EDITORIAL

This issue of the journal coincides with the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) in London in 1926. It addresses aspects, in particular, of the history of the European Union (formerly European Region) (EUPJ) and Youth Section of the World Union (WUPJYS). But it has also been in some ways an exercise in nostalgia for the editor. In 1964 Rabbi Lionel Blue was appointed European Director of the European Region, with a second task of working with the Youth Section. Shortly before taking up the post, he, together with Rabbi Dow Marmur, had asked me if I would take over as chairman of the Youth Section, ‘for six months while it was wound up’. In the end I filled the role for over two years during which we organized a series of conferences, in Amsterdam, Berlin, Arnhem and Jerusalem, that proved to be major recruiting grounds for rabbinic students for Leo Baeck College, challenged the taboos against engaging as Jews with Germany, helped create new congregations on continental Europe, and sowed the seeds for the development of unique programmes in both Jewish–Christian and Jewish–Christian–Muslim relations that continue to this day. In retrospect it was a European Jewish expression of the phenomenon of ‘the sixties’; at the time, however, we were only conscious that we were on an exciting journey, in part revolutionary, in part seeking to rebuild a Jewish world all but destroyed, and in part a personal spiritual adventure which also meant bringing new life and a new sense of purpose to Judaism itself. Something of the enthusiasm, but also our awareness that what we were engaged in was of major significance, can be seen in the Documenta section (*WUPJYS in the 1960s*) that includes excerpts from reports of some of these conferences.

To put faces to some of the names mentioned in Documenta we have included a number of photographs. Two are from the World Union Conference in Berlin in 1928, with Claude Montefiore in the Chair and the Hon. Lily Montagu beside him. There are group photographs from the WUPJYS conferences in 1964, 1965 and 1966, as well as a meeting of the European Progressive rabbis in 1969 and rabbinic students and rabbis attending the World Union Conference in Amsterdam in 1970. Another photograph captures the start of the ground-breaking visit of members of the congregation of Pastor Dieter Schöneich from Germany to South West Essex Reform Synagogue in 1967.

As earlier background, we reproduce part of the Presidential Address to the WUPJ Conference in 1946 given by Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck, with his remarkable affirmation of the universal values of Progressive Judaism so soon after his release from Theresienstadt Concentration Camp. A decade later his

successor as President of the WUPJ, the Hon. Lily Montagu, the driving force behind the creation of the world movement and an indefatigable activist in ensuring its growth, offers a personal account of its origin and present scope. The text comes from the first publication of the WUPJYS, *The Jewish Youth Group: A Handbook for Progressive Jewish Youth Groups*, edited by John D. Rayner and Henry F. Skirball, published in 1956. Their preface and part of an article on the aims of youth group work by Colette Kessler, a key figure in the Liberal Jewish movement in France, are included within the Documenta (*WUPJYS in the 1950s*).

Three extensive studies (by Brasz, Berkowitz and Adunka) provide histories, respectively, of the Dutch, French and Austrian Progressive Jewish communities. They are a reminder that although the roots of the movement go back to the early nineteenth century in Germany the unique situation of the Jewish community in each European country and the impact of the local historical and cultural environment led to very different rates and forms of development. In all cases the post-war situation required a new beginning as part of the rebuilding of decimated Jewish communities, as well as attempting to address radical changes in Jewish identity, self-confidence and relationship to Jewish tradition and values. Jan Mühlstein describes the rebirth of Liberal Judaism in Germany with particular reference to the history of Beth Shalom in Munich. It is a reminder of how Jewish communities can be created and developed if a dedicated few begin by addressing the felt needs of people, their aspirations and their wish to retain some kind of Jewish identity for themselves and their families. Moreover, the careful use of limited but consistent rabbinic input provided through the European Region and WUPJ, as well as regular contact with other Progressive communities throughout Europe, have offered essential ideological and practical support, as well as friendship and networking, for otherwise small, isolated communities.

The story of Beth Shalom is a reminder that part of the art of community building is to value whatever people bring of their Jewish commitment; to build from the grass-roots up and only then discover empirically what contemporary Judaism is and can be. The alternative is to start with a fixed idea of what Judaism ought to be, and try to graft it onto the mixed society that is the reality of much of Jewish life today, especially in smaller Jewish communities. How the latter approach can go wrong can be seen in the personal memoir by Martin Šmok. He addresses directly issues related to the complexity of Jewish community life as they played out in Czechoslovakia, as in other countries similarly emerging from Communist regimes. Where Jewish life had been suppressed, and consequently Jewish identity had been deliberately concealed for generations, a far broader understanding of Jewish 'belonging' was now needed.

A view of the self-perception of the British Jewish community in the post-war period can be seen in the Rosh Hashanah sermon by Tony Bayfield, who was head of the UK Movement for Reform Judaism (formerly Reform Synagogues of Great Britain) from 1994 to 2011. His reading of certain qualities of pre-war *Liberale Judentum* sheds light on the way these values can offer lessons for the future and have already influenced changing commitments and priorities.

The editor's overview of post-war Progressive Judaism in Europe focuses on the broader question, posed already in the immediate aftermath of the war by Leo Baeck, about the role Jews might be expected to play in the 'new' Europe beyond the task of rebuilding destroyed communities. One example of an emerging Jewish spirituality in Europe can be seen in Annette Boeckler's study of the remarkable growth in the creation of prayer books in Europe reflecting the inner needs and values of individual Progressive congregations and movements. They indicate the wish of new, post-war 'Progressive' Jewish communities to reconsider earlier decisions about what constituted the values of Judaism as reflected in Jewish liturgy. So they tend to anchor themselves more consciously in traditional texts than did their pre-war 'Progressive' predecessors, while responding to new realities, notably the impact of the Shoah and the creation of the State of Israel.

Three memoirs reflect personal experiences of key stages in the post-war development. Hank Skirball sketches his experience of the beginning of the Youth Section with its input from the leadership of the American National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). Richard Hirsch, the former Executive Director of the WUPJ (1972–1999), who was responsible for the transfer of the headquarters of the movement from New York to Jerusalem, presents a view of the European scene from these two perspectives. Jeffrey Newman recalls his experience during the heady expansion of the work of the Youth Section in the 1960s, complementing the materials in the Documenta section.

The issue is completed with book reviews, poetry and a moving article by Jonathan Wittenberg marking the fiftieth anniversary since Czech Torah scrolls were brought to Westminster Synagogue for restoration.

This conference issue is indebted to Miriam Kramer, the current Chair of the European Union, who sought contributors and helped in the planning. What becomes clear from the limited materials made available here is that, with congregations in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as smaller ones in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain, there has been a remarkable rebirth of European communities long thought to be on the verge of extinction. We might add to this list the current renaissance of Jewish cultural activities, including the phenomenal growth of activities

like Limmud. There is still no certainty about the long-term future of Jewish life in Europe, but the present is extraordinarily vibrant. A full study of the post-war history and growth of Progressive Judaism and the European Union is long overdue.

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