

World ORT

# What Would You Do

Case Study Booklet

## Practice Case Study: ORT after World War I

### Case Study

ORT was first established in the 1880s in St. Petersburg to help the Jews in the Pale of Settlement improve their economic futures. In the first decades of its existence, ORT created schools, language programs, and certifications, and sent much needed equipment to many small Jewish factories throughout the lands of the Russian empire.

With the end of World War I in 1918, however, the Russian empire collapsed and a new government emerged amid massive upheaval. This new government introduced policies to enforce strict controls on all independent Russian organizations working throughout the country.

ORT lost most of the lands it had been using for training schools. Their deposits in Russian banks disappeared as well. The local Jews, meanwhile, were living in destroyed cities while the world economy was quickly sinking into the Great Depression. The Russian Jewish community did not have the means to finance ORT, and yet they desperately needed the organization's resources. ORT was looking less and less likely to survive if it was to remain a Russian entity.

If you were ORT, what would you do? How could you survive to help the Jews in the Pale of Settlement?

## Isolate

What are the three most important problems in this case study?

1. Local Jews all over Eastern Europe are desperately in need for ORT's help.
2. The Russian Empire is broken up and ORT has no autonomy under the new Russian government
3. ORT does not have the finances, land or supplies necessary to continue its work on such a large scale

## Solve

How could you fix these problems?

1. ORT should create local branches to motivate community members
2. ORT should create main offices outside of Russia
3. ORT should look for financing abroad

Stay creative! All ideas are good, and if you are struggling to find solutions for these case studies, remember that it was just as hard for ORT to think of solutions to these massive problems too.

## Practice Case Study: ORT after World War I

### Responses

Dr David Lvovich was a Russian Jewish political activist who had spent the war years in the USA. Dr Leon Bramson was a politician and leader of ORT in Russia. In 1919 these two men were sent to Europe to raise awareness and funding for ORT to help the Jews in need.

World ORT's founding mission was the belief that the Jewish people are one nation no matter where they live in the world, and that financial self-sufficiency is a key factor in the safety and success of the Jewish community.

The two leaders addressed mass meetings and formed local committees wherever they spoke. They opened an office first in Paris and then in Berlin, which was transformed into the World ORT Union at a founding conference in the summer of 1921.

A year later, there were 54 ORT groups in Eastern Europe and ten organizations in Western Europe and the United States joined to the central body. By 1933, not only were there World ORT financial institutions, political establishments, and local branches all over Europe, but there were also 165 trade schools and vocational courses, as well as 132 factories, training workshops, and industrial co-operatives.

In just over ten years, ORT both solved its own existential problems and assisted thousands of Jews across Europe.

### Compare and Contrast

What similarities and differences can you find between your solutions and World ORT's?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Case Study: Polish Jews after World War I

### Case Study

With the conclusion of World War I, Poland once again became an independent country and was renamed the Second Polish Republic. As a new country, Poland needed a government to create alliances with international powers and a working economy for its citizens.

This new government decided that to succeed economically, it would nationalize some of the most profitable industries in the country, namely tobacco, salt, liquor, and matches. These industries happened to be the main places where Jews worked.

There was an antisemitic response, with the removal of Jews from all senior government positions and targeted boycotts affecting the everyday lives of the Jewish community. Although Poland's three million Jews constituted 17% of the population, they held fewer than 1% of government jobs.

The only sector where jobs were available was in factory work and machining, yet there were very few Jews who had any training in this work, and most of the Jewish community spoke only Yiddish.

If you were World ORT, what would you do to help the Jews in Poland?

**Isolate** - What are the three most important problems in this case study?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Solve** - How could you fix these problems?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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## Case Study Part II: Polish Jews after World War I

### Responses

To address some of the massive problems facing the Jews in Poland, World ORT created schools that focused on the sectors where jobs were available.

Courses included metal work, machining, cabinet-making, tailoring, electricity, and radio.

The schools had the option for students to study in Yiddish, and World ORT even created a series of Yiddish technical manuals.

When, in 1925, the Polish government changed their laws to require tradesmen to be better educated and supervised, 100,000 Jewish artisans no longer had the legal ability to work. World ORT immediately stepped in, creating language, trade, and continuing education courses to help professionalize the Jewish tradesmen and legalize their right to work.

### Compare and Contrast

What similarities and differences can you find between your solutions and World ORT's?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Case Study: Lithuanian Jews after World War I

### Case Study

Following the independence of the Baltic states from the Russian Empire in 1918, the first democratic government of Lithuania legalized many different types of social projects. This included permitting local organizations of Jews (called *Kehilot*), and for a short while Jews were able to be in charge of their own communities.

At this time, there were 155,000 Jews in Lithuania, making up 6.2% of the total population.

Three years later, a new nationalist and antisemitic government removed those rights and abolished the *Kehilot*. Jews became isolated from the rest of Lithuanian society, and while the majority of the Lithuanian economy relied on the agricultural sector, only 6% of Jews had farming knowledge.

33% of the Jewish community was considered "commercial," meaning that they were extremely poor salesmen who would travel from city to city peddling secondhand products. The Jewish community also included a number of intellectuals who had trained at western universities and were currently out of work.

If you were World ORT, what would you do to help the Jews in Lithuania?

**Isolate** - What are the three most important problems in this case study?

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**Solve** - How could you fix these problems?

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## Case Study Part II: Lithuanian Jews after World War I

### Responses

World ORT opened a trade school in Kovno, Lithuania in 1920 to train the Jewish community in agricultural practices. It soon became known for its excellent educational practices, and for the fact that it had both a full-time school for youth as well as a part-time educational center for adults.

The school had 400 full-time students, creating a hub for other World ORT schools throughout the Baltic region.

When the Nazis arrived in Kovno at the start of World War II and forced the Jewish community into a ghetto, the graduates of ORT Kovno decided to create their own school. The ghetto school helped thousands of Jews find meaningful outlets and community while living under Nazi terror.

### Compare and Contrast

What are the similarities and differences between your solutions and World ORT's?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## Case Study: Jewish refugees in France after World War I

### Case Study

Throughout the 1920s, German Jews gave generously to support international Jewish charities and they gave substantial support to the work of ORT. As the Nazi regime rose to power in Germany in the early 1930s, many Jews fled to France.

There was a widespread belief among German Jews that it would be possible to remain in other countries in Europe until the Nazi party was replaced with a new government in Germany. Within ten years, however, the Nazi party would take control of parts of France, and many former German Jews who had fled a decade prior were deported to concentration camps.

In the years before the Nazi takeover of France, however, there were thousands of German Jews throughout France who had fled from the Nazi policies of the early 1930s. These Jews needed to integrate into the French economy as quickly as possible, even though many of them did not speak French and there were very few jobs available.

If you were World ORT, what would you do to help these newly arrived Jews in France?

**Isolate** - What are the three most important problems in this case study?

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**Solve** - How could you fix these problems?

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## Case Study Part II: Jewish refugees in France after World War I

### Responses

To help the new arrival of Jews into France, World ORT created vocational training schools teaching agriculture. The schools were not only for gaining new skills, however. They became centers for exchange of information among the refugees, for inquiries about families and lost ones, an informal post office to receive and transmit messages, and for helping with the various challenges that face a newcomer in a strange land.

These ORT courses for refugees began in Paris in 1934 and expanded rapidly across the country in the years that followed.

With over one million unemployed French people, however, the farming training could unfortunately not guarantee jobs to the the French Jewish graduates of the ORT programs. Many graduates grew disillusioned, and students began to drop out of the schools. But for some families, ORT was a lifeline, giving out loans, providing seeds, cattle, tools and technical direction.

### Compare and Contrast

What are the similarities and differences between your solutions and ORT's?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Case Study: Jews in Berlin after World War I

### Case Study

With a thriving and diverse Jewish community at the end of World War I, Berlin was the obvious choice for World ORT's first international headquarters in 1921. Shortly after, ORT opened additional offices in Great Britain, France and Switzerland, as well as local branches throughout eastern Europe.

By 1933, the rise of the Nazi regime meant that the headquarters could no longer remain in Berlin and the office was moved to Paris.

During that same year, they enacted a law that limited German high schools, universities, and technical colleges to have only 1.5% non-Aryan students. In addition, tens of thousands of Jews were forced out of business, industry and professions, leaving manual work as the only option to earn a living.

World ORT responded by opening a school in Berlin, for young students in the day and adults in the evenings. As a precautionary measure, ORT Great Britain purchased all school equipment and 'loaned' the supplies to the Berlin ORT school.

If you were World ORT in 1938, what would you do to help the Jews in Berlin?

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**Solve** - How could you fix these problems?

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## Case Study Part II: Jews in Berlin after World War I

### Responses

By the beginning of 1939, it was clear that something drastic had to be done in order to save the students and the school. World ORT negotiated with the British government and the Nazi police to move the students and school equipment from Berlin to Leeds, UK.

The students were supposed to depart Germany in two groups, with the first half leaving Berlin in August and the second scheduled for September. At the last minute, the Nazis confiscated the equipment and, following the departure of the first group, forced the second group of students to remain in Germany.

The 104 boys who reached the United Kingdom in August lived there for the remaining years of World War II. As promised, World ORT set up a new school for them in Leeds and had students construct a new set of equipment. The school opened in December 1939 and was soon filled with Jewish refugees from across Europe. Many graduates were able to find jobs with their education and some even fought for Britain against the Nazi forces.

The remaining teachers and students in Berlin incredibly continued to operate the school into the war until 1943 when the SS shut down the school and deported most of the 100 remaining students to Auschwitz.

### Compare and Contrast

What are the similarities and differences between your solution and World ORT's?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Case Study: Jews in the Ghettos

### Case Study

In October 1939, the Nazi regime established the first Jewish ghetto in Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland. The ghettos were one of the last steps in the Nazi process of separating Jews from their societies and deporting them to concentration camps. Ghettos were often city districts that the Nazis confined the Jewish community in and then surrounded with guards and fencing.

Many Jews did not survive the ghettos because of the disease and starvation that spread in the poor conditions. The ghettos were demoralizing, and there was very little people could do as they waited months or years for the Nazis to finally begin deportations.

Some of the cities where ghettos were created had been home to ORT vocational schools, however, and many of the Jews living in these ghettos had benefited from ORT vocational training programs in the past.

If you were World ORT, what would you do to help the Jews in the ghettos?

**Isolate** - What are the three most important problems in this case study?

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- 2.
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**Solve** - How could you fix these problems?

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## Case Study Part II: Jews in the Ghettos

### Responses

With the help of World ORT, graduates of ORT programs started opening new schools in the ghettos as a means of "Rescue through Work." They hoped that if Jewish people became educated in the most important of the wartime industries, they would be so necessary to the German war economy that the Nazi regime would halt deportations to the concentration camps.

The ghettos of Kovno and Warsaw were two of the locations where ORT was most active. Indeed, the ORT workshops in Warsaw were so successful, that by June 30, 1941, there were 2331 students split between 24 courses for boys, another 24 for girls, and 16 co-ed courses.

The school managed to remain open for another two years. It functioned until 16:00 on April 18, 1943, the day before the famous Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that ended with the destruction of the ghetto.

### Compare and Contrast

What are the similarities and differences between your solutions and World ORT's?

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- 2.
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