

STEPHEN ROTH (1915-1995)

When he was miraculously released in September 1944 from the Gestapo prison in Budapest, Stephen Roth decided that if he survived the Holocaust he would devote his life to Jewish causes. His career culminated as director of the widely respected Institute of Jewish Affairs (IJA) in London and as an acknowledged expert on legal measures to protect minorities and combat incitement to racial hatred.

Stephen Roth was born in the Hungarian provincial town of Gyöngyös and received a doctorate in law from Budapest University. As the Nazi grip spread across Europe, he became active in the Zionist relief effort, helping Jewish refugees into Hungary from neighbouring countries under Nazi occupation. In 1944, when the Germans took control in Hungary and deportations of Jews began, Roth became prominent in the Zionist underground, organising the forging of papers and smuggling of Jews over the border to Romania, an activity that led to his eventual arrest and torture.

After the war, Stephen Roth became the first director of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) office in Budapest. Moving to the United Kingdom in 1947, he became general secretary of the WJC British Section, then the WJC European Director, and in 1966 WJC President Dr Nahum Goldman transferred the WJC's Institute of Jewish Affairs to London so that Roth could become its director. Roth effectively re-established the IJA and, under his leadership, it came to play an important role in intellectual Jewish life in the UK and its publications commanded international respect in the general academic world. As the obituary in the *London Times* observed: "Roth endowed the Institute with a unique character by always linking particular Jewish concerns with universal or general issues. Jewish problems were never studied in isolation."

Stephen Roth served as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews 1979-85, and chairman of the UK Zionist Federation 1985-90. He was chairman of the Helsinki Monitoring Committee of the World Conference on Soviet Jewry and devoted much energy to the "Helsinki process," successfully securing recognition of the distinctive problem of antisemitism. After his retirement, he continued to write and lecture on issues concerning Jews and human rights, and to produce the annual survey of legal developments relating to antisemitism and racism, published by Tel Aviv University. In 1993, Roth was the first recipient of the annual Award for Excellence from the British Chief Rabbi.