Paris Letter No. 56

To: Mr. Morris Laub
AJDC NEW YORK

Dear Moish:

I have just come back to Paris after three very strenuous, but I think on the whole fruitful days in Munich. I had two full days of sessions with representatives of Camp Foehrenwald during which I hope they learned something about the facts of life. At the moment all is externally calm, but just how the position will develop over the next few days it would be hazardous to predict.

I shall not try to give you a full report of the contents of the meetings. I was able to arrange, with the full consent of the Camp representatives, for the meetings to be tape recorded. I have brought the reels back to Paris with me and they are now being transcribed. The multiplicity of Yiddish accents employed will make the transcription process a difficult one, but as soon as it is completed I shall send you a copy.

For the moment I would only like to add that it is my principal impression that the basic difficulty arises out of the fact that the so-called leaders of the Camp population have developed for themselves a completely distorted picture of the demands which they are entitled to make upon the "Jewish world" and of the almost contractual obligations which that world has to them. Perhaps even more important is the fact that American and world Jewish organizations have wittingly or unwittingly conveyed to the Camp population the impression that they accept the above estimate of the relative rights and obligations of the Camp population and the "Jewish world". I do not criticize the motives of the individuals or organizations concerned, but I am forced to confess to having had an inner feeling of disquiet when the Chairman of the Camp Committee recited to me the letters and oral assurances which they had received ever since the Hague negotiations began that adequate funds would be available for the reestablishment of the Camp population. Apparently, until Sam Haber sat down with them last October and they broke off negotiations with him because it became clear immediately that he did not regard "adequate funds" as meaning anything like five million dollars for 1400 persons, no-one of the many individuals and organizations with whom they had been in touch had ever attempted to put them straight on either the amount which the "Jewish world" would regard as a fair discharge of its obligations to them, nor had even raised the question of criteria by which such obligations could be measured.

The Joint Distribution Committee receives its funds in the United States through the United Jewish Appeal. Outside of the United States, the Joint Distribution Committee has the active cooperation of the South African Jewish Appeal United Jewish Relief Agencies, Canada; Central British Fund; Organizaciones Central de Ayuda, Argentina; Conges Auxiliars do Jont, Brazil; United Jewish Overseas Relief Funds, Australia; Joint Relief Committee, Mexico; and others.
To: Mr. Morris Laub, AJDC New York

1-3-1954

I enclose a copy of the relevant pages of Marian Gide's newspaper which appeared on the second day of our negotiations (i.e., Thursday, February 25 — the paper is dated February 26 because it is a weekly) and which, while it brought forth a terrific outburst of indignation during the course of the meeting, I think helped to reinforce what I had been saying to them — namely that not everybody in the "Jewish world" felt as they did about the rights and obligations involved.

I shall not go into the eight specific demands and the proposals I made with respect to them. I think that Gide's full report of his interview with me after the meetings will have appeared in the Yiddish Daily Forward by the time this reaches you, and I know that he intends to report on each of the points. Wherever I felt that the prospect of stimulating exit from the Camp would not be hindered by concessions on our part, I made, what I believe to be reasonable and perhaps generous concessions. On the other hand, I stuck absolutely to the proposition that the very purpose of liquidating the Camp would not longer be served if we continued to allow the so-called Camp Welfare Committee even that measure of participation and control in relief determinations which they had enjoyed before the outburst, and I insisted that as a symbol of our and their earnest desire to liquidate the Camp as quickly as possible the time had now come when all JDC services to Foehrenwald should be integrated in one unit which would be housed in Munich (although direct services like medical care, social work consultation, emigration registration etc. would continue to be provided on a visiting basis in the Camp), and which would use as its principal criterion in the granting of welfare assistance an assessment of whether such assistance was likely to help or hinder the individual in getting out of Foehrenwald.

These two points, of course, constitute the real threat to their present inert security and were, as I indicated in my telegram, the two points which made it impossible for us to reach full and final agreement. Our staff in Munich, however, is unanimously and firmly of the conviction that without some such change in their and our approach no substantial further headway can be made. Our present intention, therefore, is to stand by our position and await events, with full recognition that we may still have to go through with a complete but temporary withdrawal from Munich if that should be the direction in which events move.

Sincerely yours,

MWB/hf
M. W. Beckelman

Enc.
cc: JR

The Joint Distribution Committee receives its funds in the United States through the United Jewish Appeal. Outside of the United States, the Joint Distribution Committee has the active cooperation of the South African Jewish Appeal, United Jewish Relief Agencies, Canada; Central British Fund; Organización Central de Ayuda, Argentina; Comités Auxiliars de Joint, Brazil; United Jewish Overseas Relief Funds, Australia; Joint Relief Committee, Mexico; and others.