

Fear and Misery in the Third Reich: From the Files of the Collective Guardianship Office of the Berlin Jewish Community¹

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"Guardian and ward have left. There are no assets." This was the terse formulation used by the National Association of Jews in Germany (Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland) in the 1940s when it had to "propose" to the county court that a guardianship be terminated. It was the closing comment for most of the 106 extant individual case files of the collective guardianship (*Sammelvormundschaft*) that had been administered by the Berlin Jewish Community. While these files contain numerous indications that the original number must have been far larger,² that incompleteness does not detract in any way from the historical value of what has been preserved. In particular, the materials cast new light on a phenomenon that has tended to be treated only marginally in historical research on the Berlin Jewish Community: poverty within the Jewish population, with all the concomitant social, psychological, and material consequences for the families involved.

¹ The German original of this article was published in "Elend und Furcht im Dritten Reich: Aus den Akten der Sammelvormundschaft der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (45) 1997, pp. 617-641.

² Thus, though there are occasional references to other wards, these files have not been preserved. Moreover, in the collection of existing files, which exist in alphabetical order according to the last names of the children, a number of initial letters are lacking. The material is part of the files of the Berlin Jewish Community (Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin) deposited in the General Archives of German Jewry, housed since 1958 in the German Central Archives in Potsdam, and now located in the archives of the foundation "Neue Synagoge Berlin - Centrum Judaicum" (CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, Nos. 337-457); see Barbara Welker, "Das Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden," in Hermann Simon and Jochen Boberg, eds., *Tuet auf die Pforten. Die Neue Synagoge 1866/1995*, exhibition catalogue (1995). The Reichsvereinigung, established in February 1939, and supervised by the Gestapo, was the compulsory organization of all "Jews by race" (*Rassejuden*) in Nazi Germany. From that time on, the Jewish communities were termed "Kultusvereinigungen" and functioned as local branches of the Reichsvereinigung until its official disbandment in June 1943. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Barbara Welker, director of the CJA, and her associate Sabine Hank for their kind and competent assistance.

Various authors have pointed out that it is high time to revise the old cliché of (upper) middle-class Jewish Berlin, since, even before 1933, the wealthy Jewish lawyer or doctor living in the western neighborhoods of the city was by no means representative of the economic norm in the broader community.³ Yet even in these diverse studies, so rich in substantive material, "poverty" remains largely an abstract statistical variable; seldom is the fate of the individual highlighted and made palpable. In the cases discussed below, that dimension is described *in concreto*.

Nevertheless, even in these files, the predominant perspective on the lives of those affected is external: the outsider's view of the welfare agencies in dealing with their clientele. Rarely are the voices of those harried individuals heard; they are articulated here mainly in the form of petitions to the guardian. Of course, the descriptions in these texts often had an underlying purpose, and any interpretation must take that into careful account.

A further aspect under focus here and closely linked with poverty is that of illegitimate children and their mothers. Negligible in quantitative terms, this group has received comparatively little attention to date. Their numbers were artificially augmented after 1933, due to diverse measures in racial legislation, such as deprivation of citizenship, prohibitions on marriage and the like. It will be shown below that when it came to deportations, the legal status of illegitimacy was a factor that could prove crucial in determining the life or death of children classified as "half-Jews" ("*Mischlinge*") or "*Geltungsjuden*" (literally, persons "legally regarded as Jewish"). Moreover, the extant case documentation from Berlin once again clearly underscores a salient fact of life during the period of Nazi persecution: in the context of the oft-described process of forced pauperization of German Jewry, those who had always

³ For a general treatment, see Donald L. Niewyk, "The Impact of Inflation and Depression on the German Jews," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book (LBIYB)* 28 (1983), pp. 19-36; for Berlin: Gabriel Alexander, "Berlin Jewry and Their Community During the Weimar Period, 1919-1933," dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995 (Hebrew, English summary); *idem*, "Die jüdische Bevölkerung Berlins in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts: Demographische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklungen," in Reinhard Rürup, ed., *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Essays und Studien* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), pp. 117-148; for the period after 1933: Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation. The Economic Struggle of German Jews 1933-1943* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989; German original, *Vom Boykott zur "Entjudung"* [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988]).

occupied the rock bottom of the social scale were the first to be stripped of all prospects for existence, and in their case the effects were most enduring.

Whereas previous research on the ordeal of Berlin's Jews has been based largely on the description of Nazi governmental policy and the testimony of those who managed to survive by emigrating abroad, by hiding inside Germany, or by living in the protective shell of a "privileged" mixed marriage, the files of the collective guardianship office constitute a useful supplement to the historical literature on the persecution in the German capital.⁴

The Collective Guardianship of the Berlin Jewish Community

In Imperial Germany, and parallel to analogous developments in Christian and secular welfare, the Jewish communities began to expand traditional welfare for the poor by centralizing and specializing services into an effective, modern social-work network.⁵ The creation of the collective guardianship office in 1913, under the umbrella of the welfare and youth office of the Jewish Community, should also be viewed in this context.

A dual objective appears to have guided the initiator's thinking: first, to incorporate such "problem cases" (and most were indeed of this type) into the framework of the general welfare provisions of the community right from the start. Second, to assure that these children would remain within the Jewish

⁴ In addition, there are a few memoirs by Berlin Jews who survived the camps; see, for example, Hildegard Henschel, "Aus der Arbeit der Jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin während der Jahre 1941-1943. Gemeindegarbeit und Evakuierung von Berlin," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden* 9, no. 1/2 (1972), pp. 33-52; Martha Mosse, "Erinnerungen" (Berlin: 1963; ms., Leo Baeck Institute, New York, Ar.-ME 751); Manfred Fackenheim-Field, "Tatsachen über die letzten Jahre der Jüdischen Gemeinde in Berlin 1943 und die KZ-Zeit bis 1945" (Chicago: 1963; ms., Yad Vashem Archives, [YVA] 08/108). On the history of Berlin Jewry during the National-Socialist dictatorship, see Hans Gerd Sellenthin, *Geschichte der Juden in Berlin und des Gebäudes Fasanenstrasse 79-80. Festschrift anlässlich der Einweihung des jüdischen Gemeindehauses* (Berlin: Jüdische Gemeinde, 1959); Annegret Ehmann *et al.*, *Juden in Berlin 1671-1945. Ein Lesebuch* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1988); Hermann Simon, "Die Berliner Juden unter dem Nationalsozialismus," in Arno Herzog and Ina Lorenz, with Saskia Rohde, eds., *Verdrängung und Vernichtung der Juden unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Christians, 1992), pp. 249-266; *Die Grunewald-Rampe. Die Deportation der Berliner Juden* (Berlin: Landesbildstelle Berlin, 1993); Wolf Gruner, "Die Reichshauptstadt und die Verfolgung der Berliner Juden 1933-1945," in Rürup, *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin*, pp. 229-266.

⁵ For a general treatment, see Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 195-199; to date, this process has been investigated only for a few Jewish communities in Germany, see Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, *Die jüdische Minderheit in Königsberg 1871-1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 112-121.

community. The municipal youth offices, legally entrusted with guardianship functions under the supervision of the county courts, were authorized to delegate custodial powers not only to individuals, but also to institutions. This included the legally incorporated, autonomous Jewish Communities, the *Gemeinden*.

According to Para. 35, 41, of the Reich Youth Welfare Law of 1922, a legal guardian was appointed for any illegitimate child or orphan; indeed, such cases make up the overwhelming majority of those preserved in the files. A guardian could also be appointed if a child had no "suitable person having custodial authority," such as in cases when parents, suspected of parental neglect, had been stripped by the court of authority over their child or the right to its representation (Para. 1773, German Civil Code). In addition, a legal guardian could be named if it were impossible to determine the family status of a minor. Some children from broken homes were also appointed a legal guardian; in most instances in order to assert their legal claims via an arrangement of maintenance *in loco parentis* (*Unterhaltspflegschaft*). Still another subgroup, especially after 1933, were children who had emigrated; their financial interests were represented by a so-called property trust (*Vermögenspflegschaft*).

In the 1940s, the collective guardianship office in Berlin was required to take on some cases from other cities; therefore, wards from Frankfurt am Main, Breslau, and Mannheim are also to be found in the Berlin files.⁶ Between 1913 and 1943, a total of over 3,000 children and adolescents were in the custodial care of the collective guardianship office of the Berlin Jewish Community.⁷

The legally appointed task of the guardian was to represent the ward in all legal matters; in practice, this meant primarily to represent the child in connection with paternity suits and claims for maintenance against fathers unwilling to provide support. In addition, responsibility for the well-being of the

⁶ Cf., for example, the maintenance *in loco parentis* arranged for Helga Zickrick, CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 448; and the trusteeships for the emigrated youths Ursula Mann, Horst Mayer, Traute Noafeldt, and Eva and Marion Renzer, *ibid.*, nos. 391, 393, 400, 453; likewise the guardianship cases of Wolfgang Moses (Breslau), Gisela Rabe (Frankfurt am Main), and Judis Rubin (Mannheim), *ibid.* nos. 398, 403, 417.

⁷ See Ernst G. Lowenthal, *Bewährung im Untergang. Ein Gedenkbuch* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1965), p. 110.

child led, where necessary, to provision of comprehensive care, organized in close cooperation with the other departments of the welfare and youth office (and included accommodations, day-care facilities, school lunches, and vacations at summer camp). These services were handled by female social workers in the various welfare districts of the Berlin Jewish Community.

Although the collective guardianship office had only a very modest budget for special expenses,⁸ its importance as a key component of youth social services became ever more evident in the 1920s. At this time new approaches aimed at modernizing social-welfare practices began to emphasize "early recognition" and "preventive measures." Thus, for example, Fritz Lamm, head of the collective guardianship office, put forward an impassioned plea in June 1921, at a session of the "Composite Committee for Reorganizing Welfare Services in the Jewish Community," for a corresponding revamping of welfare work. To support his arguments, he cited an example drawn from his own area of expertise:

In an especially well-known case, stepwise assistance developed as follows: the first to act was the Relief Fund for the Indigent, then came the Commission for the Poor; after the father's death, the Orphans' Commission became involved. With the increasing negative influence exercised by the widowed mother on her children, the Welfare Commission felt it necessary to step in. Finally, the Collective Guardianship Office entered the picture. Now one cannot simply maintain that these children would have fallen into bad ways anyhow because of the negative traits inherited from their mother. A custodial arrangement at the proper time, not just for the provision of needed support, but including measures for the planned early preventive care of these children, would have improved matters significantly.⁹

Yet Fritz Lamm (1876-1942), by training a lawyer, was not just the driving force behind the development of the collective guardianship office into a coordinating node for a range of welfare and educational measures. The files clearly indicate that he also represented the legal interests of his wards, particularly when it came to fathers reluctant to provide support. In this he was extremely tenacious and enormously committed. Lamm was appointed

⁸ In 1929 and 1930, for example, there were RM 6,000 allocated for this purpose; see "Das Budget der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin für das Jahr 1930," CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 129, fol. 60.

⁹ Minutes of the meeting, June 9, 1921, *ibid.*, no. 61, fols. 24f.

attorney for the community in 1924; soon thereafter he took on the job of deputy head of the welfare and youth office, continuing in this capacity until 1942. From 1933 on, he was assisted by Dora Silbermann (1882-1942), director of community youth welfare services.

On October 20, 1942, the Gestapo issued a deportation order for more than 500 employees of the Jewish community, i.e. it ordered the departmental heads in the Jewish communal administration to select staff for deportation. Dora Silbermann broke down, unable to carry out the command.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, on November 29, 1942, she too was deported to Auschwitz. Twenty community employees attempted to flee; three of these (according to other accounts, two) were soon apprehended or turned themselves in to the authorities. The response by the Gestapo was to seize twenty hostages. Twelve (other reports indicate ten) of these hostages were deported; eight were shot dead. Fritz Lamm was among those executed.¹¹ His functions were then taken over by Oskar Guttman, who continued at the job until the community was dissolved and its remaining staff workers were deported in May-June 1943. Later, Bernhard Baruch and Richard Rockmann, earlier head of the Welfare District Southwest, administered the last collective guardianship cases as part of the terminal activities of the "rump" Reich Association of Jews in Germany.¹²

Poverty in the Jewish Community

¹⁰ According to a note written by Silbermann that same day (October 20, 1942), she was urged on by SS Obersturmbannführer Günther with the following words: "Come on, just hurry up. Look, you can switch some people later on," CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 14, fol. 110f; cf. also Lowenthal, *Bewährung*, p. 157.

¹¹ See the list of the staff of the "*Jüdische Kultusvereinigung Berlin*," the deportation lists for 1942, and the associated correspondence, *ibid.*, no. 14; a facsimile copy of these lists is reproduced in Reinhard Rürup, ed., *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Bilder und Dokumente. Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung der Stiftung "Topographie des Terrors"* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), p. 322; Mosse, "Erinnerungen," p. 11; Bruno Blau, "Vierzehn Jahre Not und Schrecken," (ms., New York: 1952), partially reproduced in Monika Richarz, ed., *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1918-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), pp. 459-475, p. 474, fn. 3; on Lamm, cf. also Lowenthal, *Bewährung*, pp. 110-111.

¹² These and all subsequent data regarding deportation are based on *Gedenkbuch Berlins der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, Rita Meyhöfer et al., eds., Central Institute for Social Research, Free University of Berlin (Berlin, Edition Hentrich, 1995). After June 1943, the disbanded Reichsvereinigung existed as a so-called "Rest-Reichsvereinigung" until 1945; see Barkai, *Boycott*, pp. 184-185.

In Wilhelminian Germany, Berlin's Jewish population had been largely middleclass; it remained so down into the Weimar period. However, after World War I, a growing influx of Jews from Eastern Europe and the economic crises of the 1920s led to increasing social differentiation within the Jewish community in Germany, a phenomenon especially pronounced in the German capital.

While old-age pensioners, small independent businessmen, and independent professionals had been particularly hard hit by the great inflation, the Depression that began in 1929 also struck blue-collar and white-collar workers; in 1925, these latter categories accounted for nearly half of all Jews gainfully employed in Berlin.¹³ The jobless also had to contend with mounting antisemitism in the labor market. This was probably one of the reasons why more and more Jews began to seek out the Jewish Employment Bureau, i.e., the labor placement office operated by the community. In 1931, a total of 14,560 men and women were registered there.

In the view of Jakob Lestschinky, an economic analyst of the day, the real figure was probably a third larger, since many job-seekers were not registered with the Bureau. In Lestschinky's estimate, the total number of Jewish unemployed at the beginning of the 1930s amounted to approximately one-quarter of all Jewish wage earners.¹⁴ The situation among Jewish teens – the generation of future parents of community wards - was especially dramatic. Given the myriad constraints, few had any prospects for vocational or industrial training. In order to provide some help and also to keep them "off the streets," the community social-welfare services instituted special schemes, including training courses for domestics, saleswomen, and craft apprentices. In 1932, there were also two community-operated residential homes for male teens, where they could be looked after in an intensive framework.¹⁵

¹³ See Niewyk, "Inflation," pp. 23-26; Alexander, "Jüdische Bevölkerung," p. 135.

¹⁴ See Jakob Lestschinsky, *Das wirtschaftliche Schicksal des deutschen Judentums. Aufstieg, Wandlung, Krise, Ausblick* (Berlin: Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der deutschen Juden, 1932), pp. 151, 156.

¹⁵ See *Mitteilungen des Wohlfahrts- und Jugendfürsorgeamtes der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin* 4, no. 1/5 (1932), pp. 5-7.

However, a submerged sector of unemployed workers slipped through the official nets of the labor offices: for the most part, working women, and rising numbers of independent small traders and craftsmen whose income levels had been slashed as a result of the economic crisis and the concomitant plunge in consumer purchasing power. Just how rapid that social decline could be is illustrated by the plight of Arthur and Valeska Aron. The Arons ran a small men's clothing shop in Schöneberg. By 1931, they were no longer able to get by on the dwindling income from plummeting sales. After failing to pay their rent and other debts, their furniture and stock were impounded; in May 1932, they received an eviction notice. Arthur Aron moved with his wife and four children to a cramped two-room apartment. He tried his luck as a merchant at the market, but with no success. By the end of 1932, Arthur Aron was totally dependent on help from public and Jewish welfare agencies.¹⁶

Due to the lack of statistical data, the precise extent of pauperization in the Jewish population during this period can be gauged only indirectly, based on rising community expenditures for welfare. It is important to note that, at this point in time, such communal assistance was regarded solely as a supplement to government welfare payments. Yet even before 1933, state welfare offices had begun to tighten the screws on one category of the needy aid applicants — those without German citizenship in 1925, who accounted for some 25 percent of Berlin's Jewish population. A 1932 report by the Jewish welfare office alludes to this problem: “Recently there have been more and more cases in which the regional welfare association offices have informed needy foreigners that if they should continue to make use of public support, they would seek an order for their deportation.”¹⁷

Such threats and discrimination were undoubtedly one of the reasons why many community members preferred to knock immediately on the doors of the Jewish welfare offices. That trend is evidenced in the files by the numerous letters to applicants advising them to apply first for municipal welfare assistance. Although its budget was being constantly expanded, the Berlin Community welfare office was ill-prepared to cope with the deluge of requests

¹⁶ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 337, fols. 2-26.

¹⁷ *Mitteilungen des Wohlfahrts- und Jugendfürsorgeamtes der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin* 4, no. 1/5 (1932), p. 10.

in the 1920s, especially since it had to get along on less revenue as a result of the drop in income from taxes and contributions. In 1933, the recipients of welfare benefits almost equaled the number of Jewish Community taxpayers.¹⁸

In keeping with their concept of "preventive action" and "helping people help themselves," employees at the welfare office tried to tailor the aid package to the individual. They sought to assist applicants to get on their own two feet as soon as possible, but were not always successful. Though often praised as "efficient and hardworking," the loans given to Arthur Aron, for example, as seed money for his market stand ended in failure.¹⁹

As always, the children bore the initial brunt of the social crisis. The youth office endeavored to provide speedy assistance and tend to their most pressing needs. In one case, the daughters of Jetty Szarfscher, who had been abandoned by her husband, were described as "anemic but clean." In 1928, their mother collapsed while at work and was sacked from her job at Siemens; the family was now compelled to live on a meager pittance of RM 28 a month. The youth office then stepped in: the children were placed in the community-run day-care center and provided with essential clothing.²⁰

Hugo Schön, born in 1925, spent his early years in even greater hardship. The small boy lived with his parents in a basement apartment at Grenadierstrasse 26; he was seldom taken out, since his mother, determined to supplement the small family income, worked half-time in their store or part-time elsewhere. The social worker assigned to his case described the apartment as "damp, dark, filthy and a mess"; she urgently requested that Hugo be placed in a day-care facility, and this was finally arranged.²¹ Income from the family shoe store had been minimal for some time, and Charlotte Schön found herself constrained again and again to request her son's guardian for help:

¹⁸ See Rürup, ed., *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Bilder und Dokumente*, pp. 209-215.

¹⁹ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 337, fol. 29; see also no. 386, fols. 1a, 11, 45, 47, the case of Martha Lewin.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 443, fols. 1a, 2, 26 (quotation).

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 429, fols. 1, 10 (quotation), 13, 14.

Sad to say, there's nothing I can do for my son. He's eighteen months old now and a big boy. I can't afford a bed, so he still has to sleep in a tiny basket. Now I have to make sure my child develops normally, does not get stunted, so I'd like to ... ask you to help me get a little cot. Please believe me, doctor, I wouldn't have turned to you for such a favor. But the dire situation I'm in leaves me no choice.²²

In the early years of the Nazi dictatorship, the economic plight of these families changed less dramatically than the situation of the university graduates and professionals hit by the first wave of discriminatory legislation. Though many were abruptly sacked or barred from practicing in 1933, they often managed to get by with help from well-to-do relatives or by using assets of their own. One such example was the father of Dorothea Littauer: a former lawyer, he was employed in 1937, working in his brother-in-law's sewing-machine factory.²³ But those who had been at the bottom of the social pyramid even before 1933, had no such options; moreover, now the Jewish jobless had virtually no chance of being reintegrated into the labor market. At the same time, despite the generally strong economy and the declining Jewish population as a result of emigration, their ranks continued to burgeon, especially among white-collar workers. In 1933, more than 20,000 job-seekers were on the rolls of the Jewish Employment Bureau in Berlin; two years later, that figure had soared to nearly 30,000.²⁴

The independent, small shopkeepers and craft artisans came to feel the effects of this surging tide of pauperization, compounded by the barrage of anti-Jewish boycotts and other local antisemitic measures. Most, such as the hosiery merchant Salomon Fichtelberg and his wife, tried somehow to keep afloat in their previous line of business.²⁵ Others, as one social worker put it, lived in "rather dubious" economic circumstances, say by "trafficking in various kinds of used goods" or the like. Women and girls would hire themselves out as domestics, but some became entangled in likewise questionable situations of personal dependency.²⁶

²² Ibid., fol. 11.

²³ Ibid., no. 388, fols. 4, 14.

²⁴ Figures based on Clemens Vollnhals, "Jüdische Selbsthilfe bis 1938," in: Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945. Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft* (Munich: Beck, 1988), pp. 314-411, 375-376.

²⁵ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 374, fols. 1-7.

²⁶ Ibid., no. 363, fols. 1b, 7 (quotation), 31.

In 1936, Jakob Lestschinsky vividly described the consequences of the creeping erosion of Jewish economic life in Germany in the early years of the Nazi regime:

Some 20 to 22 percent of the Jewish population today is already more or less dependent on welfare. Twenty to 25 percent are living on their last savings.... Whoever has children and was somehow able to manage, has sent them abroad. His hope now is to receive some good news, and that redeeming message requesting him to come to the new homeland, the homeland of the children. Whoever is childless sits and counts his coins, and prays to heaven that his years will not outlast, God forbid, his handful of marks. Earning a living — and maybe in some cases a quite decent one — that's something only 10 to 15 percent of the Jewish population, at the most, are able to do. The rest have just enough to scrimp by on.²⁷

And some did not even have that. The debilitating physical effects of the social crisis now began to make themselves felt, especially among the long-term unemployed. Thus, a medical report from August 1934 states that the laborer, Frieda Burau, 33, was suffering from malnutrition and "general physical debility."²⁸ The files contain a similar report on Valeska Aron, who, in the summer of 1935, struck the welfare worker assigned to her as looking "quite wretched," and was run down from "nervous exhaustion and loss of strength."²⁹ Her husband's condition was hardly any better. He had been called in 1934 to work short-term at emergency labor; though the family weekly income of RM 26.38 was only 2 marks more than what they had received on the dole, the Arons now had to spend more on food, because, as his wife commented, "he can't work all day long on a diet of just bread and margarine."³⁰

The Jewish welfare services, by now hopelessly overtaxed, had only one option: to attempt to ease the more serious hardships in such cases. Wherever possible, the unemployed were fixed up with small jobs in communal institutions; their families were given clothing, rent allowances, food, coal, and other material assistance. Their children, after April 1936,

²⁷ Quoted from Barkai, *Boycott*, pp. 108-109; see also *ibid.*, pp. 92-99, 106-109.

²⁸ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 437, fols. 7 (quotation), 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 337, fols. 58-59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 102 (Aron in the meantime was employed in conscripted labor, at even lower wages); see also *ibid.*, fol. 33.

barred from non-Jewish day-care facilities in Berlin,³¹ were placed in community-run institutions or given special small presents on Jewish holidays like Hanukkah. But the basic approach remained a policy of initial referral of the needy to the municipal welfare offices in order to request the aid to which they were legally entitled. Only in cases in which the Jewish social workers believed there was "scant prospect for success" because, for example, the applicants were not German citizens — was it deemed prudent to bypass the municipal authorities.³²

Beginning in 1933, and even without any basis in National-Socialist legislation, those same authorities sought to badger Jews on welfare and discriminate against them wherever possible. One degrading tactic, for example, was to give them second-hand clothing so shabby it was no longer wearable.³³ A more serious harassment was to reduce the payments recipients were entitled to and cancel their supplementary benefits.³⁴ In October 1934, Arthur Aron informed the Jewish welfare office about his dealings with the municipal authorities in connection with the birth of his baby:

On August 28, my wife gave birth at the Jewish Hospital on Exerzierstrasse; the charges amounted to 65 marks. Since I'm unemployed and the municipality refused to cover the bill, I made an extra effort to contact the municipality personally in order to save the community these expenses. The upshot is that they granted me 32 marks for the midwife, along with a supplement of 10 marks, though on the condition that my wife's maternity benefit of 23 marks be included in the package as part of payment. They said that if my wife didn't agree, the city would refuse to pay anything. Then the Jewish Community would have had to foot the entire bill. I hope my wife acted as you would have wanted.³⁵

³¹ See Wolf Gruner, *Judenverfolgung in Berlin. Eine Chronologie der Behördenmassnahmen in der Reichshauptstadt* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1996), p. 39.

³² Thus, for example, in connection with applying for a maintenance allowance for the stateless daughter of Salomon Fichtelberg; see CJA 1 75 A, Be 2, no. 374, fol. 7.

³³ For example, in a letter to Lamm in 1935, Arthur Aron wrote about just such an experience he had had; Aron asked Lamm to try to understand why he no longer wished to request assistance from the municipality, "especially since conditions today haven't improved after all"; see *ibid.*, no. 337, fol. 62.

³⁴ See Wolf Gruner, "Die öffentliche Fürsorge und die deutschen Juden 1933 – 1942, Zur antijüdischen Politik der Städte, des Deutschen Gemeindetages und des Reichsinnenministeriums," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (45) 1997, pp. 597-616.

³⁵ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 337, fol. 45. The next child was born at home.

Even subordinate municipal offices frequently took matters into their own hands. Thus, in December 1937, the district office in the Prenzlauer Berg section of Berlin slashed the monthly child allowance for 10-year-old Ruth Schuster from RM 13 to RM 8 — no reason was given. Prior to March 31, 1938, when the Berlin mayor ordered that all benefits provided by Jewish institutions be applied in full to the total amount of public-welfare assistance due a recipient.³⁶ In September 1938, the district office in Pankow cancelled further payments to cover accommodation costs in a children's home for the eleven-month-old infant Rolf Kreiner³⁷ again, without a written justification. That same month, the welfare office in the Berlin Mitte district rejected an application for a child allowance for Michael Scharff, aged six months. This time the reason stated left no room for doubt: Otilie Reich, the child's mother, said she had been informed that "the city of Berlin has its hands full providing for Aryan children."³⁸ The ordinance of November 19, 1938, finally bundled together the previous arbitrary measures into a nationwide exclusion order barring all Jews in Germany from receiving public welfare. The impact was disastrous and immediate: from one day to the next, the lives of women like Otilie Reich deteriorated dramatically. After her welfare and rent allowance had been cancelled, she wrote on January 8, 1939, to her son's guardian: "I don't know what's gonna happen.... As you know, ... the boy's father is in a camp. I can't let the child starve. I did everything I was able to. Now I can't go on."³⁹

The Illegitimate Family

Traditionally, due in part to the common practice of early marriage, illegitimacy had been a relatively marginal factor in German-Jewish society. Furthermore the broad masses of the Jewish population achieved middle-class status in the course of the nineteenth century, the figures on unmarried mothers had tended to decline. For example, for the period 1905 to 1909, the municipality

³⁶ Ibid., no. 435, fol. 60; see also Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, p. 47.

³⁷ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 380, fol. 4.

³⁸ Ibid., no. 424, fol. 23.

³⁹ Ibid., fol. 27.

of Schöneberg reported only seventeen Jewish children born out of wedlock. Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, if not earlier, the numbers gradually began to rise, especially in the large metropolitan areas. Between 1881 and 1890 in Prussia, the incidence of illegitimacy was 2.5 for every 100 live births; by the eve of World War I, that percentage had nearly doubled.⁴⁰

Felix Theilhaber, physician and sexologist, was probably correct in attributing this increase to the emergence of a Jewish lower class that is in "complete conformity with the habits common in its milieu."⁴¹ In his view, an additional factor was heightened personal aspiration to achieve material success, which precluded early marriage. For demographic reasons, Theilhaber was sharply critical of that trend toward later marriage: "According to one estimate, there are in Berlin some 20,000 unmarried Jewish girls aged 20 to 50; of these, half have missed the so-called boat." He went on:

...[this] development, which allows only one fifth of all Jewish girls to marry at the age physically most suitable, and the need to prepare for a career instead of marriage and then fend for oneself, constitute the basis for the mounting frequency of sexual intercourse among Jewish girls, with all its attendant consequences. On the other hand, religious barriers have tumbled, and this has swept away the checks to the natural urge ... The fact that there are ever more illegitimate children testifies to the yearning among younger girls for a child.⁴²

Based on a perusal of the documented cases, the actual intensity of this desire appears quite doubtful. But the social causes of illegitimacy were compounded in the 1920s and 1930s, when stringent legal restrictions were introduced that acted to prevent legalizing a de facto long-term relationship between a couple. It is impossible today to determine the extent of the increase in children and adolescents in custodial care under the Nazi regime,

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, no. 58/1, fol. 4; cf. also Mordechai Breuer and Michael Graetz, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael A. Meyer. Vol. 1: *Tradition and Enlightenment: 1600-1780*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 182; Steven M. Lowenstein, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Peter Pulzer and Monika Richarz, *Umstrittene Integration: 1871 - 1918*, vol.3, p. 16, of Michael A. Meyer, ed., *Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1996 – 1997), 4 vols. Also appeared in English as *Integration in Dispute, 1871 – 1918*, vol. 3 of Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1997), 4 vols., p.11]

⁴¹ Felix Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden. Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1911), p. 77, statistics p. 76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

especially as a result of such discriminatory racial legislation. Only for the year 1937 do we have an accurate documented figure of 861 wards. In December 1942, there were still some 800 active cases of guardianship and foster parentage. If one takes into account the decline in the Jewish population in Berlin, particularly in the wake of the great wave of emigration in 1938-39 and the later deportations, that figure probably reflects a sizable rise in such cases.⁴³

The extant files alone contain ten instances where the parents were married by a rabbi and also treated as married couples by the communal institutions. Already in Weimar Germany, a number of foreign or stateless Jews had been denied the right to a civil marriage due to their lack of proper papers or because of far more rigorous requirements for naturalization.⁴⁴ The number of such cases rose after the Nazis began to annul all naturalizations of Jewish citizens from the Weimar period. Thus, among couples wed in accordance with Jewish law (but without a civil marriage) who were the parents of wards born after 1933, all the non-German spouses were stateless.⁴⁵ Their situation was particularly precarious, since they were also subject to the anti-Jewish measures and stiffer laws on foreigners, but had no foreign citizenship to shield them. They, too, had almost no chance to emigrate or be repatriated — an option theoretically still open to Polish Jews, for example, until, like the fathers of Hugo Schön and Hella Chilmann, they were expelled in 1938.⁴⁶

Far more difficult to identify are cases in which the 1935 "Law for the Protection of Blood" — i.e., the prohibition of marriage and sexual relations between German Jews and non-Jews — was what rendered a child

⁴³ See "Verwaltungsbericht des Vorstandes der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin für das Jahr 1937," p. 17, Leo Baeck Institute New York, Ar.-no. 3957: H. Seeliger Collection, no. 4; CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 371, fols. 66ff.; among the cases investigated for this study, there were fifty-eight illegitimate children, eight children whose parents had emigrated, six whose parents were under arrest or had already been deported; there were also four orphans and two cases of neglect.

⁴⁴ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 375, fols. 1-2; No. 409, fol. 101; no. 429, fols. 1, 4, 25; no. 443, fol. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 363, fols. 1b, 7; no. 373, fols. 1, 5; no. 374, fols. 1a, 5; no. 359, fol. 2; no. 417, fols. 1, 17; no. 456, fols. 4, 8.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, no. 429, fol. 34 (Schön); *ibid.*, no. 375, fol. 96 (Chilmann); also Trude Maurer, "Ausländische Juden in Deutschland 1933-1939," in Arnold Paucker, ed., *Die Juden im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1933-1943* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), pp. 189-210.

illegitimate.⁴⁷ As early as 1934, the Berlin mayor's office had ordered a check on the origin of all municipal wards in order to determine which children had "non-Aryan" fathers.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Jewish mothers — the preponderant majority in cases of collective guardianship — were able after 1935 to conceal a possible "Aryan" parent either by failing to report him or by naming as the father a Jew who had already emigrated.⁴⁹ However, there are cases in the files where, although marriage was prohibited by the Nuremberg Laws, the criminal offense of "race defilement" did not apply, and where the children were also protected from deportation due to their "improved status as *Mischlinge*." Thus, the "*Geltungsjüdin*" Vera Edel was not permitted to marry Kurt Glinemann, "of German blood," but her three children born in the 1940s were classified as "second-degree *Mischlinge*," a decision buttressed by her having assured the authorities she "did not wish to bring them up as Jews."⁵⁰ There were also several children in collective custodial care from mixed marriages that had ended in divorce after 1935. However, it cannot be conclusively determined in all cases whether the divorce was due solely to the vise of racist persecution. Dorothea Borger, married to a Jew, requested a divorce after 1935; her daughters Eva and Gisela were placed in "Ahawah," a home for Jewish children and youth. The "Aryan" mother of the three Nathanson children did not leave her family until 1941, and got a divorce a year later. Initially, she was rather lax in looking after her three children; first they lived with Jewish relatives and were later housed in an institutional home. By contrast, the Jeglinskis undoubtedly had a mutual understanding when the Jewish father emigrated to Shanghai in 1939, and transferred custodial

⁴⁷ The possible consequences of the "Law for the Protection of Blood" are documented in detail in the case of one family in Irene Eckler, *Die Vormundschaftsakte 1935-1958. Verfolgung einer Familie wegen "Rassenschande"*. *Dokumente und Berichte aus Hamburg* (Schwetzingen: Thorneburg, 1996).

⁴⁸ See Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ See, for example, CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 344, fol. 5; no. 346, fol. 2; no. 414, fol. 2; no. 430, fol. 3; no. 457, fol. 7.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, no. 342, fols. 1-10. According to the First Ordinance on the Reich Citizenship Law of November 14, 1935, it was necessary to have a special permit for marriages between "first-degree *Mischlinge*" and "persons of German blood" ("*Deutschblütige*"); in practice, however, such permits were almost never issued; see John A. S. Grenville, "Die 'Endlösung' und die 'Judenmischlinge' im Dritten Reich," in Ursula Büttner, ed., *Das Unrechtsregime. Festschrift für Werner Jochmann*. vol. 2: *Verfolgung - Exil - Belasteter Neubeginn* (Hamburg: Christians, 1986), pp. 91-121, p. 105. Generally, two Jewish grandparents classified a person as "first-degree *Mischling*," one Jewish grandparent as "second-degree *Mischling*."

authority for their two sons to his wife. In a bid to strengthen her appeal for recognizing her children as "first-degree *Mischlinge*," Martha Jeglinski obtained a divorce in 1943. After his Jewish wife and older daughter had been deported to Auschwitz, the father of thirteen-year-old Gisela Rabe, himself a prisoner in Dachau, appears to have sought a divorce in 1943 for the very same reason.⁵¹

Yet most of the children dealt with by the collective guardianship office were "classic" cases of illegitimacy. Although it is impossible, based on the often incomplete data, to make a precise analysis of the social origin of the parents, attributes such as place of residence and the profession of the fathers and mothers or grandparents tend to confirm Theilhaber's assessment: these children were largely offspring of members of the lower class, or the ever more impoverished lower middle class. Women like Johanna Cohn, who had a diploma from a girls' secondary school and ran her own shop on Beusselstrasse, or the physician Dr. Ilse Kassel from Hermsdorf, were rare exceptions to the rule.⁵² Most of the children came from families living in the districts Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, or Weissensee, Moabit, Friedrichshain, and Kreuzberg. Conspicuous among the mothers is the relatively large percentage who worked as domestics, though there are also a substantial number of seamstresses and salesgirls.⁵³ Their fathers generally appear to have stemmed from a similar background, but tended to be in a slightly higher social category. Most were not from the commercial professions but, rather, earned their living as craft artisans and blue-collar workers. Also conspicuous is the relatively large number of multiple divorces in this subgroup (not including divorces that were the product of National-Socialist legislation) and

⁵¹ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 341, fols. 6, 29 (Borger); no. 399, fols. 1, 12, 22, 36, 57 (Nathanson); no. 358, fols. 10, 91 (Jeglinski); no. 403, fols. 3, 17 (Rabe).

⁵² See *ibid.*, no. 377, fol. 1; no. 367, fol. 1.

⁵³ In Prussia in 1925, 7.5 percent of Jewish working women were employed as domestics, 16.6 percent as sales personnel in various commercial branches, and 10.8 percent were engaged as garment workers; statistics based on Lestschinky, *Das wirtschaftliche Schicksal*, pp. 132-139; on the distribution of the Jewish population in the individual districts of Berlin in the 1930s, see Rürup, ed., *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Bilder und Dokumente*, p. 279. The districts mentioned here were predominantly proletarian or lower middle-class.

the fact that several illegitimate mothers (and one father) had themselves been illegitimate.⁵⁴

While the preponderant majority of families in this category eked out a quiet, unobtrusive life strung between work and welfare support, socially deviant behavior in the true sense of the term is recorded only in the case of a very small number of mothers.⁵⁵ Welfare case workers often commented that these women were "slightly retarded," characterized them as "hysterical," or criticized the mothers for "drinking and running around with men."⁵⁶ Yet only when there was the chance of possible "moral risk" for the children, or in cases of severe neglect did the collective guardianship officials feel compelled to intervene. Such fears did exist — repeatedly — in the case of Hella Chilmann, born in 1925, and living on Mulackstrasse; already at the age of eight, Hella had been "sexually molested." The proceedings were later terminated due to the death of the accused; it was never possible to substantiate similar charges against her mother, who operated a "honky-tonk in Bülow Square."⁵⁷

In the case of Waltraud Levy, already in kindergarten it was evident that she was suffering from extreme neglect. Over the years, the reports by welfare workers contained devastating assessments of her mother: "We can assume that Mrs. Levy earns her living immorally. Her intellectual level is so low that she is unable to provide the child with even the most rudimentary basics of education." When Waltraud reached the age of eight, an order was issued sending her temporarily to be cared for *in loco parentis*, and her mother was stripped of custodial authority.⁵⁸

The case of Frieda Burau indicates that the various measures for support provided by communal welfare were effective even though the social workers'

⁵⁴ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 346, fol. 2; no. 365, fol. 1; no. 379, fol. 17; no. 414, fol. 2; no. 444, fol. 3.

⁵⁵ The fact that the parent in all cases here was the mother is the result of the particular welfare perspective that guided the collective guardians, who were especially solicitous about the child's well being. Since the fathers generally had little contact with their children, their specific "way of life" is seldom mentioned in the files, although they, too, could represent a social problem. There is one case of rape in the files where the age of the mother and the associated circumstances suggest that sexual abuse by a relative was involved; see *ibid.*, no. 410.

⁵⁶ Quotations from *ibid.*, no. 427, fol. 105; no. 437, fol. 7.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 409, fols. 33, 40, 101.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, no. 384, fols. 1, 2, 6, 10, 11 (quotation).

initial assessment of the household and the way Frieda was bringing up her child had been extremely negative. After her divorce a job was arranged for Frau Burau at the cemetery in Weissensee, and provision was made to look after her two children. Her "domestic situation" had shown marked improvement by October 1937, when she was taken into protective detention and sent to the Moringen concentration camp.⁵⁹

The files rarely make explicit mention of the psychological problems the single mothers had to grapple with as a result of their arduous situation. In a disparaging comment on her child's father, who had gotten her pregnant and then chosen to marry the "daughter from a good family," Frieda Berger complained: "Thanks to Ludwig Lesser, I'm a physical and mental wreck, the doctor's given me a medical certificate and I have to stop working."⁶⁰ Yet she was unsuccessful in her attempts to obtain compensation. Likewise to no avail were the far more spectacular efforts by Helene Abrahamson, aged forty. So viciously did she harass the father of the child, a married employee of the Jewish community, that even the welfare worker assigned to her case could find little sympathy for her plight:

...[Helene] is trying by every possible means to induce the father of the child to come to see her again and ruin the marriage through phone-calls, letters, visiting him at work and making scenes on the street,.... Slighted in her affections, that hurt is expressed in reactions of hatred against the man. In her agitated state, and given her excessively emotional character, she is quite capable of doing something very foolish. The desire to get rid of her daughter, now no longer a means to lure back the father, has already led on one occasion to her abandoning the child in its father's office.⁶¹

Her later behavior toward her daughter, repeatedly put up for adoption, did not reflect much of an improvement in her domestic situation. As so often, it was the child who suffered the most.

Such cases were probably even more traumatic when the fathers took to battering mother and child, as in the case of Gerda Burau and Ruth Lewin.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, no. 437, fols. 7, 12, 21, 25, 29, 41.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, no. 339, fols. 19ff., 52, 55, 58, 59 (quotation), 68.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, no. 423, fols. 1, 7, 8-11 (quotation, fol. 10), 15-29; See also the case of the mother of seven-year-old Alfred Marcus; *ibid.*, no. 419, fol. 2.

Both men were later prohibited from having any contact with their children, or their visiting rights were severely curtailed.⁶²

It is quite likely that such behavior on the part of fathers was more frequent, but went unnoted in the files. Yet the files of the collective guardianship office do contain clear evidence of a paternal reaction that was quite commonplace, perhaps even what might be termed typical: numerous fathers refused to provide financial support for their children. The overwhelming bulk of documentation consists of correspondence on this very topic. The men often refused to acknowledge paternity and accused the mothers of having engaged in "multiple intercourse" during the "legal period of conception." That was a charge almost always rejected in the subsequent paternity-suit proceedings.⁶³

Even more common were cases in which men who had acknowledged paternity or who were divorced from the mother failed to fulfill their maintenance obligations. In some instances, this led to repeated and laborious proceedings, drawn out over years. Fritz Lamm pursued these cases with tenacious persistence. However, as the general economic situation of the Jewish population deteriorated more and more in the 1930s, the more problematic it became to ensure that the fathers, some penniless themselves, were regular with their payments; this is attested by the many enforcement orders and oaths of disclosure in the files. In addition, frequent changes in residence and easily concealed income from often shady dealings made it more difficult to establish a father's ability to pay maintenance. Non-Jewish fathers found it even easier to dodge their obligations. Thus, for example, the coppersmith Erich Kröber refused in 1939 to go on with alimony, which he had been paying regularly up until that time, after a Jewish guardian was appointed for his seven-year-old daughter Ellen Salingré in place of the previous municipal guardian. In another case, the Austrian Gustav Haugeneder, who had been repeatedly lax in his payments since his son's

⁶² See *ibid.*, no. 386, fols. 55ff., 67a, 70; no. 437, fol. 7.

⁶³ At least when it came to Jewish fathers; while in the case of "Aryans," it appears that, right from the start, those men had a good chance of avoiding a paternity suit altogether; see, for example, *ibid.*, no. 346, fol. 21; also no. 365, fol. 1; no. 375, fol. 2; no. 377, fol. 83; no. 379, fol. 7; no. 397, fol. 5.

birth, arbitrarily terminated his legal obligation to provide child support in 1942.

His justification was:

I have stopped payment of an allowance for the minor Alfred Israel Salomon because I believe that if the Jews are enemies of the Reich and German nation, then no support should be given in any way to any person belonging to the Jewish race, so as not to aid in furthering its development.⁶⁴

The struggle for maintenance became especially dramatic when the father not only wanted to emigrate, but also had the concrete possibility of doing so, and in the absence of any guarantee for child support, the county court had confiscated his passport at the request of the guardian or the child's mother. Fritz Lamm occasionally found himself in an uncomfortable position as mediator, since he was personally acquainted with some of these fathers from his welfare work. Thus, in December 1938, he received a letter from the mother of a Jewish community employee and former ward. She beseeched him to release her son from the onerous obligation of child support:

Horst can't be of any further use to you here in Germany. And who knows how long the community will be able to go on. Then, of course, another arrangement will have to be found for all these custodial matters. So there should be nothing standing now in the way of releasing Horst once and for all from his obligation, in order to make it possible for him finally to depart for his new home abroad. I'm sure you share my view ... Keep in mind that in your hands rests my child's future happiness, or his misfortune!⁶⁵

In this and the other known cases, the fathers were able to emigrate in the end, especially since they could extricate themselves with relative ease from promises that they no longer had to keep once they were abroad. Few managed to finesse their way out as elegantly as the father of Ilse Kassel's child. Kassel was a physician, and the father assured Lamm in a carefully formulated letter that "he held the mother of the child close to his heart," that he would do everything possible "to assist Dr. Kassel and her child," and that,

⁶⁴ Ibid., no. 419, fol. 107, see also fols. 1b, 16, 44, 82, 91; and *ibid.*, no. 418, fols. 5, 14, 31 (Salingré).

⁶⁵ Ibid., no. 379, fol. 26, see also fols. 21-25, 29.

"unfortunately," there was no doubt he would not be emigrating soon. Two months later the man was in London and refused to have any further contact with mother and child.⁶⁶

Naturally, fathers who did not wish to acknowledge their paternity in any case had few if any compunctions about leaving their child. Yet, some fathers who had sole custody for their children as a result of divorce or the death of the mother also decided to leave them in the care of communal institutions, with the intention of summoning the children later to join them abroad. In the two such cases documented in the files, this did not happen due to the father's vacillation. Alfred Littauer refused to agree to the emigration of his seven-year-old daughter to England on a so-called "*Kindertransport*." And the father of eleven-year-old Margot Jakobius appears to have become too heavily embroiled in disputes with his second wife to call his daughter to come to join him in Shanghai.⁶⁷

Conspicuous in the material is the large number of fathers who emigrated. In contrast, couples — either married or unmarried — seldom left their children alone in Germany.⁶⁸ In two such cases, the youngsters were in *hachsharah* (training for later emigration to Palestine), so that there was a definite plan for them to leave later as well; in another, the child was living with its grandparents.⁶⁹ Generally, single mothers could only decide on this step if they, too, had had little or no contact with their children since birth.⁷⁰ The great majority of mothers had no prospects for emigration, simply because they lacked the necessary funds. This financial predicament was compounded by the need to care by themselves for children who were often only infants, making emigration seem virtually impossible.

What impact did these living conditions have on the children themselves? Thanks to the regular medical check-ups and reports by Jewish welfare workers on their home visits, the files give a relatively distinct picture of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., no. 367, fol. 19, see also fols. 17-18, 22ff.; similarly, no. 435, fols. 34, 45ff.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 388, fols. 24, 27ff., 31, 33, 39; no. 354, fols. 8-11, 21, 52.

⁶⁸ If there were no other option, the father was commonly the first to emigrate; once established in a new country, he called the rest of the family to join him. See, for example, the case of the fathers of Hugo Schön and Rosa Jurmann, who did not succeed in building a new life (in Brazil and Uruguay respectively) and returned after a few months to their families in Germany; *ibid.*, no. 429, fol. 25; no. 363, fol. 7.

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, no. 369, fol. 2; no. 421, fol. 1; no. 438, fols. 3, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 348, fol. 1; no. 444, fols. 1, 3, 28, 30; no. 452, fol. 18.

physical consequences of poverty. Many children were noticeably "small, extremely pale, thin," rachitic, "often sick and feeble," and were characterized as physically underdeveloped.⁷¹ Yet extreme neglect, such as in the case of Waltraud Levy described above, seems to have been the exception. However, the Levy case also underscores the close link that existed between physical and mental suffering. The director of the day-care center described the girl in the following terms: "Waltraud has a dull, obtuse personality, she is quarrelsome at times due to her feelings of inferiority. She's shy and very phlegmatic, and shows no joy in anything."⁷²

It is difficult to determine what psychological impact there was on the children as a result of the ever more constricted conditions in which they lived and the deepening distress and fear among the adults who looked after them — whether relatives, foster parents or educators. A markedly large number of children struck the welfare workers as "mentally retarded," or "deficient in intelligence," "restless and jumpy," or "totally apathetic, indifferent." For the most part, their grades at school reflected this.⁷³

A child's psychological state was doubtless also much dependent on whether he/she had grown up in the care of the mother or other relatives, or had been raised in a children's home or foster family. A crucial factor was the degree of stability in living conditions; as the screws of discrimination tightened, that constancy became ever more elusive. On principle, the collective guardianship office sought to induce single mothers to keep their child with them, at least for the first few months — and then, if there was no other option, to place the child with relatives. In any event, many single mothers were still living at home with their parents or had moved back in with them after giving birth; often, they also stayed with their sisters. As a rule, pregnant women were only admitted to the Home for Mothers and Infants in Niederschönhausen operated by the Jewish community if they agreed in advance to remain at the facility and care for their baby four to five months

⁷¹ Ibid., no. 341, fols. 4, 30; no. 429, fol. 25; see also no. 359, fol. 11; no. 374, fol. 7; no. 386, fol. 10; no. 397, fol. 4; no. 427, fol. 169; no. 437, fol. 7.

⁷² Ibid., no. 384, fol. 2.

⁷³ Ibid., no. 410, fol. 38; no. 413, fol. 16; no. 386, fol. 10; no. 432, fol. 21; similarly, no. 363, fol. 33; no. 435, fol. 51.

after birth as well. Yet the worsening situation in the labor market meant that many mothers could no longer afford to do this.⁷⁴

Other grounds for admission to the home were the death or emigration of one's parents (or the parent with legal custody), the mother's poor scholastic aptitude or very young age. In the 1940s, forced labor and deportation destroyed many still-intact families, and this in turn led to an increase in the number of admissions to the facility in Niederschönhausen.

One invaluable advantage of being raised in a communal home was that it could provide the children a relatively constant, protected environment at a time when such a shielded stable framework was an ever-rarer option for harried Jewish adults on the "outside." In the 1930s, an additional possibility open to educators was to recommend pupils for Youth Aliyah (emigration to Palestine) or for inclusion in a group of children to be sent to England on *Kindertransport* — in this way saving their lives, as in the cases of Hilde Mendelsohn and the Renzer children.⁷⁵ There are hardly any reports from the children's point of view on life "inside" the homes; the memoirs of Hans Rosenthal, later a well-known television celebrity in West Germany, constitute a rare exception. At the age of sixteen, after the death of his mother, Hans joined his younger brother in the orphanage at Schönhauserallee 162, and soon rebelled against the authoritarian style prevailing there: "In the orphanage, things were really strict. You had to make your bed according to the rules, there was an exacting code of conduct, almost like in a military school."⁷⁶

Well aware of the drawbacks of life in a children's home, the Jewish youth office, already back in the 1920s, had initiated a program to expand the system of foster families in line with the new emphasis in welfare work on prevention. In 1937, 180 children were living with foster families.⁷⁷ The youth

⁷⁴ Ibid., no. 436, fols. 2-6; no. 444, fols. 3, 28.

⁷⁵ Ibid., no. 395, fol. 45; no. 453, fol. 2.

⁷⁶ Hans Rosenthal, *Zwei Leben in Deutschland* (Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe, 1980), p. 50; after Hans had violated the orphanage code of rules several times, the director finally refused to keep him there, and he was transferred to the Jewish Residential Home for Youth, see CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 412, fols. 1, 16, 84.

⁷⁷ See "Protokoll der Sitzung der Deputation für die Reorganisation der Wohlfahrtspflege der jüdischen Gemeinde," June 9, 1921, in CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 61, fol. 24; *Mitteilungen des Wohlfahrts- und Jugendfürsorgeamtes* 3, No. 3/4 (1931), pp. 6f.; "Verwaltungsbericht des Vorstandes für 1937," p. 16.

office and/or the collective guardianship office tried to assure that children and foster parents were compatible; for example, they recommended a suitable "bright child" to "educated individuals who will have considerable contact with the child."⁷⁸ In another case, there was praise for the positive influence the foster mother exercised: she wished to raise a "slightly timid" five-year-old and turn him into a "real young man," and "with that end in mind," was teaching him "military games and how to shoot."⁷⁹ Yet slip-ups were not always possible to avoid: the foster parents sometimes neglected their wards, or even subjected them, as in the case of the four-year-old Hans Berger, to abuse, especially since many of the children had been taken in by foster parents for motives more pecuniary than emotional.⁸⁰ Foster families with several foster children were not uncommon; the youth office was quite well-disposed toward such arrangements: "There are six foster children there at the moment, all sleeping together in one room with their daughter Erika. Every child has its own bed, each with a clean sheet. During the day the children stay in the very large dining room, where they have plenty of space to move about."⁸¹

Yet most foster parents appear to have taken in only one or two children, and many were extremely attached to them. That in turn had a positive impact on the children. Thus, for example, little Ephraim Toronczyk did not begin to blossom until he was placed with a foster family; the director of the Reichenheim orphanage had characterized the boy as "not simply retarded, but slightly abnormal." He noted: "Since going to a foster family, he's a totally different child."⁸²

Foster families that developed a close and warm relationship with the children in their care often sought to adopt them. However, in all documented cases, the court rejected their application. In most instances, the children continued to live with their foster parents even after such a negative adoption decision. But when foster families emigrated, they were not allowed to take their wards along; this sometimes meant that the children went through the wrenching

⁷⁸ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 351, fol. 26.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 449, fol. 26.

⁸⁰ As a result, the foster relationship was immediately terminated, see *ibid.*, no. 339, fols. 161, 167, 176, 178, 181ff.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no. 437, fol. 38.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 452, fols. 4, 24.

experience of repeated separations.⁸³ Moreover, the May 1938 guidelines issued by the Berlin municipality for taking in foster children specified that in the event of the death of the Jewish spouse, the "Aryan" parent in a mixed couple had to return a Jewish child to the authorities. In two such extant cases, children were removed from what had been a very happy and nurturing foster family environment.⁸⁴

When the deportations began, these separations multiplied, since once the foster family had received a deportation order, the youth office hastened (for obvious reasons) to place the children elsewhere.⁸⁵ What that meant for the parents reverberates in the words of Erna Bentscher, the foster mother of Ellen Salingré and Avigdor Lissner, who, in June 1942, turned in desperation to Dora Silbermann:

I heard today ... that if you're evacuated you're not allowed to take your foster children along. Is that true? I've been beside myself since I heard. Please ... let me know. To be separated from the two children would be terrible for us both, because we're attached to them as much as to our own flesh and blood.⁸⁶

For the foster children, the mounting discrimination meant that it was nearly impossible to assure the necessary continuity in living conditions; more and more often, they were shunted from one residential home to another, one foster family to the next. For example, between 1939 and 1942, Margot Jakobius stayed in a total of four different homes and five foster families. In a letter to Dora Silbermann, the young Margot, now aged fourteen, described her life:

I'm the daughter of Oskar Jakobius, who is living in Shanghai. I was born in Danzig on December 23, 1927. My mother died when I was two-and-a-half. My father raised me until I was nine. While my father was at work during the day, I was taken to stay at my grandparents'. When I was six, I started to attend school to learn my necessary duties.

⁸³ See *ibid.*, no. 351, fols. 10, 14; no. 410, fols. 38, 44, 100, 141; no. 420, fols. 19, 39, 58, 62, 90, 93; no. 444, fols. 49, 88-89.

⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, no. 354, fol. 47; no. 449, fol. 28; Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ Though, mindful of the sensitive situation, they usually gave other reasons for the move, such as food ration cards that might otherwise expire; see CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 351, fols. 43ff.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 418, fol. 91.

Unfortunately, since I've changed schools so often, I won't reach the highest grade. Because my father wasn't able to find any real mother [for me] in Germany, and so had me put in various homes and foster families. Even now, when I could be a sensible young girl, I still miss my father. Please take me into consideration, and help make my wish come true [to emigrate and join her father, S.S.S].⁸⁷

The Radicalization of Discrimination From 1939 Onward

Intensified racial exclusion and discrimination in the wake of the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom affected the wards of the collective guardianship office in all spheres of their lives. One of the first ordinances issued after the pogrom, a decree of November 19, 1938, stipulated that all Jews were barred from public-welfare benefits. This meant, for example, that no maintenance allowances were to be paid for Jewish foster children and that the Jewish communities had to assume immediate responsibility for all costs incurred for the support of children in homes. Since the Berlin Jewish Community was by far the largest, and thus quite unable to cope with the staggering financial demands, this ordinance was initially applied here only in part. At the beginning of 1939, the district offices distributed forms in which the Jewish welfare and youth office was ordered to assume all expenses for the specific individual case in question, effective immediately:

...If this is not possible, I request that you inform me in writing within a week whether you can assume the costs for further services in the institution where the ward is being cared for — and if so, to what extent. You should specify your reasons for refusing to take over these costs, either in full or in part.⁸⁸

The Jewish community replied with its own form letter, refusing to take on these costs. It referred to the petition of December 14, 1938, presented by its board to the mayor, protesting against the December 12 decision in Berlin to exclude Jews from institutional welfare coverage. Then, in May 1939, in Berlin, too, the community was ordered to bear the full costs for all the children being cared for in institutions. However, until the end of 1940,

⁸⁷ Ibid., no. 354, fol. 49.

⁸⁸ Ibid., no. 379, fol. 27.

municipal aid could still be requested for children in non-institutional care.⁸⁹

But as illustrated by the case of Johanna Kirsch, whose unemployed grandfather received only a few more months of maintenance allowance for Johanna and her brother despite the backing of the former municipal guardian, such applications were often turned down on quite flimsy grounds.⁹⁰

The only category for which benefits were payable until the end of 1942 was that of children classified as "*Geltungsjuden*," as indicated by a comment in the Waltraud Levy file: January 1943 is noted as the date when the Jewish welfare office assumed the full costs of her maintenance.⁹¹

The impact of all these measures on the children often meant that, once again, they had to move elsewhere. Since the government declined to pay maintenance, a number of foster parents returned their children to state custody. At the same time, the community tried to arrange for children housed in homes to return to live with their mothers or other close kin.⁹² By the spring of 1940, if not earlier, those efforts were made more complicated by the expanding program of forced-labor mobilization. Labor conscription made it extremely difficult for families to remain together, even for those who had succeeded until then. The mass conscription of Jewish forced laborers now affected nearly all parents, aunts, and uncles of children in care, and often their grandparents as well — unless, as welfare recipients or unemployed workers, they had already been called earlier for labor service. According to an August 1941 report, there were some 26,000 to 28,000 Jews in forced labor in Berlin: women aged 16 - 50 and men aged 14 – 60 were being conscripted. Working time for males averaged 50-60 hours a week; for women and adolescents 45-55 hours. Forced laborers were engaged primarily in shift work in industrial plants, sometimes quite far from their home.⁹³

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, no. 379, fol. 28; also Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, pp. 62-63, and *idem*, "Fürsorge", pp. 606 – 610.

⁹⁰ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 371, fols. 3, 5, 12; Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, pp. 66, 76.

⁹¹ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 384, fol. 38.

⁹² See, for example, *ibid.*, no. 437, fol. 38; no. 380, fols. 4-5.

⁹³ See "Bericht über die organisatorischen und sonstigen Verhältnisse der jüdischen Bevölkerung in Berlin unter Berücksichtigung des gesamten Altreichs," August 18, 1941, pp. 6-7, in: YVA, no. 3775; also Wolf Gruner, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997), pp. 116-151, 161-165, 206-212.

Labor under these harsh conditions was, in the cautious words of a report at the time, "very strenuous" for the younger workers. Some were still in their teens, slaving away for wages of RM 12 to 18 a month or paid on a piece-work basis.⁹⁴ Ruth Naftaniel, employed at Siemens, was described as a "tall and delicate girl, sensitive; required to put in ten hours a day on the job, she's fainted many times."⁹⁵ Hugo Schön, now seventeen, likewise looked "very wretched, his cheeks extremely sunken"; like his mother, he was often ill.⁹⁶ The extreme conditions of work meant that families — and especially single mothers with small children — were often compelled to rearrange their children's care completely. That in turn stretched the capacity of the various community welfare institutions to the breaking point. In September 1942, with the deportations already in high gear, there were 1,102 children being looked after in the ten day-care facilities still in operation; of these, ninety-nine children were under the age of three, 313 under the age of six, and 623 younger than twelve. In the case of 822 of these children, both parents were in forced labor; 213 had one parent who was a forced laborer.⁹⁷

The minimum pay for such work was barely enough to survive on, especially when dependents also had to be fed. Single mothers were in an even more dire predicament; they had to provide not only for their children, but often for their parents as well, since they shared the same household. Moreover, women's wages averaged up to 40 percent less than the men's.⁹⁸ The weekly earnings of mothers of children cared for by the collective guardianship office, who were mostly employed at AEG and Siemens, ranged between RM 16 and RM 22. After deduction of taxes and travel expenses, the actual amount was less: Frieda Berger's take-home pay, for example, amounted to RM 12 a week after deductions.⁹⁹ Absence from work due to illness — hardly surprising given

⁹⁴ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 378, fol. 258; see also *ibid.*, no. 395, fols. 131, 139; no. 413, fol. 16; no. 403, fol. 36; no. 443, fols. 55, 60.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 435, fol. 109.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 429, fol. 38.

⁹⁷ See also the list of September 9, 1942, in: Bundesarchiv, Archive Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten (BA-DH), R 8150 (= former folder 75 C Re 1, Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland), no. 759, fol. 68; also reproduced in Rürup, ed., *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Bilder und Dokumente*, p. 300.

⁹⁸ See "Bericht über die organisatorischen und sonstigen Verhältnisse der jüdischen Bevölkerung," p. 7.

⁹⁹ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 339, fol. 191; also no. 359, fol. 11; no. 379, fols. 30a, 41; no. 408, fol. 9; no. 441, fol. 23.

given the debilitating working conditions and poor diet — compounded matters, reducing weekly wages even further.¹⁰⁰

Thus, a family's situation was largely dependent on the number of persons in the household who were able to work. The mother of Judis Rubin, aged two, made a mere RM 20 a week at the Siemens plant; but since her father and brother also had jobs, the family was comparatively well off. By contrast, the mother of newborn Denny Klein lived together with the infant's father, who was also employed, yet their combined weekly earnings of RM 41 also had to cover expenses for the two grandmothers living with them. Elfriede Kochenstrom's situation wasn't much better. With a weekly wage of 20 RM she had to support her mother and son. In cases of extreme destitution, communal welfare could furnish only scant relief: Julius Kochenstrom, aged ten, who had nothing but a pair of "wooden shoes," was listed to receive a donation of shoes and clothing.¹⁰¹

The only way to improve a family's economic situation was to cut down on living space: rooms were let out, or a family itself moved in elsewhere as boarders, either by choice or because of forced eviction. As a result, at the beginning of the 1940s, there were several persons to a room in almost all Jewish families with wards. The cramped living conditions were exacerbated by the pressures of forced labor and anti-Jewish harassment, which were stepped up in 1940 and 1941. These placed an onerous burden on any living arrangement.

Yet there are few specific references to such pressures in the files.¹⁰² It is likely that the reporting welfare workers were now preoccupied with one primary task: maintaining the material conditions for survival. The files do make mention of the visible consequences of destitution. In 1941, for example, the forced laborer Werner Nathanson, whose wife had left him, complained that he was no longer able to keep up the household for his three

¹⁰⁰ See *ibid.*, no. 355, fols. 18-19; no. 429, fol. 38; no. 443, fol. 60.

¹⁰¹ See *ibid.*, no. 417, fol. 2 (Rubin); no. 373, fol. 3 (Klein); no. 375, fol. 14 (Kochenstrom).

¹⁰² One exception was the Jochowitz family, where the wife and mother-in-law had "big disagreements," revolving at least superficially around questions of order and cleanliness; see *ibid.*, no. 359, fols. 11, 14.

children: the bugs were gradually taking over in the apartment, and his children, "constantly upset," were "being devoured alive by the pests."¹⁰³

In 1941, the Aron family, now seven members, was struggling to survive on a weekly income of RM 16. According to a medical report, the children were "underfed," and even the food at school was insufficient to stay their pangs of hunger. The local welfare office reported to the central office: "We really cannot allow this family to starve, and *in this case they are indeed starving.*" The officials made an urgent appeal for supplementary assistance:

We ask you to intervene here, providing help so that Mrs. Aron, who knows how to run an economical household, is neither compelled to ask us so often for assistance nor forced to say to us: 'I haven't been able to feed my kids recently, I had to let some ration cards expire without even using them.'¹⁰⁴

The constant hunger would eventually drive the oldest son in the family, Julius, a forced laborer since 1941, to his death. Shortly after his conscription, the eighteen-year-old started to be absent from work at regular intervals, staying away for days or even weeks, and began to steal small things: "He says he was filled with anxiety and had no other alternative but to leave home. He slept in waiting rooms, did odd jobs, and with the money earned bought himself ... non-rationed food." The neurologist who examined him reported that the tall youth was "lacking in mental capacity," and "his main interest ... was food." Since his parents, a mixed couple, were also unsuccessful in their attempts to supervise him, he was ultimately taken into custody, confined in the Tegel Prison and later deported to Auschwitz.¹⁰⁵

Given the spiraling pressures on the Jewish population and the harsh conditions in which individuals were forced to live, it is actually astonishing that there were apparently few young people who stood out by rebelling or causing conflict in the home or at school. There are occasional reports in the documentation of minor problems typical for children of their age: for example, coming home late, "hanging out" on the street, or giving a false account of the money they had received. The desire for a bit of "luxury" stands out in a letter

¹⁰³ Ibid., no. 399, fol. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., no. 337, fols. 172, 203 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., fols. 228-229, 237.

written by seventeen-year-old Siegbert Freiberg to his guardian: he justified holding back a portion of his wages so that his "Aryan" relatives could buy him a suit and make other "private purchases."¹⁰⁶ Some, like Wolfgang Nathanson and his younger brother, also tried to escape the coil of discrimination for a few hours by shedding the obligatory yellow badge and visiting relatives in Berlin, or, like Hans Rosenthal, they might meet with friends outside the city — an extremely risky venture at this point.¹⁰⁷ That urge for a bit of freedom was to have disastrous consequences for Siegfried Roth, who, abandoned as a baby, had lived since birth in a series of institutions. After he had been caught several times stealing a bicycle in order to ride out into the countryside around Berlin, he was sent, in 1941, to the Rummelsburg reformatory and deported one year later to Riga.¹⁰⁸

These few examples illustrate the dilemma faced by the educators responsible for their wards: they had to punish even small transgressions severely, since, given the lethal stage that discrimination had reached, the youngsters in their supervision were endangering themselves by these actions even more than they presumably realized. As legal guardian, it was incumbent upon Fritz Lamm to assure that the children and adolescents adhered to all the new anti-Jewish legislation and regulations: that they used the compulsory middle names "Israel" and "Sarah," and were careful as stateless aliens to apply in time for alien's passports or residence permits — and, from September 1941, that they wore the identifying Jewish star in public. In order to provide a legal basis for his supervisory capacity, all the youngsters had to sign a form. It was a capsule of their living conditions in the two years prior to the beginning of deportations:

I have been informed by my guardian today of the following: I must be at home by 8 P.M.; I am not permitted to go to any movie houses or public places of entertainment, and may only attend the functions at the Jewish Cultural League open to those of my age; I must carry my I.D. or passport on my person at all times; I am allowed to go shopping only between the hours of 4 and 5 P.M. unless given a special certificate from my employer; when in the street, in public squares, on streetcars,

¹⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, no. 345, fol. 28; see likewise no. 395, fol. 117; no. 435, fol. 107.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 399, fol. 2; no. 412, fol. 84.

¹⁰⁸ Roth is the only ward whose date of death is known: he perished on February 2, 1945, in the Natzweiler concentration camp (Alsace); see *ibid.*, no. 416, fols. 6, 9, 18; *Gedenkbuch*.

the elevated train, etc., I am to conduct myself in a highly inconspicuous manner; I must obey unconditionally the orders of my foster parents or supervisors; I am not permitted to smoke in public if still under the age of 18; in the event of an air-raid alarm, I must obey the orders of the air-raid warden and remain in the shelter from the time the siren sounds until the all-clear is given.¹⁰⁹

Deportations from Berlin began in October 1941.¹¹⁰ Most of the children under the care of the collective guardianship office appear to have been spared during the first few months of these operations, while the parents were initially still on forced labor. Yet foster families were already being torn apart, and children were placed once again in institutional homes after their mothers or fathers had been deported or attempted to go into hiding. Two of the latter, the father of the Nathanson children and the mother of Bela Flatow, were soon discovered and later deported; but the fate of Margarethe Jastrow and Leonore Rosner, who went into hiding with her baby Uri, remains unclear.¹¹¹ Older teenagers also tried to flee: after hiding out for almost a year, Stefanie Kolodzinsky, aged eighteen, was discovered. In the case of Hugo Schön, the file ends with his disappearance underground in October 1943, and his name is not recorded in the Berlin *Gedenkbuch*. Hans Rosenthal survived and has given a vivid description of his experiences while in hiding. Perhaps he was also helped by the circumstance that, after some discussion back and forth, he was reported to the district youth office in June 1943 as "deported."¹¹² In September 1942, there were still 350 children in the care of the Jewish community; 103 were in foster families. The removal of the children in Jewish institutions commenced a short time later with the deportation of the infants and small children in the Niederschönhausen facility; by the end of December

¹⁰⁹ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 435, fol. 84a.

¹¹⁰ See Robert M. W. Kempner, "Die Ermordung von 35000 Berliner Juden. Der Judenmordprozess in Berlin schreibt Geschichte," in Herbert A. Strauss and Kurt Grossmann, eds., *Gegenwart im Rückblick. Festgabe für die jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin 25 Jahre nach dem Neubeginn* (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1970), pp. 180-205; a brief overview is provided in *Die Grunewald-Rampe*, pp. 32-42; Gruner, "Die Reichshauptstadt und die Verfolgung," pp. 247-253.

¹¹¹ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 344, fols. 16, 26, 29, 33 (Flatow); no. 399, fols. 29, 53 (Nathanson); no. 355, fol. 24 (Jastrow); no. 415, fols. 4, 13-17 (Rosner). There are two cases of suicide or attempted suicide in the documentation, those of Ilse Kassel and Jetty Szarfscher; see no. 367, fol. 46; no. 443, fol. 63.

¹¹² See *ibid.*, no. 378, fols. 307, 323ff. (Kolodzinsky); no. 429, fol. 56 (Schön); no. 412, fols. 128, 130, 136 (Rosenthal); see also Rosenthal, *Zwei Leben*, pp. 54-92.

1942, all children's homes and day-care centers had been closed down.¹¹³

Almost all the wards still remaining in Berlin fell victim to the massive deportation wave in February and March 1943, that engulfed forced laborers in particular, their families, and the youngsters from former *hachsharah* camps.

After this point, only those children classified in the records as *Mischlinge* or *Geltungsjuden*, or whose "racial" category was still unclear remained in Berlin. Since most of the wards under collective guardianship in this group were listed as "un-clarified" due to illegitimacy, or were already living in a community facility, they were initially placed in a provisional home established at Oranienburgerstrasse 31. After the dissolution of the Jewish Community in June 1943, they were brought to the children's facility set up in the Jewish Hospital in Wedding.¹¹⁴

Desperate attempts now ensued to save the children accommodated at the hospital and in the care of families. The illegitimate "half-Jews" were at a decided disadvantage, since, in accordance with the First Ordinance of the Reich Citizenship Law, they were automatically considered Jews, i.e. "*Geltungsjuden*"; only by special pardon, an act of bureaucratic mercy, could they be accorded recognition as a "first-degree *Mischling*" and thus be spared from deportation.¹¹⁵ One rare successful case was that of Bela Flatow, whose foster parents Einstein (a mixed couple) were even able to locate an "Aryan" father for Bela. The man was immediately arrested and charged with "race defilement," but the "Aryan" Emmy Einstein, in the meantime a widow, persevered. Successful in her repeated attempts to drag out the proceedings, she was ultimately able to keep Bela.¹¹⁶ In contrast, the attempt by Julius Aron's "Aryan" mother to have her legitimate son, then in prison, declared a premarital "Aryan" *ex post facto* were to no avail, especially since she herself

¹¹³ See BA-DH, R 8150, no. 759, fols. 3, 62.

¹¹⁴ On the history of the children's facility (*Kinderunterkunft*) in the Jewish Hospital, see Rivka Elkin, "Kinder zur Aufbewahrung im Jüdischen Krankenhaus zu Berlin in den Jahren 1943-1945," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994), pp. 247-274.

¹¹⁵ See Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1979), p. 141. On the precarious situation of the "*Mischlinge*" and their families, see Jeremy Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy Towards the Christian-Jewish 'Mischlinge' 1933-1945," *LBIYB* 34 (1989), pp. 291-354; Grenville, "Die 'Endlösung' und die 'Judenmischlinge'; Ursula Büttner, "The Persecution of Christian-Jewish Families in the Third Reich," *LBIYB* 34 (1989), pp. 267-289.

¹¹⁶ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 344, fols. 39, 41, 50, 53-54, 69, 72.

had not formally disaffiliated from the Jewish faith until August 31, 1942 (at the urging of the community).¹¹⁷

The situation of stateless children with two Jewish grandparents was similarly complicated: they were considered "first-degree *Mischlinge*" according to the Nuremberg Laws, but, in April 1943, were classified *Geltungsjuden*. Ilse and Werner Rosinski and Johanna Kirsch fell victim to this new regulation, although Johanna had been taken home from the Jewish Hospital facility by her mother, who was now living in a mixed marriage. However, since the girl's "Aryan" father was reported missing in action and presumably dead, Johanna was deported in October 1944.¹¹⁸ In the summer of 1943, attempts were also initiated in the Jewish Hospital children's facility to mobilize "Aryan" relatives for children designated *Geltungsjuden*: these relatives declared their willingness to take the children into their family and, in this way, saved their lives. However, not every bid was successful: some, such as Gerda Burau's father and Gisela Rabe's aunt, refused to take the children in as *Geltungsjuden*, since, among other things, this would have entailed marking the apartment externally with a Jewish star. In both these cases, the application to have the girls classified *Mischlinge* was turned down. Their eventual fate remains unclear.¹¹⁹

Based on the files, it is difficult to understand the behavior of the divorced Charlotte Nathanson, who initially was opposed to the idea of placing her three children with their grandfather. But she then balked and refused to take the children in, arguing that her apartment was too small. Finally, in June 1944, she was summoned by the Gestapo. At this meeting, the following arrangement was concluded:

Officer Dobberke ordered me to take the three children home. Otherwise they would go with their father, who was interested in having them. He told me their father was there in the building. After a discussion with my former husband ... we reached the following understanding: the two boys would go with their father, I would take the

¹¹⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 337, fols. 198, 201, 222.

¹¹⁸ See *ibid.*, no. 371, fols. 9, 16-17, 35 (Rosinski); no. 371, fols. 66-69, 77, 88, 93ff.

¹¹⁹ See BA-DH, R 8150, no. 764, fol. 222; Elkin, "Kinder zur Aufbewahrung," p. 263 (Burau); CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 403, fols. 8, 17, 20, 25, 31, 37 (Rabe). Gerda Burau's younger brother was murdered in Riga, the two girls are not mentioned in the *Gedenkbuch*.

girl. Officer Dobberke agreed to my request and permitted me to take my daughter home.

On June 16, Wolfgang and Alfred Nathanson, together with their father, were deported to Theresienstadt.¹²⁰

In five cases, "Aryan" relatives took the children in without any hesitation, thus saving their lives. As is clear from the files of the collective guardianship office and the accommodation facility in the Jewish Hospital, the degree of kinship or sex of the "rescuing" parent or relatives was immaterial. In July 1943, the Jeglinski brothers were taken home to live with their mother. Waltraud Levy's father was also quick to react; although, apparently — at least according to the files — he had never shown any previous interest in his illegitimate daughter. Gisela Borger was taken in by her grandfather, Siegbert Freiberg by his aunt, Günther Lewin by his stepfather.¹²¹ Along with the wards who emigrated before 1939, two infants classified as "first-degree *Mischlinge*" shortly after birth in 1944, and a girl being cared for in a monastery in Silesia, who was in the end not deported,¹²² these five children are the only ones in the preserved files of the Berlin collective guardianship office who survived the genocide. All other wards were murdered, in most instances together with their relatives still living in Berlin. The youngest deportee was Hannacha Jacob, aged three months.¹²³

The wards under the Jewish community's collective guardianship and their families were among "those who could not escape,"¹²⁴ individuals who otherwise appear solely as ciphers in deportation statistics and only in rare instances left any written record. Being children and the being poor, they had

¹²⁰ See CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 399, fols. 36, 53-54, 61, 64, 74, 75 (quotation), 77.

¹²¹ See *ibid.*, no. 358, fols. 1, 3, 115 (Jeglinski); no. 384, fols. 39-43, 69, 74, 96 (Levy); no. 341, fols. 14, 17-20, 39, 56-57 (Borger); no. 345, fol. 43 (Freiberg); no. 427, fols. 184, 192, 195 (Lewin); likewise BA-DH, R 8150, no. 764, fols. 212, 219, 222-223.

¹²² Curiously, the decisive factor for the survival of this child — who was alternately classified as "*Mischling*," then as "*Glaubensjüdin*" (a Jew herself of the Jewish faith) — appears to have been a long and drawn-out dispute between the Berlin Jewish Community and the monastery in Gostal, about who would bear the costs for her care in the home, that dragged on from 1943 to 1945; see CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 348; also *ibid.*, nos. 342, 343 and fn. 5.

¹²³ See *ibid.*, no. 353, fols. 1, 4.

¹²⁴ The title of an impressive exhibition in the Jewish Museum section housed within the Berlin Museum: *Als wäre es nie gewesen: Menschen, die nicht mehr entkamen - Fotografien aus den letzten Jahren des jüdischen Gemeindelebens in Berlin bis 1942*, catalogue (Berlin: Samson, 1989).

no voice and were totally defenseless. Even in these documented cases, the depth of their fear during the period of the Third Reich can only be surmised. Yet between the lines, we can sense how racial discrimination ravaged the web of social and emotional relations. In individual cases, the situation even led some parents, fathers in particular, to decline any responsibility for their children, or induced relatives to refuse to care for their stigmatized nephews, nieces or grandchildren.

The files present a stark picture of the steadily worsening material misery during the 1930s and 1940s, and the destitution in which most wards (and their single mothers) were compelled to live. Under the circumstances of the Nazi regime, a major consequence of that poverty was that, right from the start, it ruled out escape; poor people had virtually no chance to save their lives by emigrating. Yet the collective guardianship files contain little about the reality of the genocide, the bureaucratic machinery that made the mass murder possible, the perpetrators on the spot or behind their desks. However, their lurid presence flickers through the laconic, standard phrases of inquiry regularly used by the county courts in the 1940s. Without any salutation or additional text, they asked the Reichsvereinigung about the wards in its care: "Where have the children been deported to? Where were they last living? Are there any assets?"¹²⁵

Translated by William Templer

Source: *Yad Vashem Studies* Vol. XXVII, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 61-103.

¹²⁵ CJA 1, 75 A Be 2, no. 349, fol. 12.