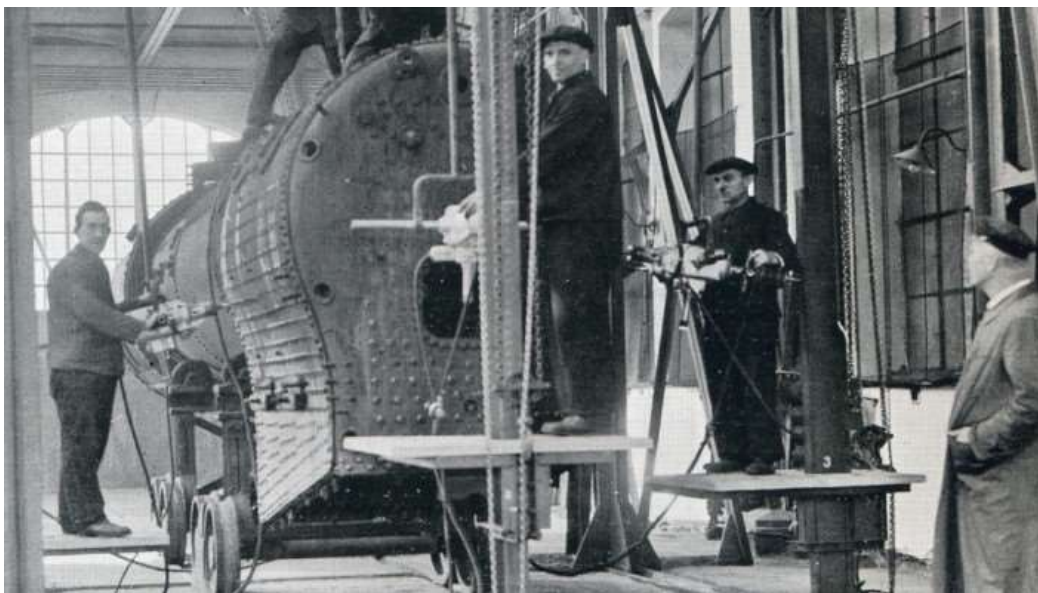


**From the Suddeutsche Zeitung, via Google translate...**

## **Upper Palatinate:How a railway worker from Weiden saved the life of a Jewess**

January 13, 2018 at 11:10 am



Workbench for the lifeline of the Reich: After 1933, the SPD man Nikolaus Rott was no longer welcome at the Reichsbahn in Weiden, because he threatened the peace of the works.

(Photo: oh/illustrated book Weiden, Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark 1939)

Nikolaus Rott was a thorn in the side of the Nazis. He hid a Jewess and never bowed. But his story is that of a forgotten hero.

By [Johann Osel](#) , Weiden

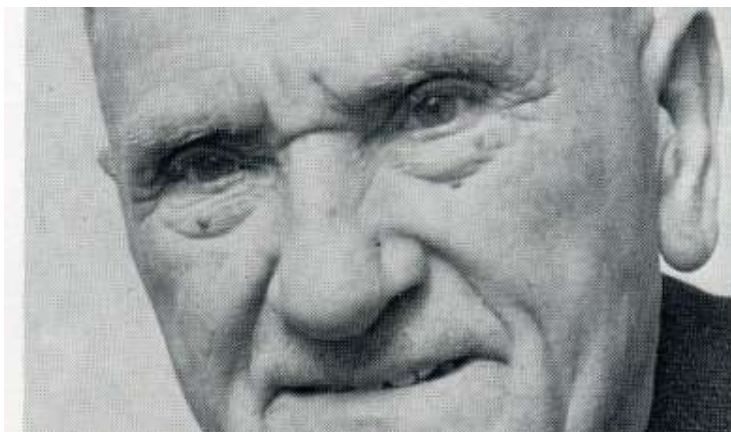
The first memo by the Nazis about the railway fitter Nikolaus Rott from Weiden is already devastating. He had "not yet committed himself to the national government" and said he would "remain true to his convictions until death," wrote the Reichsbahn operations office shortly after the seizure of power. Before that, the career and everyday life of the 42-year-old had ended abruptly. Until 1933 Rott was a foreman in the railway depot, main works council, SPD city councilor, lay judge, veteran comrade, respected citizen.

Now he was removed from all honorary posts, dismissed from the service; Luckily he saved life and limb, in the chaotic beginnings of the Reich an SA squad had planned to arrest him. He ended up as a gatekeeper, at half wages, 30 kilometers away from Weiden - the main thing was to get away from his political friends, that's what the NSDAP thought.

All ambitions to return failed. His former depot reported in 1935 that the red Rott had "not kept the peace in the factory". The job as a train driver, his wish, was eliminated anyway. He did not fulfill his duties - "to be a role model for all fellow Germans" and "to remain loyal to the Führer until death". In 1938 Rott was allowed to go to Weiden, to the railway maintenance department. One thing was clear: from then on he was in the eyes of the Nazis. And it was precisely in this situation that Rott decided towards the end of the war to hide a Jewess with him. In Weiden, which according to those in power was "judenrein".

The story of Nikolaus Rott is that of a forgotten hero. It is an example of the fact that the railways in the Third Reich were not only part of the totalitarian machinery, but that there were definitely opponents of the Nazis, even resistance fighters. Above all, however, it is a story that is nowhere consistently told, that can be reconstructed from the pieces of a puzzle.

If you visit the Stadtarchiv Weiden, in the beautiful rooms of the historic school building, you will hardly find any documents, a few books only with notes on Rott: For example a yellowed volume "80 years of social democracy in Weiden", with a greeting from the SPD leader at the time, Willy Brandt; or research on Judaism in the city. The newspaper *Der Neue Tag* has meritoriously collected a few things, there are other finds. "Even if others set the course" is the title of a book by the journalist Bernd Eichmann, who paid tribute to German railway unionists in the 1980s. He visited Rott in Weiden at the age of 97, shortly before his death.



Rott, born in Weiden in 1891, has often witnessed history.

(Photo: private/Karl Bayer: 80 years of social democracy in Weiden 1897-1977)

As everywhere in the Reich, anti-Semitism was growing in Weiden in the 1930s, and those who could fled. In 1938 the newspaper *Bayerische Ostmark* wrote: "Weiden can count itself lucky that it has lost half of its Jewish parasites since 1933. We would be

even happier if every last Jew would shake the dust of our homeland off their feet." The Reich Program Night followed, followed by deportations.

In 1942 the mayor declared: no more Jews in the city. But he was wrong. The Jewess Rosa Hoffmann - in her mid-40s, married in a "mixed marriage" to a Protestant doctor - went into hiding in anonymous Berlin in 1939; In the last years of the war, however, her husband brought her back to the [Upper Palatinate](#) . Doctor Hoffmann, who had long been cut off from society, was able to weave a network of accomplices and find shelter for his wife in various families - more than a year with Rott and his wife, under the roof of a gatekeeper's house.

## **Rott shaped the city even after the war**

The son worked at the front, Rott in railway bridge construction. He was apparently willing to rebel. Little is known about the shelter. In any case, in 1945 Hoffmann was the only surviving Jewess in Weiden - of 168 who were still registered in 1933. Many emigrated, many were murdered. Rosa Hoffmann then stayed in Weiden, she later died childless.

There are no surviving scenes to be found today on a city walk. The gatekeeper's house is no longer there, there is a motorway bridge there, an electronics store next to it, people load televisions into cars. The apartment of a second family on the Unterer Markt, where Hoffmann was also hidden for a long time, is home to a fashion department store.

Rott also shaped Weiden after the war. The US command appointed him an advisor and he was offered the post of mayor. He worked in committees to reorganize and denazify factories. In the sheet that deals with his past, Doctor Hoffmann's statement was found as an appendix. Until 1960, Rott was SPD parliamentary group leader in the city council. It came full circle in a biography that is a kaleidoscope of the century.



The Reichsbahn workshops in Weiden during the Nazi era.

(Photo: illustrated book Weiden-Oberpfalz, Max-Reger-Stadt, published by Stadt Weiden, Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark, 1939)

Rott, born in Weiden in 1891, has often witnessed history. At the end of the First World War he was posted to Munich as an armaments fitter, where he became a social democrat during the revolution and Soviet Republic. After the murder of Kurt Eisner, he returned home. It began, wrote Eichmann, "the unspectacular, tough struggle" as a trade unionist. "Between dusty furniture from the 1920s, he tries to come to terms with the ailments of old age."

This is how the journalist described the 97-year-old widower Rott during his visit in the late 1980s. Sometimes his "unbridled energy of the earlier years" shines through - for example when he gets upset about relatives who have not carefully treated his documents on many decades of union history.

### **The relationship with the family was difficult**

A similar concern drives Rott's grandson, Heinrich Rott; the 70-year-old lives in the Black Forest. On the phone he reports that his parents "stoned up" when it came to grandpa, especially his mother. The documents are gone, mostly destroyed. The relationship between Nikolaus Rott, his son and his daughter-in-law - who incidentally comes from the family that hid Rosa Hoffmann on the Unterer Markt - was obviously difficult. Details remain a private matter.

The grandson only got to know the grandfather as an adult: as a "very dear person for whom justice came first". Rott searches for memories, he is supported by the city archives. Director Petra Vorsatz once designed an exhibition about pastures during the Nazi era; and her deputy Sebastian Schott did his doctorate on Jewish pastures and is considered an expert. But: documents are missing. "A contemporary historical archive," Eichmann lamented, "was wasted through carelessness."