

From the Testimony of Elisabeth Freund about the War Years in Berlin

[Elisabeth Freund lived in Berlin. Her husband was an executive in a German corporation who was dismissed in 1933 since he was a Jew. He worked until 1938 as an employee in a firm. Their three children were sent abroad. In 1941, Elisabeth Freund was conscripted to forced labor, first in a laundry and then in a munitions factory. In 1941 they managed to immigrate to Cuba, and from there in 1944 they went on to the United States. She wrote the following report in Cuba in December 1941]

... The Aryans have problems with food too, but they may buy at all hours. There is not enough merchandise. In the morning there are long lines of women in front of the shops. It is extremely difficult to find potatoes. The last crop was bad and there are shortages of vegetables.... The Aryans get significantly more than we Jews. We have had a "J" stamped on our ration cards for a long time, so that we could not go and get food under false identity. There are no extra rations for us, no canned food, no fish, no chicken, no smoking materials, no coffee and especially no milk.... Milk is given to Jewish children only when they are very young. I am always angered by the fact that there is no candy for Jewish children. It is so vile. Other children receive very little too, but what difference would it make if Jewish children would get some candy or synthetic honey.... [Sunday] strolls are not as pleasant as they used to be. Until now one could find at least a few benches in the Tiergarten [one of Berlin's parks] on which one was permitted to sit. All the benches have been recently painted. They now all have signs reading "not for Jews". This, while there is a shortage of labor and lack of paint... Kaethe tells of her mother. The elderly woman lives all alone in Frankfurt. The Jews there received eviction notices. We heard the same from Leipzig. A family has the right, if at all, to one single room. All the Jews are to be crowded into "Jewish Houses". The mother received a questionnaire, which she is unable to fill out on her own. It requires detailed information about her assets and a list of all her furniture and smaller possessions. They may dispossess all the Jews over there too and confiscate all their belongings, as is presently being

practiced in the small towns. But this could also be a preparation for the deportation of all Jews to Poland. Such deportations have been carried out from Vienna and Prague to the Polish ghettos in Galicia. There are terrible rumors about these deportations. But for the moment, the worst is that this elderly woman has nothing to eat, because food is being sold to Jews only in very few shops. She is sick and cannot walk the distances to far away parts of the city every day. Kaethe wants to go there as soon as possible to take care of her mother. This however is not so simple, because the Gestapo in Frankfurt/Main does not permit Jews from elsewhere to stay in town without a special license. Kaethe therefore cannot stay there overnight.... We have not been allowed to buy clothing for the past two years, ever since the ration cards for clothing have been distributed to "Aryans" only. The worst are the stockings. We do not even get a supply of thread to mend stockings... There is great commotion in our circles, in all of Jewish Berlin. About one thousand Jewish tenants received notification that they would have to move out of their apartments. They have to vacate them within five days. The Gestapo demands that the Jewish Community find accommodations for these families. Jews may not move into houses belonging to Aryans.... The Jews are not be concentrated in non-Aryans houses, houses that belong to Jews or had belonged to Jews in the past.... The justification given for this measure is that many apartments were destroyed by air raids.... Of course there is a housing shortage in Berlin, but it is mostly due to the fact that in spite of the war, half of the city is being torn down for the construction of the new Berlin. This is Hitler's favorite project. The prisoners of war are such cheap labor that the construction goes on in spite of the war as long as there is a supply of building materials. The authorities and offices have to move to residential houses because entire neighborhoods are been torn down in the city center... It is terrible that the apartments have to be vacated within five days. It is being taken very seriously. The head of the Jewish housing department, who asked for an extension of the time limit, was sent immediately to a concentration camp. The move has to be completed within these few days. Everyone will have to spare as much room as he can. We also will give one room in our small apartment. Many women in the factory [where Elisabeth Freund worked]

are affected by the cancellation of their rental contracts. They are asking for vacation time in order to look for apartments. As the Gestapo is behind these measures, they permit them to go on leave. The Community, which was by no means prepared for such sudden challenge, provides addresses of Jewish houses. Finding apartments is very difficult, especially for families with children. One of the kindergarten teachers is totally desperate. She wants to move in with her mother, who lives in a rented furnished room. This, however, is impossible because the mother lives in an Aryan house. Although she has not as yet received orders to move, Jews are not allowed to move in to such a house, even if this would not constitute an addition to the space rented by Jews. We got rid of our [free] room in a second. An old couple will move in. They are quiet people who already had to flee once, in 1918 from the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg. They were lucky to be the first ones to show up. Our doorbell was ringing continuously because of that room. My husband has to notify the Jewish Housing Department about the rental of that room. Hundreds of people are standing in line at their offices as early as 7 a.m. and it takes eight hours of waiting to arrange that matter. I have asked the factory for one day's leave to rearrange the apartment and create space for the new tenants. We secretly get a paper from the kiosk. It is not being brought to our house any longer, and as Jews, we are not permitted buy it, since Jews are not supposed to read German newspapers any longer. However, the lady selling papers is so nice and always keeps one copy for us.... The atmosphere in our circles is terrible. Some have found rooms, most of them found very poor housing. All the women are very depressed. They have had to sell furniture once again, and the prices they got were ridiculous because of the sudden increase in offers of Jewish belongings. It is not only the question of housing. This will be solved somehow in the next few days. The potatoes are in very short supply. Aryans hardly get any, and Jews get none at all. There are more and more signs in food stores "goods in shortage are not being provided to Jews". There are searches for food in Jewish homes all over. Everything worsens, and the worst is that the hopelessness of our situation is becoming increasingly clear to everybody. The same goes for me. I have lost my nerve. I don't know how I am going to survive.... At the

beginning, work in the factory was something new, and even the way we were treated was relatively decent. But it gets worse and worse. Even the prisoners of war are being treated better than we are, even if it is only because of the consideration for the German prisoners in the hands of the enemy.... But with the Jews, no consideration is necessary. The Jews have become convicts of sorts.... The worst situation is that of the boys who work here. There is a whole group of them, aged 14 and above. I often talk to them when I meet them. My own son is almost 14... I hope he will not become as serious and embittered as these boys. He is lucky to be in his English school [in England]. He can study and grows up in equality and among friends. The only hard part is that he is separated from his parents. Those poor boys at the factory. It is not the work, but the hopelessness of their situation. There is one, Kurt, a fast growing tall boy in pants that have become much too short for him. His arms stick out of sleeves that are too short. Even adolescents don't get ration cards for clothes. Kurt worked in a Jewish Community Training workshop for a year. He is very interested in technology and wanted to become an electric engineer. I ask him: isn't it interesting for you here? There must be a lot one can learn'. Oh, what do you know. Only the Aryan boys are apprentices. They are being trained. We Jewish boys may not learn anything.... We are to remain unskilled laborers.... I cannot even study at home. My parents also work in a factory, and I have to help with the housework. I always want to read in the evenings, but mostly I fall asleep.' The other boys agree with this. They have only Sundays free, and even then they have very little free time. And where should we go? We may not go to the woods and certainly not to the parks. If someone has a bicycle, he can perhaps go out and bathe somewhere in the open - we are not permitted to enter public beaches. But this too is dangerous. If the Hitler Youth catch us or if someone does not like our noses, we are beaten, and we will always be in the minority. It is much too dangerous to go out in a group of more than two or three.'... The community's funds have decreased, and the needs constantly grow. The problems and pressures have become unbearable. This summer, for example, one of the major problems was what to do with school children. In almost all families, the parents work in the factories and the children have been left with no

supervision. Where was one to accommodate these poor, stressed children who are in such need of a vacation. In past years, the School Department had organized excursions in the woods. This was extremely difficult, because the Gestapo declared that the children could ride public transportation only in small groups of no more than six children.... In addition, one had to find a place where the children could play without being harassed and beaten by some scoundrels. This year however, the Gestapo strictly forbade these excursions. What options remain? The parks are forbidden too. Many of the children don't even have a yard, let alone a garden in which they can play. And even if they have one, they may not play there because the neighboring houses complain about the noise. The Jewish Community has finally found a solution. It is turning every empty space in the Jewish cemeteries into playgrounds with sandboxes for the smaller children. And the older children have the task of cleaning the tombstones and weeding the paths. This way the children are kept busy and enjoy the good air, and at the same time the graves are being tended.... In the Germany of today, the cemeteries are not only the last resting place for old people, but the only place young children can play... An old worker with white hair pushes some fruit into my pocket. He does it secretly of course. He had heard we get no fruit, and he has his own garden. It is very nice and courageous of him, because it could cause him a lot of trouble... I am being transferred to another department [of the factory].... It is a department for petrol lamps and stoves for army use, probably for the Russian front.... The first eight days are terrible.... The small wires pierce my fingers and they bleed.... In the first weeks, my fingers are so inflamed and in such pain, that I wake up at night. Then my fingers become hard.... What do I need delicate fingers for? I will probably never do any work but factory work for the rest of my life. Since I have been in the radio factory, I have not done a single drawing. I have no time for it. I am too tired in the evenings. I am happy when I manage my housework in the few free hours of the evening. There is so much washing and mending to be done. My stockings are in terrible shape. I am so exhausted in the evenings that I go to bed early and fall asleep the moment I lie down.

There have been so many air raids lately. There was an alarm every night in the past week. No real sleep at night and no sufficient nutrition....

And there is a new order: As of 19 September, every Jew in Germany has to have a large yellow star sewn to his clothes in a visible way whenever he goes out in public. The word "Jude" [Jew] has to be written on the star in letters that look like Hebrew. Even children of 6 years and more may not play in the street without the star. The order causes enormous agitation at the factory. People speak of nothing else.

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