

Outlook

Like at most archives, libraries and other storage places for documents that note an intensive use of their records, a reformation of the access suggested itself at the ITS. The natural wear and tear in consequence of a frequent use as well as the decomposition of the acid paper made the limitations become visible more and more clearly. If a total loss of the information and/or the documents was supposed to be averted within the foreseeable future, speedy action would be necessary. In such a case, it really suggests itself to have recourse to computer solutions, because many of the open problems may be solved this way. If one looks soberly at the most diverse possibilities suddenly opening up, the restrictive general conditions, which are not to be neglected, also become evident. As greatest disadvantage of an electronic variant of document administration, for example, the lacking knowledge of the retention periods of stored data may be mentioned. Even though, at present, a "relatively short duration of retention" is to be proceeded from regarding this medium, two criteria speak in favour of the introduction – if only for security considerations – of such a procedure:

- the relatively low duplication costs of the data captured this way and
- the technical progress to be expected in this field in the near future

In the middle of the 1990s, those responsible for the ITS decided in favour of the introduction of a consistent computer administration and thus evaluation of the records preserved in Bad Arolsen. This, consequently, long before the latest flood of inquiries in connection with the settlement of the German Fund could be foreseen and therefore at a time when the number of incoming letters and the backlog

in processing resulting from it, however, had already risen enormously and when measures for heading off the threatening collapse became inevitable. A further simplification of the actual processing method was no longer feasible, the same as a hypothetical increase of the stock of personnel. After the numerous recruitment measures in the preceding years, the double burden particularly in the field of personnel – resulting from the necessary parallel settlement of an increased number of inquiries and implementation of an intensive training activity – became more and more apparent. The planned simplification of the processing of inquiries by electronic means helped to dispel still existing reservations, because it became possible to partly replace, thanks to an individual software, what had caused the greatest bottleneck, namely lacking knowledge and/or experience. The essential gain in the computerized procedure is, however, the evidently faster settlement of many steps of work. The conversion from pure paper archives into electronic archives, started years ago, is presently being continued purposefully. The originally designed concept has remained the same in its essential points. Owing to the tremendous progress in the field of information technology, little adaptations are being made permanently, which again and again give rise to pleasant new prospects.

Besides this, the International Commission is, now as before, dealing with the realization of the already decided extension of the mandates in respect of the opening of the personal records. Even though the general course – i.e. the amendment of Article 4 of the Bonn Agreements – has met with the consent of all, important agreements are still lacking regarding some questions of detail. As far as the subsequent practical implementation is concerned, the situation is the same, since the planned resolution also requires further discussions before an approval by all members. The uniform will of the Commission members to carry out the humanitarian as well as the his-

torical work concurrently gives rise to the hope of a conclusion of the debates soon.

In one point, all representatives are agreed: the expected end of the original task in the service of the "former persecutees themselves or their legal successors" will probably not be reached so soon. Considered from a realistic point of view, the termination of one mandate before taking up the next is therefore inconceivable, which is why the ITS is presently preparing an extension of its tasks according to the stipulations of its supervisory organ. This provides for the caseworkers at the Tracing Service to continue the humanitarian mandate and for third parties to do the historical research themselves. All this work on the ITS-documentation, however, is supposed to be carried out on the spot in Bad Arolsen.

This way, a precedent and thus a certain prospect for the future has been created. In the Bonn Agreements, the rights of ownership concerning the records preserved by the ITS are not laid down explicitly, considered from a juristic point of view. In two Commission meetings of the last years, the members have deferred the subject of the future organization of the ITS and its organs to the time after the completion of the humanitarian work. The unchanged large number of incoming mail, in 2001 and 2002 even the largest results ever achieved, directly influenced the decision for the near future to continue giving priority to the humanitarian work and, at the same time, to prepare respectively introduce a historical research. The large number of former persecutees still sending inquiries speaks against an uncontrolled opening from the point of view of those responsible, among other things for reasons of data protection.

Owing to the numerous current problems to be solved (increased efforts in the imaging project, solution of the acute conservation and restoration difficulties, as well as planning of the introduction of historical research), questions of the ownership and of the possible

juristic organs of the future ITS have presently moved into the background. Different variants are imaginable as, for instance, the establishment of a foundation whose members could be e.g. the governments represented in the International Commission today. Clear statements in this respect are presently turning out to be premature and only the consideration of theoretical models seems to be realistic.

Very topical, however, are, so many years after the events, still the concerns of the former persecutees of the National Socialist Regime, and therefore the tracing service work accomplished for this group of persons.

Roughly DM 106 billion (i.e. a little more than € 50 billion) have, until today, been paid by the Federal Republic of Germany for the indemnification of injustice suffered from the National Socialists. To this can be added DM 118.5 million that were voluntarily reimbursed by German industrial enterprises to victims for their forced labour²⁰.

Of the indemnification fund for forced labourers that is presently being settled, only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the DM 10 billion at disposal had been paid out by the end of the deadline for applications on 31st December 2001.

The current demands on the part of the inquirers force the ITS to fully take care of its humanitarian mandate in the interest of those concerned. It is necessary to help particularly the victims who are still alive – who, in many cases, have not even received any indemnification payment at all so far – in asserting their rights now, more than half a century after the events. As many other offices, the ITS feels especially obliged towards this group of persons, as long as the possibility of a direct assistance still exists at all. We all know that the dead do not have any advocates.