ultimately contributed.²⁵

By the summer of 1923, following the decline of People's Relief, American ORT again became an independent organization. The short-lived 'marriage' with People's Relief was not as happy as ORT's cooperation with the People's Tool Campaign, launched in 1927. This group developed ORT's original ideas, providing artisans in eastern Europe with modern equipment and valuable know-how. In 1932, the People's Tool Campaign merged with American ORT, forming the People's ORT Federation, renamed later as American ORT Federation.²⁶ American ORT raised funds for various programmes, including the Jewish Reconstruction Fund in London. The fund's guiding principle was 'helping people to help themselves' by establishing a sound economic and self-supporting basis for Jewish artisans, farmers and other workers. It concentrated on distributing credits to agricultural projects and other pro-

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Delegates at the 1923 World ORT Union Congress in Danzig. Dr Syngalowski is seated second from the left. Next to him are Jacob Tsegelnitski, Dr Leon Bramson and Dr David Lvovitch.

grammes in eastern Europe, while the Berlin bureau allotted permanent loans, notably to institutions of vocational education.

A group of ORT's full-time emissaries travelled all over the world, raising funds and drawing sponsors. One of them was Ilya Trotzky, whose association with ORT began after two seminal meetings in Berlin: the first with Bramson, when the latter gave a talk in front of a circle of Russian-Jewish intellectuals, and the second in the Romanisches Café (the hub of bohemian life in 1920s Berlin), where he met Lvovitch and Syngalowski:

All this happened in 1926. In the same year, Berlin saw the establishment of the so-called Public Committee ORT-OSE-Emigdirekt.²⁷ This was a body that aimed to spread the ideas of the three sister organizations in the Jewish world and, at the same time, raise funds for their wide-ranging programmes in central and eastern Europe. I was invited to become an emissary, and my responsibility was to represent the interests of the sister organizations inside and outside the Jewish world.

I still remember the inaugural meetings of this committee, chaired by its first president Dr Myron [Meir] Kreinin. For several days there took place heated debates on issues such as the immediate tasks of the committee, its structure and its tactics in the struggle for recognition from the inter-

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national Jewry community. Apart from defining the directions for further activities and reaching other important decisions, the discussions also put in the forefront the people who became tone-setters and decision-makers among the leaders of the committee. They were six key figures, all truly remarkable individuals – with all the virtues and shortcomings characteristic of personalities of such calibre: Dr Myron Kreinin, Dr Leon Bramson, Dr Boris Chlenov, Dr Aron Syngalowski, Dr David Lvovitch and Dr Jacob Frumkin. In fact, this small group of men, who were essentially political antipodes, led the Public Committee and left its distinctive imprint on the committee's activities. Men of different outlooks, political sympathies and social origins, they managed to achieve some unity when leading the committee. This successful balance between conflicting tendencies was possible thanks to Dr Lazar Gurvich,²⁸ who was then the secretary general of the committee. His stoicism controlled the floods of emotion which sometimes overwhelmed the leadership.

I was present during the different stages of the committee: It was initially a threesome – 'ORT-OSE-Emigdirekt', then it functioned as a twosome – 'ORT-OSE', and finally the organizations separated completely. ... I have experience of working on two continents, covering Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxemburg, Alsace-Lorraine, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia, as well as the vast spaces of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba.²⁹

Out of the three ORT leaders Bramson, Lvovitch and Syngalowski, the latter could be seen most often in the Romanisches Café, which had several tables occupied by its Yiddish-speaking habitués. In December 1924 Syngalowski co-founded the Sholem Aleichem Club for Berlin-based Yiddish literati and later took part in lectures, parties and even disputes.³⁰ He became a close friend of David Bergelson, the celebrated Yiddish prose writer, who went on a mission on behalf of ORT in 1924, visiting Bukovina and Bessarabia. In his letter to Lestschinsky, Bergelson hailed ORT as 'a national movement, swallowing and digesting in its healthy stomach all our "redemption"-preaching currents'.³¹ Upon his return he reported on the local Jews' 'longing for land' and on the impressive achievements of the vocational schools opened by ORT.³²

Although ORT supported various projects in Poland, Rumania and the Baltic countries, Soviet Russia became the epicentre of its operations. In the early 1920s, the more market-driven environment of the New Economic Policy (NEP) had improved the image of the Bolshevik regime. Lestschinsky described the NEP period, particularly the years 1922–25, in his succinct style:

Breathing spell, revival, the peasant starts to plough the fields again, and the city begins to revive; production doubles [within] a couple of years;

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Jews open stores in the largest cities of Russia; the artisan resumes work and hires a helper; the nationalized large factories begin to operate, and the non-Jewish workers, who fled to the villages under military communism, go back to the cities; urban industry grows apace, and so does the machinery of government. Jews flock to government jobs in great number; the spontaneous trend [towards] agriculture gathers momentum; ORT tries to organize these trends, to strengthen and intensify them; hunger still rages, and the number of Jewish *déclassés* still runs into the hundreds of thousands.³³

After much negotiation between ORT representatives and Soviet functionaries, the sides finally agreed on the nature of cooperation: World ORT and Soviet ORT (formed from the remains of the pre-revolutionary organization) remained independent bodies, but Soviet ORT was allowed to receive financial help from its foreign counterpart.³⁴

In 1924 the Berlin Russian daily *Rul'* (Rudder), which was unofficially considered a 'Jewish newspaper',³⁵ printed a story about a Soviet governmental commission that discussed possible locations for a Jewish territorial autonomy: Belorussia, Altai, Bashkiria, and even – echoing Zhitlowsky's 1917 plan – on a strip of land from the Dniester to Abkhazia with Odessa as the capital.³⁶



Departure to the field at Friling colony, Odessa region, 1930.

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The Soviet colonization drive appealed to many around the world, particularly to former and current Territorialists. Less than six months before his death in August 1926, Israel Zangwill had taken part in a meeting held in support of the Jewish colonization movement in Russia. A decade earlier he suggested carving out a Jewish province somewhere in the vast neglected Siberian territories.³⁷ Boruch Glazman, an American Yiddish prose writer, attempted to explain the enthusiasm among western Yiddish activists for Jewish colonization in the Soviet Union. He wrote: 'it is a great joy for us all. Our lives are being normalized, because a peasant class is emerging among the Jews – and not only in the Soviet Union but among the Jewish people at large – a peasant class that will bring new freshness and new content into our lives.' Glazman also mentioned how Jewish intellectuals were often 'extremely frightened at the new, alien tribe that is being now, before our eyes, created in Palestine'. Some people even came from Palestine to try their luck in the Crimea.³⁸

An ORT delegation came to Moscow in November 1926 to take part in the Society for Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Toilers (OZET) congress.³⁹ During the congress, Syngalowski was surrounded by his old friends from the Zionist Socialist party, including the leading Soviet Yiddish journalist Henekh Kazakevich. Syngalowski was feeling very much at home in Moscow. Together with other former Territorialists, he was thrilled to hear Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the All-Union Executive Committee and titular head of state, promising to form a Jewish republic in the Crimea.⁴⁰ After his return to Berlin, Syngalowski wrote and lectured about his trip to the Soviet Union, speaking of Jewish villages in Ukraine, Belorussia and Crimea, milk farms and cheese dairies, and reading rooms frequented by young and old. All together, nine million roubles were invested in the settlements – two million contributed by the settlers, three million from Soviet banks and funds, and four million from foreign Jewish organizations, predominantly the JDC.⁴¹

Syngalowski argued that the Soviet attitude towards the Jews should set an example to other countries: the Soviets let the Jews settle in their country instead of trying to get rid of them. He praised Soviet Jewish colonization not just for its unprecedented scale, but also as the only efficient method of building a healthy social and national life for the *déclassé* Jewish masses.⁴² The colonies' Yiddish names soothed his ear: *Friling*, *Frayland*, *Sholem Aleichem*, *Ratndorf*, *Naylebn*. He did not see any problems in cooperating with the Bolsheviks as long as they supported Jewish colonization. At the same time, he wanted to make the project more palatable to ORT's Zionist members. He emphasized that the Soviet colonization had no covert Jewish national idea but only aimed to ameliorate Soviet Jewish life by strengthening its economic state and therefore was simply not in the same 'league' as Zionism and other national movements.⁴³

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A blacksmith's shop in Sholem Aleichem agricultural collective near Odessa, Ukraine, 1930.

Meanwhile, opponents of the Bolshevik regime (who readily admitted they were a minority in non-Soviet Jewish circles) urged Jewish organizations to stop bankrolling Soviet projects.⁴⁴ Even Boris Brutskus, a supporter of the Crimean campaign, was cautious not to overestimate it. He criticized ORT, in particular Syngalowski, for being lured by the Soviet 'bait' and praised the JDC for its rather more careful policy.⁴⁵ In 1926, Syngalowski was part of the editorial group of the short-lived pro-Soviet Yiddish literary journal *In Shpan* (In Harness) though as an ORT functionary he did not want to see his name mentioned in the publication.⁴⁶ Still, he became the most divisive figure within the ORT leadership, which usually emphasized its good-hearted, if sceptical, attitude to Zionism. Thus, the Third International Conference of ORT (1926) praised the Hechalutz (Zionist pioneering movement) for playing an important role in productivization of Jews and instructed ORT's central apparatus to support similar activities.⁴⁷

The official relations between ORT and the Zionist apparatus were predominantly non-confrontational. For instance, ORT and Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund, later the United Israel Appeal), the fundraising arm of the World Zionist Organization, tried to avoid direct competition. As a result, they agreed to coordinate their 1927–28 campaigns in various

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countries.⁴⁸ A number of letters written by the leading figures in ORT and Keren Hayesod show that both organizations did their best to avoid conflicts between their emissaries.⁴⁹ For all that, many ORT activists had problems playing two contradictory parts by trying to be Zionists and to support the Bolsheviks at the same time.⁵⁰ Wilhelm Graetz, chairman of ORT Germany, recalled later that although 'all circles of German Jewry worked together in supporting and actively promoting the noble concept represented by the ORT ... a certain amount of resistance had to be overcome in many headquarters'.⁵¹

Ben-Adir's return from Palestine and his active involvement in ORT, particularly as editor of the journal *Virtshaft un Lebn* (Economy and Life, 1928–31) together with his reputation as a vehement anti-Bolshevik helped to 'improve' the organization's image. None the less, German ORT's leaders expressed their unhappiness with some of the statements in Syngalowski's writings about the Soviet Union, in particular his reluctance to use the notion of Jewish *Volk* (peoplehood), preferring *jiidische Massen* (Jewish masses) and *Judenheit* (Yiddishkayt), which connoted Yiddishist socialism. The German activists claimed that their support of ORT was based on Theodore Herzl's idea that Zionism meant both a return to Jewish national values and Jewish productivization. They did not want to tolerate anti-Zionism in the ranks of ORT's



An ORT stand at an agricultural exhibition in Kishinev, 1925.

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leadership, which had already been criticized in the press.⁵² In 1930, Kurt Blumenfeld, the head of German Zionists, resigned from his position on the ORT Central Board.⁵³

In 1929 pro-Soviet Jewish activities in Berlin began to decline, reflecting the general point of view during the year of the Great Break, as it was called by the Soviet propaganda. By that time, the consolidation of Joseph Stalin's power created a much more dogmatic climate within the international network of pro-Soviet organizations. The year 1929 marked another 'great break': fundraising targets could not be realised because the stock market crash in the United States brought lasting economic, social, and ideological changes to the Jewish community and limited its ability to support humanitarian projects in other countries.

It was a devastating blow to ORT's budget. In 1926–28, 145,000 dollars had been raised in Poland, Rumania, Lithuania and Latvia, 130,000 dollars in western Europe (mainly in Great Britain and Germany), and 40,000 in South Africa, Australia and Egypt. However, over 60 per cent of ORT's budget depended on American money: over 255,000 had been raised through American ORT and over 284,000 had been donated by the JDC. Because the JDC did not want to see independent campaigns organized by ORT on its 'turf', it committed itself to contributing money to ORT programmes, mainly its agricultural projects in the Soviet Union. This agreement, however, could not stop direct donations from Women's American ORT (founded in 1927) and various labour groups.⁵⁴

American ORT was hardly a centralized organization. For instance, Women's American ORT, a truly national organization with scores of chapters throughout the country, operated practically independently. In addition, the first decade of ORT's existence in America was, according to Louis B. Boudin, 'a period of continual conflict, mainly between what may be called roughly the "*Forverts's Group*" and the general organization.' The leadership was in the hands of Jacob Panken and Baruch Charney Vladeck, who belonged to the *Forverts* circle and its affiliated labour groups and trade unions. At the same time, tensions between the socialist *Forverts* group and its opposition, which represented liberal nationalist currents in American Jewish life, created a difficult atmosphere in the organization. Finally, as Boudin recalls in his writings, 'Vladeck submitted his resignation in March 1933 ... After I assumed active leadership, Vladeck loyally cooperated with me until his death.'⁵⁵

Dr Boris Surowich (Aysurovich), a veteran of ORT and the socialist movement, describes in his 1947 memoirs the extent of ORT's financial problems during the 1930s:

In the second half of 1932, the financial condition of the World ORT was catastrophic. I was then in Poland, a member of the Central Committee and of the Executive Committee.⁵⁶ For months on end we had received no sub-

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sidies from ORT headquarters; were thus unable to pay regularly the salaries of the employees and instructors. This was true of other countries as well.

In November 1932 the World ORT delegated me to visit the United States in order to conduct a campaign. I received a visa quickly enough, but I was detained for five weeks, because there simply not enough cash in the treasury for passage. And then through a private loan made in Poland, I arrived in New York in January 1933.

The condition of ORT in the United States at that time was not good at all. It was the period of the depression. The American ORT, which at that time bore the name 'People's ORT Committee', was in a bad way (*of groise zores*). There were no campaigns running at that time. Moreover, at the time of Dr Lvovitch's visit to the United States in 1932, \$15,000 had been borrowed from the Amalgamated Bank, and the notes were endorsed personally by members of the committee, who worried about the fact that it was impossible to repay the debt. Nor were there any funds in the office of the ORT to cover running expenses.

I immediately visited Philadelphia, accompanied by the late B. C. Vladeck, then President of ORT. We did make a collection, but there was not enough to cover even the most pressing debts.

In March I started a campaign in Boston. Unfortunately the Bank Holiday intervened and I was not even able to cash the checks that were already collected. It was even difficult to cover the expenses of the return trip to New York.

The headquarters of World ORT at that time was in Berlin. And after Hitler came to power, our leaders were in danger. In April 1933 I received a letter from the ORT office in Berlin signed by Dr A. Syngalowski: 'Our home has become too small for us. In order that our health does not suffer, we must move to another home. We need \$1,500 expenses. *Pidyon shevooim* (to free the prisoners).' In the summer of 1933 the financial condition of ORT became critical. I was invited by President Vladeck to visit with him, and he stated his intention of resigning. He even suggested that we close the ORT office and that I, like the representatives of other European institutions, should make a campaign by myself. Other members of the committee stated their intentions of resigning. The situation seemed hopeless. A way had to be found

After many conversations, I managed to convince Mr Louis B. Boudin that he should undertake the leadership of ORT, that he should become Chairman of the Board of Directors, and in that manner could we convince Vladeck to remain as president. To my great satisfaction, Boudin agreed, and Vladeck withdrew his resignation.

But nevertheless the situation was not a happy one. The treasury was

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bare. In the summer time, as everyone knows, one does not conduct campaigns, but an accident played its part in changing the picture.

In July 1933 there took place in Winnipeg, Canada, the first convention of the Canadian Jewish Congress. ORT was one of the two organizations invited (the other was Keren Hayesod). I represented the ORT and addressed the convention. My address made a strong impression; I won many friends for the ORT and after the convention, I announced a campaign, which resulted in the raising of \$1,600.90, a tremendous success at that time. We sent the money immediately to Europe.

In September I went out on an extended tour across the United States. The campaigns everywhere were successful; the situation bettered itself, the ORT began to pay its debts, the work of ORT in America was becoming stabilized.

Now, in 1947, when the ORT budget is actually in the millions, it is interesting to recall those heavy-hearted days of long, long ago.⁵⁷

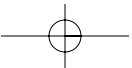
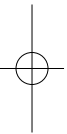
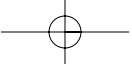
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2. Mikhail Beizer, *Evrei Leningrada, 1917–1939: Natsional'naia zhizn' i sovetizatsiia* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Mosty kul'tury/Gesharim, 2004), p. 242.
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4. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson and World ORT', *ORT Economic Review*, 4/2, November 1944, pp. 4–7, World ORT Archive ref. d05a088.
5. Gennady Estraiikh, 'The Soviet Shtetl in the 1920s', in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 17 (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), p. 201.
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7. Minutes of the meeting of the Central Committee of ORT Berlin on 6 September 1921, World ORT Archive ref. RG/2/7/61; J. Frumkin, 'Stages of ORT Activities', in *Material and Memoirs: Chapters for the History of ORT* (Geneva: ORT, 1955), pp. 65–66, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a008.
8. Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 169.
9. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 169.
10. Wilhelm Graetz, 'ORT's Work in Germany', in *Material and Memoirs: Chapters for the History of ORT*, p. 36.
11. 'ORT in Berlin oyf ... yidish', *Undzer bavegung*, 1 June 1922 (author's translation).
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18. 'Di ershte delegatsye keyn Amerike', Historical notes on the initial steps of the ORT delegation to the USA, unknown author, undated, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a077.
19. Shelly Appleton, 'ORT and the Labor Movement', *Forverts*, Special Supplement, 23 March 1980.
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25. 'Di ershte delegatsye keyn Amerike'.
26. See, for example, Block, 'A kurtser iberblik iber der geshikhte un grindung fun dem ORT in Amerike'.
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31. Papers of Jacob Lestschinsky, YIVO Archive, RG 339, folder 7.
32. 'Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie evreev v Bessarabii', *Rul'*, 1 January 1925.
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37. Joseph Leftwich, *What Will Happen to the Jews?* (London: P. S. King, 1936), p. 161; Joseph Leftwich, *Israel Zangwill* (London: T. Yoseloff, 1957), p. 217.
38. Gennady Estraiikh, 'From "Green Fields" to "Red Fields": Peretz Hirschbein's Soviet Sojourn, 1928–1929', *Jews in Russian and Eastern Europe*, 1/56 (2006), pp. 60–81. See also Anita Shapira, 'Goralah shel 'kvutsat Elkind' be-Rusya', *Shvut*, 1 (1973), pp. 87–94 and Goetz Hillig, 'Voio-Nova' v Krymu – zabytaia sel'khozkommuna (Marburg, 2005).
39. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 148.

3. From Foreign Delegation to World ORT Union 93

40. Hersh Smolar, *Fun inevyeynik* (Tel Aviv: Y.L. Perets Farlag, 1978), pp. 335, 353.
41. Z. Iu. Arbatov, 'ORT v SSSR', *Rul'*, 19 January 1927; id., 'Bol'shoi den' ORTa', *Rul'*, 3 February 1927.
42. *ORT Yediot*, April 1927.
43. A. Singalowski [Syngalowski], 'Aufbau und Umbau: Zum Problem des jüdischen Wirtschaftslebens in Osteuropa', *Der Morgen*, 3/4 (1927), pp. 355–65.
44. Grigorii Landau, 'Evreiskaia kolonizatsiia', *Rul'*, 29 March 1924; E. K-n., 'Evreiskaia kolonizatsiia v SSSR', *Rul'*, 30 January 1926.
45. 'Evreiskaia kolonizatsiia v Rossii', *Rul'*, 12 April 1927.
46. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 144.
47. 'ORT und Hechaluz', *Juedische Telegraphen-Agentur*, 5/184, 14 August 1926.
48. 'ORT i palestinskaia kolonizatsiia: spravka o vzaimootnosheniakh s sionistskim dvizheniem', YIVO Archive. RG 252, box 2, folder 20.
49. See, for example, letters in World ORT Archive, ref. d07f173, d07f174 and d07f175.
50. Michael Traub, 'Zionistische Mitarbeit am ORT', *Jüdische Rundschau*, 8 January 1929.
51. Graetz, 'ORT's Work in Germany', p. 39.
52. A. Monussi, 'ORT – eine nationaljüdische Bewegung?', *Jüdische Rundschau*, 22 November 1929; Y. Gitlin, 'Vegn ORT un arum ORT', *Folksblat* (Kaunas), 16 January 1931.
53. 'A shedlekhe misfarshteyenish', *ORT Yediot* [News], 6/1 (January 1930), p. 7, World ORT Archive ref. d07a268.
54. 'Obshchii obzor deiatel'nosti za 1926–1928', World ORT Archive, ref. d07f193.
55. Memorandum to Julius Hochman from Louis B. Boudin, 29 June 1948, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a267.
56. Surowich probably means the ORT Central Council and Central Board, ORT's executive bodies at the time.
57. B. Surowich, 'A Chapter of ORT History in America in 1933', YIVO Archive, RG 380, part 1, box 1, folder 4.



From the archive

א.ר.מ.
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Poster advertising a charity concert held in London in aid of the ORT Vilna (Vilnius) Technicum. The star of the concert, Isa Kremer, was internationally renowned as a performer of Yiddish and Russian folk songs during the 1920s and 1930s.

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The following debate on the character of ORT was published in In Memoriam: Dr Aron Syngalowski. After Ten Years, 1956–1966 (Geneva: ORT, 1966). It is reproduced here in its entirety, including the introduction by its editor, Sussia Goldman.

Is ORT a Society or a Movement?

Sussia Goldman

In the course of the 1920s a heated discussion had arisen among the leading ORT circles on the above question. However, the differences on the subject were not aired in public. In June 1930, the periodical *Virtshaft un lebn* (Economy and Life) which ORT then published in Berlin, contained an article by Dr M. Zilberfarb, then president of Polish ORT, entitled 'The ORT Idea and the Organization of ORT' which, for the first time, openly dealt with this question. Dr Zilberfarb questioned the character of ORT as a movement, analysed the causes of this phenomenon, and sought to explain in what way ORT could be turned into a mass movement.

In the same issue of *Virtshaft un lebn* Dr Syngalowski had taken up the discussion with Dr Zilberfarb and in his article 'Society or Movement', he developed the point of view that ORT is, in fact, a movement.

In order to better evaluate these differences in opinion, we are publishing below both of these articles.

On this occasion it should be added that the endeavours of the ORT leadership to accentuate the quality of ORT as a movement were considerably strengthened after the Second World War. This was stressed particularly during the past ten years, when efforts were made to attract alumni of ORT schools throughout the world. Today, there are ORT alumni associations in France, Switzerland, Italy, England, Israel, Iran and Morocco. They are represented on the national ORT committees, on technical and pedagogical boards as well as on the central committees of the World ORT Union.

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The ORT Idea and the Organization of ORT: some thoughts concerning the past and the future of ORT on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary

Dr Moshe Zilberfarb

The ORT idea is much older than the organization itself. The organization celebrates this year its fiftieth anniversary, but the ORT idea – the idea of transforming the economic life of the Jewish people on the basis of productive work – begun to take shape in the minds of men a full century before the foundation of the organization.

This is not the place to delve into history to establish who was the first to formulate the ORT idea. Was it Ber Aysik-Ber, the leader of French Judaism at the time of the French revolution, who, in his proclamation of 1791 advocated the creation of apprentice workshops in order to wean away from commerce Jewish youth of certain classes by preparing them for crafts useful to society?¹ Or does this distinction belong to that Polish author who, in 1782, edited under the pseudonym 'Anonymous Citizen' a booklet with a profound analysis of the situation of the Jewish population in Poland and who came to the conclusion that Jews should attain equal status with other citizens, enjoying full rights. They were, however, to be prevented from selling liquor, but in exchange they were to have the right to follow all other trades and crafts and particularly farming.²

I shall not dwell here on various governmental projects in which the idea of ORT appeared in various forms. Such projects were worked out in Prussia, Austria and in Russia where, towards the end of the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th century various attempts were made to attract the Jewish population to crafts and farming. These

subjects deserve special treatment and – may I say so in passing – it would be fitting if ORT, to commemorate its jubilee, could offer a prize to a writer of a historical monograph explaining and describing the birth and development of the ORT idea and the various changes it has gone through during the last 150 years.

However, it is important to recall the following point: the ORT idea and the idea of Jewish emancipation were born simultaneously, they are almost sisters. Together they have travelled a long road across all the countries of eastern and western Europe, appearing wherever the question of equal rights was discussed. Only incorrigible rationalists, fanatic believers in the efficiency of an all-powerful juridical decree, were convinced that on the faith of nothing but a legal declaration is it possible not only to establish liberty, but to usher in an era of equality and fraternity for all humanity. Only these rationalists believed that the Jewish question – enmeshed for scores of generations in religious, national and economic difficulties – could be solved without further ado by a bilateral declaration. The governments were to declare that henceforth they would consider Jews as citizens, enjoying equal rights; the Jews were to declare that henceforth they would not consider themselves as Jews but as French, German, Italian, Hungarian, etc., of Jewish faith. Thus, it seems, the question was to be solved in the most rational manner. Those who opened the gates of the ghetto did not try to learn what went on inside, they did not take into account the cultural, economic and social aspects of its life.

However, this blindness could not last. Protests, individual and collective, were heard everywhere. The further one went east, and the nearer one came to the most densely populated Jewish centres, the

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more often one heard the Jewish question discussed, not only in connection with civic rights but also in its social implications. Thus crystallized the idea to transform the social and economic structure of the Jewish population; thus the ORT idea was born.

And so the ORT idea roamed the world for an entire century, appearing among men of various countries, preoccupying the minds of statesmen and the deliberations of political parties. But only then was this idea able to set its course correctly when it was taken up by a broad stratum of the Jewish population itself. Only then did this idea materialize, and only then did it acquire the character of an organization, and it was then that ORT was born as an *organization*.

It was thought that the newly created organization would quickly grow, polarize the energy and the initiative of society, and would become an efficient factor in the process of reclassification of the Jewish masses. Were not the ideological foundations for the organization's work well laid by social workers and by generations of thinkers! Did not the leaders of Jewry strive for ages towards the creation of such an organization! The press of those days fully approved the watchwords of ORT and publicized them among its readers in all countries. Many – 12,500 men and women in 400 towns and villages – imposed upon themselves voluntary contributions to the ORT Fund which in six months totalled 200,000 rubles, a considerable sum for those days.³

Everyone thought that the organization was born under the best of auspices, that it was to lead the abandoned Jewish masses to the goal of productive labour.

Such were the conjectures and hopes. But what actually happened was quite different. The organization was to remain in its swaddling clothes for years to come.

It withered before it could grow, it lost its strength before it found its legs. It was forgotten and abandoned in some far-away corner of Jewish life where it vegetated lazily with hardly a sign of life for several decades.

What happened?

To be sure there were some exterior obstacles that hindered the organization's development. The tsarist regime could not tolerate any free development of private social initiative, no matter what it was, and it seemed that ORT was held in particular ill-favour by the tsarist bureaucracy. Before it was legally approved, the charter of ORT gathered dust in various chancelleries for a quarter of a century. There were other difficulties, of a formal nature, that put grit in the bearings and slowed down ORT's progress towards the goal it had set out to reach.

But to make only the exterior factors responsible for the situation, without an understanding of the core of the problem, would be to render an inconsiderate judgement. Why then did not these very same factors hinder the development under the tsarist regime of such popular Jewish movements as Zionism, Territorialism, Yiddishism, etc? Why was not a popular movement leavened by ORT's watchwords? How did it happen that all the fury of the tsarist regime singled out ORT and crashed on it? Isn't it possible that in addition to exterior obstacles there were others, more important and more organic, which prevented ORT from gathering around itself large masses of the population?

Were this question of interest only for ORT's history, then, perhaps, it would not be worthwhile to look at it closer. But the truth is that it has not lost its significance to this very day, and more than that – it was never as significant and important as it is at the present time.

Today ORT has become a respected

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and popular organization with a vast network of institutions which establish and develop their activity in the most populated Jewish centres and satisfy the economic needs and aspirations of the Jewish masses. ORT's watchwords so vigorously stood the test of the World War's aftermath and of other developments of these recent times that now they ring true in the remotest corners of Jewish life, penetrating its spirit as axioms and with the force of evidence itself. The ORT idea is the very foundation of a reconstruction plan, similar to a plan worked out by the Soviet government in Russia for the Jewish population of that country. ORT's activity meets with general approval and, in view of its national import, it is in the midst of our preoccupations and social efforts. The activity of ORT is supported by political movements of various and even opposite tendencies and it enjoys the goodwill of broad masses of the population. How is it then that ORT did not stimulate a movement connected with its watchwords and its mission?

This question was raised time and again among the leaders of ORT Union. It was discussed at length at the ORT congress in 1926, but nevertheless its solution remained just as far away. Something, however, was done in the right direction: successful efforts were made to increase the numbers of friends and members of the organization. But the problem was not to be solved in this way. Were the members of ORT to increase tenfold, the organization would not become a popular movement for all that. Here the determining element is not the size of membership but a number of other factors, and notably the character of the organization.

ORT is not an organization of uprooted masses; it is an organization for them. These masses may seek its help –

and they do so when they try to identify themselves with productive trades and craftsmen, but they do not merge with the organization and ORT does not identify itself with them. They are the object and not the subject of ORT's activity. They are ORT's clients and not propagators of the idea. ORT plays the role, as it were, of a midwife; it eases, to a certain degree the pains of birth of new productive groups into the Jewish economic life, it helps them to make their first steps. But, when all is said and done, their ways part because they are not bound by kinship, because they are not held together by ties of blood but are connected by a sort of a sponsorship arrangement.

Compare ORT and the Halutz [Hechalutz] and the difference in the social structure of these two organizations will become immediately obvious. Basically, both strive towards the same social goal, that is, to integrate as many elements as possible in the arts and crafts, industry and agriculture (here I do not take into account the Zionist ideology of the Halutz). But the Halutz unite elements ready to accept a revolution in their own lives, ready to break once and for all with the old ways of their economic existence and to start a new life of work; members of Halutz strive for a social and economic reform among themselves. ORT, on the other hand, tries to carry out such a reform for the masses which remain outside of the organization. In other words, Halutz is a *movement* and ORT is a *society*.

I cannot conceive of a mass movement supported not by those concerned, i.e. by the masses whose interests the movement is to defend, but by other elements of society.

When the famished clamour for bread and work their demands may, in certain conditions, generate a movement. On the other hand, an organization which

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proposes to give these masses bread and work will never be able to transform itself into a mass movement, no matter how broad its activity and how large the size of its membership.

And it is precisely for this reason that in the actual phase of its development ORT is not a popular movement, in spite of the fact that it helps thousands of persons, in spite of the fact that it is the spokesman for the needs and aspirations of millions. And yet should it not have grouped around itself a mass movement of uprooted Jewish masses? Could it not have done so?

Alas! Among the Jewry there is no lack of uprooted persons. They vegetate in towns and villages and are unable to integrate themselves with the economic stream. Their numbers grow from year to year, their misery becomes more desolate and their situation more desperate. In its daily work ORT is in constant contact with them: it speaks to them about their economic problems, it talks to the entire world about them. Should ORT call, they would gather themselves around it, but what would be the purpose of such a call?

Masses begin to move when they have certain claims to make on a state, on authorities or on the society. The uprooted masses of Jewry, too, have a long list of claims. These concern education – general or professional, work in the fields and factories, in governmental and communal enterprises and so forth. Given the political nature of these claims, the movement that would bear them should have from the organizational and ideological point of view – a purely political character. And were ORT to head such a movement, it would come into conflict with this or the other political party, or with this or the other professional organization. However, ORT has firmly resolved not to travel the political road which could lead to a division among its

own ranks, now uniting men of all political tendencies. And that is not all for, if needs be, it could have lain such considerations aside. The principal explanation of the fact that ORT is not a popular movement is that had it engaged in political activity, it would not only bring trouble into its own ranks but would jeopardize its main foundation, the basic principles of its activity and the cohesion of its competent collaborators. In short, it would have destroyed everything it had so far built up.

Does this mean, then, that ORT should forever conserve its present organizational form?

All those who are close to the work of ORT, and even some who are somewhat removed from it feel that its present organizational structure has become too narrow, so narrow, in fact that it threatens to strangle it. This structure is neither able to take into account the growing popularity of ORT's mission, nor will it tolerate manifestations of growing approval of its work.

It is a fact of common knowledge that the organic malady which paralyses more than anything else the evolution of our people in the social and national plan is the pathologic abundance of intermediary elements in Jewish economic life. Stricken with this malady, people are no longer able to keep body and soul together, to say nothing about progressing to a better life. Those who have started on the long road that leads to the final goal, whether it be social or national (the creation of an ideal state or of a national home in the future) know already that they should join with ORT to make a bit of a way with it before continuing their travels towards other destinations. The serious efforts made in the course of these last ten years in Russia and in Palestine with a view to organize Jewish life on sound foundations do not, it seems, leave any room for doubt

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about this question. Whatever the conditions may be, whatever may be the differences in the details, the 'B'rechith', the beginning will always be ORT, and in all circumstances one should begin with the ORT activities programme, with measures that are apt to stiffen the backbone of our social structure.

Nevertheless, the way of attacking the national Jewish problem in order to elucidate its basic social and economic premises has been considered not only in the small circle of our own milieu, but also beyond it, that is in the world that surrounds it, by men of action and by theorists. Now some statesmen begin to understand that the process of uprooting must be stopped, for otherwise it will end in a complete economic collapse of the Jewish population, and that it is in the interest of the state itself to prevent such a development with all the power at its disposal. Today, there may be few statesmen who take Jewish problems to heart, but tomorrow there may be many and it is not at all impossible that after tomorrow they will gather around a table to study together colonial and industrial problems of Jewish population which, at the present time, is left to its own devices in its bitter struggle with deep economic misery.

There is no shortage of forces, active and potential, either among ourselves or elsewhere, which could be mobilized in ORT's course. One must only awaken, organize and encourage them.

How is one to go about it?

I do not at all intend to present here a plan worked out in all details; generally speaking that might not even be possible, and in any case it would be premature. Suffice it to know where to start!

I think that we should start with the creation of an international forum to discuss ORT's mission and to proclaim ORT's watchwords. ORT conferences

cannot serve this purpose since they are exclusively reserved for ORT people who come together periodically to study and establish the general principles of its practical work. What we should do, then, is to convene a Jewish world congress with a different membership and with a different mission. Such a congress would unite all social Jewish forces, actively working in the economic domain on the scientific and practical level, i.e. community federations, central organizations of cooperative societies, trade unions, political-economic societies and so forth. Such a congress would bring into sharp focus the economic situation and perspectives of the Jewish people in each country and would then proceed to work out plans for constructive action.

The congress would elect an executive committee that would take upon itself the realization of political measures destined to define and improve the economic situation of the Jewish population and, particularly, to carry out the proposed plans. One of the executive committee's tasks would also be the creation of central bodies, entrusted with the regularization and rationalization of constructive activities; I have in mind such bodies as an institute of economic research, central loan fund and so forth.

I cannot dwell longer on this subject. The work programme of such a congress and its proposed membership are not matters to discuss in passing. If there is a chance that the proposal for convening such a congress will be received favourably then it will be necessary to come back to these matters, and more than once.

What we must define, however, right here and now, is ORT's attitude towards such a congress. Is ORT to dissolve itself in this congress? Certainly not. ORT Union would remain as an independent organization with its network of

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affiliations and institutions; it would constitute an integral part of the congress, much as any other organization. But we can make greater demands on ORT. It should take the initiative in convening the congress, it should become its soul and share with it its spirit and impetus. This is the privilege and duty of ORT.

ORT is the senior Jewish organization in the field of moral improvement and reconstruction. It was the first to evoke the problem of reconstruction and to propagate it in the widest social circles by dint of long unflinching labour in education and propaganda. It is the historic mission of ORT to weld all competent social forces into a powerful organization which by weight of its authority would be capable of carrying out this immense work undertaken by it.

That would be a glorious task for ORT, a task worthy to crown its fifty years of activity.

1. See Dr A. Syngalowski's article in *Aufbau und Umbau*, Berlin, 1928.
2. The 'Anonymous Citizen' booklet went through three editions in seven years, which proves that at the time it was well received by the public. The last edition was published in 1789 by Butrimovitch, deputy of Pinsk at the Polish Sejm. [See also Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2000), p. 132.]
3. An editorial in the [Petersburg Russian Jewish newspaper] *Rassvet* [1880] characterizes the serious attitude of the public opinion towards the creation of ORT. In this article, the author invited the Jewish population to participate in the building up of the 'ORT Fund', and explained that it was not a matter of charity for victims of the Radomisl fire, nor of temporary aid for victims of bad harvest here and there; it was rather a measure of a wide and general character to aid the masses of the Jewish people. 'This aid is of permanent and historic importance ...' See G. Aronson, 'On the Occasion of ORT's 50th Anniversary', *ORT News*, 6/3 (March 1930) [World ORT Archive, ref. d07a270].

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Society or Movement?

Dr Aron Syngalowski

Within ORT itself there are many active and respected persons who do not attach a great deal of importance to this question. My friend Zilberfarb is not one of them. Quite on the contrary. As his article proves, he is persuaded that the ORT idea will find its right direction only in a mass movement and that only in this way will ORT be able to fulfil the tasks assigned to it. Mr Zilberfarb assumes that the stage is set for such a movement but that ORT is 'organically' incapable to engender it. Since that is so, what is there to be done about it? To this Mr Zilberfarb's answer is: 'It would be enough to convene a Jewish world congress, which, in turn, would create the movement.'

Although we might approach the problem raised with all seriousness and although we might fully admit that to this very day and in spite of its growth during the last decades ORT's development did not keep pace with the growth of its tasks, we cannot, nevertheless, agree that the difficulties exist where my friend Zilberfarb seems to see them. If the remedy proposed by him, namely the congress, could – if the worst would come to the worst – have a real value, then it would be even less capable than ORT Union to create the necessary 'organizational structure'.

Unfortunately, I do not have the possibility here to study in detail just how ORT Union could organize itself to take into account the interest evoked by its watchwords and the growing popularity of its activity; it is even more difficult to examine all of the questions related to the project of a Jewish congress. Today I shall limit myself to a few remarks of a general order on the fundamental problems raised by Mr Zilberfarb and on his conclusions.

First of all, before passing any judgement on ORT, it would have been necessary to define the term 'movement'. My friend Zilberfarb proceeds in a different manner. First, he rules ORT is not a movement; then he tries to find the reason for this situation and concludes that it is not a result of exterior obstacles but of a congenital deficiency. This deficiency is inherent to ORT because it is an organization *for* uprooted masses and not an organization *of* uprooted masses. We are to get an idea of what Mr Zilberfarb calls a movement from the analysis of this deficiency which seems to be peculiar to the ORT organization.

For the time being, however, let us leave aside the factors which may characterize the authentic nature of social movements. The entire art of thinking of my friend shows that he does not find in ORT sufficiently distinctive *exterior* manifestations of a movement; that is to say that he does not see the link with the vast masses of the people. The fact that ORT, an organization of a good many years standing, has not yet grouped around itself the mass of the people irks him and gives him cause to think that here we have to deal not with exterior obstacles but with an *organic* incapacity. To prove the point he recalls ORT's history and tries to persuade us that ORT had suffered from this shortcoming from its youth. As further proof he mentions that the ideological foundation for ORT's work was well prepared half a century ago by social workers and thinkers of preceding generations, that the Jewish press fully approved ORT's watchwords from the very beginning and so forth, but that nevertheless the organization remained in its swaddling clothes and did not transform itself into a people's movement. It is true, my friend Zilberfarb admits, that the tsarist regime did not look upon social movements with particular favour. But

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then, he wonders, how was it possible that under the very same regime other movements, such as Zionism, Territorialism, etc., were born and could develop? To that we can answer that it was possible because there was no internal contradiction between Zionism or Territorialism on one hand, and external obstacles, on the other. Quite the contrary. Denial of rights, political impotence and brutal anti-Semitism constantly stimulated Jewish aspirations towards other worlds, beyond the limits which circumscribed one's existence. But whereas these exterior obstacles were a powerful stimulant for the above-mentioned national movements they could not but paralyse our organization which aimed to develop its activity within Russia itself and which staked so much on the economic self-help of the native Jewish population.

To be sure the ORT idea is an old one. With the very first ray of the dawn of modern times it penetrated the ghetto and sparkled in the souls of thousands of men and women as a guiding star to emancipation. Nevertheless, lacking the basic conditions of equal political rights and deprived of continuous state aid this idea could not have had a concrete foundation for its development.

During the years mentioned by Mr Zilberfarb the most ardent wish of the Russian Jews was to liberate themselves from this prison which was the Pale of Settlement. In its early days ORT was also guided by this desire. It is known that its point of departure was a project of internal migration beyond the limits of regions where Jews were authorized to reside. Strenuous efforts were made to permit Jewish craftsmen to establish themselves in the interiors of the country and the people expected a great deal from ORT's initiative. However, the work begun soon had to be stopped for the authorities

were constantly hindering it. Local police paid hardly any attention to the law authorizing Jewish craftsmen to reside outside of the assigned zones and raised such difficulties that prospective emigrants soon lost the desire to hazard such a risky enterprise. No wonder, therefore, that under such conditions (which remained in force for decades) an ORT 'movement' could not develop. Without any real perspectives, without any hope for constructive possibilities vast masses of the population could not link their lot with that of ORT. Their interests were almost entirely concentrated on the elementary rights of a citizen, and within this framework other movements were born and had developed. ORT did not act. A militant movement for constructive work could not be led as a conspiracy. Furthermore, without a minimum of favourable basic conditions of a politico-economic nature such an action would be unthinkable.

Consequently, if – besides exterior obstacles – ORT's development was hindered by an internal, organic deficiency, it happened rather because ORT was not an organization that was nourished by abstractions and long-term aims.

The very same congenital deficiency influences our organization to this very day. No matter how popular ORT's mission may be in the final account the measure of approval of those who are interested in it materially and ideologically will be proportionate to the amplitude of its concrete plans and to their social and economic significance. Any Jew conscious of the necessity of productivization is attracted by the idea of an apprentice workshop, but I do not very well see how a leader of a community would be seriously interested in the fate of a modest little workshop. For, in truth, what is an apprentice workshop – even an

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excellent one – in comparison with other and far more serious problems of a community ...

To mobilize the masses one must offer concrete plans of great economic importance to many. Whether such plans be executed depends on the economic and political situation in various countries and also on the measure in which various states consider that the economic reconstruction of the Jewish population coincides with the interests of the country.

As long as ORT's watchwords were linked with concrete plans (and did not voice an abstract credo of toil), the organization never ceased to develop.

Mr Zilberfarb admits that ORT has become 'a respected and popular organization with a vast network of institutions which establish and develop their activity in the most populated Jewish centres and satisfy the economic needs and aspirations of the Jewish masses'. He knows just as well as I do that the results of its activity today are far more important than in the past and that it gains more and more influence with the Jewish masses in Europe and America. But that does not prevent Mr Zilberfarb from asking again and again the same question: Why isn't ORT a movement? I cannot reply to this question if it is formulated in this manner primarily because ORT is a great movement in the Jewish world, and I am convinced of it even if this is not apparent in some town or other. But Mr Zilberfarb contends that no matter how great the number of ORT's friends or even members the term 'movement' does not suit it. Were this only a question of definition, our debate could end right there; it would only remain for us to submit the question to a committee of experts on terminology. But as ill-luck would have it, my partner in the discussion, basing himself on his analysis of the word 'movement', comes to the conclusion that ORT finds itself in

a blind alley and that it is necessary 'to try to mobilize 'forces, active and potential' not within ORT but elsewhere. For that reason I am obliged to dwell on the question and to pose it in a different manner: Why, in fact, couldn't ORT be regarded as a movement? Why wouldn't ORT be capable of awakening, mobilizing and organizing the active and potential forces? To this my friend finds only one answer: ORT is not and could not be a movement because it does not draw to itself elements personally interested in productivization and because it does not aspire to provide with work its own members but unites within its framework individuals and groups animated by the will radically to change the Jewish economic structure in general.

Mr Zilberfarb is quite right if he thinks that a mass movement should be supported by those concerned. Unfortunately, he has constantly before his eyes the image of Halutz [Hechalutz] and that befuddles him. That explains his error in judging the nature of a movement which does not incite its members to work on themselves but to transform the economic structure of a people. That also partly explains the contradictions found in his article, for in accordance with the principle of organization which he discusses therein, even the Zionist organization – unless it be composed of persons desiring to emigrate to Palestine – would be no more than a midwife assisting at the birth of another organization. The Zionist organization is not related with those it supports by blood ties but by ties of sponsorship. Accordingly, even Zionism would not be able to engender a mass movement ...

The truth of the matter, however, is that this very same Halutz which my partner in the discussion uses as a criterion, could have been created and can exist only insofar as it was and is

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dependent on the Zionist movement. Thus, Mr Zilberfarb's discovery, this definition of a movement by the presence within its ranks of elements personally and directly concerned, does not apply in all cases.

When the will and actions of a great many people are commanded by a social objective as yet not achieved, that is to say by a social idea, then we find ourselves in the presence of a social movement (the term 'great many' is not defined in this particular case). It is perfectly possible that national and social movements may be promoted by different groups interested in a different manner and on a different scale in different problems. In most cases the inclusion of personally and directly concerned elements is one of the prerequisites of a movement, but these elements are not its sole carriers.

In Germany, for example, there was in its day a movement of social colonization. It was directed by an association bearing the same title whose slogan was: 'Workers' gardens on cities borders for low-income earners!' That was not a claim on governments nor municipalities, but a call destined to stimulate self-help of the population. Up to this very day this movement is supported not by those who want to have as their own property a bit of land or a hut, but first and foremost by those who see in this movement a means of developing the physical and moral forces of the people. Take as another example the movement against capital punishment. If we are to believe Mr Zilberfarb, the principal supporters of this movement could be only those who are condemned to die, just as the sole supporters of a school reform could be the students and their parents.

It is just as erroneous to believe that everywhere and always the act of claiming something from the governments

or from the great of this world is a characteristic feature of a movement. We all know that there are a good many religious, cultural and sport movements with quite different characteristic features. In short, among all the movements, large and small, useful and harmful, social and national, there is a movement called 'ORT'. This movement does not identify itself completely with ORT Union. It gravitates around the latter and its scope is much wider. It brings together within its framework the most varying tendencies. According to some, work is the only means immediately to secure one's material existence; others see in it a way to secure the future of their children and grandchildren; others yet seek the welfare of their people in the growing number of workers in their midst. ORT Union is the organizational expression of this movement gravitating around it.

One can find traces of the ORT movement wherever Jewish social life develops. ORT organizations in Europe and America, comments on ORT in the Jewish press, the mass movement which supports the People's Tool Campaign in the United States, the very great number of its friends and enemies – all these point to the fact that we deal with a movement. And in order that ORT might draw from it ever renewable vigour it must constantly seek to widen its organizational framework. But all these are questions of principle or of organizational technique and they can very well be solved within ORT itself, without going afar into the field to seek new ways. Surely there is no lack of means to solve them. To give you but one example, I should like to refer to a resolution passed by the Third ORT Congress concerning the introduction of a sort of a 'shekel' of ORT which would give the holder the right to vote at the session of World Union. Thus the growing goodwill towards ORT would be catalysed

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not only from the financial, but also from the organizational point of view.

I know full well that Mr Zilberfarb might answer that in spite of his resolution and ORT's popularity – which is just as great in Warsaw as it is in the United States or Western Europe – in Warsaw, precisely there is no *people's* ORT movement. Well, to my mind the reasons for this are to be found not in the structure of ORT but rather in the still limited economical and political possibilities for constructive work in Poland, and in the social character of the Jews. In general, one must not lose sight of the fact that ORT, more than any other Jewish movement, bears the consequences of the lag of the Jewish masses in the domain of laic culture, and above all the consequences of its inveterate disdain for immediate tasks. The Jew as individual might be ever so practical as far as his own person is concerned, but he waxes 'poetic' the moment matters concern the community... Matters that touch the community must bear the imprint of spirituality; they must be coupled either with the distant past or with the even more distant future. Whatever is within immediate reach is not worth bothering with. And it is precisely this transposition of daily petty concerns to the level of a national concern that constitutes an enormous cultural task for Judaism, a task which will require long years of unremitting labour.

And even if Mr Zilberfarb were right, and that despite the presence of a favourable setting one would seek in vain for indications pointing that ORT was a movement, even then one could ask oneself by what a miracle a world congress would make up for this lack of evidence.

Not only men active in ORT, in the narrow sense of the term, participate in the sessions of ORT Union; more and

more they are attended by representatives of Jewish circles in Europe and America simply interested in constructive Jewish work. Most of the delegates to the sessions take part in them as representatives of ORT members whose numbers are constantly increasing. Nevertheless, according to Mr Zilberfarb's formula, the world congress should be composed of representatives of bodies, occupied with other matters throughout the year. That being so, how can a congress of eminent community leaders start a mass movement which ORT cannot start no matter how it tries?

The congress, however, could have another important function. It is enough to examine the question in detail, without being put off by the magic of the world 'congress'. It is quite possible that in certain circumstances such a congress could be of real value to our work. I mentioned such a possibility two years ago in a meeting of plenary session of the ORT Central Committee.

My friend Zilberfarb did not propose to present in his article a detailed plan of such a congress. As he said himself, he only sketched a general outline of the fundamental principles of the congress's work and the nature of its organization. According to this outline the mission of the congress is to unite all Jewish social forces in the interests of ORT's cause. There is no question of supplanting ORT; quite on the contrary, my partner in the discussion thinks that ORT Union will continue as an independent organization. Therefore, the congress is not to create a parallel organization to engage in constructive work in accordance with the ORT programme. What would then be the practical function of this congress and its executive?

Mr Zilberfarb has indicated several of them. Let us single out from their number, to begin with, political measures

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connected with the execution of proposed constructive projects. There is no doubt about the importance of this function. However, experience has proved that when world Jewish organizations are created expressly for the purpose of political representation and intervention, their authority is weak and their success nil, and nothing up to the present has shown contrary. It seems to me that the execution of this function is the province of precisely such an organization as ORT. Thanks to its international connections and, above all, to its character of a practical economic organization – and that feature has been recognized in many countries – ORT's interventions would be more useful and efficient. Mr Zilberfarb thinks that political interventions – inasmuch as they lead either to a reconciliation or a conflict with certain political tendencies – might jeopardize ORT's entity. If that is so and if it is dangerous for ORT Union to execute this function, then how can the congress and its executive (and they too are made up of representatives of various political tendencies) overcome this obstacle and yet keep the goat happy and save the cabbage?

Besides it seems to me that had my friend Zilberfarb approached the congress issue with the same sense of critical analysis as he had done in the case of ORT, then his conclusions would be somewhat different.

Indeed, after a period of activity as urgent as it was fortuitous time has come to do some planned work. But how can we engage in systematic planned work on a long-term programme with a sure income in the future? How can we bring order into our constructive work if there is an absolute anarchy on the income side of the budget? How can we be sure of a stable budget if the regular flow of receipts is not guaranteed? And it goes

from bad to worse. Every day brings us dire news from the United States. The work of many important projects has started, but now the scope has to be reduced! How much energy has been wasted! How many social assets will be lost! How many intelligent initiatives will have to be abandoned!

That is why it is high time to think about the necessity of creating for ORT's work a modest but sound financial base. For this work cannot be based on chance collections and sporadic contributions. We cannot be sure even of an indispensable minimum as long as it has to come from individual sources. It would be quite a different story if the budget could be made up of sizeable subsidies from permanent bodies, themselves with a secure budget.

A number of Jewish communities in Eastern and Western Europe grant to ORT annual subsidies. But for the time being the number of contributors and the total of the subsidies are quite limited. It is absolutely indispensable for Jewish communities throughout the world to understand that the Jewish population of Eastern Europe goes through a period of an acute crisis and that, therefore, important financial means are urgently called for. The economic development of Eastern Europe must occupy the place it deserves in the preoccupations of every Jewish community. Finally, community budgets must provide the necessary funds for the realization of this economic development. This holds true not only for the communities but, in a large measure, for all other units of Jewish collectivity.

Now here is something that could form the fundamental task of a congress or a general Jewish conference on economic reconstruction.

Thus, it seems to me that the principle functions of a congress should include the establishment of a permanent tax on

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communities and other Jewish bodies, the discussion of particularly important projects of reconstruction work, and the creation of a control body to supervise ORT's activities.

But we must be sure that such a congress will not transform itself into a forum of 'unlimited possibilities'; we must avoid its seeking contrary ends. And for that it is necessary to thoroughly study its preparation. All the communities and all the bodies that will participate in the congress will have to be won over in advance to the cause of ORT so that they will promote its idea without breaking adrift.

My friend Zilberfarb hopes that ORT will be the soul of the congress. That will be possible only if it will not be a foreign body as far as ORT is concerned. And therefore taking the initiative for preparing such a congress, ORT itself must get ready for it.

Mr Zilberfarb is quite right when he says that more can be demanded of ORT. Well and good. But above all, let us ask ORT to proceed with great caution and to prevent, as much as it is possible, the degeneration of any congress into market fair with nothing to show for it but 'solemn proclamations', all of them gratuitous.

From Berlin to Paris and Beyond: the 1930s and 1940s

4

ORT's Berlin years, between 1921 and 1933, were a significant period in the life of the organization – in the German capital ORT reinvented itself as an international body. ORT activities linked East European and German Jewish activists: The German branch of ORT emerged as a principal fundraiser for various vocational education projects and other forms of assistance to disadvantaged Jewish urban and rural dwellers in eastern Europe. In general, ORT had taken root in Berlin and fulfilled a meaningful function in local Jewish life. This situation changed dramatically in 1933 as Germany became a fascist state.

On 11 March 1933, the German police arrested the economist and statistician Jacob Lestschinsky, whose early publications triggered the interest of ORT activists in the fate of Jewish artisans.¹ The police either followed the contents of his Yiddish correspondence to the New York daily *Forverts* or simply could not tolerate the presence of a person associated with the biggest Jewish-cum-socialist newspaper. It was one of the first Nazi arrests of foreign journalists in Berlin. Following pressure from the US State Department, Lestschinsky was released after four days in prison and was given two weeks to leave Germany.² A second Jewish journalist by the name of Shmuel Mayzlish was arrested in Berlin and deported by the Gestapo shortly after.³ While colleagues of Lestschinsky and Mayzlish initially believed that the political tension was only temporary,⁴ thousands began to flee Germany after realising they were facing state-sponsored terrorism against Jews and political opposition. Like many others, the German-Jewish protagonist in the 1933 American Yiddish film *Der vandernder yid* (The Wandering Jew) considered his options: 'Shall it be Palestine, Argentina, Canada ... or Birobidzhan?'⁵ Jewish organizations also realized that they had to relocate their staff and their archives. In May 1933 the JDC (American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee) offices in Berlin were searched by the Nazis and the organization moved its European headquarters to Paris.⁶

Once the necessary funds arrived from the United States, ORT too decamped to Paris where it joined the ORT France branch (established in 1921). Though the Russian Jewish intellectuals working in ORT's central office were largely fluent in French, Yiddish remained the dominant language. In fact, according to Sussia Goldman, the years 1933–40 were the most

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'Yiddishist' period in the history of the organization, when Yiddish was the main language in ORT's schools as well as its conventions and publications.⁷ This linguistic shift emphasized ORT's transition from an essentially *Russian* Jewish organization to an *international* Jewish organization, whose operations increasingly transcended the borders of the disintegrated Russian Empire, but still remained confined predominantly to the Yiddish-speaking masses. This transition to Yiddish was true even of ORT activists who had previously preferred to converse and write in Russian. The Yiddish press, for example, began to feature articles by Ilya Troitzky, an ORT emissary in Europe and Latin America, and by Solomon Poliakoff-Litovtseff, an established Russian writer and an ORT activist in Paris.

When moving to Paris, Syngalowski managed to bring with him the library and furniture belonging to émigré Alfred Döblin, a German novelist and essayist who for several years flirted with Yiddish and Yiddishist Territorialism.⁸ Around that time, Ben-Adir and several other veteran Territorialists began to revitalize the movement after more than a decade of inactivity. Neo-Territorialism took an organized form in 1935, when the Frayland (Freeland) League for Jewish Territorial Colonization was established in a conference in London.⁹ Writer Stefan Zweig, who also supported the League, claimed that Jewish emigration 'would relieve Europe not only of its surplus people, but also of its surplus enmities'.¹⁰ And although ORT was at pains to manifest its political neutrality, it naturally gravitated towards the Frayland League – the two organizations, after all, shared a common objective: helping Jewish refugees from the Third Reich to settle in Europe and other parts of the world.



German Jewish refugees during an ORT vocational course in Lithuania, 1933–34.

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At the ORT Berlin school,
November 1938.
Above: meal time.
Left: student blacksmith
Bernard Joseph.
Photographs by Lilli Szkoling.

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'All of a sudden, the Jews of Germany were transformed from a community that *supported* ORT's work in other countries to being the most "de-classed" of all Jews, more desperately in need of ORT's aid than those living in countries where ORT's fine training centres had so far operated undisturbed.'¹¹ ORT reacted to the crisis by developing a special emergency programme, which mainly focused on providing manual and farming training for German Jews expelled from the intellectual professions. Several ORT schools in Latvia and Lithuania were made available to students from Germany. The majority of the 130 German Jewish trainees later found refuge in Palestine.¹² Wilhelm Graetz, head of ORT Germany, recalled later:

With the increase in restrictions and deprivation of rights in Germany, it became clear that only well-equipped training centres could meet the growing requirements. In November 1935, work began on the establishment of a suitable ORT school in Berlin. The difficulties in the way of providing suitable premises, machines and instructors, and legal and administrative opposition and objections of all kinds, were gradually overcome. The negotiations with the Gestapo ended with the ORT school being only allowed to prepare Jews for *emigration*. We evaded the risk of having the funds ... and the machines and other equipment purchased with them stolen by the Gestapo by arranging for the English ORT to act as sponsor for the school and as owner of all machinery and equipment. The 'ORT Private Jewish Centre for training Jews wishing to emigrate as artisans and tradesmen, Berlin, Ltd.' was opened in April 1937. ...

The plight of the Jews worsened at breakneck speed, and there was finally no option but to decide to transfer the Berlin ORT school abroad. As the property of the English ORT, the machinery and equipment could be exported to England [Leeds] without opposition by the authorities. The main point about the transfer, however, was that it simultaneously enabled the school's trainees and instructors to be removed from Germany in time and thus saved them from destruction.¹³

According to Leon Shapiro, the transfer of equipment to England did not go completely without problems. However, 100 students and seven teachers did cross the British Channel in August 1939, only days before the outbreak of the war. In Berlin, the school continued to run some training programmes for adults until its complete liquidation in June 1943.¹⁴

Leaders of ORT, particularly veteran Territorialists Lvovitch and Syngalowski, always had a soft spot for agricultural colonies. Small wonder then that one of their plans, conceived after ORT's relocation to Paris, dealt with German Jewish refugee settlement in regions of France where the authorities encouraged re-population of rural communities. They finally chose the *département* of Lot-et-Garonne near the city of Toulouse because the climate and infrastructure of the region were best suited for the experiment. Initially,

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the idea was to attract a large group of settlers who had some agricultural experience as well as money to invest in farming. At the same time, ORT was ready to provide credit for seasonal activities as it did in Poland and Rumania. Although the scheme received a good response and more than 200 families with an aggregate capital of over one million gold marks volunteered to move to France, the project had to be scaled down when the Nazi government tightened the rules regulating currency export. Still, about one hundred refugees settled in Lot-et-Garonne with ORT's support. Other families joined the community during the war, until it was finally closed down in 1943.¹⁵

After 1933 ORT decided to expand its operations to more ideologically challenging areas, most notably Palestine and Birobidzhan. The ORT leadership had come to the conclusion that it could not be too selective when searching for safe havens for Jewish refugees, particularly as only a trickle of Jewish immigrants were allowed into countries around the world. The situation quickly worsened even in France, which initially opened its borders and welcomed thousands of German Jews: soon the presence of Jewish refugees stimulated an anti-Semitic backlash in a country torn by depression.¹⁶

Before 1933 Palestine was a strictly no-go area for ORT activities. Although its programmes contributed indirectly to the Zionist cause particularly by training future *Olim* (new immigrants), the three ORT leaders – Bramson, Lvovitch, and Syngalowski – were all sceptical of Zionism. In their view,



ORT fashion design course in Paris, 1939.

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Palestine was an ideologically and linguistically peculiar constituent of Jewish Diaspora and should not be the centre of Jewish national revival. However, in 1932 Bramson did visit Palestine. At that time he toured Egypt and Syria with his daughter (and secretary) Sarah on behalf of ORT and OSE. He was welcomed by Tel Aviv's legendary mayor Meir Dizengoff, who volunteered to chair a committee of local ORT supporters.¹⁷ Bramson travelled to Palestine again two years later, this time with the express purpose of negotiating ways of cooperating with the local establishment. However, his approach was received with suspicion and distrust. Representatives of the Yishuv industrialists and trade-unionists either did not want to deal with the 'anti-Zionist ORT' or demanded full control over its operations in Palestine. Finally, Bramson decided that ORT could not operate in such a hostile environment and left the country empty-handed.¹⁸

The Soviet Union, in contrast, appeared to be a promising place for ORT's programmes. The organization initially limited its projects in the Soviet Union to the European parts of the country. Initially, it did not participate in the grandiose plan then under way to build a Yiddish-speaking autonomy in Birobidzhan, a vast underpopulated land with no link to Jewish history, near the border with China. The name Birobidzhan was made up of a combination of Bira and Bidzhan, two tributaries of the river Amur. Despite the very modest outcome of the project, Birobidzhan was celebrated by anti- and non-Zionists circles as a prototype of the solution to the Jewish question. By 1932 there was organized support for Soviet Jewish colonization in seventeen countries and after 1933 the Soviet Far East received attention from various ideological circles.¹⁹ Lord Dudley Marley, deputy speaker of the House of Lords and chairman of the Committee for the Relief of Victims of German Fascism, described Birobidzhan as 'about the safest spot in the world'.²⁰ In America, the former Democratic congressman William W. Cohen chaired a committee of influential figures who were fascinated by the Birobidzhan vision. Meanwhile, Soviet representatives kept sending heartening messages.²¹ In May 1934, the far eastern territory designated for Jewish colonization was being officially referred to as the Jewish Autonomous Region, and this was seen as a temporary status on the way to proclaiming a full developed republic.

ORT finally joined the efforts in Birobidzhan, following 'the completion of a thorough investigation of the country, of its productive possibilities, of the available raw materials and after the formation of ORT's own administrative apparatus, which was organized in the city of Birobidjan'.²² Adolf Held, president of the Amalgamated Bank of New York and a member of the American ORT's Board of Directors travelled to Birobidzhan and wrote an only-partly-sceptical report about the Jewish autonomy on his return.²³ In March 1936, the Soviet authorities allowed ORT to send to Birobidzhan a group of 200 people, consisting mainly of ORT graduates from eastern Europe. The applicants

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were nationals of various countries, mostly Poland and Lithuania.²⁴ In 1936, the Soviet propaganda industry produced a talkie, *Seekers of Happiness*, whose central characters were Jews who came to settle in Birobidzhan.²⁵ In the West, ORT campaigns began to raise money in support of emigration to the Soviet Jewish autonomy.²⁶ The whole campaign, however, was futile. Despite the Soviet government's promise to allow 1,000 foreign families to settle in the Jewish Autonomous Region, less than 1,400 foreign individuals were permitted to settle there between 1931 and 1936.²⁷

The carnage and mass repression in the Soviet Union that began in the autumn of 1936 continued to intensify throughout 1937–38 and the country was no longer considered a suitable location for resettlement campaigns. None the less, ORT leaders still held on to the hope that it was only a temporary setback and the Jewish nation-building projects would continue to develop in the Soviet Union. It is illuminating that Syngalowski sent a short message of greetings to the Left-dominated Yiddish Cultural Congress, convened in Paris in September 1937, and that a M. Syngalowski (presumably his wife, Michaela) was listed among the people elected to the board of the congress's spin-off – the World Alliance of Yiddish Culture.²⁸ There is no doubt that by 1938 the Syngalowskis would have been reluctant to associate themselves with such a pro-Soviet gathering, as by then Stalin's massive purge of the Communist Party, the government and other bodies had reached ORT's offices in the Soviet Union. The millions of Soviet citizens imprisoned and murdered as 'enemies of the people' included representatives of ORT, including Jacob Tsegelnitski, veteran of the organization and its leader in the Soviet Union. From 1938 until the official opening of its first resource centre in Moscow in 1991, ORT did not operate on Soviet territory.

In the 1930s, ORT programmes were increasingly focusing on support and training for refugees and immigrants. Migration also determined the geographical spread of ORT's activities, especially in Latin America, where new branches appeared, for instance, in Mexico, Cuba and Argentina. Alongside the concern for Jewish refugees from the Third Reich, the plight of Polish Jews continued to dominate ORT's agenda. In fact, in the mid-1930s the situation in Poland was seen sometimes as even more tragic than the situation in Germany.²⁹

There were clear similarities between the Polish and German attitudes towards the Jewish population. Both regimes devised plans of massive Jewish emigration from their countries, whether to Palestine, Africa (e.g. Madagascar) or elsewhere.³⁰ The nationalist regime in Poland had introduced an autarky (closed economy) and forced out Jewish professionals, entrepreneurs and workers. Anti-Jewish legislation and growing popular anti-Semitism created an atmosphere in which some Jewish intellectuals began to idealize the Jewish ghetto of the past. Advocates of the 'back to the ghetto' stance argued that, historically, the Ashkenazi civilization had been formed in isola-

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tion and that isolation might help European Jews to overcome the present crisis.³¹ Lestschinsky, who also lost his faith in successful multiethnic coexistence, wrote in his article 'Ghetto and Migration in Jewish Life':

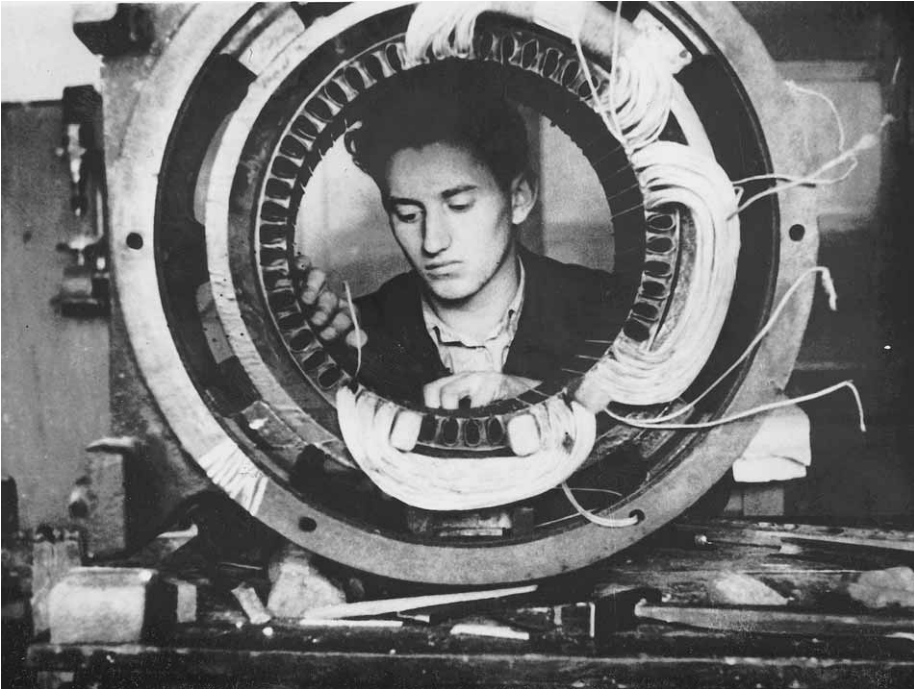
Ghetto and migration are the two pillars that have been sustaining Jewish national life in the Diaspora. The ghetto, which had geographically and socially delineated us and separated us from the surrounding population, had also isolated us behaviourally and culturally from non-Jewish life, creating as a result the basis for our own historically developed forms of communal life. ...

Migration repeatedly interrupted the unavoidable processes of assimilation. Thanks to migration, assimilation never damaged the roots of Jewish national life. Rather, assimilation was kept in such a minimal proportion that it could not endanger the cultural structures and forms of communal life, which had been historically accumulated and later preserved in the ghetto.³²

In 1934 Lestschinsky chaired a committee, established by ORT Poland, to study the desperate conditions of Jewish artisans. As part of the 'back to the ghetto' drive, Lestschinsky suggested that the Polish Jewish community should turn inward and fight fire with fire by introducing its own autarky and creating an alternative Jewish economy inside the hostile Polish economy. According to Lestschinsky, social and professional re-stratification was the key to peaceful coexistence with the co-territorial population and an antidote to the virulent anti-Semitism. The creation of an alternative economy meant, of course, more attention to ORT-related programmes, because an autarky could not be achieved without a society-wide shift of professional aspirations: a move towards menial and low-wage occupations, development of agricultural production in every shtetl and, generally, economic independence from their gentile neighbours.³³ Development of Jewish farming was one of the priority tasks of ORT Poland. After a few years of dealing with various forms of agricultural activity, ORT activists came to prefer establishing specialized (e.g. dairy) cooperatives.³⁴ However, a closed Jewish economy could not survive without Jewish merchants. Joseph Jaszunski, an educationalist and leader of ORT Poland, dramatically revized the ideology of ORT, which traditionally despised commerce, considering it a 'non-productive' occupation. Given the new circumstances, he insisted on developing a training programme for merchants.³⁵

Although initially Jewish parents disapproved of vocational education for their children, regarding it as the lowest form of educational endeavour, the economic situation in Poland forced them to turn to ORT schools. Activists of ORT Poland advocated two competing models of vocational training. The majority lobbied for three-year technical schools (similar to the Vilna Technicum) issuing certificates recognized by the Ministry of Education and the

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Electricity workshop at the ORT Kovno (Kaunas) school, Lithuania, 1939.



Working with cement at ORT Vilna (Vilnius), 1936.

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guilds. Others, mainly a group of activists from Lodz, argued that short-term courses were much more appropriate in the unstable political climate of the time. ORT finally sponsored both types of vocational training.³⁶

ORT's vocational education programmes in Poland and around eastern Europe helped thousands to improve their economic conditions in their own countries or to find gainful occupations elsewhere. By the end of 1936, 20,000 Jewish artisans had qualified in Poland, where guild certificates were required for obtaining permits to practise a particular trade.³⁷ Professional training also became a crucial issue for Jewish artisans in Bessarabia when a 1936 edict of the Rumanian government required technical proficiency as well as knowledge of the Rumanian language. According to the new legislation, artisans who failed their exams could not continue practising the trade. A conference of ORT workers in Bessarabia developed an emergency programme of short-term courses and, at the same time, used lobbyists (*shtadlonim*) to negotiate with the authorities. As a result, all Bessarabian Jewish artisans were allowed to continue in their occupations.³⁸

The scale of ORT's projects depended on the success of its fundraising campaigns. In the early 1930s, the organization was badly affected by a worldwide economic depression and the loss of the German Jewish community as an important contributor to its budget. During that critical time, Leon Bramson decided to seek the help of the prosperous Jewish community in South Africa. He spent seventeen months in the country, from May 1933 to



Dr and Mrs Syngalowski arrive in South Africa, 1936.

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September 1934 (by the time he returned to Europe, ORT's offices had moved from Berlin to Paris). Bramson's successful campaign in South Africa provided the main source of income for both ORT and OSE. In 1936, Syngalowski spent a whole year in South Africa, consolidating ORT's position in the country.³⁹

In the meantime, the economic situation of the American Jewry had begun to improve and it could once again become involved in philanthropy. The American ORT Federation raised (independently and with the aid of the JDC) the following funds: 23,000 dollars in 1932, 37,500 dollars in 1935, 149,600 dollars in 1936, 227,100 dollars in 1937 and 202,700 dollars in 1938. Characteristically, membership dues accounted for only a small fraction (1 to 3 per cent) of these amounts. ORT did not manage to fulfil its perennial dream of forming a mass-membership organization in the United States – this was evident especially outside New York. (In fact, the dream was never realized in Europe either.) The failure to achieve this goal in America was probably due to the widespread conviction that organizational campaigns would interfere with fundraising campaigns and the resistance to any alternative organizational structure which could compete with the existing fundraising machinery.⁴⁰ The attempt to recruit 'guardians', who would 'adopt' Jewish children in Europe and provide money for their technical training, food and lodging, also yielded poor results. The bulk of funds would be raised thanks to traditional techniques used in American Jewish philanthropy, such as face-to-face solicitation and testimonial dinners.⁴¹

The beginning of World War II created new challenges for ORT. Poland was under German occupation and the Baltic countries had to accept the presence of Soviet military bases and in the summer of 1940 were fully annexed by the Soviet Union. Initially, ORT organizations in the Baltic countries tried to continue their activities – ORT in Vilnius even attempted to provide assistance to refugees from Poland.⁴² Ultimately, the Soviet authorities suppressed all independent organizations. The educational institutions of ORT were transformed into state schools and ORT activists in the Soviet Union were not allowed to correspond with their colleagues outside the country.

France too could no longer be a safe haven. Jacob Frumkin described the experiences of that time:

As soon as the Second World War started, both organizations [ORT and United Committee of ORT-OZE] decided to move to Vichy where it was easier to find office facilities because the season had already ended. Dr D. Lvovitch carried on extensive activities at that time – just before his departure for the United States, at the outset of hostilities. At the end of 1939 it became evident that the so-called *drôle de guerre* was not disturbing the normal routine. We therefore returned to Paris along with the United Committee of ORT-OZE.

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In June 1940 we witnessed the urgent evacuation of Paris because of the threat of the approaching German armies. Again ORT, OZE and their United Committee appeared in Vichy. Very soon thereafter the Germans occupied Vichy. While some of our workers succeeded in escaping, the largest part of the personnel remained in Hitler's power. My wife and I were forced to remain and add to the unhappy experiences of our six years in Berlin. As is well known, the occupation of Vichy did not last long and there were no special incidents. Immediately after the Germans left, the Pétain government moved in. The French administration started to clean up Vichy, evacuating institutions and persons not connected with the government. At the end of November 1940, we had to leave. ORT and the ORT-OZE offices moved to Marseilles and OZE went to Montpellier. Our existence in Marseilles was difficult. The Pétain administration was unfriendly and the Germans were not very far away – in neighbouring Aix-en-Provence the largest hotel was occupied by a German military commission. The difficult conditions did not affect our work. We adapted ourselves to the new circumstances and participated in the relief work organized in the concentration camps, arranging for the vocational education of the refugees who appeared in great numbers searching for refuge in the non-occupied parts of France.

ORT was directed by L. Bramson and A. Syngalowski, who despite the many handicaps, called a conference of ORT representatives in France. This conference took place in Marseilles. Dr D. Lvovitch conducted an extensive campaign for ORT in both Americas and served as liaison between ORT in those countries and the European Friends of ORT.

Dr A. Syngalowski submitted plans to the conference for a new programme of ORT activities to meet the existing conditions. Leon Bramson, contrary to the advice of his doctors and friends, worked without cease, neglecting his health until he collapsed on 21 January, 1941. During an ORT Executive Meeting he was taken ill. The doctors declared his condition extremely serious. On 2 March 1941 he died.⁴³

David Lvovitch's memorandum to Blanche Renard, the leader of the Jewish community in St Louis, gives an insight into the structure of ORT circa 1940:

Since ORT is a federation of membership organizations, based on democratic principles, each national organization elects its central committee, boards and officers at its own national convention. It is the function of the national convention of each ORT organization not only to elect national committees but also to determine the duties of each committee, define budgets, and take the proper measures to provide the means with which to carry out the budget.

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Each country prepares a budget in which it stipulates that a certain amount will be collected with the help of the Central Board within the country and the balance will be provided by the Central Board. The budget is then sent to the Central Board for approval.

Under present conditions abroad, naturally communications are more difficult than before, but still we are informed about the most important functions of the Central Committee of the ORT. ... Furthermore, the Central Board of the World ORT usually not only supplies a portion of the budget for each country but actually helps each national organization to collect money to support ORT institutions. ... Aside from the general campaign, various activities conducted by ORT organizations have supplemented this method of raising funds, such as the setting up of women's branches and numerous social undertakings like raffles, dances, etc.

Previously, a good deal of support was given to ORT institutions by Jewish communities and even by respective governments. The Lithuanian government until recently provided 50 per cent of the budget for ORT schools in Kaunas. At the present time we may even expect financial support from the British government for our school in Leeds and other institutions in London. ...

In regard to sending money to various countries ... we do not send any dollars to Germany or Nazi-occupied territory. For your private information, we are financing our school in Berlin through donations of German refugees who still have blocked marks, and we also use a clearing system ...⁴⁴ We recently sent \$20,000 to Poland for ORT trade schools



An ORT student band, The Rhythm Teddies, performing at the school which was transferred from Berlin to Leeds, c. 1940.

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through the clearing system of J.D.C., which also does not send dollars to Germany. We are sending money to non-occupied France with the permission of the US Treasury Department but American dollars are not going there. The Bank of France is paying the ORT in francs while the dollars, which will be at its disposal, are blocked here. Other neutral countries are receiving money from America without any difficulty.⁴⁵

In the spring of 1942, Lvovitch and several other ORT leaders in America formed an Emergency ORT Committee for World ORT Affairs which modelled on the post-World War I experience of ORT's foreign delegation. In fact, the Emergency ORT Committee had much more leverage than the Bramson-Lvovitch twosome mission of the early 1920s. Among its members in New York were prominent ORT figures such as Jacob Frumkin and the leaders of ORT Germany Solomon Frankfurt and William Kleeman, and it was supported by American ORT's well-established organizational and financial basis. The committee even established its own academic think tank, the Economic Research Committee, which published the journal *ORT Economic Review*.

In many ways, Lvovitch could be regarded as Bramson's legitimate successor. It is therefore not surprising that shortly after the establishment of the Emergency ORT Committee, some of its members sought to form the organization's new headquarters in New York.

There is no doubt that this angered Syngalowski, who had escaped to Switzerland and was operating a new ORT centre in Geneva. Significantly,



Dr Syngalowski during a visit to Poland in 1938.

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this centre was considered to be the new site of the *same* headquarters that was established in Berlin in 1921, moved to France in 1933 and then left the French territory in 1943. The new executive secretary, Vladimir Halperin, who was a direct descendant of Baron Horace Gunzburg, provided a direct link to the organization's founding fathers. Soon after Syngalowski's appearance in Switzerland, ORT began to operate vocational training programmes for Jewish refugees.⁴⁶

ORT was split between two headquarters. Its two leaders, old comrades Lvovitch and Syngalowski, were locked in a feud.⁴⁷ Their rivalry was never brought into the open and was never played out publicly, but the organization effectively had two leaders in the 1940s. Syngalowski was based in Geneva, where he developed a network of ORT institutions, while Lvovitch lived mainly in New York (he became an American citizen in 1939) and Paris. Although Lvovitch was known as a prominent personality on the American Jewish landscape, Syngalowski secured for himself a more influential role, particularly by publishing essays on the historical importance of ORT and by finding a common language with the Israeli establishment. In his eulogy to Lvovitch on the day of the latter's funeral, Syngalowski wrote that ORT had become 'more than an organization' (he always dreamt to lead a mass movement rather than be a self-appointed saviour of disadvantaged masses) and that Lvovitch, one of its legendary figures, 'had the good fortune to have many friends, who loved him even if they disagreed with him'.⁴⁸

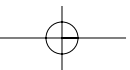
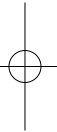
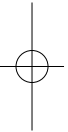
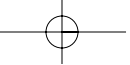
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7. Sussia Goldman, *Mayne fertsik yor in ORT* (Montreal: ORT, 1968), p. 4, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a266.
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19. Henry Srebrnik, 'Diaspora, Ethnicity and Dreams of Nationhood: American Jewish Communists and the Birobidzhan Project', in Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (eds.), *Yiddish and the Left*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 84; V. V. Romanova, 'Birobidzhanskii proekt: k istorii razrabotki', in E. A. Kuznetsova (ed.), *Raddevskie chteniia: istoricheskii opyt zemledeliia, pazvoitiia proizvoditel'nykh sil, ekonomiki i sotsial'noi sfery Evreiskoi avtonomnoi oblasti* (Birobidzhan, 2003), p. 87.
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24. I. Korálnik, *ORT Union 1935–36. Report*, pp. 6–7.
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28. *Ershter alveltlekher yidisher kultur-kongres* (Paris, 1937), pp. 359, 364.
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34. 'Übersicht über die Tätigkeit der Gesellschaft "Ort" auf dem Gebiete der Landwirtschaft in den Jahren 1926–1928', World ORT Archive, ref. d06c857.
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37. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 182.
38. A. A. Yakir, 'An Episode from ORT Activities in Bessarabia', *Material and Memoirs: Chapters for the History of ORT*, pp. 63–64.
39. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson and SoiuZ ORT', *Evreiskii mir* (New York: SoiuZ russkikh evreev, 1944), p. 38; Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, pp. 186–87.
40. Memorandum to Julius Hochman from Louis B. Boudin, 29 June 1948, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a267.
41. Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. American ORT Federation. Budgeting. August 1939. YIVO Archive, RG 380, part 1, box 1, folder 4.
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43. Jacob Frumkin, 'Stages of ORT Activities', *Materials and Memoirs: Chapters for the History of ORT* (Geneva: ORT, 1955), p. 67. World ORT Archive, ref. d07a008.
44. Government-controlled clearing systems were devised as a substitute for normal international financial clearing processes if they had broken down as a result of rigid foreign exchange restrictions. See, for example, Marcus Nadler, 'Economic Interdependence, Present and Future', *The American Economic Review*, 27/1, Supplement (1937), p. 5.
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46. Simon Erlanger, 'The Politics of "Transmigration": Why Jewish Refugees Had to Leave Switzerland from 1944 to 1954', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 18/1–2 (2006).
47. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, pp. 207–15.
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From the archive



The archive at the ORT Vilna (Vilnius) Technicum in Poland (now Lithuania), 1930s.

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This undated text from the World ORT Archive was probably written in the 1960s or 1970s. It was translated from Yiddish by Gennady Estraiikh.

Three Men – Three Dreams

Sussia Goldman

Portraits of the three late presidents of ORT Union hang in my office in the central bureau of the organization in Geneva: Dr Leon Bramson, Dr David Lvovitch and Dr Aron Syngalowski. In addition to working with them for many years in the central ORT offices in Berlin, Paris and Geneva, we were also tied together in friendship. All three of them were realists when it came to ORT's day-to-day work, its structural development and growth. All three of them were dreamers in their visions of the *future* of ORT. During their short lives (they died relatively young – Dr Bramson was 70 years old, Dr Lvovitch 68, and Dr Syngalowsky 66), ORT's activities brought them much anxiety and aggravation, but also a great deal of delight and satisfaction. None of them, however, had the opportunity to see their dreams come true. During the last few years, as I looked at the portraits of these three realist dreamers, I would often reflect on their lives ...

Dr Leon Bramson fully devoted himself to ORT. He believed in ORT just as a pious Jew believes in Mosaic Law and the Messiah's coming. It was simply beyond him to understand why a Jewish person living in any part of the world could not share with him the same belief. In the 1930s, when ORT's activities were concentrated in the East European areas – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Bessarabia, old Rumania [i.e. the non-Soviet territories after 1940], Bulgaria and Hungary – ORT schools and courses predominantly attracted pupils from the poorest segments of the Jewish population in those countries: artisans, petty traders, low-income office workers or simply déclassé populations.

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Sending children to learn a trade was regarded by parents as a last resort. Dr Bramson often travelled in those countries and, coming back to Berlin and later to Paris, he spoke proudly of the development of ORT organizations and schools, and about the increasing prestige of vocational education among the Jews. Describing the abject poverty of the Jewish masses in those countries, he could not hide his disappointment that the vast majority of ORT pupils had been recruited only from the poverty-stricken strata. He *could not*, and did not *want* to understand why Jewish parents were happy to send their children to study at secondary schools and universities, commercial schools and polytechnic colleges, but were reluctant to send their children to the existing ORT schools, which had no *numerus clausus* and where the children's education would give them a good chance of a respectable life. Dr Bramson would often say: 'I dream about a time when affluent families – the wealthy, entrepreneurs and academics – will send their offspring to learn a trade at ORT.' He had a saying which he repeated again and again, with an amiable, wise smile: 'Only when Rothschild registers his children to study at an ORT school will we be ready to acknowledge that ORT's ideas have finally taken root among the Jews.'

Well, so far, Rothschild has not sent his children to any ORT school in any country. Despite all the recent achievements in social and technological progress, a banker still earns more than even a first-rate specialist in electronics. But it is an established fact that ORT institutions in the majority of countries, most notably in Israel and France, stopped being sanctuaries for those who had no other place to go. Moreover, well-situated parents quite often look for the 'right connections' in order to secure a place

at an ORT school for their child, similar to the way people used to make an effort to get access to secondary schools and universities. At three o'clock in the morning, rich parents join queues at ORT schools in Israel, wishing to be among the first to register their children. In France, hundreds of applications from people who want to study at ORT schools cannot even be considered due to the limited number of places. Some years earlier, similar situations became characteristic of ORT schools in North America and in Iran, where everyone had recognized that a solid technical profession was a better guarantee for children's future than various questionable mercantile operations or even the so-called liberal professions.

Bramson's dream has been realized. It is a shame, however, that the dreamer is no longer with us.

Dr David Lvovitch was the restless spirit of ORT. I knew it from the first moment I met him in the 1920s. His head was always full of plans. While still in the process of realizing one plan, eighteen new ones were already pushing each other in his brain, fighting for his attention. None the less, his greatest ambition remained to secure a place for ORT on the world stage. Dr Lvovitch always maintained that productivization of the Jewish and non-Jewish masses, their integration into the national economies, was in the interests of all countries and it was, therefore, the responsibility of all governments to provide ORT with financial and moral support in order to facilitate the realization of its projects. In the democratic world, leadership meant parliaments. Dr Lvovitch's priority was to establish parliamentary committees in the biggest western European countries, as well as overseas. The first success came in 1930, when an ORT parliamentary committee was formed in Britain, chaired

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by Lord Marley. Similar committees emerged in France (1934), led by Paul Painlevé (he was succeeded by Edouard Herriot), and in the United States (1938), led by Senator Robert F. Wagner. In 1938 Lvovitch convinced the participants of the Evian Conference, chaired by James McDonald,¹ to give preferential treatment to visa applicants who were ORT graduates. In 1946 he signed an agreement with UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration], which opened the door to organizing an extensive ORT programme of professional training for survivors in the DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy.

However, Lvovitch's dreams went much further. He believed that governments in the free world should acknowledge ORT for its universal humanitarian achievements and therefore financial contributions for ORT programmes had to come not only from Jewish sources. In other words, ORT's ideas would be successfully realized only if the organization was universally recognized as the most important agency in the field of vocational education.

Nowadays, the French government covers two-thirds of ORT's budget in France; the Italian government contributes 40 per cent of funds to ORT's budget in Italy; and the Israeli government underwrites three-quarters of our budget in the country. The governments of the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and other countries give money for ORT activities in the field of technical assistance to the developing world, where World ORT fulfils various programmes. Instructors, educated at the central ORT Institute in Geneva, work in schools and other vocational outfits of ORT around the world. Presidents of numerous countries, ministers and ambassadors congratulate ORT and express their appreciation of its work and achievements.

One more dream has been realized. And, once again, it is a shame that the dreamer is no longer with us.

Dr Aron Syngalowski was both ORT's theoretician and its 'doer'. To be more precise, he was the *Jewish* theoretician and the *Jewish* doer, because he always sought to emphasize the Jewish aspects of issues. He was the one who essentially formed the *ideology* of ORT and freed the organization from all remnants of philanthropy, preserved from its early years in Russia. He used to say: 'The philanthropic outlook of *compassion* has to disappear, being replaced with a social, political, progressive and national outlook. The objective is to reform the economic structure of Jewish life, rather than to provide individual help to poor people.' For three and a half decades, he spread ORT's ideas, in verbal and written forms, all over the world, trying to deliver them to all segments of the Jewish people.

As a man of deeds, Dr Syngalowski established a number of initiatives in the field of Jewish economic reconstruction. From time to time, this activity had to be adapted to conditions of war or peace, to periods of normality or catastrophe, to conditions in different developed or underdeveloped countries, etc. Dr Syngalowski never looked at ORT vocational schools as simply places where Jewish youth learned a trade. He said: 'The vocational school for young people is first of all an *educational* institution, for training both the *hands* and the *spirit*.' He maintained that 'the whole Jewish persona has to be formed at the place where the Jewish artisan and the Jewish technician are being formed.'

During Dr Syngalowski's lifetime, ORT developed into a national movement, shedding all the remaining attributes of a philanthropic society. He also witnessed the great progress in Jewish education that was achieved in ORT

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schools. After World War II, Jewish education played an increasingly important role in the curricula of ORT schools.

I remember very well how Dr Syngalowski spoke to his inner circle of colleagues, sharing his dream that the word 'ORT' would become a household name around the world and would be used without inverted commas, as a regular lexical item for a specific notion, rather than a Russian-derived abbreviation. People would not wonder about the etymology of 'ORT': it would simply mean 'Jewish vocational education', like 'table' means 'table' and 'lamp' means 'lamp'. 'Only when the whole world recognizes the word as an independent notion will we be ready to acknowledge that the ORT ideas have ultimately taken root everywhere.'

When I pronounce the word 'ORT' during our meetings and when I hear this word being pronounced in various conventions by ministers and ambassadors of numerous countries and by representatives of international bodies, I feel that the third dream has been also realized. And, I have to repeat it again, it is a shame that the dreamer is no longer with us.

1. The Evian Conference was convened at the initiative of the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1938. The American delegation was headed by Myron C. Taylor, a businessman and close friend of Roosevelt. James G. McDonald, chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, was a member of the delegation.

ORT in the Soviet State: 1917–1938

5

At the beginning of 1928 Boris Brutskus, a prominent economist and an advocate of colonization in Palestine, wrote that 'the Soviet authority not only gives equal rights to the Jews, it also has given them ample opportunities to enter "productive" labour. The current government ... is on the right way to providing a radical solution to the Jewish question. The situation of the Jewish masses is still difficult, but within the socialist framework it continues to improve.'¹ Brutskus, who had been an ardent opponent of Soviet power and often 'spoke against illusions of [Jewish agricultural] colonization' in the USSR at the ORT Union leadership meetings, suddenly endorsed the Bolshevik 'productivization' of Russian Jewry.²

Brutskus in fact intended to resign from the ORT Central Council due to disagreements with its leaders Aron Syngalowski and David Lvovitch over 'the nature of [ORT Union's] cooperation with the Soviet state'.³ His writing from that period, however, expresses a radical change of attitude characteristic of Russian-Jewish intelligentsia in Berlin in the late 1920s. The modernization of Jewish life in Soviet Russia, which completely transformed the Jewish economy, aroused feelings of admiration and gratification in Berlin's Russian-Jewish community. During that period, the upset and despair that usually prevailed in the city's émigrés' cafés and political clubs gave way to enthusiasm and hope.

The dramatic events of World War I, the Bolshevik upheaval in October 1917 and the subsequent civil war brought the collapse of traditional Jewish life and ruined the economic and social relationships that held together the Jewish economy in the former Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. In the early 1920s, the official Soviet attitude towards Jews was full of contradictions. While the Soviet leader Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of VTsIK,⁴ claimed that the Russian Jewry was oppressed under tsarist rule and was given equal civil rights by the Soviet authorities,⁵ in reality, the civil rights of more than 40 per cent of the Jewish population were restricted under the 1918 Bolshevik constitution.⁶ Complete rights were given to the proletariat and to peasants but not to so-called 'non-productive elements' such as petty traders and owners of small artisan workshops – the dominant trades in the Pale. The Soviet administration was keen to draw the Jewish poor into productive pro-

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fessions by promoting Jewish agricultural colonization and establishing Jewish autonomies, an initiative that was supported by the Jewish population.

In order to relocate Jews from their small settlements to the bare lands that allowed for agricultural farming, the Soviet administration established two different organizations in 1924: KOMZET (the Committee for Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Toilers), which acted directly on behalf of the government and OZET (Society for Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Toilers), which operated as a public body. The leaders of both organizations were members of the Jewish section of the Communist Party (known as *Evseksia*).⁷ Peter Smidovich, a non-Jewish Bolshevik, was appointed head of KOMZET; former Commissar of Jewish Affairs Semen Dimanshtein became OZET's chairman.

From the beginning, it was assumed that these new Soviet-Jewish bodies would cooperate with the 'old' Jewish philanthropic organizations. ORT, which arguably enjoyed most popular support in the Soviet state, was assigned an important role in the colonization campaign. According to a 1927 article in the OZET magazine *Tribuna*, this role was 'to attract the mass of Jewish toilers into industry and craftsmanship, and to reinforce the economy and raise the level of technical instruction in the Jewish agricultural settlements'. ORT was also responsible for 'organizing vocational classes ... [and providing] material support for professional schools and courses for workers and craftsmen'.⁸ The Soviet authorities were eager to use the organization's experience for their own purposes, and from this point onwards ORT's activities were strictly controlled by the Communist *Evseksia*. Already several years earlier, following a special 1921 decree, the ORT Russia Central Committee in Moscow was dissolved and replaced by a provisional central committee.⁹ The new body was dominated by *Evseksia* activists and chaired by the staunch Jewish Communist Yuri Golde. Its work was supervised by the People's Commissariats for National and Internal Affairs.

The Sovietization of Russian ORT complicated its cooperation with ORT Union, and work relations between the ORT Foreign Delegation (see Chapter 3) and Russian ORT finally stopped. However, as ORT Union leader David Lvovitch later wrote, 'it became clear that help for Russia and Ukraine was becoming ever more urgent because of the famine which struck city and village alike.'¹⁰ Finally, although Soviet ORT was never a member of the Union, the two bodies partnered for joint projects in the Soviet state in the 1920s. Former general secretary of the ORT Russia Central Committee Jacob Tsegelnitski, who lived as an exile in Berlin since 1921, returned to Soviet Russia as the Union's chief representative.

Born in Vilnius in 1886, Jacob Tsegelnitski was a veteran ORT activist who witnessed many of the major events in the lives of both the organization and the Russian Jewish community. By the time of his arrest in April 1938, he was responsible for numerous projects around the USSR: thousands of disenfran-

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chised Jews received professional training and equipment and were able to integrate into the new Soviet economy thanks to ORT's work in those years.

Tsegelnitski's contribution to the history of the organization is usually left unacknowledged in memoirs and history books, in which he is repeatedly overshadowed by his more famous colleagues. In fact, Tsegelnitski's organizational skills and knowledge of agriculture were very quickly noted by ORT leaders and at the age of 28 he already became the first executive of ORT's Relief-through-Work department (see Chapter 2) and supervised ORT's network of labour bureaus.¹¹ In 1918–19, after the Bolshevik Revolution, Tsegelnitski took part in organizing horticultural cooperatives in the outskirts of Petrograd and helped to save many of the city's residents from starvation. He became a member of the ORT Central Board and together with Bramson and Lvovitch was elected to the ORT Union Executive Committee.¹² His many responsibilities included organizing agricultural training for ORT's instructors; supervising ORT's professional education and labour support programmes in Soviet Russia and Lithuania; overseeing the statistics department in Berlin; and many other financial and organizational duties.

The terms of the agreement were settled during a meeting between Yuri Golde and members of the ORT Union in Berlin.¹³ In the final agreement,



Using a new American washing machine at a home worker's laundry in southern Odessa district, autumn 1930. The machine was supplied by ORT and paid for by relatives abroad.

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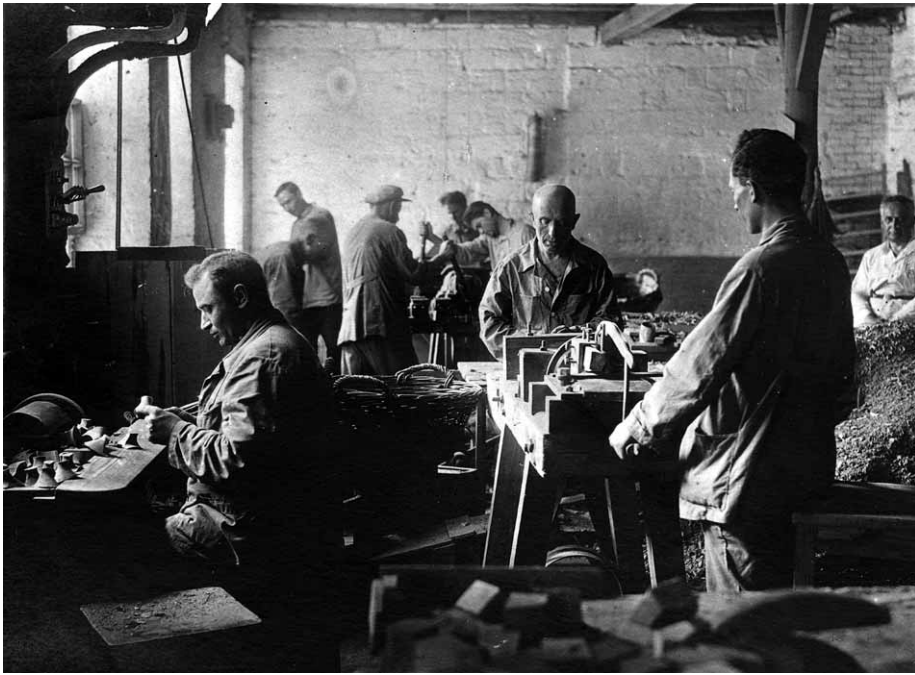
which was ratified after Tsegelnitski arrived in Moscow at the beginning of 1923, ORT Union committed to 'financing ORT's agricultural activities, professional training and resettlement projects in the USSR'.¹⁴ Several additional agreements allowed the expansion of these activities.¹⁵ In 1925, in an agreement with KOMZET, ORT Union was allowed to import machines and tools for agricultural use, with a small part intended for artisans' and craftsmen's associations.¹⁶ Two years later Tsegelnitski and Lvovitch successfully led negotiations to allow ORT to import equipment for individuals too.¹⁷ Gradually, ORT Union managed to expand its work to support several different sections of the Soviet Jewish community.

In 1923 David Lvovitch came up with a new project to assist individuals in the West who wished to donate machinery and tools (rather than funds) and send them directly to the USSR, mainly to Jews who were not recognized as productive and so were not eligible for full civil rights. Often these were religious Jews who observed the Sabbath and Jewish festivals and so could hardly work in Soviet factories.¹⁸ Many received some financial support from their relatives abroad. Thanks to the new initiative, they could obtain machines and equipment for their domestic industries which, in turn, opened up new possibilities for many craftsmen working at home.

The project 'went ahead with great success and enjoyed much support among the Jews in Soviet Russia, the United States and other countries', Lvovitch later wrote.¹⁹ In 1927–28, around 5,000 machines were directly imported to the USSR, allowing about 4,000 déclassé households to enter cooperatives, join the Soviet economy and gain their civil rights.²⁰ ORT's support was warmly acknowledged at the time by the head of the religious Chabad movement, Lubavitch rabbi I. I. Shneerson.

Historian David Hammack argues, like many others, that in the early twentieth century 'the professionalization of philanthropic work, management, and fundraising distanced donors from the objects of their charity.'²¹ However, ORT's work in the Soviet state proves the opposite. The deliveries initiative helped to maintain the ties between thousands in the United States and western Europe and their beneficiaries in the Soviet Union. It ensured that their support was economically and politically effective and allowed many to regain their civil rights.²²

ORT's achievements triggered hostility from the Communist Party's 'politically conscious' rank-and-file. One report to the Leningrad Provincial Department for Public Education complained that the '*Evprofshkola* [the Jewish professional school] in Leningrad was organized by ORT... a society subsidized by wealthy Jews from London, Berlin and New York. So that even though the school is located in the territory of Soviet Russia, its real owner is the foreign bourgeoisie ... We must urgently wrest the school from the influence of the bourgeois ORT.'²³ This hostile attitude played to the hands of KOMZET officials who were looking for an opportunity to redistribute ORT

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Workshop in Kopir-Kabluk co-operative, Odessa, Ukraine, 1930. Profiling machines were paid for by relatives abroad and supplied by World ORT Union.

Union aid as they saw fit. At the beginning of the 1930s Soviet ORT was ordered to merge with OZET. An article in *Tribuna* magazine justified the decision:

A public organization such as ORT cannot cope with the range and magnitude of the industrialization challenge ... it was therefore logical to merge ORT and OZET into a single organization. It is, however, necessary to stress categorically that this does not mean ORT's existing operation will be liquidated.²⁴

Many members of the ORT Union Central Board were quite reluctant to cooperate directly with the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, ORT's involvement in the Soviet Union increased, culminating in support for the economic development of Birobidzhan, the territory designated to become a Jewish autonomy through large-scale resettling in the far east of the USSR.²⁵

The Jewish colonization of Birobidzhan was decreed on 28 March 1928 by the Central Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (*TsIK SSSR*). The Soviet authorities mobilized the Jewish masses under the slogan 'To the Jewish homeland!' which seemed for a while to be as effective as the Zionist propaganda that called for a very different Jewish homeland. 'I doubt whether without this slogan we would have been able to persuade

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enough workers to set off for Birobidzhan', said KOMZET official Abram Merezhin in 1929.²⁶ It also helped to promote the Birobidzhan project among West European and American Jewry. The project was in desperate need of qualified workers. In 1928 OZET, together with two pro-Soviet foreign organizations – IKOR in New York and PROKOR in Buenos Aires – arranged the resettlement of Jewish engineers and agronomists from Argentina, the United States, Poland and Lithuania.²⁷ By early 1932, 870 Jewish migrant workers arrived in Birobidzhan. By the following year, however, 500 of them who could not bear the harsh climate and the difficult conditions had left.²⁸

ORT's part in the industrialization of the [Birobidzhan] district was announced in *Tribuna* a little prematurely in mid-1928 when the ORT Union had not yet given its approval to the resettlement plans.²⁹ However, the economic crisis of the late 1920s, which brought a rise in anti-Semitism and left many Jews in eastern Europe unemployed and on the verge of starvation, forced ORT to reconsider its stance on Birobidzhan. Moreover, the Nazi threat was beginning to cast its shadow on Jewish life in Europe and the inevitability of World War II meant that many Jews would soon become refugees. The Territorialist ideas that prevailed in parts of the ORT Union Central Board were rekindled.



Construction work in Birobidzhan.

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In August 1932 Lord Dudley Marley, chairman of the Parliamentary Advisory Council of British ORT, met with KOMZET chairman Peter Smidovich in Moscow. The discussion revolved around the Soviet government's attitude to the Jewish question and its relations to ORT as well as the 'establishment of the Jewish autonomous republic'.³⁰ Lord Marley, who was initially sceptical about Jewish settlement in Birobidzhan, became one of its avid supporters a year later, when as chairman of the World Committee for Relief of Victims of German Fascism he considered Birobidzhan to be a suitable shelter for Jewish refugees.³¹

It was probably Jacob Tsegelnitski who first introduced the idea of resettling German Jews in Birobidzhan. He definitely lobbied for the plan when meeting Smidovich in June 1933.³² By October of that year the plan was described in a letter from the ORT Union office in Moscow. 'With the rise of the Fascist government in Germany', the letter stated,

ten thousand Jewish families were forced to seek refuge in other countries. ... [bearing in mind] the great demand for qualified experts ... in the Jewish colonies ... experienced engineers and mechanics who had been working for big German companies ... could be employed in heavy industries ... and a small number of Jewish families could settle ... in the national districts.³³

Indeed, from mid-1933 ORT viewed the development of Birobidzhan as the key to solving the problem of Jewish refugees. That year the organization became directly involved with the industrialization of the region for the first time, delivering equipment to a veneer factory.³⁴

The unlikely union of the British Lord Marley, high-ranking Soviet official Smidovich and the Jewish social worker Tsegelnitski was instrumental in promoting Birobidzhan as a safe haven for Jews escaping persecution. Though in many ways their ideologies were worlds apart, they did have in common a sense of idealism influenced by ideas of social and political progress and devotion to the struggle for equality and justice. For all three men, the establishment of a 'Jewish homeland' in Birobidzhan was an integral part of their vision.

Dudley Leigh Aman, first Baron Marley, was a distinguished marine officer, politician and public figure. He was the deputy speaker and chief whip of the Labour Party in the British House of Lords and served as Lord-in-Waiting to King George V. His political career could have been jeopardized by his work for German Jewish refugees, indeed for a while he was accused of political short-sightedness and of being a Communist sympathizer, but attitudes changed with the publication of *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*. The book, sponsored by the World Committee for Relief of Victims of German Fascism and with an introduction by Lord Marley

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himself, was the first popular exposé of Nazi Germany, attracting public attention in Britain and the United States.³⁵

Peter Smidovich belonged to the moderate wing of the Bolshevik movement. He was a prominent figure in the highest ranks of the Soviet authorities in the 1920s–30s.³⁶ A staunch Communist-internationalist, Smidovitch took part in several initiatives directed at improving the lives of national minorities in the Soviet state. He was responsible for establishing national autonomies in the Soviet far north and of course, later on, was considered the founder of the Jewish Autonomous Region in Birobidzhan. In many memoirs from the period, Smidovich is described as knowledgeable, kind and humane – traits that made him an unusual character within the Soviet administration.³⁷



Delivery of equipment purchased by World ORT Union and sent to Jacob Tsegelnitski in the USSR. New York, 1930s.

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Finally, Jacob Tsegelnitski. A Bund activist in the 1900s and a non-partisan intellectual in the 1920s, Tsegelnitski was never interested in the ongoing debate within ORT about the cooperation with the Bolsheviks and preferred to focus on serving the broadest interests of the Jewish masses. He felt that it was his personal responsibility to do the best he could for Russia's Jews, who in the fallout of the civil war were facing a humanitarian crisis, and therefore willingly (and courageously) took on the risky job of representing ORT Union in Soviet Russia. Tsegelnitski spent most of his time visiting ORT branches around the Soviet Union (including Birobidzhan in 1934) and attending ORT Union congresses and meetings abroad, where he put his initiatives forward for expanding ORT's work in the USSR and the Birobidzhan project.

In October 1933 a delegation of the World Committee against War, including its president Lord Marley and the French communist writer Paul Vaillant-Couturier, travelled to Birobidzhan.³⁸ Doubts about the suitability of this remote territory for Jewish resettlement increased after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, on the border with Birobidzhan, two years earlier, and Marley was keen to see the area for himself. After a 'close inspection' of the territory, reported the Jewish national monthly *Bnai Brith Magazine*,

Lord Dudley Marley ... an Englishman with vast military experience, ascertained ... that the impassable bogs on the border of Birobidzhan with Manchuria make a Japanese invasion from the south impossible.³⁹

Further convinced by his visit, Lord Marley became one of the most prominent advocates of the project. His 'Some Notes on Birobidzhan', written on his way back to Moscow, depicted a very positive image of the Jewish colonization of the area and were later revised, published and widely used in fundraising campaigns by foreign pro-Soviet organizations in the mid-1930s.⁴⁰

In December 1933 Peter Smidovich, in an interview with the Philadelphia daily newspaper *Public Ledger*, announced that 'Russia was able to render a shelter for persecuted Jews from Germany searching for a new homeland and welcomed their participation in the construction of the Jewish Autonomous Republic in Birobidzhan'.⁴¹ The international press was quick to respond. The New York Yiddish newspaper *Der Tog* declared that 'it is possible that future Jewish historians will write about the catastrophic significance of the rise of Hitler for the Jewish people, and about the hope that they found in Smidovich's appeal. There is real hope ... The Soviet state ... illuminated the darkness of the year 1933 ... we will not forget this.'⁴²

The following year was no less promising. The official establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Region (JAR) in Birobidzhan on 7 May 1934 was celebrated by the foreign pro-Soviet Jewish press as one of the greatest events in Jewish history. It certainly brought hope, albeit short-lived, to many European Jews suffering from anti-Semitism and economic hardship. By the end of



Fitting wheels to carts in Birobidzhan, 1930s.

February, the ORT Union Central Board approved its work plan in the USSR for 1934, with Birobidzhan taking a central role.⁴³ Alongside the veneer factory, there were plans to build a sawmill and to organize basket-weaving workshops, increasing the funds to 150,000 roubles. According to official documents, additional projects 'could be decided upon after further negotiations with KOMZET and evaluation of the possible scale of the resettlement'.⁴⁴ Smidovich and Tsegelnitski resumed their discussions immediately after.⁴⁵ Tsegelnitski suggested supporting the resettlement in Birobidzhan with 'a special mass loan', an idea that was later accepted by the ORT leadership.⁴⁶ Lord Marley, in a letter to David Lvovitch, proposed to publicize the loan in London 'so as to appeal to the smaller man, who would like to feel he is doing a good work as well as getting a good return'.⁴⁷

By early 1935 the lion's share of donations collected by ORT Union were being used for developing the Jewish autonomy; by the first half of 1936, this sum reached about 902,000 roubles.⁴⁸ An ORT memorandum to the Soviet authorities in 1938 stated that 'a number of factories and workshops (producing furniture, plywood, clothing and so on) were founded or reorganized thanks to the equipment and technical instruction provided from abroad by ORT'.⁴⁹ The document, however, does not mention other enterprises that were built with ORT funds: cedar-oil and timber-chemical plants; brickworks; the Detal sawmill; the marble factory at Birokan (whose high-quality products

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Basket-weaving courses for women organized by ORT Union in Birobidzhan, 1936.

were used inside the Moscow metro);⁵⁰ the Dimitrov furniture factory (whose Viennese chairs were exported to China); and the haberdashery factory in the town of Birobidzhan. A special ORT office, run by N.L. Leikhakh and a staff of nine, coordinated these operations.⁵¹

The cooperation between Tsegelnitski, Marley and Smidovich ceased with the latter's death in April 1935. Marley was kept occupied by his numerous duties at the World Committee for Relief of Victims of German Fascism and Jacob Tsegelnitski continued to promote his resettlement plan.⁵² In November 1935 he sent a letter to KOMZET suggesting that settlers would be chosen 'from among the graduates of the professional schools, technical colleges, training workshops and farms maintained by ORT in various countries', that ORT would help to publicize the project through its offices 'in America, Africa and western Europe' and would 'transfer to KOMZET ... 200 dollars for every family or individual' who resettled in the territory. He also proposed that settlers would be given help 'in drawing up documents enabling them to quit their country of residence and enter the USSR' and that ORT Union would provide specialist workers with 'tools appropriate to their trade.'⁵³ KOMZET accepted Tsegelnitski's suggestions but refused to publicize the project widely in order to avoid a mass immigration of Jews.⁵⁴ In fact, the Soviet government

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had a clear idea of the number of foreign settlers to be allowed in: '1,000 Jewish families and 500 individual Jewish workers from other countries in 1936 and 1937'.⁵⁵ ORT was allowed to resettle between 200 and 300 foreign Jewish families in Birobidzhan, and was given the option to increase the number to 1,000 people annually in the future.

In the meantime, the idea of resettling in Birobidzhan was becoming increasingly popular among Jews in eastern Europe and even in the Americas. Around 1,500 Jews, mainly from Poland, Lithuania, Argentina and the United States arrived at the JAR in 1934–37.⁵⁶ The Soviet authorities demanded that foreigners settling in Birobidzhan received their citizenship at USSR consulates in their native countries, but the process proved to be long and complicated and most immigrants preferred to enter the USSR as tourists and then try to apply for permanent residence.⁵⁷

The ORT Union, which was now responsible for organizing foreign resettlement in the JAR, launched a publicity campaign and ORT branches in Poland and Lithuania targeted members of their local Jewish professional associations, such as the Union of Jewish Engineers of Vilna.⁵⁸ Applications were then sent to Tsegelnitski in Moscow: in 1936 the ORT Union bureau in the city processed immigration documents for ninety-six families from Poland, forty-two families from Lithuania, twenty-one from Germany and seventeen from Hungary, Latvia, France, Rumania and the United States – a total of 269 individuals.⁵⁹ The candidates' personal files, now kept at the Russian State Archive of Economics in Moscow, indicate that they were mostly highly qualified agriculturalists, construction and electricity engineers and artisans (carpenters, metal workers, tailors) who graduated from ORT's professional schools and colleges.⁶⁰

Although the head of ORT Birobidzhan assured Tsegelnitski that all candidates 'could immediately get a job [in the Region]', there were many problems along the way.⁶¹ The process was slow and tedious and Tsegelnitski often received letters from the ORT Executive Committee imploring him to do his best to speed it up. The JAR resettlement was under the control of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). A special section of NKVD was responsible for issuing visas and naturalizing foreigners and was mainly busy investigating their 'loyalty' to the state and ensuring that there were no spies or 'hostile elements' among the immigrants. These checks were lengthy and immigrants were kept waiting for months, sometimes even years. Franz Berwald, a young agronomist and refugee from Germany, was one such immigrant. Because he was the nephew of Paul Berwald, president of the Joint Jewish American Distribution Committee (JDC), ORT Union officials took special interest in his case and really did their best to help him get a Soviet visa. Although it is impossible to say whether Franz Berwald finally managed to immigrate, the 1936 correspondence between Tsegelnitski and

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Comrade Torchik, a worker of the lime plant at Londoko, a re-settler from Palestine (undated).

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ORT Union executives document the state of Soviet bureaucracy: poorly coordinated, uninformed, torpid and probably paralysed by the terror of Stalin's regime in those years.⁶²

The cooperation agreement between ORT Union and KOMZET expired in May 1938. Already in January of that year ORT sent a memorandum from Paris detailing its activities in the USSR and requesting to extend the agreement until 31 December 1940.⁶³ It took eleven months for the Soviets to reply: KOMZET chairman S. E. Chiutskaev informed Jacob Tsegelnitski that the Soviet Union no longer required assistance and that the agreement therefore would not be extended. The decision hardly came as a surprise. In fact, as former *Evsseksia* members, including those responsible for the original agreement with ORT in 1928, were falling victims to Stalin's purges in 1936–38, it became increasingly clear that ORT would need to lessen its involvement in the country.⁶⁴ Tsegelnitski began to arrange the transfer of ORT's work and property to the hand of Soviet public organizations and on 29 March 1938 wrote to the ORT Union Central Board in Paris, urging it to finalize the agreements with its successors OZET and the Soviet *Promkooperatsija* (the union of artisan cooperatives). Tsegelnitski also prepared a final balance sheet, in which he wrote:

On 1 January 1938 ... our final balance is approximately 1,700,000 roubles, which is the amount owed to the Central Board of ORT Union, and which will, by agreement with KOMZET, be offset by a corresponding sum in ready cash when the final extent of the sum owed to the Central Board is made known.⁶⁵

A month later, the ORT Moscow office sent another letter to Paris, on the same subject:

Bearing in mind that, in accordance with paragraph 19 of the 1928 Agreement, the Central Board has the right to claim not more than 50 per cent of the value of machines, tools, etc. which it has supplied ... the total value of the goods delivered at ORT's expense is approximately 70,000 dollars, and the sum liable to be transferred is 35,000 dollars.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, Tsegelnitski did not manage to finish his work for ORT. He was arrested by NKVD agents on 10 April 1938 and was put in prison. The news of his arrest shocked ORT leaders in Paris, who immediately wrote to the Soviet authorities:

J. S. Zegelnitski [Tsegelnitski] has been part of ORT since 1913. The Central Board ... can state with absolute certainty that he has never been involved in political activity, and has devoted himself completely to ORT's work. He has always acted according to the laws and decrees of the Soviet government. Abroad, Zegelnitski always worked to protect, as far as possible, the

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Session of the communist cell at Friling colony, Odessa region, Ukraine (undated).

interests of the déclassé (and working) Jews in the Soviet Union, for whom the Soviet government has also cared. In view of all this we request you review Zegelnitski's case and allow him to take part in the liquidation of ORT's work in the USSR.⁶⁷

Indeed, Tsegelnitski never criticized the Bolshevik system and in many ways acted as a typical Soviet citizen. He was, however, the representative of a foreign philanthropic institution, the 'bourgeois ORT', whose influence within professional schools had to be kept in check. This was reason enough for persecution during the years of Stalinist terror.

ORT never received a reply. Lord Marley, after a visit to Moscow wrote to Leon Bramson in September 1938:

Zegelnitski [Tsegelnitski] I found difficult to get news of: but I think he will receive 'another appointment to prove himself' as soon as ORT negotiations are finished. I should tell you that I had conversations with a number of people in order to gather information and to prepare the ground for our work – but it is a slow and arduous business. But I hope that we will achieve a fully satisfactory outcome.⁶⁸

But the hope was shattered. On 29 September 1939 Jacob Tsegelnitski was found guilty 'according to Article 58, Clauses nos. 6 and 11' and was sentenced to five years imprisonment. The notorious Article 58 was popular among Stalin's butchers in the torture chambers of NKVD. Clause no. 6 stated that 'espionage, i.e. transferring, abduction or collecting with the purpose of

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transferring information that includes protected state secrets to the foreign states ... entails imprisonment for the term of no less than three years'. Clause no. 11 stipulated long stretches for 'any sort of organizational activity directed towards preparation or fulfilment of crimes ... and participation in organizations formed for preparation or fulfilment of crimes ...' ⁶⁹ According to documentation, Tsegelnitski died on 28 February 1942 in Unzhlag, an infamous lumbering camp in Gorky region. More than 25,000 prisoners were held there between 1938 and 1941.⁷⁰

ORT terminated its activities in the USSR by the end of 1938, and never received compensation from the Soviet government. It would be more than half a century until it returned and resumed its activities in Russia.

1. B. D. Brutskus, 'Evreiskoe naselenie pod kommunisticheskoi vlast'ju', in O. Budnitskiy (ed.), *Evrei i russkaja revoliutsija* (Moscow, 1999), p. 319 (author's translation).
2. Gregory Aronson, 'Zapiski sekretarja ORTa', in O. Budnitskiy (ed.), *Arkhiv evreiskoi istorii*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 2006), p. 103.
3. Minutes of the united meetings of members of the presidium of Central Council and Central Board of ORT Union, 7 June 1928, ORT collection, no. 25, p. 9, ACPJ (Archive of the Centre 'Petersburg Judaica') (author's translation).
4. VTsIK – Pan-Russian Central Executive Committee of Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.
5. M. I. Kalinin, 'Evreiskii vopros i pereselenie evreev v Krym. Pis'mo komsomol'tsa Ovchinnikova', *Protiv Antisemitizma* (Moscow, 1928), p. 187.
6. Z. Mindlin, 'Sotsial'nyi sostav evreiskogo naseleniya SSSR', *Evrei v SSSR: materialyi i issledovaniya*, 4 (Moscow: All-Russian ORT, 1929), p. 7.
7. The main aim of *Evspektia* was to oppose the Bund and other Jewish socialist and Zionist parties. It closed in January 1930 when all the national sections of the Communist Party were liquidated.
8. 'V ORTe. Chto budet delat' ORT?' [In ORT: what will ORT do?], *Tribuna*, 2 (1927), p. 21 (author's translation).
9. This decree accused the old ORT Committee of having been 'elected in pre-revolutionary times when the right to vote was the privilege of those who exploited the labour of other people'. See Decree of *Narkomnats* on the dissolution of the old Central Committee of ORT and the assignment of the Provisional Central Committee for reorganization of the Society, 1921. *TsIAM* (The Central Historical Archive of Moscow), f. 1404, op. 1, d. 76, l. 1.
10. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson and World ORT', *ORT Economic Review*, 4/2 (November 1944), p. 5, World ORT Archive, ref. d05a088.
11. See, for example, Jacob Tsegelnitski, 'Trudovaja pomoshch na mestakh. Simferopol', *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev*, no.1 (December 1915), pp. 12–14.
12. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson and World ORT', p. 7.
13. Memorandum. From L. A. Orfman, plenipotentiary representative of the Central Committee of the Russian ORT in Petrograd, to *Sovprosveschenija* Natsmen, 12 November 1923, TsGASPB (The Central State Archive of St Petersburg), f. 2552, op. 1, d. 1523, 1, pp. 1–2.
14. Draft of agreement between the ORT Union Central Board and ORT of the USSR, January 1923, p. 1, CAHJP (The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People), WOU/102, p. 1 (author's translation).

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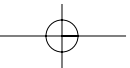
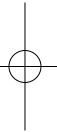
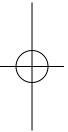
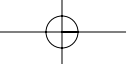
15. In the years 1926–30, after several fundraising campaigns in the United States and western Europe, ORT Union collected 4.7 million roubles for the Soviet Jewish community. Some of the funds were used for shoemaking and sewing equipment and to support 700 productive cooperatives, which were given credit towards extending their workshops. Obschii obzor deiatel'nosti Souza ORT v 1926–1928, manuscript, p. 89, World ORT Archive, ref: d07f193.
16. Final agreement between the ORT Union Central Board and KOMZET, 9 October 1925, RGAE (The Russian State Archive of Economics, Moscow), f. 5244, op. 1, f. 37, ll. 2–4; Resolutions of *Sovnarkom* of the USSR on ratification of the agreement between the ORT Union Central Board and KOMZET of 1925, GARF (The State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow), f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 5–13, 36–38. *Sovnarkom*: Council of People's Commissars.
17. Agreement between the ORT Union Central Board and *Narkomtorg* of 1927, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 68, ll. 4–5. *Narkomtorg* (Russian: *Narodnyi komissariat torgovli*): the People's Commissariat for Trade. See also: Agreement between the ORT Union and KOMZET, 24 May 1928, Moscow, Kremlin, 1, ORT Collection, no. 24, ACPJ.
18. From the early 1920s, Monday was the regular day of rest in many Soviet state enterprises. The Soviet 'six-day week', introduced in 1929, was completely independent of the regular calendar week and did not account for any religious festivals.
19. David Lvovitch, 'L. M. Bramson i ORT', *Yevreiskiy Mir*, 1944 (Moscow and Jerusalem: 2001), p. 38 (author's translation).
20. Brief sketch of ORT activity in the USSR, 8 January 1938, World ORT Archive, ref. d06c500.
21. See for example David Hammack, review of Richard Magat, *Philanthropic Giving: Studies in Varieties and Goals*, in *The Journal of American History*, 77/4 (March, 1991), pp. 1347–48.
22. Restrictions of civil rights were officially abolished only in 1936 in accordance with the adoption of the new Soviet constitution. The impact of ORT Union activities on the philanthropic practices in the 1920s–1930s was examined in A. Ivanov, 'From Charity to Productive Labor: The World ORT Union and Jewish agricultural colonization in the Soviet Union, 1923–38', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 37/1, (April, 2007), pp. 1–28.
23. Report sent to the Leningrad Provincial Department for Public Education, TsGASPB (The Central State Archive of St Petersburg), f. 2552, op. 1, d. 1216, ll. 33–34 (author's translation).
24. A. Strashun, 'Sliyanie OZETA i ORTa' [The merging of OZET and ORT], *Tribuna*, 33 (1930), pp. 1–2 (author's translation).
25. The territory of the Birobidzhan district was about 2.5 million hectares which lay midway along the course of the river Amur, between the river and the Trans-Siberian railway line. See Prof. B. Bruk, 'Kratkie svedenija o Biro-Bidzhanskom raione', *Tribuna*, 1–2 (1928), p. 14. Other foreign Jewish charitable organizations such as JDC and EKO that sponsored Jewish colonization in the Soviet Union refused to invest funds in the Birobidzhan project.
26. Abram Merezhin, 'O lozunge – "V evreiskuyu stranu"', *Tribuna*, 3 (1929), p. 13 (author's translation).
27. Correspondence between KOMZET and *Narkomindel* on resettlement of Jewish toilers from abroad to Birobidzhan, 1928, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 197, ll. 9, 15. See also *Tribuna* (1929), no 4, 11–13; no 137; no. 14, 10–11. *Narkomindel*: the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.
28. Report on strengthening the workforce from abroad for Birobidzhan, 1933, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 197, l. 92. See also RGASPI (The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow), f. 17, op. 3, d. 827, l. 5.
29. 'V ORTe. ORT budet uchastvovat' v rabote po Biro-Bidzhanu' [In ORT: ORT will participate in work in Biro-Bidzhan], *Tribuna*, 12 (1928), p. 16.
30. Interview of Mr Smidovich with Lord Marley, Moscow, 23rd August, 1932, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 567, ll. 15, 19.

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31. Established in 1933, the World Committee for Relief of Victims of German Fascism had branches in twenty-two countries. The Committee united Labour politicians, writers and scientists including Kingsley Martin, J. B. Priestley, Vera Brittain and H. G. Wells. See Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 9, (London, 1993), p. 21.
32. Letter to P. G. Smidovich from ORT Union, 10 June 1933, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 553, ll. 77–78.
33. Letter to KOMZET from the Moscow bureau of the ORT Union Central Board, 19 October 1933, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 553, ll. 91–92.
34. Agreement of the Moscow ORT bureau with Birobidzhan's *Raipromsouz* and correspondence on examination of the delivered equipment for the veneer factory in the town of Birobidzhan, 1933, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 651, ll. 1–12. Thanks to ORT, the factory was equipped with its own power plant which occupied the first place among the power stations in the district. *Raipromsouz* (Russian: *Raionnyi promyshlennyyi souz*): the Regional Industrial Union.
35. Nicole Taylor, 'The Mystery of Lord Marley', *The Jewish Quarterly*, 198, (Summer 2005), p. 14.
36. See for details the biography of P. G. Smidovich: Dina Amanzholova, *Gorjacho zhivu i chuvstvujju: Pyotr Germogenovich Smidovich – dvorjanin i revolutstioner* (Moscow, 2006).
37. Interestingly, P. G. Smidovich's second cousin was the famous Russian writer V. V. Veresaev (real surname Smidovich) who made him one of the central heroes of his memoirs. See V. V. Veresaev, 'Nevydumannye rasskasyi o proshlom', *Collected Works in Five Volumes*, 4, (Moscow, 1961), pp. 352–78.
38. The World Committee against War was an international organization with its headquarters in Paris. Among the Committee members were public figures and writers including Anri Barbusse, Theodore Dreiser, Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorky, Henrich Mann, Dos Passos, Roman Rolland, Bertrand Russell, Epton Sinclair and Sun Yat Sen.
39. Review of the Jewish foreign press prepared for KOMZET, 1935–1937, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, f. 879, l. 5.
40. Some Notes on Biro Bidgan [Birobidzhan] by Lord Marley, October 1933, typescript, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 633, ll. 118–23. It was later published in Lord Marley, *Birobidzhan as I Saw It* (New York, 1934). From the archive section at the end of this chapter.
41. Interview of P. G. Smidovich concerning resettlement of the Jews from Germany to Birobidzhan, 8 October, 1933, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 633, l. 128 (author's translation).
42. 'Why precisely Birobidzhan? The appeal of Peter Smidovich to the German Jews', *Der Tog*, 14 December 1933, GARF, P – 7541, op. 1, d. 633, ll. 125–26 (author's translation).
43. Plan of the ORT Union's work in the USSR for 1934, registered at KOMZET on 5 March 1934, GARF, P – 7541, op. 1, d. 607, ll. 1–37.
44. Plan of the ORT Union's work in the USSR for 1934, GARF, P – 7541, op. 1, d. 607, l. 3 (author's translation).
45. Letter to the ORT Union Central Board from J. Tsegelnitski, 21 November 1934, CAHJP, WOU/111, 1.
46. Letter to the ORT Union Central Board from J. Tsegelnitski, 21 November 1934.
47. Letter from Lord Marley to Dr Lvovitch, 19 June 1934, House of Lords, London. World ORT Archive, ref. d06b480.
48. Brief survey of the work of the ORT Union with productive enterprises in the JAR in the first half of 1936, World ORT Archive, ref. d06b266. For comparison, in 1936 the average annual salary of an industrial worker in the USSR was 2,776 roubles.
49. Brief sketch of ORT activities in the USSR, 8 January 1938.
50. 'Mramor EAO dlja metro stolitsyi', *Tribuna*, 13 (1935), pp. 18–19.

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51. List of ORT Union employees in the USSR, 1935–1937, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d., 830, l. 20. See also Letter to J. Tsegelnitski from the representative of the ORT Union in the JAR N.L. Leikhakh, 4 December 1935, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 738, l. 37.
52. Correspondence between ORT Union and KOMZET concerning resettlement of specialists and qualified workers from abroad to JAR, 1935, RGAE, f. 5244, op.1, d. 687, 755, 756.
53. Letter from J. Tsegelnitski to KOMZET, 9 November 1935, World ORT Archive, ref. d06b451 (author's translation).
54. Reply from the deputy chairman of KOMZET, comrade B. Trotsky, to J. Tsegelnitski's letter (see note 53), 11 November 1935, World ORT Archive, ref. d06b450 (author's translation).
55. Letter from J. Tsegelnitski to the Central Board of the ORT Union, 9 May 1935, ACPJ, ORT collection, no. 28, 1.ACPJ (author's translation).
56. David Vaiserman, *Birobidzhan: Mechty i tragedija* (Khabarovsk, 1999), p. 26.
57. This did not always work out. In April 1937 the New York daily *Morgen zhurnal* reported that 'a group of thirty Lithuanian Jews was expelled from Birobidzhan because they had been suspected of Trotskyism'. See Review of the Jewish foreign press, 1935–1937, GARF, f. P-7541, op. 1, d. 879, l. 29.
58. Correspondence between the Union of Jewish Engineers of Vilna and ORT Vilna, 1926–1940, LCSA (The Lithuanian Central State Archive in Vilnius), f. 326, op. 1, d. 63.
59. Lists of persons who would like to resettle from abroad to the JAR, 1936–1937, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 838, l. 256.
60. See personal documents of foreign resettlers to the JAR and their correspondence with the ORT Union, 1936–1937, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 834, ll. 3–135; d. 835, ll. 1–189; d. 837, ll. 1–160; d. 838, ll. 1–308.
61. Letter to J. Tsegelnitski from N. L. Leikhakh, representative of ORT Union in the JAR, 4 December 1935, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 738, l. 37.
62. Personal file of agronomist Franz Berwald, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 834, ll. 6 – 26. See also A. Ivanov, 'The work of ORT in the USSR from 1921 to 1938: events, people, documents', in V. Dymshits and A. Ivanov (eds.), *The Hope and the Illusion: The Search for a Russian Jewish homeland. A Remarkable Period in the History of ORT*, (London: World ORT, 2006), pp. 149–52.
63. Letter from the Deputy President of ORT Union, Dr. L. Zadok-Khan, to Sovnarkom, 8 January 1938, RGAE, f. 5244, op. 1, d. 985, ll. 4–6.
64. It should be noted that although ORT Union failed to achieve the desired result in resettlement of the Jews from abroad to the JAR, thanks to its activity in 1935–36 more than 1,500 Jewish settlers found work in the enterprises and construction sites of Birobidzhan. See 'The Work of the ORT in the Soviet Union', Paris, 16 August 1938, World ORT Archive, ref. RG/2/7/219, Box DC/0112.
65. Letter from J. Tsegelnitski to the Central Board of ORT Union, 3 March 1938, p. 7, World ORT Archive, ref. d06c508 (author's translation).
66. Letter from Moscow bureau to the Central Board of ORT Union, 22 April 1938, World ORT Archive, ref. d06c507 (author's translation).
67. Copy of letter from the Central Board of ORT Union to *Sovnarkom*, undated, World ORT Archive, ref. d06c506 (author's translation).
68. Letter from Lord D. Marley to Dr Bramson, 16 September 1938. World ORT Archive, ref. d06c498.
69. Reference on J. S. Tsegelnitski, 17 March 2007, TsAFSB RF (The Central Archive of Security Service of the Russian Federation). See also *Ugolovnyi kodeks RSFSR* (Moscow, 1938), pp. 27–32 (author's translation).
70. *Sistema ispravitel'no-trudovyyikh lagerei v SSSR, 1923–1960. Spravochnik* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 489–90.





From the archive



A small grocery shop in a shtetl, Belorussia, 1927.
Photograph by P. Ganin.

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Lord Marley (1884–1952) was a senior member of the Labour Party and chairman of the Parliamentary Advisory Council of British ORT. In August 1933, Marley met with Peter Smidovich (1874–1935), a Soviet official and chairman of KOMZET (the Committee for Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Toilers), to discuss the possibility of the Jewish colonization of Birobidzhan. The State Archive of the Russian Federation holds two versions of the report of the meeting. The Russian version is entitled 'The transcript of the conversation between Comrade Smidovitch and Lord Marley'. The English text reproduced here is a translation of the Russian transcript. It is believed to have been translated by one of the interpreters who worked at KOMZET, or by an interpreter who accompanied Lord Marley. It is printed here by kind permission of the State Archive of the Russian Federation.

The Interview of Mr. Smidovitch with Lord Marley

Moscow, 23rd August, 1932

Lord Marley. I am a socialist and labour leader in the House of Lords. We have in the Parliament groupings of different parties interested in the Jewish question. All these groupings are united in the Parliamentary Committee. I am chairman of this Committee.

I would like to know the attitude of Soviet Government to the Jewish question and the relations with 'ORT'.

Mr. Smidovitch. The Jewish question does not represent a specific problem in the USSR. It forms a part of the general solution of the national question. Nevertheless, as Jews during tsarism were in an exceptional position, i.e. they did not have their own land (territory), but lived in small provincial towns and were mostly traders, farming was prohibited for them, the Government now pay special attention to the land settlement of Jews.

After the revolution in Russia every nation, for instance, tartars, bashkirs, etc, established an autonomous republic on their own land. But Jews had no land. Therefore, in the beginning they received free land in the Ukraine and the Crimea, and afterwards – in the Far East – in Birobidjan.

Jewish settlers receive like other peasant settlers an assistance from the Government in the form of an advance credit. But as Jews never were farmers, they have no cattle, horses, no agricultural implements, and their position is worse in comparison with settlers of other nationalities. Therefore, in addition to the assistance of the Soviet Government they require help of Societies like 'ORT', 'Agro-Joint', America, 'IKO',¹ Paris,

The Government has agreements with these societies. They lend money for

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certain terms, after which the money is repaid, as the settlers repay their advances received from the Government. The terms of agreements are from 10–17 years. For instance, in January–March 1933 we will begin repayment to 'IKO', Paris. We have received from these societies about – \$15,000,000, of course, the Government give annually ten times more (approximately).

Besides capitalist societies helping Jewish settlers, there are few proletarian ones, – in America, in South Africa. Of course, they have not much money to spare, but we highly appreciate their moral help.

As there is no more free land in the Ukraine and the Crimea, the attention is directed towards Birobidjan. In two years the Ukrainian and the Crimea settlement scheme will be fulfilled.

Birobidjan is situated south-west from the centre of the Far Eastern District Khabarovsk – between two rivers – Bira and Bidjan falling into Amur, thence the name Birobidjan. Birobidjan has a very severe climate, the same as in Manchuria, a very cold winter and a very hot summer with plenty of rain. The climate is very 'continental'. The soil is virgin and requires considerable investment for cultivation: draining of moors, stubbing work, etc., but once cultivated it gives a very rich crop. There are mountains rich with minerals – coal, gold. Settlers go willingly to Birobidjan and work there with enthusiasm. The Government hope that the Jewish autonomous republic will be established in Birobidjan in 1934.

Lord Marley. How will be dealt with the natural surplus of population in the Ukrainian and the Crimean settlement and the surplus of labour as a result of the mechanization of agriculture?

Mr. Smidovitch. We have a natural increase of population everywhere in the [Soviet] Union. Therefore, it will be dealt

with in the ordinary way. The surplus of population go in towns, as to the surplus of labour resulting from the mechanization of agriculture, our experience shows that with the development of the mechanization more labour is employed in agricultural than before.

Lord Marley. Is there any anti-Jewish feeling spread as a result of these measures of the Soviet Government?

Anti-Semitism is [very spread] in Western Europe.

Smidovitch. In the days of tsarism anti-Semitism was spread in Russia more than in any other country of the world. It was caused by special economical position of Jews. They could only be traders, speculators, middlemen between the town and the country. Now, when they work together with other nationalities in factories there is no reason for anti-Semitism. We have only individual cases, surviving prejudices of the past-old regime. They are regarded as counter-revolutionary cases. These cases are expounded during meetings, the culprit became very ashamed and never repeat it again.

Lord Marley. Will the Jewish republic in Birobidjan have its own language and national culture?

Mr. Smidovitch. Of course. Soviet Government encourage the development of the national culture. Our republics are national in their form and socialistic in their contents, hence we are the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

We have now the plenary meeting of the Committee of the North. There are represented 24 nationalities. Some of them are very primitive and have no written language of their own. The Committee is working to give them written language, their alphabet in Latin letters, to establish schools, newspapers, etc.

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Lord Marley. Under the constitution of the USSR every 20 citizens can form a religious group. Will it be allowed in Birobidjan?

Mr. Smidovitch. Of course. We have full religious freedom. No doubt, the impression may be that the Government do not tolerate the religion, because sometimes we take churches, but we need these buildings for more important social purposes. Besides, the priests, who are not engaged in any productive work, have no political rights, like capitalists, land-owners, etc. But the church is disestablished from the state, and religion is the private business of every citizen.

Lord Marley. I am an atheist and I made this query from their (religious people) point of view.

Yesterday I visited the marriage registry office. There I heard propaganda against Jewish practices, such as circumcision, from the medical (national health) point of view. I believe, it was party-propaganda.

Mr. Smidovitch. The Government have no special institution for anti-religious propaganda. Tsarism had the Holy Synod for the religious propaganda. Anti-religious societies are private societies which, of course, enjoy full freedom to carry on their propaganda. It is obvious that in Soviet Russia the prospects of religion are not high, and with the weakening of the religious feeling will diminish the anti-religious propaganda.

Lord Marley. Early next year I am going to America and I will tell them of the generosity of the Soviet Government in the question of Jewish settlement in Birobidjan, where there is heavy ground for cultivation. I believe the Americans will highly appreciate this generosity.

I, myself, am not a Jew, but I am very interested in this question.

Mr. Smidovitch. I would like to point out that the ground is not heavy for cultivation. The soil is virgin, it never was

cultivated, and naturally it requires considerable investment for its cultivation, but afterwards the yield is very rich.

I would like to know why Lord Marley, not being a Jew, is interested in this question. I also am not a Jew, but my Government appointed me for this work. In the course of work I see how important and necessary it is and I am working with enthusiasm.

Lord Marley. I am doing this work because I do not believe in private charity; I believe in giving assistance by means of training people as productive units. I believe that an international organisation will serve best to establish friendly relations between two peoples and will prevent the intervention into USSR. I am a socialist. This is my ideal. I work with all my soul.

Mr. Smidovitch. It appears that we are working for the same great purpose – to establish a new order of society, where there will be no exploitation of a man by a man. Therefore, I may say: 'Comrade Marley', instead of Lord Marley.

Lord Marley. Of course, 'comrade Smidovitch'.

Mr. Smidovitch. Comrade Marley.

1. Smidovitch means EKO (Evreiskoe Kolonial'noe Obschestvo), known in English as ICA (Jewish Colonization Association).

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An advocate of the Jewish Autonomous Region in Birobidzhan, Lord Marley toured the region in October 1933. 'Some Notes on Biro Bidgan', written on 14–15 October 1933 and published here by kind permission of the State Archive of the Russian Federation, record his impressions from the visit.

Some Notes on Biro Bidgan

by Lord Marley

Biro Bidgan itself is first a large territory of about 17.5 million acres stretching from the Amur River northwards. It is also the name of the small capital town (and station) previously called TIHONKAIA. This is an untidy and badly planned town of 500 to 5,000 inhabitants, mainly in houses of wood, with rough roads and much mud in wet weather. Recently a soviet has been set up and a plan for the town prepared, and many new buildings of an excellent type are being erected including a large new brick building for the house of the Soviets, and a new hospital just completed. A hotel is in course of erection near the station. It is proposed to make the territory into a Jewish Autonomous district, and later into a Republic. We only had time to visit in the town itself the Lenin Club, a large meeting room, and the Restaurant. We also saw the Cooperative and other stores, and the new public baths and laundry. The first settlers came in 1928 when there were no roads, only tige, and a small village. 6 Polish Jews and 25 Russians. They lived in tents and several deserted but many stayed on and are still there. An early difficulty was an annoying type of fly. They did not cause illness but had an unpleasant bite and were very numerous. It was found that as soon as the tige was cleared the flies went also and now there are none at all in the villages and cultivated areas. One of the original settlers we met in Waldheim said it was his greatest happiness when he left Poland. We also heard of 50 Jews who had been in Palestine, but came to Biro Bidgan because they were dissatisfied. They were now far better off. We visited a new wooden bridge of interesting construction, over the river Bira, on the

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main road to Biro Feld. This bridge had been completed in 9 months, was 560 metres long, would take all traffic including tractors and caterpillars, and was specially protected against floating ice by separate shoe shaped piers in front of each main pier. At present there was a floating ferry taking all vehicles including tractors and caterpillars.

We motored over some 80 kilometres of excellent road with occasional bad patches, but were able to keep up a speed of 50 kilometres an hour even in a truck. The countryside is very beautiful, with wide valleys of fertile soil, and wooded hills of fir, oak and birch, with thick undergrowth. Coal is found on the railway, and iron also exists and experiments are being carried out. The people are very proud of their work and want to develop it. They were glad we were prepared to travel by lorry and did not demand limousines like some tourists. They want railway connection into the interior and towards the great collective. They promise to have new pattern houses with baths and central heating and water by 1934.

As our saloon coach had been attached to a slow train we got out of the coach at a station called Waldheim, and went on by a small motor coach called 'Dressin', travelling at 90 kilometres an hour, to Biro Bidgan Station.

We obtained some statistics of the growth of population (e.g. that Birobidgan had started with 60 in 1928, and now had 5000. That there was a M.T.S. with 50 tractors. That Waldheim collective had increased from 40 families in 1927 and 150 in 1933), but these will be confirmed and added to by statistics now being prepared and to be forwarded to us later.

On the afternoon of the 14th October we motored out to Waldheim Collective Farm about 15–20 kilometres. Met the Agronome (a young woman who had only

left the University at Odessa six months previously), the School teacher and the President of the Farm (MUCHNIK a young intelligent man of 28). There are 150 families with 600 people. Of these 50 children are in the crèche, 50 children are in the kindergarten and about 130 at the school (7–17). There are 8 teachers and the school is in one shift, from 9–2. They get breakfast at the school. The kindergarten was a good building with a playground, cloakroom, washing place with water laid on, dining room clean and with muslin against flies. There were three teachers. Self service is taught, each child has its own towel, own mug, own sign (written by child). We saw a small boy busy cleaning his teeth after food. There was a small technical room for children from 4–8, with little saws, hammers, pottery, etc. The Club was an old building with a meeting room, piano and restaurant. We saw the crèche with usual cots, play room, very clean and muslin over windows for flies. We also visited several houses, one family in each house, with two rooms and outhouses. Large stove in middle. Bad sanitary huts. The village has a telephone, post office (letters every day) a truck of 1.5 tons (a gift) and four tractors (kept at M.T.S). We visited an apartment house for six families, one story, small but clean and well kept. The children had good clothes and boots and close cut hair. Some of the cotton clothes were torn and worn, we were informed that the peasants had the material but could not find time to make up new clothing till after harvest. The children were charming with Kurtov,¹ crowding round and clinging to his hands and coat; they thought he was Stalin, who they all loved. We went out to the cultivated part through fields of corn, soya and raspberries. The land has been reclaimed from the forest and this reclamation is still going on. About 180 hectares cultivated,

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and another 60 hectares of virgin soil this year for oats. There are 40 hec[tares] of vegetables, 10 of wheat, 8 of soya, 24 of potatoes, also oats, buckwheat, tomatoes, kassia and honey. In 1934 they will increase wheat to 70 hectares. The crop this year was very good, with 12 centners of wheat, and 18 centners of soya. They have ordered two machines to make barrels for tomatoes, etc. They are liquidating prejudice of Jews to pigs, and now make own sausages. There is a large honey station with 1000 hives (to avoid having to buy sugar). Some of this honey has already obtained a good price in New York. We talked to some workers in the fields who were enthusiastic. One man had been a cobbler, with T.B. Was now very well and strong, and happy.

On the evening of 14th Oct[ober] we attended a public meeting about 400 present. Very orderly but enthusiastic and pro soviet. The hall was near station, with electric light (rather poor) and lamps. Local MOPR² secretary (a woman) in chair. We three spoke and Medem³ translated into German and Russian. I dealt only with Jewish question, fascism and hitlerism in Germany, and matter of good quality immigration. Other speakers included a Korean man and woman, who said they were free in B.B., but slaves in Korea. Here they had equality of rights. Pioneer girl made a brilliant speech: no war wanted; they must learn and learn and again learn; they were all ready to defend the Soviet Union. Speech by a French Jew in Yiddish and French: they had never been so free as in the USSR. Speeches by Kolkhos Director, a Garment worker woman (value of antiwar conference in face of triumph of fascism). Asked to deny all the lies about Biro Bidgan. An old bearded man of 53 representing a local factory said they would give blood and muscle to defend Soviet Union – they had no fear of blood.

Director of Technicum then spoke followed by Krutov. The audience was very responsive and ready to laugh. After meeting at 1.30 a.m. we went to have supper in the local restaurant, consisting of soup, chicken, pork and sweet with sweets, cocoa, etc. To bed about 2.45.

I asked about position of old people in USSR. Dependents are entitled to full social and material sustenance; the worker gets one-third extra pay for his father and mother, or the same amount for either of them. If they are not yet over earning age, but are partially incapacitated, he will get a % of invalidity insurance benefits for them. The worker can draw extra rations from his cooperative for all such dependents. This system is known as IZHDIWENETZ. 60 visas were issued in August alone for dependents to enter USSR to come to Biro Bidgan, mainly from Vilna.

On the 15th we motored out by a beautiful winding road, crossing the new bridge, to Biro Feld Collective, about 45–50 kilometre. We passed a road repair village on the way, but apparently after building the road there is no permanent organization constantly at work keeping them in repair. We called on the Manager of the Honey farm who lives in a substantial wooden house, and had about 600 hives (we also passed a second honey farm belonging to Biro Feld). This man had two good rooms, and some hens, a cow and calf and a horse. He was a peasant but had a remarkable library including works by Anatole France, Victor Hugo and technical works on Bees, Fish, Life on earth, astronomy, and an encyclopaedia. His name was Michaelov. This farm was out of the primeval forest (known as sleeping tiga). We then got to Biro Feld and visited the School (75 children, lessons in Yiddish) which was old but very clean. Attended a meeting of three classes to decide on details of Social

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Competition. Presiding was a business-like girl of 12 who took the votes to elect the Presidium. 60 families in this Collective which is in a beautiful valley about 15 kilometres wide, with rich black earth about 10 cms deep. They have just received 5 new caterpillar tractors which can do more than a hectare an hour with 4 blades, or 70 hectares in 24 hours using 8 blades for straight forward work. The tractors return to MTS for winter, and for the summer there is a temporary MTS for small repairs in Biro Feld. 400 hectares are under cultivation and they are adding an extra 35 hectares this year. A new Collective called Alexiefka has just been established next to Biro Feld. It has excellent new buildings. Good water is obtained everywhere at 20 metres. The tractors use a mixture of Kerosene and Benzene. The Collective is 48 kilometres from the railway. They have post office (letters delivered daily) telephone and E.L [electric light]. They have 1100 bee hives, 90 cows (of which 46 are Kholk[h]os and 44 private) 18 horses, 18 pigs (10 private).

The food situation in Biro Bidgan is now excellent. Last winter there were difficulties. Owing to the floods there was a great shortage of vegetables. There was always bread except a purely temporary shortage for five days owing to a transport trouble when the full ration was slightly reduced. Sugar was served all the year except for two months. There was plenty of fish and a fair supply of meat. Every worker received 1.25 litres of milk in summer and less in winter. At both Collectives we had the same meal as the workers, consisting of soup and vegetable and fish, fried chicken and potatoes, cake and honey, tea or fresh milk and fried eggs.

At Biro Feld we went to see the threshing. The workers were organized in a brigade of 25 (7 women). They were at dinner in the open field: soup, potatoes,

fish, bread, milk. The Thresher was made at Kharkov, the tractor was USA. The Farm was entirely self supporting. The harvest is divided up as follows: first the State makes an estimate of production and fixes the necessary % to State needs. In this case the estimate was 8 centners, and the state to get 16% – 1.5 centner. The State takes nothing on production above the estimate.

20% of full harvest goes to cost of getting it: tractor ploughing, drilling, harrowing, disking, harvesting, threshing, horses (if any needed).

16% to maximum of estimate to State.

14% to seeds for next year.

10% to insurance against loss.

This year the harvest was an average of about 10 centners.

To state: 1.3 centners per acre

To cost of getting: 2

To seed: 1.4

To insurance: 1

Leaving 4.3 centners per acre to be divided up among the members according to the number of days they have put in. This worked out at about 1.25 kilo of wheat per formal working day (10 hours in summer). By working specially hard, and over, it is easy to get many extra working days; for instance we met a man who had to his credit 410 days in 9 months.

Special Meeting of Kholk[h]oz settles the amount of sustenance as the number of persons to be sustained.

Member requiring a day or [more] off for personal work would have ask permission from the Chairman, or suffer loss of that day. Time off needed for real work, no loss is sustained if has been obtained.

Marley [signature]

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1. Grigory Krutov was an official of the Regional Executive Committee of the Far East of the USSR (Dal'kraispolkom) who accompanied Lord Marley to Birobidzhan.
2. MOPR (International Organization for Assistance to Fighters for Revolution) was a Soviet public body.
3. Regina (Gina) Medem was an American journalist who promoted the Birobidzhan project abroad. She was the widow of the Bund leader Vladimir Medem.

ORT and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors: from the DP camps to Israel

6

Perhaps at no other time and at no other place in the world have the objectives of ORT been so dramatically demonstrated and justified as in the DP camps in Germany.¹

Inside the ghettos of eastern Europe during the Holocaust, ORT came to the aid of the starving and destitute Jewish population. It gave food and shelter whenever possible and fought hard to obtain exemptions from deportation for those fortunate enough to find a place in its workshops. Occasionally ORT was able to save the lives of pupils and staff, although most were deported to the concentration and extermination camps. While the majority of teachers died in the camps, there were those like Jacob Oleiski from Kovno, who went on to shape the character of World ORT's rehabilitation programme after the war.

World ORT's post-war work played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of thousands of Holocaust survivors. ORT was instrumental in equipping survivors with the skills they needed to forge new lives and in helping them to come to terms with what they had lost. The presence of ORT inside the DP camps made the immediate post-war months and years bearable. The importance of the provision of long-term stimulation for those housed in the DP camps cannot be underestimated. It was the diligence and initiative of the workers of World ORT that was responsible for instilling self-worth and purpose back into the lives of the newly liberated concentration camp survivors.

From 1949 onwards, World ORT started to dismantle some of its schools and workshops inside the DP camps. As more and more pupils emigrated from Europe to other countries, the demand for ORT courses inside the camps started to decline. However, they were now in greater demand in the new countries of settlement.

The creation of the State of Israel in May 1948 saw a huge shift in focus from the Diaspora towards the new state. It is this ideological and political shift that will be explored in this chapter. The chapter examines the DP camps and considers the possibility that these were the primary site of this change in policy and ideas.

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Once the DP camps started to be disbanded, World ORT made its way to Israel. Traditionally known in Palestine and later in Israel as a Diasporic movement, ORT fought to secure its place in the new state.²

Due to the dedication and perseverance of the World ORT staff in Israel together with their desire to succeed inside the new state, a shift in focus slowly enabled ORT to transform itself from a European Jewish movement into an integral part of the Israeli 'national fabric.'³ This shift in policy and ideals will now be examined.

The outbreak of the World War II in September 1939 affected all Jewish social and educational organizations and ORT was no exception. When the Germans entered Warsaw, Jewish life stopped and all schools and training facilities were shut down. Within a couple of weeks, however, the situation changed once more and within a month, the ORT workshops were once again fully functioning. Rachel Gourman, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and a former ORT employee, described how news of the workshops reopening breathed life into the desperate Jewish population of Warsaw:

Like a cry from Heaven, the rumour spread among the Jewish population that the ORT workshops were to be reopened ... The excitement of the people at this news is indescribable ... This enabled them to earn at least a little something almost immediately, so that they could buy a loaf of bread or a head of cabbage.⁴



ORT course in the Warsaw Ghetto, 14 March 1941.

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In September 1940, the ORT courses in the Warsaw Ghetto reopened under the leadership of Joseph Jaszunski. This was a momentous occasion which created a glimmer of hope for those who were fortunate enough to gain a place on a course or a position as a teacher. In addition to running ORT within the ghetto, Jaszunski was a member of the Warsaw *Judenrat* and the head of ORT Poland between 1935 and 1942.

Gourman stresses the importance of gaining a place on an ORT course and explains how this could help with securing work.

... life in the ghetto became more and more difficult. The Jews tried to 'escape' by setting up workshops in order to work for the Germans. Unbelievable sums of money were paid to enter the workshops. People stood in queues for days and nights. Those in possession of ORT certificates were employed by any workshops.⁵

While Jaszunski was running ORT in the Warsaw Ghetto, Jacob Oleiski, former head of ORT Lithuania, took control in the Kovno Ghetto. In 1943, while celebrating a third Passover Seder inside the Kovno Ghetto, Oleiski rose to speak. He delivered a speech which backed the new Zionist teaching of the school and explained how his own feelings on Zionism, the Diaspora and the work of ORT had changed:

I have sinned. I have been in error. I have sought redemption in the ideal of universal humanity – in distant lands – and I have failed. We must have our own land, our own life. The land of Israel is the one and only truth.⁶

Oleiski's speech at the Seder is extremely important, not only because it marks a significant moment in his life when his views on Zionism changed but also because this change reflected a greater shift that was taking place in ORT across Europe at this time: a shift that would reach maturity inside the DP camps in Germany after the end of the war.

Not only did the Jewish communities inside the ghettos of eastern Europe celebrate religious festivals and mark the high holy days, they attempted to continue with other forms of Jewish life and culture. The increased use of Hebrew inside the ghettos and the concentration camps and later in the DP camps is linked to this change in ideology within ORT. Inside the ghettos and concentration camps, Yiddish and increasingly Hebrew were used as a form of spiritual and cultural resistance. Authors and poets wrote their works in these languages so they would not be understood if discovered.⁷

Once inside the DP camps, the use of Hebrew continued, now not as a form of spiritual or cultural resistance but as a political expression and an ideological tool. The increased use of Hebrew in the DP camps reflected the desire of the newly liberated survivors for a Jewish homeland. Hearts and hopes were now turned towards Palestine.

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Although the loss and devastation caused by the deportations from the ghettos in eastern Europe was immense and to some extent incalculable, the important part played by ORT inside the ghettos should not be overshadowed. As the *ORT Economic Review* stated in 1948,

The ORT ideology lived, as in Warsaw and Vilna, until the last dying gasp of the ghetto. To know a skill, to be a worker, or even a master craftsman often helped young Jewish people to save their lives from a dreadful death, or at least to prolong life to have a chance of surviving Nazism.⁸

Wherever and whenever possible, ORT protected the Jews inside the ghettos of eastern Europe. It cast its net as wide as possible, hoping to save as many people from starving in the ghettos and from being deported east. As was often the case both in the ghettos and the concentration camps, the main emphasis was on trying to save the children. In the case of the ghettos, this was an almost impossible task as they, together with the elderly, were among the first to be included on any transports east. Still, Gourman says, 'during all that period there was not a single incident of anybody being taken away from ORT and deported to Treblinka.'⁹

Out of the destruction of the ghettos and the concentration camps, ORT created a refuge for the remnants of Europe's Jewish communities inside the DP camps of Germany, Austria and Italy. Although World War II left Europe with huge and daunting challenges it also allowed ORT to fulfil its mission like never before. According to the *ORT Economic Review*,

Perhaps at no other time and at no other place in the world have the objectives of ORT been so dramatically demonstrated and justified as in the DP camps in Germany. Established and organized amid the ruins of a broken, bombed-out land, for men, women and children who had gone through seven years of hell – people without a country, still hated by the Germans who had persecuted them, still harbouring one major desire, that of getting away from the scene of their misery and getting on, somewhere, somehow, to a happier land.¹⁰

In the British Zone of Occupation, the former concentration camp at Belsen, renamed Hühne by the Allies, was to become the site of the most politically active and diverse Jewish DP camp in Europe.

The Jewish DPs in Belsen were very politically minded and were quick to organize themselves. By the end of April 1945 Josef Rosensaft, a 34-year-old Polish Jew, had set up a committee to represent Jewish interests in Belsen. Historian Joanne Reilly, discussing the success of this early committee, claims that it was able to achieve so much because its members were in relatively good health and that they had a clear plan for their future. 'These factors enabled them to serve as the leadership of the weak and exhausted survivors',

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Reily explains, 'to offer a vision for the future and to establish an organizational model.'¹¹

Rosensaft's committee was Zionist in outlook but represented all political parties among the Jewish population of Belsen. The committee was dedicated to Zionist goals, a desire to unite the Jewish survivors across the British Zone of Occupation and to the presence of a thriving cultural and educational life within the DP camps.

The first Congress of the Jewish Survivors in the British Zone was held in Belsen on 25–27 September 1945. It was at this congress that the Central Committee of Liberated Jews was formed in order to represent the interests of all Jews in the British Zone of Occupation. Josef Rosensaft, due to his earlier work on the provisional committee, was the natural choice for president.¹² According to Hagit Lavsky:

The congress set the stage and gave direction to the survivors' struggle for freedom, which was closely bound up with the Zionist struggle for independence. On both fronts Britain was the source of antagonism, as the occupation authority in Germany, and the mandatory power in Palestine.¹³

Major C. C. K. Rickford of the British Policy Division covered the congress in a confidential report. The authorities were particularly interested in the meeting which dealt with British Policy towards the DPs and with Palestine. 'Despite a few enthusiastic anti-Zionists,' Major Rickford later recorded, 'the meeting was overwhelmingly in favour of the opening of Palestine to such as wished to go there, and of immediate segregation into Jewish Camps.'¹⁴

The British authorities kept a close eye on the work of Rosensaft and refused to recognize officially the Committee of Liberated Jews. As the Committee was openly dedicated to the Zionist cause, the British could not recognize it without legitimizing their aims.

In November 1945, Dr Lvovitch, by then chairman of World ORT Union and the man responsible for the DP programme, made an agreement between ORT and UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] for vocational schools to be set up wherever possible in order to aid the DPs. It was obvious from the beginning that the most urgent need was for tools and machinery, as well as raw materials. In order to help with distribution a central supply office was set up in Arolsen by Vladimir Grossman. Within days of being established, twenty-nine cases of tools and forty sewing machines were sent to Belsen.

While Lvovitch was running the DP programme from Paris, Syngalowski had the responsibility for other areas of World ORT's work including eastern Europe, which he oversaw from Geneva.

World ORT's mission inside the DP camps was to equip the DPs for the future and Belsen was no exception. Not only was the organization equipping them with new skills but also with the confidence to imagine a future in

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ORT sewing course at the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, in the British Zone of Germany, 1947.

which these skills could be used. The success of the ORT school was twofold: it tackled the immediate problems inside the camp, those of apathy and dissatisfaction, while also encouraging the survivors to face the future with hope. Once established, 'the school was strongly backed by the Central Jewish Committee and by UNRRA as both bodies recognized not simply an educational opportunity but also a "potent instrument for real rehabilitation"'.¹⁵

The Lvovitch agreement was made permanent in March 1946 when Vladimir Grossman was appointed director of ORT in the American and British Zones. This agreement, 'made it possible to extend ORT's vocational training activities to the entire American Zone, as well as to the British and French Zones of Germany.'¹⁶

ORT's activities in the American Zone of Occupation were divided between four districts. The main centres in each of the four areas were Stuttgart, Kassel-Frankfurt, Regensburg and Munich. The Jewish DP centre at Landsberg was in District 4 which had Munich as its centre. In October 1945, A.C. Glassgold was assigned to the Landsberg DP camp as an UNRRA director. He later recalled:

Though I had heard and read about the tragic lives of these people in German concentration camps, I was not quite prepared for the shock of seeing the tattooed blue numbers on their left forearms ... It was here in

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Landsberg, that I witnessed the miracle of the human spirit; saw it revive from the ashes of the gruesome past to rise above the obstacles of the present and soar above the bleak promises of the future.¹⁷

Although conditions were bad in Landsberg, Major Irving Heymont of the United States Army, who was based there, was pleasantly surprised by the remarkable work that was being carried out in the area of education:

The schools of the camp were impressive. Under the leadership of Dr J. Oleiski, a graduate of a concentration camp, Landsberg has developed a remarkable school system ... Children are now learning to read and write. Adolescents, for the first time, are learning trades. Instruction is offered in a great variety of skills, including garment making, all phases of shop working, auto mechanics, radio and repair and construction, and many others. Nor were the adults neglected. Former shopkeepers and salesmen are learning to work with their hands. A variety of evening courses in cultural subjects is also offered.¹⁸



Mechanics' workshop at the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, in the British Zone of Germany, 1947.

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Jacob Oleiski who had run ORT Lithuania and had been so prominent in the Kovno Ghetto went on to set up the ORT school in the Landsberg DP camp. The same drive and determination he had brought to the workshops inside the Kovno Ghetto, he now applied to the school system within the Camp. On 1 October 1945 he gave a speech marking the opening of ORT Landsberg:

We must give camp residents a purpose; we must reorganize their daily lives and introduce them to every possible kind and aspect of work. They must have the feeling that everywhere there are things to do. This is the only way we can prevent our fellow sufferers from letting their minds atrophy and become even more demoralized.¹⁹

In these few sentences, Oleiski summed up exactly what was required in the DP camps. He had assessed the situation and, as a fellow sufferer, instinctively knew how his co-inhabitants were feeling. He continued:

Whenever I spend time in training workshops or visit vocational classes and look into the eyes of former concentration camp inmates, my faith grows stronger and stronger ... Indeed it is only through productive, creative work that we can lessen our anger at having lost so many years.²⁰

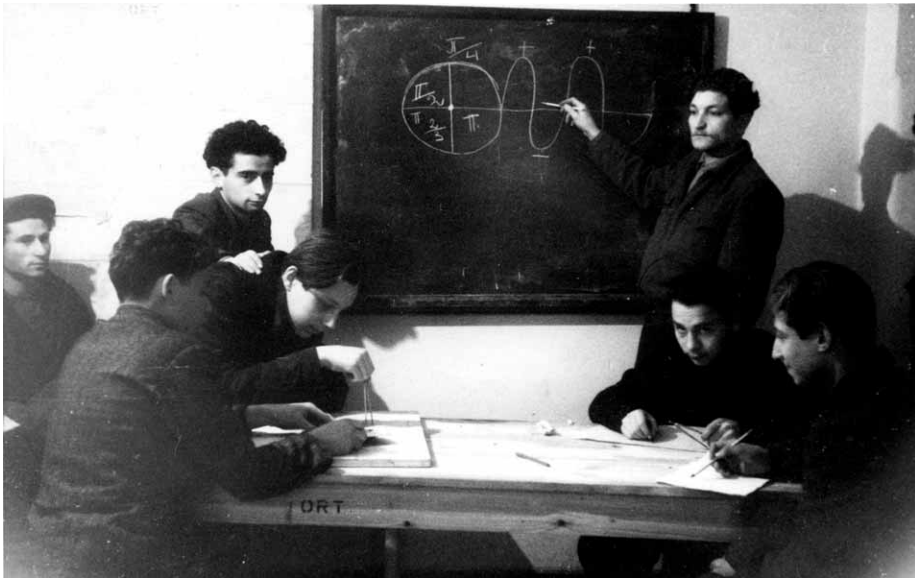
Describing Oleiski, Heymont writes: 'Before Hitler, this remarkable man had been a trained agronomist in Lithuania, working for the ORT organization. ... Now, he is preaching and putting into practice his credo of salvation through work.'²¹

It was the combination of Oleiski's personal drive and determination and the influence and capabilities of the World ORT Union that lay behind the success of the ORT school in Landsberg. In December 1945, Vladimir Grossman fully realized the potential of this alliance: 'Immediate relief in the form of training skilled and semi-skilled workers must be given', he wrote in the *ORT Economic Review* 'particularly where there are remnants of destroyed Jewish communities who want to start life on their own.'²²

By 1947 much of ORT's work in the DP camps was aimed at possible future emigration to Palestine. In 1947 the ORT school in Belsen held a ceremony for two newly graduated students who were leaving for Palestine. They were two of ORT's best graduates in carpentry and tool making, and in recognition of their skills they were awarded sets of tools which they could take with them to Palestine.

On 6 January 1948, Y. Levy of the Jewish Agency for Palestine in the United States zone wrote to Jacob Oleiski:

Your organization, which gave thousands of our people the opportunity to receive vocational training that they may be able to live a productive future, has rendered a great and important service to our people ... We

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Electrical engineering course at the Exodus camp ORT school in Emden in the British Zone of Germany, January 1948.

want particularly to note our great satisfaction that your plans for vocational training have been adjusted to the needs of emigration to Eretz-Israel.²³

While all this work was being carried out in Germany, important programmes for Jewish children were taking place in Italy. Throughout the war, hundreds of Italian Jewish children had escaped deportation to ghettos and camps by hiding in convents and monasteries. After the war, Raffaele Cantoni, a prominent figure in the Italian pre-war Jewish community, began trying to locate these children. Cantoni worked closely with his assistant, Mathilda Cassin. In the weeks and months after the end of the war it became clear that this was a task too big for Cantoni and his staff to achieve alone so they called for assistance from the soldiers of the Solel Boneh Company of the Jewish Brigade. With the help of these soldiers, Cantoni began collecting children from the convents and monasteries and placing them in a safe house in the village of Selvino. This was set up as a boarding school and overseen by Moshe Ze'iri, a member of Solel Boneh.²⁴

Collecting these surviving Jewish children proved problematic. Due to their young age and the length of time they had been in hiding, more often than not the children had forgotten they were Jewish and had no recollection of their former lives. They wore black clothes and crucifixes and were highly suspicious of the Jewish adults who wanted to take them away.

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By July 1945 Cantoni and Solel Boneh had collected so many children that they left their initial residence and moved farther up the mountains to Piazza Torre. In the early weeks and months at Piazza Torre the counsellors became aware of both behavioural and linguistic problems amongst the children from the camps and convents. The children from the convents spoke Italian and could not understand those who had come from the camps. The latter spoke Polish, Yiddish and Hungarian and were in turn suspicious of the convent children. Both groups initially found it hard to communicate with the counsellors and with each other as it had been decided that in preparation for emigration to Palestine, Hebrew should be the language used. Everyone was taught the language, and had to try and speak it as much as possible. This was extremely hard for the children who were in desperate need to express what they had experienced during the war and to form new relationships with each other. The counsellors, however, were convinced that their decision was right and that it would initiate a new start for the children – a new life in Palestine.

The plan for all the children living in Piazza Torre was emigration to Palestine. 'There was a profound longing to put an end to impermanence, to begin a new life, to put down roots,' writes Aharon Megged.²⁵ As very few certificates for legal emigration were getting to the house they had to make plans for illegal emigration. Everything was geared towards a new life in Palestine and 'the children lived vicariously through everything that went on in Palestine. Newspapers brought word, Brigade soldiers brought word ...'²⁶

Education was an important part of life at Selvino and Ze'iri and the other counsellors saw to it that the children received a well-rounded schooling including practical trades and skills in addition to Hebrew classes and other subjects. Nitza Sarner, the daughter of Moshe Ze'iri, recalls:

Then there were all the ORT classes as well ... That time at the end of the war, there was a big DP camp in Milan and children kept coming. I think ORT came from the DP camp in Milan to the house ... There was metal-work, cobbling ... sewing (tailoring) and embroidering. The sewing classes were run by two sisters, one of whom was a qualified teacher. At the end of the war lots of the organizations started to move in, in an official way. ORT – there were lots of workshops in the building. It was a huge building, sprawling. There was a cinema, a full-size cinema.²⁷

While Moshe Ze'iri and ORT were working tirelessly at Selvino, the *ORT Annual Report* stated in early 1948 that 'of the 36,000 Jews in Italy, 11,000 live in Rome. The vast majority live from hand to mouth without the knowledge of any trade. Thus, the ORT programme is of great significance'.²⁸

Four ORT workshops and schools were set up in Rome and the surrounding area: a mechanical knitting school, a professional school, workshops for shirt making, millinery and corsetry and agricultural courses. There were also

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ORT pilot training course, Italy, 1948. Graduates of the course joined the newly established Israeli Air Force.

ORT activities taking place in three DP camps at this time, situated in Bari, Barletta and Trani.

Between 1946 and May 1948, several groups of children left Sciesopoli and the village of Selvino for Palestine through illegal channels of emigration. Sarner recalls how the younger group of children, of which she was a member, remained at Selvino until the establishment of the State of Israel. She stayed a few months longer: 'My mother and I stayed until December 1948. Israel was founded in May. The house shut down at the end of 1948.'²⁹

The creation of the State of Israel and the closure of the DP camps were closely related. After the establishment of Israel, write Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, 'ORT's programmes, as well as other aspects of life in the Jewish DP camps, had to be re-evaluated in light of the fledgling Jewish State's needs.'³⁰ No doubt, the foundation of Israel marked a turning point in the history of the World ORT Union.³¹

From the moment the new State of Israel was declared, the full focus of ORT's work shifted from rehabilitation towards immigration. However, although the focus shifted towards Israel, according to the minutes of a meeting held in Paris during November 1948, preferential treatment could not be given to those seeking entry to Israel over those seeking entry to other countries of settlement. The minutes read:

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Keen controversy exists as to whether Jewish organizations supported by Jewish funds have the right to assist in the individual resettlement of a person who for some reason of his own decides to emigrate to a land other than Israel ... Those of us whose mandate it is to render all possible assistance to every displaced and refugee Jew should not be drawn into ideological considerations.³²

Despite this decision, the fact that the issue was even being debated illustrates the shift in position and policy that was taking place within ORT and the priority, if only theoretically, that was being assigned to work in Israel.

On 11 July 1948, the World ORT Union Central Board met in Paris and declared that it welcomed

the new State of Israel and gives assurance of its full support for the up building of Israel's skilled labour force ... the Central Board affirms its readiness to negotiate with the Israelian Government the transfer of ORT DP schools and further working in Israel and confirms the decision of the Interim Committee that Dr Syngalowski should proceed to Israel as soon as possible.³³

Dr Syngalowski left Venice for Tel Aviv on 1 November 1948 on a fact-finding mission to establish how ORT could transfer its courses and equipment to the new state and how ORT would be received there. He remained in Israel until April 1949. Within Israel, Syngalowski was initially viewed with some suspicion as his anti-Zionist sympathies were well-known. This opposition was most prominent with the Histadrut, the Israeli labour organization, which did not necessarily want to face competition from this European organization.

Although there was initial resistance to ORT establishing itself in Israel, the very fact that the country was only in its initial stages helped the organization. Israel soon realized that ORT with its long history, loyal staff and good-quality equipment would prove extremely useful in educating and nation building.

The creation of the State of Israel and the subsequent immigration of the DPs combined with the closure of the DP camps marked a turning point in the history of World ORT. As more and more groups of DPs started to arrive in Israel, ORT followed closely behind, and arrangements were made for work to continue in Israel: 'The agreement with UNRRA and the Central Committee of Liberated Jews had specified that school equipment would follow the DPs to their new home,' stated an American ORT Federation publication, 'Large quantities began to arrive in Israel during 1949 ...'³⁴

An important ORT meeting regarding the future of the organization took place in August 1948 between a manager from Geneva, Dr Jehuda Beham,

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president of the ORT Tool Supply Corporation for Palestine Ltd., and Mr Shlomo Jaffe, a member of the Council of the ORT Tool Supply Corporation from Tel Aviv. According to the minutes of the World ORT Union Administrative Committee held in Paris on 10 November 1948,

The two Israeli delegates made a complete report on the present situation in Israel, vocational training needs and the situation with regard to the supply of artisans and kibbutzim with machines and tools on credit. In the course of the ensuing debates which lasted all week the possibilities of ORT activities in Israel were examined and preparations for beginning of ORT's work discussed.³⁵

On 3 December 1948 the *ORT Chronicle* announced that

After years of work in the Diaspora, during which ORT has trained qualified workers for Palestine, too, it can now finally place its vast technical and pedagogical experience at the disposal of our pioneers in Israel herself, contributing thus directly and immediately to the construction of the new state ... Twenty ORT schools are scheduled to be set up in Israel as soon as possible. Their technical equipment will shortly be shipped from ORT trade schools in central European DP camps.³⁶

According to a Foreign Office document sent from the Chancery to the British Embassy in Tel Aviv on 2 August 1955:



ORT students in Ben Shemen, Israel, unloading machinery shipped from World ORT Union's DP programme in Italy, c. 1950.

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ORT school for rug-making in Ramla, Israel, c. 1950.

At the end of 1948, ORT extended its activities to Israel and transferred here a number of schools, complete with equipment. Training centres have now been established in some of the main towns and larger agricultural settlements and plans have been laid for a further extension of its activities in Israel ... The Ambassador ... has been much impressed by the excellence of the training given and by the spirit and manners of the pupils.³⁷

In early 1949 ORT schools and classes started to appear in various locations across Israel. These included Jaffa, Tel-Aviv, Kfar Abraham, Kfar Ganim, Ben Shemen, Pardes Chana and Jerusalem. Between June and October 1949, the following machinery and tools were transferred from Germany to Israel: '10 Universal wood working machines, 10 Dubied knitting machines, 10 knitting machines of Swedish manufacture, 10 lathes, 100 sewing machines.'³⁸

In addition to the meeting held on the transfer of individuals and tools, preparations were made for transferring entire schools from Germany, Austria and Italy. However, it was decided that this could not start until Dr Syngolowski had returned from his trip to Israel.

Two conferences were held by the World ORT Union in Geneva on the subject of the transfer of the European schools to Israel. These were organized

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by Dr Lvovitch and Dr Syngalowski and were attended by Dr O. Dutch, Director for Germany and Austria, Mr A. Saolun, Chief of Supply and Transport for Germany and Austria and Mrs D. Greene, Director of the American Zone of Germany.

Between the years 1948 and 1949, 341,000 immigrants arrived in Israel to start new lives there. 'Within a period of two years, the Jewish population – which numbered 650,000 persons at the inception of the state, absorbed the influx of immigrants and the population jumped more than 50 per cent.'³⁹

In March 1949 the *ORT Bulletin* described the first meeting of the National Council of the Israeli ORT which took place in Tel Aviv on 16 January 1949:

A definite programme for ORT was adopted. The programme was launched on the basis of an intensive study of the vocational training needs of Israel made by Dr A. Syngalowski, chairman of the executive committee of the World ORT Union and his assistants, in many trips throughout the country. ... The Minister of Justice has granted ORT the status and privileges of a public utility ... By official proclamation, the Minister of Finance exempted all tools and machines imported by ORT for vocational training purposes from customs duties. Close contacts have been established with the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Labour as well as with the Educational Department of the government.⁴⁰

By the summer of 1949 the publication announced that:

ORT's popularity in Israel is increasing. From the various strata of the population, from towns and settlements, youth and adults apply for admission to ORT's institutions. Numerous organizations, educational authorities, town councils and kibbutzim request an expansion of Israeli ORT's network of trade schools.⁴¹

1949 also saw the building and establishment of the ORT Nevi'im-Oleiski school which was completed in 1953. The building, which had been damaged during the war of independence, was put at ORT's disposal by the Administrator General of the State of Israel. The construction work on this project continued throughout 1951–52 and as building materials were scarce in Israel at that time, World ORT shipped materials from Geneva in order for the school to be completed by 1953.⁴²

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11. Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 167.
12. For more on the Central Committee of Liberated Jews see Hagit Lavsky, 'A Community of Survivors: Bergen-Belsen as a Jewish Centre after 1945', in Reilly, Cesarani et al. (eds.), *Belsen in History and Memory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 162-77.
13. Lavsky, 'A Community of Survivors', p. 169.
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From the archive



Pamphlet cover: ORT Vocational School in Bergen-Belsen 1945–1947. The illustration shows the ORT school arch, erected in the camp's Freedom Square, by ORT's carpentry and electro-technicians course participants.

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This article from the ORT Economic Review, appearing here in a slightly abridged version, was written by Dr Franklin J. Keller, head of the vocational and technological section, education and religious affairs branch of the American military government in Germany after the end of World War II. Upon the request of David Lvovitch, Dr Keller spent two months in 1947 inspecting ORT's schools in the DP camps. Of the 45 schools in the American Zone, Keller visited 29, from Bayerisch-Gmain in Bavaria to Hofgeismar in Hesse.

The Miracle of ORT among the DPs

Franklin J. Keller

Perhaps at no other time and at no other place in the world have the objectives of ORT been so dramatically demonstrated and justified as in the DP camps in Germany. Established and organized amid the ruins of a broken, bombed-out land, for men, women, and children who had gone through seven years of hell, – people without a country, still hated by the Germans who had persecuted them, still harboring one major desire, that of getting away from the scene of their misery and getting on, somewhere, somehow, to a happier land. In this unfriendly atmosphere, seething with unrest, unstable, temporary, transitional, they took thought for the fundamentals, the permanent things of life – education, work, education for work, work for education – and often, with nothing but four walls and a roof (war-damaged at that), started schools, general schools for the youngsters, trade schools for everyone old enough to handle tools and create usable goods. In the beginning, as at Landsberg, where Jacob Oleiski organized the first one, everything was done by the DPs themselves. Temporary as it might be, each camp was a community and, as a highly civilized community, it must live – therefore schools were imperative. So, the miracle happened, and in the summer of 1947, among the 150,000 Jewish DPs in the American and British Zones there were 45 ORT schools and 8,000 students. True, by this time much help had come from America in the form of supplies, equipment, food and personnel. But the impetus was supplied by the people themselves.

Upon this high note of praise must be sounded another – one of warning. As has been the case with the DPs, when hope is

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deferred again and again, when real, compensated employment is lacking, when normal life is pushed indefinitely into the future, deterioration – physical, mental, moral – is bound to set in. There are many signs of it already. The only real answer is, of course, to open up opportunities in other lands, to turn displaced persons into well-placed persons. But in the meantime, while the slowly awakening conscience of the world moves into action, the thousands and thousands destined to remain in custody, as it were, must be truly helped in every possible way to regain and retain the personal dignity that was once theirs and be prepared for life among the peoples of other lands. Unless this is done, even migration to another country will not be the ultimate solution. Both character and physique must be adjusted to new climates (physical, social and mental) and it is far, far wiser to do this now than to let it come about through later struggle against maladjustment.

Another note of warning: It is virtually impossible to convey through words the atmosphere, the tone, the reality of a Jewish DP camp. Even a visitor, especially a non-Jew, one who has never suffered the humiliation of discrimination, I suppose, can fully appreciate the situation. But to sense it at all, you must be there to see and feel and hear what life in no-man's land is like. This is very real unreality. These introductory paragraphs are being written at Vale Perkins in Canada on the shore of Lake Memphremagog, thirty-five miles of gorgeous water cutting through the magnificent hills of the Vermont-Quebec border, uniting, as it were, two great democratic countries. Some of the later paragraphs were written a year earlier after visits to the orphan children's camp at Prien on beautiful Chiemsee in lower Bavaria, where Hitler perpetrated some of his choicest barbarities. In a

sense, you have no right to enjoy Lake Memphremagog unless you have been with the DPs at Chiemsee. You cannot know and suffer with your oppressed fellow-men unless you have lived with them for at least a few hours in their misery and despair, and have realized that the countryside can be truly beautiful only when you live in it as a free man or woman.

No observations or recommendations can have any significance unless they are considered in a framework of conflict, – conflict of emotions and ideas. Necessarily ORT must strive to set up schools that meet the standards of efficient schools in a normal environment. There are tried and tested ways of teaching occupations, and they must be used wherever possible. However, any such drive towards stability must always vie with ever-growing restlessness. The remarkable thing is that a few of the ORT schools, notably Landsberg and Heidenheim, approach the norm so closely. On the other hand, there are inevitably those schools that limp along and are pale reflections of things as they ought to be. One can only conclude that wherever one or two are gathered together to learn how to live efficiently and, let us hope, nobly, any effort to enable them so to live is justified, no matter what the cost. Whatever the shortcomings or difficulties resulting from conditions that cannot be changed, however large or small the number of students, every effort must be made to carry on the work as effectively as possible.

To a certain degree, these schools were planned, but only in the most general way. For the most part, they are like any other military improvisations. DPs were housed wherever military commanders could find room, often in old German army barracks, sometimes, as

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in Stuttgart, in a block of apartment houses, in still others, as in Heidenheim, in fairly comfortable (except for the crowding) individual dwellings. Within these densely packed communities, badly needed living room had to be requisitioned for school use, both academic and vocational – all this amid unbelievable destruction. The resulting struggle for Lebensraum, not in the old German sense of expansion but rather in the sense of contraction, packing much into little, was and always is a severe one. Given two families and two rooms, it is not easy to decide whether each family shall have a room of its own or whether two families shall live in one of them and the other shall be used for school purposes.

The following paragraphs are a composite of observations and recommendations. However, since the original report, on the basis of which this article is written, was made in the summer of 1947, unquestionably some conditions have changed and many of the improvements here suggested have now been made. Indeed, much progress was going on at that very time. Nevertheless, as noted, conditions are so difficult and obstacles so many that betterments are brought about all too slowly. The general principles behind these recommendations remain sound and important. This is fully realized by those men with whose whole-souled and enthusiastic cooperation the present data were collected and suggestions were evolved. They include the entire teaching and administrative staff, but especial mention must be made of Mr. Louis Walinsky, Mr. Jacob Oleiski, and my colleague and former student, Dr. Samuel Steinberg, chairman of the social studies department in Styuvesant High School, New York City.

Administration and Supervision

The steps already taken to strengthen administration and supervision through the appointment of American personnel are all in the right direction. These men not only bring to bear upon the situation the most recent philosophy and best methods of recent years, but are able to make contact with and tap the resources of the Military Government. The schools cannot operate effectively solely within the framework of IRO, the powers and resources of which have been desperately curtailed. There are many ways in which the Military Government can help. But for the most part, ORT American personnel have to capitalize upon each situation as it arises. The principal handicap of newly arrived Americans is that they need time to acquaint themselves with the strange environment in which they find themselves. At first, I too experienced the bewilderment that only time and experience could resolve. However, in the spirit of common endeavor, the Americans can quickly learn from those who have been in Germany a longer time, especially from ORT officials who are themselves DPs. Working together, they make a powerful team for good.

Specialists have been assigned to the supervision of various subjects or groups of subjects – metal work, woodwork, garment trades, and so on. At weekly meetings of school directors their problems are threshed out. Within the limitations of the physical set-up, any school is just as good as its director. Wherever a new dynamic man has replaced a weak one, the school has taken a sudden spurt, attendance has jumped, and it has been difficult to keep up with the applications for admission. Schools have to be built up stone by stone, piece by piece. Nothing, absolutely nothing, comes easily.

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Vocational, Educational and Spiritual Guidance

If there is any point that I would stress above others, it is the necessity for heavy emphasis upon guidance for each individual. In a situation where the dignity of the person is so important, a coordinated system of vocational, educational, and spiritual guidance should be organized. Granting all the difficulties, it is not an impossible task. As a matter of fact, all the elements are at hand, and in a few instances, they have been utilized. The IRO employment and welfare officers are deeply concerned. Note especially what Mr. Branton did in the ORT schools in Austria in cooperation with the Education Ministry. On the basis of his previous experience he instituted a series of tests showing that six years in a concentration camp make normal standards useless. Gestapo methods have produced curious results. Place forty objects on a table for three minutes of observation by a person who has been in a concentration camp, and the subject will remember very few of them. However, give him a written list of the same objects and his memory becomes remarkable. He has had *practice* in memorizing orders. The necessity for counter-measures has taught him to be better than the Gestapo itself.

Mr. Kornitzer has tabulated and graphed the results of achievement tests in various types of work. These are very valuable for educational and vocational orientation. Mr. Kaufman's cards in the IRO employment bureau have on record much valuable material, but should contain much more. Individual and detailed data should be accumulated for each student. His past accomplishments should be considered in the light of some kind of planned future. I anticipate the comment that nobody knows where he is going, but this is also true in normal

situations. It is all a matter of degree. And education means the application of science, experience, reason, and sympathy in helping individuals to find themselves in life. That is the kind of service that the DPs need in the nth degree. Counselors, psychiatrists, spiritual advisors (spiritual in the deepest and broadest personal sense) should be present to give it to them in the best possible form and manner. And whatever scattering efforts are now being made, should be carefully coordinated. Until this is done, ORT and associated organizations are losing a great opportunity.

It is true that nobody knows where any individual DP and his family will be one year, two years, ten years from now, or what kind of work he will be doing. It is important to give him as good a fundamental vocational training as possible, to prepare him for any eventuality. Rotation among trades using various media – metal, wood, cloth, earth – would be a good thing. However, such a scheme is fraught with difficulties, – physical, psychological, social, difficulties that arise from world-wide conditions, from the internal organization of the camps, and from the inflexibility of individual students. The ideal is good, but its fulfillment, in most cases, is impractical.

Local Camp Committees

Especially under the IRO policy of placing responsibility for administration upon each camp community, these committees are exceedingly important. My contact with them (it has been none too extensive or intensive) has not made me happy about their enthusiasm for ORT schools. When I asked the chairman of the committee at Landsberg what suggestions he had for the school, or what I, as an educator, could do for the school, his only

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response was that I should try to get the students higher rations. When Dr. Steinberg and I talked to the committee member (also employment counselor) at Fohrenwalden about putting the school in a building of its own, he proposed that ORT should spend 50,000 marks in making the woodshed available!

The task of the ORT school directors and inspectors is not made easier by the existing plan of camp administration. In the light of our democratic aims, it is certainly the right and privilege of displaced persons to govern themselves. They have suffered enough indignities without having imposed upon them the dictation of outsiders. Moreover, with the cutting down of IRO personnel it has become more and more difficult for that organization to exercise control, even though in the last instance, it has the authority. As has been pointed out, owing to their experiences, many of the DPs are unsettled, unstable, anxious to get away from whatever place they are in. Their interest in their present abode is casual and transitory. They are using property that is not theirs, in fact, that belongs or will belong to people with whom they do not wish to have any traffic. Moreover, the DPs are receiving all their sustenance and clothing from others. They are dependent upon others for their very existence. In such a situation there cannot be the real democracy that carries with it responsibility for production as well as for consumption. Even the Employment Board program, excellent as it is under the circumstances, has very little real economic basis.

Moreover, it appears that, as would be expected, a variety of religious and political opinions exist in each camp, with the result that the membership of the local committee is determined by the balance of party forces. School directors are asked to make decisions regarding teachers and

students in the light of party requests rather than on the merits of each case. I know of nothing that can be done about this beyond the ultimate solution for all DP problems, – that is, the earliest possible transportation of all of them to the countries to which they want to go. But I think it worthwhile to state the problem as a partial explanation of some of the ORT school shortcomings. In other words, ORT schools cannot be administered only in terms of good educational practice, but must be handled in the light of the extraordinary DP milieu.

One of the extraordinary features of this milieu is the cigarette economy. It very definitely affects vocational training in ORT schools. A DP camp is a community. Housing and a basic food ration are provided by the U.S. Army and by IRO. But people want more than just minimum shelter and food. They want better and more food, and clothing. So the ‘workers’ in the camp, those who render services-protection (policemen), cleaning, repair, construction – are paid in marks, additional food, and some cigarettes. Marks, as everybody knows, buy little or nothing, but cigarettes buy everything. Now, if an adult decides to attend vocational school for a full day, he is not available for service. So he says, ‘How about pay for attending school?’ And by pay he means cigarettes. If a man is on the ‘invalid list’, he does not work, but he gets paid. So it is better to be an invalid than to be a student. Every DP has to balance his present opportunity to earn ‘money’ against his future opportunity as measured by the skills he can learn at present. In an attempt to get the young men into school, a ruling was made that those between 18 and 23 might not take jobs in camp but must go to school. All this constitutes a problem that does not appear on the surface –, and takes a little probing to reveal, but it is always there. From the

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directors and teachers I always heard that the students were eager, that there was never enough room to accommodate all that wanted training, but from others I gathered that these economic factors are basic.

In an American democratic community the schools are as good as the people make them. And the people make them good if there are enough intelligent, community-minded, and forceful citizens in the community to communicate to the others what the real needs are. Something like this same process should operate in these camps. Here and there it does, as at Zeilsheim, for instance, where the committee chairman had been a teacher in Warsaw, and had a very fine conception of the place of the ORT school in the camp. More of this dynamic, group-minded leadership is needed. ORT directors, teachers and students should supply it. I am not sure of the method, but I am sure of the desirability. The problem is basic.

Standards

Much is being done to set up standards. Too much cannot be done. To take one simple thing: There ought to be a standard list of equipment, tools, furniture, and supplies for every different kind of shop. A teacher of machine shop practice and his director should know what the administration considers standard, and what help he can expect to attain that standard. Otherwise, every teacher thinks of himself as being an individual and, of course, as always being slighted. Standards must be set for all phases of the work. (The new manual, published after these observations were made, went a long way in this direction.)

For my own use, while visiting the schools, I compiled a series of simple questions, each implying a standard, and suggested that they would be useful to

directors in administering and supervising their own schools. They need not be carried around in a note book, but they should certainly always be in mind. These questions dealt with (1) admission and attendance of students, (2) courses of study and lesson plans, (3) personnel records of directors and teachers, (4) equipment and supplies, (5) methods of teaching, (6) school buildings, (7) guidance, scholarship, and work records, and (8) administrative measures.

An excellent way of maintaining standards is the present practice of having each student examined by a committee of competent technicians and educators. This is the well-known method for passing upon the skill of apprentices when they are ready to become journeymen, and later of journeymen to become masters. It is gratifying to note that ORT is using this method. It should be exceedingly effective if the examiners' standards are high and their attitudes are both sympathetic and disinterested. This practice should be followed for all students. Examiners should be drawn from as many outside sources as possible. Not only will this assure the maintenance of high standards among the teachers but it will bring to the attention of outsiders the fine character of work in ORT schools. In other words, it is the soundest kind of public relations.

Individual Progress

Most courses are set up on the assumption that it will take, say, twelve months to make a good machinist, nine months to make a good dental mechanic, and so on. (These are not actual figures.) It is well established that each learner has his own rate of learning and also his maximum and ultimate degree of skill. The best way of teaching a trade is through a series of individual jobs, described on what are known as job instruction sheets, and allowing each student to progress at his

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own rate. One can arbitrarily set twelve months as the length of a particular course, but some will finish the prescribed work in six months, others in sixteen. The rapid learners should be credited with their accomplishment, and then either given advanced work (also well-planned jobs), or 'graduated' and put on a production job. This practice is an excellent incentive to learning, and is especially desirable in the DP camps if resettlement is based upon skill (as it should be) and the desire of each individual is to get out as fast as he can.

There is frequently raised the question of what to do with the 'graduate' when there is no job for him. 'He just sits around.' Essentially this problem need not exist. Under DP conditions, in the time available, no one can learn everything there is to know about a trade. Advanced courses are always possible. If the student insists that he has had all he wants and must go to work, that problem must be solved through vocational guidance procedures and not by prejudicing the effectiveness of the teaching process.

Text-books, Reference Books, Magazines

Commendable progress is being made in providing mimeographed material for instructional use. Some text-books have been printed in Yiddish, with Latin letters. The 'E and I' text-books, issued by the Army during the war, are a great asset. Even for those who cannot read the English text in the technical books, the diagrams and pictures speak a universal language. Moreover, technical terms are readily recognizable. Wherever language is still a barrier, translations can be made into Yiddish. This would not mean the translation of whole books but only of sections. In some cases, only rough outlines would be necessary. If four or five people could be put on a job like this, in a very short time there would be available

a store of printed material that would be useful not only in Germany, but wherever ORT schools are, or may be, established. Wherever such material has already been developed in ORT schools in other countries, it would be most desirable to get it into Germany as fast as possible.

Trade magazines are exceedingly useful. They are usually full of diagrams and pictures. They are beginning to be published in Germany, in German, of course, and a few copies should be available. The paper shortage makes them hard to get, but a good supply of those printed in the United States would be exceedingly valuable. Here and there, in the ORT women's classes, I have seen a well-worn copy of a fashion magazine. The colored pictures are very helpful. The students are clever at making patterns after just looking at the models. It would be easy to start a regular supply of magazines flowing into women's shops.

Learning to Teach

Very very few of the teachers in ORT schools have had previous experience or training in teaching. For the most part, they are well intentioned trade and technical people who are doing their best to pass on to others the skills and knowledge that they have acquired as journeymen or engineers. They know what skills are required of workers. They have standards of achievement. As teachers, some do well, most others do poorly. The series of seminars now being held should go a considerable way toward remedying this situation. Of course, what is taught in the seminar must in itself be good. If it were all on the plane of what I observed Mr. Albrecht doing, there would be little to worry about. He teaches good method and practices it while he teaches it. However, even with this good normal training, there is always great danger that the listeners will take it in with their

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minds but not with their muscles and their senses. The great virtue of good vocational education is that it educates the whole human being – body and soul. It will require very close follow-up by the inspectors and directors, through regional and school seminars, and through supervision. And the inspectors and directors, too, must really understand good methods. A man like Albrecht is a born teacher, and I have not seen many born teachers in the ORT schools I have visited.

This suggests the careful combing of the German teaching force for additional help. Where competent teachers cannot be found among the DPs, every effort should be made to find them elsewhere. Some good ones have already been discovered. While there is also a shortage in the German schools, owing principally to denazification, there is always the possibility of using them during vacation time, during afternoons and evenings and on Sundays. Contact with the German educational authorities, seeking out liberal and anti-Fascist teachers, would also tend to establish better understanding of and sympathy with the DPs. Nobody can get into this work without developing a better attitude toward it. Peace and reconciliation must start from where you are.

During my visits to ORT shops and classes in actual operation I have seen little that could be called good *teaching*, that is to say, good teaching *processes*. Trade teachers, not only in ORT, but everywhere, have a tendency to let students work alone on jobs and to give them help only when difficulties arise or when help is specifically requested. They do not conceive of teaching as a positive, forward-moving process. Particularly in ORT schools is this dynamic conception important.

Enlisting the Help of Other Agencies

It is most important to get the sympathy, understanding, and support of all the agencies in Germany. When Americans come to Germany, they are exceedingly curious about the DP camps. They wonder about them but do not get into them. They hear that 'they are hotbeds of blackmarketing,' and that is about all they ever do hear. I suspect it is pretty much the same with the Germans. And while the evidence indicates that the amount of blackmarketing that does go on in DP camps has no relation whatsoever to creed, race, or nationality, the finger of scorn is always pointed at the Jews. To put it mildly, this is an extremely unfortunate situation. One way, perhaps the only way of meeting it, is by coming out of isolation and establishing official and friendly relations with as many agencies as possible. For instance, in the Military Government, the Education Branch should be asked to help in getting teachers, teaching material and perhaps space in schools for teaching. (ORT has done well to get space in the Elisabethschule in Munich.) The Economics Division should assist in getting surplus Army material and captured enemy material. The Reparations people should find machinery for use in the schools, or at least refrain from taking such machines as the schools now have. The Information Control Division ought to help in providing entertainment. The local Liaison and Security Officer could and should help in many ways; he usually knows very little about the camps in his area and knows nothing at all about ORT schools. The Constabulary ought to be invited in to see that the camp consists of ordinary people who are looking for a permanent home. And so on, and so on.

It ought also to be asked: How much do the DPs know about what is going on in the outside world? How much can they

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get over the radio? How much through the newspapers? They seem to be getting precious little. There must be two-way communication.

Transportation

For the most part, the schools in the Munich district lie from fifty to one hundred kilometers from the central office. Those in Wuerttemberg-Baden and Hesse lie at still greater distances. Effective administration and supervision can be had only by the generous use of automobiles. They are the only means of adequate transportation. I understand very well how use can become abuse. For that reason, the superintendent of maintenance and operation should also be head of the motor pool and should be responsible for both use and maintenance of all ORT cars. The repair shops for these cars could work in cooperation with automechanics shops in schools.

ORT School Management

The difficulties created by many of the foregoing conditions point up the necessity for making the line of administration in ORT schools as clear and firm as possible. There can never really be co-directors of anything. On any level, or in any area, some one person must always be the authority, must make the decisions, and must take the responsibility. It should be clearly understood who this person is. If one co-director is a DP and the other is an American, the problem is further complicated. Whatever concession must be made to the respective talents, sympathies, and emotions of Americans and DPs, certainly the best interests of the DP students will be served only by clear-cut administrative policies. The problem is difficult and touchy. It must therefore be squarely faced.

A. C. Glassgold was appointed UNRRA director of the DP centre in Landsberg in the American Zone of Germany in late 1945. In 'The Spirit will Rise', first published in The ORT Economic Review in March 1947 and printed here in full, he describes life at the Landsberg Centre and the ORT courses that were held there.

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The Spirit will Rise: the miracle of Landsberg

A. C. Glassgold

In October, 1945, I was assigned to Landsberg, Bavaria, as UNRRA director of a DP (displaced persons) center. Though I had heard and read about the tragic lives of these people in German concentration camps, I was not quite prepared for the shock of seeing the tattooed blue numbers on their left forearms. Almost every one of the 4500 DPs in Landsberg had such a number; like a branded steer. There were even children of ten and eleven who could boast of this gruesome honor bestowed upon them by the 'Aryan Supermen.' It was there, in Landsberg, that I witnessed the miracle of the human spirit; saw it revive from the ashes of the gruesome past to rise above the obstacles of the present and soar above the bleak promises of the future. It was there I met Joe Pilzer.

Joe had seen the Nazis burn his entire family. Joe was young – seventeen – and strong; too strong to be burned alive; he was just what was needed in the frantic German drive to build an invincible war machine. Even a young, strong Polish Jew, if properly broken in spirit, could be made to contribute a share in realizing Hitler's mad dream of world domination. That was in the winter of 1939.

Joe was sent to Auschwitz, to Bergen-Belsen, to Buchenwald, to Dachau. At each he slaved under broiling suns or in icy slush, building roads, underground ammunition factories, concealed plane hangars, ack-ack installations.

The years droned by. For every passing year, more than a million of Joe's fellow Jews were tortured, starved, or worked to death; were gassed, shot or burned alive. Finally, during the winter of 1943-44, weighing little more than half his weight,

Joe was sent to dig in the clay pits of Lager No. 2 in Landsberg, a satellite camp of Dachau in southern Bavaria.

Standing on the edge of the pit and looking across the flat, snowcovered fields, across the mound that marked the mass burial ground of 2800 Jewish slave workers, Joe could see the tower of the Landsberg prison. There, about the very year Joe was born, Hitler and his mad companions had written *Mein Kampf* – the death warrant of 6,000,000 Jews and untold millions of Russians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, French, English, Dutch, Americans, Norwegians, Poles, and millions of his own German people.

Slaving in Lager No. 2 with Joe were about 1250 others, mostly Polish Jews. Confused rumors used to penetrate the Lager about the Allied invasion of German soil, but few of the Lager prisoners took comfort in these tales. Freedom was not for them. The others, like Joe, weakened by starvation, beatings, typhus, or brutalized into subservience, had little strength or spirit left for hope. Wrapped in a dull, stuporous haze, each waited for the day when he would be added, an anonymous number, to the toll of the thousands in the snowcovered burial pit.

But fortune had no such unspectacular end in store for them. On the evening of April 27, 1945, American troops entered Landsberg. Suddenly, Joe and his companions found themselves liberated. The Lager guards and gang leaders had fled; the gates were open. About 8,000 French, Greek, Hungarian, Russian, Dutch, and Polish slave workers from the four Lagers around Landsberg were set free. The American forces, pursuing retreating Nazi troops, did what they could to care for the liberated concentration camp prisoners. Rear-guard units gathered up as many of the aimless wanderers as possible, placed them in guarded detention centers, and set up

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supply systems. In spite of the valiant efforts of the American forces during the chaotic month of May, 1945, many of the ex-concentration camp victims died and hundreds contracted typhus.

With the capitulation of the Germans in June, the American occupational army was able to devote more of its resources to the care of the liberated DPs. The immediate task was to round them all up, assign them to reception centers and repatriate them as rapidly as possible.

To such a center in Landsberg came Joe. By the middle of June, 1945, there were over 7500 people bursting the walls of the former German artillery barracks which had been designated as a DP camp. There were Poles, Dutch, Latvians, Lithuanians, Russians, Greeks, Frenchmen, Rumanians – people from every land ravaged and despoiled by the Nazis. There were Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Mohammedans. The DP population was a constantly shifting one. As transports of men, women and children were dispatched to their homelands, new arrivals, singly or in groups up to a hundred, poured through the gates of the Landsberg Center.

In billets intended originally for 2500 German soldiers, these thousands of DPs milled about awaiting final disposition by the Army. Some slept in attics, some in basements, and others in disused garages. One of the barrack buildings was converted into a 200-bed hospital, serving a daily average of 350 patients. Joe was one of these who shared his narrow single straw-sacked wooden cot with another suffering from malnutrition. As their strength returned, they devoted a few hours each day acting as hospital orderlies, ministering to the typhus victims, the tuberculars, and the half-starved.

The Landsberg camp, like most other DP centers at the time, was only a way

station for the thousands who were being returned to the lands from which the Nazis had snatched them or which they had voluntarily left to go to Germany for reasons of their own. By the Fall of 1945, millions of DPs had been repatriated. Only those remained in Germany who refused or feared to return to their native lands; some because they had willingly collaborated with the Germans; some because they were politically opposed to the newly formed governments; many who, though forcibly impressed as slave labor, were now, out of ignorance, being terrified by the stories and threats of reactionary propagandists about the dire fate that awaited them at home; others because their homelands gave only promise of continued suffering and misery. Separate camps for these ‘non-repatriables’ were then set up on a nationality basis. These camps were of a more permanent character and were, at first, administered jointly by UNRRA and the respective armies of occupation. Later, UNRRA took over all functions of DP camp operation.

The Jewish DPs almost to a man refused repatriation. I once asked Joe why he didn't return to Poland: Was he afraid?

‘No, I'm not afraid to go back. But what should I go back to? I've lost my family, I haven't any friends there. The only people I know are here in Landsberg.’

I asked Dimitrios Cohen the same question about Greece. ‘There are many Greeks who do not like Jews now,’ he explained. ‘Once, that was not so in Greece. I lived in the city of K—— [*sic*]. For hundreds and hundreds of years my family had lived there. There was no difference; we were all Greeks. Never was there an anti-Semitic pogrom in all the history of Greece. Then the Germans came. First, they did nothing. Then they said, ‘Greeks this side, Jews that.’ Then

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some Greeks themselves began to say it. One day the Germans came with Greek police and arrested all the Jewish men in the city.' He paused for a moment and then continued in the same level voice: 'I was at home. They arrested me and clubbed my wife and baby to death. I do not think I will go back to Greece.'

Some Polish Jews did return to Poland, hoping to resume their lives and work. But historic Polish anti-Semitism, encouraged during the German occupation, still flourished in spite of the efforts of the present government to eradicate it. After a number of anti-Semitic pogroms, climaxed by Kielce, they fled back to Germany, bringing thousands of other Jews with them.

When I arrived at the Landsberg Center, in October, all but eight of the 4500 DPs were Jews, mainly Polish. To these Jewish DPs, Landsberg represented a little island of security in a hostile world. Of the eight non-Jews, two were Catholics married to Jewish wives; one was a Hungarian Catholic woman married to a Lithuanian Jew, and two were Greek Catholic men.

A directive had been issued ordering the transfer of all non-Jews to nationality camps. When this became known, the two Greek Catholics came to me with a delegation of their Jewish Greek countrymen, of whom there were about fifty in Landsberg.

'We refuse to leave,' said the two Catholics.

'We can't let them go,' said the delegation – 'they are our brothers.'

'Together we worked for three years,' explained one of them. 'For three years, in concentration camp, we ate the same bread, we slept in the same dug outs. Look!' And he rolled up his left sleeve, exposing the tattooed number – 'This is the mark of our common sorrow.'

'They will go together with us and live

together with us in Palestine,' said another of the delegation. 'They are our brothers.'

During the Fall of 1945 the infiltration into the American Zone of Occupation of refugees from Poland – 'Infiltrates', as they became officially known – was just a mere trickle. The 4500 residents of the Landsberg Jewish Center were strictly displaced persons. All had served terms in Nazi concentration camps, work camps, or slave factories, and had been liberated in Germany. The Landsberg Jewish Center was literally a city of souls snatched from slaughter. Some had been liberated in and around Landsberg; others had been brought there or made their way to it from other parts of Germany. But for every living Jew in the Center, there were two murdered ones buried in mass graves within a radius of five kilometres of the camp.

There may perhaps still be need for it, but this is not the place to repeat the horrible tale of their sufferings. All of them revealed – some clearly, others guardedly – the physical, emotional and psychic damage inflicted by the brutality of their oppressors who had coldly and systematically tried to transform them into beasts of burden and senseless automatons.

Walking through the Center one morning shortly after my arrival, I noticed a young fellow in the middle twenties slouched against a building. I got him to tell me something about himself. He told me that his name was Jakub, that he was born in Warsaw, and had been studying at the medical college there when the Germans occupied the city. He was sent to Bergen-Belsen where he dug sewers for a while and later cleaned officers' toilets.

'What are you doing now?' I asked.

'What do you mean, "now"?''

'I mean, what work are you doing in the Center?'

He looked at me with a slight air of

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belligerency mingled with a touch of disdain.

'Why should I work? I worked enough for the Nazis. Five years I worked for them. Now others can work for me.'

Although many DPs felt as did Jakub – that the Germans should now be made to work for them – there were others who saw the need to distinguish between imposed and elected work. They were firmly opposed to the employment of Germans (who, incidentally, would have been paid salaries by the local Burgermeister), maintaining, rather, that all work should be done by the residents of the Center themselves. These were the men and women who volunteered their services as doctors, nurses, cooks, secretaries, teachers, waiters, or garbage collectors. Joe Pilzer was one of these. He had regained much of his health and was employed as a carpenter's apprentice. One day as he was building a railing in the room next to my office, which was being converted into a library, I provocatively asked him why he was working so hard.

'Why?' he repeated in a surprised voice. 'I've got to work.'

'Not necessarily,' I countered.

'UNRRA gives you a place to sleep, warm clothing, all the food you need, and even cigarettes, whether you work or you don't.'

'You don't understand, Mr. Director,' he explained patiently. 'I can't afford to be idle. Look, we Jews have always been treated like dogs, not like people. In the concentration camp we were treated worse than dogs. But no more. Now we're going to build our own land, where we'll be able to live like human beings.'

'You mean in Palestine,' I said. 'But this isn't Palestine, this is Landsberg, Germany.'

'No, Mr. Director, the Landsberg Jewish Center is a little outpost of

Palestine. Here is where I'm preparing myself for the hard work ahead. They'll need carpenters like me. I can't afford to be idle.'

Joe's devotion to his work was matched by hundreds of others, though not in every case was the devotion prompted exclusively by a faith in a Jewish Palestinian homeland. For example, there was Nathan Markowsky. It was after midnight one day when I lifted my head wearily from the pile of documents before me and turned to Markowsky, a member of the Camp Committee. Markowsky, one of the few men in the camp over forty-five, had been the manager of a large paper mill in Poland, a fairly well-to-do person. He had owned a summer home, an American Packard car. His wife was a cultured musician, his two daughters were doing graduate work at the University of Warsaw. The Nazis had taken all from him.

'Markowsky,' I said, 'let's stop now.'

'No, no, let's finish this list first.'

'It's frightfully late. We're both tired.' I paused and then added: 'By the way, why are you working yourself to the bone like this?'

'What have I left to do? My wife and two girls were cremated in Maidanek. Now my family is everybody in the Landsberg Center.' He smiled wryly. 'It's a big family and takes much work.'

It was people like Joe Pilzer and Nathan Markowsky – the 'derelicts' of Nazi bestiality – who helped organize and participated in the work of running a community whose population at one time rose to 6300. Under the most trying circumstances, with limited facilities and a heartbreaking shortage of supplies, they operated a hospital, a dental clinic, a weekly newspaper, a cinema, recreation centers, a kindergarten, grade school, a folk university, sport clubs, clothes and

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shoe repair shops. They established their own police department, courts, fire department and sanitation department. They ran conferences, training sessions, concerts, debates and lectures on historical, scientific, political and cultural subjects. They distributed supplies, they cooked and served the food, ran the public laundries and baths, maintained, repaired and renovated the camp structures. Out of an empty armory, with salvage from some disintegrating wooden storage buildings, a theatre seating 1100 people was constructed, with a stage of professional proportions and conveniences.

One of the most interesting phases of the educational program was the technical courses – classes in locksmithing, tool making, shoe-making, carpentry, automotive engineering, costume designing, leather work, hat designing, and many others. These classes, conducted as a joint undertaking of ORT and UNRRA, with some assistance in the way of supplies by AJDC, were taught by DP instructors, residents of the Landsberg Center. Young people from all ends of the American Zone sought admission into these classes where, in spite of a heartrending shortage of instruments and supplies and an appalling lack of text books, products of amazing inventiveness, artistry and skill were produced. Enthusiasm, persistence, courage, and dauntless spirit overcame the hardships of cold, cramped class-rooms, uncomfortable benches, inadequate black-boards, and a pathetic lack of writing supplies. Ingenuity and determination combined to produce in time some of the tools and instruments needed for the classes.

In the brief course of months, the people of the Landsberg Jewish Center had established a varied social life, rich in cultural, recreational and educational

opportunities, that employed almost 2000 residents and provided schooling for about 1500 children and adults.

What was it in these penniless, homeless, tortured people, despite memories filled with the agonized cries of murdered children and parents, despite nightmares of beatings and torture, despite the years of filth, starvation, and humiliation of the concentration camp; despite the uncertainty of the morrow, that drove them relentlessly toward a civilized way of life?

One's speculation on this miracle of the spirit of man may end in varied and complicated explanations. I was content to rest with the phenomenon itself when one cold January morning I walked into the 'sport hall' and saw Jakub, the youngster who thought he had done enough work for a lifetime, running a group of plump, perspiring young ladies through a fast and exacting routine of setting-up exercises!

ORT in Post-Holocaust Poland

7

Emil Sommerstein was a dominant figure in Jewish life in Poland before World War II. A recognized Zionist leader, he headed a number of Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Farmers Cooperative Union, and was a member of the Polish Parliament (Sejrn). After he spent some time incarcerated in the Gulag, the Soviet authorities decided it would be advantageous to have Sommerstein, a respected Jewish public figure and a non-Communist, within Poland's Soviet-controlled administration. Sommerstein was released and appointed chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CCJP). The committee included representatives of all the Jewish political parties that operated before 1939 (apart from the Revisionists) and worked to provide material support for Jewish survivors and help them to resume productive life.¹ In July 1945 Sommerstein was given permission, alongside other Jewish leaders, to participate in the first post-war conference of the Zionist Organization.²

Around that time Aron Syngalowski wrote a letter to Sommerstein, outlining a plan by the ORT Central Committee, together with ORT branches in the United States and Canada, to assist the Polish Jewish community. The organization was offering its usual 'package' of vocational training, machinery and tools for Jewish artisans and artisan cooperatives, and material support for Jewish farmers and farming associations. ORT had already sent a supply of tools delivered from Canada to Poland by a Soviet ship: in February and July 1945, two five-ton shipments of machines and tools including equipment for vocational schools, sewing machines and tools for carpenters, electricians, shoemakers and masons arrived in Poland. The tools were produced by European refugees, trainees at the ORT school in Montreal.³ However, in his letter, Syngalowski made it clear that in order to establish a regular system of support, ORT would be required to be permanently present in Poland.⁴

For many Jews in the West there was a crucial difference between assisting Holocaust survivors in Poland and developing long-term projects that aimed to encourage and revitalize Jewish life in the country. This was also debated within ORT, and finally, despite a vociferous group of ORT activists who predicted that the initiative would fail and claimed that Jews should leave Poland altogether, the majority of people at ORT (including Syngalowski) were in favour of establishing long-term projects. The decision was inspired

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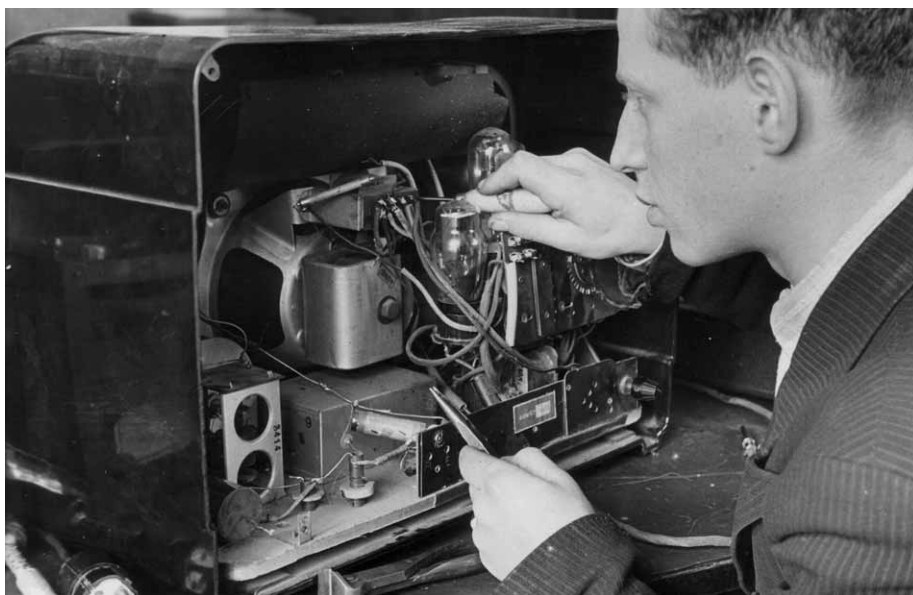
by the wish to see Polish Jews enjoying equal civil rights for the first time and to help them benefit from unprecedented opportunities for upward social mobility. In addition, there was the hope that Poland would not replicate the Soviet model and avoid becoming a totalitarian society.

On 13 and 14 October 1945, the first post-war conference of ORT Poland activists in Warsaw discussed the early results of their work. Representatives of the government, CCJP and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) took part in the conference. Among the leaders of the revived ORT branch was journalist Gregorz Jaszunski, the son of ORT Poland's last leader, Joseph Jaszunski. Twenty-four vocational courses were already operating in several different locations and fourteen other courses were being developed at the time of the conference.⁵ At first, the Polish government preferred ORT to operate as a sub-division of CCJP but the economic devastation in the country made the government more tractable, and in December 1945 it allowed ORT to operate in the country as an independent association. A month later, on 14 January 1946, ORT opened a temporary central office in Warsaw and the final legislation regarding ORT Poland was obtained on 15 May 1946.⁶

By that time, the Jewish population in Poland was increasing rapidly. The organized repatriation from the Soviet Union reached its peak in spring 1946, bringing to Poland 136,550 Jews. This, together with 14,000 Jews who were demobilized in autumn 1945 as well as about 20,000 refugees who arrived independently from the Soviet Union and a further 60,000–70,000 concentration camp survivors and others who survived in hiding, meant that there were at least 245,000 Jews in Poland by mid-summer 1946. However, the pogrom in Kielce on 4 July, among other assaults elsewhere, convinced many to leave the country. By the end of 1947, only 100,000 Jews remained in Poland.⁷

Among those who stayed were many youngsters who had lost their families and were scattered in the towns and villages around Poland. These were children who missed years of study during the war and were suffering from trauma and other psychological problems. Their integration into the Jewish education system was a real challenge, and in 1945 Jewish sociologist Arieh Tartakower wrote: 'How can the child who witnessed and survived the inferno of Jewish life under Nazi domination be converted into a member of human society with a more or less normal attitude not only towards the Germans, but towards all other nations as well? ... No real cultural reconstruction will be possible, unless this educational problem is solved first.'⁸ The youngsters who had arrived as repatriates from the Soviet Union also had to overcome a language barrier: they grew up speaking Russian while Polish and Yiddish were the languages of the Jewish education system.

These young people had to be integrated into the system and brought up to par with their relative age groups so they could continue their education. In

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ORT school for radio technicians, Dzierzoniow, Poland, 1948.

order to take part in this process, ORT developed its educational projects in cooperation with the youth division of CCJP. These projects focused mainly on manual training, acquainting children with materials and tools so that they could eventually benefit from the growing demand for qualified workers, technicians and engineers. ORT schools and courses were opened in more than a dozen Polish towns: twenty-five schools operated in 1946, sixty-six schools in 1947 and ninety-seven in 1948. The teachers and instructors showed exceptional patience working with the students, many of whom were rehabilitated after completing their two years at ORT technical schools. ORT helped its graduates to continue their education at higher technical colleges. Some went on to the Polytechnics and later occupied important posts in industry and academia.⁹

Training for adults was another major part of ORT Poland's programmes, as 37 per cent of returnees had no profession.¹⁰ The need for a network of vocational courses was at least partly due to the social and economic transformation of the country and the rise of a socialist economy in which the nationalization of industry, trade and transport signalled the end of the middleman. In addition, as Jan Gross shows in his analysis of post-Holocaust Poland, the native Polish petty bourgeoisie had filled the social vacuum created by the mass killings of the Jews and were obviously reluctant to 'make room' for those who returned. Gross also writes about the resurfacing of the perennial obsession with 'productivization':

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There was a whole effort, both within the Jewish community and outside it, to bring about 'productivization' of the Jews, who presumably did not want to be employed except as middlemen and traders, that is, in jobs that 'do not produce' anything. The movement reflects a derogatory outside perception of the Jews as people who live off the work of others, but also an internalized sense of the inferiority and social backwardness of the traditional Jewish community. To fully deconstruct the theme, one would have to concurrently analyse Zionist efforts to teach East European Jews working skills to prepare them for *aliyah*; Nazi categorizations of Jews in the ghettos according to working ability; *Judenrate* response to those demands during wartime ...; and also the Communist mythologization of the working class and institutionalized efforts to 'productivize' Jews by the Central Committee of Polish Jews and designated agencies of the Polish government.¹¹

It was decided initially that six-month courses would provide the best solution for people with families; the majority of adult students were keen to gain no more than the core skills of a trade (such as shoemaking, bag making, electrical fitting and watchmaking) and were unwilling to embark on in-depth training. Six months of training, however, proved insufficient for learn-



Students at the ORT school for weaving in Bielsko-Biala, Poland, c. 1948–49.

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A student at the ORT training workshop for leather processing in Cracow, Poland, c. 1948.

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ing any sort of trade and there was growing demand for longer courses. The majority of women applied for dressmaking courses, but ORT encouraged them to learn other trades, such as lingerie, corsetry, weaving, and decorative art.¹²

Another important aspect of ORT's activities in Poland was providing training programmes for members of Jewish cooperatives. A network of 220 light industry cooperatives, united under the umbrella of the Jewish Solidarnosc (Solidarity) centre, was built with aid from JDC. They sold their produce through a network of twenty-four shops and one department store. These producers' cooperatives, with 6,000 Jewish workers in 1947 and twice as many in 1949, were established in response to the anti-Semitism that prevailed among the artisan trades; Polish artisans simply refused to work with Jews.¹³ In a sense, it was a reincarnation of the Jewish autarky advocated by Lestschinsky in the 1930s.¹⁴ In 1948, the Polish Ministry of Education indirectly sponsored ORT's programmes by sanctioning a preferential exchange rate, which gave ORT many millions of zloty. In 1949, this became a direct subsidy. That year the second national ORT congress was convened in Warsaw.¹⁵

Despite all this, the days of ORT Poland were numbered. In 1948, after three years of pursuing a united front policy, the Polish regime finally turned to Stalinism. The Jewish sector was reshaped and placed under the exclusive



ORT dental technicians course in Lodz, Poland, 1948.

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domination of the Communists, and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was replaced by the Social-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (SCSJP). By the end of 1949, the Jewish cooperative movement *Solidarnosc* was amalgamated with its Polish counterpart. During that year, the Bund and all Zionist parties and organizations were disbanded. Towards the end of 1949, JDC was ousted from Poland, and in 1950 the vocational ORT schools and courses were taken over by the state.¹⁶ The events in Poland echoed the Soviet regime's suppression of virtually all the remaining Jewish institutions and the arrests of scores of employees. However, according to Leon Shapiro, who assiduously followed the events in eastern Europe, 'Poland did not experience the worst excesses of the anti-Semitic trend which characterized the Soviet satellites during the last years or so of Stalin's life'.¹⁷ Indeed, ORT Poland was shut down a year after other ORT operations in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were closed down.¹⁸

In the 1950s Poland was home to a fairly vibrant Jewish community and a relatively dominant group of Yiddish literati who had several Warsaw-based outlets for their journalistic and literary endeavours. In contrast to Soviet Yiddish literati, the Yiddish literary circle in Poland was not isolated from colleagues abroad. On 20 May 1955, during a meeting in Warsaw, a group of Polish Yiddish writers decided to take advantage of the changes in the Soviet Union following the death of Stalin and the first signs of Jewish cultural revival there, and to strengthen their ties with Soviet literati.¹⁹ Warsaw became a stopover point for Jewish activists and journalists going to and from Moscow. Among such journalists was Leon Crystal, a special correspondent of the New York Yiddish daily *Forverts* (Forward), famous for breaking the story of the August 1952 execution of a group of prominent Soviet Yiddish writers.²⁰

On his way back from Moscow, Crystal briefed Hersh (Gregorz) Smolar, chairman of SCSJP and editor of the Yiddish newspaper *Folks-Shtime* (People's Voice), about the results of his two-month journalistic investigation. As a result, an editorial entitled 'Our Pain and Our Consolation', published in *Folks-Shtime*, provided revealing information about Stalinist repression of the Yiddish literati. It dispersed the smokescreen created by the well-oiled Soviet propaganda machine, which did its best to camouflage the anti-Jewish climate of the Stalinist society, particularly the closing down of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and Yiddish theatres and publications in 1948–50 – a step that made Soviet Yiddish culture disappear from public life. While many left-wingers rejected Crystal's articles as malicious slander published by the notoriously anti-Soviet *Forverts*, the editorial in *Folks-Shtime*, which was part of the Polish communist mainstream, was harder to dismiss. The story set off a soul-searching debate in pro-Soviet circles and catalysed the decline of the Yiddish-speaking sector in the International Communist Movement.²¹ In the general context of the then strained Polish-Soviet relations, with Polish leadership

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seeking to secure some level of independence from Moscow, it would be wrong to assume that the publication of the editorial was caused by rash misjudgement: the conflict with the Soviet Union was part of the process that led to the so-called 'Polish October' (the month when Wladyslaw Gomulka became first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party), with a number of important changes in the state apparatus and a certain liberalization of the regime.²² The editorial on 4 April 1956 was approved by the highest Polish authorities.²³

With the production slump, shortages of goods and raw materials, inflation and partial unemployment, the economic situation in Poland at the time was difficult. The United States assumed that the maverick regime of Wladyslaw Gomulka would weaken the Soviet coalition and started a programme of economic aid to Poland.²⁴ The problem of unemployment was acute for Poland's Jewish population, especially as several thousand Jews returned from the Soviet Union and many did not have professions that were of any use in Poland. In addition, only a minority of the repatriates could speak Polish well enough – their languages were mainly Russian and Yiddish. Thus the problem of vocational training once again became urgent. The Polish Jewish leadership signalled that the authorities were ready to renew ORT's operations, but ORT could not say whether or when this was to happen or under what conditions it would consider returning to the country.²⁵

In September 1957, following unofficial contacts with former ORT Poland workers, World ORT Union received letters from the Presidium of SCSJP with proposals to start work in Poland. Later that month Joseph Chorin, a member of the ORT Executive Committee, and Vladimir Halperin, the World ORT Union Director, arrived in Warsaw. In welcoming them, Hersh Smolar declared that ORT was an institution whose idea was always dear to Polish Jews 'because it was the idea of Jewish progress, of social restructuring and productivization' and mentioned ORT's contribution to Jewish life in Poland in the first years after the Holocaust.²⁶ A quarter of a century later Smolar recalled that it was much easier to reach an understanding with ORT's representatives than with their counterparts from JDC.²⁷

On 3 October 1957, Halperin wrote a 'very confidential' letter to the American ORT President William Haber:

I am just about to write my report on my return from Poland a few days ago. But before the report will be finished I wish to write you in haste in order to acquaint you with the essentials.

After spending two days in Vienna, where Mr Chorin and myself were able to consider in detail the rather important ORT work in favour of Jewish Hungarian refugees,²⁸ and where we also had discussions at the Israeli Legation in connection with our trip to Poland, we arrived in Warsaw on September 10th. We were received at the airport by the Presi-

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dent [Hersh Smolar] and the General Secretary [David Sfar] of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee, the Director of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and by the former director of ORT in Poland, Mr Slobodkin. The same evening a small reception was arranged in our honour, attended by about twenty people, by the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee and by the community. In his welcoming address, Mr Smolar, president of the Committee, stressed the importance of ORT's work in Poland in the past and the still prevailing popularity of ORT in Poland among its Jewish population. He also indicated his regret in regard to the enforced interruption of ORT's work in 1950, and expressed his profound satisfaction to welcome again representatives of the ORT Union in Warsaw. After sketching a general picture of the situation of the Jewish population in Poland, which today comprises about 40,000, Mr Smolar stressed the problem of Jews repatriated from the USSR, numbering about 8,000 and about 12 to 15,000 still expected until the end of 1958. Speaking of these repatriates, he stressed their difficult situation and concluded his address with the words 'helft uns' [Yiddish: help us]. ...

Incidentally, it will interest you to know, that when [director general of overseas operations of JDC] Mr Charles Jordan, accompanied by Mr Lewin, arrived in Warsaw ten days later, they were received in the same manner with the difference, however, that the government was not represented at the airport and instead of the former director of ORT, the former director of the JDC attended the reception on the evening of their arrival.

I cannot enter into too many details in this letter, which would be late in leaving if it became too long. I shall confine myself to the following points:

1. In addition to the leaders of the Social and Cultural Committee as well as the Vaad Hakehiloth [Jewish Religious Organization], we had many discussions with the Minister of Israel and his closest colleagues, with former ORT workers and with a great number of Jews belonging either to the native population or to the group of repatriates from Russia. Among both these groups there was a considerable number of people who, on various grounds had been bound to ORT in the past, some had been members of ORT committees, instructors or former students. In addition to these contacts with Jews, we had some very long talks with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare [Stanislaw Zawadzki], as well as with the Vice-President of the Council of State and various other government officials.

2. ... I am glad to say that on the whole it appears to me that the plan of action which we have worked out, and of which I shall speak to you in a minute, seems to correspond to Mr Jordan's ideas. On the other hand, 9/10 of our plan was very warmly received by the Minister of Israel and his colleagues.

3. The current political situation in Poland cannot fail to strike the western observer by reason of its very pronounced trend towards freedom

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of expression which is manifest both in part of the press as well as in talks with the man in the street or with officials, in the influx of foreigners, tourists, journalists and businessmen, and also in the possibility of finding at news stands various foreign newspapers, such as, for example, the *New York Herald*. The current government, and particularly Gomulka, enjoy very great popularity, even though the economic situation remains extremely precarious.

4. In regard to Jews, the government adopts a rather friendly attitude, but among the population anti-Semitism is violent. For that reason, as well as for other reasons, almost the total number of Jews repatriated from Russia, as well as a large part of the local Jewish population want to emigrate to Israel. The government shows no opposition to the emigration, although it tries not to precipitate matters in avoiding the creation of a situation which might risk a serious reprimand by its mighty eastern neighbour.

5. The main discussion on government level was one which lasted nearly three hours with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, a talk which was followed by an evening which Mr Chorin spent at his home. This minister, who is not a Jew, and who is one of the strong men of the government, is particularly close to Gomulka and is extremely influential in the country.²⁹ *Nota bene* and for your strictly personal information, the government of Israel has just invited him for an official visit. In the course of this very cordial and frank discussion we have been able to explain to the Minister the position of ORT in general, and in Poland today in particular. Same as Mr Smolar, he too expressed his regrets as to what happened in 1950 and let us understand clearly that the government was interested that ORT should resume its activity in Poland, especially insofar as it concerns aid to repatriates from the USSR, and that it would do everything to facilitate our task in putting at our disposal premises and granting subventions. We did not deem it opportune to finalize too much the eventual undertakings of the government, as this would automatically imply a definite decision, even an undertaking on our part, on which there could be no question before the session of our Executive Committee. The question was also raised concerning equipment which belonged to us in the past, and I believe that some formula might be found to the effect that at least some part of it could be returned to us. The Minister and those members of his staff with whom we met, have understood perfectly that the machinery which would be sent, must remain the property of the ORT Union and even, it was understood, that if we allow individual tools to our graduates or to artisans, they would be entitled to take away these tools or machinery with them on leaving for Israel.

6. In discussions with the leaders of the Social and Cultural Committee, we have clearly specified that ORT would not be able, currently, to make

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considerable investments in Poland but that we realized ... the importance of ORT's tasks in the field of *accelerated* training of adults, by means of evening courses or day courses with a duration of four to ten months, according to the choice of trade. We have rejected the possibility of creating normal vocational schools with the usual curriculum of from two to four years. ...

7. In our opinion, the programme of action of ORT in Poland should [include] for a first period of about six months, approx. 1,000 people, mostly adults. I do not believe in a long-term programme of ORT in Poland, but I am convinced that for two or three years, or perhaps longer – who knows? – ORT has to play a historical role in Poland and that, if we do not exist, one should create an ad hoc organization to assume urgently the training or reclassifying vocationally those uprooted Jews who wish to go to Israel and who, if they arrive with a trade become an asset, and if they arrive untrained shall be a grave liability for the state. ...³⁰

In November 1957 a conference of SCSJP announced that ORT would help to train recent repatriates.³¹ One of the conditions formulated by the Polish authorities was that the money for ORT's activities in Poland would not come from Germany, particularly not from the Claims Conference funds. Leaders of SCSJP also insisted on adding a 'constructive aspect' to ORT's work, that is, projects that would contribute to Polish Jewish communal life rather than to vocational training aimed exclusively at emigration to Israel. In December



Toy-manufacturing course in Legnica, Poland, 1958

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1957 a new ORT Committee was elected in Warsaw and work was renewed. ORT operated as an autonomous body with its own name, administration and finances, but was not as a fully independent, membership-based organization as it was in 1946–50.

The year 1957 saw Jewish cooperatives reappear in Poland as anti-Semitic sentiments again prevented Jewish repatriates from joining general cooperatives. During the 1950s and 1960s Jewish cooperatives belonged to the centralized cooperative system but formed an autonomous network coordinated by the economic section of SCSJP, in which both ORT and JDC were represented. Leaders of SCSJP, together with their Ukrainian and Belorussian counterparts, had convinced the government that cooperatives could reinforce the financial basis of national-minority organizations and as a result were allowed to form associations of cooperatives under its auspices. Although the majority of the new Jewish cooperatives produced goods, often from high-quality raw materials supplied by JDC, two cooperatives in Warsaw managed to generate income from other services: one was a cooperative of translators and the other ran a Jewish restaurant.

With ORT training and supporting hundreds of recent repatriates, the number of Jewish cooperatives rose to seventeen, with almost 2,000 Jewish workers – 90 per cent of whom were ORT graduates. These cooperative workers and their families, almost one fifth of the Jewish population in Poland in the 1950s and 1960s, were the social core of Jewish cultural life in the country.³²

For ORT, this new period was driven by a different ideology from the one in the years immediately after the war. While the main objective then was to develop the economic foundation of Jewish life in Poland, this time the aim was to facilitate emigration to Israel. Many Polish Jews were clearly ready to leave, but the Polish government was under pressure from the Kremlin and forced new repatriates to stay in Poland for at least one year before leaving for Israel. Chaim Suller, managing editor of the New York communist daily *Morgn-Frayhayt* (Morning-Freedom), who visited Warsaw in the summer of 1956, noted that this ongoing emigration worried the leaders of SCSJP: the dwindling numbers meant that *Folks-Shtime* could not be published every day of the week.³³ It is unlikely, however, that the mood among Polish Jewry was responsible for the change in ORT's ideology. After all, even in the 1940s Jews in post-Holocaust Poland were more likely to emigrate than not.

From 1957 onwards the main task of ORT Poland was to provide training for future emigrants to Israel. Under the circumstances, there was no need for ORT to create a permanent infrastructure there, and it was more or less clear that the training equipment would be left in the country at the end of the operation. Instead of importing machinery, ORT decided to use workshops in existing educational institutions and factories (the ministries of education and industries assisted ORT in making these arrangements) and to set up its own

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Hairdressing course in Wroclaw, Poland, 1958.

centres only for courses that did not require heavy equipment. A total of 12,500 adults and children took part in ORT's training programme between 1957 and 1967, during this second, and final phase of operations in Poland.³⁴

Given ORT's predominantly emigration-oriented work, it is hardly surprising that the Communist leaders of SCSJP became increasingly suspicious of the organization. They refused to allow ORT its own offices in Warsaw, insisting that it operated from the premises of SCSJP, and appointed their own representatives to dominant positions within ORT Poland.³⁵

In 1964, ORT summed up its achievements in Poland:

Six years ago ORT, in association with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was officially invited by the Polish government to revive its activities in the once great Jewish community, now reduced to some 30,000. Almost a third of this number, many of them coming from the Soviet Union as repatriates, have attended ORT courses in fifteen different localities. ORT in Poland not only trains its students, who are of all age groups, but places them in employment, and provides general education where appropriate so that tradesmen may qualify for State proficiency certificates. ORT is therefore closely linked to the economic life of the Jewish community as a whole.³⁶

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Following the Six Day War, the climate in the Jewish sector of the International Communist Movement took a turn for the worse. This was particularly true in Poland. Anti-Israel and general anti-Jewish rhetoric began to dominate the Polish public sphere, revealing the anti-Semitic culture flourishing in the highest echelons of state leadership and driven by the regime's hostile response to protests from Polish intellectuals, who were subsequently labelled as representatives of the 'Zionist fifth column'. The state media attacked JDC and ORT, accusing them of using philanthropy 'as a smokescreen for hiding their real purpose – namely intelligence activities'.³⁷ In August 1967 ORT was informed of the decision to liquidate it as of the end of the following October and according to David Slobodkin, the head of ORT in Poland, 'the liquidation of the apparatus took place in an unbelievably unpleasant atmosphere'.³⁸ For almost a year after the end of ORT's operations in Poland, the authorities insisted on carrying out a series of audits and investigations in a futile attempt to find any possible confirmation of misappropriations. ORT's assets in Poland were finally handed over to SCSJP, whose leaders, including Smolar and Sfar, were forced to leave the country. *Folks-Shtime*, previously published four times a week, was transformed into a weekly, while the Yiddish



Handicraft course at the Jewish school in Legnica, Poland, 1958.

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literary journal *Yidische Shriftn* (Jewish Writings) and the publishing house Yidish Bukh (Jewish Book) were closed down. The Jewish schools were integrated into the general education system and the Jewish producers' cooperatives were incorporated into the general cooperative network.³⁹ Poland once again became a no-go area for Jewish organizations.

1. Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists in Poland* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 232.
2. Hanna Shlomi, 'The "Jewish Organizing Committee" in Moscow and the "Jewish Central Committee" in Warsaw, June 1945–February 1946: Tackling Reparation', in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (eds.), *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 245.
3. 'ORT Ship Tools to Poland', *The New York Times*, 23 July 1945; 'Reports Poles Get 5 Tons of Tools from Rehabilitation Group', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 August 1945.
4. Shimshon Tapuach, *Pe'iluyot 'Ort' be-Polin ha-amamit: ba-shanim 1945–1950* (Ef'al: Yad Tabenkin, 1981), appendix A.
5. *Pierwszy walny zjazd delegatów organizacji twórczości ORT w Polsce* (n.p., 1946). For the story of Gregorz Jaszunski's survival, see Mordechai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescues of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1993), p. 241.
6. David Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland, 1946–1967: Report on the Activities of ORT in Poland in the Postwar Period', pp. 1–3, World ORT Archive, ref. d06a083.
7. Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 203–7.
8. Arie Tartakower, 'Problems of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction in Europe', *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 18/5 (1945), p. 272.
9. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', pp. 3–5, 8–9.
10. Yosef Litvak, 'Polish-Jewish refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards', in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (eds.), *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 236.
11. Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 123.
12. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', pp. 5–6.
13. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', p. 20; Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 231.
14. See Chapter 4 for further discussion.
15. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', p. 10.
16. Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 233, 254–55.
17. Leon Shapiro, 'Poland', *American Jewish Year Book*, 57 (1956), p. 434.
18. Shapiro, 'Poland', pp. 266–9.
19. Shlomo Strauss-Marko, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn yishev in nokhmilkhomedikn Poyln* (Tel Aviv: author's publication, 1987), pp. 170–71. For the situation in the Soviet Union see Gennady Estraiikh, 'Literature versus Territory: Soviet Jewish Cultural Life in the 1950s', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 33/1 (2003), pp. 30–48.
20. See Harrison E. Salisbury, 'Soviet Confirms Jews' Execution', *The New York Times*, 7 March 1956.
21. Gennady Estraiikh, 'Metamorphoses of *Morgn-frayhayt*', in Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov, (eds.), *Yiddish and the Left* (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), pp. 144–66.
22. Aleksandr Orekhov, *Sovetskii Soiuz i Pol'sha v gody 'ottepeli': iz istorii sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Indrik, 2005), pp. 92–93.

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23. Hersh Smolar, *Oyf der letster positsye mit der letster hofenung* (Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Peretz, 1982), p. 216. In general, the year 1956 was a 'golden period' for the Polish journalists – cf. Aleksandr Orekhov, *Sovetskii Soiuz i Pol'sha v gody 'ottepeli'*, pp. 92–93.
24. Stephen S. Kaplan, 'United States Aid to Poland, 1957–1964: Concerns, Objectives and Obstacles', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 28/1 (1935), pp. 147–66.
25. *Barikht fun der sesye fun der tsentral-farvaltung fun velt-farband ORT*, 30 June–2 July 1957 (Geneva: ORT, 1957), pp. 50–51, World ORT Archive, ref. d06a040. [English version].
26. A[braham] K[waterko], 'Tsuzamentref mit di forshteyer fun velt-farband fun ORT', *Folks-Shtime*, 19 September 1957.
27. Smolar, *Oyf der letster positsye mit der letster hofenung*, p. 248.
28. ORT branches in France, Italy, Austria and Germany provided vocational and language training for Jewish refugees who fled Hungary after the anti-communist uprising in 1956. See *Barikht fun der sesye fun der tsentral-farvaltung fun velt-farband ORT*, p. 48.
29. The former Warsaw transport worker Stanislaw Zawadzki could speak some Yiddish. See Smolar, *Oyf der letster positsye mit der letster hofenung*, p. 176.
30. Letter from Vladimir Halperin to Dr William Haber, 3 October 1957, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a285.
31. 'Undzere oyfgabn oyfn gebit fun arbets-aynordenung un produktivizatsye', *Folks-Shtime*, 19 November 1957.
32. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', pp. 22–23; Smolar, *Oyf der letster positsye mit der letster hofenung*, pp. 248–50; David Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere* (Jerusalem: Yerusholayimer almanakh, 1984), pp. 251–52.
33. I want to thank the YIVO archivist Leo Greenbaum for allowing me to use Chaim Suller's uncatalogued collection. In 1957, the circulation dramatically declined due to the emigration, which was partly influenced by the revelations about the Stalinist period. See Strauss-Marko, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn yishev in nokhmilkhomedikn Poyln*, p. 149.
34. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', pp. 14–18.
35. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', p. 23.
36. 'ORT', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 September 1965, supplement, p. iv.
37. See, for example, 'Party in Poland Expels Colonel', *The New York Times*, 8 August 1968.
38. Slobodkin, 'ORT in Poland', p. 31.
39. Paul Novick, *The Jewish Problem in Poland* (New York: Morning Freiheit, 1969), p. 5; Leon Shapiro, 'Poland', *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 71 (1970), p. 471. See also Itche Goldberg and Yuri Suhl, (eds.), *The End of a Thousand Years: The Recent Exodus of the Jews from Poland*, (New York: Committee for Jews of Poland, 1971) as well as Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2000).



From the archive



An ORT sewing and embroidery class at the Jewish school in Wroclaw, Poland, 1958.

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In October 1957 an ORT delegation arrived in Poland to assess the needs of the local Jewish community before resuming activities in the country. This is an abridged version of the delegation's report, written by Joseph Chorin, member of the ORT Executive Committee and World ORT Union director Dr Vladimir Halperin. The original and complete document can be found in the World ORT Archive in London.

Report on Mr J. Chorin's and Mr Halperin's Mission to Poland Internal Report, Strictly Confidential

10th–25th September, 1957

J. Chorin
V. Halperin
Geneva, October 23rd, 1957

Before proceeding to Warsaw we stayed two days in Vienna to visit the vocational courses and training workshops of ORT there, as well as in the camps for Hungarian Jewish refugees at Korneuburg. This inspection is dealt with in another report.

Arrival in Poland

At our arrival to Warsaw we were met at the airport by Mr Lusycki, Director of the Ministry of Labour Social Welfare, Mr H Smolar, Chairman, and Mr D Sfar, Secretary General of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee, and by Mr D Slobodkin, former Director of ORT in Poland.

The evening of our arrival an intimate reception had been organized at the seat of the Social and Cultural Committee at which the following people were present: Messrs Smolar and Sfar, Dr Libo, President of the Vaad Hakehiloth, Eng. Frenkel, Vice-President of the Vaad Hakehiloth, Mr Olicki, writer and member of the Cultural Committee, Messrs. Hurwic, Wasserstrum and Felhender, all three members of the Presidium of the Social and Cultural Committee, Messrs. Kirman and Kwaterko, journalists, Mr Slobodkin, former director of ORT in Poland and Mr Eizman, former secretary general of the Polish ORT.

In his welcoming address, Mr Smolar emphasized the special importance of ORT's activity in Jewish economic and social life in Poland between the two wars, and from 1945 to 1950. The constructive help of ORT has always been

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for us the most welcome help, since it was help through work,' he said. 'We deplore what happened at the beginning of 1950 and we want you to know that we have learned a great deal since.' He expressed the deep satisfaction of the Presidium of the Cultural and Social Committee to be able to welcome again in Warsaw World ORT Union representatives. After having given some facts about the situation of the Jewish population in Poland, amounting to about 40,000, Mr Smolar talked about the fate of the repatriates from Russia. There are currently about 8,000 repatriates in Poland, 12 to 15,000 are expected to arrive by the end of 1958. The government extends considerable help to the Social and Cultural Committee not only in respect of the indigenous Jews, but also for the Jewish repatriates. 'However, the vastness of our tasks in the educational, social and economic field makes us need urgently the help of the large Jewish organizations, and first and foremost, ORT and the JDC.'

Mr Chorin, speaking in the name of our Executive Committee, stressed the fact that we were conscious of the deep roots and the rich past of ORT in Poland; for that reason we were happy to be able to accept the invitation to come to Warsaw to resume contact with Polish Jewry after a long and painful interruption. We have come to study on the spot the social and vocational situation of the Jewish population to get an idea as to whether and in which proportion the resumption of ORT work is necessary and possible. ORT always worked in Poland, as in all other countries, as an integral part of Jewish life and it is in this spirit that we wish to start our present mission here.

Dr Halperin expressed the emotion of the World ORT Union delegation to be in Warsaw and evoked the heroic path ORT had often followed during the difficult periods of Jewish life for over three

quarters of a century, only in the service of Jewish work without any political tendency. 'We think with pride of the role ORT has played in the social life of Polish Jewry between the two wars and after the liberation under the leadership of our unforgettable Dr Syngalowski, chairman of the World ORT Union Executive. We think of all this work with infinite sorrow, because so many thousands of our teachers, our students and graduates were exterminated by the Nazis. We honour their memory respectfully. ORT, a strictly non-political organization, has always gone wherever Jewish needs have called it, and we are grateful to the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee of Poland for its invitation which permits this renewal of contact which we hope will be useful and fruitful in the interest of the Jewish population. According to the terms of our mission we have not come here to decide on the spot on the resumption of ORT work, but we will submit the recommendations we think appropriate to our Executive Committee.' Dr Halperin then gave a survey of ORT's activity throughout the world, stressing particularly ORT work in Israel as well as in Western Europe and North Africa. This exposé, which was listened to with much interest, started a lively discussion in which everybody present participated. Among the questions which were asked were: Has the ORT Union got in touch with any other eastern European country during the last months? What do the government subventions in the various countries in which we work amount to? What are the admission conditions of the Central ORT Institute in Anières? What kind of structure has the ORT Union currently? The wish was expressed to receive all our publications in Yiddish etc.

During the discussion, Dr Libo of Lodz, President of the Communities Council, gave some supplementary

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information on the situation of the repatriates. He stated that there were ten kasher kitchens in the various communities, serving meals for 5 zlotys, while the real cost per person is 15 to 20 zlotys. The foods parcels which Mr Haymann's Committee sends from Geneva are much appreciated. The most difficult problems regarding the repatriates are accommodation and employment; or rather vocational retraining, since a large part of these repatriates come from administrative jobs. A number of them come from Vilna. It is extremely urgent to organize for these repatriates and also for a section of the local Jewish population courses for the young and for adults, and to provide some help to artisans to facilitate particularly their preparation for Israel.

The day after our arrival we examined the situation thoroughly, with two former ORT workers, engineer Slobodkin and Dr Kacenbogen, who gave us most valuable information.

First Meeting with the Leaders of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee

We had a four-hour meeting with Messrs Smolar, Sfard and Wasserstrum. The agenda was as follows:

1. General information regarding the situation of the Jewish population in Poland, by Mr Smolar.
2. Exposé by Mr Wasserstrum on what the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee has already done or was going to do in [sic] behalf of the repatriates.
3. Exposé by Mr Sfard on the manner in which the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee sees the task and the eventual functions of ORT in Poland.

It was clearly understood that during this first meeting our task was to get all the necessary information without as yet formulating any recommendations.

This is the résumé of the information we received:

Subsequent to the economic situation having become more difficult and the political evolution, radical changes took place in 1956. Jewish emigration has become a social problem. Up to March 1957, for both political and economic reasons, there was a mass emigration of tens of thousands of Jews which changed the social structure of Polish Jewry. This mass emigration stopped last spring. The number of indigenous Jews in Poland is now estimated at 35 to 40,000. There is an emigration but on an individual basis. Of the 10,000 Jews repatriated from Russia, 2,000 have left for Israel. The Polish government is giving constant financial aid to the Social Committee, recently it allotted 2,000,000 zlotys, mainly in favour of repatriates. Emigration is becoming more difficult, but in the case of re-uniting families, the negotiations of the Social and Cultural Committee with the government have until now been successful. Some days ago, the Social [and Cultural] Committee obtained the authorization for the departure of 500 repatriated invalids. There are currently 8,000 repatriates who need assistance in various ways, mainly constructive help. The deep nostalgia of these repatriates to live again in a Jewish atmosphere and in a Jewish environment must not be forgotten. The activity of the Social and Cultural Committee extends over three different spheres:

- a) active resistance to anti-semitism, not from the government, but from the population,
- b) the field of employment where many difficulties arise because of anti-semitism. This is both a political and economic problem and could be solved, at least partly, by the creation of 'Jüdische Arbeitsplätze' [Jewish employment places],

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c) a Jewish cultural program which shows already repercussions in Poland and among the immigrants in Israel. Many of the repatriates want to emigrate to Israel, but others want to stay. Since 1955 attempts had been made to make a larger number of Jewish women economically productive, but no efficient solution has been found. In this field too, the Social Committee has high hopes as regards ORT. There are currently considerably more unemployed women than men among the Jewish population. At the beginning emigration to Israel was quick, but now those repatriates who wish to stay and even those who want to emigrate, have more time before them and a vocational training program would be most useful. Of the 8,000 repatriates currently in Poland, one third can work, but 40% of them never learned an adequate trade, which means that approx. 1,000 people must be retrained without delay. One estimates that until the end of 1958 10 to 15,000 Jews will arrive from the former Polish territories of Russia which means a total of approx. 6,000 people, able to work, of whom about 2,000 must be retrained.

For various reasons these people cannot be sent to Polish institutions or cooperatives, mainly because of language difficulties and the anti-semitic atmosphere, so that most of them want to work among Jews. In Warsaw the Social Committee recently opened a cooperative workshop for about 30 craftsmen, i.e. tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, leather specialists, furriers; among them are some who formerly directed firms. The Committee would like to extend this cooperative to enable 100 people to work there. At Lodz, Wroclaw, Schidnice and Stettin similar workshops were started. Projects to open others in Kattowice, Cracow, Czenstochow, Skolicz, Glinice, Zjary and Dzorzonow are also under

way. Ninety per cent of the people working in these workshops are repatriates. The Social Committee project envisages to retrain 400 to 500 people in these workshop cooperatives.

The first task of the Social Committee, Mr. Sfarid declared, is to make these repatriates more work-minded and to improve their situation, in view of the fact that the Jewish repatriate returning to Poland does not know anyone who could help him, while non-Jewish repatriates receive considerable assistance from the 'Polonia' movement of the United States. The Jewish Social Committee receives a budget from the government for its permanent requirements, but if the Committee approaches ORT and the JDC as well for additional aid, it is because the manifold tasks exceed its current possibilities and because the Committee has to think of all those who do not want to remain in Poland and are preparing for emigration.

According to the leaders of the Social Committee, a resumption of ORT activities is particularly urgent for those who have never learned a trade and for those who have no possibility to exercise their trade independently or in existing enterprises. The most efficient system would be a combination between a workshop and a training centre for apprentices, i.e. the placement of apprentices with craftsmen who work in cooperative workshops at the rate of one or two apprentices per each member of the cooperative. This method is worthy of consideration from various points of view. First of all it would provide those interested with an occupation at an accelerated rate and besides the government disposes of an Intervention Fund from the Ministry of Labour, which finances two thirds of investments for cooperatives according to the number of participants and also pays 15,000 zlotys

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for each repatriated participant. In addition, the leaders of the Social Committee would like ORT to create a training centre for young people at Wroclaw which could be attended by youth from the whole district of Lower Silesia. During this first meeting, Mr Smolar insisted that we should get all the information we needed through direct contact with the government and also with repatriates themselves.

Consultations with the Israeli Ambassador

On September 11th, we had a long and very friendly talk with Mr K. Katz, the Israeli Ambassador and Mr Zvi Netzer, Second Secretary of the Embassy, who gave us important information.

Meeting with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and other High Officials

On the 12th of September we had an official audience, which lasted almost three hours, with Mr Zawadzki, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, who received us in a particularly friendly manner. [...] His Ministry, he said, is desirous to do all it can to facilitate our task in this field. It is true that accelerated courses are necessary, but in his opinion, it is important that ORT exercises its activity by setting up school-workshops, i.e. cooperative workshops which would enable the repatriates, including those who know a manual trade, to work while training a number of students or apprentices. The Minister of Labour gave us to understand that in this field too ORT could count on adequate help from the Government. In reply to the question regarding the premises which had formerly belonged to ORT, or occupied by ORT until 1950, the Minister indicated that he understood our claims perfectly, but since most of these buildings had been turned into flats, he did not think it would be wise or possible to envisage that

they would be returned to ORT. However, the Minister made a proposal to the effect that the government would place at the disposal of ORT the premises required for our various workshops. ...

We also drew the Minister's attention to the fact that ORT had, in the past, disposed in Poland of a great quantity of machinery and tools and that the resumption of our activities now would be greatly facilitated if at least part of this equipment could be returned to us. Here again the Minister recognized the logic of our argument, but explained that the shortage of machines was so great in Poland that despite his wish to be as helpful as possible, he could not assist us in as concrete a manner as we had outlined. However, after a long discussion on this point, Mr Zawadzki ensured us that his Ministry would certainly take our request into consideration and that in one way or another, which had still to be defined, he would see to it that ORT should benefit from material aid to facilitate the equipment of our new workshops and courses, particularly from the 'Interventions Funds' specially intended for cooperative workshops. The Minister also pointed out that there was a shortage of certain raw materials (like wool, leather, plastic materials etc.) and hoped that in the framework of its aid to craftsmen ORT would find it possible to import a sufficient quantity of these raw materials. We explained to the Minister that this activity was not part of our program and that only raw materials necessary for vocational training could be sent by us to Poland, insofar as they could not be obtained locally. We reserved, however, the right to review this question later in order to ascertain whether ORT could not take into consideration the wish expressed by the Minister of Labour.

At this meeting, the question of guarantees regarding the ownership of

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the equipment of ORT was thoroughly examined. The Minister assured us that not only the equipment of our workshops will remain the property of the World ORT Union, but also the machinery and tools which ORT might sell on credit to craftsmen or our graduates [...] could be taken with them in the case of emigration without any difficulty or payment of any special tax.

Mr Chorin advised the Minister of Labour of the structure of ORT organizations in each country. Should ORT resume its work in Poland, it would be necessary that our organization – which is strictly non-political – should have its own committee consisting of representatives of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee as well as other people from social and industrial circles in order to represent the entire Jewish population of this country. The Minister remarked that this question must be settled with the presidium of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee.

In the course of the interview the general situation of the Jewish population in Poland was discussed at length. The Minister of Labour is perfectly aware of the very strong tendency towards emigration. The government does not wish to prevent this, nor does it wish to speed it up.

Mr Zawadzki still remembered the favourable impression made upon him by the Central ORT Institute for the Training of Instructors in Anières, which he visited with Mr Chorin last summer. He noted with pleasure Dr Halperin's suggestion that if ORT resumed its activities in Poland, a certain number of vacancies at the Institute would be reserved for student-instructors who would be sent by ORT-Poland.

Mr Chorin had several interviews with Mr Lein Chain, Vice-President of the Council of State, with Mr Mlodzinski,

Minister of Trade. Both of them assured him of the great interest of public authorities in the resumption of ORT's activity in Poland and the authorities' desire to do all in their power to facilitate our task. [...]

Cooperative Workshop in Warsaw

Before going to the provinces, we got in touch with Mr Smolar to tell him of our meeting with the Minister of Labour and we also visited the young cooperative created by the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee in Warsaw. This cooperative is directed by Mr Platz, a tailor who was formerly in charge of the large Wroclaw cooperative 'Sgoda' financed in the past by the AJDC and at which ORT operated an important training program. Mr Platz enjoys a very good reputation among former ORT workers and the current leaders of the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee. This cooperative was set up four months ago and has today over thirty participants working in various trades. Some of them are repatriates, but there are also 'retrainees' who formerly worked in administrative jobs and even held directors' posts and who, because of the increasing anti-Semitism want to learn a manual trade which will enable them to earn their living independently. The workshops we saw are hardly equipped, and even a very modest assistance would be greatly appreciated.

We had a meeting with the members of the Landsmannschaft Committee consisting of Jews from Vilna, who gave us valuable information on the situation of repatriates and who also gave us names of interesting people among these repatriates. We are considering approaching some of them with a view to eventually entrusting them with responsible positions within our new program.

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Lodz

[...] At the end of 1956 Lodz had approx. 7,500 Jews. Today there are only 3,000 including 250 repatriated families. [...]

ORT activity in Lodz seems indicated, particularly on behalf of the repatriated Jews: a) those without a trade; b) those in need of assistance to be able to work in their trade; and c) for a number of indigenous Jews requiring retraining. The necessary premises will be placed at our disposal.

The courses which we think may be considered are the following: radio, cabinet-making, locksmithy, welding, sheet-metal work as well as one or two courses for women, for instance, children's clothes, corset and slipper-making.

Instructors can be found locally either among former ORT workers or among repatriates [...]

There is a Jewish school, the Peretz school in Lodz, which has 400 pupils between the ages of 7 and 16, 150 are children of repatriates. We envisage the creation of workshops for children and for pre-apprenticeship classes at this school. [...]

Wroclaw

Wroclaw is the centre of Lower Silesia and has about 16,000 Jews, half of whom are repatriates. Wroclaw itself (formerly Breslau) had last year 14,000 Jews, of whom 75% left last year. Five hundred repatriated Jewish families arrived from Russia during the last few months. [...]

The following courses are envisaged for Wroclaw: cabinet-making, motor repair, automechanics, welding, typewriter repair, leather and lacquer work, photography, knitting and weaving for women, cosmetic chemistry and household cleaning products (especially for women and invalids).

On an individual basis, the placement

of a number of young people in state schools could also be envisaged and a few could receive scholarships for the training of laboratory and radiology assistants, etc.

Most of the instructors could be found locally. We were told of the competence and particular devotion of the former ORT director in Wroclaw, Mr Benjamin Slucky, who emigrated to Israel early this year. He seems to have been one of the best ORT workers during the 1945/50 period. We have written to him and have just heard that he would be willing to accept a temporary ORT mission to Poland to take charge of one of the programs foreseen.

The Jewish school in Wroclaw has 350 pupils, more than half of them repatriates. The Jewish Social and Cultural Committee as well as the Israeli Minister asked us to introduce a manual training program for children to all Jewish schools in Poland. [...]

Cracow

Cracow once had 300,000 inhabitants, a third of whom were Jews. Today of the 400,000 inhabitants 3,000 are Jews among whom there are only about 100 repatriates. A new group of repatriates is expected to arrive shortly.

We spent two days in Cracow and had lengthy discussions with the leaders of the Community, Mr Jacoubovitch, President, and Mr Stulbach and Mr Rympel, and with the heads of the Social and Cultural Committee, the brothers Fiszgrund, one of whom is member of the Presidium of the Social Committee, formerly member of the Bund, as well as with many repatriated and local Jews.

We were told that the former ORT building would be placed at our disposal. The cinema operators' school opened by ORT in 1947 in Cracow still exists and is operated by the government. It would be possible to come to an agreement by

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which ORT could place groups of students there in the late afternoon.

There is a tailors' cooperative of 250 artisans in Cracow, of whom 18 or 19 are Jews. Some years ago all were Jews. There is also a cooperative for metal work with 200 workers, of whom 15 are Jewish.

We were asked to envisage the creation of a production and apprenticeship workshop for chemical products.

The fact that currently there are relatively few repatriates in Cracow does not make the need for ORT work there less urgent, since among the local Jewish population the vocational training problem for young people, adults and women alike is a serious one. About 50% of the able-bodied Jewish population in Cracow want to be retrained.

The trades we have in mind for this town are: cosmetic chemistry, beauty culture, electrical installation, cinema operators, welding, knitting and dressmaking.

In Cracow, as everywhere else, we realized the extraordinary range of the ORT program in Poland, not only before 1939, but also during the period between 1945 and 1950, in the course of which 10,000 Jews, youth and adults, learned a trade in ORT schools. One can say that all of them currently work either in Poland or, in their majority, in Israel. [...]

Our Contact with the AJDC Delegation

Mr Charles Jordan and Mr M. Levin arrived in Warsaw on the 19th of September. We met them on our return from the provinces and could give them our impressions and some useful information for their own mission. We were glad to note that in principle the delegates of the AJDC shared our feeling that it was imperative to give immediate help, be it in the social field, in the field of vocational training or re-training, to all

Jews who are in need, particularly those repatriated from Russia.

We agreed that the problem of repatriation from Russia is the point of departure for our activity, and also the official invitation which we received from the authorities and from the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee. However, we do not think we have the right to make any discrimination in the implementation of our program between the needy non-repatriated Jews and those repatriated from the USSR.

We told Mr Jordan that we envisaged the constitution in Warsaw of a Central Committee which should be as representative as possible of all classes of the Jewish population and in each town where we will work there should be local ORT committees composed of former ORTists and repatriated Jews. We were interested to learn later that Mr Jordan had defined the organization of AJDC work in Poland on similar lines.

We are convinced that a good basis of cooperation could be established between our two organizations. It must not be forgotten, however, that ORT enjoys in Poland, with the government and among the entire Jewish population, a very special prestige and a popularity which by far surpasses the reputation of any other social organization.

In its program and in its work methods ORT must – as in all other countries – scrupulously follow its own way of action and its own traditional methods of organization and techniques, naturally adapted to the requirements of the moment.

Interview with the Israeli Ambassador

As already mentioned in the first part of our report, we greatly appreciated the assistance given us by the Israeli Ambassador and his staff. We were happy to see that they welcomed our program

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almost in its entirety with complete approval.

Certain facts on the subject will be given verbally. The exceptional devotion of this team deeply moved us.

Program and Teaching Staff

The program outlined above foresees accelerated training in the course of the next twelve months of a minimum of 1,000 people in courses of a duration from 4 to 10 months, with the intention of extending this program to 1,500 to 2,000 participants within the limits of possibilities.

In addition, enrolment of 500 to 800 children into the manual training and apprenticeship workshops (at the rate of several hours a week) is also included in this program.

We think that after its establishment ORT in Poland should also extend limited, but effective help to artisans and workers who already know a trade, in the form of machines and tools supplied on credit terms and which would facilitate their integration in Israel immediately upon their arrival.

The accelerated courses would take place after working hours, i.e. after 4 pm, or full-time. In the latter case, an agreement must be concluded with the Jewish Social and Cultural Committee, or eventually with the AJDC, to obtain maintenance grants for those who attend ORT courses during the day.

As stated above, it seems to us that most of the instructors and teachers could be recruited locally from among former ORT workers or repatriates from the USSR. However, it will doubtlessly be necessary to delegate to Poland on temporary missions some technicians from Switzerland, France or Israel. We think that some young Anières graduates could be sent, provided they are in

possession of a national passport and know Polish or Yiddish.

These courses must be organized mainly in Warsaw, Lodz, Wroclaw, Dzierzonow, Lignice, Walbzych, Kattowice, Cracow and Stettin.

[...] the former Director of ORT in Poland, Engineer D. Slobodkin, has, as in the past, not only our absolute confidence, but also the esteem of all those who have come into contact with him in Poland during the past years. Currently he occupies a responsible post with the Program Division of the Ministry of Technical Education. We think that the direction of the new ORT program could be entrusted to him, but that he should be seconded by a delegate of the ORT Union who, if he cannot stay permanently in Poland, should go there frequently to ensure constant contact with the Polish ORT.

Last Meeting with the Leaders of the Jewish Social Committee in Warsaw

Prior to our departure we had a long session with Messrs. Smolar, Sfar, Hurwic, Fiszgrund and Wasserstrum. We told them again that a definite decision regarding the resumption of ORT work in Poland could only be taken by our Executive Committee which will meet in Geneva late in October. We pointed out that our recommendations would be first of all in favour of accelerated courses for adults and workshops for manual training and pre-apprenticeship for children and that we realized the importance of extending help to individual artisans or to groups working in small collective workshops, but that we could not as yet give any information on the exact amount of allocations ORT might give. We also made it clear that whenever we felt it was necessary, we would delegate to Poland ORT workers from abroad. The one sine

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qua non condition was the establishment of a Central ORT Committee which should be as representative as possible and the composition of which should be set up with the mutual agreement between us and the Presidium of the Social and Cultural Committee, and that in each town where the ORT program was operated, the local committee would be elected by us.

Mr Smolar and his colleagues assured us, as they had done at the outset of our negotiations, that they would do everything in their power to obtain from the government the maximum guarantees to permit the smooth functioning of ORT work.

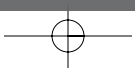
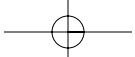
Final Remarks

It is a fact that the political and economic situation in Poland remains difficult and the future, even the near future, is rather uncertain. The program which we are submitting to the ORT Union Executive Committee, in our opinion, meets the present requirements of the Jewish population in the country and is also taking into consideration our past experience.

The program is an ad hoc activity program which could be implemented within the shortest time possible.

We have ourselves realized and we were told by many people in Poland that this program today represents one of the few, if not the only concrete way of providing effective help and is as important to all those who benefit from it individually, as well as to the State of Israel, which will receive most of them.

As already so many times in its past history, ORT has a decisive role to play on behalf of rescued Jews still in Poland. We are convinced that with combined efforts we will not fail in this task.



II. RECENT TIMES

ORT's Return to the Former Soviet Union: 1989–2008

8

There is little doubt that Jews in the Soviet Union were unable to enjoy any real sense of community life before 1989. There were very few synagogues open in the 1970s and 1980s and there were no Jewish NGOs or any formal Jewish education system. The small number of Yiddish newspapers and magazines in circulation were carbon copies of Soviet publications and had no Jewish-related content. The celebration of religious festivals was forbidden other than in synagogues.

Away from the public eye, however, one could find signs of a dynamic community: small groups studied Torah in private flats and thousands learnt Hebrew in private *ulpanim*, using photocopied Israeli books and copied audiotapes. Many took private lessons in Hebrew and then started teaching others – even forming a union and providing ongoing training for their members. Jewish youth gathered near Moscow's Choral Synagogue during the holy days and many young intellectuals rediscovered their Jewish roots and began practising Orthodox Judaism.

This flourishing underground community received support from outside the Soviet Union. Bilingual editions of the Torah (reprints of nineteenth-century copies), Hebrew textbooks and audiotapes of Israeli songs were produced in the West and smuggled into the country by American and European Jewish tourists. (Israeli citizens were not allowed into the Soviet Union after diplomatic relations ceased in 1967.) During the 1980s one could even 'subscribe' to the Russian edition of the weekly *Israel Today*, which arrived to the reader's letterbox in a sealed white envelope.

The majority of the Jewish population, however, was not involved in these activities, and only a small number could speak Hebrew. Yiddish was spoken by elderly people, mainly in small towns in the former Pale of Settlement but it was very rarely heard in the larger towns and cities, and few had any idea of Jewish traditions, religion or philosophy. Jewish education was therefore in great demand in the final years of the Soviet Union; it increased even further when in 1986 the gates opened and many could leave for Israel. The fall of the Eastern bloc was caused, among many other reasons, by a growing drive towards ethnic and national self-determination within the Soviet Union. The Jews, it could be said, were at the forefront of this tendency. Underground

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activities became public and began attracting a growing number of people, and numerous Jewish organizations started working publicly. At that time, two major organizations, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), began operating in the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel were renewed officially on 18 October 1991, only two months before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In reality, diplomatic relations were underway already at that point via the Dutch Embassy. These were years of rapid change for the Jewish community: the first Israeli Cultural Centres were opened soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the first Jewish Sunday schools were established by Israeli and Jewish organizations in 1992–93; and in 1994 the first ORT schools were opened in Moscow and St Petersburg.

The story of ORT's return to its country of birth begins in 1989, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November that year and before the first free elections in Poland, which marked the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet bloc. In 1985 the Soviet Union started a campaign to introduce computers into the general education system. It gradually became clear that the country could not achieve these goals without international support and expertise, and in 1989 the USSR State Education Committee held talks with the IBM Corporation. The result was a pilot project which aimed to establish thirty-two regional information and communication technology (ICT) centres and install 1,000 computer laboratories in general secondary schools. However, the country's large vocational education network also required the authorities' attention: by then its schools were in great demand and in need of specific equipment that would suit the ongoing changes in technological fields.

That same year Joseph Harmatz, then director general of World ORT Union, met with Professor Alexei Semenov, a representative of an ambitious *Shkola* (school) Project. The project was begun as the result of a joint decision of the Ministry of Education, the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and the State Committee for Science and Technology of the USSR. The leader of the project was Evgeny Velikhov – a renowned nuclear physicist, vice-president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and personal adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev. Professor Semenov was the organizer of the project and Velikhov's deputy for it. The project was aimed at constructing a new educational system for the country, using such mechanisms for this as the integration of subjects, hands-on research by students and use of technology. The project also emphasized utilization of international experience in education. Semenov was keen to use ORT's approaches to technology-learning for Russian education, and Harmatz saw an opportunity for ORT to return to Russia after the last ORT operation there was closed in 1938 (see Chapter 5). Semenov introduced Harmatz to Velikhov and to the Minister of Education of the City of Moscow, Lubov Kezina, to the St Petersburg educational authorities and to the vice-

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Director General of World ORT, Joseph Harmatz, and the Russian Minister of Education, Evgeniy Tkachenko, signing the letter of understanding between World ORT and Russia, ORT Central Office, London, 1993.

minister of the USSR State Committee on Education, Felix Pergudov (leader of the IBM pilot project). Pergudov subsequently invited ORT to join the project and work together with IBM. The formal agreement between World ORT and the USSR State Education Committee was signed in August 1990 and the first six ORT laboratories were opened in Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev, Nizhny Novgorod, Sverdlovsk and Dnepropetrovsk – all equipped with IBM computers and ORT kits for vocational training.

ORT's first years of work in Russia were also a period of dramatic transformation in the Soviet system. 1989 saw a wave of emigration to Israel, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the appearance of cracks in the Soviet Union. The demand for freedom and openness to the world dominated the public sphere and there could be no doubt that ORT was part of the changing times.

Dr Arie Geter was the first World ORT representative to arrive in Moscow in August 1990. In cooperation with the Institute of New Technologies in Education (headed by Professor Alexei Semenov), ORT organized a series of presentations of its equipment and pedagogical solutions to the Ministry of Education, to the Academy of Pedagogical Science, to teacher-training institutes and to leading technical universities. This was followed by an ORT exhibition at the Moscow Polytechnic Museum in spring 1991.

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ORT's educational kits were adapted by the Institute of New Technologies in Education and introduced into the IBM-ORT laboratories. The kits included training aids for robotics, digital-logic modules, programmable logic controllers and digital and analogue networking – all developed by the World ORT Union Research and Development Department. These educational tools were considered truly cutting edge, and managed to attract the attention of the education authorities.

The first IBM-ORT laboratory was opened on the decision of Lubov Kezina at the House of Creative Education of Youth (the former mansion of Wisotzky –the famous Jewish tea producer) in winter 1990 and was sponsored by Emanuel and Sarah Racine. In 1991 World ORT opened its new Russia offices in the same building that housed the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party and ORT was soon caught up in the turmoil of the time. During the coup in August 1991, when a group of conservative Soviet leaders attempted to oust President Mikhail Gorbachev, the building was surrounded by Muscovites protesting for democracy, and Communist Party property was confiscated. The ORT office was allowed to stay open and continue its work only after receiving a special written permission from Moscow's mayor, Gavriil Popov.

The first Moscow laboratory was followed by laboratories in five other cities, including one in the Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg) Institute for Industrial Pedagogy, a university specializing in training teachers for vocational schools. The institute rector, Evgeniy Tkachenko later became Russia's minister of education and a good friend of ORT.

It became clear very early on that ORT was answering a real need for vocational and Jewish education. At the time, thousands of Soviet Jews were planning to emigrate to Israel (make *aliyah*) without any knowledge or skills suitable for Israel's job market. Much more than simply a question of language, these people needed to overcome differences in production standards, procedures and technologies. In response, ORT (in cooperation with JAFI) developed a special pre-emigration training programme for engineering professionals (including mechanical, civil and electrical engineering). The first course, opened in November 1990, catered for 150 participants and marked the beginning of an immensely popular programme that soon expanded to St Petersburg and other cities. That year ORT began installing computer laboratories in the new Israeli Cultural Centres and trained instructors to deliver computer courses for future *olim* (those emigrating to Israel).

At that time, ORT also became involved with International Cooperation projects in the region. Part of a consortium with several other non-governmental educational organizations, World ORT received a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support the developments of NGOs in Russia. As a result of the grant, ORT trained hun-

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dreds of NGO professionals (accountants, executive managers, public-relations teams etc.) in computer technologies. Shortly after beginning operations in Russia, ORT was gaining a strong reputation as an efficient and professional provider of technology training.

In 1992 Professor Semenov introduced ORT to Professor Alexander Asmolov who became Russia's deputy minister of education and the president of ORT Russia (Alexei Semenov being its vice-president). They both supported the ORT connection with Minister of Education Tkachenko. By 1994 there were already several Jewish schools operating in Russia. Many Jewish bodies, from religious organizations to the Kibbutz Movement, attempted to open their own educational establishments in the country. The most successful project at the time was the Ma'avar (transition) school network, a joint venture between the Israeli Ministry of Education and local education authorities. The schools, which were established in 1992–93, prepared children to make *aliya*, and Israeli teachers arrived in order to ensure high standards of Hebrew teaching and to run the Jewish education departments. The emissary teachers (*shlichim*) enjoyed an independent budget that was quite generous in comparison to the budgets of regular post-Soviet schools, and their programme did not require the approval of the local education authorities. This arrangement did not always receive full support and some were unhappy about an independent network being supported by government funds.

In spring 1994, Professor Lubov Kezina, head of the Moscow Department of Education, and Alexei Semenov (who was appointed by Kezina to the post of Rector of the Moscow Institute of Open Education), visited the World ORT offices in London at a time when the organization was planning to open its own school in Russia, focusing on high quality technology education and offering an extended Jewish education programme alongside the national curriculum. Kezina preferred to establish an advanced state high-school that would provide top-level technology courses along with good-quality general education with optional Jewish studies. She also had in mind a vocational school – an establishment similar to ORT Braude in Israel. After lengthy negotiations, the two parties drew up an agreement that did not mention a Jewish education programme for the new school. (In reality, the school was inaugurated in May 1995, and the college opened only two years later.)

The new school was equipped with ORT's best education kits for robotics, fibre optics, digital electronics and programmable logic modules. In May 1995, ORT opened a centre in St Petersburg – the ORT de Gunzburg Resource Centre at the Shorashim Jewish School, which was part of the Ma'avar school network. ORT's involvement in the school was different to its work in Moscow. In the Russian capital, the school was an ORT establishment. Its principal was appointed in full cooperation with ORT and the school's extracurricular programmes, including courses for adults, Sunday school classes and teacher training programmes, were under ORT's control. In St

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Petersburg, where ORT established a resource centre, the school was run at that time independently of the organization.

ORT's involvement introduced a new and innovative type of school into the Russian education system – a modern and well-equipped establishment that offering an advanced technology curriculum. Soon the organization was running a wide educational network, including short-term training courses, a Jewish technology school, and a college.

The ORT Moscow Technology College opened in 1996 with three departments: computer design, technology in advertising, and IT applications for accounting and business management. The college quickly gained an excellent reputation and its students won numerous awards, medals and diplomas in professional competitions and contests. When Moscow's vocational education system was reformed in 2005, the college was expanded and two new departments opened for hotel catering and for fashion design (later expanded to include computer design). Today the college caters for more than 6,000 students and runs a vocational training centre as well as ORT's adult training programmes – an initiative created by the Lawson family of the UK.

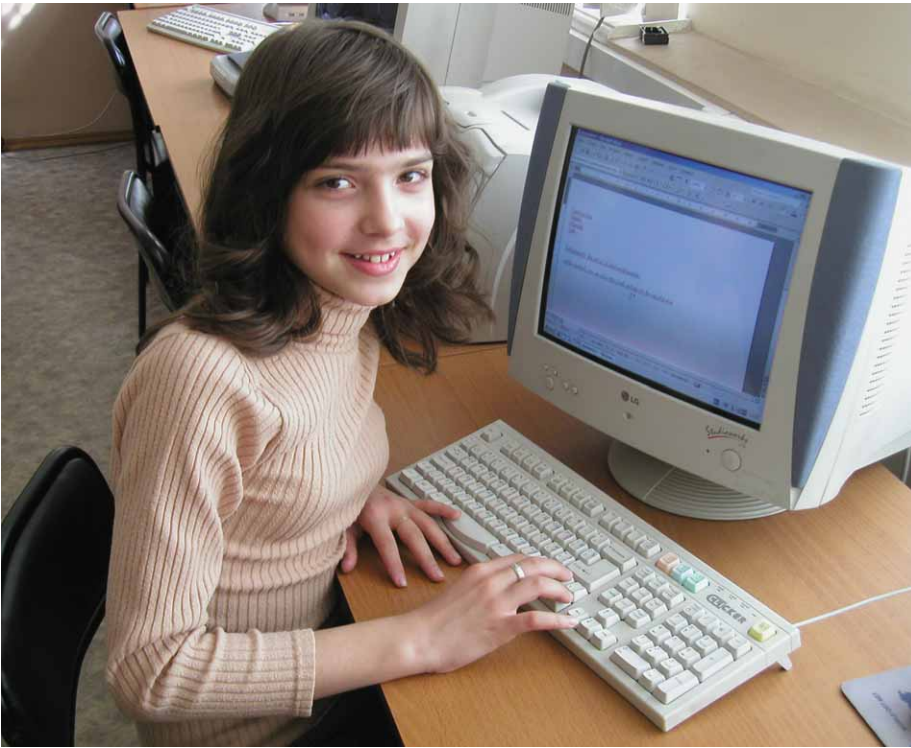
The pilot project, was of course designed for the whole of the Soviet Union, but soon the newly independent countries were establishing their own



Jewish studies lesson at ORT St Petersburg, Russia, c. 2001.

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education systems. It became clear that ORT needed to open new local branches in order to ensure its presence in the former Soviet republics. Ukraine, which was home to the second largest Jewish community in the former Soviet Union, was a priority at that point. Alexander Furman, a native Ukrainian who moved to Israel in the 1970s and taught at ORT schools there, was appointed director of ORT's operations in the CIS. His first task was to open ORT establishments in Kiev and Odessa, two cities with large Jewish populations. Odessa in particular has a long history of Jewish education, from the Jewish trade school Trud that was founded in the nineteenth century, and with which ORT worked in the 1920s, to the Jewish Ma'avar school where ORT finally opened a computer laboratory in September 1997. ORT's work in Ukraine was at the time spearheaded by Professor Efim Karpovsky, the organization's first lay leader in the country and head of the physics department at the Odessa State Medical University. Karpovsky, who for years led the efforts to establish a modern secular Jewish education system in Ukraine, was instrumental in bringing World ORT to Odessa and in establishing important contacts between the organization and the city's administration. The ORT Odessa centre opened its doors in spring 1997 and the ORT Shirley and Milton Gralla Centre was opened at Odessa's Jewish school the following September. ORT's programme of technology education courses complemented the school's high standards of general and Jewish education and it quickly became a popular choice for students and parents. In April 1997 ORT established a computer laboratory at the Kiev Polytechnic Institute (KPI), Ukraine's leading technical university. When ORT Ukraine was officially established in 2000, the institute's First Deputy Rector Yuri Yakimenko became its president. The ORT laboratory at the institute has since become a hub of innovation in the field of technology in higher education and has been supporting the local Jewish community through computer training and vocational education. In September 2000 ORT's flagship school, the ORT Kiev Technology Lyceum, was opened as part of the Regeneration 2000 campaign (see below). On the eve of the new millennium ORT already had several projects throughout the former Soviet Union – schools in Moscow, St Petersburg and Odessa, the ORT Technology College in Moscow, and a network of computer laboratories in Israeli Cultural Centres that operated programmes for local Jewish communities as well as International Cooperation projects. Nevertheless, it was very clear that many large Jewish communities did not benefit from ORT's programmes. Many Jewish schools founded in the 1990s were not able to offer the same high standards of technology and science education and ORT was eager to come to their aid. Moreover, after ten years of renewed operations, the organization had to change its work methods. Western donors were now much more particular about the causes they wished to support and were determined to see immediate results in improving services and quick and notice-

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Student in the computer lab, ORT Samara, Russia, c. 2006.

able effects on individual beneficiaries and local communities. Now that the great waves of *aliyah* of the 1990s were over, ORT's work had to focus on supporting the local Jewish education system. This change of circumstances and focus initiated the Regeneration 2000 campaign, which aimed to create a network of technology centres for Jewish schools in large cities. The centres, staffed by ORT teams, would offer regular technology and computer training to the students at the schools as well as introduce advanced technology into the general curricula, with professional, educational and administrative software and equipment. The transformation in ORT's fundraising methods and its direct work with the American Jewish federations (see Chapter 11) meant that new centres were supported not only by ORT traditional supporters in the United States and Europe, but also by the federations that partnered with the local communities catered for by ORT.

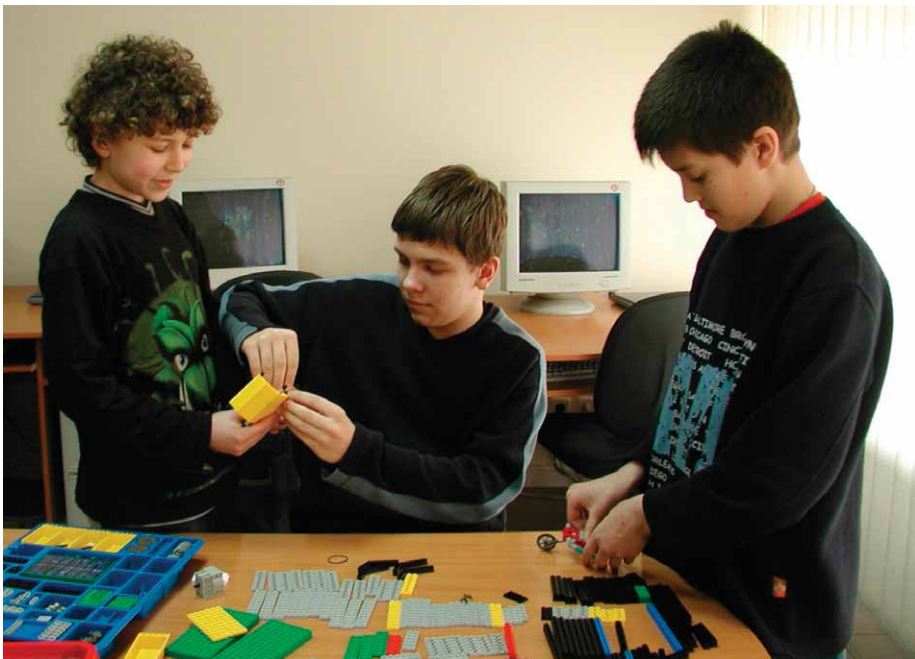
The first Regeneration 2000 centre, sponsored by Sir Maurice Hatter, opened in Samara in October 1999 and became the archetype for the centres that followed. It included computer and technology laboratories, a teachers resource room and a range of equipment for technology education, and

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offered various courses. The ORT centre in Kazan was opened in September 2000. Kazan, capital of Tatarstan, the largest Muslim autonomous republic in the Russian Federation, is home to a small but active Jewish community. Keen to promote the local Jewish school, community leader Mikhail Skoblionok invited ORT to open a centre there. The school became one of the republic's leading educational institutions and is now used as a model for secondary schools by Tatarstan's Ministry of Education.

The ORT centre in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, was opened in September 2000 at the Or Avner Orthodox Jewish School. The new centre had a positive effect on the school as a whole and has become a leading centre of technology teaching and computerized administration. That same month saw the opening of the ORT Technology Lyceum in Kiev. This, like the Moscow ORT Technology school, was an ORT establishment through and through – a new type of educational institution that responded to the increasing demand by Jewish communities for modern technology education. Today the Lyceum caters for students in grades 8 to 11 and provides a wide range of vocational courses. Its IT curriculum has been adopted by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education as the national standard.

A year later, in September 2001, the new ORT Technology Centre was opened in Moldova's Jewish school in Kishinev. This allowed the school to become a lyceum, that is, a school that provides education at university entry



Students at work at the Kharkov ORT Technology Centre, Ukraine, 2004.

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ORT students in Kishinev, Moldova, c. 2006.

level. It caters for students from grade 1 to 12 and combines advanced science and technology studies with an extensive Jewish curriculum. The ORT Technology Centre in Kharkov was also opened in 2001. The centre is located at the Beit Dan Jewish community centre and serves Jewish students from various schools around the city, university students and adults.

The year 2002 was no less productive for ORT and the Regeneration 2000 campaign, and four new centres were opened that year in Jewish schools in Riga, Vilnius (see Chapter 12), Moscow and Minsk. The ORT Technology Centre at the Belarusian State University (BSU) in Minsk is located in the building of the Department of Culture of the Faculty of International Relations of BSU. The department, formerly The Marc Chagall Institute, was originally created to fill an essential gap in the city's higher education system, providing a centre for education where young people could pursue academic and professional studies as well as explore Jewish culture, history and traditions. The ORT Technology Centre at the university enables close cooperation between the centre and the BSU in both secular and Jewish studies. The ORT centre provides support and resources to the educational programme of the university in various disciplines, including Jewish studies. World ORT later expanded its operations in Minsk, with the opening of the ORT Technology Centre at the Bialik School in 2006. The school, widely acknowledged as one

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of the best schools in the city, offers a curriculum that combines the educational requirements of the local education authorities with a Jewish syllabus. The ORT Technology Centre consists of an IT laboratory and a resource centre which provides technology education as well as facilities and technical support for other subjects.

In summer 2003, due to changes in the administration and management of the Jewish school system in the former Soviet Union, twelve Jewish schools joined forces and formed the ORT Schools Network in the former Soviet Union. The schools already had ORT centres operating on their premises and were mostly part of the Ma'avar network. Three other schools soon joined the newly established network: Aleph Jewish Gymnasium in Zaporojie, Ukraine; Yerushalaim Jewish School in St Petersburg; and Etz Chaim Jewish School in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. All three schools have been transformed by joining ORT and have enjoyed a rise in the standards of teaching and learning.

Zaporojie is an industrial city in the east of Ukraine and is home to a relatively large Jewish community. ORT opened an ICT centre in the city's Aleph Jewish Gymnasium two years after the gymnasium (academic high school) joined the network. The centre, supported by British ORT, has advanced facilities and equipment and offers several vocational courses, with a speciality in video production.

Yerushalaim Jewish School in St Petersburg is one of the first Jewish schools in post-Soviet Russia and is located in a remote industrial district of the city. Joining the ORT network was a natural step for the school, which started offering technology education to its students in 1995. The school's existing ICT centre was renovated in 2005 and is now considered to be the best local establishments of its kind. In 2007 ORT established an ICT centre at the Beit Sefer Menachem Jewish religious school in north St Petersburg.

Lastly, Etz Chaim Jewish School in Bishkek is the only Jewish school in Kyrgyzstan, a predominately Muslim country in central Asia. It caters for eighty students from age seven to seventeen. Three years after this small secluded school joined the ORT network its students were enjoying an advanced technology education programme that guaranteed them a place in the local job market.

In 2001 ORT, in cooperation with women's organization Keshet, opened a network of sixteen training centres in small Jewish communities in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. KeshetNet provides professional retraining in information technology and aims to help create new employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed women in these communities. In addition to work skills, the centres provide women with personal support, leadership training and job placement services. ORT is responsible for setting the training standards at all KeshetNet centres, as well as providing technical assistance, management and accounting.

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In recent years, ORT has cooperated with the World Bank and National Training Foundation in their efforts to computerize the general education system by helping to develop a national technology curriculum and education standards in Russia. ORT also has been involved in several international cooperation projects such as the Hewlett Packard Digital Community centres in Tula (Russia) and Slavutych (Ukraine) which run entrepreneurship and several training programmes.

In 2008 the Tallinn Jewish School – the only Jewish school in Estonia – with 200 students, joined the World ORT network bringing the total of World ORT students in the former Soviet Union to more than 27,000 (compared to 3,500 students in 1999). These students study in sixteen Jewish day schools, a technology college, KeshetNet centres and a network of adult training centres and ICT laboratories in Jewish schools, colleges and Jewish community centres across the region. In the near future, the organization is planning to begin work with local Jewish communities in Georgia and Armenia.

World ORT **9**

In his keynote presidential address to the 1980 World ORT Union Centenary Congress, Dr William Haber described the event as a 'watershed for a new beginning, a time of change when many of the long time lay and professional leaders were to give way to new faces and personalities to lead ORT towards the year 2000'. After 100 years, the Congress did indeed herald a time of change for ORT, as it faced up to a world that was being transformed by technological advance as well as by developments in the social, financial and political spheres – all of which were to have a major impact on the organization in the last years of the twentieth and the early years of the twenty-first century.

Aware of their responsibilities to the Jewish populations that ORT served, delegates to the 1980 Congress also voted to increase their efforts to further Jewish education as part of the fight against assimilation. At the same time, World ORT was involved in helping another, lesser known Jewish community – the Beta Israel of Ethiopia (called Falasha by the non-Jewish Ethiopians). A party of 21 agricultural agents were sent out to the region to help set up schools and to provide skills training for the local population. With help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), 4,280 families out of a total of 5,180 were being cared for by ORT for their basic educational, vocational training, health and agricultural needs.

An essential part of the role of the Director General of World ORT is to strengthen ORT's ties with governments and communities throughout the world. During 1980 Joseph Harmatz, newly appointed to the post, visited South America where he met, among others, the Minister of Education of Uruguay. The Jewish communities of the region were increasingly anxious to ensure that their children could enjoy a Jewish as well as a career-oriented education and welcomed ORT's operations. Harmatz reported that 'there was an increasing desire on the part of South American Jews to intensify their links with Judaism and to give a Jewish education to their children' and that ORT was striving to fulfil this need.

The impact of change was felt throughout the ORT network in the early 1980s, and countries were experiencing a period of inflation and rising unemployment; those jobs that were available often required technological skills. ORT responded to this need by providing courses in many of the burgeoning

high-tech fields at its schools and centres. This was particularly so in France, Latin America, Israel and Italy. ORT educational efforts continued to be supported by funds raised throughout the world and distributed to the operational countries via World ORT.

In some parts of the world, the training need was more basic and ORT publications of the time record projects in Senegal, for example, where vocational courses provided skills for the construction trades, textiles and machinery maintenance. The Technical Assistance programme, active on the African continent, was extended to South America as ORT maintained its commitment to improving the social and economic circumstances of some of the world's poorest populations. ORT had been mandated by the 1980 Congress to work towards encouraging a more equitable balance in the world's resources.

The economic decline of the period also affected ORT's fundraising efforts and, in its 1981 budget, ORT was obliged to reduce its expenditure while trying to maintain its commitments. The phrase 'unmet needs' was increasingly heard as new demands reached the central office which could not be fulfilled simply because of the lack of resources. National organizations worked hard to find the income to maintain programmes and, where possible, to continue expansion; World ORT Union's one million dollar capital expenditure programme in Argentina, for example, was being matched by funds raised locally.

In a climate dominated by rapid and constant change, ORT was obliged to continue to adapt its courses and to ensure that it kept its students – adults as well as youngsters – at the forefront of their chosen fields. The pressure to do so in the face of dwindling income was intense. At the centre of operations, the World ORT London office monitored patterns of technological and educational development and acted as a catalyst to ensure that the network remained at the cutting edge of these developments. The declared thrust of this activity was to continuously upgrade the skills of ORT teachers and to keep them ahead of the fields in which they specialized.

Other projects were introduced in France, Italy and Latin America, to encourage women to participate in vocational training and to move into areas that had traditionally been male preserves. In India, programmes were being implemented to encourage girls to enter the workforce – a practice that hitherto had not been a feature of Indian life.

One of the challenges that has faced World ORT throughout its existence has been the need to attract and retain groups of supporters in communities throughout the world. When the recruitment process is successful, however, the results can be spectacular and throughout the world ORT has succeeded in attracting a number of high-profile supporters who have become enthusiastic ambassadors for ORT and its mission. In 1982 an Organization Department was established at the London office to 'gain adherents for ORT and to mould

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them into active groups which function as part of the worldwide ORT network'. The creation of the department and a full-time director of organization provided a focal point for these groups, enabling them to have support from and direct contact with the centre of ORT's operations. This function has been retained over the years, although the manner of its implementation and the scope of its activities have been subject to change. In later years it would be reconstituted as the International Liaison Department.

Another innovative dimension to teaching that was introduced into ORT schools and supported by the central office was that of Creative Education. Piloted by ORT in South America, the concept of addressing and nurturing the creativity of young students gained prominence during the 1980s and 1990s. The rapid introduction of technology into ORT schools provided new ways to enable children to give substance to their creative ideas and to lay the foundations for experiential learning – a pedagogical approach that has remained a feature of modern education systems in the ensuing years. World ORT produced a number of publications relating to this theme, both for internal and wider consumption.

World ORT's move to London, just before the start of the 1980s, soon began to have positive effects as ORT's work was brought to the attention of UK education authorities. At the time, the government was launching new education initiatives aimed at broadening the appeal of technical studies in a climate where academic education had traditionally been the first preference for students and their families. ORT's emphasis on developing students' skills and abilities in technological fields resonated with ministers, and several senior government personnel came to the World ORT office for briefings. Following ORT's increased exposure and the recognition of its capabilities, a number of local government officials and members of parliament requested visits to ORT schools and were given tours of ORT operations in France. The visits made a strong impression on the British delegates and helped to seal ORT's reputation as an innovative and capable education provider.

Several educational programmes subsequently created by the UK government were influenced by the ideas brought to them by ORT. These included City Technology Colleges. Working with British ORT, World ORT also succeeded in attracting funding from the British government for training projects to run at key locations in the UK.

Jewish schools in the UK also began to make contact with ORT with a view to introducing the subject of computing into their curricula. World ORT specialists were able to advise them on the procurement of equipment and the setting up of computer classrooms and then to provide training for their teachers. Communities in other countries also requested support from ORT.

World ORT also acted as an agent of change for the network, helping the member organizations to introduce new technology into their management systems. The ORT Academic Advisory Council (AAC) 'think tank' held its

inaugural meeting at Oxford University in October 1984 under the chairmanship of Professor William Haber, former Dean of the University of Michigan. Consisting of some of the most eminent scientists, historians, and academic personalities and international figures, the group meets once per year and is charged with advising and directing ORT so that it 'would remain at the forefront ... of technological and scientific education'. Recommendations of the AAC that have been implemented by ORT include the introduction of biotechnology into the ORT curriculum and the strengthening of ORT's Jewish education provision. Subsequent chairmen of the AAC have included Professor Ephraim Katzir, an internationally renowned scientist and former president of the State of Israel.

The recommendation to develop ORT's involvement in Jewish education was implemented by the appointment of Moshe Davis as the first Jewish education director at World ORT. He declared his mission as being 'to secure an entry into the minds of our students of the various Jewish experiences – historical, sociological, etc – that underlie Jewish teaching and Jewish knowledge ...'. He and his successors developed innovative materials for use in ORT schools and organized Jewish education seminars for ORT teachers, in London and at other ORT locations, worldwide. With the support of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, ORT began to introduce teachers to the use of computers in Jewish education and to the range of software titles that was increasingly becoming available. The Jewish education function has been maintained in the London office, providing input for Navigating the Bible and subsequent development programmes; implementing Jewish education projects in London and throughout the network, including Holocaust education programmes; and preparing numerous Jewish education funding proposals. The need to strengthen the sense of identity among ORT's Jewish students has been a recurring theme throughout the organization's recent history.

Throughout the mid-1980s, World ORT Union aimed to establish a climate of creativity and inquisitiveness in which new educational trends and challenges would continuously unfold. The intention was for World ORT Union to highlight new advances and improvements in science and technology education to ORT national organizations and individual schools, and to provide them with essential guidelines. Constantly accelerating developments in industries and services required changes in curricula, and World ORT Union spearheaded efforts for ORT schools to change with the times and meet these challenges. At the same time, Jewish education was, and remained, a topic high on World ORT Union's operational agenda. World ORT Union therefore initiated encouraged and motivated ORT's professional leadership to make this a part of ORT's educational commitment.

By 1985, World ORT was set to make a considerable impact in Britain with the launch of the Robotics and Automation course aimed principally at multinational companies based in the UK. The courses were developed and run by

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World ORT Union in London in cooperation with Britain's 'Open Tech', an organization modelled on the Open University, but dealing with technical and vocational training. The knowledge, expertise and equipment developed by World ORT for the Robotics and Automation course were later provided to ORT schools in many different countries, including Israel and the former Soviet Union, where they became an integral part of technology teaching for that period. Graduates of the programme in the UK went on to establish regional training centres in robotics in strategically placed parts of the UK.

At the World ORT Union Executive Committee Meeting held in Zurich in 1985, a topic widely discussed was how ORT had become a 'victim of its own success' – the problems and challenges encountered by ORT as it expanded its activities and increased its number of students worldwide. At the same time, the meetings of the World ORT Technical Commission, under the joint chairmanship of Bruno Jarach and Branco Weiss, placed into context the technical and information revolution in which ORT had been sharing, and searched for a rationale influencing the direction to be taken by education. Dr Dan Sharon, director of the World ORT Union Technical Department, analysed the effect on education of changes in technology since the beginning of the century. He forecast the predominance of automation and flexible manufacturing systems with computing power available in large measure and at low prices. Branco Weiss reported that the Technical Commission believed that ORT's creative educational system could make a significant contribution to the curriculum of Jewish schools in many parts of the world. The Commission recommended that work in the fields of robotics and computer-aided manufacturing and design should be pursued further, and new studies in fields such as energy should be undertaken.

The chairman of the World ORT Union Organization Commission, Ruth Eisenberg, reported that new committees and activities encouraged and initiated by the World ORT Union Department of Organization were showing positive results.

The Commission's positive report was recognized as standing against a background of worldwide social and political developments which endangered Jewish life. With civilized and democratic values in retreat and atavistic forces resurgent, Jewish communities were seeking ways to regenerate leadership and to rekindle the spark of commitment among Jewish youth. There was a renewed awareness that World ORT still had a larger role to play as a social movement in this context, as well as a perception of the vast scale of its agenda.

While Jewish education remained an essential strand of the work of World ORT, technical education continued to occupy a role of increasing importance. By 1990, the considerable expertise developed by World ORT in London in the use of computers in education placed the organization in a highly advantageous position in its ongoing negotiations with the Russian authorities. Five

years of Russian *perestroika* (economic restructuring) culminated in 1990 with the start of the dissolution of the USSR. Having already laid the foundations, Joseph Harmatz, then director general of World ORT, travelled to Russia to sign agreements with the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Moscow Education Committee to establish a resource centre for technological and creative education in Moscow. At that time, World ORT's expertise in the use of computers in education was breaking new ground and represented an entirely new branch of curriculum development. For Russia, the development presented an opportunity to develop in a new direction.

The 1990 meeting of the World ORT Central Board (later to become the General Assembly) was significant not only because it marked the 110th anniversary of the founding of ORT but also because it occurred in the midst of a sea change in technological developments and, in Russia, geopolitical revolution. The demands were such that World ORT was obligated to address these changes and steer a path for the organization as it moved into its second century of operation.

Among the new policies debated by the Central Board were the need to strengthen its training and resettlement services, both to Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union who were at that time reaching Israel in large numbers and to those who chose to remain in the USSR.

David Young, Lord Young of Graffham, the newly elected president of World ORT Union, addressed the issues directly in his inaugural speech: 'A million of our people will emigrate from the eastern lands into the State [of Israel] and will change it, and in doing that ORT must play a role.'

Lord Young, who had previously served as a cabinet minister in the British Government with responsibility for job creation and enterprise and who had held a number of senior appointments including chairman of Britain's Manpower Services Commission, was also well placed to see the significance of technological development that World ORT would pursue over the next decade and beyond.

The Academic Advisory Council, established by World ORT in 1984, continued to take a close interest in the curricula and pedagogical methods used in ORT's international school network, and from its broad range of expertise, made suggestions as to where new fields of employment were about to open up. The members were concerned not only with what was taught, but also with how successfully the training will be used in the future, and to that end recommended that ORT should monitor the careers of its graduates.

The Integrated Technology Laboratory (ITL), established at ORT House in London, played an increasingly important role in technology training both to ORT staff from other countries and in the local Jewish community. World ORT's goal of harnessing technology to improve the delivery of Jewish education was one of several important areas of development. Teachers from Europe's largest Jewish school, the JFS (Jews' Free School) in London, enlisted

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in a three-year ongoing programme to become confident in the use of educational software in the classroom. The programme also enabled World ORT staff to further develop the use of computers in education and to roll out the programmes to the ORT global network.

In 1993, Joseph Harmatz retired from the post of Director General and was succeeded by Dr Ellen Isler. Realizing the global potential of the internet, Ellen Isler encouraged the linking of all ORT schools through ORTnet, ORT's own internet website.

As the importance of information technology began to grow, World ORT responded by establishing a new department, dedicated to the role of information technology in education. The World ORT Information Technology Department, established in 1993, developed from the World ORT Technical Department, but activities were to be focused on harnessing the potential of the emergent internet as well as new developments in multimedia teaching aids. At this time, the internet was mainly known and used only by academics and large corporations. The World ORT Information Technology Department proposed to harness the internet in order to create a communications network that would bring together World ORT, ORT schools, and ORT administrative centres in a seamless global connection – to be called ORTnet. The initiative was at the time a bold and visionary step that required considerable investment in new equipment and in the recruitment of new staff with sufficient knowledge of this little-known area. The setting-up of ORTnet would also enable ORT to support the growing needs of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe by means of email and electronic conferencing, and by providing access to databases of Jewish interest.

While work concentrated on developing new multimedia and internet-based education materials, World ORT also began to focus on establishing new projects in the CIS and Baltic States (the former Soviet Union). In 1994, a World ORT programme began to install computer facilities and provide teacher training in twelve locations in the CIS and Baltic States. The programme, called 'The Twelve Tribes Project', was a phased introduction of technology learning centres at Jewish schools and community centres in twelve locations in the CIS and Baltic States, all coordinated by the World ORT office in Moscow. All centres were connected to ORTnet through the internet. At this stage, 3,300 students were enrolled.

At the Board of Directors Meeting held London in January 1999, Robert Singer was appointed Director General, succeeding Ellen Isler, and took up his post in mid-March. Prior to his appointment as Director General, Singer served with the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, occupying several senior posts. An experienced diplomat and energetic leader, Singer rapidly began to strengthen funding and expand global activities. Originally from Ukraine, fluent in Russian, and with diplomatic links in both Israel and the former Soviet Union (FSU), he soon embarked upon a project to regenerate Jewish

communities in the FSU. By the end of 1999, his initiatives had resulted in a sixfold increase in the numbers of students benefiting from ORT in the former Soviet Union. At the same time the main focus during his time in the office remained World ORT's involvement and activities in Israel.

World ORT entered the twenty-first century with the celebration of its 120th anniversary in 2000. While looking back at its many achievements throughout the years, it also faced new challenges with the emergence of the global village, virtual communities, the Information Superhighway and distance learning, all becoming an inseparable part of daily life. In the first years of the twenty-first century, World ORT recognized the challenges involved in harnessing the most advanced resources and technologies to provide real answers to changing needs.

In order to best approach the challenges posed by the new millennium, in late 1999 World ORT established a commission of inquiry to explore the 'Future of ORT in the twenty-first century'. The commission was charged with examining both World ORT's programmes and structure, and attracted the enthusiastic participation of younger ORT lay leaders and professionals from many countries. No aspect of ORT's work around the world was neglected by the commission, and the commission's recommendations were considered and approved at the World ORT Executive Committee meetings in 1999 and at the 120th Anniversary Congress held in Jerusalem in June 2000.

World ORT's global programmes had shifted dramatically as the new millennium emerged, consistent with the enormous needs within Russia and the newly formed countries of the Former Soviet Union. With the implementation of its Regeneration 2000 programme, ORT refocused its priorities and allocations to become a vital factor in the rebirth and revitalization of this sizable yet latent Jewish community.

In June 2000 the International Mission to St Petersburg, the city of ORT's birth, launched phase I of the Regeneration 2000 programme to establish a network of technology centres in the CIS and Baltic States. The mission was followed by the World ORT Congress held in Jerusalem, where the structure of ORT's governing bodies was radically reconstituted and the ORT constitution was amended in line with the recommendations of the Goldstone Commission. The Congress also adopted the World ORT Strategic Plan 2000–2004 to help ORT meet both present and future challenges.

At the same time, ORT's long-established global programmes continued to move forward utilizing the latest technological developments to place them at the forefront of educational innovation and expertise. In line with ORT's enormous programmatic developments and growth coupled with little appreciable increase in significant funding, under the leadership of new Director General Robert Singer World ORT reduced its administrative costs and revised its operating structure while spearheading the move for closer coordination and cooperation among ORT countries worldwide.

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New projects implemented by World ORT included DO I.T., a foundation course in information technology that went live on ORTnet, the official World ORT website, in September 1999. DO I.T. provided a stimulating environment for students and teachers to learn the fundamentals of new information and communications technology through the use of the latest interactive multimedia techniques. A CD-ROM version of the programme for use in schools was released in November 1999. ORT's Global Campus website, which provided a showcase for ORT's online educational activities and resources, was added to ORTnet in March 1999. Other new projects were EnglishSpace, a multimedia interactive English language course, and the addition of Spanish translation to the Navigating the Bible website. In 1999 the CD-ROM version of Navigating the Bible became the 'best seller' on the list of Davka Cooperation, the world's largest distributor of Jewish educational software. A CD-ROM of Navigating the Bible complete with English, Russian and Spanish translation was released in 2000.

ExtraORT, another initiative of World ORT, was inaugurated in 1999. This five-month programme brought 10 groups of some 24 teenage students on educational and cultural visits to London in a varied programme covering information technology skills, English lessons using ORT's EnglishSpace interactive language programme, and visiting places of cultural interest around England. World ORT also began piloting the Technology for All programme in ten schools and technology colleges throughout England, and was instrumental in enabling four of the schools to achieve the status of Technology College.

Whilst adapting to rapid change was very much a feature of World ORT's passage through the last decades of the twentieth century, it was from 2000 that the organization began to think strategically about adapting to the changing fundraising environment.

The impetus for this adjustment came from the donor community which became increasingly unwilling to provide general funds for charities but, rather, preferred to focus their donations on specific projects. This gave them the ability to scrutinize the recipient charities and to demand full accountability for monies received. In this environment, charities that did not adapt were doomed to failure; donors faced with a choice of possible recipients would direct their funds toward organizations that could provide full clarity and transparency.

A tangible result of the strategic approach to dealing with new realities in the area of fundraising was that, in 2000, World ORT designed and developed a completely new procedure for project proposals to reflect and complement the new channels of fundraising (see Chapter 11). With this new system, World ORT was able to clearly prioritize the needs of ORT's operational countries and turn them into focused funding requests to address the specific requirements and interests of donors and philanthropic bodies.

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The result of the strategic move towards a project-based fundraising style also led World ORT to develop new approaches to its relationships with its fundraising and operational countries. A department structure was created within World ORT to reflect the new reality. The International Liaison Department, headed by Sonia Gomes de Mesquita, was established to ensure that the needs of both fundraising and operational countries would be efficiently serviced. The national directors in each region were encouraged to maintain regular contact with the head of the International Liaison Department and to keep her informed of all developments. In this way, they could report in a timely fashion on any new needs or opportunities that arose, and World ORT could be in a position to provide a rapid response. By the same token, through their regular communications and the build up of relations, they could confer on strategic issues and develop medium- and longer-term plans. As this approach became increasingly successful and the workload increased, the International Liaison Department concentrated on maintaining contact with the fundraising countries and spawned an offshoot, the Coordination Department, which concentrated on maintaining links with the operational countries. In Latin America, the CIS and Baltic States, Europe and Australia, World ORT representatives were appointed to manage the local activities.

As part of the process of promoting the exchange of views and experiences among national directors and senior World ORT professionals, an annual National Directors Forum was instituted in 2001. This event, held each year in a different prestigious centre of learning around the world, gives participants the opportunity to hear presentations from leading scholars and to thoroughly discuss issues that affect them and the organization. Additionally, a number of national directors are encouraged to undertake exchange visits to each others' operations and to shadow their colleagues in order to add to their experience.

One major innovation was the introduction of 'desks' to manage the flow of information between the centre and the periphery of the organization. The increasing global uptake of electronic communication led to an explosion in the quantity of information within and between organizations and World ORT, with its widely distributed network of local branches, found itself dealing with a mounting volume of communications traffic. The desks represented the first line of communication between the centre and the periphery, filtering out issues that did not require action, dealing with issues that were of a routine nature and passing up the line matters that required decision making at a higher level. With this improved structure World ORT was able to achieve a growth in annual fundraising in eight years from 11 million to 35 million dollars and to deal with the huge growth in activities worldwide.

The initiative to create a portfolio of project proposals that would become a tool for fundraisers and a source of information for donors was discussed at the National Directors Forum held in Jerusalem in early 2000. Later that year,

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in June 2000, the World ORT office in London began preparations for the first portfolio of project proposals, to be launched for the fundraising year commencing January 2001. The objective was to create proposals that could be submitted to prospective donors – to the North American Jewish Federations, under the aegis of the United Jewish Communities (UJC), to foundations throughout the world, and to private individuals everywhere, who might be willing to support ORT operations.

A survey was sent to all national directors, asking them to submit their operational requirements for funding to World ORT, in order that World ORT could prepare the necessary proposal documents.

One year later, World ORT's first portfolio of project proposals was prepared and circulated to fundraisers throughout the world.

In order to ensure and maintain full accountability, World ORT also developed a database system to track projects and implemented a set of standard procedures to support the project process.

The structure that facilitated greater cooperation between World ORT and national offices enabled the organization to develop a global perspective on the allocation of its resources and the ability to evaluate the respective merits of the needs that were presented to it. It was this global view that enabled the organization to take strategic decisions and to implement and coordinate the Regeneration 2000 and Regeneration 2004 campaigns as well as the campaign to help Argentina, the Emergency Campaign for Israel and the fundraising for the Kadima Mada programme in Israel. Similarly, the existence of a powerful coordination function enabled World ORT to establish (or in some cases to renew) its representation in a number of small Jewish communities such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Cuba and Tunis. A new representative operation was also opened in Australia. These initiatives are welcomed by the host communities who see local World ORT operations as helping them to maintain their links with the Jewish people as well as raising their profile with their own governments.

World ORT has a limited budget compared with other international Jewish charitable organizations (notably JAFI and the JDC) but regularly punches above its weight because of the cohesiveness of its operation and the close measure of coordination effected from the centre.

Another illustration of World ORT's readiness to adapt to constantly changing realities, was the overhaul of the governance of World ORT that took place in 2000 and then again in 2008. The 2000 change, as a result of the recommendations of the Goldstone Commission, introduced a hierarchical decision-making system that consisted of the General Assembly (in place of the World ORT Congress) in which up to 250 members met every four years; a Board of Directors – made up of up to 70 members – that met annually; an Executive Committee of 12 members that met 3–4 times per year; and an Officers Committee of the four most senior lay leaders of the organization that

dealt with urgent matters in between the Executive Committee meetings, and matters delegated to them by the Executive Committee. Seats on the committees were allocated on a geographical basis in proportion to the size of local ORT entities. Before the General Assemblies of 2004 and 2008 working parties consisting of senior professionals and lay leaders were established that prepared four-year strategic plans that were submitted for approval to the World ORT General Assembly. These plans, drawn up in the light of prevailing conditions, prescribed the paths that the organization would adopt in the coming period.

The 2008 revision, led by World ORT's new President Dr Jean de Gunzburg was designed to streamline the decision-making process. The Board of Directors was replaced by a Board of Representatives, and the Executive Committee was replaced by a Board of Trustees. Crucially, the concept was introduced of lay leaders being appointed on the basis of the skills that they could bring to bear on the organization rather than being selected on a geographical basis.



Signing an agreement between World ORT and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science promoting ongoing cooperation in information technology and computer studies at primary and secondary schools and at further education establishments in Bulgaria, October 2003.

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It is remarkable that over the entire period of World ORT's history, as the details of its operations and its governance reflected changing conditions, its mission statement and the essence of its *raison d'être* remained constant.

Meanwhile, World ORT's commitment to Jewish education, serving all countries, continued apace. World ORT, together with the Ghetto Fighters House Museum in Israel, began work on the *Learning about the Holocaust through Art* programme. This was a multimedia internet-based programme to provide an important educational resource for learning and teaching about the Holocaust and shed new light on the subject through the use of drawings and paintings created by Holocaust victims and survivors during and after World War II. World ORT developed other learning resources and also encouraged local ORT organizations to harness their talents to create multimedia educational material. One striking result of this was the CD-ROM set entitled *The Jews of St Petersburg* which depicts the story of the Jewish community in that city in text, images and music. Further projects included the *Music during the Holocaust* website and participation in a UK Jewish community project *The Jewish Way of Life* to introduce the community, its institutions and its practices to the wider population.

Despite the heavy programme of work undertaken by World ORT at this time, its commitment to *tikkun olam* (the Jewish principle of 'improving the world') led World ORT to respond to the crisis in the Balkans. In 1999 World ORT's International Cooperation Department, together with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), commenced training programmes for Kosovar refugees in Albania and Kosovo. In 2000 the International Cooperation Department completed its Integrated Livelihood Project in Ghana. The project created income-generating activities such as bakeries, poultry houses, mills, mushroom farms and stores in which to sell the produce. Several thousand people benefited.

The network in the former Soviet Union continued to develop and expand. Two new schools, one in Kiev (Ukraine) and one in Kazan (Tatarstan, Russia) were added in 2000. At the same time, in order to meet the growing demand for more sophisticated educational technology in the Baltic States and Eastern European countries, World ORT focused on re-establishing and developing its presence in cities such as Sofia, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw. ORT also expanded and directed its efforts and expertise towards the needs of the Latin American community, where the economic climate, especially in Argentina, was leading to severe hardship.

World ORT opened new centres in Latvia and Lithuania in 2002. By this time the number of students benefitting from an ORT education in the CIS and Baltic States had increased from 3,500 to more than 20,000 as a direct result of the success of World ORT's Regeneration 2000 project. The forward-looking curriculum and state-of-the-art facilities given to Jewish schools and centres by World ORT under the Regeneration 2000 programme set the stan-



Robert Singer with Lithuania's Vice-Minister of Education, Rimantas Vaitkus, signing a memorandum on cooperation with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science, ORT House, London, September 2004.

dard by which other schools in the CIS and Baltic States were judged, and the growing reputation of ORT schools in the region succeeded in attracting students from Jewish families who would otherwise be totally unconnected to their Jewish community.

Many formal agreements at government level were entered into by World ORT Director General Robert Singer in order to formally establish World ORT's presence in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. By the time the Regeneration programme was fully underway, agreements had been signed with ministers in Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Moldova, Belarus, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria for a network serving some 27,000 students.

During this period, attention also turned to recording and preserving World ORT's own history. *Facing the Future*, published in 2000 at the time of the organization's 120th anniversary, was a richly illustrated history of World ORT in three languages. History of ORT courses were produced in St Petersburg in Russian, and in London in English and *ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors* recounting ORT's activities in Europe during and after World War II was published in 2008 after a two-year academic research programme. Importantly, an extensive programme was undertaken to preserve and catalogue the many thousands of photographs

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and documents dating back to the founding of the organization. This continuing project remains active today, as contemporary material is continually being added to chronicle ORT's work in the present day and beyond. A database of the archived material was developed and is continually being updated in order to provide controlled access via the internet to those seeking information about ORT and its past and present activities. Within just two years, the total number of scanned images on the World ORT Archive database had reached nearly 4,000, with some 3,000 images added in one year alone.

Unfortunately, ORT was not immune to the scourge of worldwide terror that the world faced at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The outbreak of the second Palestinian *Intifada* in October 2000 affected all Israelis, including students, teachers and staff at ORT schools. Twenty ORT students and graduates were killed by terrorist attacks in 2001 alone, and many others suffered the grief and heartbreak of friends and loved ones being killed or injured. At the same time, the Israeli government was forced to divert precious financial resources from education to defence and security. In response to these challenges, in mid-2001 World ORT launched an Israel Emergency Campaign to help see Israel through this difficult period. The campaign began with a single pledge of 25,000 dollars and within six months had raised more than 1.2 million dollars. The campaign ran until 2004, by which time it had raised a total of 3 million dollars.

In the early part of the twenty-first century, the escalating economic crisis in Argentina and other Latin American countries was beginning to place an enormous strain on ORT's resources there. By early 2002 approximately 25 per cent of the once mainly middle-class Jewish community was living near or below the poverty line and an estimated 2,000 students at Jewish schools received their only hot meal of the day at school. In Buenos Aires, the centre of ORT's activities in Argentina, some 1,700 Jewish families had lost their homes. Despite these difficulties, or rather because of them, World ORT committed itself to supporting its students in Argentina and assisting their families in coping with the deteriorating economic situation. ORT always had a policy of never turning away a Jewish student despite his or her inability to pay. This policy was reinforced with a special project to raise funds to help the families of ORT students in Argentina pay their school fees. The project began in 2000, at the start of the Argentine economic crisis, and in 2002 became part of World ORT's Argentina Emergency Campaign – a multimillion campaign to help the Argentine Jewish community by providing meals and tuition to ORT Argentina students. The Campaign raised 1.6 million dollars in 2002, 1.4 million dollars in 2003, 0.8 million dollars in 2004 and 0.3 million dollars in 2005. In addition, in 2004 World ORT began its Argentina Retraining Programme, a project designed to provide vocational training for unemployed and underemployed members of the Argentine Jewish community to help them cope with the economic crisis. Combined, these projects assisted ORT

Argentina students and their families maximize their prospects for employment, break the downward spiral into poverty, and helped them to build a better future.

Elsewhere in the world, in Italy, World ORT sent a representative to assess the local situation and to ascertain the viability of renewing its involvement there. It identified a deficiency in the education offered to Jewish students in Rome. ORT Italy initiated the relocation of Rome's Jewish school to newer, larger premises opposite the city's main synagogue. The new ORT-Renzo Levi High School opened on 1 September 2004. New developments in Jewish education were developed in other directions also. World ORT began development of its Yizkor website, launched in September 2002 in the presence of UK Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks. The site, which received the endorsement of world Jewish leaders, provides valuable education and support to the global Jewish community by helping to preserve the centuries-old Jewish traditions by which Jewish communities remember departed family and friends. The redesigned Navigating the Bible II website, accommodating English, Spanish and Russian, received positive feedback from around the world and was receiving more than 70,000 hits per day in 2001.

Publicity and public relations, which for several years had a low profile, was now beginning to be seen as an essential tool in an emerging new world order in which competition for funding and for recognition was becoming increasingly significant.

World ORT began producing its quarterly publication *The World ORT Times* in 2001. With an initial circulation of 2,000, by 2008 the print-run had grown to over 8,000 copies. The paper, which reaches staff and supporters throughout the world, has become an invaluable means of providing information about achievements and events taking place within the ORT world. An electronic version of *The World ORT Times* was also made available on the ORTnet website, and supplemented by regular email news updates.

World ORT was gradually becoming more involved in organizing seminars and conferences for its teachers, professional staff and lay leaders from around the world. This became the basis of what was becoming known as a Virtual Academy. Until the 1980s World ORT's Central Training Institute in Anières, Switzerland had provided an education centre at which cadres of ORT teachers had received their professional instruction. Apart from the knowledge that was transmitted, the Institute was a powerful force in creating unity among World ORT's professional staff. In the twenty-first century with the growth of the organization, seminars together with online activities, video conferencing and post-event support were being used as the primary means of providing World ORT staff with continuing professional development. Increasing attention was being paid to the importance of the support function, which was carried out by the members of the Educational and Technology department.

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Participants in the 9th Wingate Seminar, which focused on new technologies for collaborative learning, ORT House, London, 2008.

ORT's portfolio of regular international training events for teachers and senior staff includes the annual Information Technology Seminar sponsored by the Wingate family (started in 1999) and the Hatter Seminar sponsored by Sir Maurice Hatter (started in 2002), devoted to technological subjects. The seminars, which take place at ORT House in London, include presentations by prominent specialists in the chosen field, visits to local schools and places of interest, presentations by the participants themselves and a full programme of social and cultural activities. In subsequent years the Hatter seminar addressed subjects that included creativity, the environment, design, bio-science and nanotechnology.

In 2008 the first World ORT Jean and Terry de Gunzburg Jewish Education seminar took place in Rome, introducing modern computer based educational methods to Judaic subject teachers. Further seminars are planned to take place at other international centres. An annual English Language and Science Summer School for World ORT students was inaugurated in 2003. Participants, selected for their leadership potential and language skills, undertake an intensive two-week course in London in return for a commitment to assist their less able fellow students on their return to their home countries.

World ORT's first fundraising workshop, named in memory of the late Paul Bernick, took place in New York in March 2002. Participants from all the



Members of Women's American ORT with World ORT President Sir Maurice Hatter inaugurating the IT lab, ORT House, London, November 2004.



Participants of the inaugural World ORT Terry and Jean de Gunzburg Jewish Education Seminar, Rome, July 2008.

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major ORT fundraising countries attended a two-day workshop that focused on the development of ORT public relations and fundraising. In August 2002 the first annual World ORT Chief Financial Officers Conference was held at ORT House in London. At the conference, sponsored by JPMorgan Private Bank, ORT chief financial officers from around the world gathered for a series of professional presentations and to exchange ideas and develop a close working relationship among themselves and the ORT national organizations they represented.

World ORT also organized a full programme of missions and visits to its schools and centres throughout the world in order to allow donors to see the impact of their support first-hand.

While continually adapting strategy to the current needs of education and training, the need to finance these programmes meant that World ORT also had to embrace new initiatives in fundraising that would serve the organization both for the present and for the future. At the 2004 World ORT General Assembly, a new grand fundraising initiative was therefore launched – called The 1880 Society (see Chapter 11), taking its name from the date of the founding of ORT. This exclusive society was open only to major donors. It was the fruition of three years of discussion and planning and was a crucial component of World ORT's 2004 strategic plan to increase the organization's worldwide fundraising revenue. In order to join the society, a donor was required to commit to a minimum pledge of 100,000 dollars over three years. Other levels were 250,000 dollars over three years and 500,000 dollars, the latter entitling the donor to life membership.

Later in the same year, a second new initiative was launched, this time to engage and nurture a new generation of future lay leaders. Called the Next Generation network, World ORT established a group of some twenty young leaders from twelve countries. Coordinated by World ORT, the Next Generation was committed to developing an international network of young people to ensure a chain of leadership that will take ORT into the future. The Next Generation members support the work of World ORT through local, national and international events and programmes, local leadership of committees and boards, recruiting and mentoring of future leaders, fundraising and outreach efforts to new constituencies.

In 2007, World ORT embarked upon a new mode of working directly inside the State of Israel that was different to anything it had previously done since the State was founded. The new World ORT programme, Science Journey (called in Israel Kadima Mada), immediately met with high acclaim both inside and outside Israel. This activity was endorsed by the Israeli Minister of Education and by the 34 local municipalities in which it developed a presence and is described in more detail in Chapter 12.

The American Anchor Revisited: **10** recent decades

'ORT is never contented to live in the present, it always is looking to the future,' wrote former Director General of World ORT Joseph Harnatz. 'We anticipated, therefore we exist.'¹ Harnatz may have referred to the global ORT programme, but his words account for the durability of ORT in America. For the last three decades Women's American ORT (WAO) and American ORT Federation (later called American ORT) adapted and readjusted their activities to the changing social, economic and cultural conditions in the United States in order to build strong national organizations that were able to raise substantial funds for ORT programmes worldwide. To understand the circumstances that led to their eventual merge into one national organization, one must look at the climate in which they existed.

The 1970s were undoubtedly WAO's 'golden years', culminating in the Golden Anniversary Convention in Jerusalem in 1977. The national organization experienced an increase both in membership and fundraising; it assumed responsibility in the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish; educated thousands about the merits of vocational and technical education; and lobbied on issues such as Soviet Jewry's emigration rights, quality public education, women's rights and First Amendment civil liberties.

WAO's ability to raise considerable sums and influence the way funds were allocated led to the building of new schools for the Jewish community in France, which helped to cater for North African Jews arriving to the country at the time, and in Argentina, where ORT was attempting to reach a young generation of Jews.

The prosperity of WAO during these years was largely due to an untapped resource within the Jewish community – its women. The national organization was able to turn these women into volunteers through extensive outreach methods. Most women in those days married early, had children when still young, and stayed at home to raise their families. College-educated and in their prime, WAO provided these women with an aim and an outlet for their energy and intelligence. They may have joined for social reasons initially (the chapter was a place where they could meet and interact with like-minded people) but they soon learned what ORT stood for and what they could accomplish together. ORT was an organization that valued what they had to

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offer and gave them an opportunity to express their Jewishness by helping to empower Jewish communities through education.

The members, young women who previously knew nothing about Jews in other parts of the world, eagerly banded together in chapters throughout the United States in order to learn about and work for ORT. The camaraderie enjoyed by these women forged life-long friendships and they looked forward to the monthly meetings and special events. WAO's presidents Pat Goldring, Ruth Eisenberg, Beverly Minkoff and Gert White understood the nature of these ties and ensured that the members could relate to ORT and its work in a personal and meaningful way. They created a loyal network of members who would follow ORT for many years to come.

By 1977 Women's American ORT was the largest ORT national organization. That year it had 130,000 members contributing more than over 3.2 million dollars.² This was not all – 1977 also saw the opening of the Bramson ORT Training Centre, Division of Technology and Business Administration, in New York City, as a result of WAO's ten-year struggle for an ORT operational presence in the United States.

In those years WAO encompassed as many as 1,050 chapters, fifty-eight regions, six area councils and five chapters-at-large (also known as 'coordinating committees').³ In order to deal with the increase in numbers and bring the organization closer to its grass roots, WAO underwent the first of several structural modifications in 1972. The country was divided into ten districts, each with its own elected board, bringing together women in smaller areas and giving members the opportunity to participate in local leadership sessions, meetings and conventions geared towards their specific needs. Organized in this way, the individual districts were able to capitalize on the talents and abilities of a burgeoning number of regional leaders, many of whom later became national leaders.

The vision and ideology that directed WAO through the years – and was articulated in 1968 by Nathan Gould, then WAO's executive director⁴ – meant that the organization was concerned primarily with supporting ORT's work for Jewish communities worldwide. At the same time, it was acutely aware of its obligations to the society and democracy in which it thrived. National leaders had realized that the organization could support the ORT global programmes as well as actively engage in communal issues that were vital to the interests of women in the United States: the preservation of democracy, quality public education, social and economic justice, civil liberties and equal rights for women. At national meetings, Gould often discussed historical and political developments such as the re-emergence and resurgence of anti-Semitism and the activities of the radical right. WAO joined Jewish and community-wide umbrella organizations including Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (later renamed Jewish Council for Public Affairs), American

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Vocational Association; National Coalition Against Censorship; Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights; and Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. WAO's activities and involvements mirrored the interests of its young members, who were mostly educated in the 1960s, during the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement rallies.

The 1970s were also a decade of growth for American ORT Federation (AOF). It expanded its largely labour- and immigrant-oriented constituency and became a broad membership organization, numbering more than 18,000 members in 100 chapters by the late 1970s.⁵ Following twenty-five years of Dr William Haber's presidency, the AOF instituted a new organizational structure that included term limits for officers. A succession of AOF leaders from Harold Friedman and Sidney Leiwant to Alvin Gray and David Hermelin directed the organization towards the broader Jewish philanthropic community and mainstream American Jewish life. These leaders were already well known as activists in their respective communities and as part of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and their local federations.⁶

Although the concept of community chapters worked well for WAO, it did not suit the men of American ORT, who were unable to devote as much time to socializing and meetings. They were more inclined to act individually, making donations and offering professional advice. In the 1980s, under the leadership of Murray Koppelman, Paul Borman and Michael Stoler, AO developed industry chapters in various fields such as jewellery, real estate, finance and engineering. These chapters functioned very differently from those of WAO. Although there were occasional meetings, the fundraising was done through direct solicitation of funds from business associates and friends, and during an annual event in honour of prominent figures and members. WAO, in comparison, was more focused on special fundraising projects aimed both at members and the broader community.

In the 1980s, helped by national laws to ensure equal job opportunities and equal pay for women and the expansion of child-care facilities outside the home, women began to join the workforce in great numbers. Directly affected by the 1960s women's movement, this was a new generation of women, the 'Me generation', who had different expectations from life. Sheltered from the experiences of the depression, they realized that the increasing costs of raising a family and maintaining the kind of lifestyle to which they aspired would require two wage earners in their family.

Many of the organizations that relied on women volunteers began to feel the effect of these changes. Women were now too busy with their home and job responsibilities and could not find the time to attend meetings on a regular basis. With fewer women coming together, it became harder to arrange events and fill leadership roles. WAO began encouraging members to meet less frequently, to hold fewer functions and to consolidate units and positions. A

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nation-wide sequential campaign was initiated and participating areas were urged to organize three major functions a year – fundraising, community and membership events – and to capitalize on these events through major outreach to the media in their respective communities. (This was a rather radical change for areas that heretofore were highly structured. It took a great deal of work to alleviate the initial fear of doing things differently). WAO launched its first major professional advertising campaign in conjunction with these events. Full-page advertisements ran in major daily newspapers, including *The New York Times*, under the title ‘L’Dor V’Dor’ (For Every Generation) featuring pictures of two generations of ORT members – a young professional and her mother.

American ORT’s industry chapters were also being transformed by women joining the workforce. Seeking networking opportunities, professional women began joining AO industrial chapters, which were concentrated mainly in New York City – and the national organization commonly referred to as ‘Men’s ORT’ saw an increase in the number of its women members. However, because of by-law restrictions, there was no counter tendency of male members joining Women’s American ORT.

Despite fiscal constraints, which brought the elimination of most of the districts and the introduction of field committees, Women’s American ORT’s support of the global ORT programme did not waver. In particular, the organization raised funds towards the construction of the ORT Braude International Institute of Technology in Karmiel (opened in 1988) with a ten-million-dollar grant, and the creation of ORT Operations in the United States.⁷

During that period an influx of Russian, Iranian and other Jewish immigrants propelled the US operations, jointly sponsored by WAO and AOF, to accommodate the increasing number of applicants who sought access to advanced technology education. In 1985 the Los Angeles ORT Technical Institute (LAOTI) opened its doors and ORT Bramson moved to a new building in Forest Hills in New York. As a service to local Jewish communities, new programmes opened in the South Florida Hillel Community Day School in Miami and in the Hebrew Academy, Epstein Day School and Yeshiva High School in Atlanta, Georgia. Progress was also made towards the establishment of the new Zarem-Golde ORT Technical Institute in Chicago, which was finally opened in January 1991 in response to research that showed a growing discrepancy between the demand for highly skilled workforce in industrial fields and the number of technically trained employees.

The mass exodus of Soviet Jews during the 1980s and 1990s energized the members of Women’s American ORT. Many national leaders held positions in other organizations fighting to free Soviet Jewry such as the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. Meeting in coalitions with other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, synagogues, federations and interested citizens, WAO members participated in letter writing campaigns, special vigils and sit-ins at the

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First Lady Barbara Bush receives the Beverly Minkoff Excellence in Education Award from former WAO President, Reese Feldman, 1989

United Nations and in front of the Russian Embassy. Most importantly, they participated in a rally in Washington DC, where they joined thousands of other Jews from around the country. WAO national president Reese Feldman was one of the speakers who addressed the gathering.

One of the major highlights of the period was a grant from Women's American ORT member Claire Mazer that enabled the publication of *Sarah's Daughters*, a pictorial book recording women throughout the world, which is listed in the Library of Congress. In fundraising, the concept of Major Gifts – large donations from individuals – began to be accepted by the membership and appropriate campaigns were initiated. At the same time, the organization capitalized on state-of-the-art technology and undertook two satellite broadcasts to areas throughout the country, which were then followed by local phonathons to contact individuals in their communities.

On 1 November 1989, at a National Convention of Women's American ORT, Barbara Bush, wife of the then American President George Bush, received the first Beverly Minkoff Excellence in Education Award for her contribution to literacy in the United States. 'We can't all be heroes. Some of us have to sit on the curb and clap as they go by,' said Mrs Bush in her acceptance speech, 'Well, I am clapping for you, the members of Women's American ORT. You are heroes to me.'⁸

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Bramson ORT students on their graduation day, New York, 2006.

A slow but steady change was taking place in American Jewish life during the 1990s. Financial success, the diminution of discrimination in the workplace and in institutions, and the subsequent cultural integration into the broader American community, led many to rethink their donations and to concentrate only on causes that were important to them personally. Religion and education – areas that were the primary recipients of American charitable dollars – had to start competing for funds with other non-profit causes. Museums, orchestras, universities and medical and environmental organizations all began vying for leaders and their donations. Both WAO and AOF had to ensure that ORT remained at the forefront of philanthropic attention. ORT's focus was, of course, on education and not religion. However, the very fact that this education was intrinsically linked to Jewish traditions, culture and history provided for many the needed 'comfort zone for giving'. Despite a drop in overall membership numbers at the beginning of the decade, WAO's contribution to the subvention budget of World ORT Union represented 24.9 per cent of the total funds, maintaining its place as the largest single contributor.⁹

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Sandy Isenstein, WAO's national president, foresaw the challenges involved in working in the increasingly competitive field of fundraising. She established the President's Young Leadership Council as a new framework for creating dynamic programmes, upgrading materials, fostering exciting community projects and most importantly, developing and promoting leaders for the twenty-first century. 'We must find a way to accommodate the women of the future – if Women's American ORT is to have one', Isenstein wrote. The Council aimed to meet the needs of younger women with diverse lifestyles – 'from the mum of three trying to "fit it all in" to the professional thirty-something who is looking for a way to find personal gratification beyond her career.'¹⁰ The programme, introduced in the spring of 1994, provided specialized training, awards, incentives and missions as well as a forum for like-minded women to meet and network. This cadre of leaders would ensure that WAO maintains its commitment to the future of the global ORT network.

Promising young women were identified in seventy-five WAO chapters and were fast tracked into leadership positions, locally and nationally. All were born after 1948 and many had only a limited relationship with Israel. Nineteen of these young leaders visited Israel as part of the 1998 Young Leadership Mission and returned from their trip with a strong sense of connection to Israel and its people. Once again, Women's American ORT provided a platform for raising Jewish consciousness among a new generation of young women. The Nathan Gould Memorial Endowment Fund was established in 1995 in order to encourage similar activities for future young leaders.

The concept of missions was introduced in the early 1990s by Sandy Isenstein as a way of enabling large numbers of members to visit ORT facilities throughout the world as well as avoiding the expense of organizing small annual delegations of leaders. Mission trips, which were funded by members, would include visits to various schools, talks with teachers and students, social events and sightseeing. The missions were sometimes timed for special World ORT events, such as the General Assembly in Israel or the dedication of a school in Buenos Aires, or geared towards a special group (such as Young Leaders). However, they all had one aim in common: creating an opportunity for supporters and potential supporters to personally experience the worldwide programme. Many participants have found, and are still finding, mission trips to be one of their most exciting, motivating and memorable experiences, and missions have been an effective fundraising tool for both organizations through the years. In 2005 an American ORT mission to Moscow and Prague raised almost 100,000 dollars.¹¹ According to former AO President Joe Cohen, mission trips tended to raise an individual's annual donation by up to 80 per cent.¹²

With the decline in the number of community chapters and local activity, and the increased mobility of society due to downsizing and outsourcing, the adoption of Life Membership in 1990 proved prophetic for WAO. It hailed a

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ORT America 1880 Society reception, 2007. L to R: Aaron Trub, ORT America Board member Sara R. Trub, ORT America President Doreen N. Hermelin, and ORT America Life Trustee and former American ORT President Robert L. Sill.

new era, in which women could remain a part of the organization regardless of their location and level of involvement. In the first year of the programme 300 women paid 500 dollars; by November 2007, the membership fees from 4,788 Life Members provided a stable financial support for the Endowment Fund.¹³

In 1995 a new Strategic Plan introduced another structural change for WAO, creating ways of dealing with a changing fundraising world and the transformations in women's lifestyles. Isenstein recognized the new trends that were going to impact the national organization: women were beginning to marry later, have children later and return to their jobs after a short maternity leave. Although they had less time for volunteering, they often had more disposable income and more choices for charitable giving, both in the Jewish community and the broader American community. Many were now occupying senior positions in the workplace while serving on local boards of other organizations, which tended to rely on paid professional staff (as opposed to volunteers). The plan presented a set of organizational modifications that intended to assist the leadership in finding new and productive methods for sharing their responsibilities as well as improving fundraising. The Board of Directors model was adopted, with only half the number of people that served on the former National Executive Committee. Term limits were introduced: eligible leaders would serve no more than two three-year terms on the board. This new trimmer structure was not only more efficient, but also allowed for a greater turnover in leadership and fast-tracking opportunities for younger leaders.

The American ORT Federation was also changing and transforming in preparation for the twenty-first century, not least by shortening its name to American ORT (AO) in 1995. Over the years, many of AO's affiliated units, such as Labour ORT and the National ORT League, had fulfilled their original

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raison d'être and ceased to function. Acutely aware of the need for AO to involve younger members, Murray Koppelman made a concerted effort during his tenure to put 'new faces' on the board. He promoted ORT, visited every AO chapter in the country and was instrumental in founding the Investment and Finance Chapter, which at its height raised 500,000 dollars for ORT's activities and schools worldwide.¹⁴ At that time, AO also established viable chapters with large memberships in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington DC. The chapters were usually developed where there was a crossover involvement with the local Jewish federation or where an ORT school or programme existed. The problems of having both AO and WAO chapters in the same city would eventually be solved with a merger.

The technological advances of the late 1990s impacted the manner in which both organizations functioned, particularly in the realm of communications. Digital technology transformed the way people and organizations communicated and worked. The internet and the increase in the number of cheaper, faster and more powerful personal computers – and those able to use them through easy operating systems and programmes – all impacted the work of both organizations. Websites were built, offering the option to donate money online, and direct mail solicitations were increased – all in an effort to reach new donors and larger contributions.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a gradual increase in reliance on professional staff at all levels. National president Pepi Dunay began to concentrate on new creative ways to encourage special local fundraising events, which required stronger staff support in the field. Faced with diminishing resources in both money and manpower, Women's American ORT's national leadership had to make some hard decisions.

The emphasis on communal activities of earlier years now shifted even more towards the organization's core mission (supporting the worldwide ORT programme), capital fundraising and Major Gifts. One of the greatest successes was Regeneration 2000, which founded a network of schools and training centres in the CIS and Baltic States. Utilizing advanced technology, WAO organized two satellite video conferences and nation-wide phonathons. Also around that time, *The Visionaries*, a public television series documenting ORT programmes in Odessa and Chicago, was broadcast throughout the United States.

Alongside achievements in fundraising and marketing, WAO and its president Carol Linch introduced further structural changes to the national organization. Faced with a dwindling number of lay leaders, the field committee system was dissolved, regional offices were closed down and the concept of ADCs (area development coordinators) was launched. The underlying aim of the various structural changes over the years was the pragmatic balancing of expenses, the empowerment of women and the ability to achieve results.

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Several innovations in fundraising occurred during this time. Since its inception, Women's American ORT had been successful in raising money for particular projects. This aspect of fundraising received further emphasis with the Project Portfolio – special projects that required urgent funding and that WAO could support directly. The portfolio concept gave the different areas of activities the emotional and financial hooks to raise substantial funds by earmarking individual projects in Russia, Israel, and the United States. Another fundraising innovation was the President's Challenge in 2004 – an opportunity for members to make their gifts go twice as far thanks to an anonymous European donor who agreed to match gifts up to a total of 500,000 dollars. WAO assumed responsibility for a significant portion of the challenge.¹⁵

American culture in particular encourages philanthropic giving, mainly through policies of tax advantages. WAO and AO both took advantage of the various options and incentives for charitable giving and established planned giving departments, where they promoted and advertised the various options and which enabled them to stay competitive in the field. In the first half of 2007, WAO received over three million dollars in legacies and seven gift annuities for the amount of 90,000 dollars. During that time, American ORT received twenty legacies totalling over 500,000 dollars and added three gift annuities in the amount of 82,000 dollars.¹⁶

During the presidency of Robert Sill (2000–2004) thirty-two students at ORT Bramson took advantage of American ORT's Twin Towers Fund, which provided scholarships for survivors of the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001: victims' families, emergency services and rescue workers and displaced employees. The fund followed AO's tradition of providing aid in crisis situations, such as the 2002 Emergency Fund for Argentina and the 2003 fund to safeguard Israeli students.

2003 also saw the dedication ceremony of the David B. Hermelin ORT Resource Centre in the Dan and Betty Kahn Jewish Community Centre in West Bloomfield, Michigan, which brought together many local and national ORT leaders as well as leaders of the Detroit Jewish community. The Centre, which includes the Cyber ORT Cafe, the ORTnet Learning Lab and the ORTM2 Studio for state-of-the-art multimedia projects, was a joint effort of Women's American ORT, American ORT and ORT Operations USA in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. It serves as a technology resource centre for Jewish educators and provides students of all ages with the opportunity to explore Jewish history and culture in an exciting and innovative interactive forum. It also emphasizes marketable skills and offers computer-based job skills classes for at-risk members of the community at large. The centre, along with the ORT Hermelin College of Engineering in Netanya, Israel, are both tributes to Hermelin's strong belief in education as a cure for poverty and a way of preserving human dignity, and to his strong commitment to ORT. AO President Paul Borman was instrumental in raising funds

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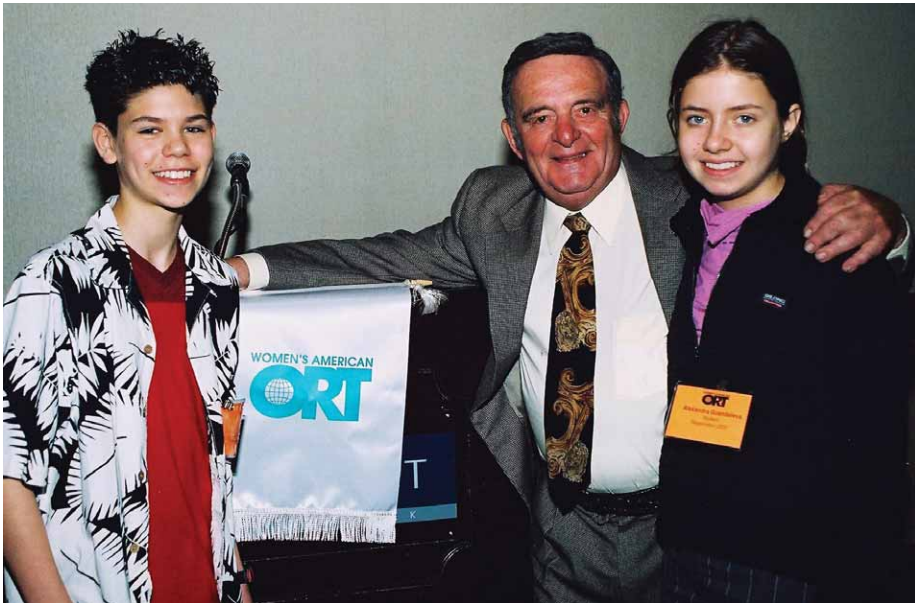
to build the college and in naming it after David Hermelin, former president of American ORT and World ORT and former US ambassador to Norway. In addition to the ORT Hermelin Resource Centre, ORT centres are located in Miami, New York, Atlanta and Cleveland. These centres aim to interact with local Jewish schools and congregational schools and to provide education resources including teacher training, technical support and consulting services.

The ORT Lipson International Studies programme was also inaugurated in 2003. Conceived by former American ORT national vice president Nathan Lipson and Rabbi Steven Ballaban, this innovative exchange programme brings students from Argentina and Israel to study for six weeks at Jewish day schools in Cleveland and Atlanta. Lipson's generosity has enabled these cultural exchanges to increase ORT's visibility in the local communities and has created a forum that brings together a new generation of young people – the Jewish men and women of the future. During 2004 American ORT held twenty-five major fundraising events throughout the country, presenting awards to distinguished individuals: eight Community Achievement Awards, four Man of the Year Awards and three awards for ORT Jurisprudence.

ORT Operations USA, these days an essential component of ORT's worldwide network, enrolls students from over forty countries speaking more than twenty-five different languages. Since 2000, ORT Bramson has been operating as a two-year junior college and both LAOTI and Zarem-Golde are working towards similar accreditations. True to their mission to provide key vocational skills that meet the needs of the employment market, the schools offer advanced courses in computer technology, electronics, medical technology and hospitality management. The schools serve as an important ORT presence in the general community as well as a source of pride to members and an important fundraising vehicle.

In April 2004 the World ORT General Assembly took place in North America for the first time. The 1880 Society, which was inaugurated by World ORT earlier that year, was formally introduced during the meeting. Women's American ORT and American ORT proudly announced enrolment of more than 50 per cent of the Society's initial membership. The Society was established to attract the highest level of philanthropists with minimum gifts of 100,000 dollars over a three-year period. The 1880 Society soon had forty-nine American members, whose combined contributions represented more than 13.7 million dollars.¹⁷

Women's American ORT's Triennial Convention was held in conjunction with the General Assembly. Judy Menikoff was elected president and members adopted a three-year strategic plan that concentrated on fundraising, community activities, improved communications and public relations and closer coordination between national and local efforts on behalf of the programme. The successful implementation of this plan was to lead to both

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Regeneration 2004 launch. Milton Gralla, a major benefactor for the World ORT Regeneration Programme in the former Soviet Union, with students Dan Fokin and Alexandra Guendeleva from Lipman Jewish School in Moscow who participated in a press conference for the World ORT General Assembly in New York, May 2004.

increased visibility for the national organization as well as to some of the most productive financial years for Women's American ORT.

Building upon the success of the Regeneration 2000 campaign, Regeneration 2004 was launched at the convention. Women's American ORT accepted the lead for this campaign and pledged 2.8 million dollars towards its completion. It fulfilled its obligations to the campaign a year ahead of the schedule.¹⁸

Two new vehicles were soon introduced to ensure the future financial viability of Women's American ORT – the Diamond Ladder and The Heritage Society. A year after its foundation in June 2006, the Diamond Ladder, a three-year commitment of a minimum gift of 5,000 dollars per year, reported eighty-four members representing more than 2.5 million dollars. By April 2007, The Heritage Society, representing a verifiable minimum planned gift of 50,000 dollars, had over seventy members.¹⁹

The introduction of the Students at Risk Programme (STARS), which provided hot meals, clothing and transportation vouchers for the neediest students in Israel, had an immediate appeal to many members; 2,347 students were supported by the programme over a two-year period and in 2007 it was expanded to include students in Argentina, Italy and Russia.²⁰

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World ORT Director General and CEO Robert Singer and Women's American ORT President Judy Menikoff with guest speaker former President Bill Clinton at the Visions of Hope event, May 2004.

In summer 2006 the confluence of leadership and circumstances paved the way for substantive talks regarding the merge of AO and WAO. Under the careful direction of American ORT president Joe Cohen and Women's American ORT president Judy Menikoff, the legal process was completed by January 2007. The new entity, ORT America, began a restructuring process. The aim was not only to merge the leadership but also offices and staff. The responsibility for managing the merger was given to Women's American ORT's Executive Director Hope Kessler, who subsequently became executive director of ORT America.

The future of the united ORT America lies in raising and contributing funds to the global ORT network and strengthening ORT's voice, presence and influence in the United States. Already the new organization began to benefit from joining forces, as Diamond Ladder numbers have climbed to 115 and the number of contributors who donated more than 5,000 dollars has risen to 224.²¹

The existence of the two separate organizations often confused those who were unfamiliar with ORT's work in the United States. Speaking with one unified voice throughout the country has proved beneficial, particularly as ORT America began interfacing with the broader Jewish community's federa-

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Women's American ORT delegation visit ORT House, London, November 2003.

tion system. Through the tireless efforts of World ORT, many local federations in the United States are currently making direct donations to specific ORT programmes and projects in Israel, the CIS and Argentina.

ORT America began functioning under the same board structure adopted by Women's American ORT, with an equal representation from each national organization. Areas were once again realigned into a National Alliance Network (NAN) and were grouped according to size rather than geography.

Throughout the decades, national leaders of AO and WAO not only led their respective organizations but also held important leadership roles in World ORT, using their enthusiasm, talents and expertise to forward ORT's work. The organizations have continued to provide the largest proportion of funds to World ORT, totalling more than twenty-four million dollars between 2002 and 2006. Additionally, four million dollars were raised for ORT Operations USA.²²

'Women's American ORT has stayed relevant by changing with the times; we are not afraid of change', declared national president Ruth Taffel in 1997, 'I always say that if a corporation made the changes we have made in the past six years, it would be on the cover of *Newsweek*. We've gambled, we've taken risks, and we've come through with flying colors.'²³ Taffel's remarks truly capture the strength of the new organization and her words herald the future of ORT America. As the new organization enters the new millennium, it is prepared to take further risks and ensure that it continues to provide unshakeable moral and financial support to ORT worldwide.

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1. Joseph Harmatz, Address to Women's American ORT 16th National Board Conference, 9–11 November 1986, Atlanta, Georgia, World ORT Archive, ref. RG/1A/1/6/1.
2. Ruth Eisenberg, 'Women's American ORT Fiftieth Anniversary', *ORT Yearbook 1977* (New York: American ORT Federation, 1977), insert.
3. Chapters have a minimum of twenty-five members. A region includes a minimum of four chapters; an area council includes a minimum of three chapters. Chapters-at-large, coordinating committees and area councils existed in cities or communities with smaller Jewish populations. The type of organizational unit was based on the size of the community and its growth potential. As the organization grew, the various echelons provided a link to the national organization.
4. Nathan Gould, *ORT as a Movement in Jewish Life* (New York: Women's American ORT Community Service Publications, 1968), World ORT Archive, ref. d07a263.
5. Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 228.
6. Adrian Bernick, former assistant executive director of American ORT, in interview with Lynn Leeb, October 2007.
7. Women's American ORT, 'International Agenda Israel', *Women's American ORT, The Gateway to Education that Works, Report for the New Century* (New York: Women's American ORT, 1997), p. 9.
8. Barbara Bush, 'My Heroes: Address to the National Convention of Women's American ORT, Washington, DC, 1989', *Women's American ORT Yearbook 1990* (New York: Women's American ORT, 1991), p. 2.
9. 'Women's American ORT', *Women's American ORT Yearbook 1991* (New York: Women's American ORT, 1991), p. 23.
10. Sandy Isenstein, 'Viewpoints', *The Reporter* (Autumn 1992), p. 4.
11. World ORT, *World ORT Report* (London: World ORT, 2006), p. 18.
12. Joe Cohen, former president of American ORT, in interview with Lynn Leeb, November 2007.
13. Larry Ludwig, Life Membership Database, Women's American ORT, November 2007.
14. Murray Koppelman, former president of American ORT, in interview with Lynn Leeb, October 2007.
15. Carol Linch, former president of Women's American ORT, in interview with Lynn Leeb, October 2007.
16. Judy Menikoff, 'Pride and Prophecy: Past, Present, and Future of ORT America', speech given at Women's American ORT Convention, Washington, DC, April 2007.
17. Bernick interview with Leeb, October 2007.
18. Women's American ORT, 'International Agenda Israel', p. 9.
19. Bush, 'My Heroes', p. 2.
20. 'Women's American ORT', p. 23.
21. Menikoff, 'Pride and Prophecy', p. 8.
22. American ORT & Women's American ORT, Summary of Revenues and Commitments 2002–2006, November 2007.
23. Ruth S. Taffel, 'Message from the National President, Women's American ORT 1996/97 Year in Review', *Report for the New Century, Women's American ORT, The Gateway to Education That Works* (New York: Women's American ORT, 1997), insert, p. 2.

ORT and Fundraising: **11** challenges and achievements in recent years

There is a Jewish saying (*Masechet Avot 3:17*) *im ein kemakh ein torah* – literally, without flour there can be no Torah, and metaphorically meaning that no community enterprise can succeed without adequate (financial) nourishment. The ORT enterprise throughout all its metamorphoses and 128 years of historical development and geographical peregrination has been alive to this imperative and has adopted a variety of means to ensure that funds are available to enable it to carry out its work. As ORT's programmes became ever more ambitious in scope and size, the need to provide the necessary finance dramatically increased and new funding models have evolved.

The core of ORT's funding – although not necessarily the most significant sums – has always come from its loyal supporters. As an organization created on ideological principles, ORT has been able to call upon those who identify with its ideology to provide ongoing financial and practical support. As described elsewhere in this volume, the founders of ORT raised their initial funding by circulating their message throughout the Jewish communities of the Russian Empire. Indeed this supporter base has always been the key element in the continued growth of ORT and its programmes.

In the United States this principle was later taken to enormous heights, with Women's American ORT at its peak boasting in excess of 130,000 members in well over 1,200 chapters throughout the country (see Chapter 10) and the same pattern was repeated, albeit on a smaller scale, in many other countries including Britain, Canada, South Africa, Switzerland, Mexico and Israel. The genesis of ORT's presence in these countries was remarkably similar. During the 1920s and 1930s one or more of World ORT's high profile personalities would arrive in the country and, through oratory, conviction and passion for their cause, were able to win the hearts and minds of a number of influential members of the local Jewish community. These individuals, in turn, created committees among their friends and acquaintances and began to campaign for funding and support among the wider Jewish community in their country. The legacy created by the early ORT leaders was powerful enough to enable ORT groups to continue to flourish through successive generations, maintaining their alignment with ORT's mission and generating millions of dollars to fuel the organization's programmes and activities.



ORT Switzerland Bollywood fundraising event in aid of ORT India projects, Beau Rivage Hotel, Geneva, November 2006.

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These support organizations are extremely important for ORT, not only for the funds that they have been able to contribute in their own right, but also because their activist members are able to galvanize backing from the wider community for fundraising campaigns and to raise awareness of the issues that underpin ORT's work. Furthermore, many of ORT's leading supporters at a local level have gone on to become ORT's lay leaders at an international level; through the governance mechanisms they guide the organization and shape its policies, eventually ensuring that the ORT ethos lives on to resonate with new generations of supporters and donors – as well as beneficiaries.

However, in spite of being able to attract support at the highest levels, promoting the ORT message and thereby attracting the interest of the wider community has been one of the major challenges facing ORT fundraisers throughout the organization's existence. Whereas the community at large can always be relied upon to respond to an appeal for an emergency ambulance, famine relief or for providing food and shelter for people displaced by natural or man-made disasters, it is a far more formidable task to raise money for the long-term needs, the investment in human potential and the community-building activities in which ORT specializes. This is aptly illustrated in a letter written in 1972 by William Haber, president of the American ORT Federation to Edward Ginsberg, president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in connection with JDC's contribution to ORT:

It's harder to 'sell' education and training than feeding stations and nurseries. *Rachmonos* [compassion] is deeply ingrained in the Jewish psyche. Other causes are secondary. In my mind it has been a tribute to the Joint that throughout its history it has not overlooked some of the other causes.¹

Additionally, the locations where ORT's operations take place are generally not the locations where the funds are raised, and the quest to service the education and training needs of foreign Jewish communities has historically placed ORT at a disadvantage when seeking its portion of community funds. As an organization with a specific mission and ideology it attracts enthusiasts from those who identify with its purpose, but it almost always finds itself outside the mainstream of Jewish communal fundraising endeavour. It therefore has to work very hard to put its case. Through policy and pragmatic means World ORT has risen to this challenge in a number of different ways, adapting the flexibility that characterizes its operational programmes to its fundraising activities.

One approach, first pioneered by David Lvovitch and later successfully adopted by successive World ORT administrations, has been to convince governments to make a substantial contribution to the cost of services provided by ORT within their territory or within foreign territories in which they have aid commitments. Thus in France, Israel, the CIS and formerly in Italy, a size-

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able amount of ORT's operational budget has been met by the national government, and ORT schools are recognized as being part of the state network. This enabled the funds raised by ORT's supporters to be used to provide the 'added value' that could make the ORT schools in those locations the schools of choice for families. Obtaining government backing in this way also considerably increases the prestige of ORT's schools and educational establishments, enhancing the attractiveness of these establishments as a suitable destination for charitable donations.

In other countries, notably in Latin America, the majority of ORT's operational income is derived from tuition fees paid by students or their families, with extra support coming from the local community and, to a lesser extent, from World ORT. The fragility of this funding model became apparent in Argentina at the end of 2001, when the country's economic crisis virtually wiped out the middle class and plunged a large section of the Jewish community into hitherto unknown poverty which affected the schools. In order to overcome this crisis, World ORT mounted an emergency campaign which received magnificent response by the worldwide membership of ORT.

In all countries, ORT's fundraising activities reflect local norms as well as the status of ORT within those countries, and a comparison of some of the different fundraising models that have been employed provides an interesting insight into the diversity of this aspect of the Jewish experience throughout the world – as well as to the workings of ORT. In France, 25 per cent of the budget (amounting to eight million euros in 2007/8) is derived from the unique *taxe d'apprentissage* system which obliges companies to pay an amount, equivalent to 0.5 per cent of their salary costs, either directly to the government or towards officially sanctioned training programmes. As an accredited provider of training services ORT France is one of the organizations authorized to receive this funding, and is one of the largest recipients of these payments in the country. This innovative method of raising funds was initiated during the 1950s by Ghers Melamed of ORT France who approached scores of Jewish employers, offering to handle all the administrative aspects of the *taxe* in return for a commitment to make the payment to ORT. As a refinement to this initiative, Melamed and other members of ORT France went on to contact several hundred accountants, convincing them to encourage their clients to discharge their *taxe d'apprentissage* obligations by giving the money directly to ORT.

The scheme has continued successfully each year since its inception, and some 20,000 companies contribute to ORT France in this way. The programme is administered by a team of full-time staff working with a fully computerized system developed by ORT France and has proved to be an efficient and effective fundraising tool. Although general income received in this way can only be used for salaries and equipment directly related to training courses, in light

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of the esteem in which ORT is held in France, ORT France was given dispensation by the government to apply these funds to the capital costs of the redevelopment of the Montreuil and Toulouse schools.

In the United Kingdom, fundraising is carried out by British ORT, an autonomous charitable organization that has been regularly contributing to World ORT since its creation in 1920. It is a significant member of the World ORT family, providing well in excess of one million dollars annually to the World ORT core budget. Although the primary aim of British ORT is to raise funds for World ORT activities, it is equally passionate about the need to raise awareness of the global work of the organization, knowing that there are a number of members of the community who identify strongly with World ORT's educational aims. Originally operating as separate men's and women's divisions, the two combined in 1987 to create a single entity. British ORT is an organization steered by a highly committed group of leaders and with a consistent and loyal following of patrons, supporters and contributors. Day-to-day operations are managed by a small professional team. Many of British ORT's leaders have gone on to hold high office in World ORT including David (later Lord) Young who was president of World ORT from 1990 to 1994 and Sir Maurice Hatter who occupied the same post from 2004 to 2008.



British ORT 85th Anniversary Annual Dinner held at the Savoy Hotel. Entertainment was provided by a group of students from ORT Vilnius Shalom Aleichem school with British ORT Chairman Alan Goldman (*centre*) flanked by British ORT Executive Director Ivor Levene OBE and Trustee Simon Freeman and ORT students and staff from Argentina, Ukraine and Lithuania. London, September 2006.

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British ORT has always worked alongside the main Anglo-Jewish establishment, and has succeeded in garnering high-profile support from leading members of both the Jewish and the wider community. Thus a guest at an ORT function in the United Kingdom is equally likely to encounter the Chief Rabbi, the currently serving prime minister, assorted politicians from all parties, top industrialists and business leaders and leading personalities from the world of the arts. Much of the ability to reach these individuals stems from the highly placed members of the British ORT Committee and their wide range of personal contacts.

Fundraising is seen as both a short-term and a long-term endeavour. Guests and patrons at a function contribute generously at the event itself but, equally importantly, they are exposed to the work of ORT and the power and benefit of the ORT education system. One of the positive results of this is that many people, having learned of ORT's work, take an increasing interest during their lifetime and some make generous provision for ORT in the form of legacies in their wills.

A significant boost for British ORT came as a result of World ORT's move from Geneva to London in 1979. The presence in the UK of World ORT's professional teams encouraged increasing practical cooperation with government and local education agencies and Jewish and non-Jewish schools in the country, generating income as well as good will. A resource centre was established, which acted as a technology education hub, drawing on ORT's international expertise and supplying training courses for teachers and consultancy for schools and education authorities. In the 1980s virtually all UK Jewish schools seeking to introduce the new subject of computing into their curricula turned to ORT for help, which was readily given. In 1987 the City Technology Colleges Trust was created in the UK in order to foster the growth of technology specialist schools nationwide. ORT was at the heart of this development, providing advice and specialists to help the movement in general and supplying teachers to a number of the individual schools. ORT has continued to be well received and respected at the highest levels of British education and government.

In spite of its relatively small Jewish population, Switzerland has a prominent place in ORT's history and its own unique story. From 1943 to 1979 the headquarters and centre of operations of World ORT (then World ORT Union) was in Geneva, providing essential training courses for the thousands of refugees from war-torn Europe that passed through the country. Although the operations moved to London in 1979, Geneva remains the official financial and legal centre of World ORT and home to its European International Cooperation office. Training programmes took place in ORT centres in Switzerland until 1992. From the outset, the local Jewish community provided unflinching financial support for ORT programmes and its beneficiaries, and the enthusiasm for ORT's mission was sufficiently strong to ensure that even when

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courses were no longer being run in the country, fundraising continued unabated.

The four chapters of Basle, Geneva, Berne and Zurich each organizes a series of prestigious fundraising events each year, contributing over half a million dollars to the World ORT core budget, sponsoring operational, capital and International Cooperation projects. ORT Switzerland is a high-profile organization, and considerable support is drawn from the wider community for ORT's projects. From the 1950s to the 1980s Jacqueline Maus was the tireless president, devoting her energy and resources and ensuring the success of the fundraising effort.

Before discussing the special case of fundraising in the United States, it is necessary to examine the global trends in fundraising during the latter years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century and to see how these have impacted on ORT's own strategy. Prior to the 1990s donors were, in general, content to contribute their gifts to charities without regard to the eventual destination of the funds. They relied on the recipient organization knowing its own needs and deciding how and where to apportion its charitable income. Donors expected honest accounting, of course, but did not feel the need to stipulate in advance how funds were to be used. In ORT's case the greater part of this general money thus raised was distributed to its operational countries through a system of subventions, while some was retained in order to support the organization's infrastructure and overheads. During 'good years', income exceeded expenditure and the availability of general funds allowed World ORT to build up reserves.

The late 1990s saw a dramatic change in patterns of charitable giving. The profile of donors changed and so did the manner in which they made their charitable donations. The new philanthropists were often successful professionals, entrepreneurs and business people who demanded that the principles that governed their business activities be applied equally to the organizations that received their charitable gifts. They were not content to put their money into general funds and for indeterminate purposes; they wanted to know – and to have a say in – the destination and the distribution of their largesse.

In the light of these trends World ORT saw a diminution of its general income. As the pressure persisted, and ORT's reserves continued to decrease, it was forced both to reduce the subventions and to cut its overheads. The agonizing that was involved in reaching these decisions is reflected in the minutes of the Administrative Committee meetings of the time.

It became apparent that a major change in strategy was called for. At the January 1999 meeting of the World ORT Administrative Committee, one member averred that 'projects were the way of future fundraising and [general funding was being replaced by] designated giving (i.e. earmarked funds)'.²

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Although ORT had benefited from a certain amount of designated income in the past, it was clear that the proportion of designated to general funding would have to rise sharply. It was thus, in 1999, that World ORT initiated its own project process system, signalling a new direction in the organization's fundraising style. The project system was managed by the then newly established International Liaison Department, headed by Sonia Gomes de Mesquita who introduced new fundraising ideas and technologies to the ORT global network. The new approach called for the creation of a series of project proposals and an attendant reporting structure coordinated and controlled by the World ORT office in London. Where before, operational countries simply submitted a list of subvention requests, they would now be required to present their detailed needs, supported by relevant information, in a form that would allow ORT staff in London to create project proposals that could be submitted to donors. The individual documents would be combined into a project portfolio and presented to World ORT's international fundraising teams.

The first portfolio was released in 2000 and contained 120 proposals to mark ORT's 120th anniversary. Fundraisers in all countries enthusiastically embraced this new approach, which enabled them to present prospective benefactors with potential projects that were matched to their needs. Individual donors welcomed the opportunity to invest in specific projects and to follow through their development from inception to completion. In this way, in the UK and Switzerland for example, a number of high net worth benefactors were encouraged to contribute substantial sums to projects throughout the ORT network, especially to schools in Israel and the former Soviet Union. By moving away from relying on general funding to a system of targeted giving, World ORT has had to adjust its fundraising culture, but it has seen the benefits in the form of a significant increase in its revenue.

It is the United States that has been ORT's most important source of funding since the 1920s, and especially from the period since World War II. Here especially, the changing trends and societal patterns have required ORT to adjust its fundraising approach in order to maximize its income. The creation and development of ORT's own network of members and supporters in the United States is described in Chapter 10; the focus of this present chapter is on ORT's position vis-à-vis the wider North American organized Jewish community.

The modern era of ORT's relationship with the US Jewish communities begins in 1947 with an agreement between World ORT and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).³ Under that agreement, which was regularly renewed and which remained in force until 1999, the JDC transferred an annual grant received from the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) to World ORT Union to support its operational programmes. In 1947 the amount was two million dollars; in subsequent years it varied between 1.5 million and

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4.7 million dollars. The JDC agreed that they 'could not give ORT what our programmes deserved'.⁴ It is a tribute to American ORT and Women's American ORT that, although hampered by the restrictions of the agreement, they nevertheless contributed large sums for ORT's worldwide operations.

The major change that took place in ORT's relationship with the organized Jewish communities of the United States stemmed from the formation of the United Jewish Communities (UJC) in 1999 and, at the same time, from the professional leadership change in World ORT. The UJC was created by a merger of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), the United Israel Appeal (UIA) and the United Jewish Appeal (UJA). In order to appreciate the role of ORT in this new order, it is important to understand a little of the history and the somewhat complex structure of the organized Jewish communities that led to this development.

In 1895 the first Jewish federation in the United States was founded in Boston, coordinating and consolidating local fundraising and taking responsibility for a variety of social services in local Jewish communities. Within several decades, scores of other Jewish communities joined Boston, forming independent Jewish federations. In the 1930s the Council of Jewish Federations was formed to provide a national organization for the federations, by then numbering over 200, and a collective voice for North American Jewry.

The JDC was established in 1914 as a rescue and relief organization 'to serve the needs of Jews throughout the world, particularly where their lives are threatened or made more difficult'.⁵ It has continued in this role assisting distressed and vulnerable communities both in the Diaspora and in Israel.

The United Israel Appeal (formerly the United Palestine Appeal – UPA) was established in 1925. Its purpose was to provide a link and a conduit for funds from the American Jewry to the Jewish community of Palestine (later Israel). It became the primary source of funding for the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI).

The United Jewish Appeal was formed in 1939 to unite fundraising efforts of the JDC and the UPA. Over the ensuing years, working with the federations, it grew to become the 'largest voluntary philanthropy in Jewish history'⁶, raising hundreds of millions of dollars annually for Israel and Jewish causes. The UJA collected the money from federations and distributed it to the JDC and the UIA (and thus to JAFI) allowing each to carry out its own mission.

By virtue of the agreement with the USA, American ORT and Women's American ORT operated outside the structure described above, although many millions of dollars were raised for ORT and many of ORT's donors were themselves contributors to their local federation and hence to the collective funding system. It can also be seen that the annual allocation that World ORT Union received from the USA through JDC derived from the UJA which, in turn, received its funding from the federations.

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During the thirty to forty years following World War II and the founding of the State of Israel the system operated more or less without change: the CJF generally focused on local or domestic issues while the UJA (through the JDC and the UIA-JAFI) was concentrating on overseas needs. Organizations such as ORT remained on the periphery of the system, providing more specialized services.

As the Jewish community developed and new generations of donors emerged, the trends in giving described earlier began to manifest themselves, and major changes took place across the whole of the US Jewish philanthropic landscape. The younger generation had different priorities from those of their parents and grandparents as well as alternative, often non-Jewish, avenues for charitable giving. As mentioned above, these new donors also wanted more say in the distribution of their philanthropic gifts. The federation system was faced with a steep decline in the funds collected and available for distribution for overseas causes. Faced with this reality, the major organizations were obliged to regroup and in 1999 the UJC, CJF, UIA and the UJA combined to form a new umbrella organization, the UJC.

Within the new framework, and in an attempt to raise more funds, the total overseas 'pot' was divided into 'core' and 'elective' components. The distribution of the core component – comprising 90 per cent of the total – was placed in the hands of a new committee, consisting of representatives of nine-



World ORT Next Generation mission participants on Mount Zion in Israel, September 2005.

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teen federations, known as the ONAD (Overseas Needs, Assessment and Distribution) Committee, while the elective funds could be allocated to overseas programmes at the discretion of each individual federation and their donors. Initially, the JDC and JAFI were the sole recipients, competing with each other for the 10 per cent elective funds from the federations.

The single most important effect of this reorganization on World ORT was that JDC, faced with a reduction in core funding and uncertainty regarding elective funding, decided to withdraw from the 52-year-old agreement with World ORT. In 2000 ORT was to have received 2.8 million dollars from the JDC; instead, they received notification that from 2000 onward there would no longer be any funds available. As 2.8 million dollars represented about 20 per cent of the entire core budget of World ORT at that time, ORT was faced with a potential crisis.

However, out of adversity comes opportunity and this apparent setback in fact led to a fundraising revolution for ORT that has had immense benefits for the organization. Upon learning that the grant would no longer be forthcoming from the JDC, World ORT mounted a vigorous drive to recover the lost funding. David Hermelin, former President of World ORT and a leading figure in American Jewry and Robert Singer, newly appointed Director General of World ORT, headed a sustained campaign of meetings, presentations and lobbying that resulted in the UJC agreeing that the subvention for general funding to ORT, previously paid through the JDC, would instead be awarded from the core funds administered by ONAD. More importantly, henceforth World ORT would join JDC and JAFI as the only beneficiaries of the UJC collective funding process and receive funds from any special national campaign that was conducted.⁷ This remarkable decision acknowledged the importance of ORT's work for world Jewry and the reality that supporting World ORT was part of the collective responsibility of the American Jewish community. It marked the beginning of a process that would see World ORT increasingly gain acceptance within the federation system as a preferred service provider with growing impact on decisions regarding the allocation of collective funds.

In preparation for the promised opportunity to be eventually eligible to receive elective funds, World ORT began to reposition itself and to create the climate for greater recognition within the system. Early in 2002 World ORT sent senior professionals from London to meet with several individual federations. Their mission was to begin educating federations about the work of ORT and to begin learning about the types of projects that might be attractive to federations, with a view to tailoring projects within the portfolio to federations' needs. However, although valuable contacts were made, these visits appear to have had minimal impact; in reviewing the minutes of these meetings it seems that most federations were cordial but at best saw ORT's efforts as potentially putting additional further pressure on their local allocation

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process. Federations were facing increasing demands from local agencies to help meet local needs, as well as demands from UJC to maintain and even raise the level of funding for JDC and JAFI as the principal overseas providers. They had little flexibility in which they could find additional funds for ORT projects.

The situation changed dramatically in April 2002 when, in response to heightened terrorist activity in Israel, the UJC launched the first Israel Emergency Campaign (IEC) with a fundraising target of 300 million dollars over and above the annual campaign. As part of the incentive to federations to increase their contribution, the UJC allowed them to direct 5 per cent of sums raised within the IEC to projects outside the usual JDC/JAFI purview. This was the opening that ORT needed; using the contacts that had been established, proposals were submitted to federations for projects that fell within the IEC remit, and a number of these were granted.

At the same time, in addition to the emergency in Israel, the UJC also recognized the severity of the situation in Argentina, where the economic situation was causing major hardship to the Jewish community. Accordingly, federations were authorized to release some of the IEC funds to JDC, JAFI and World ORT to be spent on approved projects in Argentina. This too provided an opportunity for World ORT to submit proposals for emergency projects to help relieve the pressure on the families of students at the ORT schools in Buenos Aires. Altogether, World ORT presented over 100 projects in Israel and Argentina that could receive funds directed by federations. World ORT also reached agreements with AO and WAO that allowed it to reopen a representative office in the United States to develop relationships with federations and the UJC and to secure some of the directed funds and funds from special campaigns. In mid 2002 Harry Nadler joined the World ORT staff as the North American representative. By the end of summer 2002 World ORT had already received pledges from several large federations for ORT Argentina tuition subsidy and for schools in the ORT network in Israel.

The security situation in Israel also had another impact on federations and an unexpected benefit for ORT: it became more and more difficult to persuade federation supporters to visit Israel on missions. Missions were one of the most successful fundraising strategies that federations used, so visits to Argentina replaced ones to Israel. Throughout the next two years many federations visited Argentina, and the ORT schools in Buenos Aires became one of the showcases for every mission. This also raised the level of visibility of World ORT and awareness among the federations of the importance and the quality of ORT's work worldwide.

Contact with federations grew in subsequent months. In November 2002 World ORT was able to highlight the programmes at the UJC General Assembly (GA) in Washington. Four ORT professionals from Argentina, Russia, Israel and US Operations joined World ORT professionals Robert Singer,

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Sonia Gomes de Mesquita and Harry Nadler at the GA, further elevating ORT's profile. At subsequent General Assemblies of UJC, ORT continued its high-profile efforts. In addition, numerous meetings were held with top-level professionals and volunteers within the UJC and dozens of individual federations. These meetings included the senior professional staff of World ORT and World ORT volunteers from America and overseas. These meetings provided opportunities to update federations and to strengthen the relationships that were being fostered in the United States.

Within two years the UJC implemented additional changes within the ONAD Committee relating to ORT. By 2003 World ORT had gained observer status at the ONAD Committee. A subcommittee was formed by the ONAD Committee specifically to address the needs of World ORT. In the fall of 2003 this committee recommended that ORT receive a further increase in its core funding. They also recommended that as of July 2004 World ORT would be eligible for directed funds from federations with some stipulations. This change had a major impact on World ORT fundraising and once again led to changes in the way World ORT solicited funds from the organized Jewish community.

World ORT had already set the stage for directed giving previously restricted to the Israel Emergency Campaign. Now ORT was in a position to design hundreds of special projects to meet more ordinary needs. While these needs had always existed, federations would now be able to determine which of the projects were most consistent with their own mission. During 2004–2006 many federations responded positively. Initially the projects were focused in Israel as almost all the federations had existing relationships in communities in Israel. As federations became more familiar with ORT, the designations expanded to the FSU and Argentina. Federations' missions began to include visits to ORT activities in Israel, Argentina, Uruguay and the FSU.

Each year after 2004 the amount of funds raised in this manner increased substantially, providing an additional 20 to 30 per cent on top of the general funds provided by the ONAD process. At the 2005 GA the UJC reaffirmed its support for World ORT. Firstly, it guaranteed that the level of general funds would remain at 3.6 million dollars. Secondly, it designated World ORT as a partner along with JDC and JAFI in all future planning and special campaigns of UJC. Thirdly, it removed the restrictions on ORT's ability to raise designated funds from federations.

The development and strengthening of relationships with these other organizations is an additional important trend for World ORT. Through these partnerships World ORT is able to further carry out its mission, to satisfy federations that want to see demonstrated cooperation and coordination, and to demonstrate accountability and efficiency. The future for World ORT appears

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to be written already by these recent trends in fundraising as it relates to the organized Jewish community in North America. It is evident that as long as World ORT can continue to clearly demonstrate needs consistent with the mission of federations and the UJC, it will receive increasing funds that are directed to specific programmes and needs.

World ORT is essentially a federation. There have been many occasions where the individual countries have combined forces, under the umbrella and leadership of World ORT, to raise money for a single major international project. Such a project was undertaken in 1987 to construct what became the ORT Braude College in Karmiel in northern Israel. This project had all the right ingredients. The concept was attractive: an international college in a multicultural development region in the north of Israel where Jewish students from all over the world would come together with native Israelis to study. The fundraising approach was intelligent: high-profile individuals were approached to become involved in the project; in return for significant donations they were granted 'a piece of the action' by being invited to join the board of governors, participating in the college's decision-making forums and presenting awards to the college graduates. A variety of contributions and naming and commemoration opportunities was available: endowments for subject chairs, capital gifts for buildings and facilities, a synagogue, scholarships for



ORT Braude Karmiel campus, Karmiel, Israel.

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deserving students. Of particular interest were opportunities to sponsor students who had completed their army service.

Enthusiasm for the Karmiel project was infectious, and all concerned were highly motivated. Through careful organization, public relations and diplomacy, all those involved in the project throughout the Jewish world understood that they were part of an exciting international effort with enormous benefits for residents of both Israel and the Diaspora. Such was the success of the Karmiel campaign, that although the initial fundraising target was ambitious at fifteen million dollars, by the time the campaign was over it had raised some thirty million dollars.

Towards the end of the twentieth century another international coordinated fundraising campaign was created, this time in the territories of the former Soviet Union. That campaign became known as Regeneration 2000 (see Chapter 8). Under this campaign, and its successor, Regeneration 2004, ten million dollars were raised, sixteen centres were equipped and some twelve thousand students were able to receive the benefit of high-quality education programmes each year. This provides an example of a project undertaken by ORT where the impetus came from a committed donor, in this case Milton Gralla of the United States, and where a group of donors from around the world responded to an identified need. Examining this project through Gralla's eyes provides an insight into the motivation of ORT's supporters and the ingredients that lead to success.

Milton and Shirley Gralla are first-generation Americans born to Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe. A journalist who went on to build and then sell a successful publishing empire, Milton Gralla was a staunch supporter of Jewish causes, especially those related to education and Jewish continuity. As part of his activism he visited the Soviet Union to give help and support to the clandestine Jewish groups there who were struggling to preserve their heritage:

We were periodic visitors to the Soviet Union both before and after 'perestroika' opened the gates to religious freedom and/or emigration. During my pre-perestroika visit I was saddened to see the apparent doom of our precious Jewish heritage, due to seventy years of oppression of schools and religious continuity. We continued to support some semi-underground Jewish activities that were resistant to eradication.⁸

When the Iron Curtain finally fell, Gralla led a mission to the region that convinced him that 'despite seventy years of repression, intermarriages, and absence of open Jewish education'⁹ resurgence was still a real possibility. Inspired by this belief, he returned to the United States where he discovered that World ORT shared his dream of rebuilding the Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union and was working to create quality educational opportunities for young Jews.

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Gralla recalls his meeting with ORT fundraisers who described to him their plans to create a school in Odessa, Ukraine, home to 40,000 Jews. Recognizing the value of this development and of ORT's approach, he enthusiastically embraced this scheme, immediately pledging and providing major funding for the school. More importantly, he began to think ahead:

This first success started some thinking of repeating the formula in other Soviet cities with similar needs and opportunity. ORT drew up a list of eight locations and the title 'Regeneration 2000' was selected for a world campaign to wholesale this formula to thousands of Jewish youngsters most likely to benefit from this combination of academic excellence and Judaic exposure. While perestroika had freed countless Soviet Jews to depart for Israel, United States and other destinations, the Soviet Union [still] remained the home of the world's third largest identifiable Jewish population.¹⁰

Buoyed by the success of the first school in Odessa and his vision for replicating this accomplishment, he went on to sell the idea to his friends:

One of my own lasting memories is a date I made with two generous world-known philanthropic friends who inquired of the results of my 'dedication trip' to Odessa. The meeting took place in the Englewood NJ mansion of Russ Berrie (since deceased), whose mind-boggling worldwide gifts to 'make a difference' have set an incredible standard.

I described the Odessa experience and results, the emotional exposure to renewal of our heritage, and the resulting birth of Regeneration 2000. Norman Seiden immediately announced his dad and uncle had attended similar schools in Minsk, and on the spot he reserved and 'bought' an ORT school for Minsk. Not to be outdone, Russ Berrie recalled his family origins in Dnepropetrovsk, and bought the ORT school for that city. This was the stunning opening of a campaign which succeeded in half the allotted time, stimulated gifts worldwide, and opened schools with a current total enrollment of 11,000 students. Without the vision of ORT in recognizing the long-repressed needs of our Soviet brethren, this could not have happened.¹¹

Gralla is proud of the words he delivered to the students of the 'Regeneration' schools:

I am not looking at classrooms of students. I am looking at future community leaders, doctors, scientists, inventors, rabbis, statesmen, and people who will make our world better. And yes, I am looking at future philanthropists who will build schools like this when their turn comes.¹²

Individual high-worth donors such as Milton Gralla are crucial to World ORT's fundraising strategy. Many of them have achieved success in their business lives and are keen to encourage younger people to begin to follow in

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their footsteps by acquiring the skills that can help them to begin their own careers, and World ORT understands that it is essential to cultivate them. The 1880 Society was created to encourage this select group of people to identify with ORT and its programmes and to support students as they prepare for their own productive lives. The name of the society – recalling the year that ORT was founded in St Petersburg – was chosen to reflect the indomitable spirit and the unchanging ethos of the organization and its supporters; and the badge of membership, a medal especially struck in Jerusalem by the Israel Government Coins and Medals Corporation, conveys the essence of its Jewish, historical and international character, depicting ORT's three founders – Gunzburg, Bakst and Poliakov – on one side, and the word 'Jerusalem' in twelve languages on the other. Members of the 1880 Society pledge to contribute a minimum of 100,000 dollars over three years and, in return, become a part of a prestigious fellowship of like-minded individuals who share a common commitment to ORT's goals. This powerful group is given unrivalled access to ORT's worldwide programmes and to the leading personalities – from government, business and communities – with whom ORT works.



World ORT's most prominent office holders became the first recipients of gold medals specially minted to mark their membership of World ORT's 1880 Society. Left to right: Dr Jean de Gunzburg, World ORT's Deputy President; Sir Maurice Hatter, President of World ORT; Robert Sill, World ORT Board of Directors Chairman, and Mauricio Merikanskas, Chairman of World ORT's Executive Committee. London, September 2004.



ORT flies the flag at the North Pole marking ORT's 120th anniversary. The flag was taken to the Arctic by Dr Evgeny Gontmacher, a member of World ORT's Board of Directors, as part of an expedition of prominent politicians of the Russian Federation, April 2001.

The opportunity to become a member of the 1880 Society was also offered as one of the key inducements of World ORT's eight-million-dollars Latin America Campaign, launched in January 2007. Slowly recovering from almost a decade of recession, the population of the region was faced with rising inflation, high unemployment and a widening poverty gap. In response, World ORT was determined to build on its existing infrastructure in Latin America and to provide the Jewish communities there with improved learning opportunities that would lead to increased employability and restored prosperity. Ambitious capital and operational programmes were planned for the major communities of Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay and the smaller ones of Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Peru and Panama. Once again, ORT's worldwide supporters took up the challenge and by the end of 2007, through a coordinated operation run from World ORT in London, more than four million dollars had been pledged towards this effort. An exceptional feature and a strength of this campaign was the full involvement of the local commu-

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nities in the fundraising endeavour, to the extent that, of the total budget, in excess of four million dollars was expected to be raised from local sources.

In 2008, large fundraising programmes for World ORT projects in Israel also attracted major international support. Notable among these was the multi-million donation of the Schoenbaum Family Foundation to the Kiryat Yam Science City project (see Chapter 9) and the 500 'Smart Classrooms' initiative mentioned in Chapter 12, which attracted the individual involvement of ORT supporters and a generous grant from the Israeli government.

From its initial appeal to the Jews of Imperial Russia in 1880 through to its sophisticated international campaigns in the twenty-first century, World ORT has stoically adapted every aspect of its fundraising to the prevailing conditions. Its success is a tribute to the men and women who, throughout the years, have continued to support the organization and its enduring mission in the finest traditions of generosity and *tzedakah* (charity).

1. Letter from William Haber to Edward Ginsburg, 7 March 1972, World ORT Archive, ref. RG/2/1/5, box DC/0001, folder 5.
2. Pepi Dunay, World ORT Administrative Committee Minutes Athenaeum Hotel, London, UK, 9 and 11 January 1999, World ORT Archive, ref. d07g043.
3. See Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), pp. 221–23.
4. Letter from Paul Bernick to David Hermelin, 11 February 1997, World ORT Archive, ref. RG/2/1/5, box DC/0001, folder 5.
5. JDC Mission Statement, available via JDC website, www.jdc.org.
6. Fred Skolnik (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, xx (2nd edition, Michigan: Thomson Gale, 2006), p. 257.
7. UJC also made it very clear that any other funds, outside of the general funds provided by UJC, could not be used for general purposes. Any allocations from individual federations must be directed to specific ORT projects and locations at the discretion of the federation making the allocation.
8. Milton Gralla, email to Judah Harstein, December 2007.
9. Gralla, email to Harstein, December 2007.
10. Gralla, email to Harstein, December 2007.
11. Gralla, email to Harstein, December 2007.
12. Gralla, email to Harstein, December 2007.

Renewal and Growth: **12** an update on ORT's work around the world†

In *The History of ORT*, Leon Shapiro dedicates a chapter (Chapter 15) to mapping the changes and developments in ORT's work throughout the world. In the years and decades following the end of World War II and the Holocaust, ORT came to the support of Jewish communities worldwide. It helped those who emigrated to the West from eastern Europe and North Africa, welcomed immigrants (*olim*) to Israel, and supported local Jewish communities who attempted to revive Jewish life in their own countries. But things did not always work according to plan. In the years immediately after the war, Shapiro writes, David Lvovitch and Aron Syngalowski were keen to return to Sovietized eastern Europe and reopen ORT's schools there, but were unable to resume long-term operations in that part of the world.

Shapiro's book was published in 1980, and much has changed since then. ORT has managed to return to many of these countries and today operates a flourishing network of schools and science and technology training centres across the former Soviet Union. Elsewhere in the world, global and local political milieus affected ORT's services to Jewish and non-Jewish communities as the organization expanded its operations in Latin America, Africa, western Europe and other places.

What follows is a description of only some of the major developments within the ORT global network in recent decades. It has not been possible to include many other ORT national organizations operating around the world in a book of this length, or even to cover fully the activities in the countries that are mentioned.

World ORT in Israel

Since ORT started its operations in Israel in 1947 it has become a key feature in the country's education system. The organization helped to shape and to define the place of vocational training and technology education within the country's educational agenda and in relation to its social, economic, industrial and even military needs. Through the years, ORT's educational services to the Israeli public have undergone several major transformations, changing and

†. This update reflects a representative selection of ORT's activities up to January 2009. It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to cover the full range of activities and all the countries in which World ORT currently operates.

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expanding from vocational training centres to secondary education and in more recent years, practical engineering junior colleges and academic colleges, which introduced groundbreaking changes to the structure and understanding of technology higher education in Israel. Changes such as these involved not only constant revision and modernization of ORT's facilities and equipment around the country, but also a struggle against social prejudices within the Israeli education system.

ORT brought to Israel a strong commitment to support poor and vulnerable communities that relied on vocation-based education to strengthen their socioeconomic status. In the young country's particular social milieu, this meant paying specific attention to development towns and the peripheries, and to the ever-present need to absorb generations of young immigrants. The character and background of ORT's beneficiaries also changed over the years – from the Middle Eastern and North African communities that arrived to Israel in the 1950s to the Russian and Ethiopian youth in the 1990s and onwards. In the early years of the country's existence, ORT's work towards immigration absorption provided a solution for the local education system, which was overwhelmed by the constant influx of youth from different parts of the world. However, this came at the price of being stigmatized as somehow inferior to mainstream education:



An Israeli student using new science and technology equipment funded by World ORT's Kadima Mada (Science Journey) programme. Sha'ar HaNegev High School, Israel, March 2007.

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[Through the years] significant waves of immigration arrived in the country and the education system, which did not have the facilities to absorb such a large number of immigrants from such varied cultural backgrounds, chose to send the students who were considered 'underachievers', 'unsuitable' and 'culturally backward' to the vocational education system, that was then considered as the most suitable framework for them. Technology education was given the task of absorbing immigration and ensuring that all Israeli youth receive adequate education ... This process reinforced the idea that [the] academic track is the respectable educational route leading to higher education on university level and that the vocational route is the option for those with no options, and was seen as a sign of failure.¹

In the early years of the state, the role of the education system in Israel was considered to be largely cultural, motivated by the need to define a new culture for a new country; vocational education was regarded as being purely functional – ensuring a constant supply of human resources for the country's fast growing economy. ORT challenged this dichotomy and its underlying assumptions of different educational needs for working class and middle class youth, by emphasizing cultural and social values in its growing number of schools, opening them to a wider range of subjects across the educational spectrum. Most importantly, it spearheaded groundbreaking changes in technology curricula, which anticipated the changes in Israeli industry as it approached the twenty-first century. In 1976 ORT opened its engineering school at the Givat Ram Campus of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a move that launched a new era of practical engineering courses which later became a network of junior colleges, providing access to quality higher education in local communities. Joshua Fliedel, an influential figure in the development of World ORT's technology education in different countries worldwide, wrote in 1977:

As a result of its unprecedented growth, the [technology education] system became an agent for a revolutionary change in Israeli society and secondary education. In this sense, the system's development should be considered as one of the greatest achievements in modern Israel, comparable, in my opinion, to its successes in agricultural and military developments. [This achievement consists of] the system's success in fusing both the 'cultural' and 'materialist' educational concepts and in attracting middle-class youth to its establishments as well as creating a valid alternative within secondary education and attracting immigrant youths into a modern education system and bringing them closer to the world of industry and technology.²

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Constant innovation in technology education allowed ORT to blur the accepted boundaries between the academic and technological systems and to facilitate social mobility within Israel's underprivileged communities. However, social prejudices persisted, and the struggle to change the public's perception of technology education continued to be affected by the sector's ongoing commitment to social issues: while the academic, 'regular' schools held discriminatory practices and refused to enrol students whom they considered to be 'below average', ORT schools remained open to all. ORT's social commitment, paradoxically, worked to its disadvantage, argued Israel Goralnik, National Director of ORT Israel from 1983 to 1997:

The image of technology schools was damaged twice over: first, because they had become an avenue of last resort for underachievers; and second, because their students have always been told they were underachievers, and therefore believed themselves to be underachievers. Thus the technological course of studies, labelled as being a simplified curriculum for [weaker students], acquired a totally erroneous image of a kind of limbo in which students rejected by the academic schools were placed until they graduated. This despite the fact that the technological education system has developed high-level study programmes aimed towards preparing its students for Matriculation Certificates in both academic subjects and fields of advanced technology.³

The frustration of Goralnik and his ORT colleagues was not motivated solely by the understandable need for recognition. The social stigmas that still dominated the Israeli education system and the insistence on complete separation between technology and science (which was then still part of the academic curriculum) had a very real and damaging impact on Israeli industry. Growing rapidly, the industrial sector was in desperate need of a highly qualified workforce, but its availability was kept limited by students' reluctance to choose technological routes. These students, no less than their peers in ORT schools, were victims of old-fashioned educational concepts:

In the academic schools, while students learned scientific subjects, they were not offered technological subjects. A student in such an institution might know and understand the workings of a complex electronic circuit in theory, but no-one ever put a soldering iron in his hand and showed him/her how to build one. Thus the student's choices for career opportunities through higher education are limited, and fewer choose to pursue careers in science and technology. Each year, engineers, scientists and technicians are needed [in industry and the army] in increasing numbers. To solve this 'supply problem', the school system must provide interdisciplinary teaching to open up a wider range of opportunities for personal fulfilment. This, in turn, will raise the student's level of satisfaction, happiness,

self-esteem and motivation. Human potential will grow, both for the individual and for the nation as a whole.⁴

In the 1990s, as a result of the growing discrepancy between the requirements of Israeli industry and the country's education policies, the Israeli government was finally alert to the need for reform. In November 1990 the then education minister Zevulun Hammer set up the Harari Commission in order to examine and re-evaluate the way technology and science subjects are taught and learned in primary and secondary education. The Commission, chaired by Professor Chaim Harari, former president of the Weizmann Institute of Science, was made up of fifteen members from academia, the IDF, local industry and the educational sector. Its final report was presented in 1992. In it the Commission recommended greater emphasis on science and technology across the board and called for the removal of traditional categories of academic and technological education. In modern societies, the Commission claimed, all students must have some level of scientific and technological thinking skills. Following the report, science and technology subjects, which were so far separated between two different education systems (the academic and the technological) became part of a new interdisciplinary scheme entitled Science and Technology for All, and were introduced as compulsory in all junior high schools. Other recommendations included complete computerization of the teaching process (particularly in the fields of natural sciences) and an extensive network of teacher training and support.

The World ORT Kadima Mada programme, which commenced in Israel in 2007, was the start of a new World ORT initiative to undertake activities in Israel that were unlike any of those it had done in the past. The Kadima Mada (Science Journey) programme was created in partnership with Israel's Ministry of Education and implemented in more than 60 schools in 34 municipalities, benefiting some 40,000 students mainly in the north of the country, but also in the northern Negev. Kadima Mada was designed to provide cutting-edge technology and innovative pedagogy to reach out to students and to support and motivate teachers. Activities under the Kadima Mada banner include special programmes for students at risk, teacher empowerment centres and mobile science exhibitions.

Two major projects in the programme are the Science City undertaking in Kiryat Yam (described in Chapter 9) and an ambitious Educational Village in Sha'ar HaNegev that is planned to include a science and technology centre, a community and arts centre, and a sports centre. The World ORT initiative in Kiryat Yam, a medium-size coastal town near Haifa began in May 2008, when World ORT and the Kiryat Yam municipality announced a joint project to build an educational complex in the heart of the town. The programme addressed the entire town's educational needs rather than the needs of an

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individual school and was largely underwritten by the Schoenbaum Family Foundation, which donated 5 million dollars for this project. The new campus would encompass one of Kiryat Yam's two high schools, a new library building, and a community centre. It would also include an Ethiopian heritage centre, which would be built next to the community centre, to serve the needs of the 3,000 people of the town's population of 48,000, who are of Ethiopian descent.

World ORT introduced and pioneered the use of interactive whiteboards and computerized classrooms to much acclaim in a number of the schools participating in Kadima Mada, which led to the government-supported 500 'Smart Classrooms' initiative in 2008. Under this initiative, a critical mass of computerized classrooms and associated teacher support programmes in key schools will ensure the take up of this technology and a corresponding raising of the potential for educational achievement among some of the country's previously deprived population groups.

ORT Italy

ORT's activities in Italy began in 1946 following a visit to the country's refugee camps by Dr Aron Syngalowski. Between 1946 and 1950, ORT ran courses for Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) throughout Italy in a variety of subjects, including sewing, tailoring, masonry, typing, tractor driving and dental technician skills. It has retained a presence in the country ever since.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union were temporarily accommodated in Italy while waiting for visas to the United States, Canada and Australia. ORT Italy opened special English language and Jewish education courses to assist them in preparing for their new lives. At its peak, the programme included thirty-nine courses attended by 1,000 students, but this was gradually reduced and finally terminated in the mid-1980s. When the programme closed, two schools remained open: the ORT Community High School in Milan and the ORT Technical High School in Rome, which was later handed over to the Rome Jewish Community.

In the 1990s, new leadership in the Rome Jewish community created fresh impetus for improvements in education and a renewed role for ORT. However, it took several years for the cooperation to really take off, and in 2003 World ORT sent a representative to assess the local situation and to ascertain the viability of its renewed involvement. When The Rome Jewish Community decided to move to new premises, ORT became involved in providing technology education facilities. The new ORT-Renzo Levi High School opened on 1 September 2004. Today the school caters for around 224 students in grades 6 to 13 with enrolment numbers rising steadily.

The Community High School in Milan caters for 545 students and has strong IT education and Jewish studies departments.

ORT France

Since its foundation in 1921, developments in ORT France were closely linked to the history of the local Jewish community: from the years of enforced 'half sleep'⁵ under Nazi occupation, through the education and training services to North African Jews who arrived to France in the 1960s, to the periods of modernization and renewal in the 1980s and 1990s. As new communities have become more established, ORT's schools continue to be in demand, providing employment-oriented education leading to nationally recognized vocational qualifications. Today ORT France is the largest ORT network in western Europe, operating eight schools and centres located in and around Paris, Strasbourg, Lyons, Toulouse and Marseilles, and providing high-school and higher education as well as vocational adult education.

The 1980s were years of economic recession and unemployment in France. Nationwide instability and reforms in the private education sector saw ORT France struggling with economic problems while working towards its own reforms. New courses in advanced technology were introduced and equipment modernized, and the organization had to adapt to the changing character and needs of its student body. French-born and well-integrated, these young French Jews were now expected to continue to higher education and ORT France, as the only French Jewish provider of technology education, had to change its programmes accordingly and began to offer higher technical diplomas (BTS). Lower-level training courses leading to vocational education certificates were gradually withdrawn and more emphasis was put on high school technical diplomas, which aimed to enable participants to continue on to higher education: either to higher technical diploma courses at ORT or to universities and engineering schools within the state system.

Today, 25 per cent of ORT France's 5,100 students study at post-secondary level. Particularly notable is ORT Strasbourg, a school which attracts Jewish students from across the country and is the only high school of its type in France to offer boarding facilities and kosher catering.

During the mid-1980s, ORT France had increased its cooperation with the education authorities on national, regional and local levels. This strengthening of relations with the education authorities was one of the factors in ORT France's greatest achievement in the following decade: the national organization achieved financial independence and was no longer dependent on direct financial support from World ORT. This accomplishment was the result of a long process of financial and organizational change, including the introduction of administration fees, better financial efficiency and 'belt-tightening' across the board as well as increased efforts in fundraising. Importantly, an agreement with the French education ministry, which saw the government take on the responsibility for the salaries of teachers of national curriculum subjects, was another major step towards financial independence (the Jewish education programme, then and now, is sponsored by ORT France).

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Since 2000, ORT France has been focusing on maintaining the academic standards and physical facilities of its schools. Apart from ORT Strasbourg, post-secondary courses that combine work-placements are offered in Marseilles, Lyons, Toulouse and Montreuil, and ORT France regularly assesses and updates its programmes to reflect current trends in technology. At the same time, the organization remains firm in its commitment to provide opportunities for students who struggle to fit elsewhere within the French education system.

Today, within France's Jewish population of about 600,000, ORT schools provide an important choice for the community in two important respects: firstly, they offer a sound Jewish education without making demands for religious conformity whereas most Jewish schools in the country are religious in character. The schools and the administration of ORT France respect the Jewish calendar and Sabbath, the schools offer Jewish education and the cafeterias serve kosher food. Secondly, while other Jewish schools generally deliver their secular education in a traditional, European, academic manner, ORT's schools provide a practical approach to science and technology education which is more likely to lead to rewarding employment opportunities.

In Paris, ORT France provides courses adapted to the specific requests of companies wanting to retain and upgrade new employees in the fields of ICT and foreign languages. In addition, its technology department takes part in a European Commission-led research and development programme for the implementation of new technologies in the fields of teaching in training. ORT also provides an essential service to adult members of the community within its schools. The national organization offers retraining and reskilling through courses in information technology and related subjects.

ORT Anières

The ORT Central Training Institute in Anières, Geneva, was opened in 1947 in order to train teachers and instructors for ORT schools and centres around the world. The Institute 'united in its programme a constant interest in technical education, a feeling for change in pedagogical methods, and a deep concern for the development of human qualities of future ORT cadres'.⁶ At the time of Leon Shapiro's book, ORT Anières was a prosperous establishment, and the author was clearly in awe of the Institute's achievements. No wonder then, that its closure of the Institute in 1983 was seen by some as the 'loss of the family silver'.⁷

The situation, however, was unavoidable: ORT was giving its graduates scholarships to study at ORT Anières (and the Ecole Technique Supérieure⁸) and in return expected their commitment to teach at an ORT school in their own countries for five years. While some fulfilled the agreement, others, mainly from North Africa and Iran, did not. Instead of returning to their own countries, they preferred – understandably perhaps – to stay in Switzerland or

move to France. This situation, together with a decline in demand for training as ORT national organizations developed and became self-sufficient in this respect, led to the termination of activities at ORT Anières.

After the Institute closed down, the premises were leased to a refugee welfare organization, under the control of the Geneva authorities. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, ORT decided not to renew the lease and to resume its activities in the area. The plan was to establish three different programmes at Anières: a centre for management studies (including public and voluntary organizations); a hi-tech resource centre for technical and educational training; and a Jewish community leadership programme. After long debates within the organization about the validity of the project, with strong opinions for and against, ORT refurbished the premises and re-established operations. In the mid-1990s, ORT Anières carried out leadership development programmes for Jewish lay leaders and professionals, multimedia technology courses and various seminars. The activities, however, were short-lived and the building was sold in 1997.

ORT in Jewish communities in North Africa

In his *The History of ORT*, Leon Shapiro ends the chapter on ORT's work in North Africa on a positive note. 'At the time of writing, ORT continues its work in Morocco, and seems set to do so for some time,' he concludes. 'Its programme plays a vital role in the more or less stabilized community, providing education and skills to Jewish youth looking for social advancement.'⁹

Writing in 1979, Shapiro already documented the termination of ORT programmes in Algeria, after the country had gained its independence in 1961 and the Jewish community left for Israel or France. He chronicled a similar story in Tunisia, where ORT started operating in 1950: the country was granted independence in 1956 and the subsequent wave of Jewish emigration to Israel and France brought a gradual reduction in ORT's programmes, until the last ORT school in Tunisia was closed in 1972.

Despite his optimistic tone, Shapiro was already aware of ORT Morocco following a similar fate. The foundation of Israel triggered mass emigration from the country and ORT schools were facing a dramatic decrease in enrolment numbers. Nevertheless, ORT Morocco persisted. In the 1980s, as the only Jewish organization in the country offering vocational training, ORT continued to operate a school for boys and a school for girls in the Casablanca area, with a roll of 249 students in 1986. The schools provided general, vocational and technological education (secretarial skills, beauty therapy and chemistry for girls, and electronics and information technology for boys) as well as Jewish studies and training courses for adults. The schools enjoyed an 'excellent relationship with the authorities',¹⁰ who frequently approached ORT Morocco with requests to develop programmes in teacher and general training. In the early 1980s World ORT built a new information technology

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laboratory, and several other national organizations supported ORT Morocco students and families in need.

Demographic changes finally caught up with the schools. With the Jewish community dwindling, ORT began to admit non-Jewish students and was forced to restructure in 1986–87. The school for girls was closed and the remaining girls began attending the boys school. With no boarding facilities, it was no longer able to cater for students from other parts of the country. The last ORT Morocco school closed in 1997, marking the end of ORT's operation in the country.

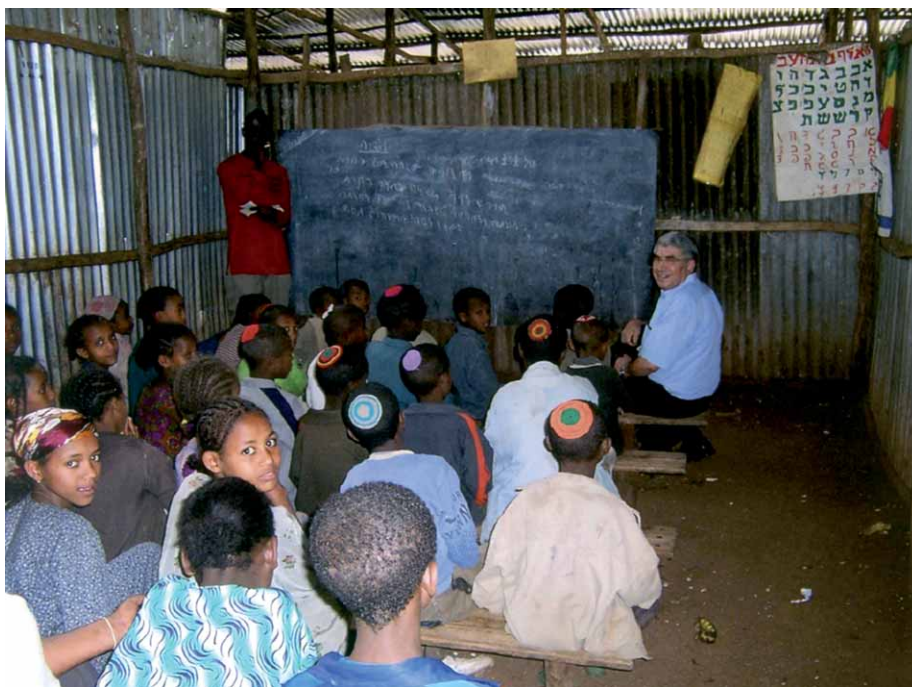
However, as the history of ORT shows, endings are never final. In 2004 World ORT Deputy Director General Dr Gideon Meyer travelled to Tunisia and visited a small Chabad school in Tunis. Three years later, on 8 October 2007, a new World ORT computer laboratory was inaugurated at the school. The laboratory, which was funded by ORT Netherlands, will provide ongoing training to the school's sixty students and to the local Jewish community at large. World ORT has established a new ORT Committee in Tunisia and is planning to use its renewed presence in the country to expand its International Cooperation work.

ORT in Ethiopia

World ORT began working towards a better life for the Jews of Ethiopia in the 1950s, when its representatives were sent on a mission to the Gondar province to assess the needs of the Jewish population and determine whether or not it would be viable to implement projects in the region. Some ten years later, in cooperation with the JDC, ORT returned to Ethiopia, but it was not until the 1970s that a programme of projects was established, resulting in the opening of nineteen schools, employing seventy-three teachers and educating a total of 1,400 students.

In 1984–85, Operation Moses became the first of two secret missions to airlift Ethiopian Jews to safety and a new life in Israel. In the midst of the Ethiopian civil war, 10,000 Jews were led out of the country via Sudan, and flown into Israel. A further six years was to pass until the second mission to airlift Ethiopia's Jewry was undertaken. Operation Solomon in 1991 brought almost the entire remainder of Ethiopian Jewry to Israel.

Following Operation Solomon, World ORT continued to operate its International Cooperation projects in Ethiopia until 1999. Then, in December 2004, the Israeli government recognized the rights of a separate group of Ethiopian Jews, known as the Falashmura. These were communities of Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity for reasons of social or economic survival but who never abandoned their Jewish faith. The Israeli government set a target to bring all eligible Falashmura, numbering some 20,000, to Israel by the end of 2007. In preparation for this undertaking, World ORT immediately embarked upon a fact-finding mission, sending veteran ORT specialists to the



Dr Gaby Meyassed with members of the Ethiopian Jewish community during a fact-finding mission for pre-*aliyah* training, Ethiopia, 2005.

regions of Gondar and Addis Ababa, where the Falashmura were encamped, to investigate the situation and to set in motion a programme of pre-*aliyah* training. Today, World ORT continues its work with Ethiopian Jewry – now in their new home in Israel.

ORT South Africa

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s ORT South Africa was predominantly a membership and fundraising organization for World ORT, fundraising both locally and internationally. At the time World ORT was reluctant to open schools in South Africa as long as apartheid's racial segregation policies prevented black students from attending 'white' schools, though some attempts were made to collaborate with local Jewish day schools. With the changing political and economic environment in South Africa, and the change in the rand-dollar exchange rate, ORT South Africa's membership numbers and fundraising diminished and during the 1990s the national organization expanded its operations and became a self-funded service provider, working with the local Jewish community as well as the wider South African population. In 1993, as part of the ORT Step project, ORT South Africa began training teachers in mathematics, science and technology in Midrand, Cape Town and

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Grahamstown. The project was supported by the South African electricity company Eskom.

From 2000 ORT South Africa's operations have been divided into four main channels of activities: teacher-training programmes in schools across the country including all Jewish day schools; community development programmes which, in cooperation with ORT International Cooperation, support the Dikhatole community at the ORT Digital Village east of Johannesburg and youth-at-risk in Namibia through the USAID-funded Skills, Opportunities & Self programme; skill development projects that provide vocational training in impoverished communities; and ORT JET, a programme empowering Jewish businesses and entrepreneurs in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In addition, ORT South Africa continues to raise funds for ORT programmes worldwide.

ORT India

ORT began its association with India's Bnai Israel community in the 1960s, offering a programme of part-time courses in English and maths and building a full-time training centre within the grounds of the Sir Elly Kadoorie Jewish School in Mazgoan in 1962. ORT established a second larger base at Worli especially for Jewish girls in 1970 to provide training as general clerks and in office skills, hairdressing and beauty care. Through the years, ORT India's operations have grown and evolved with the needs of the community, developing very successful courses in office skills, computing, early childhood education and travel and tourism.

The Indian Jewish community is spread throughout the subcontinent, and while the majority of Jews live in and around Mumbai, there are smaller communities living in more remote parts of the country. One of these is the Bnai Menashe community, most of whose members are located in Manipur and Mizoram, two states in Northeast India. The Bnai Menashe community numbers around 7,000 and claims to be the descendants of the Israelite tribe of Menashe, which was exiled with the rest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BCE.

The ORT Manipur Computer Centre was opened in June 2003. It operates from two rooms within Churachandpur's Beith Shalom Synagogue and provides education and vocational training to the local Bnai Menashe Jewish community as well as to the local non-Jewish population.

ORT has been engaged in vocational training for Bnai Menashe students from Mizoram and Manipur for the past twenty years. In the early 2000s, the Israeli government has allowed the Bnai Menashe to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return and ORT India has been providing them with the vocational training they need for their new lives in Israel. Each course generally lasts for five months and takes place at the ORT India building in Mumbai. Bnai Menashe students are exempted from tuition fees, given free

housing at the ORT India student accommodation in Mumbai, and are provided with full board for the duration of their course.

In terms of their ties with the Jewish world, ORT India caters for two different populations outside Mumbai. Firstly, there are those who carry a strong sense of Jewish identity and have a basic knowledge of Jewish culture and laws. They receive their education through ORT in the local Marathi dialect. ORT, however, is currently focusing on a second group; those who have no sense of involvement and are beginning to assimilate. It offers them courses and educational programmes in modern and biblical Hebrew, Jewish festivals and Jewish history. ORT India is also involved in efforts to preserve the specific culture and traditions of the Bnai Israel community.

ORT Iran

Beginning in 1950, ORT Iran was a flourishing establishment with a flagship school in Teheran. Offering advanced technical education, modern equipment and boarding facilities, ORT Teheran had a non-sectarian student body of 975, including 142 students in its teacher training programme. Iran's Islamic Revolution, however, brought ORT's work in the country to an abrupt end, and although Leon Shapiro mentions in his book the 'growing political unrest'¹¹ that threatened Teheran's Jewish community at the time, nothing could have prepared ORT Iran's staff and students to the dramatic events of summer 1980.

Two years earlier, Jewish families began to flee Iran and many sent their sons abroad to avoid military service. After the revolution in summer 1979, ORT Teheran continued to operate despite an atmosphere of tension and fear. Parvine Motamed (later Motamed Amini), director of ORT Iran, showed real bravery and commitment by keeping the school going and even applying for funds from the Ministry of Education. During the summer recess of 1980, representatives of the same ministry arrived at the school and confiscated the building, equipment and furniture.

Motamed described the events to Joseph Harmatz, then Director General of World ORT.

Today, August 20 1980, I spoke to Rafi, the man responsible for the boys' dormitory. He was very worried and told me that the day before yesterday, he had left Teheran with his wife and children to go to one of his friends in Switzerland. ... He was very agitated and explained to me how a group of 'Comités' led by a mullah went to the school and looked for documents, and, since they did not find anything to interest them, they tried to find other excuses, asking why the Shah's portrait had not been burned until a late stage. They tried to occupy the school.

At the same time, Rafi described how someone from the Ministry of Education came with a letter in his hand to the school, introducing himself

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as the representative of the ministry with full authority. He asked Mr Elie, director of the boys school, to hand over his position to him. He immediately started to question the students and people working there (the school is closed for the summer vacation). Rafi said that during the last two weeks, the new so-called director had been collecting information and making lists of the school's equipment. He talked to the personnel of the school, who tried to conceal their fear as they replied. Three days ago, this man called Rafi and started to question him, asking who sent the boys and girls to Israel and why Rafi was selected as group leader when they travelled. They also asked him who was in charge of the extra-curricular programme (this programme has been run in recent years under the auspices of the Jewish Agency in Iran, Rafi being their closest contact). They also asked him where the ORT graduates were living now and how many of them went to Israel. However, once he heard from Radio Israel that Mr Farahmandpour, the Jewish member of Iran's parliament had been arrested, and one of the reasons given was his support for the ORT school,¹² he was really frightened. On the same night, he left Iran with his wife and children.

I still do not want to lose courage, and do not want to believe that everything I have been building during the best twenty-five years of my life has gone with the wind. But an unknown feeling tells me that this is the beginning of the last chapter of ORT's history in Iran. I know that ORT people are leaving both the school and the country one after another. Although there are still more than 50 per cent of our children in Iran, the situation shows that predictions are coming close to being realized, and our ceaseless efforts in the face of a vast wave of revolution and its effect have not managed to resist. I think we must get the Jewish youngsters out of Teheran and prepare them in another place in the world for their future – and their future lives will not be easy.¹³

The school was never returned to ORT. It was nationalized and reopened as the Palestine Madrasa (the Palestine School) and the organization was never compensated for its losses. Motamed escaped to London, and today lives in the United States.

ORT Bulgaria

The Jewish population of Bulgaria is estimated at 7,000, with the largest concentration (2,800) located in Sofia. As a result of emigration (mostly to Israel) and assimilation, the elderly account for a large percentage of the population. After the fall of Communism in 1989, the Jewish community was reconstituted, and a new communal body, the Shalom Organization, was established. With assistance from Israel and World Jewry, the community is able to provide social, educational and welfare programmes.

Bulgaria was once the site of an important ORT centre, but the Sofia school closed down in 1949 when its staff and pupils emigrated en masse to Israel. On arrival in Israel they re-established their school in Jaffa. This school later moved to Tel Aviv and became the successful ORT Syngalowski Centre.

ORT relaunched its activities in Bulgaria in December 1995 when it set up an Information Technology Laboratory (ITL) in the Jewish school in Sofia. The school was inaugurated by the Deputy Minister of Education and other dignitaries. This became the first school in Bulgaria to have an ITL and to be connected to the internet. Through this connection the school maintains contact with the wider Jewish community.

In 2003 the Bulgarian government and World ORT signed an agreement officially recognizing ORT as an operational body within Bulgaria. By that year the school in Sofia was catering for 680 students and providing them with up-to-date technology education. In October 2003 the Lauder-ORT Science and Technology Centre at the Dimcho Debeljanow Jewish School was opened in Sofia. This project enabled the school, which is a part of The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation educational network, to attain the status of a high school and fill an important gap in the city's Jewish education system. This centre consists of two IT laboratories, a media laboratory and a science laboratory. Thanks to its advanced equipment, the school is able to cater for students up to senior high school level, spanning grades 1 to 10 with a total of 700 students. In 2005 ORT Bulgaria signed an agreement with The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. This guaranteed that the students receive free IT training leading to a qualification recognized across Europe.

With its emphasis on excellence, the Sofia school now stands as a flourishing, highly respected institute at the front line of twenty-first century Jewish education. As the only Jewish school in Bulgaria this centre combines the educational requirements of the Bulgarian authorities, a rich and comprehensive Hebrew and Jewish studies syllabus and ORT's cutting-edge science and technology education.

A new phase of ORT's involvement with the school is presently under way. Within the framework of the new project, ORT will continue to ensure that the school remains a leading force in the field of technology education. As part of this effort, World ORT plans to build a multimedia centre at the school that will include an educational photo studio and a radio and audio recording studio. At the same time, ORT will continue to maintain and upgrade the school's existing ICT and technological facilities and equipment; improve and update the school's curricula, teacher guides and student resources; provide salaries for ORT staff and additional remuneration for key teachers; and provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) teacher training programmes for teachers and tutors.

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ORT Hungary

ORT operates a computer centre at the Bálint Jewish community centre in Budapest, in full cooperation with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The centre offers a range of ICT activities, community development programmes and Jewish education programmes. Some 200 people use the centre's recently upgraded equipment for training and studying while a further 2,000 local people participate in other activities there.

ORT in the Czech Republic

After years of suppression by Communist rule, Jewish community life in Prague began to revive with the fall of the Iron Curtain in the 1990s. Prague's secular population is, however, highly assimilated and only 1,500 out of 7,000 of the city's Jews are active members of the community.

After a brief period of operations in the late 1940s, ORT returned to Czechoslovakia in 1992 when an ORT Committee was formed in Prague under the chairmanship of Dr Vladimir Zelezny, a prominent journalist and prime ministerial advisor.

Since 1996 ORT achieved much in the Czech Republic under the leadership of Dr Radan Salomonovic. In August 1996 the long awaited ORT Information Technology Lab (ITL) in Prague was established inside the city's Jewish Museum. The inauguration was attended by President Vaclav Havel and the ambassadors of Israel, the United States, France, Germany and Poland. The ITL expanded over the next two years and by 1998 was offering courses in basic computer skills and multimedia languages. The success of ORT's ITL in Prague led to services being updated in 2002 and 2005 so that the entire community could make use of the latest technology.

In 2006 ORT opened an ICT centre in Prague on the site of Lauder Jewish Community School. The school caters for 174 pupils aged between six and seventeen and provides its students with a Jewish education in addition to those subjects covered by the state curriculum. Courses in Hebrew and Jewish tradition are mandatory for Jewish and non-Jewish students in an attempt to promote tolerance and understanding of Judaism in Prague. The school also offers a special programme for students with learning disabilities.

The new ORT centre located within the school provides students with state-of-the-art ICT and science laboratories. As a leading force in the field of science and technology education in the Jewish world, ORT is able to substantially strengthen the school's role within the local community. Providing valuable skills for the twenty-first century market, the Lauder-ORT Centre is expected to attract more Jewish students and help the school become an important platform for the future of the Jewish community in Prague.

ORT Lithuania

Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, has special significance in Jewish history. It is known both as a one-time international centre of Jewish culture and learning and as the site of tremendous loss and devastation during the Holocaust. In the early twentieth century Jews comprised almost 50 per cent of the capital, but 94 per cent of Lithuania's Jews were murdered during World War II. Today, the local Jewish community numbers around 5,000.

At the centre of the community stands the ORT Shalom Aleichem Jewish School (headed by Principal Misha Jacobas) which provides a comprehensive Jewish education to 230 students. Over the last several years, the ORT Technology Centre at the school has been a benchmark of excellence in advanced technology education ensuring as strong an academic reputation as that of any school in the region. It is on this basis that increasing numbers of young Lithuanian Jews are receiving their education within a Jewish environment.

Since the inauguration of the ORT centre at the school in October 2002, ORT has invested significant resources and endless hard work in order to ensure its success. It is a flourishing, highly respected institute that stands at the forefront of twenty-first century Jewish education. The ORT centre delivers high quality education and advanced vocational training to ensure its graduates a real competitive advantage when seeking higher education and opportunities for employment. Technology education courses include computer science, technology, computer graphics, programming and web design. The ORT centre comprises an information technology laboratory, a video-editing lab, a network and resource centre and a media library.

ORT Latvia

Prior to World War II, ORT operated a thriving training network in Latvia, encompassing eleven training institutions, five workshops and five schools. The organization returned to the country in 2002 with an aim to help and rebuild the Jewish community in Latvia and other newly independent Baltic States. ORT has programmes at the Simon Dubnov Jewish School in Riga, the first Jewish school in the FSU inaugurated during perestroika, and at the Jewish community centre which opened in a building the community had received as restitution.

In 2002, together with the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, with financial support from the Clore Duffield Foundation and with the support of the local Jewish community, two technology centres – one in the Jewish community building and the other at the Dubnov Jewish school – were inaugurated within the framework of the ORT Regeneration 2000 project.

During the academic year 2006–7, and under the auspices of ORT Regeneration 2004 project, ORT upgraded the equipment at the school to include new computers, presentation facilities, network improvement and software. Inter-

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curricula projects carried out within the school's ICT environment play a significant part in the school's activities. This, together with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for the school's teachers, will help to attract more Jewish parents – especially to the primary school – bearing in mind the demographic situation in Latvia and the priorities of the Jewish community.

The adult members of the community also have the opportunity to hone their skills at the Jewish community centre where ORT holds classes. Latvia has recently joined the enlarged European Union and many of its younger citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, are building new lives elsewhere in Europe. It is hoped that the improvement of the primary school will encourage Jewish families to educate their children in Jewish schools and, in that way, the youngsters will learn about their background and history from their very earliest years.

ORT in Latin America

By the early 1940s, the Jewish population in Latin America had reached 600,000 people, many of whom European refugees fleeing pogroms and the subsequent devastation in Europe. As Leon Shapiro recounts in his book,¹⁴ World ORT sent several delegations to the continent during World War II in a bid to assess the needs of the Jewish community there. Subsequent World ORT delegations during the mid-1950s made clear that the community, by then dispersed in different countries around Latin America, required training for skilled manpower, and the organization initiated ambitious plans for classes and courses in cooperation with local governments. These plans included combined Jewish studies and vocational education programmes, ORT schools and fundraising campaigns.

The venture into Latin America presented a real challenge. The geographical distance to the ORT headquarters in Europe, the cultural and language differences and the sheer size of the continent made it necessary to appoint an ORT representative who would coordinate the work and create an infrastructure that would enable local ORT operations to cooperate on educational projects and fundraising initiatives.

In 1966 Bernard Wand-Polak became the first director of Latin American operations for the World ORT Union. Wand-Polak and his successors, Joshua Fliedel, Shimshon Shoshani and Menachem Argov, were all instrumental to the subsequent success of ORT's work in that part of the world.

National Director of ORT Uruguay Charlotte de Grunberg was in charge of coordinating ORT's activities in the continent between 1995 and 1999. In 2004, Isidoro Gorodischer, former president of ORT Chile, was appointed World ORT representative to Latin America, a position which he still holds today.

One of the World ORT representative's most important responsibilities is to identify the needs of the various local Jewish communities in a politically



Young student celebrating Passover at ORT Lithuania, c. 2005.

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and economically unstable region, and to advise World ORT on the necessary steps that need to be taken in response. He is also responsible for developing ORT committees in new countries and for encouraging new lay leaders to become involved with ORT's work. The World ORT representative to Latin America also works on ORT's International Cooperation projects in the continent, liaising between the local authorities and World ORT.

ORT Argentina

ORT Argentina is the largest ORT operation in Latin America and one of the country's largest providers of education, with a student population of 7,500. ORT Argentina students attend one of two junior high schools and two high schools in Buenos Aires and study subjects such as science, computing, electronics, business administration, media studies and music production. Following graduation many continue their studies at the two ORT institutes of technology, which grant official diplomas in biotechnology, food technology, film and television production, tourism and fashion design. With a waiting list hundreds of students long, ORT Argentina is about to embark upon a sizeable expansion project in order that no child be turned away from an ORT education.

Apart from providing an outstanding level of education to thousands of students, ORT Argentina works in a number of other capacities off campus. ORT Argentina is an official advisor to the education ministry, helping to improve the mainstream educational system for the teaching of science and technology. In turn, ORT is helped to develop its educational approach by an academic advisory board comprising seven of Argentina's leading academics and intellectuals.

ORT's success in Argentina becomes even more noteworthy when one remembers how turbulent the last thirty years have been for the Argentine people and for its Jewish community in particular. Despite serious challenges, ORT Argentina found itself as a pivotal point of support for students and parents through years of political turmoil, anti-Semitic attacks and acute economic hardship.

Overcoming these difficulties with the help of the global ORT network strengthened ORT's position in Argentina and helped to define it as a leading educational organization in the country – one that is in tune with the changing employment market and that is able to offer skills for a future of self-sufficiency.

The first ORT school in Buenos Aires was established in 1941. By the mid-1960s, radical reforms in structure and content set the tone for what would become the ORT Argentina of today, focused on reaching the highest standard of general education, introducing education in technology, science and humanities and incorporating Jewish education into the syllabus. Following



ORT Argentina graduation ceremony, 2003.

the reforms, ORT began to recruit highly qualified staff, develop teaching materials and invest in modern facilities, equipment and teaching tools. It also began to provide technical assistance and equipment to primary schools associated with the Central Council for Jewish Education (Vaad HaChinuch). In the decades to follow, ORT Argentina continued to revise and reform its technology education, developing new disciplines in advanced technical education in line with changes in industry and the growing and urgent need for highly skilled, specialist staff.

ORT Argentina soon established a tradition of innovation: its schools were the first to offer studies in mass media, biotechnology and information and communications technologies (ICT). This emphasis on empowering Argentine Jewry by giving its youth the right skills for employability was to become increasingly relevant as ORT and its local community along with the rest of the country faced periods of economic hardship.

In the years following the return of democracy in 1983, life in Argentina was marked by an ongoing economic crisis which severely affected small and medium-sized businesses and the professional classes. Unemployment spread rapidly and the inflation rate remained high throughout the 1980s, reaching 200 per cent in 1989. Most of the Argentine Jews (some 400,000 people in 1984) traditionally belonged to the middle classes – large and small-scale manufacturers, shopkeepers, professionals and employees – and experienced considerable loss of income, redundancy and bankruptcy. Despite the official position of the government, which was opposed to all forms of dis-

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crimination, the number of anti-Semitic attacks on the Jewish community increased in those years: bombs were planted in synagogues and Jewish schools – including the ORT Buenos Aires Technical School in July 1980.

In 1987, ORT Argentina opened its second school (ORT Technical School No.2) in response to the increasing demand for places at the existing ORT school. The establishment of the school was wrought with challenges due to the difficult economic situation at the time, with constant delays in the schedule. In the meantime, ORT Technical School No.1 underwent refurbishment to increase its capacity. In 1989 World ORT provided ORT Argentina with didactic materials in automation and robotics, significantly boosting the level of the schools' technology curricula. Subsequent research has shown that the project increased students' interest in the curricula and contributed greatly to ORT Argentina's reputation as a leading establishment with the Argentine education system.¹⁵ Soon after, ORT began providing advisory services to other schools and public bodies and adapting the ORT educational model to their various needs. By 1990 ORT Argentina had 4,061 students in its schools with a further 16,430 in affiliated establishments. Figures increased consistently every year after. In 1992 the Shazar Teacher Training College joined the ORT Argentina network, offering teacher training courses for Jewish primary and secondary education in Latin America.

The first half of the 1990s was particularly hard for the Argentine Jewish community, as it was shaken by the two worst terrorist attacks in the country's history. In March 1992 a suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into the front of the Israeli embassy, killing twenty-nine people and injuring 242. Two years later, in July 1994, the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, or AMIA) Jewish community centre was subjected to a bomb attack that killed eighty-six people. Among the victims of the attacks were ORT students and parents.

This difficult and tense atmosphere continued to affect the Jewish community, and when many thought that the situation could not get much worse, in 1998, an unprecedented blow was dealt to the community and Argentine Jewry was plunged into a new crisis. Two banks that had sustained much of the community's activities collapsed, resulting in widespread unemployment as businesses failed and families lost their life savings. By the summer of 2003 one third of Argentina's Jewish community was living below the poverty line. In Buenos Aires alone 1,700 families lost their homes and the number of welfare recipients in the Jewish community increased to more than 30,000. The ramifications for ORT Argentina were severe. Parents, unable to pay school fees, were forced to take their children out of Jewish education and the loss of income was putting the future of ORT Argentina in danger.

World ORT and the global network, committed to help ORT Argentina, launched the World ORT Emergency Campaign for Argentina. The funds raised provided grants and tuition fees for students who otherwise would

have had to drop out of the Jewish education system. The funds also provided hot meals for students, essential books, medical supplies as well as much needed counselling services at the schools. At the same time as responding to these immediate needs, ORT worked to provide the newly unemployed adults of the Jewish community with employable vocational skills that would help them climb back towards financial self-reliance and independence. ORT's retraining programme provided vocational training geared to the demands of the new labour market.

In 2005, ORT Argentina opened the Noel Werthein Auditorium, the ORT Entrepreneurship Centre, potentially the country's leading training facility and CREA, the Resource Centre for Education and Learning. ORT Argentina also continued to increase its cooperation with universities and institutions of higher education, such as the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, and established itself as the heart of ORT's work in Latin America, providing technical support, teacher training and infrastructure to ORT institutions across the continent.

The success of ORT Argentina's schools led to them becoming increasingly oversubscribed, having to turn down some 200 applications each year. The decision was made to purchase an adjacent plot of land and to build a new state-of-the-art Science and Technology Centre to house advanced laboratories, workshops and classrooms, increasing the school's capacity and expanding the opportunities available to its students. Fundraising for the new project began in 2008.

ORT Uruguay

ORT Uruguay was created in 1942, offering courses in metalwork, electricity, electronics and mechanics to European Jewish émigrés. In the decades that followed, ORT expanded its operations and began catering for the local community. In the 1980s ORT Uruguay was fast becoming a leading provider of technology education, and by 1989 it was the largest non-governmental organization for technical education in the country. Rather than opening its own schools, ORT Uruguay provided support for existing Jewish schools and did not operate an independent institution until the opening of the Bernard Wand-Polak School of Engineering in 1996 (named after the former World ORT Union representative to Latin America), though much earlier, in 1985, the newly installed democratic regime in Uruguay officially recognized ORT's degree programmes in systems analysis and electronics.

1998 saw the establishment of ORT's business school (later called School of Administration and Social Sciences) which was the first of its kind in the country and later ranked among the thirty best business schools in Latin America. ORT's degree programmes have continued to develop since the mid-1990s: the first design degree was introduced in 1995 and a year later, new degree programmes in journalism, audio-visual production and advertis-

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ing were added to the curriculum. That same year Universidad ORT Uruguay became the first certified private university in the country, with three new academic departments: the Institute of Education (1998), the School of Architecture (1999) and the Department of Jewish Studies (2003).

Today, ORT Uruguay operates the largest private university in the country, with more than 5,000 students enrolled in postgraduate, undergraduate and technical courses taught by more than 500 staff members in five officially recognized faculties. Degrees are granted in architecture, engineering, management, economics, international relations, media studies, advertising, journalism, design and education. The ORT University in Uruguay is famous for being a centre of academic excellence: in 2000 the Uruguayan Parliament awarded national recognition to ORT for outstanding academic achievement and in 2007 the university was ranked among the world's top 500 tertiary institutions according to the quality of its teaching and research, the employability of its graduates and its internationalization. The ORT University is one of the very few Jewish institutions attracting Jewish young adults in large numbers and is the only Jewish institution in the country that provides a post-secondary education to Jewish students, with 80 per cent of graduates from Uruguay's Jewish schools attending each year, as well as many Jewish students from non-Jewish secondary schools.

ORT Uruguay is also an integral part of the larger Uruguayan Jewish education system. It provides technical and pedagogical support to all Uruguayan Jewish schools, including teacher training and IT programme development and certification. Some of ORT Uruguay's services are directed towards Jewish families in economic need, providing them with scholarships, job retraining and other forms of support for them and their children. Unemployed and economically deprived Jews benefit from such scholarships every year. Other ORT Uruguay activities focus on social and political relations between the Jewish community and Uruguayan society at large, while others consist of leadership training and management development for lay leaders and professionals of other Uruguayan Jewish communal organizations.

ORT Brazil

World ORT arrived in Brazil's two largest cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in 1943 and opened its first school, the Instituto de Tecnologia ORT, in Rio two years later. The school's curriculum combined humanities, including Hebrew and Yiddish, with technical training. It was modified in the 1950s in response to the difficult economic situation in the country and the school began to offer short-term courses at much lower cost, which helped its students to find employment even during those difficult times.

After a period of development during the 1960s, The ORT Science and Technology Institute was further renovated and modernized in 1980. That year, with the support of World ORT, and in cooperation with the Brazilian

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labour and education ministries, ORT Brazil opened a new distance learning programme that catered specifically for students who had no previous qualifications and who could not afford to get their education anywhere else. The programme helped more than 30,000 students to become qualified professionals and was repeated in Uruguay, Peru, Mexico and Venezuela. In 1985, again with the support of World ORT, ORT Brazil's activities in São Paulo were reopened to provide technical support for the local Jewish schools and training for members of the local community. The programme was closed again in 2001.

In 1992, ORT Rio de Janeiro went through a second wave of extensive modernization and opened a pioneering programme in biotechnology. Six years later, data processing was added to the curriculum. Today it is a leading educational establishment and is involved in stem-cell research together with the Pro-Cardiaco Hospital. 2001 saw the opening of the Experimental Centre for Environmental Education, an innovative establishment that combines natural sciences and advanced technology. Two years later, the Centre for Jewish Technology was opened at the ORT Rio de Janeiro campus to serve ORT students, students of other schools and members of the local community. The centre aims to disseminate Jewish culture, tradition and technological understanding and is supported by ORT Brazil, the Community Fund and the

Biotechnology is one of the key subjects at ORT Brazil, enhancing ORT's reputation as the country's best school for teaching science and technology, 2005.



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Jewish Education Centre of Rio de Janeiro. At the time of writing, ORT Brazil is benefiting from another boost from World ORT, with the Latin America Campaign providing tuition assistance to underprivileged students and helping to upgrade equipment and facilities at the school.

ORT Mexico

Although there has been an ORT Committee in Mexico since 1935, operational activities did not begin until the 1970s. ORT Mexico was put on a formal footing in 1984, when it began collaborating with the Mexican community in both public and private institutions.

Today ORT Mexico provides technical support by reviewing and updating study programmes in technical education and by training teachers in the use of new equipment. To date, ORT Mexico has developed more than forty vocational training workshops; the Industrial Training Centre, which is located within the densely populated zones of Mexico City; the Training Centre for Operators and Technicians of Agricultural Machinery; the Regional Training Centre for Crafts in the state of Hidalgo; and a Mother and Child programme in the State of Oaxaca. More recently, the new ORT Media Training Centre was opened at the Colegio Israelita School in Mexico City. The centre operates completely independently of the school and provides four high-quality educational tracks: a degree in media production, short vocational courses, media workshops and teacher training programmes. 2008 saw ORT Mexico organize the first ever Week of Educational Innovation and Technology for teachers and other education professionals. The event encompassed twenty workshops, sixty conferences, keynote speakers, an exposition of educational material, products and services and an education book fair featuring the output of eight publishing houses. ORT Mexico is now committed to making it an annual fixture on Mexico City's calendar.

ORT Mexico has worked in cooperation with institutions such as the National System for Integral Development of the Family (DIF) and Mexican Petroleum (PEMEX), and with the states of Hidalgo and Oaxaca.

ORT Cuba

After closing down its operations in Cuba in 1959 ORT returned to the country in 2000, opening a new ORT Technology Centre in the Jewish community centre in Havana. During the first years of operations the ORT centre has become the leading provider of Jewish education and technological training for the community, with fifty-nine different courses including Hebrew, psychology, information and communication technologies and web design. As part of the new World ORT campaign in Latin America, ORT is developing a national communication network that will connect congregations in Havana with smaller communities scattered around the island.



ORT Cuba students,
Havana, 2003.

ORT in Chile

ORT first arrived in Chile in 1943. In the 1970s it began working together with Vaad HaChinuch to introduce its science and technology programmes into local Jewish schools. These have grown through the years to include seminars and courses for students and adults, teacher training and Jewish education.

Recent years saw ORT Chile become even more involved in supporting the local community and the organization has attracted widespread acclaim and support for its projects, which have helped thousands of people in the country's Jewish and wider communities. In 1995 it began working with the Coca-Cola Foundation on a network of science education centres (the Tavec project). The project includes fifty different programmes in Chile's state schools and provides state-of-the-art science and technology laboratories together with an educational infrastructure, training programmes for students and teachers and technical support. To date, more than 400 science teachers have been trained by the project, subsequently raising the level of science and technology education for their students.

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In the 2000s, ORT Chile continued its work for the local community, offering training programmes for students with special needs and introducing the project Children Have the World in some of the poorest municipalities in Santiago. Following the success of the project, the Chilean Ministry of Education invited ORT Chile to utilize its approach in other schools in the capital. In 2002 ORT started operating a three-year project, funded by the education ministry and the United Nations Development Programme, to provide management workshops for teachers and training for the teaching of Spanish and mathematics at eleven schools serving 10,000 students. In 2005 ORT Chile also started to work together with the Chilean Ministry of Interior on projects for young people at-risk and is continuing to cooperate with the country's largest telecommunications company, Telefonica Corporation, to provide technology education to disabled people. World ORT and ORT Chile are now planning to open a new Jewish school in Santiago, catering for Jewish students who are currently not benefiting from any form of Jewish education, mainly due to the shortage of places in existing Jewish schools and the high tuition fees that they demand.

ORT in small Jewish Communities in Latin America

World ORT is building upon the success of the Tavec project and ORT's cooperation with the Coca Cola Foundation in order to raise standards in Jewish schools in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Peru and Panama. In Panama, local ORT Committee members attended the inauguration of a new science laboratory installed at Panama City's Isaac Rabin School under the supervision of Professor Rolando Diaz of ORT Chile. In Peru, a second laboratory is being built for the Leon Pinelo School. An ORT Committee, led by Alejandro Laufer, is currently operating in Paraguay.

Australian ORT

Australian ORT has a short yet exciting history. Years of planning the ways in which ORT could best serve the ongoing educational needs of the Australian communities finally led to the national organization being incorporated as a recognized legal entity on 2 January 2007 and as a charity in May 2007.

Since beginning its operations, Australian ORT has been welcomed by Sydney's Jewish and non-Jewish communities. ORT's reputation for high-quality contribution to education and training preceded it and the organization quickly formed relationships across the private and public sectors, including schools, non-profit organizations and industrial bodies.

Operationally, Australian ORT, together with other non-profit organizations and under the guidance of ORT South Africa, founded and developed ORT JET Australia – Jewish Entrepreneurial Training. The brainchild of ORT South Africa, ORT JET brings together volunteer business consultants with struggling small businesses. Following the programme launch in March 2007,

ORT JET quickly expanded and currently includes a database of ninety business people. Thirty-one Jewish-owned businesses have sought assistance through ORT JET so far. In addition to ORT JET Australia, Australian ORT is developing services that integrate technology into classroom teaching and bring students closer to their peers around the world.

ORT International Cooperation (IC)

ORT's decision to establish the International Cooperation (IC) department was taken half a century ago. The eightieth ORT Congress passed a resolution in 1960 to extend the reach of ORT's specialized workforce development and technical assistance programmes to developing countries. The IC department has since implemented more than 350 projects in ninety-eight countries, benefiting approximately three million people. ORT is now recognized as a major Jewish provider of long-term development assistance worldwide, working in partnership with other NGOs, donors, corporations, governments and foundations.

IC's basic philosophy of helping others to help themselves is integrated into all programme objectives, which are specifically designed to promote self-reliance through proficiency and income-generating skills. Max Braude, the former World ORT Director General, looked back at this important moment in ORT's history on the twentieth anniversary of International Cooperation during the Centenary Congress in Jerusalem:

Our success thus far is remarkable. Our position in the field of development work is now well recognized. It has grown in size and sources of support. It has enhanced ORT's image, Israel's image and, in fact, the Jewish image. It is a social and economic need and a humanitarian purpose which we helped meet in no way departing from our service to the Jewish people, in fact strengthening the service.¹⁶

Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir was a strong advocate of IC, and personally approached ORT in 1960 to provide training and assistance in order to build relationships between the newly independent African nations and Israel.

The foreign assistance branch of the United States government, the Agency for International Development (USAID), approached ORT in 1960 to conduct an assessment survey of vocational education needs in eight newly independent African countries. USAID felt that ORT was ideally suited to undertake this evaluation due to its extensive training experience in Francophone nations, as well as its schools in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. IC established procedures and financial guidelines to procure and manage donor and government grants and contracts. Max Braude himself undertook to head the team sent to the African nations in September 1961 to conduct the initial IC mission. USAID subsequently awarded contracts to ORT in 1962 to establish

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technical and vocational training centres in Guinea and Mali. Foremen, supervisors and technicians were trained for national industries. Teachers and administrators were trained to take over from the ORT teams, and administer the schools properly in order to sustain the institutions.

ORT's performance in Mali was described as 'brilliant' by Herbert Waters, the assistant administrator of USAID.¹⁷ Waters indicated that the AID contract exemplified the very essence of the congressional mandate directing the United States government to make maximum use of the skills, experience and resources of American voluntary non-profit agencies.¹⁸ The US Ambassador to Mali presented the Meritorious Honour Award to the ORT team for its effectiveness in the establishment of the Malian school.

Funding for ORT's International Cooperation programme is generated from governments of beneficiary countries, bilateral assistance, multilateral institutions, private industry, and voluntary agencies working in the field. Over the years, IC developed its training and technical assistance capabilities in response to a rapidly changing environment. Services were expanded to include all of the following: civil society, democracy and governance; NGO strengthening programmes; roads and transportation; agricultural training centres for rural and urban development; community development and early childhood programmes in health, education and nutrition; and training for government ministries, public utilities and industrial and commercial enterprises. ORT began to work in cooperation with all of the major multilateral agencies, including the European Union, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Asian, African and Inter-American Development Banks.

World ORT training programmes are designed to meet local needs and are particularly successful in overcoming economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. ORT works with local, national and regional partners in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and Latin America. Providing for sustainable economic, social and cultural growth is the motivating force behind every World ORT undertaking.

A key objective of World ORT technical assistance programmes is to establish a self-sustaining, locally based training capacity. To achieve this goal, ORT adheres to the following guidelines: define project objectives with local participants and beneficiaries or host governments and other appropriate institutions; provide a team of specialists who develop, in conjunction with local counterparts, customized technical assistance and training programmes; design and implement a comprehensive strategy; provide a rapid mobilization and subsequent work plans with detailed benchmarks; and conduct careful monitoring, measuring and evaluation of programme goals and objectives to ensure a high level of performance and proper allocation of project resources.

ORT's early childhood and community development programmes were designed to overcome the critical deficiencies in impoverished communities

and local education systems by providing the means of ensuring basic pre-school education and health care for children. Over the past twenty years IC has successfully designed and implemented numerous childhood and self-help community development programmes throughout the developing world. Income generation activities were added to improve economic development in rural areas. The overall result has been the efficient delivery of education and healthcare to thousands of underprivileged women and children, as well as higher income and generation of employment to improve the quality of life of beneficiaries and their families. Such programmes have been established in Argentina, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Uruguay and Venezuela.

World ORT has long worked to strengthen and build local capacity through development assistance, and currently plays an active role in revitalizing civil society through the training and promotion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public policy and watchdog advocacy and citizen participation. IC designed and delivered dynamic democracy programmes in Russia, Albania, Bosnia and Montenegro to develop and strengthen local NGOs as they undertake civic action functions and engage in public policy-making. ORT developed and implemented customized support packages – comprehensive training and technical assistance – targeted at strengthening democratic self-governance, civic action and advocacy. Financial grants were provided as a means of building long-term institutional capacity and supporting public policy initiatives and coalition building programmes. The IC approach focuses on strengthening both organizational and human resource capacity to serve as effective facilitators for democratic change. The Council of Europe recently praised ORT's contribution, through its extensive IC activities, to the furtherance of European values of democracy and the rule of law.¹⁹

ORT has historically focused its efforts on the reintegration of refugees and communities in post-conflict societies. Recent examples include Kosovo and Albania. World ORT was one of the first international NGOs to implement a development project in Albania in 1991. In doing so, IC faced extremely difficult local conditions, which were further compounded by significant government changes. Nevertheless, within forty-five days of contract notification from USAID, the ORT Training Centre was fully staffed and operational. In a short period of time, IC was able to win the confidence and cooperation of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, local NGOs, local foundations and other donors which in turn enhanced ORT's ability to provide assistance to the formerly persecuted population and to expand the workforce skills training programme. In total, the Human Resource Development project provided for the training of more than 26,000 Albanians and established the first coordinated network of adult education centres throughout the country.

International Cooperation is working increasingly with corporate social responsibility programmes such as ExxonMobil, Citigroup, Hewlett Packard

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(HP) and others. In partnership with Hewlett Packard, World ORT launched three digital villages in South Africa, Russia and Ukraine. The programmes provide tools for learning and competing in the digital economy to communities with the greatest need and help those communities harness technology in collaboration with partners, including schools, universities, local government, community services and non-profit organizations. In 2007 HP expanded its partnership with World ORT to include graduate entrepreneurship training to improve the IT-related business skills of school graduates in Russia. World ORT also partners with other Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), to provide long-term assistance after natural disasters such as the tsunami which struck Asia in December 2004. In cooperation with the JDC, ORT IC designed and delivered educational, trauma counselling and livelihood development programmes to the local communities in Sri Lanka and India.

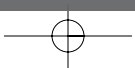
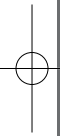
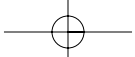
Another key aspect of IC has been its important work with orphans and other vulnerable children, as well as carrying out other community development projects. With funding from USAID, IC is reaching out to orphans and other vulnerable children in Namibia by providing long-term job skills training and youth development programmes to communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS. In addition, IC is working closely with ORT South Africa to implement two vital community development programmes focused on helping children and women in impoverished South African communities and strengthening local non-governmental organizations.

The intellectual richness and recognition provided by International Cooperation contributes significantly to what makes World ORT prestigious and well-known in both non-Jewish and Jewish circles. It is looked upon as ORT's hallmark in the true spirit of the Jewish tradition of helping others, and provides an important tool to fight and prevent anti-Semitism and to instil good will worldwide; this in turn has a positive impact on local Jewish communities.

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4. Goralnik, 'Reforming Technological Education in Israel', pp. 8-9.
5. Judge Leon Meiss quoted in Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 269.
6. Daniel Mayer quoted in Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 254.
7. Dr Gaby Meyassed, quoted in 'Video Conferencing: Seeing is Believing', *World ORT Times* (summer 2006), p. 8.

12. *Renewal and Growth* 323

8. See Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 252.
9. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 308.
10. World ORT, *Annual Report of the World ORT Union 1984* (London: World ORT Union 1985), p. 56, World ORT Archive, ref. d05a066.
11. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 320.
12. According to the *Jerusalem Post* (19 August 1980), Eshaq Farahmandpur was charged with collaborating with the regime of the late Shah and with Zionism as well as with 'opposing to the taking of hostages at the American embassy and with protesting against the execution of Jews on an espionage charge'. Furthermore, Farahmandpur was an ORT teacher until 1969, an institution 'which had relations with Israel'.
13. Letter from Parvine Motamed to Joseph Harmatz, 20 August 1980, World ORT Archive, ref. d07a275.
14. Shapiro, *The History of ORT*, p. 293.
15. Sergey Gorinskiy, Marcos Berlazky, Luis Perez et al., 'Is the Whole More than the Sum of its Components? An Analysis of Technology Education in ORT Schools around the World', in Rod Custer and Marc J. De Vries (eds.), *International Handbook of Technology Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006), pp. 33–52.
16. World ORT, *World ORT Annual Report 1980* (London: World ORT Union, 1981), p. 22, World ORT Archive, ref. d05a062.
17. World ORT, *World ORT Annual Report 1980*, p. 22.
18. World ORT, *World ORT Annual Report 1980*, p. 22.
19. 'Praise for World ORT at the Council of Europe', *News Update*, 29 October 2007, World ORT [website] www.ort.org/asp/article.asp?ID=601.



World ORT Leadership



Participants at the National Directors Forum, ORT University,
Montevideo, Uruguay, 2007.

Back row, going up the stairs L to R: Vladimir Dribinskiy (World ORT), Guillermo Lutzky (ORT Argentina), Luis Perez (ORT Argentina), Ephraim Buhks (US Ops), Sergey Gorinsky (ORT Russia), William Miller (ORT Cuba), Vlad Lerner (World ORT), Benjamin Isaac (ORT India), and Oscar Waisgold (ORT Argentina).

Middle row, standing L to R: Niamh Cordeiro (World ORT), Rodolfo Osers (ORT Venezuela), Marcelo Lewkow (ORT Chile), Isidoro Gorodischer (World ORT Rep. for Latin America), Michael Sieff (ORT South Africa), Slava Leshchiner (ORT Ukraine), Harry Nadler (World ORT Rep. for North America), Jimmy Salinas (ORT Mexico), Hugo Malajovich (ORT Brazil), Sandra Borenstein (ORT Argentina), Baruj Zaidenknop (Argentina) and Randy Grodman (IC, Geneva office).

Front row, seated, L to R: Janice Stolar (ORT America), Natalie Laifer (ORT Australia), Sonia Gomes de Mesquita (World ORT), Vanessa Cholat (ORT Switzerland), Robert Singer (World ORT), Charlotte de Grunberg (ORT Uruguay) and Jorge Grunberg (ORT Uruguay).

World ORT Officers at December 2009



Dr Jean de Gunzburg (*left*)
President
World ORT



Mauricio Merikanskas (*right*)
Chair of Board of Trustees
World ORT



Eugene J. Ribakoff (*left*)
Deputy President
World ORT



Martin Behr (*right*)
Secretary
World ORT

Judy Menikoff (*below*)
Treasurer
World ORT



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Samuel Poliakov (*left*)
President of ORT 1880–1888

Daniel Poliakov
Chairman of ORT 1902–1906

Baron Horace Gunzburg (*right*)
President of ORT 1906–1909

Jacob Halpern
President of ORT 1910–1914

Genrikh Sliosberg
President of ORT 1915–date unknown

Zalman Szabad
Chairman of the World ORT Union
Central Council 1921–1923

Dr Chaim Zhitlowsky (*right*)
Chairman of the World ORT Union
Central Council 1923–1925

Simon Dubnow
Chairman of the World ORT Union
Central Council 1925–date unknown

Henri Bodenheimer
President of the World ORT Union
Central Board 1937–1946



George Backer (*left*)
President of World ORT Union
1946–1949

Judge Leon Meiss
President of the World ORT Union
Central Board 1946–1955

Dr William Haber (*right*)
President of the World ORT Union
Central Board 1955–1980



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Chaim Herzog (*left*)
President of the World ORT Union
Central Board 1980–1983



Professor Ephraim Katzir (*right*)
President of World ORT Union
1986–1990



Lord Young of Graffham (*left*)
President of World ORT Union
1990–1993



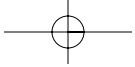
David Hermelin (*right*)
President of World ORT Union
1993–1997



Justice Richard Goldstone (*right*)
President of World ORT
1997–2004



Sir Maurice Hatter (*left*)
President of World ORT
2004–2008



330 World ORT Executive Leadership



Professor Nikolai Bakst (*left*)
 Founder and Chief Executive of ORT
 1880–1904



Isaak Berger
 Executive Head of ORT
 1906–date unknown

M. Bomze
 Executive Head of ORT
 date unknown–1911



Dr Leon Bramson (*top right*)
 Executive Head of ORT 1911–1914
 Chairman of the World ORT Union
 Central Board 1926–1941



M. Gurevitch
 Executive Head of ORT
 1915–date unknown

Dr David Lvovitch (*2nd left*)
 Co-Chairman of the World ORT Union
 Executive Committee 1941–1950



Dr Aron Syngalowski (*2nd right*)
 Co-Chairman of the World ORT Union
 Executive Committee 1941–1950
 Chairman of the World ORT Union
 Executive Committee 1952–1956



Max Braude (*left*)
 Director General of World ORT Union
 1957–1980

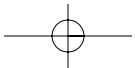
Joseph Harmatz (*3rd right*)
 Director General of World ORT Union
 1980–1993



Dr Ellen Isler (*left*)
 Director General of World ORT Union
 1993–1998



Robert Singer (*right*)
 Director General and CEO of World ORT
 1999–present



Notes on Contributors

Notes on contributors

I. History

Gennady Estrai kh was managing editor of the Moscow Yiddish monthly *Sovetish Heymland* in 1988–91. In 1991 he moved to Oxford where he combined academic and literary activities. Estrikh became Rauch Associate Professor of Yiddish Studies at New York University in 1993. His recent publications include *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism* (2005) and *Yiddish in the Cold War* (2008).

Alexander Ivanov is a research fellow in the Interdepartmental Centre Petersburg Judaica of the European University in St Petersburg. His research concentrates on the history of the Jewish agricultural colonization in Russia and Soviet Union in 1910s–1930s. Among his recent publications are *Experiments of a 'Young Man for Photographic Works': Solomon Yudovin and Russian Pictorialism* (St Petersburg: Petersburg Judaica Publishing, 2005) and *The Hope and the Illusion: The Search for a Russian Jewish Homeland* (London: World ORT, 2006), a study of ORT's work in Soviet Russia co-authored with Valery Dymshits.

Sarah Kavanaugh completed her PhD 'The Jewish Leadership of the Theresienstadt Ghetto: Culture, Identity and Politics' at Southampton University in 2003 under the supervision of Professor David Cesarani. She has been working as a researcher in the History Department of Royal Holloway (University of London) and at World ORT since September 2005. Her book *ORT, The Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors* is published by Vallentine Mitchell.

Rachel Bracha is World ORT's Archive Coordinator; she joined ORT in 2000. In addition to organizing and cataloguing the wealth of material held at World ORT's administrative office in London, Rachel also works with researchers in other countries to gather and preserve ORT-related material, particularly material held in the archives of the former Soviet Union, only recently opened up to the public. Rachel received her Masters degree in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art, London, and completed an MLitt in Archives and Records Management at the University of Dundee in 2009.

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Vyacheslav Leshchiner is past National Director of ORT Russia. He completed his PhD at the Russian Academy of Education in 1993. For 12 years, he was principal at the Moscow ORT Technology School. Prior to this position, he acted as World ORT's Representative in the Ukraine and Moldova. Vyacheslav's research interests are focused around the usage of modern digital technologies in general education. He is the author and editor of numerous educational media materials for the Russian school system.

Lynn Leeb, author of Chapter 10, is a *cum laude* graduate of Vassar College, majoring in political science and a newspaper and magazine journalist. A long-time member of Women's American ORT, Leeb held countless leadership positions on local and national levels. Most recently she served on the National Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. Currently she is chair of Marketing and Communications Department and Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Bramson ORT College.

Judah Harstein is Head of Jewish Education at World ORT and former Co-chair of the World ORT Jewish Education Standing Committee. He joined the organization in 1981, developing technology education programs for use both within the ORT network and outside of it. During his career at ORT Judah has overseen the development of a number of educational projects in technology, business studies and Jewish education, including several online projects. He has written a number of papers on Jewish education themes and co-authored a textbook on Robotics and factory automation.

Sonia Gomes de Mesquita is Chief Development and Public Affairs Officer at World ORT. She joined the organization in 1999. During her career at World ORT, Sonia has initiated various new developments within the organization, which have helped to change the organization and have contributed to its current impressive international standing. As Head of the Coordination Department, Sonia developed strong associations with the operational countries of ORT and in moving to the International Liaison Department, she deals with the most important objectives of the organization

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on a daily basis. She is responsible for, among other things, leadership development, fundraising capability, project development process, Next Generation, lead donor groups, outreach to various national organizations and the smooth running of the organization's governance structure.

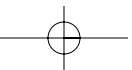
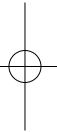
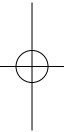
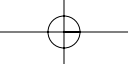
Vladimir Dribinskiy is Chief Program Officer at World ORT. Vladimir started his career at ORT in 1992 as the first Director of ORT St Petersburg, after ORT re-established its presence in the place where the organization first began in Tsarist Russia in 1880. After joining the World ORT team at the London administrative offices in 2002, he has been responsible for many World ORT educational projects and their implementation in operational countries. As a team leader, Vladimir participated in a number of multimedia and web projects related to Information and Communication Technology in education and in the history of Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

Harry Nadler joined World ORT in July 2002 as the North American Representative to the Jewish Federations. Prior to joining ORT, Harry was for 17 years Executive Vice President of the Indianapolis Jewish Federation and later Executive Vice President of the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County. As the North American Representative, Harry is in a position to see the work of ORT in various countries, from high school and Jewish education in Israel or Argentina to general and vocational training in the Former Soviet Union, and even skills training for Jews still living in Ethiopia and awaiting *aliyah*. Harry obtained his Bachelors and Masters degrees from Washington University in St Louis.

Geoffrey Yantian is Head of the World ORT Projects and Reports Unit. He joined ORT in 1983 as part of the development team of the World ORT Technical Department, when he produced much of the curriculum material for the Robotics and Automation course that was adopted across the World ORT network in the 1980s. He is also co-author of the textbook *Robotics and Automation*. He was later responsible for World ORT publications, including the ORTnet website, and for several years produced and edited the World ORT Annual Report and the World ORT bi-monthly *Frontline News*.

Adi Drori-Avraham is a writer, translator and editor. She is the author of numerous articles, many on matters of Jewish interest. From 2003 to 2008, Adi was part of the World ORT Projects Team in London. Adi Drori-Avraham grew up in Israel and obtained a BA in English Literature from Roehampton and an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck College, London.

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