

## Philip Rubenstein | Nazi War Criminals in the UK

- Good evening everybody. Tonight we welcome Philip Rubenstein. Philip was Director of Parliamentary War Crimes group, which in the mid to late 1980s campaigned to bring Nazi War criminals living in the UK to Justice. Philip was also Founder/Director of the Holocaust Educational Trust and played a role in getting the study of the Shoah onto the National School's Curriculum in the UK. These days, he works with family businesses advising on governance and continuity from one generation to the next. He will be talking to us tonight about Nazi war criminals in the UK. Philip, a very warm welcome. We're looking forward to hearing from you tonight, so it gives me great pleasure to hand over to you. Thank you.

- Hello, Wendy. Hello everyone. Thank you so much for the introduction. Thank you for the privilege of talking at Lockdown University. I'm a big fan and so it feels very special to be able to do a session myself. So, as Wendy says, this is a story about Nazi war criminals in the United Kingdom, how they got here and once it was discovered that they were here, what was done about it. And the story runs from 1940 over about 70 years. And so during the course of the next 50 minutes or so, we're going to stray over the whole timeline from 1940 virtually to the present. The time that I would like to start is in the mid 1970s, because it seems incredible today but for those of you, I suspect there aren't that many who may be old enough to remember, for the first 30 years after World War II, very few people wanted to talk about Nazi War crimes.

Very few people were interested in hearing about the Shoah and very few people were interested in talking to and hearing the testimony of survivors. It was as if there was a curtain of silence that came down the whole of the western world, and it was simply too painful to go back and hear the stories being recounted of what happened during those terrible years. This started to change very slowly. A reawakening of interest started to happen in 1961 with the Eichmann trial, and bit by bit interest picked up, but it was really only in the mid to late 1970s that people really started having their curiosity aroused and survivors, many of whom had never spoken, started to speak for the first time.

All those who had spoken but hadn't been listened to, suddenly began to attract an audience. And curiously, one of the triggers for this is that, and many survivors will tell you this, many survivors did not talk to their children for obvious reasons about what had happened to them. But when their grandchildren were of age and asked them what happened to them during World War II, they realised that they hadn't told their story and they were more inclined to talk to the grandchildren. And many survivors who go around schools today will say that the very first time they talk to anyone was to one of their grandchildren.

*Photographs are displayed on screen.*

Now, I'm just going to put a whole bunch of slides up, so just bear with me while these come up. So the first slide you will see, you may remember this from the 1970s. So this was Hollywood produced mini-series, and you can see there's a young Meryl Streep and a young James

Woods. And this is 1978 an NBC broadcast, this mini-series, it's schmaltzy, it's melodramatic, but it has the most profound impact. And it comes just at the right time. It's seen in the US by 120 million people. That's almost half the population of the US And after its US showing, it's then shown all across the western world.

And it has a particularly profound influence in West Germany, where the West German government had been considering a statute of limitations on all Nazi War crimes that would be impossible after a certain period to try anyone for war crimes in West Germany. And once this was shown, there was such a worldwide outcry that the statute of limitations was abolished. And for many people, the very first time that they had either ever heard of the Shoah or that they had any inkling as to what it was and what it involved came with the watching of this mini-series. So as I say, it came in the right time.

And one of the manifestations of interests in the Shoah and all things to do with the Shoah is that western governments started to wake up to the fact that they were harbouring Nazi War criminals, usually unbeknown to them within their midst. So that's if you like the background to some of this story. But where the story begins in the UK is in the fall of 1986, so this is October 86. And the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which is different to Simon Wiesenthal himself and his own organisation in Austria, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in LA at the time, headed by Rabbi Marvin Hier, who you can see in the photograph, compiled a list of 17 individuals who they claimed were Nazi War criminals living in the UK.

And this list they sent to the British Prime Minister, who at the time was Margaret Thatcher. They asked the government to take action, and they heard very little for the first two to three weeks. They also contacted some members of parliament in the UK. Now unusually for a campaign, the campaign that was about to happen, all centres in and around parliament, it wasn't people outside who were pressurising MPs, it all came from Parliament. So a group of members of the British parliament all got together and they decided that they were going to push and prod and ask questions and find out what was going on and what the British government proposed to do about the list. They made one very early, and I would say critical decision, which is they decided that their role was to campaign.

They were not Nazi hunters, they were not investigators of Nazi crimes themselves. And so any information that came into their possession, they decided to treat as confidential. These were allegations and until any allegation was proved in a court, they certainly weren't going to be responsible for leaking any information to the press. So you can see around this clock, there were a number of individuals, there were something in the region of 17 members of the group, all members of the House of Commons or House of Lords. But these were some of the key actors. So let me just introduce you to some of them.

So at the top there, at 12 o'clock, we have anyone from the UK would be familiar with this individual, this was Merlyn Rees. He had previously, he was labour part. He was a Labour MP. He had previously been the Home Secretary under the last Labour government. For those of

you from the US, just to explain, the Home Secretary runs the Home Office, which was an incredibly powerful Office of State. The Home Office at the time combined the equivalent of Homeland Security, the interior and Justice. So it had all of those three as part of its remit.

So anyone who occupied that role was normally a figure of some respect, and he was universally respected. Then at one o'clock, again, we have someone who'll be familiar to most people from the UK who are watching. So this is Greville Janner, and Greville at the time was the most prominent Jewish member of parliament at a time when many Jewish MPs kept their Jewish origins under the parapet. Greville was an extremely proud Jew who would campaign on Jewish and Israel related matters. And he'd also been a war crimes investigator in 1946 serving in the allied zones of occupation. So for him, there was some unfinished business here.

Then at three o'clock we have another labour MP, Llin Golding, and I'll say more about Llin later, but not now. At four o'clock, we have John Wheeler, who was a conservative, who was the head of the Home Affairs Select committee, which is a bit like a Congressional Committee. So again, he was an extremely influential individual. Then five o'clock we have character, another conservative, who's also a historian called Robert Rhodes James. Robert Rhodes James, interestingly, before he'd become a member of Parliament, had been the Private Secretary to Kurt Waldheim, when Waldheim had been the UN General Secretary in the 1970s. And Robert Rhodes James hated Waldheim and said he was the most appalling, atrocious boss.

And when it came to allegations that came out a little later, and if anyone's interested, we can talk about this later, that Waldheim had himself been in the Waffen- SS and had been involved in the roundup of Shoah and Jews. Robert Rhodes James was an enthusiastic campaigner to bring out the truth of the Waldheim case. Next to him at seven o'clock, another conservative MP, extraordinary man called Stephan Terlezki. Stephan Terlezki was Ukrainian Catholic. He was from the West Ukraine, and he and his parents and the rest of his family had suffered under both Soviet tyranny and of course under Nazi tyranny as well.

As a young boy, he'd seen Nazis throwing Jews off the local bridge having shot them. And he would help his father, who was trying to get Jews out of Nazi clutches by forging false baptism certificates for them. Next to him, at nine o'clock we have, just to show the different parties involved, we have the Reverend Martin Smyth, who was a Presbyterian minister and an Ulster unionist. And finally we have a liberal Democrat, Alex Carlile, who later became the government's oversight man over terrorism legislation. So these individuals and others meant that we had a pretty formidable team, I think at this stage.

I just need to explain how I come into the picture. So they decided very early on that they were going to run the campaign on a professional basis. And so they wanted a full-time staff member to actually run the campaign for them. So I should just explain, I had just left university, I had started doing a Master's, but it didn't particularly agree with me. So I left my Master's course and I was out on a limb looking for gainful occupation. This group could have done with a lawyer or a historian or someone with any previous political campaign experience sadly for them, I didn't

have any of these things.

So you might ask why it was that I was actually appointed director, and two answers, I was extremely cheap, having just left university and being grateful for any paid occupation and second of all, I was immediately available. So those were the two key elements my CV. I'm going to introduce you to this individual in a moment. But suffice to say that the government had hold of a list of 17 individuals. The press at this time were clamouring to find out who was on the list. We absolutely refused to publish the list. As I say, these were allegations. We didn't know what the provenance was, where they came from.

And the last thing we wanted to be involved in was in any attempt to smear anyone who was entirely innocent and who'd managed to find that they'd got themselves onto a list by mistake. However; there was a leak and the press did get hold of all the names and unfortunately did publish the names. And one of the names they published was this man, whose name is Antanas Gecas. And Gecas was an ex Lithuanian International who'd left his part of Europe after the war 1946. As part of the Polish free forces, he'd come over with a Polish resettlement scheme. He'd settled in Edinburgh.

Here you see him on the right in his uniform and he's sporting the Iron Cross. And Gecas interested Scottish Television 'cause he was living in Edinburgh, and they decided to investigate him. There was an incredibly intrepid journalist by the name of Bob Tomlinson, who was more responsible, I think than anyone for uncovering the truth about Gecas. So Tomlinson managed to persuade his bosses at Scottish Television, that they needed to investigate him by going over to Lithuania. And what they discovered is that he had joined the 12th Lithuanian Battalion. As soon as the Nazis had invaded in June, 1941, he'd been made a lieutenant lieutenant of his particular platoon.

And they were given the job of rounding up all the local Jews and taking them out to forests and shooting them. They did their job extremely well, and so much so that by the autumn of 1941, when the Nazis were sweeping into Belarus, into Belorussia, they took the platoon with them and they were asked to do pretty much the same job. In one rather grizzly episode, he was responsible for leading a platoon to taking all of the Jews of Slutsk out of the town into the forest and overseeing their execution. Scottish Television managed to interview eyewitnesses. They also interviewed other members of the platoon who all testified that he'd been there and what he'd been doing.

And when the Scottish TV crew came back to the UK, they door stepped him. He didn't have any legal representation by this time. He opened the door to them, he admitted on camera that he'd been a member of the 12th Lithuanian Battalion and that he had been there in Slutsk when the murders were carried out. But he said that he'd had absolutely no part in the shootings, so that's Gecas. Scottish Television then proceeded to make a programme which was called "Britain: A Nazi Safehouse," which was first shown in February '87 in Scotland and then it was shown nationally, and I want to just say at this stage that they had enormous help from the

Soviet authorities.

Remember, this is the mid 1980s when even though there's a slight thaw in the Cold War, because Gorbachev is now General Secretary of the Party, the Cold War is still raging and all of the old source of the Cold War are still there and still apply. The Soviets have always been unusually helpful in this area, in part for propaganda reasons. I mean, the idea that the West should be harbouring Nazi War criminals is something that obviously has great appeal to them. But actually the main reason why the Soviets were impelled to do so is something I think that we don't particularly appreciate enough in the West, which is that every single family in the Soviet Union was deeply touched and scarred by the war.

No nation state suffered as many casualties as the Soviets and their territory did. It's estimated that somewhere in the region of 26 million Soviet citizens were killed during World War II, of which 11 million were competence. And the war, of course, is known as the great patriotic war and is absolutely, or was absolutely central to all the propaganda that the Soviets used to spread internally while the Soviet Union was still in existence. A real sense that the motherland had to defend itself against that world. So the Soviets not only helped Scottish Television in Lithuanian, which was of course Lithuania was then a Soviet satellite, but they also gave them an extra 34 names. So we now have over 50 names, which have now gone to the British government. So when the programme airs, airs nationally, it causes a huge national uproar.

All the newspapers are full of it. And the British government, which until then had not responded to anyone, then found that they were under very significant pressure. We didn't know who was actually dealing with ESU in the government for weeks on end. And we later found out that this was a hot potato. No one wanted to deal with it, and it was being passed from pillar to post. But eventually it ended up with this gentleman who many of the Brits will recognise is Douglas Hurd, who was at the time the Home Secretary. So once we knew he was handling it, we were able to ask for a meeting with him.

So we sat down in front of him and it was a case of good news, bad news. So he said, "We have looked at the list and we have found that of the 17 individuals who are on here, six of them we can confirm are still alive and well and living in the UK. And the bad news," he said, "Is absolutely nothing can be done because we don't have any law in this country, which says that if you committed a crime, even murder, even mass murder or genocide, if you committed a crime outside of this country before you were a UK subject, you cannot be prosecuted for it. So nothing can be done." And that was how the meeting ended.

So we left the meeting rather downhearted and feeling that actually all we had to do was just renew the pressure and keep going and keep pushing as hard as we possibly could. What about the Jewish community in the UK? I think one of the really interesting things I've found in going back to this period in the mid 80s is realising how much has changed in the UK both in terms of the the Jewish community and as I'll come onto a little bit later, in the wider community as well. The Jewish community initially, was completely split over this issue and it was split, not

wholly, but very largely on the basis of age.

And very broadly, most older members and leaders of the Jewish community at the time, felt that we should leave well alone. There was a feeling that we shouldn't put our head above a parapet. This was a generation that largely felt grateful to be in Britain, was quite deferential towards government authority. And one or two of the leaders said that they felt that it would stoke antisemitism if we pursued the issue because it would make it seem as if Jews were a vengeful people. On the other hand, there was a younger generation that was just coming up, and I guess I probably fell at the time, not anymore though, into that category who had none of these qualms, who came from a different place, who had no sense of oversensitivity.

We were very much part of a generation where minorities would take to the streets and would have huge great banners expressing pride in themselves and wouldn't be timid. So it was in the mid 80s, for example, that the whole gay pride movement started up. And in many ways the younger Jewish community very much felt themselves part of that. So as I said, initially there was a split in the community, although as things went on, the community did what the community does so well, it managed to get together in that and to unify over time. The government meanwhile was coming under very significant pressure from all sides. And so they decided to do something.

And what did they do? They did what governments traditionally do when there's a difficult issue that they want to go away, they decided to set up an independent inquiry. And there's a phrase that we have in the UK which is, "You put something out into the long grass and then you just hope that the inquiry takes so long to sit and pontificate and report that by the time it's reported, everyone will have moved on from the issue." And they're appointed a sign of the establishment man called Sir Thomas Hetherington, known as Tony Hetherington, who'd been a former Director of Public Prosecution. So this is the same role that Keir Stamer, head of the Labour Party incidentally had.

So he was, if you like, the chief prosecutor, he'd been the chief prosecutor in the UK and his job was to decide whether or not there was any case to answer and to make any recommendations, as to any possible action that the government might take. I have to say we were all a little depressed when we heard the news that was going to be a government inquiry because we all felt this was going to be a whitewash and that it would just shut everyone up for the next year and we'd have to sit on our hands. And so we had to find a way not to sit on our hands. And the thing we did, the main thing we did, was we decided that one issue in particular had really been bothering us.

We'd been asked persistently by journalists and by others, "How was it that war criminals actually came to the UK? How did they get here in the first place?" And we'd been able to give them something of a generic answer and I'd certainly read everything I could get my hands on. And the truth of the matter was we didn't know, we didn't have sufficient information in order to be able to really understand ourselves what the backstory was. And given that none of us were

professional historians, we needed some help. So I made a phone call to this gentleman who many of you will recognise was the late professor David Cesarani, Professor of Jewish History. And David had taught me back in the day and asked him if he was willing to lead a small research team to go to public records and reconstruct the story of how it happened.

And so David put together a small team and I joined the team and we spent four months in the dusty archives trying to figure it all out. And we found through the help of many people, we discovered the most extraordinary story. And I have to pay a tribute to David because without him, and without his tenacity and his curiosity, I don't think we would've ever got there. So the story starts in June of 1941 with Operation Barbarossa, which of course is the Nazi invasion of Russia, of the Soviet Union. And most of the people who we're talking about, the vast majority of the war criminals who were investigated then and subsequently in the UK were Baltic nationals from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, or from Poland or from the Ukraine.

Okay, so it's those territories that we're talking about. So what happens, the Nazi invade and behind the army, they create, as we all know, sweeping up divisions, the Einsatzgruppe. Four Einsatzgruppe, Einsatzgruppe literally means a deployment group. That's how it translates. And each of these Einsatzgruppe, they're tiny, they have 500 to 1000 men at best. So you have a total covering this vast, vast region of only 3000 men. They are not elite troops by any stretch of the imagination. They're a combination of real ragtag of regular troops. Some of them are PhDs, older policemen who've been conscripted. And yet over the course of 18 months, their job is to come in after the army and to murder Jews, Roma and dissidents, but mainly Jews.

And over 18 months they manage to be responsible for the killing of 2 million people, of which we're not quite sure, but best estimates are about 1.3 million Jews. So that's only 3000 men. And the fact is there's no way they would've done it had they not had the active and willing collaboration of local individuals. And again, we're not quite sure of the numbers, but it's estimated that something in the region of 30,000 local individuals were conscripted or joined the Einsatzgruppe alongside them. And were responsible for carrying out the murders.

So the people who we are mainly concerned with, who mainly who find their way to the UK are mainly those who were working with Einsatzgruppe A and Einsatzgruppe B on this map. And certainly Gecas who I introduced you to earlier, he was with Einsatzgruppe A, starts out in Lithuania and then works alongside them when they go south into Belorussia. So now we move three years on and it's now June, 1944 and the Soviets are starting to turn the tide in the east and repel the Nazis. And I'd just like to pause a moment over this map. I'm sorry it's not the best of maps, but it's the best I could find.

And you can see in the right hand corner, it describes the name of an operation, operation Bagration over June to August, 1944. Operation Bagration starts two weeks after the D-Day landings, after the Normandy Invasion. So it's starts on the 23rd of June and like the Western equivalent, it lasts three months. It gives me, I have to say great sadness that we in the West don't sufficiently remember the Soviet contribution to winning World War II throughout and the

Soviet sacrifice over the course of World War II. Last year you will recall that we had huge commemorations all over the West for the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

And sad to say there was hardly a murmur about the 75th anniversary of Operation Bagration. But let me just tell you a little bit about it. So as I say, it's launched two weeks after D-Day. It's estimated that D-Day and the operations that happen afterwards are responsible for somewhere in the region of two to 300,000 Nazi casualties. Operation Bagration is responsible for at least 400,000 Nazi casualties. 750,000 Soviet soldiers give their lives. It is the worst defeat that the German army has ever experienced since unification. Operation Bagration, totally and utterly shatters the German frontline, 28 out of 34 German divisions are totally destroyed. So what happens to all of those 30,000 people who have been involved with the Nazis enthusiastically helping the Einsatzgruppe to murder Jews and dissidents and others?

Well, many of them having experienced the Soviets before the war, know what will happen if they're discovered to be Nazi collaborators by the Soviets. And so many of them, most of them flee west and try to hide and in most cases pretend to have been innocent civilians caught up in the throes of war. So it's now 1945, 1946, and Europe has a huge problem because in the allied zone of occupation, there are now 7 million displaced persons, an enormous number. And I mean talk about logistical headaches, 75% of them are returned to territories, which are now under Soviet yoke as a result of what was agreed in the alter agreement, which still leaves one to 2 million of them who are in the West, who are in the allied zones and who were applying to be displaced persons. What does it mean to be a displaced person after the war?

Displaced person, it was a term used by the refugee organisations and by the relief organization's, particularly UNRWA. And if you were a displaced person, it meant you were entitled to food and shelter. There was one condition, you couldn't be a Nazi war criminal or collaborator. And so it was insisted that every army that was responsible for bringing in displaced persons have some form of screening to make sure that no Nazi collaborators were allowed in. Most of the armies applied poor, perfunctory screening, probably the worst offenders were the British Army who hardly screened anyone.

The foreign office claimed of course in PR terms that their screening was very effective. But in truth, hardly anyone was ever screened. Most of the time it was self-certified. An individual will be asked a question, "Did you collaborate with the Nazis?" And if they said "No," they were in. The only time the the only time on record that we have of anyone being refused is when seven Latvians were captured in their Waffen-SS uniform. So it was pretty difficult to be able to give them sucker in those circumstances. One of the people who we met, 'cause she was in the House of Lords, was this extraordinary lady who is second on the left.

Again, those of you who are Brits will be very familiar with this name. Her name's Sue Ryder, and she's well known in this country because there are charity shops that bear her name. Sue Ryder set up a charity after the war, which specialises in palliative care, an extraordinary woman. But immediately after the war, she was a displaced person's relief worker working in



one of these camps. And she spotted there were 20 Baltic nationals who came in and she saw that they all had a very similar scar in exactly the same place, which was under their left armpit. And she discovered the reason why they all had that scar is that they all had their SS tattoo there and they'd all had their tattoos removed.

And so the scarring was the removal of the tattoos. And when she mentioned this to her superior officer, she was told to get on with it and shut up and do her job, which was to let people in. So it was extremely unwelcome to say to anyone that there were Nazi collaborators. What was going on and why were the British and others so uncaring about this issue? Well, there were two kind of push me, pull you forces. The first is that by this time the hot war against the Nazis had very quickly been replaced by the Cold War against the Soviets. So anyone who claimed to be Anti Bolshevik effectively was in. But there was also a much more practical issue for Western governments, which was that as a result of depletion of men during the war, there was a critical labour shortage in a number of Western countries, particularly in Britain.

And so the British government hatched a scheme which was called Westwood Ho, whereby they would bring what they considered to be the best and most able of the displaced persons over to the UK to fill the gap in terms of the labour shortage. And so began a race, a competition, to get the best of the workers. There was one point where one foreign office official says that they're competing against the French to get what he calls the cream of the crop, but they want to skim the cream. And the last thing that they were going to do was ask any questions about what any individual had done during the war.

And any time anyone did ask questions again like Sue Ryder, they were told to shut up and get on with it. 100,000 Individuals were brought over to the UK under the scheme, most of them were Baltics. So Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians and Ukrainians, in addition, another 100,000 were brought to the UK under the Polish Resettlement Scheme. This was a scheme that acknowledged the bravery and gallantry of the Free Polish Forces, General Anders' Army, Churchill call them the Gallant Poles. The only problem is that among the Gallant were secreted a number who joined them only in the last year, many of whom had been Nazi collaborators, who in 1944 had seen that the tide had turned and that the war was going against the Nazis and that they needed to get out fast.

And so they repurposed themselves into Polish Free Forces, were accepted. And again, in the chaos of Europe after the war, no one asked too many questions. And so that's how Gecas and others got in. So we had 200,000 people who came into the UK after the war. The majority of whom are entirely innocent, but secreted among them are a number of Nazi war criminals. So what happens over the next 30 years? Well, it's a pretty sorry tale because the government has decided after Nuremberg, that they want justice to be as swift as possible to be able to put all of this behind them. And in 1948, three years after the war, there's a famous submissive that is sent to every commonwealth country by the then commonwealth secretary of the UK, whose name is Philip Noel-Baker.

And he says, and this has been a greeting cabinet, that there will be no further trials of any Nazi war criminal because quote, "It is necessary to dispose of the past." In the 1950s, there were occasional deportation requests for a Nazi war criminal living in the UK. And they're always met with the same answer because they always come from a Baltic country or from the Ukraine. These are Soviet satellites. They're not recognised as Soviet satellites by the UK government. There are no extradition agreements and so the British government says, "Well, our hands are tied and terribly sorry, but we can't extradite and anyway, we don't believe in your system of justice, so we're not going to do anything."

So between 1945 and 1985, 40 years, there are seven requests for extradition and none of them, of course are honoured. Let me give you one example of the brazenness with which ever the evidence is ignored. So this is an individual whose name, as you can see, Ain-Ervin Mere. He is notorious, he was the chief of security in Estonia when the Nazis invaded in 1941. He works with the SS and the Gestapo to make Estonia. He oversees the Jagala concentration camp and he's there on a regular basis at Kalevi-Liiva, which is the memorial that you see on the right hand of the picture where 6,000 Jews and Roma are murdered.

After the war he becomes a displaced person and he ends up as a textile worker in Leicester in the UK. And he's a decent, honourable member of the local Estonian community. When he's discovered there by the Soviets, his extradition is requested, the UK refuses to extradite him because they don't recognise the Soviet claim to Estonia. They say the evidence is probably untrustworthy. He's tried in Estonia, dozens of eyewitnesses testify, he's sentenced to death in absentia. The UK, ignore everything, absolutely nothing happens to him. And he dies peacefully in 1969. His trial, by the way, in 1961, coincidentally happens to be the same year as the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

The same story is repeated on one or two occasions, but that just gives you a sense of how little interest there was among anyone in the UK for pursuing these individuals. So again, with the help of David Cesarani, we've managed to construct the story and we put a report together in 200 pages. And in November, 1988, we published the report and the press went absolutely nuts. And it was on the front pages of every single National Newspaper in the UK and many media outlets across the world covered the story as well. So again, the pressure was on, and for the first time now we felt that we actually had a real understanding of how they got there in the first place and why it was that nothing had happened for so long.

So it's now 17 months after the war crimes inquiry under Thomas Hetherington, Tony Hetherington has been set up. And the day finally comes February, 1989, when the inquiry report is to be published. We are, to use the technical term, we are all on Shpilkes wondering what the report is going to say, hoping that it's not going to be a whitewash, which was our big fear. So the report is published and the Home Secretary comes to the House of Commons to read the conclusions of the report. In the report, the investigators say they've examined seven cases in detail, and in four they found that there's enough evidence to warrant a prosecution.

They note that the governments of Australia, Canada, and the US have all been confronted with the same problem that they've all set up or created legal machinery to deal with Nazi war criminals living in their country and that the UK would be out of step if it didn't follow suit. They also note that there's no limitation on trying someone for murder and therefore, having looked at all the legal options, they recommend that there should be a change in criminal law to allow for prosecution of Nazi's living in the UK. This is their conclusion, extraordinary statement, "The crimes committed are so monstrous that they cannot be condoned. To take no action would be to taint the United Kingdom with the slur of being a haven Nazi war criminals."

Well, the report was tabled. And what governments often do in these situations is they then having tabled a report, they then open it up to debate, first of all in the House of Commons and then in the second house, the House of Lords. And then there's a vote that's taken on the report. Now these votes, they don't have any legal force, but they do have moral force. And importantly for the government, it gives them a very strong indication as to what the mood of both houses is and whether or not they should be using political capital on taking the matter any further.

We were not sanguine about how the House of Commons would react to the conclusions of the report and whether they would support a change in the law for prosecution. After all, the House of Commons had many people who were much younger than in their House of Lords. Many of them weren't born in 1945. Many of them would have no memory whatsoever of the Second World War. And so it was a huge question mark to us as to whether or not there'd be support for any prosecution. Moreover, and again, this is what I mean when I talk about the fact that it's interesting to reflect on those days, it was only the 1980s.

For those of you who have an interest in British politics, the conservative party of today is very different to the conservative party, it's always, of then. Then you could be a little Englander conservative, you could have the most outrageous right wing views and your views were, tolerated, I mean they may not have been supported, but they were certainly tolerated. And I just want to draw attention to this rogues gallery here, because these were four conservative members of Parliament and the four, I would say most vehement opponents in the House of Commons.

So first of all, to take on the top left, we have Sir John Stokes, a true Little Englander. This was an individual who'd in reference to the number of Jews in the cabinet at the time, had accused Margaret Thatcher of not having enough red-blooded Englishmen in the cabinet. Oh, next to him on the top is Ivor Stanbrook and Ivor Stanbrook said that the Jewish community wanted specially made laws, which would be revolting to most Christians in Britain. He said the problem was this issue stemmed from quote, "The cult of revenge that is at the heart of all Jewish philosophy." He's saying this in the House of Commons and this is tolerated. I mean, you can't imagine anyone saying this today, is absolutely extraordinary and it's only 40 years ago.

On the bottom, on the left, we have Quentin Davies, who, when the home secretary was reading

the report, reading the conclusions of the report referring to Nazi war crimes, was repeatedly shouting, "What crimes, what crimes?" And finally we have one of the most vicious and vile anti-Jewish MPs that I've ever come across whose name was Tony Marlow, who said that the entire war crimes campaign was a trick of the Zionist lobby who were using the Shoah as an excuse to justify the state of Israel. He called it quote, and again he says this in the House of Commons, "A form of moral blackmail that is being used to cover up the behaviour of the state of Israel." So it just gives you a sense of what was tolerated.

As I said, not supported, it wasn't the mainstream of the Conservative party, but it was certainly tolerated at the time. And again, you know, for those students of British politics the next day in the way that the newspapers covered the story, we had The Times, which these days is a very different newspaper, but The Times ran an editorial opposing any action. And talking about the fact that the Old Testament was the testament of the Jews, it was the testament of then the God of vengeance. And the New Testament was the testament of the Christians and it was the testament of mercy. And that, "Britain is a Christian country and its laws enshrine principles of justice, tempered with mercy, not with vengeance."

Similarly, we had the Daily Telegraph, which talked about, "Nazi hunting as a distasteful sport. And there should be overwhelming revulsion, revulsion at the idea of further war crimes trials." So it was against this backdrop that the debate occurred, first of all in the House of Commons and then in the House of Lords. In the event and to our great surprise, the vast majority of members of Parliament were hugely in favour of a change in the law, hugely in favour of investigations happening, and very much shared the conclusions and the sentiments of the authors of the Hetherington Inquiry. Now, we expected that the House of Lords, if anything, would follow suit after all.

The House of Lords was full of individuals who were far, far older, many of whom had fought in the war or had been part of the wartime effort, who'd have memories of the war many of them painful. And all I can say is how wrong we were because in the House of Lords, the reaction was very largely against doing anything. And there were, I would say a number of reasons for this. First of all, there were a fair few Jew haters there, but they were a minority, but there were one or two who were in there who were fairly vocal. Second of all, there were one or two very strongly Christian lords who also had the same idea that the bill was a product, or the attempt for a bill was very much of a product of the Jewish Old Testament.

Lord Longford, some of you may know that name, said that that this debate is a product of the Jewish Old Testament. While forgiveness and mercy are Christian virtues, and this is a Christian chamber, but some of the other opponents of any action were those who were very much in favour in 1945 of swift justice. One of them, a guy called Morris Hankey, Lord Hankey. Now he had been a senior civil servant he'd even been against, and we have all the minutes of this in meetings 'cause we'd found them with David Cesarani, he had opposed the Nuremberg trials and he said the British government should oppose the Nuremberg trials because they would be Victor's justice.

So we never had a chance with people like him. I also think, and it's curious, many people who spoke were people who felt real pain after World War II and wanted the curtain to come down over the terrible pain of World War II. And for them, Europe was about looking forward and optimism and the European Union and Britain and Germany and France working together after centuries of discord. And they felt that by pursuing Nazi war criminals, we'd be opening all that up again. I mean, extraordinary but that's how they felt. I was there in that debate and the person who I thought was the most honest out of every voice I heard was this woman, her name is Lady Saltoun of Abernathy.

She by dint of her title is the chief of the Fraser clan, who knew? And this is what she said, "Is it decent that we should take such a step to enable one group of aliens to revenge themselves against another group of aliens for something done in a foreign country half a century ago?" And I think that's how a lot of people felt. So the House of Commons voted in favour of action by three to one. And in a mirror image, the House of Lords voted against three to one, extraordinary. So now the government had to figure out what it was going to do, and we thought it was really important that we keep the pressure up. And so we did a few things.

The first thing that we did was we put on an exhibition because it was the 75th anniversary, sorry, it was the 45th anniversary of the Liberation of Buchenwald that summer. So we put together an exhibition, first of all in the House of Commons, and then second of all, the exhibition went to the Imperial War Museum. Now, in those days, there was no permanent exhibition of Shoah in the Imperial War Museum. And it was a result of the work that we did with the IWM that they then started the campaign to get what is today a very, very good exhibition, which is permanent, and which has been there for a number of years.

The person who opened the exhibition was this woman, I mentioned that one of the people in our war crimes group was a Labour member of parliament whose name is Llin Golding, just an absolutely lovely, warm, extraordinary woman. Her father had also been a Labour member of parliament and he had been a member of a parliamentary delegation that Churchill had asked to go to Buchenwald on its liberation and to report back to the UK. And she said, and she opened the exhibition by saying she recalled it when her father came back. This is what she said, "Father stood there, grey and drawn, 'Do not touch me, I am covered with lice. Everyone in the camp is covered with lice.'" And she said, "He couldn't sleep for many weeks and had nightmares for many years.

He told us what he'd seen at the camp, of the hangings and the giblets. He told us that people in charge skinned prisoners and used their skins to make lampshades. They discovered that when people died, their skin was given to shrinking too quickly. So they tried skinning them alive. My father showed me photographs of bodies, part on carts." There wasn't a dry eye in the house when she made speech. And she said that her father never really recovered from the trip and never had a good night's sleep from then on for the rest of his life. The next thing we did was we held an international conference to which we invited officials from the US, Australia, and

Canada, all of whom spoke, explained what they did in their country, how they'd responded to the findings of Nazi war criminals and the actions they were taking on the legal machinery that was created.

Again, the sense that Britain has the same problem and Britain is now out of step. But the best speaker, the outstanding speaker that day was the great Rabbi Hugo Gryn, who of course himself was an Auschwitz survivor. And Hugo talked memorably about the fact that so many people had said that this was a campaign by Jews for vengeance. And he explained that this wasn't anything to do with vengeance, this was about justice. And he memorably repeated something that he'd written a few years earlier, which is that what the Nazis had done, and I think truly talked about this in a previous lecture, is that they'd reversed the 10 Commandments.

They'd said, "There is no God and you must steal and you must murder." And by reversing the 10 Commandments, they'd destroyed any idea of justice and any idea of the rule of law. They'd given no due process, no rule of law to any of the victims in Treblinka. And that we do give them law and we do give them justice for our sake as well as for anyone else's. It was absolutely extraordinary. More extraordinary still was when Hugo left the conference that day, and word had got out that we'd been holding the conference and an unsavoury team turned up from the British National Party, Neo-Nazis, and they were holding banners up saying the Holocaust was a hoax.

So Hugo Gryn, Auschwitz survivor, comes out of the conference and that's what he sees. Just, you know, absolutely awful and extraordinary. And the final thing that we did was we held a meeting here for members of the House of Lords to try and give as many of them the facts as possible and allow them to make up their minds in a last bit attempt to appeal to them to vote in favour of the bill. Tony Hetherington, who was the author of the report, was the main speaker, and he spoke incredibly movingly. And I have to say it was absolutely surreal because you can see at the very end of this room, which dominates the room, there's an enormous mural. This is known as the Moses Room in the House of Lords.

And the mural depicts Moses coming down from Mount Sinai holding the two tablets. And so to be talking about justice in this room against the backdrop of this mural was really quite something. The day came when the Bill got its first reading and the House of Commons, the majority increased to four to one, and the House of Lords still held out. And we had an unpass and we didn't know what was going to happen because the government was totally split down the middle. The cabinet was absolutely split 50 50. 50% believe that the government should pursue this and 50% felt that they shouldn't be using their political capital on this. And then the issue was resolved because one person in the cabinet said, "This is going to happen."

And Margaret Thatcher decided that whatever the House of Lords felt, the law was going to be changed. So the bill was introduced again and the House of Commons again passed it. And for a second time, the House of Lords voted it down. Now, you may recall if you heard Patrick last Sunday, Patrick was talking about 1910, and he said that in 1911, the government of the day

introduced the Parliament Act because they needed to clip the wings of the House of Lords and to assert the primacy of the House of Commons. And indeed the Parliament Act was passed in 1911, it was amended in 1949, but it was never used in anger until 1991 when at Margaret Thatcher's behest, Parliament Act was used to force the House of Lords to accept that there was going to be a War Crimes Act.

And so in 1991, finally having started back in 1986, 5 years later, we got legislation which extended jurisdiction of the UK courts to mean that anyone who was guilty of Nazi war crimes committed during the war outside of the UK was liable to prosecution inside the UK. So what happens next? Well, in 1991, after the Act is passed, the Metropolitan Police Force set up a specialist unit to investigate Nazis living in the UK. The unit investigates altogether almost 400 suspects over the course of its eight years. In all that time in 1996, there is one committal and a committal that doesn't exist anymore, but it's pre-trial proceedings and it's a man called Serafimovich, Simon Serafimovich.

But a year later, his lawyers managed to persuade the courts that his medically unfit to stand trial. In 1998 however, there is a trial and there is a conviction. And as soon as the trial is finished and the conviction is successfully obtained, three months later, the police unit is wound up having investigated all these suspects, having spent 11 million. No report is ever published on their work and to all intent purposes, that was that. In theory, the Met Police said, "If ever there are allegations, we will investigate them." But there was no investigation that ever happened afterwards, even though there were some allegations that came through. So what of the trial and conviction in 1998?

It was this man Anthony Sawoniuk, particularly nasty individual. Some of you may know the journalist Jon Silverman, who when Jon was with the BBC and tried to ask some questions of Sawoniuk, Sawoniuk tried to hit him with his walking stick. Sawoniuk was 78 at the time of the trial. He lived in Domaczewo in Belarus, in Belorussia. When the Nazis invaded, he joined up immediately. He had a longstanding hatred of Jews in his village. Word was that he was particularly jealous of Jews. He was responsible for taking part in rounding up some 3000 Jews in and around the area for participating in their murders.

He was also put in charge of a hunt squad so that anyone who escaped, he was responsible for finding them and shooting them. And he was eventually convicted on charges of being personally responsible for the execution of 18 Jews. He served in prison two life sentences and died in prison in 2005. Just before I move on to some final reflections, I just want to say a word, not just about him, but about almost all of the individuals both here and in Oz and in Canada and in the US and elsewhere who've ever been investigated and brought to trial.

Most of them came to this country or wherever they came to. They lived very quiet lives. There's a book called "Quiet Neighbours", which very much describes them. They didn't seek any publicity, they did respectable middle class jobs usually, railway ticket inspector is what Sawoniuk was. He worked for British Rail here. Mining engineer is what Gecas was. They didn't

get involved in emigrant politics. They kept themselves to themselves. And when you asked their neighbours, they said, "You know, they were, you know, nice man kept himself to himself." Whenever they were discovered, whenever they were tried, there was never an ounce of contrition. These weren't people who'd been racked by guilt or conscience for 40 years. In almost every single case when they were asked, they said, "It wasn't me," or "It was me, but I was never there that day," or "I was there that day but I didn't take part in any of the shootings."

None of them ever admitted to guilt. It's absolutely extraordinary. I mean, there are one or two exceptions of people who did show some amounts of contrition, but it's extraordinary that the vast, vast majority of them show none whatsoever. So let me end just on a few final reflections before, if we have time, we revert back to Carly for any questions that anyone might have. The first thing that I'd want to say is just, you know, going back to those times and thinking about the Jewish community then and the Jewish community now, last year was a authority year for the Jewish community in this country because we had the prospect of a labour party, which some of us thought might actually form a government, which was riven with anti-Semitism.

And the Jewish community, I felt, responded in an incredible way, in a very visible way and many demonstrations took place and there was huge pride among the community and coming out on those demonstrations. And the community was extremely assertive in the way that it acted and behaved. And what I found interesting is that it was the generation, that younger generation in the 1980s who came up campaigning, who came up being very proud of who they were, who didn't like the way that their elders had deferred to authority. It's that generation who are now in leadership today, and it's that generation who led these demonstrations.

So very interesting to see that line over 40 years between the 1980s and today. The second thing I just wanted to just reflect on is memorialization. This campaign, as far as I was concerned, was always about justice, not about vengeance, about justice. It also wasn't about education. But clearly there is an educative element and a documentary element when you put people like this on trial. And there's witness testimony and there's documentary testimony and it says something about memorialization and about the perpetual challenge of keeping the memory alive of the Shoah, particularly at a time when as we know we are losing more and more survivors' firsthand testimony to what really happened.

And I thought I would put up this quote from Joseph Roth, one of the great writers of the early 20th century who had such an insight into the frailties and the limitations of human nature. And here he is in the 1930 edition of his book where he's actually writing about the , the Jews who are forced to leave Russia. And he says, "When a catastrophe occurs, people at hand are shocked into helpfulness. But it seems people expect catastrophes to be brief. Chronic catastrophes are so unpalatable to neighbours, they're gradually becoming indifferent to them and their victims, if not downright impatient.

The sense of order irregularity and due process is so ingrained in people they're only willing to entertain the opposite, emergency, madness, chaos and confusion for a brief period. And once



the emergency becomes protracted, helping hands return to pockets and the fires of compassion cool down." And I remember reading that and thinking, you know, he's just describing human nature you know? We shouldn't be too short with people when they do forget and when they do need reminding. This is what we're all like, and it's why it's so important that we keep talking about the Shoah and don't apologise for it either.

The third thing I just wanted to show is the best defence I've ever read or seen on the rule of law. And for us as Jews, I feel it is just so important just to say, we don't take the rule of law for granted. And we are aware of what happens to a society when people do run roughshod over the rule of law or claim the law for themselves. This is one of the great scenes from "A Man For All Seasons" the story of Thomas Moore, it was a play and then a film by Robert Bolt made into the film 1966. And here is Thomas Moore played by Paul Scofield, arguing with his son-in-law, who's a zealot. And his son-in-law says, "So now you'd give the devil benefit of law?"

And Moore says, "Yes, what would you do Roper? Cut a great hole through the law to go after the devil?" And Roper says, "I'd cut down every law in England to do so." And Moore replies, "Oh, and when the last law was down and the devil turned round on you, where would you hide Roper? The law is all being flat. This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast. Man's laws, not God's. And if you cut them down and you are just the man to do it, do you really think you could stand up right in the winds that would blow them? Yes, I'd give the devil benefit of the law for my own safety's sake."

And the final quote, I want to end with Llin Golding. And she was asked, "Isn't this all a waste of time? Because you might go to all of this effort and change the law and there might never even be a single prosecution." And this is how she answered that question, "This bill may not lead to a single prosecution of a single Nazi war criminal living here, but at least it might give them bit of fear that one day soon someone will knock on their door and make them answer for the suffering they inflicted on so many innocent men, women, and children." So thank you. And with that, I'm going to turn off screen share and here we go and pass over to Carly.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Wow, Philip, thank you. I feel we could do an episode day of this story and still be learning more from you. I wanted to step back to something you touched on midway through, which was how the media responded to this both, you know, the kind of sensationalised stories originally and then the actual coverage of the parliamentary votes. How did you feel that British society reacted in general, and do you feel it had an effect on levels of anti-Semitism in the country?

A: Well, I mean, we were in a very fortunate position because being in parliament, we were able to poll a number of MPs and we asked them what was happening in their post bag. And what happened in an MP's post bag, a mail bag, is a really reliable way of finding out what the British public do actually think. There were a number of crazies, as you can imagine, but I would say on the whole, somewhere in the region of 70% were very broadly in favour of the government

taking action and only 30% were against. The 30% who were against, I mean, were often particularly vile but not always. Among the 30%, I have to say, there were some who were particularly concerned about the emigrate communities and particularly concerned that there was a danger that the whole of the Ukrainian or the whole of the Polish or the whole of the Lithuanian community were going to be tarred with the same brush.

And we did our best to make sure that we defended those communities and said, you know, we're talking about a very small number of people. The the media were mixed. I mean, on the whole, the conservative press at the time were against, the left wing press at the time were in favour. But over time, and as the government got behind the issue, most of the press fell behind and felt that there should be action. And that was over the course of about three years.

Q: So taking a step back and looking at this inquiry's effect on the UK's willingness in general to recognise war criminals in their midst, what do you feel the legacy was? You know, particularly as we look at those who could have been responsible for war crimes in former Yugoslavia or even the Rwandan genocide, how do you see the effect today?

A: Well, I think the first thing to say is that Ben Ferencz, Benjamin Ferencz, who some of you will be familiar with, he was the Chief Prosecutor in the Nuremberg military trials for the US. And he then returned to the US after the war, and he became a lifelong proponent of an international war crimes trial. And I think he's responsible more than anyone for the ICC and the Hague being created in the 1990s where we've seen the prosecution of people responsible for genocides for crimes in Rwanda and in former Yugoslavia.

So there's certainly a connection in terms of the legacy. But I mean, in answer your to your specific question Carly, in the UK I think the reality is that these things often come down to political pressure where there is political pressure to take action, governments will often get behind and do something about it. And where there isn't, there's usually too many things on their plate for them to do other things. And so I think one of the reasons why there's been relatively little interest in some nasty Rwanda ex generals living in London, is that there's been insufficient pressure.

Q: So the most recent time this kind of issue came to the news was in 2018 with the case of the Nazi war criminal, who was found to be a pensioner living in Shropshire, which came to the attention because the Germans actually, you know, announced they'd had an investigation against him. And the German message at the time was, "We have unfinished business when it comes to prosecuting collaborators." Do you feel that this case led to a resurgence of interest in the UK despite the fact that many of the targets have now deceased?

A: Well, the short answer is no. So the Germans were very late onto this, very, very late indeed. There was a book that was published last year called "Reckonings," which is fantastic book. I mean very, very thick tone, which anyone who's interested in what the success of it states, west Germany, east Germany and Austria did. It's well worth the read. And the West Germans finally,

finally got onto this really kind of in the last 15, 20 years and through their office in Ludwigsburg have been pursuing this. So they investigated a man called Stanislaw Chrzanowski who was the pensioner.

- You looked at how I didn't try to say his name.

- Yeah, I'm sorry. It took me a while to get my mouth around it. I mean he had been responsible for... I mean, there was very, very good evidence that he'd been responsible for being the overseer of a massacre of 30 Jewish prisoners in, Slonim in Belarus. He was never tried here because of lack of evidence. So they got to him, they got to him too late, and they just built up their case. It was just too late. The German campaign, it's called, "Spät, Aber Nicht Zu Spät", late but not too late. But the fact is that Germans did get on onto it too late. And many people have commented on the irony of the name for that campaign.

Q: So in terms of educating the broader British society, you know, obviously you've touched on a number of the movies and TV shows that were created. And then, you know, more recently we had "Schindler's List." How important do you feel those types of media were in helping to inform public opinion?

A: Well, I think enormously important. I mean you know, it's not my field and and there are others who've got far more expertise in this area than I have. But, when stories of the Shoah are told, are told properly and thoroughly and truthfully and are told through mass media, they have enormous impact. And again, you know, it started, as I said, with with Meryl Streep and James Woods in "Holocaust." I mean, I remember watching it at the time, I remember cringing and even as a kid at the time, watching it, but it had the most enormous impact and we shouldn't forget that.

- Thank you very much. I'm now going to hand back over to Wendy.

- [Philip] Okay.

- Philip wow, thank you. What an excellent presentation. That was truly a fascinating hour. I feel that we only scratched the surface of a very challenging but crucial subject. It's really remarkable to learn about this little known piece of recent British history. Without you and a few dedicated British parliamentarians who just were tirelessly committed to shining a light on the subject, many of these criminals would've just lived out their golden years in the best of comfort in Britain. That's really unbelievable. So from all of us, please allow me to thank you for your efforts in seeking justice for the Jewish people. We have so much more to learn from you, and hopefully we'll be hearing more from you in the future. Thank you, Philip. That was really brilliant. So on that note, I'd like to say goodnight and thank you to everybody for being present with us. Goodnight.