

Reich Representation of German Jews

(*Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden*), central representative organization of German Jewry. The Reich Representation was founded on Jewish initiative in September 1933, several months after Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany. Spearheaded by its president, Rabbi Leo Baeck, and its executive director, Otto Hirsch, the organization's goal was to confront the grave problems facing German Jewry under the antisemitic Nazi regime.

As its name implied, the Reich Representation was to serve as the representative of German Jewry both in dealing with the German authorities and with Jewish organizations outside of Germany. Though it had no official status, the organization was recognized by the Nazi authorities. Thus, the Reich Representation was responsible for administering all aspects of German Jewish life, including education, both for young people and adults; job training and retraining for the many Jews who had lost their means of livelihood as a result of anti-Jewish legislation; support for the poor; general economic assistance, which included establishing employment offices and loan funds; and emigration. All these methods of assistance helped the Jews of Germany cope with the serious problems they faced as a result of the Nazis' anti-Jewish decrees and measures.

In 1935 the authorities forced the Reich Representation to change its name to "Reich Representation of Jews in Germany" (as opposed to "German Jews"), and in 1939, following changes in its structure, the organization's name was changed once again to "Reich Association of Jews in Germany."

From late 1938 until its dissolution in July 1943, the Reich Representation/Association was the only organization in Germany itself that dealt with the issue of Jewish survival. By that time its main goal was Jewish emigration, and it continued in its efforts to help Jews leave the country until all emigration was banned by the authorities in October 1941. In addition, when all Jewish students were expelled from German public schools, the organization set up a widespread Jewish school network, which functioned until it was shut down by the government in June 1942.

The last of the organization's leaders were deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943, and in July of that year, the Reich Representation/Association was officially abolished.