

Kinderda trasporto



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Nell'ambito del Kindertransport, i figli degli ebrei polacchi provenienti dalla regione di confine tra Germania e Polonia arrivano a Londra sulla nave *Varsavia*, febbraio 1939.

Kindertransport, (in tedesco o: "Trasporto dei bambini

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ni") è l'operazione di salvataggio di nove mesi

autorizzata dal governo britannico e condotta da individui in vari paesi e da gruppi religiosi e laici assortiti che ha salvato circa 10.000 bambini, sotto i 17 anni e la maggior parte dei quali ebrei, dalla Germania nazista, dall'Austria, dalla Cecoslovacchia, dalla Polonia e dalla città libera di Danzica (Danzica)) trasferendoli nel Regno Unito. Il programma iniziò dopo i pogrom della Notte dei Cristalli del 9-10 novembre 1938, quando i nazisti attaccarono persone e proprietà ebraiche e condussero arresti di massa, e si concluse in gran parte il 1° settembre 1939, con lo scoppio della seconda guerra mondiale, anche se i bambini continuarono ad essere salvati fino al 1940. Il nome Kindertransport è entrato in uso alla fine del 20° secolo.

Origini e funzionamento del Kindertransport

Pochi mesi dopo l'ascesa al potere di Adolf Hitler in Germania nel 1933, decine di migliaia di ebrei lasciarono il paese. Tuttavia, l'emigrazione iniziò rapidamente a rallentare man mano che diventava sempre più difficile ottenere un visto. Il presidente degli Stati Uniti Franklin Roosevelt rispose a questo "problema dei rifugiati" – cioè l'incapacità degli ebrei bloccati nella Germania nazista di trovare paesi disposti a offrire loro rifugio – proponendo che si tenesse una conferenza. A partire dal 6 luglio 1938, i rappresentanti di 32 paesi si incontrarono per 10 giorni nella località turistica francese di Évian-les-Bains. Nonostante i grandi proclami, poco si fece della Conferenza di Évian. Ci sono state discussioni su potenziali insediamenti, ma la maggior parte dei paesi è rimasta riluttante ad ammettere nuovi immigrati. I partecipanti sono riusciti solo ad accordarsi per incontrarsi di nuovo più tardi.

Nel frattempo, la persecuzione degli ebrei in Germania e in Austria aumentò drammaticamente, raggiungendo un crescendo il 9-10 novembre 1938, con il pogrom che divenne noto come Kristallnacht ("Notte dei cristalli"). Nelle rivolte antiebraiche autorizzate dallo stato, più di 1.000 sinagoghe furono bruciate o distrutte mentre i vigili del fuoco rimanevano inattivi, agendo solo se gli incendi minacciavano di propagarsi agli edifici vicini; più di 7.500 attività commerciali ebraiche furono vandalizzate o saccheggiate; Gli ospedali, le case, le scuole e i cimiteri ebraici furono danneggiati; almeno 91 ebrei furono uccisi; e migliaia di uomini ebrei furono arrestati e deportati nei campi di concentramento.

Eppure, anche sulla scia della Kristallnacht, pochissimi paesi aprirono le loro porte ai profughi ebrei, ai quali fino alla chiusura delle frontiere all'inizio della seconda guerra mondiale fu permesso di lasciare la Germania, a condizione che lo facessero senza denaro o possedimenti. Durante il Terzo Reich, gli ebrei lottarono inutilmente per trovare un paese che offrisse loro rifugio.

Dopo la Notte dei Cristalli, il Parlamento britannico rispose alle richieste di azione del Comitato britannico per i rifugiati ebrei con un dibattito alla Camera dei Comuni il 21 novembre 1938. Sebbene il governo britannico avesse appena imposto un nuovo limite all'immigrazione ebraica in Palestina come parte del suo mandato, diversi fattori contribuirono alla decisione di consentire a un numero imprecisato di bambini di età inferiore ai 17 anni di entrare nel Regno Unito: la diligenza della difesa dei rifugiati, la crescente consapevolezza delle atrocità antiebraiche in Germania e Austria, e simpatie filo-ebraiche tra alcuni britannici di alto rango. Per "assicurare il loro reinsediamento finale" è stato necessario inviare una cauzione di 50 sterline per ciascuno di questi bambini, che, si presumeva, si sarebbero ricongiunti con i loro genitori una volta che la crisi fosse passata. Sono stati ammessi con documenti di viaggio temporanei.



Kindertransport—The Arrival

Kindertransport—The Arrival, sculpture by Frank Meisler, 2006; at Liverpool Street Station, London. It commemorates the arrival at Liverpool

On December 1, 1938, less than one month after Kristallnacht, the first transport left Germany. It arrived at Harwich, England, the following day, bringing 196 children from a Jewish orphanage in Berlin that had been burned by the Nazis on November 9. Most of the subsequent transports left by train from Vienna, Berlin, Prague, and other major cities (children from small towns traveled to meet the transports), crossed the Dutch and Belgian borders,

Street Station of children rescued as part of the Kindertransport; from the station the children were sent to foster homes and hostels.

and from there went on to England by ship. The majority of the children never saw their parents again.

People of a number of faiths—Christians of many denominations, including Quakers, along with Jews—collaborated on this effort to rescue primarily Jewish children. Leaders in the effort included Lola Hahn-Warburg, a member of a prominent German Jewish banking family who established the framework for the rescues in 1933 before immigrating to England herself; German Jewish businessman Wilfrid Israel, who used his extensive network of personal connections to secure passage for countless Jews; former British prime minister Stanley Baldwin, who appealed to British conscience via a BBC broadcast in December 1938 in support of the Lord Baldwin Fund for Refugees; Viscount Walter Horace Samuel; Sir Wyndham Deedes; Rebecca Sieff; Rabbi Solomon Schoenfeld (whose efforts were responsible for the rescue of nearly 1,000 Orthodox Jewish children); Nicholas (later Sir Nicholas) Winton, who, working with Trevor Chadwick, Doreen Warriner, and Bill Barazetti, saved 669 Czechoslovak children; academic Norman Bentwich; Quakers Bertha Bracey and Jean Hoare (cousin of Sir Samuel Hoare), the latter of whom shepherded a plane full of children out of Prague; social workers in the Jewish communities of Vienna, such as Franz Danneberg-Löw (who later became the guardian of the Jewish children trapped in Vienna after the last Kindertransport); and leaders of the German youth movement in Berlin, such as Norbert Wollheim (who accompanied several transports as an escort and refused a place on what he knew would be the last one because he did not want to leave his wife and young child in Berlin; in 1943 he was deported to Auschwitz).

One organizer, Geertruida (Truus) Wijsmuller-Meijer, a Dutch Christian, appealed directly to SS officer Adolf Eichmann in Vienna before leading the escape of 600 children on a single train. She also helped smuggle children onto a ship bound from Marseille to Palestine and was largely responsible for the success of the final transport. She sped her charges through burning Amsterdam to the freighter *Bodegraven*, which left IJmuiden, Netherlands, for Dover, England, on May 14, 1940, the day that Rotterdam was bombed and the Netherlands surrendered to the Germans. The ship was raked by gunfire from German warplanes.

La vita in Gran Bretagna

Those children who already had been assigned sponsors were taken to London; those without prearranged sponsors stayed in summer holiday camps until host families, hostels, or schools could be found for them. Among the organizations that helped settle the children

were B'nai B'rith, the Refugee Children's Movement, the YMCA, the Society of Friends, the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council, and a variety of other organizations (both Jewish and non-Jewish). Private donations—from money and clothing to houses—also played an important role.

The children, few of whom knew English, were dispersed to many parts of the United Kingdom. There was a relatively even split between those who lived in group settings and those who lived with foster families. Those over age 14 who lacked sponsors or who had not been fostered or sent to boarding schools often underwent a short course of training and joined the British labour force, usually performing domestic service or agricultural work.

Most of the families (both Jewish and non-Jewish) who took in children treated them well and developed strong bonds with their guests. Some children, however, were abused or maltreated. Upon reaching age 18, some of the children took up arms against Nazi Germany by volunteering for the British or Australian military.

In the spring of 1940 hysteria raged over a supposed “Fifth Column” threat by domestic Nazi sympathizers within Britain. Ostensibly to prevent them from collaborating with the Nazis, Jewish refugees, Austrian and German non-Jews, Italians, and others were interned by the British government. More than 1,000 Kindertransportees (boys and girls) over age 16 were interned on the Isle of Man and other sites. Moreover, some male Kindertransportees were shipped to Canada on the same vessels as German prisoners of war, and others were transported to Australia aboard the notorious *Dunera*, labeled a “hell-ship” because of the overcrowded conditions and terrible treatment of foreign nationals meted out by the British escort troops. Opposition to further internment mounted among the British public in July 1940 after a German U-boat sank the *Arandora Star*, carrying more than 1,200 internees (including Italians as well as German and Austrian refugees), with the loss of some 800 lives. A large number of all of those who had been deported were returned to Britain.

Fiftieth anniversary and organized remembrance



Für das Kind—Wien

Kindertransport children had gathered in small groups over the years, reunited by the hostel they lived in or by the school they attended. In June 1989, however, what had begun as a local 50th anniversary reunion of the Kindertransportees in London (organized by Bertha Leverton, a Kindertransport child still living in that city) became an international reunion, the very

Für das Kind—Wien ("For the Child—Vienna"), sculpture by Flor Kent, 2008; at the West Railway Station, Vienna. It commemorates children relocated as part of the Kindertransport (1938–39).

first gathering of Kindertransportees regardless of where they had lived during World War II. More than 1,200 Kinder (as the refugees now called themselves, their spouses, and their children) arrived from all parts

of the United Kingdom, Israel, Australia, and elsewhere, as well as from Canada and the United States, where some 2,500 Kinder had immigrated. They gathered to reconnect with old friends, to celebrate their survival, to express their gratitude to the British people, and to honour the parents who had selflessly sent away their children in order to save their lives.

The success of the reunion spurred the formation of the Kindertransport Association in 1989. It is based in New York, and its mission is to locate, reunite, and bring together Kinder and their families, to educate the public about this little-known chapter in Holocaust history, and to assist with charitable work dedicated to helping children without parents, regardless of race or religion. The Kindertransport Association established World Kindertransport Day on December 2, 2013, the 75th anniversary of the day the first Kindertransport arrived in Great Britain.

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