

**On 18 July 1933 scientists at the Potsdam Observatory denounce their colleague Professor Erwin Finlay Freundlich as an 'anti-nationalist descendant of Jews'<sup>1</sup>**

Letter from the National Socialist Civil Service Department, Observatories Department, Potsdam Kreis Branch, Gau Kurmark, Department Head Obst, and sent through official channels to the National Socialist Civil Service Department of the Gau Kurmark of the NSDAP, Berlin, 18 Dessauerstraße, dated 18 July 1933

Since 1 June 1920 Professor Erwin *Freundlich*<sup>2</sup> has worked as a Prussian civil servant at the Astrophysical Observatory, initially as observer and now as chief observer. Prof. Freundlich's father was a Jew. Before the war he signed, and signs again today, his name without proper authority as 'Finlay-Freundlich' by prefixing his surname with the family name of his maternal grandfather, a well-known English astronomer and discoverer of comets. During the war he did not use the English word 'Finlay' in his name, though he resumed this practice after the war.

At the beginning of 1932 the November parties'<sup>3</sup> Minister for Science, Art, and Education appointed Prof. Freundlich head of the Astrophysical Observatory-affiliated Einstein Institute, now the Institute of Solar Physics. At the same time, in deliberate humiliation of the thoroughly nationalist-minded director Prof. Ludendorff,<sup>4</sup> he was given – both in his management of the scientific work of the Einstein Institute and in administrative matters – an unusually far-reaching degree of autonomy that was otherwise uncommon for department heads.

Instead of defending the nationalist-minded director against the pretensions and intervention of his chief observer, the November government put the anti-nationalist Jewish descendant on a nearly equal footing with the director.

However, the National Socialist government has since largely reversed this policy of equivalent status. Yet that has not served to eradicate the un-Germanness of Prof. Freundlich. Enclosed is a statement by Chief Observer Prof. Münch<sup>5</sup> as evidence of his un-German behaviour.<sup>6</sup> I also have in my possession recent information in written form

1 GStA PK, I HA, Rep. 76, Vc Sekt. 1, Tit. XI, Teil II, Nr. 6b, Bd. 10. This document has been translated from German.

2 Erwin Finlay Freundlich (1885–1964), astrophysicist; from 1921 to 1933 professor at the Astrophysical Observatory in Potsdam, where he worked with Einstein; emigrated to Turkey in 1933 and worked there as professor of astrophysics; moved to Prague in 1937 and to Britain in 1939; returned to Germany in 1956. He was the brother of Herbert Max Finlay Freundlich: on the latter, see Doc. 41, 9 May 1933, fn. 14.

3 This is a reference to those political parties who were associated with the armistice of Nov. 1918, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, and the subsequent Weimar Republic.

4 Hans Ludendorff (1873–1941), astrophysicist; began working at the Potsdam Observatory in 1898, first as assistant and then as observer; appointed professor in 1909; promoted to chief observer in 1915; appointed director of the Potsdam Observatory in 1921.

5 Wilhelm Münch (1879–1969), astrophysicist; from 1919 professor and chief observer at the Potsdam Observatory.

6 According to Münch, Freundlich made statements in 1920–1922 to the effect that Germany bore responsibility for the war and in 1932 that emphasizing 'nationalism' was a regression to a long-outdated era, and the only aim should be to create a European culture. Note regarding Münch's statement of 11 July 1933: GStA PK, I HA, Rep. 76, Vc Sekt. 1, Tit. XI, Teil II, Nr. 6b, Bd. 10.

which was dispatched to me through official channels. This reveals that Mr Freundlich made remarks about the Führer of the National Socialist Movement that must deeply outrage every German Volksgenosse. All of the above has convinced the National Socialist Department for Observatories that Prof. Freundlich is – due to his anti-völkisch attitude – fit neither to be a civil servant in the new Reich nor least of all to hold a senior civil service post. It is doubtful that a dismissal in accordance with § 3 of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service is applicable in the case of Prof. Freundlich. The department, however, deems a dismissal from service or at least a removal from his senior position to be necessary, for there is absolutely no guarantee that he will unreservedly and always support the national state. On the contrary, the department has gained the impression that he is quite spiteful towards the national movement.

The Department for Observatories therefore submits a request through official channels to the Kurmark<sup>7</sup> Gauleitung for the forwarding of the foregoing information to the appropriate officials.<sup>8</sup>

7 German for 'electoral march' originally referred to the part of the Holy Roman Empire held by the margraves of Brandenburg but was later used as the name of one of the NSDAP Gaue. In 1940 it was renamed Mark Brandenburg.

8 Max Planck and Max von Laue interceded with the minister on behalf of Freundlich, who then accepted a position at the University of Istanbul and left Germany in Oct. 1933. Prior to this the ministry had decided to approve his compulsory retirement in accordance with § 3 of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. In Sept. 1933, however, the Reich Foreign Office and the Reich Ministry of the Interior intervened and proposed that Freundlich be granted a leave of absence for several years for foreign policy considerations, as they wanted him to establish an observatory for furthering German research in the Mediterranean region. Since he departed for Turkey before his leave of absence was approved, his salary was suspended on grounds of unauthorized absence from service. See letter from the Prussian Minister of Science to the director of the Astrophysical Observatory, dated 3 April 1934, *ibid.*