

Copy

Wulf Auerbach, Alpsteinerweg 4

Konstanz, Germany

Mr. Fred Esch:

May 24, 1944

"Something more: On Feb. 16, 1943, your sister in law, Mrs. Mildred Harnack-Fish, born September 16th, 1902 at Milwaukee, Wis., was executed by the Gestapo. By the person of the prison, I knew quite surely that she didn't know for what a crime she was in jail at all - The execution was nothing but a judicial murder. The culprit No. 1 for this crime is the Oberreichsanwalt Dr. Panginger, who is responsible for hundreds of suchlike crimes. She was, as you know, the wife of my uncle, Dr. Arvid Harnack, who was the first anti-Nazi executed by being hanged, on December 21st in 1942 at Plötzensee near Berlin."

Wulf Auerbach.

To Harriette:

Hess-Lichtenau
5 Sept. 1944 -

"You ask that I tell you about Mildred and Arvid. Arvid once said to me that the last time he was at Washington (summer 1939), he had a long discussion with you and Fred concerning Germany's political situation, her future and the mission of the people who were willing to oppose Nazism inside Germany. You will have learned

by this discussion - no, you certainly knew before - his liberalism and his burning zeal in trying to overcome Nazism. He often emphasized that he had imbibed his social mindedness at Wisconsin University, working with Commons. His doctor's thesis "Labor Movement in USA", the greater part of which he finished in the States, is, as he often said, an expression of his ideals and a program of his further life. Since 1933, he was in the underground anti-Nazi movement being the chief of a left-wing group. He tried to gather liberals and socialists, and paid special attention to younger people in ministerial agencies which, in his opinion, might be able to do useful work after Nazism had broken down. Mildred was in full sympathy with him, cooperating with all her strength. Their work was not only illegal insofar as they gathered Nazi-opponents and spread forbidden news gotten by foreign radio or inside information. They had also direct contact with USSR. Both were in a tremendous nervous strain all these years, for they knew the danger hanging over them. They had devoted private to political life. Arvid told me once that they had renounced children.

because they thought they should not hamper their political work by family interests, and because they always had to keep ready to break off their tents and to flee. They even went so far as to refuse having a telephone in their apartment, being afraid that friends might endanger them by speaking carelessly over the phone which, of course, was watched over. Mildred suffered much from the lack of privacy and comfort resulting from this kind of life.

"How in spite of all precautions, they were discovered, is still a secret. We guess that they had a Gestapo-spy among them. Here is a symptom: once, one of the group had to go to Stockholm in order to meet some Russian. The day before this man went to get an exit-permit, a Gestapo-official gave order to the police-office that no difficulties should be made. In summer, 1942, Mildred and Arvid had their vacation at Nidden on the Kurische Nehrung, a peninsula near Königsberg. (Jane and I had been there in 1940, and you got a lot of snaps we had made there.) At Nidden they were arrested by the Gestapo

and immediately brought to Berlin. They were charged with high-treason. As the proceedings were secret we did not hear too much. Neither Mildred nor Arvid denied. Arvid delivered a great political speech for defense in which he explained the motives of his work, and his conviction that it was necessary to cooperate with Russia. Otherwise, he said, Germany must inevitably run into total defeat. Arvid was condemned to death, with him a great many other people. By the same court, Mildred was condemned to five (or six) years imprisonment, but Hitler rejected this sentence as too light. In the second proceedings Mildred too was sentenced to death. Arvid was hanged at the end of 1942, and Mildred at the beginning of 1943. A priest was with them during their last days, a very courageous and upright man who happened to know other members of the Tarnack family and therefore took a special interest in Mildred and Arvid. As a consequence of all the physical and mental torture Mildred had to endure, she had fallen rather sick and got a serious tuberculosis."

Otto.