

Alexandru Kohn In Jerusalem



This photo was taken in 1973 in Jerusalem, during a visit to Israel. I'm with Eva Wolberg, the great-granddaughter of grandfather Schillinger's sister Nina, and her father, Isidor Wolberg. He was arrested in Romania on account of being a Zionist, leading him to move to Israel in the 1960s.

When the state of Israel was established, I must say I felt an indescribable joy. Anti-Semites often said Jews were a parasitic nation, incapable of living by themselves and not needing a country to call their own. And even if they had one, so the saying went, Jews wouldn't know their way about because they were nothing more than parasites living on the backs of others. Israel has proven exactly the opposite. It can be taken as a model country. Look at how much they have created from nothing! I must also add that we were always being told in my childhood that we were from Palestine and that we should go to Palestine. I think and I feel it now too that Israel is the land and the root of all Jews. Jewry as a nation has, in my mind, three pillars – one being Israel, the other consisting of the Jews from the United States, and the last consisting of the Jews of the Diaspora.

I didn't leave for Israel because I was unfortunate or perhaps lucky to have tried to enroll in a university in Romania in 1956. I even became famous in the process, as everybody was astonished that I went to the secretariat and said, 'Sir, there is a mistake. I'm not on that list.' I was told I didn't have the right to be on the inscription list because I didn't have a good social background given that my father had been a merchant. In the Nazi era I had suffered because I was a Jew, and now the Communists made me suffer because my father was a merchant. I was told that these were the laws, and I answered that most of the Jews were and always had been merchants and that the policy amounted to discrimination against Jews, just as there had been under the Nazis. The

secretary asked me how I could compare socialism to Nazism, and I answered that these were the same and walked out. Shortly thereafter I was arrested, and I got sentenced in 1956 to hard labor on the Danube-Black Sea Canal. I was there for two years, between 1956 and 1958, before they let me free.

When I got back, I wanted to leave for Israel. But when I went to ask for my papers, the authorities told me that I could never leave because I was an enemy of the Communists. They feared that I was going to make anti-Communist propaganda abroad. I tried many times to obtain a passport, but I didn't succeed. I intended to flee across the border, but I never did.