

London, June 16, 1937  
about May 26, 1937

MEMORANDUM

(For my personal use exclusively)

Notes about an interrogation by the "GESTAPO" (German Secret Police)

(Not to be used for publication.  
Strictest discretion imperative.)

During the winter 1936-1937 I spent four months in the U.S.A. and paid visits to the Schools of Social Work with the object of completing an international Survey on Schools of Social Work. In exchange for hospitality I had promised to lecture ~~minutely~~ for students, alumni and teachers on the results of this study and also on the theory of Social Work.

It was understood that I am not entitled to lecture or to talk on present-day German problems, and my friends saw to it that no difficulties should arise.

When I returned to Germany on March 6th I was informed by my house-keeper that she and the caretaker of the house in which I live, had in the meantime been questioned by the "Gestapo" about the purpose of my trip to America, my connections there and about a trip to England and Switzerland which I had made last summer.

I also heard that various people who had emigrated from Germany but returned for a visit, were either sent back at the frontier or interned in a so-called "Schooling Camp" (Concentration Camp) for an indefinite period.

Yet, as I had not emigrated and had a permanent home in Berlin, I never connected these two instances, and I attached not such importance to the visit of the Secret Police to my house.

Three months after my return, on May 25th, I was summoned by the "Gestapo" (Secret Police) for the next morning to come to their Berlin Office and to give explanations about my trip abroad. I knew that most of the University Professors who had been invited to lecture in America had, on their return to Germany, been asked to give such a report about their professional activities, a proceeding which as a rule had been got over quickly and courteously.

My passport having expired in the meantime, I had made an application for a new one at my local police office, and received at about the same time as the summons to the Secret Police the reply that my application had been granted, as there was nothing unfavourable known against me. For this reply I had been waiting fully eight weeks, not a comfortable time for a person whose whole ~~life, work, interest and friendships~~ life, work, interest and friendships had always embraced many other countries besides Germany!

My interrogation by the "Gestapo" lasted for over four hours. There were two officials in the room. A younger one who was polite and questioned me and wrote at the same time a record of my explanations, and an elder one who pretended to work on different records, and who seemed to act as a sort of "watchdog" and interrupted the interrogation several times in a rough manner.

Until the very end I was not aware that any charge would be made against me as I knew that I had not acted incorrectly and had a clear conscience.

The interrogation was, as far as I can reconstruct it from memory, as follows:-

"Have you brought your passport?"

"Yes, here it is."

Can you tell me when you left Berlin last summer?

About May 20th. (He examines my passport)

You left Berlin on May 19th. Where did you go?

First I went to London, where I stayed with an old friend of mine, the Hon. Mrs. Franklin, then with another friend, Lady Pentland.

Have you been somewhere else in England?

In Scotland with Mrs. Johnston.

Where was that?

In Prestwick (I spelled the word to him)

Somewhere else?

Yes, with Lady Aberdeen in Ireland.

Have you any proofs of this trip?

Yes, here are the invitations from my friends.

(He writes down the names of the March, of Aberdeen and Mrs. Franklin).

How did you get to know these ladies?

I have known Lady Aberdeen for 40 years, she is my best friend, she is my godmother.

How did you make her acquaintance?

At a meeting of the I.C.W. (International Council of Women).

How did you come to know Mrs. Franklin?

I also made her acquaintance during such a meeting, 34 years ago.

Where did you meet Lady Pentland?

She is the daughter of Lady Aberdeen.

Where is Mrs. Johnston?

I met her through friends of mine.

Where did you go to from England?

I went to Engelberg in Switzerland, where I made a cure every year.

Did you go straight to Engelberg or did you stop somewhere?

I went straight through.

Via Germany or via France?

That I do not remember. During the last three years I went twice to Switzerland via Germany, where I stayed as a guest with the Ambassador von Schubert, and once via France.

(He examines my passport)

Last year you went via France. Where did you stop there?

Nowhere. I changed from the boat to the train and went straight on to Lucerne.

Where else have you been in Switzerland?

Nowhere.

So you went straight back from Engelberg to Berlin?

Yes, quite, without stopping anywhere.

When did you leave for America?

On October 6th or 7th.

Where have you been living during your stay in America?

First in New-York.

With whom did you live in New-York?

With a Mrs. Sturgess-Johnson, a Mrs. Boyd and Mrs. Schott.

But you told me that Johnson was in Scotland?

Yes, but that was a different lady. Johnson is a very usual name.

Schott, that are Germans?

Mr. Schott was born in Germany but has lived in America for 50 years. Mrs. Schott is an American.

Have you been somewhere else in America?

Yes, in Bryn-Mawr, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, St. Louis, New-Orleans California and many other places.

(The Watchdog: - "Do not always ask her where she has been, but why she has travelled!").

I have completed some research work in America, here it is.

(I showed him my new book: "Education for Social Work". Obviously he did not know any English as the copying of the title took quite a long time and much comparing).

Here is the invitation of the National Association of Schools for Social Work, who asked me also to talk to their students and teachers.

On what subjects did you lecture?

Here is the list of my subjects, I lectured on nothing but social work. (They never looked at this list).

(The Watchdog:-) "Will you tell us definitely what trips abroad you have made!"

During all my life? I really could not remember at a moment's notice!

No, we are only interested in what you have been doing since 1933.

I went once to England and once to Switzerland every year, apart from this one trip to U.S.A.

(I had actually been also a few days in Holland, once in Paris and once in Belgium, but forget all about it at that moment).

In the middle of this interrogation I asked him:

"Why do you ask me all this? As far as I am informed it is not forbidden to travel, whom should I ask for permission if I intend to travel abroad?"

Oh no, you need not ask anybody for permission. But if Jews are frequently absent and for quite a long time, they are asked to leave Germany for good, or.....

(he made a movement as if he wanted to say: or they will be arrested. But the word was not uttered.) He added kindly:-

But in your case this is unlikely as you have been abroad for research work.

(I do not believe that he wanted to make me feel safe in order to get more out of me, I rather felt that he disliked this dirty job, but that he was obliged to press for some confession or guilt.)

At about the beginning of this interrogation, - I cannot quite remember when it was, - he asked me whether I had met many Jews abroad, or something like that, and I answered that I am not Jewish but Lutheran. I had the impression as if he was rather glad and hoped that trouble might be averted for me, but I added instantly that I was of Jewish descent and, according to the terminology of the Third Reich Jewish, but that I had been brought up in a protestant school.

"How could that be as both your parents were Jews?"

"In former times people did not make much fuss about the education of children. We were sent to the nearest school which had an absolute protestant denominational character and by which we were very much influenced. But I have only been accepted by the protestant church as a grown-up person.

(He, whilst turning over the leaves of his records) But you have only been baptized in 1917.

No, in 1914.

That is impossible, 1917 is stated in our documents.

That must be a mistake.

Can you tell us a date?

Yes, I have been baptized in the first days of September 1914. This was after the beginning of the world war, and I could not have lived through the war without the spiritual help and support of the church.

But how was it possible that it is stated here that you have been Jewish until 1917?

(After some consideration)

Oh, the reason for that must be that those Jews who left their religious community had to pay taxes for another couple of years.

So you belonged to two religious communities during the course of some years?

No, but I had to pay taxes to two of them.

When this interrogation was finished I was asked to sign what the man had recorded. Then I was sent to the corridor which had iron bars on both sides. I suppose that these gates can be automatically closed instantly in case somebody tries to escape. (But this is guess-work only. In any case people are not admitted to this corridor unless they present their summons. No one may accompany a person who has been summoned. However, I had never thought of bringing someone with me.)

After an interval I was called in again and questioned by the same man. He tried to look at me with Hitler's hypnotic glance and said:-

"Fräulein Doctor, are you a member of any organisation for example of the Jewish Culture Organisation?"

"No, I am not. Formerly I was a member of the International Council of Women, a highly respected organisation of women to which some of the best people in all countries belong. However I have resigned and they made me an honorary member, which does not include any activity on my part.

Do you belong to any other organisation?

I am managing a little Study Circle of schools for Social Work, if this can be called an organisation.

Who belongs to this group?

Nine people.

Who are these nine people?

Mme Mülle at Brussels.

Who is she?

The director of the school for Social Work in Brussels.

Who else?

Dr. Moltzer, Amsterdam.

Who is he?

The director of the school there.

Who else?

Prof. Lloyd, London.

The same question. The same answer.

Mme Wagner-Back, Geneva.

Wagner, that is a German lady?

No, a swiss.

Miss Wisner, America.

New-York?

No, New-Orleans. She is the chairman of the American association of Schools for Social Work.

Who else?

Miss Black, Liverpool.

Who is she?

Director of the schools there.

You did not tell us nine names.

No, but there is my own name, and one place is free for the time being.

Is there somebody else belonging to that Committee?

Yes, several schools.

German schools?

No.

Where are the headquarters of the Committee?

If it can be called headquarters or office, it is in my sitting room.

Have all ladies with whom you stayed abroad, been working for the International Council of Women?

Lady Aberdeen and Mrs. Franklin have done so.

Does Lady Fentland also work in that Council?

Yes, she has recently taken up this work.

And Mrs. Johnston?

That I cannot tell. Women of this class are all active members of the social public life in England, but whether she has been a member of the I.C.W. I do not know.

Do the American ladies with whom you have been staying also work in the I.C.W.?

None of them.

But how did you meet these ladies?

Many years ago I was invited to an American Congress for Social Work, I gave some lectures and the people became interested in me.

(Interval, again the hypnotic glance.)

Fräulein Doctor, have you been talking to Emigrants?

(I answered after a pause of reflection as follows)

Yes, I met Dr. Weiss in London. I had never met him before. In his trouble he received hospitality through the intervention of an emergency committee at the house of friends of mine whom I had visited for many years. Once when I arrived in London, I was told that these friends had offered him hospitality, an apartment in their house, and he was introduced to me. It would have been a cowardice on my part on his account to run away from a house where I had always been treated with the utmost kindness and friendship.

What is Dr. Weiss doing in London?

He tries to get orders for stationery for some printing firms.

"The Watchdog: - "The former Vice President of the Berlin Police?"

Yes, quite.

Did you talk to him again?

Yes, several times, when I met him on the staircase we exchanged a few words.

Have you seen other Emigrants?

Yes, some teachers of my former institution who are now teaching in England.

What is the name of your former institution?

Soziale Frauenschule.

Who are the ladies whom you met?

Dr.S.from X.

Where is she now?

She is teaching German at a very good English school.

Who else?

Dr.A., who is teaching at an Oxford College.

Where does she come from?

That I cannot tell you. But she has been working at our institute and later as professor at Teacherd College in X.

Which other Emigrants did you see?

Some of my former pupils who have been living in England for a long time and who in consequence you could bot call Emigrants.

If they left Germany before 1933 we are not interested. Which Emigrants have you met in America?

If you call such people Emigrants: I met some professors who have received leave of absence from their universities for their activities abroad.

Who are these professors?

First of all my nephew, Prof. Albert Salomon.

Where has he been before?

In Cologne at the College.

Where is he now?

In New-York.

At the University?

Yes.

Whom else?

Prof. Werner Jäger from the Berlin University.

Where is he now?

In Chicago at the University as well.

I am sure you will have met some other people.

Yes, Dr. Helmut Seckel.

Where was he before?

In Bonn as a lecturer.

What is he doing now?

He has a research fellowship at Chicago.

Whom else?

Prof. Neumeyer, a teacher of history of art.

Where is he now?

In Oakland.

But you will have met more Emigrants still.

(After some reflection)

Prof. Goldschmidt, the famous biologist of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute in Berlin.

Where is he now?

In Berkely.

But all these are Jews.

Not, this is not the case.

Tell us some more names.

I cannot think of any others as I met mostly American people.

What did you talk about with the Emigrants?

Mostly about America. America is a very interesting country and those people who have only recently come to that country are tremendously interested in the development there.

So you had scientific discussions?

Yes.

But the people will have asked you about Germany as well!

Oh, they are all longing for Germany!

What did the American people say about Germany?

Very little, they are just as much interested in Germany as we are in Armenia.

But what did they talk about?

First about the presidential elections, then about the Duke of Windsor, then about Spain.

(Getting very alert)

If they talked about Spain they must also have said something about Germany?

Why? They were much interested which side would win.

If someone asked you about the Third Reich, what did you answer?

I drew attention to the positive achievements of the Third Reich. Sometimes people asked me in U.S.A. whether I intend to return to Germany. I always said: certainly, I live there without ever being molested.

But why do you think they put this question?

Because they saw many refugees.



What was the general feeling about Germany, kind or unkind?

The attitude was not favourable, but no less so than during the years 1923 and 1924, when I was in U.S.A.

(He notes in the report: - "The attitude is unkind.")

Whom did you associate with in Engelberg?

I lived very quietly.

Do you want to say you never talked to anyone?

No, in a hotel you do talk eventually to someone.

With whom did you talk?

For instance with the proprietor of the Hotel and his family, whom I have known for many years.

What is their name?

Gattani.

Did you meet any Emigrants?

Not to my knowledge. I met a Berlin friend.

Do you wish to add anything to my record of the interrogation?

No, I have a pure conscience and no reason to reproach myself for anything. The only thing that you could reproach me from your point of view would be the fact that I met Dr. Weiss, if that is a reproach! Besides I met no former politicians.

The interrogation lasted already for four hours, I was exhausted - besides all those questions seemed so utterly futile - it was all about nothing - they reproached me of nothing so that I did not think it worth while to say anything else. Before that I had said that I knew how one ought to behave abroad.

"I belong to an old family whose members have been in Germany for 225 years. One of my ancestors got a safe-conduct by Frederic the Great. I would like to show it to you, you will never have seen such a document before."

(He examines the document with interest).

"I was awarded the great silver medal for special services for the State, which as far as I know, no other woman in Prussia possesses."

(I told him all this in order to draw their attention to the fact that they did not speak to a "Nobody". It would have been undignified to say more).

I also mentioned that after the war my lectures abroad were much appreciated by the Foreign Office and considered as very useful in the interests of Germany.

I was again sent to the corridor with the iron bars on both sides. Several times during the interrogation I had asked for the permission to give a telephone call to my housekeeper as she and a friend, whom I had asked for lunch, would be waiting for me. It seems, however, as if they were afraid I should call for help, - a thought which never entered my mind. I was not in the least afraid, not for a single minute. I never guessed they could harm me. I explained to them why I wished to telephone, but it was not allowed.

After a long while of waiting, - it was after 8 o'clock p.m., - I was called into a different room, where I was asked by a fairly rude man: -

"Miss S. what was your idea, were your intentions when you travelled abroad?"

(I, perfectly amazed)

"My intentions? I made a trip as I made many during my life".

He: Did you mean to stay here from now on?

I: Certainly.

He: This is impossible. You must leave Germany within three weeks.

(This was like a lightning, coming from a clear sky - completely like a shell-shot. An emergency which I had never contemplated ever for a second in my worst dreams.)

I: "This seems pretty short notice!"

He: "Why, what have you got to do here?"

I: "For example, to dissolve a household."

(I did not add: to look through the archives which a scholar and author and teacher has accumulated within 40 years and to decide what should be taken as the tools of her profession into a "one-room-life".

I neither added: to liquidate several small funds which were entrusted to me for charities and social work.

I neither added: to look about for a refuge, as I have to go abroad without money.)

He: § Do you have an apartment of your own?"

I: "Yes".

He: "How many rooms"?

I: "Four rooms and a housekeeper for whose future I feel bound to provide.

He: But you knew that you may not remain abroad for any length. Otherwise why did you inquire about it at the German Ambassador at Washington. Give me your Passport. At which frontier station will you leave Germany and where will you live?

I: I could not possibly decide at a moment's notice. May be I shall go to Switzerland, may be via Bâle. But I cannot tell.

He: Anyway your passport has expired. If you get the new one the day after to-morrow, come back to my room and tell me the day when you will leave Germany and the frontier station. Good day."

I drove home, where my housekeeper and a friend waited for me, rather excited because I was so late. I told them: "I have to quit, I have to leave the country within three weeks. God wills it. If I accept it you have to do the same. Don't cry."

I asked right away a friend, a lawyer, to settle my affairs, and over night I decided to ask British friends whether they would take me in for some time, and wrote at once to American friends for an Affidavit so as to make it possible for me to get an emigration visa for U.S.A.

My lawyer told several friends what had happened and some of them came to ask whether they should try and get this preposterous order cancelled, for which they knew no precedent. But all agreed with me that a further life in Germany - after this affair- was impossible. Better poor but free!

Two days later a friend went with me to the local police office where I received my new Passport and she accompanied me to the Secret Police - but was not allowed to pass the iron gates.

I went to the same room and presented my passport.

He: "At what frontier station will you leave Germany?"

I: "At Bentheim. I go first to England.

He: "Will you remain there?"

I: I cannot tell. I suppose however, that you are not in a position to decide whether I am obliged to remain in the country to which I go first?

He: No, we make no regulations in this respect. Which was the day you came here first?

I: On May the 29th.

(He took his calendar and it took him a long time to find out which date would be three weeks after May 29th).

According to our first summons you ought to have left Germany June 16th but considering that it is already May 29th I could perhaps allow you to stay until the 17th or 18th.

I: No need for that. One or ~~two~~ two more days make no difference to me whatever! May I get my Passport back?

He: No, it remains here, you will find it at the frontier.

I: This means that I will probably miss my train and shall be left at the frontier without money.

He: Oh, this does not happen. Which is the date when you will cross the frontier?

I: Between June 11th and 16th.

He: Your Passport will be ready in Bentheim from June 11th.

I, getting up! - "Have I finished here? I suppose I shall get this order of expulsion in writing.

He, also getting up, very cross and excited! - "This cannot be done under any circumstances. We never give anything in writing".

I: But I must know who has given this order, at least the name of the department. My legal advisers intend to petition that the Dollars should be paid back to me which I have earned for the Third Reich during the trip which apparently has broken my neck.

He: But they will be credited to your account.

I: No, we do not want to have blocked Marks, worth 1 1/2d. We want the money back in Dollars. What should my American friends say who sent me home with Dollars, if I return without the money!

He: You need only say you wanted it for emigration purposes.

I: This is not sufficient. It is no voluntary emigration. I should never have left without being compelled to go.

He: I will believe this!

(He was mistaken. If I could have taken my money with me I should have gone long ago. But if we emigrate we go poor, "Naked as we came forth of our mother's womb").

I: An enforced emigration.!

He: An order to emigrate so as to avoid being sent to a Schooling Camp (New name for Concentration Camp).

Anyway, I had made him express these words point blank. Then I left.

A necessary period of my life has come to an end, necessary for the development of my moral strength. There is only one thing I ask from my friends: Do not make any fuss about me and my affairs! I am not the first and shall not be the last who has been persecuted. All over the world centuries the Jews were persecuted. The first Christians had been persecuted and the Christian Churches are persecuted to-day in Germany as they were in Russia and Mexico and Spain. The Armenians had been persecuted, and the unfortunate Spaniards have been obliged to flee in thousands and thousands. The poor have been suppressed at all times, and the Negroes are still far from being emancipated. St. Paul has written his most wonderful epistles from prison, and it always remained true what he has expressed:

"By evil reports and good reports.....  
As dying, and behold, we live.  
As sorrowful, but all way rejoicing.  
As having nothing and yet possessing all things."

During all my life I have tried to help others who were depressed or in trouble. I know that others will stand by me.

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London, June 16th 1937.