

AJC List Stirs German Response

AJC's release of a list of over 250 German companies that used forced and slave laborers during the Nazi era has prompted widespread interest and press coverage in Germany and the United States.

German Report

Hundreds of newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations in both national and local media covered the release of the list on Dec. 7. Especially noteworthy was the reaction throughout Germany, which 55 years after the war is still struggling with the legacy of its past and searching for its identity.

"Fortunately, the strong corporate criticism could not counteract the public pressure that arose in Germany for companies to join the fund following AJC's publication of the list," says Deidre Berger, director of AJC's Berlin Office.

"Our list prompted countless conversations in families throughout Germany. We could not have had more success in breaking through the taboo on this subject."

Deidre Berger, director, AJC Berlin Office

After the major papers in Germany had reported the news of AJC's list, local journalists were inspired to embark on further large-scale investigations of companies in their regions. Many contacted the companies identified in our list and asked

if they planned to join the compensation fund.

"The list evidently prompted a level of detail in local reporting on this issue that had not happened during the entire year of negotiations," says Berger.

Publication of the list also stimulated political activity. The national leadership of the Green Party, now part of the governing coalition, sent letters to all the firms on the list urging them to become part of the fund, and individual party representatives asked firms in their districts to join. The city of Wuppertal passed a resolution demanding that companies in the region join the fund. In the ensuing weeks, other city councils followed suit.

The combined pressure had tremendous impact. Prior to AJC's intervention, only 24 companies had agreed to join the fund. Since the publication of the list, over 99 additional companies have joined.

Berger notes significant societal reverberations. After reading about our list, one journalist was moved to ask his father what he remembered. The father, it turned out, was a source of untold stories about forced labor in his hometown. "Given the extensive local coverage, I would like to believe that our list prompted countless conversations in families throughout Germany," said Berger. "We could not have had more success in breaking through the taboo on this subject."