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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Leopoldine Wagner: shameful for us Germans

Leopoldine Wagner is one of the few contemporary witnesses of Freiberg who contacted us. She is from South Kärnten in Austria, which, like South Tirol, became part of Italy after World War I. In 1935 she met her Freiberg-born husband in Tunis, where he was working for the German consulate. They were married in 1936. This made her a citizen of the German Reich. When war broke out, German men fit for military service working abroad were summoned to the German Wehrmacht. This is how Ms. Wagner ended up in Freiberg. Due to her language skills she was appointed as an interpreter beginning in 1943, particularly for the Italian prisoners of war working for Freia GmbH. Ms. Wagner had already written us in 1991:

“Even though I am already very old, I would still like to help shed light on Germany's dark history. I hope I can help the project group with my experience. During the war years I was mobilized to work in Arado aeroplane factory. Because of my language skills I was placed in the foreigner's camp "Am Hemmschuh" and had 300 Badoglio prisoners (Italians), 180 interned civilian Italians and 180 Flemish, Walloons and French under my supervision, which meant discussing and leading work counselling in the foremen's rooms, taking the sick to the doctor and similar tasks. I came in contact with the interned women because they cleaned the floors in the offices, closely supervised by the "flint-ladies", the SS guards, of course.”

When, in September 2000, survivors of the camp from Israel and Poland were in Freiberg, I got a chance to meet Ms. Wagner at the "welcome evening" at the Petri church. It broke my heart to

see them: so thin, shaven, at temperatures of 18 below zero without warm clothes, without socks, only in wooden clogs and with bloody feet!", Leopoldine Wagner sobbed. "Sometimes I was able to slip one of them something to eat in their mouths when they came to scrub the floor. But I was afraid too. We couldn't help them!"<sup>1</sup> In an interview Ms. Wagner said<sup>2</sup>:

"It was shameful for us Germans that we debased ourselves and tortured people to such an extent. They had nothing but their prison clothes, and their wooden clogs, covered in blood and pus, were frozen onto their feet at the heels. Nothing to wear in this kind of cold, the food

1

Quoted from Sabine Ebert (Hg): Region Freiberg. Das Jahrbuch, Freiberg 2000, S. 99.

2

Claudia Schön, MDR-Fernsehdokumentation "Gestohlene Jugend - Die Zwangsarbeiterinnen von Freiberg", Erstausstrahlung am 3. Mai 2001.

they got was terrible. Yellow carrot soup, red beetroot soup, beetroot as salad or compote terrible! As a person having gained German nationality only through marriage, I felt shame for this misery, and hopefully, hopefully nothing like this will ever happen again. I gave one of them a bra, not a delicate one, one that warmed chest and back. And the next day, "Oberscharführer" (chief staff sergeant) Bertram came with my bra in his hand and said: "Ms. Wagner, do you know this?" I said: "Yes." He said: "If you have something to give away, give it to Germans, or you will no longer be called Ms. Wagner, but by number one thousand and something!" Of course, I was afraid. If you didn't howl with the pack, you practically had one foot in the concentration camp. I once had to transport 8 Jewish women from the camp at Hemmschuh to the main camp. I was in a cold sweat because I was afraid one would run away. And I tried to talk to them. Among them was an 18 or 19 year-old Hungarian woman. She was a pianist. Her name was Ilona. While she scrubbed she told me she wanted to flee and asked me whether there was any way I could help her. During work I kept repeating my sister's address in Austria to her, so that she could memorise it. My idea was that she could flee dressed as a nun. Our catholic priest had a sister in Dresden-Goppeln who was a neophyte teacher. And she provided a worn out nun's robe. I hid it in the right hand side of the confessional. Then I told Ilona, when they next go to be showered and disinfected at the Untermarkt, she should try to sneak into the door of the church at Kreuzgasse and hide in the right hand side of the confessional, and after some time come out as a nun. I don't know what became of her. The robe really was gone, but I never heard from her again. Father Hartwig was arrested a short while later by the Gestapo and imprisoned for one year in Bautzen jail, the "yellow misery". I don't know whether there was a connection to our ploy.

The camp in Freiberg? It was ignored, hushed up. Most people only knew: there are barracks at Hammerberg. But who is suffering in the barracks, no one cared about that. It really is sad for a town like Freiberg, that such a disgraceful thing can be hushed up and no one wants to know about it...

taken from:

Düsing, Michael (Hg. im CJD Chemnitz): Wir waren zum Tode bestimmt – Lodz – Theresienstadt – Auschwitz – Freiberg – Oederan – Mauthausen: Jüdische Zwangsarbeiterinnen erinnern sich. Leipzig 2002: S. 158-161.