JAKOBOVITS
Chief Rabbi

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Lord Jakobovits, Outspoken Chief Rabbi In Britain for 24 Years, Is Dead at 78

By WARREN HOGE

LONDON, Nov. 1 — Lord Jakobovits, outspoken former chief rabbi of Britain whose views on individual responsibility endeared him to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, died on Sunday morning at his home here. He was 78.

He died of a brain hemorrhage, the family said.

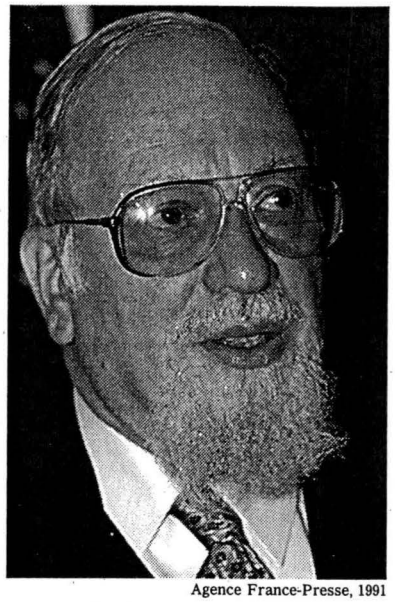
As head of an organization that made him the acknowledged spokesman for British Jews, Lord Jakobovits had extremely conservative views on social issues. But he defied easy political characterization because of his often expressed sympathies with Palestinians in lands under Israeli control and his opposition to international arms trading. He used his own identification as a refugee from Nazi occupation and the historical Jewish experience of rising out of poverty and oppression through self-help as a common underpinning for what appeared to critics to be contradictory values.

He came under criticism in Israel when he warned publicly that he believed that the future of the Jewish state was at risk if its government did not seek a way for peace with the Arabs. At the same time, he stirred the hostility of British liberals by denouncing abortion, homosexuality, infidelity and easy divorce. He once advocated genetic engineering as a way of preventing the birth of homosexuals, and in a debate about AIDS he said he thought that "more important than clean needles are clean conduct and clean thoughts."

Tall and bearded, he spoke in a florid manner that lent him a prophetic appearance and bearing. On arriving in London as a teenager, he had refused to utter another word in German, developing a rich English with a minimized middle European accent.

Immanuel Jakobovits was born on Feb. 8, 1921, in Königsberg, Germany. With the rise of Hitler, his father, Julius, also a rabbi, decided in 1936 to send him to England, where he received his education. He studied both Jewish and general subjects, receiving his undergraduate degree from Jews' College, the principal theological seminary for English Jews, his rabbinical diploma from Yeshiva Etz Chaim and his Ph.D. from London University.

He flirted with the idea of becoming a scientist and later in life published a well-regarded book, "Jewish Medical Ethics." But at his father's urging, he studied for the rabbinate, and at 20, with most rabbis doing



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Lord Jakobovits

service in the war, he became a minister of the Brondesbury Synagogue in northern London. At war's end, Rabbi Jakobovits moved to the South East London Synagogue.

In 1947, he became the rabbi of the Great Synagogue in the financial district, the oldest Ashkenazic temple in London, although he had to minister

A leader who defied easy political characterization.

to his congregation in temporary quarters because the traditional building had been badly bombed.

In 1949, he married Amelie Munk, an extrovert daughter of a French rabbi, and moved to Dublin to be chief rabbi of Ireland. They promptly became a pastoral team, opening their house to crowds of guests and reaching out to people in a way that gave the rabbi a reputation for personal compassion to go along with his fame as a strict community moralist. She survives him, as do their 2 sons, 4 daughters and 38 grandchildren.

In 1958, he moved to New York to become rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue for nine years. Looking back later on his experience with his prosperous congregants there, Rabbi Jakobovits wrote, "My challenge has been to make Orthodoxy elegant and fashionable and to show that you don't have to live in squalor to be a strictly traditional Jew."

In 1967, he answered the call to London to become chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the largest organization of synagogues in the United Kingdom, which Parliament established in 1870. Although Reform and Liberal congregations do not belong to the organization, its head becomes the leading spokesman for British Jews.

As chief rabbi, his first mission was to heal a split that threatened the 350,000 Jews in Britain, a dispute between a leading Orthodox scholar and his predecessor, Rabbi Israel Brodie. Rabbi Jakobovits then acted to reorder the balance of expenditures to reduce the sum directed at synagogues and increase education spending. He set up a trust and, in a few years, doubled the number of places at Jewish day schools.

When in 1985, a report by the archbishop of Canterbury, "Faith in the City," took the Thatcher government to task for overemphasizing individualism as the driving force to endpoverty and social deprivation, Rabbi Jakobovits responded with his own document, "From Doom to Hope."

He argued that immigrants and the unemployed should follow the example of Britain's turn-of-the-century Jewish population and lift themselves up through hard work without looking to the state to rescue them.

The views harmonized perfectly with those of Mrs. Thatcher, and it was a time when the Church of England was one of her harshest critics. She reportedly told people that she wished Rabbi Jakobovits were the archbishop of Canterbury. And she saw to it that he was knighted in 1981 and made a peer in 1988.

Since his retirement as chief rabbi in 1991, he had been a relatively active member of the upper house, attending sessions in his dark blue yarmulke and speaking out on matters of religion and morality.

In one speech against plans to relax laws that bar commercial activities on Sundays, Lord Jakobovits said, "The loss of the Sabbath will deprive Britain of the last visible vestige of national spirituality and sanctification."

The hush in the ornate chamber was broken by shouts from an Anglican admirer in the galleries. "But it takes a Jew to tell you," he said.