

## **Obituary - Dr. Walter Zander**

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WALTER ZANDER, lawyer and scholar who has died aged 94, was a latter-day Pangloss.

“You never know what is good news and what is bad news,” he would say. When Hitler came to power and he had to flee Germany he thought his whole world had collapsed. “But,” he liked to add, “I came to England and lived happily ever after.”

Walter Zander was born on June 8 1898 into a cultivated and prosperous German Jewish family; his father was an eminent lawyer, his mother a painter.

Young Walter himself trained as a musician and played the piano and viola. Then came the Great War. He fought in the German army both on the eastern and western fronts and was awarded the Iron Cross.

He studied at Jena and Berlin, took a doctorate in law and soon built up a legal practice in Berlin. In 1930 he married Gretl Magnus, daughter of Rudolph Magnus, the physiologist, and they had three children (a fourth was to be born in England).

When Hitler was elected to power in 1933 Zander could not believe what was happening, for it did not accord with his understanding of Germany and the Germans. As he came to terms with reality, he found it difficult to abandon his clients and he did not come to England until 1937.

Zander was nearly 40 by then, with a young family and without an income or prospect of employment. But he teamed up with a fellow refugee who had developed a new photogravure process and set up a printing works in Slough. It immediately prospered, but in 1940, shortly after the fall of France, he and other German refugees were rounded up as “enemy aliens”, his factory was confiscated and he was interned on the Isle of Man.

Zander recalled those events, and even his flight from Germany, without bitterness; he preferred to dwell on the kindness of his neighbours in Gerrards Cross. His wife took in lodgers, traders gave her extended credit, and the headmaster of the local preparatory school waived his fees. His experience of those years made him an inveterate Anglophile.

He remained on the Isle of Man for 25 months and joined with other internees to set up a sort of ad hoc university in the camp and a scratch symphony orchestra. He lectured in law and economics and played in the orchestra. (Four of the more accomplished musicians were later to set up the Amadeus String Quartet.)

On his release Zander was engaged by the Ministry of Information to lecture British troops on the Nazi treatment of the Jews. In 1944 he became secretary of the British Friends of the Hebrew University, a post he retained for the next 27 years.

It was a lowly office for a man with his qualifications. He began with one assistant in a tiny room, but soon built up a major operation which endowed scholarships, arranged cultural exchanges and remitted millions of pounds to Jerusalem.

Though working for an organisation at the heart of the Jewish national revival, Zander was not a Zionist. In 1948, while the nascent Jewish state was struggling for life, he published a pamphlet, *Is This the Way?*, in which he questioned the need for a state at all. He was not only concerned about the situation of the Arabs: he was also inclined to regard Jewish culture as a sort of homeland in its own right.

A deeply religious man, without any trace of sanctimoniousness, Walter Zander somehow managed to combine spirituality with geniality.

He could, though, carry charity to uncharitable lengths, and did not let even the Holocaust, in which his own mother perished, open his eyes to the realities of the Jewish situation.

*Is This the Way?* caused an immediate furore and there were demands for his resignation. But if it was easy to be exasperated with Zander it was impossible to be angry with him.

After Norman Bentwich, a former Professor of International Law at the Hebrew University (and a Zionist), came to his support, the uproar subsided and Zander eventually became not only a cherished institution but a governor and an honorary fellow of the University.

In 1971 he was appointed an associate fellow of St Antony's College Oxford. His eyesight was failing by then, and he became completely blind, but he managed to produce one book on Soviet Jewry and another on Israel and the Christian Holy Places.

He had an idyllic family life and derived great joy from the successes of his children.

One son became a professor of law at the London School of Economics, another a lecturer in medicine at St Thomas's, the third, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, while his daughter, a distinguished art historian and critic, is married to the President of Harvard University.

Sir Isaiah Berlin summed him up in a phrase on his 90th birthday. He was, he said, "probably the purest hearted man I have ever met".

His wife died in 1968. They had three sons and a daughter.