

# PHILOSOPHY AND THE WORLD VIEW

## Otto Mandl has Worked with Wells, Huxley and Haldane

**D**R. OTTO MANDL, who is in New Zealand with his wife, Lili Kraus, was willing to be asked in Wellington, after having had a chance to see something of this country, what he thinks of us. His answer was this: he feels we have something in common with many Scandinavians—perhaps Norwegians and Danes in particular—in that we are what he calls “pioneers of mankind.”

“I have not been here long, so I know very little,” he said, “but I think New Zealanders have the inborn wish to embrace all of mankind in their activities. They want to go out and move in the centres of civilisation and discover all they can. Then when they have done this they realise that the world is round after all and these two small islands are just as good a centre as anywhere else.”

Dr. Mandl said that in Java he was interned with 9,000 men, who included 16 Norwegians and one New Zealander. “We eighteen,” he said, “became a group, and were often together. I found that although these Norwegians talked of their home villages and the purely local things that belonged to them (knitting patterns, for instance), and they had particular interests that we others couldn’t share with them, yet in conversation I could talk of the common interests of mankind more easily with them than with most of the Dutch, who had more short-sighted, material interests. Among New Zealanders, whom I have known overseas and now here, I think I see the same idealism, that lifts people above the prejudices of nationalism, and creed, and race, and so on.”

While he was in prison camp in Batavia, Dr. Mandl lectured for what he computes at more than 1,000 hours, at times for six hours a day to groups of 20 and 30 at a time. He lectured on post-war reconstruction, world council, and similar subjects.

### Varied Career

The background of experience behind his present beliefs is a varied one. He served as a captain in the Austrian army in 1914 and was wounded fighting against the Russians. For a time he studied social conditions in the coal pits of Wales and Newcastle, prepared and published a report on mining and forest conditions in the Caucasus and Armenia, and later worked on the development of the original undertaking to exploit the largest Eastern and Central European forests for the British market. He lived in England for many years—his first wife was English—and became intimate with H. G. Wells, 21 of whose books he translated into German for a Viennese publisher. When he translated “The Shape of Things to Come” in 1936, he found himself in trouble with the Gestapo. In 1938, after the Anschluss, he refused to become a German citizen with other Austrians, and was granted permission to settle in New Zealand pending official adoption of New Zealand citizenship. His published works include (apart from the Wells translations),

translations of J. B. S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, and the French philosopher Alain.

The outbreak of the Japanese war caught the Mandl family in Bali, and Dr. Mandl, during the internment, prepared the outlines of a work on the philosophy of music and one on *The New World View*, which he is now completing.

### Meeting with Wells

He met H. G. Wells first in 1919 and saw him last in 1939. His first meeting, he told us, was a strange story. He was in England in 1919, and lonely—“you can be damned lonely in London”—and Wells’s *Outline of History* was then coming out in instalments. He bought the first five numbers one day, and read all night and until 7.0 o’clock the next morning. He began to make a translation at once, and shortly went back to his home which was then in Northern Bohemia. There, he saw an announcement that Wells was to attend a journalists’ conference in Prague.

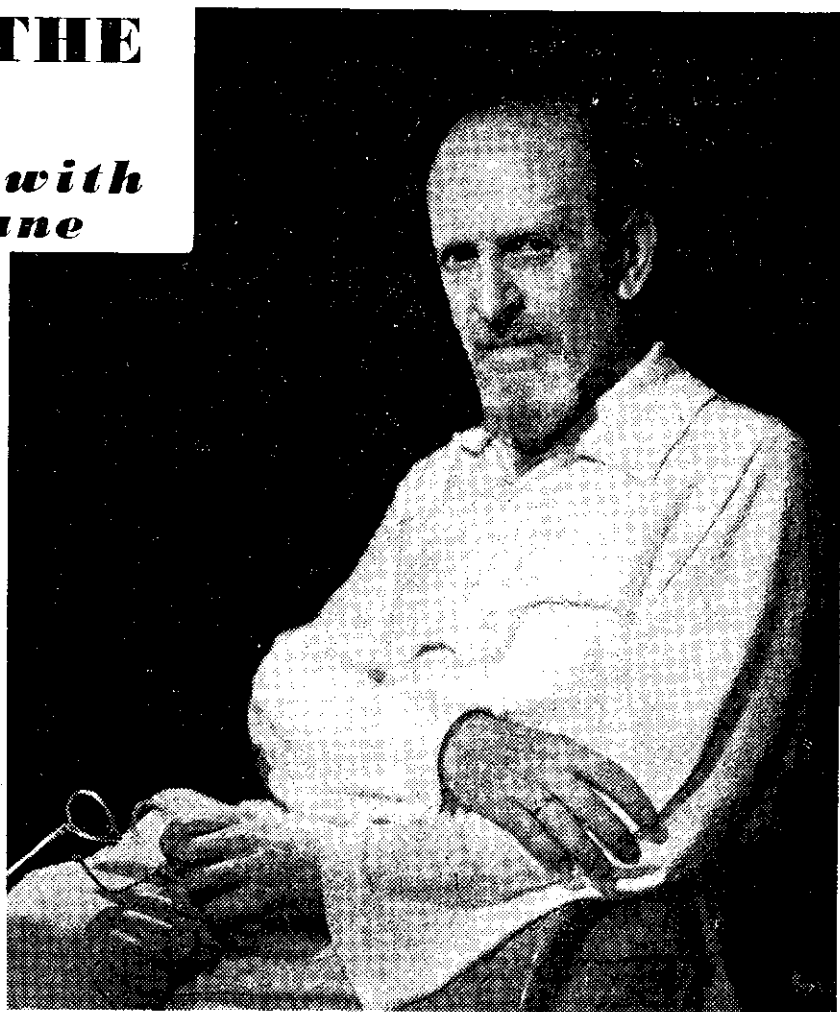
“I caught the next train, and took my manuscript translation. I began to try the hotels, and at last found Wells’s son in one of them. He told me they were on their way to Russia, and were in a hurry. But he told me where his father was. He was having dinner when I called, but I sent in my card. Wells knew nothing about me then but my name, but out came a short little man, with a high-pitched voice, and as we talked, he walked quickly up and down. I showed him my manuscript and said I wanted the right to publish it. He didn’t ask me what else I had done. We talked about the Czechs, and I told him I had known Masaryk when I was a boy, and so on. He took my visiting card, and scribbled something on it. Then he said he had left two ladies at the dinner table, and he must go back. So I said, ‘But I have your permission to translate your *Outline*?’ He made me look at the card. He had written ‘Dear Dr. Mandl (all wrongly spelt)—I give you sole permission to translate . . . etc., etc.’ And that card was the only agreement.

“Later I went and stayed with Wells in England, and he came and stayed with me. I translated *The Science of Life*, which was by Wells, and his son (a biologist) and Julian Huxley, and many other books of his. And at his home I met Bertrand Russell — and Charlie Chaplin one evening.”

### Clandestine Play

After Dr. Mandl had been joined by his wife (who came back to the hotel from a four-hour practice) we heard the story from both of them of the play they produced in the Batavia prison-camp in January of last year. It was written by Dr. Mandl, in English, and called *The Point of View*. It sounded as if it was good fun.

“It was all in English except for some short scenes in Dutch which my children wrote for me,” Dr. Mandl explained. “The parts were written for the four of us—Lili, myself, our daughter Ruth, and our son Michael. Ruth



DR. OTTO MANDL

*“The world is round and these two small islands are just as good a centre as anywhere else”*

was a very gay Dutch widow of 42; Michael, who was then 13, played her sophisticated and cynical daughter of 18; Lili was Gopal, the prince of Annam (he was a painter, and a musician, and he had once been a pupil of the Hungarian pianist Lili Kraus); I was a wicked old Hungarian count of 65, who had been in very close friendship with the Dutch widow.

The scene was a Swiss luxury hotel. The time, five years after liberation. You can imagine how we had fun making the garage in which we lived look like a boudoir in a luxury hotel. The Dutch widow had been interned during the war and she had met Lili Kraus—of course! And the characters talked of having been to a Lili Kraus concert, which was never heard, but only discussed. We put in all the bad gossip we could think of. I invented the things people might be saying about us. Afterwards we found it was very much to the point! And the Dutch lady ordered meals in the Swiss hotel, and looking back to her time in the prison camp, she found it was not so bad. With her daughter she talked of how they had raised one single tomato, and that gave as much pleasure as gallons of chilled tomato juice from the luxury hotel. And there were long serious parts, about music, racial questions, and so on. There was an eight-minute lecture on why Vienna was the musical centre of Europe; Prince Gopal told how his father had indignantly objected to his marrying anything so low as a white woman (the Dutch daughter); there was

a passage on Russia as the great experiment in mixing Asiatic and European cultures; and a part on the sweet revenge of the negroes, whose music has so much life in it that their slave-drivers, all over the world are now compelled to sing and dance to their tunes. This part showed how very important this fact might be when some day the negro problem is solved, the negro assimilated by the white man, and their clash softened by the fact that in music the union has already been made—and so on and so on.”

### Guards Looked the Other Way

This play was meant for New Year’s Eve, 1944, Dr. Mandl said, but he fell into a gutter and was out of action for a while. In January of last year it was performed ten times before other internees. Actually, all gatherings were forbidden, and if permission had been asked it would have been refused, but the Japanese camp officers did not come near it, though they knew it was being performed. There were even visitors from another camp, who had to get permission to come for the evening. But no attempt was made to prohibit the play.

Dr. Mandl gave a lecture in Sydney for the Australian Institute of International Affairs, called “The World Impasse—Is there a Way Out?” In New Zealand he will give lectures on “Absolute Music” and on “World Literature”—a comparative study of writings in different languages.