

Fry, Varian

Immediately following the occupation of France by the Germans, an organization was established in the United States known as the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC). Their purpose was to aid mostly intellectuals stranded in France to leave for the USA. Paragraph 19 of the cease-fire agreement between Germany and France, stated that France was obligated to turn over to the Germans any anti-Nazi refugees on the Gestapo's list - a large number of whom were Jews. In June 1940, the U.S. government agreed to provide entry visas to two hundred intellectuals who were in danger of being arrested. Varian Fry was selected to fill the post of ERC representative in France. His job was to reach Marseilles, which held the largest concentration of these refugees, and to find a way to get them out. He had a list of two hundred names of those eligible for visas, and a sum of \$3,000 on his person.

Arriving in Marseilles in August 1940, he summoned the refugees on his list. But the rumor of his arrival had spread, and hundreds of people came to ask him for assistance. Fry decided to find ways - most of which were illegal - to smuggle out these refugees who faced immediate danger of falling into German hands. He rented an office and put together a staff of reliable workers to help him in the process of classification. The office dealt in legal as well as illegal ways - forging documents, smuggling refugees across borders by land and by sea. Fry's activities reached such significant dimensions that it became difficult to keep them secret. The French police and the US Embassy in Vichy decided to take firm action against him. As a first step the French police raided his offices. In December 1940, he was arrested and held for a while on a ship. But Fry remained in France even after his passport had expired, and continued his rescue activities. He was ultimately arrested by the French police who had been tipped off by the United States Embassy. He was deported from France after thirteen months of operation.

Fry estimates that his office dealt with some 15,000 cases by May 1941. Of these, assistance was provided to approximately 4,000 people, over 1,000 of whom were smuggled from France in various ways. Among the Jews Fry

helped to smuggle were a number of well-known figures, such as Hanna Arendt, Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, Siegfried Kracauer, Franz Werfel, Lion Feuchtwanger, and many others. When asked as to his motives, Fry responded that when he had visited Berlin in 1935, he saw SA men assaulting a Jew, and he felt he could no longer remain indifferent.