

JEWISH CENTRAL INFORMATION OFFICE
19, Manchester Square
London, W. 1.

January 1946

Although this speech of Dr. Z. Grinberg, copy of which is attached, was delivered as far back as May 27, 1945, few weeks after liberation, it is only now that the full text has been received. Ear-witnesses of the performance report that when the speech was first delivered, Dr. Grinberg, who is a comparatively young man in the middle thirties, created a tremendous impression. Even now it will be difficult to read the address without deep emotion, and its value as record of Jewish suffering is enhanced by the detailed and specific information contained in it. Dr. Grinberg is at present editor of the Yiddish paper UNZER WEG, which is published in Munich on behalf of the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in Bavaria, Germany.

Translated from the German language

Speech given by Z. Grinberg, M. D.
Head Doctor of the Hospital for
Political Ex-prisoners in Germany
At the Liberation Concert in St. Ottilien
on May 27, 1945

420 Jews, the last representatives of the European Jews, after the most difficult period of suffering ever conceived, are now here in the hospital of St. Ottilien. These people are of the few survivors of the vulnerable old Jewish communities of Europe. Budapest and Prague, Warsaw, Kovno and Saloniki are represented here.

Millions of members of these same communities have been annihilated. What is the logic of fate to let us, then, live. We belong into the common graves of those shot in Kharkow, Lublin and Kovno; we belong to the millions gased and burnt in Auschwitz and Birkenau; we belong to the tens of thousands who died under the strain of the hardest labor; we belong to those tormented by milliards of lice, the mud, the starvation, the cold of Lodz, Kielce, Buchenwald, Dachau, Landshut, Utting, Kaufering, Landsberg and Leonsberg. We belong to those who were gased, hung, tortured, starved, worked and tormented to death in the concentration camps. We belong to the army of nine million fallen under the heel of this expertly organized and cunningly prepared system of murder. We are not alive — **W e a r e s t i l l d e a d !**

Nevertheless, there is a purpose in my address here today. We act as delegates of millions of victims to tell all mankind, to proclaim all over the world how cruel people may become, what brutal hellishness is concealed within a human being, and what a triumphant record of crime and murder has been achieved by the nation of Hegel and Kant, Schiller and Goethe, Beethoven and Schopenhauer.

Each one of us has had a different road of torture. During the past six years, almost all of the 3 ½ million Polish Jews have been lost. There remain perhaps 10,000 out of 350,000 Lithuanian Jews. 95% of the Hungarian Jews have been annihilated.

Yes, the road of torture is different. One led via Warsaw and Auschwitz to the Upper Bavaria; another from Budapest via Auschwitz to the Upper Bavaria; a third from Kovno-

Stutthof to the Upper Bavaria; still another from Lodz to Sachsenhausen, from Sachsenhausen to Belsen, from Belsen to Leonsberg, from Leonsberg to Kaufering.

Different is the road, various are the stations of torture, unlike is the space of time—but together they form one common red thread of blood, torture, torment, humiliation—and violent death!

In order to give you a slight intimation of what we went through, what we saw, and why we are still under the relentless pressure of the experiences of the last few years, I will try to give you a brief account of the stations of torture I personally passed during this time.

Kovno, Saturday, June 21, 1941. The peaceful life is running its usual course.

Kovno, Sunday, June 22, 1941. That night our sleep is disturbed by some kind of detonations. At first we take it for military maneuvering. However, we learn the next morning that Germany has attacked the Soviet Union without a declaration of war. Fighting is already going at the frontiers, which causes anxiety, apprehension, and excitement among all classes and all nationalities of the population. The German army approaches Kovno and takes the town. However, we are far behind the fighting zone, and indeed glad that we avoided the menace of being caught between the firing lines. We expect little trouble. We know indeed that we shall be deprived of a certain amount of our civil rights, but we are almost secure in our hope that we shall survive this war together with our wives, children, parents and relatives. This hope was short lived, for an announcement is heard through the radio that for every German soldier killed a hundred Jews would be shot! Simultaneously a Lithuanian mob is organized under German leadership, and the worst kind of massacre imaginable is begun. Babies in arms were shot; ears, noses and fingers cut off; the bellies of young women slit—the devil celebrated his greatest triumph. The little homes in the suburbs of Kovno were flooded with blood. Men were brought in groups to the 7th and 9th Forts of Kovno and there machinegunned. Women were pagued, violated, and shot. This is not fiction, but true fact. It is all related by witnesses who succeeded in escaping from the death Forts.

Thousands lost their lives at the seventh and ninth forts in this manner, but gradually the massacre died down. We lulled ourselves into a sense of false security by considering all this as merely an unfortunate incident of war, and again dared to hope that the survivors would be able to live in bearable conditions now. In the meantime, a civil government was established in Kovno and we thought that law and order would be the rule again.

However, the first order issued by SA-Brigadeführer Cramer, the newly appointed commissioner of the town, read that all Jews must, under threat of the death penalty, bear on the breast and on the back a yellow star; that the Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks, the gutter alone remaining for that purpose.

We could do naught but bear this humiliation, and hope that somehow this war would be soon over and this nightmare would end.

Order No. 2 of SA-Brigadeführer Cramer read: that the total Jewish population of Kovno had until August 15 to move to a little suburb of the town, and that after August 15, all Jews found outside the borders of the ghetto would be shot. Once more we are disillusioned and hopes fade. 26.000 persons from all parts of town, and by every means available, start moving to the ghetto in Viliampole. Up until the 15 of August there is one continuous caravan of men and women moving to their new homes.

One square meter of dwelling space is allowed per person. Three square feet! But we ignore the lack of space, the dirt, and squalor and try to be content having our wives and children with us. We do not know how we are going to feed ourselves or our family, how we are going to clothe ourselves, how we are going to find warmth. We soon learn,

though, to forget the future, to think about the present day only. We become hardhearted, for false illusions will only make us more bitter in the end. Our sole hope was that the most difficult part was now over, and that here in the ghetto we would be able to carry on some sort of existence. Around the ghetto a fence of barbed wire is built. A guard with fixed bayonets is stationed. We are imprisoned!

Within the ghetto an administration must be established and a board of eldest is formed. Venerable, well known Dr. Elkes becomes the leader of this tragic community. A ghetto police is created, and various offices of administration are organized. We endeavor to create tolerable conditions by mutual help and organization. A hospital is established, with all the doctors bringing their instruments and medicines there. Sanitary measures are taken throughout the ghetto to prevent epidemics. Ten cows which remained in the ghetto are put under the control of the board of eldest to secure milk for the young ones. Everything was equally distributed, everyone bore his share of the suffering, for is it not true that shared suffering is milder suffering. During this period of feverish organization, the 3rd Police Company, under the command of a Captain Tornbaum, moved into the ghetto. Every house was searched, and all valuables were taken from us. This was an official plundering sanctioned by the state!

You learn soon that property has, after all, no value, and you give all you think valuable to the intruders voluntarily. The Germans behave brutally in order to intimidate the population. Men, women, and children are beaten cruelly. There is shooting on a large scale. The groans of wounded men, and the cries of despairing women are heard all over the ghetto. Trucks are used to carry away the loot. This action continues for a full week.

One now believes that the devil would be satisfied after you have thrown into his greedy throat silver, gold, wedding rings, furs, fabrics, and linen. It is calm one day, and perhaps the crisis has passed. Now that we were poor, they should leave us in peace. But, keeping with Nazi policy, this was not the case. The new orders are: that our ten cows are to be delivered to the authorities, our children remaining without milk. That all valuables remaining should be delivered voluntarily. This is done, for we want to display our good will, we do not want to provoke the devil—we want to save our lives!

Nevertheless, on October 4, one part of the ghetto is surrounded by heavily armed soldiers. The inhabitants of that section are driven to the street and there a part is picked at random, driven to the 9th Fort and murdered!

The hospital, our only means of caring for the sick and wounded, is locked and set afire. The patients, the doctors, and the nurses are victims of this sadism.

I am one of those supposedly fortunate ones who were allowed to join the other part of the ghetto. Even now I can see the blazing hospital. It seems like a bad dream, but, alas, it was true!

I now remained without shelter for my wife and little child in another part of the ghetto; but fortunately I soon obtained lodging and some help. For the next twentyfour days nothing of importance happened and it seems as if the beast had left us to our lot. We were sure all the trouble was over; that they had merely wanted to reduce the population of the ghetto and accomplished it in this cruel way.

On the twenty eighth of October another edict was issued: all the population of the ghetto, healthy, ill, young, old, must be present at a certain place. Then began a game of chance—amusement for the Germans present, a game of life or death for those of the ghetto. Herr Rauca, a representative of the Gestapo in Kovno arrives, and as the columns of 24.000 souls pass by him, he sends one part to the right, the other part to the left. The people are puzzled as to which side they should choose, for they still do not realize the significance of the situation.

This procedure, which looks so much like the driving of cattle to market, goes on all day. In brief, the 10.800 people who were sent to the right side were massacred at the 9th Fort the following morning.

The population of the ghetto is further diminished, and there is indeed more space for the survivors. However, there is no longer place for illusion, and we are all in a mood of deepest depression, sorrow, and mourning.

Once more the Nazi promises. SA-Hauptsturmführer Jordan arrives and declares to the board of Eldest: "You have nothing to be afraid of in the future; you will work and live; you will work for the German Wehrmacht, and we will take care of you!" With that he throws 10.000 marks on the table and states that this was the first payment to the ghetto for the work they will do.

But nobody trusts him; experience has made us suspicious. However, the coming months and years proved him to be true. Life in the ghetto became hard, everyone being forced to fulfill extreme physical labor.

Although the ghetto was raided continually, there were none of great importance—until March 27, 1944. On this day the camp (the ghetto was now a concentration camp) was raided by the SS in a brutal hunt for children up to the age of 13.

Just as hunted and wounded animals, the children were thrown into the trucks of the SS. I can still see the heart-rending scenes. I see mothers clinging to their children, I see mothers covering their children with their bodies, so that they may be shot instead of the children. I see the whole camp crying, the tears of innocent children, the wild despair of all, the sight of children being torn from their parents' arms.

In the meantime, the SS is deploying in cars and motorcycles throughout the whole camp, shooting and fighting their gigantic battle—the battle against children!

"Give us your children! Are there any children here? Where did you hide your children?" I can hear it even now!!! Everyone is going wild trying to hide their children: in barrels, in the cellar, in the garret, in bed clothes! Some parents poison the children and then commit suicide!

On the 29th of March the concentration camp of Kovno is empty of children. A few of the parents succeeded in hiding their little ones, but they must be kept hidden, since officially, there are no children in the camp.

July 12 came, and with the successful Russian offensive, the Soviet armies approached Kovno. The commander of the camp, SS-Obersturmbannführer Goecke declared that the camp must be evacuated and that there was no reason to fear; we were going to Germany and would be well treated there. We would go to, and be with our families at the newly established concentration camp of Stutthof, near Danzig.

They very graciously allowed us to take some things of value along because we would need them in Germany. The closer the front approached, the more we were promised!

Those who did not trust those promises tried to escape through the fence of barbed wire. Some of these people were shot in flight, some got through to—no one knows! Some tried to hide themselves in the hope that at the rate the Russians were going they would soon be there. Working at night some of the people built hiding places and remained there. But their work was for naught—the Gestapo was too smart. The armed troops came into camp, blew up houses, set them afire, exploded grenades, fired small arms, and these people crept from their holes like frightened mice. Columns were quickly formed, brought to the railway station and shipped to Tiegenhof.

When we arrived at Tiegenhof, our old SS guards are replaced by new troops of the "Sturmführer". An order is immediately issued that all women and the rest of the children will be separated from the men and sent to a different place. The women weep, tak-

ing leave of their husbands, the children are crying bitterly. Thus all promises once again prove to be lies!!!

The Jewish Eldest, the venerable Dr. Elkes, has the courage to approach an SS-Obersturmführer and ask him the reason why we were separated, despite the promises that had been given in Kovno. The brave Obersturmführer gives the 65 year old doctor a box on the ears that is a clear reply. Dr. Elkes kisses his wife and takes leave of her. My wife is weeping and reproaching me because I did not listen to her advice and commit suicide rather than be evacuated to this new camp. I beg her to just wait and hope. Perhaps we would some day see each other again. As we were exchanging this last goodbye an SS-man approached and chased away my wife and all the other women who were seeing their husbands for what would be perhaps the last time.

We were driven to wagons and locked up. We grew numb; the blood in our veins almost stopped circulating; we were in a state of the greatest despair.

It was clear to us that our women had started their last walk. It was clear to us that we in turn were going to our deaths. Our only wish—that to die together with our loved ones—had been refused.

Three long days and nights we were dragged through Germany in these dark wagons. We did not know our destination, but we did know that Jews from France, Belgium and Holland had been brought to Kovno and annihilated. We sat apathetic in our wagons and did not touch the meager food we had.

After 144 hours we arrived at an unknown place and were ordered to get out. With an anxious and beating heart we left the wagons. Were we brought here for labor, or was our last hour at hand? SS men formed columns of five each. There appeared Obersturmführer Foerster who had led the war against the children in Schaulen.

A bad omen! Black clouds cover the sky and it begins to rain. This rain accompanies us to our new home. A camp only half ready. There are little tents for us to live in. Everything we possess is taken from us; even the photos of our families, passports and other documents are destroyed. It is explained to us that we have no rights whatsoever. "If the bread of Dachau you eat from this moment on and if your rotten Jewish lives are of any value to you, you filthy pigs, you will have to obey blindly; otherwise you will perish much sooner than you can guess." Thus spoke the famous Oberscharfuehrer Kirsch. The destiny of the 2000 men is in the hands of Kirsch. Daily, Kirsch beat the old people cruelly, Kirsch ill-treats the youngsters, Kirsch picks out certain people from the ranks and compels them to bathe in the mire of the latrines. Kirsch governs the world of these 2000 men. Kirsch is the God and the ruler. Boys under 16 years of age are shipped to Auschwitz. The rest go daily the long way to the Moll factory. The Moll factory means 12 hours daily of the hardest labor in beton and cement. Moll is terror, Moll is death! Day shift Moll, night shift Moll! Moll without interruption. Columns march to Moll, Columns return from Moll. The people get thinner, food rations smaller. 300 grams of bread and watery soup. They begin to treat us in an even more brutal way. Fifty-sixty men die every day. 60 to 80 % of those who had come to Kaufering lost their lives there. Those who are unable to work any more—starving, tortured by lice are transferred to camp 4, where they soon die.

Many Führers come and go, each one worse and more bestial than the other. We hear that on one front after another, Germany is suffering defeat, but there seems to be no change on our front. Those in charge of the camp have no scruples, and do not hesitate in their brutality, even up to the last moment. Himmler himself ordered on April 14, 1945, that no prisoners should fall into Allied hands. We were to be evacuated to the Tyrol. The commandant of the camp declared publicly that we were going to be brought to Switzerland to be taken care of by the International Red Cross. One more lie! We learned

later that the Red Cross knew nothing of such a plan. The truth is that we are to be annihilated. But fortunately Herr Himmler was no longer able to decide our destiny. The liberators had come earlier than those "gentlemen" had calculated.

Partly on account of our long marches, previous treatment, and being for a time within the fighting lines, we are still suffering heavy losses. Even in this hospital, where the people are no longer under the Nazi yoke, the Nazi regime demands new victims every day. We have 35 people buried in the cemetery here now!

We have met here today to celebrate our liberation; but at the same time it is a day of mourning for us. Because every clear and joyful day at present or that may be in the future is overshadowed by the tragic events of the past years. 1% survived to see the liberation, and of these, 99 % are very ill. Are we able to enjoy this day? Are we able to celebrate?

Hitler has lost every battle on every front except the battle against defenseless and unarmed men, women and children. He won the war against the Jews of Europe. He carried out this war with the help of the German nation.

However, we do not want revenge. If we took this vengeance it would mean we would fall to the depths of ethics and morals the German nation has been in these past 10 years. We are not able to slaughter women and children! We are not able to burn millions of people! We are not able to starve hundreds of thousands!

We are free now, but we do not know how, or with what to begin our free yet unfortunate lives. It seems to us that for the present mankind does not understand what we have gone through and experienced during this period. And it seems to us that we shall neither be understood in the future.

We unlearned to laugh; we cannot cry any more; we do not understand our freedom: this probably because we are still among our dead comrades!

Let us rise and stand in silence to commemorate our dead!