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The Holocaust and Lessons Learned for NZ

Clouds hung in the sky casting an ominous atmosphere over the city. Did they perhaps know of the horror that they would witness as they floated about the skies? Man against man, stranger fighting stranger, people blinded by a hate that they didn't understand. No one was spared. Pointless murder of innocent people, to fight for something they had long ago forgotten. Where was compassion?

The crowd of unruly Polish were separated.

"You! Go this way and you can go that way!"

Soldiers, red-faced, were pushing people with their guns. It was a choice in their mind. This woman, that man, and the young child – to send them to their death was as easy as brandishing a gun and telling them to join a line to their right. Letting them live was simple. A choice.

To live, or to die.

The fact that I am alive today is a result of this choice. Send my grandfather – at the time, simply a young boy – to his death? Allow him to live? The soldier who decided this probably hadn't even begun to conceptualise the consequences of that moment. Or maybe he did. Perhaps it went through his mind that this young boy still had a life ahead of him. He still had a purpose – he hadn't even begun to experience all of what life had to offer. Perhaps this was why the soldier told him to go left.

Propaganda played a large part in the support and indifference about the Holocaust. It was a seed, planted in the fertile soil of the Axis' brains, which grew. The Nazis and their supporters were taught that the genocide was the ideal process in which to free their country from the plague of Jews, gypsies, blacks and other minority groups. The seed started this sense of hate towards minority groups. The seed is what was grown into the mind of those soldiers, who were given the choice of whether the Polish would be exterminated or simply let to live. The weed grew and grew, until it throttled all compassion in the minds of thousands of people. Propaganda initiated the extreme hate which is what started the genocide. If such propaganda and general hate of certain race or religion happened again, New Zealand could easily plunge into similar circumstances as most of Western Europe did during World War II. In fact, such hate and discontentment has been seen in Australia – the government is adamant that refugees should not be allowed past the Australian borders. This extreme thinking, stemmed from propaganda, is what will start the hate that was clearly seen by the Nazis in World War 2. New Zealand cannot be so naïve as to think we are immune to this thinking. The seed of propaganda is easily spread, cast into any minds that are fertile enough. We must never let ourselves fall into the trap of being the nation plagued with a lack of education about the things that matter the most- awareness of the world's diversity, a colourful and beautiful thing.

Perhaps another crime, almost as terrible as the Nazi slaughter of Jews, was the silence of the bystanders. With the weed of propaganda blooming within the confines of their minds, they did not feel inclined to speak out about the wrongdoings of the implemented hate which was becoming embedded in the minds of the Nazis and their followers. For an event like the Holocaust never to happen again, the people of our country need to speak up – silence is a crime within itself which was proven during the Holocaust. If people will learn to be aware of the present, what's going on around them, then they are able to form an educated opinion. For our country to learn from mistakes and move on in the nature of discrimination, it is crucial that people have the freedom to speak out.

In the end, my grandfather was saved from the genocide. He is still alive today, a witness to the horrors of humanity. But his friend was killed. His father was killed. His neighbours were all killed. For every person saved, another handful would die. It was brutal, sickening and tragic.

Yet the most important thing for us to do now, is to remember. To honour the people who died, to learn to never repeat the mistakes made. We must never scatter the seed of propaganda in the first place – ensure that it never has a place to grow. People have to speak their minds, give an opinion and learn about the issues we will continuously face through time. People have to remember.