

Summary on the Symposium in Bonn from 3 to 5 June 2005: Sixty Years after 1945 - Deaf History into the Future

The Symposium in the Gustav Heinemann House in Bonn will remain a special memory for many participants for a long time. For 170 participants these were three very informative days. From the beginning of the Symposium Jochen Muhs and Helmut Vogel, M.A. dedicated themselves to the Deaf victims of the National Socialist tyranny (forced sterilization and euthanasia). The structure of the Regede at that time (Imperial Federation of the Deaf in Germany) was dictatorially developed during the Nazi period. Mark Zaurov, M.A. reported descriptively on the Nazi crimes against the Jewish Deaf. Many Jewish Deaf were murdered in the concentration camps. Nowadays right-wing radicalism, Anti-Semitism and the hatred for foreigners are not allowed to find a place in our society. During her lecture held in International Sign Language, Marie-France Percevault from France delivered the important message that we are to stress a sign of peace and agreement, so that human beings can continue in friendship together.

On the next day Dr. Hans-Uwe Feige reported on the history of the Deaf Federation in the GDR from 1957 to 1989. That topic was new to many participants who were not alive at that time in the GDR. That also applies to Martin Domke's presentation; he was able to show vividly how he implemented ideas in his own way to overcome barriers in the GDR. Gerlinde Gerkens experienced the same hardships as Domke in western Germany. The participants became acquainted with her eventful life and her achievements on the board of the German Deaf Federation, where she worked and fought for many issues starting in 1994, and later when she became president in 1999. Lastly it was pure luck that the participants had the opportunity to experience live in person Friedrich Waldow, who is 90 years old. His stories about his youth in Stettin (today Szczecin/Poland) and Berlin made it possible for the participants to experience deaf history in the early 20th century and to take part in his life. He had earned the highest regard as publisher of the German Deaf Newspaper (Deutsche Gehörlosen-Zeitung) for many decades.

It was a outstanding mixture of deaf historians, witnesses and speakers. Altogether the Symposium participants took a lot of information home with them from this event. May deaf and hearing participants pass on their knowledge, because it is essential: To learn from the past, so that we can understand the present and mold the future!

The multifaceted program included an art exhibition from Rudolf Werner, a Deaf History exhibition from Lothar Scharf and Nicola Galliner, the film presentation "Hanna" from CinéSourds, Herbert Christ's Quizshow and a tour in the House of West German History.

The Symposium, organized by the Culture and History of the Deaf e.V., also became an historical meeting in the history of the Deaf movement.

Gez. Helmut Vogel, President