

Adv. Joel Levi in an Interview for the Journal of the German Federal Bar Association

In 1998 the first display of an exhibit on the fate of Jewish lawyers in during the Nazi Regime in Germany. The exhibit was built by the President of the German Federal Bar Association, Dr. Bernhard Dombek.

This exhibit was shown at the Zentrum Judaicum in Berlin, in Leipzig and thereafter in many cities throughout Germany, as well as in Israel, the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Joel Levi, one of the founders of the Israel-Germany Jurists Association, triggered the exhibit "Lawyers without Rights" to be displayed.

Mr. Levi, you propelled the project by presenting the Head of the Berlin Bar Association at the time, Dr. Bernhard Dombek, with a request for a list of the names of the Jewish lawyers in Berlin who were expelled from the profession during the Nazi era. What was your aim in making this request to the Berlin Bar?

I presented the question during an open conversation with the presidium of the Berlin Bar Association. I was one of the Tel Aviv Bar Association Committee members who were invited by the Berlin Bar. I had already spent five intensive years dealing with the joint past of the Germans and the Jews. I was certain that the names could be found; today I know that many archives need to be sifted through in order to find the complete information about the legal profession during the Nazi regime.

Now, after the exhibit in memory of the Jewish lawyers in Germany was displayed in many cities in Germany, in Israel and even in New York, what significance does it have?

We are honored by the rich life stories of the people that led the jurists in Germany in the period up to 1933. The work on writing the books and the exhibit led me to black holes. I decided to investigate how the Aryanization of Jewish law firms was performed, how prosecutors, judges and law professors in German universities were fired. Naturally, the question arose as to how the disappearance of these Jews affected the legal profession in Germany.

Mr. Levi, after having participated in many ceremonies, how was the exhibit received in countries outside of Germany and especially in Israel?

The exhibit brought insight that persecution is not dependent only upon racism. The exhibit was a pillar of fire leading jurists to fight for justice and human rights. In Israel there is the also the mourning for the loss of six million Jews during the Holocaust. It revealed also that jurists who were educated in Germany built the Israeli legal system.

The German Bar Association and the Association of Lawyers published books and participated in memorial projects. Is all of this too late?

There is no late and early in memorials; memorials have results. It is equally hard for victims and perpetrators to talk about these terrible events, the millions who were murdered, the many who committed suicide and the suffering that is indescribable .

However, if memory does not rest on the book shelves, but is rather ingrained in the people living among us, and we shall remember every day those who lived under the yoke of the Swastika, then we can fight against oblivion and for democracy. Germany proves today that it can be done. The memorial is still far from being exhausted. Do you know that all of the commanders of the Einsatzgruppen and all the participants in the Wannsee Conference were jurists?

Today we can talk with Martin Burmann junior who was a jurist and with children and grandchildren of those who took over the offices of Jewish lawyers and had them sign an undertaking not to return to the city even if they regained their licenses; In this way we can deal with the past and draw the required lessons.

You, who are raising the issues in Germany, how would you like to see the memory of the fate of the Jewish colleagues dealt with in the future?

I would like to lead the research and identify each perpetrator; In every building where there was a Jewish law firm, I would install a memorial plaque. Furthermore, it is important that in January of each year, on the International Holocaust Memorial Day, a memorial ceremony be held near the plaque that was placed in the yard of the Court on Litten Street in Berlin.

Further to the exhibit "Lawyers without Rights", more information on publications on this subject is available from the German Bar Association.