

Jewish Situation under the German Occupation of The Netherlands

"Few Jews survived in Holland, but those few were saved as a result of the most strenuous efforts, for Holland was the one territory of the occupied West in which the Jews did not have an even chance to live." ([Hilberg](#)).

Everything worked against the Jewish population in Nazi-occupied Holland. Geographically, the terrain is flat with no natural hiding places. With the open sea to the north and west, the German Reich to the east and occupied Belgium to the south, escape beyond the borders was difficult and dangerous. Before the occupation most Dutch Jews already lived in close proximity to one another in a few large urban centers, with over half in Amsterdam alone.

Far worse for the Jews than the geographic disadvantage was that the German-imposed government was civil rather than military, and was therefore concerned primarily with control of the civilian population rather than with military matters. The governing body was headed by Arthur Seyss-Inquart, an Austrian veteran of the Anschluss known for his severity and efficiency in promulgating Hitler's idea of "racial purity." He closely followed the pattern of economic and social anti-Jewish measures which had previously been carried out with no little success in Germany, which were designed to gradually destroy Jewish culture and eventually eliminate all trace of the Jews themselves.

There were perhaps three key factors to the success of the anti-Jewish measures in Holland. First, the initial wave of public protest on the part of the Dutch population was immediately and ruthlessly suppressed with extremely severe reprisals. From that point on protest became a more private matter, conducted largely by small underground groups engaged in sabotage against the Germans, or in aiding Nazi victims, particularly Jews, to hide or escape. As public protest disappeared, the Germans were encouraged to proceed with their systematic plan to empty the Jews from Holland.



Jews Registering for "jobs" at Westerbork by Jewish Council Members, Amsterdam, 1942

The second factor was the German device of setting up a Jewish Council, the Joodsche Raad, composed of a group of prominent middle-class Jewish leaders, for the purpose of conveying German commands efficiently to the Jewish population. The Jewish leaders reasoned among themselves, as they did in other occupied countries, that their role in keeping the channels of communication with their German oppressors open, and of maintaining law and order in the newly formed chaotic ghetto population of uprooted families, would help the bereft Jews more than harm them. In retrospect it is easy to see how wrong they were, as the Council quickly became the unwitting tool of the German destruction machinery, actually delivering the Jews directly to the German deportation trains.

The third factor was the gradual nature of the implementation of the anti-Jewish measures, which lulled Jew and non-Jew alike into believing that despite the difficulties and inconveniences, things weren't that bad, and the Germans' demands could be accommodated. The common feeling was that the Germans would certainly lose the war and it was just a matter of waiting out the interim as best as possible. With this in mind, a great many Dutch Jews willingly reported to the trains, which they believed would take them to work camps where they would labor for the Reich.

Of the 140,00 people who registered themselves with the Germans as being Jewish, 107,000 were deported, of which only 5,500 came back. Approximately 24,000 went into hiding, of whom about 8,000 were caught.

The following chronology of events shows how the German occupation government imposed its will upon the Jewish population of Holland.

May 14, 1940: Holland surrenders to Germany. Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart appointed Reichkommissar, the highest governing authority.

October 1940: Every government official must sign an affidavit that neither he, his wife, fiancé, parents, or grandparents are Jewish.

Jews are not to be promoted or appointed to government jobs.

All businesses owned or operated partly or fully by Jews, or in which Jews have a financial interest, must register with German authorities.

November 1940: Jews in the Dutch Civil Service are dismissed.

December 1940: Persons of German "blood" are not allowed to work in Jewish households.

January 1940: All Jews residing in Holland must register with German authorities. Failure to do so is punishable by 5 years in prison or confiscation of property, or both.

The Jewish Council, Joodsche Raad, is established, consisting of 20 members, including rabbis, lawyers and middle class business men.

February 1941: The Amsterdam ghetto is established following a series of incidents arising from an attack on the old Jewish quarter by groups of Dutch Nazi sympathizers. Several subsequent counterattacks by Jewish and Dutch youths set off severe reprisals by the Germans. A resultant general strike lasting several days is ruthlessly suppressed. This is the last large scale public demonstration of civilian protest in Holland to Nazi policies.

March 1941: Germans begin to "Aryanize" Jewish property.

The Jewish Council is given authority over all Jewish organizations.

Jews can no longer travel without a special permit from The Jewish Council, can not participate in the stock exchange, can not hold cultural posts, or enter public parks.

April 1941: German identification cards issued to the Dutch population.

July 1941: Jews who registered have their I.D. cards stamped with a large "J".

August 1941: Jewish children are barred from public and vocational schools.

All Jewish assets, including bank deposits, cash, and securities, are blocked in order to be confiscated. A maximum of 250 guilders per month is made available to a Jewish owner of such assets, for his own use.

January 1942: Forced labor camps for Jews are established.

May 1942: Jews must wear a yellow star with the word "Jew" printed on it.

Jews must observe a curfew between 8 P.M. and 6 A.M.

Jews are allowed to shop only between 3 P.M. and 5 P.M.

Public transportation is forbidden for Jews.

Telephones are forbidden to Jews.

Jews are forbidden to enter the homes of non-Jews.

German government is authorized to confiscate all Jewish property except for wedding rings and gold teeth.

July 1942: Deportations of Jews out of Holland begin.

Two concentration camps are established in Holland, Westerbork and Vught, from which Jews are shipped to other camps, primarily Auschwitz.

September 1943: In the last major round-up, 5,000 Jews, including the Jewish Council leaders, are sent to Westerbork.

May 1945: Holland is liberated by the Canadian Army.

SOURCES CONSULTED INCLUDE:

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