

BEGINNING OF BERLIN AJDC TRACING OFFICE

No search and tracing could be started unless one knew how many survivors of the Berlin Jewish Community had returned to Berlin and one had a list of their names and addresses. The Berlin Jewish Community registered all of its members who returned from concentration camps or from hiding. Inquiries came not only for those who survived, but also for the tens of thousands of deported whose fate was unknown. As mentioned previously, the mail received contained tracing requests for other European countries now liberated by the Allied Forces, and also tracing requests filed by surviving Jews in Germany for their relatives abroad. A complete list of the Berlin Jewish Community had to be prepared not only for our information, to indicate who was surviving in Berlin, but also to show who was to be serviced by us.

All aspects of AJDC activity were carried out through the Community, since it was the governing body for the Berlin German Jews. Compilations of the Berlin Jewish Community showed only 7822 members, out of which only 1778 were returned concentration camp prisoners. According to their statistics a total of 50535 persons were deported from Berlin of which 5100 survived the camps or lived in hiding. These are numbers which cannot be very well corroborated since some returned and settled in other communities in Germany and others emigrated to countries abroad. At one time the AJDC Tracing Office registered 1963 Jews in the US sector, 2868 in the Russian sector, 2229 in the British sector and 762 in the French sector.

With such complete lists our activities started. First, copies of lists prepared for us by the Gemeinde were dispatched to major cities in practically every country in the world. Immediately, thereafter, inquiries concerning former Berlin residents came pouring into this office.

Our staff consisted of three persons. Since no Reichspost (German Mail) was permitted, the whole correspondence was carried out either through the APO or through special couriers. UNRRA had a wide net of communication within the British, French and US Zones; approximately 500 UNRRA Teams operated in all Western Zones. The AJDC Berlin office covered not only the Berlin City, but also the whole Russian Zone of Germany. Without a single team within the Russian Zone we started to reorganize the Jewish Communities there. At the same time anti-Jewish hostilities in Poland forced many of the Jewish survivors to flee Poland and adjacent territories to seek safety in what was known as a haven for refugees: The US sector of Berlin and the US Zone of Germany. Thus, in addition to the 7000—8000 Berlin Jews on hand, the Berlin AJDC soon had to service approximately 3000 Polish infiltrees packed into transient homes and small camps in Berlin. These Polish infiltrees were registered, but very soon most of them were on their way to the US Zone and were replaced by others who had come into Berlin.

On November 21st, Mr. Skorneck dispatched his first letter from Berlin to the AJDC Headquarters. This was his first cry for help asking for food, clothing and medical supplies. These were the chief items needed for the almost starving Berlin Jewish population and those escaping pogroms in Poland. In his first letter he mentioned the organized search office which already then had dispatched several thousand packages and letters to survivors here in Berlin and to known recipients abroad.

Needless to say, the first supplies and material aid were most important, but the possibility of communicating with relatives abroad and of learning the fate of thousands of deported was of equal importance to the few survivors.

Most of the Berlin police precincts and registration bureaus were bombed out and 80 % of the wartime records were destroyed or hidden in territories outside of our jurisdiction. However, through registration at the Berlin Jewish Congregation we established an index not only of those who

returned from concentration camps and those who lived in hiding, but also obtained exact data on half-Jews who lived with their non-Jewish spouses throughout the war in Berlin and were not admitted into the Community. Such complete listings almost eliminated possibilities of not locating surviving Berlin Jews.



Partial view of the Berlin AJDC Tracing Office

In building up our search and tracing activity we at the same time rendered "emergency assistance" e. g. hundreds of cables were dispatched to old addresses known to our inquirers and an attempt was made to establish prompt contacts with relatives abroad. Regular tracing applications were dispatched almost every day. We were sorry to note that by the time replies to these "emergency inquiries" were received by our cooperating agencies, many of our inquirers were on their way to the western zones. It became most essential to learn of all transports leaving Berlin. Many left Berlin on their own and to keep control of all such movements, we looked to cooperating AJDC committees and other agencies throughout the world with whose assistance we could keep our indexes up to-date.

returned from concentration camps and those who lived in hiding but also obtained exact data on half-Jews who lived with their non-Jewish spouses throughout the war in Berlin and were not admitted into the Community. Such complete listings almost eliminated possibilities of not locating surviving Berlin Jews.

Partial view of the Berlin AIDC Working Office

In building up our search and tracing activity we at the same time rendered "emergency assistance," e.g. hundreds of cables were dispatched to old addresses known to our inquiries and an attempt was made to establish prompt contacts with relatives abroad. Regular tracing applications were dispatched almost every day. We were sorry to note that by the time replies to these "emergency inquiries" were received by our cooperating agencies many of our inquiries were on their way to the western zone. It became most essential to learn of all transports leaving Berlin. Many felt Berlin on their own and to keep control of all such movements, we looked to cooperating AIDC committees and other agencies throughout the world with whose assistance we could keep our indexes up-to-date.

