

# ILAE and Epilepsy 1939–1945

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of Neurology took place in August 1939 in Copenhagen, and the ILAE held its sectional meeting at the conference, during a tense international situation. The League now had five chapters: United States (129 members), Britain (105 members), Holland (49 members) and Czechoslovakia (11 members). This was to be the last meeting for 10 years, as days later the Blitzkrieg started. The ILAE limped on with activity only in the United States, and *Epilepsia*, too, was continued almost entirely through the efforts of Lennox.

During the war, conditions for institutional patients with epilepsy in the occupied countries of continental Europe deteriorated – as it was said later, physically and morally to the level of the psychiatry of the Middle Ages. Initially, many patients were deprived of rights and sterilised. Then, in the early 1940s, a programme of killings ('euthanasia') of the handicapped was inaugurated, called *Action T4*. Physicians provided the names, and the victims were gassed or poisoned. It has been estimated that between 200,000 and 250,000 mentally and physically handicapped persons were murdered from 1939 to 1945 under the *Action T4* and other 'euthanasia' programmes.



Nazi propaganda poster concerning the cost of looking after the mentally defective