

Leopold Simke was born in Posen on 19 September 1874, the son of the master tailor, Moritz Simke, and his wife, Emilie, nee Kaul. He attended secondary school there, subsequently completing an apprenticeship as a uniform tailor and in addition a commercial apprenticeship. Later he took over the business of his father, who ran a uniform tailoring firm in Posen. In 1901, he moved to Berlin where he ran his own uniform tailoring business.

On 9 September 1901 Leopold Simke married Bertha Koschminski who was born on 3 December 1875 in Witkowo near Posen. The couple had two children. Their daughter, Margarete, was born on 16 July 1902 and their son, Ernst, on 10 June 1908 in Berlin. The couple employed a nanny for the children. In 1928, Ernst Simke, whilst still a young man, emigrated to Shanghai and subsequently lived for the rest of his life in Manila in the Philippines.

After the First World War, Leopold, according to his wife's testimony, ran a good business trading in men's fabrics and tailoring requisites, initially from 19 Waitzstr. in Charlottenburg and later-in the 1930s-from 5 Ravensburger Str. The business address was in both cases the home address of the family and the latter their last voluntary, shared address. Leopold Simke is said to have employed a clerk and at least two sales representatives. According to Bertha Simke, the family income in 1932, '33 and '34 was around 1,200 RM monthly. Thereafter, the business slowed down dramatically and from 1935 generated hardly any output. In 1937, Leopold's monthly income was only 220 RM. As his daughter affirms, by this juncture he was already subletting 2 of the 5 rooms in their large flat.

In 1927, Leopold was sentenced by the local criminal court in Wedding to 14 months imprisonment. The reason for this is not known. He managed repeatedly to delay the service of his sentence but when eventually in 1936 he was charged again, on this occasion for fraud (according to the file for violating the state alcoholic spirits monopoly), which meant that his old conviction would be revived, he fled to Czechoslovakia. There in all probability he must have met up in Prague with his older brother, Robert Simke. An arrest warrant had been issued for Leopold Simke on 17 September 1936 and he was remanded in custody in Moabit on his return to Germany in April 1937. On 23 June 1937, he was eventually sentenced to 10 months imprisonment for "Commissions Fraud". In November 1937 he was also found guilty of a currency offence and was sentenced to a total of 21 months imprisonment, which he served in Tegel Prison, and a fine of 1,000 RM. It is not possible to establish from the available documentation when, taking into account the sentence of 1927, he was actually released from custody but this was probably in the second quarter of 1939.

While Leopold was still in prison, his wife, Bertha, succeeded on 1 March 1939 in leaving Germany heading for England where her married daughter, Margarete, had already been living for some time with Dr. Erich Cohn, a dentist. Erich Cohn was her guarantor. The outbreak of war on 1 September 1939 and Leopold's imprisonment made communications between him and Bertha no longer possible. They did not see each other again.

After his release from prison, Leopold moved into a flat (belonging to the Gutmanns) at 6 Tauenzienstrasse. On the evening of 27 May 1942 the Gestapo, as part of a special operation, arrested initially 154 Jewish men, including Leopold Simke (and then later the same day a

further 250). They were transported to Sachsenhausen and over the following two days executed in the so-called Station Z along with 96 other Jewish men who were already imprisoned in the camp. The background to this mass murder was an arson attack carried out on 18 May 1942 by the Jewish-Communist resistance group led by Herbert and Marianne Baum on an exhibition called "Soviet Paradise". The exhibition was staged between the beginning of May and the end of June 1942 in the Lustgarten in Berlin by the propaganda department of the Nazi Party. The so-called revenge action-the mass murder-was devised by Josef Goebbels, the State Propaganda Minister and Gauleiter of the Nazi Party in Berlin and agreed with Hitler and the SS and Police Chief, Heinrich Himmler.

At the end of October 1942 Erich Cohn, the son-in-law of the murdered Leopold Simke, who was living in exile at 53 St. John's Court, London, received the following letter from the Jewish Refugees Committee in Bloomsbury House:

"Attached please find a Red Cross Message addressed to Mrs Bertha Simke which was passed on to us by the British Red Cross Society for forwarding. We note from our records that you are Mrs Simke's guarantor and in view of the very sad contents of the Message we wonder whether you would be good enough to hand the Message to her personally as we think it is inadvisable to send this tragic news direct."

The message attached to the letter stated that Leopold died on 28 May 1942. It contained no further information about his death.

Bertha Simke and both children survived the Holocaust in exile. Bertha lived for many years at 17 Lancaster Grove in London. From 1953 she received a widow's pension in accordance with the German Compensation Law and otherwise was supported financially by her two children. She died on 17 April 1963 at the age of 87. Her daughter, Margarete, died in 1996 at the great age of 93. After the war and the foundation of the State of Israel, Bertha and Leopold's son, Ernst, who in Manila called himself Ernest Simke, was for many years the Israeli Consul in Manila. Professionally, he acted as agent in the Philippines for various international corporations. Both Margarete and Ernst maintained close contact with the nanny of their childhood, Ernst taking her on holiday with his own children when visiting Europe.