

## **Cemetery Coburg 09/26/1988 and meeting with Mayor Rolf Forkel 09/27/1988**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqQjRv0r\\_Cs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqQjRv0r_Cs)

Transcription: Dr. Hubertus Habel, Gaby Schuller, 2022/02;  
Translation using Google translator

03:00 **Harry Nomburg** calls for the memorial stone to be moved to the Jewish gate in the Jewish cemetery.

## **Meeting with Mayor Rolf Forkel in the "Regimentstube" of the town hall, 27.9.1988:**

### **Speech Forkel:**

[difficult to understand because of background noise: "[---]": incomprehensible passages]

"Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you here in the regimental room of the Coburg town hall. .... You are on a Germany trip and are visiting our beautiful city of Coburg. For some of you, our city of Coburg is known as home. You were born here and lived in Coburg until you emigrated. The city of Coburg is pleased that you are visiting our Coburg on the occasion of your visit to Germany. I would like to invite you to a Coburg specialty, a Coburg bratwurst and a Coburg beer, and before you ask your questions or if you want to be informed about something worth knowing, I would like to give you a brief historical outline of Coburg. In particular, I would like to greet the representatives of our two daily newspapers in Coburg, as well as Dr. Erdmann, who already wrote a biography, one could say, or a treatise on Judaism in Coburg up to the year 1924/25, [---] didn't get any further [---] and Herr Fromm, who wrote a biography, that is the name of a documentary about the Kristallnacht written on behalf of the evangelical church in Coburg. Both gentlemen might have taken the opportunity to ask you a few questions afterwards or to agree on a time when you would be comfortable having a small discussion or conversation with these two gentlemen.

In 1919 a referendum was held in Coburg as to whether the people of Coburg, the Coburg region, wanted to join Thuringia or Bavaria. Of the approximately 30,000 people entitled to vote, more than 27,000 voted for Bavaria. That was our great luck, because after the loss of the Second World War, Germany was divided. If we had gone to Thuringia, we would be behind the Iron Curtain today. Because if you look at the map, Coburg is surrounded by the Iron Curtain, i.e. by the border, in the west, north and east. Coburg used to be in the heart of Germany, today it is a border area. As a result, this is also very disadvantageous economically, because there is no large surrounding area, because Coburg was also particularly oriented towards southern Thuringia. We are in the area...

I'll pause now [so you] can eat your sausages, otherwise they'll get cold. They have to be eaten warm.

*[break with sausages; Some don't eat the bratwurst. They contain pork, so they are not kosher.*

16:40:]

**Forkel:** So, ladies and gentlemen, I have given a brief historical outline. I have now been asked what happened to Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria. That's right, Tsar Ferdinand came from the so-called Kohary line and, after he had to leave Bulgaria in 1918, lived in exile in Coburg from 1918 to 1948. He died here in September 1948 and his grave is in of the Catholic Church of St. Augustine. Parts of the social department are now in the Bürglasschlößchen."

**Harry Nomburg:** "[I have a question about your statement:] Tsar Ferdinand lived in the Bürglasschlösschen until the end of his life. We lived with my parents in Pilgramsroth and across from us lived the tsar, lived the king of Bulgaria. He had a villa there, which was mainly characterized by large bird cages. So King Ferdinand must have moved into the Bürglasschlösschen later. Back then, in my day, in our day, when my brother and I lived in the Pilgramsroth, the tsar, King Ferdinand, also lived there."

**Forkel:** "Yes, that is correct, he stayed partly in this so-called Zarenvilla and partly in the Bürglasschlösschen. That's correct. This tsar's villa no longer exists."

**Forkel:** Yes, Coburg is a school town, so to speak. We have a lot of secondary schools. We have a technical college, a technical college, a business school. So we are particularly proud here: Here in Coburg, everyone can educate themselves as they see fit. And of course the whole thing has another disadvantage, that due to the border location, it is hardly possible to accommodate all students here in the Coburg area for vocational training. You then have to go to the metropolitan areas like Munich.

**Forkel:** Well, to get back to you, ladies and gentlemen: There was also a fairly large Jewish community in Coburg. There were about 325 Jews here in 1925 according to old statistics and the synagogue was the Nikolauskapelle on Ketschendorfer Strasse. This relationship was terminated in 1932 by the then city council, leaving the Jews without a place of worship. The services then took place at the preacher Hirsch in Hohe Strasse. You may remember, Mr. Forchheimer [correct: H. Nomburg!]. – [To Robert Forchheimer's question:] He (Preacher Hirsch) also had to close down and over the years there were fewer and fewer because most of them emigrated.

As already said: The evangelical church has a documentation created, which is done by Mr. Fromm, and: Mr. Fromm, maybe you can then agree with the gentlemen how you can do it so that we can talk to you a bit more?

In any case, I have a copy of the "Stone Witnesses of Jewish Life in Bavaria" here. This is documentation about the churches in Bavaria, about the Jewish churches, and there is actually a mention of Coburg as far as one [unintelligible]. I would like to give you this book, it is probably very valuable for you. I'll give it to you, Mr. Forchheimer [hands it to Robert Forchheimer] I would also like to give each family a book from the city of Coburg. [Coburg: The Franconian Crown] –

May I wish you a very pleasant stay in the Federal Republic of Germany, and of course in Coburg in any case, and later a safe journey home. If you have any questions or would like to know something, I would ask you to put them to us."

**Robert Forchheimer:** Thanks on behalf of the group [Talks about the dictatorship 50 years ago in Germany, now democracy. Hope that democracy may come in East Germany as well.]

"The house where we once lived on Bahnhofstrasse is the only one [...] it's still like a ditch [...] Bahnhofstrasse 28."

**Forkel:** "As far as I know, this belongs to a community of heirs. But I could find that out as soon as possible. They're still there for a few days." [Forchheimer nods]

**Harry Nomburg** [stands up, has buttoned his jacket]: "I don't speak to a mayor every day, not every day [...] I would like to thank you for this festive reception and for the gifts you have given us here. My good brother and I were from Coburg and had to leave Coburg early because my father's shop was burned down. We are Nomburgs. And we also had our windows smashed in Pilgramsroth, broken. It was then that my father realized it was time for us to leave Coburg. Then we moved to Berlin. Despite all that, I've always liked being in Coburg and if I could choose where I was born, I would certainly have chosen Coburg. I have always found it a special pleasure to have been born here in this pretty, beautiful and very special city. Maybe on the map, but especially when you stand here on the market or on the Veste Coburg: Then you know that Coburg is not just a small town, but a special residential town. And as you pointed out, Mr. Mayor, a residential city that is closely linked to the royal houses of Europe.

We know, uh, Bulgaria, Belgium and Great Britain, also Sweden. But I think I can remember that the unfortunate Crown Prince Rudolf von Habsburg was also married to a woman from Coburg. Is that correct? [...] In any case, [...] there must have been a connection there. And I believe that one of the Dukes of Coburg, or one of the Princes of Coburg, was perhaps a brother-in-law of Crown Prince Rudolf.

But quite apart from that, we just enjoyed the fine bratwurst and the nice beer. Of course I'm sorry to have to leave the beer behind here.

But now, I think, it's our turn to give you something too. It's nothing special... - it's something special, it's nothing big, but it's something special. My good brother, he helped me to create this picture. This image, basically, is a British postage stamp. A stamp issued by the Royal [...] Post Office in 1987 and is still in heavy use today. It is a set of approximately five stamps. However, I have only chosen two stamps from this set, because Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg can be clearly seen on these two stamps. As far as I can tell, it's the only stamp on which the prince is published. I may be wrong, but I have yet to see a British postage stamp or any other postage stamp in international circulation where the image of the Prince of Coburg is shown. This is the young queen, Queen Victoria and behind her the picture of the Coburg prince consort.

[hands over the stamp, framed horizontally in the format approx. DIN A5, to Forkel, who thanks him warmly. Picks up second frame of the same size.]

I must continue, Mr. Mayor. The queen grew older, she reigned for over 60 years. Prince Albert died at the age of 42. The Queen erected a very special monument to Prince Albert in London, a monument surrounded by the great men of world history, including Jewish composers. In any case, here on this stamp you see the Albert Memorial, the memorial to Prince Consort Albert in London. Very famous. Everyone has heard about it, everyone knows about it. London is of course a big city and there are many monuments in London, but not one of them is as pompous and grandiose

as the monument to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Here on this stamp is the elderly Queen Victoria and behind her the monument to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and - coincidentally - the man behind her is the Prime Minister, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, a favorite of the Queen and a man of Jewish descent. Herr Mayor [hands the framed picture over to Forkel, who thanks him. ...]

**Forkel:** Thank you very much for that. I will make sure that these two pictures find good places in the Bürglasschlösschen or here in the town hall.

**Harry Nomburg:** Uh, shall I mention that on this occasion? Mr. Mayor, I'll stay seated this time. My brother and I were born in Coburg and just had to leave Coburg for certain reasons. I'm convinced my father would have liked to stay here. He established himself here, he had his business here, we lived well at the Pilgramsroth, but it was clear that we no longer had anything to do with Coburg. Disgraceful things happened in Germany. That's why we left Coburg early.

As I said before, my brother and I were born here, but we didn't emigrate from Coburg. That's why we're the only people from Coburg who weren't invited by the city. I would like to ask if it might be possible for my brother and sister-in-law, both Israelis from the Jewish State of Israel, and my wife and I, to be invited by the city after all? We are very happy with what we are being given, but I would like to point out to you whether a change might not be possible after all."

**Forkel:** "We are bound by a city council decision that dates back to 1977 and was repeated again by the finance senate a few weeks ago. This decision states that this generous donation that the city gives may only be given to Jewish citizens who were born in Coburg and lived in Coburg until they emigrated."

**Harry Nomburg** [increasingly loud and agitated]: "Mr. Mayor, I just wanted to mention that. I am now that it is [...] I told you. Of course we accept the decision of the city council. I just wanted to talk about it. But now that you say that this decision has been made repeatedly, we will not argue about it.

[Robert Forchheimer asks something to H. Nomburg, who first asks and then responds and stands up.]

**Harry Nomburg:** Yes, Mr. Mayor, [translated into English] yesterday I had the opportunity to visit the cemetery in the city of Coburg. I have been to the cemetery three times before: 1946, 1961 and 1982; the first time as a soldier. Yesterday we were back at the cemetery and I have to admit that the cemetery was never in better condition than yesterday. It could be seen that the cemetery had been worked on and the cemetery was in relatively good condition. There hasn't been a burial here for six decades, and yet it was well maintained.

The stone stands in the cemetery with the names of the Coburg Jews who were sent to certain perdition by the German government. Well, the stone is hidden in the Jewish cemetery. The fact that the stone was created by the city of Coburg must of course be acknowledged. And we acknowledge it. We know it wasn't that easy. We know that the stone has been there for decades and that Coburg made the decision to set the stone is a must.

But I say the stone is hidden in a Jewish cemetery!

No one sees him except for the Jewish visitors who come to the cemetery to stand at the graves of their relatives.

You have a Jewish alley here in Coburg. You have a Jewish Bridge here in Coburg, you have a Jewish Gate here in Coburg, and also a Jewish Mountain, as I saw it. There have been no Jews in Coburg for decades. And why are there no more Jews here? We all know this only too well.

Mr. Mayor, this stone must not be hidden in the Jewish cemetery. This stone belongs as an atonement stone near the Jews' Gate or perhaps at the Jews' Bridge. The Judentor is of course the best place for such a stone in my opinion. The children of Coburg should be given the opportunity to ask their mothers: "What is that stone here? What are those names?" And the mothers should be given the opportunity to answer: "Those were the Jews of Coburg." – "Mama, what happened to the Jews of Coburg?" And the mothers should be given the opportunity to answer: "They have been sent to perish. Not a single one came back alive." And then the mothers were to be given the opportunity to talk about the Jews of Coburg. About the Jews, about their hideous, cruel fate that the German government prepared for them. From their own government, to which they paid taxes. They have been condemned to perdition by their own government that they have served. A few years earlier they had gone into the field jubilantly for God, Emperor and Fatherland.

And twenty years later they were murdered.

Let's never forget that those hands that set the gas chambers in motion were German hands! Or hands of their hired servants.

And that is why, Mr. Mayor, I believe that this stone deserves a place where the Coburg youth have the opportunity to see it and where the Coburg mothers have the opportunity to give them the answer to what happened.

On another topic, I would like to mention that yesterday we went to the Veste and stood at the war memorial. It was horrifying to see how the memorial of the German Compatriots was smeared from top to bottom.

As you can see, we don't just think Jewishly, but also as people from Coburg. Coburg, a city where the law clearly rules order and discipline, where everything is clean and beautiful. And standing in front of the memorial of this country team, for the fallen of the First World War, which is smeared from top to bottom, is by no means dignified

And so we hope that this monument will be cleaned soon so that other visitors are spared the horror.

Thank you very much."

**Forkel:** "Yes, dear Mr. Nomburger [sic!], I would like to reply briefly. So, the care of the Jewish cemetery is not only done at present because we knew that you were coming, but that is, this cemetery is constantly being cared for. These are not empty sayings, but if you read this book [points to: Stone witnesses to Jewish life in Bavaria] that I gave you earlier, you will see that it is very praiseworthy that in Coburg this Jewish memorial and the cemetery is always kept in order.

As far as moving the monument is concerned, we will bring that up for debate in one of the next city council meetings or that we deal with it in the responsible committees first. I assume that it will also appear in the daily newspapers that one of our [...?] here [...]. If an opportunity arises, it will certainly be realized.

What - now to the compatriot monument: You are absolutely right. It's also a scandal, how the monument is always prepared."

**Nomburg:** "Is it always prepared like this?"

**Forkel:** "Yes, these are [...]. The day before the festivities, when everything was shiny, it's smeared over again and concreted in and who knows what. So those were the worst conditions."

**Nomburg:** "Mr. Mayor, can't you build a fence, a grid, a bronze grid around this monument?"

**Forkel:** "I doubt whether that would be of any use [...]. So, what you say is absolutely correct. This monument is [...]."

**Robert Forchheimer** stands up and shakes hands with Forkel. The meeting is over.