

## PREFACE

On behalf of the *Interessengemeinschaft Gehörloser jüdischer Abstammung in Deutschland* (IGJAD, Association of the Deaf of Jewish Ancestry in Germany), it is an honor to publish these conference proceedings.

The IGJAD was founded in 2001, with the goal of revitalizing the Deaf Jewish community and restoring its Jewish roots dating back to pre-Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe. We have already made significant strides toward that goal, even though we are still a young association. One of our milestones is the organization of this 6<sup>th</sup> Deaf History International Conference. At this conference, participants will examine the lives of Deaf Jewish people from a cultural, historical and sociological perspective, rather than from a religious perspective. Since the Soviet Union's dissolution, many Deaf Soviet Jewish people have immigrated to Germany. The IGJAD strives to share the Jewish heritage with them, a heritage that Communist regimes deprived them of. Moreover, we will continue to educate Jewish communities about Deaf members' communication needs. We also intend to address the German Deaf community, the Jewish public, the non-Jewish public, and especially Deaf young people, in order to promote discussion and to move towards the future together while remembering the past. Discussion will also take place on issues such as political and social discrimination against the Deaf community – particularly Deaf Jews, who are a minority within a minority. It is important to consider those issues and to find ways of dealing with both, the present and the future. It is highly appropriate that the motto of the conference is "Overcoming the past, determining its consequences and finding solutions for the present." Another topic is the status of Deaf History, with special regard to the interdisciplinary area of Deaf Arts within history. We will re-examine the terms *Deaf History*, establish goals and determine an agenda for the future. Equally important is the documentation of discrimination against Deaf people in the educational system, as well as prejudice against Deaf people as a minority. One conclusion to be drawn from this is the need for a closer look at Deaf History's relevance and status within the Deaf community over time and in Deaf Studies.

This conference is the first in Europe to focus on the eventful era of 1933-1945 with respect to the Deaf Jewish community: the Deaf Holocaust, forced sterilizations, mass evictions and large-scale escapes. There has only been one previous conference focusing on this topic, held at the Washington, D.C. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1998. It was followed by the 2002 publication of a volume of scholarly papers based on the presentations given there. However, research at that time was still in its infancy, and we have made great progress since then. Here at this conference, we have invited people to share updated research. I am very pleased to welcome the former pupils of the *Israelitische Taubstummenanstalt* (ITA, Israelite Institution for Deaf-mutes) Berlin-Weissensee, as well as Deaf survivors of the Holocaust. The ITA, between 1873 and 1942, attracted students from distant places, including Palestine. There were only 52 Deaf Jews among the Deaf Berlin population of 627 in 1872. The ITA transformed Berlin into the center of a large Deaf Jewish population that peaked at 600, as documented in several issues of *Das Band*, a Deaf Jewish magazine published for an audience in and outside of Germany. The editor

of *Das Band* was Dr. Felix Reich, the principal of *ITA Berlin-Weissensee* and son of the ITA-founder Markus Reich.

The publishers of *Das Band* included three organizations:

1. *Verein zur Förderung der Interessen der israelitischen Taubstummen Deutschlands e.V.* (Association for the Promotion of the Interests of Israeli Deaf-mutes in Germany)
2. *Verein ehemaliger Zöglinge der Israelitischen Taubstummen-Anstalt zu Weissensee e.V.* (The Alumni Association of ITA in Weissensee), which existed from 1908 to 1935. This organization also had a junior Deaf group, for which any Deaf Jewish person up to 25 years of age was eligible for membership.
3. The *ITA Berlin-Weissensee*. The ITA Berlin-Weissensee provided Jewish education and religious services in sign language in their own synagogue. It took account of the needs of Deaf Jews, with the cantor signing while facing the audience instead of turning his back on it in order to pray towards Jerusalem. There were also three Jewish Deaf schools in Vienna (1844-1926), Budapest (1877-1944 and 1948) and London (1865-1965) and some classes in Prague and Lodz<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there was a Zionist Deaf Society in Vienna.

As a result, Deaf Jewish networks thrived internationally before the 1931 Congress, not only in Germany. In 1931, the International Congress of Jewish Deaf was held in Prague, with participants from several countries including Germany, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and elsewhere. The German delegate Erwin Kaiser was elected president. However, the congress faced criticism from German Deaf people and *Die Stimme*, a Deaf German newspaper and also the voice of REGEDE, published an editorial reeking of anti-Semitism<sup>2</sup>. The editorial criticized the congress for “upstaging” REGEDE, arguing that the REGEDE should represent all Deaf Germans regardless of religious or political affiliation and that there was no need for a World Association which would only earn belittling smiles and shrugs from the government. The next congress was scheduled to take place in Berlin in 1934, but did not take place because of the rise of the Nazi regime. In 1943, Kaiser was deported to Auschwitz. It is people like him that we should commemorate here.

In 1932, a documentary, *Verkannte Menschen* (Misjudged People), was filmed on the ITA premises in Berlin. The film demonstrated the exclusion of Deaf people from society and illustrated that a Deaf person could be as “good” as anyone else. Based upon recent discussions about the Anti-Discrimination Act, current genetics research, and medical advances in eliminating deafness through cochlear implantation, it is clear that mistreatment of Deaf Germans continues to exist.

Another exciting event at this conference is the unique opportunity to revisit and revive the spirit of Erwin Kaiser. He was the president of the *Bund der israelitischen gehörlosen*

---

1 There was also a Deaf Jewish school in Warsaw.

2 There were also later anti-Semitic articles and calls for Deaf Jews not to be trusted.

*Europas* (European Jewish Deaf Union) which was established by Bogumil Liban in Krakow, Poland in 1930. Kaiser was also the president of the *Weltbund der jüdischen Gehörlosen* (World Union of Jewish Deaf) in 1931, and was the president of the *Verein zur Förderung der Interessen der israelitischen Taubstummen Deutschlands e.V.* (Association for the Promotion of the Interests of Israelite Deaf-mutes in Germany) for more than 30 years. This association was established in 1896, celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1936, with 400 Deaf Jewish Berliners representing two-thirds of the Deaf Jewish German population. Seventy years later, we have an international Deaf Jewish event in Berlin. We want to revitalize Deaf Jewish life at this conference.<sup>3</sup> Kaiser helped to establish the retirement home for Deaf Jews in Berlin. In December 1933 the *Reichsbund der jüdischen Gehörlosen* (The German Reich's Union of the Jewish Deaf) was established because of the exclusion of Deaf Jewish persons from several associations due to the Aryan exclusion law (Arierparagraph). It later changed to the *Bund der jüdischen Gehörlosen*, led by Erwin Kaiser. Between 1934 and 1936, this association was forcibly merged with other Jewish Deaf clubs into one organization, *Selbsthilfegruppe der jüdischen Taubstummen* (Jewish Deaf-mute Self-Help Group), which was placed under the control of the *Selbsthilfegemeinschaft der jüdischen Körperbeschädigten in Deutschland* (Self-help Society of the Jewish Physically Disabled in Germany) founded by the *Zentralwohlfahrstelle der deutschen Juden*, the German Jewish Welfare Agency. As a result, the control of the individual Deaf Jewish organizations was lost to hearing German Jewish people who were not aware of the specific needs of Deaf people.

This conference is also an opportunity to remember people like Paul Kroner. In the same documentary film mentioned previously, Kroner is described as a self-employed dentist with his own office. He and others were excluded from the *Reichsverband der Gehörlosen in Deutschland* (REGEDE, the German Reich Deaf Association) because of its rules<sup>4</sup>, even though he was one of the founders. He was also actively involved as co-founder and a board member for more than 30 years with the *Berliner Taubstummen-Schwimmverein von 1900 e.V.* (BTSV), the major sporting club of that time in Germany. He was also an honorary member. He was deported in 1943. To date, Kroner and others still have not been commemorated by REGEDE's successor, the *Deutscher Gehörlosen Bund* (DGB, German Deaf Association). This is difficult to understand, because the ITA superintendent Dr. Felix Reich gave a stirring speech of encouragement on the day REGEDE was founded, with several Deaf Jewish REGEDE board members such as Alphons Levy (a merchant who was deported to Lodz, Poland), Martin Kaiser (Erwin Kaiser's Deaf brother, who was deported to Auschwitz), and Willy Oppenheimer (who initiated and paved the way for the retirement home for Jewish Deaf persons; he survived through inter-marriage). Among others who were active in the German Deaf community and survived

---

3 Deaf Jewish life flourished in Germany, as evidenced by Deaf Jewish clubs in German provinces like Westphalia and the Rhineland: Gelsenkirchen was chaired by Eugen Traub and Dortmund by Max Ransberg. Further Deaf Jewish local organizations were in Düsseldorf (Ludwig Mainzer), Frankfurt am Main (Jewish Deaf-Mute Association, headed by Max Blumenthal and Ruth Jacob). There was also a Deaf Jewish-affiliated association in Silesia (now Poland), headed by Rosenthal in Breslau (the Silesian capital, now Polish Wrocław).

4 Deaf Jews were no longer eligible to be members of the Deaf Association and were excluded.

through mixed marriage are Martin Czempin and Felix London. Both were presidents of major associations.

We also should honor Horst Biesold, the renowned author of *Klagende Hände* (Crying Hands), a book about the forced sterilization of Deaf people; and David Bloch, a Dachau concentration camp detainee famous for his Holocaust artworks; as well as Jacob Gersten on whose photographs the exhibition about the ITA in 1994 was based on. They all preserved the “World of Deaf Jews”. It is unfortunate that no memorial has been erected for the murdered Deaf Jews to this day, except for a plaque at the ITA in eastern Berlin. It would be appropriate for a monument to be erected in central Berlin, like the Holocaust Memorial Hall.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome participants from 28 different countries. On behalf of the IGJAD board, I thank you all for coming here!

Mark Zaurov  
Coordinator, 6<sup>th</sup> DHI Conference

Thanks

We thank all who supported our goal in coordinating the conference. Special thanks go to Olaf Scholz, MdB (Member of the German Parliament) and his SPD (Social Democratic Party) office, and Dr. Harald Schlüter from the University of Hamburg. They provided invaluable advice in setting up the conference.

The Humboldt University of Berlin also supported us, especially Dagmar Oehler and Eva-Maria Kolb, who helped with our organizational needs.

We also thank Nicola Galliner for providing us with the 1994 ITA exhibition materials, as well as the Paulinenpflege Winnenden for permission to show David Bloch's painting, *Mein Lebenslauf* (My Resume). We are also very grateful to our members, colleagues and staff, to the presenters and our two German sponsors, the *Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* (BMBF, Federal Ministry of Education and Research) and *Aktion Mensch e.V.* (The German Aid for the Handicapped Association) who have contributed to this conference. We also thank the Hans-Böckler foundation for their cooperation regarding education certification and to the Foundation Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe to provide us a room in the preparation time. The same thanks go to the *Stiftung Mitarbeit* (Cooperative Foundation) for their support for the start of the preparation of the project. Our thanks are also directed to Aneta Chavizon for lending us a helping hand.

We thank Prof. Dr. Bencie Woll and Oya Ataman for their helpful comments and proofreading of the following articles: Deaf Holocaust, Closing Panel and Conclusion.

Thanks to Newby Ely for his generous support and Oya Ataman for her kind help in editing of the texts for Panel 1 and Panel 2.

Last, but not least, we also thank the staff, the lecturers, panelists and participants for their contributions in making the conference an excellent event. We apologize in advance if we have inadvertently and unintentionally overlooked anyone we should thank.

Mark Zaurov & Klaus-B. Günther