

It is time to lay off

THE DELIVERY of Ivan Demjanjuk into our hands is a mixed blessing. We have a duty to perform. He must be tried and, if found guilty of genocide, put to death in accordance with the law.

Justice will then be done; but that is all. There is no other benefit to be gained. More than 40 years have elapsed since his crimes were committed. Neither the courtroom proceedings nor his execution will bring a single one of his victims back to life.

An ordinary trial would suffice to give this Ukrainian lout his just deserts; but what we are likely to get is a show-trial. This would presumably have a wider purpose: to prevent a recurrence of the Holocaust by keeping alive its memory, by reminding the gentiles of the atrocities committed, by deterring future evil-doers who will be made to see that murder does not pay.

Will these messages get across? I doubt it. At the beginning something had to be done, it was necessary to brief the gentiles about Hitler's bestialities. That was effectively achieved in the Eichmann trial. The world was shocked by its appalling disclosures and became duly contrite.

It continues to be contrite, but the effort is hard to keep up. The revelation of Nazi brutalities has gone on for a long time, perhaps too long. Contrition is beginning to wear thin.

THERE ARE two sides to our tragic ordeal as we present it. The side we Jews see is the cruelty of the oppressor, and at first that is what loomed largest for everybody. The other side

is the terrible degradation of the Jews. Masochistically we keep harping on that theme, not realizing how it shames us.

We remind the foreigner at every twist and turn of things that should

by now be allowed to fade in the mists of history: that many Europeans (not just the Germans) viewed us as an alien species; that they needed little coaxing to help get rid of us.

We expose our wounds to the strangers' gaze. We thrust in their faces pictures of our collective humiliation. What are we trying to do – arouse their pity? There is no glory in being trampled underfoot. Showing off our debasement endlessly can cause enervation. Our collocutors' sympathy gets to be overtaken by distaste.

It is time to lay off. Good gentiles know about the Holocaust by now and do not need to be reminded. Bad gentiles will not be disturbed by what we show them. On the contrary, their anti-Semitic appetites may be whetted by scenes of cruelty in the concentration camps; just as coarser elements everywhere find their sadistic feelings stimulated by films of violence, even though the malefactors are depicted as the villains of the story.

IF A SHOW-TRIAL is wrong for the gentiles, it is doubly wrong for the Jews, for it makes us bask in our own weakness. It exalts our traditional role as the passive victim, the perpetual underdog, the universal Aunt Sally.

Throughout the centuries we Jews

Throughout the centuries we Jews were never able to fight back. When the enemy fell on us, all we could do was preach at him, berate him, reproach him for his inhumanity, call on his better feelings. It was a waste of breath: nations have – in their relations with each other – no better feelings.

David Krivine



Eichmann on trial in 1961

We would be wiser to recognize the recurring pogrom each time for what it is: a Jewish defeat, a *fashla*, a failure for which, in the absence of anyone else to bear the burden, we must take full responsibility ourselves.

ourselves.

The cause of the slaughter must preoccupy us, not the slaughter itself. Our dead must be mourned; that is indisputable. We feel a terrible kinship with them, because they were martyred for being what we

are, for being Jews. But we cannot restore them to this earth, we cannot undo the horrors of the Holocaust. The one gift we can make them is to ensure that their martyrdom was not in vain, that it will not be repeated – that there will never be another slaughter of Jews.

The safety of our people depends on us, and only on us. Begging the stranger to be benevolent has never been the way, yet we cannot shake the habit off. We choose the passive role, because that is what we were used to in the *gola*. We re-enact the past, re-live its agonies, wallow in self-pity, shake our fists against our fate and destiny. Cannot we see how ridiculous this is? We are like a pedestrian caught in a snowstorm who catches double pneumonia and curses the elements, blaming them for his ordeal.

THE WOES of the Jews under Hitler, however dreadful they seem to us, are not the world's most overwhelming preoccupation. This is what we fail to understand. Nations are not concerned with other people's sufferings, only their own. There are plenty of candidates for international commiseration – the Armenians, the Cambodians, the starving Africans. The Holocaust was worse? Sure it was, but nobody is listening.

So let us do our own thing for once. Instead of sermonizing our oppressors, let us quit their territory and live in our own country where

oppressors, let us quit their territory and live in our own country where we belong. When we are together we can do what other countries do: utilize our power as a nation-state to defend our rights. Jewish matters

should cease to figure on the agenda of other governments; they are on our agenda. The ordeals we have undergone are our own affair. Our mourning is something private to us.

IN THE SAME WAY Demjanjuk's court case is a domestic matter. We are not prosecuting the entire Ukrainian people, or Germany's Nazi regime, or any other corporate body. In the dock is one individual who is accused of murdering Jews. His trial should be open to foreign observers so that nothing is concealed. But there is no reason to turn these proceedings into an international spectacle.

Demjanjuk is a common criminal and should be treated like one. Instead, he is being blown up into a VIP. Television viewers watch his descent from a plane (as if he was Sadat), examine the cell in which he will reside, scrutinize his toilet bowl. A special tribunal will judge him in a special courtroom. Journalists, press photographers and TV cameramen are flocking in from the four corners of the earth. What for? The situation is getting out of hand.

The case should be handled in the regulation manner by a district judge in a district court, without theatricals. If the Jewish peoples want to commemorate Demjanjuk's downfall and that of his fellow-assassins, let it be by organizing the immigration of 50,000 Jews to Israel.

That is what our murdered brethren would have liked to see, and not a repeat technicolour performance over all networks for the

and not a repeat technicolour performance over all networks for the umpteenth time – on this occasion in Treblinka – of their pain, their fear, their starvation, their emaciation, their humiliation and their destruction.

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